

SHE

E-BOOK

Stands for Peace

A thin gold outline map of the African continent is positioned behind the text. The word 'SHE' is in a large, gold, serif font. The words 'Stands for Peace' are in a blue, cursive font. A horizontal gold line is under the 'E' in 'SHE'. The map outline is centered behind the text.

*The stories and lived experiences
of women peace champions in Africa
— told by the women themselves.*



SHE *Stands*

E-BOOK *for Peace*



This book is published by the United Nations Office to the African Union with support from the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs.

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August 2022

This book is the second publication following the first published in commemoration of the 20th anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000). This e-book recounts 23 additional journeys of African women and organisations contributing to the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda in Africa. It also amplifies the voices of women with regards to their concerns and experiences in peace building efforts.

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The stories featured in this publication were written by the selected nominees in their personal capacity. In some cases the nominees were interviewed and the scripts written and validated by the women, to ensure that the story was truly theirs. They are not representatives of any government, authority, or institution. To ensure accuracy the stories have also been validated through the UN Women as well as UN Political missions at the country level.

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«Africa's greatest resource is its young people. If the majority of the youth demographic comprises of the girl children, then we must accept that women and girls are the critical voice and primary actors for building the foundations of a prosperous Africa that is at peace with itself.»

H.E. MR. MOUSSA FAKI MAHAMAT, CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION, At the Opening Ceremony of the 4th African Union High Level Panel on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment on "Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investments in Youth: Empowering Young Women and Girls" ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA 29 June 2017

«The best way to honour the inspiring commitment and bravery of women peacemakers is to open doors to their meaningful participation. Let's turn the clock forward on women's rights and give half of humanity the opportunity to build the peace we all seek.»

UN Secretary - General Antonio Guterres remark at the United Nations Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security, 21 October 2021

Acknowledgements

This 'She Stands for Peace' E-book is published by the United Nations Office to the African Union (UNOAU), made possible by the support of the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA). UNOAU also wishes to acknowledge the support provided by the Government of the Kingdom of Norway and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

Special thanks to the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs - Rosemary DiCarlo and the former Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General to the African Union and Head of UNOAU - Hanna S. Tetteh for their guidance and leadership during the process.

We also thank the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) Gender team at the headquarters in New York, the UN Women Country Offices in Burundi, Cameroon, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Uganda, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the UN Resident Coordinator Office, Cameroon for their support and guidance.

Sincere gratitude to those who supported, populated, and responded to the open call for nominations, including everyone who nominated outstanding African women to be featured in the book and those who took the time to apply themselves.

Finally, we thank Martha Tusiime Tukahirwa with whom the UNOAU Gender team worked with to interview the nominees, write the story scripts, and compile the E-book.

Foreword

by Rosemary A. DiCarlo

United Nations Under-Secretary-General
for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs



The critical contributions women make to the rebuilding of societies ravaged by violent conflict are too rarely documented or leveraged in pursuit of peace. This engrossing eBook is a timely corrective to that problem, illustrating through the personal stories of courageous women identifying the needs of their communities and designing and implementing inclusive and long-lasting solutions during and after fighting.

The testimonies collected in this eBook flow from deep introspection, and some from personal tragedy. They call attention to the political, humanitarian, social and economic difficulties the women featured have encountered. They also demonstrate the great courage, creativity, and persistence inherent in their efforts to build more equal and peaceful societies. I salute them for their inspiring leadership.

I would also like to recognize the work of the African Union. Under the Joint UN-AU Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security, the Women, Peace and Security agenda

is a central pillar. With Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent texts on the Women, Peace and Security agenda, the international community has unequivocally affirmed the importance of women's participation and leadership in conflict prevention, resolution, peacebuilding and reconstruction.

The UN Department for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs actively champions women's meaningful and equal participation in political and peace processes as a central part of our efforts to prevent conflict and help partners reach lasting political solutions and sustainable development. The stories in this publication are powerful evidence of the importance of this work. We will continue the support to, and the partnership with, African women in their fight for peace, justice, and equality.

I hope that you will be as inspired as I am by the stories in these pages.

Lina Ekomo - Woman Leader
in the Central African Republic



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Her Excellency **Mme. Binta Diop** African Union Special Envoy for Women Peace and Security, and UN SRSG, **Parfait Onanga-Anyanga** after holding a meeting at UNOAU on strengthening the partnership between the UN and the AU to enhance implementation of the WPS agenda in Africa.



Foreword

by Mme Bineta Diop

Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security to the African Union

Women have often been viewed as victims of conflict. This view masks and diminishes the important roles women play as leaders, especially in helping to end conflict, developing post conflict reintegration efforts and economic recovery, and even in initiating the mediation processes with complex situations. They work in their communities, in camps for internally displaced persons and refugees, seeking to protect lives. This e-book is a testimony to the extraordinary efforts African women put in and their commitment to peaceful conflict resolution.

I would first and foremost like to thank all of the women featured in this book who generously shared their stories and realities in conflict situations in order that we may all read and be inspired to work together for peace in Africa. They have shared their valuable experiences and insights as activists, humanitarians, peacebuilders, mediators and human rights defenders. They have contributed to making the book a rich and moving read with a call to action.

With complex and protracted conflicts more common today on the African continent, and the stakeholders directly impacted ever expanding, it has become clear that the solutions for

realizing peace must evolve. In addition to women's participation being a fundamental right, women from marginalized communities are more often disproportionately impacted in these more complex conflicts. Similarly, experiences shared by the women featured in this e-book affords them unique insights into the complex drivers that have caused conflict in the first place.

It is my hope that this e-book inspires swift and positive action on how we support women in all their diversity to take part in the highest levels of peace and security decision-making. While these stories and experiences only offer a snapshot of the experiences, the fact that these are documented based on their voices in first person illustrate the timeliness and call for the urgent and accelerated implementation of the UNSCR1325 and the African Union WPS agenda.

I thank UNOAU for availing African women of a platform to amplify their voices and share their lived experiences and to the continued partnership with the African Union in forging a pathway to silencing the guns and seeking to usher in an era of peaceful resolution of conflict in Africa.

Foreword

by Parfait Onanga-Anyanga

the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General to the African Union & Head of the United Nations Office to the African Union (UNOAU)

In 2020, on the twentieth anniversary of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, the United Nations Office to the African Union together with the African Union Commission, published the **“She Stands for Peace”** book featuring stories and experiences of 16 individual women and 4 women’s networks who have been involved in peacebuilding efforts on the continent. Some of them were mediators, activists, and others providing support for women who were victims of sexual violence in conflict. They all had a common objective to contribute to peacebuilding, rebuilding and strengthening communities, and in some cases to care for and rehabilitate women, girls and the most vulnerable in society who were victims of conflict. The publication was a vehicle for making the voices of these women heard and underlined the need for the full implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, as well as being part of a broader effort to ensure the inclusion of women of all ages in strengthening the partnership between the two organizations on matters relating to peace and security. This was followed up with a High-Level Dialogue on Women, Peace and Security as well as the production of two series of **“She Stands for Peace”** podcasts, comprising a total of 22 episodes, on different themes under the Women, Peace and Security Agenda (WPS).

As a follow-up initiative, we called for contributions and recommendations to develop this e-book which features the stories of 20 women and 3 women’s networks/civil society organizations selected from across the African continent who have also been involved in peacebuilding, mediation and supporting survivors of conflict and displacement. These stories were written and told by the women themselves, sharing their

experiences in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and reconciliation, and on the impact of conflict. The stories show the resilience, strength, and courage of women who have sought to rebuild their communities and nations and to protect the human rights of women and girls and provide support to victims of conflict related sexual violence.

On my visits to Somalia, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Mali, Niger, and Ethiopia, which is the host country of UNOAU, and in my interactions with women of all ages from other African countries, I have encountered many women from diverse backgrounds who are playing commendable roles in their communities and have clear visions about how to address the peace and security challenges they face, recognizing the Trauma and impact on victims and demonstrating through their efforts a commitment to make a positive contribution. Their experiences show the correlation between gender and power, and their testimonies help us to deepen our connections, empathize with them and embrace our common humanity. Their voices and their faces tell their stories and their knowledge of what their families, communities and countries need in order to put the troubles of the past behind them and move forward with confidence and optimism. These are only a sampling of the women involved in these processes across Africa, and it is important that we document their stories, acknowledge the contributions made by women to peacebuilding and make the case for their inclusion in the negotiation of peace processes.

The United Nations Office to the African Union with the support of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs are pleased to share the experiences of these women, and I hope you find them interesting reading.

INTRODUCTION

The framing of Women Peace and Security agenda in Africa finds its history and origin in the Windhoek Declaration 2000 which led to the birth and adoption of UNSCR 1325. Since then, Africa has made progresses in terms of providing legal and policy frameworks; establishing institutional mechanisms for implementation of WPS agenda and undertaking different advocacy actions.

Women in Africa are engaged at different levels and doing lots of work to promote and sustain peace in the continent. Yet, most of the time their stories go untold and women's contributions are not acknowledged. This is due to lack of systematic documentation and sharing of their work and lack of access to existing platforms to share their stories. The United Nations Secretariat and the African Union Commission have deployed efforts to accelerate progress and deliver on commitments made regarding implementation of the women, peace, and security

agenda in Africa. Within the broader context of the Joint UN-AU Framework for an Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security, the two organizations have agreed to further enhance their collaboration around women, peace, and security.

In February 2020, the United Nations Office to the African Union (UNOAU) and three departments of the African Union Commission (AUC) – the Peace and Security Department, the Political Affairs Department and the Office of the AUC Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security – jointly published a commemorative book, titled 'She Stands for Peace', which paid tribute to twenty African women and women's organizations who had made outstanding contributions to peace and security on the continent. The stories featured in the book highlight the impressive peace efforts by women across the continent. Efforts that have remained largely unrecognized and, as underlined by many of the women featured in the book, unsupported and

Malawian peacekeepers serving with the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) greet children while on patrol in August 2012.



ONUCI / Patricia Esteve

underfunded. The publication reemphasized the need to fully implement the women, peace and security agenda in Africa, to continue to tell the stories of women peacemakers, especially those working at the grassroots level, and to elevate their voices.

The UNOAU, the AU, with support from the governments of Sweden and Norway held a 2-days virtual dialogue on 30th November and 1st December 2020 to commemorate the 20th Anniversary of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) under the theme, **'Advancing the WPS Agenda: Political Leadership, Partnerships and Concrete Action Beyond 2020'**. The dialogue has created an opportunity for participants to share experiences, to identify gaps in the implementation of WPS agenda on the continent and to come up with recommendations to enhance the implementation of the UNSCR 1325 on the continent.

UNOAU has continued to put a spotlight on the achievements

made by African women and women networks in promoting peace and security, on the need promote women's participation, and stakeholder accountability by producing She Stands for Peace Podcast series comprising of 22 episodes. UNOAU is also in the process of developing the "She Stands for Peace" website to serve as a point of reference and learning on the progress of the promotion of the women peace and security agenda in Africa.

The publication of this "She Stands for Peace" e-book is a continuation of UNOAU's effort in amplifying the voices of women and women's networks who are making outstanding contributions to the promotion of peace and security in Africa.

This e-book is published by the United Nations Office to the African Union (UNOAU) with support from United Nations Department of Political and Peace Building Affairs Peace (DPPA). The e-book contains the stories of 20 women and 3 women networks.



«Experience shows very clearly that when women are involved, the durability of peace can be secured.»

H.E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf



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A women's health group at the Jamam refugee camp in South Sudan, 2012.

A Precis of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325

The peace and security agenda on the African continent has been driven and promoted by women particularly considering that several countries on the continent are either amidst conflict or emerging from conflict. Within these settings, they continue to see the profound effects that war, conflict, and its effects have on gender roles, especially women's autonomy and ability to influence the social and political arena. However, we continue to witness new openings for women to influence social and political structures.

On the African continent, women, across all demographics, play important roles as custodians of culture and nurturers of families, yet in the precarious times of conflict they are not represented at the peace negotiating table or in community reconstruction efforts. According to UN Women, women constitute fewer than 10% of peace negotiators globally and only 3% of signatories to peace agreements.

The International community recognized the importance of women's participation in creating the conditions for permanent peace thus on 31 October 2000, the UN Security Council

adopted the landmark resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security, which acknowledged the critical role women, could play in preventing and resolving conflicts, negotiating peace, participating in peacekeeping and in humanitarian response and post-conflict peacebuilding. Among other things, the resolution calls for women to participate fully in all efforts to maintain and promote peace and security. The resolution also requires the UN to solicit and consider all viewpoints on gender issues to increase the role of women in all peace and security activities. It also requires all parties at war to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse.

Africa continues to be the vanguard in terms of normative developments on Women, Peace & Security. Although several legislative and policy instruments after UNSCR 1325 have integrated its principles by addressing conventional security issues as part of the Women, Peace, & Security agenda, the UNSCR 1325 remains a key pillar of promoting the women peace and security agenda in Africa.

EACH OF THE RESOLUTION'S MANDATES IS RELATED TO ONE OF THE FOUR BASIC PILLARS:



PARTICIPATION

Calls for increased participation of women at all levels of decision-making, including in national, regional, and international institutions; in mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict; in peace negotiations; in peace operations, as soldiers, police, and civilians; and as Special Representatives of the U.N. Secretary-General.



PROTECTION

Calls specifically for the protection of women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence, including in emergency and humanitarian situations, such as in refugee camps.



PREVENTION

Calls for improving intervention strategies in the prevention of violence against women, including by prosecuting those responsible for violations of international law; strengthening women's rights under national law; and supporting local women's peace initiatives and conflict resolution processes.



RELIEF & RECOVERY

Calls for advancement of relief and recovery measures to address international crises through a gendered lens, including by respecting the civilian and humanitarian nature of refugee camps, and considering the needs of women and girls in the design of refugee camps and settlements.

Despite these requirements, UN Women says the percentage of women in peace talks has stagnated at single digits since the resolution was passed. The results have had a devastating impact on women's lives. Time is up to press for progress to increase women's active participation in peace and security matters.

To date, twenty nine (29) UN Member States have developed and adopted **United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 National Action Plans** (NAPs). These include;

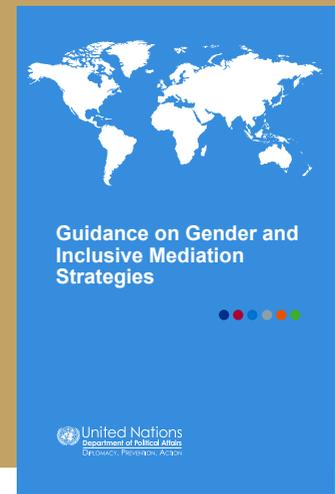
Angola, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Côte D'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Djibouti, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, South Sudan, Togo, Uganda



H.E. DR. SPECIOSA WANDIRA
PANEL OF THE WISE

THERESA WHITFIELD

PHILIPS



«Getting women to the peace table is not enough. To maximize the contribution of women, they must also have negotiation and peace building skills...»

H.E. Specioza Wandira Kazibwe - Former Vice President of Uganda
& member of the AU Panel of the Wise





LEONIE ABELA

LEONIE ABELA



Leonie Abela is a renowned peace negotiator and activist who has pioneered community-centered mediation approaches in Africa. She was Chief Mediator of the peace process that culminated in the Mabanga Peace Accord.

I have always affirmed that peacebuilding is a higher calling – beyond just the work that I do as a peace activist.

My rich and complex identity has propelled me to ground myself in the work of promoting peace. I was born in Uganda, grew up in Eastern DRC, got married to a Rwandan and established our residency in Kenya where our children were born. While I lived in the Democratic Republic of Congo with my family, we were faced with societal stigma because we were labeled “outsiders”. It was at this point that I realized that I needed to embed peaceful co-existence in the work that I do.

For the past 14 years, I have been involved in peacebuilding working with various organizations and networks. This journey has led me to rekindling communities’ abilities, skills, and knowledge in conflict resolution mechanisms. I deeply believe in citizen-driven and owned processes, aimed at achieving peaceful co-existence, using home grown/adopted/adapted approaches to conflict transformation, peacebuilding, and conflict mediation, anchored in constructive community-based dialogue processes.

Following the post-election violence experienced in 2007-2008 in Kenya, I worked with local NGOs to facilitate a dialogue process between two communities from the Rift Valley and Nyanza Region, which led to signing a social contract for peaceful co-existence between the target communities. During this process, we utilized a mediation approach known as “Community peace recovery and reconciliation” mainly implemented at the community level, targeting members from the smallest unit of the geopolitical administration while spreading and reaching out to other administrative units. The approach seeks to translate peace accords negotiated by top political leadership into reality at the community level. The approach is structured in such a way that it brings divided communities/groups together in dialogue to analyze the root causes of con-

flicts threatening their relationships and livelihoods, then together explore ways to address identified contributing conflict factors, come up with a community peace agreement which stipulates measures jointly adopted to resolve current conflicts as well as prevent emerging ones; finally together identify and implement peace dividend/projects meant to cement peaceful co-existence, reconciliation and pave the way to community development at large. This approach has proven to yield positive results as it gives community members the opportunity to be at the forefront, leading the whole negotiation process, own the process and ensure its sustainability.

More importantly, the above-described approach creates an enabling environment where citizens engage on many other issues affecting their lives such as their own participation in good governance and demand for accountability, promotion of human rights and development, gender equality, environmental protection among other issues of community as well as national interest. The above approach can be easily adapted to any conflict context as illustrated in the experience below.

The approach had formerly been used in Burundi during a time when community conflicts were common, and the approach needed to be modelled on how communities could come to resolve conflict. When it was piloted, the warring communities would sit under a tree for hours on end to pinpoint the root causes of the conflict. The dialogue process would feature very simple questions, like “Why did you decide to fight?”, “What factors led to you getting to this point of disagreement?” Each response to the question posed would uncover deeper issues and the pertaining root causes.

In 2011, I tested the above approach in another Kenyan conflict context in which I assumed the role of Chief Mediator, leading peace negotiations which brought together 130 elders from three ethnic groups - Kopsiro, Kaptama and Chep-

tais. The actual peace negotiation, which took a whole week, was a culmination of a three (3) year community journey, with multi-level negotiations (both intra and inter-community dialogue/negotiations) culminating in the signing of a peace pact known as “The Mabanga Peace Accord”, which was witnessed and bears the signature of the then Vice President, the Honorable Kalonzo Musyoka. It involved several stakeholders at various levels, including cultural leadership representation, church leaders, women, youth, peace actors, NGOs working on conflict transformation, the media and political leadership representation. Although the process was a success from many angles, it had an important challenge related to women’s inclusion at the negotiating table, given the heavy patriarchal milieu in which we intervened. Nonetheless, we had to create a women platform enabling us to have an addendum to the peace accord which highlighted women’s issues in a more detailed

and meaningful way. The peace accord was instrumental and became a bargaining tool in negotiating a fair share of political leadership representation among the three major ethnic groups in the new governance system ushered in by the 2013 general elections, subsequently avoiding politically motivated violence that had become a cyclic recurrence every election year.

