



EDITORIAL

The 21st of September marks The International Day of Peace, which was celebrated around the world on Wednesday. The UN General Assembly established the International Day of Peace in 1981 for “commemorating and strengthening the ideals of peace within and among all nations and people.” Twenty years later, the General Assembly decided that the 21st of September would be observed annually as a “day of global ceasefire and non-violence” and invited all Member States, organizations and individuals to commemorate the day through education and public awareness, as well as to cooperate with the United Nations in the establishment of a global ceasefire.

We come across news reports everyday depicting conflicts in Africa. We have all seen images of violence where civilians are often the target and where widespread sexual violence is used as a weapon of war. These images are the evidence of a reality in a number of African countries where thousands of people die and even more are forced to flee their homes to escape violence.

The question one should ask is what is the role of African women in peace negotiation and peace process on the continent?

While women remain a minority of combatants and perpetrators of war, they increasingly suffer the greatest harm. From the DRC to Cote d'Ivoire, and from Burundi to Liberia, African women have played a critical role in the peace process and are essential agents in post-conflict reconstruction. However, they have either been absent or under-represented in diplomatic peace negotiations during which peace accords have been signed and the future of countries decided. Women are often left behind when it comes to peace negotiations. It is important to bear in mind that the processes of reconstruction are dependent on the equal involvement of women and men.

African women's efforts to participate in formal peace process have faced various challenges. The polarized and tense environment of conflict negotiation usually reinforces prevailing patriarchal structures and other social attitudes towards gender that exclude women from the peace process, decision-making positions and leadership positions.

The UN efforts to address women's exclusion from the decision-making process that addresses

peace, security, and development led to the unanimous adoption by the security council in October 2000 of the United Nations Resolution 1325 on *Women, Peace and Security*.

The adoption of this landmark resolution marks the first time that the Security Council formally addressed the role and experience of women and girls in armed conflicts. The UNSCR 1325 acknowledges the importance of the participation of women and the inclusion of gender sensitivity in peace negotiations, humanitarian planning, peacekeeping operations, post-conflict peace building and governance.

The resolution 1325 calls all UN bodies, Governments and all parties to conflict to take special measures in order to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, in situations of armed conflict; to respect the rights of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict; to increase women's participation in all conflict resolution, peacekeeping and peace-building, as well as the inclusion of gender perspectives in the planning of refugee camps and rehabilitation programs. Lastly, it calls for an end to impunity by demanding for the prosecution of the perpetrators of sexual violence on women and girls.

So far, only [6 Africans countries](#) have adopted a national action plan on UNSCR 1325.

It is clear that in order to secure peace in Africa women need to be an integral part of the peace process. How can peace be secured if half of Africa's population is left out or are not considered direct beneficiaries of peace and reconciliation?

There is an urgent need to advocate for the integration, recognition and inclusion of women in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, reconciliation, and peace building. The words of UNSCR 1325 have not corresponded to effective policy and practice changes. We must continue to advocate for an increase to women's participation in the areas of reconciliation, negotiation and mediation of conflicts and improve the capacity of women's organizations in the field. We also must lobby African governments to put in place mechanisms for the reduction and control of the arms trade that fuels conflicts and wars and jeopardizes the development of Africa

African men and women need to work together to end the years of armed conflicts on the continent and to secure lasting peace in Africa, which will lead to the socio-economic transformation and sustainable development of the continent.

INTERVIEW OF THE MONTH

[AFRICA: OUR INTERVIEW OF THE MONTH WITH MARIE-LOUISE PAMBU ON THE SITUATION OF WIDOWS IN THE DRC](#)

Marie-Louise Pambu is a 60 years old Congolese widow, mother of four children; a former high school geography and history teacher, currently Social and Human right activist. She has an extensive experience working within the DRC civil society for the advancement and economic empowerment of women, and raising awareness about women's poverty and ignorance; lack of food/human security and peace in the DRC as consequences of militarization and Multinationals corporate power. In the DRC, she has been campaigning for women's rights (particularly for widows), civic empowerment, women's participation and environment, in organisations such as SUNAMITES and CAUSE COMMUNE RDC. In the UK, she is the co-founder and current chair of COMMON CAUSE UK, the platform of Congolese Women in the UK and she is also an active UK WILPF VoAW Member. Marie-Louise Lobbies around demilitarisation, social justice, CEDAW and the African human right Charter. Furthermore, she is promoting education as a tool for the development of a democratic culture and peace in the DRC.

