...EAC-COMESA promises to strengthen security for women in Burundi participating as voters and candidates in this year’s upcoming elections

East African Community Secretariat, Gitega, Burundi, 16 March, 2015: As part of its objective to increase the participation of women in the electoral process in Burundi, the EAC Secretariat, together with joint efforts from the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), held plenary discussions to women groups in the town of Gitega, Burundi from 11th – 12th March, 2015.

The participants were drawn from the provinces of Gitega, Karuzi, Muramvya, Kayanza and Mwaro, in the northern and central parts of the country.

The women’s dialogue brought together women leaders from political parties; civil society organizations (CSOs); faith-based organizations (FBOs); national and local administration; security and defence; members of the press and eminent persons from the EAC and COMESA regions, to a roundtable discussion to tackle the challenges facing women in the electoral process.

Some challenges were identified as the fear of women to participate in the forthcoming elections due to discouraging messages from politicians, concerns of fewer women candidates to vote for, inadequate participation of women in intra-party policy formulation, lack of self-belief among women that they can achieve anything thus the lack of mutual support for women candidates, lack of awareness on the existing electoral laws, lack of common understanding on the provisions of the Arusha Agreement and the Constitution in regards to the number of presidential terms, poor security and lack of resources for women to participate in electoral politics.

In response to these challenges, eminent persons from the EAC-COMESA committed themselves to working in solidarity with the Burundi Women in the period prior, during and after the 2015 general elections for promoting peace, dialogue, national unity, reconciliation and cohesion among the different stakeholders.

Further commitment was extended to strengthening security for women participating in the electoral process as candidates and voters, to raising awareness on the existing electoral laws through theatre, games and sketches, to sensitizing women to participate both as voters and candidates in the electoral process, to working with men to encourage their wives to getting involved in the upcoming elections, to working with political parties, CSOs, religious groups and women on mechanisms towards peaceful elections and consolidating with local media in promoting messages depicting peace.

Peaceful elections will promote peace and stability in Burundi which is crucial to strengthening
democratic principle, boosting the country’s economy and improving the standard of living for the people.

Drawing from a myriad of experiences working with and for women in Africa and beyond, HE Dr. Speciosa Wandira-Kazibwe, Former Vice President of the Republic of Uganda, and current member of the African Union (AU) Panel of the Wise and EAC Eminent Person, urged the women attending the Women’s Dialogue to courageously come up with a women’s manifesto.

The manifesto, she continued, would help take stock of the achievements registered since the Arusha Agreement signed at the start of the New Millennium, while also strategizing for full emancipation.

Dr. Wandira-Kazibwe shared graphical examples from her experience as a surgeon and mother of twins, calling upon the Barundi to reject any cultural practices that negate women, stating that “women should stop stereotyping men, and must nurture their children to appreciate the reality that what men can do, women can do even better.” She iterated the need for more women to thrive in politics, medicine, engineering, law, journalism and other professions.

“When women are elected to critical positions in their leadership ranks, their participation and influence are sometimes undermined through marginalization or critical decisions being taken outside the main formal party decision making structures,” said Mr. Charles Njoroge, the Deputy Secretary General in charge of the Political Federation. “By actively involving more women at all levels of the democratic process, countries would achieve good governance, peace, democracy, accountability and a representation of a demography that would have otherwise been absent from the policy making process.” he said.

DOWNLOAD: DECLARATION OF THE EAC-COMESA ROUNDTABLES FOR CONSOLIDATING REGIONAL STABILITY THROUGH PEACEFUL ELECTIONS IN BURUNDI - WOMEN DIALOGUE

ENDS-

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