



Mohamed Ibn Chambas

Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS)



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Together, for peaceful elections

2020 is an election year in West Africa and the Sahel.

Following Togo where presidential elections were held last February, five more presidential elections are planned in Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Ghana and Niger.

These elections are a major opportunity to continue the efforts undertaken for decades to strengthen democratic institutions, consolidate peace, and promote development. However, it must be noted that they are also a source of political tensions, and even - regrettably - all too often a source of violence and crises that threaten social cohesion and stability, not only in the concerned countries, but also in the sub region.

Violence against a backdrop of divisions, hate speech, and human rights violations should no longer be a mean of resolving disputes relating to electoral processes.

That time has passed. Only consultation, dialogue and consensus, supported by a responsible and inclusive approach, can help shape lasting solutions in the interest of all.

To help achieve this purpose, we have recently undertaken joint missions with ECOWAS and the AU to Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire.

This regional approach to conflict prevention demonstrates the commitment of the three entities to the peaceful resolution of disputes, and their commitment to pooling their efforts to better support and encourage the various actors involved in the electoral process to work for peace.

In a context marked by the COVID-19 pandemic that continues to threaten the lives of millions of people and severely affect the economies of the countries of the sub region, it is necessary to mobilize to ensure that these elections are truly synonymous with democratic progress for the sub region.

All the interlocutors we met during our joint missions, particularly women and youth, were unanimous in expressing their commitment to peace and non-violence.

Together, let us mobilize more so that this becomes a reality, and so that women and young people can play an effective role in peacebuilding and development, as affirmed in the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which we will be celebrating the 20th anniversary on 31 October.



Elections in West Africa and the Sahel, between crisis and hope



The joint delegation of ECOWAS, the African Union and the United Nations at the Sekhoutoureira Palace to discuss with President Alpha Condé. Conakry, Oct 4, 2020
Photo: UNOWAS

Five countries will hold elections: Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Ghana and Niger. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, UNOWAS, in close coordination with its regional partners, ECOWAS and the AU, have been mobilized through joint missions to prevent potential crises and conflicts.

Elections are one of the main means for citizens to participate in decision-making that affects their lives, and to hold their representatives accountable for their actions and the results that flow from them. Elections are also an important moment in the strengthening of peace and democracy.

In West Africa and Sahel sub-region, which faces a multitude of challenges, the political legitimacy conferred by the holding of peaceful, transparent and credible elections is indispensable for ensuring the optimal functioning of the state and meeting development and security challenges.





The population of West Africa stands at about 391,026,791 people who represent nearly 29% of the total population of the continent. About 41% (159,226,372) of this population will go to the polls in the last quarter of this year, to choose their Presidents of the Republic. They are Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Ghana and Niger.

30 years after the first waves of democratization in the sub-region, the 2020 elections are an opportunity for the citizens of these countries to consolidate democratic practices.

Indeed, despite the reforms undertaken to adjust legal and regulatory frameworks, electoral processes continue to suffer from a lack of consensus and fuel political tensions in these countries.

Elections against the backdrop of COVID-19

Beyond being an election year in the sub-region, 2020 is also the year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The upheaval in political, social and economic life caused by the eruption of this pandemic has added to the many challenges facing the countries of the sub-region.

Faced with this unprecedented situation, UNOWAS quickly mobilized to support these countries in their fight against the pandemic, and in their efforts to organize peaceful and inclusive elections.

Virtual» meetings and working sessions were organized with the various UN Resident Coordinators in the five countries, national authorities, political actors, civil society representatives, as well as regional and international partners.



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The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, in discussion with the President of the National Assembly of Burkina Faso, Ouagadougou, Oct 7, 2020. Photo: DR.

The objective was to take stock of the preparations for the upcoming elections to be held against the backdrop of COVID-19, and to mobilize all stakeholders to work together to ensure the organization of peaceful elections.

These «virtual» working sessions helped assess the needs and expectations of the actors involved in the electoral process. They also helped to diagnose the various political situations and to develop an action plan focused on conflict prevention..

Joint actions for conflict prevention

It is clear that there is no shortage of disputes related to electoral processes. The political tensions and crisis observed during the pre-electoral period, often accompanied by acts of violence, as in Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, are a cause for concern, as they carry the risk of a major crisis that could affect the stability and security of the countries concerned and the sub-region.

While maintaining «virtual» discussions with stakeholders to help bridge differences and foster consensus, it was necessary to plan physical meetings with all potential actors in the five countries.

This was possible when the governments of the sub-region lifted some of the measures put in place to combat COVID-19, including travel restrictions.

In early September, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), Mohamed Ibn Chambas, began a series of marathon visits to the countries concerned.



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From [Niger](#) to [Guinea](#), through [Côte d'Ivoire](#) and [Burkina Faso](#), the Special Representative, alone and with his partners of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU), undertook several good offices missions aimed at encouraging everyone to work for peaceful and inclusive elections.

Mohamed Ibn Chambas recalled the need to resolve disputes through legal means, and to seize the opportunity of these elections to further consolidate peace and democracy. He also called on other actors, especially the [media in Guinea](#), to contribute to the culture of peace and to refuse the dissemination of hate speech and divisions.

Aware of the stakes of these elections and the importance of joint regional action, UNOWAS and its ECOWAS and AU partners have undertaken [high-level pre-election missions](#), notably to Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea to help stakeholders overcome their disagreements and act in the interest of their populations who aspire to peace and prosperity.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres echoed these calls, urging all political leaders and their supporters to refrain from incitement, inflammatory language, ethnic profiling and violence.

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UNOWAS promotes the participation of women in peace processes

In the sub-region, UNOWAS remains mobilized to support the effective implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security.



Demonstrations by anti-slavery activists in Nouakchott, Mauritania. Photo: REUTERS

Twenty years ago, the international community, through the UN Security Council, took a strong decision by adopting a Resolution which calls for the respect of the women fundamental rights, their protection against violence, and their participation in peace processes. It is the birth of the Resolution 1325.

