



Statement in Support of UN Secretary General’s Call for a Global Ceasefire from the Community Voices for Peace and Pluralism – Africa, Network of African Women Peace Builders

The Community Voices for Peace and Pluralism:

The Community Voices for Peace and Pluralism - Africa (CVPP) <https://peaceandpluralism.org/> is a non-profit network that builds the capacities of women and other groups in preventing, transforming and solving violent conflict through a Peace and Pluralism approach. CVPP-Africa equips women to contribute to peace processes in decision making roles.

Introduction:

National Governments, international organizations and regional bodies have increasingly recognized the pragmatic importance of the call by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres for warring parties across the world to lay down their weapons in support of the bigger global battle against COVID-19, the common enemy that is threatening all of humankind.

Against this backdrop, we as African women peacebuilders are articulating a collective vision in support of the ceasefire that would contribute to access to humanitarian aid and sustainable peace in our communities across the spectrum of conflict prevention, human security, response to conflict and post conflict recovery.

A wide gap remains between the existing support for the ceasefire and the social realities girls and women face when seeking a meaningful laying down of weapons and justice in our contexts. Invariably, this gap has consequences as ceasefires are important building blocks for long-term peacebuilding that is also built on justice and respect of human rights for all. Ceasefires that are rooted in community-based peace initiatives involving women will form the cornerstone for the political and socio-economic path that the area or country embarks on, offering opportunities to address the needs and interests of the communities at large.

Suggested Immediate Measures

- **Address the willing buyer, willing seller arms industry:** Stop the manufacture and sale of illegal weapons and outlaw all arms dealers to non-state actors in Africa. This is in support of the African Union Master Roadmap (AUMR) of Practical Steps to *Silencing the Guns*, a project that targets silencing all illegal weapons in Africa by 2020.

- **End violence by uniformed forces:** Ensure no violence from uniformed forces during enforcement of lockdowns/curfews as the ceasefires will be very difficult to implement when uniformed forces are violent.
- **Rein in Political actors:** Rein in and hold accountable economic and political actors aggravating conflicts as this may have retrogressive outcomes for efforts to ensure a ceasefire.
- **Use gender sensitive indicators:** Design specific gender sensitive indicators for the successful implementation of the ceasefires including a strict implementation of equitable involvement of women in decision making roles in response to COVID-19 in Africa.
- **Devise gender sensitive action plans:** Entrench women's participation in the implementation of the ceasefire through gender-sensitive action plans.
- **Support vulnerable communities devastated by conflicts and war:** Enhance the call for ceasefire through support towards vulnerable communities particularly those devastated by the aftermaths of conflicts and wars such as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) to mitigate the impact of the severe shock of COVID-19.
- **Use inclusive language:** Use inclusive language in formalized ceasefires that explicitly recognize both women and men rather than just people or groups in any of the formalized ceasefire documents.
- **Deploy appropriate monitoring systems:** Ensure that monitoring systems for the ceasefires are equipped to detect gender-related challenges such as domestic violence and establish ways to address them.
- **Make contingency plans for probable future violent disturbances:** Pay attention to the violence that is to come as much as the current violence as militias are currently recruiting school children sent home as part of the COVID-19 lockdown measures.
- **Create ceasefire incentives:** Create incentives for laying down of weapons with potential to provide a roadmap which can inspire other people to take similar initiatives to advance peace. This is crucial since COVID-19's threat to easy availability of life basics as one of the feared impacts of the lockdown might lead to people using their weapons to access food and other necessities.
- **Support Community responses to the ceasefire and COVID-19:** Community responses will enhance responsibility, accountability and sustainability.
- **Create a rapid response fund:** Create a rapid response fund to address dire emergencies as and when they crop up.

Beyond the "Call to Lay Down Arms," What else can be done?

- **Mitigate economic impact of containment and lockdown measures:** Many countries are proving that coronavirus can be stopped through containment. Containment is however coming at a great economic cost for African countries, resulting in food shortages that will lead many people to ignore lockdowns or curfews in the interest of feeding their families.
- **Design gender specific post conflict reconstruction plans:** The experience of past outbreaks like Ebola point at women and girls as being more vulnerable and impacting their health more than men because of domestic violence. Plans could include safe houses for either or both women and men suffering domestic violence.
- **Address structural violence:** Efforts should be made to address all social inequality and historical injustices that have made some of the conflicts and wars protracted.

- **Address root causes of current conflicts in Africa:** Address the root causes of identity and boundary conflicts that could worsen the negatives effects of the virus.
- **Adopt programs that can accommodate the needs of children who cannot access online learning:** Design programs for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, who, with schools shut down and online learning not possible, are idling or joining radicalized groups or cattle rustling gangs. Some girls could also be caught up in negative coping mechanisms and subjected to Early Child Marriages and Trafficking.
- **Support those on unpaid care work:** Support those taking care of the sick and vulnerable and exposed to the virus by providing protective gear.
- **Gender sensitive allocation of resources:** Since most of the unpaid caregivers are women and girls, it is important that the UN works with governments to ensure that a significant percentage of the allocated resources for COVID-19 target women and girls.
- **Designate Social Workers as an integral part of those providing essential services:** In times of such crises, provision of social services is even more critical than usual. Categorize social workers as “essential services” and accord them the requisite rights and privileges to enable them to move freely and quickly throughout the community to serve.
- **Work with Governments to prioritize the provision of Water and Sanitation:** Work with Governments to prioritize the provision of water for poor and vulnerable people as it is difficult to end COVID-19 without water and adequate sanitation facilities.
- **Work with Governments to deliver Health care:** Work with governments to ensure local basic free health care provision including psycho-social support and counselling. Africans have a strong family and communal approach to issues, therefore ensure that some of the psychosocial responses include community-based group therapy workshops as individual referrals are sometimes perceived as foreign and intrusive.
- **Enhance creativity:** Use creative methods including those drawn from indigenous communities to prevent and end conflict particularly in the informal settlements.
- **Promote use, where appropriate, of traditional health methods:** Work with governments to ensure enhanced use of traditional African methods of treating flu symptoms such as steaming using boiled eucalyptus, mixtures of lemons, ginger and garlic, and others. This information should be localized and translated into local languages.
- **Provide clarity on the selection of subjects for testing of vaccines:** We applaud the World Health Organization’s statement denouncing the suggestion that Africans should be used as guinea pigs for vaccine trials. We call for clarity and assurance that this denouncement will translate into implementable policies protecting poor Africans from being used as guinea pigs.
- **Protect patients and survivors:** Enforce measures towards holding bullies - online and physical - of COVID-19 patients accountable so as to end discrimination. Enhance community resilience towards non- stigmatization of coronavirus patients by encouraging online and other possible ways of counselling that respect lockdown demands.
- **Continue to provide correct information on COVID-19:** Continue to provide information to demystify COVID-19 in languages accessible to many.
- **Work with faith-based organizations:** Faith based organizations have experience and resources on post traumatic healing that can be availed as a resource for COVID-19.
- **Support the widespread planting of food:** Support planting of food crops that do not demand a lot of care but can add to immunity as well as feed a sick population in the

coming months. These food crops include, yam, cassava, sweet potatoes, arrowroots and fruits.

Commitment - Community Voices for Peace and Pluralism

Many of the women in CVPP interact with armed groups as part of their peacebuilding work. We undertake to take the message of the call by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres for warring parties across the world to lay down their weapons in support of the bigger global battle against COVID-19 to these armed groups.

We also request our Governments to support the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres' call for a ceasefire.