

The International Colloquium on Women's Empowerment, Leadership Development,
International Peace and Security, Monrovia, Liberia.
"This is our Time"



(picture: Isabelle Geuskens, IFORM/WPP)

On 7 and 8 March 2009, women and men from all over the world gathered in the Samuel K. Doe Stadium in Monrovia to landmark a historic moment: Women peacemakers rising to their feet, in order to effect lasting change in the world. The Colloquium, co-convened by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia and President Tarja Halonen of Finland, took place to achieve the following goals:

- to empower women to be more effective leaders by linking with their peers from around the world and sharing best practices;
- to support the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325;
- to contribute to the achievement of Millennium Development Goal 3 on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (MDG 3);
- to demonstrate the clear gender dimensions of climate change, environment protection and sustainable development; and
- to launch the Angie Brooks International Centre on Women's Empowerment, Leadership Development, Peace and Security in Monrovia, in order to support the implementation of actions emerging from the Colloquium.

In an atmosphere of joy, connectedness and inspiration, the Colloquium participants did not shy away from sharp analysis, tough questions and firm commitments for the future.

What stood out in this gathering was a sense of collaboration and partnership: (Former) Presidents, Ministers, representatives from international institutions and grassroots leaders sat side by side as they agreed on a common cause: To work together strategically in order to make a lasting mark on peace and reconciliation in the world.



President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf reaches out to the new generation (picture: Isabelle Geuskens, IFOR/WPP)

“The Power of Partnerships is the Power of People, and the Power of this Colloquium”

Speakers spoke passionately about the need for men and women to work together to build harmonious societies, and the importance of women’s involvement in order to reach much-needed lasting solutions.

One theme featuring prominently throughout the Colloquium was the importance of addressing the gender dimensions of climate change. President Tarja Halonen from Finland stressed how climate changes is hitting the poorest and weakest the hardest; the majority of which is female, hence the need for women to be a firm part of environmental discussions and solutions. Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Managing Director of the World Bank, underlined that not only will those with the least resources be the most affected economically; climate change will also create migration flows and new conflicts over resources, leaving women particularly vulnerable. She cautioned that the current financial crisis will also pose a significant challenge to gender equality efforts, and urged the audience to gear up and make sure that women would not fall behind in the upcoming months, when the crisis will affect them hard: “We need to be constantly vigilant to sustain where we got; as no-one will look out for us if we don’t do it.”

Rwanda’s President Paul Kagame stressed that it is in every nation’s interest to have women active in society and the economy. During its reconstruction phase, Rwanda has made an effort to repeal laws that discriminate against women, and changed its Constitution as to ensure girls and women can have property rights and inherit land. He reminded the audience that such reforms and initiatives not only improved the lives of Rwandan women, but of Rwandan society at large; restoring dignity and purpose to both women and men. He went on to confirm that women’s participation in the Rwandan economy is

reflected in the country's economic growth and development. Nonetheless, although he felt that a lot had been achieved – currently 56 % of Parliamentarians are women, with 36 % female representatives in the Cabinet - he reminded everyone that there was still work to be done.

Michaëlle Jean, Governor General of Canada, inspired everyone with her personal account and passionate statement “ignoring the plight of women is a crime against humanity”. She stressed that the time spent together at the Colloquium is priceless in order to strategize and reflect, reminding everyone that the fight for freedom will never be over until freedom is enjoyed by all. According to her, women can make an important difference as they more readily embrace the notion of community instead of self interest, which only feeds tensions in the world. She called on the audience to celebrate those women who measure their success in terms of what they give, instead of what they take.

Several heads of State expressed their support for the Colloquium's theme via video messages, including U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who stressed the importance of women being involved in every aspect of society - not only by participating, but also as leaders: “Many of you have leadership roles in your home countries but you also know how important it is for us to network and stay connected around global leadership”. She reminded everyone of the importance of achieving the third Millennium Development Goal, linking the success of this goal to the success of the other goals: Only when women are included as equal partners can poverty and disease be fought, and the environment protected.

