

Gender and Human Security Program, No.1

May 2001

DISCUSSION PAPER NO. 90
**Women's Organizations Working For Peace and
Reconciliation in the Great Lakes Region of Africa**

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This paper is a result of research for the "Gender and Human Security Program" based at the CDAS and financed by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada's Community-University Research Alliance (SSHRC-CURA) program

RÉSUMÉ

Organisations de femmes au service de la paix et de la réconciliation dans la région des Grands Lacs en Afrique

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Alors qu'experts et universitaires continuent de débattre des causes des guerres et de leur rapport avec la violence et la pauvreté, sur le terrain, dans les régions déchirées par les conflits, des femmes, des hommes et des enfants, dont l'existence quotidienne est ravagée par la guerre, conçoivent différentes formes de résistance organisée et prennent différentes mesures pour affirmer les possibilités d'une nouvelle existence inscrite dans une culture de paix. S'appuyant sur plusieurs années de recherche dans la région et plus récemment au Rwanda et en Ouganda, ce document décrit certaines initiatives, essentiellement féminines, dans la région des Grands Lacs en Afrique.

Ce document se veut une ressource pour ceux qui travaillent dans le domaine des traumatismes et de la réconciliation, des femmes et de l'établissement de la paix et avec des organisations féminines de la région. Il donne un bref aperçu de certaines questions clés liées aux femmes et à la guerre et expliquent pourquoi celles-ci doivent être intégrées au processus de paix. L'expérience féminine des conflits diffère de celle des hommes, ce qui explique que leurs besoins et les avantages qu'elles ont à tirer du processus de paix soient également différents. Il est essentiel que les femmes participent à la transition vers la paix dans leur communauté, leur nation et leur région et qu'elles en bénéficient. Ce document décrit par ailleurs le travail de plusieurs organisations régionales et nationales. Les initiatives régionales prises par des femmes depuis dix ans témoignent de l'importance des activités de solidarité transfrontalière. En outre, les organisations nationales fournissent un échantillon transversal de groupes qui travaillent essentiellement avec des femmes pour cicatriser les blessures de la guerre et promouvoir la paix au Burundi, en République démocratique du Congo, au Rwanda et en Ouganda.

Alors que le travail des organisations non gouvernementales (ONG) domine dans cette région, il existe quelques initiatives gouvernementales. La réconciliation suppose un effort collectif qui contribue à l'établissement de la paix. L'État manque souvent des ressources nécessaires pour lancer les programmes sociaux essentiels; la fourniture de services impératifs comme le counseling en cas de traumatisme a été dévolu aux organisations qui travaillent à la base, souvent avec l'aide des organisations internationales. Mais l'État a également un rôle important à jouer et travaille souvent en collaboration avec les ONG pour répondre aux besoins de la population. Enfin, ce document recense les organisations présentes dans ces régions et en fournit les coordonnées.

Les femmes des pays ravagés par la guerre forgent de nouvelles alliances pour affirmer le droit à participer à l'établissement de la paix et au processus de développement. La contribution potentielle des femmes à la vie politique n'a pas encore été pleinement réalisée. La région des Grands Lacs d'Afrique fournit un exemple remarquable de la manière dont les organisations féminines se mobilisent collectivement, malgré des conditions peu favorables, pour aider leur région à retrouver une paix durable et profitable.

Ce texte est le résultat d'une recherche effectuée dans le cadre du « Programme genre et enjeux de la sécurité humaine », basé au CERD et financé par le programme de l'Alliance de recherche universités-communautés du Conseil de recherche en sciences humaines du Canada (CRSH-ARUC).

Women's Organizations Working for Peace and Reconciliation In the Great Lakes Region of Africa

"Women's visions, intelligence, energy and experience are indispensable to the creation of a more just, prosperous and peaceful world."

Towards a Women's Agenda for Peace (1999)

Introduction

While the pundits and academics continue to debate the causes of wars and their relationship to violence and poverty, people on the ground in war-torn areas – women, men and children whose daily lives are turned upside down by these conflicts – are developing various forms of organized resistance to conflict and steps to affirm the possibilities for new lives embedded in a culture of peace. Based on several years of research in the region and most recently in Rwanda and Uganda in September 2000, this document describes some of those initiatives, particularly by women in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

The document is intended to be a resource for those working in the areas of trauma and reconciliation, women and peace building, and with women's organizations in the Great Lakes region of Africa.¹ First, it provides a brief overview of some key issues related to women and war and why they must be included in the peace process. Women's experience of conflict is different from that of men, and their needs and benefits from the peace process are also different.² It is essential that women be included in and profit from the transition to peace in their community, nation and region. Secondly, the work of several regional and national organizations is described. The regional initiatives that women have taken over the decade reflect the importance of trans-boundary solidarity activities. In addition, the national organizations illustrate a cross-section of the groups that are working primarily with women to heal the wounds of war and promote peace in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Uganda.

While the work of individual non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is dominant in this area, government initiatives are also presented. Reconciliation involves working with all efforts that contribute to peace. The State often lacks the resources to carry out essential social programs; thus provision of needed services, such as trauma counseling, has devolved to grassroots organizations that are often supported by international organizations. But the State does have an important role to play and often

¹ I would like to thank Karen Barnes, CDAS Fellow, for research assistance on this document.

