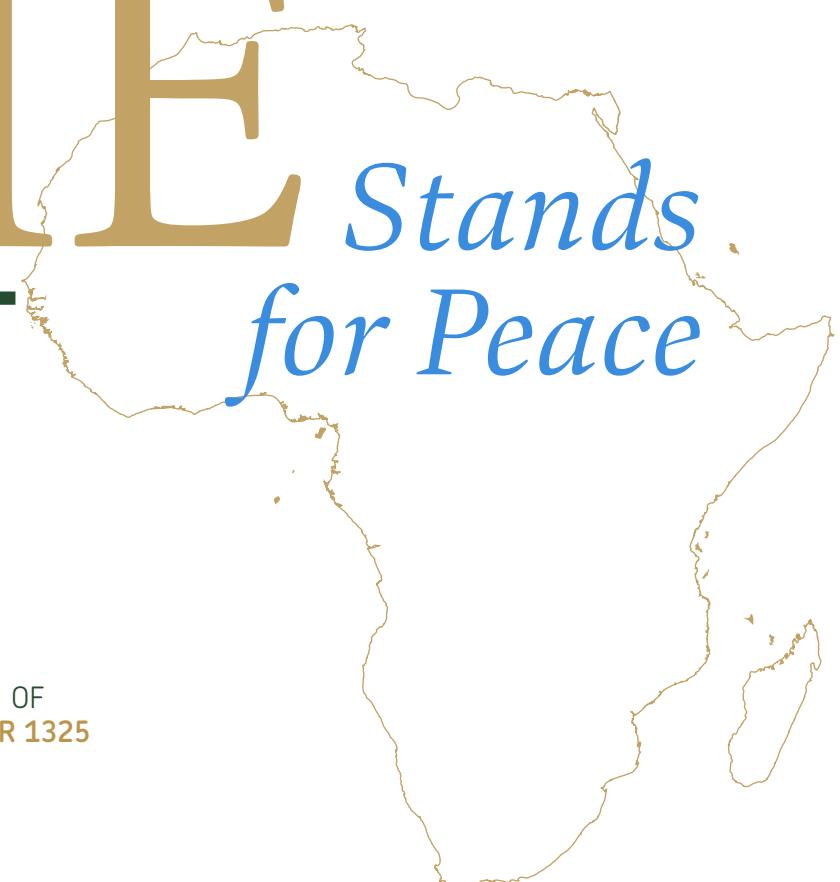


# SHE *Stands for Peace*

25

STORIES  
IN CELEBRATION OF  
YEARS OF UNSCR 1325







# SHE

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*Stands  
for Peace*

25 STORIES  
IN CELEBRATION OF  
25 YEARS OF UNSCR 1325



Norwegian Ministry  
of Foreign Affairs



Ambasáid na hÉireann  
Embassy of Ireland



**She Stands for Peace:**  
25 Stories in Celebration of 25 Years of UNSCR 1325

This book is jointly published by the African Union Commission (AUC) and the United Nations Office to the African Union (UNOAU), with the generous support of the Government of the Kingdom of Norway and the Government of Ireland.

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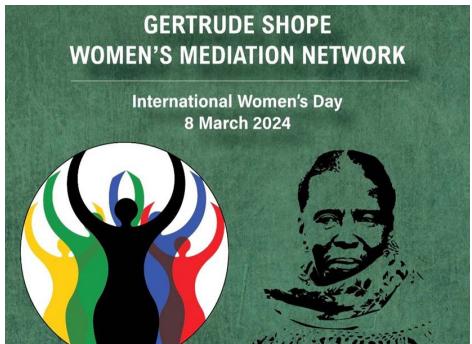
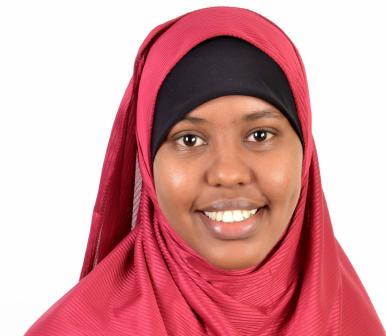
This book commemorates 25 years of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000). It captures 25 stories of African women and women networks/organisations contributing to the implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda in Africa.

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*On 31 October 2000, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopts Resolution 1325 (2000) calling for participation of women in the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict. The resolution calls on all actors involved to adopt a gender perspective when negotiating and implementing peace agreements and further calls on all parties to armed conflict to fully respect international law applicable to the human rights of women and girls, as civilians and as refugees. A general view of the meeting as the vote is taken.*

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## Acronyms

<b>ACCORD</b>	The African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes
<b>AFCF</b>	Association des Femmes Chefs de Famille en Mauritanie
<b>AFELL</b>	Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia
<b>AIDS</b>	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
<b>APSA</b>	African Peace and Security Architecture
<b>AU</b>	African Union
<b>AUC</b>	African Union Commission
<b>AWLN</b>	African Women's Leaders Network
<b>CAFCO</b>	Cadre Permanent de Concertation de la Femme Congolaise/The Permanent Framework for Consultation of Congolese Women
<b>CGBV-Ethiopia</b>	Campaign Group against Gender-Based Violence-Ethiopia
<b>CHOGM</b>	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
<b>CLVF</b>	Comité de Lutte Contre les Violences Faites aux Femmes
<b>CNDP</b>	National Congress for the Defence of the People
<b>COGWA</b>	Coalition of Grassroots Women's Organisations
<b>DDR</b>	Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration
<b>DRC</b>	Democratic Republic of the Congo
<b>ECA</b>	Economic Commission for Africa
<b>ECOWAS</b>	Economic Community of West African States
<b>EWLA</b>	Ethiopian Women's Lawyers Association
<b>EWPB</b>	Ethiopian Women Peace Builders
<b>FAHP</b>	Forum Against Harmful Practices
<b>FDC</b>	Foundation for Community Development
<b>FDRE</b>	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
<b>FEMNET</b>	African Women's Development and Communication Network
<b>FRELIMO</b>	Mozambique Liberation Front
<b>GIF</b>	Groupe d'Initiatives des Femmes
<b>GSADF</b>	Gertrude Shope Annual Dialogue Forum
<b>GSPMN</b>	Gertrude Shope Peace and Mediation Network
<b>GSMWN</b>	Gertrude Shope Women Mediators Network
<b>HINNA</b>	Haweenka Horseedka Nabadda and Nolosha/Women Pioneers for Peace and Life
<b>HIV</b>	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
<b>HLP-Sudan</b>	High-Level Panel on Sudan
<b>HRCSDL</b>	Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone
<b>HYPREP</b>	Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project
<b>ICC</b>	International Criminal Court
<b>ICTs</b>	Information and Communication Technologies
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced People
<b>IEC</b>	Independent Electoral Commission
<b>IGAD</b>	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
<b>IMD</b>	Institute for Multiparty Democracy
<b>LAWYERS</b>	Legal Access through Women Yearning for Equal Rights and Social Justice
<b>LRA</b>	Lord's Resistance Army
<b>M23</b>	Movement du 23 Mars
<b>MARWOPNET</b>	Mano River Women's Peace Network
<b>MONUSCO</b>	United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
<b>MRU</b>	Mano River Union
<b>NAPs</b>	National Action Plans

<b>NEWA</b>	Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations
<b>NGOs</b>	Non-Governmental Organisations
<b>OAU</b>	Organisation of African Unity
<b>OHCHR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
<b>PAPS</b>	Political Affairs, Peace and Security
<b>PAWO</b>	Pan-African Women Organisation
<b>PoW</b>	Panel of the Wise
<b>PRRFON</b>	Peace Revival and Reconciliation Foundation of Nigeria
<b>PSC</b>	Peace and Security Council
<b>PSEA</b>	Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
<b>R-ARCSS</b>	Revitalised Agreement on Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan
<b>RCD-Goma</b>	Rally for Congolese Democracy-Goma
<b>RENAMO</b>	Resistência Nacional Moçambicana/ Mozambican National Resistance
<b>RJMEC</b>	Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission
<b>RSF</b>	Rapid Support Forces
<b>RWN</b>	Rwanda Women's Network
<b>SAF</b>	Sudanese Armed Forces
<b>SAWID</b>	South African Women in Dialogue
<b>SGBV</b>	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
<b>SPLA</b>	Sudan People's Liberation Army
<b>SSWAP</b>	South Sudan Women Advocacy for Peace
<b>SWDC</b>	Somali Women Development Centre
<b>TPFL</b>	Tigray People's Liberation Front
<b>TV</b>	Television
<b>TVF</b>	Trust Fund for Victims
<b>UEWCA</b>	Union of Ethiopian Women and Children Associations
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNECA</b>	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNIFEM</b>	United Nations Development Fund for Women
<b>UNMISS</b>	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
<b>UNOAU</b>	UN Office to the African Union
<b>UNSCR</b>	United Nations Security Council Resolution
<b>UNSMIL</b>	United Nations Support Mission in Libya
<b>UNTMIS</b>	United Nations Transitional Assistance Mission in Somalia
<b>WAND</b>	Women's Association for National Development
<b>WCC</b>	World Council of Churches
<b>WOMEN</b>	Women Organised for a More Enlightened Nation
<b>WPM</b>	Women and Peace Movement
<b>WPS</b>	Women, Peace and Security
<b>YWCA</b>	Young Women Christian Association



*AUC PAPS and UNOAU Annual Strategic Meeting,  
5 March 2025. © UNOAU*

## Acknowledgments

This publication is the result of collaborative efforts between the African Union Commission and the United Nations Office to the African Union. It is made possible through the generous support of the Government of the Kingdom of Norway and the Government of Ireland. It is a critical reflection on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 across Africa, where women have been at the forefront of peacebuilding efforts, often in the face of persistent structural and cultural barriers.

Special thanks to the African Union Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace, and Security, H.E. Ambassador Bankole Adeoye, the former African Union Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on Women, Peace and Security, H.E. Bineta Diop, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General to the African Union and Head of the United Nations Office to the African Union, Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, and Deputy Head of United Nations Office to the African Union and Director of Political Affairs, Gerald Mitchell, for their guidance and leadership during the process of production of this book.

Great appreciation to all the women who responded to the call and to those whose stories have been documented in this book. Thank you for sharing your firsthand accounts, case studies, and analytical perspectives. These narratives illuminate their resilience, agency, and determination to shape a more just and peaceful future for humanity.

Recognition and appreciation to the African Union Commission's Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security, the Office of the AUC Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, and the AUC Women, Gender and Youth Directorate, for reviewing the stories as well as providing useful insights for the publication.

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The AUC and UNOAU also commend the authors, contributors, and editors for bringing together this important volume, which not only documents the progress made but also highlights the road ahead.



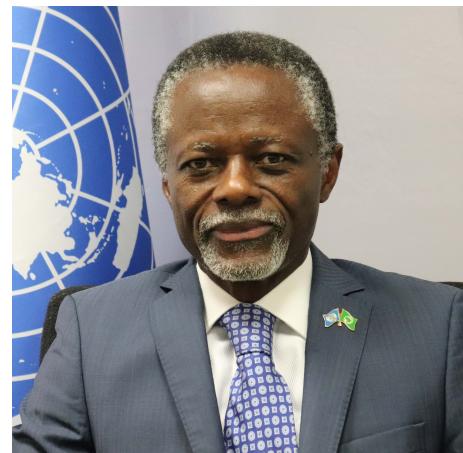
***This book is dedicated to the remarkable African women  
who have continued to make significant contributions to the  
promotion of peace and security across the continent.***



*H.E. Mahmoud Ali, the  
Chairperson of the African  
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*This book has been published under the leadership and guidance of H.E. Mahmoud Ali, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission; H.E. Ambassador Bankole Adeoye, the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security; H.E. Bineta Diop, the former Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission; and Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General to the African Union and Head of UNOAU. The implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda greatly benefits from this leadership.*



*African Women Leaders Network (AWLN) High-Level Side Event on the Margins of the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FFD4) held on 30 June 2025, in Seville, Spain.*

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ETHIOPIA

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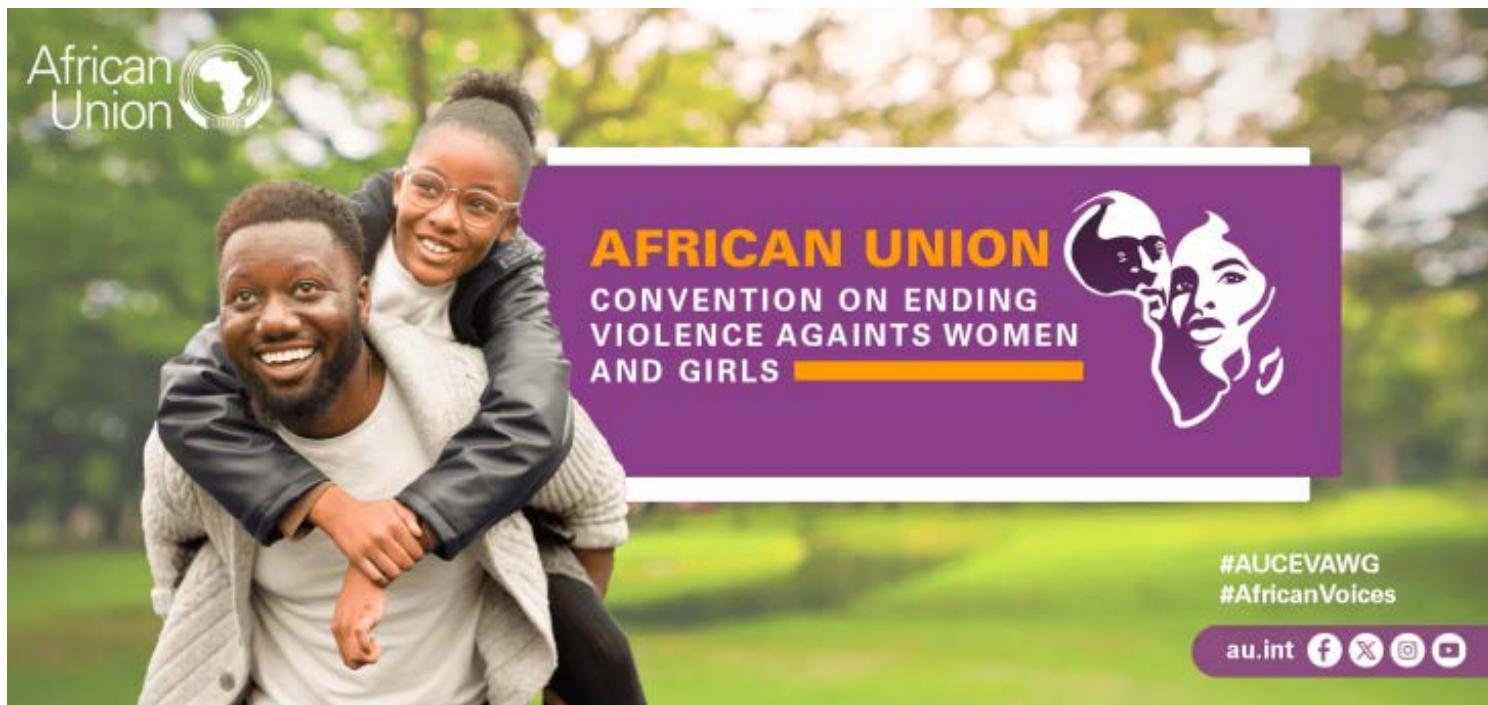
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UN SECRETARY-GENERAL  
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*The African Union Commission Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (AU CEVAWG) was adopted in the 38th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 15 to 16 February 2025.*  
 © African Union Convention on Ending Violence Against Women

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### THE JOURNEY OF UNSCR 1325 IN AFRICA

# FOREWORD

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FORMER PRESIDENT OF ETHIOPIA  
**H.E. SAHLE-WORK ZEWDE**

As we commemorate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325), we are reminded of the critical importance of women's voices and leadership in the pursuit of peace and security.

The third edition of *She Stands for Peace*, a joint publication by the United Nations Office to the African Union and the African Union Commission, is a timely and essential contribution to this ongoing dialogue.

Over the past quarter-century, we have witnessed significant progress in recognising the pivotal role of women in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Women have emerged as leaders, advocates, and agents of change in their communities, often at significant personal risk. The stories captured in this third edition of *She Stands for Peace* highlight the resilience and determination of 19 remarkable women and six women's networks who have navigated the complexities of conflict and stood out as champions of peace across Africa.

Despite these advancements, we must continue to confront the challenges of implementing the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. Women remain underrepresented in decision-making processes, and their contributions often go unrecognised. In many conflict-affected settings, systemic barriers, cultural norms, and political obstacles hinder women's full participation in peace processes. These challenges remind us that while we celebrate our achievements, we must also renew our commitment to dismantling the

barriers that prevent women from fully realising their potential as leaders in peacebuilding.

As we reflect on the progress and work ahead, I urge governments, civil society, and international organisations to prioritise gender inclusivity in their peace efforts. We must strengthen the implementation of the National Action Plans on WPS and promote the formulation of policies that recognise and actively support women's roles in decision-making at all levels. This includes ensuring that women are present at the negotiation tables and empowered to influence the outcomes of peace agreements and post-conflict reconstruction. As I stated at the third Africa Forum on WPS, there is no special peace and security for women alone, nor can it be achieved by women alone. Ensuring the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women must be non-negotiable to guarantee inclusive and sustainable peace. Full, equal and meaningful participation of women would also ensure that peace agreements reflect the unique perspectives of women and are firmly grounded in the realities of communities.

The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UNSCR 1325 is an opportunity to remind ourselves that progress is possible when we are intentional, when we are unified, and when we are bold. Africa has demonstrated to the world that leadership can take different forms. We have produced women who lead nations, defend peace, drive economies, and demand justice. But we must ask ourselves: Are we doing enough to prepare and sustain the next generation of women leaders? Too often, we



*Former President of Ethiopia H.E. Sable-Work Zewde*  
© Office of the President, Ethiopia

focus on getting women into leadership roles but forget to keep the ladder once we have climbed it. It is imperative that we empower our youth and future leaders, so that when someone asks, "Where are the women?" we have an extensive list of ready, capable, and credible leaders. We need to institutionalise mentorship, provide pathways, and ensure that every aspiring girl can see herself in the halls of power as a rightful participant and not as a token or an exception.

If we are serious about achieving peace, we must be equally serious about closing the financial and opportunity gaps that hold women and young people back. The simple truth is this: without economic power, political voice remains fragile. The stories shared in *She Stands for Peace* serve as a testament to what African women can achieve and have achieved despite the structural barriers set against them. Their strength and commitment

teach us that gender equality is not merely an ambition but a lived reality worth aspiring to. I hope this publication and the experiences shared will serve as a resource for promoting gender-sensitive approaches to conflict resolution and peacebuilding and inspire future generations of women leaders across Africa.

Let us celebrate the achievements of women in peacebuilding while remaining steadfast in our commitment to overcoming the challenges that lie ahead. The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the stories presented in this book are reminders that our commitments must be backed by the question: What difference are we making in the lives of women on the ground? Keeping that in mind, we can significantly contribute to bringing about "The Africa we want" and create a more inclusive, equitable, and peaceful world for all. Otherwise, it will remain a mere slogan.

Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed and Ethiopian President Sable-Work Zewde, pictured on 21 October 2019 following their strategic dialogue on advancing the Women, Peace and Security agenda in Ethiopia and across Africa. The meeting was part of the third joint UN-AU solidarity mission, which included high-level consultations with other regional leaders. © UNOAU



# FOREWORD

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AFRICAN UNION COMMISSIONER FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS, PEACE AND SECURITY  
**H.E AMBASSADOR BANKOLE ADEOYE**

This book, *She Stands for Peace*, is a testament to the extraordinary contributions of African women to peace and security across Africa. It chronicles the stories of women who have defied immense odds to advance peace and security across the continent. Their journeys remind us that peace is not merely the absence of war but the presence of justice, equality, and inclusive governance.

In an era defined by unprecedented global challenges, escalating conflicts, climate crises, the erosion of women's rights, and the proliferation of violence, the pursuit of sustainable peace has never been more urgent. Yet, amidst these trials, African women have emerged as pillars of hope, courage, and leadership, tirelessly working to silence the guns and rebuild fractured societies. Africa, a continent brimming with resilience and potential, remains at the forefront of these struggles, bearing the brunt of nearly half of the world's conflict-related casualties.

Since the adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in 2000, Africa has made significant strides in integrating the principles of the WPS agenda into its peace and security architecture. Today, 35 African countries and six Regional Economic Communities (RECs) have adopted National and Regional Action Plans (NAPs), reflecting a growing commitment to advancing women's leadership.

However, as this publication poignantly illustrates, significant challenges persist. Gendered violence, chronic underfunding of peace initiatives, and evolving conflict dynamics, exacerbated by climate change, economic strife, and violent extremism, continue to hinder women's full and meaningful participation in shaping the future of their societies.

Amid these challenges, the often undocumented and undervalued work of women at the grassroots and local levels stands as ample evidence of their resilience and ingenuity. Across the continent, women in local communities are quietly but powerfully driving change. They mediate disputes, foster dialogue, and rebuild trust in fractured societies. They organise peace marches, help establish early warning systems, and provide safe spaces for survivors of violence. Women advocate for education, economic empowerment, and the inclusion of marginalised voices in decision-making processes. These women, though rarely in the spotlight, are the backbone of sustainable peace. Their localised efforts create ripples of hope and transformation that extend far beyond their immediate communities.

This book sheds light on these unsung heroines, whose contributions are too often overlooked in formal peace processes and policy discussions. By amplifying their stories, we honour their invaluable



H.E. Ambassador Bankole Adeoye  
© African Union Commission

work and underscore the critical need to support and fund grassroots women's initiatives. Their experiences remind us that sustainable peace is not built solely in boardrooms or at negotiation tables but in the everyday acts of courage, compassion and leadership demonstrated by women in their communities.

The African Union Commission (AUC), through its Department of Political Affairs, Peace, and Security, remains steadfast in its commitment to advancing the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. Recognising the transformative power of collaboration, the Department actively promotes joint initiatives with the United Nations (UN) to mainstream women's voices and leadership in peace processes across the continent. A prime example of this partnership is the *She Stands for Peace* project, which has produced two publications and a podcast series, showcasing the extraordinary contributions of African women to peace and security.

This third edition of *She Stands for Peace* is both a celebration and a call to action. It celebrates the resilience, innovation, and leadership of African women who have turned challenges into opportunities to influence political and social structures. Simultaneously, it calls on the international community to adequately support and fund African women's contributions to peacebuilding. Their stories remind us that sustainable peace can only be achieved when women are fully, equally, and meaningfully included in every aspect of peacebuilding.

As we commemorate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UNSCR 1325 in October 2025, let us recommit to the principles of prevention, participation, protection, relief, and recovery. Let us honour the unsung heroes of peacebuilding, whose tireless efforts have laid the foundation for a more just and peaceful world. And let us ensure that their voices continue to guide us as we work toward a future where peace is not just a dream but a reality for all.



*Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General to the African Union and Head of UNOAU, H.E. Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, with AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, H.E. Ambassador Bankole Adeoye, during the UNOAU-AU Annual Consultative Meeting on 21 February 2024. © UNOAU*

# FOREWORD

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FORMER SPECIAL ENVOY OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION ON WOMEN,  
PEACE AND SECURITY

**H.E. BINETA DIOP**

In a world where the echoes of conflict continue to reverberate across continents, the pursuit of peace stands as an unwavering call to action. The 2023 Global Peace Index paints a sobering picture, highlighting the deepening global crises, with Africa disproportionately bearing the brunt of conflict-related suffering. As we navigate a time of unprecedented instability, it is crucial that we recognise the steadfast women whose courage, resilience, and leadership have become the cornerstone of peace in our communities, countries, and on the continent.

It is with immense pride and a profound sense of duty that I introduce *this third edition* of *She Stands for Peace*—a powerful compilation that celebrates the indomitable spirit of African women who have relentlessly stood at the forefront of peacebuilding efforts. This publication is not just an anthology of stories; it is a testament to the strength, sacrifice, and transformative impact of women across Africa, whose contributions continue to shape the future of peace and security.

The stories within these pages reflect the essence of Africa's journey towards peace. They are the voices of women who have been directly impacted by conflict, but who have turned their personal experiences into a driving force for change. From community-level peacebuilding to shaping national and regional policies, these

women have defied the odds, overcoming immense barriers to challenge entrenched systems of violence and inequality. They are the architects of peace—often unsung, but always resilient.

The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda is built upon the fundamental pillars of prevention, participation, protection, and relief and recovery. Over the years, Africa has not only embraced this framework but has also led by example, implementing National Action Plans and developing institutions that champion women's leadership in peace processes. Today, 35 African countries have adopted National Action Plans, and the continent continues to serve as a beacon of progress in advancing gender equality and women's inclusion in peace and security.

However, while we celebrate the strides made, we must also acknowledge the challenges that remain. Gender-based violence continues to undermine women's full participation in shaping peaceful societies. The evolving nature of conflicts, driven by climate change, economic strife, and the rise of violent extremism, requires us to adapt and respond with renewed commitment and urgency.

As we reflect on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, it is clear that considerable work lies ahead. The road to sustainable peace requires more than just the recognition of women's contributions; it demands



*H.E. Bineta Diop, the former Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on Women, Peace and Security © African Union Commission*

that women's voices are heard, valued, and integrated at every level of decision-making. The *She Stands for Peace* initiative amplifies the stories of women who have long been at the heart of peacebuilding, inspiring a new generation of women to continue this vital work.

Let us remember that true peace is not simply the absence of conflict; it is the presence of justice, equality, and opportunity for all. These stories remind us of the transformative potential of women in creating sustainable peace, and they urge us to remain steadfast in our commitment to ensure that women continue to lead in every aspect of peacebuilding.

As we continue this journey, let us honour the remarkable women featured in this e-book, whose courage and leadership are shaping the future of Africa and the world. Their legacy will serve as a beacon of hope for generations to come, reminding us all that peace is not just a dream—it is a collective endeavour that requires all of us to stand together, in solidarity, for a better, more peaceful world.

