



WPS BULLETIN

Message from the Editor



Dear Readers,

This issue shares urgent stories from Africa that show the strong connection between conflict, governance, gender-based violence, and women's agency. Through the lens of Women, Peace and Security (WPS), these situations remind us that women not only suffer more than men from war, displacement, and insecurity, but they also play crucial roles in promoting peace, shaping policy, and supporting communities.

The siege of El Fasher in Sudan demonstrates the cruel use of starvation and sexual violence as weapons of war, while women-led networks work hard to keep their communities alive despite their precarious conditions. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, renewed clashes with M23 rebels and outside negotiations threaten to overshadow women's voices, even though sexual violence and displacement affect them the most. At the same time, the new mining agreements in the Democratic Republic of Congo highlight how resource extraction in unstable areas can increase inequalities if women's rights and safety are not protected.

Inside

Over 500 days of siege: Women and girls trapped in El Fasher face the risk of starvation and death

World leaders step up efforts behind the scenes at the UN to end the war in Sudan

Congo, army and rebels dig in for war
Trump says is over



Outside of conflict zones, ongoing gender-based violence and femicide in South Africa and Kenya reveal deep rooted structural and systemic inequality patterns in the justice and protection systems. The murder of young Mary Treza in Kenya represents a broader crisis where women's lives are often undervalued. This situation calls for survivor-centered approaches and an end to impunity. Meanwhile, women-led coalitions during Malawi's elections show how civic education and grassroots peace-building can turn political involvement into a force for unity.

Safety in urban areas is also a key issue for peace and security. The Zanzibar Global Leaders' Forum on Safe Cities emphasizes that public spaces must be safe, inclusive, and responsive to gender needs. Urban safety connects with WPS—it is part of the ongoing themes of peace, justice, and participation that support sustainable societies.

Finally, reflections on the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration reveal both progress and setbacks. Legal frameworks are in place, but weak enforcement, climate issues, and deep-rooted patriarchal norms continue to threaten women's rights and safety.

This collection of stories serves as both a warning and a call to action. We must ensure that women's protection, participation, and leadership are seen as essential, not optional, to establish peace and security across the continent.

**In solidarity and hope,
Helen Kezie-Nwoha**

Acronyms

ADF	Allied Democratic Forces
AU	African Union
CCDO	Chipembere Community Development Organization
CVDPV	Circulating Vaccine-Derived Poliovirus
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EU	European Union
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GBV	Gender Based Violence
IDPs	Internally Displaced People
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
MSF	Medecins Sans Frontières
MONUSCO	The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
NICE	National Initiative for Civic Education
RSF	Rapid Support Forces
SAF	Sudanese Armed Forces
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
UN	United Nations
US	United States
WPS	Women, Peace and Security



Over 500 days of siege: Women and girls trapped in El Fasher face the risk of starvation and death

For more than 500 days, women and girls in El Fasher, North Darfur, have borne the brunt of a relentless siege—cut off from humanitarian aid and protection, facing starvation as a weapon of war, indiscriminate bombardments, and widespread sexual violence. Over the past three weeks alone, the United Nations has recorded at least 125 civilian deaths, with the true toll likely far higher. These escalating violations—ranging from conflict-related sexual violence, including rape and gang rape, to the deliberate use of starvation as a method of warfare—constitute grave breaches of international humanitarian law and must be urgently recognized and addressed.

Since the conflict began, 1.79 million Internally Displaced People (IDPs), representing 8 per cent of the total IDPs in Sudan have been living in North Darfur state, more than half of them women and girls (54 per cent). There have been repeated deadly incursions into the Abu Shouk displacement camp, where famine conditions were identified in December 2024. Women-led organizations and women volunteers remain the backbone of community survival. Despite scarce resources, they are on the frontlines, addressing the needs of women and girls. They urgently need direct, sustained support to continue their work.

We are calling for an immediate ceasefire in Sudan and for immediate steps to be taken to protect civilians and enable the safe, unhindered and sustained delivery of humanitarian assistance into the area, and to allow any civilians seeking to leave the area voluntarily to do so safely. This is in compliance with the Security Council Resolution 2736 (2024), which demands an end to the siege of El Fasher and South Kordofan, protection of civilians, especially women and girls and civilian premises.

<https://africa.unwomen.org/en/stories/statement/2025/09/over-500-days-of-siege-women-and-girls-trapped-in-el-fasher-face-the-risk-of-starvation-and-death>

World leaders step up efforts behind the scenes at the UN to end the war in Sudan

Behind the scenes at the annual gathering of world leaders at the United Nations, key countries and regional organizations have been coordinating efforts to try to end the horrific war in Sudan, which has created the most devastating humanitarian and displacement crisis in the world. In a key development after a series of discussions, the United States, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates issued a joint statement on September 12 calling for an initial three months to deliver desperately needed aid throughout Sudan, followed by a permanent ceasefire. The group, calling themselves the Quad, met on the sidelines of the assembly to discuss the implementation of their road-map.

