Dear FAS Members, Networks and Friends,

The past three months have been full of exciting events for Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS) and its network. FAS organised parallel events at both the 52nd Session of the UN Committee on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York, USA and the 7th Session of the Human Rights Council at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. Building on its recent work on women and human rights in the Darfur region of Sudan, FAS continued its advocacy activities by bringing women from Darfur to speak at both events. The women shared their experiences and also urged the international community to become more effective in the response to their plight. FAS is also pleased to share information on the progress of its Women-Led Business Project for six African countries as well as announce the candidate selected for the Dr Wanjiru Kihoro Fellowship Award.

With more advocacy activities envisaged that focus on Darfur, training on both the Women-Led Business Project and the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and African Union Legal Instruments, FAS is embarking on the next phase of work with great passion. Your support and interest are invaluable to us, and we hope you will enjoy reading and learning about our activities in this latest issue of FAS News. We welcome any comments that you may wish to make.

Yours in solidarity,

Bineta Diop, Executive Director

SUDANESE WOMEN SPEAK ON DARFUR

During the 7th session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland, a delegation of six members of the Sudanese Interim Steering Committee had a chance to address more than 60 people at a panel meeting, present a statement to the Council as well as create new partners in the struggle to free their country from conflict. This was made possible by the support of the Department for International Development (DFID).

The panel, which Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS) co-sponsored with World YWCA, was titled “The Road to Peace and Justice: Sudanese Women Speak on Darfur” and was held on 12th March.

The audience included government representatives, UN agencies, NGOs and civil society. Journalists were also invited and the women were interviewed on their experiences and their views of the conflict.

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Recipient of the Dr Wanjiru Kihoro Fellowship announced

Ms Beatrice Kizi Nzovu has been selected as the recipient of the Dr Wanjiru Fellowship programme. Beatrice was selected out of a total of 23 applicants because she was an exceptional candidate and had worked in peace building initiatives, which work is closely related to what FAS does.

The Dr Wanjiru Kihoro Fellowship Selection Committee were unanimous in picking her as she had demonstrated leadership qualities in her application dossier and showed potential to deliver on the objectives of the Fellowship which is to contribute to the development of a new generation of African women leaders, dedicated to utilizing their voices and experience to further women's central role in peace building and development work in their country, region and continent. At the end of the Fellowship, she is expected to utilise her new skills in her work in Africa.

She will start the 9 months Fellowship with FAS soon. The internship provides her with an opportunity to work with FAS on its projects in Geneva and Africa as well as at some United Nations organs. She will also be mentored and assisted by some Selection Committee members.

Hoping to foster the economic empowerment of women-led businesses in African societies, FAS has partnered with the Centre for Diversity in Global Management at the Instituto de Empressa (IE) of Spain and started a project called The “Training and Mentoring Program for Women-Led Business”. This programme is funded by the Government of Spain to target and work with 25 African women, from six different African countries, who have established business enterprises with strong growth potential.

The six countries targeted in this programme are: Mozambique, Senegal, South Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia and Rwanda. The aim is to inspire women with the courage to break free from the chains of limiting belief patterns and societal or religious conditioning that have traditionally kept women suppressed and unable to see their true potential. The desired outcome is to improve the women entrepreneurs’ access to financial resources, access to technology, access to markets and increasing academic knowledge of the challenges of women entrepreneurs in Africa.

The programme, through training workshops, hopes to build the capacity of the 25 women-led businesses by broadening their knowledge and opening up networking and mentoring opportunities.

To this end, FAS organised a panel during the 52nd session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York titled “Women Empowerment in Africa: Women entrepreneurs in post conflict situations” on 25th February. One achievement during this discussion was the sharing of best practices by South Africa and Senegal and discussions on lessons learned for implementing this kind of project in Africa.