In the spirit of these remarkable women, I encourage you to read, reflect, and take action. This is their story—one of resilience, leadership, and an unwavering commitment to a more peaceful world.

AU – UNOAU Joint workshop for Election Management Bodies (EMBs) in Africa on women's Meaningful Participation in Electoral Process held at AU Headquarters from 13 to 14 October 2022. © UNOAU



# FOREWORD

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SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UN SECRETARY-GENERAL TO THE AFRICAN UNION AND HEAD OF UNOAU  
**MR PARFAIT ONANGA-ANYANGA**

It is a great honour to contribute this foreword to the third edition of *She Stands for Peace*. This publication and the aspirations it represents speak not only to the enduring struggle for women's participation in peace and security but also to the quiet power and consistent leadership of African women whose contributions too often go unacknowledged. Featuring 25 stories of women and women's networks actively engaged in peace initiatives, this edition arrives at a landmark moment: the 25th anniversary of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). It is a moment that invites both celebration and reflection on the progress of the WPS agenda in Africa—an opportunity to re-dedicate ourselves to the full implementation of the resolution and the realisation of its pillars. For a quarter of a century, Resolution 1325 has reminded the global community that peace built without women is neither sustainable nor just. However, we cannot afford to mark this anniversary with rhetoric alone. Let it be remembered not by the volume of our words but by the structural transformations we are willing to pursue.

Across Africa, we have seen the truth repeatedly affirmed: women are not merely victims of conflict—they are leaders, negotiators, agents of peace, and visionaries, driving positive change. From rebuilding

fractured communities to mediating between divided factions, their labour is often invisible but never insignificant. The stories featured in this book are evidence. The challenge before us is not whether women are capable but whether we are willing enough to remove the obstacles that impede them. It is our collective responsibility to uplift and empower women in the pursuit of peace and security, ensuring they possess the capacity and knowledge to make a lasting impact when the time comes for them to step up.

Let us be unequivocal: women's participation in peace processes and peacebuilding is not symbolic or merely tokenistic; it is essential. We cannot claim to build inclusive societies while excluding half of our population from shaping their future. When we look around the continent, we still see far too few women in positions of leadership, and far too many antiquated notions about where women belong. These are not just policy failures—they are moral ones. Women's full, equal, and meaningful participation in all efforts to build sustainable peace is at the heart of the *obligations* towards advancing the WPS agenda. Hence, the call to all stakeholders must recognise that the voices of young women and girls are essential in shaping a sustainable future. Peacebuilding initiatives must amplify their perspectives and empower them to take on leadership roles, actively participating in peacebuilding efforts.



*Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General to the African Union and Head of UNOAU © UNOAU*

The *She Stands for Peace* initiative and its products continue to serve as a medium for women to share their stories, including their achievements and the challenges they face. As we consider the future of the WPS agenda, we must do more—we must build cultures that value women's voices. This includes recognising the women already doing the work on the front lines: climate activists managing resource conflicts, peacekeepers de-escalating tensions, and community leaders reconciling families torn by war. These women do not need us to speak for them; they need us to listen, support, and follow their lead.

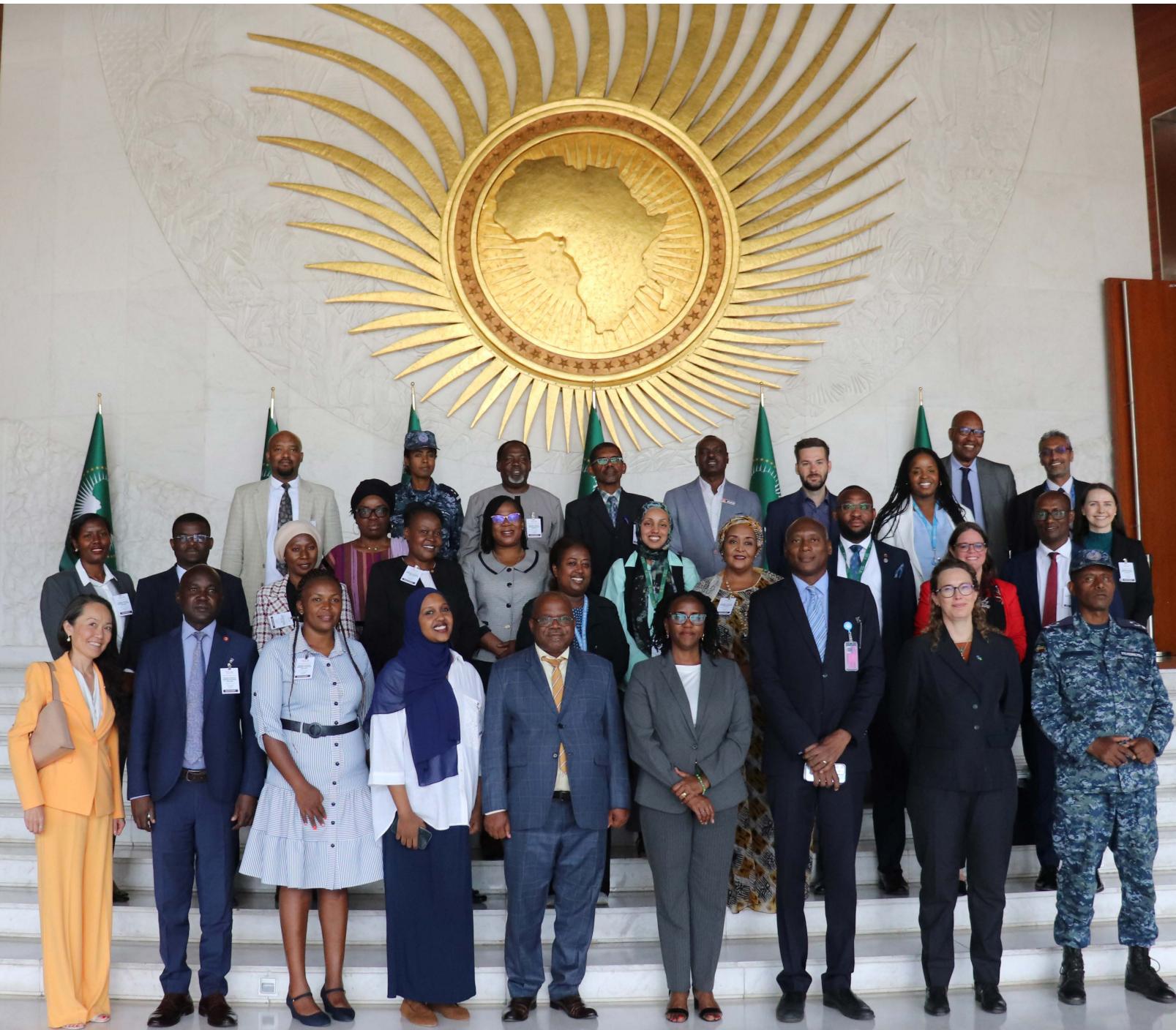
Importantly, we must speak with one voice. In global forums, Africa is strongest when it speaks with a unified voice. When we consult across borders, we align our priorities and defend the dignity and leadership of African women together. The global stage does not wait for those who hesitate. Our voices must be confident, united, coordinated, and clear.

Lastly, we must be innovative to address the evolving conflict landscape and shifting security dynamics. The WPS agenda must keep pace. Data and evidence of realities on the ground must back every commitment we make. If our work does not reflect the needs of the displaced mother, the aspiring girl leader, or the woman entrepreneur, then we are falling short. Accountability is not only about data; it is also about dignity.

This edition of *She Stands for Peace* is more than a historical record—it is a roadmap for what women can achieve. It is a call to action for governments, international organisations, civil society, and every citizen who believes in a more just and peaceful world. Let us honour the legacy of Resolution 1325 not just by looking back but by pushing forward collectively.

Let us be bold in our ambition, deliberate in our actions, and unwavering in our belief that African women are not just participants in peace—they are integral to its architects.

*Africa Regional Strategic Meeting on Gender Mainstreaming in Small Arms Control in Africa, held on April 16-17, 2025. The workshop was co-organized by the African Union Commission and the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa. © UNOAU*



# INTRODUCTION

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The world stands at a crossroads. According to the 2023 Global Peace Index, global peacefulness has continued to deteriorate, with more than 170 conflicts recorded worldwide impacting 612 million women and girls, many of which are concentrated in Africa. From the Sahel to the Horn of Africa, the Great Lakes and southern Africa, the continent remains one of the most conflict-affected globally, accounting for nearly half of all global conflict-related casualties.

Yet, despite these alarming figures, global military spending reached an unprecedented 2.4 US dollars trillion in 2024, reflecting a troubling prioritisation of militarisation over investments in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The growing expenditure on arms starkly contrasts with the chronic underfunding of initiatives that address the root causes of violence, mediate conflicts, and sustain peace. This imbalance fuels instability, trapping many communities, particularly women and children, in cycles of suffering.

At the same time, we are witnessing a rollback of women's rights, alongside gross human rights violations, mass displacements, and unprecedented violence against women and girls within societies and families.

Against this backdrop, the global peace architecture has undergone transformation. The United Nations Secretary-General's 2023 **New Agenda for Peace** reinforces multilateral efforts to

sustain peace, puts the leadership and participation of women at the centre of decision-making, and underscores the transformative potential of women to attain sustainable peace. The Secretary-General has also advocated for a renewed focus on global peacebuilding through the **Pact for the Future Summit**. This initiative emphasises the interconnectedness of global challenges, from climate change to conflict, and underscores the importance of inclusive governance. In Africa, **Agenda 2063**, the continent's blueprint for sustainable development, champions "silencing the guns" by addressing structural drivers of conflict.

At the same time, mediation spaces are evolving, with new actors emerging. Local, national, and cross-regional women's networks, as well as youth networks, are increasingly entering the mediation landscape, introducing innovative approaches to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. No single actor leads peace processes alone, but women have established themselves as critical players within this spectrum of mediation efforts.

In October 2024, the world marked the 24<sup>th</sup> anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325. This milestone underscored both progress and persistent challenges in advancing women's meaningful participation in peacebuilding. At the heart of these celebrations was the launch of the UN Secretary-General's **Common Pledge**, a landmark

commitment to further increase women's representation in peace negotiations and conflict prevention initiatives by 2030. These global commitments reaffirm the importance of women's leadership in creating sustainable peace.

Since 2000, Africa has made significant strides in advancing the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda through the creation of legal frameworks, institutional mechanisms, and advocacy efforts. Numerous states have also developed regional and national action plans to apply these principles. So far, 35 African countries have adopted the National Action Plans (NAPs), with recent additions including Zimbabwe, Somalia, Malawi, Morocco, and Chad.

Yet long before UNSCR 1325 codified the role of women in peace and security, African women were already leading in this area, confronting violence, mediating disputes, and rebuilding fractured communities. This e-book, ***She Stands for Peace***, honours their extraordinary contributions. It chronicles the stories of African women who, against all odds, have advanced the principles of UNSCR 1325. These local, national, and continental Sheroes are the often unsung architects of peace, continually redefining resilience and leadership in times of crisis. As we celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UNSCR 1325, this e-book aims to amplify the voices of African women peacemakers whose work forms the foundation of the WPS agenda.

To boost WPS implementation in Africa, both the UN Office to the African Union (UNOAU) and the African Union Commission (AUC) have increased their efforts over the last decade. The Joint UN-AU Framework for an Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security has strengthened collaboration on advancing women's roles in peace and security. The She Stands for Peace project is a testament to this commitment. Through collaboration with the UNOAU and key AUC departments—including Peace and Security, Political Affairs, and the Office of the AUC Special Envoy on Women, Peace, and Security—this initiative has already yielded two e-books and a podcast series.

This third *She Stands for Peace* e-book represents a further step forward in this collaboration. It highlights the experiences of nineteen women and six women's networks, showcasing the crucial role of women in promoting peace and security in Africa. These stories reveal how women, particularly in conflict-affected settings, have transformed challenges into opportunities to influence political and social structures across the continent. Their experiences underscore the importance of '***glocalising peace***' and the urgent need for the international community to adequately support and fund African women's contributions to peacebuilding.

UNSCR 1325 focuses on four main pillars: prevention, participation, protection, and relief

and recovery. These pillars highlight the crucial role women play in preventing conflict, negotiating peace, maintaining peace, and rebuilding societies after conflict. This e-book shares stories of effective practices in these areas, showcasing progress in increasing women's involvement in peace processes and addressing gender-based violence. These practices include local community initiatives, youth leadership, cross-country and regional collaborations, and women's leadership networks.

However, the experiences contained in this e-book remind us that much work remains to be done. Gendered violence continues to hinder women's full involvement in shaping the future of conflict-affected societies. Meanwhile, the dynamics of conflict are evolving and are now shaped by intersectional factors such as globalisation, climate change, economic strife, and the rise of violent extremism. These factors, coupled with the development of new technologies, have given rise to new forms of conflict in Africa, making the WPS agenda more relevant than ever.

The year 2025 marks the 25th anniversary of the adoption of United Nations Security Council

Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325). This anniversary presents a crucial opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda in Africa. By transforming our commitments into concrete actions, we can ensure that women are not only included in peace processes but are also empowered as leaders and decision-makers in building sustainable peace and security across the continent.

As we reflect on the achievements of the past 25 years and look to the future of the WPS agenda, this e-book stands as both a tribute and a call to action. By amplifying the voices of African women at the forefront of peacebuilding, we ensure their stories are heard, their struggles recognised, and their contributions celebrated. Their journey illuminates the path forward, reminding us that sustainable peace and security can only be achieved when women are fully, equally, and meaningfully included in every aspect of peacebuilding. This is their story: a tapestry of diverse experiences shaped by countless conflict contexts where the WPS agenda finds expression across Africa. We are honoured to share it.



## Third Edition

-  Individual Stories
-  Women Networks
-  Youth

*This map of Africa illustrates the diverse representation of women, highlighting youth, individual stories, and women's networks.*  
*Copyright: UNOAU/Pravina Makan-Lakba.*

## **A New Chapter in Advancing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Africa**

The African Union Commission has formally appointed H.E. Ambassador Liberata Mulamula as the African Union Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security (WPS).

At the high-level workshop on revitalizing WPS monitoring, convened at the AU Headquarters from 23 to 25 June 2025, Ambassador Mulamula reaffirmed the Union's unwavering commitment to advancing the WPS agenda. She stressed that inclusive leadership, evidence-based policymaking, and strategic partnerships are not optional but essential to shaping sustainable peace and security across the continent.

In her remarks, she paid tribute to her predecessor, H.E. Bineta Diop, whose pioneering leadership laid the foundation for institutional progress and positioned WPS at the heart of the AU's peace and security architecture.

Her address signaled a defining moment in Africa's journey toward gender-responsive peacebuilding, as the continent prepares to commemorate the 25th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325. With clarity of purpose and bold vision, Ambassador Mulamula has committed to accelerating implementation of the WPS agenda, anchored on three interdependent pillars:

- **Diplomacy** – to elevate women's leadership and strengthen peace processes.
- **Accountability** – to ensure commitments are translated into measurable action.
- **Innovation** – to drive transformative and sustainable change.

AUC Chairperson's Special Envoy  
on Women, Peace, and Security  
H.E. Ambassador Liberata Mulamula.  
© African Union Commission



# AMER MANYOK DENG



Amer Manyok Deng is a founding member of the Women's Bloc of South Sudan and a dedicated advocate for women's rights and their inclusion in peacebuilding. As Chairperson, she played a pivotal role as a negotiator, championing women's participation in the IGAD-led peace process in Addis Ababa in 2015.

Together with women peacebuilders, her efforts have been instrumental in ensuring that women's voices are heard in shaping South Sudan's path to peace and stability.

My name is Amer Manyok Deng, and I am a civil society activist as well as the leader of the Women's Bloc, which has played a crucial role in calling for an end to the conflict in South Sudan. I've been advocating for peace and stability for women for many years. This has included pushing for affirmative action policies to ensure women are represented. I have drawn on UNSCR 1325 to advocate for women's participation in government and peace efforts.

I was born in Gow, South Sudan, and I was impacted by conflict from a young age. In 1986, war erupted in Bor, Jonglei State, forcing my family to flee to Ethiopia. We ended up in the Dima Refugee Camp in Ethiopia, and my mother became the sole caregiver for our family after my father and brothers died during the South Sudanese liberation movement. My mother's activism has a big impact on me because she became a leader in the refugee camp, sourcing food and selling it to those in need. This was also where I developed my mediation skills, as I would often mediate family disputes and facilitate dialogue between people who were fighting.

**“Gender-based violence affects all women in South Sudan whether you are educated or not, rich or poor: gender-based violence is pervasive. We desperately need peace in our homes. Without peace it is not possible for the country to develop. But we have yet to achieve peace in our country.”**

I had returned to South Sudan after independence, but when the civil war erupted in 2013, women were badly impacted with widespread displacement and rampant sexual violence. The fighting also created a lot of orphans and widows. Because of this, I started trying to mobilise women to support relief efforts. We went to the radio stations to call for the churches and media houses to assist. We managed to get porridge and fuel for the hospitals. This marked the beginning of my continuous work to support victims and promote peace.

In 2015, I was one of the founders of the Women's Bloc of South Sudan, an NGO established to strengthen women's collective power. For the past nine years, the Bloc has worked hard to highlight women's concerns and advocate for women's representation in all decision-making processes. The Bloc is an umbrella network of women from different ethnic, political, and socioeconomic backgrounds and includes women from civil society, political parties, the diaspora, and the private sector. At first, we advocated for the inclusion of women in the peace negotiations. We have also called for the inclusion of women's specific issues, including affirmative action. We started by advocating for a space to speak, and we never stopped!

I served as a negotiator and advocated for women's participation in the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)-led peace process in Addis Ababa in 2015. Because of our mobilisation, the warring parties had to include women in the list of delegates at the peace talks. The Women's Bloc was also granted accreditation by IGAD as a stakeholder in the peace process, following campaigns led by the South Sudan Women Advocacy for Peace (SSWAP).

As a result, in 2015, the Bloc served as formal observers and signatories to the 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan. It was the first time that



© Amer Manyok Deng



*The Women's Bloc of South Sudan, led by Amer Manyok Deng, delivered the communiqué to the Office of the President in Juba, South Sudan, on 16 July 2016. It was received by then Press Secretary Ateny Wek Ateny. © Women's Bloc of South Sudan/Amer Manyok Deng*

South Sudanese women were signatories to a peace agreement in Sudan's and South Sudan's history. The Agreement set out a roadmap for a future of peace and made explicit provisions for women's participation in implementing the Agreement and economic development. We were also appointed as members of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission.

However, the peace was fragile, and conflict resumed in 2016. The Revitalized Agreement on Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) was signed in Addis Ababa in 2018. All those who signed on behalf of parties to the conflict were men. Only seven of the 17 civil society signatories were women.

Due to women mobilising for their meaningful inclusion in peace processes, South Sudan has made some progress in appointing women to high-level positions since 2015; however, there is still work to be done. The economic situation in the country is now also creating conflict. In response to this challenge, I am advocating for women's economic empowerment and have urged the government to provide financial opportunities for women.

Unfortunately, women in South Sudan often face discrimination in business, and men are more likely to be awarded contracts. Men are often not aware that women have equal legal status and rights to them in the country. Additionally, women are often burdened with responsibilities such as childcare and education,

which can limit their economic opportunities. And even when women succeed in business, they may face challenges from their husbands' families, who will always claim that the money they have earned is theirs. In some cases, women may be forced out of their businesses or even experience domestic violence.

What I've experienced as a South Sudanese woman is that women are not acknowledged in their lifetime. Women who are willing to advocate for the unity of women do not get a lot of financial support. When it comes to empowerment, people who advocate for these spaces are often forgotten when resources are available. But I will continue to raise my voice in campaigns for women's participation, women's economic rights, and against gender-based violence. To achieve this, I want to mobilise men. Our male counterparts as allies should be part of discussions on how peace and security are important for everyone in our society. Women know what the problems are, but men have to become part of the healing and reconciliation that is needed. We need to unite, respect each other and value each other.



Participants of the three-day conference held in Juba from 21-23 March 2018, under the theme "Women Together for Sustainable Development" to sensitise women at all levels about the Phase one and two of the High-Level Revitalization Forum of the 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan ("Peace Agreement"). The conference was organised by Women's Bloc of South Sudan, in partnership with UN Women, RJMEC and UNMISS. © Amer Manyok Deng

#### UNSCR 1325 – PARTICIPATION & RELIEF & RECOVERY PILLARS

Amer Manyok Deng's activism highlights the potential of implementing UNSCR 1325 for women's participation in South Sudan as well as the need to promote the relief and recovery pillar. The Women's Bloc successfully advocated for women's inclusion in the IGAD-led peace talks and contributed to a more inclusive peace process. The involvement of the Women's Bloc also ensured significant gender-specific provisions in the peace agreement.

Deng's story also demonstrates the importance of sustained support for the relief and recovery pillar. Despite the commitments made in the peace agreements, their effectiveness has been constrained by limited political will and inadequate resource allocation.



© Aminatou Mint El Moctar

# AMINETOU MINT EL-MOCTAR



Aminetou Mint El-Moctar is the founder and director of the Association des Femmes Chefs de Famille (Association of Women Heads of Household) in Mauritania. She has been a pivotal force in advancing the rights, empowerment, and well-being of women across the country.

My path to human rights work began in my youth; I was involved in politics before I transitioned into human rights work. From an early age, I recognised the systemic injustices faced by women in Mauritania. My activism stems from a deep sense of duty to protect women's rights, and I have dedicated over 40 years to advocating for change in my country.

I was born in December 1956 into a conservative family from a "warrior" clan. I was shaped by a traditional Arab desert lifestyle, which places heavy restrictions on women's freedom. My political consciousness was sparked during my first year of high school when I became aware of the democratic movement's emergence. Observing the marginalisation of women and children, I actively campaigned for freedom of speech, realising that speaking out was necessary to bring about transformation.

My commitment to justice, democracy, and equality often came at great personal risk, and I have endured detentions, imprisonment, and accusations of betraying my people. Over the years, I frequently faced harassment and criticism due to my vocal pursuit of justice. In a conservative society where female activism is discouraged, operating as an advocate is often dangerous.

I have been subjected to a fatwa because of my work. A fatwa against me was issued by a sheikh who called for my execution. In 2015, these threats intensified and forced me to send my son abroad for his safety. Despite currently having no protection from the police or government, I continue my work and refuse to be silenced.

My mother passed away when I was young, and my father initially opposed my political involvement, but he eventually came to understand and support my beliefs. I married at 14 to a progressive man in his 30s who was part of the democratic movement. At the time, I didn't distinguish between forced and consensual marriages, as forced marriage was the norm. My

## “What is a Fatwa?

A fatwa is a formal legal ruling issued by a high-ranking Islamic scholar or council. It can address various issues, sometimes targeting individuals who are accused of insulting Islam or the Prophet.”

first husband's supportive nature allowed me to pursue my political aspirations and enabled me to gain independence from my family. However, my second husband did not share my democratic values.

Mauritania remains a difficult environment for women, as gender inequality is deeply ingrained. It fuels issues like child marriage and teenage pregnancies and creates barriers to property ownership. Through the *Association des Femmes Chefs de Famille en Mauritanie* (AFCF), we support women by operating several shelters for survivors of violence and sexual abuse. We also provide legal aid through a network of dedicated lawyers. Through these initiatives, we assist women suffering from domestic violence.

Our campaign for legislation to protect women from domestic and sexual violence began in 2012 by mobilising 4,000 women to present a proposed law to the presidency. The draft bill initially has faced with significant opposition. The bill is currently at the Ministry of Justice. It is eagerly awaited in Parliament by a committee of women mobilized to support its adoption.

“Defending human rights is at the core of who I am. I am a campaigner for change, committed to fighting against impunity, discrimination, slavery, and racism. I believe in confronting taboo subjects to expose all forms of degrading and discriminatory practices, particularly those affecting women and children. My advocacy has made me a target, but I will always raise my voice against injustice.”

Our advocacy for the legal protection of women has been fraught with challenges, but despite this, more and more Mauritanian women are standing up for their rights. We have engaged in protests, strikes, and sit-ins to bring our issues to the attention of stakeholders and push for change. Achieving electoral quotas has been a victory for us. After initially advocating for 20 per cent representation, we secured a 25 per cent quota in 2006. Our goal is now to achieve 50 per cent representation of women in parliament, which reflects the proportion of women in the population. Thirty-three per cent is more likely in the short term, but we remain committed to pushing for equal representation.

AFCF has expanded its work to promote peace and stability in the Sahel region. We collaborate with women's groups to foster dialogue on peacebuilding and mentor young women to counter violent extremism. Our initiatives span five conflict-affected countries, and we have established committees focused on the



© Aminatou Mint El Moctar



Aminetou leading the women's march organised by AFCF in Nouakchott, Mauritania, in 2012 to submit the proposed law on the protection of women and girls to the presidency. © AFCF.

protection of women and children. Our model has gained recognition, with neighbouring countries like Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire wanting to mimic our approaches.

To amplify the voices of Mauritanian women and their experiences, we want to get comprehensive media coverage at the local, national, and international levels. This includes producing parallel reports to highlight the lived realities of women, the root causes of instability, and barriers to peace. Women's involvement is crucial in peace processes, and with the support of the global community, we can push for meaningful change. Advocating for human rights is more than my work; it is my life's mission.

#### UNSCR 1325 – PROTECTION AND PARTICIPATION PILLARS

Aminetou Mint El-Mohtar's work exemplifies the participation and protection principles of UNSCR 1325, particularly in promoting women's roles in peacebuilding and addressing gender-based violence. Through the *Association des Femmes Chefs de Famille*, critical support has been provided to vulnerable women through the establishment of shelters for survivors. In so doing, they advance the protection of women in conflict.