Worried about the ownership by States of the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325), the latter urges States to ensure that women are more represented at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for prevention, management and resolution of disputes. It also calls for the integration of, among other things, the gender dimension in all programs, including disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. The UNSCR 1325 also emphasizes the responsibility of all states



to end impunity and to prosecute those accused of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, including all forms of gender-based and other violence against women and girls.

Over the years, Resolution 1325 has been supplemented by the following eight Resolutions related to women, peace and security; namely: 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015), 2467 (2019); as well as resolutions 2250 (2015) and 2419 (2018) on youth, peace and security.

A sustained advocacy

For 20 years, calls for greater participation of women in the ceasefire and peace processes have multiplied. Most recently, in view of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) and UN Women published on 3 August 2020 a [briefing note entitled «COVID-19 and Conflict: Advancing women’s meaningful participation in ceasefires and peace processes»](#). This note recognizes that the full participation of women is essential for an effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic and in the advancement of peace processes.

Through this document, the two UN Entities recall that “women have a fundamental right to and interest in participating in decision-making that affects them and the future of their countries. Beyond this, women’s engagement in peace processes brings substantive advantages. Their direct participation in a critical mass can contribute to shifting dynamics and broadening the issues under discussion, which increases the likelihood of addressing the root causes of the conflict as well as building community buy-in to the process and outcome”.

The note also provides a preliminary analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on women’s participation in ceasefires and peace processes and offers a series of recommendations.

Priority to the inclusion and protection of women

In West Africa and the Sahel, armed conflicts have increased. In addition to violent extremism leading to terrorism in several countries, election-related crises like in Guinea and Côte d’Ivoire, climate change, piracy and transnational organized crime, are all threats to the security and stability in the sub-region which require a coordinated action from States, and which involves the participation of young people and women.



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High Level Event on the theme: "Women, violence and terrorism in West Africa and the Sahel: building a regional and international response". Dakar, April 10, 2018. Photo: UNOWAS



UNOWAS works daily to ensure the implementation of the various Resolutions

This year, the COVID-19 pandemic has added to the many challenges facing the sub-region. It has put political and economic actors to the test. It has also accentuated gender inequalities and threatens to undermine human rights.

UNOWAS works daily to ensure the implementation of the various Resolutions, but also to further encourage the governments of the sub-region to facilitate the involvement of women in political decision-making processes.

Through a close partnership with regional organizations, such as ECOWAS, the Mano River Union, the G5 Sahel, and United Nations agencies such as UN Women, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and other stakeholders for the implementation of Security Council Resolutions, UNOWAS promotes the systematic inclusion of women in conflict prevention and resolution, mediation, negotiation and post-conflict reconstruction, as well as gender mainstreaming in security sector reform. It encourages the integration of gender in peace programs and processes, as well as the adoption and implementation of policies, laws and measures in favor of the empowerment of women and gender equality, in accordance with existing international and regional legal instruments.

During his participation, on 8 October 2020, in the ECOWAS Ministerial Meeting on Sexual Gender-Based Violence and the Rights of Women and Girls in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Special Representative for West Africa and the





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Sahel, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, reiterated the continued commitment of the United Nations, in partnership with ECOWAS, to prioritize the protection and promotion of the rights and freedoms of women and girls in the sub-region.

Still a long way to go

“Since its adoption, we have made significant progress in understanding and addressing the challenges women face in achieving full and equal participation in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, peacebuilding and sustaining peace,” said Ms. Rosemary A. DiCarlo, the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, in her speech on 2 October 2020 to the Peacebuilding Commission. «Women’s contributions to peace and security are still often outside the mainstream of formal efforts, and too frequently undervalued,» she added.

Echoing the statement made by Ms. DiCarlo, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, recalled during his speech at the ECOWAS ministerial meeting on gender-based sexual violence and the rights of women and girls «that together, we must work to invest in gender equality and the empowerment of women, not only as an end in itself, but as an essential means of achieving our overarching goal of preventing conflict and building peace and prosperity in the region.»

Despite a sustained international effort to implement UNSCR 1325, women are still largely excluded from peace negotiations and the level of violence against women is still high. The participation of women in negotiation and peacebuilding processes, as well as in transitional justice, reconstruction and development processes, remains too low.

Indeed, the new Gender Social Norms Index released on 5 March 2020 by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) reveals that despite decades of progress closing the equality gap between men and women, close to 90 percent of men and women hold some sort of bias against women. The same study also points out that less than 24 percent of parliamentary seats in the world are occupied by women and there are only 10 women heads of government out of 193, while men and women vote in the same proportions.

On the eve of the twentieth anniversary of Resolution 1325, efforts are still needed to facilitate the full participation of women in peace processes, and the building of a better world.

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INTERVIEW WITH MS. OULIMATA SARR

“The results achieved are encouraging but are still far from the objectives set by Resolution 1325”



As part of the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of Resolution 1325, UNOWAS Magazine met Ms. Oulimata Sarr, Regional Director for West and Central Africa of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, UN Women. She shared with us her views on the impact of COVID-19 on women and the implementation of Resolution 1325 in West Africa. Interview.

▲ Ms. Oulimata Sarr, Regional Director for West and Central Africa of the United Nations Entity on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, UN Women

The COVID-19 pandemic spares no one. What is your assessment of its impact on women in the sub-region?

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are affecting every sector, the entire population, and women in particular. Women are harder hit by the economic impacts that COVID-19 causes. Most of them work in the informal sector to obtain the resources necessary for their daily survival. Partial or





Visit to Maiduguri refugee camp in Nigeria. Photo: UN Women

total confinement can prevent them from earning a living and meeting the basic needs of their families. Experiences have shown that where women are primarily responsible for providing and preparing food for the family, increased food insecurity in the wake of crises can expose them to precariousness and family destabilization and to an increased risk of domestic violence due to heightened tensions within the household. For some of them, especially those who run small businesses whether in the formal or informal, the lack of support measures they face lead them to choose between opening their business or staying at home to take care of their family.

