



WPS BULLETIN

Message from the Editor



Dear Readers,

January 2026 started with a reminder that peace and security across Africa cannot be understood without examining the gendered realities shaping conflict, governance, and crisis response.

From Sudan to the Democratic Republic of Congo, women's bodies continue to be used as sites of violence targeted not only because of conflict, but because of identity. In Mozambique, climate-induced displacement has exposed how environmental shocks are intensifying insecurity for women and children. Meanwhile, civic repression in Eswatini and electoral processes in Uganda demonstrate that political systems, when exclusionary, deepen instability rather than resolve it.

This month's developments also reveal a deeper truth: insecurity is not only driven by armed violence. Gender stereotypes, shrinking civic space, and institutional blind spots within peace operations continue to limit women's participation in shaping peace and governance outcomes.

The stories captured in this Bulletin illustrate a widening gap between continental commitments to Women, Peace and Security and the lived realities of women across conflict and crisis settings.

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Whether through the weaponisation of sexual violence in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, mass abductions in Nigeria, or the structural exclusion of women from governance processes, the pattern is clear – peace remains fragile where women’s protection and participation are not prioritised.

At the same time, efforts to integrate gender perspectives in peace support operations and challenge harmful norms signal important progress. These initiatives underscore that sustainable peace requires more than military stability or electoral legitimacy; it demands inclusive systems that recognise women not as passive victims, but as essential actors in prevention, response, and recovery.

As we move into 2026, the imperative is clear. Advancing peace on the continent requires confronting both the visible and structural drivers of insecurity. The Women, Peace and Security agenda remains a vital framework for ensuring that responses to conflict, climate shocks, and political transitions do not reinforce inequality, but instead foster resilience and justice.

This Bulletin invites reflection not only on the challenges ahead, but on the urgency of aligning policy commitments with action – placing women at the centre of Africa’s peace and security landscape.

**In Sisterhood and Solidarity,
Helen Kezie-Nwoha**

Acronyms

AU	African Union
CAN	Christian Association of Nigeria
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
NAP	National Action Plan
RSF	Rapid Support Forces
SAF	Sudanese Armed Forces
SOFEPADI	Solidarity of Women for Peace and Integral Development
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNOAU	United Nations Office to the African Union
UNSCR 1325	United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325
WPS	Women, Peace and Security



Sudan: End ethnicity-based attacks on civilians, including women, in Aljazeera

On 9 January 2025, at least 13 women were abducted by armed forces affiliated to the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) in areas of Kambo Taiba in Aljazeera. Two children were killed according to local leaders, who reported killings and beatings of a number of women in the area. The victims of these attacks are from western Sudan, Darfur and South Sudan. These incidents of widespread attacks against the civilian population targeting people from specific ethnic backgrounds, came after SAF gained control over Madani city, the Capital of Aljazeera state, from the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in the last couple of weeks. The attackers filmed themselves proudly killing, beating and insulting women and men from western Sudan and South Sudan.

The nature of these attacks signifies a serious escalation in the conflict in Sudan, where military successes have been followed by violent reprisals against innocent civilians, particularly women, who are deliberately targeted based on their ethnicity. What transpired in Aljazeera was not mere incidental violence but represents a disturbing form of identity-based punishment. Women from already marginalized communities were subjected to abduction, beatings, and humiliation, actions intended to instill fear across entire populations and to reinforce ethnic hierarchies through intimidation.

Moreover, the public display of these abuses reveals a troubling trend: the normalization of gendered and ethnic violence as instruments of war. Women's bodies are being weaponized for intimidation, displacement, and social fragmentation, deepening the wounds within communities.

Firstly, there is the weaponization of identity, where women are attacked not for their involvement in hostilities, but strictly for their identities. Secondly, despite the documentation of these heinous acts, there is a glaring absence of protection and accountability for the victims, highlighting a state of militarized impunity. Lastly, the ongoing acts of gendered violence are exacerbating societal divisions and entrenching grievances, severely undermining any prospects for lasting peace.

The targeting of women, particularly in the wake of territorial shifts, clearly illustrates how the conflict in Sudan is increasingly influenced by ethnic tensions and enforced through gendered harm.

Until women are safeguarded not just as civilians but acknowledged and supported as key agents of community dignity and resilience, military advancements will continue to lead to dire humanitarian crises.

<https://ishr.ch/latest-updates/sudan-ethnicity-based-attacks-in-aljazeera-where-women-were-killed-beaten-and-abducted/>

Severe floods displace nearly 400,000 in Mozambique, heightening protection risks

Recurrent climate shocks are again driving mass displacement across Mozambique. Since the start of the year, severe flooding has engulfed communities in the southern and central parts of the country – regions already scarred by other extreme weather events, such as tropical storms, cyclones and droughts. The latest floods have displaced around 392,000 people, adding pressure to a country grappling with conflict in the north, which displaced over 300,000 people in the second half of 2025 alone.

Beyond the immediate humanitarian devastation, these floods are intensifying insecurity in ways that disproportionately affect women and children. Displacement strips families of stable shelter, livelihoods, and community protection systems, placing women and girls at heightened risk of gender-based violence, exploitation, and trafficking. Overcrowded temporary settlements often lack privacy, security, and access to essential services, exposing women to daily threats while simultaneously increasing their care burdens. For children, especially girls, displacement frequently results in disrupted education, heightened vulnerability to abuse, and increased likelihood of early or forced marriage as families struggle to cope with economic loss.

Mozambique is already navigating the impacts of armed conflict in its northern regions, and the convergence of climate-induced displacement with conflict-related instability creates layered vulnerabilities. As resources become strained and State capacity is stretched, competition over land, food, and aid can fuel tensions within and between communities. In such fragile environments, the exclusion of women from decision-making processes around disaster response and recovery further entrenches inequality and weakens resilience.

Climate shocks are therefore not neutral events; they reshape security dynamics and deepen existing structural violence. When women's safety, livelihoods, and participation are undermined, the foundations

for sustainable peace are also weakened. The absence of gender-responsive protection measures risks turning environmental crises into long-term drivers of instability.

Addressing this requires more than emergency relief. Protection must be embedded within climate response strategies, ensuring safe shelter, access to healthcare and reproductive services, and continuity of education for displaced children. Women must be actively included in disaster governance and recovery planning so that response efforts reflect lived realities on the ground. Recognising climate displacement as a peace and security concern is essential to preventing future cycles of vulnerability and conflict.

Mozambique's floods highlight the urgent need to integrate gender-sensitive approaches into climate resilience efforts. Without doing so, environmental shocks will continue to magnify insecurity and undermine both protection and peacebuilding outcomes.

<https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing-notes/severe-floods-displace-nearly-400-000-mozambique-heightening-protection-risks>

Worsening drought conditions in Somalia

Somalia is facing a rapidly worsening drought following the near-total failure of the 2025 Deyr rains (October–December), compounded by unusually high temperatures. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the International Organization for Migration, and the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (ECHO Daily Flash, 6 January 2026), an estimated 4.61 million people are affected nationwide, with conditions expected to deteriorate further as the next rains are not expected until April 2026.

The country is approaching a breaking point where environmental stress and insecurity are converging to exhaust household coping mechanisms. The Norwegian Refugee Council warns that women and children are bearing the brunt of this crisis through worsening food insecurity, rising displacement, and escalating protection threats. Pastoral and agropastoral communities in Puntland, Gedo, Lower Juba, Sool, Sanaag, and Togdheer are among the hardest hit. Projections indicate that more than 211,000 people could be displaced between December 2025 and March 2026, with the majority uprooted due to drought-related pressures.