1. What are the most dire issues that widows in the DRC face? but if you could make a statement about the issues that women in general face that would also be helpful.

You have to put Congolese Widows in the socio-political context of the DR Congo. Since the independence of the DRC, in 1960, no social policy has enabled widows to live a harmonious and prosperous life. Despite the existing legal frameworks such as CEDAW, The AU Maputo Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, the DRC constitution, most widows are still denied State protection, State benefits, property, inheritance rights, employment and access to finance. Despite the existence of UN SCR 1325, their role in building peace are still undermined and ignored. Widow's interests were terribly neglected in all phases of conflict prevention, during peace negotiations and post conflict situations. Discussions on widowhood are notoriously vague in state institutions. Most Congolese widows are denied basic human rights. Many Congolese widows are suffering in silence.

Regardless of the DRC socio-economic situation, a woman who loses a husband or partner in the DRC becomes vulnerable, is neglected, excluded and her fundamental rights are likely to be violated. This situation is exacerbated by the continuation of armed conflicts and the lack of rule of law in the DRC, which in turn continue to produce ever larger number of widows and female-headed households.

Due to the succession of recent wars of occupation and economic exploitations in the DRC and great lakes region of Africa, lack of infrastructure and defective national/local institutions, there aren't any reliable statistics. Considering certain reports from local NGOs in Eastern DRC there is an exponential increase in widowhood, currently estimated to 40% of the population. There are even villages consisting of only women and children, as all men have been killed during the war.

During my last two visits to the DRC, I have witnessed the extreme deteriorating living conditions of many DRC widows.

- Widows are notably among the poorest of the poor, with many being the victims of

accusations of witchcraft, social alienation, ostracism, harmful practices and humiliation.

- Young widows with no education remain illiterate and often try to financially support their young children through informal trade of vegetables or fruits. In many cases, their children have no access to education, ending up begging on the streets, in prison or being trapped in prostitution. Widow's children are acutely vulnerable social group.

-Widows have no right to inheritance and have had their houses and properties confiscated. They receive little or no living allowance – many allowances are not only insignificant (less than \$ 2) but often misappropriated by male relatives. Widows are therefore forced to live in highly deprived areas in poor conditions of hygiene and sanitation, with no running water or electricity.

-Widows have increased vulnerability to physical, mental and sexual violence being. As a result of this social and economic marginalisation, violence is perpetuated with impunity and their lack of knowledge of their basic rights hinders their access to justice. Many have been victims of rape during and after the conflict and are afflicted by HIV/AIDS and other sexual transmitted diseases (STDs).

On May 2008 and June 2011, I held meetings with some widows' organisations in Kinshasa and in Bandundu, respectively. Many widows were able to break their silence and raise many painful issues together. I also took these opportunities to report back to these widows about the sessions of the UN Commission on the Status of Women and raised awareness of numerous national, regional and international legal frameworks signed by the Government of DRC, such as CEDAW and UN SCR 1325 and the African Union Maputo Protocol on the rights of Women in Africa. It is very sad to observe that the DRC government does not take into account the situation of widows in its social and development policy. There appears to be a lack of political will on the part of the Congolese State in the application of these different legal instruments. This is a situation that requires urgent attention.

2. Specifically regarding land ownership, what does Congolese law say about women retaining her husbands land (I think legally she should?), and in reality what actually happens? Does the husband's family take the land more often in the rural areas?

The preamble of the 2006 promulgated Constitution of the DRC does uphold the principle of equality between men and women, including widows. The articles 5, 14 and 15 set up the foundations of legitimisation of any policy of equality and equity in the RDC. Article 14 of the Constitution provides that “the State shall have the duty to ensure the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (including widows) and ensure the respect and promotion of their rights.” It must “take measures to address all forms of violence against women in public and private life”.

