

# BURUNDIAN WOMEN IN PEACEBUILDING AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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Pretoria, July 2016

- To the Host organization SALO, Excellences, doctors, Burundian community, distinguished personalities, Ladies and gentlemen here present, good morning,
- I feel highly honored as a member of civil society in Burundi community to represent women this morning

# HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- For the past half century, Burundi has been a theatre of conflicts and violence.
- Through out this period of turmoil, Burundi women have paid the heaviest price in terms of being raped or victims of other forms of GBV, abused becoming widows, raising children as single mothers in refugee camps or as displaced people (IDPs) etc.
- At the same time and historically women in Burundi have been marginalized in a socio-political context dominated by men.

- This conflict had taken immeasurable toll on human lives, leaving people dead, mutilated, and displaced either internally or in neighboring nations.
- In those disastrous situations, women and girls were often exposed to acts of violence which seriously undermined their human rights and deny them opportunities arising from gender inequality.
- Studies have shown that women are worst hit in situations of violent conflict and are also affected differently from men during these crises.
- It is further to note that women are deeply affected by conflicts, which they have had no role in creating.

# ROLE OF BURUNDI WOMEN IN PEACEBUILDING

- The role of Burundi women in peacebuilding reached a turning point during the Arusha Peace Process between 1998 and 2000.
- Pressure from women's organization contributed to developing a culture of negotiation for national peace and for the interest of all.
- Additionally, women's participation in the Burundi's conflict resolution helped in integrating gender equality into democratic governance and the peace building framework.
- The participation of women was initially inconsistent due to lack of political will by men and in some cases strong resistance by political parties.

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- For example: when Arusha peace process began in 1998,
- 17 different political parties met for the first round, no civic organizations were authorized to participate including women.
- Hutu and Tutsi women decided to join force to protest against this exclusion and to call for a place at the peace table.
- Their initiative led to the creation of numerous women's NGOs, among them the Group of Associations and Feminine NGOs of Burundi, Women's Network for Peace and Non-Violence, and the Women's Association for Peace.
- These groups organized a wide range of activities, including workshops on non-violent conflict resolution, a forum gathering women from different ethnic backgrounds, uniting women from the Diaspora and women living in the country to discuss strategies for national reconstruction.

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- A breakthrough was reached when UNIFEM and the late Mwalimu Nyerere Foundation sponsored the All-Party Burundi's women peace conference held July 17 2000 in Arusha, Tanzania.
- 19 Burundi organizations were represented at the peace negotiation sent two women delegates. More than 50 Burundi women and observer participated in the event.
- Amongst the activities, women's proposals were presented at a meeting with the late South African President Nelson Mandela, who was designated to replace the late Mwalimu Nyerere, one of the fathers of the national liberation movements, as the facilitator for the Burundi peace negotiations.

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- Among the steps of action requested were the following:
- A women's charter to be included in the constitution and the elimination of all laws discriminatory to women;
- Special measures for women's security;
- Women's right to land and inheritance;
- Equal access to education for women and girls; and an end to impunity for gender-based war crimes, including domestic violence.



- When Arusha Peace Accords were signed in August 2000, the interests and place of women were taken into account in the political apparatus.
- It was suggested that no less than 30% of all political and administrative positions should go to women. Later, this statement was incorporated in the Burundi Constitution adopted in March 2005.
- Women represent 36,4% in the Burundi National Assembly and 41,9% in the Senate today.

- At the community level, Burundi women played an important role in promoting reconciliation between Hutu and Tutsi.
- Radio Isanganiro which broadcasts from Bujumbura, presented cases of women counted among Burundi heroes known as *“Inkingi z’Ubuntu”* (meaning Pillars of Humanity): This appellation came from the role these people played: During interethnic massacres they decided to hide their fellows at the risk of their lives.

# WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT

- The economy of Burundi relies heavily on Agriculture which represents 40% of the Gross Domestic Production (GDP) but this sector employs almost 90% of the population.
- The majority of those really engaged in production are women. In other words, Burundi women are key actors in economic development of the country.
- The small trade of vegetables, fruits and other small items is also dominated by women while men are employed in the building sector, mining, fishery on lake Tanganyika and transport.

- Recently, Burundi women have launched a serie of enterprises dealing with fashion, tourism, arts, and agribusiness.
- However there is still a number of challenges that is limiting the emergence of Burundi women.
- The challenges are linked to the patriarchal structure of the Burundi society, the culture and traditions and beliefs that encourage the marginalization of women.

# CHALLENGES TO DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE OF WOMEN

- The patriarchal society (especially opposition to women inheritance).
- Early marriage
- School drop
- Unwanted pregnancies
- Sexual and Gender based violence etc.

# RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

- For Burundian woman to be effective in the peace building role and socioeconomic development, they need joint support, nationally and internationally from both men and women.
- in order to organize themselves, strive for institutional, political and legal representation, and create solidarity and support through local, regional, and international networks.
- The community should also help to promote more gender awareness, and to review the content of laws that perpetuate discrimination against women, constitutional reforms, judicial reforms, election participation, as well as access to and control over economic resources, education, and training. This is because despite the ground breaking contributions made by women's groups, gender equity mechanisms created during peace negotiations still remain weak.



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- Burundi has made some progress in terms of integrating women in decision-making positions, in civil society and the media and in the business sector.
- According the recent report from the Inter-parliamentary union, Burundi occupy the 27<sup>th</sup> rank among the countries in which women are well represented in the world.
- However, structural problems remain and need to be addressed.
- Dealing with structural challenges that prevent women from playing a bigger role is crucial to promoting an integrative development.
- Finally but not the least, we hope and trust that the current inter-dialogue team will also consult women in Diaspora like it has consulted diaspora elsewhere in Europe.

Thank you!