**DEPUTY PRESIDENT: REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

Private Bag X 1000, Pretoria, 0001

# NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ORAL REPLIES THURSDAY, 20 AUGUST 2020

**(Submitted as written) DEPUTY PRESIDENT**

## 7. Ms J M Mofokeng (ANC) to ask the Deputy President:

With reference to the theme *Silencing the Guns: Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa’s Development* and upon the Republic’s assumption of the Chair of the African Union (AU), the Government committed to promote women’s economic inclusion and strengthening the fight against gender-based violence, which are challenges faced by women in Africa that have all been exacerbated by the novel coronavirus, what therefore are the details of his role in assisting the President in efforts towards building a better Africa as the Envoy to South Sudan in silencing the guns on the continent, with particular reference to (a) protecting women and children and (b) fighting gender- based violence? **NO1950E**

## REPLY:

South Africa continues to be at the frontline of championing the implementation of the African Union theme for the year, of “Silencing the Guns: Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa’s Development”. The flagship initiative of *Silencing the Guns* is at the core of activities led by the African Union, towards ensuring that Africa is a more peaceful and stable continent.

Amidst various challenges encountered such as the unprecedented global COVID-19 pandemic, we are forging ahead with this work, towards laying a foundation for achieving the objectives linked to Agenda 2063. At the centre of this agenda, is prioritising mechanisms that promote a dialogue-centred approach to conflict prevention, mediation and resolution of conflicts to ensure that peace and a culture of tolerance is entrenched.

Alongside leading these African Union efforts, South Africa continues to play a role of assisting in the implementation of the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan. Our role is to ensure that the Revitalised Government of National Unity achieves all elements they have set out, to attain national reconciliation, national healing and that permanent and sustainable peace is restored to enable South Sudan to prosper and where its people realise their full human potential.

Evidence across all conflict spots, demonstrates that at the receiving end of conflict is always the ordinary people, mostly women and children who bear the brunt of immeasurable pain and disruption to their lives. In conflict, women and children often face the daunting task of keeping families together after displacement by providing food, clothing and shelter. With our humanitarian intervention in South Sudan, women are the majority of beneficiaries. The same is true for the Central African Republic, where the conflict of over the past two decades has had a dramatic impact on women and children.

To date, South Africa has been championing interventions in the region, which are focused on facilitating high level national dialogues, reconciliation support, offering high level advisory services and the necessary technical support required for building and strengthening the political and economic infrastructure required for sustainable democracy. We do this, for we believe that conflict is not good for our continent as it stunts growth and development. It breeds discontent and it is a recipe for disaster.

In our engagements with leaders on the continent, we have always advocated for international, regional and national strategies which are gender responsive, and focused on the advancement of the rights of women and girls.

This year the world also marks 25 years since the *Beijing Declaration: Platform for Action* that was adopted by the United Nations, which advocated strongly for the rights of women and gender equality to be prioritised. As we mark the historic Beijing Declaration, we also need to guard against regressing on the gains made in the global fight against all forms of violence against women and other forms of gender-based violence and femicide.

According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS for instance, nearly one in three women worldwide have experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner, non-partner sexual violence or both in their lifetime.

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1820 further highlights that, sexual violence is “a tactic of war to humiliate, dominate, instil fear in, disperse and/or forcibly relocate civilian members of a community or an ethnic group.” In such instances, rape is used to demoralise and destabilise entire communities. Women and children are often the most vulnerable to this war tactic during times of conflict.

As we have said, these challenges have been exacerbated by the global COVID-19 pandemic, which is heavily affecting the livelihoods, socio-economic stability and security of many families and communities in Africa. This pandemic has shown that women and girls are disproportionally affected, often finding themselves at the forefront of fighting the disease.

We can all agree that more needs to be done at individual country level as well as globally to eradicate such violations. We have always advocated for strategies that would commit Member States of the African Union to ensure access to justice for victims and survivors of gender-based violence, protecting women and girls in humanitarian situations across Africa, and establishing of humanitarian corridors for accessing aid.

We are encouraged that the African Union recognises gender equality as a fundamental human right, and an integral part of regional integration, economic growth and social development. To this end, the African Union has developed a strategy for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment, to ensure the inclusion of women in Africa’s development agenda. This Gender Empowerment strategy is a timely intervention to address imbalances and gender inequities.

We are confident that all parties and stakeholders in South Sudan, will ensure that peace holds and that women are not hindered in playing a leading role in the rebuilding of the country and all its institutions.

South Africa shall continue to support such efforts, as we do with the capacity training programme that supports peace-building efforts. The training focuses on increasing existing mediation capacity of women.

The Capacity Training Programme in Conflict Resolution, Negotiation and Mediation attracts international women, the majority of which are from African Member States to the African Union. This programme has trained 26 women leaders, including those from the Republic of South Sudan in the current year.

In conclusion, we have always sought to ensure that our commitment to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of human rights is among the guiding principles that inform South Africa’s engagement with South Sudan, and the rest of Africa.

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