

Message from the Editor

Dear Readers,

The May 2026 edition of the REWiB Women, Peace and Security (WPS) monthly Bulletin comes at a time of deepening humanitarian crises, evolving security threats, and growing calls for more inclusive and people-centred peacebuilding approaches across Africa. This month's developments reveal a continent navigating complex intersections between conflict, governance, displacement, economic insecurity, migration, humanitarian response, and gender justice.

From Sudan's escalating hunger crisis and humanitarian collapse to renewed African Union efforts on ceasefires, mediation, and humanitarian coordination, the stories featured in this edition reflect both the severity of ongoing challenges and the resilience of communities and institutions working toward sustainable peace. The Bulletin also highlights women-led initiatives and leadership milestones shaping the continent's peace and security landscape – including women mediators in Chad, grassroots peacebuilding in Burundi, specialised support for women peacekeepers, and Zimbabwe's appointment of its first female Chief Justice.

At the same time, this edition underscores that WPS cannot be treated as a standalone gender issue disconnected from broader political, economic, and humanitarian realities. Rising xenophobia, violent extremism, shrinking civic space, food insecurity, displacement, and underfunded humanitarian systems continue to disproportionately affect women and girls while limiting their participation in decision-making processes. Yet across these crises, women remain central actors in mediation, humanitarian response, governance, and community resilience.



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As REWiB continues to monitor and analyse continental developments through a WPS lens, this Bulletin seeks not only to document events, but to encourage deeper reflection and coordinated action on the structural conditions shaping peace and security in Africa today. Sustainable peace requires more than crisis response alone — it demands inclusive governance, accountability, gender-responsive institutions, and sustained investment in local peacebuilding efforts led by women and communities themselves.

In Solidarity

Helen Kezie-Nwoha

Acronyms

AUC	African Union Commission
AU	African Union
PSC	Peace and Security Council
DPO	Department of Peace Operations
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PMNCH	Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health
PHEIC	Public Health Emergency of International Concern
RECs	Regional Economic Communities
SACBC	Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
WHO	World Health Organization
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

South African Bishops Condemn Anti-Migrant Violence Amid Rising Xenophobia

The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) has strongly condemned recent violence, intimidation, and displacement targeting migrants and refugees in South Africa, describing the attacks as "a grave assault on human dignity." In a pastoral letter issued on 20 May 2026 and signed by Cardinal Stephen Brislin, the bishops warned against growing xenophobic violence and called on political leaders, communities, and civil society to reject narratives that scapegoat migrants for the country's social and economic challenges. The bishops emphasised that violence against migrants "can never be justified, tolerated, or accepted," urging South Africans to uphold solidarity, dignity, and social cohesion.

The statement comes amid renewed tensions in parts of South Africa where migrants and refugees have increasingly become targets of intimidation, displacement, and exclusion during periods of economic hardship and social frustration. South Africa continues to face high unemployment, inequality, rising living costs, and public dissatisfaction with governance and service delivery. In this environment, migrants are often blamed for crime, unemployment, and pressure on public services despite evidence showing that structural economic and governance challenges are the primary drivers of instability.

Xenophobic violence carries particularly severe implications for women and girls. Migrant women often face intersecting vulnerabilities linked to displacement, poverty, insecure legal status, and limited access to protection mechanisms. During outbreaks of violence, women and girls are exposed to heightened risks of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), exploitation, trafficking, and barriers to healthcare, education, and livelihoods. Female migrants working in informal sectors also face increased economic insecurity when businesses, markets, or communities become sites of targeted violence and exclusion. The bishops' intervention therefore highlights how migration, social cohesion, and human security are deeply interconnected within broader peace and security discussions.

Importantly, the SACBC statement challenges securitised and exclusionary approaches to migration by framing migrants and refugees not as threats, but as individuals deserving protection and dignity. This framing aligns with growing calls across Africa for more human-centred approaches to migration governance that prioritise rights, inclusion, and community resilience. Religious institutions and faith leaders have increasingly emerged as influential actors in peacebuilding and social cohesion efforts, particularly in contexts where political discourse around migration becomes polarised.