However, all these legal frameworks are not having an impact on the lives of women who are widowed, as the law is not often implemented, and only sometimes applied for those who could afford to pay to enjoy their rights. The DRC sends reports to the CEDAW Commission in 2006, however, despite several key reforms provisions contained in the DRC Constitution and various recommendations, by the CEDAW Committee, the Congolese legislation remains contradictory and discriminatory towards women widowed on many different levels.

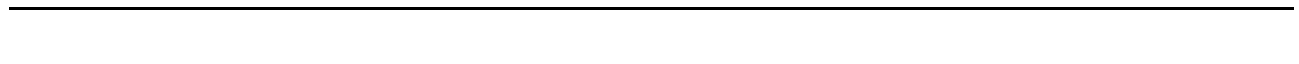
The DRC constitutional frameworks and mechanism for the advancement of women remains extremely weak in rural areas where so called tradition laws or culture/mentality are applied.

The DRC Family Code organises marital life on a discriminatory basis. Married women have a low degree of protection with regards to family matters. It become even worse for widowed in rural areas. Law n°87/010 of the family code, accounts in its first paragraph: « the present law aimed at unifying and at adapting rules which touch the rights of the person and the family to the Congolese mentality ». Moreover, article 215 limits the autonomy of the wife. Article 444 says that the man is the head of the household and the woman must obey him. This put women as second class citizen.

Furthermore, if the husband is deemed absent by a court or if he dies, the wife must share the running of the household with one of her husband's relatives. Concerning inheritance rights, article 758 gives preferential treatment to the children of the deceased but does not discriminate between women and men within the second category of heirs. However, following the death of a husband, in many tribal traditions and mentalities; wives must share the running of the household with a male relative of the deceased – in part to compensate for women's lack of ability to sign legal acts. In many cases, the property and several items are confiscated from the widows, in total impunity.

Lack of the functioning of Justice fuels impunity. Human rights abuses is a serious issue in the DRC and it is true that these abuses occur at the top of society in terms of high level abuses of political power but it must also be tackled at the grassroots levels, where local people are abused of their human rights because the system fails to protect them.

[Read More](#)



TOP WOMEN PEACE AND SECURITY NEWS

[GHANA: STATE OFFERS LESSONS FOR SIERRA LEONE IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT](#)

Source: Public Agenda

A Sierra Leonean Member of Parliament and women empowerment advocate has acknowledged the fact that Sierra Leone as a country has a long way to go, especially in respect of women's empowerment and human rights.

[ZAMBIA: WOMEN IMplored TO PREACH PEACE](#)

Source: All Africa

First Lady Thandiwe Banda has called on women in the country to help shape the country's future by participating in elections on September 20, this year.

TOP VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN NEWS

[CHAD: WOMEN ACTIVISTS SAY 'NO' TO SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN CHAD](#)

Source: UNICEF

A brave mother, Hadjara Oumarou, sat under a tree with her estranged husband, Oumar Sidik, outside their local village courthouse here in Chad's Tandjilé District. Their 10-year-old daughter Amira (not her real name) sat between them.

[KENYA-SOMAIA: REFUGEES AT RISK OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE](#)

Source: IRIN

Amina*, 27, left her home town of Kismayo in south-central Somalia at the end of May for northern Kenya's Dadaab refugee camp. The journey took her and her four children 14 days and nearly broke them, but between the famine and the conflict, she was afraid that staying in Somalia could mean death.

TOP POLITICAL PARTICIPATION NEWS

[SOMALILAND: FIRST FEMALE MAYOR ELECTED](#)

Source: Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organizations (UNPO)

Testament to an ongoing process of increasing gender equality, Khadra X. Ismail Yonis has been elected Somaliland's first female mayor.

[DRC: WOMEN POLITICIANS "KEY TO PROMOTING RIGHTS"](#)

Source: IRIN News

Political parties in the Democratic Republic of Congo are struggling to recruit women into their ranks to run for parliament, despite a legal requirement to do so and a belief that greater numbers of female parliamentarians are critical to advancing women's rights.

TOP ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT NEWS

[NIGERIA: TO TRAIN 100 WOMEN IN KANO](#)

Source: Daily Trust

About a hundred women in Kano State would benefit from the skills acquisition training programme of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), the State Coordinator, Alhaji Aliyu Umar Yar'adua said yesterday in Kano at the take off of a four-week special training for women in the state.

