

'Stronger' effort must be made to cement peace deal for South Sudanese women and girls: UN Women chief

Putting the latest peace deal into real effect across South Sudan, must include addressing "in a stronger manner, the challenges facing women and girls", said the UN's leading voice for gender-equality, who is part of a joint United Nations-African Union delegation to the country this week.

The delegation's there to express solidarity with the people and leadership of the country, in support of the peace agreement signed early last month in Addis Ababa by President Salva Kiir and his former deputy and political rival, Riek Machar.

Speaking after arriving in the capital, Juba, both [UN Peacekeeping](#) chief, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, and the head of the UN's gender equality agency, [UN Women](#), Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, said there was a need to focus on those most affected by conflict – vulnerable women and children.

South Sudan's development has been stunted by ongoing conflict over the past five years, but there is hope that the new deal will stem the tide of violence across the country, which has resulted in the displacement of more than four million people.

We want to be sure that all negotiations going forward must include women in a substantive way. Women need to be supported and protected – *Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Women*

"We are currently at a time where the emphasis has to be put on the implementation of the revitalized peace agreement," said Jean-Pierre Lacroix. "We are ready to help, we are ready to support and at the same time ready to say that it is very important to take time...for the implementation to be inclusive."

Championing the rights of women who are victims of the conflict, Mr. Lacroix said that women being heard "represents the process of bringing peace to South Sudan."

"There is a glimmer of hope now with the peace agreement, but we know much more needs to be done, and we are here to see how we can help that," he said. "The only way to bring durable peace is to build an inclusive peace."

While there has been some skepticism about whether the political will exists to implement the peace agreement, the international community hopes that the government and opposition parties will compromise to enable peace to prosper.

“The purpose of our visit is to focus on women, peace and security because of the impact of the conflict on women,” said Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka.

“It is to be in solidarity with women and to look at how we can address, in a stronger manner, the challenges that are facing women and girls, especially violence against women.”

“We want to be sure that all negotiations going forward must include women in a substantive way. Women need to be supported and protected...but women are also decision makers in their own rights, so it is important to hear their voices,” she said.

September’s peace deal has a 35 percent quota of executive appointments set aside for women, “It’s a good step and we would like them to do more,” said the UN Women chief.

The Africa Union’s Speciosa Wandira-Kazibwe, who is also the chairperson of the African Women’s Network on Mediation – FemWise, said she wanted to encourage the women of South Sudan and tell them to join men in the struggle to develop the country.

Referring to the peace agreement, she said: “What is happening in South Sudan gives us a lot of hope, and with hope, there is innovation, with hope there is rebirth.”

She challenged South Sudan’s leaders to end the conflict and work together for peace. “The dream of silencing the guns in Africa is here, and it is up to us to take it – take the bull by the horns now, in South Sudan, to make sure that this region which has been dubbed the Great Lakes Region of conflict, becomes the Great Lakes Region of peace and prosperity,” she said.

Female UN police and military personnel held discussions with the joint-delegation which stressed the need for increased numbers of women serving in peacekeeping missions.

“We are convinced that peacekeeping with more women is more effective peacekeeping,” said Jean-Pierre Lacroix. “We heard from their experiences. We heard about the challenges they are facing.

He said that with more women in the [UN Mission in South Sudan, UNMISS](#), and with more women in peacekeeping operations in general, “we are better at engaging with the population, we are better at creating trust [and] confidence, and therefore we are better at building peace.”