



The Eastern African Sub-Regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women
EASSI, P. O .BOX 24965, KAMPALA, UGANDA., Email : eassi@eassi.org, web site :
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Participants from Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Somalia, Tanzania and Uganda pose with Kenyan sisters during the Regional Women's Voices for Peace Initiative, organized by the Eastern African sub Regional Support Initiative for the Advancement for Women (EASSI) at the Sarova Stanley, Nairobi Kenya, on 15th February 2008



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“The Women’s Voices for Peace Initiative”

On Friday 15th February 2008
EASSI held a regional solidarity meeting
With the women of Kenya – Dubbed **“The Women’s Voices for Peace Initiative”**
Included in this special Report are the statements
From the women of Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Rwanda,
Tanzania and Uganda and a special poem from Somalia to the
Women of Kenya. EASSI’s own statement is also included



EASSI Board Members left to right Imelda Simbare- Burundi, Bazgenawork Medhin – Vice Chairperson, Ethiopia, Tsegga Gaim - Eritrea, Joy Masheti – Kenya, Semira Alhadi - Ethiopia, Gemma Akilimali - Tanzania, Jane Abatoni - Rwanda, Mariam Yassin Yussuf - Somalia and Jolly Mugisha - Uganda



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Welcome Remarks

Marren Akatsa-Bukachi, EASSI Executive Director, welcomed participants to the meeting. She appreciated that there were very many other meetings going on yet they had chosen to attend this one. She explained that EASSI organized this forum in order to bring solidarity messages and voices of women from the region who have been with Kenyans in spirit since the conflict began. She noted that women from across the region have experienced conflict in various forms and there was a strong need to bring their voices together to express solidarity with Kenyan women and support their efforts towards peace building

The facilitator of the meeting, Ms. Irene Ovonji-Odida welcomed all participants to this special meeting organized by EASSI for women of the region to share messages and dialogue with the women of Kenya on their role in peace-building.

Introductory Address

Dr. Miria Matembe noted that “we are here in Kenya hurting. We would have loved to tell the negotiators what we are feeling.” We are feeling hurt but we are glad that there is calmness – we want to see peace restored in Kenya. We are longing for that.

As Ugandans, she assured participants that the people who crossed the border to seek refuge in Uganda are being looked after because Kenya has been a home for Ugandans.

She noted that the men of Africa have failed us again and again – we are tired! She exclaimed. – let us get together and make a difference in this continent. Crying alone will not make a difference. Let us make a difference not only for Kenyan women but for African women.

Key Note Address

Hon. Beatrice Kiraso, Deputy Secretary General, Political Affairs of the East African Community, gave the Key Note Address. She noted that several of the countries in the Eastern African sub-region have experienced conflict. Women are the majority in the region and can make a difference to this situation. The problem is often we become vocal, make headway, then we retract.

She challenged the women to think about the connect between ourselves and the people e.g. in Kibera slum. One of the issues to tackle is to ensure policies



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that will address the problems that are special to women. For instance, agriculture is the biggest income earner for us – but women do not own land.

The early warning aspect of the cause of conflict must be focused on – women can be good advocates for policies that can address conflict. In the current intervention we must consider actions to ensure the rights and needs of women who have been subjected to Sexual and gender based violence, displacement and dispossession are addressed. We should have a cross-fertilisation of views so that we know how to move from here.



Hon. Irene Ovonji-Odida, Facilitator of the meeting



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“Waano” – Somali Poem to the Women of Kenya

*Beloved Kenyans,
Soul Sister, Strong Brother.
We are one body,
One Spirit
We share one Heart,
Our bodies are connected.
Your suffering is my pain.
Your downfall my death.
You gather your wood
You prepare fires of war
And fear and sadness fills the minds and hearts
Of our people
Therefore we beseech you
Our Kenyan sisters and brothers
Let us not begin
A new season of war
In the heart of Africa.
In these hard times
Face to face with challenges
Beyond our strength and capacity
Seek the counsel of those who are familiar,
With the atrocity of destruction
For Somalia has faced these troubles
Has experienced this evil
Has seen such death and sorrow.
You are the lamp that lights the street of Africa
The shining beacon
The example of prosperity
The land of peace
For peace is a nation’s greatest gift
Embrace justice to preserve the history of your country
Refrain from negative rhetoric
Protect the land that you have taken years to conserve
With green fields and beautiful flowers
No family should be separated*



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Composed and narrated by: Khadija Isse Fara'adde
Translated by: Yasin Hersi, Diana Njeru, Linda Nzioki
15th February 2008

Voices of the Women of Burundi presented by Imelda Simbare on behalf of Collectif des Associations et, ONGs Feminines du Burundi (CAFOD)

We, Burundian women, felt very bad when we heard of the terrible events following the elections in Kenya. We know this from our own experience; since we have faced such a situation for many years. To date we continue suffering from the outcomes of the civil war. We know that civil war is very bad and people who are supposed to be brothers and sisters even kill each other.