Women in Sudan, as in other conflict zones, face particular harms: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), loss of livelihoods, breakdown in care-giving, increased burdens in displacement camps, risks in accessing health, education, food distribution, etc. If peace processes are negotiated without women, they risk being exclusionary, lacking legitimacy, and failing to address gendered harms.

Furthermore, peace processes that focus only on arms, ceasefires, territory, political power among elites, etc., but ignore gendered economic inequalities, legal inequalities, social norms, risk reinforcing patriarchal systems, and recovery without transforming gender norms can leave women in pre-conflict positions of disadvantage or worse. Women's roles in peace-building, reconciliation, leadership and rebuilding institutions, justice mechanisms must be supported to ensure that the gendered inequalities that made women vulnerable in the first place are addressed.

<https://apnews.com/article/un-sudan-war-us-saudi-uae-au-7cd71534f7e5fa06e4fec1ff1919f3be>

In Congo, army and rebels dig in for war Trump says is over

Congo's army and Rwandan-backed rebels are reinforcing military positions and blaming each other for flouting peace accords in an escalation that experts say risks reigniting the simmering conflict, which U.S. President Donald Trump claims to have ended. The M23 rebels seized two major cities in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in January and February, posing the biggest threat to the government in Kinshasa in two decades. The offensive raised fears of a return to regional war as neighbouring armies took sides. There has since been a series of U.S. and Qatari-led peace talks but those efforts have been undermined by mediators rushing to close deals and relying on past agreements ground out by African negotiators before building trust between the warring factions. The rebels want prisoners freed before talks can advance, as well as a power-sharing deal in the parts of DRC they now control.

Eastern DRC has one of the highest rates of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) in the world. Displacement puts women at risk of hunger, disease and sexual exploitation. Talks are between governments, rebels and foreign mediators, not communities, and yet sustainable peace depends on including women at local and national levels. Actors need to guarantee seats and decision-making power for Congolese women's networks, displaced women, and women from all affected ethnic groups in peace talks, not just as observers, and also prioritize mechanisms to prosecute sexual violence and pillage, restitution of land, and reparations for survivors.



<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/congo-army-rebels-dig-war-trump-says-is-over-2025-09-18/>

Global leaders renew commitments to enhance the safety of cities for women and girls

Over 150 leaders and experts from 21 countries gathered in Zanzibar from 26–28 August to chart bold, coordinated action toward creating and empowering public spaces with and for women and girls. The high-level meeting also reinforced cross-regional efforts to localize the Beijing+30 Action Agenda and accelerate progress on gender equality. The gathering marked the Seventh Biennial UN Women Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Global Leaders' Forum and the Fifth Global Meeting of Mayors for Gender Equality, including main partners implementing programmes that form part of the UN Safe Cities and Public Spaces Global Initiative, spanning 65 cities in 35 countries, and the first time both events were held in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The Global Commitment of Mayors outlines a shared vision to build safe, inclusive, and gender-equitable cities by advancing the Beijing Platform for Action, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the New Urban Agenda. The declaration includes commitments to strengthen multi-sectoral partnerships, enhance the participation and leadership of women and girls, and develop gender-responsive policies informed by disaggregated data. It further commits to promoting sustainable gender-responsive budgeting, integrating women's safety into urban planning, and improving access to justice, health, and social services, as well as ensuring decent work and workplaces free of sexual harassment for women and girls across all sectors, including also in the blue and green economy.

Strengthening city safety is also peace-building through reducing fear, violence, enabling trust in public institutions, enabling women's participation in public life, all of which help social cohesion. Also, the participation of women from informal settlements, refugee/displaced women, girls, women with disabilities in decision-making bodies charged with urban planning, safe public spaces audits, budgeting should be mandated. The above-mentioned commitments should be embedded in national and local WPS action plans, so safety in urban spaces is not seen separately but part of broader peace, justice, inclusion and recovery goals.

<https://africa.unwomen.org/en/stories/news/2025/09/global-leaders-renew-commitments-to-enhance-the-safety-of-cities-for-women-and-girls>

Fight Against Gender-Based Violence Remains Urgent Challenge in South Africa

The Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities says the fight against gender-based violence (GBV) and femicide remains one of the most urgent human rights and social justice challenges facing South Africa. The department highlighted the persistent barriers faced by victims and survivors when seeking justice, including stigma, secondary victimization, slow judicial processes, and a lack of adequate support services. This comes amid alarming statistics showing that between July and September 2024, 957 women were murdered in the country, according to the Human Sciences Research Council. With over one in three women experiencing physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, the call for improved access to justice underscores the need for a survivor-centred approach to combat this epidemic.