² Throughout the 1990s, there has been a worldwide increase in activities that assert the need for women's involvement in the formal resolution of conflicts in all regions. See the bibliography in Boyd (1994) and the selected bibliography on page 17 of this document.

works in alliance with NGOs in their attempts to respond to people's needs. Finally, at the end of the document, there is a list of the various organizations featured here with their full contact information.

Women in war-torn countries are forging new alliances to assert their right to be included in the peace-building and development processes. The potential contribution of women to political life has yet to be fully realized. The Great Lakes region of Africa provides a remarkable example of how women's organizations are mobilizing collectively despite adverse conditions to achieve a lasting, profitable transition to peace in their region.

Women, Peace and Reconciliation

The number of civil conflicts around the world has grown rapidly over the past two decades, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the Great Lakes region of Africa. While not a constant feature, several prolonged, destructive civil wars have continued to afflict the populations of the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire), Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda. At present, despite the Lusaka Accords of 1999, the region is still plagued by fighting centred in the DRC and involving nine African states which continues to disrupt the lives of millions of innocent civilians. This regional conflict and the internal conflicts in each of these countries have claimed civilians as the majority of their victims, and of these, most are women and children. During war, women experience many horrors including displacement, destruction of land and property, sexual and physical violence, as well as loss of and separation from family members. Paradoxically, conflict often undermines the traditional patriarchal cultural values that women have been subjected to, which allows them to take on more productive roles in society during the conflict. This independence is often rescinded at the end of hostilities, but in the aftermath many households become female-headed which has been the case for all of the countries in this region. The provision of money and support for keeping the family in its altered state often becomes a woman's responsibility alone.

As is well known, war leaves a socioeconomic, psychological, political and cultural impact on women's lives. Despite this, they struggle to fulfill their daily obligations in unsafe and difficult circumstances without the support of a family or community. However, women are not always victims and innocent bystanders. They sometimes participate directly in combat or by indirectly supporting the conflict through information-gathering or supplying food and other resources. Also, they can assume the role of protagonists, rising above the fighting and instability to become a force for change, advocating for peaceful resolution to conflict. Thus, conflict affects women in unique and complex ways, and irreversibly transforms the world and social space in which they live. That is the focus I have chosen in this document.

Although women are the most adversely affected by conflict, they are often overlooked, or their input and needs are rarely taken into account, during the formal process towards the transition to peace. Women are instrumental in molding and

supporting the social fabric of a country and thus their *inclusion* is integral to the success of peace-building processes in this region of Africa as in any other region of the world. It is important that the transformed role of women is maintained and that their potential to become powerful forces for peace is realized. Women have a stake in the new society that develops in the transition to peace and they are increasingly asserting their right to have a say in its formation. Also, women tend to be more involved in the grassroots level of politics and community, and thus they are a touchstone of popular sentiment providing negotiators and development workers with a perspective from diverse levels of society.

While many assume that women are natural peacemakers and ‘nurturers’, the reality of the benefits that women bring to peace-building are more complex. Women tend to respond to conflict and difficult situations by uniting, talking about the atrocities and difficulties they face, exposing the negative human consequences of conflict with the hope of finding some solution to enable them to meet basic human security needs. Therefore, women can use their distinctive experience of conflict to bring a new and creative approach to the struggle towards peace and to the transformation of the state.

This document focuses primarily on organizations that address issues related to the trauma that women frequently experience both during and after conflict, and the reconciliation and treatment that is necessary to allow them to overcome it. The conflicts in the Great Lakes region were both exacerbated, and in turn worsened by societal cleavages. These cleavages resulted in widespread massacres, massive refugee flows, and a culture of fear and hatred throughout the region. The sexual violence that is frequently perpetuated against women during times of conflict and its aftermath carries a negative social stigma that women often shoulder for the rest of their lives. It often prevents them from being able to marry or remarry, makes them outcasts from their communities and immediate family, and leads to psychosocial trauma. Additionally, women often suffer severe physical injuries as a result of this violence and accessibility to treatment for these scars is limited. This trauma and fear is slowly being addressed to allow women to move on, overcome the horrors of the past and become constructive members of society.³

Despite the reduced personal capacity that is a consequence of trauma, women are consistently faced with increased responsibilities in the home and community. With many men dead, in prison or absent, the burden of providing food, school fees and other resources to the family falls mainly on women. Opportunities for them to participate in productive activity are limited, and there are usually legal obstacles to acquiring the land and property of male relatives. In the face of this reality of poverty, fear and destruction, women throughout this region have continuously demonstrated that they are determined to rebuild their lives and themselves, for the sake of their children and community.

³ I have also conducted research on issues that relate to the need for men, especially the army and demobilized soldiers in this region, to address trauma in their lives, as it is linked to domestic violence. However, the focus of this document is women’s experiences and organizations. See, for example, Breines et al. (2000).