Earlier, a two-day training workshop was organised in Dakar for facilitators from 11th to 12th January 2008 with the aim of training them in the use of the project's selection criteria. The Consultant Dr Celia De Enca, Director, Center for Diversity in Global Management, introduced the participants to the concept of female entrepreneurship. She provided an understanding of the concepts of entrepreneurship, and facilitated a discussion on the different cultural landscapes that women in business in both Africa and Europe operate in. Another facilitator, Dr Martin of IE had a discussion which acquainted the participants with the basic theories in business, economics and the essentials of a successful business. This criteria serves as the basis for the pre selection of the women entrepreneurs. Currently, there are two consultants visiting and mapping the six African countries trying to identify the 25 women who will undergo this training. They have also gathered information on social, political and economical situations of the countries. The final selection will be done by FAS, IE and the consultants by mid May.
FAS ATTENDS PREPARATORY MEETING FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM IN LIBERIA

In its continued preparations for the International Colloquium on Women’s Empowerment, Leadership Development, International Peace and Security, to be held in Monrovia, Liberia from 7–8 March, 2009, FAS, being vice chairperson for Africa, attended a meeting in January this year to discuss preparations for the event. The objective of the meeting was to specify the global functions of the Colloquium stakeholders, to build networks and partnerships to ensure the success of the main event next year. This objective was met in that five separate committees were set up with specific tasks: the agenda, logistics; finance/resources; communications; and protocol and security. Also agreed was the general theme of the March 2009 Colloquium which would be the UNSCR Resolution 1325 as the main focus.

Some of the people that attended this meeting were Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, Ms Elizabeth Rehn, former defence minister (Finland); Mrs Lalla Ben Barka, UNECA; Mrs Aminata Mbengue, deputy minister (Senegal), Mrs Bisi Adeleye-Fayeni, AWDF Director, Honourable Etmonia Tarpeh, Minister of Youth and Sports (Liberia); Honourable Vahah Gayflor, Minister of Gender and Development (Liberia); Ms Paivi Kairamo-Hella, Political Advisor to President Tarja Halonen of Finland; members from non-governmental, governmental and international organisations such as UNMIL. The International Steering Committee met again in early March in New York, parallel to the 52nd Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), to further specify the 2008 work plan.

Resolution 1325 specifically focusses on the effects of armed conflicts on women and girls and underlines the importance of women in peace processes. In order to ensure that these goals are fully met and understood by those African countries in conflict, women organisations felt it was their duty to raise awareness of the Resolution’s existence and ensure that African governments affected adhere to it. Hence the Colloquium was born and is co-convened by President Johnson-Sirleaf and President Halonen.

FAS PROMOTES WOMEN’S INITIATIVES AT 52nd CSW

At this year’s 52nd Session of the Commission of the Status of Women (CSW), FAS held three panels in order to promote women’s initiatives in peace negotiation and peace building in Africa. This was facilitated by FAS, representatives of the Sudanese Interim Steering Committee, the Sudanese civil society, and the Sudanese Diaspora who gathered in New York.

FAS in partnership with YWCA successfully facilitated the presentation of the outcome documents of the African Women’s Consultation on Darfur held in January this year, in a special panel discussion for the Sudanese women entitled “Sudanese Women voices on Darfur Presentation of the Sudanese Women Declaration on Darfur”, which took place on 29th February at the UN Millennium Hotel. The event was attended by more than 60 participants, including representatives from UNECA, AU, UNDP, UNIFEM, AWDF, Sudanese Women General Union, Hawa Society for Women (Sudan), and representatives from Ms. Robinson’s organization, Realising Rights: the Ethical Globalisation Initiative.

The panel was comprised of Mr. Sam Ibok, Mediator/Negotiator and Principal Advisor to the AU Special Envoy for Darfur; Ms. Betty Ogwaro, Minister of Agriculture, Southern Sudan; Dr. Sidiga Washi, President, Babiker Badri Scientific Association for Women Studies; Dr. Mahasin Elabass, Executive Director, Babiker Badri Scientific Association for Women Studies; Ms. Amal Allagabo, Darfur Peace and Development Organization; Mr. Amir Osman, International Advocacy Director, Save Darfur Coalition; Ms. Niemat Ahammad, Representative of the Darfur Leaders Network, USA. The panel was chaired by Ms. Nyaradzai Gumbonzvanda, World YWCA General Secretary.