To date, the accord is still alive as the national steering committee on peace and conflict (Trans Nzoia Branch) recently referred to it, saying: “We want the Mabanga Accord re-looked into to help provide a framework for conflict prevention and management ahead of the 2022 election and related politics and potential violence”.

I have also had a chance to train community-based peace-building practitioners on the above approach in several African countries, including Tanzania, Uganda, the DRC, Ethiopia, Mali, Central Africa Republic, South Sudan, and Guinea Conakry.

The phrase “The Mt. Elgon Conflict” is a handy shorthand frequently used in popular and scientific publications that stands for protracted violence over land resources between members of various communities inhabiting the Kenyan side of the mountain on the border with Uganda. These dramatic events, leading to large-scale infringements of human rights and generating significant internal displacement, started in 2006 and lasted for the next two years until finally suppressed by a brutal intervention of Kenyan security forces. While the government’s military involvement brought the widespread inter-community acts of violence to an end, it also left structurally intact both the economic determinants of the violence as well as its direct progeny in a form of individual and inter-community resentments and grievances. No comprehensive solution was presented by Kenyan authorities to address the inherited economic stalemate concerning land distribution and to

reconcile the interests of the various groups and the victims of pre-conflict economic injustice. This omission jeopardized the peace and security in the area, something that was escalated by the fact that perpetrators and victims of the violence lived next to each other and had easy access to small arms and light weapons. Against this backdrop, indigenous councils of elders representing the communities involved, facilitated by some Kenyan non-governmental organizations (NGOs), worked out the so-called Mabanga Peace Accord (MPA) of the 21st of October 2011. The document marked a pivotal point within the local transitional justice (TJ) process. It set up a plan of inter-community cooperation to be commenced in its aftermath, hence providing a framework for post-conflict management addressing issues of inter-community reconciliation within the context of prolonged land dispute.

[SOURCE](#)

I have been requested recently to edit the draft book which documents all processes that led to the adoption and signing of the Mabanga Peace Accord. Hopefully it will be published in the coming year before the 2022 general elections in Kenya.

I have had several successes, some of which include leading and facilitating successful peace processes which are inclusive, sometimes in very hostile and male dominated contexts. For instance, being a woman and leading a team of mediators as a chief Mediator, bringing together 130 members of a council of elders from three ethnic communities to negotiate their peace accord and conclude the process with an adopted and signed Mabanga Peace Accord was a significant achievement. Ten years later, the Mabanga Peace Accord is still alive. The Mabanga Peace Accord is currently a reference resource in matters of conflict prevention and management, and it has been researched and studied. This has triggered several writers to take interest in processes leading to securing peace agreements.

At a time when relationships between Rwanda and the DRC were very hostile and tense, I led a regional roundtable to secure the commitment of political policy makers from the DRC, Rwanda, and Burundi to support citizens' recommendations for a roadmap to peace in the Region. These recommendations were the outcome of a three-year journey of regional peace-building incorporating action research carried out in the target three countries mentioned above, virtual regional parliaments and community dialogue led by peace artisans. This was in 2016 when relationships between Rwanda and the DRC were very hostile and tense.

Participating in the initial brainstorming and discussions which led to the creation of the global women mediators' network that we named "Community Voices for Peace and Pluralism/Africa", with our Lead Founder Ms. Alice Wairimu Nderitu, is a major step toward a social peace movement of women mediators who continue to interact and share knowledge on issues affecting our continent and options to resolving them. Our network is a well from which you can draw water to quench any thirst linked to the multi-faceted peacebuilding field.

Standing as a woman Chief Mediator in front of 130 members of the council of elders, all men, including my mediation team which had 3 men, facilitating various negotiation sessions for a whole week, and finally securing the Mabanga peace accord, was my pivotal moment. If I could do it, many more women could/can do it.

I am currently in the process of rolling out a platform for



"Passing on the Baton" aimed at mentoring, influencing and inspiring young women and men to make their contribution toward rebuilding Africa and making it peaceful and prosperous. My hope is that this will be done through networking and information-sharing, knowledge production and giving more space for the younger movement and having the older ones in a more advisory position.

We have and they have all that is needed (the power is within) to rebuild our beautiful continent and free it from conflicts, poverty, mental slavery, corruption, and all other challenges that continue to cripple its abilities, tear its beauty down, plunder its wealth, undermine its rich traditions and values to name but a few. We need young Africans who are proud to be Africans, who love Africa and who are ready to build the Africa we want. They need to be nurtured. I see myself touring Africa and inspiring/influencing/speaking to our African young people, to play their part in reclaiming our beloved continent



DR. EMMILY KOITI

Dr. EMMILY KOITI



Dr. Emmily Koiti is a South Sudanese medical doctor by training and practice. She is also a peace-builder and human rights activist. She played a critical role as a signatory to the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) representing the youth of South Sudan.

Activism is at the center of medicine just as peace is a key determinant of the health of society. My appreciation of this keeps my flame burning in these key roles that I play in my daily life.

I consciously started being a peace activist in South Sudan ten years ago while still an undergraduate university student and following a strike that emanated from ethnically charged differences among students. I recall how tragic it was for several ambitious students like myself to lose a whole academic year because of what may be deemed a senseless violent conflict. It was at this point that I realized that having South Sudan was just the beginning of the hard work toward nation building and gaining independence in 2011 alone would not be everything. That said, I was also conscious that I needed to take active steps in building peace in my country. It is from then onward that I intentionally got involved in as many initiatives that I perceive as aimed at enabling South Sudan to gain meaningful social, political, and economic vibrancy as had been envisioned by activists who had defined the political struggle toward South Sudan's independence.

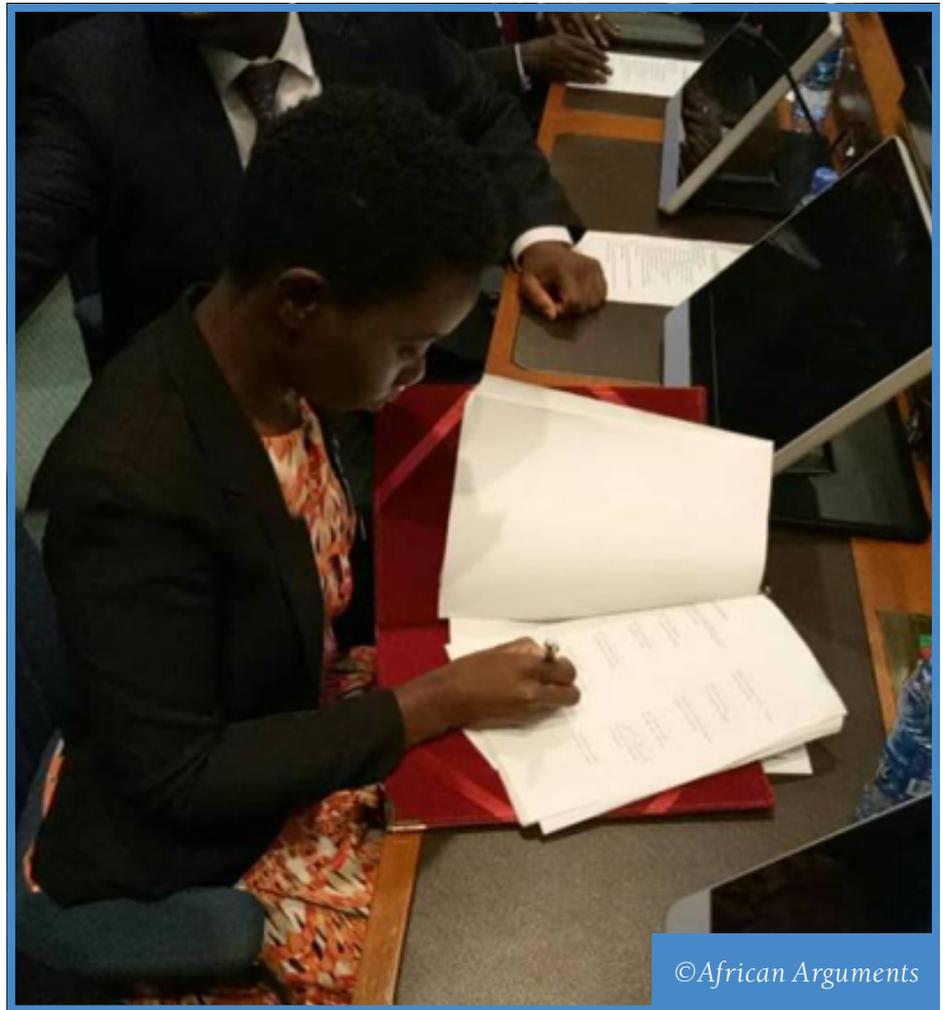
My journey as a woman peace activist has been intentional, rewarding, evolving but also marred with great challenges and risks by virtue of being a woman, a young one, in a patriarchal society.

Since then, I have joined, co-founded, and stewarded different initiatives that address human rights issues, youth in-

clusion in governance and nation building, women's participation in leadership, quality, and equitable health service delivery among others, alongside pursuit of medical training and career. Moreover, through it all, I have oscillated between being an activator and an accidental peace activist depending on the political atmosphere and the extent to which it guarantees freedom of expression.

As a woman peace activist, I have found it difficult to pursue the attainment of peace without being preoccupied with centering the issues of women in all endeavors. This is because women are disproportionately affected by the prevalence of violent conflicts across the region and globe.

Some of my notable achievements include co-designing with young leaders in a youth platform, an inclusivity model for the IGAD-led peace process in South Sudan that happened from 2014 to 2015 and culminated in the Agreement on the Resolution of conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCSS). The model was premised on the need to respond to the question on how to include non-political stakeholders in the track 1 peace negotiations at the time. I was tasked to present the model to the mediators and while it was not adopted entirely, it influenced not only the understanding of the need to include civil society and other interest groups, but also how and served as a unique contribution of youth to answering the questions at the time alongside other groups such as women.



Signing of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) on 12th September 2018

Doing this as a young woman meant setting the precedent for others who would come after me. Eventually I had the singular honor of serving as a youth representative to the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC) that was tasked with overseeing implementation of the ARCSS. It also provided a platform for articulation of more youth and women's issues in the work of JMEC and eventually culminated in the categorical inclusion of youth as a stand-alone stakeholder in subsequent track 1 peace process for revitalization of the ARCSS after its collapse. The process known as the High-Level Revitalization Forum (HLRF) had my participation as negotiator and signatory as a youth representative. Through the process,

I proposed the need to redefine the resultant peace agreement; Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) from power-sharing to a "responsibility-sharing agreement" as a way of enabling the leaders of South Sudan to begin shifting paradigms regarding the use of power. I also steered the organization of youth organizations and women into coalitions for influence of the process, from an advisory and co-founding capacity respectively. This resulted in pushing parties to ensure youth and women's inclusion in their negotiation teams among others. I also articulated women's issues alongside my designated role of doing the same for youth.



Consultation of youth on the HLRF in South Sudan in 2018

The R-ARCSS is an agreement that seeks to revive the ARCSS of August 2015, which had temporarily ended the first civil war of South Sudan that broke out on the 13th of December 2013. Between August 2015 and June 2016, the ARCSS played a noticeable role in constraining the key parties to the conflict from engaging in confrontations, until July 2016 when conflict ensued.

Since the resurgence of the civil war in South Sudan on the 7th of July 2016, there have been efforts to ensure a return to peace in the country through various initiatives at national and regional levels.

As a result, the R-ARCSS remains one of the first peace agreements ever, on the globe, to involve direct participation of youth and women inside the negotiation room and moreover as members of delegations of protagonist groups. Compared to past peace agreements of South Sudan, the R-ARCSS boasts more youth and women's participation during its negotiation and subsequent implementation.

As a peace activist, my most pivotal moment is realizing that while women and other societal groups like youth must be included in peacebuilding processes, conflicts cannot be resolved but will always exist and as a peace activist, I must be prepared to re-solve conflict. That conflict can be resolved is

The establishment of the High Level Revitalization Forum (HLRF) by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) – a seven-member regional bloc comprising Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda – at its Extra-Ordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government on South Sudan on the 12th of June 2017, was instrumental in convening negotiating parties in South Sudan to revive the ARCSS.

SOURCE

false. Conflict transforms to be resolved. Understanding this has enabled me to manage my expectations and those of the different constituencies for whom I choose to pursue peace.

Being young and a woman in a patriarchal society yet being a peace activist entails disrupting patriarchal systems. The chances of not being heard are high and this requires more resilience. I have overcome the challenges with everything that keeps the fire burning in me while also seeking safe spaces for support and solidarity.



©Courtesy of Malek Elmaghrebi

ASYA AL-SHUWAIDI & LATE AMAL BARAKA



Amal Baraka (left), Bayda Misbah Omar (centre) and Asya Al-Shuwaidi (right) have worked tirelessly to reconcile Misrata and Tawergha.

My dear friend – the late Amal Baraka and myself established the Libyan Women for Peace – both of us having come from two cities – Misrata and Tawergha in Libya that have been at war for a long period of time.

Tawergha and Misrata were caught up in the conflict of the civil war. In 2011, together with 40,000 other people from Tawergha, the Late Amal, her mother and other relatives, took shelter in a refugee camp in Tripoli.

In 2018, I was living with my family in Misrata, a city which later became the frontline of the battle against pro-Gaddafi's forces. When the forces stormed Misrata, my home was one of those that were destroyed, forcing my family and I into displacement. This, for me, was a turning point because I now knew that I needed to do something within my power to change the reality for Libyans, particularly those in Misrata and Tawergha. Similarly, Amal's house had also been destroyed leading to her family's displacement. This is the point at which I met her – through another group that was working to restore peace in Libya. After several conversations, I realised that we shared a vision of peace, and it was at this point that I had the inkling that this was going to be a connection of a lifetime.

One of the first moves that we made as a team was to meet the Minister of State for Displaced Persons. We wanted to share our realities as displaced Libyans. And with this, we wanted to secure support for our initiative. We informed him that we wanted to establish a women peace team. Shortly after that meeting, the "Women's Peace Team Tawergha – Misrata" came into existence. We started mobilizing women to join our cause, and through this – we organized meetings in different homes to strategize on creative approaches that we could use to localize the conversation on peace and reconciliation. We commenced conversations with the leaders of Misrata and Tawergha as a step to mediation. Our conversations circled around the impact of the conflict on families, the social dynamics, and their mental health. Having endured years of conflict and displacement, we believed that there can be no winner in war and the only option for the two communities was to mend their social fabric. We also sought to have men and women detainees released.

Over the next years, our team continued to mobilize and organize women to be champions of peace. We visited women who gave birth during that hard time of war and conflict and took care of these women by supporting them and securing the availability of health care and support to them and

to their babies under the dire situation. We worked on environmental issues that affected the life of women and children in the war zones.

We supported the youth and women in sport and worked hard to facilitate venues and to normalize their lives and to encourage them to continue with sport. We also supported the campaign for Covid 19 vaccination in remote areas, and initiated food distribution circles for Internally Displaced Persons.

Meanwhile, prior to us starting our initiative, we had learned that the Libyan 5+5 Joint Military Commission had been having peace talks. We knew this was a position of influence and advocacy for peace – so we started strategizing our participation in the process. As part of the ceasefire agreement and after tireless advocacy, the reopening of Libya's coastal road was underway. This highway that connected Misrata with Sirte and was vital for the movement of people and goods had been closed. Its closure had impoverished many Libyans and cut them off from their families across the country. In a landmark ceremony which was the last event that I attended with the Late Amal – on 20th June, the road was finally reopened ahead of the Second Berlin Conference on Libya, a gesture of progress in the peace process. We were the only women's group that attended this event, which for us was a step forward in achieving peace and reconciliation.

Unfortunately, on the way back from that event, the Late Amal was involved in a car accident which claimed her life. This, for me, was the day that a shadow was forever cast on my life.

The Libyan Women for Peace Team works with over 100 women. We have enabled many Tawerghans to return to their homeland. We have leveraged on traditional customs to create opportunities for restoration of peace and reconciliation. I recall a time when we organized a baby shower in Misrata where the family of the first Tawergha child born to a returnee family received Misratan well-wishers and their gifts. This, for us, was pivotal in our journey together.

Today, we are running centers for psychological support in the two cities to help women cope with war and displacement trauma and get back on their own feet. We also facilitate economic empowerment training for vulnerable displaced Tawerghan women in Misrata to alleviate their hardships.

The vacuum that the Late Amal left is palpable, however in the work that the team and I are doing in Libya, we have committed ourselves to tirelessly work to achieve in Libya – which was central to the Late Amal's vision for Libya.



The Women in Peacebuilding Network – **WIPNET**, Program of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding – **WANEP**



The Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) Program of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) was established in 2001 as a sustainable platform to ensure the inclusive participation of women to play key roles in peacebuilding and human security within their communities. WIPNET is committed to ensuring that women’s needs, concerns, and issues are central to all informal and formal peacebuilding processes at community, national and regional levels. The program operates on an ideology aptly tagged: “Women’s Peace Activism”, to promote social justice across the region where patriarchy has kept women marginalized and excluded from leadership roles and at decision-making levels. This ideology is premised on the belief that the systematic and targeted engendered forms of violence against women such as rape, physical violence, sexual harassment, and abuse etc., which are prevalent during armed conflict and in post conflict eras, are expressions of a deeper systemic disregard for women which exists in West African societies. This activism ultimately seeks to protect women, promote their rights, and ensure their meaningful inclusion in leadership and peace processes. The ideology relies on building capacities of a critical mass of women to utilize consistent and targeted advocacy to demand cessation of physical violence against women during conflict/wars and the deconstruction of structural forms of violence which exist in everyday society.

WIPNET has played pivotal roles in intervening in violent conflicts, giving women visibility, promoting their involvement, and advancing their rights at all levels around peace and security. This feat was actualized in Liberia where the first WIPNET program commenced. Under the WIPNET program, WANEP-Liberia provided training for women groups in advocacy and peacebuilding skills, peer mediation and peace education. The program was an effective platform to encourage both grassroots Liberian women’s participation and involvement in the peace process. With the skills acquired, the women

were mobilized as a pressure group, referred to as “Women Mass Action Campaign for Peace” to demand an end to the civil war and ultimately force the government of Charles Taylor and the various rebel factions (Liberians for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), Liberia Peace Council (LPC), United Liberation Movement of Liberia (ULIMO-J & ULIMO-K), etc.) into signing a peace agreement in Accra-Ghana in 2003.

This victory did not come cheap. It followed a series of planning and commitment on the part of the women who were steadfastly united against a common foe. They employed conventional and unconventional strategies buoyed by dogged determination to broker peace. The women held fasting and prayer vigils, slept in open fields regardless of the weather, organized sit-ins just to drive home their point. The beauty of the women mass action campaign, which came to be known as “the Liberian Women Mass Action for Peace”, was that it transcended religion and ethnicity, bringing together women from diverse backgrounds with a common message: “we want peace, no more war!”