The Role of Women's Organizations in Peace-building

During and after armed conflict, there are countless examples of women who have united to hold communities together out of necessity. To move on, to regain their constructive role in society, and to enable them to forge new alliances, women are recognizing that they also need to address the atrocities they experienced and witnessed during armed conflict. As will be demonstrated, women's organizations in the Great Lakes region have begun to understand the importance of confronting their trauma.⁴

Although there was an active civil society in the region before the eruption or escalation of conflict, in the transition to peace, women's organizations have since multiplied and come to the fore. These organizations provide a forum for women to address the trauma they experienced through psychosocial counseling, medical assistance, and the support of other victims. Not only do they offer a network of support; these organizations also provide micro-credit initiatives, legal assistance, education programs, and various forms of concrete support. In each country of the region, whose histories and experiences are distinct, they are making a lasting contribution to women's health and well being, and the well being of their societies as a whole.

Women's organizations come in many different guises and they represent the most effective way for women to become involved in peace-building. They provide the opportunity for women to increase their economic independence, participate in the political process, and force the integration of gender concerns into the development process to challenge the masculine societal culture. However, these organizations often function under extremely difficult conditions, including continued violence, severe underfunding, and in a climate where many women are often unaware of their rights. Women's organizations whether grassroots, national, regional, or umbrella organizations recognize the need to cooperate to raise the profile of the plight of women beyond the community and national level. This cooperation strengthens the network of organizations allowing them to participate more fully and effectively in all aspects of peace-building from assisting individual victims of rape to the reform of unequal land laws, all of which are taking place in this region. These organizations work to raise awareness through peace education, workshops and seminars, radio programs and projects targeted at diverse groups of women in order to focus public attention on the important issues related to women and armed conflict.

Another difficulty faced by women in this region who are committed to the promotion of peace relates to the contradictory nature of their governments which are themselves still highly militaristic and yet clearly responsible for positive change, especially their daily security. The entire region is heavily reliant on the army for its solutions to conflict. Even Uganda, which has had relative peace since 1986, which has had major national elections for a functioning civilian Parliament as well as a new Constitution for establishing a new polity, relies too heavily on the military for resolving conflict. The challenge in Rwanda is equally contradictory when it comes to criticizing

⁴ For almost twenty years, the women in the Luwero district who had been raped and brutalized during the 1980s civil war in Uganda were neglected. See Isis-WICCE (1998) for their stories.

the militaristic character of that regime. Without doubt, it was the Rwandan Patriotic Front/Army (RPF/RPA) that was responsible for bringing the genocide to an end in 1994 and continues to repel insurgent attacks. As such, to criticize this government comprised mainly of the RPF as too militaristic even seven years later is tenuous. How do you contribute to one's sense of security, to help people to heal without fear and, at the same time, work towards reducing the reliance on the army?

Another problem in the region as a whole is the increase in arms trade. Even the small arms legally purchased by civilians in these societies, reflecting their sense of insecurity, is steadily rising. For example, in Uganda, during the year 2000, there were 10 pistols legally purchased per month; at present, that figure is up to an average of 38 per month. The trade in illegal small- and medium-sized arms, which continues to fuel these conflicts, is rampant. The principal manufacturers of arms are the developed countries of Europe and North America. Promoting peace in the region means to challenge the purchase of weapons and the militaristic discourse in resolving conflict.

The international community has an obligation to assist and foster these women's initiatives in the Great Lakes region of Africa. These organizations carry out work in health, education, income-generation, trauma-counseling; areas that are often over-looked and neglected in government development programs and policies during the transition to peace. By helping women and their communities rebuild and heal from the ravages of conflict, they are contributing to a national and regional culture of peace and tolerance. In all of their different programs and visions, it is in these organizations on the ground where the real peace negotiations are being cultivated. Before turning to the regional and national organizations to describe the work that they are doing, an outline of some regional initiatives for peace-building that have taken place over the past decade is provided. These initiatives are testimony to a new discourse and direction that women are asserting throughout the region.

Regional Initiatives for Peace

During the 1990s, there have been an unprecedented number of regional initiatives by women in Africa that concretely demonstrate their level of commitment to the pursuit of peace in their communities and to demilitarize the region. The following initiatives that I have chosen to cite do not claim to be a comprehensive or exhaustive list; they do, however, serve to illustrate the types of action that have been carried out in working for peace, reconciliation and conflict mediation. These conferences were generally organized through the cooperation of several different bodies, including regional, national, government, and non-governmental organizations. Although these initiatives may have varied in focus and structure, the one over-riding similarity is that they have all built on the previous accomplishments and declarations of African women creating a strong momentum for peace that continues to gather strength to this day.

Kampala Action Plan on Women and Peace: Kampala, Uganda, 1993

This conference was a joint initiative of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Organization for African Unity (OAU), and the Government of Uganda. It

was a direct response to women's concern at the number of major conflicts in the African region at that time and it took place during the UN's Decade for Women during which women were beginning to seek a more constructive role in peace-building. The Kampala Action Plan, which was eventually sanctioned by the heads of state of the OAU in 1995, covered four key issue-areas: the nature and effects of conflict and underdevelopment, women in the struggle for peace, the empowerment of women in the peace process, and a culture of tolerance and violence.