Several participants at the panel acknowledged the need for the cessation of hostilities in Sudan and the need for capacity building amongst the women so as to enable them take up the challenges in peace negotiation and peace building in the country. With this goal in mind, the need for networking and coalition building was deemed a necessity.
SUDANESE WOMEN SPEAK ON DARFUR

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The panel comprised of Ms Halima Yagoob Mohammed, Gender Based Violence Expert; Ms Mariam Alsadig Almahdi, General Secretary Assistant for Communication, Umma National Party; Ms Mona Elshareif Tazorah, Public Health Professional, University of Medical Science and Technology; Ms Mona Mohammed Gumma Khatier, Human Rights Expert; Dr Asma Siddig Adam Abdalla, Klaimendo Development Organisation and Nemat Ahmadai, Representative of the Darfur Leaders Network, USA. Dr Monica Juma, Executive Director, African Policy Institute, chaired the discussion that was attended by more than 50 people from different non-governmental and international organizations as well as government representatives. Also in attendance was Ms Marema Toure as a FAS Consultant.

The panel underscored the need for peace and security in their country in general, and Darfur in particular. All of them recognized the destruction of property and systematic violation of human rights as a situation that was unhealthy and needed to be resolved. They were unanimous on the need to empower all Sudanese women and engender the peace process so that they effectively participate in the search for peace and reconstruction in their country.

The women recognized that they were poorly represented in peace negotiating teams/missions because, among other things, they lacked the capacity for effective participation. They appealed to civil and international organizations to help build their capacity so that they could add their voice to the peace efforts in Sudan. The women also wanted certain Sudanese laws reviewed, which they felt greatly disadvantaged them and infringed on their rights, particularly those that deal with rape.

“We, Sudanese women here, are seeking peace, protection, security and sustainability for all people of Sudan. We are not against the Government (of Sudan). We recognize the effort of the Government and the international community but there are some things, such as acts of sexual violence against women, in particular rape, that need attention. If we deny them, we are not healing,” Ms Mona Elsharief Tazorah said during the meeting. These profound words were a testament of people who are feeling the real effects of the conflict.

On 17th March, one of the women, Ms Halima Yagoob Mohammed, read out their statement urging the HRC to become an effective advocate for the Darfuri woman. This statement had an important repercussion in the room, and many NGOs, government delegations and journalists requested copies of it.

The Sudanese delegation, FAS and World YWCA staff had a chance to meet and have a discussion with Ms Sima Samar, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in the Sudan, on the situation in Darfur, who noted that peace building cannot be possible without women's participation. Ms. Samar agreed to convey these concerns to the UN envoy for the Darfur peace process, Jan Eliasson, and his counterpart in the African Union, Salim Ahmed Salim.

The women also met with Mrs. Khadija Masri, Permanent Observer, African Union Delegation; Ambassador Sahnoun; Mrs. Elisabeth Rehn, Former Minister of Defence, Finland; Prof. Yakin Ertürk, Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women; Mr. Daniel Duvillard, ICRC, Head of Operations for East Africa and Ms. Florence Tercier-Holstrone, ICRC Women and War Unit; Ms. Margriet Kuster, representative of the Netherlands; Mr. Pekka Metso, representative of Finland.

At the end of their stay in Geneva, the delegation had the opportunity to meet with Ambassadors Eliasson, the UN Special Envoy and Ambassador Salim Ahmed Salim, AU special Envoy on the Darfur Peace process. Eliasson commended the Sudanese Women for creating a common forum and initiative whose activities and impact was being followed with great admiration by many international stakeholders.