On July 24, 2018, WIPNET made history again with the award of the “Grand Order of the Star of Africa” by the Liberian Government under President George M. Weah. This award, which is one of the highest honors conferred on institutions and individuals based on their contributions to national Peace and stability in Liberia, was in recognition of WIPNET’s contributions to championing the cause of women and girls in Liberia. In presenting the award, His Excellency President George M. Weah, indicated that the award was given to WIPNET in recognition of the “women’s selfless sacrifices and contributions to peace in Liberia and the continuous efforts being made in sustaining Liberia’s fragile peace.” The award was presented along with a cash donation of L\$1 million (One Million Liberian Dollars) by President Weah. The money was distributed to all WIPNET Peace Hut Structures in support of their efforts in the fight against domestic violence, including sexual and gender-based violence



and the promotion of women leadership in Liberia.

The Liberian Women Mass Action for Peace signaled arguably the first-time women successfully united in a coordinated manner to play significant roles in peace processes since the end of the cold war. This novel event has been referenced in numerous literatures and succinctly captured in a video documentary aptly tagged: “Pray the devil back to hell!” Perhaps the greatest outcome of the mass action for peace was that it led to the awarding of the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize to two Liberian women, H.E. President Ellen Sirleaf Johnson, who became the first female president of the country after Charles Taylor was pushed into exile, and Mrs. Leymah Gbowee, who in her capacity as the then WIPNET Coordinator for WANEP-Liberia played a key role in mobilizing women across religious divides, leading to the actualization of the peace agreement. Recalling those moments, the Nobel Laureate Leymah had this to say; “We felt like the men in our society were really not taking a stand. The world once remembered Liberia for child soldiers, they now know our country for the women in white.” [1]

The greatest legacy of the movement was that it became a virtual space and provided the constructive platform for women’s engagement and participation in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and in the rebuilding of war-torn communities. In Côte d’Ivoire for instance, the Ivorian women relied on strategies of the Liberia Women’s Mass Action for Peace to fully mobilize women to play active roles in the political process of the time. Their actions created the needed space for more

women to be involved in the elections both at the community and national levels. These efforts paid off as Cote d’Ivoire became one of the first countries to pass a law increasing women’s political quota thus enabling more women to contest for political positions in the 2020 elections. The momentum also galvanized a regional Mass Peace Action where women from across West Africa mobilized to support their counterparts in Cote d’Ivoire to demand an end to post-election violence in a process spearheaded by WIPNET in collaboration with the African Women Active Non-violence Initiatives for Change (AWAN-ICH) and Urgent Action Fund.

The first test of the women’s resilience and commitment to the principles of non-violence came during the 2005 elections in Liberia. Given that the women’s mass action mobilized across religious and political divides, it was imperative for WIPNET to maintain its impartial and non-partisan role especially considering the personal political interests of some of its members. This perception created voter apathy among the women who now felt that the network has deviated from its impartial stance. To maintain their integrity, the women unanimously agreed that WIPNET members with political ambitions should disengage temporarily from the activities of the Network to actualize their ambition. This decision further enabled the network to get more women to vote, thus achieving a 60% increment in the process where hitherto there was voter apathy among the women.

Liberia has suffered the devastating effects of Ebola, which took its toll on the populace particularly on women and children. The novel COVID-19 pandemic also happened with its attendant consequences. More worrisome is the heightened insurgency and militia attacks ravaging the coast of West Africa and the Sahel further undermining the legacies of the movement and the gains achieved by women across the region.

Despite these setbacks, WANEP remains steadfast in ensuring that the WIPNET program continues to live up to the ideals that necessitated its establishment. In 2017, during the WANEP 20th anniversary celebrations, one of its founders, the Hon. Emmanuel Bombande reiterated the emergence of the WIPNET program. According to Bombande, the program was born during one of WANEP’s activities where the women participants were not willing to share their stories of sexual and gender-based violence in the presence of the men who perpetrated the violence. WIPNET was therefore established to create a platform for the women where they could discuss issues affecting their peace and stability in their own space and in a non-threatening environment.

[1] Women: Liberians guardians of peace; by Franck Kuwonu;
Africa Renewal- April - July 2018

Following the success of the women's movement, WANEP launched West Africa's first regional community women's radio program called Voices of Women. This radio program is aired in local languages from central rural locations serving communities. Through this radio program, WANEP has been able to provide a forum for grassroots women to be heard and join national and regional debates on key issues affecting women. The program also engages local policy makers and traditional rulers in dialogue on issues of women, peace, and security. In Liberia the WIPNET Voice of Women Radio Program has given women visibility and a space for them to share their stories and their contributions to the peace process. At the close of the Mass Action Campaign, WIPNET, to maintain links with women at the grassroots levels, introduced the Peace Hut Initiative. This concept spread through 10 of the 15 sub political divisions of Liberia to provide women and young girls' further support. Under the "peace huts" in the communities, WIPNET as part of its emphasis on capacity building has provided training for women in mediation, peacebuilding, and reconciliation. As a result of the enhanced capacity of women, they are participating in mediation and are assuming leadership roles in their

communities. The "Peace Huts" initiatives have been used to enhance women peace and security in Liberia through the provision of psychosocial support to women and girls victimized by sexual domestic violence.

Over the years, WIPNET has been able to transcend its beginnings and is continually reviewed to respond to current dynamics in the women, peace and security agenda using the UNSCR 1325, ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) and other normative frameworks as guide and reference. The program is functional in the 14 WANEP national networks (except Cape Verde), with dedicated staff while a Coordinator at the regional office provides oversight to ensure uniformity in implementation. Through WIPNET, the organization is leading the development and implementation of the UNSCR 1325 National Action Plans, building capacities of women to equip them with the skills for meaningful involvement in leadership, peace, and decision-making processes. WIPNET is also instrumental to engendering all WANEP programs and has been creating awareness on the various normative frameworks and gender-focused policies in terms of ensuring their appropriate application.





BEATA MUKARUBUGA «MAMA LAMBERT»

BEATA MUKARUBUGA “Mama Lambert”



Beata Mukarubuga is a Rwandese peace and human rights activist. Her work is focused on trauma healing and psychosocial support to survivors of the 1994 Rwanda Genocide against the Tutsis, having gone through the process of healing and reconciliation herself, as a survivor.

Sharing my story has always been one step further to achieving full healing. I am a true testimony of healing and reconciliation as a survivor of the Rwanda genocide against the Tutsis.

In 1994 during the brutal genocide against the Tutsis, I was traumatized. My husband, five children, mother, father, and other close relatives were brutally murdered. I fled to the bush with my one-year-old baby, Lambert. With nowhere to go and no human interaction, each day came with misery and excruciating pain. The future seemed bleak at that point in time. On one of those dreary days, a Christian organization called Solace Ministries found and rescued me. The state in which they found me was woeful. When these good Samaritans took me in, I was mute – not saying a single word. The pain had affected my speech. Many other survivors taken in by the ministries, many of whom were widows and orphans, were equally facing adverse trauma – in many cases, worse. Some completely lost their memory. Others committed suicide because the pain was unbearable.

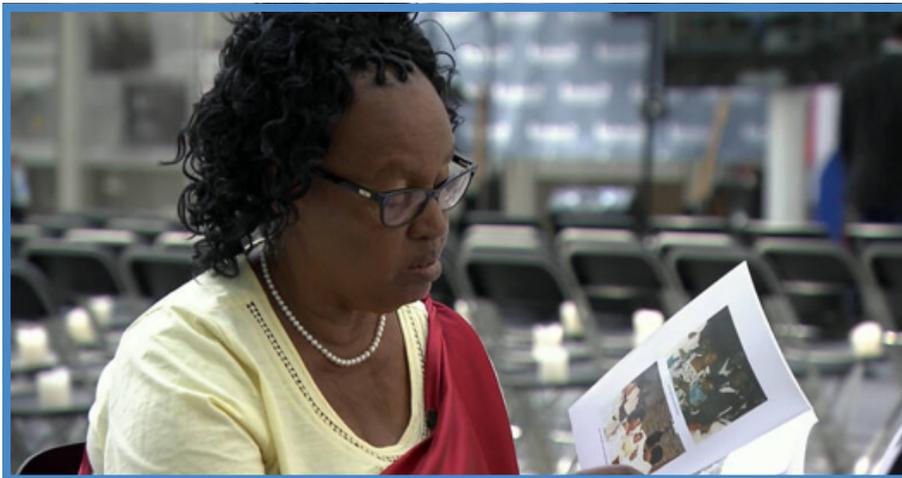
At Solace Ministries, the survivors were taken through the intricate and intentional steps of emotional healing on the foundation of forgiveness and reconciliation. As I progressed through my healing journey, I became increasingly convinced that with this second chance at life, I had to work with widows and orphans. The counselling that we were taken through was Christian founded.

Once we were set on the right course to recovery and healing, we (the survivors) returned to our homes. It was disheart-

ening to find that the genocide perpetrators had re-integrated back into society. And even after the atrocious crimes that they had committed, they were still employing tactics to silence us. However, the Gacaca courts redeemed a very dismal situation. These transitional justice courts were a crucial apparatus for communities to help the survivors access justice. Many survivors asked the killers where they had buried their loved ones. Upon discovery of their remains, they were able to hold proper burials for their loved ones.

At a certain point in my journey, I vividly recall one of the most important encounters I had: when I faced the men that killed my husband and children in prison. In 2000, one of the perpetrators wrote me a letter. At this point, I thought I was in the advanced stages of recovery and healing. Unfortunately, receiving this letter uncovered the bare truth that I still had a long way to go to forgive. Two years later in 2002, the same man wrote me another letter. This time, I was ready to open and read it. Again, the letter was overtly asking for forgiveness. This time though, he listed his fellow killers who had committed the murders of my husband and children.

Unimaginable at the time, I visited him in prison and asked him to provide me with the details of where the remains of my beloved were thrown. Later in 2002, I held a burial. This burial was of most significance to my journey toward healing. At this point, I made a commitment to reconstruct myself and contribute to the reconstruction of my country.



«Often lauded by international observers, Rwanda's gacaca courts have long been held up by their proponents as a model for successful, post-conflict reconciliation efforts. Confronted with the nearly impossible challenge of rebuilding a country after genocide, Rwanda needed a mechanism to hold those who committed genocide accountable in an efficient and effective manner. The solution was gacaca: a system of 12,000 community-based courts that sought to try genocide criminals while pro-

moting forgiveness by victims, ownership of guilt by criminals, and reconciliation in communities to move forward. While the organizers and leaders of the genocide were mostly sent for trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in Arusha, Tanzania, gacaca courts tried more than 1 million ordinary people who served as the foot soldiers of the genocide.»

SOURCE

As a step further toward this, I was eager to recover my years of youth because I did not have the opportunity to go to school. At the times when I would have attained some level of education, Rwanda was riddled with conflict – in 1959, 1963 and 1973. Furthermore, there was a cap for ethnic balance in schools, and every single time, I missed the cap.

Therefore, with the support of the current government to encourage Rwandese to gain education, I had to seize the opportunity. At the time, I was a caregiver to 14 orphans in my home. This enabled me to motivate them to go to school too. I juggled my work at the ministries with school – and while it wasn't easy to juggle these two important callings of my life, I had to see this to the end. In 2015, I successfully completed a degree in theology at the Rwanda Institute of Evangelical Theology (RIET University).

Later in 2015, I published my life story "For Those Who Do Not Believe in Miracles", which was updated in 2019 and 2021. People who have read the book are inspired by my wisdom, resilience, and courage. I have spoken about my own experiences and my work to empower women in Rwanda, both nationally and internationally, including several times in my

Many women bore the brunt of the genocide and many more continue to suffer the repercussions of a genocide that left a hard-to-erase imprint of trauma



©US Institute for Peace

One of the survivors from the weekly group counselling sessions embraces Beata Mukarubuga after agreeing to forgiveness and reconciliation

country and in the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, Kenya, Uganda, and the USA. Within this memoir, I share my journey of forgiveness and reconciliation with the perpetrators of my family members' deaths.

Although Rwanda is a safe country now, and in fact one of the safest and economically fastest-growing countries in Africa, you can imagine the strides we had to take after the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994. Victims and perpetrators had to continue to live side by side, as some of our neighbors and friends turned against us in 1994. Many of those accused were sent to prison and we had to testify against them. This was not easy, but I decided to speak the truth in the Gacaca about what I witnessed and to speak up to find out what happened to my family members. I think it is important to speak the truth, in

the legal setting, but also outside the legal setting. By speaking the truth, one can heal oneself. Forgiveness does not guarantee forgetting but triggers reconciliation to rebuild the country.

Today, I take care of thousands of other genocide survivors across all demographics. I build bridges of peace between women and men, including couples, as well as survivors and perpetrators to build one peaceful Rwanda without division based on ethnicity and gender. I continue to empower women who gave birth to children and/or are infected with HIV/Aids because of rape during the genocide. I conduct regular visits to the women in the countryside of Rwanda, where the women live, several hours from the capital, where few facilities are available.



Women's International Peace Centre – WIPC



Forty-seven years after its inception just before the Mexico Conference in 1974, the Women's International Peace Centre (originally née Isis-WICCE) has instilled value in the stories and lived realities of women by cultivating hope, healing, empowerment, and significant change for women at personal, community, national, regional, and international levels.

At its inception, the Peace Centre started out as a global women's resource center - documenting and disseminating

women's ideas, concerns, and experiences with the aim of ending gender inequality. This approach naturally resulted in physical cross-cultural exchanges, bringing together women activists and human rights defenders from several countries to discuss gender equality issues, share experiences and strategies to dismantle patriarchy and advance women's liberation across the world.



©The Women International Peace Centre

Amuria Peace Exposition in Eastern Uganda. The aim of the Peace March was to sound an alarm on peace and the fight against GBV and HIV/AIDS



In 1994, Isis-WICCE relocated from Asia to Africa, with the aim of getting the voices of African women to the international platform. When the Peace centre moved to Uganda in 1994, the organization organically carved out a niche focusing on the women, peace, and security agenda. What started off as a platform for international cross-cultural exchange evolved into a feminist leadership institute focused on peacebuilding and human security. We broke the barriers of research and came up with different methods of researching women in conflicts.

While asserting its presence in Uganda, the organization initiated the cruciality in tapping into the voices of rural women. The documentation center was extended outside the four walls

of its building and went to the field to meet women to collect their stories, the good, the bad and the ugly. We wanted to prevent people from seeing them only as victims; we wanted to show the power they have inside! This encouraged us to document these stories because we knew that they had so much to say about the war, especially what they have done that no one else has done.

Through this experience, the resource center realized a new focus on conducting research and generating feminist knowledge on women's experiences and specific needs in conflict and post-conflict, which also formed the evidence base for women's advocacy for peace and gender-responsive post-conflict recovery in 27 countries.



Prior to its new identity, Isis-WICCE also focused on healing women war survivors – addressing their psychological, physical, and gynecological needs – and mentoring women leaders and women’s groups to continue their inspiring peacebuilding and conflict transformation work.

As the organization took on a more holistic approach in its work through research, advocacy, healing, skills-building and mentorship for peace, the organization (still as Isis-WICCE) realized that it was not just a platform for women’s international cross-cultural exchange. As such, the organization deemed it

«While we were making the documentation, we noticed that there was no use talking about them without actually connecting research and information to healing. We came up with another idea. Most of the women's healing required somebody who'd deal with their body, mind, and soul. There's no way you can build women's leadership with such a background unless you heal them.

So, we came up with the "emergency medical intervention" which we named "Healing the body,

mind and soul". We told the doctors: "we don't have the money to bring these women to your clinics, you need to go to the rural communities to understand what they are living and saying". We went to the rural areas with the doctors to work. There were psychologists and psychiatrists, and of course surgeons, to analyze the situation and identify women in need of surgery who were then transported to appropriate health centers. This transformed how the doctors work.»

Ruth Ochieng
(former Executive Director, Isis-WICCE)

necessary to adopt a name that reflects its core focus on igniting women's leadership, amplifying their voices and deepening their activism in recreating peace.

After 45 years, the Isis-WICCE adopted its name: the Women's International Peace Centre (The Peace Centre). The new name Women's International Peace Centre reflects a commitment to create an incubator for women seeking to re-create peace and live in peace across the globe. The change in name was also timely as the name ISIS had been adopted by other actors with views and actions adverse to the organization.

Quite remarkably, the Peace Centre has played a key role in engendering and facilitating women's meaningful participation in various regionally and nationally significant peace processes in Burundi (the inter-Burundi dialogue), South Sudan (since 2007) and Uganda (since 1994).

The Peace Centre, then Isis-WICCE, spearheaded the Uganda Women's Coalition for Peace during the Juba Peace Process between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance

Army (LRA) to end the 21-year civil war in Northern Uganda. In this process, over 2000 women survivors in the greater Northern Uganda participate meaningfully. The coalition, under the Peace Centre's leadership, held talks with the President of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni, urging him to nominate more women to the negotiating team – which saw the nomination of one woman, the Hon. Betty Bigombe, to the government negotiation team.

Similarly, the Peace Centre also led the formation and functioning of the Women's Task Force (WTF) to engage in the implementation, monitoring and follow-up of the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan for Northern Uganda (PRDP) as community watchdogs to hold policymakers accountable.

Notably, through the Feminist Leadership Institute, the Peace Centre has grown a pool of numerous women leaders from Civil Society Organizations, Faith-Based Organizations and women's associations, NGOs, political parties, and government institutions by enhancing their expertise to effectively



Ruth Ochieng, Former Executive Director of Isis-WICCE and Helen Kezie-Nwoha, Current Executive Director of The Women's International Peace Centre

participate in peace processes. These women have taken up over 100 political leadership positions and influenced policies and realities in their countries.

Any attempt to perforate the precarious but fearless and crucial work that the Peace Centre has done, has not gone amiss. In August 2018, the Peace Centre's offices were broken into and hard drives and data storage devices containing the organization's information stolen. Regrettably, data was lost. This in tandem with shrinking civic space in the region meant that the organization had to undergo digital and physical security training and set up a security management committee and related protocols to track compliance to minimize the same risks from cropping up.

Over the next years, the organization aims to enhance the position of women to influence peacebuilding processes and transform these spaces to be more gender inclusive and gender responsive, powerfully, and unapologetically. The work of amplifying the voices and decision-making power of women within peacebuilding processes in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, and Uganda remains critical to seeing the women, peace and security agenda asserted in all decision-making spaces and processes.



ROSE TUOMBEANE

ROSE TUOMBEANE



Rose Tuombeane Kahambu is an Investigative Journalist who has made it her mission through the Collective of Women Journalists to document the crimes perpetrated against communities ravaged by the conflict in different parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

When I studied Investigative Journalism, my goal was to eventually put my skills to use in a renowned media house in the capital, Kinshasa. Little did I know that I would be working with fellow women rights activists with the same passion to promote peace in our country, from my home region - in North Kivu.