Do you think the governments of the sub-region have done what is necessary to protect women?

We do not know yet the full extent of the impact of this crisis. Women's organizations in the region are warning of the risk of increased teenage pregnancies in the coming months and we are already seeing an increase in early marriages and other forms of violence in some countries in East Africa.

In any case and recognizing that no government was ready to deal with a pandemic of this magnitude, the crisis has emphasized the need to build resilience and improve protection of populations for future shocks. And at this level, the current crisis has revealed certain significant deficiencies and gaps in the social protection systems of our region. We need to



Increased food insecurity in the wake of crises can expose them to precariousness



work to expand social protection mechanisms to reach the most vulnerable, including workers in the informal sector, and to develop solutions adapted to the living conditions of the region. Unpaid assistance activities continue to hamper women's economic participation, a gap that has been further widened by the health crisis and the closure of schools.

The COVID crisis has also highlighted the structural inequalities that exist in all areas: health, the economy, security, social protection, violence against women and girls. In times of crisis, when resources are scarce and institutional capacities are strained, the situations women and girls face have disproportionate impacts. The gains, wrested from a fierce struggle in terms of women's rights, are also threatened.

Today, the data collected from rapid assessments as well as from testimonies show that mitigation strategies such as confinement, restriction of movement have been aggravating factors of violence against women because they have led to domestic and intra-family violence as well as other types of violence against women around the world, including in the sub-region. The confinement has exacerbated the tensions and stress created by security, health and economic constraints. In other words, measures to ensure the safety of populations often have the opposite effect for women and girls.

Even before the irruption of COVID-19 domestic violence was already one of the greatest human rights violations. In the previous 12 months, 243 million women and girls (aged 15-49) across the world have been subjected to sexual or physical violence by an intimate partner. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, this number is likely to grow with multiple impacts on women's wellbeing, their sexual and reproductive health, their mental health

Despite the high visibility that has been given to the impact of Covid-19 on violence against women, the response capacity has been limited, due to insufficient funding.

Why is it important that women be at the heart of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic when statistics show that men are the most affected?

Although the health aspect of the disease affects more men, the socio-economic impacts associated with the COVID-19 pandemic have not been distributed evenly. Women and girls are particularly affected disproportionately, due to pre-existing inequalities. In addition, the crisis risks are worsening



The COVID crisis has also highlighted the structural inequalities that exist in all areas





gender inequalities and widening the gaps between men and women. This is the reason why measures that consider the needs of women and girls are essential to guarantee an effective and fair response to the pandemic. In addition, businesses run by women have been affected more quickly by the effects of the pandemic than small or medium-sized enterprises (SME) run by men. Indeed, a survey by UN Women and the SME agency of Côte d'Ivoire showed that a higher number of businesses headed by women were forced to stop their activity due to the crisis (64 percent of businesses run by women versus 52 percent of businesses run by men). It therefore becomes essential to position women and women-led businesses at the heart of the sectors that will benefit from the post-COVID recovery in order to ensure inclusive and sustainable growth, by rebuilding for the better.

And to conclude on this subject, I would like to quote the Executive Director of UN Women, Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka who in a speech delivered on 6 April 2020 said: "COVID-19 is already testing us in ways most of us have never previously experienced, providing emotional and economic shocks that we are struggling to rise above. The violence that is emerging now as a dark feature of this pandemic is a mirror and a challenge to our values, our resilience and shared humanity. We must not only survive the coronavirus, but emerge renewed, with women as a powerful force at the centre of recovery.»

▲
Visit of farm-schools
in Ross Béthio by Mrs.
Oulimata Sarr, northern
Senegal. Photo: UN
Women.



This month we will celebrate the 20th anniversary of the resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security. What inventory do you make of its implementation in West Africa and the Sahel?

The unanimous adoption of Resolution 1325 by the Security Council was historic. It was the first time that a resolution exclusively devoted to the issue of women, peace and security had made the object of attention and strong commitment on the part of the Security Council. Its adoption created a lot of enthusiasm but also great expectations from women and different gender actors around the world. During its 20 years of existence, the Security Council has prioritized the status monitoring its implementation, which has led to the adoption of 9 other Resolutions. At the level of West Africa and the Sahel, many initiatives have been carried out and have led to results that are certainly not sufficient but encouraging. At the normative level, almost all countries have national action plans for the implementation of the Resolution 1325, following strong awareness-raising on the Resolution, the actors and the population are more convinced of the role that women must play to achieve lasting peace. Across all the countries of Africa, women are organized in associations that work for peace and they carry out invaluable work in terms of community rapprochement and reconciliation. Their role is sometimes obscured or not rightly appreciated, but there are many very successful examples in the region where women have been able to mobilize to curb bloody community conflicts, advocate for peace and peaceful management of conflicts whether in Mali, Niger or Burkina Faso, and they are hard at work to prevent electoral conflicts in many countries.

In terms of protection, defense and security forces as well as the justice sector have made progress to better protect women against violence. Several trainings were conducted for members of these bodies, which enabled a change in behavior and the adoption of initiatives in favor of gender. Thus, the army and police in many countries have now action plans and gender units, have revised their codes of conduct, and have policies for a gradual increase in the number of women in these bodies. Many countries have also adopted laws to better punish violence against women.

Encouraging results have also been achieved in the representation of women in decision-making spheres in countries in peaceful and post-conflict situations, especially through the adoption of quota laws in many countries. The United Nations has also taken a great leap forward, increasing the number of women in peacekeeping missions and in strategic representative positions in the region.



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What must be done to ensure that the implementation of this resolution further improves the situation of women in the years to come?

