

December 2008

Dear Friends,

It has been some time since you have heard from us but as you will have seen from our website we have not been quiet! This year has been another busy and encouraging year for the Women's Initiatives, and our work towards gender justice.

Some of the highlights for us this year include:

Our first large event with the very successful **Justice for Women Forum** held in Kampala, Uganda on 6-8 October with 155 women's rights and peace activists mostly from the four conflict situations we work in - Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Darfur, Sudan and the Central African Republic (CAR). At the Forum, we formed an international solidarity network of women victims/survivors/activists from these conflicts.

This year we have seen the impact of our advocacy with charges for gender-based crimes included in every indictment by the Court in 2008. Gender-based violence is now being charged in each of the situations under investigation by the ICC.

We continued our extensive work on the Uganda Peace Talks in partnership with women from north and north eastern Uganda as well as national organisations. In April, we were the only international women's human rights organisation invited to attend what was meant to have been the signing of the final peace agreement between the Government of Uganda and General Joseph Kony, Head of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), the militia group which is a party to the Talks. Unfortunately, General Kony did not sign the agreement. The Peace Process stalled following several failed attempts by the Mediator to get the LRA to sign the agreement. On Sunday, 14 December, combined armed forces from Uganda, the DRC and South Sudan attacked five LRA camps in Garamba National Park in northern DRC. With this attack, the Peace Talks are effectively ended. It is unclear how many casualties there have been, and equally unclear is the plight now of the hundreds of children formerly abducted by the LRA. Concerned about the welfare of their family members who had been abducted by the LRA and whether they are still alive, communities in Northern Uganda also fear retaliatory attacks from the LRA as a result of the military offensive against them.

We continue to support the newly established Greater North Women's Voices for Peace Network, which became the platform for women's rights activists in the conflict-affected areas in Northern Uganda to participate in the Peace Talks.

We facilitated victims' applications before the ICC from women in the DRC. On 15 December, the Judges gave a decision regarding victim applicants, some of whom we have been working with over the past two and a half years. This decision recognizes 86 more victims in the case against Thomas Lubanga, and as such, they are able to participate directly in the case. This is a very significant development as prior to this

decision, only four victims had been recognised - no girls and no victims of gender-based crimes. With the inclusion of these applicants, that scenario has now changed.

We held consultations in Juba, Kampala and The Hague with women's rights activists from DRC, CAR, Uganda and Sudan on justice and accountability, reconciliation and peace.

We published four new publications and distributed over 2000 copies of our Gender Report Card. All available on our website, these publications include: Legal Filings Submitted by the Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice to the International Criminal Court; Making a Statement: A Review of Charges and Prosecutions for Gender-based Crimes before the International Criminal Court (available in English and French); Advance Preliminary Report: Structures and Institutional Development of the International Criminal Court 2008.

We produced a music video on Northern Uganda entitled 'We Speak for Ourselves'.

We organised training for 21 women lawyers on the ICC List of Counsel and co-hosted with Africa Legal Aid the Gender Justice Forum for 60 lawyers, judges, practitioners and activists.

Organisationally, we have also expanded and hired more staff this year. We now have 6 full time staff in The Hague and 3 staff working in Uganda, DRC and Egypt. This triples our staff from last year! We also have a small but great group of consultants for our communications, publications and translation work.

In January 2009, we are launching the 'new look' and more comprehensive 2008 Gender Report Card on the ICC. This will provide an extensive review of all the major developments at the ICC during the year. We will be launching the publication in New York during the resumed 7<sup>th</sup> Session of the Assembly of States Parties (ASP). Watch out for this publication on our website in January.

We thank each of you for your support, feedback and solidarity during the year.

Merry Christmas for those of you who celebrate it. We wish each of you a peaceful break and renewed energy for a great 2009.

Warm wishes,

Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice