Role of Women Parliamentarians in Peace and Security in Africa and the Arab World

Paper presented

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Introduction:

Allow to thank the organizers for having extended an opportunity to me to join here you here Honorable ladies Members of Parliament from Africa and the Arab world. This meeting is part of my continued aspiration to contribute to enhancing the role of women in securing a better and peaceful society globally. Particular attention to Madam Abla from Sudan , who ha been and continues to be an inspiration to me and many others on this agenda.

The role of Women Parliamentarians from Africa and the Arab world in peace and security can only be discussed well if situated within the governance agenda of the two regions. Women MPs work within the governance agenda as their primary function.

African and Arab Women and Political Participation :Although many measures have been taken by the majority of African and Arab countries to enhance women's representation in decision-making positions, women's participation in public life and positions of power have not been achieved the desired level. The Arab region in particular ranks the lowest in the world in terms of women's participation in parliaments. The objective of this paper is to examine the Political participation of women in Africa and the Arab countries and identify different challenges that impede African and Arab women participation in politics and decision making and creating gaps in the roles and participation in peace and security agendas. Challenges include: cultural factors, the stereotyped image of women, women's low self-confidence, lack of coordination among women's organizations, effectiveness/efficiency of women empowerment programs, shortcomings in the institutional and legal frameworks, practices of political parties and election process, skepticism about the Agenda for Women empowerment, the process of development of Women empowerment strategies. Thus, challenges facing women in politics are immense and lead to their limited participation in peace processes. They require the consolidation of all efforts with great belief in women's capabilities as human beings who are able to lead and shoulder the responsibility in the building of their nations.

Setting the Scene at the Global Level: During the last decades, the world has witnessed special international attention to women's issues, and devoted 1975 as the International Year for Women. The year of 1975 laid the groundwork for the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) during the first international conference on women held in Mexico in 1979. The Mexico conference was followed by other main significant international conferences on women held in Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985). The pace of the attention to women's issues has accelerated in the beginning of the nineties, with the growing international concern about the persistence of discrimination against women and the marginalization of their role in all aspects of public affairs including peace and security .

The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994 had the major impact on the emerging concern of gender issues. This was followed by the Beijing conference in 1995, which paved the way to strengthen women's participation in decision-making process and higher positions and endorsed the cumulative effect of the previous efforts of all conferences emphasizing on the states' accountability and commitment to adopt concrete plans of action that respond to Beijing's Platform for Action (BPFA)

In further pursuit of women's rights, the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) in 2000 clearly specified the importance of women development in its Goal 3; —to promote gender equality and empowerment of women.□ Other MDG's have not explicitly stated gender as a target; however, women's issues are addressed implicitly in many areas of the MDG's such as poverty, education, and health

The African and Arab regions were not in isolation from the global debate on women and human rights, where the political will has played a major role in enhancing African and Arab women development. African and Arab countries have witnessed major shifts over the past decade in political, economic, and social development.
The Arab region, comprises 22 states that are members of the Arab League, is defined by a complex set of issues, including the Arab–Israeli conflict and its repercussions, unstable economic conditions and trends, population-resource imbalances and environmental stress while the African region comprises 54 states some of which are members of the Arab league too with almost similar conditions as the Arab region. The Arab Islamic cultural heritage and common Arabic language have preserved a unique character for the region and its peoples while Africa has a diversity of language and identity.. Democratization in the African and Arab region remains a slow process which faces various setbacks including regional instability and conflict, economic imbalances, and the lack of freedom to engage in a meaningful democratic process. Such setbacks have not only hindered the democratization process, but have also delayed efforts aimed at promoting women's empowerment and equal participation in decision-making including their role in peace and security as a decision making architecture

The African and Arab world is ranked by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) as the lowest region in the world on the Gender Empowerment Measure. The African and Arab freedom and democracy deficit' has gained much attention soon

In addition, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) ranked the African and Arab region as the lowest region in terms women participation in parliaments7. Therefore, the political status of African and Arab women is still a critical issue. women. In addition, women participation in politics and decision making was highlighted as one of the main priority areas for women development.

Poor governance is often both a root cause of conflict and a major obstacle to building lasting peace. At the same time, the legacies of conflict – such as polarised societies with high levels of distrust and weak institutions – create barriers to improving governance. Peace, security and peace building are governance issues. Unless Women Parliamentarian have undisputed hand in governance, they cannot play any significant role in any peace and security architecture, because peace and security activities are part of the governance agenda.