Mobilising women to achieve parliamentary representation advances one of the core objectives of the 1325 framework: elevating their participation in decision-making processes. This, in turn, helps create a society where women's rights are respected.

# DR BRIGALIA BAM



Dr Brigalia Bam is an internationally recognised mediator who has held various key positions in South Africa, Africa, and globally. She served as the Chairperson of the Independent Electoral Commission of South Africa and is a former member of the African Union (AU) Panel of the Wise. She was also Executive Programme Secretary for the Women's Department of the World Council of Churches (WCC), General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches and a founding member and former President of the Women's Development Foundation.

Women's lived realities mean that they can offer unique and central contribution to mediation processes. When we begin to talk about how women are affected by conflicts, it will never be like when a male is describing to other people how the conflict is affecting women's lives. When you begin to speak about the absence of peace, women bring in the human aspect. They will focus on the children whom we have a responsibility for in life. I think it is those aspects that we need to ensure are always part of mediations. With all the principles that we do have, we must realise that women bring this and encourage more women to mediation.

I was born in Goqwana village, Tsolo, in the former Transkei, South Africa. My mother wanted to ensure that her children achieved all that was possible in education for black people at the time, despite the reality of racial and gender discrimination in South Africa. Resisting injustice was a theme that drove my family and me, and we became part of the struggle against apartheid.

I have had difficulty separating my political involvement, activism, feminist beliefs and religious beliefs. If I protest against a particular issue, for example apartheid, am I protesting because of my religion, because of my political beliefs or because, as a feminist, I believe no human being should be oppressed? All these aspects of my identity have a bearing on what I do.

During the 1960s, through my affiliation with the World Young Women's Christian Association and the Council of Churches, I attended a number of international conferences. At that time, these organisations provided a training ground for women, especially in leadership. Women like me, who would never have the opportunity to speak in public anywhere, learnt to do so in public meetings. While visiting countries like Zambia, Kenya and Uganda, I gained experience as a speaker and organiser, which led to my appointment as Director of the Department

of Co-operation of Men and Women in Church and Society in the World Council of Churches (WCC). Despite the apartheid government's attempts to prevent me from taking up this role, I moved to Geneva in 1967.

While heading the Women's Department of the World Council of Churches from 1967 to 1981, I witnessed the specific challenges women faced in the church and society. I had to organise meetings for women in different parts of the world, set up structures for women in different regions and strengthen existing regional groupings. I met many women around the world and saw, first hand, that the subordination of women, negative attitudes towards women and our exclusion from participation in public life were a universal phenomenon. I also saw that women's exclusion was based on culture, which had nothing to do with the scriptures. This drove my commitment to campaign for the greater participation of women in decision-making, as women need to be able to rise to the highest levels of leadership.

After leaving the WCC, I worked for the Women's Workers Programme (Africa Region), which was part of the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF) in Geneva. Following my return to South Africa prior to the fall of apartheid, I served as General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches from 1994 to 1998. I then founded the Women's Development Foundation and became the Foundation's president.

In 1999, President Mandela appointed me as the chairperson of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) of South Africa. He did not ask me to confirm my interest or decline the position. In fact, Mandela made it clear he was not giving me an option but simply wanted to inform me that I was now in charge of the IEC. During my twelve-year service at the IEC, my team and I developed an efficient electoral system in South Africa.



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*Dr Brigalia Bam, sharing her lessons and insights for future generation with ACCORD, 29 August 2019, Durban. © ACCORD*

However, my position in the IEC did not come without detractors. When I started my job, all political parties were male-dominated, and people said, "Mandela has made the biggest mistakes. How can a woman be made Chairperson of the Commission? Does she even understand politics?" But I was able to overcome these negative voices by focusing on the fact that my task was to ensure that democracy is felt in each and every corner of South Africa. I tried to guide South Africans with humour, tolerance and impartiality along this path to inclusive democracy.

Another significant initiative I was involved in was supporting Mrs Zanele Mbeki's initiative of women's participation in the Inter-Congolese Dialogue. In 2002, we worked closely with women from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) who, in a powerful act of activism, formed a human chain to persuade the men into signing the peace agreements at Sun City, South Africa. Their determination paid off, and the agreements were signed, marking a critical step toward peace.

The Inter-Congolese Dialogue culminated in the signing of the Global and Inclusive Agreement, signed in Pretoria on 17 December

2002, laid the foundation for a transitional government in the DRC. Our work with the women from DRC also served as a catalyst for Mrs Mbeki to establish the South African Women in Dialogue (SAWID) in 2003. SAWID went on to facilitate national and regional dialogues with women in South Africa, as well as with women from the DRC, Burundi, and Sudan.

In recognition of my role on the continent, in 2007, I was appointed as a member of the first African Union's Panel of the Wise (PoW), a critical pillar of the AU's Africa Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). The PoW is composed of a five-person panel of highly respected African personalities from various segments of society who have made outstanding contributions to the cause of peace, security and development on the continent with a task to support the efforts of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) and those of the Chairperson of the Commission, particularly in the area of conflict prevention.

It was during my tenure as a member of the Panel of the Wise that I was sent to Kenya on a diplomatic mission, which included Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in the aftermath of the 2007-8 election violence. At that time, I was one of the only two women in the team. At one point, the negotiations became so tense that, it felt like the room was going to explode. I asked that we have a break, and I called the other woman aside, and I said, "You know what? You and me are the only two women who are in this team. You and me are the only ones who can make or break this mediation. Too many lives are being lost. People are dying". I realised that the reason this woman and I were there was to humanise the process and to remind the leaders at the table of the devastating toll this crisis was taking on ordinary Kenyans. With this renewed sense of purpose, we worked together to de-escalate tensions, urging all parties to move beyond their political grievances and prioritise the well-being of their people.

Ultimately, the mediation efforts led by the African Union resulted in the signing of the National Accord and Reconciliation Agreement in 2008. This power-sharing deal helped restore stability and prevent further bloodshed, marking a critical turning point in Kenya's political landscape. Looking back, I know that the presence of women in that room was instrumental in steering the process away from collapse and toward peace.

Nonetheless, I had to learn to address my own self-doubt during my early experiences of mediation. I was afraid at first because I thought you must look terribly clever and appear to really know everything. However, you must be honest. Just realise that you have a responsibility towards protecting people's lives. That's what it means to be a mediator.

Despite some incremental changes, the peacebuilding sphere remains dominated by patriarchal attitudes. While there is

progressive rhetoric and increased representation of women, attitudes have been slower to change, and gatekeepers abound. Overall, the ongoing equation of women with gender has served to reinforce patriarchal gender relations. To break these barriers, women must continue pushing not only for representation but

also for meaningful participation and influence in decision-making spaces. Building strong networks, amplifying women's leadership at all levels, and demanding accountability from institutions that pay lip service to gender inclusivity are critical steps forward. *Aluta Continua!*



*Former IEC Chairperson Dr Brigalia Bam shares a moment with Graça Machel, wife of the late Nelson Mandela, during her birthday celebration at St Alban the Martyr Anglican Cathedral.*  
© Thobile Mathonsi/African News Agency (ANA)

#### UNSCR 1325 – PREVENTION, PARTICIPATION & PROTECTION PILLARS

Dr Brigalia Bam's extensive contributions as a mediator and as the chairperson of South Africa's IEC significantly align with the four pillars of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325. Her active involvement in promoting women's participation during the Inter-Congolese Dialogue exemplifies the participation pillar, highlighting the importance of women's voices in peace processes. Additionally, her role as a mediator during Kenya's post-election conflict underscores her commitment to the protection of women and girls and the prevention of violence against women and girls, who often bear the brunt of such crises.

Furthermore, Dr Bam's leadership at the IEC was instrumental in ensuring that South Africa's election outcomes were accepted by all political parties and local and international observer missions. This achievement not only showcases the vital role women play in facilitating fair and free elections, but also reinforces the significance of women's leadership in fostering democratic governance and stability. Through her dedication and impactful work, Dr Bam exemplifies the principles of UNSCR 1325, advocating for women's participation and protection in conflict situations.

*Participants of AU Women Peace and  
Security /Continental Results Framework  
(WPS/CRE) Training and Research  
High-Level Workshop held at the AU  
Headquarters from 23 – 25 June 2025.  
© Africa Union Commission*







**PLATEFORME DE VEILLE DES FEMMES POUR LA  
PAIX ET LA SECURITE « ËTTU JÀMM »**

# ËTTU JÀMM NETWORK A PLATFORM FOR WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN PEACEFUL ELECTIONS



ËTTU JÀMM is a coalition of women's organisations in Senegal. It is focused on issues of peace and security, emphasising dialogue, participation, and advocacy. The organisation is a recognised leader in the field of Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) across the West African region.

ËTTU JÀMM (Peace Space in the Wolof national language) was founded in 2012 as a women-led Platform to promote peaceful elections in Senegal. It was established with the support of the former Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on Women, Peace, and Security, Bineta Diop, and is coordinated by the NGO Femmes Africa Solidarité. ËTTU JÀMM comprises over 60 Senegalese civil society organisations exclusively led by women, boasting a membership base of more than 520,000 women across Senegal's 14 regions.

Senegal has faced a series of conflicts, particularly in the Casamance region, where many women live in post-conflict situations as survivors of violence, including sexual violence and landmine injuries. ËTTU JÀMM has actively supported these women by advocating for their reintegration into society and lobbying for their inclusion in the peace and decision-making processes. Through awareness campaigns, advocacy, and participation in electoral processes, the Platform promotes peace and human rights. According to the organisation's President, Penda Seck Diouf, the women who make up ËTTU JÀMM saw that "without peace, without stability, without security, there can be no development and no empowerment of women".

ËTTU JÀMM's mission is rooted in the advancement of gender equality and the extension of parity principles in decision-making bodies. The Platform's work draws on UNSCR 1325 and underscores the importance of women's participation, protection, and the elimination of gender-based violence. Membership is made up of local women leaders in conflict prevention and management who have gone on to play a significant role in electoral monitoring and conflict prevention in Senegal. The Platform's work also includes addressing the widespread impact of sexual and gender-based violence, such as domestic violence, early marriage and harmful practices.

One of the flagship initiatives of the organisation has been electoral monitoring. From 2012 to 2024, ËTTU JÀMM members travelled throughout all the regions of Senegal to raise awareness of the need for peaceful elections, contributing to the prevention of conflict and gender-based violence during the electoral period and providing early warning and poll-watch services in conjunction with key players to preserve peace, security and democratic gains. Visiting the ËTTU JÀMM monitoring room, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, former President of the Republic of Liberia, noted: "The women of Senegal are today showing the whole world that they are not just observers of the political process, but players in their own right who, aware of their political responsibility, are taking the fight for peace in Senegal into their own hands".

## Activities and Methods: The 3M Strategy

ËTTU JÀMM's work is based on the "3M" strategy: Mobilisation, Mediation, and Monitoring.

- **Mobilisation:** The Platform brings together women's organisations, community leaders, institutional actors, and development partners, rallying them around the common goal of peace and security.
- **Mediation:** Preventive diplomacy is at the core of ËTTU JÀMM's mediation efforts. The Platform facilitates dialogue between various political, traditional, religious, and cultural stakeholders to ensure a peaceful electoral process. A series of meetings are held with local populations, civil society organisations, youth, and women's groups to foster understanding and cooperation.
- **Monitoring:** ËTTU JÀMM actively monitors the electoral process, working to prevent conflicts and ensure social cohesion. This includes producing awareness-raising materials on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and developing projects and programmes aimed at GBV prevention.



*A press conference by the Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on Women, Peace and Security, Bineta Diop, during ETTU JÀMM peace caravan in Diourbel, 30 January 2024.*

© ETTU JÀMM

ETTU JÀMM has made significant strides in training and capacity building. This has included developing training modules on gender-based violence and supporting the creation of a glossary on GBV, gender equity, and equality, now widely adopted by civil society. Over 1,000 paralegals and community workers from 35 civil society associations have benefited from these initiatives. Collaborating with the Senegalese government, particularly the Ministry for Women, ETTU JÀMM has also contributed to the development of a National Plan to Prevent and Combat GBV. Additionally, the Platform has integrated Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) into its strategies, enhancing outreach and effectiveness in GBV prevention.

A notable achievement of ETTU JÀMM is its advocacy for women's participation in peace negotiations, particularly in the Casamance region. The Platform trained women leaders on peace and security issues, emphasising mediation, community mediation, and communication strategies for peacebuilding. Dialogue sessions and community forums provided spaces for exchanging views on peace and security, enabling grassroots communities to engage in discussions on critical topics such as violence against women, its prevalence, and potential solutions. Collaboration with other sectors, including religious and civil society organisations, has been integral to building trust within communities. Through awareness campaigns and meetings with religious, traditional, and cultural authorities, the Platform has engaged diverse stakeholders, with religious leaders in several regions becoming ambassadors for peace and reinforcing its message.



*Youth Training on electoral observation conducted by ETTU JÀMM - Dakar; 20 March 2024. © ETTU JÀMM*

Despite these achievements, ETTU JÀMM has frequently confronted challenges rooted in sexist stereotypes and resistance to gender equality. While men are often perceived as the main obstacle, resistance also comes from women who view gender advocacy as divisive. According to Penda Seck Diouf: "There are also women who are even more patriarchal than men, especially religious women". These women adhere to traditional beliefs that men, as "natural leaders," hold authority over women, a perspective sometimes used to justify violence against women. The Platform addresses these issues through targeted dialogue sessions that challenge these stereotypes and promote inclusivity.

ETTU JÀMM also works to connect women's rights, security, and empowerment to the broader fight against discrimination. Advocacy efforts emphasise that all forms of discrimination are root causes of insecurity and conflict, disproportionately affecting women. A critical aspect of the Platform's work is urging states to implement laws and international conventions they have ratified, reinforcing the link between eliminating discrimination and achieving lasting peace and security.

The Platform's efforts have led to a growing acceptance of its peace message and conflict prevention approach. Training by ETTU JÀMM's grassroots network has focused on capacity building, dialogue, and effective communication. Reflecting on this work, Penda notes: "In the fight against violence against women, the involvement of grassroots communities is the fourth pillar, and the participation of men is the fifth. When gender equality is highlighted, it must be explained by appealing to our values and our culture.



ETTU JÀMM “Situation room” for the Presidential Elections - Dakar, 24 March 2024 . © ETTU JÀMM

When we talk about gender-based violence, gender equality, and women's participation, we automatically refer to our values. We need to have men with us and encourage positive masculinity". This approach has contributed to a notable increase in men speaking out against acts of violence and supporting efforts to eliminate gender-based violence.

#### Use of Media and Advocacy Tools

The Platform has effectively leveraged media and developed advocacy tools tailored to local contexts, translating them into national languages for greater accessibility. These tools have been crucial in spreading the Platform's message through campaigns and community engagement, particularly in post-conflict zones. The Platform has also promoted women's participation in reconciliation ceremonies, disarmament efforts, and post-conflict reconstruction initiatives.

ETTU JÀMM produced an advocacy film featuring appeals from women survivors of landmine injuries, urging the enforcement of the Ottawa Convention and UNSCR 1325. These lobbying efforts also contributed to the integration of a national peace education programme into Senegal's strategy to prevent and combat sexual and gender-based violence.

#### Integration of ICTs for Early Warning and Response

Recognising the transformative potential of technology, the Platform integrated ICTs into an SMS-based early warning system for reporting incidents of violence. This system has become a vital tool

for quickly alerting communities and locating victims of violence, enabling timely support and intervention. By reducing isolation and fostering immediate responses, the early warning mechanism has strengthened community resilience.

ETTU JÀMM has established focal points across every region in Senegal to handle conflicts, threats to peace, or mediation needs. This decentralised network ensures that victims receive prompt assistance and remain connected to societal support structures.

#### Regional and International Impact

The Platform's influence has extended beyond Senegal, impacting neighbouring countries such as Mali, Mauritania, Guinea, and the DRC. Women from these regions have sought ETTU JÀMM's expertise to establish similar initiatives focused on peace, security, and democratic transparency. For example, during Mauritania's 2024 elections, women organised an early warning room to advocate for peace, security, and respect for democracy. Reflecting on this regional collaboration, Penda Seck Diouf states, “In other countries, we have had the opportunity to exchange experiences of how to promote the participation and mobilisation of women”.

This cross-border cooperation has enabled knowledge-sharing on dialogue, conflict resolution, and women's involvement in peacebuilding. Additionally, the Platform has compiled extensive documentation on violence against women and girls in conflict-affected areas, including Liberia, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Guinea, Benin, and Burkina Faso, further contributing to regional and global efforts in addressing gender-based violence in conflict contexts.

# FAIDA MWANGILA FABIOLA



Faida Mwangila Fabiola is a women's rights activist and politician from North Kivu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. She is a former Minister of Family and Women's Affairs, founder of the Bureau de Consultation en Genre, Participation Citoyenne et Développement (Gender, Citizen Participation and Development Consultation Office) and the Cadre Permanent de Concertation de la Femme Congolaise (CAFCO: The Permanent Framework for Consultation of Congolese Women).

Conflict has deeply affected my life, and I am devoted to the pursuit of peace and women's rights in the DRC. I was born in Obaye, North Kivu, in 1965. When I was a student at the University of Kisangani, I started my activism journey. There was only one dormitory for girls, which was unsafe for us at night. We decided to organise ourselves, writing a statement that led to banning men from our dorm. After I graduated from university, the first Congolese war was raging. I founded my first NGO, *Action pour la Participation de la Femme au Développement* (Action for Women's Participation in Development), amidst the violence.

In 1995, I was appointed to the office of the Governor of North Kivu, first as rapporteur, then as administrative advisor and eventually as cabinet director. I was later appointed Minister for Family and Women's Affairs in the Transitional Government of the DRC, so I have a long history in politics.

While I was working for the Governor of North Kivu, we launched *Tous Pour La Paix Et Le Développement* (All for Peace and Development). *Tous Pour la Paix* advocated for cohesion between the ten communities of North Kivu. It was a group of young people who said, "We don't want conflict". However, many people in the region were worried that we could never have peace without the return of the refugees from Rwanda.

In 1996, when Kabila's rebellion intensified, women continued to face brutal violence, particularly in areas like Masisi and Rutshuru. The refugee camps were dismantled, forcing Rwandan refugees into the forests or nearby homes. Recognising the impact of the crisis, *Tous Pour la Paix* launched a Rwandan refugee repatriation project in partnership with the UNHCR in 1999. Many refugees had spent more than a year living in misery in the bush, and so many of them were dying. We raised awareness among refugees about our repatriation project and urged them to return to Rwanda.

However, not everyone supported our work, and in March 1999, armed groups ambushed our convoy on the Rutshuru road. During the violent attack, they opened fire on us and clubbed us with their guns. My driver was shot dead, and I feared for my life. I even prayed for the Lord to receive my soul! I narrowly escaped death after bribing the soldiers with United States Dollars 3,000, buying time until some other soldiers from the national army intervened. I was hospitalised after this, and I have had to live with the trauma of that ordeal, but it continues to fuel my fight against violence.

I participated in the Sun City peace talks that led to the 2002 Global and All-Inclusive Agreement Between Jean-Pierre Bemba's *Mouvement pour la libération du Congo* and the government of Joseph Kabila. I was there as part of the Rally for Congolese Democracy-Goma (RCD-Goma) delegation. I advocated for women's inclusion and mobilised Congolese women to do the same. After the 1999 Lusaka Ceasefire Accord, the signatories committed to convening an Inter-Congolese Dialogue. There were a series of negotiations in Ethiopia (Addis Ababa) and South Africa (Sun City and Pretoria) between 2001 and 2003. The Lusaka Accord made no provision for a gender quota for the talks, and we had to pressure the facilitator of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, Sir Ketumile Masire, to promote the inclusion of women.

Before travelling to South Africa, I met with other women in Nairobi so we could build a coalition prior to the Sun City negotiations. In particular, we wanted to increase the number of women representatives in the upcoming talks, as the negotiations in Addis Ababa had only included six women out of 74 delegates. I joined 64 women from various factions at this workshop in Kenya, which was organised by *Femmes Africa Solidarité* and United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), and we managed to come up with a Nairobi Declaration and Action Plan, which included recommendations for the peace process.



© Faida Mwangila Fabiola

**The violence I have known is a key motivation in my fight for peace. The horrors I have experienced will stay with me for the rest of my life.”**

At the beginning of the meeting, we could not get along; we could not even greet each other. We were from all walks of life—there were women from the rebel groups, women from government, and women from civil society, and it was the first time since the war broke out in 1996 that women from all over the country had come together. Eventually, we decided that instead of fighting, we should unite. As women, we realised that we were not the problem: the political actors waging war against us and mismanaging the country were the problem. So we wrote an open letter to the facilitator of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, reminding him of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 of 2000,

which requires the representation of women. By the start of the negotiations in Sun City, women made up 11 per cent of delegates.

But, even with women participating in the negotiations, we still had to fight to be heard. Hence, in Sun City, we would meet in the evenings to work out strategies together. We went on a hunger strike in March 2002 when the talks were not progressing. We also produced a daily leaflet called *La Pensée du Jour* (Thought of the Day) to comment on the issues under discussion and their relevance to women. On the final day of the negotiations, we were fed up with the men and blocked the exits until the agreement was signed.

Because of our advocacy, we managed to get some provisions on gender into the final peace agreement (the Global and Inclusive Agreement). These included a 30 per cent quota for women in all decision-making sectors at the national level, the creation of a Ministry of Gender and Family Affairs, as well as changes to laws that discriminated against women.

As a result of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue in Sun City, we created the *Cadre Permanent de Concertation de la Femme Congolaise* (CAFCO: the Permanent Framework for Consultation



*Participants of Focus-Group discussion on the history of parity in the DRC 'Peace, Parliament and Parity" on June 21, 2024.*  
© Salama Women's Institute (SAWI) / Happy Parcours



*Advocacy meeting with the religious mission National Episcopal Conference of Congo (CENCO) and the Church of Christ in Congo (ECC) in February 2025. © Eulodie Ntamuzinda*

of Congolese Women) in 2005. It is a platform for women in civil society and political parties to promote women's human rights. In 2023, we set up the Women's Synergy for Peace and Security, in which we are working to ensure that the Luanda Agreement is respected so as to guarantee the return of lasting peace. Today, our organisation is one of the leading advocates for women, peace, and security in the region. We work across borders, collaborating with women in Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda. Women in the region have borne the brunt of conflict, and we know that working together is essential.

With the resumption of hostilities in the East of our country in 2022, we deemed it useful to work through a Synergy of Women for Peace and Security.

We had begun to alert both our leaders and even the facilitator, the Angolan President, Excellency Lourenço. We realise that the voice of women is not listened to and continue to accentuate our advocacy actions to demand an end to hostilities in order to put an end to the humanitarian tragedy that is happening in the East of our country.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our African sisters who have always supported Congolese women in the difficult times our country has faced. Their solidarity is a great contribution to the struggle for our participation in the process of conflict prevention, management, and resolution.

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#### **UNSCR 1325 - PROTECTION AND PARTICIPATION PILLARS**

Faida Mwangila Fabiola's work draws on 1325's participation pillar and emphasises the importance of women's representation in peace processes. Her commitment to inclusive representation goes beyond quotas; it emphasises how women's insights contribute to comprehensive and sustainable peace strategies.

Fabiola's work also highlights the complex experiences of women in conflict zones, recognising both the trauma they endure and their capacity for resilience and change. Her experiences underscore a feminist peacebuilding approach that sees women as central to the resolution of conflicts and is instrumental in promoting societal healing and reconciliation.

Advocacy walk to launch the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence held at the AUC Headquarters, November 2023.

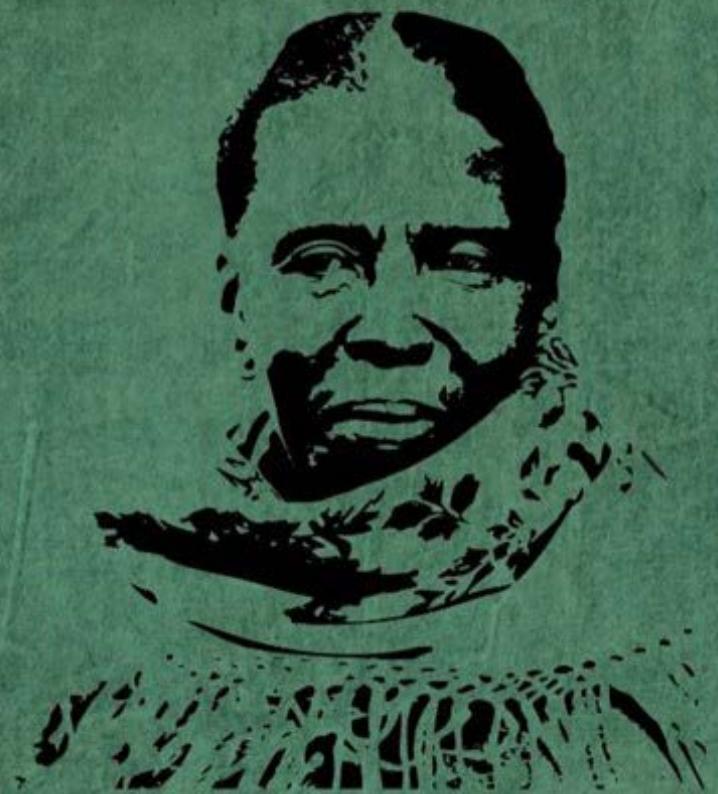
© UNOAU





# GERTRUDE SHOPE WOMEN'S MEDIATION NETWORK

International Women's Day  
8 March 2024



# GERTRUDE SHOPE WOMEN MEDIATORS NETWORK - GSWMN



The Gertrude Shope Annual Dialogue Forum (GSADF) and the Gertrude Shope Peace and Mediation Network (GSPMN) provide an invaluable platform for women peacemakers and peacebuilders to share their experiences and best practices. These initiatives not only amplify the voices of African women in mediation but also ensure that women remain at the forefront of shaping sustainable and inclusive solutions.

