



**OPENING REMARKS BY H.E AMB. RAYCHELLE OMAMO, SC, EGH
DURING THE 1063RD OPEN SESSION OF THE PEACE AND SECURITY
COUNCIL ON THE URBANIZATION, WOMEN PEACE AND SECURITY,
TUESDAY, 8TH FEBRUARY 2022**

**AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, H.E. Amb.
Bankole Adeoye;**

Honourable Ministers present;

**H.E. Madam Bineta Diop, AU Special Envoy on Women, Peace and
Security;**

**Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif - the Executive Director of the United
Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat);**

Your Excellences,

Distinguished members of the Peace & Security Council,

1. I welcome you to this session and heartily thank you for designating time to attend this 1063rd open session on urbanization, women, peace and security nexus.
2. Africa is rapidly urbanizing and its urban population will almost double in the next 20 years, from 587 million in 2020 to 1.12 billion in 2040. Data from the UN HABITAT indicates that Africa's rate of urbanization rose from 15% in 1960 to 40% in 2010, and is likely to rise to 60% in 2050. While the phenomenon of urbanization exhibits many positive things, unplanned and rapid urbanization is becoming the biggest challenge of our times. Most of the people living in our

cities are poor and therefore pose serious challenges to governance, peace and national security.

3. Since unplanned urbanization is not driven by industrialization, the subsequent scarcity of employment and income-generating opportunities coupled with rapid population increase is overwhelming governments and creating circumstances for increased poverty, violence and despair for women and girls. Moreover, unplanned urbanization weakens traditional family support systems leaving women and girls extremely exposed thereby requiring governments to provide social and safety nets.
4. In situations of war and internal conflict, cities become magnets for the internally displaced and refugees, including climate change refugees, therefore stabilization and state rebuilding, relief and integration must take this phenomenon into account. We need to understand that IDPs and refugees in cities can also transfer community conflict to these settings.
5. War and conflict in cities is becoming more pronounced. Terror attacks have almost exclusively focused on urban spaces. The impact of this on the protection of civilians and the provisions of services pose new and unprecedented challenges for peacekeepers and humanitarian workers. Attacks destroy infrastructure such as water supply, housing, energy supply and other services and affect the quality of life of women and children the most.
6. Cities can become centers of conflict between urban criminal gangs, such as drug cartels and formal law enforcement agencies thereby undermining state governance and exposing women to violence and

insecurity from both formal and informal security structures. In addition, women are extremely vulnerable to electoral violence in our cities especially Gender Based Violence.

7. Women's experiences in urban areas are highly varied and context-specific, shaped by factors such as location, education levels, household profiles and wealth. Typically, gender norms and discrimination mean that women in African cities are likely to be more vulnerable to environmental hazards than men, and face additional socio-economic challenges.
8. Although comprising an important constituency of the urban population, women in African cities are generally poor and mostly operate in the informal economy. Their limited resources mean they do not have security of tenure in urban settlements and have no means to provide protection to their business, homes and families.
9. In many cities around Africa, the major issues and concerns of urban safety and security affecting women and girls relate to crime and violence, insecurity of tenure and forced evictions, and natural and human made disasters. The increase in informal centres in urban areas has led to an increase in ungoverned spaces that the Government and specifically security agencies cannot monitor. The unplanned and fluid circumstances in sprawling urban settlements means women are susceptible to human trafficking, slavery and sexual exploitation as well as radicalization and violent extremism.
10. Women are the worst affected in forced evictions, resettlement schemes, slum clearance, domestic violence, civil conflict, discriminatory inheritance laws and practices, development projects,

and globalization policies. Sexual violence is often used to forcibly remove women from their homes before and during forced evictions. Combined together, these threats pose a challenge to national governments as well as the international community.

11. For this reason, urban planning and development needs to be elevated to a national security issue and should be gender sensitive and take the unique challenges germane to women and girls into account e.g. easier access to hospitals, sanitary and hygiene facilities and effective policing, which are necessary for increasing security of women and their participation in society. Also, women, especially those in informal sectors need to be meaningfully included in political decision making, to enable them bring their issues to the peace building table and to create conditions for a gender inclusive sustainable peace.
12. It is in this regard that today's open session committed to the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda, a thematic issue which has been part of the PSC's standing agenda items since 2010, is expected to address the nexus between Women, Peace and Security and urbanization.
13. Although the United Nations (UN) Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 speaks to the positive contributions and negative impacts of urbanization on the implementation of the WPS agenda, there is need for further assessment of the prevailing conditions in order to develop tangible action points.
14. Indeed, both Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2030 recognize urbanization as a driver of sustainable growth and transformation.

Furthermore, the new global Urban Agenda adopted at the Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development provides further impetus to optimize the urban advantage in support of Africa's long-term vision for transformation.

Excellences, Distinguished Members of the Council,

15. The objective of our meeting today is to explore the role that sustainable urbanization and effective cities and local governments can play in preventing escalation of conflicts, rebuilding the social contract, preventing further displacement, extremism and proxy-wars, and promoting bottom-up stabilization efforts to complement higher-level peace processes.

16. To effectively dissect today's subject matter, some of the questions that we may need to ask ourselves include:
 - How do we incorporate the crisis in Africa's burgeoning cities and the emerging patterns of violence and instability in urban settings into the WPS agenda, with regard to the key pillars of participation, protection, prevention and relief and recovery?
 - What initiatives should we take in the areas of peacekeeping and peacebuilding in light of the impact of rapid urbanization and violence particularly in conflict and post-conflict settings? What is the role of women peacekeepers in this regard?
 - How can women in urban settings become agents of peace and stability in post-conflict rebuilding processes? How can existing organic peace building efforts by local women be incorporated into peace negotiations and peace agreements and related political processes? How do we ensure that women's voices are heard in efforts towards strengthening local

governance and administration to enable the silencing of guns in urban settings?

- How can security sector reforms be more aligned to the protection of women in urban spaces, especially with regard to reshaping police forces and other local administration agencies particularly in conflict and post-conflict settings?
- How can we protect women and raise their voices in urban settings?
- What are the new triggers and risks for international peace and security associated with rapid unplanned urbanization, climate change, conflict over land and urban violence? And what kind of early warning mechanisms can be put in place?

17. I thank you for your kind attention and I wish you fruitful deliberations.

Thank You for your kind attention.