



femmes africa solidarité

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Dear FAS Members, Networks and Friends,

The past three months have been very exciting for FAS. I was able to travel to eastern Chad to meet with women in the refugee camps and hear their experiences of the conflict in Darfur. As well, FAS participated in the sixth session of the Human Rights Council, in Geneva, and an Arria Formula Meeting with the UN Security Council in New York City.

Of course, your support is essential to our achievements. We are proud to share our latest successes with you in this latest issue of *FAS News*.

Yours in solidarity,

Bineta Diop, Executive Director

CONTACT:

Beatrice Fantoni
Femmes Africa Solidarité
International Secretariat
Geneva, Switzerland
Tel: + 41 22 328 80 50
Fax: +41 22 328 80 52
Email:
communication@fasngo.org

Regional Office for Africa
Stèle Mermoz Immeuble
Rose,
Appt. No. 31C,
P.O. Box 45077 Fann,
Dakar, Senegal
Tel: +1 221 33 860 20 48
Fax: +1 221 33 860 20 47
Email: fas-ong@sentoo.sn

New York Liaison Office
United Nations Liaison
Office
777 United Nations Plaza
5th Floor
New York,
New York 10017
Tel: +1 212 687-1369
Fax: +1 212 661-4188
Email: infony@fasngo.org

Website:
www.fasngo.org

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FAS RAISES PROFILE OF WOMEN IN DARFUR-CHAD, DR CONGO TO INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

In early September Bineta Diop, Executive Director of Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS), travelled to eastern Chad on a fact finding and solidarity mission along with seven other prominent women, including Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland, and Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, former Minister of Foreign Affairs and former Minister of Finance of Nigeria.

The mission was organized with logistical support from Oxfam International. The women travelled to the refugee camps of Djabal and Gassire near Goz Beida, in eastern Chad, to gather first-hand accounts of the violence faced by the displaced women and children from Chad and Sudan's Darfur region. In the camps they met with *umdas* (traditional leaders), women leaders, youth, educators, and local government authorities.

In small-group discussions, refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) were able to share first-hand accounts of their experiences in the conflict and in the camps. The mission met with a group of women who were victims of rape. As Mme Diop wrote later in a statement to the United Nations Human Rights Council, 'Their stories of rape and mutilation were the most inhuman and degrading we have ever heard.'

The mission returned to Paris on 5 September and met with French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner and the Secretary of State, Rama Yade. Other meetings were held shortly thereafter with members of the German Bundestag, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, Karl Bildt, Foreign Minister of Sweden, and Salim Ahmed Salim, the African Union Special Envoy for Darfur.



The mission delegates meet with French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, 5 September 2007. From left to right: Bineta Diop, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Angelique Kidjo, Bernard Kouchner, Mary Robinson, Musimbi Kanyoro, Jane Wales. (Photo: Oxfam)

Mme Diop has since been working tirelessly to bring the voices of Darfur's and Chad's refugee and internally displaced women to the international community.

Along with the seven other women of the mission, Mme Diop signed an open letter that was published in Nairobi's *East African* daily newspaper on 11 September.

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FAS Celebrates 45th Pan-African Women's Day with Government of Senegal

Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS) commemorated the 45th Pan-African Women's Day by participating in a panel discussion with ministers of the Senegalese government on 31 July 2007 in Dakar, Senegal.

Mme Bineta Diop, Executive Director of FAS, made a presentation on FAS's advocacy activities – particularly the Gender is My Agenda campaign. Other panellists included Mme Awa Ndiaye, Minister of Families and Women's Entrepreneurship, and M Cheikh Tidiane Gadio, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The African Union designated July 31 as Pan-African Women's Day in 1962 in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, at the first-ever Pan-African Women's Conference. While the African Union has since moved the official celebration date to 25 September, events worldwide are nonetheless planned around its original date of July 31.

Pan-African Women's Day is of particular importance to FAS and its networks. It is a celebration of African women's accomplishments vis-à-vis gender equality at all levels of African politics. At the same time, Pan-African Women's Day is a reminder of the structures of inequality that African women continue to face in their daily lives. For FAS and its networks, the day serves to renew their commitment to the advancement of women in peace processes across the continent.

Voices of Women in Darfur, Chad, and DR Congo Heard at International Level

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The letter, which was authored by Asha Hagi Elmi Amin, a member of Somali transitional parliament, addressed the public and policymakers. It emphasized the need for immediate action on Darfur and the need for concerted effort by the international community.



