PREAMBLE

Over 430 women, gathered in Juba, South Sudan for the inaugural International Women’s Conference on Transformational Leadership from 13-15 February 2023. The Conference was hosted by H.E. Rebecca Nyandeng De Mabior, Vice President of the Republic of South Sudan responsible for the Gender, Youth and Humanitarian Cluster, the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare, the National Transformational Leadership Institute- NTLI, at the University of Juba and the United Nations. Delegates attending the conference included representatives of the ten (10) States and three (3) Administrative Areas of the Republic of South Sudan and African women from 15 countries, representing a cross section of women leaders including former Presidents, former and serving Cabinet Ministers, Judges, Governors, Speakers and Deputy Speakers of Parliaments, politicians, political party leaders, development partners, community leaders, senior government officials, women’s rights and civil society activists, faith based, traditional leaders, academics, persons living with disabilities, diaspora, refugee, internally displaced, young women and other sectors.

The Conference was officially opened by H.E. President Salva Kiir Mayardit, President of the Republic of South Sudan and Commander in Chief of the South Sudan People’s Defence Forces.

The objectives of the conference were to create a space for African and South Sudan women leaders to celebrate and reflect on their leadership journeys and share perspectives and recommendations on the role of women in leadership and decision making across governance, economy, peace and security domains; deliberate on actions and strategies to strengthen women’s participation and leadership; safeguard and deepen gains made; engage with young women to bridge the generational gap, promote inclusion of all women including rural women and girls and expand networks for shared learning to build stronger women’s movements for transformational change.

The conference's objectives are deeply embedded in UN Sustainable Development Goals, which emphasize the interlinked priority on people, planet, peace, and partnerships. The African Union Agenda 2063 reinforces this embodiment. We recognize the dependency on achieving these goals, realizing gender equality and consequent progress across all goals and targets within both development frameworks.

We affirm the significance of a systemic approach to advancing gender equality with a clarion call for full human rights and equal opportunities for quality education, economic resources, employment, sustainable protection of the planet and its natural resources, political participation, and leadership and decision-making at all levels.

The conference presented a rare opportunity for African women to deepen and expand regional and international networks and catalyze learning in support of South Sudan’s women in advancing women’s leadership in the peace and security arena. The conference met its objectives of holding space for women leaders across Africa and South Sudan to reflect on their personal leadership journeys and share perspectives and recommendations on the role of women in leadership and decision making across peace and security domains in national and state government, in the United Nations and Civil Society. Deliberations at the conference included actions and strategies to: a) strengthen women’s participation and leadership in decision making and peacebuilding; b)
enhance women’s economic empowerment as a driver for gender equality; c) safeguard and deepen gains made; d) engage with young women to bridge the generational gap; e) promote inclusion of all women including rural women and girls in climate action and policy formulation; f) eliminate gender based and sexual violence against women and girls; g) deepen engagement with men as allies and agents of change for in advocating gender equality. Further, conference participants appreciated the potential of collaboration and networks for shared learning nationally, regionally, and internationally as a first step to build stronger women’s movements for transformative change in a digital age.

THE CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS:

RECALLED that the Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan, 2011 (as amended) provides for women to be accorded full and equal rights in all spheres and specifically provides that women shall have at least thirty-five per cent (35%) representation across all sectors.

RECOGNISED the opportunities presented by the ‘Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan’ (R-ARCSS) 2018, to address women’s peace and security issues spanning inclusion, participation, promotion of women’s rights and protection concerns. The Agreement contains important provisions for governance reforms, security sector reform, humanitarian assistance and reconstruction, resource, economic and financial management reform, transitional justice as well as provisions for inclusion of women in decision making positions of at least 35% in all sectors.

NOTED that women are underrepresented in decision making positions in the executive (at national and state levels), in the Judiciary and the Legislature as well as in key sectors, such as security, private sector and in mechanisms established under the R-ARCSS.

DEEPLY CONCERNED that South Sudanese women and girls continue to suffer sexual and gender-based violence and conflict related sexual violence, high levels of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, maternal mortality, HIV/AIDS, displacement and disproportionate impact of climate change.

APPRECIATES the continuing support of all regional and international partners to the implementation of the Women Peace and Security agenda and their commitment and support to women’s leadership globally and in South Sudan.

DEEPLY APPRECIATES H.E President Salva Kiir Mayardit, President of the Republic of South Sudan and Commander in Chief of the South Sudan People’s Defence Forces and H.E. Dr. Riek Machar Teny-Dhurgon, First Vice President of the Republic of South Sudan for gracing the opening and closing ceremonies of the conference respectively.

FURTHER APPRECIATES the participation of distinguished Keynote speaker H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and former president of Liberia, H.E President Catherine Samba- Panza, former interim president of Central Africa Republic, H.E. President Ameenah Fakhri Gurib, former president of Mauritius and H.E. Amina J Mohammed, Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations among other distinguished speakers who included The Right Honourable Speaker of the TNLA, Honourable Ministers of the Republic of South Sudan, Governors, Hon First Deputy Speaker of the Council of States and distinguished women leaders from across Africa and high ranking United Nations Officials and members of the Diplomatic Corps.

AFFIRMS our commitment to advocate for the full implementation of the recommendations from this conference on the key themes of
Women Peace and Security
Governance and Political Participation
Women’s Economic Empowerment
Climate change and its impacts
Movement building and women’s leadership in Civil Society and
Intergenerational pathways to leadership:

OBSERVATIONS

- Women can, and must redefine what peace means, take ownership, rise above sectarian, political and other differences to build and consolidate peace in their communities and country. Partners play a supportive role however, responsibility for peacebuilding lies with the people, with the community, with the women. Peacebuilding is a process, not an event.

