INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL COLLOQUIUM ON WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT, LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY

Monrovia, Liberia | March 7-10TH, 2009

“You exclude women you fail, you include women you build nations”
Ms Michelle Jean, Governor General of Canada

Global Action was recently invited to participate in the “International Colloquium on Women’s Empowerment, Leadership, Development, International Peace and Security” to discuss, learn, and share best practices and recommendation on how to promote women in leadership. The Conference was, co-convened by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia and President Tarja Halonen of Finland, attracting over 400 international participants and 400 Liberian national participants.

The Colloquium covered seven key thematic issues around which panel discussions and breakout sessions were organized: Women’s Leadership, Women’s Economic Empowerment and Decent Work, Millennium Development Goal Three, Implementation of Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1325, Women and Climate Change, Migration and Youth.

Session outcomes were consolidated into recommendation for the Angie Brooks Center, launched in Monrovia on March 7th. The ‘1325 National Action Plan’ (first national plan in Africa) was also launched at the Colloquium. The Conference resulted in the Monrovia Declaration and ‘Call to Action on SCR 1325’ which will be presented to the Secretary General and the General Assembly.

Day 1 – Plenary One; Making a Difference through Women’s Leadership

The first plenary commenced with a distinguished panel of experts raising questions and issues for further extrapolation within each thematic area. Some of these questions included:

- How to maximize the potential of the extensive women’s networks worldwide
- What difference do women make when they hold key leadership / decision-making positions
- How to seek accountability for women’s rights
- How to support young women and the next generation
- How to sustain change and maintain momentum
- How to convert political documents into political action
- How to ensure adequate training, education, skills are provided to women to expand the pool of negotiators, mediators, political and community leaders.
Day 2 – Plenary Two; Women at the Peacetable

This session introduced women from various regions that provided their expertise and experience from peace negotiations through to women in the peace movement. Experiences included;

Betty Bigombe a mediator in the northern Uganda peace process discussed the role of women in engaging rebels in peace talks and to DDR initiatives. Discussed how they involved mothers/wives to send messages to their sons and husbands to lay down their weapons, this resulted in 5000 fighters surrendering.

Former Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik discussed the importance of women talking to other women to learn and share ideas. She brought together women leaders from the Middle East to one place to gain engagement across cultures, religions and ideologies. She concluded her remarks by stating; "It's not just China and India - it's women who are the emerging power of the 21st century!"

Senior representative of Manu River Peace Network (Liberia) recounted that during the war women were never invited to the peacetable but women wanted their voices to be heard and created the Liberian Women’s Initiative, where the “pen is mightier than the sword”. They forced themselves into the peace process and engaged with all parties to the conflict.

Plenary Three; Gender Response in Justice and Security Sector Reform (SSR)

Speakers focused on the importance of gender justice from court based prosecution through to incorporation of gender perspectives in non-judicial systems like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The strong link between effective SSR and judicial reform was also noted.

Litha Musyimi-Ogana of the African Union (AU) discussed the ‘solemn declaration on gender equality’ adopted by the AU in 2004. The AU is developing a training manual on women’s human rights and undertaking training on gender sensitivity with AU troops. Further, gender experts are slowly being attached to all regional AU liaison offices.

Massa Washington, Commissioner of the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) outlined some of the achievements of the TRC. The Commission established 2yrs ago, has collected 20,000 statements (of which 8,900 came from women). Targeted outreach has been made to the 15 counties to encourage women to provide testimonies. The
TRC has also trained psychosocial counselors, traditional women’s leaders, connected NGOs providing referral services and assisted in the reuniting of stolen children. Questions remain on reparations and what happens to the perpetrators.

Aloise Inyumba a Rwandan Senator outlined the ‘gacaca’ process in Rwanda, which sought to establish the truth of what happened during the Rwandan genocide. She stated that gender was carefully incorporated into the process with over 40% of the judges being women and all judges trained on issues of sexual violence.

**Breakout Session – Security Sector Reform and Gender**

This session was facilitated by Global Action to Prevent War and FOKUS (Norway) and involved participants from the Liberian traditional council, Ghanaian military, Liberian Justice Ministry, Armed Forces of Liberia, peace and security networks, regional and international NGOs. Key recommendations included:

- Need to undertake community based approach to security ie; establishing more rigid, monitored and effective community based policing; convince village leaders/local women’s groups/religious leaders to adopt a “bottom up” approach to security
- Youth participation is important, especially young women – seen as a means to empower and educate women
- Need more resources to strengthen existing mechanisms and also allow for better coordination
- Need to remove the stigma associated with the security sector (especially role of women in security), provide better access to education and increase gender specific recruitment strategies
- Important to utilize existing women in police (UN and Liberian National Police) as role models, to inspire and encourage involvement from other women
- Security Sector reform and justice reform are intricately linked, one cannot be successful without the other.
Outcomes

1. Launched the **Liberian National Action Plan** on Security Council Resolution 1325 – this is the first national action plan in Africa. The gender minister outlined key actions within the plan and the next steps in assigning responsibilities and timelines.

2. **Angie Brooks International Centre on Women’s Empowerment, Leadership Development, International Peace and Security**, was launched in Monrovia on March 7th. The center will support the implementation of actions emerging from the Colloquium, through training to empower current and future women leaders, research, analysis and advocacy on women’s leadership.

3. **Monrovia Declaration**; compiled and launched at the Colloquium, called for the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and 1820, encouraged other countries to develop national action plans, made a commitment to honor women’s leadership, support efforts to empower women to participate fully and on fair terms in economic life, noted the impact of climate change on women and encouraged their participation at the Copenhagen summit.

4. **Call to Action on UNSCR 1325**; highlighted outcomes of the Colloquium which will be taken to the UN General Assembly to demand a General Assembly resolution with key demands being:
   - Calling on all Member States to fully and effectively implement UNSCR 1325 at the national level through the development of UNSCR 1325 National Action Plans with a definite budget line.
   - Call upon the Security Council to enforce UNSCR 1325 by creating a permanent working group on women and armed conflict and adopting additional resolutions to strengthen it further by the year 2010
   - Call on the UN Secretary General to appoint a Special Representative for Women and Armed Conflict, accompanied by adequate resources, who will further raise awareness on the differential impact of violent conflicts on women and men and the key roles women play in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, peace building and decision-making.

5. **NGO Statement for the Colloquium**; this statement made specific recommendations relating to women’s participation in peace negotiations and peace processes and gender-responsive justice and security, with signatories from 42 NGO’s.