

Experiences of women in conflict area
conflicts in Africa

“In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate”

It is my distinct pleasure to express to European People's Party and women to the friendly people of Spain my sincere thanks and deep gratitude for hosting our works in the beautiful city of mallorca . I take this opportunity to express my deep consideration to the EPP for his support to the sustained efforts of African countries for Peace and development .

Introduction :

I would like to start my speech by the message of the United Nation's Secretary General Ban Ki Moon on 13 June 2010 a 100 days countdown to international days of peace «one hundred days from today, the world will mark the international day of peace _ a day on which armed conflict is meant to be stilled ...a day on which we appeal to combatants to observe the ceasefire...a day on which we reaffirm commitment to non-violence and the peaceful resolution of disputes...”

Our Academy workshop coincide with the declaration of the African Union Assembly 2010, “the year of Peace and security in Africa .the year provides the continent with an opportunity to take stock of and celebrate its achievements in peace-building as well as to review current efforts with a view to strengthening them and were appropriate launching new initiatives for peace and security” .

According to the African statistical yearbook 2010 (prepared by Development African Bank with the collaboration of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund) the total mid year population of Africa is around 1008354 thousand on 2009 which is one of eight of the world 's population ,yet 75 percent of the continent, is sparsely inhabited ,with the highest birthrate of any continent Africa projected to grow to tow billion by 2050, so it will face the most serious shortages of food and water.

The African Gross Domestic Product GDP represent only 3.1 percent of the world GDP, however Japan contribute itself by 6 present . unfortunately for African people continent's resources and wealth have rarely been harnessed for their benefit and if we argue that poverty is both a cause and a consequence of conflict, that poverty leads to conflict and vice versa we have a response how 30 of 53 countries in Africa are currently experiencing some form of conflict .

My presentation is divided into three parts I begin by reminding causes and consequences of conflicts then summarizing some conflicts in three zones. Next I examine the impact of wars and armed conflicts on women and the main solutions taken , the Tunisian experience in building a long lasting peace and creating safety will be the last part of this presentation.

Part I : Africa conflict : causes and consequences

1) ROOT CAUSES OF CONFLICT AND WARS

Poor governance, mismanagement political corruption, lack of respect for rule of law, human rights violations are all common reasons heard for some of Africa's problems. But those are not the only reasons for these problem because there are other root causes such as :

- The legacy of European colonialism :the artificial boundaries created by colonial rulers as they ruled and finally left Africa had the effect of bringing together many different ethnic people within the nation that did not reflect, no have the ability to accommodate or provide for cultural and ethnic diversity.

- The new political geography once imposed by colonialist process was enthusiastically reinforced by the African themselves, tribes became the object of passionate African imagination.

- The support for the repressive regimes in the cold war ,the creation of the debt trap, the massive failure of structural adjustment programmers imposed by international monetary fund and the world bank and the deeply unfair rules on international trade cannot be denied .

- Inept leadership is also one of the most factors, few countries in Africa with good leadership have been stable .

- In the competition for oil and other precious resources in Africa interests external to Africa continue to play a large and sometimes decisive role both in suppressing conflict and in sustaining it.

Causes of armed conflict are numerous and interconnected which give rise to violent reactions.

2) CONSEQUENCES

conflicts makes life a constant process of adopting to basic insecurity and permanent crises for the generations caught up in war. this is generally the impact in human we can cite :

- wars displace whole populations and make millions homeless. over than 9 million Africans are currently living as refugees as a result of wars and regional conflicts.

- wars prevents people from meeting their basic needs by destroying crops land and environment . Civilians ,mostly women and children bear the brunt of war ,accounting over 80 % of war victims .

- conflicts contribute to the “feminization of poverty” , women are not as mobile as men ,do not have the same access to credit and resources and must assume men’s responsibilities in addition to their own .

- war and militarization impose special burdens on children when children are drafted into armies . The number of orphans and homeless children grows .children in a culture of violence fueling the desperation that forces them to pick up a gun before they reach adulthood .

- war impairs physical and mental development , destroys schools and immerses , and promote disease .

