

Women in Transition

Harare, Zimbabwe, 7 April 2009

More than two hundred women, including several WPP Zimbabwe representatives, gathered in Harare to discuss the Global Political Agreement (GPA), the country's current operational document, and to work out its use regarding the different aspects of women's life in the country. To ensure that the group of participants would be a representative cross section of the women in Zimbabwe, several women NGO's were invited to take part, as well as Zimbabwe government departments and community based organizations.

The conference consisted of presentations and plenary sessions, in which the importance of the Zimbabwean women claiming their space in the community and the political sphere was emphasized. It was agreed on that the participation of the women of different cultural and social backgrounds in the various sectors of public life has to be increased in the future. Dr Olivia Muchena, Minister of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development, stressed the need for the women to be united and to redefine the Zimbabwean woman as an empowered individual.

The conference took place just after the Zimbabwean Cabinet adopted the 100-Day-Plan for the country, which focuses on the economic empowerment and the national constitution as the priority issues. In relation to that, Jessie Majome, Deputy Minister of Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, led the participants through the national constitution, pointing out the parts which are discriminating in one way or the other towards women. She emphasized how important it would be that women participate in the coming constitutional review process, and suggested an adoption of section 33 of the Ugandan constitution which notes the rights of women as an integral part of women's lives.

This explicit illustration reinforced the women's commitment to be involved in the constitutional processes of Zimbabwe in the future. The participants also had the opportunity to engage the Minister of State, Sekai Holland, in a discussion on the issue of national healing, recognizing the fact that the whole nation, and women in particular, are in need of healing in order to proceed with their lives.

The participants could then choose between different workshops on subjects such as the constitution, education, health, justice, peace building, or economic reconstruction, always with the focus on how this issue would affect the women and their lives.

Afterwards the different groups reported back to the whole group of participants, discussing the issues raised in the workshops. One recurring issue was the prevailing injustice regarding women's participation in the government. Following this a petition was drawn up, demanding, among other things, that in the parliament's selected committees 50 percent of the representatives should be women. This petition was signed and sent to the leaders and the chief whips of the different political parties.

A detailed report on the conference, which was funded by the British Embassy and Action Aid International is currently being finalized.