

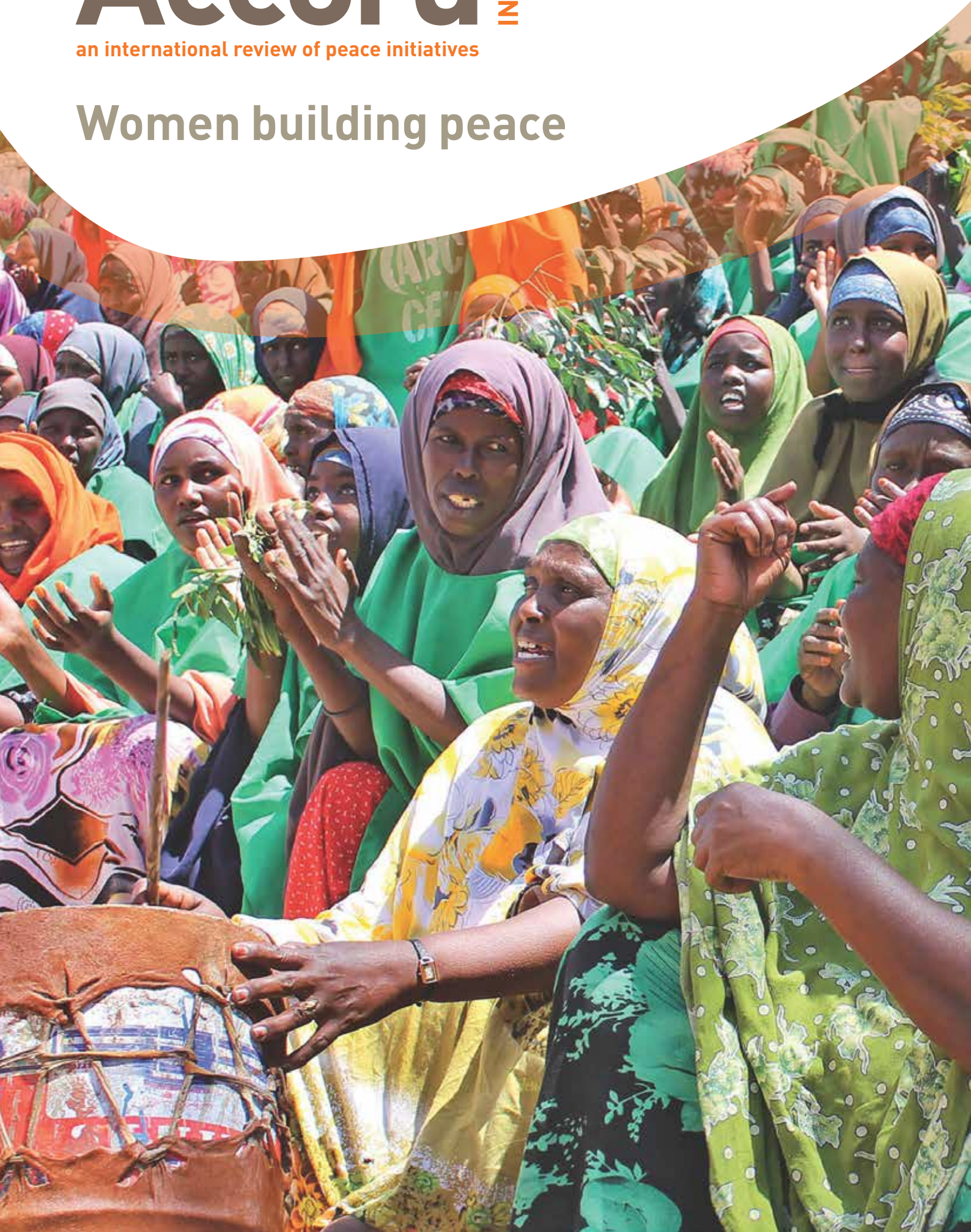
# Accord INSIGHT

an international review of peace initiatives



**CONCILIATION  
RESOURCES**  
working together for peace

## Women building peace



## Women building peace

**Accord Insight** presents cutting-edge analysis and contemporary peacebuilding innovation by re-examining key challenges and practical lessons from Conciliation Resources' Accord publication series



**CONCILIATION  
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Published by Conciliation Resources, to inform and strengthen peace processes worldwide by documenting and analysing the lessons of peacebuilding

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Cover photo: Somali women clap during a ceremony marking the first anniversary of the withdrawal of Al-Shabaab from Mogadishu at Konis stadium in the north of the Somali capital in August 2012 //

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# Acronyms

## General

**CEDAW** – Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women  
**CSO** – Civil Society Organisation  
**DDR** – Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration  
**DFID** – Department for International Development  
**EC** – European Commission  
**NGO** – Non-governmental Organisation  
**INGO** – International Non-governmental Organisation  
**UN** – United Nations  
**UNSCR** – United Nations Security Council Resolution  
**MoU** – Memorandum of Understanding  
**MP** – Member of Parliament  
**NAP** – National Action Plan  
**UNDP** – United Nations Development Programme  
**UNIFEM** – United Nations Development Fund for Women (now UN Women)  
**US** – United States  
**UK** – United Kingdom  
**WPS** – Women, Peace and Security

## Aceh

**BRA** – Aceh Reintegration Board  
**CMI** – Crisis Management Initiative  
**GAM** – Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*)  
**HDC** – Henry Dunant Centre (now Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue)  
**KPA** – Aceh Transition Committee  
**LoGA** – Law on the Governing of Aceh

## Angola

**FAA** – Angolan Armed Forces  
**FAS** – Social Action Fund  
**FNLA** – National Front for the Liberation of Angola  
**LIMA** – Independent League for Angolan Women  
**MPLA** – Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola  
**MPP** – Women, Peace and Development  
**OMA** – Organisation of Angolan Women  
**UNITA** – National Union for the Total Independence of Angola

## Bougainville

**BICWF** – Bougainville Inter-Church Women's Forum  
**BIG** – Bougainville Interim Government  
**BODICA** – Bougainville Community Integrated Development Assistance  
**BRA** – Bougainville Revolutionary Army  
**LNWDA** – Leitana Nehan Women's Development Agency  
**PNG** – Papua New Guinea  
**PNGDF** – Papua New Guinea Defence Forces

## Cambodia

**FUNCINPEC** – National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Co-operative Cambodia  
**SRP** – Sam Rainsy Party  
**UNTAC** – United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia

## Northern Ireland

**NIWC** – Northern Ireland Women's Coalition  
**IRA** – Irish Republican Army  
**UVF** – Ulster Volunteer Force

## Northern Uganda

**LRA** – Lord's Resistance Army  
**NRM/A** – National Resistance Movement/Army  
**PVP** – People's Voice for Peace  
**UPDF** – Uganda People's Defence Force  
**ACORD** – Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development

## Sierra Leone

**APC** – All People's Congress  
**ECOMOG** – Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group  
**MARWOPNET** – Mano River Women's Peace Network National Organisation for Women  
**NPRC** – National Provisional Ruling Council  
**REPARCOR** – Network for the Promotion of African Principles of Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation  
**RUF** – Revolutionary United Front  
**SLAUW** – Sierra Leone Association of University Women  
**SLWF** – Sierra Leone Women's Forum  
**SLWMP** – Sierra Leone Women's Movement for Peace  
**WAND** – Women's Association for National Development  
**WOMEN** – Women Organised for a Morally Enlightened Nation  
**YWCA** – Young Women's Christian Association

## Somalia

**AMISOM** – African Union Mission in Somalia  
**COGWO** – Coalition for Grassroots Women's Organisations  
**INXA** – Peace and Human Rights Network (*Iskuxirka Nabadaiyo Xuquuqal Adamiga*)  
**HINNA** – Women Pioneers for Peace and Life (*Haweenka Horseedka Nabadda*)  
**ICU** – Islamic Courts Union  
**SWA** – Somali Women's Agenda  
**TFG** – Transitional Federal Government  
**TNG** – Transitional National Government  
**UNOSOM** – United Nations Operation in Somalia

## Sudan

**AU** – African Union  
**CPA** – Comprehensive Peace Agreement  
**DPA** – Darfur Peace Agreement  
**GoS** – Government of Sudan  
**GoSS** – Government of South Sudan  
**IGAD** – Intergovernmental Authority on Development  
**JEM** – Justice and Equality Movement  
**SPLM/A** – Sudan People's Liberation Movement /Army

# Foreword

This is the first *Accord Insight* paper, a new format presenting cutting-edge analysis and contemporary peacebuilding innovation by examining key challenges and practical lessons from peacebuilding experience.

For nearly two decades Accord has been documenting and analysing lessons from peace processes, featuring first hand accounts of people's efforts to build peace. The range of experience and regions covered by Accord brings a breadth of insight and expertise and a unique source of applied and comparative learning.

The role of women in peacebuilding and peacemaking has been a recurrent theme in the Accord series, and we are delighted that our first *Accord Insight* presents case studies and lessons on this important topic.

The protection of women in conflict-affected areas, as well as their participation in political decision-making, has been increasingly prominent in international policy over recent decades. But the development of new policy and approaches has not yet had the impact many had hoped for.

This publication presents nine case studies drawn from past issues of Accord that examine the roles women have played in addressing violence and building peace. An expert analysis highlights common themes and experiences and situates these in the context of current policy on women, peace and security. To help place the articles in their broader context they have been extended through the addition of an abstract, contextual background and biographical note about the author.

Both individually and collectively the articles make a powerful story. Excluding women from peacebuilding neglects a rich source of skills, insights and energy. The case studies illustrate how women have found innovative and creative ways to contribute to peace through both formal and informal processes. They also show how women's peace efforts play a role in addressing the structural changes necessary for sustainable peace.

But overcoming barriers to political participation remains a key challenge – and peace itself is invariably gendered. Peace process assistance and practice needs to rethink how to better support and integrate women's peacebuilding.

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# Accord Insight

## Women building peace

This volume looks back at a wealth of women's peacebuilding practice documented by Accord since 1998. Case studies from Cambodia, Sierra Leone, northern Uganda, Papua New Guinea–Bougainville, Northern Ireland, Angola, Sudan, Indonesia–Aceh and Somalia (presented in the chronological order in which the original Accord issues were published) shed light on what women peacebuilders have done to overcome conflict and the challenges they encountered.

The cases reflect women's practice in particular contexts yet also provide general insights for peacebuilding practitioners and policymakers – insights into what women peacebuilders can achieve and how they can be effectively supported in their efforts.

### Insight from Accord case studies

- **Women's peace efforts can broaden the scope of peacebuilding by:**
  - *Promoting consensus and inclusion as a key strategy*
  - *Advancing broader issues of social justice*
  - *Building peace beyond the negotiating table*
- **Overcoming barriers to political participation is a challenge that requires:**
  - *Going beyond quotas to meaningful participation*
  - *Translating existing capacities and expertise into political participation*
- **Understanding gender relations is key to building sustainable peace:**
  - *Mainstream gender analysis of conflict and peace*
  - *Engage both men and women in reshaping gender dynamics*

### Women's peace efforts can broaden the scope of peacebuilding

Conflict is fuelled by deeply engrained divisions, mistrust and exclusionary politics. Women's peace efforts, like many civil society activities, often challenge these dynamics in both formal and informal spheres by advocating consensus building instead of recrimination and inclusion instead of elite-dominated politics. These efforts often aim to address the structural changes necessary for sustainable peace, and can attract wide support for women's groups and build their legitimacy.

### *Consensus and inclusion as a key strategy*

A key strategy used by women's groups is to take a non-partisan, unified and consensus-based approach to achieve influence. Women in Bougainville and Northern Ireland developed forums and networks as a way to achieve strength through consensus and unity. In Sierra Leone in 1995 the women's peace campaign put the issue of a negotiated settlement in the public domain in a non-partisan and non-confrontational manner, combining non-threatening events like prayer meetings to mobilise support with more direct measures like marches and meetings with government. As a result a negotiated settlement became a respectable option for both the government and the rebels without loss of face.

### *Advancing broader issues of social justice*

Inclusion – ensuring that a wide range of perspectives is represented, including marginalised sections of community – is an important factor for sustainable peace. Women's groups can broaden the range of substantive issues on the table, promoting not just women's rights but also social justice. Many peace processes prioritise elites and those carrying arms and aim to satisfy their demands. Issues key to long lasting, durable peace such as reconciliation, equality and access to land can go unaddressed. Women's groups can therefore gain legitimacy and support by appealing to a broader constituency; they can also help ensure the interests of a wider section of the community are heard.

“ **A key strategy used by women's groups is to take a non-partisan, unified and consensus-based approach to achieve influence** ”

During negotiations for the Belfast Agreement, the Northern Ireland's Women's Coalition (NIWC) ensured that victims' rights and reconciliation were included. These became key issues in the referendum campaign for the agreement. Accord author Kate Fearon argues that if the agreement had not addressed these concerns, many people might have voted against it.

In Cambodia and Sierra Leone women's groups reached out beyond urban centres. Cambodian women activists worked to promote a broad social development agenda focused on the

neglected rural majority. The Sierra Leone Women's Movement for Peace (SLWM) opened branches in all accessible parts of the country which strengthened its support base and helped to share information and coordinate marches.

#### *Building peace beyond the negotiating table*

Women activists also promote a vision of peace that goes beyond the negotiating table. The case studies demonstrate that women have been at the forefront of grassroots and civil society initiatives to address violence and build peace, and that their actions have often been instrumental.

Peace conferences in Somaliland in 1993 and 1996 would not have taken place without the collective lobbying of elders by women who urged them to intervene to end conflicts. Women were also instrumental in mobilising funds for peace meetings to take place.

Women have contributed to stopping violence and alleviating its consequences in a range of ways: providing humanitarian relief, creating and facilitating the space for negotiations through advocacy, and exerting influence through cultural or social means. They have also spearheaded civil society and reconciliation activities.

In Bougainville, individual women used their status in the family to negotiate peace in their communities and managed to use their influence and act as go-betweens with the warring factions to maintain constructive dialogue.

Women in northern Uganda worked collaboratively to revive cultural institutions and prepare the community for reconciliation and the reintegration of armed groups through prayer meetings and peace education, as well as through songs and story-telling.

Peace process support often focuses on formal negotiations and settlements, overlooking the significant contribution of broader, complementary peacebuilding efforts that are vital to sustainable peace. Important contributions by women, often at the household and community level, tend to go unrecognised.

It is therefore essential *to link efforts at multiple levels* more effectively, to open up the space where women and others excluded from formal forums work, and for this space to receive more recognition.

#### **Overcoming challenges to political participation**

Assistance to peace processes and practice needs to be re-thought so that women are better supported and integrated. The Accord case studies underscore the need to promote women's inclusion – in official negotiations aimed at bringing an end to conflict, as well as post-settlement decision-making processes. Women face major challenges to engaging in formal peace processes and exclusion is often the norm. Practical and logistical support can play an important role in facilitating participation in some cases; political support is almost always required.

#### *Beyond quotas to meaningful participation*

Experiences from Northern Ireland show that despite the obstacles women can achieve political change. The NIWC's

direct involvement in negotiations for the Belfast Agreement not only facilitated and secured women's participation in electoral politics, it also demonstrated a way for civil society to participate in and influence formal political negotiations.

**“ Important contributions by women, often at the household and community level, tend to go unrecognised ”**

But women's inclusion in talks can be superficial. During negotiations for the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Sudan, women delegates were expected to follow the party line and their perspectives and experiences in peacebuilding and negotiation were overlooked. In the post-settlement phase women were once more politically marginalised.

Women's meaningful participation in decision-making during and after negotiations requires going beyond token measures and quotas. International partners could more clearly define parameters for women's participation as a precondition for their support. International partners can also set the right example by ensuring that women are represented in senior posts within their own structures, including as mediators.

#### *Translating existing capacities and expertise into political participation*

Women often influence formal political processes from the outside. Women's groups have campaigned for the inclusion of women's rights during negotiations, monitored policies and legislation and lobbied for women's rights in new constitutions. In Aceh, women's organisations promoted political education at the grassroots to ensure the general population was familiar with government policies.

Those providing peace process support can help connect capacities and expertise among women's groups and integrate them more directly into formal political processes. The NIWC demonstrates the possibility of transitioning from civil society to political party.

Women in the case studies identified a lack of resources and capacity to engage in institutional politics, including deficits in funding, organisational and advocacy skills, and knowledge of political practice. The NIWC initially struggled to finance the activities required of a political party and was forced to rely on donations. The consensus-based approach many women's groups employ can involve lengthy consultations that take time.

It is also important to recognise that women are not a homogenous group: location, education, class and opportunity condition how individuals are affected by conflict, as well as the approaches they employ in peacebuilding. In Angola poor women, in both rural and urban areas, faced very different challenges from those more privileged. Larger numbers of poor women lost their husbands and were displaced; as a result their responses were focused at the household and community level and involved economic and social welfare. It was privileged women who were more likely to become political leaders.



The reality of women as primary caregivers in the home should also be recognised. Responsibilities such as child care and economic welfare may impede those desiring to engage in both civil society and formal politics.

Support and planning for peace processes should acknowledge these challenges, and adjust accordingly to build in training, capacity-building and technical advice. Mentoring may be one useful way to approach training.

Direct political support for participation is crucial. Politics in conflict and post-conflict contexts are often configured in a way that excludes those other than elites. In Cambodia after the 1991 Paris Agreement few political parties, despite commitments, seriously invested in programmes to help women move out of their traditional gender roles. In Sierra Leone, elites discouraged women's participation in political leadership for fear of disrupting traditional politics, resulting in women's groups refusing to convert into a political force that would have leverage in the peace process. International actors can fill this gap through political support.

An example of effective international support is the negotiations for the Darfur Peace Agreement in 2006. Darfurian women harnessed support from UNIFEM and other international actors to ensure that their participation in negotiations actually influenced the content of the negotiations. The result was over 70 sections in the agreement referring to women.

### **Understanding gender relations is key to building sustainable peace**

Underlying many of the challenges women face are the power dynamics between men and women (and within gender groups) that exist at all levels of peace and conflict.

### *Mainstreaming gender analysis of conflict and peace*

Understanding gender relations is key to effectively addressing armed conflict and building sustainable peace. A gender lens sheds light on the different experiences of women and men in armed conflict, which are in turn the result of socially constructed concepts of masculinity and femininity. Promoting and mainstreaming gender analysis of conflict and peace is a way to understand and address the power dynamics at play.

Examples from the case studies highlight how conflict impacts on gender roles and relations. Women responded to conflict and its effects in a variety of ways, some of which challenged traditional female roles. Women joined armed groups, both as combatants and as support, while others took over household and community duties normally assigned to men. In Angola, women's earnings in the informal sector of the economy started to pose a cultural challenge to men's income-earning abilities and to gender relations in the family. This has been linked to an upsurge in domestic violence against women and children in the 1990s.

### *Engaging both men and women in reshaping gender dynamics*

Gender roles are often reinforced through all sections of society. Many of the case studies identify this as a major challenge to participation: in Northern Ireland the mainstream media were dismissive of the NIWC as a serious political force. After the 1991 Paris agreement, many Cambodians saw the maintenance of traditional gender relations, which discriminated against women entering politics, as crucial to the preservation of the Khmer cultural identity. The way in which gender is intertwined with social structures and reinforced by them requires further disaggregation, but many of the case studies point to the need for both men and women to be involved in reshaping the political and social culture to ensure gender equality.

# Expert analysis

## From the forefront of peace and reconciliation: testimonies from women building peace<sup>1</sup>

Judith Gardner and Judy El-Bushra

Judith Gardner is a social development and gender analyst with a special interest in gender relations in conflict-affected communities. She has worked as a development practitioner in the NGO development sector for over 20 years. She has worked with Somali women peace activists to research and document the gendered impact of the war and their role in peacebuilding.

Judy El-Bushra has worked on issues of gender, conflict and peacebuilding for over 20 years, with NGOs such as ACORD,

CARE International, and International Alert, focusing on the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes. She has written on conflict and changing gender relations, the gender dimensions of sexual violence, HIV and AIDS, and more recently on gender in peacebuilding.

Judith Gardner and Judy El-Bushra co-edited, *Somalia – the untold story: the war through the eyes of Somali women* (CIIR & Pluto Press 2004)

This publication brings together nine case studies of women's peacebuilding from Conciliation Resources' Accord publication series. The Accord series informs and strengthens peace processes by documenting and analysing practical lessons of peacebuilding, looking at both specific conflicts and common peacebuilding themes. Each publication presents a range of experiences and insights from local and international practitioners and experts. Many have included case studies of women's peacebuilding efforts, and it is these that are collected and analysed here.

The case studies document women's peacebuilding practice, the challenges and opportunities they faced, and the lessons they have drawn from their experiences. They cover a period from 1998 to 2010, and describe women's involvement in peace processes as far apart as Bougainville and Sierra Leone, Aceh and Northern Ireland. They show how women have been specific targets of violence, and also how they have participated in it – as combatants and supporters of armed resistance. Most importantly, the case studies demonstrate women's contribution to mediation and reconciliation. They depict women in different contexts taking varying approaches to peacebuilding – some local, some national; some political, some non-political.

### **Women, peace and security: global policy developments**

The international policy environment has seen significant shifts regarding women, peace and security over recent decades. Milestones in policy evolution include:

### **BOX 1**

#### **Gender & peacebuilding**

Gender relations – the way men and women live together in society – underlie many of the women's experiences documented in the case studies. A gender lens recognises that women and men are differently affected by armed conflict, violence and peace, and play different roles in relation to them. Although these roles vary from place to place, women's experiences of conflict and violence often mean that they have different views on what peace should mean and how it should be built. The focus on women in this volume does not overlook the need for a gender analysis of peace and conflict, but complements it. A reflection on women's actual experiences of peacebuilding helps identify the gaps in policy and practice, and the ways in which women's peace practice can be better supported and incorporated into peace initiatives.

- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979
- The Beijing Conference on Women (1995), which identifies women and armed conflict as one of twelve priority areas for action
- UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 (2000) mandating member states to protect women and girls in war and to promote their participation in peace negotiations

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from a line in a poem by Anab Xasan, peace activist, Puntland, Somalia, quoted in Faiza Mohamed's article 'Somali women and peacebuilding'

## BOX 2

### Accord case studies of women's experiences of peacebuilding

Accord publication	Case study title & author
Issue 5 (1998) Safeguarding peace: Cambodia's constitutional challenge	Mu Sochua Cambodian women in politics: breaking through the traditional image
Issue 9 (2000) Paying the price: the Sierra Leone peace process	Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff Sierra Leonean women and the peace process
Issue 11 (2002) Protracted conflict, elusive peace: initiatives to end the violence in northern Uganda	Rosalba Oywa Women's contribution to peacebuilding in northern Uganda
Issue 12 (2002) Weaving consensus: the Papua New Guinea – Bougainville peace process	Lorraine Garasu The role of women in promoting peace and reconciliation
Issue 13 (2002) Owning the process: public participation in peacemaking	Kate Fearon Northern Ireland's Women's Coalition: institutionalising a political voice and ensuring representation
Issue 15 (2004) From military peace to social justice? The Angolan peace process	Henda Ducados Angolan women in the aftermath of conflict
Issue 18 (2006) Peace by piece: addressing Sudan's conflicts	Anne Itto Guests at the table? The role of women in Sudan's peace processes
Issue 20 (2008) Reconfiguring politics: the Indonesia-Aceh peace process	Suraiya Kamaruzzaman Agents for change: the roles of women in Aceh's peace process
Issue 21 (2009) Whose peace is it anyway? Connecting Somali and international peacemaking	Faiza Jama Somali women and peacebuilding

- UNSCR 1820 (2008) identifying sexual violence as a potential war crime and calling for an end to impunity for it

The UNSCR 1325 framework in particular has succeeded in prioritising women's participation on the international peace and security agenda, and has linked protection and participation concerns. It acknowledges that women and men experience conflict and its consequences differently; that women play important roles in relation to peace and security, often at the grass roots level; and that women face various barriers (cultural, social, political and economic) to participating in official peace and security efforts.

Since the adoption of UNSCR 1325, the international system has further developed conceptual frameworks that address the specific concerns of women in conflict, and these have been widely accepted throughout the international system. Concerns such as sexual violence in war, women's political participation, and the appointment of women to mediation teams have been accorded an increasingly higher profile internationally.

In 2004 the UN Security Council urged member states to develop National Action Plans (NAPs) to implement Resolutions 1325 and 1820. As of February 2013, 37 such NAPs were in place worldwide. More broadly, international organisations, governments and other authorities have

been drawing up policy documents, setting up institutional machinery, and initiating capacity-building projects around these resolutions.

These developments have made women's rights in conflict-affected settings more visible. However this is often separate from mainstream, official 'post-conflict' and 'fragile states' work. As a result it is often difficult to see the impact of policy initiatives in practice, and many women's rights activists still feel that women are largely excluded from political processes. A report by UN WOMEN in 2012 (*Women's participation in peace negotiations: Connections between presence and influence*) assessing the impact of Resolution 1325, found that 'a limited but reasonably representative sample of 31 major peace processes between 1992 and 2011 reveals that only 4 per cent of signatories, 2.4 per cent of chief mediators, 3.7 per cent of witnesses and 9 per cent of negotiators are women'. The report also refers to another survey which found that only 92 (16 per cent) of 585 peace agreements since 1990 contained at least one reference to women or gender.

The UN itself acknowledges the lack of progress, even within its own structures, and especially in bringing women into formal peace negotiations. In 2010 the UN Secretary-General introduced a 'Seven-Point Plan' to track progress on women's participation in peacebuilding. The plan required that

'UN entities take more systematic action to ensure women's participation in and the availability of gender expertise to peace processes'.

The challenge therefore is how to translate the international commitment manifested in Resolutions 1325 and 1820 into real changes for women on the ground. This collection of Accord case studies suggests that one of the most effective strategies for achieving this is to support women's own varied and broad-ranging peacebuilding initiatives and capacities.

### **What do women do for peace?**

The nine Accord case studies demonstrate the range of peacebuilding activities women have carried out in their respective contexts. As the case studies illustrate, there are many similarities across the nine country contexts. At the same time, they show how women's priorities and actions vary depending on the phase of the conflict, and how they are influenced by social and cultural factors, such as class and rural or urban settings, and by their political orientations.

Women are not always united in their peacebuilding initiatives. For example, in Angola poor women in both urban and rural communities faced immediate practical problems that constrained their ability to unite. More privileged women were more inclined to engage politically, but they were divided politically according to their views in favour of or against the government's policy framework for women.

The peacebuilding roles women have played include:

#### *Humanitarian and social welfare*

During conflict, many women take up roles normally assigned to men, as breadwinners and protectors of their families. Outside their own families they play humanitarian roles in the community: providing food, clothing, and medicines to families in distress. In Cambodia women ran a literacy campaign, took care of war orphans, and set up a national network of co-operative groups to maintain the local economy. In Aceh they buried the dead in the absence of men, and kept religious observance going through Koranic recitation. Women in Somalia promoted security by taking down roadblocks.

#### *Peacebuilding and mediation (both formal and informal)*

All nine case studies describe how women peace activists sought to bring an end to violence. The approaches they used included engaging locally with elders, commanders and warlords to advocate clemency and negotiated settlements. They spoke out against violence, and persuaded family members to put down arms and return home. They negotiated between warring parties and maintained contact with other women across divides.

In general women used all the resources they could muster to achieve influence over peace processes, including holding prayer meetings, marches and vigils, and circulating petitions against violence. Some – as alluded to in the Sudan case study – withheld sexual services from their partners or shamed authorities into negotiating by appearing naked in public demonstrations.

Women in Somalia deployed their traditional skill in poetry to move male elders and political negotiators towards reconciliation. Women in southern Sudan continued to communicate with each other after the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) underwent a serious split, thus making later reconciliation possible.

Organised women's groups in Bougainville, Northern Ireland, Sierra Leone and Aceh deliberated on the politics of formal peace negotiations and drew up written submissions proposing ways forward. Women in Bougainville and Sudan lobbied for peace in the highest councils in the land, and went further to lobby the international community in Sydney and New York. The Sierra Leone Women's Forum advocated for conflict prevention when it argued in favour of democratic rule as the main guarantor of peace and pushed for elections in 1996. Some women, including authors Anne Itto in the Sudan and Kate Fearon in Northern Ireland, took part in officially sponsored peace negotiations, though unfortunately they remain exceptions.

#### *Human rights: advocacy and awareness raising*

The women whose work is depicted in this volume were instrumental in bringing human rights violations to national and international attention both during and after violence, including publicising abuses to the international community.

In northern Uganda the local NGO People's Voice for Peace carried out research and documentation projects which provided material for use in advocacy campaigns, as well as giving its members a deeper understanding of conflict dynamics. Somali women were influential in setting up the country's first human rights monitoring organisation, the Peace and Human Rights Network. Women in Uganda monitored and reported on rights violations by both government troops and rebel militias, and campaigned for the return of abducted schoolgirls. The Women's National Coalition in Northern Ireland adopted equality, human rights and inclusion as their guiding principles and sought to exemplify these principles in all their work.

In the post-settlement phase, women have continued to press for broader social change on a rights based agenda. The Organisation of Angolan Women (OMA) pushed for the introduction of a Family Code, which recognised consensual unions as marriage, protected the rights of children born out of wedlock, and encouraged fair division of responsibilities within the family.

#### *Promoting women's rights and political participation*

Women's goals in peacebuilding have been both to improve society in general and to improve women's position within that society. They have often viewed these two goals as inseparable. Across the case studies, women's organisations promoted women's rights and opened up discussion about subjects of concern to them, including some that had previously been taboo, such as customary marriage and abortion.

These goals have also meant encouraging women to get involved in local and national politics. In Cambodia women addressed domestic violence and lobbied for women's rights in the new constitution. In Uganda women activists advocated for women to be adopted as candidates in elections. Sudanese women lobbied for their participation in formal peace



Cambodian women from Boeung Kak community shout slogans during a march on International Women's Day in Phnom Penh on March 2012 // © TANG CHHIN SOTHY/AFP/Getty Images

negotiations. Women from southern Sudan, who became disillusioned with unfulfilled promises about participation in negotiations, offered advice based on their own experiences to their counterparts in Darfur (the eventual Darfur peace agreement in 2006 recognised gender-based violence and recommended women's involvement in the drafting of legislation). In Angola, Northern Ireland and Sierra Leone, women deliberately promoted an inclusive and non-partisan approach to politics, ensuring that the widest range of voices would be heard, including those of women from different factions, classes and areas of the country.

*Social and economic reconstruction*

The women activists described in the case studies identified a range of changes they wanted to promote as part of the preparations for the new society that they hoped would emerge after the war. Women in Cambodia and Somalia, for example, were active members of emerging civil societies and founded their countries' earliest civil society organisations and networks. In Uganda, some women became active in local government, while others ran reception centres for returning ex-combatants, or promoted reconciliation by campaigning for the re-constitution of cultural institutions. Women's organisations in Bougainville developed new roles in literacy, health, and education, and aimed to build the capacity of their own organisations. Women in Somalia were active in encouraging young men to demobilise and provided them with micro-credit to prevent a return to violence.

**What 'added value' do women bring?**

*Bringing inclusivity into peacebuilding*

The range of women's peace activities is broad and has expanded the scope of peacebuilding itself. As Accord author Anne Itto pointed out in 2006, many mainstream peace actors

see peace as a process of settling national and regional power contests between elites. In contrast, women peace activists tend to work towards a vision in which peace is a just society; one where political participation is inclusive and where the security and needs of the whole population are adequately and equally addressed. Their specific experiences of suffering during conflict – both directly and through the suffering of their families and associates whom they support – have led them to work to address a wide range of psychosocial, relational, spiritual as well as political and economic dimensions of conflict transformation.

The consequence of women's exclusion from peace processes is therefore not only the gender-blind nature of peace agreements, and the absence of gender-based targets in post-conflict settlements, but also a broader lack of concern in peace processes for inclusivity. It is not just women who suffer as a result of this but society at large. As Henda Ducados from Angola tellingly suggests, there is a need to 're-adjust gender relations to the needs of both women and men, as a fundamental component of the long-term process of peaceful and sustainable development'.

*Capitalising on women's traditional roles*

Even though the stereotype of women as 'natural' peacemakers is difficult to sustain given their multiple roles in conflict contexts, it is clear that for women peace activists, their identity as women gives them qualities that bring something special to their work. The stereotype is not without its uses – the widespread perception of women as natural nurturers has given them small windows of opportunity to achieve their goals, and they have been willing to deploy these advantages where they can.

Much that the women in the Accord case studies accomplished would not have been achievable for men, in whom support for peace initiatives has often been viewed as either a weakness or a threat to those in power. Women can wield the 'power of the powerless': as a Bougainville peace activist explained when describing how she had stood up to soldiers at a roadblock, 'If we had involved men there would have been trouble'.

In many societies women have specific functions in relation to decision-making about conflict and peace, often wielding sanctions against men for being more – or less – bent on violence than the women thought right. In societies as far apart as Sudan and India it has been traditional for women to step into battlefields between opposing forces when they saw the need to bring an end to fighting. Case studies from Bougainville and Somalia describe how women used their special status (in Bougainville their role as custodians of the land, and in Somalia their position as privileged channels of communication between clans) to mediate, entreat and exert influence.

#### *Women at the forefront of civil society*

The case studies show that women have been at the heart of the emergence of civil society movements both during and after the violence. Mu Sochua of Cambodia, for example, founded Khemara, Cambodia's first indigenous NGO. In Northern Ireland the Civic Forum that was set up as part of the 1998 Belfast Agreement was the brainchild of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC).

Faiza Jama describes how in Somalia the establishment of the Peace and Human Rights Network was the outcome of a conference organised in 1997 by the Coalition for Grassroots Women's Organisations. Rosalba Oywa depicts the role played in peace advocacy by People's Voice for Peace, an early example of civil society in northern Uganda established mainly by women. These women's organisations focused on defending women's rights, but at the same time were actively campaigning for and supporting change that would benefit the whole society.

#### *A different sort of politics*

The case studies present examples of women peace activists seeking to operate through a different sort of politics – a politics based on inclusivity and consensus as opposed to the adversarial confrontation and mutual recrimination that characterised existing political relations in their contexts.

- In Northern Ireland, where sectarian political groupings were the norm, the NIWC was established as a political party with membership drawn from the two conflicting communities. It ensured that both nationalist and loyalist women were present throughout the all-party talks that led to the signing of the Belfast Agreement, and made sure its policy proposals were acceptable to both its nationalist and unionist members.
- The women's perspective articulated by the Sierra Leone Women's Forum (SLWF) was deliberately non-partisan, while both the government and the rebels were committed to entrenched positions. At first the government dismissed the women as rebel sympathisers but eventually accepted their legitimacy. By presenting peace as a 'neutral'

## BOX 3

### How the NIWC influenced the Northern Ireland peace process

Adapted from: Institute for Inclusive Security, 'Bringing women into peace negotiations', *Strategies for Policymakers*, No. 2, October 2009

The NIWC played an important role in shaping the Belfast Agreement. Party members brought health and social issues to the forefront of the agenda. They broadened the talks to include topics of interest to marginalised groups other than women and fought for recognition of the rights and needs of victims of violence. NIWC delegates applied principles of inclusion, equality and respect for human rights when developing positions, and argued that a workable solution needed to be based on values and common ground, not fixed positions. They also had an important impact on the formal negotiations; by remaining impartial, the women built trust and broke down communication barriers. NIWC delegates established close relationships with other parties, and as a result of its influence and approach, it had more of its issues and proposals included in the final document than any other party.

The peace process benefited from their participation through:

- Bridges built among negotiating parties. Using their access to full effect, the NIWC delegates served as facilitators for the negotiations, encouraged political opponents to work together, and promoted novel solutions as well as consensus building.
- Increased awareness of prisoners' rights. The NIWC successfully pushed for the agreement to include accelerated release and reintegration of political prisoners.
- Emphasis on victims and youth in reconciliation. The NIWC secured language on victims' rights in the agreement, and argued that young people required particular attention. The agreement acknowledged that addressing the suffering of victims was a necessary element of reconciliation and committed to supporting development of special community-based initiatives to help young victims of violence.
- Promotion of social goals, including integrated education and mixed housing. During the peace talks, the NIWC argued for safer communities and ensured that the agreement included provisions for the support of integrated education and mixed housing.
- More comprehensive dialogue. The NIWC proposed a Civic Forum to ensure that the inclusive process continued beyond the negotiations. Comprising business, trade unions and other civic sectors, the forum was created to consult with the new Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly on economic, social and cultural issues.
- Protection of women's political rights. The agreement's human rights section included a clause calling for 'the right of women to full and equal political participation'.

option, the SLWF contributed to a climate in which both government and rebels could agree to negotiations without losing face. The SLWF felt able to challenge the military rulers when other civil society organisations would have been perceived as a threat.

In these cases women activists created an environment in which women were acknowledged as legitimate political participants, and at the same time raised the profile of peace activism, which, as in the case of Sierra Leone, had previously been viewed as a 'fifth column' aiming to undermine the government.

The studies show that women have sometimes been able to change the nature and culture of politics, at least for a certain length of time. The NIWC in Northern Ireland is probably the most significant example of this, and remains a model to which many other movements aspire (see Box 3). However, it is important not to overstate the influence women have had in changing political cultures; more often than not the barriers they face to entering politics and achieving change are considerable.

### **Women as political actors – what are the challenges?**

Given the extent and significance of women's peace activism it is surprising how uniformly women have been excluded from formal peace processes. UN WOMEN's 2012 report *Women's participation in peace negotiations* provides countless examples of women being excluded from the peace table by national leaders and the international community alike. International, as well as national, organisations employ minimal numbers of women as mediators.

The nine Accord case studies uniformly attest to this pattern. To give just two examples:

- Although Bougainville women hold an important position in society and specific social responsibilities, their extensive peace work ran in parallel to official negotiations rather than being integrated into them. Women acquired almost no positions in post-conflict institutions such as the Bougainville People's Congress.
- Somali women lobbied clan elders to sustain dialogue in a series of negotiations over clan conflict in Somaliland in the mid-1990s, supporting peace conferences as fundraisers and even as cooks. Though some women were eventually allowed to attend the conferences as observers, they were denied voting rights.

It is not just the negotiating table that women are excluded from, but also the post-conflict settlement in general (the two are, of course, linked). For example, in Somalia, Puntland and Somaliland, agreements on quotas for women in post-war parliaments have been progressively downgraded.

The Angolan case study refers to the problem of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration arrangements in which women – and especially women who were attached to armed groups but did not carry arms – were typically not counted, nor provided with demobilisation support, in spite of their entitlement in international policy (note that a similar constraint applies to children).

#### *Why are women excluded from peace processes?*

The case studies suggest several reasons for the failure to include women in peace processes, including their inexperience of formal political engagement and the practical difficulties of sustaining a non-partisan position based on broad consultation.

Henda Ducados of Angola, for example, accepts that women's civil society organisations are comparatively weak, which reflects the elite dominance of Angolan civil society generally. Anne Itto, in Sudan, remarks that meetings were often called at short notice, giving women inadequate time to confer among each other and present consensus.

Women face a number of other impediments that relate less to organisation and more to public perceptions. It is these public perceptions that present the most obvious challenges to participation. As many of the case studies emphasise, women are often seen as passive victims rather than active participants in decision-making processes. There is a perception that it is only men who engage in violence and it is they who should therefore determine the peace.

In southern Sudan thousands of women joined the armed struggle, as combatants and as providers of support to fighters. Yet their involvement was overlooked and they were not seen as appropriate participants for negotiations.

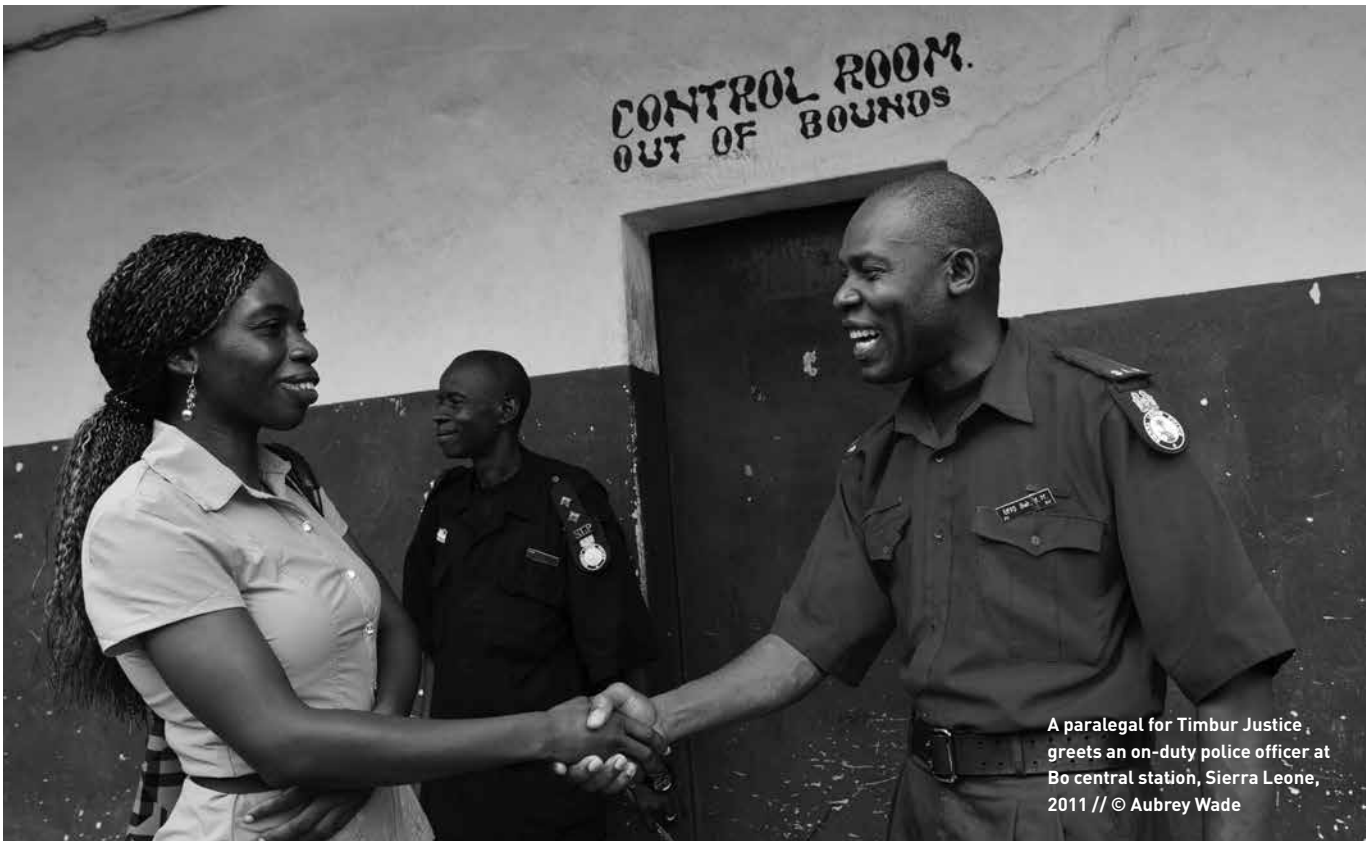
Anne Itto identifies the following manifestations of such attitudes in the case of Sudan:

- Lack of confidence in women's capacity to fill political positions
- Belief that power-sharing is the preserve of those who had participated directly in hostilities (the assumption being that these are men)
- The promotion by male leaders of customs and traditions that marginalise women
- Lack of commitment to implementing provisions of agreements pertaining to women's participation
- Peace agreements built around political and regional interests, rather than bringing in other constituencies to share power and resources.