- war destroys social fabric and coping mechanisms when civilians are direct targets or affected by standers ,returning to moral community life can take years following the deliberate destruction of social institutions and way of life .

- war disrupts the support provided by wider family and kinship systems, exacerbates divisions between groups increases intra –groups insecurity and hostility ,disrupts inter group economic relation.

- violent conflicts destroy local and national economies capital and investment and skew productive activity often deliberately.

3) A view of three dramatically wars

We choose just to speak about Darfur Rwanda and DR of Congo because of their importance in Africa history and because we haven't a lot of time to illustrate other experiences.

3-1) **The Darfur conflict** is a civil war, it began in February 2003 when movements groups in Darfur took up arms, accusing the Sudanese government of oppressing black Africans in favor of Arabs.

Some 2,7 million people have fled their homes since the conflict begun in the arid western region and the U.N says about 300000 have died. Many agreements of ceasefire were signed between the government and the army groups to pursue further peace however disrupted (the last one was before the April 2010 elections).

War crimes had been committed, Darfures say the janjaweed patrol outside the camps and men are killed, and women raped if they venture too far in search of firewood or water.

There are thousands of peacekeepers in the region under the auspice of a joint African Union and U.N peacekeeping mission.

3-2) **The Rwandan genocide** in 1990 a rebel group composed of Tutsi refugees invaded Northern Rwanda from Uganda which increased the Ethnic tensions in the country and led to the rise of Hutu power after

four year civil war with the Hutu dominated regime of the President Habyarimana . The Rwandan Genocide was declenched by the assigation of the president lasting 100 days, at least 800000 people were killed.

Women were targeted during the genocide on the basis not only of their ethnicity, but also of their gender, they were subjected to sexual assault and torture, including rape, forced incest and breast oblation . Women who survived the genocide witnessed unspeakable cruelty and lost husbands, children, relatives and communities . In addition to this violence, women lost their livelihoods and property, were displaced from their homes, and saw their families separated.

After the genocide, Rwanda had a demographic imbalance 70% female, so women assumed roles as heads of household, community leaders and financial provides. Rwanda is still vastly underdeveloped and the great majority of Rwandan women are disadvantaged with regard to education, legal rights, health and access to resources.

The dramatic gains for women are result of specific mechanisms used to increase women's political participation, now Rwandan women held more than 50% of seats in the country's parliament, it traced the changes in gender roles in post genocide Rwanda .

3-3) Democratic Republic of Congo : After Belgian colonization, President Mobutu was soon seduced by the wealth of the country and once he controlled and gained a level of stability and prosperity, he remained in power which contributed in the growth of ethnic groups.

The Rwanda's genocide affected DR Congo because it has common borders through where more than two million Hutus fearing reprisals against them by the new, Tutsi-dominated government in Rwanda. Than they allied themselves with Mobutu's government and began to attach DR Congo's sizeable population of Ethnic Tutsis.

The Tutsi militias, allied to other local groups backed by Uganda overthrew Mobutu's government, and installed Kabila as President unable to get rid of the Hutu militia and tiny Rwanda Kabila called in help from Zimbabwe, Namibia and Angola all of which fought a proxy 5 year war on Congolese land

during which war was used as a cover to loot country's reaches. War was over in 2003, however the East of the country remained unstable.

The U.N's current mission in DR Congo was the biggest peacekeeping operation in the world. It's mandated to protect civilians and also help in the reconstruction of the country.

But Congolese government troops backed by thousands of peacekeepers failed to defeat the Hutu rebels from the Democratic forces for the liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) .

Part II : Conflict impact on women and different Solutions

1) Conflict impact on women

Sexual and other violence against women have been the feature of conflicts across Africa from Sierra Leone and Liberia to Burundi and Democratic Republic of Congo rape often used as a weapon of war, even worse policemen and soldiers whose job is normally to protect citizens have in some case often been among the abusers.

An Average of 40 women are raped daily in South Kivu, DRC ; in Sierra Leone , more than 50,000 internally displaced women suffered sexual assault at the hands of combatants ; the Rwandan genocide memorial notes that 500,000 women were raped during 100 days of conflict .