In 2010, several women rights activists, including myself, decided to initiate a collective of women journalists with the sole purpose of demystifying the lack of credible information on peace which should be accessible to rural communities. Through the formation of the collective, we knew that we were playing an important role in giving these communities access to information. We were witnessing the harrowing crimes of violence that were being perpetrated against women and girls in the communities, therefore we saw the critical need to work together to build peace armed with information.

Several activists within the collective were also journalists by profession who wanted to investigate the atrocities occurring and subsequently document them. One of the pioneer activities

of the Collective of Women Journalists was documentation. This documentation led to whistleblowing on the harsh crimes that we were witnessing daily, which eventually would lead to advocacy with the political leaders. The documentation took on many forms including information related to the victims and survivors, the authors and perpetrators of the conflict, and the impact of the violations on the communities. One may ask why we took on an approach that has not been popularized - we know that one day, local, regional, and global tribunals will be set up and this information will be pertinent to seeking justice for the victims, survivors, their loved ones and the country-at-large.

In 2018 following the Beni massacres which left more than 7,000 people hacked by machetes/axes and shot by rifles, I initiated data collection activities through the Collective around human rights violations that communities had witnessed. During the field research, I identified and trained focal points down to the depths of inaccessible areas to be able to support the documentation process that was highly critical in pinpointing the triggers for the massacres.

During this exercise that lasted months, several alleged perpetrators were documented, and subsequently, the reports were shared with national authorities. This information, which culminated in an advocacy campaign targeted at Congolese national authorities in Kinshasa as well as various national and international decision-making bodies with a view to asking them to use their power to put an end to the massacres in Beni, was a step forward in enabling the victims, survivors and families access justice and redress.

Due to the precarious nature of the human rights-centered peacebuilding work that I and my colleagues are doing, we are exposed to a multitude of risks and challenges. The high rate of instability in the region has meant that we must keep an ear to the ground watching out for any early warning signs of threats and attacks. In certain areas, we must seek dialogue with armed groups to provide us information - and unfortunately, in many cases, they are not willing to offer this important information in fear of their own security at the hands of their superiors.

Another challenge that I personally face is the stigma associated with being a woman investigative journalist. Some members of the society that I live in are prejudiced toward the work that I do. Another challenge faced is that we are constantly having to back-up the security of the data that we gather. We try our best to safeguard the data with passwords on the laptops and mobile phones that we have, however we have limited knowledge on data security. Our hope is that opportunities can be availed for us to have our capacity strengthened in securing all this credible information that we collect.

Whilst we navigated documentation, we also saw the cruciality in civic education. For the women to build peace, we understood that they needed to be involved at the political level. Thus, the Collective of Women Journalists organized a series of training sessions for women political leaders who were holding office and those who had political ambitions and aspirations. Furthermore, we carried out public rallies where these women were accorded space to share their respective manifestos and action plans. We organized radio programs as part of sensitization in addition to organizing open space conventions to popularize women's meaningful participation as a gateway to building peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In 2018, I led a vast campaign to raise awareness and mobilize women to mass participation in elections. These activities, which took place in the cities of Butembo, Beni and Goma in North Kivu and the territories of Lubero and Beni in North Kivu, aimed to sensitize and mobilize women to participate massively in the elections of 2019 and vote massively for women so that they are present in decision-making bodies. This vast awareness-raising and mobilization campaign had positive impacts: the rate of participation of women in the election was considerably higher compared to the 2011 elections. The number of women in elected positions during the 2018 elections increased in Beni-Lubero.

In July 2021, through the *Dynamique des Femmes pour la Bonne Gouvernance* where I represent the Collective of Women Journalists, a campaign dubbed SURSECO aimed to detect and denounce the enemies of peace who are hiding among the population and planning more criminal acts. This community campaign gained traction through the community dwellers and have consequently taken full ownership of it.



Some of the members of the Collective of Women Journalists after a sensitization session on UNSCR 1325



NEEMA NAMADAMU

NEEMA NAMADAMU



Neema Namadamu is an advocate for peace and a women's rights and disability rights activist in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. She is the Founder of Hero Women Rising. She also founded the Maman Shujaa Media Center to empower women and give them voices to tell their stories. She leverages the power of digital technology to mobilize women to act.

I was born in a remote mountain village of eastern Congo, called Marunde, a region mostly riddled with conflict and isolated from Congolese society as well as isolated from any progressive cultural evolution that might be taking place. At the time, Marunde was a highly patriarchal society governed by belief in literal Biblical texts introduced by missionaries during Belgium's colonization of countries in the region known as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, and Rwanda. At the age of 2, I contracted polio. Everybody knew that this reality would come with heavy societal stigma. As norms dictated, the assumption was that I would never get married, yet marriage continues to be viewed as the only way for a woman to survive in my context since women can neither own property nor inherit from their husband's or parents' estate.

I was not the first child born to my mother, but the fourth. I was however the first child that survived childbirth. So, when I contracted polio due to a lack of vaccination, my father married a second wife. This was deemed as my mother's public shame since she could not "bear healthy children" especially sons, when according to culture, a wife is not assured her place and full privilege as a "wife" until she has borne a son.

Against all odds, my beloved mother, Polline, devoted herself wholeheartedly to ensuring that I had access to education. I recall from a tender school age, my mother carried me on her back, to and from school.

Education was important to me and so despite the daunting social stigma and personal hardships, I persevered to become the first handicapped woman from my tribe to graduate from university, which laid the foundation for a career in public service that eventually saw me serve as Chief Advisor to Congo's Minister of Gender and Family.

Frustrated by the lack of impact I was able to have in the government setting, I moved from Kinshasa back to Bukavu

in 2007 and started a non-governmental organization to enable and empower women with disabilities. In 2012, I started the Maman Shujaa (Hero Women) movement and the Hero Women Rising organization – with a mission to enable and empower all Congolese women. I established the first Maman Shujaa Center in the South Kivu Province capital city of Bukavu, as an advocacy and skills development center where women learn basic knowledge about using a laptop, the internet, and interactive applications like email, World Pulse, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, as well as attend classes on entrepreneurship and networking – all for free.

In July 2012, I set up a women's internet café and media center. With this initiative, I gathered grassroots women leaders across my region to discuss the future of our country. Within two months, we had mobilized approximately 200 women activists reporting about life in war-torn DRC through the action media network, World Pulse. We began speaking out – demanding the Congo we hold in our hearts to manifest peace all around us. As women, our solutions to ending conflict are inclusive because they are rooted in family and community.

Soon after the Maman Shujaa Center commenced its activities in 2013, I filed an online petition for peace. This petition called on the public and US women leaders to take immediate action in solidarity with the women of the Democratic Republic of Congo calling for peace. The petition also called for a seat at the table for Congolese women. The petition garnered over 100,000 signatures and an audience at the White House with President Obama's National Security Council to advocate for the appointment of a US Special Envoy to the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Great Lakes region of Africa. Months later, the newly appointed Special Envoy visited the DRC and came all the way to Bukavu to interact with many communities living there.

In Congo we don't use the word "rape"; we call it "violence". For as women, we are raped in a hundred ways every day; our dignity stripped, our value tarnished, our very personhood denied from the earliest age so that we can be violated throughout our lives without there being any consequence. Surely, this reporter understands that the greatest defilement of one's person is not what is done to the body. It's not the physical damage that takes your life. It's that you are eaten alive as if you are a thoughtless being and left to decompose in those life-stealing memories.

Soon after I had set up the first Maman Shujaa Center, I initiated the "Girl Ambassadors" mentoring program with the objective of establishing a next generation of Maman Shujaa (Hero Women) leaders. This program introduced university-aged young women to the principles of UN Security Council Resolutions 1325, 1820 and 2250. Through this program, the young women are given practical experience in conveying the principles to other women and girls and even entire rural communities by leading programs and events such as literacy training for teenaged unwed mothers, and theater skits, dramatizing the inequities of being a girl in Congolese society, as well as demonstrating ways in which an educated and well-regarded girl/woman can contribute to her family and community.

Two years after the first Maman Shujaa Center was established, a second one was built in a remote mountain area of the Bukavu province, as a center to bring the transformative programs to the isolated area. The Maman Shujaa Center has become a convening place and incubation center for Women, Peace and Security-targeted projects. In keeping with the theme of advancing the women, peace, and security agenda in Bukavu, Congo, I spearheaded the building and operation of a girls' school and went on to start the "Keep Girls in School" program. Through this program, reusable sani-pad kits are made with locally sourced materials and distributed to adolescent girls that face challenges with managing their menstrual hygiene.

In 2020, I filed a second petition to draw attention to the peaceful demonstrations that the displaced women of the iso-

lated region of our second Maman Shujaa Center were holding. Our role was to make as much noise as we could, giving voice to the women risking their lives to change the future for themselves and their communities. These women are abused, beaten, raped, mutilated, and murdered. We commit ourselves to ensuring that their cries for a different future never die.

Neema Namadamu in her letter
["Creating Heaven in a place called Hell"](#)

My journey as a woman peacebuilder has been enriched by several pivotal moments, all of which have further affirmed my resolve to stay the course.

In the early years of my peace activism, as a young junior in high school, I was given the opportunity to host a weekly radio program on national radio to sensitize families with disabled children about the sensitive qualities, dreams, and capacities of their children.

Another pivotal moment on my journey happened on a July evening in 2012 when I sent my adult daughter to purchase phone credit from a vendor at a neighborhood kiosk. While there, she was brutally beaten by three young Congolese soldiers. Despite the pain and anger I felt, I considered that as a woman of respectable standing in my community, I ought to react in an objective manner lest my impulsive reaction incites tribal conflict. I did not want my response to be dictated by the burdens of oppressive interpretations that I had endured and witnessed. My end approach and response were love, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

In 2013, a US reporter was considering writing an article on my work and our online petition, but first needed to know



Neema with a group of some of the women that she works with at the Maman Shujaa Center in Bukavu

if I had ever been raped. I was shocked. I wrote a response with the last line reading, “Have I ever been (raped)? I didn’t grow up in New York City, USA. I grew up in a remote area of eastern Congo dubbed by the UN as the worst place in the world to be a woman or girl. And my work isn’t interviewing celebrities for a magazine. My work is to create heaven for my daughter in a place called hell.” That was a moment of truth for thousands that read the article, but more importantly a pivotal moment in my advocacy work.

Having suffered from the societal stigma of having polio, the stigma of being a girl, the stigma of being educated and having an opinion, I have been publicly shamed by men for confronting their patriarchal ideas: “Women are for sex. Maybe one day I will take you for sex”. However, the suffering I have endured has allowed me to relate to the most vulnerable.

Along the way, I have encountered several challenges. For instance, a few years ago, a rebel militia commander operating in our remotely located Maman Shujaa Center approached our Facility Manager demanding payment for “security” for our Center or they would spray our Center with bullets. I asked our manager to inform him that we were not outsiders; this is where I was born, where I grew up, where my parents and siblings live; this is where I have built a community center, built a girls’ school, developed an industry to make washable, reusable sani-pad kits for girls, and established a reforestation initiative operated by women villagers. I am contributing to my motherland and am not going to pay them \$1 for their security.

Following this incident, I wrote the story and emailed it, along with his name and photo and the name of his general in Kinshasa, to UN dignitaries, the US Ambassador to Congo, a Voice of America journalist and a Washington DC-based non-profit that lobbies the White House for sanctions against such types, etc. I had never met or spoken with him before but got his cell number and the next day I called him on WhatsApp. Of course, he had received word about all the noise I was making about his threats. He was incredulous. He asked how I could make such a big deal out of such a small thing. I told him that I took his threats seriously and that I don’t accept bullying. The next time I visited the remote Maman Shujaa Center, he visited me and had a photograph taken with me. He publicly apologized.

My life is poured out for my Congolese sisters promoting the women peace and security agenda in addition to elevating women’s understanding, capacity, and ability to advocate for change and peaceful co-existence in their respective communities. Grassroots funding is paramount. There are so many wonderful women giving their lives to an inner desire to enable a better future for their sisters and their sister’s daughters. Empowering women to inform, educate, and illuminate their peers is powerfully effective. Empowered women are and will continue to become bridges to their sisters’ rightful futures. Women are giving their sisters the consideration, information, education, and opportunities, as well as access to food security, health, and a dignified and honoring community.



ASHA HAGI ELMI

ASHA HAGI ELMI



Asha Haji Elmi is a humanitarian and peace activist, internationally recognized for her work helping to build peace in Somalia. In 1992, she co-founded Save Somali Women and Children (SSWC). In 2000, she formed the Sixth Clan women's movement to advance women's active and meaningful participation in Somali politics.

Somalia has, and continues to be, a country of vantage within the Horn of Africa. It has been engulfed in civil war and political turmoil for decades after the overthrow of the late Siad Barre's dictatorial regime by armed opposition groups. This gave birth to clan hostilities led by warlords from different clans that threw the country into total anarchy.

As has always been the case in all armed conflicts, women and children are the first and last victims of the war, though war is neither their desire nor decision. In Somalia, those who suffered most were women from cross-clan marriages. When the civil war based on clan affiliation erupted, that was the first time I realized that my husband and I were from two different identities. I knew we were from different clans, but I never thought one day we would be targets of clan hostility.

As a result, I was caught in between and ended up with half an identity since I was not a full member of either clan. In that painful and stressful moment of striving for a full identity, I realized that the only full identity that women could have, was the "Identity of Womanhood". Instead of letting myself be

buried in that stressful and painful moment, I opted to turn it into strength and came up with these ideas, namely: Put an end to senseless murders and war, since it has nothing to offer to women other than death, destruction, and devastation; unite Somali women beyond the clan boundaries and strive for women's identity; promote peace from a woman's perspective to prevent my daughters from going through the same painful experience I went through.

I shared my sentiments with my fellow women who were undergoing the same experiences but were not bold enough to speak out. This subsequently led to the formation of Save Somali Women and Children.

During the Somali conflict, there had been many international and regional attempts to bring the warring factions together and solve the Somali political crisis. Thirteen conferences had been held over a decade, but all failed because they were all warlord-oriented conferences which meant that only armed groups had the right to participate, excluding the participation of other actors from civil society including women.



©NGO Working Group on Women Peace and Security

Asha El Hagi makes a statement to the United Nations Security Council in 2009

In 2000, the President of Djibouti convened the first all-inclusive National Reconciliation Conference aimed at ending clan hostility and coming up with a comprehensive national solution. Unlike the previous attempts, the participation of the Arta/Djibouti conference was clan-based. But again, women were still excluded, as women have no space or room in the traditional five (5) clan structures since in patriarchal and patrilineal societies, women have neither the responsibility to protect the clan while at war nor the right to represent the clan at the negotiating table.

It was the courage, tenacity, vision, activism and dynamism of Save Somali Women and Children, of which I am the Chairperson, that organized the women beyond the clan boundaries and brought them together to form our own clan, the Sixth Clan, as an identity enabling us to fully participate in the national solution seeking process. We demanded our rightful place in the national reconciliation process. It was our strong conviction that our contribution was vital and valuable. We mounted pressure on the host country (Djibouti), paramount clan elders, religious leaders, and built strategic alliances with some of the clan leaders, Islamic scholars, politicians, and other key actors from different clans to support our cause. After a tremendous

struggle, eventually our participation was recognized. Since we have five distinct clans in the Somali clan structure, the new clan, the women's clan, became the Sixth Clan. On my journey as a peace and human rights activist, I have had several achievements.

In July 2003, I was one of the signatories of the Somali Peace Accord in Mbagathi, Kenya. This was one of the key processes that led to the transition government of Somalia and the current Somali government.

In 2012, when my husband was elected as the Prime Minister of Somalia, he led efforts for women's inclusion in the government. Consequently, a woman was appointed Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Undoubtedly, my pivotal moment as an activist was the formation of the Sixth Clan. The Sixth Clan created the base for all the women achievements we are witnessing today in Somalia. Today, women in Somalia are involved in all peace and security processes and their views are recognized and appreciated. Moreover, there are several women legislators in the Somalia parliament. Today, the Sixth Clan remains active as the pan-Somali women's movement.

Women's organizations built a strong coalition to increase their influence in the negotiations, which took the name the Women's Clan, and became known as "the Sixth Clan".

As a result of women's inclusion, the Transitional Charter that came out of the conference emphasized the human rights of children, women, and minorities, and women's organizations successfully secured a women's quota of 25 out of 245 seats in the transitional parliament.

SOURCE

The suffering of the most vulnerable groups I witnessed during the war keeps on fueling my zeal to build peace among the people of Somalia. The power of feminism has given me courage, commitment, consistency, and resilience to fight for the peace of Somalia people. The unity of Somalia women and women-led organizations has really encouraged me as a peacebuilder. I have come to realize that women can have a positive impact and play an active role, making a huge difference if they unite their voices, articulate their agenda, put aside their differences and focus on their just cause.

There is a need to increase women's meaningful participation in formal and informal peace negotiations by raising awareness among mediators and parties of conflict, just as critical as the long-term, strategic importance of women's inclusion. Women's participation in peacebuilding and recovery planning, women's economic empowerment within recovery efforts, and the establishment of gender responsive post-conflict institutions are all crucial.

Despite the common challenges we face as women in armed conflicts, social, cultural, political and clan dynamics, we face other challenges at personal and collective levels. Of course, every great achievement has a price, and we paid a

huge price in promoting peace and women's participation in armed conflict. We risked our lives, sacrificed our families and time. We lost some of our loved ones, some of whom were at the forefront of the struggle for women's rights. Others died of stress-related illnesses because of the hostile situation we were in. Some of us are still living under constant death threats and stress-related illnesses.

All these dynamics compelled me to risk my life and have the courage to meet the Islamic Leaders face-to-face to raise and discuss with them women-related issues and roles. In fact, I mobilized and organized the first women's gathering since the Islamic Courts took over the control of Mogadishu. We utilized that platform to break the silence and I spoke strongly and boldly about the importance of women's role in peace, politics, business, and all walks of life, and I urged women to keep their role in society alive. That was an indication that we Somali women have the stamina, will, courage and commitment to take on challenging work on the ground despite often lacking the technical and financial capacity to do so.



PASTOR ESTHER IBANGA

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Pastor Esther Ibanga is the founder and Senior Pastor of Jos Christian Missions International. She is also the President of the Women Without Walls Initiative which seeks to develop a non-violent, creative, and inclusive approach to conflict resolution and transformation in Nigeria, through women who are natural agents for social and national change.

The Women Without Walls Initiative was established in April 2010, borne out of a need to respond to the incessant religious and ethnic crisis that rocked Plateau State Nigeria for decades. The organization's objective was to bring down the walls of religion and ethnicity that have been used by politicians to polarize the community.

Prior to the creation of the initiative, I was still serving as a religious leader pastoring a Church as a Minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Whenever there was conflict, I tried to avoid the troubled areas and not get involved, especially politically.