Therefore, it is important for you to to be part of processes that improve government accountability and responsiveness in dealing with the unmet needs and contested issues that cause conflict, increase ordinary people's ability to voice concerns, monitor government actions and improve their access to information about existing policies, create better understanding of the challenges and strategies for peacebuilding and

governance , deepen analysis and inspire fresh ideas through international joint analysis like within this framework of Afro-Arab and comparative learning between Women Parliamentarians from Africa and the Arab world. This process is one such forum that is starting to more explicitly explore the policy implications of this experience of Women Parliamentarians from the two regions within the challenges of structural and cultural diversity and history.

Peace building and state building are increasingly the focus of much international attention towards conflict-affected states. The core concern of peace building is putting in place processes that help end violence, address conflict and repair relationships. The focus of state building is on enhancing governance, state capacity and state-society relationships. Madeleine K. Albright once said *"Success without democracy is improbable; democracy without women is impossible."*

Women Parliamentarians work and function with the governance and democracy architecture . Democracy is the best form of government ever devised, but this does not mean that every democracy does well in practice. Many countries with an elected government are held back by the absence of a democratic tradition, or by such problems as poverty, crime, corruption, environmental degradation, and civil strife.

If a democracy is to deliver on its promise, it must be able to count on the contributions of all its citizens including Women and Women Parliamentarians.. This cannot happen if women and girls are prevented, whether by law or by custom, from full participation in the political and economic life of the country.

It is true that the role of women in democracy has been debated for as long as democracy has existed. **The debate, however, is over**. Women are entitled to equality in voting, organizing, running for office, starting a business, obtaining credit, expressing their views, and benefiting from the rights and protections of law.

In the modern world, women's empowerment is not merely a goal, but a cornerstone of democratic growth. This is because women raise issues that others overlook, devote energy to projects that others ignore, reach out to constituencies that others neglect, and help societies to move forward together. Women's empowerment leads to governments that are more representative, responsive, and accountable and better able to reach across ethnic, racial and religious lines. Women have also shown talent and commitment in helping societies to recover from civil war and natural disaster.

The debate is over, but the struggle is not. In many countries, women continue to be denied their rightful place. This may be due to bigotry, chauvinism, tokenism, or a simple fear of fair competition. Sometimes, the gains that women make are too slow and incremental. Often, laws are changed but habits are not , causing good laws to be enforced badly. Frequently, women are advised to wait quietly until "more urgent" concerns are dealt with first; after all, "your time will come."

The time is now. If democracy is going to put down strong and healthy roots, it must profit from the full and equitable participation of women in international, regional , national and local leadership positions and in a full range of advocacy roles. Our hope is that this landmark forum of Women Parliamentarians from Africa and the Arab world will serve as

a resource not only for Women Parliamentarians's work, but also for political parties and civil society leaders working to promote women's engagement in all aspects of public life. I am proud to be part of this effort.

Women in Parliament in Africa and the Arab world: Peace building efforts in Africa and the Arab world today are being hindered because women remain significantly under-represented in today's parliaments, but women must now stop looking beyond the numbers to focus on what you can actually do while in parliament, how you can make an impact, whatever your numbers may be. You are learning the rules of the game and using this knowledge and understanding to promote women's issues and concerns from inside the region's legislatures. In so doing, you are not only increasing the chances of your own success, but you are also paving the way for a new generation of women to enter the legislative process. How can women maximize your impact on the political process and peace building through parliament? What strategies are most useful in increasing your effectiveness? What lessons can you women MPs share with those aspiring to enter the field? In what ways have women impacted on political processes? This is part of my focus, as we move from the road to parliament to making inroads in parliament.