Women from the mission meet with UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown. From left to right: Mary Robinson, Gordon Brown, Asha Hagi Elmi Amin, Musimbi Kanyoro, Sarah Brown (Photo: Oxfam)

During the month of September, while in Geneva, Mme Diop met with several African delegations at the UN Human Rights Council including the delegations from Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Roberta Méan, the Coordinator of FAS' International Secretariat, gave an oral statement at the UN Human Rights Council during the debate on the human rights situation in Darfur, stressing the importance of the participation of women in the Darfur peace process.

At the end of the month, Mme Diop travelled to London on 23 and 24 September to attend the UK Labour party conference. At the conference, she met with Prime Minister Gordon Brown and confirmed the Labour Government's support for the plight of women in Darfur and Chad.

FAS has been able to secure the support of the Brit-

ish government to bring a group of women to the negotiations in Tripoli, Libya, at the end of October. This is a tremendous achievement for the peace process in the region. Women will now be able to contribute to the peace process and ensure that post-conflict reconstruction adequately addresses their needs.

Most recently, Mme Diop was in New York City, USA, at a meeting with the UN Security Council on 1 October. At this Arria Formula Meeting (a Security Council meeting held outside the official chamber where NGOs are invited to participate) Mme Diop spoke about the plight of women in the DRC.

She echoed the recommendations made in a written statement submitted by FAS to the UN Human Rights Council on the human rights situation in the DRC, as well as recommendations drafted by the NGO Working Group on Women. Among these were the need to implement post-conflict support measures for victims of sexual violence, and the need to build women's capacity to improve their access to health care, education and professional training.

In collaboration with its partner organisations, FAS is now working on a project to bring a delegation of women from Darfur and Chad to the Darfur peace talks in Tripoli on 27 October, 2007.



Refugee and displaced women at an informal meeting in Djabal refugee camp, Chad. (Photo: Emmanuel Braun, Reuters)



Sixth Session of UN Human Rights Council Addresses Gender Integration and Women's Rights in Darfur, DR Congo

The Sixth Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council opened on the morning of 10 September, 2007, at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. The programme of work for this session of the Council was varied, and focused a great deal on the last steps of its institution-building process. However, several debates were relevant to the work of Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS).

The staff of FAS' International Secretariat in Geneva began preparations in the summer, contacting partner organisations in Africa to gather input and recommendations for oral and written statements. FAS drafted statements on the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), on the integration of a gender perspective into the work of the Council, and on the human rights situation in Darfur, Sudan.

FAS submitted a written statement on the human rights situation in the DRC on 5 September. The statement includes recommendations to ensure that the post-conflict needs of women, particularly of the victims of gender based violence, are adequately addressed in the country's peace process.

On 20 September, Roberta Méan, Coordinator of FAS' Geneva office, delivered an oral statement to the Council during the debate on the integration of a gender perspective in the work of the Council. Member States and observers of the Council reacted very positively to the need for a gender perspective. Several delegations suggested the inclusion of specific gender measures in the criteria for the Universal Periodic Review reports.

Ms. Méan also delivered an oral statement on behalf of Bineta Diop, FAS' Executive Director, on 24 September

to the Council on the human rights situation in Darfur and eastern Chad. The debate allowed for Member States, observer States, and NGOs to express their concerns on the situation in Darfur, as well as in other countries such as Burma/Myanmar, Iran and Zimbabwe. FAS' oral statement sparked the interest of sev-



Roberta Méan prepares to deliver an oral statement to the Human Rights Council, 20 September, 2007. (Photo: Pratima Upadhyay)

eral Member and observer States, resulting in meetings with the Permanent Missions of Ghana, DRC and Sudan.

FAS staff attended nearly every session of the Council, monitoring the discussion, particularly the angles taken by the members of the African Group on issues such as gender and the mandates of the Special Rapporteurs to Burundi, DRC and Sudan. The Council generally supported the extension of the mandates.

On 28 September, the last day of the session, the Council decided extend the mandate of the Special Rapporteur to Burundi for one year, and to defer the consideration of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Sudan to the December 2007 session. The Council also deferred the vote on the resolution on technical cooperation in the DRC to its Seventh session in 2008.

At the December session of the Human Rights Council (which will be held from 10 to 14 December, 2007), FAS will be actively advocating for the extension of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur to Sudan, as the human rights situation there will require constant monitoring and reporting to the UN even during the deployment of the EU and UN-AU hybrid forces.