## From Dialogue to Action: The Birth of the Women's Mediation Network

The Gertrude Shope Annual Dialogue Forum (GSADF) was established in August 2015 to unite women peacemakers and leaders in exchanging knowledge, sharing best practices, and fostering collaboration to address peace and security challenges. Named after anti-apartheid stalwart Gertrude Shope, the Forum is inspired by her vision of empowering women as architects of peace and agents of change. Gertrude Shope, a prominent figure in South Africa's liberation movement, has been a lifelong advocate for gender equality and peacebuilding. Organised under the banner "I am a Cadre for Peace," the Forum embodies Shope's enduring belief that "every generation has got a responsibility to know what its mission is".

Since its inception, GSADF has played a pivotal role in promoting annual discussions on the Women, Peace, and Security agenda with a particular focus on policy development at both the national and regional levels. The Forum uniquely encompasses recognition of all Mediation Tracks I, II and III and, as such, seeks to address the numerous disadvantages women face during conflict. It has also facilitated advocacy over the implementation of policies that prioritise representation, equality, and meaningful participation in peace processes. GSADF was founded on the principle that global peace and security structures must realise their commitments to fully utilise women's capacity and ensure their significant involvement in decision-making.

The Forum has made significant strides in this regard, inspiring women mediators internationally and contributing to the establishment of women's mediation networks worldwide, such as the Nordic Women Mediators Network, the Mediterranean

Women Mediators Network and the Commonwealth Women Mediators Network. It also spurred the creation of the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation, officially referred to as FemWise-Africa, in 2017. FemWise-Africa is a subsidiary mechanism of the Panel of the Wise, one of the critical pillars of the African Union's Peace and Security Architecture. However, despite these efforts, the implementation of WPS commitments remains slow, highlighting the need for further action.

The Gertrude Shope Women's Mediation Network (GSWMN) was launched on 8 March 2024 during International Women's Day celebrations. Spearheaded by South Africa's Ministries of International Relations and Cooperation, Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, and Defence and Military Veterans, the GSWMN represents a bold step forward in institutionalising women's roles in peace processes.

The GSWMN is the culmination of years of collaboration among government departments, civil society organisations, and community leaders. It recognises the unique perspectives and approaches that women bring to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Through its capacity-building training programmes, the Network has trained over 1000 women across Africa in conflict resolution, negotiation, and mediation, equipping them with the skills needed to lead peace processes.

Internationally, the Gertrude Shope Women Mediators Network is intended to build on South Africa's post-apartheid role as a global actor in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Rooted in the principles of UNSCR 1325, the GSWMN aims to amplify women's voices and enhance their participation in every stage of peace processes, including pre-conflict mediation, peace negotiations, and post-conflict social cohesion.



*Top left: Portrait of Mama Gertrude Shope. Top right: Another distinguished portrait of Mama Gertrude Shope. Bottom: Minister of Defence and Military Veterans, Ms Thandi Modise, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Dr Naledi Pandor, and Minister of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma (centre) join delegates during the launch of the Gertrude Shope Women Mediators Network, held on 8 March 2024. © Gertrude Shope Women Mediators Network*

The Network adopts a multi-track diplomacy approach, empowering women to engage in formal peace negotiations (Track 1), informal dialogue (Track 2), and grassroots initiatives (Track 3). Recognising that women peacebuilders are already actively working in conflict-affected areas, the GSWMN works to address the systemic barriers that hinder women's full participation.

The Gertrude Shope Women Mediators Network has made a significant contribution to supporting women's role in peacebuilding. It operates on the principle that peace is not only necessary in times of war, but requires a durable infrastructure capable of sustaining peace during crises. Both the Gertrude Shope Women's Mediation Network and the Annual Dialogue Forum honour the courage of the women who marched in South Africa in 1956, the vision of leaders like Gertrude Shope, and the collective strength of women across the African continent.



*The logo of the Gertrude Shope Women Mediators Network.*

© Gertrude Shope Women Mediators Network



*A group photo taken during the Graduation Ceremony of the International Capacity Building Programme on Conflict Resolution, Negotiation and Mediation in 2023. © Gertrude Shope Women Mediators Network*

# GHALIA SASI



Ghalia Sasi is a teacher, mediator, and president of the women's association Maaha (With Her). She has actively engaged in women's political empowerment in Libya and one of the women who launched the "We Start With 30" campaign to advocate for a 30 percent quota for women in political spaces. Inspired by the successes of women mediators in Northern Ireland, Rwanda, and South Africa, her efforts contributed to the 2020 Libyan Political Dialogue Forum agreeing to the 30 percent quota for women—a significant milestone in the journey toward gender equality and peacebuilding in Libya.

I am a dedicated advocate for women's rights in Libya, with many years of experience in promoting women's political empowerment. I am originally from the Nfusa Mountains and of Amazigh descent. My background as a teacher has significantly shaped my role in mediation, and throughout my career, I have encouraged girls and young women to pursue higher education.

My life took a transformative turn with the February Revolution against Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. I joined the uprising and became a member of the "17th of February" group for women's and children's rights. Before this, it was rare for a woman to become a negotiator or politician. However, the revolution briefly opened doors allowing women like me to explore roles

**“I asked, “Why should a woman become a refugee when she is a victim of the war”. This wasn’t an easy journey. Women could acknowledge that they were oppressed but it was difficult to convince them that they could do something about it. Especially because women saw themselves as being weaker than men and financially handicapped. They could acknowledge the situation they were in but didn’t know what to do about it.”**

traditionally closed to us. Later, with the legalisation of political parties in August 2011, I established a women's wing within a party to address issues faced by women.

The initial promises of the revolution faded as it soon became clear that women's rights were being sidelined. My advocacy began to be perceived as a threat by the men around me. The years following the 2011 uprisings were turbulent, with new discriminatory laws that exacerbated women's oppression, permitting practices like polygamy and reductions in quotas, which limited women's representation in Parliament. I realised that we would need women-led initiatives to directly challenge these restrictions.

In 2014, when conflict erupted again, with the Libyan National Army clashing with the Libya Dawn coalition, women bore the brunt of displacement as many became refugees while having to shoulder domestic responsibilities and endure violence. It was during this time that I became involved in mediation, forming one of the first women-led working groups on reconciliation, known as the Libyan Women Team of Peace in Misrata and Tawergha. When I saw men using the conflict to serve their own interests, I formed this committee to train women to assert their rights. We organised discussions among citizens of Misrata and Tawergha, promoting coexistence and security. During this time, I developed online skills and studied the experiences of women mediators in countries like Northern Ireland, Rwanda, and South Africa. However, although women quickly recognised their oppression, convincing them that they could drive change was challenging, especially since many felt financially and socially disadvantaged.

One of the challenges I faced as a mediator was attending meetings scheduled at night, often intentionally, so women wouldn't participate. Nevertheless, I attended these meetings, understanding the importance of having women's voices heard.



© Ghalia Sasi

When international communities sponsor peace talks in Libya, they rarely prioritise women's participation. For instance, in the Skhirat Dialogue in the Kingdom of Morocco, which resulted in the political agreement, only two women out of a total of 18 people participated in the dialogue table in 2015. After the advocacy campaign led by the "We Look for 30" campaign, in which I worked with other women to increase the number of women at the dialogue table and political participation, the percentage rose to 22 per cent, with the number of 17 women in the Geneva Agreement in 2020, and the candidates for the presidency of the government pledged that their government would be 30 per cent women.

I began collaborating with international organisations and municipalities to establish women's centres in Libya where women could learn vocational skills and communication techniques. These centres connected us with grassroots organisations in villages, promoting small projects and educating women about their rights and roles in development. We empowered women to understand their potential as agents of change, peacebuilders, and contributors to Libya's development. However, women in Libya are often denied their legal rights due to a lack of

awareness or because customary laws are misinterpreted to limit women's rights.

One of the initiatives we conducted is the "We Start with 30" campaign, which focuses on quotas for women's participation in politics and decision-making. Our campaign trained women about their rights and advocated for 30 per cent female representation at all levels of government. The campaign has been pivotal in increasing women's presence in parliament and decision-making roles. The 2020 Libyan Political Dialogue Forum even agreed to a 30 per cent quota for women, marking a promising step forward.

Thanks to these efforts, the number of women in parliament has risen from six to 17 members, achieving 22 per cent representation, which is still short of our goal of 30 per cent, but signals progress. The campaign has also pressured presidential candidates to commit to women's representation in their platforms. This has led to a 15 per cent representation of women in ministerial positions: a notable achievement not only for Libya but also for North Africa and the Arab world.

However, women's organisations and human rights defenders continue to face significant challenges. In March 2023, the



*Participants of the peacebuilding workshop held in Libya on 20 August 2024 discussing in group.  
The workshop brought together women from different disciplines. © Ghalia Sasi*



*Ghalia facilitating at the Workshop on peace building held in Libya in August 2024. The workshop that lasted for 10 days was sponsored by the Nana Marne Association and covered topics such as conflict analysis, negotiation, the art of dialogue, mediation, transitional justice, reconciliation, peace building. © Ghalia Sasi*

Supreme Judicial Council declared all NGOs illegal, restricting women's groups from conducting their work. Currently, women activists risk accusations of espionage or treason and lack legal protection. For women to fully engage in society and politics, they need legal safeguards. Women's involvement in decision-making is essential for addressing issues like conflict prevention and violence against women. Ensuring this representation in all branches of government—judicial, executive, and legislative—is needed. Women must also participate in national and local budget discussions to protect their economic interests.

Although some men support women's rights, resistance persists, as many fear that empowering women will threaten their status. Education is needed to challenge traditional stereotypes and help men see women as partners, not competitors. But despite the challenges, women in Libya have made remarkable progress since the revolution. They are increasingly visible in politics, humanitarian work, and decision-making. These changes, although gradual, reflect a hopeful future where women will play a more prominent role in Libya's development and its peace and security.

#### **UNSCR 1325 –PARTICIPATION, PROTECTION, PREVENTION, RELIEF AND RECOVERY PILLARS**

Ghalia Sasi's work exemplifies the UNSCR 1325 principles through her advocacy, mediation, and empowerment initiatives in Libya. The establishment of the "We Start with 30" campaign to secure a 30 per cent political quota reflects the participation pillar, reinforcing the resolution's call for women's meaningful involvement in peace processes. Sasi's mediation initiatives, particularly her role in forming women-led reconciliation groups, demonstrate her commitment to the prevention pillar. By addressing the root causes of conflict and fostering dialogue between communities in Misrata and Tawergha, she works to prevent further violence and build a foundation for lasting peace.

Through her holistic approach to empowerment and mediation, Sasi also contributes to the relief and recovery pillar. Her focus on transforming societal norms that perpetuate women's oppression aims to create long-term, systemic change that supports recovery and resilience within Libyan society.



© Grace Kabayo

# GRACE KABAYO



Grace Kabayo serves as the Secretary-General of the Pan-African Women Organisation (PAWO), a specialised agency of the African Union focused on advancing gender equality and women's empowerment across the continent. In addition to her role at PAWO, she advises President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni of Uganda on Special Duties.

I was born in Uganda to a family that was fairly well established. Those times kingdoms, were the routine administrative institution in the region, with more than five to seven kingdoms that struggled to defend their territories from intruders and hence causing instability. With an aristocratic, educated and religious family in their background, my parents were not only well established but loving enough with a bonded community that would give any child the protection and upbringing they need.

However, all that was short-lived due to the demise of my father, which rendered my mother a single parent at an early age with a good number of children and relatives to look after.

This was immediately followed by a civil war that abolished kingdoms in 1966, followed by a coup in 1971, a flawed election in 1981 that led to an uprising, and a revolutionary struggle for five years that brought the current Government to power. It was a mass mobilised struggle that literally involved most communities.

So, you can imagine, from the age of six years old in 1966-1971-1981-1986 going through those episodes of civil war, coups, school dropouts, displacements, imprisonment and exile. Twenty years marked by youthful loss—yet shaped by faith, hope, struggle, and the determination to survive.

In the process, our communities experienced immense suffering—particularly women and children, who were subjected to grave violations such as torture, rape, forced marriages, human trafficking, and survival sex in exchange for food.

I saw how conflicts give soldiers or combatants leeway or license to commit atrocities without query, question or caution. As usual, women became tools against their will.

During these same years, our neighbouring countries were also not at peace.

I remember seeing the influx of refugees from the DRC, Rwanda, Burundi, and South Sudan, which has gone on till now. Same atrocities were carried out even in refugee camps on top of our cultural norms that encouraged female genital mutilation, child marriages, loss of lives, and human rights were the order of the day. It is such experiences and background that forced some of us to join revolutionary struggles in search of self-defence, rights and peace. After such brutal experiences, what choice would you make?

Like the African proverbs say, "If you come across a stick that hits your co-wife, throw it far", or "The fire that catches your neighbour's house should be put out for it will catch up with you".

Having had an opportunity to be groomed by a single mother, teacher, leader in community development and a strong member of the Mothers' Union, I learnt a lot from the best. Therefore, becoming a Pan-Africanist and women activist was easy due to passion and commitment.

Sometimes, being at the centre of peace initiatives can disable you due to the sacrifice. You are torn between telling it all or held back to enable peace and healing, as is the case in my story.

I feel extra fortunate to be part of the Pan-African Women's Organization (PAWO), whose roots date back to the 1940s and which was officially inaugurated in 1962 in Tanzania. It was founded by the pioneering women leaders including Mwalimu Cissé from Guinea, Karma of Mali, Bibi Titi of Tanzania, Margaret Wambui Kenyatta, Mama Pumla Kisosonkole, Rebecca Mulira, and Joyce Mpanga from Uganda, as well as Joyce Majoro, and Justina from Mozambique, and Winnie Madikizela-Mandela from South Africa. The next generation of leaders—such as Mem Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, and Mama Astou Koité, who led PAWO for an extended period—has



*Grace Kabayo as a child accompanying her mother to meetings. © Grace Kabayo*

carried the torch forward. To them we remain forever grateful. They all stood and still stand for Peace and Human rights.

As PAWO, the oldest women's organisation of Africa, our seven priority areas start with Peace and Security, Agriculture and Environment, Water Sourcing, Regional Integration, Education and Health, all embedded in the Pan African Patriotic Ideologies.

Gender parity and women in decision-making positions are tools that facilitate the mode of operation and implementation. Having fought for Africa's independence, decolonisation, and the formation of the Organization of the African Union (now the African Union), PAWO finds it essential for the women's movement to remain intact and grounded. Without these

anchors, we risk losing direction. Knowing where we've come from, we realise where we are now and are very much aware of where we want to be. The Africa we want is a PEACEFUL AFRICA!!

African solidarity and true unity are key factors in attaining peace. Not for selfish or political gains, but to create a peaceful atmosphere for us all. Communal commitment and discipline are powerful values to us. When a cause benefits everyone, it will succeed. Let us all succeed together.

Aluta Continua, in search for Peace for us all. I stand for Peace!!!

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### UNSCR 1325 – PREVENTION, PARTICIPATION & PROTECTION PILLARS

Grace Kabayo's work as Secretary-General of the Pan -African Women's Organization (PAWO) closely aligns with the four pillars of UNSCR 1325. Her advocacy for policies that address gender inequality and poverty contributes to the prevention of conflict by tackling the root causes of violence. Her commitment to safeguarding the rights of women and girls demonstrates her focus on the protection pillar. Through targeted advocacy, she works to promote women's safety and security, particularly in contexts where they are vulnerable to violence and exploitation.

Kabayo amplifies women's voices and champions their representation in decision-making processes, advancing the participation pillar. Her efforts ensure women's perspectives are included in African institutions and policy frameworks. By fostering unity and collaborative solutions, Kabayo's work also seeks to address the systemic barriers that hinder women's recovery from conflict and inequality. Her Pan-Africanist approach creates pathways to advance more equitable access to resources post-conflict.

# HAJIYA RAMATU TIJJANI



Hajiya Ramatu Tijjani is an advocate for interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding in Nigeria. She is the National President of the Women's Wing of the Peace Revival and Reconciliation Foundation of Nigeria (PRRFON) and the President of the Foundation for the Protection of Women and Children in Nigeria.

I was born and raised in Kaduna, in northern Nigeria. Witnessing violence first-hand has motivated me to advocate for peace. In 1998, on my way to college one morning, I saw a group of Christian women marching silently with placards toward the state government house. By the time I returned home, the situation had taken a dark turn. People were running, leaving their shops and the market in chaos, and I learned that unemployed young men in the area had begun throwing stones at the women. The situation quickly escalated into widespread violence and killings. Although I was fortunate not to be caught in the turmoil, the experience left a profound impact on me and strengthened my commitment to fight for justice.

In Kaduna, interfaith clashes often arise because of religious intolerance or a lack of information about other religions. Extremists exist in every religion, but it is always possible to foster understanding among people. A lot of the conflict in our region stems from misinformation.

Having witnessed the killing of innocent people, I decided the best way to counter this violence was through dialogue. I realised that the best way to organise was by going to the head of the district and explaining our desire to sensitise the community. I asked him to gather those responsible for the violence so that we could educate them about the dangers. They needed to understand what peaceful coexistence means. The markets they destroy affect the women who struggle to make a living. Why destroy property? Looting and attacking property are also attacks on the community itself.

The Peace, Revival, and Reconciliation Foundation of Nigeria (PRRFON) is a faith-based network operating across 19 states and engaging over 50 women. Its initiatives include hosting the National World Interfaith Harmony Week to promote tolerance, organising competitions and community sports events to encourage youth participation, and fostering unity between Christians and Muslims. Recognising the violence and diversity challenges faced by Kaduna State, PRRFON also collaborates with schools to educate youth on peace and tolerance.

Through the Foundation, we raise awareness about the impact of conflict on women in the region. This includes conducting capacity-building and training for government officials, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and community leaders on addressing gender-based violence. We conduct gender-sensitive conflict analysis and work on engaging women in decision-making. We also educate women in the community on how they can be involved. My mother was a role model to me because, when we were growing up, she treated everyone as one, irrespective of religion or ethnicity. Christian, Muslim, young, and old, we all lived together peacefully.

As an interfaith dialogue peace activist, my role is to bring women of different faiths together, educate them, and share information about religious tolerance to prevent conflict. One of

**“As agents of peace, we have a purpose. We must embrace diversity within our communities and promote peaceful coexistence. Communication is key. We must be at the forefront of dialogue. If grievances arise, we must show there is a peaceful way to address them.”**



© Ibrabima Yakubu

our strategies, when there is conflict, is to send women from both faiths to engage in dialogue. I also speak with community leaders to ensure women have their own space. Women can then enter the community, identify the root causes of violence, and conduct dialogues on the way forward. When I visit churches, I speak with the women. I even used to go on Christmas Day and share food with them.

My religion should not be one of violence. This work is not easy, and extremists have tried to discredit me. They say things like: "This Muslim woman doesn't know her religion; she will burn in hellfire". But my religion teaches peace. Witnessing the violence has only motivated me further, and I want to encourage youth to support peace and security activities. They must always see themselves as agents of change, emphasising advocacy, tolerance, and dialogue in any situation.

We need to create dialogue about why violence occurs. For example, what is the role of youth unemployment? One of the greatest challenges facing Nigeria's economy is unemployment, and this issue must be addressed to reduce tension among youth. When young people have nothing to do and are not engaged in activities for the future, they often join groups to feel a sense of belonging. We must think about solutions. For example, can we provide vocational skills? We have been calling for schools to offer entrepreneurship education. This would not only create economic opportunities but also promote social justice.

This is our nation, and we need to communicate. This is our goal. I look forward to seeing sustainable development in my society. We must foster love, peace, tolerance, and mutual respect for one another.



*Hajia Ramatu Tijjani, a Muslim peace advocate and interfaith activist, distributes chickens to Christian widows and orphans in Kaduna, Nigeria, as part of efforts to promote understanding among faith-based communities during Easter celebrations. © Africa Prime News*



*In a gesture of interfaith solidarity, Hajia Ramatu Tijjani, a Muslim peace advocate, donated and helped decorate a Christmas tree at the home of Reverend John Joseph Hayap, Kaduna State Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). Her aim: to promote peaceful coexistence, religious tolerance, and unity among faith-based communities in Nigeria. © Vanguard News Nigeria, 21 December 2019*

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#### UNSCR 1325 – PARTICIPATION AND PREVENTION PILLARS

Hajiya Ramatu Tijjani, a champion of interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding in Kaduna, Nigeria, exemplifies the principles of UNSCR 1325, particularly the pillars of Prevention and Participation.

Her mission is to unite women of different faiths, fostering understanding and addressing religious intolerance and conflict. She actively promotes religious tolerance as a conflict prevention strategy and facilitates dialogue by bringing together women from diverse religious backgrounds.

These spaces are intended to build bridges and foster interfaith connections through gestures such as sharing food during Christmas celebrations. She also encourages youth to participate in peace and security activities, emphasising their role as agents of change. She advocates for the prevention of violence through tolerance, dialogue, and nonviolence.



© Koite Doumbia

# KOITÉ DOUMBIA



Mama Koit Doumbia is the President of the Platform of Women Leaders of Mali and serves as an expert on Mali's National Commission for drafting the Charter for Peace. She is also an adjunct professor at the University of Jan, Andalucia, Spain. She is the former President of the ICC Trust Fund for Victims.

I am a woman of action who was born in Thies, Senegal. I have been a trade unionist, and I am an advocate for justice and reparations for victims of sexual violence. What truly drives me is combating social injustice at any level. I draw strength from life's challenges and have never been afraid to speak out. Growing up, my family was deeply affected by the dissolution of the Mali Federation in 1960, when both Senegal and Mali declared independence. Malians like us living in Senegal were forced to leave, which was a terrible experience as we saw no distinction between our peoples. We relocated to Bamako, Mali, where we initially lived as refugees. In 1962, my father, a policeman, was transferred to Bamako and then to Kayes, where I completed my primary and secondary education before my training as a history and geography teacher in cole Normale. I firmly believe that without education and capacity building, women cannot be empowered.

After joining the civil service as a teacher, I became active in the labour union movement, advocating for the respect and recognition that teachers deserve. My experience in the union movement led to my work in government roles within the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Throughout my career, I have consistently fought against discrimination, championing women's access to education, employment, and social protection, as well as advocating for legal instruments to safeguard women's rights.

While advocating for women's rights in Mali, I was introduced to the broader network of African women leaders through FEMNET, the African Women's Development and Communication Network based in Nairobi, Kenya. My perspective on political life shifted dramatically during my first experience at their General Assembly, where I witnessed African women's solidarity firsthand. At the airport, I was detained for not having an entry visa, and I had to call the event organisers to explain my predicament. A participant intervened, and they

arranged for my visa. This act of support deeply inspired me and reinforced my commitment to advancing women's rights.

I became President of FEMNET from 2003 to 2010. At that time, only 14 countries were represented, but by the end of my tenure, 33 countries had joined. I worked tirelessly to recruit women and organisations, ensuring equal representation across all African regions to strengthen the promotion of women's rights.

I worked on peace and security efforts for many years, not realising that my own country would soon face a severe crisis. As a woman, I could not remain passive while widespread rape, humiliation and execution of women and girls devastated northern Mali in 2012 and 2014. Women suffered tremendously; their movement was restricted, and their rights stripped away. This shocking reality compelled me to take a more active role.

*“In 2013, we went into the hall where the peace negotiations were being held in Ouagadougou. We went in without authorisation and without a badge. The men said, “What are you here for?” We said, “We’re going to bring the voice of women to this room!” And it was legendary. The men looked at us and said, “But what’s this?” And we said, “What’s this?! You can’t make peace without women!”*

**“I mobilised over 500 women to rally in support of the new 2023 Constitution, which explicitly states in its preamble that Mali is committed to combating all forms of violence, especially against women, girls, and persons with disabilities. For the first time in our movement's history, Article 1 of the Constitution enshrines the principle of equality between men and women in rights and duties.”**

In 2013, during Mali's Ouagadougou Preliminary Agreement between the Malian government and Tuareg armed groups, women's organisations were not invited to participate, so we had to push for our representation. We didn't even know the venue of the negotiations, but we travelled to Ouagadougou



*Mama Koité receiving an award from the Council for International Criminal Justice and the Field Implementing Partners of the Trust Fund for Victims (TFV). © Koite Doumbia*

and demanded a seat at the table and an end to the fighting. At subsequent negotiation sessions, including those in Algiers in 2014, we continued to demand that women be represented. We travelled across the region—to Abuja, Addis Ababa, New York, even the UN Security Council—making declarations about the need for Malian women's voices to be heard. Our advocacy resulted in women being included in statements and influencing the 2013 Ouagadougou peace agreement, which has provisions for the protection of women. Since then, we have demanded a greater role for women in the implementation of the Peace Accord.

This advocacy played a significant role in my election as a member in 2015 and after President of the International Criminal Court's (ICC) Trust Fund for Victims from 2018 to 2021, representing 125 states and championing the rights of thousands of victims. For six years, I travelled to the former conflict zones that the International Criminal Court was dealing with, including the DRC, Uganda, Côte d'Ivoire, the Central African Republic, and Timbuktu. I bore witness to indescribable horrors: women who had been raped and mutilated, children born of rape, and young girls who became mothers as early as twelve years old, some of whom did not survive childbirth. The trauma and suffering were immense. My mission was to advocate for these women. When I joined the ICC, there were only six projects; by the time I left, that number had grown to 28.

I take pride in uniting various women's initiatives and organisations to advocate for peace, security, and the defence of women's rights. On the regional and international stages, I have consistently highlighted the plight of women in conflict zones, especially in Mali, leading to increased support from partners like the UN and others for women's organisations in the country.

Additionally, I am now focusing on inter-generational work with young people. I have successfully established networks of young women and girls dedicated to promoting women's rights and empowerment. Alongside these young women, I have also involved a group of men through a programme I created called "Men to Men", which focuses on fighting violence against women and girls. This group consists of 75 per cent men and 25 per cent women, including university students and legal experts, all committed to combating gender-based violence in various spheres.