The developments in South Africa also reflect broader continental and global trends where economic insecurity, political frustration, and social inequality are fuelling anti-migrant sentiment and shrinking social tolerance. For the WPS agenda, these dynamics reinforce that peace and security extend beyond armed conflict alone. Social exclusion, discrimination, and xenophobic violence undermine community stability and disproportionately affect women and vulnerable populations. Addressing these challenges therefore requires inclusive governance, social protection systems, and sustained efforts to strengthen solidarity and human dignity across increasingly divided societies.



<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/africa/news/2026-05/south-africa-catholic-bishops-condemn-violence-against-migrants.html>



AU High-Level Retreat Calls for Stronger Ceasefires, Dialogue, and Reconciliation Across Africa

The African Union Commission (AUC) convened the Chairperson's 17th High-Level Retreat on the Promotion of Peace, Security and Stability in Africa in Libreville, Gabon, from 21–22 May 2026 under the theme: "Powering Ceasefires, National Dialogue and Reconciliation for Durable Peace." The retreat brought together AU High Representatives, members of the Panel of the Wise, Special Envoys, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), United Nations representatives, women and youth peace actors, and other stakeholders to strengthen collective responses to Africa's evolving security challenges. Discussions focused on preventive diplomacy, mediation effectiveness, ceasefire implementation, reconciliation processes, and institutional coordination in conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts across the continent.



The timing of the retreat reflects growing concern over the persistence and complexity of conflicts across Africa, including wars in Sudan and the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), violent extremism in the Sahel, political instability, and humanitarian crises affecting millions. In the opening remarks, the AU Commission Chairperson Mahmoud Ali Youssouf stressed that the cost of resolving conflicts remains "exorbitant" and emphasised the importance of prevention, governance, and the rule of law in achieving sustainable peace. He also warned that increasing global political polarisation and weaknesses in multilateral systems require Africa to strengthen unity and strategic coordination in responding to emerging security threats.

The retreat is significant because it reinforces the importance of inclusive peacebuilding and African-led mediation efforts at a time when women continue to be disproportionately affected by conflict yet remain underrepresented in formal peace processes. The participation of women peace actors, mediation practitioners, and members of continental mechanisms such as the Panel of the Wise reflects growing recognition within the AU that sustainable peace cannot be achieved through militarised responses alone. The retreat's focus on national dialogue and reconciliation is particularly important given that exclusion, governance deficits, and unresolved political grievances continue to drive instability in several African contexts.

Importantly, the retreat also highlighted the growing emphasis on preventive diplomacy within the AU's peace and security architecture. Rather than focusing solely on conflict management after violence escalates, discussions centred on strengthening early intervention, mediation, and coordination between continental, regional, and international actors. This reflects broader lessons from conflicts across Africa where delayed responses and fragmented peace efforts have often prolonged violence and humanitarian suffering. The retreat additionally reinforced calls for sustainable financing of African peace operations and stronger implementation of AU Peace and Security Council decisions.

The Libreville retreat ultimately demonstrates the AU's continued efforts to reposition itself as a central actor in conflict prevention and peacebuilding across the continent. However, translating dialogue into measurable outcomes remains a persistent challenge. For the WPS agenda, the retreat underscores that ceasefires and peace agreements alone are insufficient without inclusive governance, accountability, reconciliation, and the meaningful participation of women in shaping Africa's peace and security responses. As conflicts across the continent become increasingly interconnected and protracted, strengthening women-led mediation and preventive diplomacy will remain critical to achieving durable peace in Africa.

