

Darfur women should take part in peace process – African meeting

Saturday 26 January 2008.

January 25, 2008 (ADDIS ABABA) – African women agreed that Darfur women should take part in the peace process in order to ensure their rights and recognise their role in the reconstruction of Darfur society.

Organised by Femmes Africa Solidarité in the margins of the 10th African Union Summit with the support of the UNECA, the African Women's consultation on Darfur gathered African women and Darfur women to debate in a two-day meeting on the role of the women in the peace process.

"The women leaders assembled in Addis this week agreed that Darfuri women cannot be considered only as symbols of victimization, but rather must have an active role in all aspects of the peace process, said a statement issued at the end of the consultation on Friday January 25.

Since conflict broke out in Darfur in 2002, women have been systematically targeted for sexual violence, while domestic violence has also increased as traditional social structures have broken down during displacement and long confinements in refugee camps.

A Sudanese activist, Ms Sidiga W. Babiker Badri said stakeholders should understand that women are not only victims of violence but also they are "strong community leaders" who are ready to contribute in the conflict settlement and "without whom the structures of Darfuri society cannot be rebuilt."

The meeting also agreed that Darfur women participation cannot be token. Those chosen to represent Darfuri women's interests in the peace process must be given the resources, advice, and support to sustain dialogue with their constituencies as well as to navigate the peace process mechanisms.

The African Women's Consultation on Darfur is one part of a larger initiative facilitated by Femmes Africa Solidarité to ensure women actively participate in resolving the conflict in Darfur, following a September 2007 fact-finding mission led by Nobel peace prize winner Mary Robinson.

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Women and children wait at a camp in Mornay in Darfur. (file photo)