We, Burundian women sympathise a lot with Kenyans. We know how being a widow brings suffering. We know how to be motherless makes someone suffer. We know how being raped brings shame and trauma. We know that all this violence has physical and psychological effects. We feel deeply for Kenyans in general and Kenyan women and children in particular. It is our commitment to help Kenyans to find a solution to this crisis.

*We also suffer the outcomes of this crisis since we are part of the East African Community and therefore Kenyans are our neighbors. In Kirundi we say "**If your neighbor's house is burning, your own house is burning too**", so Kenyans problems are also ours, we suffer together.*

That is why we must come together to find solutions to the crisis. Our message to you Kenyans is that in all the actions you undertake to search for solutions, we will always be together because we know that helping each other brings strength.

We advise you not to despair because you must overcome. We know that women have always played an important role in uniting people that is why we are not discouraged. We also know that women can do very good things when they are united.



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Even in our country, women who survived the war played an important role in finding a solution to the crisis. For the Kenyan crisis, we are sure that women have the capacity to do many important things. That is why we have brought this message to you.

Among the solutions we propose are the following:

- *Women take the first step in uniting people from different ethnic groups.*
- *Women should be the first in uniting people from different political parties.*
- *Centres be created to help women, children and girls experiencing various problems as a result of the conflict.*

If those actions are taken, we will stand side by side with you because we know that helping each other brings strength.

*Imelda Simbare
CAFOB
8th February 2008*

Voices of Women of Eritrea presented by Tsegga Gaim on behalf of National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW)

On behalf of Eritrean women and on my own behalf, I would like to convey Eritrean women's solidarity message to Kenyan people, particularly Kenyan women.

Eritreans have followed the internal conflict in Kenya which followed the national election and felt very sad because Eritreans have also been affected by conflict and know its consequences.

Throughout our history in Africa, women and girls are victims of armed and other conflicts within and among our nations. It is clear that the consequences are devastation, displacement, rape, death etc.

Therefore we women have to strengthen our solidarity and design effective strategies in order to contribute to resolving conflict.



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In the current situation in Kenya, men and women have to unite and make sacrifices for peace. Kenyans have the ability and power to solve their own internal conflicts.

Now, the Regional Women's Voices for Peace initiative needs to strengthen our relationships and work for peace for the benefit of our communities. We, women can make a difference as we are more than half of the population.

Finally, I would like to convey Eritrea's message of condolence to the families of those who have died as a result of the conflict.

*Tsegga Gaim
National Union of Eritrean Women*

Voices of Women from Ethiopia presented by Bazgenawork Wolde Medhin on behalf of Christian Relief Development Agency (CRDA)

We are here to express our solidarity with the Kenyan people in general and the Kenyan women in particular because we know that the aftermath of lack of peace and instability always affects the women more than it does the man.

We, therefore, urge all stakeholders for calm. And, in the short term to focus on bringing peace, stability, security and return of the rule of law in Kenya. While, in the long term, to address the issue of real democratization.

*Bazgenawork Wolde Medhin
CRDA*



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Voices of Women from Rwanda presented by Jane Abatoni on behalf of Profemme Twese Hamwe

Our Dear Sisters,

It's a great pleasure to be here with you this afternoon to express our support and solidarity to all Kenyans in general and our fellow Kenyan sisters in particular. The organization I represent, Pro femmes Twese hamwe, is an umbrella organization of over 50 associations of women countrywide, so I bring here their collective message of peace and their voices of courage.

It was shocking, heart touching and re-traumatizing to most of us in Rwanda when we saw Kenyans killing each other, in the violence that erupted after the December 2007 elections as it reminded us of what happened during genocide in our country in 1994.

We felt very sorry as we know exactly that in such violence, women and children are the ones to suffer most. We also know very well the after effects of such violence, people are affected physically and psychologically and this hinders other developmental issues.

We therefore request Kenyan women, especially those in civil society and decision making positions to work hand in hand regardless of ethnicity, religion, racism etc.; because together you can make things happen, you can make a change!

We have had enough of suffering in this region, let us stand up together and raise our voices for peace and stability in Kenya, the region and Africa as a whole.

God Bless You

*Jane Abatoni
Vice President, Pro Femmes Twese Hamwes*

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Voices of the Women of Tanzania presented by Gemma Akilimali on behalf of Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP)

I bring the message of sympathy and solidarity from the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme, its Feminist Activist Coalition, progressive Networks, Organisations, Outreach groups and Individual women.