At the national level, I focus on social issues, and through a project called Women's and Girls' Rights and Citizenship, I enabled over 12,500 children to obtain birth certificates so they could attend school. I fought for women to have identity cards, to exercise their full rights as citizens and be eligible to participate in elections. As a result, women have assumed roles such as mayors and deputy mayors and have taken active leadership positions, particularly at the grassroots level.

My efforts also contributed to the enactment of the Quota Law of November 2015, which mandates that over 30 per cent of electoral lists and appointments include women. This has created a critical mass of women leaders in the Malian political landscape today.

During Mali's recent security crisis, I was appointed President of the Women's Consortium for Socio-political Transition. In this role, alongside my colleagues, I have influenced key reforms related to the transition period. My activism has never been easy. There were many times when I cried, but I consider myself a courageous woman who doesn't give up easily.

What has sustained me throughout my journey is my conviction that social injustice must be stopped in all its forms. I draw strength from life's challenges and remain determined to fight for women and continue resisting victimisation. It was injustice that drove me to have the strength of character to defend the interests of women. Nothing is handed to us on a silver platter; you must fight.

#### UNSCR 1325 – PARTICIPATION, PREVENTION, PROTECTION AND RELIEF AND RECOVERY PILLARS

In Mali, UNSCR 1325 has been used as an instrument to ensure a more gender-inclusive peace process as well as recognition of women's rights. Activists like Mama Koité Doumbia embody the resolution's principles by insisting on women's presence and influence at negotiation tables from Ouagadougou to Algiers. Her role in promoting participation has ensured that the perspectives and needs of women affected by violence are embedded in peace agreements.

Doumbia's promotion of reparations for victims of sexual violence on the international stage is firmly embedded in the relief and recovery pillar. She has also paved the way for significant legal reforms in Mali, including the landmark 2015 Quota Law, which mandates women's representation in the political arena. Her efforts illustrate the transformative power of the WPS agenda in bridging global frameworks with local change.



*Field visit mission of Ambassadors interested in the implementation programmes of the International Criminal Court (ICC) Victims Fund in Uganda. © Koité Doumbia*



*Trust Fund for Victims (TFV) Board Members. © ICC*



*Women of Mali with UN Under Secretary-General Mr Jean Pierre Lacroix. © Platform of Women Leaders of Mali*





*Participants of training for women civil organisations (CSOs) on women's meaningful participation in electoral processes, held in Nairobi, Kenya, from 18-20 June 2024. © UNOAU*

# LIBERATA BURATWA



Liberata Buratwa is a peace activist, teacher and public servant from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. She leads a network of women peace monitors in Rutshuru, a region bordering Rwanda. Liberata led a delegation of women to meet Laurent Nkunda, the leader of CNDP. The women's audacious visits opened an unprecedented channel of communication between the rebels and the government which, combined with international pressure, culminated with the 2009 Ihusi Peace Agreement. While that truce was short lived—a rebel group known as M23 contested the accord—it provided a blueprint for women's strategies.

Since the 1990s, the region of Kivu has suffered from a series of conflicts, but as a mother, I always support dialogue to end the horrors we have suffered. I have been working for peace since I was very young. Even as a child, I tried to bring people together if there was conflict. Within my own family, I was the one who tried to step in to prevent my father from beating my mother. When I began primary school, I was frequently called upon to mediate disputes among pupils. There is something within me that longs for people to live in peace!

The conflict driven by the National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP) was brutal, and in 2008, we kept hearing about massacres near Goma. I was particularly concerned over the recruitment of children into armed groups, children who could have been my own. This led me to take action. I felt we should reach out to the rebels as mothers and ask them for a peaceful resolution. We knew that without peace, there could be no development. I said to my neighbours, "Why are we staying silent? Women are suffering, being raped, and children are being forced into the rebellion just 27 kilometres from here. What will we do if the war comes to us?" I gathered ten women from different tribes in Goma, and we made the decision to approach the rebel leader, Laurent Nkunda, and plead for an end to the fighting.

We travelled into the bush, and when we reached Nkunda's soldiers, they asked us why we were there. We responded, "We are here to see our child." They asked us, "Who is your child?" We replied, "Laurent Nkunda". The soldiers contacted Nkunda by radio, and he agreed to meet with us. I told him, "My son, rebellion will lead you nowhere; the bush is for the animals, not for the people". A few months later, when the CNDP threatened to attack Goma at Christmas, I went back to the bush and pleaded with him to spare the people. He kept his promise.

Rumours spread that Rwanda was supporting the rebels, so we decided to organise a mission to Rwanda. There, we met with a prominent civil society leader, Immaculate Ingabire, who helped us reach local officials, including the mayor of Kigali. We conveyed our message: "When your neighbour's house is on fire, you must help put it out, or the fire will spread to your own home". We implored Rwanda to cease its support for Nkunda's rebellion. Eventually, we met with senior ambassadors and sought their assistance in promoting peace in the region.

Our meeting with Nkunda led us to demand a national dialogue, so we pooled our personal resources to travel to Kinshasa and tell the government that we were tired of war. In Kinshasa, we met with a government minister who praised us as powerful women. However, we were not permitted to meet directly with the President. But while we were in the capital, we forged connections with religious leaders who agreed to help us amplify our calls for peace. We printed pamphlets stating, "We do not want to fight; we want dialogue," and spent the night distributing them across Kinshasa before heading back home.

We did make an impact because, in 2009, I received a call from Vital Kamerhe, President of the DRC's National Assembly. He informed me that a plane would be arriving in Goma in the morning to take me to Kinshasa for peace talks. When I reached the airport, I realised I was the only woman in the group. These talks ultimately led to a Peace Agreement signed in Goma in March 2009. They also led to Operation Amani Leo, meaning "peace today". I was happy to be appointed to a Peace Commission after this, but unfortunately, the rebels soon returned to the bush.



© Liberata Buratwa

I will never tire of defending women. I will continue advocating for them until my last breath. I urge all mothers to come together for peace in North Kivu. I firmly believe that we can end this war without a single bullet, but only if we are united."

Insecurity in eastern DRC continues in cycles, and in October 2022, I was displaced by another conflict. At that time, the *Movement du 23 Mars* (M23) rebel group blocked the eastern route to Goma. I lost everything—my home, my farm, my car—and now I am reliant on the generosity of others for shelter. Life in the camps in this region is harsh. Children wander the streets, and mothers who used to be able to provide for their families are now destitute. Many men have abandoned their families.

Nevertheless, I remain unwavering in my commitment to defending women and advocating for peace. In Rutshuru, I now lead a network of women who act as peace monitors. We know the reality: the rebels disguise themselves as civilians when

they are scouting for where to attack. But we can recognise them, and as women, we work together to maintain safety in the camps.

We recently met with General Peter Cirimwami from the Congolese army to ask for his help. He is in charge of the fight against the M23 in Rutshuru, so we asked him to ensure that his soldiers protect civilians and that they are held accountable for their behaviour towards women. I told him we knew who was who and that we could work together to stop the conflict if he kept the displacement sites safe. We want peace, and we'll keep fighting for it so that we can go home.



*Liberata Buratwa, representative of women IDPs from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, speaks during a panel on the situation of internally displaced women and girls in the DRC, at the ceremony marking the 15th anniversary of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention), Dakar, 11 December 2024. © NRC Dakar, SENEGAL*



*Liberata Buratwa, then Administrator of the Territory, in discussion with Mr Daniel Ruiz, Head of MONUSCO Office, on the security situation in Rutshuru, with particular focus on the condition of women, girls, and children, Rutshuru, DRC, 2017. © MONUSCO*

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#### **UNSCR 1325 – PARTICIPATION, PREVENTION AND RELIEF AND RECOVERY PILLARS**

Liberata Buratwa's story illustrates that the principles of UNSCR 1325 were being practised at the grassroots level long before the formal adoption of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. Her work exemplifies the four pillars of UNSCR 1325—prevention, participation, protection, and relief and recovery—in a tangible and impactful way. Through her leadership, Liberata mobilises women to take proactive steps toward peace, including rallying mothers to meet with rebels, seeing them as their sons, and urging them to end the violence. This reflects the WPS pillars of prevention and participation, as she brings women's voices into dialogue with rebel leaders, government officials, and international diplomats, showcasing their vital role in peace negotiations.

Liberata's involvement in community rebuilding and advancing women's economic empowerment aligns with the relief and recovery goals of UNSCR 1325, promoting sustainable livelihoods and stability post-conflict. Her grassroots activism underscores the power of local women's organisations in driving meaningful participation and shaping peace processes. Women like Liberata embody the spirit of the WPS agenda, transforming practices on the ground into policies that advocate for inclusive peace.



**MARWORPNET**

**Mano River Women's Peace Network**

# MANO RIVER WOMEN'S PEACE NETWORK - MARWOPNET

The Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET) exemplifies African women's leadership in action. Amid the conflicts, displacement, and inequality that plagued Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone during the 1990s and 2000s, MARWOPNET redefined women's roles in peacebuilding. Its ongoing work emphasises the experiences and contributions of African women, showcasing them as central figures in shaping and sustaining peace.

MARWOPNET emerged from the Mano River Union (MRU), founded in 1973 by Sierra Leone and Liberia. The MRU's original purpose was to establish "a firm economic foundation for lasting peace, friendship, freedom, and social progress". However, the brutal conflicts of the 1990s, coupled with women's demands for inclusion in peacebuilding, transformed the MRU's focus toward peace, security, and conflict prevention, paving the way for MARWOPNET's creation.

In May 2000, at a meeting of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), women leaders advocated for the creation of their own dedicated platform for conflict resolution. MARWOPNET was officially launched in 2001 in Liberia by women from Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, with strong support from *Femmes Africa Solidarité*. Designed as a sub-regional, women-led platform, its mission was to enhance peace efforts across the Mano River countries. The founding members of MARWOPNET represented a diverse and inclusive group comprising women activists, politicians, religious leaders, union members, businesswomen, homemakers, and educators. The Network operated through sub-committees in each member state, ensuring grassroots engagement and decentralised leadership. The Presidency of the organisation rotates among representatives of the three member nations.

## Shared Struggles and Formation

The creation of MARWOPNET was deeply rooted in the shared struggles of women across the Mano River region during the conflicts of the 1990s and early 2000s. The widespread experiences of gender-based violence and displacement in the region galvanised a collective determination among women to restore stability and build resilient communities. According to Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff, one of MARWOPNET's founders, the movement's genesis was inspired by the lived experiences of women refugees. The urgency of their plight underscored the need for a response to displacement that

transcended national boundaries. Reflecting on these experiences, Jusu-Sheriff recounted: "We met a young woman who had been chased by the war from Liberia to Sierra Leone to Guinea. She suggested that the solution to this conflict was for women in the three countries to get together and take collective action to stop the war".

MARWOPNET quickly achieved notable successes, most prominently through its significant contributions to the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ended Liberia's second Civil War. In 2002, the Network successfully convened a summit bringing together President Charles Taylor of Liberia, President Lansana Conté of Guinea, and President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah of Sierra Leone, fostering dialogue about the conflict among the region's key leaders. The following year, MARWOPNET was granted formal observer status at the peace talks in Accra, Ghana. The organisation was represented by a delegation of eight women, including prominent figures such as Amelia Ward, former interim Head of State Ruth Perry, and Theresa Leigh-Sherman.

Although MARWOPNET and other civil society groups did not have direct negotiating power, their influence was substantial. Their advocacy extended beyond the immediate goal of ending hostilities; they called for a peace process that explicitly addressed the deep-seated gender inequalities in Liberia. The Network insisted that any transitional framework include women's representation and robust protections for civilians, particularly women and children.

MARWOPNET's impact was widely recognised, culminating in its receipt of the prestigious United Nations Prize for Human Rights in 2003 for its outstanding achievement in human rights and peace building initiatives in the sub-region. Beyond its contributions to securing the agreement, the Network actively participated in monitoring its implementation, ensuring that the commitments made during the negotiations translated into meaningful progress on the ground.



© Mano River Women's Peace Network Sierra Leone Chapter

### From Peacemaking to Peacebuilding

Over the last two decades, MARWOPNET's work has evolved in response to the socio-political and cultural challenges of the region. At its core, the organisation positions women as essential agents of change, ensuring their voices and lived experiences are central in shaping conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes. This approach challenges the traditional, male-dominated mechanisms often prevalent in patriarchal societies like those in the Mano River region.

Overall, MARWOPNET's peacebuilding strategies remain deeply rooted in the lived realities of women. By training women as mediators, negotiators, and leaders, MARWOPNET empowers them to address the structural causes of conflict. For example, the organisation has pioneered training programmes for market women, equipping them with skills in conflict resolution, primary education, and entrepreneurship. The Network also worked to develop legal expertise to ensure the protection of women

and children and the representation of female rape victims in court through organisations such as the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL).

Central to its mission is ensuring women's inclusion in decision-making and governance. A key message from the Network has been: "Don't allow yourselves to be pushed back in a box. Stay focused on trying to make positive changes in the lives of ordinary women". This vision has materialised through notable initiatives like the 2004 youth seminar in Conakry, Guinea, which brought together over 60 participants from across Africa.

MARWOPNET's commitment to early intervention and dialogue is exemplified by the Women's Situation Room, which promotes peaceful conflict resolution during electoral processes. In 2011, the Network trained women as poll watchers in Liberia's highly contested presidential election, reinforcing the critical role of women in safeguarding democratic practices. In 2012, the



© Pewee Flomoku



© Mano River Women's Peace Network Sierra Leone Chapter

Women's Situation Room was deployed across the 14 districts of Sierra Leone with more than 300 observers. It was described as "not so much a room, but a safe space for peaceful process".

MARWOPNET has also played a significant role in advocacy. In 2012, both Sierra Leone and Liberia chapters each launched Peace Ràdio stations in border towns thereby broadcasting to cross-border communities in all three MRU countries. MARWOPNET's online journal, Voices of Peace, further amplifies stories from individuals affected by war and conflict through personal narratives, poetry and art.

The organisation's influence extends to the international stage. In 2012, MARWOPNET partnered with the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders and the National Organisation of Women to conduct workshops in Sierra Leone on UNSCR 1325 and 1820. These workshops empowered women in war-affected regions by educating them on international legislation and their potential roles in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

The Network's continuous efforts have culminated in significant milestones. For instance, in June 2021, MARWOPNET celebrated its 21st anniversary by forging partnerships with policewomen to address Women, Peace, and Security issues. It also unveiled plans for a peacebuilding and tourism centre in Bomaru, Sierra Leone, which aims to sustain the Network's legacy of empowerment and reconciliation. Achieving consultative

status with the United Nations further solidified MARWOPNET's influence, enabling the organisation to advocate on a global platform.

Despite its remarkable achievements, MARWOPNET continues to face significant challenges, including operating in politically unstable regions that pose safety risks to its members. Côte d'Ivoire joined the Mano River Union in 2008. However, to date, MARWOPNET, for various reasons, is still unable to launch the national Ivorian chapter of the subregional Network. The Network also grapples with widespread resistance to women in leadership and limited access to resources. Nevertheless, its accomplishments stand as a testament to its resilience and effectiveness.

In a world that often looks to formal processes for solutions, MARWOPNET is pioneering a distinctly African women-led model of peace. This model not only acknowledges the power and resilience of African women, but also recognises that true peace is built from the ground up through economic empowerment, social equality, and community-led transformation.

# MARIAM BABU



Mariam Babu is a mediator in cross-border conflicts and an advocate for peace. She is the chairperson of the Busia Women Cross Border Traders Cooperative and the Uganda National Women Cross Border Traders Union.

I was born in Mukono District, Uganda, and grew up in a humble household. Due to my family's economic situation, I was compelled to marry at an early age. When we married, my husband already had three wives, making me the fourth. It soon became clear that his income was insufficient to support all of us, and there was a lot of competition for resources among the wives. I was determined to break the cycle of poverty for my children, and I realised I needed an additional income to ensure their education.

I saw my sister crossing borders near Busia informally, getting sugar from Kenya and crossing it to Uganda to sell. This was her main source of income, and I decided this could be a means for me to earn money. But it often involved travelling through abandoned bush routes in the dead of night! Women make up 80 per cent of small-scale, informal cross-border traders in Africa, but studies have shown that most of us face harassment.

I started smuggling goods like rice, salt, and eggs through bush paths between Kenya and Uganda. It is only by God's grace that I am still alive. Trading as a woman in the informal sector is fraught with risk. Every day, we faced threats of intimidation and sexual exploitation in the bush, dangerous routes with deceptive agents, and the stress of getting caught by the police and having our livelihood taken away.

The Busia Women's Cross Border Traders group was established in November 2010 with 46 founding members. It emerged from a regional training programme focused on empowering women engaged in informal cross-border trade. I participated in this programme to learn about my rights as a woman, understand the procedures for crossing the border through official routes, and know which documents were required. We also learnt about the benefits of regional integration, such as the East African Community's trade regime, which simplifies the clearance process for small-scale cross-border traders. This initiative was particularly valuable for women, allowing us to exchange information on secure trade routes.

My work in cross-border trading led to my connection with FemWise-Africa, the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation, which operates as a subsidiary mechanism of the African Union's Panel of the Wise. FemWise-Africa offers a platform for membership, capacity building and networking for women. Through this network, I advocated for the establishment of a women's desks at all One Stop Border Posts across the country. Since its creation in 2017, this desk has advanced gender-sensitive mechanisms at border points and promoted inclusive trade practices.



*Mariam Babu sharing her experience of gender concepts in Cross Border Trade meeting organised by the Life and Peace Institute held on 22 November 2022 in Mombasa, Kenya. © Mariam Babu*



© Mariam Babu

**“In my experience, the people close to the conflict always have the best solutions. But women’s efforts are hardly recognised even though they are the ones who bear the burden of conflict. Additionally, women often send messages of peace, which helps the cessation of fighting.”**

Due to my work with FemWise-Africa, in 2018, Ambassador Frederic Gateretse-Ngoga assigned me to be part of an African Union mediation team set up to resolve a border conflict between Tanzania and Malawi. In this region, conflicts at our borders often arise over the management of natural resources, especially where rivers like the Songwe River change course or flood due to increased rainfall. This sometimes affects the international boundary demarcations between Malawi and Tanzania. I was asked to be part of the AU peace mediation team, and I guided the negotiators in considering and including the most affected people. Above all, I advocated for women who are consistently left out of peacebuilding processes.

When peace negotiations include only high-profile people sitting in hotels without the involvement of local people, negotiations take a long time and fail to reach lasting solutions. As a result of our intervention over the Songwe River dispute, an MoU to establish a local cross-border committee was signed by both parties in October



*Participants of Joint Boarder Dialogue held at Busia One-Stop Border Post in 2024. © Mariam Babu*

2018. I am pleased that the parties have adhered to and respected the MoU. However, border conflicts persist elsewhere due to climate change and cattle rustling spurred by competition over grazing land. Additionally, there is the ongoing challenge of human trafficking, which particularly affects women being moved across borders.

FemWise-Africa has played a significant role in building regional capacity to promote peace at the borders, and when necessary, women from Uganda, Kenya, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo collaborate to promote peace at the borders. We have established peace committees at the borders of Elegu and Busia, each comprising 20 women per border. These members have received training as peacebuilders, mediators, and negotiators, and we advocate for inclusion, especially involving youth and persons with disabilities who frequently cross borders seeking survival.

My peace committees are dedicated to identifying and addressing key issues within their communities. For example, I have prioritised supporting survivors of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in northern Uganda. The LRA has had a profound impact on the region, and some people remain in IDP camps despite the conflict being over. Our peace committees visit these camps, identify the problems that people are facing, and try to develop strategies to address the root causes of these challenges.

I am also working at the South Sudan-Uganda border, training women on the African Union's Transitional Justice Policy. I strive to ensure women's participation in transitional justice processes because I have realised that unresolved conflicts often resurface. Victims usually become perpetrators if the past is not addressed. Women, as mothers and wives of perpetrators, can exert significant influence over them and facilitate their transformation if they are included at a peace negotiation tables. I view transitional justice as important for addressing past violence and laying the foundations for lasting peace through promoting healing.

I firmly believe that equipping border communities, especially youth and women, with the necessary skills will foster lasting peace and bridge divides created by borders. Prioritising peace is essential.

#### UNSCR 1325 – PROTECTION, PARTICIPATION AND RELIEF AND RECOVERY PILLARS

Mariam Babu's journey exemplifies 1325 and the power of grassroots leadership in advancing the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda in Africa's cross-border context. Mariam has leveraged her dual roles as chairperson of the Busia Women Cross Border Traders Cooperative and the Uganda National Women Cross Border Traders Union to foster peace and economic empowerment across borders.

Her work demonstrates how locally-led approaches can address security challenges, strengthen cross-border relations, and promote sustainable peace, all of which are critical in the face of climate change. Mariam's story underscores the critical role of women in transforming conflict-affected regions and advancing WPS principles in settings where peace and economic resilience are deeply intertwined. Mariam's involvement of local people to ensure agreements are reached and sustained gives expression to the principles of prevention, participation, and protection.



Advocacy walk to launch the 16 days of activism against Gender-Based Violence held at the AUC Headquarters, November 2023.  
© UNOAU





© Mary Balikungeri

# MARY BALIKUNGERI



Mary Balikungeri is a human rights defender and an advocate for gender justice and peacebuilding in Rwanda. After the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, she founded Rwanda Women's Network, creating support for survivors and a platform for rebuilding shattered communities. Currently, she serves as the Chairperson of the Africa Network of Women Shelters.

I have dedicated much of my life to ending gender-based violence in Rwanda. Witnessing injustice has driven me to never want to see anybody suffer injustice again. My childhood as a refugee has informed much of my thinking. I was born in 1953 in Nyanza, Rwanda, and I was six years old when my family was forced to leave the country. During 1959, we were among many Rwandans who left the country due to violence. We initially moved to Burundi and later settled in Uganda, where my parents established a church for refugees under the Church Missionary Society. Reflecting on my parents now, I realise the many painful choices they had to make as refugees.

In 1986, I joined the World Council of Churches (WCC) as a liaison officer for a programme combating racism and supporting anti-apartheid efforts in South Africa. Collaborating with South African human rights defenders like Barney Pityana and Reverend Frank Chikane cemented my belief in the need to fight for justice. This time inspired me a lot, and my experiences working for the WCC influenced my approach when I returned to Rwanda.

My work with the World Council of Churches continued until the genocide against Tutsi erupted in my country in 1994. Tragically, churches, once seen as sanctuaries, became complicit in the violence. While many church leaders initially sheltered those fleeing the violence, they also betrayed them by guiding the killers to these hiding places. Following the takeover by the Rwandan Patriotic Movement ending the Genocide, discussions began in Geneva about how the churches could contribute to rebuilding the country.

This led me to return to Rwanda in 1995, and I soon founded the Rwanda Women's Network. I mobilised international partners to fund the vision of the network. One of our first initiatives was to establish the Polyclinic of Hope programme, creating a safe space for women and girls to share their experiences. After the Genocide against the Tutsi, women were deeply traumatised and needed a safe space where they could speak openly without being judged. Our approach included welcoming Tutsi as well as Hutu

women; women were welcome irrespective of their ethnicity. Their challenges varied greatly: some had endured gang rape, mutilation, and torture, with their entire families killed; others faced the trauma that their husbands were perpetrators. We explored healing methods while emphasising the importance of justice and rebuilding their lives.

Many stories stand out, but one resonates deeply. At the Polyclinic, one woman who was HIV-positive encountered the wife of the man who had raped her and killed her husband. She confronted her, asking, "Why are you here? Your husband did this to me; you have no right to be here". I intervened, encouraging both women to try to reconcile. I explained, "This woman did not know what her husband had done or that he had infected you. She's here because he is now imprisoned. Both of you are suffering in different ways, and forgiveness is essential to easing the pain and moving forward".

We witnessed many women who had suffered gang rape and contracted HIV and AIDS. Over time, these women became powerful advocates within their communities, addressing gender-based violence. Many trained as paralegals, supporting fellow women facing domestic violence and working actively as changemakers. As part of our programme, we began to offer financial education and leadership skill development. When women are economically viable, they can deal with issues of violence, they can feed themselves, take care of their families, and they won't resort to violence.

The Polyclinic of Hope grew significantly, evolving into a centre for trauma healing, economic empowerment, solidarity building, networking, and advocacy—all driven by and for women. We soon realised the need to extend its impact beyond the initial reconstruction phase. Today, the Polyclinic of Hope has expanded to 20 additional centres across different districts in Rwanda, allowing us to approach health as a pathway to peace. By integrating

“At the end of the day, the victims of yesterday are the ones that become the changemakers. They are the ones who are creating resilient networks of women who are becoming paralegals and leaders who serve their communities. The work they do embodies Resolution 1325. Because in that community, you find participation, you find prevention, you find recovery, and you find sustainability.”

psychological, gender-based violence, and economic perspectives, we were able to address women's issues comprehensively.

The Rwandan Women's Network comprises women who serve as community facilitators, amplifying the voices and pressing issues of their local communities. Our vision is to establish GBV coalition networks in every district of Rwanda, uniting these facilitators, local leaders, and security forces to foster dialogue and deepen the understanding of UNSCR 1325. These networks create vital linkages between women's households, their communities, and broader national initiatives. Additionally, we work to build regional alliances, such as with FEMNET, to strengthen our efforts.

Our greatest challenge remains ensuring that women recognise these spaces as platforms designed for their leadership, challenging entrenched societal norms. A current focus is on raising awareness about Rwanda's inheritance laws and their implications for women's rights. We are witnessing a growing realisation among women of their rights, a powerful example of Resolution 1325 in action and its transformative impact. It is incredibly energising to see young women we have mentored stepping into leadership roles at the national level. Their achievements provide hope and inspiration for others still searching for their voice.