Yet sexual violence statistics are underestimated reporting is impeded not only by fear of stigmatization and the disintegration of institutions – it is often seen as futile . Rape victims caught up in conflict or crisis are among the world's least accessible people in some of the most austere, remote regions . Rape is a torture tactic of choice, because victims are reticent to report . Survivors are stigmatized : wives rejected by husbands, girls rendered “unmarriageable” , pregnant women accused of adultery or of tainting family “honor”. This misplaced blame and shame has deep roots in a historical absence of accountability.

2) Interventions from regional to international community

We believe that the politics of exclusion adds to the multiple factors which cause conflict and political instability on the African continent . Giving recognition and visibility to women and their work is the main strategy to engender the peace process for the attainment of human security and durable peace in Africa.

Global recognition and support for the importance of women's participation and involvement in leadership and decision-making has been prominent essentially by the fourth world conference on women Beijing and the international conference on population and development. Major outcomes of these international efforts have been the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women CEDAW .

States parties to these conventions and agreements are obligated to ensure women's equal access to and equal opportunities in, political and public life, including the right to vote and to be eligible election. Interestingly most African states saigned to the various treaties but majority have failed to take concrete actions to ensure gender balance and accelerate women's participation in decision making and leadership.

The most important document addressing the issue of women's role in armed conflict and their contribution to conflict resolution are the U N Security Council Resolution 1325 adopted in 2000 and the resolution 1820 adapted in 2008 .

The resolution 1325 "expressing concern that civilians particularly women and children, account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict ...and recognizing the consequent impact this has on durable peace and reconciliation"endeavours to address The needs of women in all stages of peace and conflict and places particular emphasis on including women in conflict prevention . It demands the UN to expand the role of women in UN field-based operations, to provide gender training and materials on the protection of women and to carry out a study on the impact of armed conflict on women and girls, their role in peace building and the gender dimension of peace processes and conflict resolution. In addition the resolution urges parties of armed conflict to respect international law on the rights and protection of women and girls.

The UN SCR 1820 calls for women's participation in peace talks, urges sanctions for perpetrators, and requires that sexual violence be excluded from

amnesties, it notes that rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute a war crime, a crime against humanity.

Indeed, National Action Plan on the UNSCR 1325 is being implemented by few countries and the government institutions are firmly engaged in bringing women to the peace table.

In some countries including Rwanda laws on rape and sexual violence have been strengthened in recent years .Liberia ,Sierra Leone and south Africa have established specialized units within their police forces to investigate such crimes and has set up a special court dedicated to prosecuting sexual crimes. Guinea-Bissau has introduced gender training programmers for magistrates.

On the over hand the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa adopted by the African Heads of states and Governments in 2004 states the following .

“Ensure the full and effective participation and representation of women in peace processes including the prevention , resolution , management of conflicts and post conflict reconstruction in Africa as stipulated in UN Resolution 1325 (2000) . Appoint women as Special Envoys and Special Representatives of the African Union” .

At the regional level , the African Union has been actively engaged in peace efforts on the continent, through preventive diplomacy mediation, deployment of peace support operations, and post-conflict reconstruction and development, including mobilisation of support for countries emerging from conflicts. It also monitors electoral processes within the guidelines African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance .

It's obviously that women affected by armed conflict everywhere would have a say in their country's peace building process, and their involvement would in turn, contribute to a more just and peaceful word.

The international community plays a crucial role in coordinating assistance of all kinds, from promoting the development of democratic institutions to the

establishment of peace between warring nations, the international institutions are present on the ground supporting economic and social development and protection of human rights .

The mechanisms of the UN, African Union and those of European Union are reinforcing each other and there fore should be used together in successfully leveraging women's human rights.

While Africa security forces that are untrained, bad equips, mismanaged and irregularly paid are part of the problem and lead to serious violation of human rights .

Getting Africa's security institutions to better protect women and improving women overall social and political status, both require the integration of women into the highest levels of national decision-making and mobilization of women's associations and civil society from violence and denounce the rapists.

A number of countries are recruiting more women into their police forces and to a lesser extent into their armies .that has helped to change their exclusivity male cultures and has pushed them to take gender –based more seriously .

Many NGO's in Africa have been working to highlight the challenges faced by women living in conflict zones and raise awareness on these challenges and to bring more awareness to the UN, African Union and the European Union institutions about the human rights violations still occurring in many African countries such us Darfur, DR congo, Brundi ..., to protect women and girls that were affected and displaced following the violence that engulfed countries in conflict and facilitate humanitarian access to people in need of basic livelihood items .

The main objectives of NGO's and activists are to have women civil society organizations and grassroots women gain the capacity to advocate for their rights and bridge the gap between gender policy and practices in peace, security and development . They build mass of supporters for gender equality and the social protection of women and girls . They have women voices heard and actions undertaken . They organise different training to enhance the women capacity employment .

Part III : Tunisian experience in peace and security

The African Union's proclamation of 2010 a "Year of Peace and Security in Africa" reflects our deep awareness of the importance of security and stability, as they go hand in hand with the process of development in Africa. Development and security are, in fact, so interdependent that one cannot be achieved without the other the success of the process of development and progress in Africa depends on promoting peace, security and stability in all its regions.

In this context, I would like to confirm that Tunisia has placed the issue of security in the forefront of its priorities; Tunisia has laid the foundations of a social policy that firmly places Man at the centre of all development action and reform work. Promoting human beings, guaranteeing their dignity, developing human resources—Tunisia's main wealth—and consolidating the social fabric constitute the highest aim of all national policy.

The Tunisian Government has consequently given a prominent place to the social aspect of development, making it a tenet of the state's policy that tries to carry out the difficult balancing act of reconciling the requirements of upgrading the national economy, making it more competitive, and providing the conditions that will offer all social categories and all present and future generations access to social progress, without any exclusion or marginalization.

This emerges clearly in President Zine El Abidine's great concern for the weak, the vulnerable, and those with specific needs, and particularly the disabled, the elderly, children who are not provided for, and needy or lower-income families.

Due to the attachment to the values of solidarity and mutual help among all members of the society . The volume of social transfers has increased more than six times since 1987. The total expenditures and social transfers currently

represent 61% of the State budget 2010. The poverty rate has been brought down to less than 4%. The middle class, who is consider a crucial element for our society's balance and cohesive fabric, has been expanded. Indicators pertaining to living standards have reached high levels

Solidarity is one of the State's essential values and a foundation of Tunisia's republican system . One of the most important achievements in this field was the creation 1992, of the 26-26 National Solidarity Fund (FSN). This was essentially intended to promote the impoverished areas (commonly referred to as "shadow areas") by providing the necessary infrastructure and improving living conditions and standards of the local populations, opening up the region, giving them the essentials of a decent life, developing their resources, and creating development projects for them.

President Ben Ali launched an appeal for a World Solidarity Fund to be set up . This initiative was crowned with success when on December 20, 2002, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution to create a World Solidarity and Anti-Poverty Fund. It also decided, on Tunisia's suggestion, that December 20 of each year would be the World Solidarity Day.

Today in Tunisia, women constitute nearly 26% of the working population, 23.5% in civil service positions, 22.8% of the members of the Chamber of Deputies, and 27.7% of the members of municipal councils. Moreover, there are nearly 18.000 business women.

Partnership between women and men is today a tangible reality anchored in the legal text as well as in practice, within the family, in society, in economic and cultural circles, and in political life.

Tunisian women are a reflection of modernity, a guarantee for our people's authenticity, and one of the pillars of the Republic. Indeed, without women's citizenship, the very notion of citizenship will be incomplete.

This is confirmed by the quantitative and qualitative indicators that place Tunisia in a good level between the world countries in this field.

Conclusion :

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are all called on to coordinate our efforts and act together, as part of regional and international cooperation, to eradicate risks threatening security and stability in our continent. scourges that undermine our development efforts, and do harm to our African societies and also to our partners' societies.

”Promoting peace and stability in Africa being an African responsibility in the first place, as president Ben ali says we believe that the international community is also concerned with the achievement of this objective. That is why we attach a great importance to the promotion of cooperation with Africa and with its traditional partners, in particular the European Union, especially as regards peace-keeping, conflict settlement, disarmament, warrior reintegration, and humanitarian aid to civilians.”