This all changed on the 10th of March 2010, when the nation woke up on Sunday morning to the harrowing news of the gruesome murder of over 500 women and children in a Christian village close to where I live. It was heart-breaking. Despite that, this was also a personal turning point because I couldn't bear another minute of watching as a bystander. Shortly after the incident, several senior Christian women leaders in and around the city started streaming into my home in hopes of an

answer to what should be done in response to the crisis that had ensued. These series of visits that had not borne a solution for several days as we just cried over the happenings, then led to the organization of a peaceful protest that happened a couple of days later, led by the Christian women's movement.

The peaceful protest was aimed at demanding justice for the victims of the massacre and the halting of the horrendous crimes. The protest was organized in collaboration with other women's groups leaders such as Prof. Funmilayo Para-Mallam, Mrs. Josephine Ewuga, Mrs. Julie Makama and the Late Mama Becky Abimiku. Following that march, the Muslim women also organized a similar one which was a retaliation against the killing of muslims as well. I had to reach out to the Muslim women to see how we can end this.

This was a defining moment for me that ushered me, almost wittingly, into peacebuilding and conflict resolution as well as the subsequent formation of the Women Without Walls Initiative.

«What we have seen in Plateau in the last 20 years is comparable to genocide. The human lives lost to attacks are worrisome. The cycle of attacks and counter attacks has not stopped. I lived all my life in Jebbu Miango before gunmen killed my husband last month. When one thinks that peace has returned, one will be surprised to hear of a fresh killing and attack in another community. The attacks happen in the cities and rural areas. The killers operate during the day and in the night and

they usually don't give a warning signal before attacking. They swoop down on their unsuspecting victims leaving behind a pool of human blood, mutilated bodies, burned houses and destruction of farmlands. What is even more painful is that most of the times, the perpetrators are never apprehended as they usually escape into nearby bush.»

[Mrs. Charity Bulus](#)

The initiative was borne out of the desperation to put an end to the violent and senseless killings of women and children in Plateau State of Nigeria. Since its inception, the organization has become a strong coalition of women groups across religious and ethnic divides. From this platform, women have been placed at an advantageous position of raising their voices in the calls for peace in the troubled regions of Nigeria. WOWWI has brought to the fore the power of women's voices and created an opportunity for an organized platform of women to play an active role in peacebuilding. It is on record that the Women Without Walls Initiative is the first organization to have on its membership all the tribal women leaders, including Christian and Muslim women leaders. These women act as entry points into the various communities in their city, particularly in reaching the youths and all community stakeholders.

Through its community-centered advocacy work, WOWWI is now turning to the communities that are volatile and flash-points of violence by engaging mothers as the first line of se-

curity for their families and communities. These mothers have contributed to de-radicalizing their sons who in most cases are recruited by radical, extremist groups due to their poverty, redundancy, and lack of educational opportunities. Through the "Mothers School" approach borrowed from Women Without Borders Austria, the mothers are trained to identify the signs of radicalization in their sons. This approach has had demonstrable impact in the communities that we work in with many mothers whistleblowing on these signs, and thus providing points of entry for us to meaningfully engage these youth and impact them positively.

Beyond the home setting, WOWWI is working in schools - organizing peace carnivals and story-telling campaigns to demystify and change the narrative on conflict and crisis.

The organization now has a refined strategy focusing on six areas: advocacy; provision of relief to internally displaced persons and the needy; training of women in peacebuilding initiatives/activities, dialogues, and mediation between warring



©Women Without Walls Initiative/Willie Abok

Pastor Esther Ibanga joined with Muslim leaders in the city of Jos to call for the return of Chibok girls who were kidnapped by the extremist group Boko Haram.

parties; developmental projects in under-privileged communities with grievances that became drivers of violence; and women and youth empowerment.

The first few years following the inception of the WOWWI were challenging. However, God rewarded our efforts when I won the Niwano Peace Prize of 2015 which was a pivotal moment on my journey - I had renewed hope that the work that I was doing in collaboration with the women's movement in and around Jos was indeed bearing fruit.

Whilst doing the work through the Women Without Walls initiative in the initial stages, one of the key challenges faced was, and continues to be, funding. When we started, we had no money, thus we had to use our own money to run the different projects that we had in the docket. And even though we applied to several international donor agencies, receiving funding was, and still is, a challenge. So we decided to reach out to the private sector for help with some major projects, particularly those that we undertook in the communities like renovation of

a public school, digging of borehole in another community etc. The private sector through their corporate social responsibility programs enabled us to continue this important work. For instance, I recall reaching out to one of the prominent companies in Jos - Grande Cereals Manufacturing Company Ltd. With their support, we were able to renovate a block of classrooms in a Muslim Community and dig a borehole in a Christian community by Fatigen Engineering company.

Although we received eminent support from the religious leaders and the security agencies, this was not the case with traditional leaders and State. Up until now, we are still waiting for the Government to make good on its commitments to address the issues by moving away from using religion and ethnicity to widen the rift between communities.



STELLA MYSTICA SABIITI

STELLA MYSTICA SABIITI



Stella Mystica Sabiiti is a peace and security expert whose work spans more than four decades. She has led and facilitated several peace processes across the globe. In 1976, she was tortured by soldiers of President Idi Amin. That harrowing experience shaped her decision to dedicate herself to working with armed groups for peace if she survived the ordeal.

I was born in Mbarara, Western Uganda, but spent my formative years in Karamoja sub-region in Northeastern Uganda, where my father was a senior executive in the office of the District Commissioner. Consequently, I attended the Moroto Town Council School (now Moroto Municipal Council School) where I completed my primary level education. The Karamoja sub-region is inhabited by pastoralist and nomadic people with a passion for their animals.

In 1976, I was a student of Social Sciences at Makerere University, in Kampala, newly married and expecting our first child, a daughter. Because I was a student living on campus at Mary Stuart Hall, an imposing tall building, while my husband was a District Commissioner in the West Nile sub-region of Northern Uganda at the time, we met only occasionally. On this particular fateful day, my husband had come to Kampala to our apartment in the city.

On one “what should have been an ordinary” morning which instead turned into a nightmarish day, my husband had just dropped me at campus for me to do some reading and discuss with my roommate who was taking the same course as I was. Everything seemed normal, almost boring, when out of the blue there was a rude knock at our door. At first we thought it was our friends playing a prank but as it turned out, it was army men in full combat gear. About six of these armed men broke down our door and entered our room. My friend and

I attempted to seek refuge on the balcony of our room. The events following this moment were harrowing. I recall being hit at the small of my back with the butt of the gun and me flying over the stairs to the floor below. While this trouble was ensuing in the girls’ hall of residence, the boys in Lumumba Hall were likewise being tortured, something we did not know until the soldiers led me and my friend to that male hall of residence.

For a moment, I knew that I was staring death in the face. The scene of that day remains etched in my memory. While I was being beaten, cut and so on, for the soldiers had with them gadgets I had never seen in my life, mostly metal, I never felt any pain. Of course as you can imagine, I have shared this sense with several other survivors around the world who confirm that it is as if we psychologically give our bodies permission not to feel any pain. We are only spectators to what is being done to our bodies. As I neared the time of losing hope for survival, I had only one thought on my mind – to find out why the soldiers were accusing me of having done something they and I knew I hadn’t done.. All along throughout this ordeal I kept feeling there was someone else beside me, with me, guiding me what to do or not do. This time the voice, or ‘power’, as I would like to call it, told me to expose my face and look the soldiers in the eye, and that I would find my answer there. In their eyes. I will never forget what I saw there. Sadness.

I could see the pain he was forcing himself to bear while torturing me and my friend. Following that pivotal moment, the voice, the power, came to my rescue again. I heard clearly in my mind: 'tell him it is ok, tell him you know he is only doing his job' Btu how do that that? It seemed a bit belittling to a powerful armed soldier. So the voice, the power said: 'look for something you have in common with him. It is ok. Just look, you will find it, talk about that!' And miraculously I did! I asked him: 'what did your wife cook for you last night?' After several more beatings with his comrades joining in, and with my insistence growing stronger and stronger, the soldier responded, and others joined in and we just carried on like that under that tree in front of Lumumba Hall until they blew the whistle and ordered all the soldiers to board their trucks and leave us students alone. My question humanized the soldiers, because I did not refer to the brutality and horrid things they were doing to us. It was in this daunting moment that I realized that, upon survival of this ordeal, I would commit myself to building peace, specifically working with those behind the butt of the gun. I made a promise to work with armed groups. From my experience of visiting refugee camps since my childhood with my parents I figured there were organisations dedicated to assisting the survivors. What I saw as a gap was anyone doing any work with violent armed groups. We often forget the other side of the equation. With that incident, seeing how the armed soldiers eventually responded positively, I realized that they needed to be helped to see the "third" way, the way to transform conflict to peace. I realized that if I was to survive completely, I had not only to save myself but also the soldiers, to step out of the conflict holding their hands. As a matter of fact, I have worked with armed rebel groups and others since then I thank God for having been introduced to this field of

peace in this manner. I did not read about it, I experienced it first-hand. It is not an easy thing, but it is doable.

After that fateful day, during a very tormenting time for Uganda as a nation, my husband and I fled into exile in Canada. We returned for a year or so before we were forced to flee to Kenya and eventually to The Netherlands. In both Kenya and The Netherlands, I began working on my dream - to foster peace and security through active non-violent means.

Meanwhile, after the fall of Idi Amin in 1979, the soldiers, part of the faction that had raided the university when I was attacked, fled the country where they regrouped into armed rebel groups on the premise that they believed that they were Uganda's legitimate army.

In December 2002, 26 years after surviving that tumultuous day at Mary Stuary Hall, I was recalled by the Government of Uganda, from Mozambique where I was working with ex-combattants. The government envisaged my role as a facilitator within the mediation process working with the former soldiers-turned rebels who were seeking peace with the current government of Uganda. The rebel group, the Uganda National Rescue Front II (UNRF2) was led by Major General Ali Bamuze and the Government Team was led by Major General Salim Saleh. The Uganda Amnesty Commission was also one of the key players as well as some local organisations. This came at a time when the Lord's Resistance Army was heavily active and the people of Uganda needed real peace in their lives. I am equally a firm believer in indigenous mechanisms of finding positive solutions to seemingly impossible crises, including admitting blame and responsibility, forgiveness and reconciliation and co-creating a shared world of possibilities. Together. Mato Oput is such a mechanism, and various clusters of related cultures have their own. But they all share the

In fact, Mato Oput, which in the Acholi language literally means "to drink a bitter potion made from the leaves of the 'oput' tree", is one of the mechanisms for forgiveness and reconciliation among the Acholi people in Northern Uganda. The drinking of this bitter herb means that the two conflicting parties accept the bitterness of the past and prom-

ise never to taste such bitterness again. The payment of compensation follows the ceremony. The victim or his/her family is compensated for the harm done, for example, in the form of cows or cash.

[SOURCE](#)

same root, knowing we do make mistakes, sometimes horrid mistakes and actions, but we at the same time have a greater capacity for the good.

This was also while the Amnesty Law of 2000 was passed, and Amnesty certificates were being issued through the local structures to all rebels who had agreed to lay down arms and return home. While planning the peace talks that were going to take place in Arua, all groups were asked to present a list of mediators. On all five lists, my name was present. Following this, a directive had been issued to have me actively involved in the peace process. Initially, my role was to train and prepare all parties to build trust and articulate their demands. But gradually this role evolved into a mediative process that included carrying messages among the negotiating parties.

During this process there were some challenging moments, such as the incident when the combatants wanted me to train them alone in the dark of the night, but fortunately dynamics changed in my favor. Another incident was when they realized, in one of my negotiated and agreed moments alone with them they realized the government had given them a roll of flip chart paper, and that whole roll was covered in writing already! To the combatants, that was a deliberate act on the part of the government, but I managed to deal with that efficiently. It is small moments of a sense of betrayal that can throw the whole process into disarray. My experience also taught me that we are all human beings. Although any sense of danger or of fear at times threatened my resolve since this was a group that was part of the soldiers during the Amin regime, I remained strong and firm being guided by the principle and belief in the goodness of every single human being. This was the experience of my life coming full circle with the humbling experience of me working now with those responsible for some of the worst moments in my life, working together to turn their political demands into expressions of peace and the desire to regain their dignity and seek forgiveness from their fellow Ugandans, all spelled out in the peace agreement signed on December 24, 2002.

Following this pivotal moment on my peace journey, I continued to work on the disarmament process in Karamoja, and with that experience too, I recall falling into a deadly ambush with the late Omwony Ojwok (former State Minister for Economic Monitoring). Karamoja was one of most challenging pro-

cesses to crack open a conflict that was not an insurgency. In typical armed conflicts, there are rules of engagement and certain expectations from any of the conflicting parties. But in Karamoja, everyone had a gun and there was no visibly identified enemy or opponent. It was an existential conflict, fluid, tricky to deal with. After years of peace, the same threat is rearing its head again.

During my work, I have worked on many more conflicts, including the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, the Burundi peace talks, conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Caribbean and Asia Pacific region, Afghanistan, India and Pakistan, Thailand and Colombia, to name a few, exchanging ideas, learning and growing

As a mediator and facilitator between armed groups in Africa and elsewhere, I have worked with individuals in some of the world's most tense situations. Having worked with the AU Peace and Security Department (now Political Affairs, Peace and Security – PAPS Department) since 2006, as part of a team of experts strengthening the AU, Regional Economic Communities, Regional Mechanisms and their regional Standby Forces in building the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), I continue to see it as imperative that women are present and meaningfully engaged at all levels of peacebuilding.

One of the most important skills that women peace negotiators and mediators bring to the table must their power of listening, especially to the things that are not being said. In my experience, analyzing the situation before trying to find a solution is extremely paramount. We do not have to rush to find a solution, but more so understand the root causes. When one begins to interact with the grassroots groups and communities that are being affected by the conflict, the answers fall into place. Therefore, localized peace solutions should inform and determine the outcome of any peace process. This skill, which I learned back in 1976, is still the same trick and tool that I continue to use in peace processes that I have been involved in.

Women and children are affected differently by war and other forms of violent conflict, and this must always come out clearly so that they take up the space where decisions are being made. In my role as UN Women Advisor, I co-supported the creation of the Network of African Women and Girls in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (Femwise-Africa).



ANNE-MARIE MUSABYEMUNGU

ANNE-MARIE MUSABYEMUNGU



Anne-Marie Musabyemungu is a human rights activist who played an instrumental role in convincing Rwandan rebels fighting in Congo to come home, starting with her husband. She later vied for office as a Member of Parliament.

In 2001, while I was a teacher at a secondary school in Rwanda, I heard about the novel United Nations Security Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. The discussions around the resolution had made its way into the women's movement in Rwanda. Women were trying to find ways in which they could contribute to the reconstruction of peace and security in the country after the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994.

With my husband's role as one of the members of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) who were fighting the government of Rwanda, I developed a keen interest in peacebuilding at a time when the government and the defence forces were actively looking for interlocutors.

To tee off this interest in contributing to building a peaceful Rwanda in tandem with the proximity I had with my husband's role, I requested audience and eventually was lucky to have a meeting with General James Kabarebe, the Chief of Defence Forces to navigate communication with the FDLR aiming for national reconciliation. This was not a one-off communication - but an engagement that lasted months. In these conversations, we talked about the role of women in the search for peace and security. We also reflected on the infiltration of

FDLR, looking back at the genocide and what the triggers were. We also talked about the political will for reconciliation and reconstruction of peace in the country. We reflected on the Gacaca Courts and whether they were being will be successful in seeking justice for the genocidal crimes. We also talked about reinstatement of the former Rwandan forces.

In 2003, culminating from those series of discussions and a lot of self-reflection, I decided to take the journey into the Congolese forest to look for the FDLR with the sole purpose of sensitizing them on reconciliation and to request them to lay down weapons. Prior to taking the hazardous mission, I was already apprehensive, but I was driven by the fact that I was doing my part to the reconstruction of Rwanda. Just like any parent, my apprehension also came from the thought of leaving my children and what would become of them in the unfortunate event that I could not make it out of the forest alive.

I traveled to South Kivu in Eastern Congo, and after leaving Bukavu town, I started the trip on foot with no knowledge of my destination in the deep thicket of the forest. Five days later, I arrived while there was a meeting of the FDLR high authorities taking place. As a civilian, I shuddered at the sight of the many armed men without military uniform, some of them

were very young. I should mention that my husband who was meant to be part of that group was not present at the time of my arrival. I knew several of them because I knew them prior to them retreating to the bush.

Upon arrival, I was asked to explain why I had taken the

trip. Those that knew me from before asked me about their families. I took advantage of their excitement to sensitize those I knew and the others. We talked about the presidential and parliamentary elections, the reintegration of the civilian and armed forces and the Gacaca.

Often lauded by international observers, Rwanda's gacaca courts have long been held up by their proponents as a model for successful, post-conflict reconciliation efforts. Confronted with the nearly impossible challenge of rebuilding a country after genocide, Rwanda needed a mechanism to hold those who committed genocide accountable in an efficient and effective manner. The solution was gacaca: a system of 12,000 community-based courts that sought to try genocide criminals while pro-

moting forgiveness by victims, ownership of guilt by criminals, and reconciliation in communities to move forward. While the organizers and leaders of the genocide were mostly sent for trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in Arusha, Tanzania, gacaca courts tried more than 1 million ordinary people who served as the foot soldiers of the genocide.

[SOURCE](#)

We talked about how they could access true information from Rwanda through radio, newspapers, and other news media. We talked about the state of education, the economy, and the property that they left behind. We spoke about their objective of the war, and I explained that the war was not necessary as the country was promoting unity and reconciliation. In a nutshell, they probed into several issues, and I duly responded, this took two weeks day after day.

Although some of them received me with good intentions, many others thought I was a government spy since I was praising the government policies. They wanted me arrested, and some even thought it would be most ideal to have me killed.

Luckily my husband joined me, having returned from the deeper crevices of the forest before they took final decision about my fate. After three days of in-depth dialogues with my husband, he was the first to lay down his arms. This was pivotal. Four days later, we devoted the subsequent days to plan

our exit out of the forest. My husband Jerome Ngendahimana was a Colonel in charge of the intelligence service, which translated into a robust exit strategy. It took us four days to arrive in Rwanda. We were well-received by the government. We continued our conversations with the high authorities. Consequently, two weeks later, I went back to keep convincing the Chief of the FDRLR, General Paul Rwarakabije to lay down arms and return to Rwanda. Fortunately, he accepted and returned with several military men and a group of officers.

Upon return to Rwanda, many of them were reinstated back into the army and many others went back to their civilian lives. My husband Ngendahimana Jerome is a living example. My husband was integrated in 2004 as a colonel, then later he was promoted Brigadier General by H.E the President of the Republic in 2005 and Major General in 2010, and appointed Reserve Force Deputy Chief of Staff. position held until his retirement in July 2018.

Anne-Marie Musabyemungu

After this turning point in my life, I continued my peace-building work, working with refugees, returnees and mobilizing FDLR members still in DRC. In 2008, there have been notable results in unity and reconciliation the Gacaca Courts have brought satisfactory results, many refugees and a big number of FDLR combatants had returned. It was at this point that I felt the need to be part of the decision-making sphere as a woman. I also wanted to test the level of appreciation of the population living on the border of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda about the work done. After an encouraging

campaigning period, the people elected me to represent them in Parliament. By this, I had seen a high level of their appreciation.