*Mary Balikungeri at the General Assembly of the Rwanda Women's Network, celebrating 27 years of empowering women, strengthening communities, and advocating for gender equality in Rwanda in January 2024. © Rwanda Women's Network*

However, it is frustrating to see the disconnect between women's organisations and decision-making bodies, both locally and internationally. Decision-makers must recognise the unique ways in which women lead within their communities. It is essential to genuinely listen to women and empower them in meaningful ways. Across Africa, from Burundi to the DRC to Rwanda, women are already engaging in crucial local peacebuilding. It is imperative that these women not only have a seat at the table but are also actively included in the decision-making processes where their voices can shape policy and action.



*Mary Balikungeri explaining the work of Rwanda Women's Network (RWN) to HRH Prince Charles during his visit to Rwanda in June 2022 for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). She highlighted RWN's impact in advancing women's rights, gender equality, and community empowerment.*

© Rwanda Women's Network.

#### UNSCR 1325 – PREVENTION, PARTICIPATION, PROTECTION AND RELIEF AND RECOVERY PILLARS

The principles of UNSCR 1325 are at the core of the Rwanda Women's Network and its flagship initiative, the Polyclinic of Hope, reflecting the resolution's emphasis on Participation, Protection, Prevention, and Relief and Recovery. The protection pillar is evident in the safe spaces and support systems provided by the Polyclinic of Hope, offering survivors of gender-based violence comprehensive care, counselling, and a pathway to reclaim their lives with dignity.

Through community-driven trauma healing, legal advocacy, and economic empowerment, the Rwanda Women's Network demonstrates the participation pillar by enabling women to transform their experiences of trauma into drivers of societal change and leadership. By addressing the root causes of violence and fostering a culture of accountability and peace, the Network's initiatives advance the prevention pillar. Finally, the Polyclinic of Hope's holistic approach to care reflects the relief and recovery pillar, exploring healing methods while emphasising the importance of justice and rebuilding their lives in a post-genocide country.

# MULHER E PAZ – WOMEN AND PEACE MOVEMENT



The Women's Movement for Peace, now known as the Women and Peace Movement, was established in Mozambique as a national platform rooted in community-led initiatives. Comprised of 230 women's organizations from 53 districts and representing approximately 125,000 women.

In 2018, the Women's Movement for Peace, now known as the Women and Peace Movement (WPM), was established in Mozambique, as a national platform rooted in community-led initiatives. Comprised of women's organizations from Mozambique the Movement seeks to amplify women's roles in peacebuilding and reconciliation. The initiative was founded by two prominent peace activists: Graça Machel, a globally recognised advocate for children's and women's rights, and Marie Andersson de Frutos, former Swedish Ambassador to Mozambique. Graça Machel observed: "As a woman in a position of influence, you have an obligation to do whatever you can to make sure that the other women out there, who find it much harder to exercise their rights, can climb that ladder as well. Equality is not a women's issue. It is a societal issue".

The Movement emerged after consultations involving over 600 women's voices, where participants explored concepts related to peace, including reconciliation, mediation, conflict resolution, social cohesion, and the role of women.

Under the leadership of the Foundation for Community Development (FDC), the WPM works alongside organisations with national and international reputations, such as the Institute for Multiparty Democracy (IMD) and the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD).

Mozambique has a long history of conflict as well as a series of peace agreements and protocols. These include the 1992 General Peace Agreement, the 2014 Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities, and the 2018 Memorandum of Understanding on Military Matters/DDR. These efforts culminated in the 2019 Maputo Accord for Peace and National Reconciliation, supported by the United Nations Special Envoy for Peace in Mozambique.

In 2018, Mozambique also adopted its first National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security for the period 2018–2022. FDC is also contributing to the development of the second

**“We, as women, want to affirm our desire to embark on building peace and national reconciliation because we are BRAVE! Women participants of the 1st National Conference of the Women Peace Movement 2018 In Beira City Sofala Province - Mozambique”**

generation of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security for the period 2025 to 2029.

Despite systemic challenges, including patriarchal structures, gender-based violence, economic dependency, and low educational opportunities for women, the Women's Peace Movement is capitalising on the government's commitments to advancing women's rights. To achieve this, it has redefined the concept of peace in Mozambique by introducing the idea of "social peace". This concept emphasises grassroots collaboration, social cohesion, and the central role of women in fostering lasting reconciliation and national unity.

Through this Movement, Mozambican women have asserted that they are essential to peacebuilding since they possess the skills, knowledge, and social status needed to drive change in post-conflict environments. They emphasise their ability to build trust, engage diverse parties, and promote dialogue in challenging settings.



## **Mulher Activa, Paz Efectiva**

Women and Peace Movement  
Active Woman Effective Peace  
Mozambique

However, they have emphasised that realising women's full participation in peacebuilding and national reconciliation requires meeting several key preconditions:

- **Capacity Building:** Providing tailored training for women in mediation, negotiation, facilitation, trust-building, and dialogue.
- **Institutionalised Dialogue:** Establishing regular spaces for women to discuss issues affecting them and identify solutions for peace.
- **Leadership Inclusion:** Ensuring women are represented in leadership and decision-making spaces.
- **Educational Opportunities:** Creating initiatives to encourage women to pursue higher levels of education.
- **Economic Empowerment:** Promoting programmes that strengthen the economic independence of women and girls.
- **Male Engagement:** Involving men in promoting respect for women's rights and roles in society.
- **Addressing Violence:** Combating all forms of violence against women and girls to break cycles of abuse.

**“The Main objective of the Woman Peace Movement is to increase the space, opportunities, and capacities of women in Mozambique to become mediators and actively participate in dialogues, political processes, peacebuilding, and reconciliation processes, leading to social cohesion in Mozambique.”**



© FDC and ACCORD



Women and Peace Movement members during electoral process in Maputo Mozambique UN Women 2024. © ONU Mulheres Moçambique



Women and Peace Movement mediators trained by FDC and ACCORD in Maputo 2024. © Movimento Mulher Paz



Fátima Jerónimo, peace mediator, in Mozambique, in 2018 offered the Woman Peace National Agenda to His Excellency Presidente Filipe Nyusi. © Movimento Mulher Paz

“Women, as mothers, promoters and protectors of life, have a great responsibility to promote peace and reconciliation within the family and society in general.” Women participants of the 1st National WPM Conference



Women and Peace Movement, ACCORD and WPS Networking participants during 5th High Level Capital Meeting in Washington 2023. © Movimento Mulher Paz

The WPM has also stated that effective peacebuilding requires fostering conditions conducive to dialogue and reconciliation. These include trust-building, addressing trauma, supporting victims of violence, involving experienced community leaders, and emphasising open communication and active listening.

At present, the Women and Peace Movement’s motto is “Active Woman, Effective Peace” with more than 60 peace mediators trained to operationalise woman peace agenda contributing for the building of 372 Peace Nucleus organised at district, community, and provincial levels.

Peace Nucleus serve as safe spaces for women to engage in dialogue, plan the implementation of the Women Peace Movement’s National Agenda, and promote the social and economic empowerment of women and their families. They also encourage the involvement of men in constructive discussions.

The Peace Nucleus are the safe spaces where women collaborate on plans for the movement’s sustainability and address challenges such as social conflict and economic livelihoods.

The Peace Nucleus safe space aim to increase women’s participation in local governance and decision-making processes while fostering self-esteem and a sense of agency among members.

The movement emphasises collective action and partnership-building to address shared challenges. Through its Peace “Nucleus” and use of digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, the WPM has expanded its reach, now engaging 10,098 members and followers. These efforts aim to amplify the voices of Mozambican women and strengthen their role in peacebuilding and community development.

*Ghanaian Female Police Officers Serving with the  
United Nations Mission in South Sudan .*  
© Isaac Billy/UNMISS





*A female police officer conversing with locals during a UN peacekeeping mission. © UN Photo/Marco Dormino*



# NETWORK OF ETHIOPIAN WOMEN'S ASSOCIATIONS (NEWA)



The Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations (NEWA) is a non-partisan and non-governmental pioneer national network that was founded in 2003, with a vision for the realization of gender equality and women empowerment. It currently has 38 member organisations. The Network has been integral to the establishment of the Ethiopian Women Peace Builders (EWPB), a network dedicated to promoting women's roles in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Through EWPB, NEWA has launched the Coffee for Peace initiative, a unique programme that utilises the traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony as a platform for community dialogues on peace. By leveraging this culturally significant ritual, the initiative has become a powerful tool for grassroots peacebuilding and conflict resolution efforts.

During the 1990s, the Ethiopian Women's Lawyers Association (EWLA) was a leading force in advocating for gender justice and legal reforms in Ethiopia. Their pioneering efforts laid the groundwork for the establishment of numerous women's organisations across the country, mobilising a growing movement for women's rights. In 2003, recognising the power of collective action and voice, these organisations united to form a common platform, which became the Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations. The national coalition aimed to create synergy of efforts for Ethiopian women and strengthen the women's movement by addressing systemic gender inequalities. According to NEWA's director, Saba Gebremedhin, women in the Network quickly realised the pervasive nature of patriarchy: "It is not only embedded in the cultural system but also in the formal system, including law enforcement and policy-making processes".

One of NEWA's core strategies has been to build the capacity of its member associations/organisations, empowering them to effectively address diverse issues affecting women and girls. This approach has enabled NEWA to support a wide range of initiatives, from combating harmful traditional practices to promoting girls' education and advancing women's economic empowerment. As Saba recalls: "From 2006, we established an advocacy group called Campaign Group against Gender-Based Violence-Ethiopia (CGBV-Ethiopia) that brought together all organisations, including women's associations, working on gender-based violence. This collaborative effort allowed us to coordinate the annual 16 Days of Activism campaign and drive other advocacy initiatives".

The year 2009 marked a critical turning point for NEWA with the introduction of the Charities and Societies Proclamation (No. 621/2009). This legislation imposed severe restrictions on

Ethiopian civil society organisations, prohibiting those engaged in human rights, women's rights, or conflict and peacebuilding advocacy from receiving foreign donor funding. Saba describes this period as a moment of profound challenge for NEWA, effectively splitting the network into two: organisations reliant on international funding and those focused on human rights work that had to depend solely on local resources. "At that time," she explains, "we faced a stark choice: either become a local network committed to advocating for women's rights, justice, and human rights or transform into a donor-dependent organisation that would be unable to speak out on these critical issues. We chose the path of advocacy, despite the financial difficulties, because we believed that women's rights could not be compromised".

NEWA's decision to no longer receive international funds allowed it to continue advocating openly for women's rights without compromising its mandate. But, NEWA's 42 registered member organisations faced a crossroads: some remained with NEWA, while others formed a new umbrella network called the Union of Ethiopian Women's Charitable Associations (UEWCA), which later became the Union of Ethiopian Women and Children Associations. UEWCA initially brought together nearly 30 organisations who continued to receive donor funding, reducing NEWA to only ten organisations. It was a challenging choice for NEWA, which had to downsize its operations, retaining just two professional associations, one disability-focused organisation, and seven grassroots groups.

Despite the significant sacrifice, Saba Gebremedhin remarked: "While it was a difficult decision, I'm glad we made it. It demonstrated NEWA's commitment to advancing women's rights in Ethiopia. We had to reduce our office size and staff. But, when the Charities and Societies Law was revised in 2019, we

started receiving international funds, and our membership grew back to 38 organisations".

Today, NEWA is selective in its membership, prioritising the strength of its collective voice over expanding numbers. Initially, NEWA did not focus extensively on peacebuilding, but this changed significantly after 2019 as conflicts erupted across different regions of Ethiopia. Following the outbreak of the Tigray War, the conflict spread to Amhara, Afar and the Oromia regions. Saba noted: "We saw widespread killings and displacements. Women were particularly vulnerable, and reports of violence, especially against young girls in displacement camps, were pouring in".

Even though NEWA applauded Ethiopia's political advances for women, including the appointment of a woman president, 50 per cent women in the cabinet and a woman Defence Minister, Saba observed that women were still often absent from key conflict resolution discussions. "These were victories we celebrated," Saba reflected, "but we soon realised that despite these gains, conflicts were devastating women, and their voices were absent from peace negotiations. That's when we decided to challenge the status quo and push for collective interventions for peace."

In response, women's organisations began offering shelter and support to survivors of sexual violence, such as women in the Benishangul region and later women fleeing the Tigray conflict. Survivors shared harrowing accounts of rape and abuse, prompting

NEWA to amplify their voices. Despite fears of being misunderstood, NEWA issued press statements highlighting the widespread violence, including reports of challenges of women giving birth due to destroyed healthcare facilities. NEWA called for peace and the necessary protection for women and children in conflict areas.

NEWA also organised some relief efforts, collecting food, clothing, and sanitary pads and spearheading the "Blanket for a Mom" initiative for displaced people, many of whom were living on the streets of Tigray without access to formal displacement camps. This solidarity initiative helped bridge the gap with Tigray-based organisations, who initially felt abandoned due to the communication blackout. Saba recalled: "They asked us why we didn't support them more. We explained that while we couldn't do as much as we wanted, we did advocate: we sent letters to the President, the Prime Minister's office, and the Human Rights Commission".

At the time, there were other processes intended to contribute to peace in the country. When the National Dialogue Commission was established in 2022, only three women were appointed among the 11 commissioners. Women organisations facilitated by TIMRAN, a local women's organisation, established the Coalition for Women's Voices and National Dialogue in collaboration with NEWA. This Coalition included women from conflict-affected regions like Tigray, Amhara, Afar, and Oromia, as well as representatives from civil society, the private sector, academia, and even Parliament. Saba highlighted: "It was a diverse mix, bringing together different perspectives on the conflict. It fostered solidarity while allowing us to express the traumas we witnessed. Hearing each other's stories created a sense of sisterhood, and the dialogue between younger and older generations facilitated an important inter-generational exchange. It helped us reflect on what Women, Peace, and Security truly means for us". There has even been efforts in organising group counseling sessions, for those coming from war-ridden regions to respond to their trauma and help them engage in meetings.

NEWA currently serves as the chair of the Coalition for Women's Voices and National Dialogue. The Coalition plays a pivotal role in training women across Ethiopia to become facilitators and mediators, equipping them with skills to lead discussions and advocate for gender-sensitive approaches in peace processes. The Coalition is also conducting parallel Women's National Dialogues in various regions, providing a platform for women's perspectives and priorities to be heard in national conversations. These dialogues are crucial in ensuring that women's voices are not only included but are central to shaping Ethiopia's peace and reconciliation agenda. Through these initiatives, NEWA demonstrates a strong commitment to empowering women as key agents of change in peacebuilding efforts across the country.



*Executive Director of the Network of Ethiopian Women's Association (NEWA), Saba Gebremedhin Hagos, delivering a speech at the national "Coffee for Peace" event. © Network of Ethiopian Women's Association (NEWA)*



*Network of Ethiopian Women's Association (NEWA) holding Inter-Regional "Coffee for Peace" Dialogue between Oromia and Somalia Region in September 2023. © Network of Ethiopian Women's Association (NEWA)*



*President of Ethiopia, Her Excellency Sable-Work Zewde and the Minister of Women and Social Affairs, Dr Ergo Tesfaye, NEWA Executive Director Saba Gebremedibin and NEWA staff at the inauguration ceremony of Ethiopian Women Peace Builders held on 21-23 June 2022 at UNECA. © Network of Ethiopian Women's Association (NEWA)*

In 2022, NEWA established the Ethiopian Women Peace-builders, a broad-based initiative bringing together women peacebuilders from every region of Ethiopia. EWPB includes members from diverse sectors, including universities, religious institutions, and grassroots communities. The organisation aims to enhance the capacity of women peacebuilders, coordinate their activities, and facilitate national, regional, and community-level actions to advance the Women, Peace, and Security agenda in Ethiopia. As part of this effort, NEWA provided training on peacebuilding, drawing on experiences from countries like South Sudan and Kenya. Women leaders from these regions shared their insights on what it means to be a peacebuilder and how to effectively engage in the WPS agenda.

One of the flagship initiatives of EWPB is the Coffee for Peace (*Bunna LeSelam*) programme, which has been implemented in various communities. The coffee ceremony holds significant cultural value in Ethiopia and is a lengthy, reflective process that fosters a conducive environment for meaningful conversation. The Coffee for Peace dialogues typically last two to three hours, during which women first identify their specific circumstances and unique conflict experiences. They then discuss the perceived causes of the conflict, propose potential solutions, and explore how women can actively participate in these processes. These conversations often provide perspectives that differ significantly from the narratives put forward by political actors. Additionally, Coffee for Peace facilitates cross-regional dialogue, enabling women from different

areas, neighbouring conflict areas, to come together and share their experiences. This approach shifts the focus from individual grievances to collective understanding, as women recognise that they are all affected by conflict and share similar struggles.

The initiative has not been confined to local communities; it has also been scaled up to the national level. Women from grassroots communities have shared their experiences and insights at federal forums. Initially, the Ethiopian Women Peacebuilders did not include participants from Tigray due to the ongoing conflict. However, efforts were made to extend the programme to Tigray, where NEWA conducted twelve days of trauma-healing sessions before initiating training on peacebuilding. The next phase of the project aims to implement Coffee for Peace dialogues within the Tigray region.

According to Saba, while many community members may not be formally educated on the WPS agenda, they inherently understand the need for conflict resolution and the importance of inclusive dialogue. The issues they raise are often aligned with the principles outlined in WPS frameworks. Women are eager to contribute but often feel that their voices are not taken seriously. Providing safe spaces like Coffee for Peace is thus crucial for amplifying their voices. She notes, "Engaging women and harnessing their knowledge is essential. Women must have a seat at the table, and their input should shape any dialogue and resolution efforts".

# PEACE FOR SUDAN PLATFORM



The Peace for Sudan Platform was established in response to the outbreak of conflict in April 2023 to allow women's organisations to communicate and coordinate their actions. While supported by UN Women during its establishment, the Platform is owned and led by Sudanese women. It is made up of 49 women-led organisations and peace initiatives from various regions in Sudan, including women-led humanitarian initiatives, women-led civil society organisations and women representatives of emergency rooms. The Platform unites activists, peace advocates and women's networks in opposition to the conflict.

The Peace for Sudan Platform's primary goal is to amplify the voices of Sudanese women at national, regional and global levels to end the conflict which erupted between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in 2023. The Platform advocates for sustainable peace, recognising that while women are the most vulnerable and severely affected by conflict, they have historically been excluded from formal peace processes in Sudan. It aims to challenge the male-dominated structures surrounding peace and security, advocating for a peace process that is inclusive of women and youth, and promotes equitable participation.

Members of the Peace for Sudan Platform actively contribute to advancing a holistic approach to women's roles in peace and security. Members' efforts and through their organisation all over Sudan, focus on providing essential support to victims and displaced women and girls, such as emergency shelter, food, water, sanitation, healthcare, and education. These activities are implemented both within Sudan and in neighbouring regions hosting refugee populations. These initiatives highlight the commitment of individual members. Their efforts contribute to addressing the immense needs of women and girls as a result of the conflict, and the members share and exchange information in the Platform, including their work on the ground. The members' initiatives support broader peace efforts, challenging traditional power dynamics and emphasising the inclusion of diverse voices. By focusing on capacity building, the Platform members strengthen their community-led initiatives, reinforcing trust and solidarity across regions.

The Platform's members divided themselves to work around ten issues including: humanitarian assistance, transitional justice, violence against women, displaced and refugees, political

participation, peace and social peace, social and economic issues constitution making and international laws, labour force laws and social security, and development issues. The decision-making structure is flat, and a small admin group has been created to communicate issues to the members.

## Strategies and Activities

The Platform focuses on collaborative efforts, engaging various women's networks to share knowledge and skills, and advocacy for peace, while individual members continue their activities inside Sudan and in diaspora. The Platform has produced statements and sent a comprehensive statement to the UN Secretary-General at the beginning of the war, highlighting the need for both warring parties to protect civilians and address violence against women and children, including sexual assault. The monitoring and reporting of one individual member in the Platform on human rights abuses, supported, among other actors, the deployment of the UN Fact-Finding Mission to Sudan to investigate violations against women. UN Women consults with the Platform members when preparing for its statement at the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Through the advocacy of one member in the Platform, the member's advocacy initiative efforts have also mobilised solidarity support from 95 women's organisations worldwide. Solidarity actions included demonstrations by women in Lebanon, press releases from women in Jordan and Syria, and the creation of a WhatsApp group titled "Solidarity with Women of Sudan Against the War". The platform also created a Facebook page.

## High-Level Advocacy and International Collaboration

The Platform actively engaged in high-level advocacy meetings



Peace for Sudan

and events to demand for peace and an end to the war. In May 2023, the Platform partnered with the African Union and UN Women and organised a virtual High-Level Meeting, which included prominent figures in the Women, Peace, and Security agenda, such as former Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Other significant events include the Kampala conference hosted by the African Union, UN and IGAD in October 2023 which resulted in the Sudanese Women Feminist Declaration; the Sudan Women's Peace Dialogue conference held in Kampala in July 2024, which was a collaboration with the UN and the African Union. The conference aimed to amplify women's voices, raise awareness, and increase their participation in Sudan's peace processes.

The Platform has faced significant challenges beyond the violence of the conflict itself. Women's groups are frequently marginalised in the few peace talks that took place. This exclusion undermines their ability to influence the Sudanese peace process, prompting the Platform to tirelessly advocate for and mobilise for women's involvement. Advocacy for peace in Sudan is also fraught with political and security risks. Women activists often face threats such as arrests, kidnappings, and intimidation by different actors. Since the 2021 military coup, Sudanese women's organisations have endured heightened suppression, further compounded by the escalation of conflict in 2023. These challenges severely limit their ability to effectively mobilise civil society and carry out peacebuilding activities.

Additionally, ongoing insecurity has drastically restricted access to humanitarian aid, particularly in areas like Darfur, where basic necessities such as healthcare, food, and safety are desperately lacking. Organisations working on the ground are often under-resourced, with insufficient infrastructure to effectively deliver advocacy, training, and support services.

Despite these obstacles, the Platform persists through international advocacy, community collaboration, and rigorous documentation to push for solutions to the conflict, capitalising on the different trainings and capacity development that the members of the Platform receive either inside and in diaspora, including training in negotiations and mediation skills that UN Women provide. The Platform empowers women to lead their own peace initiatives, challenging traditional gender norms and fostering a more inclusive and resilient civil society, even amidst Sudan's ongoing turmoil.

The Peace for Sudan Platform has worked to change the narrative of women's victimhood by empowering women, affirming their right to share their stories and vocalise their suffering, and demand protection and justice. It hopes to unite communities for the common cause of peace by recalling the slogan of the revolution: Freedom, Peace and Justice.



*Members of Peace for Sudan Platform and UN Secretary - General Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa Hanna Tetteh.*  
© Asba Hamad/ Peace for Sudan Platform



*Participants of the Sudan Women's Peace Dialogue, convened by the African Union Commission Chairperson H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat through the Office of the Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, and under the leadership of the AU High-Level Panel on Sudan (HLP-Sudan), held in Kampala on 3-4 July 2024. © African Union Commission*

Union Africaine 20 ANS

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# Africa Forum Women, Peace Security

ing on WPS monitoring to  
women's participation and  
ip in peace processes in





*Women in Uniform participants of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Africa Women, Peace and Security forum held at AUC Headquarters from 14 – 15 December 2022.*  
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© Penda Seck Diouf

# PENDA SECK DIOUF



Penda Seck Diouf is the President of the Monitoring Platform for Peace and Security (ËTTU JÀMM), which unites civil society organisations in efforts to mediate peaceful elections in Senegal and promote women's leadership in accessing decision-making positions. She is also the former president of the Comité de Lutte Contre les Violences Faites aux Femmes (CLVF:Committee to Combat Violence Against Women: CLVF). She also serves as the President of the Women's Initiative Group (GIF), a women's initiative on promoting gender in public policies, gender-based violence and sustainable development.

**S**eeing women who are victims of conflict, who are unaware of their rights, who are victims of gender-based violence and who are left to fend for themselves led me to say that we need to help, and I need to get involved in these issues. I saw that without peace, without stability, and without security, there can be no development and no empowerment of women. This made me become a militant for the elimination of gender-based violence.

I grew up in a big family in Thies, a region of Senegal, and from an early age, I felt compelled to challenge social injustice and discrimination. I witnessed scenes of injustice at school, where children often became victims of violence. Hardly a month would pass without hearing women screaming for help in their homes, victims of domestic violence.

At school, I was given a sense of responsibility at a very early age, and during the school holidays, I used to join local associations. This culture of community involvement greatly influenced me to join many organisations and networks later on, and I chose organisations that defended the rights of women and girls and fought against all forms of discrimination and violence. I have never put up with injustice, the trivialisation or marginalisation of a person, or the violation of their dignity.

In 1995, I founded the association NENUPHAR, which supports women struggling with addiction. The inspiration came from the experience of a close neighbour who had dropped out of college after being introduced to drugs. Female drug users are frequently marginalised, driven out of their homes, and left to fend for themselves on the streets, vulnerable to all forms of violence. NENUPHAR is the only organisation of its kind in Senegal, addressing a social problem that remains taboo and is typically approached through punitive measures. In many instances, drug use is deeply connected to gender-based violence.

I also serve as the President of the Monitoring Platform for Peace and Security (ËTTU JÀMM) initiated by H.E. Bineta Diop former Special Envoy to the African Union on Women, Peace, and

Security. ËTTU JÀMM promotes women's leadership in Senegal and has three main areas of intervention: mobilisation, mediation and monitoring. Additionally, I am the former President of the *Comité de Lutte Contre les Violences Faites aux Femmes* (CLVF), established in 1997 to support women affected by domestic violence and violence against children. I am also the President of *Group of women initiative on gender in public policies, gender-based violence, sustainable development* (GIF). I am an Inspector of Education and Animation, Sociologist of Development graduate of the Ecole Supérieure d'Economie Appliquée/Higher School of Applied Economics (ESEA), Dakar, specialised in Social and Educational Communication.