We were shocked, horrified and disgusted by the violence that erupted in your country after the December 2007 election leading to rape, abuses and killings of innocent citizens and displacement of families.

Kenya has been a role model to us in its staunch stand against imperialism and against the macroeconomic frameworks that push our countries into economic crisis, the position that has made Kenya boost its self-dependency economy.

You, women of Kenya have been an inspiration to us in your strength and assertiveness in pushing for your rights that won the international recognition.

Today, we cannot believe that you are becoming refugees in your own country. We cannot believe the physical, psychological and moral torture you have been through and are still experiencing.

However, we have recently been noting with deep concern the democratic decay in your country that has systematically excluded women from political leadership and in other decision-making bodies. The absence of women in politics and in decision-making bodies has highly contributed to the surfacing of discriminatory identities of ethnicity, class, race, the haves and have nots.

Women you are the torch and path to peace. Take the torch of strength and lead the nation to peace.

We share in the pain of your torture and suffering but we say that it is the women of Kenya who will make a difference to all these sufferings and to the state of violence. Men cannot do it. Women take the chance and lead the Kenyan nation to peace and harmony. Take the chance to save yourselves and your daughters from rape and your sons from perishing. We believe you can do it. May God lead that healing process.



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We pray that the Almighty God rests the souls of befallen loved ones in Eternal Peace.

*Gemma Akilimali
TGNP*



Gemma Akilimali, TGNP in Centre



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Left to right front: Hon. Dr. Miria Matembe – Governance Director CEWIGO, Hon. Beatrice Kiraso – Deputy Secretary General EAC, Rukia Subow – Chairperson Mwandeleo ya Wanawake and Hon. Phoebe Asiyo – Chairperson Caucus for Women in Leadership
Back row: Margaret Shava- International Alert, Hon Njoki Ndungu, Betty Murungi – Urgent Action Fund

Voices of Women of Uganda presented by Jolly Mugisha on behalf of Uganda Women’s Network (UWONET)

We, the women of Uganda, in our diversity together with our families bring to you our sisters and people of Kenya, a message of hope.

We feel terrible that you had to go through this experience and were shocked that this could happen in Kenya, a country that has always been our safe haven. We feel for you, we hurt and mourn with you. We however want to say that there is hope. In every cloud there is a silver lining and surely you can pick up the pieces and move on.

We want you to borrow from us, pick up every opportunity that there might be and use it to advance the women’s cause. Take heart, we are with you in all you are going through and so is God who loves this country.



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We, the women of Uganda love you dearly. What you need dear sisters is genuine peace which comes from deep inside your heart. We pray that you can have this peace in your hearts so that you can plant seeds of forgiveness, love and tolerance in your families, communities and the nation.

We strongly call upon the leadership in this country and all the parties involved in peace-building to hasten the process so that the mother's of this nation can find everlasting peace, rehabilitation and resettlement.

We pledge our support in whatever initiatives you may come up with.

*Jolly Mugisha,
UWONET*

Comments from some of the Kenyan Participants:

Kenya has one of the most dynamic grassroots' women's movements. We know so much and have done so much – women have mobilized since the crisis broke and have been engaging to ensure that humanitarian support is engendered.

Activism started here in Kenya but it is also in Kenya where we have made the least impact; asking for just 30% but even that is not possible. The problem is a political problem and women need to demand for a political solution

Berewa Jommo, ACEN

What happens when you dream at night – dreaming that we are an island of peace – no body woke us up from that dream. Nobody told us we had a problem. We have ratified international instruments such as CEDAW etc but accountability to women's issues is poor. We talk of affirmative action but no one listens. Kenyans were looking outwards but not at ourselves inwardly. If it does not affect me, it does not happen. We need to face reality.

Rukia Subow, Mwandeleo ya Wanawake Organisation



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We have also stood with you – we took the peace torch to Uganda. African women understand solidarity – the first contribution to the Kenya Urgent Action fund appeal for humanitarian aid was from a woman in Senegal.

Betty Murungi, Urgent Action Fund

Wonderful having you with us; we've been in the thick of it; almost everyone has been traumatized. We are weary because of the uneasy calm – talks are going on – some of what comes through is disturbing. This is not about those negotiators but about us –the answer lies in the 6th sense of the women of Africa. In the Congo, women were denied space at the negotiating table but insisted and sat on the floor; the women got up and sang **with or without you...the Congo is here to stay**. The women refused to move until the agreement was signed.

Pray for us, think with us ...men have no monopolies over ideas – women have ideas and can find solutions.