What is unfolding is not simply a story of failed rains, but of deepening vulnerability shaped by inequality. As livelihoods collapse, women are often the first to absorb the shock, managing food scarcity, securing water, and sustaining families in the face of dwindling resources. These responsibilities frequently require travelling further distances under unsafe conditions, exposing them to violence and exploitation. At the same time, shrinking economic opportunities heighten dependence and limit women's ability to influence household or community decisions.

For children, prolonged drought erodes stability and future prospects. Hunger and displacement disrupt schooling and increase women and girls' vulnerabilities to gender based violence such as early marriage or child labour. In fragile settings, environmental shocks can intensify tensions over land and water, fuelling local disputes that undermine community cohesion.

This crisis illustrates how climate stress reshapes peace and security dynamics. When environmental pressures intersect with conflict and governance gaps, they amplify risks that disproportionately affect women and girls. Excluding women from resource management and local decision-making weakens collective resilience and narrows pathways to sustainable recovery.

Responding effectively requires recognising drought as more than a humanitarian challenge. It demands gender-responsive strategies that protect livelihoods, strengthen community safety, and ensure women's participation in shaping solutions. Without such approaches, climate shocks will continue to reinforce instability, deepening cycles of vulnerability and insecurity across Somalia.

<https://cisudk/artikler/alert-note->

DR Congo: Surge in Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

Conflict-related sexual violence in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo has escalated while support to survivors has significantly dropped, Human Rights Watch and the Congolese women's rights organization Solidarity of Women for Peace and Integral Development have reported

Human Rights Watch has documented sexual violence by members of at least five non-state armed groups and the Congolese army in eastern Congo. Expanded fighting in Ituri, North Kivu, and South Kivu provinces, as well as funding cuts and limited access to health services, have made it increasingly difficult for women and girls survivors of sexual violence to receive the holistic support they need. Many clinics offering health care and other support have been forced to close.

This surge in violence is occurring at a moment when protection systems are weakening, leaving survivors exposed to further harm. Women and girls are not only facing increased attacks, but are also being denied access to medical care, psychosocial support, and justice pathways that are essential for recovery. The closure of clinics and support centres means that many survivors are unable to access emergency treatment, including care that is critical in preventing long-term physical and psychological trauma.

Sexual violence in conflict is not an unintended by-product of war, but a tactic used to assert control, terrorise communities, and fracture social cohesion. As fighting intensifies, women's bodies are once again being weaponised, reinforcing cycles of fear and displacement across affected provinces.

At the same time, shrinking financial support for survivor services is compounding insecurity. The erosion of health and protection infrastructure weakens community resilience and signals a broader failure to prioritise gender-sensitive responses in conflict settings. When survivors are left without support, impunity is reinforced and the social fabric necessary for peacebuilding is further undermined.

Addressing this crisis requires renewed investment in survivor-centred services, strengthened accountability mechanisms, and the meaningful inclusion of women in peace and security processes. Without sustained protection and support systems, the escalation of sexual violence will continue to destabilise communities and obstruct pathways toward sustainable peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/01/12/dr-congo-surge-in-conflict-related-sexual-violence>

Strengthening Gender Integration in African Peace Support Operations

From 26 to 30 January 2026, the African Union organised an integrated event on gender mainstreaming in peace support operations. The engagement brought together stakeholders from across African peace and security structures to advance the institutional integration of gender perspectives in peace missions and operational frameworks.

This convening reflects a growing recognition that peace support operations cannot be effective if gender considerations remain peripheral. Historically, military and stabilisation missions have focused primarily on security outcomes without adequately addressing the differentiated impacts of conflict on women and men. The effort to mainstream gender within these operations signals a shift toward more inclusive and accountable approaches that align with continental commitments to Women, Peace and Security principles.

For women in conflict settings, the presence and conduct of peace operations shape everyday realities. When gender is overlooked, peace missions risk reinforcing existing inequalities, failing to prevent gender-based violence, and excluding women from decision-making processes that directly affect their safety and livelihoods. Integrating gender perspectives therefore moves beyond symbolic representation; it strengthens operational effectiveness by ensuring that protection strategies reflect lived realities on the ground.