In all the work that I have been doing to promote peace and security, the political will of the state has been crucial. In Rwanda, His Excellency the President of Rwanda Paul Kagame has been a cornerstone to ensuring that women are meaningfully engaged in all peace and governance processes – with a special emphasis on fortifying the education of the young girls.



Photo taken at the occasion of Kigali International Conference on the Role of Security Organs in Ending Violence against Women and Girls 26 – 27 October 2010. Anne Marie Musabyemungu (MP) and two officers (military and police) represented Rwanda at the Conference.



COLONEL, DR. THEOPHILIA SHAANIKA

Colonel Dr. THEOPHILIA SHAANIKA



Colonel Dr. Theophilia Shaanika is a woman peace and security activist in uniform that has served in several capacities at country level in Namibia to SADC level to continental level, serving at the African Union. Colonel Shaanika has played important roles in several mediation processes across Africa.

My journey as a woman peace and security activist started in the early 80s, when I decided to join the liberation of my country and served as a female combatant.

Having experienced the brutality of the colonial war, joining the liberation of Namibia as a fighter engaged in real combat meant a “no return” journey for me. Thus, joining the Namibia National Defense Force – a male-dominated arena – was a “fait accompli” to occupy my rightful position in the defense and protection of my country and people to pave the way for younger women’s inclusion in the defense and security sector and advocate for women’s security in Namibia and the SADC region.

Although I had several other career choices, I believed joining the defense force would be the best option to advance the women’s agenda, regardless of the innumerable hurdles.

I abide by the command, “go I will go, and come I will come”. As a soldier, I comprehended that it is my duty to protect civilians, prevent conflict, reduce violence especially against women and children and all vulnerable people like the elderly and persons living with disabilities. I was convinced that it was my due obligation to strengthen security in the conflict country to be able to assume these responsibilities.

Additionally, I draw my inspiration from the fallen heroines and heroes, who had died in the line of duty during the liberation struggle. I felt obliged to finish my journey to ensure that the stories of those forgotten, especially the women and girls, were told so that they could be written. Many of these folks died while defending the rights and dignity of others. There were many who operated under extreme pressures – including being mentally confined, and many of these died in incarceration. These are the realities that have long been excluded in decision-making spaces and processes, simply because women’s issues are viewed as peripheral issues.

After the development of the Namibia Gender Policy in 1990 in the newly independent Namibia at the time, I continued with my soldierly career where I had taken a vow of service to uphold peace and security of Namibia and of the world.

On the 14th of March 2010, I arrived at my mission area in Liberia following the establishment of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) in October 2003 mandated to “support and protect” the people of Liberia, especially women. On this peace-keeping mission, I was focused on gender mainstreaming in Liberia.

In 2021, I was appointed to the SADC Liaison Office team

that led to the successful election in Madagascar in 2013. I was the only woman in the SADC Liaison office, and consequently, I contributed to the peaceful negotiation led by former President of Mozambique, H.E. President Joachim Chisano.

In 2015, in line with the AU reinvigorated commitment to a people-centered agenda, I was appointed to represent Namibia at the Office of the Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on Women, Peace and Security. Since that appointment, I have been assigned to represent that office at various platforms as part of the mandate's advocacy and policy implementation endeavors.

Contrariwise, in my WPS work and special assignments, I have encountered several challenges with the most conspicuous one being uniformed women's limited access to key decision-making spaces and management levels. It is still challenging to have a meeting or train women at their home units or at the SADC levels. When it comes to meetings and awareness training, some authorities deliberately send junior officers to senior officers' meetings, just because it is about the gender agenda. Unfortunately, once a female officer ascends to the top without the knowledge of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, it often becomes an obstacle for junior female officers.

Alas, there has never been a better time to be a woman. Working in a male-dominated sector has not been an easy path, however it is a journey that has been, and continues to be rich with experiences, after having worked with progressive individuals. As a woman, I remain vulnerable and marginalized

in one way or the other but remain positive in overcoming the impediments. Early in my work, I recognized that gender barriers come in multiple forms, but I have always set ambitious targets for myself and put in hard work, even when times were bleak. My coping mechanisms have always circumnavigated around understanding that in every career, to be successful, one must work hard and remain focused. In my opinion, being a soldier, I never entertain an inferiority complex. I strive to remain professional and enlightened whilst I train and educate myself.

I continue to be inspired by women combatants and peace-builders and what they do to keep optimism in their lives and that of others. Women are expected to do 10 times more, to "prove themselves", yet there is little to no recognition of the incredible work that they do. I think these women are my real heroines and inspirers. States need to consider the establishment of National Women Museums to hold the names and stories of women peacebuilders within their areas of action and influence.

Today, I am part of the African Women Peace Network that represents the nucleus of an ever-expanding critical mass of gender practitioners that are committed to changing the narrative on women, peace, and security in Africa, and themselves are agents of change. My prospects in this work are to augment and further advocate through different platforms to ensure that gender mainstreaming in peace and security processes remain part of the agenda.

Colonel Dr. Theophilia Shaanika



Colonel Shaanika was part of a high level delegation on a solidarity mission to South Sudan led by H.E.Madam Bineta Diop, Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC) on Women, Peace and Security from 6th to 9th December 2016



CECILIA ALUPO ENGOLE

CECILIA ALUPO ENGOLE

Teso Women Peace Activists



Cecilia Alupo Engole is the Co-Founder and Executive Director of Teso Women Peace Activists (TEWPA) in Uganda. Through her organization, Cecilia has played a critical role in documenting the lived experiences of women survivors of the war and conflict in the Teso region in Eastern Uganda.

For the last three decades, the Teso region in Eastern Uganda has been ravaged by war and armed conflict. Ten years into the conflict, the United Nations Security Resolution 1325 could not have been more relevant to the context in my region. The observations of the Resolution – that civilian, particularly women and children, account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict, including as refugees and internally displaced persons, and increasingly are targeted by combatants and armed elements – were visibly witnessed in Teso.

At the time when the Resolution was passed and being popularized in Uganda, the Women International Peace Centre (WIPC) formerly known as ISIS-WICCE were training women on rights and peacebuilding processes targeting women from war affected areas of the Kasese, Luwero and Acholi, Lango, Teso and Karamoja regions. At the time, I was a district counsellor in the Katakwi district of North-Eastern Uganda prior to being asked to join the first cohort of 45 women from the selected conflict-affected areas to be trained since I had first-hand experience of the impact of the war in the communities.

During the concentration of cattle rustling in the Katakwi district in 2000 to 2003, and the invasion of the Lord's Resistance Army, several activists and I conducted a survey on the suffering of the women and girls during the armed conflicts. During this survey, the women painfully relayed to us how they were gang-raped, and several shared that they were impaled by any object that they could lay their hands on – ranging from metal rods and tree branches to wooden sticks. Many were abducted whilst others became widows and their property snatched away. They indicated that some were taken away as sex slaves, while others became wives of commanders. The stories that were being documented in this survey were tormenting. They went on to share that many of them had to dig mass graves of the war victims in the Ngariam and Obalanga sub-counties.

While we were conducting this survey, we almost ran into an ambush where we later learned that cattle rustlers had killed 21 civilians in Ngariam. I recall we picked up a baby who was suckling at her dead mother's chest. My colleague, the Late Akurut Scola, took this baby in as her own.

Localisation entails a people-based, bottom-up strategy that enhances local ownership and participation for more effective policymaking and implementation. The approach was cited in the reports of the United Nations Secretary-General to the Security Council each year from 2012 to 2015, in addition to the UN Women WPS report (2015), as a key tool for translating policy into practice.

In Uganda, the localisation process was introduced by CSOs in partnership with the Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development. The process directly engages local authorities, security agencies, cultural and religious leaders, teachers, security sector institutions, CSOs, youth and the media within a particular local government to

design interventions to address local issues that undermine the peace and security of women. Localisation facilitates greater cross-sectoral cooperation and collaboration, including among local government departments, and with CSOs and other development partners working in a given district. The strategy promotes systematic coordination between national and local government authorities, promotes local ownership of the agenda and supports identification of concrete actions for implementation at the community level.

SOURCE

Whilst I was personally touched by what I witnessed and heard, these lived experiences stirred up anger enough to start Teso Women Peace Activists (TEWPA) along with Amaso Christine, the late Rita Etyang, Akelo Florence and Kedi Rose to share with the world these experiences and advocate for the voiceless. On this journey, I was further encouraged by the training on women's and girls' rights, conflict resolution and transformation processes that I received from ISIS-WICCE, now the Women International Peace Centre.

After the series of training, I graduated with a certificate in Peacebuilding, Conflict Transformation and Human Rights. This was monumental for me because that was an entry into peacebuilding work, but more importantly, an opportunity to use my newfound voice to advocate for the protection of the rights of the women and youth who had been adversely affected by the conflict.

I was motivated by the fact that previous peace initiatives never meaningfully included grassroots women. Those involved were women who were already holding leadership positions but even then, these women were limited in the "meetings" of

so many men. This observation propelled me to think about starting this initiative that would meaningfully and actively involve grassroots women in peacebuilding activities, with the aim of changing the status quo and discard the belief that a woman's place is only in the kitchen.

We started work meeting under a tree. Then we moved to a store in a neighbor's house before we were given a start-up fund of one million five hundred Uganda Shillings (UGX 1,500,000) to carry out research on the experiences of women and girls during armed conflicts in the Obalanga sub-county (now the Kapelebyong district).

TEWPA is exclusively known for their long and continued experience with implementing projects, programs, and interventions to strengthen democratization, protect human rights, advocate for Sexual Reproductive Health Rights, and enhance access to justice and peaceful co-existence. All this is being achieved through stimulating dialogue, through active involvement and participation of women and other key stakeholders in the Teso and Karamoja regions, through community level structures consisting of clan leaders, religious leaders, and cultural



A Community Baraza in Kadungulu sub-country, Serere district in Eastern Uganda organised by Teso Women Peace Activists (TEWPA) in 2017

institutions, using informal and formal justice mechanisms/systems in the two regions.

Today, we have successfully mobilized and engaged more than 300 women peace committees and at least 325 local peace mediators trained in women's rights and peacebuilding processes. We have trained over 120 teachers in children's rights and peacebuilding processes. These teachers manage the school peace and human rights clubs in over 60 schools in the Teso/Karamoja regions. This series of actions culminated in the creation of more than 40 active women CBOs. We use peace as the entry point to all our interventions.

Today, TEWPA is a very strong member of the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP), which aims to build

equal, resilient, and peaceful communities across the globe. Through the national and regional coalitions with similar mandates, TEWPA advocates for women peace and human security priorities with emphasis on localizing the National Action Plan to address the needs of marginalized communities affected by conflict in the Teso districts.

One of the main activities that we are doing to localize the National Action Plan on 1325 is building and strengthening the capacity of institutions to coordinate effective GBV response and conflict prevention. Some more practical activities that we have undertaken are: holding community dialogues for conflicting communities; running a radio programme on peaceful co-existence, to mention a few.



ATOCH DENG

ATOCH DENG



Atoch Deng is a grassroots mobilizer and peacebuilder from Abyei, South Sudan. Her work on tackling sexual and gender-based violence, especially around provision of counselling and psychosocial support to survivors has been pivotal in the community that she works and lives in.

The security situation and intercommunal relations in Abyei have always been a point of discussion for many residents of the area and other actors within the peace and security arena. Many of us have witnessed this area ravaged by the conflict between the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya Communities.

When the young men and boys were being forcefully recruited into the armed forces, the women and girls were left at home to fend for their dependents. Many of us had to forge a living amidst very dire situations.

In the aftermath of the crisis of 2011 in Abyei, I was elected the Deputy Chairperson of Piontok Women's Association – an association that was founded with the objective of women championing peace in Abyei. This came at a time when the war had left scars on many of our lives. I had been recently widowed, forcing me into a more vulnerable position of raising seven children single-handedly. I had to forge this living on an income from selling used bed sheets in the local market in Abyei. Many women in my community were bearing the brunt of the conflict. This has been the order of the day for decades – with very little improvement in the situation.

Amidst a very volatile situation, many fellow women that wanted to play a role in building peace in our community came together to formulate ways in which we can contribute to a greater good for us and our families. In 2011, the Piontok Women's Association was formed. This was a timely decision made by the women since the conversation around the women peace and security agenda was being popularized on the margins of the peace talks that were being facilitated between the two factions of Misseriya and Ngok-Dinka in Abyei.

For the last ten years, Piontok Women's Association has worked closely with the women's union in Misserya to bring the women of Misserya and Ngok-Dinka to discuss ways in which we can work together to build peace in Abyei. In these communal settings, we have had dialogue around women influencing their male relatives especially husbands and sons to shun resorting to conflict. This approach has been especially successful in influencing the norms and attitudes around toxic masculinity.

Some of the other approaches have been centered around co-opting male youth into income-generating activities that simultaneously keep them away from trouble. An example of how this approach has been effective is with the involvement of young men in assisting to construct the roads. This in turn has meant that these roads have enabled expectant mothers, the sick and elderly in our community to access health facilities with less exposure to hazards on their way to seek medical care.

Through the support of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), the formation of Community Protection Committees has been a welcome initiative in ensuring that our communities have some form of protection through maintaining law and order. These committees have been an effective alternative to community policing. This has created a sense of ownership amongst the volunteer group. I am currently the Sexual and Gender-based Violence Focal Point. My role is centered around providing counselling and psychosocial support to survivors and sensitizing the community on prevention and responses to sexual and gender-based violence, which continues to be used as a weapon of war in the area.



SULAFABABO

SULAFABA BABO



When I am asked what my vision for Abyei is, I always affirm that peace must prevail in Abyei and the rest of Sudan. Hailing from the Misseriya community in Abyei has seen me witnessing a multitude of violations and injustices against the people of Abyei. The political turmoil has lasted long enough that now, all that the people of Abyei want is peace.

I started my social activism more than 15 years ago, working directly with women to address issues of empowerment while countering the narrative on war and conflict. Abyei is supposed to be the bridge between Sudan and South Sudan, however, the roots of the conflict dates back more than three decades. Despite the involvement of the regional and international community, our community continues to be ravaged by unrest.

Due to the unfortunate fact that women from our community have borne the brunt of war for many years, we started to organize ourselves into groups that could influence and promote a culture of peace and reconciliation. Previously, the role of women in the conflict also circled around motivating the men at the frontlines. The Hakamat women traditionally chant songs that instigate tribal war leaders to fight. However, when we started promoting a narrative and culture of peace, we

now had the opportunity to teach these women ways to propagate peace messages through peace songs and drama. In the chants, the Hakamat call for virtues of peaceful co-existence. Their role as agents of peace continues to be acknowledged in all subsequent calls for peace.

I came to terms with my reality when I acknowledged that the community that I live in is one of fighters and warriors. That said, the Abyei Women's Union has made it our sole purpose to let the language of peace be the common language of our community. We are actively trying to cultivate the spirit of harmony within the families and the neighboring communities. The women in Abyei have a strong spirit of collaboration and readiness to keep pushing forward toward mainstreaming peace and security. One strategy that has worked well in our context is organizing open space rallies to garner the attention of the community to build a movement that can consistently advocate for peace and an end to violence against women, girls, and other vulnerable groups of the community. One such rally was the "No for War. Yes for Peace" campaign which ultimately raised an alarm for community leaders, civil society and the regional and international community. Our demand was clear – considering all the attempts that have been made to restore peace in the area.

According to the Abyei Protocol, a 2004 agreement between the GoS [Government of Sudan] and the SPLM/A [Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army] to resolve the Abyei conflict, a referendum on the future of Abyei – to decide whether it should be part of Sudan or secede – was to be held at the same time as the South Sudan referendum on the 9th of January 2011. However, the referendum has not yet been held as disputes persist between the parties concerning voters' eligibility. Sudan insists that large numbers of Misseriya no-

mads, who spend several months a year grazing cattle in Abyei, are eligible to vote, whereas South Sudan backs the Dinka Ngok's demand that only the historical inhabitants of the region (mostly Dinka Ngok) be allowed to vote. Though both parties accepted a 2009 ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration on the boundaries of Abyei, the two countries have so far failed to reach agreement on the final border demarcation in the Abyei area.

[SOURCE](#)

Furthermore, earlier when the women's movement in Abyei was concerting our efforts, we realized that the women were ahead of the men in understanding the need to popularize the language of peace. The men were being left behind in initiatives. Worse still due to the cultural norms and attitudes that limit the involvement of women in public spheres, we had to push against a wall of resistance. Years later, we continue to do this against a political and volatile context. On the positive side, after tirelessly advocating to the men, we have been able to secure their acceptance and support of our activities as women peace champions.

Personally, being involved in the peace and reconciliation activities between the Misseriya and the Ngok-Dinka has enabled me to see a future of peace – contrary to the pessimism that surrounds the situation in Abyei. In April 2021, several of us from the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka participated in the

Aweil Community Peace Initiative supported by the United Nations. I salute the United Nations for tirelessly maintaining and developing peace by supporting peace processes at all levels. In this space, I made it my mission to amplify the voice of women. The women of Abyei must be meaningfully engaged in all the peace processes and structures, if we are going to achieve sustainable peace in my community. In this space, and all other spaces, I assert that the women of Abyei must be able to regain their full rights from men and live in harmony with our other brothers and sisters. The laws and policies must be amended to recognize the rights of women.

I have hope that my vision will come to pass if local women activists are supported in all their localized peace initiatives on promoting the women, peace and security agenda. We need to be supported with tools and skills that will enable us to keep delivering the message of peace to all – leaving no one behind.



UNAMID, in collaboration with the North Darfur Committee on Women, organised an open day session on UN Security Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security



AMINA HAGI ELMI

AMINA HAGI ELM I



Amina Haji Elmi is the Co-Founder and Executive Director of Save Somali Women and Children (SSWC). She is a dedicated advocate for hundreds of thousands of displaced Somalia women, ensuring that they have access to sanitary pads and basic hygiene when they menstruate. She is also an avid advocate for Somali women's active and meaningful engagement in political processes.

After the collapse of our central government in 1991, I became an IDP in my own country. And having seen the difficulties of the circumstances I went into, I decided to stand up to help vulnerable women, lobby for peace, and to be the voice of the voiceless.

When my family had to flee Somalia's capital, Mogadishu, because it had turned into a battle turf for armed militias, my period had come, equally unwelcome. This nerve-racking experience coupled with the responsibility of caregiving to my immediate family led me to think of other women in similar situations to mine, or worse. The state of vulnerability that I was in was palpable. That day was a turning point that led me to devote my life to serving and protecting the rights of displaced persons especially women and children.

In 1992, I founded Save Somali Women and Children (SSWC) with the main objective of providing dignity kits to groups of vulnerable and marginalized women and girls and campaigning for the restoration of their dignity. These kits

include washable sanitary pads, underwear, dresses, shawls, petticoats, head scarves and soap. Apart from restoring the dignity of women and girls, the items in each dignity kit provide basic hygiene needs.