Encouraging results have also been achieved in the representation of women in decision-making spheres in countries in peaceful and post-conflict situations, especially through the adoption of quota laws in many countries. The United Nations has also taken a great leap forward, increasing the number of women in peacekeeping missions and in strategic representative positions in the region.

In this period of crisis, what do you think are the three priorities / measures to be undertaken by governments and UN Women to better protect women and ensure their effective participation in decision-making processes?

It is essential that governments introduce measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, such as containment or quarantine, take a series of additional actions to reduce the potentially negative impact these measures will have on local populations, more vulnerable, including women and girls. It will indeed be necessary to ensure that human rights are at the heart of the response and those of women even more so.

Beyond the need to break down decision-making data relating (at least by sex, age, disability,) to the pandemic and to analyze them accordingly, it will be necessary that governments, with the support of UN Women ensure that the national strategic plans for preparation and response to COVID-19 are based on an in-depth analysis of gender issues, guarantee the right to information for all and ensure availability, accessibility, acceptability and good quality of health care facilities, goods and services to all who need them. Finally, it will be essential to ensure the participation of women and girls in all decision-making processes to face the COVID-19 epidemic and to develop targeted strategies for the economic empowerment of women to mitigate the impact of epidemic and offer effective support measures.

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INTERVIEW WITH DR. SIGA FATIMA JAGNE

“The ECOWAS Commission has made considerable efforts to ensure that women are at the heart of socio-economic development in the region”



UNOWAS Magazine spoke to Dr. Siga Fatima Jagne, Commissioner for Social Affairs and Gender of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Dr. Jagne tells us about the implementation of Resolution 1325 in the region and the achievements of his organization for gender equality.

What is your personnel assessment of the implementation of resolution 1325?

My assessment of Resolution 1325 are derived from the assessments carried out in the region by research organizations, Women’s Organizations and also and especially the ECOWAS Commission. Overall, we have noted very significant results in advocacy work for the participation of women in conflict prevention in the region. Women, Peace and Security Action



plans have been developed and implemented in most of our Member States.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and commend the preponderant roles played by sectoral Ministries and Civil Society Organizations.

However, I also remained unsatisfied with regard to the involvement of women in decision-making bodies and the effective protection of their rights against all forms of violence.

Indeed, there is a paradox between the key roles played by women in household management, community management, the management of certain agricultural sectors, ingenuity in the informal sector and their status as subordinates or even minors in decision-making power, in their rights to property and transmission of assets, in individual freedoms and the protection of their physical and psychological integrity against all forms of violence.

The inextricable link between these rights and the preservation of peace and security is well established. We must therefore adopt a systemic approach to understand the interrelationships between gender inequalities and discrimination and issues of Peace and Security in the Region.

On the other hand, enormous efforts have been made to support all Member States except for a few ones, to develop national action plans (NAPs) for the implementation of R1325.

However, due to resource constraints, many of these plans were just in papers and very little in terms of implementation.

What are the major achievements of ECOWAS for the last 20 years (in Women, Peace and Security)?

The ECOWAS Commission has made considerable efforts to ensure that women are at the heart of socio-economic development in the region. It is this political commitment at the highest level that made it possible to adopt in 2008 an ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework commonly known as ECPF.

ECPF includes fourteen components that constitute the chain of initiatives aimed at strengthening human security and integrating conflict prevention (operational and structural), peace-building activities.

ECPF Component 10, entitled Women, Peace, and Security,



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aims at facilitating the implementation of the provisions of UN Security Council Resolution 1325; relevant provisions of the 1993 ECOWAS Revised Treaty, in particular Article 63; and the provisions dedicated to Women and Youths in Articles 40, 42 and 43 of the ECOWAS Additional Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance.

To translate these gender policy documents into operational programs, ECOWAS, through its Center for Gender Development (EGDC) adopted the ECOWAS Regional Action Plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and related ones, in 2010, thanks to the financial support of UNDP.

After adoption of this plan, in collaboration with UNOWAS and UN Women, ECOWAS supported the establishment of national action plans on Resolution 1325 in 13 ECOWAS Member States between 2010 and 2014. The Plans ultimate goal was to accelerate the efforts of ECOWAS Member States in the implementation of international, continental and regional commitments regarding Women, Peace and Security.

In 2017, ECOWAS also adopted an ECPF Action Plan for the Women, Peace and Security Component. This Plan is the result of consultations with government mechanisms, civil society actors and technical and financial partners on the region's priorities in terms of leadership and inclusion of the specific needs of women in matters of peace and security in the region.

We can also cite the establishment of an Early Warning System at the regional level with a component aimed at integrating the gender dimension into the alert system based on disaggregated gender data on victims, informants, the differentiated roles and impacts between women and men, the analysis of gender-specific needs, etc.



In 2017, ECOWAS also adopted an ECPF Action Plan for the Women, Peace and Security Component



To this again, we can add the production of a Manual and Training Modules on the integration of Gender in the ECOWAS Early Warning System with a view to including gender into the different phases of early warning, especially in the collection and analysis of data as well as the formulation and implementation of appropriate responses.

The Social Affairs and Gender Department, through ECOWAS Center for Gender Development (EGDC) has also made additional efforts to promote peace and security in West Africa, by establishing regional mechanisms involving civil society organizations. Thus, working in the field of Women and Security, the Network on Peace and Security for Women in the ECOWAS Region (NOPSWECO) and the West African Network of Young Women Leaders (ROAJELF) were created EGDC in 2009.

Technical and financial support provided to the national branches of NOPSWECO and ROAJELF made it possible to develop awareness programs on Peace and Security and to combine these activities with economic programs with the Village Savings and Credit Associations (VSLAs) in order to guarantee lasting peace and promote the fight against poverty feminization.

ECOWAS has also transformed the Committee of Wise Men into a Committee of Wise Persons in order to enable the integration of women in the mechanism of preventive diplomacy in matters of peace and security for the West Africa region.