#### *Opportunities for political engagement*

The nine Accord case studies show the range of ways women have seized opportunities for political engagement and their varying degrees of success.

- In Sierra Leone, Jasmin Jusu-Sheriff points out that women initially succeeded in influencing political decision-making by effectively arguing for democratic elections to be held in 1996. Once a civilian government was sworn in, however, members of the Women's Forum drew back from seeking further political engagement on the grounds that their immediate peacebuilding goal had been attained. In her analysis, Jusu-Sheriff argues that one factor that held them back was the lack of an 'ideological framework' or a 'clear and consistent long-term vision'.
- Kate Fearon describes how the NIWC became a political force by forming a political party of its own. In its political engagement the NIWC attempted to foster consensus and dialogue, thereby promoting a political culture that 'worked to accommodate difference, instead of throwing up obstacles based on those differences'.
- In Aceh, Suraiya Kamaruzzaman shows how women were poorly represented in post-settlement national political structures, but subsequently developed a lobbying mechanism through the Women's Peace Network



A paralegal for Timbur Justice greets an on-duty police officer at Bo central station, Sierra Leone, 2011 // © Aubrey Wade

(established in 2005) and the Gender Working Group. This monitored policies and legislation, and lobbied to ensure women's interests were taken into account, albeit with little direct representation in the actual corridors of power.

- The Angola case study raises the issue of differences between women in terms of their political goals. Whereas some saw the establishment of the Ministry for Family and Women, for example, as a positive step forward in creating political space for women, others argued that it reflected a patriarchal view of women's social roles, and sought to distance the women's agenda from core government policy.

The case studies also show that when women were blocked in their attempts to influence post-settlement politics they developed roles in social activism. For example Lorraine Garasu shows how women's NGOs in Bougainville began focusing on literacy, reproductive health, education and combating violence against women, as well as small business training and capacity building for women and women's organisations.

### **Conclusion: lessons learned and challenges for policymakers and practitioners**

What is the most effective way of translating commitments to the women, peace and security agenda into reality for women on the ground? This collection of Accord case studies suggests that the answer lies in supporting women's own varied and broad-ranging peacebuilding initiatives and capacities. Spanning three continents and more than a decade, the case studies present strikingly similar experiences. They demonstrate that women's peace activism covers a huge range, from humanitarian to economic, from rights advocacy to mediation and negotiation. These add value to mainstream peace processes because they derive from real life experiences rather than from political power play.

The case studies demonstrate women's resilience and their capacity to use what leverage their social and cultural positions allow to influence those set on violence. However, while underlining the capacity of women to mobilise and organise for peace, they also point to their marginalisation and exclusion from peace processes, political settlements, and post-conflict political forums. As a result of this exclusion, most peace agreements are gender-blind, failing to pay special attention to gender-specific concerns or to recognise women's contributions to peace.

### *Challenges and lessons for women peace activists and organisations*

Many of the constraints women peace activists face are practical ones. These include the costs – in time and money – of organising and sustaining an inclusive and consultative approach, as well as women's general lack of familiarity with the practice of advocacy.

The biggest challenge, however, concerns political engagement – in formal political processes but also the politics of engagement in decision-making generally, whether at household and community or national levels or within civil society movements.

For peace to be sustainable it requires structural change towards greater levels of inclusion and participation. This means going beyond expressing women's immediate and practical needs or simply promoting quotas. New political structures and practices are needed in which the involvement of women as decision-makers is accepted as legitimate and normal.

What lessons can be learned about women's involvement in political processes? A key strategy used by the women



described in this volume was to play a neutral and facilitating role.

The NIWC developed a broad agenda and supported the rights of marginalised groups, whether men or women. They formed alliances with other parties in the negotiations, whom they were then able to influence, and took on the politically neutral role of upholding procedures and processes. In this way they helped define common ground between otherwise polarised positions.

Similarly, women in Sierra Leone gained influence by being perceived as politically neutral. Women in Angola who took part in peacebuilding platforms rather than political parties found that this enabled them to present a united front. Bougainville women attending the Sandline talks in Burnham in 1997 also found that unity, in spite of their different political affiliations, enabled them to influence talks more effectively.

Ensuring strong links between national-level representatives and their grass-roots supporters was another key strategy, and one adopted successfully by the Angolan women's organisation OMA as well as by women in Sierra Leone and Sudan. In Aceh, women's organisations took this strategy one step further by promoting political education at the grass roots to ensure that the general population was familiar with government and international policies (and the budgets attached to them).

As the case studies show, evidence about women's capacity to influence the political process is contradictory. The NIWC did exert a positive influence on key political decision-making, raising issues such as victim rights, which would not have been addressed by the main protagonists. Yet women often lacked the confidence to confront experienced political actors and felt more comfortable influencing situations indirectly.

In weighing up the risks and challenges attached to political engagement, some women, including those in Sierra Leone, have felt that gradual change is more secure – and incurs less resistance – than radical change.

But, as Anne Itto describes in Sudan, a pragmatic approach may simply privilege the warring parties, no matter how culpable they were during the war and even if they represent past institutions whose interests are threatened by the notion of inclusivity. Once fixed, decisions agreed early on in peace negotiations can be hard to influence later.

The Aceh and Bougainville case studies, for example, demonstrate the risk that old politics may simply continue as 'business as usual'. Case study authors from Angola and Cambodia also viewed with alarm tendencies to perpetuate patriarchal structures that violate women's rights.

Clearly confidence is a key asset for women seeking to influence political settlements. Sharing lessons and strategies can help to build women's confidence and showcase ways of overcoming obstacles.

#### *Lessons for policymakers*

The most significant lesson brought out by the case studies is that women should be viewed as legitimate political actors

during conflict, during negotiations around peace settlements, and in post-settlement political accommodations. Women's peace movements derive legitimacy from the fact that they represent a broad and inclusive constituency at times when inclusivity is a critical ingredient in building a new society.

Finding practical mechanisms for involving women in peace processes from the beginning is therefore a win-win strategy. Governments and donors often prioritise the involvement of armed parties in order to guarantee security and prevent a return to violence. They often justify pushing 'women's issues' back on grounds of pragmatism, arguing that there are more urgent priorities and that gradual change is best.

But, as noted above, decisions made early on are hard to reverse later. It is wrong to assume that involving women is inconsistent with addressing pressing security and reconstruction issues. On the contrary, women have important things to say about all components of conflict resolution and reconstruction processes.

Peace processes consist of negotiations not only for ceasefires and an end to violence, but also for a whole range of instruments that contribute to the foundations for a newly emerging society. These include plans for the transition to civilian governance, such as demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration, as well as plans for political power-sharing, economic recovery and transitional justice. A broad range of interest groups need to contribute to dialogue on these issues if the post-conflict political settlement is to be inclusive, and therefore sustainable.

Women can help to achieve this, but to do so they need to gain access to those planning and managing peace processes and political settlements. The breadth of consultation that women bring to peace processes needs to be acknowledged in the timing of events and in the costs of logistics and communications. Women's inputs into peace processes can be maximised through relevant and timely support. This might include helping them develop political awareness as well as organisational and advocacy skills.

A clear lesson from the case studies in this volume is the importance of networking. Linking women across divides, facilitating contacts and consultations between women in capital cities and those in the countryside, can enrich peace processes by contributing to the development of broad-based agendas. Moreover, women peace activists and their organisations gain confidence and inspiration from learning about other women's experiences elsewhere in the world, as Bougainville women did for example when they attended the Beijing Conference on Women in 1994. Indeed, in the case of countries divided by war, such forums may provide the only occasion for women from the different sides to meet at all.

Most significantly for donors and decision-makers, the case studies illustrate how 'peace' is a gendered concept. The women peace activists writing in this collection describe a view of peace that is holistic and inclusive. Involving women in peace processes, on their terms, will help to ground settlements and ensure their sustainability.

# Cambodia

## Accord 5 (1998) 'Safeguarding peace: Cambodia's constitutional challenge'

### Abstract

During the 1980s women constituted 60 per cent of the Cambodian population; more than half were principal breadwinners. The article describes how during the 1980s and 1990s women's social activism – which included caring for war orphans, running a literacy campaign and setting up a system of cooperatives – evolved into a political role after the Paris peace conference of 1991. The women's

movement lobbied for greater recognition of women's rights and worked to promote a broad social development agenda focused on the neglected rural majority. Despite gaining parliamentary seats, women found it difficult to break into politics due to the heavy socio-economic demands placed upon them and prevailing views of traditional gender roles.

### Background

As the Vietnam War spilled over into Cambodia in the late 1960s, the country was launched into a 30-year period of conflict and social upheaval shaped by regional Cold War dynamics and oppressive national rule.

In 1975 the Khmer Rouge took over the country. Headed by Pol Pot and inspired by Mao's China, its brand of utopian socialism led to the purging of Cambodia's educated classes. The population was systematically driven into the countryside to begin establishing a collectivised agricultural system. Between April 1975 and January 1979, 1.5 million Cambodians died from malnutrition, overwork and disease, while at least 200,000 others were executed without trial as 'class enemies'. The Khmer Rouge was eventually swept from power in 1979 by the Vietnamese. The resulting People's Republic of Kampuchea, backed by Vietnam and the Soviet Union, spent the next 10 years defending its rule against a US-sponsored tripartite resistance – comprising the Khmer Rouge, the royalist FUNCINPEC and the Khmer People's National Liberation Front.

Talks between resistance factions and the government began in 1987 with extensive international involvement. The resulting Paris Peace Accords of 1991 had two main objectives: to end international involvement in Cambodia,

and ensure all factions relinquished their weapons and took part in the political process. The UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) was established in early 1992 to oversee implementation of the agreements and elections. It functioned as the country's governing authority until its mandate ended in 1993. It also provided space and opportunities for the growth of civil society: NGOs, community-based civic groups, and grass-roots networks.

Implementation proved difficult in a country with no tradition of political power-sharing and a peace process driven by international pressure rather than national reconciliation. Although elections in 1993 saw an 89 per cent turnout and were hailed a success internationally, factions remained armed and fighting continued. The Khmer Rouge's power declined significantly, but other factions were able to use the power-sharing arrangements to pursue their own interests unchecked. In 1997, a coup by the Cambodian People's Party, led by Hun Sen, dislodged Prince Ranariddh and his FUNCINPEC party from government, leaving Hun Sen in complete control of the state. In 1998, the year the Accord article was written, internationally sponsored elections took place once again but negotiations over the formation of a new government remained deadlocked.

# Cambodian women in politics: breaking through the traditional image

## Mu Sochua

Mu Sochua has been a leading human rights advocate for over 25 years, and is a prominent member of Cambodia's leading opposition party, the Sam Rainsy Party. She was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005 and touted by the *New York Times* in 2010 as 'part of a new generation of women who are working their way into the political systems of countries across

Asia and elsewhere'. Since her return to Cambodia in 1990 she has worked to promote women's rights, founding Khemara – the first indigenous NGO in Cambodia. She has been influential on issues of human trafficking, child abuse, domestic violence, worker exploitation and corruption. She was appointed Head of the Ministry of Women's and Veterans' Affairs in 1998.

The socio-economic burdens of Cambodia's transition from three decades of upheaval to relative peace have been disproportionately shouldered by its women. Along with unequal access to educational opportunities and persisting cultural biases, this has proved a formidable obstacle to Khmer women seeking a more active role in public life.

### Women as mass mobilisers

During the 1980s Cambodian women played a major role in the revitalisation of their society. Shattered by the long war and the Khmer Rouge genocide, Cambodia suffered further from the international isolation of its new Vietnamese-backed government. At this time, women accounted for some 60% of the population. One third of them were widows. More than half were also the principal breadwinners in their families.

Led by the Women's association of Cambodia, women were behind a nation-wide literacy campaign. They also took the lead in caring for the thousands of war orphans and in developing a nationwide system of cooperatives to regenerate local social and economic activity. With women still struggling to meet their families' daily needs, however, only a very few became active in formal politics.

### A timid political awakening

The 1991 Paris peace agreements opened the way for Cambodian women to play a greater political role than ever before. The proliferation of indigenous NGOs (some 300 to date, of which over 40 have a women's agenda) marked an important step forward. Khemara, Cambodia's first indigenous NGO, was founded by a small group of women dedicated to a society based on democratic and gender-balanced principles. The fledgling NGO-based women's movement became involved in addressing domestic violence and sexual exploitation and also lobbied for specific articles in the Constitution to ensure greater recognition of their rights.

At the same time, Cambodian women have worked to promote a broader social and human development agenda for Cambodia's reconstruction. This reflects a more comprehensive understanding of the needs of Cambodia's deeply divided society with a particular focus on its largely neglected rural majority. In a society marked by open displays of violence, the peacebuilding approaches of women, involving

diverse initiatives such as peace rallies and petitions, stand out from the more confrontational tendencies of men and student groups.

Through their experience as social activists, women have come to realise that overcoming gender-biased policies will demand a more active political role as well as broader changes in Cambodia's male-dominated society. After the 1993 elections, seven women joined the 120-seat National Assembly and a Ministry of Women's Affairs was created. At the same time, however, virtually no women won posts in the provincial, district and commune-level administrations. While there were twice as many female candidates in the 1998 elections, they still represented just ten per cent of the total at this level.

### Changing mindsets

The lack of women in official posts masks more enduring problems in Cambodian society. Even when women are elected to official positions, they still face difficulties in breaking into the 'boys' club' and playing a real role in decision-making processes. Behind the formal trappings of the parliamentary system, this still occurs informally in a largely male-dominated world. Here elections and politics are often interpreted narrowly as a means of settling disputes rather than as an opportunity to debate and advance issues linked to broader national interests.

The ability of women to make their voices heard is further undermined by traditional cultural biases against women. Women are still expected to be more soft-spoken than men, and many Cambodians see the maintenance of gender relations which discriminate against women as crucial to the preservation of the Khmer cultural identity. Few Cambodian political parties, despite their claims, have seriously invested in programmes to help women move out of their traditional gender roles. Along with fears of intimidation and a lack of formal education, this saps the confidence of many women.

The huge socio-economic demands still placed on Cambodian women are perhaps the greatest obstacle militating against their greater political role. While there is still a long way to go before women enjoy the full fruits of equality, their growing involvement in Cambodia's political life has injected a new vitality into it and placed a greater emphasis on social issues.

# Sierra Leone

## Accord 9 (2000) 'Paying the price: the Sierra Leone peace process'

### Abstract

This case study traces and critiques the evolution of the women's movement that grew out of the civil war in Sierra Leone. It assesses the achievements and weaknesses of women's collective actions, and the reasons why despite forming extensive networks for the advancement of women's rights the movement fell short of becoming a political force. The author describes the creation of the Women's Forum and how it became one of the chief

advocates for a return to civilian rule and democratic elections. Despite – or perhaps because of – the Forum's success in involving women from across the country, politicians discouraged their continued engagement in politics, and women lacked the confidence to withstand this. Nevertheless, the Forum succeeded in opening up public debate on contentious issues and articulating a politically non-partisan, female perspective.

### Background

On the eve of civil war Sierra Leone was on the verge of collapse. Mismanagement and corruption were rife and a vast pool of young people lacked opportunities for education or employment. Against this backdrop a small group of armed Sierra Leoneans crossed over from Liberia in 1991 and began to attack border villages. The main armed force that emerged was the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) led by Foday Sankoh and backed by Charles Taylor, the leader of the Liberian insurgency.

With few conventional battles between the RUF and the Sierra Leonean army, much of the military action was directed at civilian targets. The RUF became notorious for forcing abductees to murder, mutilate and rape civilians so they would not be accepted back into their communities or families. Estimates in 2000 were of between 30,000–75,000 dead. An estimated 5,000 underage combatants were forced into or volunteered for the various armed factions.

Some of the war's most intensive fighting was for control of mining areas. At various points in the conflict government forces were aided by local armed groups (Kamajors), the South African private security firm Executive Outcomes, or the Nigerian and Economic Community of West African

States Monitoring Group peacekeepers. In the latter stages of the war, the RUF's staying power was largely attributed to its control over major diamond fields in the east of the country.

By 1995 a military and political stalemate had developed. The rebel movement lacked widespread support and the government had lost credibility for not being able to ensure security. The 1996 Abidjan peace accord collapsed and fierce battles later swept the capital Freetown in 1999, prompting new international efforts to broker a negotiated settlement. Under the Lomé Accord of 2000 Sankoh was granted the status of vice-president and made chair of a commission with ostensible powers to regulate the country's diamonds. However, disarmament attempts were met with resistance and in May 2000 the RUF took hundreds of UN peacekeepers hostage. This, and the overall lack of progress in disarming the RUF, triggered popular protests in Freetown that led to Sankoh's capture and detention.

At the time this issue of Accord was released in 2000, the struggle for power in Sierra Leone was continuing. The outcome of these struggles was then uncertain, but amid the renewed fighting the struggle for peace continued too.

# Sierra Leonean women and the peace process

## Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff

Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff is a lawyer and women's rights advocate. She was a prominent member of the women's movement in Sierra Leone, and sits on the board of Femmes-Africa-Solidarité. She has held posts as Executive Secretary for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Sierra Leone,

Sub-regional President and head of the Sierra Leone Chapter, Mano River Women's Peace Network and Coordinator for the Network for the Promotion of African Principles of Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation. Most recently she was the Vice President of the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone.

Centralisation of power, violence and patriarchal attitudes excluded women from politics and public decision-making in post-independence Sierra Leone. Subsequently, politics and politicians were discredited by the failure of the All People's Congress (APC) one-party government to meet even the most basic needs. In response, women formed non-political voluntary groups that focused on the advancement of the status and welfare of women and worked at the community level to provide them with material benefits and democratic opportunities not otherwise available. Eschewing politics was seen as essential to protect oneself at the personal and organisational level under the APC regime and its successor, the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) junta.

### The Women's Forum

In mid-1994, the Sierra Leone Association of University Women (SLAUW) proposed that women's groups meet regularly for networking, information sharing and collective action on issues of common concern. SLAUW, the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), the Women's Association for National Development (WAND), the National Organisation for Women (NOW), and long-time community activists such as Haja Isha Sasso formed the backbone of the new structure. Soon the women of ZONTA and Soroptimist International were networking with Omo Benjamin of the Women's Wing of the Sierra Leone Labour Congress, with Alice Conteh of the newly formed National Displaced Women's organisation, and with members of different women traders groups. Muslim women's associations and mass membership Christian women's groups were also active participants in the Women's Forum, as the discussion group came to be known.

The first issues tackled were preparations for the Beijing Conference on Women. However, the rebel war was having such a negative impact on women it could not be ignored and women were drawn into political discussions on how to end it. Amy Smythe, the then president of the YWCA, was one of those who argued consistently that women should not insulate themselves from the ongoing crisis and insisted that the YWCA offer its resources in support of activities that were considered by many of her members to be 'too political'. In 1995, Patricia Sharpe of the US Information Service at the US Embassy in Freetown organised a series of discussions with teleconference facilities, enabling Sierra Leonean women, many of them members of the Forum, to learn about initiatives taken by other Third World women in similar situations. At the end of 1994 a women's seminar organised with support from the US Embassy ended with a resolution to take action for peace.

### Women's Movement for Peace

As a first step the Sierra Leone Women's Movement for Peace (SLWMP) was formed and joined the Women's Forum. The SLWMP's initial objective was simply to restore peace in the country. It justified its strategy of direct intervention in politics on the grounds that the national crisis was too serious to be left to the military government. They argued that women were natural peacemakers who could bring unique skills to resolving the conflict. SLWMP obtained the Women's Forum's active support for a campaign of appeals to government and rebels, marches, prayer rallies and meetings with government and members of the international community to apply pressure for a negotiated settlement.

“ **The first peace march organised by the SLWMP in January 1995 was a joyous carnival affair led by a then little-known paediatrician, Fatmatta Boie-Kamara** ”

The military government, like its predecessor, was uneasy about public discussion and particularly sensitive about criticism of their handling of the war. The women's peace campaign put the issue in the public domain in a non-partisan and non-confrontational manner that made public debate of contentious issues possible without the fear of automatically offending the government.

The first peace march organised by the SLWMP in January 1995 was a joyous carnival affair led by a then little-known paediatrician, Fatmatta Boie-Kamara. It was a public demonstration of a kind not seen since the Mothers' Union marched on Parliament in the 1960s to protest against changes in family law. Female professionals, previously known for standing aloof from the concerns of ordinary people, danced through central Freetown, linking arms with female soldiers, petty traders and student nurses, singing choruses. The message of the demonstrators was simple and compelling: 'Try Peace to end this senseless war'. As the march moved along, the crowd of women of all ages and stations called to onlookers to join them. Many found the appeals irresistible.

Peace groups hitherto viewed with suspicion as 'fifth columnists' and rebel sympathisers acquired legitimacy through association with the women who had mobilised a mass movement and enjoyed the support of the international community. As a result of the women's intervention a negotiated peace settlement became a respectable option that offered both government and the rebels the opportunity to climb down from entrenched positions without loss of face.

However, by mid-1995, no significant response to the women's activities from the parties left their peace campaign in the doldrums. Women Organised for a Morally Enlightened Nation (WOMEN), a small member of the Forum whose main objectives were promotion of a democratic culture and active participation of women in politics and governance, at this point provided fresh impetus. They proposed the Forum take up the government's half-hearted offer of civilian rule, given under pressure from the international community. As ever, many groups were wary of politics. In a passionate debate some members of the SLWMP, themselves recently displaced as a result of the war, pointed out that economic collusion between government soldiers and RUF forces meant a speedy battlefield victory by the government was unlikely. It was concluded that peace would best be pursued through a return to democratic civilian rule.