African Platform for Action: Dakar, Senegal, 1994

The African Platform for Action followed directly from the discussion held in Kampala in 1993 and was adopted by the Fifth Regional Conference on Women that was held in Dakar in November 1994. This declaration was prepared to allow African women to present a united front at the 4th UN World Conference on Women due to be held the following year in Beijing. It reiterated the need for a sustainable, equitable and engendered development process and for mechanisms to ensure the continued advancement of women.

Beijing Platform for Action: Beijing, China, 1995

The Beijing Platform for Action (PFA) was developed at the UN 4th World Conference of Women held in 1995. Platform E of the PFA focused specifically on the issues associated with armed conflict and women, ranging from increasing their participation in conflict resolution to assisting refugee and displaced women. This document from a recognized international organization clearly demonstrated the inextricability of peace from development and gender equality projects, and would serve as a benchmark for women's participation in peace-building around the world.

Women Leadership Forum on Peace: Johannesburg, South Africa, 1996

The principal aim of this conference was for women to come together to contemplate how their roles in the peace process could be enhanced and improved. Following from a provision of the Kampala Plan, this conference called for a Committee of African Women Ministers and Plenipotentiaries (AWCP) to be established within the mandate of the OAU and ECA that would be involved in conflict prevention, management and resolution.

Pan-African Conference on Peace, Gender and Development: Kigali, Rwanda, 1997

This conference, held in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide, was intended to bring together women and men to discuss and design preventive mechanisms to avert a similar tragedy from occurring elsewhere. It was organized by the Ministry of Family and Women in Development in Rwanda, Pro-femme Twese Hamwe, and the National Consultative Council for Women. It resulted in the Kigali Declaration that acknowledged peace as a pre-requisite for development, urged the acceleration of the establishment of the AWCP, and called on African governments and the international community to recognize and preserve the role of women in peace-building and to focus on the eradication of poverty.

Inter-Agency Workshop on Documented Best Practices of Women in Peace-building and Non-Violent Means of Conflict Resolution: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 1997

This workshop was held in Addis Ababa in November 1997 with the support of UNHCR, UNFPA, UNDP, UNESCO, UNIFEM and UNICEF. It continued the plan set out in previous declarations in Kampala, Beijing, Johannesburg, and Kigali to strengthen the role of women in the peace process.

The Pan-African Women's Conference for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence: Zanzibar, Tanzania, 1999

This was one of the key pan-African conferences of the decade that involved over 300 women from all over the continent. Organized by UNESCO in cooperation with other inter- and non-governmental organizations, it resulted in the Zanzibar Declaration and the launching of the Pan-African women's movement for peace, and the "Women's Agenda for a Culture of Peace in Africa". Women committed themselves to working for the participation of women in decision-making processes and the demilitarization of African governments, to strengthening the networks of women working for peace throughout the continent, and urged the international community to assist and support the resolutions set out in their Declaration.

Women as Partners for Peace Conference: Kigali, Rwanda, 2000

This week-long June conference brought together over 180 women from African countries of the region (Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan and Zimbabwe) as well as other conflict-ridden areas of the world, in order to debate and affirm practical strategies for including women in the peace-building process. This was the second phase of an on-going peace-building initiative that the U.S. State Department and various UN agencies had supported in February 2000. The first phase brought together women leaders mainly from the countries involved in the conflict in the DRC.

Burundian Women's Peace Conference: Arusha, Tanzania, 2000

Although a national conference, this meeting has implications for women throughout the region, as it was the first time that women had fought so successfully to be included in any peace process. This conference ran in parallel to the official negotiations in Arusha, and some of the resolutions drafted by the women were, after much insistence, included in the final peace agreement that came out of the Arusha negotiations. Around 50 women, including refugee and displaced women, representing both the 19 political parties participating in the peace process and several other grassroots organizations attended this conference. Some of their recommendations were to eliminate and reform discriminatory laws, ensure equal education rights for females, and to adopt measures to punish perpetrators of rape and other gender-related crimes. There have been follow-up consultations to this conference and the women's movement remains active and committed to the Burundian peace process, despite many setbacks.

UN Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security: New York, 2000

This debate took place on October 24, 2000 following a United Nations assertion on International Women's Day (March 8th) that women must assume a key role in peace

processes. This was significant because it resulted in the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 that called for the broad participation of women in peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction. This resolution recognizes the crucial role that women play in these processes and the need to adopt gender-sensitivity when planning development and humanitarian policies in conflict-stricken areas. The Security Council also invited the Secretary General to request that studies be carried out on the impact of armed conflict on women and girls, the role of women in peace-building and the gender dimension of peace processes. By adopting Resolution 1325, the international community has acknowledged the plight of these women and the benefits that they can bring to the peace-building process. Hopefully, this resolution will further raise the profile of these issues in the international arena.

Within the context of these regional initiatives that brought African women together across national boundaries promoting a discourse of peace and reconciliation in the region, women also established regional structures to ensure the sustainability of their efforts. Some key regional organizations are now described in the following section.

