

WPP MAKES LANDMARK APPEARANCE AT THE INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT, LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY

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An International Colloquium on Women's Empowerment, Leadership Development, International Peace and Security was co-convened in Monrovia, Liberia by two dynamic women leaders--Presidents **Ellen Johnson Sirleaf** of Liberia and **Tarja Halonen** of Finland. The 2-day (March 7th to 8th, 2009) colloquium sought to empower women to be more effective leaders by linking with their peers from around the world and sharing and implementing best practices on Economic Empowerment, influencing Climate



change and Sustainable Development. The event sought to realize the aims of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security; to ensure that women are protected from the worst abuses in times of conflict and to empower them to play their rightful and vital role in helping their countries prevent, end and recover from conflict.

The event held at the Samuel Kanyon Doe Sports Complex in Monrovia, Liberia. It was graced with the presence of a wide array of dignitaries including Abdoulaye Wade (President of Senegal), Paul Kagame (President of Rwanda), Maria Teresa Fernandez de la Vega Sanz (First Vice President of Spain and founder of the initiative "Women for a better world"), Michelle Jean (Governor-General of Canada), Luisa Dias Diogo (Prime Minister of Mozambique), Aja Dr. Isatou Njie Saidu (Vice President of the Gambia), Margot Wallstrom (Vice President of the European Commission), Angela Merkel (Chancellor of Germany), Veronica Michelle Bachelet (President of Chile), Tzipi Livini (Assistant Israeli Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs), Erastus Mwencha (Deputy chairman of the African Union Commission, Ramatoulaye Yade-Zimet (French Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Human Rights) and Suzanne Mubarak (Egyptian First Lady).

The 2-day event opened with a medley of musical performances and theatrical representations of the exploits of women legends such as the Great Nzinga, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Cleopatra. Saturday, March 7th also witnessed a plenary under the theme "Making a Difference through Women's Leadership". This was moderated by Mary Robinson, Former President of the Republic of Ireland. Panelists' discussions were on Women's Leadership, Women's Empowerment and Equal Opportunities, Security Council

Resolution 1325, Gender-Based Violence affecting women in post-conflict societies, Millennium Development Goal 3, Global Financial Crisis and Impact on Women, Economic Empowerment and Decent Work for Women, Advancing Women's Sexual and Reproductive status to achieve Women's Empowerment and Leadership, Climate Change, Migration and Youth. There were also concurrent thematic sessions on Security Council Resolution 1325, Women's Leadership, Economic Empowerment, Climate change, Migration and Millennium development Goal 3.



Sunday, March 8th witnessed concurrent thematic sessions on Security Council Resolution 1325, Women's Leadership, Economic Empowerment, Climate Change, Migration and Millennium Development Goal 3. Participants also visited exhibitions of Liberian products and services held at booths set up on the periphery of the stadium grounds. Special Invited Guests partook in the sod-cutting of The Angie Brooks International Center. A second plenary was held; it comprised the launch of "Women

Faith and Development Alliance, Liberia", Accountability for Women's Human Rights, the launch of the Liberian National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325, a Presentation of Call to Action on UNSCR 1325 and a Video Launch of the Angie Brooks International Center. There were equally reports from the Thematic Groups and Project Commitments.

Notable side events such as that of the **Women Peacemakers Program (WPP)**, which took place at the Peace Tent on the premises of Samuel Kanyon Doe Sports Complex had as theme "***African women moving from being victims of violence to active partners in peace building.***" The Coordinator of the IFOR / WPP Africa Regional Desk hosted by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), Euphemia Akos Dzathor, served as moderator. There were 4 presentations by women of the WPP in relation to their practical experiences within the domain of peace building.

Lucy Awuni (Ghanaian and Secretary of the NGO "Concerned Women of Bawku") gave a brief overview of the turbulent political state of the Bawku traditional area in Ghana, and her role in mobilizing grassroots women and NGOs in peace building within that area. There was also a presentation by Aimee Esperance Matungulu (Coordinator and trainer of the NGO *Collectif des Femmes Rurales pour le Developpement-COFERD*) from Congo DRC on work of the WPP in *Gender and Environment* training in Central Africa. She enumerated training sessions and campaigns she had organized as a result of the expertise gathered from her encounter with the WPP.

Jeanne Bitsure, a Burundian educationist and facilitator, provided participants with an overview of the context of the Burundian conflict. She spoke on her organization of workshops and training sessions (such as a “Workshop on the Evaluation and Capitalization of the MDG Awareness Project” and a “Gender, Active Non-Violence and environment” training, and her active involvement in overall grassroots sensitization and empowerment of women in Burundi.

Lastly, there was an expose by Zimbabwean Margie Mavudzi (of the NGO “Women’s Coalition of Zimbabwe”) on the political stalemate in her country. She spoke at length on the collapse or dysfunction of major state service institutions including health, the Police and Judiciary, Education, and Social Welfare. She recounted her involvement in WPP activities in Zimbabwe such as: the “Vote in Peace, Vote for Peace” campaign that was



held before the 2008 Zimbabwean elections and the “Conclude the Talks–We are Starving” Campaign. She addressed the role of the WPP in soliciting materials (such as basic foodstuff and clothing) and the offer of trauma counseling, to assist the women who were internally displaced by the violence following the 2008 elections.

All presenters gave an overview of the challenges they encountered, the impact of their activism in their respective countries, and the way forward.

The 2-day colloquium closed with a reading of the Monrovia Declaration by Vabah Gayflor (Liberian Minister for Gender and Development) and a musical concert that featured renowned African women musicians, the likes of Miatta Fahnbulleh, Onyeka Onwenu, Yvonne Chaka Chaka, and Sibongile Khumalo).