



REMARKS

BY

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AT

**REGIONAL AFRICA WORKSHOP TO PROMOTE ROLE OF WOMEN
PARLIAMENTARIANS IN PREVENTING THE PROLIFERATION OF WEAPONS OF
MASS DESTRUCTION**

AT

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Distinguished participants and delegates;

All members of the United Nations should seek to ban or limit weapons of mass destruction, which include nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. Let me, at the outset, take note that women and men are differently affected by issues related to weapons of mass destruction. On surface, the idea of identifying gender issues when dealing with weapons of mass destruction may initially seem irrelevant¹. After all, an essential quality of weapons of mass destruction is the indiscriminate nature of their destruction. Yet there are pertinent gender issues that must be considered. In particular, gender perspectives on weapons of mass destruction draw attention to issues of power, inequalities, cultural expectations, and divisions of labour². These perspectives raise issues about how people, and which people, mobilize and organize for change³.

Distinguished participants and delegates;

I would like to note that women for a long time now have been playing an important role in the nuclear disarmament movement, as individuals and within women-specific organizations. Women, for example, played an important role in the anti-nuclear movements of the 1980s. A global women's Peace Movement spread across Europe, the US, Canada and Australia⁴. Many women peace and disarmament activists have drawn on their experience as mothers as both the justification and the motivation behind their activism. On 5 August 2000 more than 1800 women met in Hiroshima, Japan, to call for the abolition of nuclear weapons. These brave and resolute women remain a good example of what women, in particular women legislators, should and can do today, to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

1 https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/un_genderperspectivesonwofmd_2001_0.pdf

2 Ibid

3 Ibid

4 Ibid

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Let me at this point refer to Zimbabwe's positions pertaining prevention of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Of the 54 states in Africa, Zimbabwe included, 60%, or 32 states, have joined the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), the first multilateral disarmament treaty banning the development, production and stockpiling of an entire category of weapons of mass destruction, was opened for signature on 10 April 1972. These states are required by Article IV to adopt appropriate national measures to prevent the range of treaty-prohibited activity specified in Article I throughout their territory. This typically requires the adoption of criminal law that establishes penal sanctions. Zimbabwe does not aspire to produce, stockpile or use these biological weapons. The country has suffered the bane of chemical and biological weapons particularly towards the end of the liberation struggle in the late 1970s when the Ian Smith-led Rhodesian regime used chemical weapons and biological weapons such as anthrax against war veterans⁵. As the war continued to intensify, the Rhodesian Security Forces initiated a CBW (Chemical and Biological Weapons) programme to kill guerrillas both inside Rhodesia and in external camps in Zambia and Mozambique. The chemicals most used in the Rhodesian program were parathion and thallium, *vibrio cholerae* (causative agent of cholera) and possibly *Bacillus anthracis* (causative agent of anthrax), and *Salmonella typhi* (causative agent of typhoid fever).

Zimbabwe adheres to international law on armed conflict and honors all international treaties to which it is party and meet all its obligations arising there from. Zimbabwe is committed to the international goals of arms control and disarmament makes its contribution to strengthen international and regional efforts to contain and prevent the proliferation of small arms, mines, conventional armaments and weapons of mass destruction, ban all production and use of biological and chemical weapons and the destruction of all such weapons and their production facilities. Zimbabwe does not possess nuclear weapons. As a state party to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) since 1991, and is recognized as a Non-Nuclear Weapon State

5 Glenn Cross, "Dirty War: Rhodesia and Chemical Biological Warfare, 1975-1980," Solihull, UK: Helion & Company, 2017

(NNWS). Zimbabwe has signed the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Zimbabwe passed the Chemical Weapons (Prohibition) Act (Chapter 11:18) to domesticate and to give effect within Zimbabwe to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction. The Act in its preamble reaffirms principles and objectives of and obligations assumed under the Geneva Protocol of 1925, and the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction, 1972. Section 4 of the provides that the Convention shall have the force of law in Zimbabwe. Section 6 of the Act stipulates that any person who (a) develops, produces, acquires, stockpiles, or retains a chemical weapon; or (b) transfers, directly or indirectly, a chemical weapon to another person; or (c) uses a chemical weapon; or (d) engages in any military preparations to use a chemical weapon; or (e) in any way assists, encourages or induces any person to engage in any activity prohibited to a State Party under the Convention; shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a fine not exceeding one-hundred thousand dollars or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding ten years.

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At this juncture, I refer to what as women legislators w can and should do to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. First, diplomacy between and among states has been marked by the under-representation of women. In that regard, women legislators should ensure that both women and men have equal access to political decision-making in the negotiations between and among states involved matters to do with control and destruction of weapons of mass destruction. It is fundamental that expertise on national and regional security studies among women is promoted, since this sector has been long dominated by males. More women could be encouraged to develop professional expertise in the technical areas related to nuclear weapons and the political skills involved in arms negotiations.

Second, given that educational patterns and social attitudes in many societies, women are not equitably represented among arms control experts, women parliamentarians through portfolio

committees and women parliamentary committees, push for equal women access to technical decision-making and technical expertise, which influence production and or destruction of weapons of mass destruction. The girl child through affirmative action policies should be facilitated to enroll in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) courses at both high school and tertiary institutions of education. This will go a long way in promoting women representation and access to technical decision-making and technical expertise.

Third, women parliamentarians, at national and regional level, should promote that international and national women's organizations coordinate, link and build mutual support for dissuading their governments from building and stock piling weapons of mass destruction. Women legislators should continue to explore ways and means to increase the links between civil society organization working on gender and weapons of mass destruction and the United Nations.

Fourth, as part of their oversight functions women parliamentarians should ensure that their governments abide by the United Nations resolutions concerning disarmament and prevention of the proliferation of weapons of mass destructions. These resolutions include the 2000 UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325), which urged Member States "to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict". The recent UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution 68/33 on Women, Disarmament, Non-Proliferation and Arms Control, of 2013 calls upon all States to empower women, including through capacity building efforts, to participate in the design and implementation of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control efforts; and requests that relevant UN organs, agencies, funds and programs assist States, upon request.

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To conclude, I would like to note the following: (i) that the attraction of biological weapons in wars and conflicts is attributed to easy access to disease-producing biological agents, to their low production costs, and to their easy transportation from one place to another. Against this

background, women legislators should engage all stakeholders, national governments, producers of such lethal weapons and leaders of groups in conflicts to curb the use of weapons of mass destructions; and (ii) women legislators legislate and remain steadfast in support for the principled stance regarding complete destruction of chemical weapons as fundamental and of high priority.