



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
28 August 2013

English only

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## Human Rights Council

Twenty-fourth session

Agenda item 2

**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner  
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the  
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

### **Written statement\* submitted by Femmes Afrique Solidarité, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[21 August 2013]

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\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

## **The situation of human rights in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)**

Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS) presents its compliments to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for its report (A/HRC/24/33) on the situation of human rights and the activities of her Office in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

According to its mission to promote and strengthen African women's economic and political leadership in conflict prevention, management and resolution, FAS has been working with the Human Rights Council (HRC) for years to make sure women voices are heard at the international level and to ensure that women are involved in formal and informal peace processes across the African continent.

FAS has been active in the Great Lakes region since 1996. Under the scope of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, FAS has been instrumental in the adoption and implementation of a National Action Plan for UNSCR 1325 in the DRC and the development of a Regional Action Plan for UNSCR 1325 in the Great Lakes region, uniting women across country borders to demand actions that guarantee peace.

FAS submits this written statement to call for action to end widespread human rights abuses by all parties to the conflict in eastern Congo that has continued in 2013. The situation of human rights has significantly deteriorated during the period under review and is still characterised by serious violations of international humanitarian law, including summary executions, mass rape, sexual violence, child recruitment, looting and displacement.

FAS is extremely concerned about the humanitarian impact of the crisis in the eastern region of DRC particularly in Katanga, North Kivu, and South Kivu provinces which, according to the United Nations (UN), includes 2.6 million internally displaced people (IDPs) and 6.4 million in need of food and emergency aid.

In addition, the conflict has disproportionate impact on women and children and violence against women and children remains a major human rights concern which has serious physical, psychological and social implications.

The OHCHR report A/HRC/24/33 recognizes that sexual violence continues at appalling levels throughout the country. Pursuant to paragraph D, part II the report notes that gender-based crimes in the DRC are still used as a weapon of war and are mostly committed by armed groups including the Congolese army. The fight against impunity requires the active and real commitment of the Congolese government and global support from the international community.

The limited progress toward access to justice and effective accountability mechanisms highlighted in the report result in the fact that the majority of rape cases are not prosecuted and the provision of services and reparations for women survivors of conflict-related sexual violence remains inadequate. The design of reparations programmes is crucial to the transformation from violence to security and women must be consulted in the establishment of such mechanisms.

The low number of women judges dealing with cases of sexual violence in conflict-affected areas; the lack of protection for women who report these crimes and for women rights defenders, particularly in rural communities; and the very low representation of women in the political sphere contributes to the systemic marginalization and discrimination of women.

Despite the constraints and barriers they face, women play a central role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, and in the building of peace at community, national, and international levels, from early-warning to post-conflict reconstruction.

FAS's recent efforts to ensure full and effective participation of women in conflict resolution and peace building in the DRC effectively link UNSCR 1325 to the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation (PSC) Framework. Together with H.E. Mary Robinson, the UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region of Africa, and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), FAS organised the first Regional Conference on Women, Peace, Security and Development in the Great Lakes region in Bujumbura, Burundi in July 2013.

The Regional Conference, which was referenced in the Statement of the President of the Security Council dated 25 July 2013 (S/PRST/2013/11) outlined a road map for women's participation in the peace process and the development of gender-sensitive benchmarks and indicators to guide the implementation of the PSC Framework. Another key outcome of the meeting was the adoption of a draft Regional Action Plan for UNSCR 1325 by the governments of the DRC, Rwanda and Burundi. The Conference gathered more than one hundred women leaders from the region, from civil society and government, who were able to overcome differences to arrive at consensus by adopting the "Bujumbura Declaration".

These important initial steps will only see true fruition for peace in the region if they are matched with ongoing promotion of women's rights and women's participation in the PSC Framework agreement and the implementation of the Regional Action Plan for UNSCR 1325. Both instruments provide an opportunity for essential cross-regional dialogue on peace and stability in a region seeking a sustainable end to conflict.

**FAS would like to make the following recommendations to the HCR and Member States:**

**1. Accountability**

Support the effective implementation of UNSCR 1325 and all existing national and regional instruments towards regional peace in the Great Lakes region that support the full involvement of women.

**2. Women political participation**

Support the Government of the DRC to significantly enhance the inclusion of women in peace negotiations and their representation at all levels.

**3. Protection of civilians**

Urge the Congolese government to fulfil its obligation to protect civilians from human rights abuses especially with regards to sexual violence for women living in conflict zones.

**4. Justice**

Provide substantial efforts to strengthen the governance, security and justice sectors and ensure access to justice for all women.

**5. Impunity**

Support the implementation of the Kampala Declaration on prevention, ending impunity and providing assistance to victims of sexual and gender-based violence in the Great Lakes region