A Gender and Elections Action Plan was also adopted in 2017 to ensure the participation of women and girls in elections and their protection during electoral and post-electoral times.

Our interventions go as far as supporting victims of Gender-Based Violence and organizing awareness-raising campaigns on the fight against impunity and advocacy for legislation on zero tolerance for gender-based crimes, including rape.

In collaboration with UNOWAS, dialogue with decision-makers has also taken place through solidarity missions in conflict countries.

The partnership also continues through the contribution of ECOWAS to the Women, Youths, Peace and Security Working Group in West Africa and the Sahel, as a founding member of this group..



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As a regional organization, what can you do more to advance the cause of women and youths?

Today, despite the remarkable work carried out by ECOWAS in terms of advocacy and actions for the involvement of women in conflict prevention, their effective presence in decision-making and their protection in conflict situations and post-conflict are still major challenges. Women, girls, and children are the main victims of political and social violence. It is therefore necessary to promote the culture of peace and implement the action plan of the Women, Peace and Security Component of the ECPF to accelerate the regional integration of peoples and lasting peace in the region.

Women must be permanently involved in conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms. Indeed, as you know, in terms of security in West Africa certain countries are exposed to insecurity and the youth population have become targets for cross-border crime and radicalism, the rapid urbanization of the majority of its countries and the birth of terrorist and jihadist groups on the Sahel-Saharan strip have further compounded the situation. To this, we must add the challenges of governance and poverty. Indeed, of the 15 ECOWAS member states, 11 are among the poorest countries in the world.

This difficult context should push us towards more synergy by involving the 52% of the population which are women and 66% of the population who are young people in our region. They must be sufficiently involved in the decision making to prevent and alert on threats to peace and security and participate in peacekeeping.

Currently, my Department is mobilizing with other departments of the Commission and with United Nations and Civil Society partners to prevent the possible risks of conflicts and their impacts on women, youths, and children in countries going for elections by December 2020 and in 2021. An important emphasis will be put on advocacy and strong actions will be taken for peaceful and transparent elections, but above all for an effective and productive participation of women in these elections.

I must also add that after having trained women mediators to support peace initiatives in the region and contribute to the construction of viable solutions for countries in conflict situations, my Department is mobilizing today, in a continental dynamic set in motion by the African Union, to support the West Africa FEMWISE regional platform.



Women must be permanently involved in conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms





Celebration of International Women's Day in ECOWAS. Abuja, March 2020.

To support democratic governance in our countries, my Department also works to strengthen the participation of women in decision-making bodies through the promotion of laws on gender equity and laws for zero tolerance for sexual and gender-based violence in our member states, especially in the context of COVID-19.

The place of youths is also to be reconsidered in the construction of peace. I said earlier, speaking of ECOWAS achievements, that we have set up peace clubs in certain countries. This is very beneficial but does not however address the propensities for conflict and violence in public and domestic spaces.

An ambitious training program for young people to reduce endemic unemployment in the region, coupled with awareness-raising on peace and security, would certainly make it possible to fight against radicalism and violent terrorism, cross-border economic crime and sexual and gender-based violence. My Department is also working on that.

We remain convinced that the demographic dividend of Youths could also be realized in promising sectors such as the cultural and creative industry, backed by training and awareness programs on peace and security prevention.

My Department intends to rely heavily on its two operational levers which are the ECOWAS Gender Development Center (EGDC) based in Dakar and the ECOWAS Youth and Sport Development Center (EYSDC) based in Ouagadougou for the implementation of large-scale programs for the consolidation of peace in the region.

In terms of participation, how do you see the future of women in WA?

The future of Women in West Africa is quite promising. Today, we have a woman appointed Prime Minister in Togo and women candidates for the presidential elections in Burkina Faso



and Guinea. We also had, in the past, a woman President of a Republic. I mean Her Excellency Mrs. Ellen Johnson SIRLEAF in Liberia. The law criminalizing rape has been passed in Senegal and quota and gender equity laws exist in countries like Cabo Verde, Guinea, Niger, and Senegal.

Experience has finally shown us that when the technical approach, I mean the capacity to develop good laws on women's political involvement, is established and if it is paired with a political approach to maintain dialogue with decision-makers, we can achieve convincing results. Women's and youth organizations are full of potentials that need to be released to support the social and economic transformations sought for the region.

In terms of women's economic empowerment, thanks to the joint efforts between the ECOWAS Commission and its Member States, the contribution of women in the agricultural value chain has greatly improved. We have also set up a regional platform to interconnect women entrepreneurs in the region, thanks to support from the African Development Bank (50 Million African Women Speak).

Children were not left out; an important child protection program is being carried out in some ECOWAS countries thanks to the support of the Italian Cooperation and the High Commissioner for Human Rights (Support Project for the Protection of Child Victims of Rights Violations- PAPEV).

What message would you like to deliver to women/ youth organizations and governments in the sub-region?

First, I would like to deliver a message of comfort to all victims of the Corona virus pandemic. To all the families who have lost one of their own and to all those who are fighting against the disease, I express my solidarity and my compassion.

I would also like to express my gratitude to all the ministries in charge of Gender, Family and Women in ECOWAS Member States and the Women's and Youth Organizations of the Region, for the remarkable work they are carrying out in West Africa to support ECOWAS humanitarian, social, and gender programs. As you know, the only reason for the existence of ECOWAS is to daily serve the populations of our Community. This work would not have been realized without the constant support of these Ministries and Organizations. This is therefore the moment to thank them and also to invite them to further build more synergy in order to accomplish the ambitious and vast project of regional integration especially for the benefits of women, youth and children.