<https://au.int/en/newsevents/20260521/chairpersons-17th-high-level-retreat-promotion-peace-security-and-stability>

Monica Geingos Appointed PMNCH Board Chair Amid Growing Global Health and Gender Challenges

The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health (PMNCH) has appointed former Namibian First Lady Monica Geingos as its new Board Chair, marking a significant leadership transition for the world's largest alliance focused on women's, children's, and adolescents' health and wellbeing. Announced on 13 May 2026, Geingos will succeed former New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark when her tenure concludes in November 2026. Hosted by the World Health Organization (WHO), PMNCH brings together nearly 1,500 organisations globally to advocate for health equity, gender equality, and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). PMNCH described the appointment as coming at a pivotal moment marked by widening inequalities, shrinking health financing, and growing threats to SRHR globally.

Geingos' appointment reflects the growing prominence of African women leaders within global governance and international development spaces. A lawyer, entrepreneur, and global advocate, she is widely recognised for her work on youth empowerment, gender equality, governance, and public health through initiatives such as Namibia's #BeFree movement and the One Economy Foundation. Her leadership has consistently linked economic inclusion, social justice, and health equity, positioning her as a prominent voice on issues affecting young people and marginalised communities across Africa. PMNCH officials noted that her background across finance, governance, and gender advocacy will be particularly important as global health institutions confront increasing political and financial pressures.

Her appointment reinforces the interconnected relationship between health, gender equality, and human security. Across conflict-affected and economically fragile contexts, women and girls continue to face disproportionate barriers to healthcare access, maternal health services, education, bodily autonomy, and economic participation. The growing global backlash against SRHR, combined with declining development assistance and humanitarian funding, poses serious implications for women's wellbeing and social stability. PMNCH's emphasis on protecting gains in SRHR and strengthening gender-responsive health systems therefore aligns closely with broader WPS objectives centred on dignity, protection, participation, and resilience.



Importantly, the appointment also comes during a period of broader debate around reforming global health governance and financing systems. Many African countries continue to face strained healthcare systems, debt burdens, unequal vaccine access, and underfunded maternal and adolescent health programmes. PMNCH has increasingly advocated for “health sovereignty” and more equitable financing models that prioritise vulnerable populations, particularly women, children, and adolescents. Geingos’ leadership may therefore strengthen African representation within global health diplomacy while amplifying calls for more inclusive and accountable health governance structures.

Ultimately, Monica Geingos’ appointment signals more than a leadership transition within a global health alliance. It reflects growing recognition that gender equality, youth wellbeing, and health justice are central to sustainable development and long-term peace. For the WPS agenda, the development reinforces that peace and security cannot be separated from access to healthcare, reproductive rights, and social protection systems that enable women and young people to participate fully and safely within society.

<https://pmnch.who.int/news-and-events/news/item/13-05-2026-pmnch-appoints-monica-geingos-as-board-chair-to-champion-a-new-era-of-leadership-for-women-s-children-s-and-adolescents-health>



Elizabeth Gwaunza Becomes Zimbabwe’s First Female Chief Justice

Zimbabwe has appointed Justice Elizabeth Chiedza Gwaunza as the country’s first female Chief Justice, marking a historic milestone 46 years after independence. Gwaunza officially assumed office on 15 May 2026 following the retirement of former Chief Justice Luke Malaba. Prior to her appointment, she served as Deputy Chief Justice since 2018 and has had a long judicial and legal reform career spanning decades. She was also among the first two Black female law graduates in Zimbabwe and previously co-founded the Women and Law in Southern Africa Research Project, an initiative focused on advancing women’s legal rights and gender justice.

Gwaunza’s appointment represents a significant symbolic breakthrough within Zimbabwe’s judiciary and the broader Southern African region, where women continue to face barriers to leadership within legal and governance institutions. Her elevation to the highest judicial office

reflects slow but notable progress toward gender representation in spaces historically dominated by men. Across Africa, women remain underrepresented in senior judicial and constitutional leadership despite increasing recognition of the importance of gender-inclusive governance systems. The appointment therefore carries significance not only for Zimbabwe’s judiciary, but also for broader debates around women’s leadership, institutional reform, and representation within state structures.