My most notable achievement was to create and standardize dignity kits in the shelter cluster for women and girls, to establish centers and safe houses for vulnerable women in IDPs and host communities as well, support GBV survivors, and provide livelihood skills training for women households and young girls.

When disaster or conflict breaks out, the international community rushes to give people water, food, and shelter yet there is a need to salvage women's dignity. Since 2011, Save Somali Women and Children (SSWC) has distributed more than 70,000 dignity kits to displaced women and girls in southern and central Somalia.

On the political front and as part of the Sixth Clan initiative, I was among the Somali women leaders who created a window

Mogadishu is home to about 600,000 Somali refugees, according to the UN, making the city among Africa's most crowded hubs for internally displaced people. In the unplanned urban camps, makeshift huts provide little security for women and girls, and [a report](#) by Human Rights Watch (HRW) has shown that women face a significant

risk of rape in the huts at night. The situation is becoming even more precarious as land prices rise and women are being pushed further out of the city, which means longer distances to health-care facilities and potential jobs.

[SOURCE](#)

of opportunity to be part of the peace and reconciliation conferences and succeeded in securing 25 seats in the first parliament after the collapse of the central government and women ministries as well. Central to my messaging while doing this advocacy was the construction of community acceptance that women can be part of the higher political negotiation table through mapping and allocating one seat for women in every three seats in the parliament, one seat for which only women could contest. All this was critical against the background that the cultural and political environment in Somalia is not conducive for women because of the clan dynamics and male-dominated politics.

When the country went into civil strife, and clans were led by warlords, the situation did not allow us to just sit and watch the suffering of women, girls, children, and elderly being displaced from their homes and living in harsh conditions in IDPs and the killings of our boys, husbands, and brothers in the name of their clan. This prompted us to come together as women peace activists and unite our voices in search for peace and security.

The priorities for women, peace and security in Somalia and Africa at large are protection for women and girls; establish-

ment of special centers and safe houses for livelihood skills training, access to justice and counselling for women and girls, and support for women to meaningfully engage in politics.

In a patriarchally-run country, being a woman peace activist is a challenge. Acceptance of our role as part of peace and development contributors has been difficult. Through the unified effort of women from different clans, and direct meetings with elders, politicians, and civil society leaders, our advocacy has reached a stage where our work has been praised and contributed to the reconciliation and peace process of the country.

Creating awareness on women leadership is a critical piece that can build women up in terms of security and peacebuilding. This will ensure women take up leadership roles and get involved in making decisions at round tables that are dominated by men. Peace starts with women since they can marshal many followers within the community set-up.

It is very difficult to escape the risks involved in being women activists in Somalia and we are always at the forefront to leave a long-lasting peace in the country. We are at risk every minute and we are determined to do what is right in building an inclusive and shared Africa where all (women and men) promote peace and security.



Mama Amina with other women activists at a women's leadership forum organized by the Save Somali Women and Children (SSWC)



PETRONILLE VAWEKA RUTAYA

PETRONILLE VAWEKA RUTAYA



Petronille Vaweke Rutaya is a humanitarian non-governmental organization activist. She was the interim chairperson of the Ituri **Interim Assembly** of **Ituri Interim Administration**, while in transition from the status of a district of **Oriental Province** to a province of the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**. She worked with the **Ituri Pacification Commission** in 2003, which helped establish the assembly.

My journey as a negotiator commenced on the margins of the Ituri Conflict when, in 1998, the Democratic Republic of Congo was torn apart by several rebellions in the eastern part of the national territory. The Ituri Province, then Ituri District, was under Ugandan occupation. Unfortunately, the absence of state authorities and partisan justice pushed various communities to take charge of themselves by creating their own militia. To settle their conflicts, mainly of land nature, these communities resorted to armed confrontations. Ituri was a powder keg.

It was within this powder keg that I started as a humanitarian worker in Water and Sanitation (WASH) to provide support to communities in the IDP camps. Within this despairing context, I negotiated with the leaders of the militias who previously held the main ground so that humanitarians had a clear path to assist the displaced from different antagonistic communities who had a visceral hatred for one another.

In 2003, I was elected President of the Interim Special Assembly, a political body that was created during the war to compensate for the lack of state authority. In this role, I worked

to stop hostilities and bring communities in conflict together. In my work and messaging, I continue to encourage peaceful co-existence through mediation and negotiation with armed groups, in addition to effective withdrawal of the Ugandan army in line with the Lusaka Accords. Likewise, along with the UN Observation Mission in Congo (MONUC), I worked to secure camps for the Internally Displaced People. But most important of all, I launched a public awareness campaign calling out all forms of violence against women and girls, and even went ahead to put pressure on armed groups to denounce the trend.

In 2004, I was appointed District Commissioner, Ituri by Presidential decree. As the first woman to serve in this role, I worked tirelessly for the restoration of the authority of the state, including justice and security through the rehabilitation of an efficient army of a local police force and the restoration of all the administrative services of the state. I also actively partook in the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) program for ex-combatants, through which child soldiers were freed and many girls released by the armed groups in Mahagi. I also worked for the return and integration

of displaced people in addition to restoration of security in their villages.

In 2006, I worked with commitment for the successful organization of democratic and transparent elections in the District of Ituri after sensitizing the population on the constitutional referendum in 2005 and the need for their active participation in the elections.

Since then, I have continued to work for Women, Peace and Security by witnessing the signing of the Peace Accords in my country and by following up on the different commitments made therein. Accordingly, As part of civil society, I actively participated in the monitoring of the Goma Accords with the Government and armed groups. I also supported the various disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs for ex-combatants by working as an expert in conflict management for the national stabilization and reconstruction program called STAREC from June 2009 to July 2021.

I am currently monitoring the Women, Peace and Security situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in the Great

Lakes region through the NGO "Women Committed to Peace" that I am in the process of setting up. In January 2021, I was appointed to the Panel of Experts responsible for accompanying the mandate of the Democratic Republic of Congo to the Chairpersonship of the African Union. I am currently monitoring the situation of Women, Peace and Security in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in the Great Lakes region through the non-governmental organization, 'Women Committed to Peace' that I am currently setting up.

I have had a number of emblematic achievements within my journey of promoting Women, Peace and Security, some of which include the cessation of hostilities between communities in conflict by signing peace agreements; the creation of nutritional centers for the children of families displaced by the war in DRC; the release of nine "blue helmets" hostages, including one Moroccan 15 kms from the city of Bunia and nine Nepalese about 100 kms from Bunia, capital of the District; the reorganization of state administrative services and the restoration of security in an administrative entity formerly under

Rich in natural resources, Ituri has been the theater of some of Congo's worst fighting. Tens of thousands died between 1999 and 2007 after a power struggle between rebel groups devolved into ethnic violence – much of it between the Hema and Lendu.

After a decade of relative peace, conflict returned in late 2017 when hundreds of mostly Hema civilians were killed in waves of attacks that caught residents off guard and overwhelmed local authorities and aid agencies alike.

SOURCE

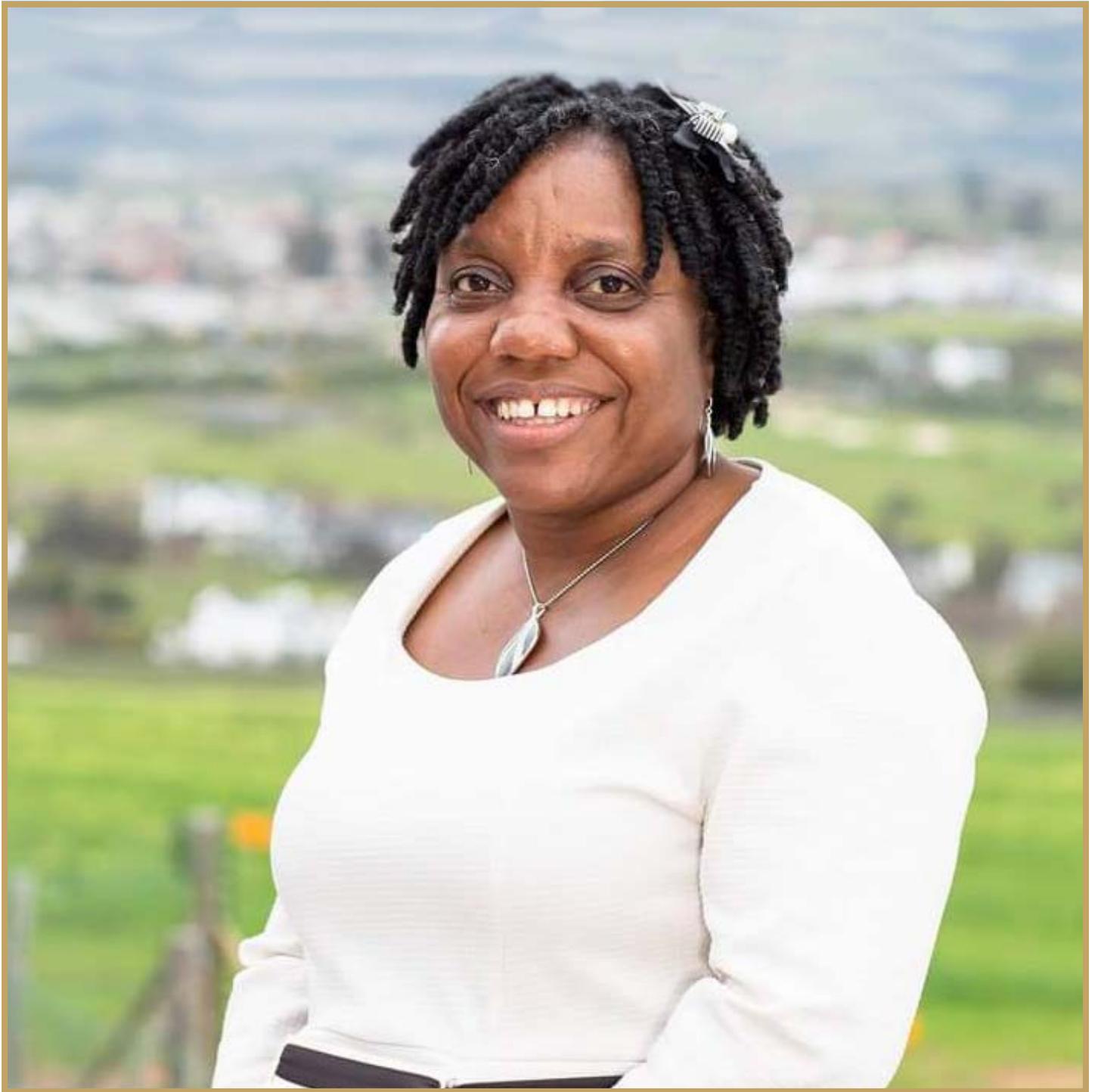
rebel control; the persuasion of displaced persons to return to their homes and the successful organization of their return and reintegration; and the liberation of child soldiers from the hands of warlord Peter Karim.

The myth of women's inability to build a nation and contribute to peacebuilding is what continues to fuel my journey as a woman peacebuilder. I am wholly committed to ending the suffering of women and girls who are victims of rape, sexual violence, assassinations, and all kinds of atrocities. I am also determined to put an end to the inter-ethnic war in my country which has caused mass deaths.

Conversely, on this journey, I have encountered hiccups not limited to being an unarmed woman in the face of armed men. The work of many women peacebuilders is characterized by insufficient financial and logistical resources which continues to be a challenge that we must navigate. Eerily, I have had to adapt my mindset to seeing warlords as dialoguers despite the magnitude of abuses they have committed. To manage these trials, I have had to overcome fear and find trust within myself.

I have also had to change my view of warlords and their troops to see them as human beings capable of changing their behavior to instill a mindset of peace.

As we mainstream the promotion of a women, peace and security agenda in the Great Lakes region and Africa at large, we must prioritize the eradication of armed groups; the inclusion and participation of women in all peace and security processes, including mediation and negotiation; women and girls' access to education and proper health care as well as their empowerment. We must also see to the establishment of quotas for women in all decision-making bodies at the local, national, regional, and continental levels, and the involvement of Heads of State and Governments at national, regional, and continental level for the effective application of United Nations Security Resolution 1325.



ESTHER OMAM NJOMO

ESTHER OMAM NJOMO



Esther Omam Njomo is the Founder of Reach Out Cameroon, a women and youth-centered not-for-profit organization in Buea. She is an active woman peace and security campaigner.

When I founded Reach Out Cameroon in 1996, this move was in response to the rife HIV epidemic in Cameroon. At the time, the aim of the organization was to provide support to persons living with HIV in rural communities in the Southwest Region who were invisible and peripheral to government and civil society efforts. The abuses and hardships I suffered when growing up in addition to the inequalities suffered by women and girls living in the remotest parts of the Southwest Region of Cameroon informed my decision to forfeit government job offers, and instead focus on fighting for the rights of women and children

Shortly after establishing Reach Out Cameroon, my focus turned to peacebuilding and human rights when I witnessed first-hand the plight of women and young girls in the Bakassi peninsula, a region devastated by the Cameroon-Nigeria conflict. In this work, I encountered and worked with women and child survivors of rape and kidnappings. Providing a platform for these women at a march parade in 2014, in Buea, before the Head of State for the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the reunification of Cameroon, was a moment of inspiration, enough to jolt me further into the peacebuilding work that I was doing.

In 2016, Cameroon began to experience a crisis that has been dubbed one of the most neglected humanitarian crises

in the world, where the conflict between the two Anglophone regions of the Northwest and Southwest has been the cause of over 3,700 deaths and internal displacement of over 712,000 persons. My work since then has primarily been focused on providing different pieces of peace to the conflict-affected communities.

The deterioration of the Anglophone crisis in 2018 was a pivotal moment in my journey as an activist advancing the women, peace, and security agenda. It has been in this context of heightened abuse of women's rights, including sexual and reproductive health rights and children's exploitation and exposure to social vices, that I have been spearheading the fight for a restoration of peace within the two conflicting regions and against the incessant disregard for women's and children's rights by the warring parties.

My work has spanned coordinating the first civilian action to advocate for an end to the Anglophone crisis through public lamentation campaigns and public peaceful demonstrations in both regions of the Northwest and Southwest to denounce the egregious acts of killings, kidnappings, lootings, and damage of properties – to facilitating the participation of women in the pre-consultations to the Major National Dialogue and women's participation in the Major National Dialogue itself.

I recall a memorable civil action where I led a peaceful march that was initially planned for 300 women, but instead drew more than 3500 women to denounce the Kumba School Massacre where on 24th October 2020, gunmen stormed a private school in Cameroon's Anglophone South-West region killing 7 children and injuring at least 13 others.

Although no one claimed responsibility for the killings, following a boycott of education in the Anglophone regions since 2017, this incident sparked a public outcry for an urgent need for peace and security to prevail in the country.

This journey has not been amiss of several challenges including the kidnapping of my children and frequent death threats. In April 2019, my daughter and son were kidnapped from Reach Out's office, on a mission that was meant for me. My children were held hostage for three days and it was an extremely traumatic personal experience. In two separate incidences, my family and I were brutalised at gunpoint at home, and many valuables were taken away.

Similarly in 2020, before the march in Kumba, I had no guarantee that the armed groups that were behind the massacre would not retaliate by making me a target, but I stood resilient amidst the fear that I would face a similar challenge to the one I had previously faced with my children being kidnapped.

I endured all these challenges amidst violent attacks by armed groups and frequent extortion. In 2016, the Reach

Out organization vehicle was set ablaze by non-state armed groups. On several occasions, Reach Out staff were kidnapped, yet we remain consistent in our humanitarian and peacebuilding work.

In this work at the frontline, I have come to witness first-hand that peace means different things to different people. To the internally displaced girl living in a remote location, peace may mean having a dignity kit to manage her menstrual hygiene; to a mother who has lost her children, it may mean healing through mental health care and psychosocial support. In conflict and post-conflict settings, there exist different pieces of peace for survivors.

Reach Out Cameroon continues to work with vulnerable groups within communities - assisting them to navigate post-conflict restoration and reconciliation. The crisis left many without means of livelihood thus Reach Out has stepped in to develop and implement capacity building programmes centered around livelihood and skills acquisition.



©Kouagheu

Schoolchildren, their parents and teachers hold a protest after gunmen opened fire at a school, killing at least six children according to the authorities, in Kumba, Cameroon October 25th, 2020. REUTERS/Josiane Kouagheu



JANE MACHIRA

JANE MACHIRA



The Hon. Jane Machira popularly known as Mama Amani is a Kenyan legislator, peace, and human rights activist. She has several years of experience in community development where she is identified with several peace initiatives.

I was born in Laikipia County in Kenya. Even though I had opportunities to live and work outside the County, after I started my family, I raised my four children in Laikipia County. It is a region I am very familiar with. I have witnessed the development, the challenges and have knowledge of the prospects that lie within the County. This is how my activism began. Having witnessed and experienced first-hand how instability and poverty ravaged families and how women struggled to navigate the challenges, I was convinced mobilizing change from the bottom-up was a strategy that would bring long-term and sustainable change. I began by having informal discussions with women at the church and in our table-banking groups on how we could turn around the cycle of poverty and instability through small efforts such as having the discussions with our husbands and sons, encouraging the church leaders to enhance calls for peace, for local leaders to be vigilant and bring perpetrators to book and so on.

These efforts, with time, became conversation starters and avenues for extended discussions and discourse. I then proceeded to join peace caravans that were organized by NGOs and the government to call for peace within the region. This expanded my network and exposure to the terrain and issues across the county. It was then in 1997 that I was employed as a Programs Officer at the Centre for Conflict Resolution-Kenya and formally continued the conflict resolution, mediation, and peace efforts in a formally structured way. My responsibilities

were to initiate and support initiatives to address the cycle of violent inter-ethnic conflict in the three neighboring counties of Laikipia, Samburu and Baringo that are inhabited by both farmers and pastoralists and has over the years recorded frequent cases of cattle rustling, human-wildlife conflict, and other security related issues. This was mostly attributed to competition over scarce and diminishing water and pastures, the proliferation of small arms and weapons, the decline of the role of community elders, political incitement, detrimental culture practices, marginalization, and insufficient state security personnel.

During this time, under the organization, we were able to train nearly 6,000 locals, village elders and the clergy as peacemakers and mediators to actively participate in community meetings (barazas), peace committees, peace caravans and to support the community elders in the arbitration function as local approaches to peacebuilding initiatives.

Throughout my journey, I have recorded several notable achievements that have given me gratification to see change in the county of Laikipia. Most importantly, I saw the reduction of the cycle of violent conflicts that always plagued the county, security has improved, the respect for human rights and good governance at the local level has also improved following the use of community-led strategies, there is inter-ethnic tolerance among members of different ethnic communities, and the implementation of sustainable prevention and management of



©UN Women Kenya/Luke Horswell

Local peace builders celebrate UNSCR1325 anniversary in Isiolo County, Kenya.

