Statement at Opening of 34TH Session of the Gender is My Agenda Campaign – (GIMAC)

Isabel..Rozaria Memorial Trust

29 June 2019, Niger

Mme Martha Muhwezi, GIMAC Chair
Mme Bineta Diop, African Union Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security
All delegates, Participants and Young Women!

Let me start by saying THANK YOU for having us as young women at GIMAC. You recognise us as leaders and as people with a voice. I am a young woman, living in the resettlement areas of rural Zimbabwe. I was forced into marriage; had a child and I am now back at school. I am a young leader working with other girls at Rozaria Memorial Trust.

You lift us up, by simply knowing that we exist, we have experiences and also solutions as young women and girls in Africa.

Today, I bring the voice of millions of my sisters, young women and girls in Africa. I also share my pain and hopes with those of my sisters in this beautiful country Niger!

We are young, female and most vulnerable in times of crisis and wars. We are often sexually abused and violated, we are displaced and live in refugee camps, our schools are closed, destroyed and unsafe. We become parents caring for other children and the elders when we are children ourselves. We struggle to look for food, water, firewood and often get raped in search of survival

We are young, we are girls and our sexual and reproductive health rights are often not respected. Our bodies are battle grounds. Patriarchy takes away our voices as girls, and makes us sex objects. We have limited access to information and services. We die while giving birth to life. Menstruation, a health issue, is made a taboo. We struggle to get
sanitary wear when each month we have to “go to the moon”. Much worse for our sisters affected by war, conflict and humanitarian disasters

With the poverty in Africa, we are the most affected with unemployment and lack of economic opportunities. Quality services do not reach us, especially those living in poor urban communities, rural areas, refugee and displaced camps. Our sisters living with disabilities are often the most affected.

Our hearts bleed because of female genital mutilation; unacceptable and painful realities that millions of us experience, child, early and forced marriage. Today we are holding our meeting in a country that has highest rates in Africa and in the world.

We are here to stand together to find solutions.

In the last GIMAC, the above are some of the issues that my sisters raised and recommended solutions. TODAY, again, I want to stress the same, and make the following recommendations.

To our Governments and African Union:

1. Adopt and implement adequate laws that protect the rights of ALL women, especially young women and girls.
2. Address violence against women and girls, with programs that PREVENT, PROTECT and PROSECUTE
3. Put more money to public services like education, health, water, agriculture in our rural communities and especially for those displaced and refugee communities.
4. Work with us as young people, support our community groups and continue to include us
5. Scale up the actions to end FGM and child marriage, and work to change negative cultures and values that support these practices.
6. Strengthen the voices of young women in the regional bodies such as ECOWAS and SADC

To Civil Society Networks

1. Strengthen networks, groups and organisations of young people, especially young women and girls particularly in the most difficult and hard to reach communities
2. Include us in your Board and other structures of decision making
3. Mentor us, and create opportunities for collaboration
4. Protect young women in your workplaces, so that they are free from abuse and violence
5. Be our advocates in the work you do every day
6. Support us to connect within our countries and our regions, so that our voice can be stronger.
I am also here to say THANK YOU with a heavy heart to our sister Farirai Gumbonzvanda, an active member of GIMAC Youth Committee, a human rights defender, who is currently under arbitrary arrest in our country, and she is not allowed to travel. Thank you for all your solidarity in search of justice.

In conclusion, I want to thank you again for having me in this opening program to share our voices as young women and girls. We feel so included by GIMAC in all its work and its programs.

On behalf of all the young women, I THANK YOU.