This highlights the critical relationship between gender equality, access to justice, and democratic governance. Judicial institutions play a central role in protecting constitutional rights, addressing gender-based violence, safeguarding civic freedoms, and strengthening accountability mechanisms during periods of political tension and instability. Women’s participation in leadership positions within the judiciary can

contribute to more inclusive legal systems and strengthen public confidence in justice institutions, particularly for women and marginalised communities that often face barriers in accessing justice. However, representation alone does not automatically guarantee institutional transformation.

Gwaunza assumes office at a politically sensitive moment for Zimbabwe's judiciary. Her appointment follows years of controversy surrounding judicial independence, constitutional amendments, and perceptions of political influence within the courts. Analysts note that one of her immediate challenges will be restoring public trust in a judiciary widely criticised for failing to maintain independence from executive power. She also takes office as Zimbabwe's Constitutional Court prepares to hear politically significant constitutional cases, including challenges linked to proposed governance reforms and presidential term debates.

The appointment therefore reflects both progress and complexity within Zimbabwe's governance landscape. While the breaking of a gender barrier is an important milestone for women's representation, the long-term significance of Gwaunza's leadership will likely depend on the judiciary's ability to uphold constitutionalism, accountability, and public trust. The development confirms that women's leadership in governance institutions is essential, but meaningful peace, security, and justice also require strong, independent institutions capable of protecting rights and advancing inclusive democratic participation.

<https://www.newsday.co.zw/amp/local-news/article/200055388/gwaunza-breaks-glass-ceiling-as-zimbabwes-first-female-chief-justice>

UK and South Africa Launch Global Coalition to Combat Violence Against Women and Girls

The United Kingdom and South Africa have launched a new international coalition aimed at strengthening global efforts to prevent Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), improve survivor protection systems, and increase accountability for perpetrators. Announced during the Global Partnerships Conference in London on 26 May 2026, the coalition brings together eight founding countries – including South Africa, Brazil, Morocco, Spain, Jamaica, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Australia – under a shared commitment to tackling gender-based violence through coordinated international action. The initiative, led by UK Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper, will focus on prevention strategies, survivor-centred responses, cross-border cooperation, and violence in conflict and humanitarian settings.

The coalition emerges at a time when VAWG continues to be recognised globally as a major human security crisis. According to the initiative, one in three women worldwide experiences physical or sexual violence during their lifetime, while online abuse, conflict-related sexual violence, and domestic abuse continue to rise across many regions. In South Africa, where GBV and femicide remain national concerns, participation in the coalition reinforces ongoing efforts to address domestic abuse, sexual violence, and growing digital harms targeting women and girls.

The coalition frames GBV not solely as a criminal justice issue, but as a broader peace, security, and governance challenge. VAWG undermines social cohesion, political participation, economic stability, and community resilience, particularly in conflict-affected and fragile contexts. The coalition's emphasis on violence in humanitarian and

conflict settings reflect growing international recognition that insecurity disproportionately affects women and girls through displacement, sexual violence, exploitation, and weakened protection systems.

Importantly, the initiative also reflects a growing shift toward transnational approaches to GBV, particularly as digital abuse and online exploitation increasingly cross-national borders. Coalition members are expected to share expertise, develop stronger national action plans, and strengthen legal and institutional frameworks to address emerging threats. However, the initiative also raises broader questions around implementation, financing, and accountability. Advocacy groups and commentators have repeatedly warned that international commitments to ending VAWG often struggle to translate into adequately funded support services, long-term prevention programmes, and structural reforms.

The launch of the coalition therefore represents both an important political statement and a test of international commitment. Sustainable peace and security cannot exist while VAWG remains widespread and normalised. Yet, achieving meaningful progress will require moving beyond declarations toward sustained investment in prevention, survivor support, justice systems, education, and community-based interventions that address the structural inequalities driving violence globally.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-south-africa-launch-coalition-to-end-violence-against-women-and-girls>

Specialized Body Armor Initiative Aims to Strengthen Protection of Women Peacekeepers

The United Nations (UN) has announced the rollout of specialized body armor designed specifically for women peacekeepers, in a move aimed at improving the safety, mobility, and operational effectiveness of female personnel serving in peacekeeping missions. The initiative, led through the UN Department of Peace Operations, addresses longstanding concerns that standard military protective equipment has largely been designed around male body types, often limiting comfort, mobility, and protection for women in high-risk operational environments. According to the UN, the new body armor has already been introduced in several peacekeeping contexts and forms part of broader efforts to create safer and more inclusive working conditions for women serving in uniform.