FAS staff outside the Human Rights Council meeting room. (Photo: Pratima Upadhyay)

Finland's President Supports Creation of UN Agency on Gender Issues

Her Excellency Tarja Halonen, President of Finland, backed the creation of a new United Nations agency to deal with gender issues and urged greater involvement of women in peacemaking and peacekeeping. In a speech to the General Assembly on Wednesday, 26 September, 2007, the President said, "We do need to take decisive measures to promote gender awareness across the entire UN system."

Finland is in support of the UN effort to set up a new consolidated gender agency headed by an Under-Secretary-General. She stressed the importance of "engaging women in all phases of crisis management: conflict prevention, peacekeeping and peacebuilding – not forgetting peace talks." Finland is also preparing a national action plan to advance the implementation of SCR1325 on Women Peace and Security.

This is welcome news for FAS and its network. Finland has been a strong supporter of FAS's work in the Mano River and the Great Lakes regions.



OTHER NEWS

FAS Collaborates with IOM and Africa Recruit to Launch Database of Skilled African Women in the Diaspora

Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS), in partnership with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and Africa Recruit is developing a database of skilled African women in the Diaspora. The idea behind this project is to mobilize African women to contribute to the national development of their countries of origin.

The database will be launched during the Africa Gender Forum 2007, organized by FAS and its PanAfrican Center for Gender, Peace and Development in Dakar, Senegal, scheduled at the end of the year. The launch will take place at a fitting time, as the theme of this year's African Gender Forum is 'Gender and Migration'. The forum will focus on the economic, social and political implications of migration and the Diaspora. Ms. Ndioro Ndiaye, Deputy Director General of the IOM, will launch the database during the forum.

Women who wish to register in the database can do so through the IOM website: <http://www.iom.int/jahia/page1810.html>. Please note that for the time being, the registration survey is only available in English.

GIVE WOMEN IN DARFUR AND CHAD A HEARING

This open letter was written by Asha Hagi Elmi Amin and the other women of the mission. It was published in Nairobi's East African newspaper on 11 September, 2007.

We are eight women leaders representing eight different countries. Five of us are African. We have just returned from the camps of eastern Chad, where we have been meeting the women victims of the Darfur conflict.

We want women in Darfur and in Chad to hear that at last their pain is heard and their words are considered at a high political level.

We are doing this because we want the killing and the raping in Chad and Darfur to stop. The stories of the women we met are a stain on the conscience of the world - like the story of Hawa, the woman who saw her only child beheaded in her arms. How can the world sit by and let this happen over and over again?

This month could be a defining moment for the people of Darfur and Chad. World leaders will meet in New York at the General Assembly meetings and at a high level meeting on Darfur on September 21.

African governments have acted but it is not enough. Despite its limited resources, the African Union has managed to send a significant number of troops to try to keep the peace in Darfur. African governments have kept their troops in Darfur, despite the human losses suffered by the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) force, which has often been targeted.

A few weeks ago, several African governments pledged more troops for the new joint UN-African Union "hybrid" force agreed in July. Moreover, a number of African leaders have been involved in the political discussions to bring all the parties to the negotiating table. We salute these efforts and invite them to do more.

Succeeding in Darfur will be a defining moment for not only the people of Darfur and Chad, but also for Africa as a whole. The conflict can be solved. But it requires political will, it requires resources, and it requires

boldness to move out of the inertia that has lasted too long, towards a lasting solution. African governments can and must do more. They have to provide the leadership that is needed.

The Darfur-Chad crisis cannot be allowed to go on for longer. We know that more than 200,000 civilians have died as result of the ongoing conflict. We know that two million people in Darfur have been driven from their homes by government forces, militias and other armed groups. We also know that the world has been talking more than acting over the past four years.

We have travelled to eastern Chad. We have seen the devastation caused by this regional conflict. Despite several peace agreements both in Sudan and Chad, civilians continue to suffer horrific abuses. More people than ever are in need of aid in Darfur and Chad - more than four million - and it is harder than ever for aid workers to help them. Violence is continuing to take place on a daily basis; humanitarian workers are targeted.

As we saw, the Darfur conflict is sending shockwaves through the region. In eastern Chad, 230,000 refugees from Darfur are living in camps, and a further 180,000 Chadians have been forced to flee their homes because of rising internal instability there. The situation is insecure and tense. Eastern Chad is in danger of becoming "another Darfur," a major humanitarian disaster, if the international community does not immediately take steps to solve the internal conflict.

There is a real window of opportunity for action. We hope that African leaders will make their voices heard loud and clear in their speeches at the UN General Assembly later this month, and make every diplomatic effort to get all sides to agree to an immediate ceasefire. Only then will an end be in sight for the long-suffering women of Darfur and Chad.