This is a critical Women, Peace and Security concern. Peace support operations are not gender-neutral spaces. Their deployment influences access to justice, humanitarian assistance, and community trust. Without intentional gender integration, these missions can inadvertently perpetuate harm or miss opportunities to support women's leadership in peacebuilding.

Efforts such as this event contribute to strengthening institutional coherence and accountability within African peace operations by aligning practice with the broader Women, Peace and Security agenda. The focus on practical recommendations underscores the need to translate policy commitments into operational realities.

Sustained progress will require continued investment in gender expertise, training, and monitoring mechanisms within peace missions. It will also depend on ensuring that women are not only beneficiaries of protection but active participants in shaping security responses.

Advancing gender-responsive peace support operations is essential to building missions that protect communities more effectively and contribute to long-term stability. Without embedding gender at the core of peace operations, the promise of inclusive and sustainable peace across the continent will remain out of reach.

<https://unoau.unmissions.org/en/news/unoau-participates-au-integrated-event-gender-mainstreaming-peace-support-operations#:~:text=Leadership-UNOAU,Women%2C%20Peace%20and%20Security%20principles>

Dozens abducted in Nigeria church attacks; church leader says more than 160 seized

Armed bandits abducted dozens of worshippers from two churches in Nigeria's Kaduna state. A senior church leader reported that more than 160 people were abducted during the attacks. The gunmen stormed the churches in Kurmin Wali during Sunday services, targeting civilians gathered for worship in a remote community that security agencies say is difficult to access.

The attack reflects a broader pattern of mass kidnappings carried out by armed groups operating from forest enclaves across northwestern Nigeria. These groups increasingly target civilian spaces such as villages, schools, and places of worship, exploiting limited state presence and infrastructural challenges to carry out abductions for ransom and territorial control.

For women and girls, these abductions carry distinct and deeply gendered risks. Women taken during mass kidnappings frequently face sexual violence, forced marriage, and prolonged captivity, while those left behind shoulder the burden of sustaining families amid trauma, displacement, and economic instability. Children abducted alongside adults face heightened risks of exploitation, recruitment into non-state armed groups, and psychological harm. The targeting of communal spaces such as churches also erodes already fragile protection networks, further isolating women and weakening community resilience.

The systematic abduction of civilians in spaces traditionally regarded as safe underscores the gendered nature of insecurity in conflict-affected regions. The use of kidnapping as a tactic of control disrupts social structures, deepens poverty, and exposes women and girls to violence that often goes undocumented and unaddressed.

Addressing these dynamics requires moving beyond reactive security responses. Protection strategies must integrate gender-sensitive early warning systems, strengthen community-based protection mechanisms, and ensure survivor-centred support for those who return from captivity. Accountability for perpetrators and investment in local peacebuilding efforts are equally essential to breaking the cycle of violence.

Without confronting the gendered impacts of mass abductions, responses to insecurity in northern Nigeria will continue to fall short of protecting those most at risk and advancing sustainable peace.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/dozens-abducted-nigeria-church-attacks-church-leader-says-more-than-160-seized-2026-01-19/>

Eswatini: Civic Repression and the Gendered Cost of Instability

In January 2026, tensions in Eswatini continued to highlight the fragile state of civic space, governance, and security, with growing implications for women's safety, participation, and peacebuilding efforts.

The ongoing political climate, marked by repression of dissent and heavy security responses, reflects deeper structural challenges that directly intersect with the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

Reports emerging during the month pointed to continued restrictions on political expression and civic activism. State responses to perceived opposition have included surveillance, arrests, and suppression of pro-democracy voices. This shrinking democratic space has had a chilling effect not only on political participation broadly, but especially on women activists and grassroots organisers, who often operate at the frontline of community advocacy.