The department stressed that victims must be empowered to report abuse in safe environments, with cases investigated thoroughly and perpetrators held accountable. This requires a collective effort from government, civil society, and social partners to expand specialised GBV and femicide courts, improve victim-friendly police services, and provide free legal aid and psychosocial support. The statement called for training all service providers in the criminal justice system, police, prosecutors, magistrates, intermediaries, court preparation officers, court clerks, and health care providers, to handle GBV and femicide cases with sensitivity, urgency, and professionalism. Promoting awareness and messaging campaigns to rebuild social cohesion and challenge misconceptions about the justice system is also key.

<https://centralnews.co.za/fight-against-gender-based-violence-remains-urgent-challenge-in-south-africa-says-department/>

UN Women condemns the brutal killing of 13-year-old Mary Treza in Homa Bay County in Kenya

UN Women condemns in the strongest possible terms the rape, murder, and mutilation of Mary Treza, a 13-year-old Grade Seven pupil in Suba North Constituency, Homa Bay County, in Kenya. We call on the Directorate of Criminal Investigations, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, and all relevant authorities to conduct a swift and transparent investigation to ensure that the perpetrator and any accomplices are held fully accountable. Justice for Mary Treza must send a clear and powerful message: Kenya has zero-tolerance for, and will allow zero impunity, for the rape and murder of women and girls in Kenya.

This tragedy is part of a broader and worsening crisis in the country. Police data show that 129 women were killed in femicide cases between January and March 2025 alone, a staggering figure that underscores the scale of this national emergency. Civil society data shows that at least 930 women were murdered in Kenya between 2016 and 2024, with 152 femicide cases recorded in 2023 alone—the highest on record. In nearly 8 out of 10 cases, the perpetrators were known to the victims. The true figures are higher due to under reporting.

We must not be numbed into inaction by these statistics. Each number represents a woman or girl whose life was brutally taken because of her gender, and because society has normalized murder of women by blaming the victims and remaining silent. This must galvanize all stakeholders, including government, civil society, communities, and individuals – to act urgently to condemn violence, strengthen protection mechanisms and demand an end to impunity.

<https://africa.unwomen.org/en/stories/statement/2025/09/un-women-condemns-the-brutal-killing-of-13-year-old-mary-treza-in-homa-bay-county-in-kenya>



United for Peace: How a Coalition Led by Women is Influencing Malawi's 2025 Elections

The coalition, consisting of non-governmental organisations, Chipembere Community Development Organization (CCDO), National Initiative for Civic Education Trust, the Public Affairs Committee, the District Peace and Unity Committee, and a community drama group, has initiated a collaborative effort to foster peaceful, informed, and inclusive elections.

Central to this initiative is a dedication to ensuring that women, who are often marginalized in political processes—are not merely voters but also leaders in cultivating a peaceful electoral atmosphere. CCDO's initiatives encompass training women and girls as peace-builders, establishing community-based conflict resolution mechanisms, and providing civic education to combat misinformation.

In a nation where political tensions frequently escalate into violence, this women-led peace initiative demonstrates that when communities come together, democracy not only survives, it flourishes.

<https://africa.unwomen.org/en/stories/news/2025/09/united-for-peace-how-a-coalition-led-by-women-is-influencing-malawis-2025-elections>

US firm linked to Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates gets closer to Congolese mining permits

American mining firm Kobold Metals, which is linked to and backed by Jeff Bezos and Bill Gates, says it has inked a deal that could allow it to mine lithium in the DRC, the first fruits of Donald Trump's forays in Kinshasa. It means the company, which specialises in mining exploration using the world's most advanced technologies is about to acquire around 17,000 mining concessions in the DRC. This project is part of its ambitious large-scale exploration programme in the country and the company will initially be allowed to explore deposits. But the firm is coming to an area where China currently reigns supreme. Kobold Metals has not yet obtained exploration licences, but it has already signed a strategic agreement with the Congolese government. The DRC is so rich in minerals that some estimates say more has not been explored and discovered yet. The subsoil of Manono, for example, in the south of the DRC, contains 132 million tonnes of lithium.

American companies are keen to get their hands on these deposits to exploit them for the production of batteries for electric vehicles. The firm claims to have obtained seven permits to search for lithium and other minerals in the DRC. This first step should lead to a cadastral notice and a draft decree for the granting of exploration permits. These projects take place in the context of the peace talks involving the DRC and Rwanda, which offer an opportunity to unlock the immense economic potential of the Great Lakes region and strengthen US critical minerals supply chains, but also pose significant risks for women and girls living in the region.

For example, in the DRC particularly, many mineral-rich areas are conflict-affected. Extractive ventures can exacerbate tensions in terms of who controls the mining, who gets what share, which group benefits, and who is excluded. Women often bear the brunt in such conflicts through displacement and sexual violence, and as such, the mining deals in volatile zones should consider peace and social cohesion, not just profit.