FAS Shares Expertise at African Capacity Building Forum, Maputo, Mozambique

Bineta Diop, Executive Director of FAS, was invited to make a presentation at the Pan-African Capacity Building Forum, from 1 to 3 August, 2007, in Maputo, Mozambique. The presentation was the focus of the session titled "Gender, Equity and Women's Empowerment in Africa's Development: Capacity Building Strategies and Programs", which was held on the second day of the Forum.

Mme Diop's presentation introduced the history, achievements and challenges of gender mainstreaming in African institutions. As well, it highlighted the importance of women's networks and civil society organisations in achieving gender parity in African development. The presentation included two discussants, Dr. Hilda Tadría, Chair and Member of the Governing Board of the African Women's Development Fund, Aminata Traoré, former Minister of Culture for Mali, and Leah Chatta-Chipepa, Program Officer for African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF). The presentation was chaired by Carin Norberg, director of the Nordic Africa Institute in Sweden.

The session participants drafted eight recommendations, including the need for African Ministries of Science and Technology to facilitate access to technology and information by rural women, and the inclusion of explicit gender and women empowerment policies in all ACBF-supported institutions.

This was the second Pan-African Capacity Building Forum, and was hosted by the president of Mozambique, His Excellency Emilio Guebueza. The theme of the conference was 'Improving Development Results for

Africa.' More than 600 delegates attended the conference, held at Joachim Chissano International Conference Centre in Maputo.

Delegates came from across Africa, including Heads of State and Government, ministers, professionals from the public sector, professionals from the private sector, civil society leaders, policy researcher, professors and educators.

The three-day Forum included presentations and discussion sessions on topics such as governance and attainment of the MDGs, the African Diaspora as an actor in African development, capacity building and HIV/AIDS, post-conflict capacity building, and gender equity programmes for capacity building. Speaking at the closing of the Forum, on 3 August, Angolan Premier Fernando da Piedade Dias dos Santos remarked how the conflicts and political instability in several African countries pose great challenges for post-conflict reconstruction, in particular, the need for the promotion of institutional capacity building that can ensure lasting peace and sustainable economic growth.

The first Pan-African Capacity Building Forum was held in Bamako, Mali, in 2001. It is organized every five years by the ACBF. The Foundation is based in Harare, Zimbabwe, and was founded in 1991. It currently works in 40 African countries and has invested more than USD \$290 million in institutional capacity building across the continent.

The ACBF is supported by the African Development Bank (ABD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank, among others.

UPCOMING EVENTS

When Culture Becomes a Barrier to Gender Equality in Africa: FAS New York Panel Discussion in Honour of UNSCR1325

October is the anniversary month of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security (UNSR 1325). The resolution was adopted unanimously by the Security Council in October 2000. It not only recognises the disproportionate effect of conflict on women, but also underlines the essential role of women in the prevention of conflict and as full participants in post-conflict peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts. To celebrate the occasion, the staff of Femmes Africa Solidarité's (FAS) New York office will host a panel discussion at the end of the month, 'When Culture Becomes a Barrier to Gender Equality in Africa'.

This is no doubt an interesting, but potentially divisive topic. Rukhsar Sharif, FAS' Research and Networking Officer in New York, says that the staff chose the topic because of its relevance to African women today. Rukhsar says, 'We want to examine the idea of culture itself in Africa and how it affects the lives of women. This culture can take many different forms: gender, race, class, or even the peacekeeping culture which has been patriarchal to a large extent in African nations experiencing conflict.' She goes on to explain that certain cultural practices or beliefs remain obstacles for the full participation of women in governance and conflict resolution. It is important, then, to address the issue if the work of organisations like FAS is to be effective in promoting change.

The panellists all work in the field of culture and gender in Africa, but from different angles. Panellists hail from academia, the United Nations system, civil society and indigenous groups. Among them are Dr. Marietou Haba Diallo, Officer-in-Charge of Tin Hinan's Health Division in Mali, and Ms. Eugenie Mukeshimana, Outreach Coordinator for Rwanda Gift for Life and a survivor of the Rwandan genocide.

Rukhsar and the New York office staff are hoping to spark debate on the definition of culture and whether it has prevented gender equality in Africa. More importantly, they hope to open discussion on the solutions to these obstacles and how best to achieve gender equality on the continent.

The panel discussion will be held on 22 October at the Church Center, 777 UN Plaza, in New York City. For more information, visit the FAS website www.fasngo.org.