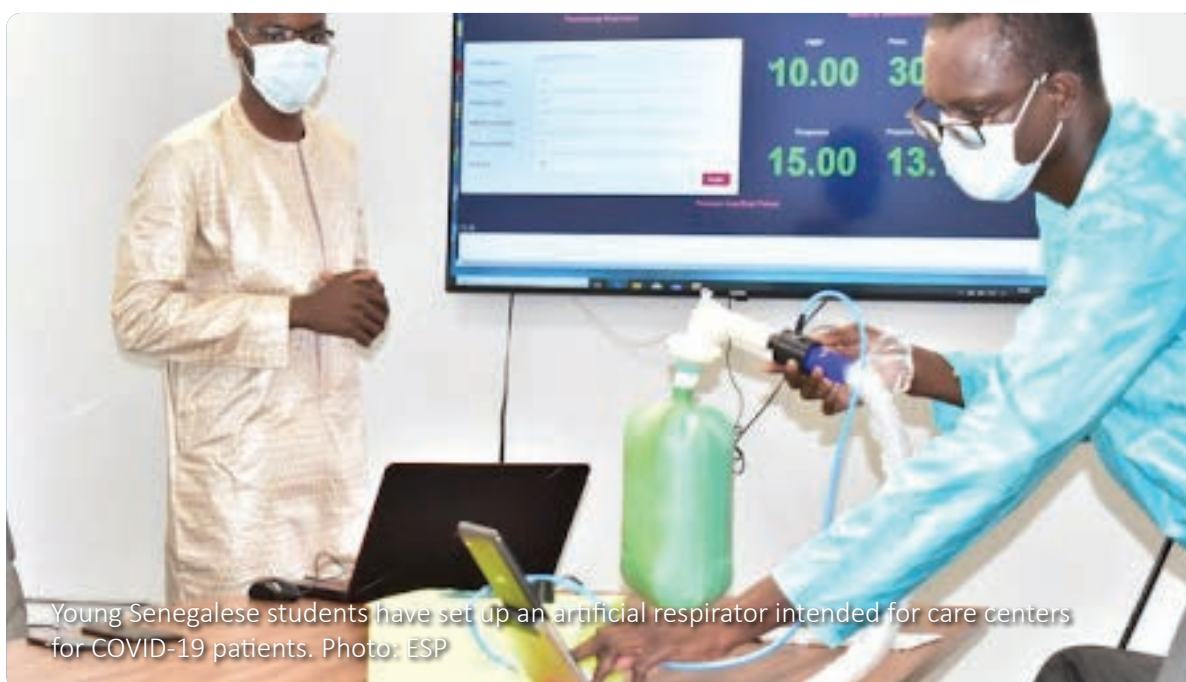


Today, we have a woman appointed Prime Minister in Togo and women candidates for the presidential elections in Burkina Faso and Guinea

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Despite COVID-19, the implementation of Resolutions 2250 and 2419 relating to youth, peace and security is on track in West Africa and the Sahel



UNOWAS conducted, in September 2020, a survey among young women's and men's organizations in 17 countries of the subregion to measure the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people, their activities and the implementation of resolutions 2250 (2015) and 2419 (2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to threaten the populations and economies of countries. According to the results of the survey conducted by UNOWAS, the impact of COVID-19 on young women and men in West Africa and the Sahel is quite significant. Youth aged 18-29 and 30-39 are the most affected, accounting respectively for 22 percent and 28 percent of confirmed cases. While it must be recognized that they benefit from a low mortality rate (8 percent of cases of





Presentation of the Togolese respirator prototype at the University of Lomé.
Photo: University of Lomé

death), the fact remains that they are under strong pressure from the impact of the pandemic: loss of jobs with the closure of businesses, especially those in the informal sector, decline or total loss of income. Growing unemployment and heightened poverty are put together with the high cost of living. Idleness, stress and depression take place in the lives of many young people and lead to the exacerbation of violence which threatens social cohesion within communities.

Significant contribution of young people in the fighting against COVID-19

Despite this upheaval, the involvement of young people, using several alternatives, did not take long to come. Through their organizations and sometimes through individual citizen actions, they mobilized to contribute, in their respective countries, to limiting the spread of this pandemic and its impact on living and working conditions. Their contributions focus on capacity building activities on prevention and response as well as awareness-raising actions in communities through radio broadcasts and the publication on social media networks of communication and educational information materials. In Niger, for example, the National Youth Committee, with the support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), has made a digital information and training platform available to young people.

Young people also contribute to humanitarian actions with donations of medical equipment, hygienic and protective equipment sometimes made by themselves and food kits to vulnerable populations. They are also noticed for their ingenuity in the manufacture of protection and treatment devices against the virus. This is the case in Ghana and Togo with innovative hand washing devices associated with solar energy, in Senegal with the nursing robot and the automatic hydroalcoholic gel dispenser, and respirators, as in Togo.



Despite this upheaval, the involvement of young people, using several alternatives



Violence during the COVID-19 crisis has a negative impact on the implementation of Resolution 2250

However, although it should be noted that the partnership between youth organizations, governments and technical and financial partners has not suffered any damage, the implementation of Resolutions 2250 and 2419 has been shaken by the slowdown or the stopping of scheduled activities that cannot take place because of COVID-19 restrictions.

In addition, acts of violence reported in some countries such as Sierra Leone, Guinea, with the death of 12 young people, and Niger following certain restrictive measures, have a negative impact on the implementation of Resolution 2250 (2015).

Nevertheless, activities carried out by young people are likely to allow harmony in favor of stability within communities. Also, faced with flaws in the acceptance and implementation of certain barrier measures and the failure to control the annoyances causing uprisings and violence, young people have been there to help ease tensions. This can be illustrated by nocturnal sensitizations and the appeal of young people to restraint in Niger.

It is important not to lose sight of the economic and social imbalance which fears more aggravating crisis situations among young women and men, and to remain mobilized to support them during and after the health crisis, in order to allow them to fully contribute to peace and development.

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INTERVIEW WITH MRS. AGATHE TELOU

“Women and young people are essential to any development policy”

Agathe Telou is the Gender Advisor at UNOWAS. She talks about her role and also about her perspectives as a woman and a mother to advance the participation of women and youth in decision-making processes in West Africa and the Sahel. Interview



Agathe Telou ▶
Gender Advisor at UNOWAS

You are the gender advisor at UNOWAS since 2012. what does your day-to-day work consist of?

As Gender Adviser, my role is to ensure the institutionalization of gender within the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) while supporting its leadership in its decisions and actions related to the implementation of the office’s mandate.



Concretely, my work covered four components: First, advising the Head of mission, the management and heads of sections on ways and means of integrating gender in the conduct of their activities, and guiding them in the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 (2000) and subsequent Resolutions on women, peace and security.

However, given the cross-cutting nature of gender, I develop tools and guidelines for the entire mission: I ensure the capacity building of colleagues on gender issues and support all sections to ensure the integration of a gender perspective in the implementation of their activities. This ranges from the good offices missions of the Special Representative to those of the entire mission in the area of preventive diplomacy, as well as accompanying countries in the context of elections, mediation, the prevention of violent extremism and the management of various conflicts.

Secondly, my role is also to promote and facilitate the implementation, by States and Governments, of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions relating to women, peace and security. At this level, we have developed close collaboration and partnership with regional organizations, particularly ECOWAS, the Mano River Union and the G5 Sahel, as well as with United Nations entities and other stakeholders, to pool resources for better coordination of actions aimed at avoiding the dispersion of our energies and the duplication of our interventions. In the same vein, in April 2009, we jointly set up a multi-stakeholder working group represented in 17 countries, which we are co-coordinating with UN Women.

Thirdly, I collect and assess data and information on the implementation of the Resolutions in the region with a view to contributing to the UN Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the Security Council Resolutions 1325 (2000) and subsequent.

Finally, my fourth area of action, since the adoption in 2015 by the UN Security Council of Resolution 2250 (2015) on youth, peace and security, I am also in charge of the programme for the involvement of young women and men in peace and security processes in the 17 countries of West Africa and the Sahel.

Based on your experience, do you think that women and youth are playing their full role in the development of the sub-region?

Women and young people are an essential link for any development policy and for the establishment of sustainable peace.



I ensure the capacity building of colleagues on gender issues and support all sections to ensure the integration of a gender perspective in the implementation of their activities





Celebration of International Women's Day with the Regional Thematic Group on Gender (RTG) of UN agencies in Senegal. Dakar, March 6, 2019. Photo: UNOWAS

According to statistics, women make up a little more than half of the world's total population and nearly 60% of the active population. In addition, more than a third of them are heads of households, but paradoxically, they are the ones who benefit least from the economic benefits and many of them live below the poverty line in the developing world.

As mother of an average of four children, women are involved in domestic work, various other income-generating activities, but also in political life and increasingly in the management of community and national affairs. Women in both rural and urban areas are unquestionably important economic agents and are present in all economic sectors, especially in the informal economy.

In rural areas, women are not only responsible for the production process, especially for food crops where they are involved in food processing and conservation, but are also strongly involved in the health sphere through their role in health care such as childbirth or environmental hygiene, water supply, improvement of housing and family nutrition, and processing and marketing of harvested products. Sahelian women play an undeniable role in the fight against desertification. They are at the origin of several pioneering activities in the field of environmental protection.

In many cities, women are increasingly playing an important economic role and contribute to household income, far beyond simply supplementing small daily expenses.

Women create or become active in groups, associations and networks through which they develop and implement various development activities. They act as bridges of peace and as educators while facilitating communication and negotiations.



As mother of an average of four children, women are involved in domestic work, various other income-generating activities



Their drive to participate in decision-making is evident today in their brilliant rise to strategic decision-making positions.

Young people are vectors of change. Energetic and much more oriented towards creative innovation, they contribute enormously to the economy of their countries through their enterprises and their participation in the development and peace-building process. This posture has justified the appointment of a special envoy of the United Nations Secretary General for youth and the development of strategies and programmes that put them at the heart of the action.

Initiatives based on the principles of inclusion with an effective consideration of the gender dimension mark their difference by achieving the expected results. However, solutions to cultural barriers and limited access to financial and production resources, as well as improved consideration of the specific needs of women and girls, could further boost the role of young people and women in the development of the sub-region, involvement of young women and men in peace and security processes in the 17 countries of West Africa and the Sahel.

What is your assessment of the contribution of the regional partnership - particularly with ECOWAS - in advancing the gender issue?

The United Nations and other partners, such as ECOWAS, work closely together on gender issues with a shared vision on the normative framework, the mobilization of means and capacity building of States but also women and youth organizations and any other actor in the service of gender equity and equality in general, and the implementation of the «Women, Peace and Security» and «Youth, Peace and Security» agendas in particular.

The work done by ECOWAS in establishing mechanisms, structures, frameworks, policies and strategies to address gender issues and the promotion of women and youth is an example to be followed.

Such structuring facilitates collaboration and enables political and strategic decisions to be placed at the level of the Council of Ministers to which partners, including the United Nations, are invited. The operational and technical level coming upstream to prepare the ministerial meeting, coherence and relevance in the interventions are naturally at the rendezvous.



The United Nations and other partners, such as ECOWAS, work closely together on gender issues with a shared vision on the normative framework



Regarding the other regional organizations, such as the Mano River Union and the G5 Sahel, each also has a unit or department responsible for gender issues. All of them have facilitated the establishment of networks of women and young people working on the themes of gender, women, youth, peace and security in their areas of coverage. And, within the framework of the sub-regional partnership for the follow-up and implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 (2000) and following, under the coordination of UNOWAS and UN WOMEN, all these organizations interact with civil society organizations, the academic world, training centers, United Nations entities in the region, within the working group, Women, Youth, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel; this multi-actor platform is a great achievement of the sub-region and is recognized at the international level.

