



PRESS RELEASE

**“Violence against women and girls cannot continue unabated”
AUC Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security tells South Sudan authorities
during Solidarity Mission**

Addis Ababa, 10 December 2016 – H.E. Bineta Diop, Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC) on Women, Peace and Security led a solidarity mission to South Sudan from 6 to 9 December 2016 in the context of the Campaign launched on 13th October 2016 by H.E. Dr, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, with the central aim to restore the dignity of the women of South Sudan.

The high-level delegation comprised the African Union (AU) Chairperson’s Special Representative and Head of the AU Liaison Office to South Sudan, Brigadier General Sara Thomas Rwambali, the Director of the Women, Gender and Development Directorate (WGDD) at the AUC, Ms. Mahawa Kaba-Wheeler, and the Adviser to the Special Envoy on Security, Colonel Theophilia Shaanika.

During the four days mission, the delegation met with key government officials, including Hon. Martin Elia Lomoro, Minister of Cabinet Affairs, Hon. Kuol Manyang Juuk, Minister for Defense and Veterans Affairs, Hon. Paulino Wanawila, Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, Hon. Jemma Nunu Kumba, Minister for Wildlife Conservation and Tourism and Acting Secretary General of the SPLM Ruling Party, and Hon. Awut Deng Acuil. Minister for Gender, Child and Social Welfare.

The Special Envoy conveyed the message from women of Africa, calling on the authorities to end violence on women and girls of South Sudan and bring to justice the perpetrators. Mme Diop said “Women and people of South Sudan have suffered for too long and it is high time to stop the violence and deliver on the responsibilities to protect citizens, address vital needs of the population, and move resolutely towards national reconciliation and justice.” She reiterated the AU zero-tolerance policy against sexual violence and abuse. During the visit, the Army Chief of General Staff, ordered for the cessation of acts of sexual violence by members of security forces, arrest of perpetrators of this crime and protection of victims and witnesses.

The delegation also met with internally displaced women in the protection of civilians sites (POC3) and representatives from women's groups and civil society organizations. The women decried the ongoing violence and abuse of their bodies, and expressed a strong need for peace and restoration of law and order, saying "When we go out to the fields, we want to hear the chirps of birds and not sounds of bullets."

The Special Envoy urged the women to work together to overcome ethnic, cultural and religious differences. "There should be unity in diversity. Women should mobilize with one voice, and convey one strong and clear message to call for 'peace at all costs', she added.

On her part, the AU Director of Gender, informed women about AU initiatives to support women in Africa, such as the African Women Fund, and the Post-Conflict and Reconstruction Funds, aimed at quick impact and long term projects in countries emerging from conflicts.

The delegation also met with UN agencies and humanitarian workers who stressed that a long lasting peace depends on political will and good faith. They requested the Special Envoy to encourage AU member states to support efforts towards peacebuilding in South Sudan.

Key recommendations highlighted during the Special Envoy's visit include; the need to create a conducive environment for truth and reconciliation, ensure women representation and engagement in Agreement mechanisms and institutions and in all decision-making bodies; ensure institutional reforms, including security mechanisms; appeal to troops and police contributing countries to increase the number of women peacekeepers and a solidarity call to African women to share their experiences in peacebuilding.

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