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**African Solidarity Initiative (ASI)****Concept Note****HIGH LEVEL CONSULTATION ON PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO SEXUAL  
VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT, POST- CONFLICT COUNTRIES AND BEYOND****Addis Ababa*****9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> October 2013*****1. INTRODUCTION.**

Sexual and gender based violence has attained alarming consequences in conflict prone countries in Africa to become a matter of international peace and security and human rights.

As numerous countries on the continent have endured over decades of armed conflicts that have had traumatic consequences on the lives of its people, the human dignity and human rights of women and girls have been violated due to a systematic culture of rape and other forms of sexual gender based violence that prevail in the conduct of armed conflict and which continue long after conflict has ended. The too commonly shared perception of sexual violence as an inevitable by-product of war has contributed to making these atrocities normal occurrences during war and has resulted in widespread and opportunistic sexual violence in post-conflict context.

The long term consequences of these endemic rapes on the fabric of society are difficult to measure, but already the increasing phenomenon of children born out of rape and rejected by the communities bear with it the seeds of future violence and does not bode well for the future of the continent.

The prevention of sexual and gender based violence has become an imperative for the observance of human rights on the continent and elsewhere in the world, however, in view of the historical absence of accountability for sexual violence, it is not surprising that the level of crime has increased as the level of impunity is high everywhere on the continent. Definitive measures must be taken to ensure its elimination as well as a change of mindset that makes both sexual violence and impunity unacceptable and abnormal and a threat to peace building and stabilization efforts.

**2. THE AFRICAN SOLIDARITY INITIATIVE.**

Launched in July 2012 during the AU Summit, the African Solidarity Initiative (ASI) is an AUC flagship programme aimed at mobilizing African member states' commitments and contributions (in kind, technical and financial) to support ongoing efforts in post conflict reconstruction in a number of African countries. The initiative is designed to encourage and empower African countries alongside traditional - and non-traditional - partners, to

offer assistance to post conflict countries. The overall intention is to promote African solidarity and support as part of an agenda to address the magnitude of challenges being faced by countries engaged in post conflict reconstruction.

Grounded in the AUC PCRD Policy (2006), the ASI aims at: (i) instituting a platform aimed at increasing African support to PCRD activities in Africa; (ii) mobilizing both in-kind and financial contributions from African countries, parastatals, private sector and other potential contributors; (iii) instituting and expanding processes for intra-African sharing of technical expertise and capacity training in line with the *Inter-African Convention establishing an African Technical co-operation Programme (1975)*<sup>1</sup>; (iv) increasing the level of intra-Africa mutual assistance and self-reliance; and (v) creating conditions for further support from international partners.

As part of the ASI process, post conflict needs assessments (PCNA) were undertaken in 8 post-conflict countries (Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire, The Central African Republic, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, The Republic of Southern Sudan, The Republic of Sudan )and force is to acknowledge that the issue of sexual violence was a recurrent concern expressed by national stakeholders and partners on the ground alike, who called for the issue to be firmly put on the agenda of the AUC.

### **3. OBJECTIVE OF MEETING.**

It is the case that the existing response to systematic rape and other forms of sexual violence on the continent, while improving, is inadequate and the issue commands the highest order of urgency. The Consultation aims at laying the foundation for the formulation of an AU led strategic framework for the prevention and response to Sexual Violence in Africa. The purpose is to dramatically reduce or even eliminate sexual violence, and accelerate the implementation of the urgent responses to the problem of sexual violence, which are required to ensure prevention, protection, access to care and to justice for the victims.

The proposal for a High level consultation on *preventing and responding to sexual violence in conflict, post-conflict countries and beyond* is an initiative of the African Union organized in the framework of the African Solidarity Initiative to bring together the AU Member states, the UN system, academics and practitioners working on the issues of prevention and response to sexual violence in Africa in a dialogue to address the compelling situation of Sexual violence on the Continent.

The Consultation is framed within key international policy and action frameworks, in particular Security Council Resolution 1325 and 1820, the World Summit Outcome (2005); the Brussels Call to Action on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Beyond, CEDAW, the Beijing platform for Action, the Protocol on the Rights of women in Africa, the Geneva Conventions, the Protocol on the Suppression and Repression of Sexual Violence against Women and Children formulated under the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region(ICGLR) , the AUC PCRD policy(2006); the AU Gender policy(2009).