[SIERRA LEONE: USING TECHNOLOGY TO CLOSE THE GENDER GAP](#)

Source: All Africa

Admire Bio has the reassured presence of a successful businesswoman, with an edge that reveals she is still hungry for more. Bio, 28, a single mother living with her parents, set up her first internet cafe in the Sierra Leone capital, Freetown, only a year ago. She has expanded with two more branches, and plans to go national if she can secure a bank loan.

TOP HIV/AIDS & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

[GUINEA-BISSAU: GUINEA-BISSAU RECEIVES BOOST FROM UN TO PROMOTE SEX EDUCATION](#)

Source: UN News Centre

Youngsters in Guinea-Bissau will receive comprehensive sexual education in primary and secondary schools thanks to a United Nations workshop to support efforts by the small West African country's education ministry.

[NAMIBIA: TIME TO END FORCED STERILIZATION](#)

Source: OSISA

The World Medical Association (WMA) and the International Federation of Health and Human Rights Organisations (IFHHRO) have condemned the practice of forced and coerced sterilisation as forms of violence that severely harm women's physical and mental health - and infringe basic human rights.

HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN

[AFRICA: SEVEN QUESTION – AFRICA BETTER ON GENDER EQUALITY](#)

Source: the Monitor

Millennium Development Goal Three of the UN has put 2015 as deadline to eliminate gender inequality and empower women at all levels including education, health, employment, equal opportunity and dignity among others.

[CAMEROON: THE PLIGHT OF WIDOWS IN CAMEROON](#)

Source: RNW

In Cameroon, widows are often go through to humiliating and degrading rituals to prove their innocence in their husband's death. Tradition in many parts of Cameroon dictates that there is no such thing as natural death. Widows are therefore subjected to various rituals to determine whether or not they are responsible for their husband's death. Elise Makouintcheu went through such an ordeal in November 2010.

FEATURED RESOURCES

[DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN IN LAW](#)

Source: Equality Now

This report draws from the Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Since 2005, this committee has referenced discrimination against women in law in 137 countries. Where countries submitted two reports in that period, Equality Now has focused on the later submission as being more current. It is noteworthy that the CEDAW Committee had cause to repeat its observation on several occasions, lamenting the slow pace of change. It is hoped that the Working Group can complement the role of the CEDAW Committee by assisting governments to find ways to address this persisting discrimination. Equality Now is pleased to note that positive changes have occurred in legislative reform since these Observations were made, but from our own study in this area, we believe the general picture remains largely unchanged.

[SECURING THE FUTURE TODAY: SYNTHESIS OF STRATEGIC INFORMATION ON HIV AND YOUNG PEOPLE](#)

Source: UNFPA

This report shows that global commitments to reverse the AIDS epidemic will be achieved only if the unique needs of young women and men are acknowledged, and their human rights fulfilled, respected, and protected. In order to reduce new HIV infections among young people, achieve the broader equity goals set out in the MDGs, and begin to reverse the overall HIV epidemic, HIV prevention and treatment efforts must be tailored to the specific needs of young people. The legal and policy barriers that prevent young people from accessing HIV services must be addressed, and young people should be engaged more effectively in the response.

UPCOMING EVENTS

[USING TECHNOLOGY TO PROMOTE TRANSPARENCY](#)

Source: New Tactics in Human Rights

Date: 21-27 September 2011

Location: Online Dialogue

Join New Tactics, the Technology for Transparency Team, and other practitioners for an online dialogue on from September 21 to 27, 2011. There has been an expanding and increasingly global movement of technology and digital media projects aimed at promoting government transparency, accountability, and public participation in political processes.

[THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PROMOTING PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT IN HORN OF AFRICA](#)

Source: Somalia International Rehabilitation Centre

Date: 23 September 2011

Location: Lund, Sweden

The Horn of African conferences have since its inception focused on issues related to peace,

security and development. So far, none of the conferences has yet had an explicit focus on the linkages between gender, peace and development. This time the focus of the conference is set on these linkages. We know that the violence has had disproportionate effects on the lives of women. Often as targets of extreme forms of violence, women in the Horn of Africa experience the full impact of violent conflict in the region as civilians and combatants, but are generally excluded from the decision-making processes that ignite wars or put an end to hostilities.