### Finda – aged 16

*Interviewed by Ambrose James in March 2000*

I was captured in 1996 at Tombodu by a woman captain. She took me to be part of her squad and to be her close aide. I was trained to use an AK-58 gun and a pistol. We attacked Tongo, Koidu, Kongoteh, and a Guinea border town called Fokonia, where we burnt houses and looted foodstuffs and chopped off people's hands. When we were [forced to move out of] Koidu, we went near to the Liberian border and then started attacking right up to Freetown. I used to infiltrate into enemy territories to spy. We smoked marijuana, took capsules, had cocaine injections. My mother was killed in Kono and I have not been able to see my father, brother and sisters. Although I have never gone to school, I want to go to school and become a nursing sister. On the whole, I am still not sure that this accord will work. Unless there are adequate job opportunities for the youths in this country, there will be no future for them. The political arena is crowded with too many old people and no chance is given to the younger people. They ask for experience and how can youths get experience when they are not given the opportunity?

### Building momentum

Women took the lead in the democratisation process encouraged by other civil society groups, who felt the military would put up with more from the women than from them. The women's position paper prepared for the National Consultative Conference in August 1995 (called Bintumani I, after the hotel where it was held) was circulated to all delegates and convinced them of the conference's importance. Many of the women's recommendations were adopted without debate, the most significant of which was the provision that only a recall of the conference could authorise postponement of elections.

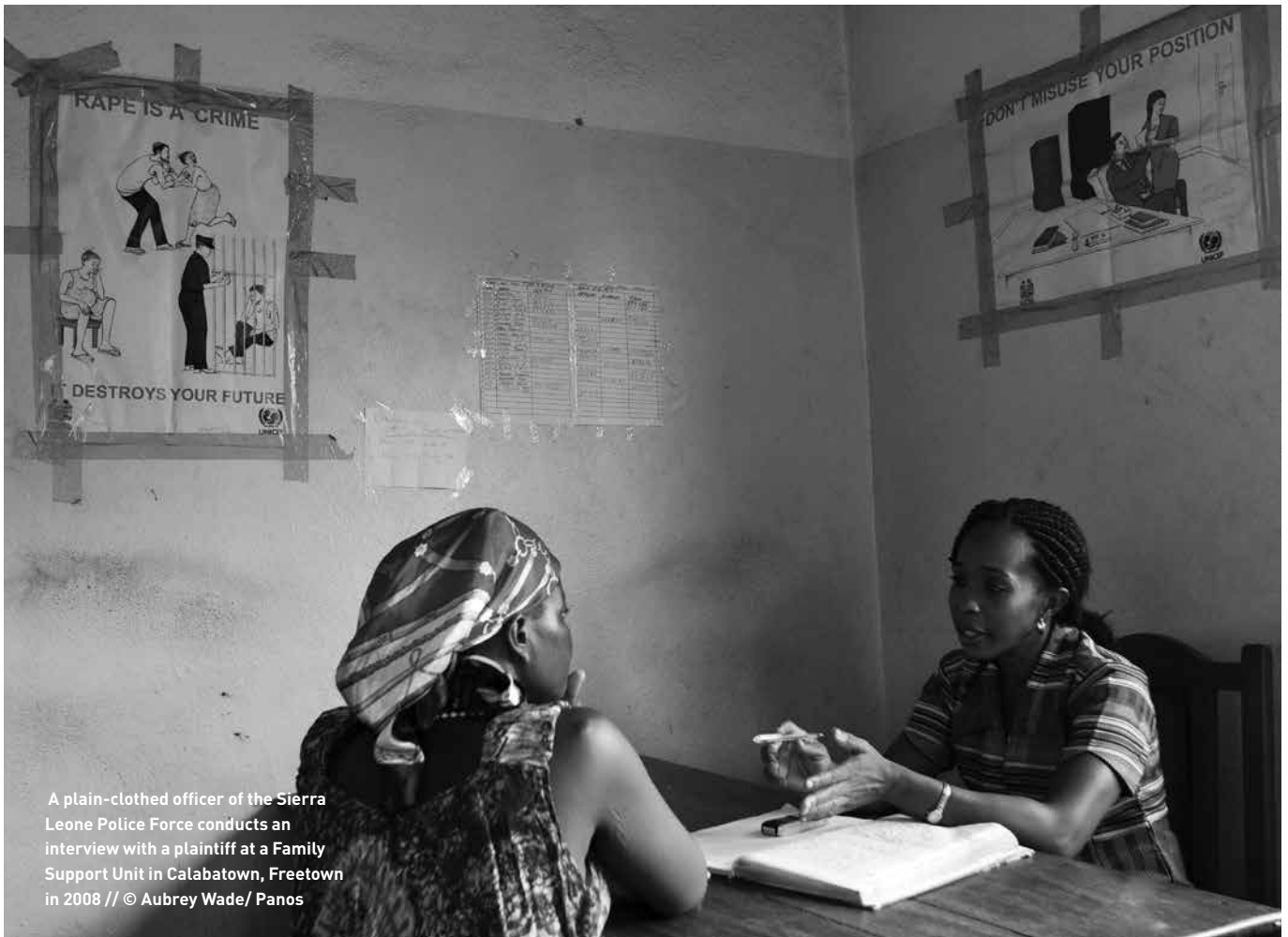
**“ As a result of the women's intervention a negotiated peace settlement became a respectable option that offered both government and the rebels the opportunity to climb down from entrenched positions without loss of face”**

As the voting date neared and civilians were increasingly targeted in brutal attacks aimed at maiming potential voters and intimidating others, the Women's Forum called a widely reported press conference. There they underlined the need for candidates to address women's issues such as illiteracy, health care, women entrepreneurship to reduce poverty and reform of laws detrimental to women on divorce, property, marriage and inheritance. They also reaffirmed their commitment to peace and demanded that elections go ahead as planned as 'an essential and fundamental part of the peace process' and that women make up fifty per cent of any peace negotiation delegation.

In the midst of the pre-election violence and an orchestrated campaign calling for peace before elections, the National Consultative Conference was recalled by the NPRC government two weeks before the election in February 1996. Looking back, the democratisation process had an air of inevitability about it, but on that morning there was still all to play for in the contest for delegates' votes at Bintumani II. Many delegates were undecided, particularly after the force commander clearly signalled the army's opposition to elections. When someone noticed that the young teacher slated to speak on behalf of the Women of the Eastern Province was being prevailed upon by Kailahun District elders to break ranks, an immediate decision was taken by the other women in the conference hall to substitute another speaker. Marie Turay's loud and unequivocal declaration in favour of elections took courage and was considered by many to be the turning point in favour of the decision to proceed with elections.

### Representation

The women's movement's claim to speak for women nationally was often challenged but it was justified. The women's demands in 1995-96 were a non-controversial minimum, reflecting the long-standing demands of women for improved welfare and status. Women displaced to Freetown and the main towns joined the Women's Forum and other connected groups. Well-established Forum members, like the YWCA, already had nationwide membership and communication structures. Other Freetown groups, such as WAND, had established contacts with up-country women leaders through their provincial projects. SLWMP undertook a successful sensitisation campaign and opened branches in all accessible parts of the country. The Forum considered these provincial links important and used them to share information, to coordinate marches, and, when places were



A plain-clothed officer of the Sierra Leone Police Force conducts an interview with a plaintiff at a Family Support Unit in Calabatown, Freetown in 2008 // © Aubrey Wade/ Panos

obtained for additional women delegates to Bintumani I, to identify and contact provincial participants. Decision-making through long and lively discussions on issues attended by up to eighty women at a time, all of whom had a right to speak and to which experts might be invited to provide information, was the hallmark of the Women's Forum and was cultivated to emphasise the democratic credentials of the movement.

Initially the women brought nothing to the peace process but idealistic appeals that carried no weight with the belligerents. The RUF never responded to their appeals for direct talks and the NPRC and civilian governments ignored their demands to be included in the formal peace process. In any case, neither the NPRC nor the RUF were, at that time, interested in the kind of peace being suggested by the women. Women believed that their hard work in the democratisation process would be rewarded by places at the negotiating table, but politicians recognised that the ideas and attitudes thrown up by the women's movement had the potential of destabilising traditional politics, so they discouraged further participation by women in leadership. Thirty years of systematic marginalisation of women in politics had left them lacking confidence. The majority of women steadfastly refused to convert into a political force that would have had leverage in the peace process. A civilian government that promised to take over responsibility for the peace process was a sufficient achievement for many of the women's groups who were not comfortable in the spotlight.

The 1996 elections produced a civilian government but neither a participatory peace process nor sustainable peace. After Abidjan (the Abidjan Accord November 1996), internal conflict disintegrated the SLWMP, while the Forum struggled to fulfil the limited role offered by a flawed agreement it had played no part in drawing up. The May 1997 coup ended women's attempts at independent intervention in the peace process. In future they would be firmly submerged within civil society.

### Lost voices

Although the participation in the search for peace and democratisation processes were very empowering experiences for individual women, the movement was perhaps not as influential as sometimes suggested – at least not in the short term. Certainly they opened up opportunities for public debate on peace issues and peace advocates were no longer automatically perceived as fifth columnists. They also emphasised the importance of issues over personalities in politics. However, the lack of an ideological framework to guide their peacebuilding activities blunted the movement's effectiveness. Forum discussions were long and inclusive, but the analysis was shallow and the consensual style prevented a clear and consistent long-term vision being elaborated.

Nonetheless, the women of Sierra Leone did succeed in creating an independent voice that articulated a non-partisan, female perspective on a wide range of fundamental issues. The most useful contribution a women's movement could make to sustaining peace would be to regain that voice.

# Northern Uganda

Accord 11 (2002) 'Protracted conflict, elusive peace: initiatives to end the violence in northern Uganda'

## Abstract

Conflict has had a profound impact on the cultural, social and economic fabric of northern Ugandan society. Reflecting on how women were impacted by and responded to violence, this case study traces the approaches women employed to promote peace and reconciliation. It shows that their efforts had more impact through community-based activities and advocacy campaigns than in formal political processes. Women marched

to demand an end to violence, lobbied government officials and reported abuses by the Ugandan army, drawing international attention to the conflict. They also supported the restoration of cultural institutions for community reconciliation and the reintegration of ex-combatants. The author argues that women's efforts show the importance of dealing with the effects of conflict at all levels to ensure sustainable peace.

## Background

After the National Resistance Movement/Army (NRM/A) overthrew Uganda's military government and took power in 1986, armed conflict broke out in the area of northern Uganda known as Acholiland and soon spread across large parts of the region.

Rooted in long-standing political power struggles, the conflict in Acholiland was triggered by gross human rights violations perpetrated by army units. As violence against civilians escalated, many turned to armed struggle. In 1989 the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), an Acholi-based insurgency headed by Joseph Kony, emerged. The LRA directed actions against the Acholi civilian population as much as government targets. Lacking in popular support, it resorted to forcibly recruiting thousands of young people through extensive raids and abductions. At the same time, civilians experienced crimes committed by the state army, the Ugandan People's Defence Force (UPDF).

By 2002, when the Accord article was published, the war had resulted in countless deaths, the abduction of almost 10,000 children, widespread human rights violations, and displacement of over half the population. Women and young girls were particularly affected through subjection to forced labour and sexual violence, including being given to LRA combatants as 'bush wives'.

Although it relied heavily on a military strategy, the Ugandan government did attempt to engage in talks with the LRA, notably in 1994. A number of unofficial peacemaking efforts emerged in 1997 – first by the Acholi diaspora, then by international NGOs. LRA infighting quickly led to the closure of these avenues of contact. In 1999 US-based NGO the Carter Center brokered the Nairobi Agreement between Uganda and the Sudan, which had supported the LRA since 1994. However, implementation proved difficult, and at the time the Accord article was written in 2002, Sudan had not yet withdrawn its support for the LRA.

In response to advocacy from Acholi elders, the Ugandan government approved an Amnesty Act in 2000. This led to the creation of an Amnesty Commission and a Demobilisation and Resettlement Team to encourage combatants and abductees to return to their communities. To further encourage return, traditional Acholi systems of restorative justice, which had fallen into disuse after the establishment of the Ugandan state, were also partially re-instituted.

As of 2002 there was still no peace in Acholiland, despite the Nairobi process placing enormous political and military pressure on the LRA. Key players remained committed to a 'military option', making the building of sustainable peace a difficult task.



# Women's contribution to peacebuilding in northern Uganda

Rosalba Oywa

Rosalba Oywa is a pioneer of community-based conflict resolution in the Acholi region of northern Uganda. In 1989 she mobilised women in Gulu to participate in a public demonstration demanding an end to the war. In 1995 she formed a women's peace group, People's Voice for Peace, which supports community reintegration of formerly abducted children and advocates for the inclusion of grass-roots

perspectives and women in peace processes. Rosalba Oywa has been Programme Director for the Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development in Gulu, and Regional Coordinator for the Coalition for Peace in Africa, overseeing its activities in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and Sudan. She was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005.

The conflict in northern Uganda has had diverse effects on women, resulting from mass displacement and the destruction of families, livelihoods, infrastructure and the environment. The conditions have led to cultural fragmentation, abject poverty and vulnerability to preventable diseases, sexual abuse, mutilation and death. Women have learned that any form of war and violence is a gender-differentiated activity in which few women stand a chance to gain regardless of which side is dominant. Women from Acholiland have responded to this challenge by assuming diverse roles, becoming combatants, negotiators and, most frequently, community peacebuilders. Many have turned their suffering into a driving force in the search for peace – even at risk to their lives.

Since its beginning, Acholi women have been armed combatants in the conflict. The most notable was Alice Auma 'Lakwena' who led the armed group that preceded Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army. In the LRA, most girls and women were forced to join after being abducted, but nevertheless comprise a significant presence in the movement. The abducted girls are mainly allocated as 'wives' to LRA officers or used as sex slaves by other rebels. Abducted girls who have returned home tend to show acute emotional disturbance, but with adequate care most recover over a period of time. Some women also joined the National Resistance Army. Most women combatants testify that they joined out of a need to save themselves or their families. Their experience demonstrates that many Acholi women have had to respond to the pressures of violence in extraordinary ways that are profoundly challenging to traditional social roles.

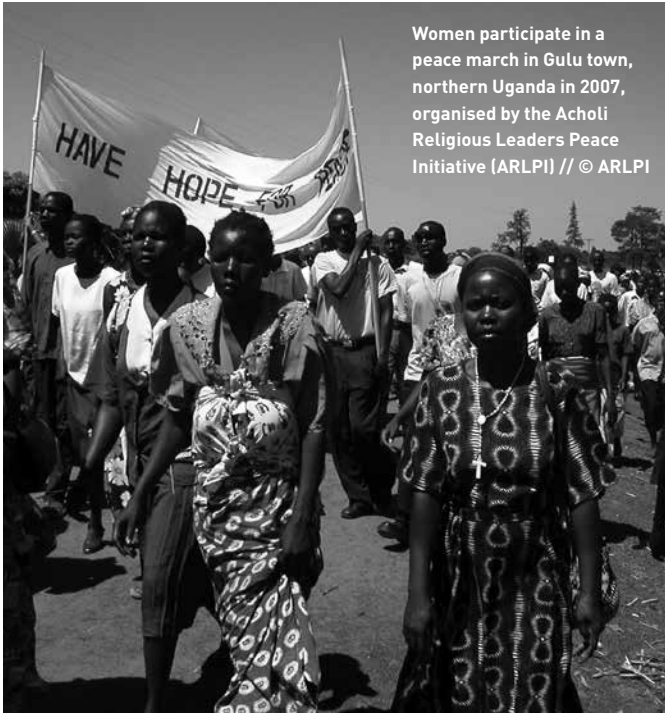
Most women, however, have tried to remain with their families and used their roles as carer to support peace in their homes and communities. Over time many have joined efforts to promote peace. One approach has been to appeal to the fighting forces to use peaceful means to resolve their differences and encourage the rebels to come back home. Many women testify to having used a variety of means to persuade or prevent their husbands, sons and other male relatives from actively engaging in the war. They have tried to persuade individual fighters to drop their arms and return to their communities while encouraging the government to change its policy to promote peace.

In 1989, the Gulu District Women's Development Committee mobilised other women in a peaceful demonstration at a time when no other groups dared to speak out about the war. Wearing rags and singing funeral songs, the women marched through Gulu town demanding an end to the violence. At the same time, many from the LRA gave up fighting and returned home. Although there are no available statistics to substantiate the outcome of the demonstration, a period of relative calm followed which provided an opportunity for various agencies to resettle displaced populations in Gulu.

**“ Since its beginning, Acholi women have been armed combatants in the conflict”**

In addition to signalling their disapproval of the LRA's behaviour, Acholi women have organised to try to influence government policy and the practices of Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) troops in the region. Realising that simple moral appeals to the fighting forces could not stop the war, in 1996 a delegation sought an audience with the President of the Republic of Uganda, army commanders and top government officials to articulate their concerns and demand a peaceful solution to the conflict and prevention of further violence. An audience with Museveni was denied but the more positive responses of military authorities, Local Councils, and the Resident District Commissioner for dialogue and development of joint strategies have greatly improved civil-military working relationships. Women have tried to prevent the excesses of UPDF soldiers by monitoring and reporting violations. Acholi women have also served on the Local Council committees in an effort to demand that their concerns are taken seriously. These leadership roles have demanded extra courage because of the high risk of reprisals from LRA fighters and, paradoxically, risk of the UPDF claiming that high profile women are LRA collaborators.

Women have also been leaders in efforts to draw international attention to the conflict. When the LRA abducted girls from St. Mary's School in Aboke in October 1996, the Concerned Parents Association was formed to campaign for their release.



Women participate in a peace march in Gulu town, northern Uganda in 2007, organised by the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) // © ARLPI

With the school's Deputy Headmistress, Sister Rachele Fassera, they initiated a high profile advocacy campaign that received attention worldwide and influenced the agenda in negotiations around the conflict. The strategy for the release of the Aboke girls has had some criticism, as the thousands of children abducted before 1997 received no such attention. The strong government support for the campaign has in fact helped to strengthen popular belief in a 'conspiracy of silence' and a lack of political will to end the conflict in northern Uganda.

**“ Women’s groups are working with others to revive cultural institutions and to prepare the community for reconciliation and reintegration ”**

Local NGOs such as People’s Voice for Peace have used participatory research to document people’s experiences. This process has helped to empower the participants with a deeper understanding of the nature, pattern and dynamics of the armed conflict – knowledge that the women’s peace

movement has used to strengthen its capacity. Documentation projects have also generated information for advocacy and lobbying work.

Women have also been active in forming or joining community-based organisations and local NGOs intended to address the consequences of the war by promoting reconciliation, reintegration and regeneration. For example, women worked with elders and traditional leaders to establish a reception centre for ex-combatants between 1989–90. This initiative ended when the government began transferring returning combatants from the camp to Kampala, a move which created so much anxiety that many of those who had previously surrendered disappeared back into the bush to continue fighting. Women have also been active in psycho-social programmes, particularly those focusing on the rehabilitation of returnees and supporting rape victims and amputees.

In addition to peacebuilding at the community level, Acholi women have played a direct role in efforts to find a negotiated settlement to the conflict. Women representatives were among those involved in the 1994 delegation led by the government’s Minister for the North, Betty Bigombe – herself an Acholi woman – to negotiate with the LRA. This initiative fostered a cessation of violence for almost six months before it collapsed.

Despite the fact that Acholi women have demonstrated both their motivation and capacity to be involved in peace initiatives, they continue to be marginalised from many of the official initiatives to address the war. They have not had a role in recent negotiation processes and, despite appeals, have not been appointed to such bodies as the Amnesty Commission. There is a general assumption that women MPs are representatives of the wider grass-roots women’s organisations, but in reality the links are inadequate.

The conflict and particularly the population displacement have undermined many traditions of social support. Women’s groups are working with others to revive cultural institutions and to prepare the community for reconciliation and re-integration. Working through local cultural institutions with activities such as prayer meetings, peace education, as well as through songs, proverbs, poetry and storytelling, women’s groups have helped to build community support and respect. Generally, women peacebuilding activists have recognised the need to address all the consequences of the conflict to develop a truly sustainable peace, and continue to work towards that end.

# Papua New Guinea-Bougainville

Accord 12 (2002) 'Weaving consensus: the Papua New Guinea-Bougainville peace process'

## Abstract

In Bougainville's matrilineal society women play important roles in the life of the clan but traditionally hold less power in the formal political arena. The author, a Bougainvillean church-based civil society activist, describes how during the civil war women used their familial positions to mediate between armed groups and set up relief networks across blockades. She also reflects on her own experience of women's groups organising to form platforms for

peace. Women emerged as important political influences, advocating behind the scenes in support of peace negotiations, speaking out against violence and actively engaging in local peace initiatives. While post-conflict political representation remains low, women have maintained an instrumental role in development and peacebuilding activities and seek long-term changes for further empowerment and peace.

## Background

The island of Bougainville, the most remote of Papua New Guinea's (PNG) provinces, became engulfed in conflict in the 1980s. At the time, Bougainville had one of the world's largest copper and gold mines, Panguna, which by the 1980s was the biggest single source of revenue for the PNG government after Australian aid. As popular disquiet grew over the allocation of revenues, the mine became increasingly intertwined with issues of indigenous identity. Bougainvilleans felt that mining activity undermined their traditional links to the land (based on matriarchal custody and lineage), reinforcing a long-standing sense of cultural and political exclusion.