The development reflects growing international recognition of the structural barriers women continue to face within security and peacekeeping institutions. Although the UN has repeatedly called for increased participation of women in peace operations under the WPS framework, female peacekeepers remain significantly underrepresented globally. Women currently account for a minority of military and police personnel deployed in UN missions, despite evidence showing that women peacekeepers often improve community engagement, strengthen protection responses, and enhance trust with local populations, particularly women and children affected by conflict.

The introduction of gender-responsive equipment highlights how institutional inclusion requires more than numerical representation alone. For many years, women serving in military and peacekeeping environments have reported challenges linked to unsuitable equipment, infrastructure, healthcare access, and operational policies that fail to account for gender-specific needs. Ill-fitting body armor can reduce mobility, increase fatigue, and compromise protection during field operations, ultimately affecting both safety and mission performance. The UN's initiative therefore signals a broader shift toward recognising that operational effectiveness and gender inclusion are closely interconnected within peace and security structures.

At the same time, the initiative contributes to wider efforts to transform security institutions into spaces that are more inclusive, responsive, and representative. Across many African and global contexts, women in uniform continue to face barriers including discrimination, harassment, limited promotion opportunities, and underrepresentation in leadership positions. Improving working conditions and institutional support for women peacekeepers can therefore strengthen both retention and participation while reinforcing broader commitments to gender-responsive security governance.

The announcement also carries wider significance for peacekeeping reform debates globally. As conflicts become increasingly complex and civilian protection remains central to UN mandates, the participation of women in peace operations is increasingly viewed as essential rather than optional. Strengthening women's safety, effectiveness, and inclusion within peacekeeping missions contributes not only to operational performance, but also to broader goals of accountability, trust-building, and inclusive peacebuilding. The initiative therefore represents a practical example of how gender-responsive reforms can strengthen both institutional equity and the overall effectiveness of international peace and security efforts.

<https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/news/specialized-body-armor-enhances-safety-and-operational-effectiveness-of-women>



African Union Launches Humanitarian Coordination Platform to Strengthen Africa-Led Crisis Response

The African Union Commission, through its Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development, has launched the African Humanitarian Coordination Platform, marking what AU officials described as a major step toward strengthening Africa's humanitarian governance and coordination systems. The platform was unveiled following a continental engagement held in Mahé, Seychelles, from 18–19 May 2026, where Member States and regional stakeholders endorsed the Platform's Terms of Reference and adopted a draft 2026–2027 Joint Implementation Plan. The initiative aims to improve coordination, resource mobilisation, humanitarian diplomacy, localisation, and accountability in responding to humanitarian crises across the continent.

The launch comes amid worsening humanitarian conditions across Africa driven by conflict, climate shocks, displacement, food insecurity, and public health emergencies. According to the AU, more than 160 million people across the continent currently require humanitarian assistance, while approximately 45 million people are forcibly displaced. Despite the scale of need, only 26.7% of required humanitarian funding has reportedly been met, creating major operational gaps in emergency response systems. The Platform therefore seeks to address longstanding challenges linked to fragmented coordination, donor dependency, delayed responses, and limited African ownership within humanitarian action.

The initiative also reflects broader continental efforts to reposition Africa as a more central actor within global humanitarian governance. For years, African leaders and institutions have criticised international humanitarian systems for being overly externalised, reactive, and insufficiently aligned with local realities and regional mechanisms. The new coordination platform's emphasis on localisation and African-led response frameworks signals growing calls for humanitarian systems that prioritise community-based actors, regional coordination, and sustainable local capacity rather than short-term emergency interventions alone.

