



GENDER AND EDUCATION FOR A CULTURE OF PEACE IN CENTRAL AFRICA

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Women in Sake, North Kivu of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), are eager to participate in their country's peace and development process.

Photo: UNHCR / S. Schulman

BACKGROUND

Situations of armed conflict and periods of post-conflict reconstruction in Central Africa pose specific challenges to achieving gender equality and the protection of women's rights. Exclusion and discrimination against the latter in power circles as well as in the allocation of resources and levels of income, have been identified as factors that continue to stoke a culture of violence. To achieve a lasting culture of peace, it is important to involve women in mechanisms for preventing and pre-empting crises.

The UNESCO Declaration in Zanzibar in 1999 and the assertion of women's crucial role in promoting a culture of peace

This declaration called on African governments, the African Union (AU), other regional and sub-regional organisations, as well as the United Nations system, to take urgent and efficient measures to ensure that women are fairly represented in decision-making processes, particularly those concerning prevention, management and resolution of conflicts and peace negotiations.

Women must actively take part in processes to promote a culture of peace.

Photo: UNAMID/Albert Gonzalez





The year 2000: The United Nations Security Council recognises the contribution of women in conflict prevention and resolution

In the year 2000, Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security was adopted. This resolution expanded the scope of application of the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). It asserts the importance of the woman in the consolidation of peace and urges member States to ensure increased representation of women at all levels of decision making in national, regional and international institutions, as well as in conflict prevention, management and resolution mechanisms.

Furthermore, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights relating to women's rights in Africa as well as the African Union Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development Framework, are important regional instruments that aim to promote women's participation in peace consolidation.

Finally, at the sub regional level, the 11th Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), held from 26 to 27 January 2004 in Brazzaville (Congo) made a declaration on equality between men and women. The declaration affirms the need to take into account the needs and concerns of women and men in the policies and programmes of the Community in order to build a society of peace, security and stability.

Security Council meeting that adopted UN resolution 1325 on women, peace and security

Photo: UN / unmultimedia.org

In spite of all these efforts, much still has to be done to achieve women's participation in peace consolidation, particularly in Central Africa. The establishment of a culture of peace requires the mobilisation of all the vital and positive forces (women and men) of society, since there can be no development without peace, and peace cannot be sustainable when it is not sustained by both women and men.



CAFCO women reviewing Resolution 1325



The role of women in maintaining peace and social cohesion

As advocated by the Zanzibar Declaration of 1999, women play a key role in promoting a culture of peace. The need to safeguard traditions, oral literature and African languages that are the sources of numerous social practices, contributes to cohesion and stability in societies. The woman's role as educator in the family and in society has been underscored, including the function of initiation rites that permit, inter alia, the establishment of strong and permanent solidarity links for an entire generation of young girls. African women played a vanguard role in the history of Africa's independence and women's organisations continue to battle for their basic rights and to preserve peace through mediation actions.

Sally Nyolo is a brilliant Cameroonian story-telling artiste

Women play a leading role in poverty control, economic exchanges and conflict prevention. They are more than ever needed to promote inter-generational dialogue and the civic education of young generations.

Women are also very active in informal mechanisms on the sidelines of peace talks. During the Sun City peace talks of April 2002, civil society women in the DRC met to advocate inter-Congolese dialogue and to compel participants at the talks to reach an agreement. In the North-Kivu region, women from all walks of life undertook various actions for peace. They created and continue to create pressure groups, organise demonstrations for peace, draft petitions, etc. They also promote peace through numerous associations.



Congolese Women rejoice after the signing of a Peace Accord in Goma in 2008

UN Photo/Marie Frechon



Obstacles to women's participation in peace consolidation

The exclusion of women from power circles and discrimination against them in the allocation of resources and sources of income have been identified as two indicators of bad governance, prevailing social inequalities and a lingering culture of violence.

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