My academic and professional career has allowed me to move around a lot and to rub shoulders with many different societies. I immediately noticed that when there is a conflict, women and girls are the most affected. I also realised that women are mediators and that they can also make a huge contribution. I have been influenced by many important women: Bineta Diop, Professor Amsatou Sow Sidibé, President of the Senegalese Human Rights

*“My happiest moments are when we manage to reach out to women who have suffered violence and reintegrate them into society—telling them, "Yes! You have your place in society and shouldn't feel guilty about it. The person who should feel guilty is the perpetrator of the violence, the person who was at the root of the situation you're living through.”*

Committee, Professor Ndioro Ndiaye, former Minister for Women, the Family and Social Development. I have worked extensively with these inspirational muses on issues of peace, security and the protection of human rights, particularly women's human rights.

The place that left an indelible impact on me was Liberia. Èttu Jàmm organised dialogue sessions, and some of the women were victims of terrible violence. They were forced by the belligerents, for example, to have sexual relations in front of their children, and then the husband was killed on the spot. Not only were they raped, beaten, and humiliated, but in the end, when the husband or spouse or son was killed, the heart was removed, which they were forced to cook and eat. If they kill you, you're lucky. That's what a woman once said. The survivors are the unluckiest because they will no longer be human beings. We tried to bring these women back to life. But it is terrible; a woman's body is part of the

weapons of war, part of the battlefield, to humiliate the enemy.

As an activist and as a trainer, I have also had to deal with the big challenge of domestic violence in Senegal. In the domestic sphere, we find murder, battery, psychological violence, sexual violence, harmful practices and economic violence. All this and more can be a real obstacle to peace, social cohesion and women's freedom. And very often, people do not dare report this violence. Senegal's National Action Plan for the Eradication of Gender-Based Violence takes domestic violence, with all its consequences, very seriously and recommends that it be dealt with. But the domestic space is a protected space. We don't have the culture of denunciation, testimony and access to justice in this space, and this is a major challenge.

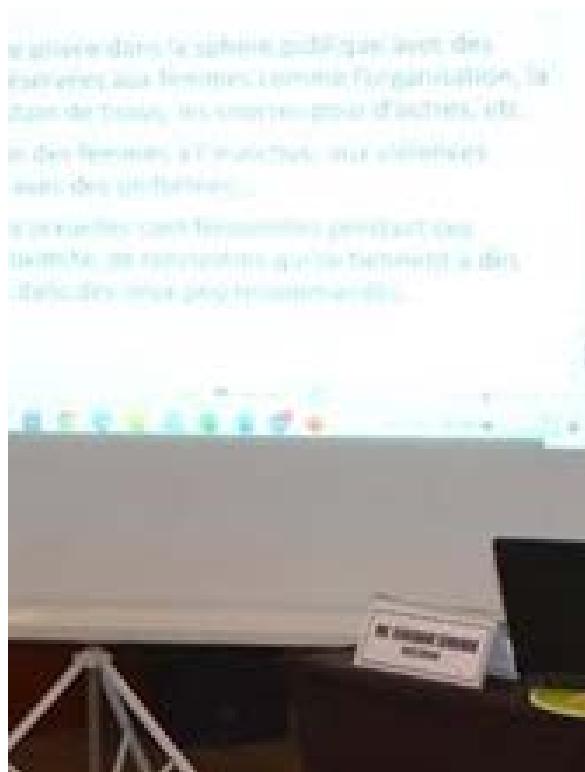
Violence cannot build a society, and gender-based violence is a violation of fundamental human rights and an affront to the



Penda Seck Diouf during an awareness campaign with traditional leader, King Sibilumbaï Diedbiou of Oussouye (Casamance), held on 28 January 2024. © ÈTTU JÀMM

principle of equality. Peace is not just the absence of war. Peace also means eliminating all forms of violence, particularly violence against women and girls—a real commitment to peace, security

and the elimination of gender-based violence. You cannot have peace and security when you are a victim of violence simply because you are a woman.



Penda Seck Diouf conducting a youth training on electoral observation in Dakar, held on 20 March 2024. © ÉTTU JÀMM

#### UNSCR 1325 – PARTICIPATION, PREVENTION, PROTECTION & RELIEF AND RECOVERY PILLARS

Penda Seck Diouf's involvement in grassroots organisations and her presidency of Éttu Jàmm and the *Comité de Lutte Contre les Violences Faites aux Femmes* reflect a steadfast commitment to amplifying women's voices in peacebuilding and decision-making processes. Through efforts to support survivors of gender-based violence, including women struggling with addiction and those affected by domestic violence, she works in forums that actively work to protect women's rights and dignity.

Penda's advocacy for legislative change and engagement with Senegal's National Action Plan aligns with the principle of preventing violence against women and fostering a culture of equality and justice. And her work with survivors of violence and her efforts to rehabilitate women affected by conflict demonstrate her dedication to recovery and healing. Her story highlights the intersection of justice, equality and peace, aligning deeply with the vision of UNSCR 1325.

# QUITERIA GUIRENGANE



Quiteria Guirengane, is a social and political activist committed to advancing the rights of women and youth. She was a youth Parliamentarian from 2008 to 2018 and is currently the Executive Secretariat of the Women's Observatory.

I am part of a new generation in Mozambique that was not engaged in the liberation war or the war for multi-party democracy. The Mozambican Parliament today only has about 17 per cent of parliamentarians are under the age of 35, which is a travesty in a country with almost 70 per cent of its population under 30. Young people can make a difference because we understand that education is politics, peace is politics, health is politics, and if we want to change our society, we need to be part of the solution.

We often hear that young people are not interested in politics. But Frantz Fanon once said that every generation must discover its mission, fulfil it, or betray it. This message is one that we, as young people, need to embrace. I believe I have a role in shaping new approaches to politics and inspiring my generation to believe that change is possible. That's why I decided to create a youth movement to contest seats in Parliament and take control of our own narrative.

I was born in Maputo on 3rd February 1990. Third February is significant in Mozambique because it marks the day that the architect of national unity, Eduardo Mondlane, was killed, and so it is called Heroes' Day. 1990 is special because it was the year when we approved the first democratic constitution of Mozambique. Although I grew up in a society where roles are divided between women and men, where there are expectations about what a man should do and what a woman should do, I have always been an activist. I started engaging through my church, and I was always someone who would question injustice and why society is divided.

I became involved in student politics while I was studying at the Eduardo Mondlane University, and it was my first experience of formal mobilisation. In 2007, I joined the Students' Association and became the head of academic affairs, fighting for

**“As young women we need to make sure that after opening the door we leave it open for more women to go through. When I started my activism people said I was not capable, but someone gave me this opportunity, and I must give the same opportunity to other young women. A lot of people have doubts about us because of our age and because of our gender. But I didn't come from any privilege, and I got here, and other young women can as well.”**

more academic support for students. However, I soon started feeling frustrated about the students' association because of the political control by the university. It became more about what the university told us to tell students, instead of being a voice for the students at the university. It was then that a friend introduced me to the Youth Parliament of Mozambique. Initially, I did not want to be a part of it, but I became interested in seeing if young people could have a space to dialogue, question, and monitor governance and assert their voices against marginalisation.

I stayed in the Youth Parliament Association for ten years, from 2008 until 2018, in different capacities. I led many campaigns, from monitoring elections and empowering young



© Quiteria Guirengane

people to vote, to organising leadership training programmes for youth, protests and marches, and promoting political dialogues across various groups. My last role was as the Program Manager of the Youth Parliament, and I managed projects in 132 districts of Mozambique. From each of these opportunities, I understood more of the challenges facing young people from different backgrounds and contexts. And I saw the privilege I had being a young woman from the capital city of the country compared to those from other districts of the country. It was through the Youth Parliament that I represented Mozambique at the First Young Leaders Forum organised by President Obama in the USA.

For a long time, Mozambique was held up as a model for stability in Southern Africa, and yet, ongoing military and political conflicts make peace an empty term. I always questioned: What does "peace" really mean? You cannot claim we are a peaceful country when there is an ongoing political-military conflict in the central region or violent extremism in the north. Can we claim peace when women in Tete Province are exploited, or when land is expropriated in Montepuez because of ruby mining?

Such disparities led me to initiate dialogues on women, peace and security. I became familiar with Resolution 1325 in 2010, when we established the Youth Parliament Association Female Front. We began discussing how women should be engaged in

peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peacebuilding. We highlighted that in every military conflict, including the central region, women are disproportionately victims of sexual abuse and exploitation. We also addressed how the amnesty law in Mozambique has overlooked crimes against women, perpetuating a culture of impunity, undermining both justice and peace.

In 2013, when RENAMO declared the 1992 General Peace Agreement void and reignited an insurgency against the FRELIMO administration, a mediation committee was formed. Yet, all representatives from the government, RENAMO, the mediators, and international observers were men. Not a single woman was included. We raised questions about this exclusion, and in 2015, in response to our pressure, they added one woman to each committee.

The lack of women's perspectives was evident during the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) process, where the so-called reintegration kit included just trousers, a t-shirt, and a belt. No consideration was given to what a woman might need to rebuild her life. I raised this issue of inclusion and how much more could have been done. Instead, we continue to move from one conflict to another, relying on technical peace agreements without addressing the deeper needs and voices of those affected.



I founded the Young Women Leaders Network, a large network bringing together young women from across the country, representing diverse political ideologies. The purpose of the network is to support and defend our rights as women. We are currently building a database of young women activists from various fields, including artists, community organisers, entrepreneurs, and scholars. This initiative also led to the creation of the Women's Observatory, which unites different civil society organisations advocating for women's rights. The Observatory focuses on monitoring the state of women's rights, tracking governance issues, engaging in strategic litigation, and advocating for gender equality.

In response to the escalation of militia attacks in Cabo Delgado in 2021, we launched the "Women Mourning" campaign. We decided not to celebrate National Women's Day on April 7th because we knew that many women were being killed, sexually abused, and exploited in Cabo Delgado. We called for everyone to dress in black and initiated a social media campaign to raise awareness.

To our surprise, the campaign gained significant traction. TV presenters appeared dressed in black, and we received numerous messages and photos of people participating in solidarity. When the President held the official ceremony at Heroes' Square, we noticed that much of the audience, including Samito Machel, the son of Mozambique's first President, was dressed in black. This visible show of support conveyed a strong message: it made no sense to celebrate Women's Day while women in Cabo Delgado were suffering so greatly.

Deploying more military personnel to Cabo Delgado will not solve the problem if we fail to address the root causes and understand the underlying factors driving the conflict. Women

in Cabo Delgado feel excluded, their land has been expropriated, and young people feel voiceless. These are all factors facilitating the spread of violent extremism. Our research has exposed widespread sexual harassment and the exploitation of women, who are often forced to trade sex for humanitarian aid.

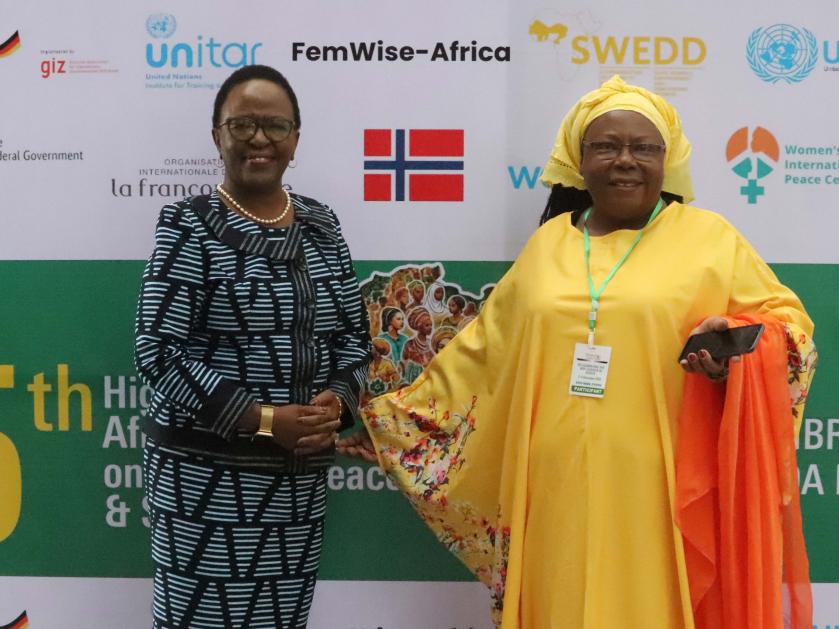
As the saying goes, "War is the place where young people who do not know each other fight at the command of older people who know each other, hate each other, but do not fight". Yet, many youth groups and associations, both formal and informal, are fighting for what they believe in: a fairer and better society. We, as young people, must seize the moment and write our own narrative.

**"Mozambique's main political groups, RENAMO (Mozambican National Resistance) and FRELIMO (Mozambique Liberation Front), have clashed repeatedly since the country achieved independence, the main parties in a Civil War which lasted from 1977–1992, and renewed violence in 2013. Women played central roles in both supporting and resisting the conflicts, often facing displacement and violence while also advocating for peace."**

#### UNSCR 1325 – PARTICIPATION & PROTECTION PILLARS

Quitéria Guirengane personifies the principles of UNSCR 1325 by championing women's meaningful inclusion and addressing the root causes of conflict through her advocacy. Her focus on addressing exclusion demonstrates a proactive approach to preventing renewed violence. Her advocacy for young women's inclusion in governance frameworks indirectly supports the protection pillar, as it aims to safeguard their rights and ensure that policies are responsive to their needs, reducing vulnerabilities in conflict-prone societies.

Quitéria also embodies the participation pillar through her assertion that young women's perspectives are essential for comprehensive peace processes. Her leadership emphasises that peace agreements lacking gender inclusivity fail to address critical social and cultural dimensions. Her commitment to resolving fundamental grievances, such as exclusion and dispossession, reflects the relief and recovery pillar, advocating for transformative and inclusive measures to rebuild communities and foster reconciliation.





*Pictures of the 5th Africa Women, Peace, and Security Forum held at AUC Headquarters from 5-6 December 2024.*  
© African Union Commission





© Samia Argawi

# SAMIA ARGAWI

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Samia Argawi is a Sudanese lawyer and a member of the Peace for Sudan Platform, a peacebuilding initiative by Sudanese women-led organizations.

For many years, I have opposed the human rights violations committed by the Sudanese government. I was born in Khartoum, Sudan, and raised in a humble home. After my father's death when I was seven, my mother had to raise eight children as a single parent. Despite our challenges, she valued education and inspired me to work hard. Her courage and determination remain my greatest influences.

Defying the cultural norms that discourage women from travelling alone, I pursued a law degree at Beirut Arab University in Alexandria, Egypt, with my mother's unwavering support. My activism had already begun in secondary school, during former President Gaafar Muhammad an-Nimeiry's regime, when I joined the student union and demonstrated against his dictatorship and other injustices in the country. But at university, my activism intensified after I connected with South Sudanese students. I learnt from them of the disproportionate suffering of women and children during the second Sudanese civil war in the south of the country. This further fuelled my commitment to stand up against injustice.

I have been arrested several times for my activism. The first time I was arrested in 2013, because I defended hundreds of demonstrators and successfully petitioned Parliament for their release. As a result, alongside two other lawyers, I was detained in the Omdurman Women's Prison, a facility notorious for holding female political prisoners.

My second arrest came in January 2013 after a demonstration against a provincial budget. This time I was held for 38 days. In 2018, I was again arrested for my involvement in opposition activities, defending people's rights and writing on Facebook about oppression and enforced disappearances. My activism also led to frequent interrogations and harassment by the security forces. I was questioned multiple times for defending women targeted for their dress or beaten by police, culminating in daily

**“I left Sudan with just the clothes on my back, and I am now a refugee in Uganda. By the time I left, my house was looted, my offices too and my car. I have lost everything. But as soon as the war ends, I will go back home. I hope I can go home soon.”**

interrogations by December 2018. My family and acquaintances were also harassed.

Women played a critical role in the revolution that overthrew Omar al-Bashir in 2019. We were equally involved in demanding representation during the 2020 peace negotiations in Juba, South Sudan. The October 2020 peace agreement reflected women's advocacy, incorporating more gender-sensitive provisions. During Track One negotiations (the main negotiations), women made 10 per cent of the negotiation team. Women NGOs participated in Track Two in Juba and advocated for women's agenda for peace. This inclusive representation significantly influenced the agreement's gender-related provisions.

When conflict broke out in April 2023, I joined the Peace for Sudan Platform, which set out to unite women against the violence. We support survivors of gender-based violence and demand an end to the targeting of women human rights defenders. Khartoum was divided into three areas after the outbreak of conflict, and I was forced to move frequently to avoid the bombings. While on the move, I stayed in touch with other

women, listening to their issues. Many called on me for help, whether trying to find them life-saving medicines or assistance in escaping dangerous areas. I remember a woman calling at one in the morning because her daughter had been raped, and militias threatened to return. I coordinated with doctors, arranged for money to be sent, and helped the woman and her daughters escape Khartoum.

Eventually, after receiving many calls that threatened me with rape and death, I decided to leave. Disguised in a black

veil, I covered my face and made my way to Port Sudan before entering Uganda. But even now, I cannot rest until there is peace in Sudan. We must continue to work together to bring back security, peace, and the establishment of a civil state where all citizens are equal, and opportunities are available to everyone, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, or tribe. Sudan is my country, and I feel a deep responsibility to do more for my people.



Samia participating in a rally against arbitrary arrest of citizens in Sudan. © Samia Argawi



Samia Argawi moderating a workshop organised by IGAD to support the participation of Sudanese women in the Sudan peace process, held in Nairobi, 2024. © Samia Argawi

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#### UNSCR 1325 – PROTECTION, PREVENTION, PARTICIPATION & RELIEF AND RECOVERY PILLARS

Samia Argawi's activism aligns strongly with the WPS agenda by advancing its four pillars: protection, participation, prevention, and relief and recovery.

Her work underscores protection as she defends women against state violence, harassment, and gender-based discrimination, fighting for their safety and rights. Samia's activism embodies prevention by challenging systemic injustices in Sudan and highlighting the impact of conflict on women. Through relief and recovery efforts, Samia aids survivors by documenting their experiences and advocating for international support. Her engagement with UN committees fosters actions to assist victims and prevent further harm, demonstrating a holistic commitment to the WPS agenda.

# DR TIMIEBI KORIPAMO-AGARY



Dr Timiebi Koripamo-Agary is a gender activist, mediator, and expert on labour and conflict issues. She is leading women's efforts in peacebuilding in the Niger Delta and has over 45 years of experience in the public and private sectors in Nigeria.

In all my work, I prioritise women's voices and advocate for policies that address their specific concerns. Although I've worked nationally and internationally, my current priority is Women, Peace and Security in the Niger Delta.

My commitment to peacebuilding was shaped by the Biafra War of 1967 to 1970, which I experienced personally as a young woman. During the war, I saw the hardships families faced and the trauma young girls endured as they were uprooted, exploited, and traumatised. In Escravos, now Delta State, I was detained by Nigerian soldiers, who accused me of being an informant for the other side. Luckily, a soldier from my community recognised my family name, sparing me from an uncertain fate. Although I was fortunate, I saw enough to understand the severe lifelong toll of conflict on women and girls. After the war, it was devastating to witness the lives of young girls left shattered: abandoned with children, broken, and with nothing to their names.

These experiences made me resolute in my commitment to protect women and girls from the horrors of war. The Nigerian Civil War was especially painful as it fractured communities along ethnic lines, turning friends into enemies. It led me to pledge to intervene, whenever possible, to support women, protect girls, and prevent violence from inflicting such profound physical, emotional, and psychological pain. I also sought to prevent minor conflicts from escalating into violence, arms proliferation, and, eventually, a full-scale crisis.

My career primarily unfolded in the formal sector, working for the government. My introduction to gender advocacy came in 1989 when I participated in the Africa Regional Conference of Women, organised by the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). This eventually led me to the 1995 Beijing conference as part of the Nigerian government delegation. There, I saw women from all over the world converging to demand equality,

**“Women in the Niger Delta bear the brunt of conflict, poverty, and environmental crisis, and their issues must be heard and addressed in any sustainable peace effort. I have made it my mission to encourage, advise, and support women and girls however I can.”**

peace, and development and uniting to face shared challenges: it was powerful. I was subsequently posted to the Ministry of Labour, where I developed an interest in peacebuilding through constructive negotiations.

Over the years, I have engaged with labour leaders, peace panels, and government programmes like the Niger Delta amnesty and post-election violence panels. In all my work, I advocate for the inclusion of women and children in finding solutions. On panels predominantly composed of men, I championed the needs of women, focusing on education and healthcare access. This reinforced my resolve, rooted in my experiences during the Nigerian War, to resist injustice.

In 1999, there was a military incursion in a community in Odi in Bayelsa State, which is where I'm from. Militants wreaked havoc in my community by harassing people until the women decided that they'd had enough. One day, the women rose in



© Dr Timiebi Koripamo-Agary

“The Niger Delta region of Nigeria has long been a hotspot for political instability and conflict. Despite the region’s vast oil wealth, conflicts have developed over resource control, environmental degradation, and the marginalisation of local communities. Armed militancy, inter-communal clashes, and youth unemployment have exacerbated tensions, challenging governance and sustainable development efforts in the area.”



© Dr Timiebi Koripamo-Agary

protest, determined to resist the violence that threatened their safety. In a powerful demonstration, they stood up to the militants. Their courage contributed to a period of peace in the community and highlighted the power of the collective.

My work in peacebuilding included the Ogoni oil crisis cleanup. A 2011 study showed that oil extraction in Ogoniland had led to severe and widespread contamination of soil and groundwater. Recognising the devastation this caused for women, I campaigned for their economic empowerment as a member of the Governing Council of the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP). This included support for technical training, alternative cooking methods, and income-generating skills for women who lost their husbands due to oil pollution.

In 2008, a serious crisis was unfolding in the Niger Delta, marked by pipeline bombings, kidnappings, and escalating militancy. In response, the government established the Presidential Panel on Amnesty and Disarmament of Niger Delta, and I was appointed as the Media Coordinator and as a community liaison. I met directly with the militants at the grassroots level, persuading them to accept the amnesty offer, emphasising that this path was far better than risking their lives. Coming from the Niger Delta and speaking the local language allowed me to connect with the militants on a personal level and build trust. I have maintained these relationships, and whenever tensions arise, I remind them of the importance of peace.

But in the Niger Delta, many women have reached a breaking point. They’re tired of being poor, hungry, and scared for their children’s futures, and more and more are standing up, speaking

out, and challenging the people who disrupt their peace. Recently, a young girl in the community openly defied a notorious militant leader, saying she was tired of him sexually harassing, exploiting, abusing and assaulting women and offering them small sums of money as compensation. She publicly demanded to go to school or learn a trade. Her courage represents the rising determination among women to stand up for themselves and their communities.

While women in the Niger Delta are ready to resist, they often lack support. Power dynamics continue to favour men, and even those of us in government circles often hesitate to speak out. It's a challenge, especially for women in rural areas who have no access to education and who have been deeply conditioned by patriarchy. I continue to encourage them to speak up and defend themselves, and I've recently started working directly with girls in secondary school, discussing ways to protect themselves.

In my experience working in peace and security, while women and children are the most affected by violence, some women also knowingly enable or even profit from conflict. However, this is something we never talk about. It's complex, but we know some women might benefit from it indirectly through the money or goods brought in by their husbands or children. They are also involved in transporting arms. It's easier for them to befriend soldiers or police officers so they can move through checkpoints easily. I'm working toward addressing this complex role women play, empowering them to recognise both their vulnerabilities and their potential for change.

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#### UNSCR 1325 – PREVENTION, PARTICIPATION, PROTECTION AND RELIEF AND RECOVERY PILLARS

Dr Timiebi Koripamo-Agary's work exemplifies the core principles of UNSCR 1325, particularly in advocating for women's active participation in peacebuilding and addressing their unique vulnerabilities during conflict. Her unwavering dedication to amplifying women's voices in peace panels, amnesty programmes, and local protests embodies the resolution's call for the meaningful inclusion of women in peace and security processes.

By emphasising the disproportionate impact of war on women, her advocacy focuses on the need for gender-sensitive conflict prevention measures. Her insights highlight the importance of addressing structural inequalities and systemic violence that make women particularly vulnerable in times of conflict, ensuring prevention strategies are inclusive and responsive. Her recognition of the long-lasting consequences of war on women resonates with WPS's relief and recovery pillar. Advancing initiatives that address the socio-economic impacts of conflict on women can foster a more holistic recovery.



© Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff

# YASMIN JUSU-SHERIFF



Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff is a prominent Sierra Leonean human rights lawyer, activist, and campaigner for women's rights. Yasmin has held the positions of Vice Chair of the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) and Regional President of the Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET). She served on the board of Femmes Africa Solidarité and was a founding member of Legal Access through Women Yearning for Equal Rights and Social Justice" (LAWYERS). She was also Executive Secretary for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Sierra Leone, Vice President of Women Organised for a More Enlightened Nation (WOMEN), and Coordinator for the Network for the Promotion of African Principles of Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation.

I am a Sierra Leonean lawyer and activist, and I have campaigned for women's rights and equity since the early 1990s. From an early age, my parents instilled in me the principle of standing up for the powerless. After I qualified as a lawyer, my mother would often send women and girls my way, seeking help with a range of problems. It became clear to me that many women were suffering in silence, and I realised the urgent need for collective action to address their struggles. As a lawyer, I knew I had a platform to speak out, and that's what I have chosen to do for the last four decades!

When Sierra Leone's Civil War broke out in 1991, I dedicated my skills to supporting other women. The conflict affected all of us regardless of wealth, education and status. We quickly recognised that the military leadership offered nothing but violence, so we organised ourselves as women to demand a role in shaping the peace process. As the conflict escalated, we began hearing harrowing accounts from displaced women fleeing the war-torn southeastern districts of Kono and Kailahun. Their stories opened our eyes and prompted us to ask, "What can we women do together?"

