Message from Mrs. Graça Machel, President and Founder Graça Machel Trust

Let me begin by apologising for not being able to take part in this meeting in person. However, because security issues in Africa are of particular interest to my work, I deemed it important to contribute to the discussions through this statement. I know that each one of us here is determined to help our continent arrive at a place, sooner rather than later, where everyone can live free from fear in stable communities, nations and Africa wide.

But the reality in which we live tells us that tens of thousands, indeed hundreds of thousands of women and girls on the continent, find themselves carrying in silence the wounds and scars of their torn dignity. Massive and repeated orgies of rape have been consistently reported in the Eastern DRC.

Since 2010, I have been unsuccessfully trying to engage African Union bodies to take a stand, to acknowledge the plight of these women and girls, and to investigate and bring the perpetrators to justice. I approached the African Commission for Human Rights, and they directly listened to accounts of women who have been personally affected by these atrocities. We demanded that the Commission take this issue to the Peace and Security Council of the African Union.

We provided training to commissioners to enable them to undertake their first hand investigations in places where alleged perpetrators had been broadly identified. To our dismay, up until now this issue is lost in bureaucracy and technicalities.

Only three days ago, a group of women from the DRC came to remind us that atrocities are still taking place, and no one seems to be taking action.

The fact that so far no African government, no regional body, not even the African Union itself has ever stood to claim the dignity, protection and rehabilitation of these women is profoundly disturbing to our consciousness.

This is a highly empowered gathering whose voice can shake institutions. I therefore submit that this forum take peace and security beyond the absence of internal, violent conflict or cross border conflict. I submit that rape as a weapon of war be vigorously addressed by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union to stop impunity and bring state and non-state armies, or even individuals to account for their crimes.

I consider that peace and security must mean that women and children live free from fear in stable communities, nations and Africa wide.
I remain fully engaged with this forum in my modest capacity to work together for peace and security for all in Africa, especially for women and children caught up in violent conflict.