We must address all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls and traditional and harmful practices such as
Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

post-conflict reconstruction and development initiatives that have made it a safe environment for all, especially women and children. Another achievement I have recorded is breaking the ceiling and demonstrating that women can contribute meaningfully to the peace and security architecture that is mostly male dominated.

I was able to serve in the Laikipia District Peace Committee, during which we established policies and conflict resolution mechanisms. I was able to use sports as a reconciliation measure and see the positive impact where warring communities were brought together to either play or watch the football matches thus encouraging peaceful co-existence of communities. I was able to secure four training opportunities on conflict resolution and peace training in Arusha, Tanzania at the MS TCDC and enrolled over 500 locals drawn from the church clergy, local leaders, women, and youth to attend and benefit from the training. The efforts of these peacebuilding and conflict prevention initiatives had a positive impact by diffusing the tensions during the post-election violence of 2007-08 as the cosmopolitan counties had learned the aspects of peaceful co-existence and registered minimal conflicts and violence.

By demonstrating my leadership capabilities, I vied and was elected as the first-ever woman representative of Laikipia County. During this time, I had the structural capacity to

influence more change such as drilling five boreholes to address the underlying causes of conflict in some areas such as Doldol, Kia Ndege, Naibrom, and installing water pipes to supply water for 9 kms at the Makutano area in the Ngobit ward. I am very pleased to see all those water provision facilities fully operational to date. I expanded table-banking opportunities to allow over 1000 women from across the county to be trained on money saving, borrowing and investment and we joined the Joywo women organization; I was able to work closely with the national government to ensure adequate deployment of security personnel to conflict prone areas; I was able to sponsor over 700 children going to school through bursaries; and I provided sanitary towels to every school-going girl in the Laikipia North constituency. Education is important to get people out of poverty.

Within the work I am doing, there are critical recommendations that ought to be considered.

The women in Laikipia and across the continent critically need peace because we are disproportionately affected by instability as women and girls are sexually abused during crises. We are pushed into Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugee camps to live in precarious situations.

Women and girls need education. Education exposes us and gives us the ability to meaningfully participate in all sectors for instance as mediators in conflict situations.



Women Volunteers for Peace – WOVOP



Women Volunteers of Peace (WOVOP), a young women-led organization, was founded in May 2019, in Kisumu County, in the western region of Kenya. WOVOP started off as a Students' Talk Program hosted at Universities with an aim of enhancing the understanding of peace and identifying threats and issues that undermine peace in learning institutions, for instance strikes and school fires. The program also aimed at developing means through which these threats and triggers could be reported and mitigated, considering that Kisumu County has previously been a 'hotspot' for violence in every election cycle.

It was evident that the threats to peace in the learning institutions were spilling over to the community which then led to the creation of WOVOP. The organization was founded on the premise that there is an urgent need for resilience in communities due to the adverse nature of trauma in the communities that we work in. We considered it pertinent to initiate creative methods in which we can contribute to increasing young women's participation in peace processes. Within Kisumu County, an area of Kenya that is rife with inter-ethnic conflicts, we witnessed that women and girls were hesitant to speak about the atrocious crimes that were being committed in their communities lest they become targets to the perpetrators. Inter-ethnic conflict has always led to adverse effects on the social fabric of communities and their livelihood. This has evolved into a very devastating phenomenon. Typical of this volatility, women and girls often bear the brunt.

Against these dynamics, Women Volunteers of Peace considered it crucial to sow seeds of peace in the younger generation through Peace Corners. These Peace Corners have been hubs for women and girls to embrace the culture of sharing their worries and feelings for effective stress and trauma healing management. Through this program, we have created safe spaces and platforms for women to share their stories, learn and understand the different dynamics affecting peaceful co-existence. These corners have been created in learning institutions right from the primary level to the tertiary level.

Due to the COVID pandemic, our engagements had to shift focus to the general community with the establishment of Peace Corners in each of the 7 sub-counties of Kisumu County, each headed by 2 Peace Champions – a woman and a man. The aim of this structure was to engage young people, especially women, in identifying challenges and risks that undermine peace and security in the sub counties by placing them at the apex, playing a critical role in identifying, mitigating, and responding to conflicts in the community as well as uplifting their voices to be active participants in the conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Kisumu County.

WOVOP leverages digital technology through social media as a tool for advocating for a peace agenda by hosting monthly Twitter chats and Zoom meetings for gender and peace education purposes. Through these virtual spaces, we can popularize key messaging around peace in Kisumu and the rest of Kenya.

Currently, WOVOP is running a social media program called Mental Fridays on Instagram live dubbed "HOW ARE YOU?" which has culminated into an online and offline safe space that encourages open discussions on mental healing among women and girls to help break the stigma surrounding mental illness while also reminding the public that help is available. The online sessions are held every Friday hosting 3 people – one of them being a mental health expert to demystify mental healing within the Horn of Africa. The physical sessions are routine monthly check-ins with over 300 volunteers to enhance and inculcate resilience among young women and men within the western region of Kenya.

In early 2020, WOVOP rolled out a campaign called Color Up Peace – Kenya. The campaign, through partnership with Color Up Peace – Ukraine, seeks to invite people from all over the world to submit photographs of what peace represents to them. Later, these photographs are turned into coloring pages for other people to color in and share their visions of peace. The Color Up Peace campaign in Kenya is giving communities and individuals the opportunity to visually re-imagine their world to achieve social change. Art is a critical tool that can be engaged to popularize a culture of peace in our community. Hence, Kenya's country-specific coloring book is available for download on the Color Up Peace website.



AISHA EL-ZADMA

AISHA EL-ZADMA



Aisha El-Zadma is a Libyan peacebuilder whose work as a peace negotiator between warring communities has encouraged other women to take on the mantle of building lasting peace in Libya.

The beginning of my journey as a peacebuilder in 2018 was triggered by the worst face of the conflict between two tribes - Awlad Sulaiman and Qadhadhfa. In 2011, the conflict began with a discussion turned into a heated argument later resulting into conflict. The conflict then became an armed conflict and ended up in war. Prior to this, the two tribes were living in peace and tranquility. When the conflict erupted, it was sad to witness a breakdown in brother and sisterhood of people who shared so much history. Over the years, several other Libyan tribes tried to intervene in the conflict - but they were failing to reach a point of compromise and reconciliation.

At a point in time, my husband and I welcomed several youths as visitors from the conflicting tribes of which we probed on why the war was happening. Unfortunately, the responses to our questions were not forthcoming. At that point,

they then intimated to us that they were not interested in the war. However, there was a bigger and covert issue. Each time that a family lost a male relative, the female relatives would push the young people, especially the young men, to act on revenge. It was evident that women were lighting the fire within the conflict.

With this painful realization, I was convinced that I had to play a part in peace and reconciliation between the two tribes. I consulted my brother and informed him of my intentions. I immediately started visiting different homes to mobilize women that would walk this journey with me. I started with the Awlad Sulaiman tribe and moved on to the Qadhadhfa tribe. When the two committees were formed, we started mobilizing elders, opinion leaders, local authorities, and well-wishers to join the efforts for reconciliation with the two committees.

Following the 2011 revolution, Benghazi came under the control of an assortment of armed groups and militias that had led the fight against the former regime. These forces were urbanized and mainly Islamist in orientation, some of them moderate and others more hard line. The overturn-

ing of the old order by these ideologically driven revolutionary forces did not sit well with the tribes, which tend, by their nature, to be prudent and adverse to change. Many elders and elites felt decidedly uncomfortable about the direction in which the revolution was headed.

[Pargeter, Alison. \(MAY 15, 2020\).](#)

["Haftar, Tribal Power, And the Battle for Libya". War on the rocks.](#)



A training workshop organized by the American Bar Association with the support from the Bureau of Democracy and Human Rights held in 2019. The workshop brought together local activists, reconciliation mediators and civil society organizations on working methods regarding transitional justice.

After a mass mobilization exercise, we planned for the first dialogue to happen in the town of Sirte. This dialogue had a fluid agenda because we aimed to have a frank and open discussion about the triggers of the conflict and the ways in which women could counter the narratives of conflict amongst the two tribes. As expected, we had those that were moving in tandem with the objective of the dialogue, and we had those that were visibly harboring ill thoughts of contention. After three long and laborious days of unpacking what the conflict meant for everyone in the room, we started to realize that the women in the space were offloading their sentiments. In the assessment of the conflict, it was also indicated that the conflict had spread beyond Sabha to the Southern part of Libya.

Subsequently, we organized a similar dialogue in Benghazi, taking on the same structure of a raw and open space to have frank discussions about the triggers and solutions to the conflict.

In both dialogues, my talks revolved around ending the conflict, reunification, and involvement of all citizenries in popularizing the language of peace through our religion.

In my recommendations, I candidly spoke about how youth can be encouraged to lay down their arms in a bid to mend the social fabric.

Coming out of that cycle of dialogues, we formulated a number of recommendations and commitments including; Upholding the nation's interest, avoiding arrogance and dom-



On the margins of the training workshop on transitional justice held in 2019, a meeting involving a representative from the Tabu tribe with whom the Awlad Suleiman tribe have had a long-standing dispute was held. This culminated into reconciliation between the two tribes.

ination that call for revenge; Maintaining the rights of the affected parties until justice is served; Disallowing subversive groups to lead the political scene of the two tribes; Working towards return of property to their rightful owners from the two tribes; Using all that we have been given to end the rift and fight sedition and its sources by creating a social system with all the ties that have been binding the two tribes throughout history; And, reconciliation between all members of the tribe, including all age groups, men and women.

Following this remarkable cycle of events, I founded an ini-

tiative called **Atnab Albeyet**. In this initiative, I work closely with Dr. Fayza Younes Al-Basha, Mrs. Salha Muhammad Abu Zaid, Mrs. Aisha Ahmed Hammouda, Mrs. Zahara Al-Sharif and Mrs. Congratulations Issa. The initiative does not follow any political orientation and does not operate or involve any civil society organization. The initiative's motivation is the friendly social bond provided to us through our faith. The objective of Atnab Albeyet is to bring together all Libyans under the pillars of the same house as members of one family.



SHE *Stands for Peace*

E-BOOK



UNITED NATIONS —

United Nations Office to the African Union (UNOAU)

- UN-AU High-Level Solidarity Missions on Women, Peace and Security, led by the UN Deputy Secretary-General and AU Special Envoy, which visited the Horn of Africa countries of Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia in 2019; Chad, Niger and South Sudan in 2018; and the Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria in 2017. The missions served to highlight the participation and leadership of women in peace and security, development and humanitarian issues in those countries, with an additional focus on zero tolerance for gender-based violence and climate security challenges.
- Participate in most meetings of the AUPSC, including the Annual Open Session of the AUPSC on WPS held every October.
- Publication of the "She Stands for Peace" book in 2020, to commemorate the 20th Anniversary of the adoption of UNSCR 1325 and to recognize the contributions of African women and women's networks in promoting peace and security in Africa. This was a joint UNOAU-AUC initiative.
- Production and broadcast of series 1 and 2 of the "She Stands for Peace" podcast series in 2021, comprising of 22 episodes, exploring the state of implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda and amplifying the voices of African women involved in these efforts.
- Production of the "She Stands for Peace" E-book and Website. The E-book will further explore the experiences of women in peace and security in Africa, while the website will serve as an information and communications tool on WPS in Africa. It will include a Community of Practice for registered members across the continent and the globe working to advance the role of women in peace and security.
- Support the African Women Leaders Network (AWLN) through development of a website and brand identity, as well as supporting the work of national chapters in 2021.
- Support the AUC in developing a Gender mainstreaming training curriculum and reader for AU peace support operations in 2021.
- Support the development and publication of the policy brief on "Digital inclusion of Women in peacebuilding in Africa" in 2021.
- Supporting the deployment of three women mediators from the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (Femwise-Africa) to support AU Liaison Offices in three countries.
- Co-convened the joint AU-UNOAU High-Level Dialogue to commemorate the 20th Anniversary of UNSCR 1325 under the theme "Advancing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: Political leadership, partnerships and concrete action beyond 2020."
- Co-convened a joint ECOWAS-UNOAU Dialogue to commemorate the 20th Anniversary of UNSCR 1325 and Gender Dialogue, both held in December 2020.
- Supported the AU Youth Envoy in 2020 by providing a mentorship and training programme for young African Women.

United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS)

- Thematic Exchange Sessions every two months on "Impact of COVID-19 on the Gender, Women, Peace and Security Agenda in West Africa and the Sahel"
- Symposium for commemoration of the 20th Anniversary of UNSCR 1325 (2000) on WPS
- 2021 Annual meeting of the Working group on women, youth, peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel
- 2021 Annual training session on 1325 (2000) reporting, monitoring and evaluation tools development and harmonizing
- Solidarity mission to Chad from 25 June – 2 July 2021 which included high level advocacy for women's involvement in the transition process

United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA)

- Joint UNOCA and ECCAS finalization and adoption of ECCAS RAP and Gabon NAP on UNSCR 1325 (2018).
- Joint UNOCA, ECCAS ministry of women, CSOs, RCO/UNCT country visit and workshop in preparation of Equatorial Guinea and Sao Tome Principe NAPS on UNSCR 1325 and follow up of Chad NAP UNSCR 1325 (2021).
- Joint UNOCA, UN Women, RCO/UNCT workshop on WPS component of Sustaining peace Strategy (SPS) Congo, with a focus on re-prioritization, women's political participation, peace building, and community violence reduction. (2019-21)
- Joint UNOCA, DPPA, RCO, UNCT workshop on Sustaining peace Strategy (SPS) Chad to support women's participation in transition. (2021)
- UNOCA- ECCAS-DPPA joint XB Mediation project which supports women's participation in conflict prevention and resolution (2021)
- Kinshasa Conference on Women Peace and Security aimed at launching Central Africa Women Mediators Network (October 2021)

UN Office of the Special Envoy

- Gender, WPS Mapping workshop for representatives of m and Security Studies (IPSS) to take stoke of existing initiat
- UN-IGAD Joint initiative to review and develop the Region (WPS agenda for IGAD (in process)
- Mainstreaming Gender, Women Peace and Security in the Prevention Strategy for the Horn of Africa – Continuous

United Nations Multidimensional Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)

- High level nation reflection workshop on women participat resulting in the inclusion of 9 women from the signatory p of the Peace Agreement (November 2020)
- Women situation rooms for inclusive transition and electio
- The "Assises Nationales de la Refondation" include over 3

unoau.unmissions.org

Color indicates UN mission's territory cover:

-  Overlapping of two missions shading same territory
-  Overlapping of three missions shading same territory
-  Location of UN mission office

United Nations Multidimensional Mission in the Central African

- Joint UN / EU / AU analysis of the CAR peace process from a in June 2020 and resulted in Pertinent recommendations fo
- Joint initiative MINUSCA/UNDP/UNWOMEN: Establishment for 2020-21 Elections in the 16 prefectures, including Ban
- Evaluation report on women's participation in elections and a

WPS IN AFRICA MAP

for the Horn of Africa (OSE-HoA)

member states, CSO, IGAD and Institute for Peace
ives in the Horn of Africa (2019)

al Action Plan (RAP) on Women Peace and Security

implementation of the UN Comprehensive Regional

onal integratd Stabilization

ion to political and peace process (January 2020)
parties participating to the Monitoring Committee

ons launched (October 2021)

5% of women in their leading commissions.



nal Integrated Stabilization Republic (MINUSCA)

gender perspective which was initiated in 2019 and finalized
r strengthening the role of women in peace processes in CAR

of Women Situation Room« des cases de veille»
gui, the capital conducted in 2020/2021.

analysis of electoral violence against women in the CAR

United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL)

- CSOs meeting on political participation, elections and implementation of the 30% representation of women which aims towards conducting the high-level strategy meeting.
- Discussion with women from different political parties on women in political parties, political participation and election laws. Discussion on building capacity of women units at the police force aimed at including women in the security sector.
- Discussion with Women of the LPDF, House of Representative and women in political parties aimed at bringing the women together to be able to unify the Libyan women groups and to work as one for women's empowerment.

United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission the Sudan (UNITAMS)

- Joint UNITAMS UN Women, UNDP support given to diverse Sudanese women's rights leaders in their mobilizing for direct participation in peace talks between the transitional Government of Sudan and SPLM-N El Hilu. (April-June 2021)
- UNITAMS, South Sudanese Mediation team, Parties joint mobilization which led to the participation of 5 women body of gender experts as observers in the negotiation. (April-June 2021)

United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM)

- Strengthening women's political participation which includes mediation, reconciliation, electoral, peacebuilding - including signing peace agreements, electoral processes.
- We provide advisory and technical support as well as logistical support, including in the form of technical advice, guidance, advocacy, provision of support through policy, legislation formulations, etc.
- Currently, one of our main engagements is to support the realisation of the minimum 30% women's quota in the ongoing election.

UN Office of the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes (O/SESG-GL)

- Regional Consultative Roundtable on Women as Agents of Change for Social and Economic Transformation (July 2020)
- Regional Consultative Roundtable on the Prevention of all forms of Violence Against Women and their Protection. (August 2020)
- Regional Consultative Roundtable on Effective Measures to Guarantee Women's Meaningful Political Participation and their Contribution in Peacebuilding (August 2020)
- A two-day solidarity and good offices mission to Burundi that involved two representatives of the Advisory Board and the Senior Gender Advisor in the O/SESG-GL. (March 2020)
- Preventive electoral violence joint mission of the advisory Board led by a Femwise leader (Liberata Mula Mula) (March 2020)
- Ambassadorial-Level Meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission on Women, Peacebuilding and Development in the Great Lakes Region. (November 2020)
- FemWise-Africa Advanced Training on Mediation and Negotiation in the Great Lakes Region which resulted in formation of a pool of women mediators to promote initiatives linked to preventive diplomacy, electoral violence and non military approach to security (September 2021)

United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA)

- Engagement by the UNISFA with the Abyei local administration and traditional leaders which has resulted in participation of two women from the Misseriya community and three from the Ngok Dinka community in peace dialogue held from 22 to 26 February 2021
- In the northern part of Abyei, UNISFA continued to strengthen women's agency in the Misseriya community by conducting seven consultations with traditional leaders and women's representatives on the primacy of women's participation in community decision-making in Al Radaya, Diffra, Goli and Makines and in al-Askar, Farouk and Um Khaer in March 2021. This resulted in traditional leaders' commitment to promote women's participation and the women leaders agreement on establishment of coordination and engagement mechanisms among themselves and the traditional leaders.
- UNISFA will continue to engage women leaders and their networks, traditional leaders and local administration in both the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka communities to promote women's participation, agency and leadership at decision making levels.

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SHE *Stands for Peace*

E-BOOK



This e-book is the second publication following the first published in commemoration of the 20th anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000).

This e-book recounts 23 additional journeys of African women and organisations contributing to the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda in Africa. It also amplifies the voices of women with regards to their concerns and experiences in peacebuilding efforts.