Women in Eswatini have historically played a critical role in social cohesion and informal peacebuilding. However, heightened militarisation and securitised governance environments tend to exclude them from formal decision-making spaces. This reinforces gendered power imbalances and undermines inclusive peace and governance processes. When civic actors are silenced, women's movements—often already under-resourced—are disproportionately affected, weakening their ability to advocate for social protection, justice, and accountability.

The continued centralisation of power has further complicated prospects for inclusive dialogue. While stability is frequently framed as a national priority, the absence of participatory mechanisms has fuelled grievances among citizens, particularly youth and women. The failure to institutionalise meaningful engagement risks entrenching cycles of unrest that carry long-term consequences for national peace and security.

Political instability and repression create environments where gender-based violence risks intensifying, particularly during periods of unrest. Women human rights defenders face threats, intimidation, and reduced mobility, limiting their ability to organise and provide community leadership. In contexts where state security responses dominate, protection frameworks for women are often sidelined.

Moreover, economic pressures linked to instability further marginalise women, many of whom operate within informal sectors that are sensitive to disruptions caused by protests, curfews, or state crackdowns. The erosion of livelihoods has cascading effects on household security, community resilience, and women's agency.

Despite these challenges, women-led civil society organisations continue to push for dialogue, accountability, and inclusive governance reforms. Their resilience underscores the necessity of integrating gender perspectives into national and regional peace frameworks. Sustainable peace cannot be achieved without ensuring that women are not only protected from the impacts of conflict and repression but are also meaningfully included in shaping political solutions.

Regional actors and continental mechanisms have an opportunity to reinforce the importance of inclusive governance in Eswatini. Aligning national processes with the principles of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 would strengthen pathways toward sustainable peace by centering participation, protection, prevention, and recovery. As Eswatini navigates this critical juncture, the trajectory of its political future will depend on whether space is created for inclusive engagement.

<http://www.swazilandnews.co.za/fundza.php?nguyiphi=11007>

Experts examine the norms and dialogue around gender stereotypes in Africa

Across Africa, conversations on Women, Peace and Security often centre on conflict, violence, and humanitarian crises. However, recent expert dialogues convened by UNESCO examining gender stereotypes highlight a deeper structural layer shaping insecurity: the persistence of harmful social norms that determine who speaks, who leads, and who is protected. These norms are not abstract cultural artefacts but active systems that restrict women's participation in decision-making, political processes, and peacebuilding spaces.

Experts emphasised that gender stereotypes continue to limit women's agency across sectors, reinforcing unequal access to education, leadership, and economic opportunities. UNESCO noted that challenging such stereotypes is essential to building "inclusive, just, and peaceful societies," as these norms influence institutional practices and public behaviours. When women are perceived primarily through restrictive roles tied to caregiving or domesticity, their exclusion from security governance and mediation processes becomes normalised rather than contested.

Socially constructed gender norms have been widely recognised as a major barrier to women's meaningful participation in political and public life across sub-Saharan Africa. These norms suppress voice, mobility, and economic autonomy, effectively limiting women's ability to engage in peace negotiations, community conflict resolution, and security sector reform. In this way, stereotypes function as upstream drivers of insecurity by shaping whose knowledge is valued and whose protection is prioritised.

Importantly, experts stressed that dialogue itself is a critical tool for transformation. Norm change does not occur solely through legal reform but through sustained engagement across communities, media spaces, and educational systems. Shifting perceptions of leadership and authority opens pathways for women's participation in prevention and peacebuilding, strengthening societal resilience against conflict and instability.

For African Women, Peace and Security advocates, this signals the need to treat harmful gender norms not only as equality concerns but as peace and security risks. Efforts to strengthen women's roles in mediation, governance, and security institutions must be accompanied by investments in education, media literacy, and community dialogue that dismantle stereotypes at their roots.