Hon Phoebe Asiyo, CWL

Key Emerging Issues from the Solidarity Meeting:

For Gender focused CSOs

- Have a common voice for peace and ensure that various issues affecting women, girls and the population such as gender-based violence are addressed.
- Take up the challenges of leadership and advocate for more women to be involved in decision-making and ensure that they are effective in the long term political process. Also consider how the few women who are in government become voices for peace
- Put pressure on Governments not to engage in perpetuating injustices in Africa no matter where they are
- Address the early warning systems for conflict – what do conflict management processes look like and how are they engendered?
- Ensure mechanisms are in place that make it impossible for mediation bodies and commissions not to ignore the voices of women.



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- Take seriously long-term planning and scenario building
- Share experiences in peace-building from across the region
- Support/ partner with Kenyan organizations working towards peace-building
- Continuous advocacy to decision-makers – there is political will among the women to push an agenda for peace and reconciliation.
- Work effectively with the media – to ensure women’s voices are heard.

The role of the EAC

- Development of an Early Warning Mechanism – the AU has a Conflict Early Warning Mechanism – the EAC is also developing one as part of the bigger AU project.
- Participants noted the need for establishment of an East African Electoral Commission.

Conclusion:

As a regional body we will support the Women of Kenya in whatever ways we can to see that peace is realized. Women should learn from one another; experiences and should avoid being divided. Celebrate diversity and build bridges. *Marren Akatsa-Bukachi, Executive Director EASSI*



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COMMUNIQUE FROM EASTERN AFRICAN SUB-REGIONAL WOMEN'S COLLECTIVE VOICE FOR PEACE IN KENYA

We, members of the regional women's voices for peace initiative from Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Somalia, Tanzania and Uganda gathered here in Nairobi on the 15th February 2008 bring women's voices and solidarity messages to the people of Kenya. We take cognizance of the exceptional suffering that has been meted out on the most vulnerable members of the population especially women and children. We know what war can do to a country and its people, and we urge Kenyans to stop the actions that will take the country down that road.

We renounce the violence that erupted across Kenya following the election in December 2007. As women many of us have suffered with different experiences of violence and war in various countries in the region. We are aware that in Kenya women have been widowed, buried children, been raped and witnessed the rape of daughters. As women of the region, we express our deep pain, grief and shock at the unfortunate retrogression in the political situation in Kenya. As mothers we are tired of violence and war, Africa is suffering. Enough is enough!

We also recognize that the youth who are paying the ultimate sacrifice are our children and the future hope of the nation and continent. We also recognize that large numbers of people are now displaced from their homes and land. Many of these are women who have endured gender based violence and lost access to basic care, medicines and food supplies.



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We appreciate the on-going mediation processes and urge the parties involved to look beyond the immediate political interests and take into consideration the interests of all Kenyans.

The regional women's voices for peace initiative is concerned that while the broad issues of democratization, human rights and business interests may be addressed in ongoing efforts to finding a solution to the crisis; it is important to articulate women's voices on the effect and impact of the crisis and the search for solutions.

Recommendations:

We hereby call for:

1. A total end to the violence, including addressing the underlying and deep rooted causes of the conflict,
2. Medical, humanitarian and psychosocial support to female victims of sexual and gender based violence,
3. Speedy political settlement including the active implementation of UNSCR Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, the AU Peace and Security Protocol, the EAC Treaty provisions on peace and security and the Great Lakes Conference on Peace and Security,
4. Political and legal reforms that will bring on board women in political leadership and other high-level positions of governance,
5. Truth, justice and reconciliation mechanisms and other national healing processes,



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6. Retributive justice including compensation that pays attention to the special circumstances of women.

7. East African Community and other regional blocs to seriously address the Kenya issue which has the potential to jeopardize the regional integration process.

We call upon the people of Kenya, to desist from acts of violence, promote tolerance and peaceful co-existence. The instruments of peace will be the people of Kenya themselves.

Dated this 15th Day of February 2008, in Nairobi, Kenya

**Regional Voices for Peace Initiative was brought by the following
Representatives from the Eastern African sub Region**

Hon Beatrice Kiraso	East African Community
Hon Dr Miria Matembe	Uganda
Hon Irene Ovonji Odida	Uganda
Jolly Mugisha	Uganda
Harriet Musoke	Uganda
Imelda Simbare	Burundi
Bazgenawork Wolde Medhin	Ethiopia
Semira Alhadi	Ethiopia
Jane Abatoni	Rwanda
Mariam Yassin	Somalia
Gemma Akilimali	Tanzania
Marren Akatsa-Bukachi	EASSI, Uganda
Jane Ocaya-Irama	EASSI, Uganda
Joyce Tamale	EASSI, Uganda



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