Making Inroads in Parliament: The actual impact you as women parliamentarians can make depends on a number of variables, including the political context in which the assembly functions, the type and number of women who are in parliament and the rules of the parliamentary game. When women in different parts of the world struggled to win the right to vote, they expected that the right to vote would inevitably lead to greater women's representation. Our expectations have not been met. Instead, women embarked on another long and difficult struggle to actually get women elected to parliament. Part of this effort involved convincing women voters to support women as their representatives. In most countries, much of the work centred on political parties, the typical channels of entry to national legislatures. Women
inside and outside political parties organized and mobilized yourselves to change long-established party methods of political recruitment. Once you aswomen entered parliament, your struggle was far from over. In parliament, as women you enter a male domain. Parliaments were established, organized and dominated by men, acting in their own interest and establishing procedures for their own convenience. There was no deliberate conspiracy to exclude women. It was not even an issue. Most long established parliaments were a product of political processes that were male-dominated or exclusively male. Subsequent legislatures were, for the most part, modelled on these established assemblies. Inevitably, these male-dominated organizations reflect certain male biases, the precise kind varying by country, region and culture. Until recently, this "institutional masculinity" has been an invisible characteristic of legislatures; it was embedded, pervasive and taken for granted. Only recently have legislatures' masculine biases come under scrutiny. Indeed, in most
countries and regions, the political role of women in legislatures became a public issue only in the second half of the twentieth century.

In 2002, women constituted 14.3 per cent of legislative members worldwide. In the Nordic countries, their numbers are highest at 38.8 per cent, while in the Arab states their representation is only 4.6 per cent. As with previous efforts to try to get women elected to parliament, today you women inside parliament are organizing, mobilizing, motivating and advancing women from inside the region's legislatures. You are devising strategies and

taking action to promote issues relevant to women and facilitate changes in legislation.

The actual impact women parliamentarians can make will depend on a number of variables that vary from country to country. These include the political context in which the assembly functions, the type and number of women who are in parliament and the rules of the parliamentary game. Each of these factors has a significant bearing on the extent to which You as women MPs can make a difference once elected. Because these factors vary significantly from country to country and from region to region, it is difficult to make generalizations that are regionally or universally relevant regarding how you as women MPs can maximize your impact. In addition, there is very little research and information available on what sort of impact you women have made. Underscoring the need for more knowledge and understanding in this particular field of women and decision-making, the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) said in a report that there is an urgent need for case studies on "women making a difference" in politics.

Extrapolating from what is available in this field and based on interactions and discussions with women MPs around the world, there have identified some of the strategies and mechanisms women are using and can use to impact on the process.The case studies on South Africa and Norway that follow illustrate some of these strategies in action.

Critical Mass: The extent of women's impact will depend very much on the number of women in parliament who are motivated to represent women's issues and concerns. Feminists often argue that pioneer women parliamentarians became surrogate men – that they were socialized into the legislature and became indistinguishable from the men they replaced. I too doubt this. Men are known to behave differently when women are absent. Because it upsets gender boundaries, the presence of even one woman will alter male behaviour; the presence of several women will alter it even further. West European experience shows that where women MPs have a mission to effect change even small numbers can produce significant results. While the presence of even one woman can make a difference, long-term significant change will largely be realized when there is a sufficient number of women in parliament who are motivated to represent women's concerns. This need for a significant minority of women to affect political change has been referred to by feminist political scientists as "critical mass". According to Drude Dahlerup, the test that a critical mass of women is present is the acceleration of the development of women's representation through acts that improve the situation for themselves and for women in general. These actions are critical acts of empowerment. In her studies of women MPs in Scandinavia, Dahlerup found that women politicians worked to recruit other women and developed new legislation and institutions to benefit women. As their numbers grew it became easier to be a woman politician and public perceptions of women politicians changed.

Rules Strategy: This strategy helps maximize women's impact on the legislative process. The full
development of this rules strategy requires a critical mass of women working on and promoting women's concerns. Simply put, the strategy consists of three parts: learning the rules, using the rules and changing the rules. By rules we mean the customs, conventions, informal practices and specific regulations that govern the way a legislature functions. These include law-making processes, division of labour in the assembly, hierarchy structures, ceremonies, disciplines, traditions, habits and the norms of the assembly including its internal functioning and its relationship to other parts of the government and to

the nation it has been elected to serve. This strategy of learning, using and changing the rules is based on the belief that there is a need for change and that an objective in electing women MPs is to secure change. Scholars and experts have identified essentially four types of change that will make a difference to women. They can be categorized as institutional/procedural change, representation change, influence on output and discourse.

Institutional/procedural change: This refers to measures that alter the nature of the institution to make it more "womanfriendly". Cultural changes, such as greater gender awareness, should be accompanied by procedural changes designed to accommodate women members. Increased gender awareness is not simply a matter of including women, but also a sensitivity that women are no more a universal category than are men and that class, age, ethnicity, race, physical ability, sexuality, parenting and life stage, have a determining effect on women's lives, much the same as they do on men's lives.

Representation change: This involves specific actions to secure women's continued and enhanced access to the legislature. These include encouragement of women candidates; a conscious use of role model capacities; the promotion of sex equality legislation, parity or equality regulations; and appropriate changes in electoral and campaigning laws. Representation change also includes actions in parliament that are designed to place women in important parliamentary positions and to secure their presence in government. It must also include changes in political parties that bring more women to legislatures. Parliamentary women often use the power their representative status gives them to support improving political opportunities for women in their parties. Similarly, parliamentary women may organize to support women for higher office. Parliaments constitute a crucial pool of recruitment to higher office.

Impact/Influence on output: This refers specifically to the "feminization" of legislation and other policy outputs, i.e., the to which laws and policies have been altered or influenced in women's favour. This includes both putting women's issues on the agenda and ensuring that all legislation is woman-friendly or gender-sensitive.

Women Parliamentarians and Peace Building: On October 31, 2000, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted **Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (SCR 1325)**. The adoption of Resolution 1325 was historic and unprecedented and marked the first time the Security Council addressed the disproportionate and unique impact of armed conflict on women, recognized the under-valued and under-utilized contributions women make to conflict prevention, peacekeeping, conflict resolution and peace-building, and stressed the importance of their equal and full participation as active agents in peace and security.

In response to persistent advocacy from civil society, the UN Security Council has so far adopted four additional resolutions on Women, Peace and Security. In addition **to SCR1325 (2000), these resolutions are: Security Council Resolutions 1820 (2008); 1888 (2009); 1889 (2009) and 1960 (2010).** The five resolutions should be taken together as they comprise the Women, Peace and Security thematic agenda of the Security Council, and the international security policy framework. The obligations in the resolutions extends from the international to the local level, as well as from intergovernmental bodies, such as the United Nations, the Arab league, the African Union, to national level governments.

As the body responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, it is critical that the **Security Council** itself consistently and systematically addresses gender and women's rights in its own work and policy-making. It is obliged to implement all of its resolutions on women, peace and security – Security Council Resolutions 1325, 1820, 1888, 1889 and 1960.

The Security Council's agenda is comprised of both geographic situations and thematic issues. Women, Peace and Security is one of these larger thematic agenda items of which the Security Council holds annual Open Debates, ad-hoc briefings, and also adopts resolutions and presidential statements.

Peace processes and dialogue are essential approaches to addressing conflict. The foundations for a just and sustainable peace are laid when those in conflict agree on how to resolve the issues that have divided them and how they will live together peacefully in the future.In addition to formal negotiations peace processes include efforts to help parties to conflict and conflict affected communities to change the way they think about the conflict, increase understanding and improve inter-communal relationships.

Creating space for dialogue: Therefore, much of your work should centre around peace processes. You should as Women MPs work with the different sides involved in a conflict to help them develop an understanding of what can be done differently and create opportunities for the people involved in the conflict to come together to discuss the issues. All this is done with a view to bringing those involved closer to a peaceful resolution of the conflict

But , unfortunately, in peace processes in Africa and the Arab world, the voices of women and women MPs often go unheard and women and women MPs are under-represented in local, national and international conflict resolution strategies. In the vast territory affected by conflict, channels of communication amongst women remain limited. As a result, international and local efforts aimed at resolving conflicts are poorly informed by the views and experiences of women. Yet the perspectives of women are critical if we are to understand the impact the conflict has had on communities and the ways in which communities can transform attitudes that sustain violence.

Your role is to work towards strengthening the contribution of women to local, national and international peacebuilding efforts. You need to work with women and women's organisations in each of the affected countries to empower and help them take more active roles in addressing the effects of the violence. The need for women and women MPs inclusion in all stages of conflict prevention and peace building processes is a pre-requisite condition for maintaining peace and security , SCR 1325 and the challenges to meaningful implementation, overcoming cultural misconceptions and finally the future for women's inclusion in the Arab Spring and other conflict-ridden areas of Africa and the

Arab world need to form the foundation of you anchoring your role with the international peace and security architecture, this is the foundation of the your mandate. This mandate can then be used to localized situations and circumstances in the regions and at national and local levels.

The UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security recognizes women's roles and perspectives in all stages of war, armed conflict and peacebuilding processes. With SCR 1325, women were fully recognized as agents of change; inextricably linked to conflict management and sustainable peace. The Resolution mandates that women should be included in all stages of peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction, but also that their human rights are to be respected in all conflict situations. The issue of gender is to be an integrated part of all policies related to post-conflict reconstruction, reconciliation and peacebuilding. According to the Resolution, there will be no sustainable peace without these provisions.

But since its conception in 2000, only 20 countries have developed National Action Plans (NAP) for the implementation of SCR 1325. The main problem in implementing SCR 1325 seems to be lack of political will at the national and regional levels, as this is where your role as women parliamentarians lie. The failure to operationalize SCR1325 is a failure by women MPs. You are the legislatures but your allow legislation in parliament that has no bearing on women while not question why legislation for which you have a major stake is not forth coming.

Given these obstacles, the most important thing the two regions can do is finance work on peace and women's inclusion. For instance, look at Nobel Peace Prize laureate Leymah Gbowee. She and her White T-shirts Movement received no funding from the outside, but she still managed to topple a dictator. Your forum needs to encourage such local, civil activism in the future. Your annual meetings should be action oriented, like adopting a plan for the development of Women MPs NAP for the implementation of SCR 1325 in countries where the government is not moving forward on the issue. Though, one of the main challenges in the years ahead is finding ways to overcome the argument that the Resolution needs to yield way to local culture and traditions.

One of the main challenges to implementing SCR 1325 is the debunking of the myth that the Resolution is an imposition of an external agenda, Very often, messages from male politicians that women's participation and inclusion in peace building and conflict management is "alien to our culture." In these instances, I always ask them: Can we ask the women about that? So, we need to do two things at the same time: make universal values resonate with local contexts, and, at the same time, insist on the message highlighted by the Nobel Peace Prize; that the fight for women's rights is indeed universal and cross-cultural."

Enforcement and accountability: A recurring subject in the discussion on the implementation of SCR 1325 was the lack of enforcement and accountability. How can we translate the policies of SCR 1325 into something real. The Ivory Coast has been one of the champions of the Resolution, and yet it seems to make no difference when tensions in the local communities arise. Cases like Liberia show that a meaningful implementation can happen. We need to learn from their experiences."

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The Nobel Peace Prize laureates for 2011, Leymah Gbowee, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and Tawakkol Karman, have defied and corrected the stereotype that women in conflict are passive victims. In Nepal during the civil war, there were hardly any men in conflict-ridden areas, the men were either out fighting or otherwise involved in the armed struggle. It was the women who stayed behind in the villages negotiating their day-to-day survival with both state and paramilitary forces. It is these women's experiences and excellent survival skills that we need to build upon as women MPs.

CONCLUSION: The people negotiating peace accords after conflict and war are often the very same people who stood on opposite sides in the conflict. In addition to this, the peace negotiation delegates are almost exclusively male. In this situation, the brokered peace deal will not reflect the needs and interests of a large part of the population, including those of women. women's perspectives of armed conflict tend to be completely different from those of men. Oftentimes, women's approaches to post-conflict reconstruction will take a more holistic view, where peacebuilding is thought of as something more than drawing up borders, building infrastructure and new state institutions. Safe access to health care, HIV/AIDS prevention, clean drinking water and measures to combat domestic violence are all vital in achieving sustainable peace and are all recurring themes when women are asked about their needs.

The countries that has made real headway, and proven to be true inspirations on the issues of women's inclusion in peacebuilding and conflict management, are all countries from the global South, New democracies in the Middle East and North Africa should really look to countries like Rwanda, Nepal and South Africa for input on processes of drafting a new and just constitution."

I also agreed that the transitional stage between revolutionary upheaval and the establishment of a sustainable, democratic state was difficult. However, she pertained that we need to be optimistic and that we all need to be part of the solution, not the problem. We need to empower the women and youth who have marched in the streets. In our struggle we also need both men and women. We rely on one another: Women cannot gain their rights without men and men will not live in a just society until women are fully included and accepted as equals.

State institutions and post-conflict managers do not know how much they are missing out on when not including women's voices in peacebuilding processes. The Arab Spring seems to provide an opportunity for women who in the past have been ignored and silenced, to speak up. We need an embodiment of the message of SCR 1325: That women are not just victims, but provides vital contributions to rethinking security issues, and processes for building sustainable peace.