The afternoons of both days were devoted to breakout groups, allowing more in-depth reflection and discussion on themes such as Security Council Resolution 1325, Women's Leadership, Economic Empowerment, Climate Change, Migration and Millennium Development Goal 3. During the first breakout session on UNSCR 1325, WPP was invited to share its experiences and lessons learned as a program supporting women's peace initiatives worldwide.

The second break-out session on UNSCR 1325 focused on National Action Plans, during which an inventory was made of the countries represented in the group, revealing that from those present Liberia, Switzerland, Finland, the United Kingdom, Uganda had adopted National Action Plans; the Philippines, Ghana, Burundi, Germany, Nepal, East Timor and Sierra Leone were “on their way”; while Mali, The United States, India, Greece, Sudan, Zimbabwe, the DRC, and Somalia have not taken it up yet.

Those participants whose countries have Action Plans shared their experiences and lessons learned with those who were lobbying for an Action Plan in their countries. The break-out session concluded that civil society should seize opportunities – such as e.g. having a supportive Foreign Minister – to create an Action Plan. It was stressed that grassroots involvement in the creation of the Plan is vital, and hence women peace activists need to collaborate to exchange knowledge and strategize together. In line with this, domestication of UNSCR 1325 was considered important, in order to create a pool of civil society agents who can lobby for its implementation. Developing accountability mechanisms and demanding funding for the Plan's implementation early on were also shared as important lessons learned.

Although everyone agreed that there is a risk that an Action Plan turns out to be *just words*, it was nonetheless considered important for countries to have a Plan, for once it has been drawn up it can be referred to when nations are not living up to its commitments.

Former President of the Republic of Ireland Mary Robinson mentioned the possibility of twinning for the creation of National Action Plans: Ireland had recently twinned with Liberia; with each providing input in the other's Action Plan.



Former President of the Republic of Ireland Mary Robinson during the break-out session on UNSCR 1325 (picture: Isabelle Geuskens, IFOR/WPP).

Throughout the Colloquium days a number of side events were organized to complement the Colloquium discussions and allow for networking and exchange of experiences and strategies, particularly among NGOs. During the afternoon of March 8, the WPP Africa Regional Desk organized a side event in the FAS Peace Tent, where WPP partners from Zimbabwe, DRC, Ghana and Burundi shared their experiences with peacebuilding on the ground.



WPP Africa Regional Desk Coordinator Euphemia Dzathor and WPP Partner Jeanne Bitsure from the Burundi Peacebuilding Centre share experiences on the ground in the FAS Peace Tent (picture: Isabelle Geuskens, IFOR/WPP).

Next to hundreds of inspired and re-energized Colloquium participants; expertise exchange and the building of strategic alliances, one immediate outcome of the Colloquium is the Monrovia Declaration, which is included below.

Monrovia Declaration: A Call to Action from the Participants of the International Colloquium on Women's Empowerment, Leadership Development, International Peace and Security.

We, who came together for the International Colloquium on Women's Empowerment, Leadership Development, International Peace and Security, have joined together under the inspiring leadership of H.E. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia, and H.E. Tarja Halonen, President of the Republic of Finland to celebrate and draw strength from women's leadership at all levels.

We recall the spirit of Beijing and other African regional and global gatherings, and the reaffirmation of women's rights exemplified in the Beijing Platform of Action, African regional instruments and CEDAW. We honor the great strides women have made since then to achieve leadership positions in international arenas and close to home. We note that women in the 21st century hold high-level positions and at the same time are doing extraordinary work at the community level. We came together as leaders celebrating our achievements, solidifying our commitment to work together for change, reassessing our efforts, and strategizing to achieve greater success.

We stand in solidarity with our sisters in Darfur, Zimbabwe, and conflict areas around the world. We commit our energies to accelerating the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

We recognize that we are living through multiple global crises that are threatening our security at all levels which are having a devastating impact on the lives of girls and women all over the world. What is now required is a paradigm shift in our approach to global security and development that puts women at the center of social, economic and political policies.