In 1987 former mine employee Francis Ona and female campaigner Perpetua Serero led an appeal to the mining company to close the mine and compensate indigenous landowners. Largely ignored, protests turned violent and the mine was forced to close in 1989. What began as a sabotage campaign quickly transformed into an armed rebellion calling for Bougainville's independence from PNG. The Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) set up the Bougainville Interim Government (BIG) with Francis Ona as President, announcing a Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1990. In response PNG imposed a military blockade and permanent curfew, with the army committing widespread human rights abuses. As the diverse island society fractured over the next decade, further conflicts erupted between different Bougainvillean groups.

Throughout the 1990s regional and international actors supported peace efforts between the BRA and the PNG government, as well as between Bougainvilleans themselves. A number of initiatives, ceasefires and tentative agreements took place, including the Arawa peace conference in 1994 which brought together over 4,000 people for an inter-Bougainville dialogue. Yet it was not until 1997 that the worst of the violence ceased. By then an estimated 10,000–15,000 civilians had died. At its peak, the number of displaced people reached 70,000.

Starting with the Burnham talks in 1997, negotiations for a comprehensive political settlement developed over several years, culminating in the Bougainville Peace Agreement in 2001. The main provisions related to disarmament and amnesty for BRA, as well as autonomy arrangements. Regional actors played an important role in monitoring the ceasefire through the Peace Monitoring Group, and a UN Observer Mission was set up in 1998. In 2002, the year the article was written, efforts were focused on setting up an autonomous Bougainville Government and processes for making a new constitution. Arrangements for a referendum on independence, a key demand of the BRA, were also to be decided.

# The role of women in promoting peace and reconciliation

## Lorraine Garasu

Sister Lorraine Garasu is a member of the Congregation of the Sisters of Nazareth and Coordinator of the Bougainville Inter-Church Women's Forum. She is also the founder of the Nazarene Rehabilitation Centre on Bougainville. She has participated in peace negotiations in Bougainville and overseas. In 2009 she was honoured as the Papua New

Guinea winner of the US State Department's International Women of Courage Award, and in 2011 received the Order of Australia in recognition of her work assisting displaced families, sexually abused youth and victims of domestic violence, as well as trauma counselling, rehabilitation and agricultural programmes.

From the early days of the Bougainville crisis, women's groups played important roles in initiatives to end the violence and promote a sustainable solution to the conflict. Women of all political, religious and regional groupings mobilised and spoke out for peace. We prayed, marched and negotiated for peace and reconciliation.

### Women in Bougainvillean societies

In traditional Bougainvillean society, women have an important place in the family, and a vital role in the life of the clan. Most language and cultural groups in Bougainville are matrilineal. This means that it is the woman's line that determines kinship and the inheritance and use of land rights. There is a saying in Bougainville that 'women are mothers of the land'. With this come other key responsibilities such as keeping the family wealth and recording family history. From time to time, in consultation with her uncle or elder brother, a woman is also responsible for arranging marriages, organising the special feasts and cultural activities within the clan and participating in important negotiations around land rights and birthrights. However it has not been usual for women to exercise political power in the public arena, although their views are conveyed through a spokesperson in the family or clan.

Prior to the war, there were two main women's organisations on Bougainville. One was the Churches' Women's organisation, which was established in the mid-1960s and had developed successful programmes for women to be self-reliant at the village level. The other was the North Solomon's Provincial Council of Women which was instituted in the late 1970s and in the 1980s was in the process of establishing a system of networks between different women's organisations when its progress was disrupted by the outbreak of violence.

### The impact of conflict on women

All Bougainvillean women were affected by the war, but their experience differed in some respects depending on whether they were in government-controlled or BRA-controlled areas.

For those of us in government-controlled areas, it was 'life between two guns'. Women experienced harassment by both the BRA and the PNGDF forces. Our lives were constrained by rules and regulations such as the curfew from dawn to dusk. Freedom of movement and communication were restricted whenever there was a military operation, affecting the supply

of medicines, basic store goods and the provision of education. Restrictions on movement meant that women often had to wait a few days before they could go to their gardens to collect food.

Women in the BRA-controlled areas bore the brunt of the war as they suffered sustained attacks by PNGDF and Resistance forces. Eight years of blockade deprived them of access to shelter, food, clothing, health and educational services. Families who had fled into the hills had to establish new food gardens and while waiting for their crops to ripen, the women would return to their old gardens to harvest food. This was a long and dangerous journey and caused many health problems. Women behind the blockade struggled to care for their children without medicines, immunisations and adequate food supplies. Many babies died from preventable childhood diseases. Those in the mountains suffered from lack of warm clothing. Women and girls in both areas were at risk of rape by soldiers from all factions.

Military operations in all areas prevented travel and contact between groups living in different places. The 'divide and rule' tactics of the PNGDF were successful in creating and maintaining divisions between Bougainvilleans, with the consequence that peace groups were initially forced to operate in isolation from each other, within their own communities.

“ **Mothers went into the bush to attempt to bring their sons home. In south and southwest Bougainville, women went into the jungle to negotiate with the local BRA**”

### Women as peacemakers

Women's groups played a major role in working for peace and reconciliation at local and national levels. Individual women used their high status in the family to negotiate peace in their communities and managed to use their influence as go-betweens with the warring factions to maintain constructive dialogue. Mothers went into the bush to attempt to bring their

sons home. In south and southwest Bougainville, women went into the jungle to negotiate with the local BRA.

Groups such as the Catholic Women's Association and the Bougainville Community Integrated Development Agency run by Ruby Miringka, were the mainstay of humanitarian networks that provided food, clothing and medicines to those in government and BRA-controlled areas. At the time, movement restrictions meant that these clandestine networks were the only source of emergency assistance. As restrictions eased, these groups became the backbone of development and peacebuilding activities.

Women's groups and individual woman leaders emerged as an important influence in the political arena. Their activities included prayer meetings, reconciliation ceremonies, peace marches and petitions. They also played an important role in awakening the international community to the suffering of the Bougainville people. Their contacts with women from Australia and New Zealand were influential in bringing in support and assistance from abroad.

### **Early peace initiatives**

It was their domestic influence on the BRA and Resistance forces that enabled Bougainvillean women to have a significant impact in the early stages of the war. Events in September 1990 on the island of Buka led to the first public display of women's courage. Various women's groups, including the women of Buka Island, protested against a BRA blockade that was preventing PNGDF soldiers from distributing emergency medical supplies. The women, led by Anastasia La Pointe, planned a march that they were then forced to abandon by a BRA roadblock. Nonetheless La Pointe had the opportunity of confronting BRA commanders with the feelings of the women. She said, 'I spoke out and told them that it was a women's initiative. If we had involved men there would have been trouble'.

The following month, the women of Selau, in north Bougainville, planned another peace march to petition the PNGDF and BRA to put down arms and begin peaceful negotiations. After this the women again organised an all-night peace vigil to protest silently against the violence. About 5,000 people, including children and even members of the BRA, attended the vigil.

These peace efforts led by local women, culminated in August 1991 in the declaration of a 'Peace Area' by the Selau people. The community took steps to disarm the local BRA and agreed not to have Resistance Forces in the area. It was our responsibility to create an environment where we could dream about a peaceful solution to the conflict. It was not 100 per cent safe but we planned to trust each other again.

Other events included a peace march in December 1993 by the women in Buka to petition the leaders of all parties to carry out peaceful negotiations. In August 1994, the women of Siwai, south Bougainville, organised a peace march to petition the BRA to stop the war and to allow people out of their bush camps.

### **Women's organisations gather momentum**

In October 1994 the national government called a peace conference in the capital Arawa. Though the BRA and BIG leadership boycotted this event, it proved significant for women's groups, who had the opportunity to meet and air their views. Shortly after this, Catholic women organised the Bougainville Reunion in Buka. More than 2,000 women from all over Bougainville attended the conference, marking a new period of confidence for Bougainville women.

In 1995, women from the BRA and government-controlled areas sent separate delegations to the Fourth Global Conference on Women in Beijing. Bougainvillean delegates realised that women from different parts of the world shared their experience of war. On their return from Beijing, women from northern Bougainville conducted a silent march in protest against the war, in defiance of the State of Emergency.

The Bougainville Inter-Church Women's Forum (BICWF) was established in 1995 because a united women's voice from all church groups was needed to help bring about peace. It included a wide range of women, many of whom were not usually politically active. Later in 1995, the BICWF began to organise for a Women's Peace Forum which was subsequently held in Arawa in August 1996. About 700 women met to discuss how they could move towards a united front and find lasting solutions to the Bougainville Crisis. Women from the three main line churches and from across the island participated at the Forum. At the workshops they freely voiced their fears about the conflict. They formed strong working groups from all the districts of the island and put in place some concrete plans on how they would work towards a lasting solution to the conflict. Another positive spin-off from this Forum was a meeting between the organisers and a BRA group in the area, which was chaired by the women.

October 1996 brought Bougainville women from both sides of the blockade together. At the 'Bougainville Women Speak Out' Forum in Sydney, I met many women, including Ruby Miringka (founder of Bougainville Community Integrated Development Assistance, BOCIDA) and Daphne Zale (who represented Bougainville women at the Beijing Conference). It was the first time that the three of us had met during the eight years of war, and for the first two days there was much uncertainty between us. We soon realised, however, that we were all working for the one cause – peace. The Forum provided us with an opportunity to discuss strategies for working together even though once back in Bougainville we would be living far apart. We produced a position paper that became our stepping stone for further peace talks. While in Australia we also met with senators and had a session at the PNG High Commission in Canberra.

### **Women's role in negotiations**

Despite having important roles and responsibilities in Bougainvillean culture, women have struggled to participate directly in the formal political peace process, which has been dominated by men. However, our different forms of support for a negotiated solution to the conflict, often expressed from the sidelines at official meetings or through discreet lobbying of the different parties, have maintained vital pressure on the men to continue to search for peace.

During the Sandline affair, a delegation of three women travelled to Port Moresby, where we met up with other Bougainvillean women. Together we produced a written petition that was presented to the Prime Minister's First Secretary, urging the government not to involve Sandline and to instead seek a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

## “ Despite having important roles and responsibilities in Bougainvillean culture, women have struggled to participate directly in the formal political peace process”

An official delegation of leaders of women's organisations played an important role at the Burnham talks in New Zealand in July 1997. This was because Daphne Zale, Marilyn Havini and I, who had all attended the 'Bougainville Women Speak Out' Forum in Sydney, Australia were able to speak with a united voice about our quest for peace. About 50 Bougainvillean women also attended meetings in Lincoln, New Zealand that led to the signing of the Lincoln Agreement in January 1998. Women drew up an adjoining statement on peace, which was presented by Agnes Titus of the Bougainville Transitional Government at the signing ceremony and which called for greater inclusion in the peace process: 'We, the women, hold custodial rights of our land by clan inheritance. We insist that women leaders must be party to all stages of the political process in determining the future of Bougainville.' One observer said, 'the women showed tremendous strength and unity. They spearheaded the union of Bougainvilleans during all exclusive Bougainvillean sessions'.

Back in Bougainville, women's groups combined outspoken criticism of the violence with quiet initiatives behind the scenes. In July 1998, the Bougainville Women for Peace and Freedom, an organisation representing women from BRA and BIG, released a statement condemning the presence and conduct of the PNGDF in their areas. They demanded a complete withdrawal of the army from their areas as well as autonomy for the Bougainville Reconciliation Government.

Other groups continued to play an active role in local peace initiatives and negotiations. For example, Helen Hakena from the Leitana Nehan Women's Development Agency (LNWDA) accompanied the Prime Minister's wife, Rarura Skate, to meet women leaders in central Bougainville. The BICWF negotiated with the BRA to care properly and provide for John Momis, then the regional member for Bougainville in the PNG Parliament, who was being held hostage by the BRA in Tinuputz.

### Women's participation in post-conflict Bougainville

With moves towards the signing of the final agreement gathering momentum, a number of us from women's organisations arranged a Bougainville Women's Summit in August 2001 funded by the New Zealand Government. The Summit aimed to consolidate and expand existing networks between women's organisations, create an opportunity for women to inform themselves of the content of the Peace Agreement, and to explore ways in which women could contribute to the socio-economic and political development of the new Bougainville. A blueprint was produced outlining the vision and some guidelines for the Bougainville Government's responsibilities for women's affairs. As a result of these discussions, it was agreed that there was a need to establish a women's body under the Bougainville Autonomous Government.

In her address at the signing of the Bougainville Peace Agreement, Ruby Miringka outlined the aspirations of the women to participate fully in political life. She devoted much of her speech to the need for peacebuilding and development in post-conflict Bougainville. A range of NGOs, led mainly by women, are now in the process of restructuring to meet new needs. For example BOCIDA, which was the lead agency delivering humanitarian assistance during the war, is now focusing its work on critical literacy, reproductive health and education. Others, like the LNWDA, offer a range of services for women and youth such as counselling and a programme to combat violence against women. Another example is the BICWF, which has shifted the focus of its work to critical literacy, small business training and capacity building for women and local women's organisations.

The question of women's participation in structures of the new government remains open. Women continue to be under-represented in the new political organs. When the Bougainville People's Congress was appointed, only six out of a total of 106 were women. During a debate it was decided that the time was 'not yet right' for stronger female representation. This has become a pattern in later political developments. The Bougainville Interim Provincial Government includes four women members. The 52-strong Bougainvillean delegation at the September 2001 talks on autonomy, referendum and arms disposal included only two women.

For some, the absence of women's voices is a great loss and they fear that reversing this may be a long-term process. According to Ruby Miringka: 'For women to be effective political leaders in shaping and developing the future Bougainville, political education for women is of great importance. Also girls must be given opportunities in formal education. Women need to be educated on the rights of women!'

# Northern Ireland

## Accord 13 (2002) 'Owning the process: public participation in peacemaking'

### Abstract

The author, a founding member of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC), traces the development of the coalition from its beginnings in 1996 as a group advocating women's political participation, to becoming a political party that participated in formal negotiations. Adopting equality, human rights and inclusion as core principles, the coalition demonstrated that cross-community political unity was possible. During negotiations for the Belfast

Agreement the NIWC promoted a broad agenda – ensuring that victims' rights and reconciliation were addressed, as well as securing wider public participation through the creation of a Civic Forum. Although sectarian political parties dominated the post-agreement power-sharing government, the NIWC showed that both women and civil society have a place at the negotiating table.

### Background

When Ireland gained independence in 1921, the north of the island remained part of the UK, becoming known as Northern Ireland. The Protestant majority living there largely supported remaining within the UK (unionists), while the Catholic minority largely considered itself Irish, with many desiring a united Ireland (nationalists).

In the late 1960s a civil rights movement emerged involving both unionists and nationalists. For many Catholics this was a call for equal rights after decades of economic and political marginalisation. Marches increasingly led to confrontations with the police, and involved more militant sections of each community. In August 1969 British troops were deployed to try to maintain control. There was also a rapid growth of paramilitary activity, including the nationalist Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the unionist Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF).

In the early 1970s a new phase of open and violent hostility developed. The IRA carried out numerous bombings and shootings including attacks against British army and state targets. Violence between the two communities also escalated, and included targeted shootings by paramilitary groups.

A number of early initiatives sponsored by the British, including the Sunningdale Agreement of 1974, sought to exclude 'extreme' elements of Northern Irish politics such as Sinn Fein (the political wing of the IRA). In 1985 the Irish and British governments came together and signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement, signalling a new willingness to cooperate. However, it would be another 10 years before the majority of Northern Irish parties would agree to share a negotiating table and Sinn Fein was recognised as a legitimate participant.

Multi-party talks began in June 1996, eventually leading to the Belfast Agreement in 1998. The agreement set forth arrangements for a Northern Irish Assembly and Executive Committee in which unionist and nationalist parties would share power. It also contained provisions on disarmament, police reform, demilitarisation and the status of prisoners.

Implementation has proved difficult. Disputes over the decommissioning of IRA weapons saw the suspension of the executive in 2000 (it was reinstated in 2001). In 2002, the year the Accord article was written, Northern Ireland was to experience a summer of rioting and a marked increase in sectarian and paramilitary violence, leaving a question mark over the success of the peace process.

# Northern Ireland Women's Coalition: institutionalising a political voice and ensuring representation

Kate Fearon

Kate Fearon is a founding member of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition. She was the NIWC's Chief of Staff in the negotiations for the Belfast Agreement and in the inaugural Northern Ireland Assembly. She went on to become Deputy Head of the Political Department of the Office of the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 2009 and

2010 she was the Governance Advisor on rule of law issues to the UK-led Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team in Afghanistan. Until 2012 she was the Head of the Mitrovica Office for the International Civilian Representative in Kosovo. Most recently she has been working for the UK Department for International Development in Sudan.

Conflict has been a feature of life in Northern Ireland for centuries. It has shaped a society that is deeply divided socially and politically and where the space for real cross-community engagement has been constricted. It dates back to the time when mostly Protestant settlers from England and Scotland moved to the area, partially displacing the mostly Catholic indigenous Irish inhabitants. In 1921, when part of Ireland was granted limited independence, the six northern counties remained under British jurisdiction. The aspiration of some to a united Ireland (the 'nationalists' and 'republicans') and the determination of others to remain joined with Britain (the 'unionists' and 'loyalists') has been at the heart of the conflict ever since. Later, the conflict manifested itself powerfully around the issue of civil and human rights. The modern 'troubles' started in the late 1960s when demonstrations began for basic rights such as housing. After response and counter response, the initially peaceful civil rights movement escalated into violent struggle, which lasted from 1970 until the late 1990s.

By the mid-1990s, it was increasingly recognised by both the British government and republican paramilitaries that the conflict could not be won through military means. After decades of various peace initiatives and growing cooperation between the British and Irish governments to sponsor joint efforts, a process for all-party talks began in June 1996 based, for the first time, on the assumption that: 'if you are a part of the problem, then you need to be part of the solution'. Representatives to the talks would be chosen through public elections with the intent of including the parties associated with paramilitary groups in formal political negotiations for the first time. In an attempt to ensure that the elections would result in delegates from all the main communities, the government developed an electoral system that offered participation based on relatively few votes. The number of seats would be assigned through a two-track system. The 18 territorial constituencies would each elect five representatives. Through a 'top-up' system, they would be joined by two representatives from each of the ten most successful parties across Northern Ireland as a whole. This enabled 110 delegates to participate in the peace process. Although the format enabled delegates outside the mainstream parties to participate in talks, there were no specific arrangements

for the participation of other organised sectors of society. What follows is the story of a group of women rooted in civil society who organised to ensure their voice would be heard in the political negotiations and who became a channel for bi-communal civil society involvement in the official peacemaking process.

## Forming the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition

The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC) was initiated by women with long histories of engagement in civil, human and workers' rights. Many were leaders in the community and voluntary sectors; others were teachers, university lecturers, professionals and home workers. They included unionists and nationalists, as well as those who did not define themselves in either of these categories. They felt it necessary to take the gigantic step from the non-governmental sector to the political arena because they believed that the incumbent political leaders either ignored or refused to take seriously the issue of women's representation and participation in the peace negotiations.

At first, under the aegis of the Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (a formally constituted organisation that still exists), the NIWC leaders lobbied for the existing political parties to include women in their candidate lists. When this action was effectively ignored and the government published its ideas for the electoral system, they decided to form a political grouping to contest the elections. Not all women's groups supported this idea. Some believed it would be difficult to sustain the bi-communal nature of the coalition over such contentious issues as policing because cooperation would require too many compromises. Despite these concerns, the NIWC attracted support from most groups.

Around 150 women attended the first meeting. Subsequent meetings regularly attracted up to 60 people. Twice-weekly and then weekly meetings were held in Belfast to debate positions and were facilitated by rotating chairs. Equality, human rights and inclusion were adopted as the coalition's three core principles and a principled approach became key to guiding and evaluating the development of positions. Another useful practice – and unusual in Northern Ireland – was that participants were encouraged to take their 'identity baggage'



into the room with them. They were expected to acknowledge differences up front, rather than to 'be polite' and leave them outside the door.

The NIWC estimated that if they could win approximately 10,000 votes across Northern Ireland, they would be eligible for the two seats offered by the top-up layer. Their strategy was to organise women through all their various networks and contacts to gain the necessary threshold of votes. The NIWC initially had no money. A community college provided rooms and several individuals made donations. When it became clear they would not be able to pay for a bulk order for printing campaign materials, an anonymous donation and the generosity of politically sympathetic printers resolved the problem.

Other parties and the media initially dismissed the NIWC. Yet it gained one per cent of the vote and finished as the ninth most popular political party. It thus secured two seats in the negotiations, where its delegates had the status of full participants. The Democratic Partnership and the Labour Coalition were the other civil society groupings to contest the elections – with the latter winning sufficient votes to join the negotiations.

### **Participating in negotiations**

During the talks, the larger parties were entitled to three seats at the table, supported by three back-up members; whereas the smaller parties were allocated two seats with three in back-up. For the purposes of voting, however, the parties were entitled to all the seats obtained through the constituency elections in addition to their two automatic 'top-up' seats. While the other delegations at the table were overwhelmingly – and initially exclusively – male, the NIWC delegation was exclusively female. These demographics meant that male voices were heard more frequently during the negotiations. The NIWC delegates challenged this dynamic by ensuring that their perspectives were heard and by confronting delegates who monopolised the debate.

The NIWC was careful to ensure that both nationalist and unionist women were at the table at all times. The team of ten women who supported them with political advice and analysis was similarly balanced. Delegates were selected at an open meeting of the NIWC, drawn from those who had been on the regional candidate list. One hurdle the delegates encountered was the attitude of the other elected representatives. The NIWC delegates had assumed initially that they would be treated with respect as equal negotiating partners. Although some grew to respect the NIWC's contributions, others showed disdain. The delegates learned to develop a 'thick skin' and not to take rejection personally. Instead they tried to maintain their focus on the bigger picture and to make strategic allegiances when and where possible.