In 1994, Zainab H. Bangura and I formed the organisation WOMEN (a member of the Women's Forum network) and began campaigning for a return to civilian rule. Under the repressive one-party state which was in place from the 1970s to the early 1990s, Sierra Leoneans had lost their voices, but the Forum became a space for mobilisation, radicalisation, and empowerment of women. We built on the strength of existing networks that had been active across the country even before the war, including the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), Muslim and Christian women's groups, and the Women's

Association for National Development (WAND). Our meetings, radio and TV programmes highlighted and analysed the dire situation of women and children in violent conflict, inspiring even more people to speak out. Our lobbying increased the number of women delegates at the Bintumani One and Two national conferences, and the women's interventions and written submissions turned the tide of opinion in favour of democratic elections going ahead. We were not overtly political, but we found our voice. By organising campaigns that were non-partisan and non-confrontational, we opened public debate on contentious issues.

We championed the active participation of women in all aspects of the landmark 1996 elections process as voter registration officers, polling centre staff, independent election observers, candidates and, above all, as voters on election day. After Ahmad Tejan Kabbah was elected President, alongside other women in the Forum, we coordinated efforts to increase women's representation in government. One of our first achievements was the creation of a Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs with Amy Smythe as the Minister. I firmly believe that women need to be part of the leadership responsible for delivering material welfare and protection. However, women in parliament and local government must remain connected to the constituencies that elected them.

I vividly recall taking Bineta Diop, who had requested to meet Shirley Gbujama, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, in late 1996. Mrs Gbujama correctly remarked, "Do you know this is the first time my nieces, the women of Sierra Leone, have come to see me since my appointment?" Her words struck a chord. By ascending to a ministerial position, we assumed she had become distant, part of the establishment. She confided, "There are times I need



*Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff, Executive member of the Forum Against Harmful Practices (FAHP), speaking at the official opening of a new primary school built on the site of a former Bondo Busg, where traditional FGM was once carried out on underage girls. © FAHP 2023*

someone to remind me of these issues". It was a stark reminder of the importance of staying connected and accountable to our sisterhoods, even when occupying positions of power.

The re-emergence of civil war in Sierra Leone in 1999 set me back on a personal level, especially after we had worked so hard to push for peace talks. When the rebels invaded again, it was devastating, but I realised that peacebuilding is a long-term process. You must step back and see the bigger picture. Because we pushed for "Elections Before Peace", armed men burned down our law office. They called it "the building where these women talk a lot". Despite the setback, I continued organising. As long as you stay true to the mission and the vision, you'll be surprised at what you can accomplish.

During Sierra Leone's conflict, we came face-to-face with the realities of displacement. Thousands of people fled from rural areas into Freetown, seeking refuge from the violence. Although I had studied the 1951 Refugee Convention, nothing prepared me for the harsh reality on the ground. It was the women who bore

the brunt of the crisis; they fled with their children, constantly moving in search of safety.

I recall a young woman who had been chased by the war from Liberia to Sierra Leone and then to a refugee camp in Guinea, where we met. She suggested that the solution lay in women from all three countries uniting to stop the violence. Her words, among others, inspired the creation of the MARWOPNET in May 2000. The roots of MARWOPNET also go back to the mid-1990s when I first connected with Femmes Africa Solidarité and met Bineta Diop and Marie Louise Baricako. They were already thinking of forming a network to amplify women's voices at the leadership level, including with the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), as it was known then. Almost 25 years later, despite existential challenges, MARWOPNET continues its sub-regional early warning and peacebuilding work with women in border communities across the Mano River Union.

The focus must always be on creating real, positive, incremental changes for ordinary women through collaboration

whenever opportunities arise. The HRCSL, in its inaugural 2007 State of Human Rights Report, publicly and controversially declared the very high rates of maternal mortality to be a violation of women's Right to Life by the government of Sierra Leone. As a result, in 2010, pregnant women were included in the government's landmark free health care initiative.

Through the work of LAWYERS, we have campaigned for women's rights to be upheld by the state, including the passage and implementation of the three transformative 'Gender Justice' Laws in 2007: the Domestic Violence Act, the Devolution of Estates Act and the Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act.

As a result of the 50/50 Group of Sierra Leone, we pushed the government to pass the Public Elections Act of 2022, which implemented a 30 per cent quota for women in parliament and local government. This was achieved in the 2023 general elections! However, quotas are not enough. We need concrete resources and policies that address the everyday struggles women face. Advancing women's rights is a continuous battle. The maintenance of unity of purpose and solidarity among women is key to continuing progress for all.

I firmly believe that the Women, Peace, and Security agenda is fundamental for building a true democracy. Making it effective is critical, even though I admit I'm uncertain about the exact path forward. We must keep working. Much of what we did in Sierra Leone was about linking grassroots communities with national and international decision-makers. While we have made significant progress, the work is far from over. Achieving the goals of WPS remains vital, even in the absence of open conflict. We cannot afford to give up, and we must ensure that those we elect to represent us take WPS issues seriously and are committed to driving lasting change.



*Mrs Gladys Jusu-Sheriff (left) is honoured as a founding and continuing member of the Women's Forum since 1994, alongside her daughter, Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff (right), who is recognised for WOMEN's role in the restoration of civilian rule (1994-1996) and for MARWOPNET's subregional contribution to peace in the Mano River Union. December 2014. © Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff*

#### UNSCR 1325 – PARTICIPATION AND PROTECTION PILLARS

Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff's activism exemplifies the principles and goals outlined in UNSCR 1325, as she worked tirelessly to ensure that women in Sierra Leone were not only protected but actively involved in peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction.

Jusu-Sheriff's experiences as a lawyer and peace advocate resonate deeply with each of the resolution's four pillars, highlighting both the importance of UNSCR 1325 and the challenges in fully implementing it.



*Participants of the Women, Peace, and Security Conference, organised by the British Peace Support Team Africa, held in Nairobi, Kenya, from 12-14 March 2025. © British Peace Support Team (Africa) / Millicent Muriithi*



# ZAHRA MOHAMED AHMED



Zahra Mohamed Ahmed is a Somali lawyer, human rights defender, and an advocate for peace. She is the founder and Chief Executive Director of the Somali Women's Development Centre (SWDC), the visionary behind HINNA (Women Pioneers for Peace and Life) and the chairperson of the Somali chapter of the African Women's Leaders Network (AWLN).

**W**itnessing the suffering of women in Somalia compelled me to take action, and for over two decades, I have been dedicated to defending human rights in my country. I currently serve as the Chief Executive Director of the Somali Women's Development Centre (SWDC), which I founded in 2000. Among our key initiatives, we provide legal aid to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), women on remand, and those in pre-trial detention.

After the outbreak of civil war in Somalia in 1991, I was forced to flee to Tanzania with my husband and five infant children. We returned to Somalia in 2000 after the establishment of the Transitional National Government. I felt a profound sense of duty to contribute to rebuilding my country, which had been devastated by the conflict. Hospitals were closed, schools had shut down, and girls faced early and forced marriages. While my children had access to education in Tanzania, countless Somali children were denied this basic right. Driven by the desire to empower women and restore communities, I founded HINNA (*Haweenka Horseedka Nabadda and Nolosha*/Women Pioneers for Peace and Life) in 2003. This grassroots organisation began with 60 women committed to advocating for a peaceful and rights-respecting Somalia.

Our efforts included fundraising to open hospitals and schools and initiating dialogues with warlords to curb violence. Young girls forced into early marriages often suffered from conditions like fistula, so we campaigned to provide them with much-needed assistance. In 2007, we secured support from the African Union and the United Nations Population Fund UNFPA, which provided two doctors to help Somali women with reproductive health. From 2013 onward, the country made significant progress in reopening hospitals in Mogadishu, laying the foundation for improved healthcare and support for women and children.

**“Somali women have played a pivotal role in the agenda of peace in Africa, particularly during the transition period in Somalia. We advocated and made the popular phrase ‘put down your guns and pick up the pen’.”**

**“My son was killed, but I had the courage to continue because so many other women had lost their husbands or children. For this reason, I continue to strive for peace.”**

Throughout my career, I have worked with various organisations, including the Coalition of Grassroots Women's Organisations (COGWA), which provide capacity building, information sharing and networking for Somali women. Women in this region have a crucial role in supporting each other and fostering peace in their communities. As mothers and caregivers, we naturally tend toward peace and stability.

In 2010, I founded the Somali Women Development Centre (SWDC) in Mogadishu, where I serve as the legal advisor and director. SWDC has focused on rebuilding communities in Somalia by promoting women's human rights. We advocate for women's access and participation in politics and for women to mediate with clan elders on issues affecting them. Additionally,



© Zabra Mohamed Ahmed



*Inauguration ceremony of Mama Zabra Mohamed Ahmed, who was elected as the AWLN Chairperson, alongside First Lady Madam Sabra Omar. This event took place in Mogadishu, on 4 March 2024. © SWDC*

“Zahra is a distinguished leader and advocate for women’s empowerment. In 2021, she was honoured with the prestigious Secretary of State’s International Women of Courage Award. In 2022, she received the Somali Women Leadership Award, and in 2024, she was nominated to the global Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Women’s Advisory Group, further cementing her role as a champion for gender equality and protection.”

we provide emergency response services for victims of sexual violence. One of our significant achievements has been the establishment of Somalia’s first free hotline service to combat sexual and gender-based violence. We have also created one-stop centres for survivors of sexual violence, where counselling, medical care, and legal representation are provided, as well as a safe house for those in need.

Somali women continue to face immense challenges following the conflict, which saw the collapse of the rule of law. Also, with many families left without fathers or eldest sons, women had to step in as providers. To address this, I began advocating for universities in Somalia to support the training of female lawyers. Today, many of our alumni hold prominent positions in the judicial sector, including one of our staff members who now presides over the Somali Bar Association. I also offer internship opportunities to top-performing women law students from the university, who often join the SWDC as paralegals.

Another significant initiative that I, along with other Somali women, spearheaded was advocating for the training and recruitment of women into the police force. This led to



*Mama Zabra Mohamed Ahmed conducting a training session on Women, Peace, and Security with a group of young women from various regions of Somalia. This session aimed to empower participants with knowledge and skills to advocate for peace and security, held in September 2024. © AWLN Somalia.*

establishing the first Women's Policing Community Unit with funding from UNDP. We have also organised programmes for youth largely neglected due to the civil war. Many young people in Somalia have never experienced good governance and are unaware of their human rights.

Defending human rights in Somalia comes with significant risks. The country consistently ranks at the top of the global Fragile States Index, making our work dangerous. Some of our activists at SWDC have been arrested, and we frequently receive death threats from unknown sources. In 2013, Al Shabaab killed two of our lawyers in an attack on the Banadir Regional Court in Mogadishu, which claimed 29 lives. These lawyers had been providing legal support to survivors of sexual violence and advocating for those exposed to rape among Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps. Despite these dangers, we remain committed to the defence of the rights of our people.

I hope that we will achieve an environment in Somalia that nurtures peace. For this to happen, we must promote good governance and empower women and youth to participate in politics. This is the only way to realise true democracy and societal development. Additionally, access to microfinance is crucial for women to enter the marketplace. We also need to create more employment opportunities for women; many hold degrees and master's qualifications but cannot find jobs. Above all, the Somali people deserve to have their human rights respected and upheld. I dream of an end to violence against women.

#### **UNSCR 1325 – PREVENTION, PARTICIPATION, PROTECTION AND RELIEF AND RECOVERY PILLARS**

As a peace advocate, Zahra Mohamed Ahmed's life's work aligns with the UNSCR 1325 mandate, specifically by involving women in justice reform and peace processes. Ahmed's initiative to train female lawyers and recruit women in policing directly addresses UNSCR 1325's calls for women's leadership and inclusion in security sectors. She also emphasises women's leadership and decision-making in rebuilding communities, supporting education, and promoting peace.

Her advocacy for SGBV survivors and focus on youth engagement reflects a deep understanding of UNSCR 1325's emphasis on protecting women's rights and promoting inclusivity in peacebuilding and the need to be intergenerational by including the various sectors, including youth.

The establishment of Somalia's first free hotline service to combat sexual and gender-based violence and the creation of one-stop centres for survivors of sexual violence give practical expression to the aspirations of the relief and recovery pillar and context-specific responses.



© UN Women/ Nilsa Zibane Ribeiro

# ZARETA BUEZA

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Zareta Bueza is a Women, Peace and Security activist from Mozambique. She is a prominent and respected community facilitator, peace activist, and local leader in Gorongosa, a district in Sofala province.

My motivation to fight for change stems from the violence I have experienced firsthand. Growing up in a community deeply affected by the civil war left me with both physical and emotional scars. It tore apart our once peaceful community, affecting every aspect of my life, from my education to my ability to find work and live in peace.

I was born on June 1, 1983. From a young age, I struggled to accept injustice, but even within my own home, I had to deal with violence. My husband was abusive towards me, and I suffered both physically and emotionally. When I tried to run away and seek refuge with my family, they sent me back, citing cultural norms that tied me to him because he had paid them the bride price. At the time, I believed that violence was simply a part of life.

In March 2017, everything changed when I joined a women's group focused on peace and security. This was a turning point. Life had been difficult, but through my involvement, I learnt that women could and should live autonomously. I started attending trainings on gender-based violence, human rights, and women, peace, and security, organised by various organisations, including UN Women. Gaining this knowledge gave me the confidence to become a peace activist, facilitator, and community speaker.

Since 2018, I have led over 65 community awareness sessions on Women, Peace, and Security across Gorongosa, reaching more than 619 women and men, including community leaders. Despite criticism, some in my community thought I was "too much" for a woman, I persisted. My determination earned me the respect of local authorities, and today, I am invited to district government sessions to share my insights.

Through my activism, I realised that many women in other districts were also suffering from violence. I wanted to help them, and I incorporated UNSCR 1325 into my work in order to protect women, prevent violence, and support their recovery. To

I started talking to women, and I said: "Women! We have to be strong enough to stop the violence. We think women don't have rights, but we have an important role in society."

empower them economically, I helped establish savings groups where women could start small businesses like selling fruits and sweet potatoes. I established 68 places for women to participate in economic development initiatives and supported efforts to improve their livelihoods. When peace efforts progressed, many women were able to access legal documents, such as birth certificates and identification cards. In my community, women traditionally don't own land; it belongs to the men. However, I advocated for women to gain access to land and helped them register land in their names.

I also campaigned for women's leadership and political participation. When I noticed that women were excluded from election campaigns, I worked with the government and local leaders to change that. I even travelled to Maputo to meet with the President, asking for his intervention to empower women, especially those who had suffered during the war. I had several close encounters with death, where armed men would threaten me, but I always believed I wouldn't be killed because my mission was to bring peace to the community.

Despite not being educated when I started to speak out, I always sought ways to communicate my ideas. I often asked others to write letters for me, including one to the government demanding peace. I remember going to the main government office and shouting: "We need peace, we need peace, we need peace". I asked why the government doesn't empower women when we fight together for peace. Most of the women suffered or were raped during the war: why the discrimination?

And it is never too late to get an education! In 2023, I completed grade nine, and am now in grade 10. I can read and write very well, and I speak Portuguese fluently. I encourage other women to return to school, as education is vital for their lives.

Now things are changing in our community. Many women are fleeing violence, and they now understand that violence against them and their daughters is a crime. They know where to report it, and men are increasingly afraid of abusing their wives. Today, I am proud of the progress I have made and the impact my work has had on my community. I am grateful for my education and continue to encourage others to pursue theirs because it is essential for a better future.



Zureta Bueza at Women, Peace and Security Conference in Cabo Delgado, Pemba, 2022. © UN Women/ Celma Costa

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**UNSCR 1325 – PREVENTION, PARTICIPATION, PROTECTION AND RELIEF AND RECOVERY PILLARS**

Zareta Bueza's work in Mozambique illustrates the principles of Participation, Protection, Prevention, and Relief and Recovery outlined in UNSCR 1325. By leading over 65 community awareness sessions on Women, Peace, and Security, Zareta has empowered women to take active roles in decision-making and peace processes, challenging systemic exclusion and promoting gender equality.

Zareta's efforts focus heavily on protecting women from violence and addressing the systemic barriers that perpetuate abuse. Drawing from her personal experiences, she educates communities on the criminality of gender-based violence and provides support for victims. Her prevention work is evident through her identification of the structural inequalities facing women.

Through initiatives that support economic empowerment, legal advocacy, and education, Zareta embodies the relief and recovery pillar of UNSCR 1325. Her work helps women rebuild their lives by starting small businesses and securing legal documentation. By encouraging education for women and girls, she provides tools for long-term recovery and resilience, breaking cycles of poverty and dependence and paving the way for sustainable peace in her community.

# ZEINAB ABDULLAHI



Zeinab Abdullahi is a peace activist from Garissa, Kenya. She is the founder of INUA, an organisation which aims at empowering young girls on issues such as gender-based violence, adolescence and early marriage. She is also the founder of The Afnan Women's Initiative(TAWI). Zeinab is a poet/writer and has published the book *"Ripples That Rain"*, which reflects on her struggles as an activist and the enduring power of love and compassion.

Part of my motivation for speaking out against injustice stems from my own experience as a survivor of sexual and gender-based violence. In my community, issues like rape and sexual violence are taboo, and survivors face stigma, shame, and fear. Rape cases are often referred to the *Maslaha* dispute resolution system, where elders negotiate a compensation fee from the perpetrator. This is usually livestock or money and effectively silences the victim. Sometimes, a rape leads to cycles of "revenge rapes" where a girl's family would retaliate by raping a girl from the perpetrator's family, further entrenching violence and neglecting the needs and voices of the survivors. Justice for the girls is non-existent in these cases.

My activism journey began at school when I was just fourteen years old, as several girls I knew were suffering in silence. At that time, girls in my region were forbidden from discussing issues such as gender-based violence, forced early marriage, and the right to education. When we began speaking together, we realised that many girls had suffered abuse but couldn't speak about it. Some girls carried the trauma of brutal rape, and many struggled with suicidal thoughts. Initially, our activism was informal—sharing our stories in safe spaces at school.

In 2012, these conversations inspired me to found an organisation called INUA, meaning "uplift" in Swahili, with fellow schoolgirls. Together, we advocated for girls' education, fought against forced early marriage, and championed sexual reproductive health rights. After two years, we began to also involve girls who had already left school. Our supportive school principal even provided an office for me within the school where girls could anonymously share their struggles.

**“Don’t be like the thunder or the storm.  
Be like the rain, which silently whispers  
hope, growth and life, with each ripple  
shimmering a calming sensation.”**

But before I became an activist, I was already reflecting on social issues through poetry and storytelling, and I would recite my poems in class. Growing up in a very small village where many lived a nomadic lifestyle, I witnessed young girls being beaten, forced into marriages with older men, and even subjected to torture. At just seven years old, I saw a 12-year-old girl tortured for three days because she resisted marriage to an older man. The incident, which involved one of my family members, traumatised me, prompting me to write a short story about it. My writing became my voice, a way to express the injustices I saw around me.

Breaking social taboos, such as discussing gender-based violence, early marriage, and female genital mutilation, led to a backlash against me. But I refused to stay silent and wanted women to unite to bring attention to issues harming girls. Speaking out was initially a challenge, as my family disapproved. People in the community pressured my parents to silence me, as my activism threatened their views. Despite this, my father eventually encouraged me to stand up for what I believed in.



© Zeinab Abdullabi



Zeinab Abdullabi celebrating the International Day of Peace with children of all abilities at the Garissa Special School in 2023.  
© The Afnan Women Initiative

“My experiences with depression, violence, and silence have shaped me and have led my activism to grow. This is how way I live—with the heart of a child but the mind of an adult, finding new ways to cultivate hope, resilience, and justice for women and girls in my community.”

But my mother only supported me after I turned 18, telling me beforehand that, as a child, I shouldn't discuss such matters. My elder brother tried to silence me, even resorting to violence one time. People in my community called me wifta, a term comparable to being labelled a “prostitute”, and is often used to criticise or demean a woman's behaviour in social contexts. Many friends abandoned me because they were warned by their mothers to avoid someone who challenged harmful traditions. Other people would question my age and dismiss my perspectives.

My focus on gender rights and sexual reproductive health intensified after a brutal rape of an eight-year-old girl in Garissa in 2013. The girl was held captive, repeatedly raped, and mutilated and yet the perpetrator was briefly arrested but then released. The community was divided on the issue, with



*Zeinab Abdullabi building interfaith harmony after the 2015 Garissa University attack held at the Almond Resort, Garissa in 2019.*

© Zeinab Bille Abdullabi

some defending the perpetrator and saying he should be dealt with through *Maslaha* instead of formal justice. In response, we demanded a health and security bill for girls, which contributed to a reduction in rape cases and increased safety for girls.

My peacebuilding journey began after the 2015 Garissa University attack, where police brutality and distrust grew between Christians and Muslims. I was inspired by Leymah Gbowee's film *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*, and I decided to challenge a culture

that historically excluded women from mediation roles. As a result, I was chosen by the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims, the Life and Peace Institute and Act to facilitate interfaith dialogues before the 2017 election. This initiative led to the formation of the Garissa County Women Peace Mediators, where I became vice-chair. We committed not only to participating in the peace process but to leading it, redefining what mediation could look like by actively involving women.

Our peacebuilding involves extensive community engagement. We conducted inter-faith discussions, with Muslims and Christians addressing prejudices. We organised visits to churches and mosques to dispel misconceptions, demonstrating that these places of worship weren't grounds for religious conflict.

I founded another organisation, the Afnan Women's Initiative, in 2018 (initially called DreamLight Initiative) to promote the voices of pastoralist girls and women in the North-Eastern province of Kenya. We focus on education, the rights of pastoralist girls and children, women's economic empowerment and peace advocacy. Our work includes advocating for mobile schools in nomadic areas to ensure that all women and girls have access to education. All these experiences have led me to focus on long-term, sustainable solutions, such as establishing a dignity doctrine for legal redress that challenges the *Maslaha* system. Through the dignity doctrine, we want to create a support system for women to report crimes, with lawyers and counsellors available.

In 2024, I published *Ripples That Rain*, a book reflecting my journey and struggles as an activist and the path toward self-care, which I describe as soul-gardening.

#### UNSCR 1325 – PROTECTION AND PARTICIPATION PILLARS

Zeinab Abdullahi's leadership in the Garissa County Women Peace Mediators and her initiation of interfaith dialogues showcase her dedication to fostering inclusive peace processes that elevate women's voices. In a society where women are traditionally sidelined in mediation, Zeinab's efforts directly challenge and transform these norms, creating spaces where women actively lead in peacebuilding.

Recognising the limitations of traditional mechanisms like the *Maslaha* system in delivering justice, Zeinab has worked to establish legal frameworks that prioritise survivors' rights, marking a significant step toward accountability and protection. Her commitment extends to educating girls and engaging communities in dialogue on these issues, emphasising prevention and the creation of a safer society. Additionally, Zeinab's advocacy for women's economic empowerment supports recovery efforts by equipping women with the skills and resources needed to rebuild their lives, fostering economic resilience within their communities.



*Participants of the 3rd Africa WPS Forum held at the AUC Headquarters from 14 - 15 December 2022.*  
© UNOAU



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NELSON MANDELA  
PLENARY HALL

NELSON MANDELA  
PLENARY HALL



# *The journey of UNSCR 1325 in Africa*

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United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) was adopted unanimously on 31 October 2000. It is the Council's first resolution on Women, Peace and Security. It calls for the protection of women, their meaningful participation at all levels of decision-making, as well as for an increased role of women in preventing and resolving conflict.

Resolution 1325 was followed by nine other resolutions 1820 (2009); 1888 (2009); 1889 (2010); 1960 (2010); 2106 (2013); 2122 (2013); 2242 (2015), 2467 (2019), and 2493 (2019), establishing a broad spectrum of norms which came to form the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Along with other policy frameworks, including regional instruments, they guide efforts aimed at promoting gender equality, protecting women's rights, and strengthening the participation of women at all levels.

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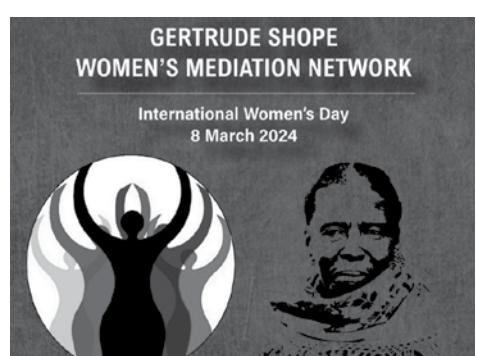
## AFRICAN UNION MEMBER STATES WITH NATIONAL ACTION PLANS

National Action Plans (NAPs) are critical instruments to localise implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. To date, 35 African Union Member States have developed National Action Plans:

Angola  
Benin  
Burkina Faso  
Burundi  
Cameroon  
Central African Republic  
Republic of the Congo  
Côte d'Ivoire  
Democratic Republic of the Congo  
Djibouti  
Gabon  
Gambia  
Ghana  
Guinea  
Guinea-Bissau  
Kenya  
Liberia  
Malawi  
Mali  
Morocco  
Mozambique  
Namibia  
Niger  
Nigeria  
Rwanda  
Senegal  
Sierra Leone  
Somalia  
South Africa  
South Sudan  
Sudan  
Togo  
Tunisia  
Uganda  
Zimbabwe



AU Members States that have adopted National Action Plans





Mano River Women's Peace Network



# SHE

*Stands for Peace*

25 STORIES  
IN CELEBRATION OF  
25 YEARS OF UNSCR 1325





# SHE *Stands* for Peace

25 STORIES  
IN CELEBRATION OF  
25 YEARS OF UNSCR 1325

She Stands for Peace: 25 Stories in Celebration of 25 Years of the Adoption of UNSCR 1325 captures the stories of outstanding African Women who have worked tirelessly towards the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

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