Regional Organizations

The *African Women's Committee on Peace and Development (AWCPD)* was established in 1998 after a long struggle within the Organization for African Unity (OAU), based on the recommendations of several regional women's conferences such as the Kampala Action Plan on Women and Peace in 1993 and the Women's Leadership Forum on Peace held in 1996. This Committee is a joint initiative of the OAU and the ECA (UN Economic Commission for Africa). The three main tasks of the AWCPD are to encourage and facilitate women's initiatives for peace and alternatives to armed conflict, to campaign for the inclusion of women in decision-making and conflict resolution and prevention, and to bring gender concerns and women's perspectives on peace and development into the mainstream. The Committee comprises women from government and the non-governmental community and functions as an Advisory Body to the OAU and ECA, working closely with these and other regional and international organizations.

Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMWA) is an international, pan-African, non-governmental organization that was founded in 1985 by African women resident in the U.K., although it now has a regional office in Kampala, Uganda. Its name, in Swahili, means "solidarity among African women". AMWA fosters this solidarity through support and awareness of women's issues and the creation of a strong network amongst African women. This organization seeks to build the leadership capacity and influence of women, identifying issues of importance and creating the tools to enable them to organize autonomously. AMWA works at the local, regional and national levels through its four programs: Human Rights, Education and Research, International Development, and Community Development. The latter program includes the African Refugee Women's Project, which involves advocacy work on behalf of refugee and asylum-seeking women, for example providing them with counseling. AMWA is in the process of extending its operations into West and French-speaking Africa.

The *Eastern African Sub-regional Support Initiative for Advancement of Women (EASSI)* was founded in August 1996, following the East-African Post-Beijing Forum that was held in Kampala earlier that year.⁵ Based in Uganda, EASSI's activities extend to Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, Tanzania and Uganda, allowing it to serve as a sub-regional support mechanism. It was established to maintain the momentum begun at Beijing and to ensure the implementation of the African Platforms for Action, and also to focus interest on issues related to the advancement of women. The main activities of this organization are information sharing, networking, advocacy, and support for collective action. EASSI works extensively to involve not only other grassroots organizations but also governments in its many programs. The Global Platform for Action identifies armed conflict, violence against women, and peace-building as vital areas of concern for women. Following from this, EASSI has supported sub-regional consultations on peace and conflict resolution and the formation of peace committees, mainly in Rwanda and Burundi. More recently, members of EASSI have made a solidarity visit to the women of Somalia.

The *Isis-Women's International CrossCultural Exchange (Isis-WICCE)* was founded in Geneva in 1974, and became a prominent global women's organization in Africa with the relocation of its office to Kampala, Uganda in 1993. This move allowed Isis-WICCE to better tap into the ideas, views and problems facing African women through its strategies of information sharing, networking and documentation. Isis-WICCE also runs an exchange program that offers women an opportunity to share skills and experiences from different cultures and regions. During 1996 and 1998-99, their exchange programs were based around issues of women's experiences of armed conflict. In addition to their extensive research on women and trauma in Luwero, Uganda, they have produced a video entitled "Women, War and Trauma". The video aims to convince policy-makers, health professionals and donors that the issue of trauma among women in Uganda, and elsewhere, must be addressed and that in general, the psychological suffering and reproductive damage caused by war are often overlooked. Isis-WICCE is continuing to document the effects of war on women's health and economic status, which will be used to record gender-specific suffering for future generations, to create a lobbying tool that can be used to seek redress, to sensitize the public, and to strengthen networks among African women.

The United Nations has also developed several programs and initiatives in the region that are designed to assist women in armed conflict. For example, the UN Development Fund for Women (**UNIFEM**) has established a program called African Women in Crisis (AFWIC), to address women's needs in conflict situations and during humanitarian emergencies, needs that are often overlooked by other development initiatives. In the past they have been able to rapidly assist refugee and internally displaced women. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (**UNHCR**) has also begun to address ways to involve

⁵ Our Montreal-based "Gender and Human Security Program" works with EASSI as its principal partner in the region.

women in conflict prevention, management and resolution. UNHCR is especially involved in the areas of violence against women and women in armed conflict where it has begun programs such as the Rwandan Women's Initiative that helps women to rebuild their lives and communities. Also, the UN Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) in conjunction with other agencies has developed a strategy to respond to female victims of sexual violence and to address their reproductive health needs. The UN Education, Social, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) established their program, Women and a Culture of Peace, in 1996. This project focuses on empowering women in political processes, campaigns of gender sensitization, and supporting women's initiatives for peace.

While the regional women's organizations have difficulties obtaining financial support because their *raison d'être* is regional rather than national, they are crucial in building solidarity among women's organizations in the region. The effects of these armed conflicts on women transcend national boundaries. The importance of regional organizations has often been misunderstood and undervalued. Their collective advocacy, information exchange and testimonies of experiences serve to reinforce the work of national organizations in the region, which I now want to describe. Starting with Uganda, there will be a brief overview of the present context regarding internal civil unrest for each of the four countries.