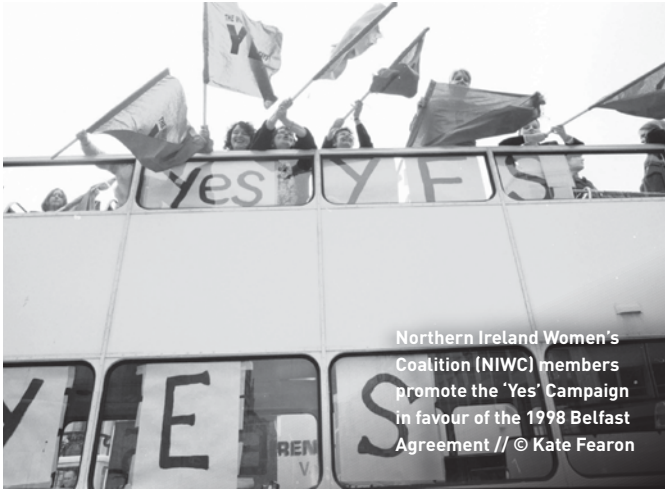
The NIWC concentrated initially on making recommendations for procedural issues, such as amendments to the Rules of Procedure that governed the day-to-day operation of the talks and suggestions for agenda items and the order in which they should be discussed. They were sensitive to how these matters linked with process issues and were attentive to the

underlying relationships between participants. They worked to promote an inclusive process and to prevent a small number of delegates getting drawn into a destructive spiral of blame that could harm the general negotiation ethos. They were later able to broaden the negotiating agenda to include such issues as victims' rights and reconciliation. The NIWC produced high-quality position papers and tried to model a fresh approach to politics based on cooperation, non-competitiveness and a willingness to share ideas. While most parties did not regard the NIWC as a political threat, some of the nationalist mainstream politicians may have perceived the NIWC policies as encroaching on their terrain, which had traditionally been based on strong advocacy for human rights and equality. Thus, even though the NIWC included many women from a unionist background, the agenda it agreed and articulated was one that would be recognised as more traditionally nationalist – at least until the smaller loyalist parties also began to adopt this political ground.

They remained true to their NGO roots and kept their feet firmly in both the world of electoral politics and in the world of public activism. This happened on two levels. First, there was a monthly meeting of the full membership of the Coalition. They discussed positions on forthcoming agenda items and provided information to the membership about developments in the political process. The meetings provided opportunities for the membership to inform the representatives of their perspectives on the process. Because the membership was bi-communal, they provided guidance on approaches acceptable to either or both communities. Second, the NIWC maintained regular contact with a range of community and NGO leaders on specific issues under discussion. The NIWC was careful not to portray itself as having all the answers and gave serious consideration to the views of those consulted. These inputs from both the membership and from these networks meant that the NIWC was confident that its positions could command cross-community support.

**“ The NIWC was able to speak simultaneously to a number of constituencies: nationalist and unionist, organised civil society and individual members of the public ”**

After a year, the NIWC decided to formalise some of its decision-making procedures and confirm its status as a political party. It developed a constitution that provided for the annual election of a 12–15 member executive committee to make policy decisions, which consisted of two representatives from each county plus the publicly elected representatives as ex-officio members. Additionally, there was an option to co-opt additional members if necessary to maintain the cross-community balance of members. Monthly meetings continued to be open to the full membership, which supplemented the decision-making process as necessary.



### Promoting the Belfast Agreement

After deliberating for 22 months, the negotiators concluded the Belfast Agreement in April 1998. Before it could take effect, however, it had to be endorsed through a public referendum. The NIWC played a key role in promoting the Agreement. Few parties were as unequivocal in their support and no other political party worked as closely with civil society leaders. The NIWC was able to speak simultaneously to a number of constituencies: nationalist and unionist, organised civil society and individual members of the public. Members helped prepare a 'user friendly' version of the Agreement, using plain speech to make it more comprehensible. NIWC representatives spoke at public debates and organised debates amongst their own members. The NIWC supported the civil society-led 'Yes' Campaign. As a political party, NIWC was entitled to free postage for sending a piece of literature to every voter. They put their own message on one side and gave the 'Yes' Campaign the other side to print with its own message and logo.

The referendum on the Belfast Agreement was passed by 72 per cent of the Northern Ireland electorate – an event of massive historical and political significance. It created the new Northern Ireland Assembly, which would govern through a power-sharing executive on issues of economic and social concern. It established the North-South Ministerial Council to formalise links within the island and a British/Irish Council to formalise relationships amongst all the representative bodies in the islands. It proposed a range of measures that addressed the political and constitutional dimensions of the Northern Ireland conflict – though not necessarily the more internalised social and socio-psychological dimensions.

### Assessing the outcomes

The involvement of the NIWC in the political negotiations had consequences for both the peace agreement and the dynamics of politics in Northern Ireland. Some of the issues the NIWC put on the agenda – such as victims' rights and reconciliation – became touchstone issues in the referendum campaign. It is arguable that if the agreement had not addressed these concerns, many people could have voted against it and thus jeopardised the greatest opportunity for peace in 30 years. The NIWC also initiated the idea of a Civic

Forum as part of the Northern Ireland Assembly so as to institutionalise opportunities for broader public participation in politics – a proposal eventually incorporated into the agreement. The NIWC worked hard to protect and nurture the agreement during the implementation period. At times they helped to mobilise civil society to protect the agreement and at other times collaborated with political parties in joint efforts to promote it.

One immediate impact of the NIWC was that the issue of women's political participation was placed firmly on the map of electoral politics. Women delegates from other political parties began to attain higher profiles within their parties. When the Northern Ireland Assembly finally appointed ministers, two out of ten were women. The NIWC also contributed to demystifying the political process, which was one of its original goals. The NIWC's involvement in the negotiations not only facilitated and promoted women's participation, it also demonstrated the possibility that civil society can participate in and influence formal political negotiations. It revealed that politics is not necessarily the exclusive preserve of customary politicians; groups other than those advocating exclusively a nationalist or exclusively a unionist perspective also have a place at the decision-making table.

The founders of the NIWC never intended it to become a permanent political party; yet it is becoming one, in part because the public has endorsed its longevity through elections. Elections to the new Northern Ireland Assembly in 1998 presented additional challenges. NIWC's delegates had to be elected directly from multi-member constituencies, rather than winning seats due to their overall proportional vote through the accumulator system used to elect delegates to the negotiations. Yet after an effective campaign, two candidates won seats from their constituencies. These Assembly members have since attempted to build cooperation with the smaller pro-Agreement parties.

The Belfast Agreement created a top-heavy executive. It is likely that the four largest parties, representing mirror images of nationalism and unionism, will form a permanent governing coalition. A mature democracy demands a constructive opposition to critique the government. The NIWC has now assumed this role. Elections scheduled for May 2003 will provide a key test of both the Belfast Agreement and the NIWC. If and when a political realignment comes to Northern Ireland in the future, the NIWC will play a vanguard role – in its current form or in another.

The NIWC cannot claim the dominant role in negotiating the Belfast Agreement, which is a collective achievement of all the parties and governments involved. But it can claim a key role in changing, at least temporarily, the culture of politics in Northern Ireland. It brought solutions to the table that recognised and worked to accommodate difference, instead of throwing up obstacles based on those differences.

# Angola

## Accord 15 (2004) 'From military peace to social justice? The Angolan peace process'

### Abstract

The ways in which women were affected by civil war in Angola conditioned their expectations of the post-war era. As well as being directly affected by violence, women adapted to changes in their socio-economic conditions in various ways. Yet in contrast to their active political role in the struggle for independence, women were largely excluded from peace negotiations and from political life after the end of the war. This was linked to the inexperience

of civil society organisations more generally, as well as prevailing patriarchal structures. Most importantly, the author argues that class and privilege affected the extent to which women were burdened by conflict as well as their subsequent political participation. She calls for more gendered analysis of the civil war to inform better policy and practice.

### Background

After a 15-year liberation war, Angola attained independence from Portugal in 1975. Almost immediately the country descended into civil war as a power struggle ensued between the three former liberation movements, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) – which took over state rule after independence – the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), and the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA). By the end of the 1970s the FNLA had disbanded, but with support from the US, Zaire and South Africa, UNITA continued its war against the MPLA government, which was supported by the Soviet Union and Cuba. The resources available to both sides, as well as profits from diamonds and oil production, ensured that Angola's civil war became one of the longest armed conflicts of the Cold War period.

From 1975 until the late 1980s Angolan society was moulded along 'classic' Marxist-Leninist lines. Private business, with the exception of the activities of foreign oil companies, was restricted. The state controlled the media and constrained the emergence of civil society organisations. The ruling party oversaw an increasingly repressive and corrupt state sector.

Peace initiatives mediated by Portugal, the US and the Soviet Union, eventually resulted in the Bicesse

Accords between the MPLA and UNITA in May 1991. These were followed by Angola's first ever general election in September 1992, under UN auspices. UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi expected to gain power; when he failed to do so he rejected the results and returned to war. This 'third Angolan war' was even more destructive than its predecessors. Whole cities were reduced to ruins, hundreds of thousands of people were killed, and millions displaced. UN-brokered talks resulted in another peace agreement, the Lusaka Protocol, in October 1994. Despite international sanctions against UNITA's supply networks, Savimbi was reluctant to surrender the military option. All-out war erupted again in 1998, ending only after Savimbi was killed in fighting in February 2002.

The Luena Memorandum of Understanding, signed in April 2002, acknowledged the ultimate defeat of UNITA and marked the end of four decades of war. It is estimated that between 500,000 and a million people lost their lives, with over four million displaced. In 2004, the year the Accord article was written, relative peace prevailed in mainland Angola, but in the enclave of Cabinda, which accounted for 60 per cent of Angola's oil production, a secessionist conflict persisted.

# Angolan women in the aftermath of conflict

## Henda Ducados

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programming. She contributed to the 1999 and 2004 Human Development Reports for the United Nations Development Programme in Luanda. Most recently she has been external relations manager for Total Angola.

Four decades of violent conflict have inflicted serious harm on the Angolan population and on women in particular. The gendered impacts of conflict and poverty in Angola are evident, as reflected in lower human development indicators for women than men. With lack of human security still an everyday reality, women and children comprise the most vulnerable groups, and along with old men, have typically comprised up to 80 per cent of the internally displaced population. In the aftermath of the war, Angolan women face new challenges as they struggle to overcome these obstacles and participate fully in their society. Yet, it seems the government has so far failed to address the changing role of Angolan women and the transformation of gender relations.

### **Women's participation in Angola's pre-independence struggle**

Women's recent history remains largely unacknowledged in public discourse on the war. The paths walked by women as soldiers, leaders, activists, survivors and victims of one of the most tragic wars in the African continent have yet to be widely discussed and their implications understood.

The Organisation of Angolan Women (OMA), created in 1962 as the women's wing of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) played a crucial role in supporting the guerrilla forces from both inside and outside Angola. Reports on OMA's activities show that its members contributed to food production for the guerrilla army, organised literacy campaigns and basic health care and carried arms and food over long distances. There are no figures on how many women participated in the MPLA guerrilla army but oral testimonies indicate a substantial number.

OMA saw women's involvement and participation in the independence struggle as being 'a testing ground where all who took part were called upon to make their utmost effort and develop their talents and abilities'. As in other women's organisations linked to liberation movements, the OMA leadership comprised mainly educated women with strong family or marital links to the political leadership of the party. Nevertheless OMA's main supporters were ordinary women from all social and ethnic backgrounds, who became involved in political activism and community work. Consequently, by independence, OMA had gained enough popular support to have delegates in every province and had an estimated 1.8 million registered members in 1983.

In turn, the Independent League for Angolan Women (LIMA), the women's wing of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) was created in 1973 and also played an important role in the liberation struggle. It is said that women who witnessed the work of women's wings of other African national liberation movements instigated the creation of LIMA. In contrast to OMA, women in leadership positions in LIMA had no kinship ties to the UNITA leadership, who feared repercussions if associated with organised women.

Women's role in UNITA during the liberation struggle involved the transport of materials, food and arms to men on the front line. Carrying was done on the head and involved long distances. Political activities consisted mainly of mobilising people and particularly youngsters to join the armed struggle. Women were also trained as political activists. During the post-independence civil war, women remained active on all fronts and the leadership of LIMA was visible in political rallies both inside and outside the country.

“ **Women's earnings in the informal sector of the economy have started to pose a serious cultural challenge to men's income-earning abilities and to gender relations in the family”**

### **The legacy of war**

Women suffered the direct effects of war in distinct ways. In addition to the large number of women who died as a result of combat operations, it is also acknowledged that many were raped by fighters on both sides. While soldiers were supposed to protect the population, many used their position to further subjugate women. Their behaviour and its impact on power relations between the sexes may have undermined the population's trust in those men. Women have also suffered most from landmine accidents, due to their responsibilities for gathering food. Many have lost their husbands and sons through the war, thus increasing the number of female-headed households.

The war and its impacts have increased women's workloads, as they have taken greater responsibility for activities usually performed by men, such as providing for the household, disciplining male children, building and repairing houses, dealing with community leaders and government officials, and fulfilling religious and social obligations. Many continue to perform these tasks even in peacetime, mainly because husbands have died or deserted the household. Women's earnings in the informal sector of the economy have started to pose a serious cultural challenge to men's income-earning abilities and to gender relations in the family. These changes may partly explain increasing evidence of an upsurge in domestic violence against women and children since the early 1990s. At the household level, the long years of conflict have also created situations where women find it difficult to marry and remarry, especially if they have suffered sexual abuse. The shortage of available men also means that marriage is associated with accepting polygamous arrangements, which continue to be a common and socially acceptable practice in Angola. In situations when men had to fight in a different region for a few years, the forming of secondary households was seen as legitimate.

**“ One of the reasons why the women's movement has failed to unite on a common platform stems from the fact that the war has not meant the same to all women ”**

The interaction of thousands of soldiers in front-line regions with the destitute population also has tremendous long-term gendered impacts. For instance, young women who engaged in prostitution for survival during the conflict may suffer from serious health problems, poor self-esteem or social exclusion if they have become pregnant and/or contracted sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

Following the Luena Memorandum, the government agreed a large demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration programme. However, against the advice of the World Bank and other institutions, non-combatant women were excluded from any direct benefit as the programme covered only a set number of UNITA and Angolan Armed Forces (FAA) soldiers and failed to make specific provisions for vulnerable groups like widows and UNITA wives.

Women who were abducted by UNITA face the dilemma of whether or not to leave their UNITA husbands and return to their original homes, where they risk being rejected. In addition, the social reality of UNITA's supporters is critical for both men and women; relationships with non-UNITA supporters remain difficult, with people still suspicious of each other and some reluctant to provide UNITA supporters with jobs.

Further evidence suggests that women from UNITA who lived through the guerrilla years in the bush now have difficulty relating to men. Those in urban areas reveal that they can now enjoy expressing their feelings more openly but are not used to doing so; long years spent under a repressive system have made them reluctant to show their feelings in public.

### **Participation in political life and women's involvement in peace initiatives**

As in so many other conflict situations, Angolan women were excluded from meaningful participation in the formal peace negotiations between the warring parties. Neither OMA nor LIMA was able to play effective roles in bringing an end to the war.

Women's most vocal participation in political life has been their promotion of women's rights. Both during and since the end of the war, they have been in constant negotiation with the political leadership, lobbying for their concerns to be taken seriously by policymakers and government officials. In the past, OMA played a decisive role as a policy-driven outfit dedicated to fighting for the improvement of women's legal status as well as their economic empowerment, and above all, the integration of women's issues into mainstream policies.

Arguably, OMA's most significant achievements occurred in the 1980s. Their efforts led to the introduction of the Family Code and formulation and implementation of a policy to provide free family planning to women. The main features of the Family Code are the recognition of consensual unions as marriage, the protection of children born out of wedlock and the encouragement of a fair division of tasks and responsibilities within the family. OMA also provided technical assistance to women and encouraged debate and discussion on previously taboo subjects such as customary marriage and abortion.

Although OMA played an effective role in promoting these reforms, the reality is that the majority of women are still fighting for their rights to be respected in practice. And while OMA is still a strong reference point for the women's movement in Angola, it is no longer the leading group representing the women's agenda. Membership has gone into decline as the organisation's continued ties to the MPLA have contributed to undermining its public credibility and ability to attract funding from the international community. Some members decided to create their own NGOs as a means of functioning independently of the party and have been more active and resourceful in responding to women's needs, through the instigation of development programmes and campaigns on issues such as reproductive rights and child vaccination.

It is important to note that some women's organisations have been visible in peacebuilding efforts. For instance, Rede Mulher has been an advocate for peace and campaigned against violence against women, and Women, Peace and Development (MPD) has also been active in peacebuilding. These initiatives have contributed to building a women's platform on peace and more importantly revealed that it is possible for women from different political parties and social sectors to combine efforts towards the same goal.

Nevertheless, the women's movement in general is weak. Like other social movements in Angola, it lacks capacity, influence and coordination. Many women's NGOs are unfocused in their role and objectives, reflecting a more general weakness in Angolan civil society, with the result that they have had little influence on policies that could improve women's lives. Criticism has also been made of the movement's failure to represent the interests of women at the grass roots. Leadership is often in the hands of privileged women who have separate agendas due to their strong links with political parties.

One of the reasons why the women's movement has failed to unite on a common platform stems from the fact that the war has not meant the same to all women. Women have used a variety of means to survive and the social reality of poor women, whether in rural or urban areas, differs greatly from that of more privileged women. Larger numbers of poor women have lost their husbands and sons in the war and been displaced. These women are left with little hope for immediate improvement of their living conditions considering their low level of education and the fact that little is done politically to address their special needs.

In addition, women's organisations suffer from the same constraints as other civic organisations in funding and undertaking activities independently of the government. The non-governmental sector is still emerging and NGOs do not have much experience or capacity to respond to the enormous needs of many communities. The majority of civic initiatives are donor-driven rather than community-driven and have so far implemented short-term humanitarian emergency activities to the detriment of long-term development activities. In this context, significant assistance needs to be provided to local groups for them to start implementing sustainable long-term activities. At present, these are mostly left to international organisations, thus contributing to a wide disparity between the capacities of local and international actors.

### **Current challenges**

Today, Angolan social policies remain largely male orientated. Despite recognition of women's rights in the Constitution, these are rarely fully upheld in practice, as demonstrated by issues such as child support, where the government has no mechanisms in place to ensure men's compliance with their duty of parenthood. The right to inheritance is also an area where women continue to lose out, although this is more complex due to customary practices that place widows in a vulnerable situation after their partners' death.

The major obstacle to the realisation of these constitutional provisions is that Angolan society remains predominantly a

'male preserve' in which women's rights are often violated for the preservation of a patriarchal structure inherited from African 'traditional values'.

Although higher than elsewhere in the continent, the number of women in positions of power and influence remains grossly inadequate. Although 54 per cent of the population are female, women are under-represented in all decision-making bodies. Just 34 of 183 parliamentarians and 3 of the government's 27 ministers are women and there are only 2 female Ambassadors, 3 General Consuls and 3 Deputy Ministers. Women's participation in local government is also limited. This can be explained by many factors, including their comparative absence from the hierarchies of the political parties and time constraints that prevent them from competing on an equal footing in the political sphere.

Women involved in national decision-making are separated from the majority of ordinary women by lifestyle, class and agendas. And although many women see the creation of the Ministry for Family and Women as a real advance in gaining political space, it can also be perceived as an institution that has helped to separate women's issues from the government's policy agenda. Many would argue that the government leadership does not take the Ministry seriously, allocating it one of the lowest budgets with the immediate consequence of understaffing and limited capacity.

The Angolan media has also played a role in reinforcing gender-stereotyped images of masculinity, often providing rationalised support for the perpetuation of violence. Women are exploited through images of the female body. This can be seen through the highly publicised Miss Angola events, endorsed by the First Lady and greatly appreciated by many provincial Governors who in some cases provide large amounts of public funding for the spectacle.

### **Conclusion**

Despite the leadership shown by many women in adapting to new roles during the war, full gender equality in Angola remains a long way off. In some ways it is daunting to even talk about gender politics and balance in an environment where economic and social disparities are the only references left to the new generations.

However there are some practical steps that can be taken. In the first instance, there need to be greater efforts to analyse and understand the gendered impacts of the war and their legacy for Angola. This would provide the basis for developing gender-sensitive policy and practice, which could enable greater participation by women in all spheres of society. This would in turn readjust gender relations to the needs of both women and men, as a fundamental component of the long-term process of peaceful and sustainable development.

# Sudan

## Accord 18 (2006) 'Peace by piece: addressing Sudan's conflicts'

### Abstract

The author, a former SPLM/A negotiator, describes women's roles in both conflict and peacemaking and argues that they were more than simply privileged 'guests at the table'. Women were combatants and supporters of fighting forces, and also promoted peace by urging family members to lay down arms, by supporting grass-roots peace accords, and by maintaining communication across divides. Women's groups, networks and NGOs

also lobbied foreign governments and the UN. Yet the subsequent Consolidated Peace Agreement (CPA) failed to meet their expectations. Despite the presence of women, talks focused on political and regional interests, excluding a wider range of constituencies. However, the article suggests that the CPA opened up opportunities for women to engage in post-agreement politics by creating a new democratic space.

### Background

Sudan has seen multiple overlapping conflicts since the 1950s. The country's two civil wars have resulted from fighting between the government and southern armed groups – the first from 1955–72, and the second starting in 1983 when former army colonel John Garang de Mabior formed the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). The region of Darfur has also seen extensive fighting in the 2000s.