The Consultation will develop high priority recommendations and inputs for a Continental framework of action, based on an analysis of the critical gaps in existing responses with regard to prevention, protection, access to services and other social and economic supports, reintegration, and access to justice and ending impunity.

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<sup>1</sup> Inter-African Convention Establishing an African Technical Cooperation Programme. Kampala 28<sup>th</sup> July-1<sup>st</sup> August 1975

The following 8 post conflict countries will be the focus of the discussions: Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire, The Central African Republic, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, The Republic of Southern Sudan, and The Republic of Sudan. However, the objective of the consultation is to assess the state of play in this sensitive area and generate practical approaches to saving the lives of millions of people, men, women and children in Africa, and other parts of the world.

### **Toward Charting a Strategic Framework: Components of the Consultation.**

Various initiatives to respond to sexual violence have been put in place by various actors including the United Nations and International partners in many countries on the continent. The challenges encountered revolve around a coordinated approach to ensure that all the efforts on the ground come to fruition and that a dramatic reduction, if not eradication, of the crime of sexual violence is witnessed in all the countries. There are gaps in the UN's response and these will be discussed at the consultation. Notably, more needs to be understood with regard to effective strategies to prevent widespread and systematic sexual violence and more needs to be done to provide effective protection for women and children in their communities and in temporary settlements such as IDP camps.

It is foreseen that this consultation, which brings together the African member states, the countries emerging from conflict, the United Nations family, bi-lateral and multilateral partners will address some of these gaps and respond to the need for a multi-pronged approach to tackling the issue whilst promoting synergies in action in preventing and responding to sexual violence in Africa.

The wide range of experience gained by African Member States, African Experts, the United Nations and international partners and NGOs working with victims of sexual violence has helped to generate lessons learned, programmatic guidance and good practices on how to address sexual and gender based violence in the context of armed conflict and post conflict situations, these will form an important basis for deliberations at the Consultation. Emphasis will be placed on ensuring holistic, human rights-based and gender-responsive approaches to men, women and children survivors of sexual violence.

Well-targeted delegations of AU Members states and representatives of the range of key stakeholders will forge a critical mass necessary for effective follow-up and monitoring of the agreements arrived at during the Consultations.

The key issues to be addressed at the Consultation are as follows:

- **Conceptual Framework:** Brainstorming on a conceptual framework for dealing with sexual violence underlying or pervasive structural causes, including social, cultural, economic and political aspects;
- **Prevention:** sharing of experience in the area of prevention such as successful national and/or community-based sensitization and mobilization for prevention and reintegration of victims of sexual violence; effective attitudinal and behavioral change approaches, and reaching out to perpetrator;
- **Protection:** Sharing of experience in the area of protection including but not limited to community policing initiatives;

- **Health Services and other social and economic services and supports:** sharing of good practices in the access to medical and psychosocial care and rehabilitation for survivors of sexual violence, including sexual and reproductive health and HIV-related care. Experience in the area of livelihoods and economic security, as alternatives to empower women and prevent their re-victimization and socio-economic vulnerability to sexual violence and sexual exploitation;
- **Rehabilitation and Reintegration:** Effectiveness of measures to facilitate rehabilitation of victims/survivors into their community.
- **Access to Justice and the legislative framework for dealing with sexual violence:** The following will be discussed: (i) Access to justice for victim/survivor or lack thereof and causes; (ii) Legislative frameworks at the national, regional and continental levels to end impunity for crimes of sexual violence and secure access to justice for women (use of existing laws, traditional law, transitional justice mechanisms, the judiciary, and the role of the security sector);
- **Priority Group:** children born out of rape during conflict and their status.

The outcome of the African Union and partners' *High level meeting on Preventing and Responding to Sexual Violence in Africa* will go a long way towards strengthening the current global effort to combat sexual violence in Africa and beyond.

As an initiative under the ASI, the Consultation will aspire to establish an Action Plan incorporating minimum standards and intervention packages including the provision of financial and in-kind support aim at improving response to victims of sexual violence such as but not limited to: Up-scaling existing response facilities; strengthening the legal framework; streamlining the judicial response; provision of medical kits; etc.

#### **4. Participants:**

The Consultation will bring together a targeted number of high level policy makers from:

- African Member states
- UN system
- INGOs
- Bi-lateral and other multi-lateral partners working on the issue in Africa.
- Practitioners.

#### **5. Date and Venue:**

The High level Consultation will take place from **9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> October, 2013** in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.