

Statement by the Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice on International Women's Day #IWD2015 #MakeltHappen

8 March 2015

Today, the Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice celebrates International Women's Day (IWD), together with our 6,000 grassroots partners, associates and members, the majority of whom are living in armed conflict countries with situations under investigation by the International Criminal Court (ICC). The Women's Initiatives is an international women's human rights organisation that advocates for gender justice through the ICC and through domestic mechanisms, including peace negotiations and justice processes. On IWD we take stock of the progress made and also the challenges that remain in achieving legal recognition of women's human rights around the world.

According to Judith Acana, Programme Officer, Uganda for the Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice, "over the past 10 years, we at the Women's Initiatives have seen an increasing number of women and girls in armed conflicts demanding accountability for perpetrators of sexual and gender-based crimes, greater access to assistance and livelihood programmes for victims/survivors, and structural support to rebuild our communities and transform our societies. In Uganda we have continued to advocate for women to be recognised as stakeholders and beneficiaries in the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) designed to support reconstruction of the districts so badly affected by the LRA-related conflict. There are many challenges. Relatively few women are benefiting from the PRDP, the government has not responded with enough assistance programmes or reparations for victims, support for young women returning from the LRA is limited and they face high levels of discrimination from their families and the community. However, we are encouraged by the inclusion of gender issues in the National Transitional Justice Policy and we urge the government to adopt the final version and begin holistic implementation of the policy in the coming months."

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, signed by 189 governments and unprecedented in its recognition of women's human rights including in the area of sexual and reproductive health, as well as the experience of women in armed conflict and the need for accountability for sexual and gender-based crimes. This year also marks the 15th anniversary of the UN Security Council's (UNSC) historic resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security which called for the protection of women during armed conflict and their participation in peace-building processes. Resolution 1325 was a first of its kind in recognising the disproportionate impact of armed conflict on women, emphasising the responsibility of all States to end impunity for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes, including those relating to sexual violence against women and girls.

"The 20th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration should inspire governments to exercise greater political will to implement this agreement, advance the experience of human rights for women worldwide, and ensure greater safety and security for women and girls during and after times of war," emphasised Judith Acana.

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Statements from some of our partners:

“The theme for this year’s IWD is ‘Empowering Women - Empowering Humanity: Picture It!’ For the Centre d’Education et Recherche pour les Droits des Femmes, in order to see the empowerment of women materialise in Province Orientale, the DRC, public authorities must create strong institutions and positive conditions for women to emerge and engage with their community on the political, economic and socio-cultural levels. Empowering women means allowing them to grow and thrive in a peaceful environment, where violence against them is rigorously dealt with through a fair justice system!”

- ***Claudine Bela Badeaza, Director of the Centre d’Education et Recherche pour les Droits des Femmes (CERDF) and Women’s Initiatives for Gender Justice Focal Point in Kisangani, Province Orientale, DRC***

“In the lead-up to elections in the DRC which will take place next year, we remind women, the DRC government, the National Independent Electoral Commission and the customary leaders that women also have the right and skills to run our government. If more women are given a voice as leaders and equal participation in government, real transformation can take place for those who have been historically marginalised and silenced in our society.”

- ***Emerite Tabisha, Coordinator of the Association des Femmes pour les Droits et le développement , and Women’s Initiatives for Gender Justice Focal Point, South Kivu, DRC***

“On this IWD, we want to emphasise that women are still victims of violence in various environments: within their families and communities, at the hands of the state and during armed conflicts and their aftermath. Violence against women continues in women’s lives, from birth to death, in the public and private sphere. Until today, in spite of the ratification of laws protecting women in the DRC, the government still perpetrates violence through the non-application of international instruments protecting women. In North Kivu, the DRC, we are still witnessing the high rate of violence against women during armed conflict, particularly sexual violence. This form of violence leaves a negative impact on women’s and children’s lives as well as on the entire Congolese community.

In 2015 we still observe the following weaknesses related to achieving women’s equality in the DRC: in all of the territories poverty is a major obstacle to education, in particular for older girls who as a result cannot access education; while men work as CEOs or company directors, this is not the case for women and more generally there are more men than women who receive paid employment; women more often than men have unsafe jobs in North Kivu and they are overrepresented in the informal sphere where they lack social security and benefits; and women are rarely represented in decision-making positions. We hope that the global community will reflect on this IWD and renew efforts to end poverty and all forms of violence towards women and girls.”

- ***Joséphine Malimukono, Director of the Ligue pour la Solidarité Congolaise and Women’s Initiatives for Gender Justice Focal Point for National Advocacy.***

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“On IWD, we want to draw attention to the Sudanese laws violating women’s human rights. Specifically, the national rape law, which has forced many rape victims into not reporting their cases and has limited their access to services and justice. These women are often victimized again for ‘failing’ to prove the violence they suffered through the testimony of four men. I am also taking this opportunity to draw attention to the continuous deterioration of security and the economy in Sudan and to ask the international community to act to stop massive violence in South Kordofan and Darfur.”

- ***Women’s human rights and peace activists, Sudan [name not provided for security reasons].***

“On this day we should remember that in Sudan, struggling for women’s rights is struggling for women’s lives.”

- ***Women’s human rights and peace activist, partner in Sudan [name not provided for security reasons].***

“As we tirelessly advocate for gender justice, accountability and meaningful peace on IWD, we, women from the Greater North Women’s Voices for Peace Network in Uganda, call for the immediate release of women and children still held in captivity by the LRA rebels. In the Greater North, we continue to demand justice for the women that have suffered brutality during the war. IWD gives women and girls a platform to openly express our views on the challenges we face, but it also gives us a chance share our incredible achievements. Our partnership with the Women’s Initiatives for Gender Justice has greatly empowered members of the network to report incidences of any form of violence, and our capacity to advocate for perpetrators to be brought to justice has been enhanced because we believe that violence against women creates misery for everyone. Today is an opportunity to showcase these developments, and to feel honoured locally and globally.”

- ***Santa Oketta, Chairperson, The Greater North Women’s Voices for Peace Network, Uganda***

“As we celebrate IWD, we must especially remember the women who suffered during the war and advocate for greater government support to assist them in achieving their rights. The Ugandan government has developed important policies to address the violations that occurred, including a reparations resolution passed last year, calling for the provision of health services to women and girls affected by the conflict and support for children born in captivity. While these measures are important first steps, the government must take action to implement them without delay to meet the immediate needs of women survivors who have waited too long for redress.”

- ***Josephine Mamawi, Member, Greater North Women’s Voices for Peace Network, West Nile, Uganda***

For further comments, please contact the Women’s Initiatives for Gender Justice: +31(0) 70 302 9911.

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