The causes of conflict in Sudan are interwoven: economic, ethnic, cultural, religious and international dimensions have all played a role. At the root of each conflict are questions over the control and distribution of resources – the most important of which are land and oil. These causes are underpinned politically by the state's crisis of legitimacy and role in economic exploitation.

In the second civil war, Khartoum increasingly used tribal militias to fight 'rebels', with famine and forced migration among the intended or unintended consequences. In over 20 years of conflict more than two million people died, four million were uprooted and some 600,000 people became refugees. By 1997 a stalemate had developed between the Sudanese government and the SPLM/A, and regional and international pressure to end the violence had increased. The parties were persuaded to accept mediation from the regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development

(IGAD) states, supported by the IGAD Partners' Forum (Italy, Norway, the UK and the US). From 2001 onwards the parties signed a series of agreements, including the Protocol of Machakos, 2002; the Protocol on Wealth-Sharing, 2004; and the Protocol on Power-Sharing, 2004. This culminated in the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in January 2005.

The recognition this process gave to the SPLM/A, and the framing of the IGAD talks as between a unified north and a unified south, alienated others who felt marginalised. These sentiments contributed significantly to the outbreak of war in Darfur in early 2003. Regional mediation, this time by the African Union, between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) and Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) led to a series of talks starting in Addis Ababa in 2004. The Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) was eventually signed by Abuja in 2006.

The DPA mirrored the CPA, covering power-sharing, wealth-sharing and security, but it failed to hold. A major criticism has been that Sudan's regional peace processes have been addressed independently of each other, and have failed to bring a comprehensive approach to Sudan. At the time this Accord article was written in 2006, implementation of the CPA was uncertain, while in Darfur there was increased instability and conflict.

# Guests at the table? The role of women in Sudan's peace processes

Anne Itto

Dr Anne Itto was a member of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) delegation to the Naivasha talks. She has taught at the University of Juba and served as the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry in the Government of National Unity from 2005–2011. Dr Itto was also the Secretary General for the southern sector of the SPLM, and was nominated to the National Assembly in 2005. She became chairperson for the

Political Committee of the Joint National Transitional Team, one of the specialised bodies created by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in January 2005. Before her involvement in the peace negotiations, she chaired the Natural Resource Management and Utilisation Committee and was an advisor to the SPLM Economic Commission on Agriculture and Natural Resources Development.

At the Machakos (2002) and Naivasha (2004) negotiations between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) it was assumed that resolving the Sudanese conflict meant sharing power and resources between political forces along regional or geographical divides. This approach neglected other constituencies and the fact that a just and sustainable peace, based on good governance, equity, justice and democracy, requires an environment where every citizen has the opportunity to contribute to decision-making and development. In particular, Sudanese women play a very central role in their society, in physical and psychological welfare as well as conflict prevention and peacebuilding. It is therefore important that women are not just seen as passive victims, or as representatives of political parties, or as having no political affiliation or perspective, but that they are encouraged to participate fully and see their perspectives taken seriously and incorporated into solutions to political conflicts.

## The complex roles of women

Women were never simply guests at the negotiating table. The roles they play as combatants, supporters of fighting forces and peacemakers qualify them to sit at the negotiating table and to assume an active role in implementation.

Thousands of women had joined the southern liberation struggle in response to a political situation that affected whole communities, leaving the comfort and security of their homes not just to accompany their husbands but to fight for freedom, democracy, equity, justice, rights and dignity. Their roles in the conflict ranged from combatants to providers of support to fighters, including feeding and caring for sick and wounded soldiers. Although in any armed conflict women are victims of violence, bombing, landmines, hunger and diseases, it is not correct to portray them simply as innocent victims. In Khartoum, women contributed gold in support of the jihad and encouraged their sons to join up, while in the south, the Nuba Mountains and southern Blue Nile women contributed food and encouraged their sons to join the SPLA to fight marginalisation and oppression by the government in Khartoum.

On the other hand, Sudanese women have worked very hard to keep families and communities together during conflicts

“ **Women were never simply guests at the negotiating table. The roles they play as combatants, supporters of fighting forces and peacemakers qualify them to sit at the negotiating table and to assume an active role in implementation**”

through singing peace songs, persuading their husbands, sons and brothers to stop fighting, risking dangerous peace missions across enemy territories, or marrying across enemy lines to unite or reconcile warring communities. There were times when women stopped conflict from escalating by defying or opposing decisions by male members of the community to go to war. In one case women from a community in southern Sudan were reported to have threatened not to comply with their conjugal obligations until their husbands stopped killing each other, while in some areas of the south women threatened to expose their nakedness (a curse in most Sudanese customary beliefs) to protest ethnic conflict.

Women have also taken a leading role in creating links and forums for resolving inter-ethnic conflict, leading to many grass-roots peace accords. Examples include the people-to-people processes, such as the Wunlit Covenant between the Nuer and the Dinka and the Lilir Covenant between Nuer groups. It has been reported that when it was decided by Dinka elders that a peace delegation was to be sent to Nuer land, no one wanted to go; it was the brave wife of a Dinka chief who demanded that her husband lead his people to Nuer land, even though she was aware of the high risk involved. Another example where women stood together in solidarity against their husband's political position was the period following the split in the SPLM/A. Women from both sides of the split continued to visit one another, maintain communication and provide a forum to discuss issues that affected their communities, something no man was capable of.



In order to effectively address social, economic and general problems of war facing women, many women organised themselves into groups, networks and NGOs on both sides of the political divide. These activist networks (including the Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace, New Sudan Women's Federation and New Sudan Women's Association) went all over the world advocating peace and drawing attention to what was then referred to as 'the forgotten war'. In Washington DC, the UN Headquarters in New York, the Hague and Beijing, women lobbied the international community to pressure Sudan's warring parties to end the war.

It is clear that the absence of women at the negotiating table in Naivasha or Abuja was not due to lack of experience and capacity, but to the perceptions of their role.

### **A gender-blind agreement**

Despite the active role women played at various levels to bring peace to the Sudan their role has tended to be underestimated or ignored during negotiations. This may have originated from the misconception that women are passive victims of war, forgetting the very important role they have played in negotiating, keeping and building peace in their communities.

The most disappointing aspect of the 2005 *Comprehensive Peace Agreement* (CPA) and 2006 *Darfur Peace Agreement* (DPA) was that negotiations for an equitable share of power and resources were premised around political forces and regional interests. Neither mediators nor drafters gave much thought to other constituencies or dimensions, such as gender, along which power and wealth could be shared.

Yet conflict in Sudan is not just a matter of political rivalry but is triggered by many forms of marginalisation. The late Dr John Garang, the SPLM/A leader and briefly the First Vice-President of Sudan and President of Government of Southern Sudan, publicly recognised women as the 'marginalised of the marginalised'. Long before the negotiations, he used affirmative action (quotas and training) aimed at creating a critical mass of women capable of influencing policies and decisions.

The SPLM/A leadership nominated a handful of women leaders as members of the delegation to Machakos and subsequent rounds of negotiations. However, this did not necessarily enable their strong participation: the women were often co-opted to these delegations at short notice with very little opportunity to consult with each other and develop a women's peace agenda; they were expected to contribute to the overall party position which was gender-blind to begin with; and they were always a minority, ill-prepared for debates with seasoned politicians who ridiculed or intimidated anyone who dared to spend much time on gender issues.

For example, during the negotiations SPLM/A women proposed a minimum quota of 25 per cent for the representation of women in the civil service, legislative and executive at all levels of government, as provided for by the SPLM/A constitution. One senior male member of the SPLM/A delegation laughed and asked me where the women would be found to fill these positions. The 25 per cent quota was eventually accepted in the larger group, where there were at



A participant expresses herself at a peacebuilding workshop organised by Pact Sudan, 2006 // © Pact Sudan/Alex Dianga

least three women, but then the all-male SPLM/A drafting committee reduced this figure to 5 per cent. The SPLM/A Chairman raised this to 10 per cent as a compromise. Later on we learned that it had been dropped altogether when government negotiators refused a quota for women in power-sharing on the grounds that they had not been fighting women.

There are articles in the final agreement that recognise customs, traditions and religion as sources of moral strength for the Sudanese people; personal and family matters including marriage, divorce, inheritance and succession fall under the competency of customary law. Yet some customs and traditions have contributed to the marginalisation of women.

Even when women were consulted about gender issues or directly included in the peace negotiations, it was only a gesture to showcase democracy and inclusiveness: their perspectives and their experiences in peacebuilding and negotiation were not recognised or fully utilised.

### **Learning from experience**

The SPLM/A women's realisation that the CPA did not require any party to achieve gender-related targets prompted them

to share their experiences with Darfurian women during the Abuja negotiations. We told them how we had been shocked that the CPA – apart from making provision for a bill of rights – left women to the mercy of governments and political parties. The Darfurian women took these experiences seriously and with support from UNIFEM and other organisations (who realised they had not done enough to support the SPLM/A women), quickly started to lay down the strategy for influencing the peace process and the final document. They lobbied to be involved and the result is over 70 sections in the agreement referring to women, including the recognition of gender-based violence and the recommendation that women be involved in drafting legislation.

**“ The role permitted to women during negotiations was based on a perception of them as passive victims of war, not active players in politics and society”**

However, like the CPA, the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) now relies largely on men for its implementation, and the likelihood that the DPA will be fully implemented appears very slim. Given the insensitivity of many Sudanese – particularly men – towards gender issues, it will be hard work for Darfurian women to get the government in Darfur to commit to such important initiatives as gender-sensitive police training. A lack of commitment to implementing the provisions of an agreement can render even a good agreement useless, so the full participation of women in the implementation of CPA, DPA and the recent *Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement* is essential. This can be achieved through the effective dissemination of the agreements and the Interim National Constitution and through building women’s capacity to organise themselves to negotiate, lobby and advocate for their rights and interests.

Even though many individual Sudanese men resist gender mainstreaming, in the South the official government position is favourable to women’s equality and empowerment. Consequently, the South’s Interim Constitution has a 25 per cent quota for women’s representation in the legislative and executive, making it unconstitutional for any government institution not to have women in decision-making positions. The President of the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) has appointed women as chairpersons for the Human Rights

Commission and the Anti-Corruption Commission, and he reportedly officially refuses to view any list of appointees for State and GoSS positions that does not include women. Currently two cabinet ministers, four Chairpersons of Parliamentary Committees and two presidential advisors are women.

On the other hand, at the Government of National Unity level, the National Congress Party, including its women leaders, opposed both a quota for women in the government and the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Instead they preferred ‘women’s empowerment’, a vague term which does not effectively tackle the issues of rights and freedoms.

**Conclusion: maximising the benefits**

The CPA ended a long and devastating war and was a source of pride for both the region and Africa as a whole because it demonstrated Africa’s ability to resolve its conflicts, notwithstanding the importance of the support from the international community. However, with due respect to the achievements of all parties to the agreement, mediators and the international community, the role permitted to women during negotiations was based on a perception of them as passive victims of war, not active players in politics and society. This is clearly reflected in the CPA’s lack of clear gender targets or timelines for the parties to meet, limiting the effective utilisation of women’s experiences, expertise and perspectives in decision-making in the post conflict period. Democracy is about freedom and rights of participation in decision-making, but the democracy bequeathed by the CPA and DPA will be lopsided, lacking a level playing field for women.

However, the CPA did create a new democratic political space and committed the government to good governance and the rule of law, justice, equity and respect for human rights. Sudanese women need to rise to the challenge of building a solid foundation for democracy by doing everything possible to increase their political participation and create an equal and level playing field for all citizens. The greatest hope now for women across Sudan is that they will be able to expand on the Bill of Rights in the Interim National Constitution as well as effect change through the mid-term elections and effective mobilisation. The peace agreements and their shortcomings are important areas for their campaign, making women realise the need to increase their representation in legislative assemblies at state and national levels, to gain more influence to address poverty and to change how laws and budgets are drafted and implemented.

# Indonesia-Aceh

Accord 20 (2008) 'Reconfiguring politics: the Indonesia-Aceh peace process'

## Abstract

During the war, many women took on traditional male roles as breadwinners, decision-makers and community leaders. The author, an Acehnese human rights defender, describes how women organised to promote human rights and peace through lobbying and education. They developed the All-Acehnese Women's Congress, which met across the conflict divide and formulated recommendations for the negotiating parties. However, women and civil society

in general were excluded from negotiations, and women's interests were neglected in the resulting Memorandum of Understanding that ended the war. Women were also under-represented in bodies managing post-conflict recovery, although they did set up structures to monitor legislation and policy. The author stresses the need for policymakers to ensure women's involvement in decision-making for meaningful peace.

## Background

Conflict in the Aceh province of Indonesia first erupted in 1953 when, fearing the role of Islam in Acehnese society and politics would be undermined, local elites and Islamic scholars supported an armed rebellion. This lasted until the early 1960s. A full secessionist uprising, led by the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), developed in 1976 as a result of continuing grievances over governance, underdevelopment, the exploitation of natural resources and revenue drain to Jakarta elites.

Military repression and human rights abuses deepened already severe alienation from the Indonesian state, accelerating popular support for independence. The status of a Military Operations Zone was imposed in Aceh from 1989 to 1998, enabling mass violations to be committed indiscriminately as part of the counter-insurgency campaign. According to the International Crisis Group between 1,000 and 3,000 people were killed during this time, and another 900–1,400 went missing.

In 2000 the Henry Dunant Centre – an international NGO now known as the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue – facilitated discussions to enable humanitarian access to the most war-affected areas of Aceh. This led in 2000 to a ceasefire known as the 'humanitarian pause' and in December 2002 to a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, which outlined a ceasefire, demilitarisation measures and 'all-inclusive dialogue' on autonomy provisions. However,

within months the talks collapsed and the Indonesian security forces launched their largest-ever military operation in Aceh.

The tsunami that devastated Aceh in December 2004 was a major turning point. GAM immediately declared a ceasefire, and within a month talks had re-started, mediated by another international NGO, the Finnish Crisis Management Initiative (CMI). By February, GAM had accepted 'self-government' within Indonesia, giving up their long-standing goal of independence. In July 2005 the fifth and final round of talks took place in Helsinki, resulting in a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which set out details for the withdrawal of Indonesian troops, GAM's demobilisation and decommissioning of weapons, and a framework for effective self-government – the Law on the Governing of Aceh (LoGA).

Critics claimed LoGA offered very little in terms of special autonomy. However, an important part of the MoU were the provisions allowing for the establishment of local political parties and making independent candidates eligible to contest elections for the administration of Aceh. Elections held in December 2006 were seen as a critical step in the peace process and the transformation of GAM into a peaceful, democratic movement. GAM-affiliated candidates secured mayoral and district head seats in 6 out of 19 districts, plus the governorship of Aceh.

# Agents for change: the roles of women in Aceh's peace process

Suraiya Kamaruzzaman

Suraiya Kamaruzzaman is a human rights activist and co-founder of Flower Aceh, an NGO set up to champion the rights of Acehese women during and after the conflict. She has worked to ensure women's safety, and has advised them on issues of economic and reproductive rights. She has also been involved in fundraising for peacebuilding in Aceh and lobbying

the European Parliament. In 2001 she received the Yap Thiam Hien award for human rights, and in 2012 was awarded the UNDP-sponsored N-PEACE award. She has provided gender analysis of Indonesia's draft bill on overcoming social conflict in line with UN Security Council resolution 1325 for the UN Population Fund.

Scant attention has been paid to the role that women played in the conflict in Aceh, their survival efforts or their involvement in development and peacebuilding. According to the historical narrative of violence and humanitarian tragedy in Aceh, women are vulnerable, victimised, suffer in submission and bear the consequences of being the wives and relatives of 'the enemy.'

This is not the whole truth: Acehese women played strategic roles, generated bright ideas and were able to find unique ways to survive. They were able to become agents for change, performing negotiations between the two parties involved in the conflict or engaging in efforts to save their husbands, sons or their community. When insecurity forced men to flee their villages, women became the main breadwinners and decision-makers and took over most of the social roles played by men in their community life. In addition, they worked together to clean and repaint *meunasah* (Islamic schools), went to the fields or gathered firewood. They took care of the children and financed their education. They hid boys being hunted because of their fathers' and uncles' political choices, and sometimes they had to carry them home and bury their dead bodies. Women also undertook various religious programmes such as rotating Koranic recitation gatherings from one house to another to build continuous communication, and accompany and console those who lost family members to the conflict.

## Unified voices

Women have also taken organised action in response to the conflict. Groups of women have undertaken peaceful campaigns, lobbying, information dissemination, human rights education, negotiation and data collection. Some brought human rights violations to the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. Many of these women faced pressure, intimidation, terror, rape or sexual harassment because of their actions.

In October 2000 the United Nations passed Security Council Resolution 1325 on the theme of women, peace and security. It stressed the importance of women's roles in conflict prevention and resolution and highlighted the need for women's equal participation in maintenance and promotion of peace and security. Months before this, Acehese women had rolled out their own agenda at the first All Acehese Women's Congress (*Duek Pakat Inong Aceh*). Nearly 500 women from all

possible backgrounds, many of whom had suffered the direct consequences of armed conflict, sat together in dialogue in February 2000. They shared their painful experiences, formed strong bonds and planned for the future. Sharing the hope that they would be able to make Aceh better – and that peace was an absolute requirement for a better Aceh – they called for the prioritisation of dialogue towards resolving the conflict and for greater women's participation in all political decision-making. They distributed their 22 recommendations to various parties, including to Indonesian president Abdurrahman Wahid. That summer, a women's group lobbied various parties to involve women in the process of negotiating and implementing the Humanitarian Pause then being facilitated by the Henry Dunant Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.

“ Women were considered only as objects of political processes, not active subjects”

## Exclusion from peacemaking

Unfortunately their voice did not resonate for long, and when the conflict parties engaged in peace talks, women were once again excluded. Despite a record of advocating for peace and fostering reconciliation, women were barely involved in the stop-start dialogue processes spanning over five years that finally culminated in the *Memorandum of Understanding* (MoU) between the government and GAM in August 2005. The kind of gender-aware conflict resolution mandated by Security Council resolution 1325 was not achieved.

*This was mirrored in other political processes as well:* when Islamic shariah law was introduced to Aceh, women's shariah representatives were once again not involved. Women were considered only as objects of political processes, not active subjects.

Without underestimating the great importance of the MoU and the hard work, skill and patience of its architects, it ignores the contribution of civil society, including women's groups, to peacemaking. The peace process was simplified into an issue between the government and GAM, negating other dimensions of conflict that had lasted for nearly 30



An Indonesian woman holds flowers and stickers protesting against the conflict in Aceh during a peace demonstration in Jakarta, May 2003 // © ADE DANHUR/AFP/Getty Images

years, wherein numerous and complex issues intertwined and impacted upon the life of all Aceh's people. As a result of women's exclusion from the peace processes, their interests are poorly covered by the agreements.

*Peace is not realised simply at the negotiating table:* sustainable peace can only be achieved if it involves women and men equally in processes of reconciliation, rights-based development, the rule of law and the dignified fulfilment of justice for victims. Signing the peace agreement is only the beginning; the next great task for all of Aceh's people is to undertake reconciliation, reconstruction and rehabilitation. Various institutions have been established to facilitate this, but women's voices are still not receiving the attention they should. Of the 43 members of the Aceh Reintegration Board (BRA), only three are women. The Aceh Transition Committee (KPA), the organisation for ex-GAM members, does not have a single woman in a strategic position in its decision-making and policy group. In the first-stage list of compensation receivers for former GAM combatants, there was not a single woman among the 3,000 names listed, despite the fact that since 2000 photos and information about troops from GAM's women's wing (*Inong Balee*) have frequently been used in media campaigns to show women's role in GAM's struggle.

### Persistence

Despite such negations by the policymakers, Acehese women have not been sitting idly, but have responded with new determination. The Women's Policy Network (established 2004) has been monitoring the development and implementation of the *Law on the Governing of Aceh* (LoGA) and of *qanun* (local laws) that will detail provisions

of the LoGA to promote the equitable inclusion of women's interests. The Women's Peace Network (established December 2005) comprises 26 organisations and seeks to socialise the MoU and strengthen women's participation in peacebuilding strategies. A Gender Working Group has been established as the hub for monitoring the policies of all parties involved in the reconciliation, reconstruction, and rehabilitation processes to ensure that they take into account the gender perspective in policymaking and application and budget development. At the grass roots level, women's groups perform political education and strengthen individual and organisational capacity through various training, workshops and seminars.

Such efforts are not sufficient in themselves. The big, unanswered question is: when will the policymakers start to open their minds and harness the great potential of women as a force for building a lasting peace in Aceh? It is imperative that the Indonesian government implements UNSC Resolution 1325 in its national policies and builds a monitoring system using clear indicators. Civil society needs to be involved and information on 1325 widely disseminated. The government should engage women in efforts to build peace in conflict areas like Papua. In Aceh, the BRA should consult women's organisations before carrying out any intervention. Applying women's experience should be a basis for strategy and ensuring that gender is mainstreamed in all programmes. More than lip-service needs to be paid engaging them equally in reintegration and reconciliation processes. There needs to be affirmative action to promote women as leaders and ensure their involvement in decision-making, especially ahead of the 2009 elections.

# Somalia

Accord 21 (2009) 'Whose peace is it anyway? Connecting Somali and international peacemaking'

## Abstract

The article looks at how Somali women have influenced both indigenous and donor-sponsored peace efforts. Their position in the clan system enabled them to bridge clan divides and act as channels for dialogue. They also influenced elders to negotiate and mobilise resources for clan conferences. However, their participation in these conferences was limited to that of observers. This led them to focus their energies on galvanising civil society

and broadening the vision for peace beyond an elite political settlement. In donor-sponsored conferences they succeeded in gaining seats at the negotiating table, but subsequent agreements on quotas for women in politics were not respected. The author argues that civil society organisations bear some responsibility for this for not having lobbied or monitored effectively.