- South Sudan has an enabling normative and policy framework, yet women’s representation falls below the minimum threshold of at least 35%, in key sectors such as security, economy, and the judiciary at the national and subnational levels.

- Women’s active engagement and inclusion in governance and decision-making is critical to ensuring the implementation of commitments contained in the R-ARCSS, Maputo Protocol, The National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325, Agenda 2063, Agenda 2030. UNSCR 1325 is a powerful advocacy tool for equal representation in politics.

- It is imperative to strengthen the access to justice institutions and to ensure that they are gender responsive as a dimension of peace and security. Women constitute only 16% of judges in the country, with all serving in the lowest courts, and no women represented in leadership and decision-making positions in the judiciary.

- Education is a key factor in the economic empowerment of women and girls and the development of the country. Investing in education, training, research science and technology that targets young women and girls will promote women’s equal access to employment and contribute to reducing employment segregation.

- Mental health of communities, survivors and women’s rights defenders to be prioritised to promote community healing, reconciliation and social cohesion by integrating mental health awareness, services and treatment into health budgets and programs and ensuring that these services are accessible to all including the most vulnerable populations without discrimination.

- Harnessing digital technology as a tool for communication, mobilisation, developing and participating in national discourses as well as fintech access will contribute to advancing gender equality and women’s economic empowerment.
- There can be no climate justice without gender justice: Women are disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change and are at increased risk of experiencing gender-based violence in addition to loss of their homes and livelihoods and ability to perform everyday tasks.

- The solidarity and comradeship that existed among women during the liberation struggle has weakened, and the respect that women and women leaders commanded during the struggle has dissipated. A strong, inclusive, cohesive women’s movement based on values nurtured during the liberation struggle is required.

- The Media, Civil Society Organisations and a vibrant and cohesive women’s movement at both national and community levels are indispensable in shaping agendas, mobilising, advocacy, monitoring implementation of the R-ARCSS.

- Men and boys are critical to transforming social, cultural and gender norms, mindsets and behaviour is critical to achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment. Engage them as partners.

- 74% of South Sudan’s population is aged under 30 years. Of this demographic, women constitute over 60% yet they are routinely excluded from participating in political leadership, in peacebuilding and decision-making positions across all sectors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We direct the following recommendations to Government of South Sudan, development partners, Women’s Rights and Civil Society Organisations

1. Provide technical and financial resources to ensure full implementation of normative provisions in the Constitution and R-ARCSS on the 35% quota for the meaningful and full participation of women in decision making and in ongoing reform processes that include: the permanent constitution-making process, the reconstitution and creation of institutions as mandated by the R-ARCSS; review of key legislation such as the economic, NGO and electoral laws; security sector reform; the establishment of transitional justice mechanisms; judicial reforms and the electoral process.

2. Develop and institutionalise gender responsive planning and budgeting (GRB) measures as a good practice that allows a systematic continuum of gender focused policy assessment across the budget cycle and a way of mainstreaming gender in all government programmes. Gender budgeting should be embedded in future National Development Plans and sectoral plans as well as developing the capacities for civil servants responsible for undertaking these tasks.

3. Accede to regional and international instruments that promote gender equality in the social economic arena and develop policies, programmes and strategies that promote and protect rights of girls and women (e.g., Implement strategies to end child and forced marriage, reduce teenage pregnancies, ensure the enrolment and retention of girls in schools, offer skills and vocational training to women)
4. Initiate programmes that strengthen the community’s resilience to climate change impacts and ensure the participation and inclusion of women in policy-making processes, and mainstreaming gender in every adaptation and mitigation plan.

5. Strengthen solidarity within the women’s movement and find ways of working across all diversities to advance gender equality and women’s empowerment and peace in South Sudan.

6. Initiate dialogues and between and among women, men and youth on positive masculinities to create a critical mass of male champions for gender equality.

7. Foster intergenerational dialogue and activism between young women and older women and create mentorship programmes on leadership skills underpinned by values of respect and mutual learning.

8. Respect and value the work of the younger generation and take deliberate steps to promote them in positions in which they can rise to leadership positions including creating a fellowship of young women in leadership from which UN agencies could draw for internships and volunteers and as a platform for experience-based learning.

9. Create a National Steering Committee for Women’s Transformational Leadership to drive implementation of Conference recommendations including the holding of a follow up International Women’s Conference and a Youth Conference in the next two years.

**A CALL TO ACTION**

♦ Enact *The Women’s Empowerment Bill (2023)* which contains provisions for the creation of a Gender Authority that will be tasked with monitoring implementation of the constitutional and R-ARCSS gender quota of at least 35% inclusion of women in all spheres- (social, economic, and political) and, at all levels - (national and subnational) and inclusion in reformed constitutional bodies and commissions. (Constitutional, Judicial, Electoral and Economic Reforms)

♦ Implement provisions in Chapter 4 of the R-ARCSS for the establishment and operationalization of a Women Enterprise Development Fund for provision of subsidized credit for women-based enterprise development and capacity building of women entrepreneurs, and a Youth Enterprise Development Fund to enable more young people participate in economic activities.

♦ Strengthen solidarity within the women’s movement and find ways of working across all diversities to advance gender equality and women’s empowerment and peace in South Sudan.

♦ Strengthen social protection systems and access to basic social services such as water and sanitation, health care, education and renewable energy sources provides a foundation that helps build women’s resilience to crises including those caused by climate change, natural disasters and conflict.
Allocate adequate national budgetary resources to criminal justice institutions for the investigation and prosecution of sexual and gender-based crimes and for protection and required medical and psychosocial care for victims and survivors.