The women also attended two training workshops aimed at building their capacity on two International and African Union legal Instruments that are important to their work. The trainings were: “United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325: A legal instrument regarding women, peace and security” AND “Introduction to CEDAW, the Human Rights System and African Union Legal Instruments”.

Sudanese women meet with Ms Sima Samar, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in the Sudan, at the UN in Geneva, Switzerland.
OTHER NEWS

**FAS STAFF RECEIVE HRC TRAINING**

On the 22nd February 2008, four people from Geneva office were trained on the new Human Rights Council (HRC) by the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland. Apart from FAS interns, others trained were ISHR interns. The objective of this training was to familiarise new Geneva staff with what the new HRC is, give a brief history, and discuss what new procedures had been introduced. It was emphasized during this training that the Human Rights Council’s success would be determined by how the new mechanism, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), and the special procedures would take place during the 7th Session. The hope is that the UPR will ensure that all states are treated equally. The HRC replaced the controversial old Commission on the Human Rights. The 7th Session of the Human Rights Council took place between the 3rd and 28th March 2008.

**UPCOMING EVENTS**

**INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR BEGINS THIS MONTHEND**

Emmes Africa Solidarité (FAS) and the coordinator of the Gender is my Agenda Campaign will be participating at the upcoming *African Book Fair* which is occurring on the margins of the International Book and Media Fair, from 30 April – 4 May in Geneva. The Fair is a multicultural event and each year, since 1987, it attracts more than 120 000 visitors. Authors, journalists, personalities and publishers are invited to participate in a dozen debates and/or sign their books. A bookshop (150 square meters) of the exhibition offers a large number of authors a chance to link with the African continent.

The theme of the 5th African Book Fair will be centering on the question ‘Africa, how are you?’ The book fair aims to dispel people’s preconceived ideas about Africa through debates and discussions which address literature and politics.

On the opening day of the Fair, 30th April, the theatre-film 'Afrique terre des femmes' which discusses the 'Gender is my Agenda' campaign and addresses the importance of promoting women’s rights and including gender considerations in politics and development projects will be shown. It was produced by FAS with the support of the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA). It will be followed by a discussion which will be opened by FAS’ Executive Director, Mme Bineta Diop.

FAS and OSIWA will also maintain a stand with material throughout the Fair.

**2ND MISSION TO SUDAN SENT**

A second mission is going to Sudan for a period of 21 days, beginning on 21st April 2008 and ending 11th May 2008. This follows the first mission that occurred between 17th to 20th January that was sent to map women’s organizations and initiatives, as a basis for grounding and guiding discussion and interactions during the 2 day African Women’s Consultation on Darfur, that was held in Addis Ababa between 22-23 January 2008, prior to the African Union Summit.

The 2nd mission aims to consolidate the momentum and achievements since Addis Ababa, as well as to move forward the Plan of Action, particularly regarding the need for training. This was jointly decided with the Interim Steering Committee (ISC). The mission will be undertaken by Dr. Marema Touré, Ms. Berewa Jommo, Ms. Jessica Nkuu, and Dr. Monica Juma, Consultants who participated in the first mission.

**FAS ORGANISES 12th AU PRE-SUMMIT**

It is that time of the year again, when FAS is busy organising the 12th AU Pre-Summit meeting on Gender Mainstreaming in the African Union. The Gender is my Agenda Campaign, coordinated by FAS, arranges this event which will take place in June in Sharm El Sheik, Egypt, on the margins of the 11th AU Heads of State Summit later the same month.

The Pre-Summits present an opportunity for networking among civil society organisations and a forum in which to strengthen the existing partnerships among the members of the Gender is My Agenda Campaign.

In organising the Pre-Summits and producing recommendations, the Gender is My Agenda Campaign highlights the importance of civil society holding the AU accountable to its commitments in gender mainstreaming and the promotion of women’s rights.