Ultimately, addressing gender stereotypes is not peripheral to peacebuilding; it is foundational. Transforming norms expands the pool of peace actors, enhances legitimacy in governance, and enables more inclusive responses to crises. Without confronting these structural barriers, commitments to Women, Peace and Security risk remaining procedural rather than transformative.

<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/experts-examine-norms-and-dialogue-around-gender-stereotypes-africa>

Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni wins seventh term: Electoral Commission

Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni has been re-elected to a seventh term, the country's Electoral Commission announced on 17 January 2026, following a tense electoral process marked by an opposition crackdown and a nationwide internet blackout.

According to official results, Museveni secured 71.65% of the vote, defeating his main challenger, Robert Kyagulanyi (Bobi Wine), who received 24.72%.

While the announcement affirms continuity of political leadership, the context in which the elections unfolded raises critical peacebuilding concerns. Reports of intimidation, arrests, abductions of opposition supporters, and restrictions on civic space including the shutdown of digital communication platforms from 13 January 2026 point to a shrinking democratic environment. For women and other historically excluded groups, such environments often translate into heightened barriers to participation, leadership, and voice.

Elections are not merely political milestones; they are moments that test the inclusivity, legitimacy, and resilience of governance systems. The climate of fear reported by election observers risks undermining public trust in institutions and weakening the social contract necessary for sustainable peace. Women candidates, activists, journalists, and voters frequently bear the brunt of such tensions through gendered harassment, surveillance, and exclusion from decision-making spaces.

The disruption of communication networks also carries gendered consequences. Women's rights defenders and grassroots peace actors rely heavily on digital platforms for mobilisation, reporting violence, and coordinating protection networks. Information blackouts therefore do not only affect electoral transparency, they also weaken community early warning systems and silence women's peacebuilding voices.



As Uganda moves into another electoral cycle under the same leadership, the priority must shift from contestation to confidence-building. This includes safeguarding civic space, strengthening independent oversight mechanisms, and ensuring that future electoral processes are inclusive and accessible to women in both leadership and participation.

For regional peace and stability, credible and participatory governance remains essential. Advancing the Women, Peace and Security agenda requires not only the absence of violence, but the presence of trust, accountability, and meaningful inclusion in political life.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/amp/news/2026/1/17/ugandas-president-yoweri-museveni-wins-seventh-term-electoral-commission>

Upcoming Events

Localizing National Gender and Climate Policy in Uganda

Online invite:
<https://bit.ly/4rpXQdF>

Date: February 24th , 2026

Time: 2pm EAT

Logos: Nottingham Trent University, Uganda National Emblem, Women's International Peace Centre, The British Academy

Conclusion

The developments of January 2026 affirm that peace and security across Africa are being shaped not only by armed conflict, but by climate shocks, political transitions, civic repression, and deeply embedded social norms. Across diverse contexts – from Sudan and eastern Democratic Republic of Congo to Mozambique, Nigeria, Eswatini, and Uganda – women continue to face heightened exposure to violence, exclusion, and economic insecurity during moments of instability. These realities highlight a persistent gap between commitments to the Women, Peace and Security agenda and the lived experiences of women.

At the same time, the month's events demonstrate that progress is possible when gender perspectives are intentionally integrated into governance, peace operations, and institutional frameworks. Efforts to mainstream gender in peace support operations and challenge harmful stereotypes point toward pathways for more inclusive and sustainable peacebuilding. However, without sustained political will and investment, such initiatives risk remaining symbolic rather than transformative.

Moving forward, responses to conflict, displacement, and governance challenges must recognise that women's protection and participation are central to long-term stability. Addressing the structural drivers of insecurity – including exclusion from decision-making, weakened support systems, and discriminatory norms – is essential to breaking cycles of violence and vulnerability.

As Africa continues to navigate complex crises, advancing peace will depend on ensuring that women are not only safeguarded from harm but are actively involved in shaping solutions. Bridging the gap between policy and practice remains the defining task for the Women, Peace and Security agenda in 2026 and beyond.

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