## Background

In 1991 an armed uprising that began in the northern part of Somalia in the early 1980s engulfed the capital, Mogadishu, forcing out the military dictatorship of Siyad Barre. Once the regime fell, Somalia imploded into civil war between clan-based military factions. Four months of fighting in Mogadishu in 1991–92 killed over 25,000 people.

With the collapse of state institutions, Somalis reverted to clan-based structures for security, governance and commerce. By 1998 two separately governed entities had emerged: the secessionist Republic of Somaliland in the northwest, and the non-secessionist Federal State of Puntland in the northeast. These two political entities have enjoyed relative peace and stable governments forged at major inter-clan peace conferences – the 1993 Boroma Grand Conference (Somaliland) and the 1998 Garowe Conference (Puntland).

In the remaining (and largest) part of Somalia, including the capital Mogadishu, chronic insecurity has continued to be rife. The political vacuum that followed the collapse of the Barre regime was immediately filled by a violent power struggle between clan-based factions over control of Mogadishu and southern Somalia's resources. A US-led UN peacekeeping mission (UNOSOM) from 1992–95 failed to end the violence and restore a government.

The international community sponsored multiple peace processes aimed at re-establishing a central government

for Somalia, including the Arta Process in 2000, which led to the creation of the Transitional National Government (TNG). Both the TNG and the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), which succeeded the TNG as a result of the Mbagathi Conference in November 2004, did little to challenge the power of the warlords. This changed with the rise of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), which took control of Mogadishu in 2006.

In December 2006, Ethiopia, threatened by the rise of militant Islamic movements in Somalia, entered Mogadishu in support of the TFG and ousted the ICU. A UN-mandated African Union peacekeeping mission, AMISOM, arrived in 2007 to protect TFG institutions. These interventions only served to catalyse support for armed resistance by Mogadishu-based clans, remnants of the ICU, and an increasingly powerful militant Islamist group, Al Shabaab. The resulting violence was some of the worst Mogadishu had seen.

Ethiopia eventually withdrew from Somalia in 2008 as part of UN-mandated talks in Djibouti. However, intense fighting continued in many areas of the country, with Al Shabaab extending its control over much of southern Somalia including Mogadishu. In 2009 estimates suggested that 1.3 million people had been displaced by fighting since 2006, with some 4 million – over a third of the population – requiring food aid.

# Somali women and peacebuilding

## Faiza Jama

Faiza Jama Mohamed has been an active member of the women's movement in Somalia for over 20 years, beginning in Somaliland in the 1990s. She co-founded the Coalition for Grassroots Women's Organisations in Somalia in 1996, which promotes peace and gender equality and advocates for women's rights. Faiza is currently Director of the Africa regional office of Equality Now in Nairobi, which works to

document violence and discrimination against women. She is a key organiser of Solidarity for African Women's Rights, a pan-African coalition that successfully campaigned for the adoption of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. In 2008 she was awarded the Africa Prize Laureate by The Hunger Project.

During the Somali civil war many women found themselves at the centre of conflicts fought between their sons, husbands and other male relatives. For the sake of their families many women have been active in peacemaking and peacebuilding.

In Somali society it is men, specifically the elders, who traditionally have the means to *make* peace through dialogue and mediation. But although women are typically excluded from decision-making forums where peace accords are negotiated, their position within the clan system gives them the ability to bridge clan divisions and to act as a first channel for dialogue between parties in conflict.

Women have also been effective in influencing elders and others to intervene in conflict and have mobilised resources to finance peace meetings and support demobilisation. While men typically focus on achieving a political settlement, with the assumption that peace will ensue, women's vision of peace exceeds this and includes sustainable livelihoods, education, truth and reconciliation.

Women have also led the way in mobilising civil society engagement in peace work, although few of their initiatives for peace have been documented. Many women peace activists have found the struggle for peace inextricably linked to that for women's rights.

In internationally-sponsored peace processes women have successfully lobbied for places in decision-making forums and for seats in parliament. And they have made some gains in formal politics, holding seats in the different Somali parliaments and some cabinet posts. But their political role remains severely compromised. The emergence of religiously driven politics presents Somali society with a new challenge: some Islamic groups are supportive of women's participation in politics; others are against it, which threatens to undermine the few political gains that women have made.

This article speaks to the vision of peace that Somali women embrace, the initiatives they have embarked on and the outcomes of their efforts.

### Women, tradition and local peace processes

The war against Siyad Barre's regime in the 1980s was seen as a just cause by many Somalis and many women participated in the struggle to end the dictatorship. Those who earned respect

from their participation later used this to demand concessions from warlords and militias. Several became leading members of civil society and the women's movement and became engaged in peacebuilding.

But with the collapse of the state, women also lost the legal status and equal rights that had been afforded them. While women have actively engaged in peacebuilding, the gendered nature of clan-based politics means that women are typically excluded from full participation in peace talks.

It is commonly said in Somalia that while women can build peace only men can make it. One reason for this is that a woman's affiliations with her father's clan, and her mother's, husband's, children's and son-in-law's clans, mean that a woman's clan loyalty is perceived as unpredictable. They therefore are not included as clan delegates in negotiations and decision-making forums that can affect the fortunes of the clan.

By the same token a woman's multiple clan affiliations can give her a structural role as a peacebuilder, enabling her to act as a conduit for dialogue between warring parties and to exert pressure on them to keep talking.

When mobilised, women play an important influencing role in local peace processes, especially if they have wealth, are related to clan elders or come from a respected family. In Puntland, in response to one conflict, elderly women from several clans approached the leaders and demanded a cessation of hostilities. Their message was simple: 'we have had enough displacement in our lifetime and at this age we can't tolerate it anymore'. This mobilised clan elders and leaders to intervene and ensure the conflict was peacefully resolved.

“ It is commonly said in Somalia that while women can build peace only men can make it”

Peacebuilding conferences in Somaliland, in Borama and Sanaag (1993) and Hargeisa (1996), would not have taken place without the collective lobbying of women pressurising the elders to intervene to end the conflicts. But despite

their efforts, and confirmation from religious leaders that Islam offered no grounds to exclude them, women did not participate in the talks themselves, other than as fundraisers and cooks. After exerting pressure on their clansmen, ten women were allowed to observe the peace talks in Boroma in 1993 and eleven were allowed to observe the 1996 Hargeisa Conference, but had no voting rights.

## “ Excluded from the all-male arena of clan-based politics, women have directed their collective political acumen and agency into the civil society space that opened up after state collapse”

One of the powerful lobbying strategies women have used under such constraints is poetry. In the 1998 Garowe conference in Puntland, Anab Xasan, frustrated by what she called 'male power-grabbing and selfishness', recited a poem that left many men in tears. Reportedly, after hearing the poem the elders agreed to allocate women seats in the administration.

*Oh men, why don't you realise the difficult circumstances that*

*We are now facing?*

*Or keep the land and we will emigrate.*

*When the rhythm for rebuilding slows down, we rally and mobilise*

*For the purpose.*

*We are always beside men, never behind them.*

*We are at the forefront of peace and reconciliation,*

*We are ready with what it takes to resurrect good government.*

*But you men ignore our advice and inspirations,*

*You suffocate our intellect, so it never sees daylight...*

*Be warned, we are now awakening after a deep sleep and passivity.*

*(Excerpt translated by Faiza A. Warsame)*

For the most part, male delegates dictate the shape and form of negotiations. Women remain in the conference venue as observers and as pressure groups ensuring that any challenges that would cause a break-up are promptly dealt with.

Puntland and Somalia allocated quotas for women parliamentarians of eight per cent and twelve per cent respectively. Somaliland has no quota system and in the 2005 parliamentary elections only two out of the 82 seats

were taken by women candidates, and only one of these two was elected.

### Women, civil society and peacebuilding

Excluded from the all-male arena of clan-based politics, women have directed their collective political acumen and agency into the civil society space that opened up after state collapse. Within the somewhat inchoate definitions and boundaries of civil society, Somali women have operated as key players and shown keen leadership. Indeed some women would argue that Somali civil society organisations' engagement in peace work did not start until women took a dedicated leadership role.

Inspired by their involvement in the Beijing Conference on Women in 1995, women in Mogadishu in 1996 built on their growing experience in cooperating for peace to establish the Coalition for Grassroots Women Organisations (COGWO) as a platform for peacebuilding that united women's voices and efforts. COGWO has worked to promote women's rights and to support victims of violence, but its major contribution to peacebuilding in Somalia has been in stimulating the engagement of civil society organisations (CSOs).

In 1997 a workshop of CSOs organised by COGWO in Mogadishu concluded that it would take more than dialogue among a small group of warlords and their international patrons to secure a lasting solution to the Somali conflict. The organisations at the meeting made a commitment to take action to overcome the obstacles to peace: warlords and their supporters in the international community, certain businesspeople, elders, militia and irresponsible media and inaction by civil society.

The first step taken after the workshop was to set up the Peace and Human Rights Network – *Iskuxirka Nabada iyo Xuquuqal Adamiga* (INXA). This was a turning point in Somali politics and CSO engagement in peace processes. INXA became a platform that politicians wanted to associate with, including the warlords who saw it as an opportunity for political survival because the public was fed up with them.

In addition to those mentioned, the range of peacebuilding activities that Somali women are involved in can be illustrated by the following examples from south central Somalia:

*Human rights:* Mariam Hussein, widow of the human rights lawyer Ismail Jumale, founded the Ismail Jumale Centre for Human Rights to monitor and record human rights violations so that perpetrators could be brought to justice once proper institutions were in place.

*Disarmament:* The IIDA Women Development Organisation of Merca was founded by Halima Abdi Arush, a former teacher, headmistress and education inspector, who lost her husband and many members of her family in the Somali conflict. Initially formed to support internally displaced populations, in the mid-1990s it started a daring initiative to disarm and retrain young militiamen. In a direct challenge to the warlords, the programme required militiamen to commit to refrain from violent acts and to hand over their weapons. In return they were given tools, training and start-up capital. Some 156 militiamen were demobilised and their rifles melted down.



*Peace and security:* The network Women Pioneers for Peace and Life, known as HINNA (*Haweenka Horseedka Nabadda*), was formed in 2003 by former women fighters, such as the late Medina Generale. They became 'peace pioneers', organising peace campaigns and using the respect they earned as fighters to intervene with militia and warlords to diffuse tensions at critical times in Mogadishu.

HINNA's first major campaign in 2005 was to remove 42 roadblocks from Mogadishu and to encamp and retrain the militia. With the agreement of warlords and militiamen HINNA mobilised resources from businesses and CSOs and established two camps. A lack of international assistance, however, meant that the camps could not be sustained and the boys returned to the roadblocks.

At the time US-led counter-terrorism action involved huge payments to warlords to deliver individuals on Washington's terrorist list. As the warlords needed to engage their militia for this, it undermined the women's plans for further demobilisation. Some of the women were later involved in mediating between the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) and certain warlords who had held and deported individuals they suspected of being on the US terrorist list.

*Political advocacy:* In 2007 IIDA initiated the Somali Women's Agenda (SWA), linking Somali women in the diaspora with

those in the country. Based in Mogadishu and with branches in several Somali regions, its members are engaged in promoting peace and advocating for the appointment of women in local councils and regional administrations.

Such initiatives have attracted support from international donors who have seen civil society pressure groups as an essential counterweight to the faction leaders, warlords and clan elders who have filled seats at internationally-sponsored peace talks. In 2000 the Djibouti government accorded civil society organisations a prominent role in the Arta reconciliation conference. In the Mbgathi peace talks in Kenya (2002–04) civil society participation was supported by the European Commission (EC) and other donors.

### **Women and internationally-sponsored Somali peace processes**

In theory at least, international support has afforded women civil society activists an entry point into externally-sponsored peace processes, which had previously largely been a male preserve. In the Arta conference in Djibouti and the Mbgathi conference in Kenya, women made inroads with their participation and representation.

The Arta process coincided with the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. This stresses the importance of women's 'equal participation



Women's peace march, Garowe, Puntland, Somalia // © Ryan Anson

## “ At the Arta conference women lobbyists succeeded in convincing Djibouti President Omar Guelleh to secure a position for women in the talks and a quota of 25 seats for women in the 245-member parliament”

and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution’.

At the Arta conference women lobbyists succeeded in convincing Djibouti President Omar Guelleh to secure a position for women in the talks and quota of 25 seats for women in the 245-member parliament. The achievement was somewhat undermined, however, when women were selected by men on the same clan basis as male MPs, using the ‘4.5 formula’, rather than on merit.

Two years later, at Mbagathi, conference organisers categorised women together with civil society. Some 100 women from diverse backgrounds tried to take part in the conference on this basis, which at its height had over 1,500 male delegates. The lines between civil society activism and politics were blurred and some political opportunists sought to gain seats under the civil society banner.

With the conference management de facto in the hands of the faction leaders and their regional supporters, just 55 women were given places: 21 as officially registered observers and 34 as official voting delegates. Of these, 26 women took part as members of faction groups or the TNG. A woman sat on each of the Reconciliation Committees established as part of the process, and two women participated in the powerful ‘Leaders Committee’, consisting of 22 faction leaders and five members of civil society.

Women therefore made some gains in terms of their formal participation at the Mbagathi talks because of international support. However the Transitional Federal Charter reduced the quota of parliamentary seats allocated to women at Arta to twelve per cent in the larger Transitional Federal Government (TFG) parliament. Political leaders have since failed to uphold even this number and when a woman vacates her seat her clan fills it with a male candidate. Consequently women made up only eight per cent of MPs in the 275-member parliament. Since the parliament was expanded in January 2009, women make up only three per cent of parliamentarians in the new government of Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed.

### Looking forward

Somali women-led civil society organisations have achieved much in the past two decades. They have helped to disempower the warlords, reduced the significance of clan

affiliation, ensured civil society representation is essential to any peace and reconciliation process, and made progress on the participation of women in politics. But Somali women still face constraints in breaking through gender-based inequalities and cultural and practical barriers to equal political participation.

It will be interesting to see how women fare in Somaliland where male dominated clan politics has, theoretically, been replaced by multi-party politics. Women have exercised the right to vote in large numbers in the three elections that have been held since 2002. Civic activists and the Nagaad Umbrella for Women’s Organisations have been educating the public on women’s leadership and have supported women’s candidates in elections. But they face a strong cultural bias against female leadership in government, among both women and men.

In south central Somalia the challenge is daunting. An increase in violence since 2006 has deepened insecurity for everyone, undermined some positive civil society developments, stalled progress towards the formation of a stable government authority, and brought religiously-driven politics to the fore.

In theory women have more rights under *shariah* than they do under Somali customary law, which treats them as legal minors. Under a moderate Islamic government women could gain in terms of increased political rights. But militant Islamist groups like *Al Shabaab* and *Hizbul Islamiya* promise no good news for women’s rights or the civil society space that Somali women have managed to occupy and evolve since 1991. Somali women point out that under traditional law women are in principle protected from killings. In some areas under *Al Shabaab* authority women have been targeted and face increased strictures on their rights and organisations.

International diplomatic engagement in this context also faces tough dilemmas. UN SCR 1325 enjoins international peacebuilding efforts to ensure the full participation of women. To insist on this risks accusations of imposing foreign values and alienating Somali society. Not to do so risks undermining the rights of Somali women.

Finally, civil society organisations and activists should take some responsibility for failing to build upon their successes. After the Arta conference, for instance, CSOs relaxed and did little to monitor the progress of the TFG and hold it accountable. Instead several activists joined the parliament or the cabinet. Similarly CSOs have failed to ensure that seats allocated to women in the TFG are filled by women only. While they have succeeded in addressing some internal obstacles to peace in Somalia, they have not addressed regional and international ones.

The Somali Women’s Agenda provides a platform around which to mobilise a common internal and international agenda in the face of these on going challenges. This time there should be no relaxing until threats to peace and the road to recovery are decisively dealt with.

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### **NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security**

[www.womenpeacesecurity.org](http://www.womenpeacesecurity.org)

### **Pathways to women's empowerment (IDS)**

[www.pathwaysofempowerment.org/index.html](http://www.pathwaysofempowerment.org/index.html)

### **Peacewomen guide to UNSCRs**

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## ISSUE 19 (2008)

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**From military peace to social justice? The Angolan peace process**

The Luena Memorandum of 2002 brought an end to Angola's 27-year civil war. Accord 15 reviews the history of peacemaking efforts in Angola, and analyses challenges that remain if the absence of violence is to develop into a sustainable and just peace.



**ISSUE 14 (2004)**

**Alternatives to war: Colombia's peace processes**

This Accord publication provides an overview of more than 25 years of peace initiatives with Colombia's guerrilla and paramilitary groups. It includes analysis of civil society efforts at local, regional and national levels and identifies the necessary elements of a new model of conflict resolution.



**ISSUE 13 (2002)**

**Owning the process: public participation in peacemaking**

This first thematic Accord publication documents mechanisms for public participation in peacemaking. It features extended studies looking at how people were empowered to participate in political processes in Guatemala, Mali and South Africa. It also contains shorter pieces from Colombia, Northern Ireland and the Philippines.



**ISSUE 12 (2002)**

**Weaving consensus: the Papua New Guinea – Bougainville peace process**

This Accord publication documents efforts leading to the Bougainville Peace Agreement of 2001. It describes an indigenous process that drew on the strengths of Melanesian traditions, as well as innovative roles played by international third parties.



**ISSUE 11 (2002)**

**Protracted conflict, elusive peace: initiatives to end the violence in northern Uganda**

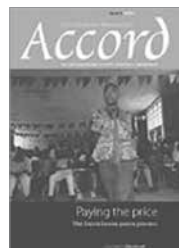
While a meaningful peace process in northern Uganda remains elusive, Accord 11 documents significant peacemaking initiatives undertaken by internal and external actors and analyses their impact on the dynamics of the conflict.



**ISSUE 10 (2001)**

**Politics of compromise: the Tajikistan peace process**

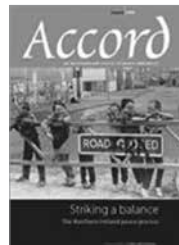
This publication describes the aspirations of the parties to the conflict in Tajikistan. It documents the negotiation process leading to the General Agreement of June 1997, looking at the role of the international community, led by the UN, and of local civil society.



**ISSUE 9 (2000)**

**Paying the price: the Sierra Leone peace process**

The Lomé Peace Agreement of July 1999 sought to bring an end to armed conflict in Sierra Leone: one of the most brutal civil wars of recent times. Accord 9 explores the Lomé process and earlier attempts to resolve the conflict, and draws lessons for Sierra Leone's transition.



**ISSUE 8 (1999)**

**Striking a balance: the Northern Ireland peace process**

This publication examines the factors that led to the negotiations resulting in the 1998 Belfast Agreement. It describes the complex underlying forces and the development of an environment for peace. (2003: Supplement Issue – see online index)



**ISSUE 7 (1999)**

**A question of sovereignty: the Georgia-Abkhazia peace process**

This publication explores the background and issues at the heart of the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict, providing a unique insight into a political stalemate and pointing towards possible avenues out of deadlock.



**ISSUE 6 (1999)**

**Compromising on autonomy: Mindanao in transition**

The GRP-MNLF 1996 Peace Agreement was a milestone, as all previous peacemaking attempts over 24 years had failed. Accord 6 analyses elements of peacemaking in Mindanao and examines the challenges of implementation. (2003: Supplement Issue – see online index)



**ISSUE 3 (1998)**

**The Mozambican peace process in perspective**

This publication documents the diverse initiatives that drove the parties to a negotiated settlement of the conflict in Mozambique. It further illustrates the impact on the country of changing regional and international political dynamics.



**ISSUE 5 (1998)**

**Safeguarding peace: Cambodia's constitutional challenge**

This publication documents issues around the signing of the 1991 Paris agreements that officially ended Cambodia's long war, and the subsequent violent collapse of the country's governing coalition in July 1997.



**ISSUE 2 (1997)**

**Negotiating rights: the Guatemalan peace process**

The signing of the peace agreement in 1996 brought an end to 36 years of civil war in Guatemala. Accord 2 analyses issues of impunity, indigenous rights, political participation and land reform.



**ISSUE 4 (1998)**

**Demanding sacrifice: war and negotiation in Sri Lanka**

This publication documents the cycles of ethnic/national conflict that have blighted Sri Lanka since 1983. It analyses negotiations and other peace initiatives, and outlines fundamental concerns that need to be confronted in future peacemaking efforts



**ISSUE 1 (1996)**

**The Liberian peace process 1990-1996**

This first Accord publication documents the lengthy and fractious Liberian peace process and provides insight into why thirteen individual peace accords collapsed in half as many years.





Conciliation Resources is an independent organisation working with people in conflict to prevent violence and build peace. We're there for as long as we're needed to provide advice, support and practical resources. In addition, we take what we learn to government decision-makers and others working to end conflict, to improve peacebuilding policies and practice worldwide.

We work mainly in the Caucasus, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Fiji, Guinea, India, Liberia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sierra Leone, South Sudan and Uganda, in partnership with local and international civil society organisations and governments. We also publish *Accord: an international review of peace initiatives*. Our funding is through grants from governments, independent trusts and foundations.

**We aim to:**

- » **Promote** understanding of peaceful ways to resolve conflicts
- » **Create** opportunities for dialogue between divided communities
- » **Strengthen** peacebuilding policies and practice
- » **Support** people to build peace

Please visit our website or contact us for more information about what we do and how you can support this work:

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Global policy highlights the importance of women's participation in peace processes and peacebuilding. Yet the impact of international commitments is not felt on the ground. Most peace agreements do not address the specific concerns of women. And women are still excluded from political processes.

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