National Organizations

Uganda

Of the four countries in the region where we are describing women's organizational work for peace and reconciliation, it is appropriate to begin with Uganda. Uganda has experienced relative stability the longest, since 1986 when the National Resistance Movement (NRM) took power following the five-year civil war. The NRM leadership established an enabling environment for women almost immediately and many of the regional initiatives for women in the 1990s emanate from or take place in Uganda. In fact, Uganda was often the inspiration for new possibilities for peace and for women's participation in these processes throughout the region. However, Uganda has also been plagued by civil strife on all its borders: conflict in the Sudan for almost two decades; civil unrest in the DRC and subsequent support for Congolese rebel organizations; civil war, genocide and continued insurgency in Rwanda with flows of refugees through Tanzania. As well, the Ugandan government has not been able to eliminate its own insurgencies, especially in the Northern districts where support from Sudan has been active throughout the 1990s. There is a growing fear among some women's groups that Uganda may slide back into the high levels of violence it experienced in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly as the militaristic solution is still too easily resorted to.

Action for Development (ACFODE) was established in 1985 and focuses on increasing the participation of women and girls in the social, economic and political spheres. The organization aims to improve the status and lives of women in Uganda through communication and networking with rural and urban women. ACFODE empowers women by sharing knowledge on issues regarding health, family planning, legal rights,

income generating projects and other social problems. It has been one of the most effective and vocal women's organizations in Uganda conducting important work on domestic violence, child abuse and women's rights.

The **Center for Conflict Resolution (CECORE)** is an initiative of Ugandans who are working to find alternative means of preventing, managing and resolving conflicts using a holistic approach to peace-building. CECORE is a registered charity in Uganda, but it has conducted programs throughout the Great Lakes and Greater Horn region of Africa, the rest of Africa and the Asia-Pacific region. This organization seeks to collect and disseminate information on traditional methods of conflict resolution and early-warning and preventive mechanisms through its extensive networks. It implements the practice of conflict resolution through workshop training throughout the region.

The **Hope Counseling Center (HCC)** was founded in 1994 in response to the increased number of reports of rape and defilement to serve as a support service for the victims of these crimes. The HCC conducts research into gender-based violence, especially its psychosocial consequences, and communicates this information to the government and other NGOs working in this field to increase awareness of the issues involved. Through its advocacy program, the HCC conducts sensitization talks, lobbies governments for legal reform, and produces television and radio shows. In addition to its counseling services, the HCC provides follow-up visits by social workers and legal assistance for victims in cooperation with FIDA-U (Uganda Association of Women Lawyers). A big part of their program is counseling children. They worked with the Concerned Parents of Abducted Children in Gulu, helping to train them in counseling. The HCC is currently operating in Kampala, Mpigi and Eastern and Northern areas of Uganda, but hopes to extend its services to the rest of the country.

The **Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development** as part of the Government of Uganda has also developed programs to assist women victims of armed conflict and sexual violence. Strategic Objective number 8 under Reproductive Health and Rights of the government's National Action Plan on Women addresses the special health needs of female victims of violence.

Registered in 1992, the **National Association of Women Organizations in Uganda (NAWOU)** serves as an umbrella organization for Ugandan women's groups, mainly community-based in rural areas. NAWOU's work is mostly concentrated in the areas of capacity building, training, lobbying for policy change, promotion of gender policy and law reform, advocacy, networking, promoting women's socioeconomic empowerment through a micro-credit scheme, and providing information and research. The principal issues currently identified by the organization are rape and defilement, child abuse, violence against women, and early forced marriage.

People's Voice for Peace (PVP) is an independent, non-governmental and non-profit organization based in Gulu. PVP has several objectives such as documentation of oral testimonies from women who have lived through armed conflict, trauma-counseling to victims of violence, networking with other national and regional organizations, capacity-

building, and peace education for conflict prevention and to foster an atmosphere free of violence. In addition to its counseling programs for female rape victims, PVP also uses seminars, workshops, publications and a radio program to encourage a positive attitude to these victims and encourages women to work together as a means of support, solidarity and recovery.

Rwanda

Since independence, Rwanda has suffered continuous internal conflict and power struggles. Following the assassination of President Habyarimana in 1994, Rwanda experienced 100 days of genocide which claimed the lives of an estimated 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus and forced millions of others to flee the country. The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) seized power in July of that year, ending the period of genocide, but not its far-reaching effects in the form of refugees and internally-displaced people and a much-diminished population traumatized by killings, rape and destruction. In the wake of this tragedy, women's organizations in Rwanda have proliferated and are assisting women to recover psychologically and socio-economically. Rwandan women parliamentarians were instrumental in forcing the reclassification of rape as a crime against humanity, and women have won the right to inherit property and to be more fairly represented in the government. However, the legacy of the genocide continues to impact on everyday life. Rwanda still struggles with issues of security and a patriarchal, militaristic society where violence against women continues, and the increase in female responsibilities are not yet reflected by increased women's rights and access to resources.

Collectif Profemmes Twese Hamwe, originally established in 1992, is the main NGO umbrella group in Rwanda. Profemmes currently has approximately 38 member women's organizations focusing on issues such as poverty, human rights, and violence against women. Through the "Action Campaign for Peace", Profemmes is managing the consequences of genocide, eradicating its causes through advocating a culture of peace, with the goal of strengthening women's power and their role within Rwandan society. Profemmes is not only a prominent actor at the national level, but often represents Rwandan women in regional and international forums.