The platform carries important implications for women and girls who are disproportionately affected by conflict, displacement, food insecurity, and climate-related crises. Women often serve at the frontline of humanitarian response and community resilience efforts, yet they remain underrepresented in formal humanitarian decision-making and financing structures. The inclusion of the AU Office of the Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security and the Women, Gender and Youth Directorate within the platform discussions signals recognition that humanitarian action must integrate gender-responsive approaches and protection frameworks more systematically.

The Platform's focus on the humanitarian–peace–development nexus is also particularly significant. Across many African contexts, humanitarian crises are increasingly prolonged and interconnected with governance failures, insecurity, and economic vulnerability. Addressing humanitarian needs in isolation without parallel investment in peacebuilding, social protection, and development has often resulted in cyclical crises and dependency. The AU's framework therefore reflects a growing understanding that sustainable recovery requires integrated approaches linking emergency response to long-term resilience, governance, and peace efforts.

The launch of the African Humanitarian Coordination Platform represents an important institutional development within Africa's evolving peace and security architecture. However, its long-term effectiveness will depend on political commitment, sustainable financing, coordination between continental and regional actors, and the meaningful inclusion of local communities and women-led organisations in implementation processes. As humanitarian crises across Africa continue to intensify, strengthening African-led and gender-responsive coordination mechanisms will remain essential to advancing both human security and durable peace across the continent.

<https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20260526/africa-unveils-landmark-humanitarian-coordination-platform-strengthen-aligned>

Fifteen Years of the WPS Agenda at the AU Peace and Security Council Reveal Progress and Persistent Gaps

A new research report published by Amani Africa has examined fifteen years of the WPS agenda within the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC), highlighting both important institutional gains and continuing implementation gaps across the continent. Released on 8 May 2026, the report assesses how the PSC has engaged with WPS issues amid evolving conflict dynamics marked by violent extremism, political instability, shrinking civic space, humanitarian crises, and protracted conflicts in regions including the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, the Great Lakes, and Sudan. The study argues that although the AU has made notable normative and policy advances on WPS, women and girls continue to face disproportionate insecurity, exclusion from decision-making, and heightened exposure to sexual and gender-based violence across conflict settings.

According to the report, the PSC has held 28 dedicated sessions on WPS over the past fifteen years, consistently emphasising key priorities such as accountability for violations against women, women's participation in mediation and peace processes, access to justice, and the institutionalisation of gender-responsive peace and security frameworks within AU structures. The report also highlights progress linked to the adoption of continental frameworks rooted in United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, the Maputo Protocol, and AU gender strategies. These developments have contributed to greater visibility of WPS issues within African peace and security discourse and expanded recognition of women's role in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and post-conflict recovery.

At the same time, the research raises concerns about the widening gap between policy commitments and realities on the ground. Despite stronger normative frameworks, women remain underrepresented in formal peace negotiations, mediation structures, and political transitions across many African contexts. The report notes that ongoing conflicts, governance crises, displacement, and economic insecurity continue to expose women and girls to heightened risks while weakening protection systems and limiting civic participation. It also points to the emergence of newer security threats – including climate-related insecurity, violent extremism, and digital violence – that increasingly shape women's lived experiences of conflict and instability.

The findings further underscore growing debates around the effectiveness of continental peace and security mechanisms in responding to Africa's changing conflict environment. While the AU PSC has strengthened its engagement with WPS rhetorically and institutionally, implementation remains constrained by limited financing, inconsistent political will, weak accountability systems, and inadequate integration of gender perspectives into operational peace support efforts. The report therefore calls for renewed political commitment, stronger institutional coordination, and sustained investment in gender-responsive peacebuilding mechanisms across the continent.

The publication ultimately serves as both a reflection on progress made and a warning about unresolved structural challenges facing the WPS agenda in Africa. It reinforces the reality that women's participation, protection, and leadership cannot remain secondary considerations within peace and security responses. As conflicts across the continent become increasingly complex and interconnected, strengthening the operational implementation of WPS commitments will be essential to building more inclusive, accountable, and sustainable peace processes in Africa.