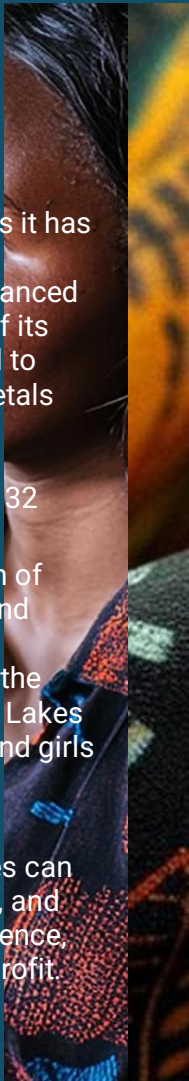
<https://nation.africa/kenya/news/africa/us-firm-linked-to-jeff-bezos-bill-gates-gets-closer-to-congolese-mining-permits-5178480>

DRC - Rwanda set October deadline for Trump-brokered peace deal

The DRC and Rwanda agreed to start implementing security measures under a US-mediated deal in October. A joint agreement reached in Washington on September 17–18, and announced by the United States, Qatar, Togo, and the African Union Commission, outlines that Rwanda will lift defensive measures and withdraw its troops in accordance with the 2024 agreement, with implementation set to begin on October 1 and troop withdrawals scheduled between October 21–31; however, progress has been slow, and mistrust, violations, and enforcement gaps continue to undermine the process.

For troop withdrawals and security coordination, there must be oversight mechanisms that guard against rogue actors, hold violators accountable, and include gendered complaint mechanisms, accessible to women, to report abuses. Also, if the peace deal focuses on short deadlines and fails to build institutions inclusive of women, then relapse into conflict is more likely.

<https://nation.africa/kenya/news/africa/drc-rwanda-set-october-deadline-for-trump-brokered-peace-deal-5205372>



Leaders lament slow progress on women's rights 30 years after Beijing milestone



The 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, best remembered for declaring that “women’s rights are human rights,” now faces a sobering reflection as U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres warns world leaders, thirty years later, of a rising global wave of misogyny and a growing backlash against women’s rights. At the Beijing conference, 189 nations signed a document calling for the “full and equal participation of women in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life.”

Guterres said the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was the most ambitious global political commitment to women’s rights ever achieved, but progress has been slow and uneven. Other leaders decried a shortage of women in prominent U.N. positions, noting that no woman had ever served as secretary-general in the 80 years of the world body’s existence. Annalena Baerbock, president of the 80th General Assembly, said one in three women globally will experience sexual violence at some point during a lifetime. “There’s no country in the world where women’s rights are purely equal to men, and they are still too many places where even speaking about women rights is a matter of life and death,” she said.

In the African context, many countries have made legal gains such as constitutional guarantees, laws against domestic violence, child marriage etc., but implementation is weak, as enforcement is patchy due to limited capacity, corruption, and patriarchal norms. In the Sahel, DRC, Sudan, Horn of Africa, climate crises disproportionately affect women through displacement, food insecurity, health service breakdowns; yet often response efforts are insufficiently gendered. While political participation of women has increased, women often face violence, harassment, and exclusion in political parties; being there does not equal influence or safety. There must be strengthened, enforceable legal frameworks that protect women from violence, discrimination, ensure SRHR, property & inheritance rights, etc., with governments resisting legislative rollbacks and anti-gender rhetoric. The meaningful participation of women across all levels such as in national legislatures, peace negotiation tables, climate policy, technology regulation etc., especially those from marginalised communities should be promoted.

Conclusion

In this September bulletin, the themes that emerge are clear: the gap between promise and practice, the need for stronger systems of accountability, and the power of inclusive action to drive meaningful change. The discussions remind us that while commitments have been made, implementation gaps remain a major obstacle. To close them, we must strengthen monitoring mechanisms, build institutional capacity, and ensure that commitments translate into tangible results at every level - local, national, and international.

At the heart of this effort lies inclusion. Women's meaningful participation, especially those from conflict-affected and marginalized communities, must no longer be treated as an afterthought but as the foundation of sustainable peace. Equally vital is cross-sector collaboration, ensuring that the WPS agenda is not isolated but woven into the broader fabric of peacebuilding and development work.

Looking ahead, the 25th anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in October 2025 presents a defining moment. It is an opportunity not only to review progress and confront remaining challenges, but to reaffirm commitments through clear, measurable, and time-bound actions. This milestone should be used to institutionalize lessons learned, embed successful practices into formal policies, and amplify advocacy that renews political will at every level.

Let this upcoming anniversary be more than a commemoration; let it be a catalyst. A call to transform reflection into resolve, commitments into accountability, and aspirations into action. The principles of Resolution 1325 must not simply be remembered; they must be realized, protected, and carried forward for the generations to come.