Examples of organizations that are part of Profemmes include the following:

ASOFERWA (Association for Solidarity between Rwandan Women) was established to address the needs of the many groups made vulnerable by the genocide: widows, orphans, girl-mothers, traumatized women and children, victims of AIDS due to rape or other forms of violence, elderly people without family support, and most uniquely, women and children in detention. Their mission is to encourage the socio-economic rehabilitation of these groups and promote national reconciliation, primarily through initiatives such as "peace villages". ASOFERWA also supports grassroots groups of women, runs income-generating projects involving 2500 women, provides psychological assistance to approximately 3,500 individuals, and tries to reunite families.

AVEGA -The Association of the Widows of the Genocide - Agahozo (Consoling) was founded in 1995 by 50 widows of the genocide. AVEGA provides counseling and medical assistance for women who are victims of violence, sensitization programs to increase awareness about issues related to violence against women in conflict, and income-generating and capacity-building projects. In 1997, AVEGA started its program of psychosocial and medical rehabilitation and now has offices in 154 sub-prefectures with 25,000 women involved in its programs. However, their needs are overwhelming. In fact, in September 2000, they had stopped planning and were concentrating all their efforts on addressing emergencies faced every day yet without sufficient counselors.

Icyuzuzo- Association for the Protection and the Promotion of the Widow is another organization established to help widows work together for a better standard of living, although it began in 1990, prior to the genocide. *Icyuzuzo* means “complement” and tries to fill the gap left by the loss of a husband. From originally 83 members, the organization now has approximately 5,300 members. In 1997, they established the Center for Psychosocial Assistance in Kigali to treat women, children and men suffering from trauma.

In addition to these organizations, there are others such as **Haguruka** which provides legal assistance and education about women’s rights, and **Duterimbere** which provides micro-credit for women and runs workshops to inform them about the management of small businesses. Almost all of these organizations are struggling to carry out their programs under difficult circumstances with little funding and too few trained personnel.

Founded by a genocide survivor in 1995, the goal of the **Clinic of Hope** is to help women to recover from the trauma caused by civil conflict in the country. The Clinic offers regular meetings where women can talk about their experiences, and where victims can receive medical treatment and counseling. In addition to these services, the Clinic also makes small loans available to women. The programs of the Clinic of Hope are directed to both all women in Rwanda, thus contributing to reconciliation.

The **Ministry of Gender and Women in Development** was established in Rwanda in 1999 to continue the work of previous ministries (Family and Women in Development and then Gender, Family and Social Affairs) and to combat the structural problems caused by the genocide with the hope of promoting gender equality and the integration of women into the development process. The Rwandan government has recognized that its population is disproportionately made up of the young and women, and that women are the majority of the active population in basic production, thus any development activities must focus extensively on these key groups. The Rwandan government has also collaborated with the World Health Organization (WHO) and various NGOs to develop training programs for counselors, networks to assist female victims of sexual violence, and projects to deal with the health problems of these women. National reconciliation has also become one of the priorities of the Rwandan government with the establishment of the **National Unity and Reconciliation Commission** (headed by the former Minister of Women) that will help to build a culture of peace, tolerance, and forgiveness. The Rwandan government has also co-hosted conferences on peace and gender and has recently undergone a reform of its laws to protect the rights of women. The government

also continues to network with the non-governmental community to increase and improve the services and support available to female survivors of the genocide.

Rwandan Women's Net (RWN) is an offspring of Church World Service, an international NGO that began its work in Rwanda in the wake of the 1994 genocide. RWN's programs are based around the need to empower and promote Rwandan women through training and economic independence. It contributes money to the projects of several other organizations including the Clinic of Hope, AVEGA and Duterimbere, for use in constructing shelters for women and sponsoring small enterprises.

The **Women in Transition** program funded by USAID, which works with Ministry of Gender and Women in Development, supports rural women's groups and national organizations of Rwandan women working in all areas from widow-support to income-generating projects. Women's groups in Rwanda also receive assistance through the **Rwandan Women's Initiative**, launched by UNHCR following the release of reports describing the rape and sexual violence experienced by women during the genocide. This initiative aims to foster reconciliation and promote economic recovery, giving priority to female genocide survivors and their families.

Burundi

Independence in Burundi was also followed by prolonged strife between ethnic Hutus and Tutsis in what was essentially a political struggle for power, resulting in periodic massacres, destruction of the economy, and constant instability. The most recent crisis dates back to 1993 when Tutsi soldiers killed the democratically-elected Hutu president Melchior Ndadaye. After much fighting and another presidential assassination, Major Pierre Buyoya, a Tutsi and former President, seized power in a military coup in 1996. In 1998, following years of devastating civil conflict involving a huge displacement of the population, peace negotiations were again initiated. Most, although not all, of the warring parties signed the Arusha Peace Agreement in August 2000. However, no ceasefire was established, and as recent events demonstrate, fighting amongst different groups continues in the capital, Bujumbura, and elsewhere.

Notwithstanding this history of conflict, Burundian women have played a dynamic role in the country's quest for peace. Despite being adversely affected by the continued conflict in Burundi, women were excluded from all formal meetings and were not consulted by the government or other peace negotiators leading up to the negotiations in Arusha. However, Burundian women with the support of women in the region mobilized independently, forcing the leaders to acknowledge them and their input, leading to their inclusion as observers to the peace negotiations in October 1998 and the holding of the Burundian All-Party Women's Peace Conference in 2000. Since then, from the community level up to the level of the Arusha negotiations, women have been a constant presence in the formal peace negotiations and also in the complicated task of reconstructing their society that continues to be destroyed by years of fighting.

