



## **Femmes Africa Solidarité**

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### **Opinion Editorial - Celebrating African Women on International Women's Day**

#### **Oley Dibba-Wadda, Executive Director – Femmes Africa Solidarite**

International Women's Day, though initially motivated by European and North American labor movements, has become central to women in Africa, as a global advocacy tool to voice their various concerns and reach a wider audience. This year's theme, "Equality for women is progress for all", speaks directly to the core challenge faced by women in peace processes across the continent. While we have made significant progress in accessing the peace negotiating tables, there is a need to revisit the issue and highlight ways in which we are succeeding in getting closer to equality, and thus progress for all.

FAS, founded by African women leaders in 1996, aims at engendering the peace process in Africa through empowering and advocating for African women to have a place and a voice at every level of peace processes. With UNSCR 1325 as a guiding principle, FAS not only calls attention to women's initiatives, capacities, and right to participate equally in efforts to establish and maintain peace in their countries; but equally coordinates and strengthens existing networks of women to increase their influence on political affairs and practices in Africa. In the Great Lakes in particular, the need for concerted efforts to address critical issues of gender inequality and promoting women's rights at all levels has motivated FAS, together with its partners and friends of 1325, to undertake a range of activities. Out of this enriching experience, a number of successes, and lessons learned, were garnered that contribute positively towards reinforcing this year's message for International Women's Day.

The women from the Great Lakes who benefited from FAS' support participated in the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the UNSCR 1325 10th anniversary and Global Open Days in New York, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This participation was highlighted by high-impact contributions by project members to the Civil Society Advisory Group (CSAG) meeting held at the UNSCR 1325 10th Anniversary Conference in New York. The testimonies and lessons learned shared by these women, working towards getting equal participation space at the peace negotiating tables speak directly to this year's celebrations. Through the prioritization of gender inequalities and obstacles to women's empowerment and the full realization of women's legal and human rights in peace and security policy and programming work at all levels; these women leaders were able to significantly increase their participation and representation in targeted decision-making structures (including the government, peace and security bodies, peace missions, the national police, and gender analysis and budgeting structures). As we highlight these successes, and celebrate women's progress this March 8<sup>th</sup>, we also recognize that our work is not yet complete.

We must continue to amplify our interventions to ensure that women's participation at the negotiating tables in peace processes becomes the norm. It is possible and sooner rather than later, will become the norm.

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