<https://amaniafrica-et.org/fifteen-years-of-the-women-peace-and-security-agenda-at-the-au-peace-and-security-council/>

Nearly 20 Million Sudanese Face Acute Hunger as War Deepens Humanitarian Catastrophe

Sudan's worsening conflict has pushed nearly 20 million people into acute hunger, according to the latest assessment by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), intensifying what humanitarian agencies describe as one of the world's gravest humanitarian crises. A report released in May 2026 estimates that approximately 19.5 million people — more than 40 percent of Sudan's population — are experiencing crisis-level food insecurity or worse as fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces enters its fourth year. The IPC further warned that at least 14 areas across North Darfur, South Darfur, and South Kordofan remain at risk of famine, with approximately 135,000 people already facing catastrophic hunger conditions.

The conflict has devastated agricultural production, disrupted markets, destroyed infrastructure, and displaced millions across the country. Humanitarian agencies estimate that over 14 million people have been displaced since the war began in April 2023, while ongoing fighting and siege-like conditions continue to obstruct humanitarian access to vulnerable communities. The situation is particularly severe in Darfur and Kordofan, where insecurity, drone attacks, and attacks on civilian infrastructure have compounded already fragile living conditions. The IPC also projects that approximately 825,000 children could suffer severe acute malnutrition this year due to collapsing health systems, limited aid access, and deteriorating food availability.

The crisis demonstrates how conflict and food insecurity have become increasingly interconnected within modern warfare. In Sudan, hunger is no longer simply a by-product of instability but a condition intensified by sieges, restricted aid routes, destruction of livelihoods, and prolonged insecurity. Humanitarian organisations have warned that civilians are being forced into extreme survival strategies, including consuming animal feed, leaves, and food waste. At the same time, attacks on markets, farms, and supply routes continue to undermine local food systems and deepen dependency on humanitarian assistance.

Women and girls continue to bear disproportionate consequences within Sudan's humanitarian emergency. Displacement, food shortages, and the breakdown of protection systems have heightened risks of gender-based violence, exploitation, child marriage, and trafficking. Women often shoulder primary responsibility for securing food and caring for displaced families despite facing restricted mobility, economic insecurity, and limited access to healthcare and protection services. The erosion of livelihoods has also intensified pressures on female-headed households already struggling within overcrowded displacement sites and conflict-affected communities.

The worsening hunger crisis further exposes broader failures within international humanitarian and political responses to Sudan's war. Despite repeated warnings from aid agencies and human rights organisations, the conflict has received comparatively limited global political attention and insufficient humanitarian funding relative to the scale of need. Analysts increasingly warn that Sudan risks becoming a "forgotten crisis" even as famine conditions expand and civilian suffering intensifies.

Sudan's situation underscores the reality that peace and security cannot be separated from food systems, humanitarian protection, and economic survival. As violence continues to spread across the country, addressing hunger will require not only emergency aid but also sustained diplomatic efforts to end hostilities, protect civilians, restore humanitarian access, and support long-term recovery and resilience for communities devastated by years of war.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/5/14/acute-hunger-grips-nearly-20-million-people-in-war-battered-sudan-says-ipc>

WHO Declares Ebola Outbreak in DRC a Public Health Emergency of International Concern

The World Health Organization (WHO) has determined that the ongoing Ebola virus disease outbreak affecting the DRC constitutes the highest level of global health alert under the International Health Regulations. The declaration, announced on 17 May 2026, follows concerns over cross-border transmission risks, continued outbreaks in conflict-affected areas, and challenges facing national and regional response efforts. WHO noted that while DRC has strengthened surveillance and emergency response mechanisms, the outbreak's geographical spread and the potential for wider regional transmission necessitated heightened international attention and support. The declaration is intended to mobilise resources, strengthen coordination, and prevent further escalation of the epidemic.