The *Collectif des associations et ONG féminines du Burundi (CAFOB)* is an umbrella organization composed of approximately 35 member organizations working in Burundi. It was established in 1994 and is active in a wide variety of areas such as peace, justice, and women victims of war. CAFOB works to develop strategies for involving women in peace-building and economic development. CAFOB has organized seminars and workshops on peace and was involved in mobilizing women to participate in the Arusha Peace Accords. Representatives from CAFOB also participated in the World March of Women in New York and the debate organized by the United Nations Security Council on “Women, Peace and Security” which took place in October 2000.

Search for Common Ground (SFCG), an NGO based in Washington, DC, opened a field office in Bujumbura in 1995. The goal of this office is to reduce ethnic conflict and to foster a culture of non-violence in Burundi through reconciliation initiatives. The **Women’s Peace Center** was opened in January 1996, and it provides services such as training in organizational development and conflict resolution, dissemination of information about women’s issues, a radio program, a micro-credit project, and, importantly, it acts as a neutral meeting place for women of all backgrounds. In May 2000, the Center opened its first branch office in Ngozi in the north of the country, permitting SFCG-Burundi to extend its reach to more women. This organization recognizes that women must have access to the tools necessary for ethnic reconciliation and that they are key actors in this process.

Women’s Peace Melody was established in the spring of 2000 and is dedicated to working with women subjected to violence in war-torn Burundi. WPM places special emphasis on their psychosocial health, which is often overlooked in favour of concern over daily survival. They see this psychological support as a key priority that can help women succeed in other aspects of life. Through trauma counseling, legal advice and training programs in conflict resolution, it assists women in their efforts to build peaceful and more secure lives for themselves and their communities. However, demand for its services far exceeds its ability, and more counselors need to be trained and cooperation with other organizations increased to meet the needs of Burundian women. WPM is faced with severe financial constraints, although given the obvious importance, value and success of the organization’s work, they remain optimistic about their future.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, formerly Zaire)

Sparked by rebellion in the Eastern and Southern Kivu provinces in late 1996, conflict between several groups in the then-Zaire intensified, culminating in the seizure of power by AFDL rebel forces led by Laurent Kabila in 1997. Promises of democracy and an end to the fighting proved to be empty as years of shifting alliances between internal forces and neighbouring governments failed to end the conflict. By the time of his assassination in February 2001, Kabila had support from Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe, was fighting several different rebel groups backed by either Uganda or Rwanda, and had lost control of vast parts of his country. Meanwhile, the Congolese population and the thousands of refugees who had fled there as a result of other regional conflicts have suffered untold hardship and violence. At present, Joseph Kabila, who took

over after his father's death, claims to be attempting to revive the failed Lusaka Accord of 1999. However, an end to the violence is seemingly still far-off, and depends in large part on the efforts of all the countries in the region.

Unfortunately, we have not yet been able to carry out new field research in the DRC. Since field research forms the principal source of information contained in this document, and is the most effective way to become informed about the activities of women's organizations and their work, the information available at this point is limited. We plan to strengthen our links with women's organizations working in the DRC later in the program. At that point, we will be able to offer more insight into the work of Congolese women's organizations. Clearly, women have suffered immensely due to this conflict. Several organizations are struggling to function in the tense and violent environment, and to provide the much-needed services of counseling, legal advice and supportive networks.

For example, **Promotion et appui des initiatives féminines (PAIF)** is a women's organization based in Goma that is involved in a wide variety of issues such as violence against women, inheritance rights, and women's human rights. PAIF raises public awareness through the local radio in Eastern Congo and has contributed to the emergence of the women's movement in the region. Another organization active in the DRC is **l'Union nationale des femmes congolaises (UNAF)**. They held a conference on women's contribution to reconstruction in Kinshasa in October 1999.

Concluding Remarks

Women's organizations and their initiatives for peace in the Great Lakes region of Africa that have been described above are struggling to assert their voices within societies that have been brutalized by years of conflict in an increasingly dehumanized world. They are offering a range of services for women and working often in materially adverse situations. Not only are they in need of assistance and training but they face the added constraint of promoting peace in a region that values the military for ensuring their security. Building a culture of peace necessitates transforming values. Confronting the militarization of society may be the greatest challenge for organizations in the region, especially as we know that armed intervention has been necessary, that people need protection and they have a right to feel secure. But how can women return to work in their *shambas* (gardens) or fetch water with the threat of landmines exploding? How can they ensure the safety of their children and families in this context?

The perspective offered in this document is to set out the range of initiatives taken by the women in the region and to affirm their place in transforming their societies. The challenges that they face daily are enormous. Poverty, war and development are all interlinked globally to the struggles in this region. Inequalities, debt and the arms trade continue to fuel these conflicts. Joint strategic action with women in the region to address these concerns is vital to contribute to peace-building. Only with a broad commitment to demilitarization and the elimination of poverty can development with peace take root.

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