It has been shown in East Asia and Latin America, that women are particularly vulnerable to reductions in exports, foreign direct investment and remittances. As countries put in place their economic stimulus packages for development, we urge them to target women's economic empowerment. But while women are vulnerable, they should not be viewed only as victims but as agents of change and worth investing in as a smart way to help rebuild economies.

The aspirations we hold as women and men coming together in Monrovia are not satisfied by the policies and practices we see all around us. We therefore shaped the Colloquium around thematic priorities that, if acted upon, would make a fundamental and sustained improvement in the lives of women and girls and their communities. Having convened this historic event, we now make a collective call for profound changes in the priorities that shape policies and resource allocations from the global to the local level, and demand accountability from the institutions and individuals who must effect these changes.

We call for full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 for the protection, participation and promotion of women's rights in peace processes, and the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1820 that addresses sexual violence as a tactic of war. We call for greater accountability to accelerate implementation by all stakeholders - UN Member States, the Security Council, the General Assembly and the

Secretary General. We call on them to present their plans of action and accomplishments at the 2010 Ministerial Review Conference of UNSCR 1325. The call to accountability and end to impunity on crimes against women should be in the declaration. We further encourage countries to collaborate creatively and support each other on the development and implementation of National Action Plans on SCR 1325.

We commit to honor women's leadership at all levels of community and public life and to enable through our actions and decisions women leaders, in particular young women, to take up roles of leadership and responsibility. We call for greater numbers of women in leadership.

We've seen that if we have more women, we see better decision-making by states and communities. It has been demonstrated that the discourse changes with their involvement, and we want to see these changes on a sustained basis. Liberia and Finland, both co-conveners of the Colloquium, are examples of this. We also call for male leaders to respect and promote women's rights and leadership development.

We call for greater efforts to enable and empower women to participate fully and on fair terms in the economic life of their communities, removing barriers and increasing their capacity in trade and business activity from the local to the global level. Women and men deserve the right to decent work opportunities in the formal and informal economy. Women's rights must be respected in the workplace and within value chains no matter how dispersed. In the current economic and food crisis, we need to make sure responses to this situation, such as stimulus packages and trade finance support, are specifically apportioned for women.

We commit to ensure that women will be present and their voices heard in all debates concerning climate change with a particular commitment to women's participation in the global climate change summit in Copenhagen in December 2009.

We call for far greater urgency in addressing the mitigation and adaptation aspects of climate change - otherwise we risk undermining all our efforts to date on eradicating poverty and suffering. An acknowledgement of women's roles as powerful agents of change, and their greater vulnerability to climate change impacts in many societies, must be demonstrated through women's greater role in climate change negotiations and incorporation of gender considerations in the new agreement as well as in international, national, and local strategies and programmes implementing this agreement.

To better protect women and girls in displacement settings, to uphold the dignity of migrants and to enhance the social and economic integration of migrant women and men alike, we call for a gender-based approach to migration management, promoting policies and programmes integrating the needs of migrant women and supporting migrant women in diaspora communities to engage in development efforts through their availability, skills, knowledge, expertise and financial resources.

The leadership of young people, and especially young women, is critical to advancing development, peace and security. The participation of young people is a prerequisite to the development of communities and nations. Young people are the inheritors of decisions made today which affect the future. We commit to the inclusion of young women and young men in decision-making processes and leadership and in all processes that work towards the achievement of the MDGs. We therefore call for:

a.. Urgent investment to support young women and young men in the achievement of the MDGs including women's sexual and reproductive health and rights.

b.. The creation of safe and supportive spaces which enable the leadership development of young women.

We further commit to unite and mobilize our collective leadership to end violence against women and especially young women. We call for safe and supportive environments for women and girls who have experienced violence and abuse. We commit to work collaboratively with women's organizations and networks. If these calls are met with action, not empty promises, the future will be brighter for every girl, every woman, every grandmother, and for the men who share their aspirations and their life journeys.

For more information on the Colloquium, please visit: <http://womenscolloquium.org>

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