The outbreak emerges within a particularly fragile regional context. Eastern DRC continues to experience persistent insecurity involving armed groups, population displacement, and attacks on civilian infrastructure. Public health emergencies in conflict settings often present unique challenges, including restricted humanitarian access, weakened health systems, community mistrust, and disruptions to disease surveillance and treatment services. These factors have historically complicated Ebola response efforts in the region, where insecurity has repeatedly undermined containment measures and delayed access to affected populations.

The declaration highlights the increasingly interconnected nature of health security and peace and security concerns. Infectious disease outbreaks occurring in areas affected by conflict and instability can exacerbate existing vulnerabilities by straining public services, disrupting livelihoods, and deepening humanitarian needs. Population displacement, porous borders, and limited healthcare infrastructure create conditions that can accelerate disease transmission while simultaneously making response efforts more difficult. The outbreak therefore demonstrates how public health emergencies can both result from and contribute to broader insecurity within fragile contexts.

Women and girls are likely to face disproportionate consequences as the outbreak unfolds. Across previous Ebola epidemics in the region, women often served as primary caregivers within households and communities, increasing their exposure to infection. At the same time, outbreaks have disrupted maternal healthcare services, sexual and reproductive health programmes, education systems, and economic activities on which many women depend. Female healthcare workers and community volunteers have also frequently carried significant responsibilities in outbreak response efforts while facing heightened occupational risks. These gendered dimensions underscore the importance of integrating protection, gender equality, and community engagement into epidemic preparedness and response strategies.

The situation also raises broader concerns regarding the capacity of conflict-affected states to manage simultaneous security and public health crises. In eastern DRC particularly, ongoing violence has already displaced millions and weakened local institutions, creating conditions where disease outbreaks can rapidly evolve into wider humanitarian emergencies. Without sustained international support, coordinated regional action, and secure humanitarian access, the Ebola outbreak risks compounding existing instability and placing additional pressure on already overstretched health systems and communities.

The WHO declaration serves as a reminder that health emergencies are not isolated from broader peace and security dynamics. The outbreak in DRC illustrates how conflict, displacement, governance challenges, and public health risks increasingly intersect in contemporary crises. Addressing these challenges will require not only effective disease containment measures but also long-term investments in resilient health systems, community trust, humanitarian access, and peacebuilding efforts capable of addressing the structural vulnerabilities that allow such emergencies to escalate.

Conclusion

The developments highlighted in the May 2026 REWiB WPS Bulletin demonstrate that peace and security challenges across Africa are becoming increasingly multidimensional and interconnected. Armed conflict, humanitarian crises, violent extremism, displacement, governance tensions, migration pressures, economic instability, and climate-related vulnerabilities continue to shape the lived realities of millions across the continent. Within these contexts, women and girls remain disproportionately affected by insecurity while simultaneously carrying significant responsibilities in sustaining families, communities, humanitarian responses, and local peace efforts.

This month's stories also reveal important shifts within continental and international peace and security frameworks. African institutions are placing greater emphasis on preventive diplomacy, humanitarian coordination, localisation, and women's participation in peacebuilding and governance processes. Initiatives supporting women mediators, women peacekeepers, women-led organisations, and gender-responsive humanitarian systems reflect growing recognition that sustainable peace cannot be achieved without inclusive leadership and structural reforms.

However, persistent gaps between policy commitments and implementation remain a major challenge. Across many contexts, women continue to face exclusion from formal decision-making spaces, inadequate protection systems, underfunded support services, and shrinking civic space despite repeated commitments under the WPS agenda. Humanitarian emergencies such as the crisis in Sudan further expose the consequences of delayed political action, insufficient funding, and weak accountability mechanisms.

The May Bulletin therefore reinforces the need to approach peace and security through broader human security frameworks that prioritise dignity, inclusion, social justice, and resilience. Strengthening women's participation, supporting locally led peace initiatives, investing in humanitarian protection, and building accountable institutions will remain critical to advancing sustainable peace across Africa. As the continent continues to confront evolving challenges, centring women's leadership and lived realities within peace and security responses is not optional — it is essential.

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