What advice could you give to the governments of the sub-region to achieve the full participation of women?

25 years after the Beijing Conference with its action plan and 20 years of implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 (2000) and following, I would give four pieces of advice to the governments of the sub-region:

First, women and youth should be placed at the heart of their actions, taking into consideration their needs and concerns. Secondly, the States of the region have made great efforts and demonstrated their willingness to reduce inequalities and discrimination, notably through the adoption of laws and other provisions to protect women and girls and/or promote their full political participation and in the peace and development processes of their countries. The next step is to act through the effective implementation of the laws and provisions voted or adopted. The governments of the sub-region must equip themselves with the means and take measures (including implementing decrees or orders, and in some cases, budget allocation) to enforce the laws passed. Some are already on the way, and we encourage them to do more.

In addition, several high-level community, local and national women mediators have been trained in all the countries of the sub-region. ECOWAS, other regional organizations, UN WOMEN and UNOWAS, together with other partners, accompanied and facilitated this process which led to the establishment of networks of women mediators including FEMWISE West Africa. We invite the Governments to involve these women mediators in all the processes of conflict analysis and management, as well as in the processes of negotiation, mediation and construction of sustainable peace in the countries and in the sub-region.



The work done by ECOWAS in establishing mechanisms, structures, frameworks, policies and strategies to address gender issues and the promotion of women and youth is an example to be followed



Finally, Governments should allocate funds for gender programmers, the promotion of women and youth, including a national budget allocation to the National Action Plan for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 (2000) and following to ensure the protection of women and girls and promote their full political participation, in the prevention and management of conflicts, as well as in the peace and security processes of their countries.

Governments in the sub-region can only achieve the expected results for the achievement of sustainable development goals 5 and 16 (relating to gender equality and peace and security) through more concerted and inclusive actions, respect for gender equality principles, the empowerment of women and youth, and the establishment of an enabling environment for their participation, influence and leadership.

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The work of the Cameroon-Nigeria Joint Commission awarded the Raymond Milefsky Prize



The Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission (CMCN) was awarded the 2020 Raymond Milefsky Prize. Created in November 2002 by the UN Secretary General at the request of presidents Paul Biya of Cameroon and Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, the main objective of the CNMC is to facilitate the implementation of the 10 October 2002 judgment of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the Cameroon-Nigeria border dispute triggered by claims of sovereignty over the Bakassi peninsula.

On 20 July 2020, IBRU, Durham University's Centre for Borders Research (United States) awarded the Raymond Milefsky Prize to the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission (CNMC). An award that rewards the work of the CNMC on the border dispute between Cameroon and Nigeria.

«We are honored and very happy with this recognition by IBRU for the work achieved by the CNMC in favor of peace between the two countries and in the sub region», said the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General for Africa of the West and the Sahel (UNOWAS), Mohamed Ibn Chambas, as Chairman of the CNMC.

▲
CNMC teams are installing terminals at the border between Cameroon and Nigeria. Photo: UNOWAS / Daniel Baril



Since its inception, the CMCN has facilitated the peaceful transfer of authority over Bakassi to Cameroon through the Greentree Agreement, in accordance with the judgment of the International Court of Justice. To date, thanks to the work of the Commission, 2,000 kilometers of demarcation have been surveyed and approved by both parties out of a total of approximately 2,100 kilometers.

Despite the extremely difficult realities on the ground and attacks from armed groups, the CMNC has also focused on confidence building initiatives, the inclusion of populations in the demarcation process and the establishment of economic development in order to mitigate the impacts caused by the demarcation of the new borders.

For IBRU Director Philip Steinberg, “The Commission has been doing work that is truly extraordinary, combining the technical mission of boundary demarcation with extensive efforts at community reconciliation and outreach, all within an exceptionally hostile political environment. Put another way, the Cameroon-Nigeria Commission dramatically illustrates how the process of bordering, which is so often associated with division and discord, can also be a means for peacebuilding. This is a mission that aligns with IBRU’s, as well as with the values that motivated Ray Milefsky’s career.»

The Milefsky Award is made annually to an individual or organisation that has advanced boundary-making or cross-border cooperation. The Milefsky Award is made possible by a bequest from the estate of Raymond Milefsky, a long-time borders expert with the US Department of State. The award includes a cash prize of £745.

For more information on the work of the CNMC, visit our website: <https://unowas.unmissions.org/>

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UNOWAS welcomes Ms. Giovanie Biha, the new Deputy Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel



Ms. Giovanie Biha, from Burundi has joined UNOWAS to serve as the Deputy Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel.

Following her appointment by the UN Secretary-General on 25 June 2020, Ms. Biha took office on 1 September 2020, under special telecommuting conditions linked to COVID-19.

Ms. Biha has extensive experience within the United Nations system. Before joining UNOWAS, she was Deputy Director in the United Nations Development Coordination Office. Ms. Biha has also held several senior positions at the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), as Deputy Executive Secretary, UN Women, as Director of Management, and the United Nations Secretariat.

Prior to the United Nations, Ms. Biha held positions of responsibility in her home country at the Central Bank of Burundi and Banque de Commerce et d'Investissement.

The poets of the International Day of Peace



Like the rest of the UN system, UNOWAS celebrated on 21 September the International Day of Peace.

Under the theme “Shaping Peace Together”, this 2020 edition coincided with the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the United Nations which gathered millions of people around the world who joined in the UN75 Campaign, the largest global conversation on building a peaceful and prosperous future we want.

To mark this important celebration, UNOWAS held a virtual discussion which allowed staff members to share their ideas and thoughts on how “we can better consolidate peace and build a better world”.

A poetry competition was also organized on the theme: “Shaping peace together”, during which UNOWAS staff members have let their hearts speak in the language of their choice.

For more informations: un.org/en/un75



Isaac Mabaya

Face covered we are safe; exposed we
are a threat, the new image of terror.
Ignorance of one could be another's
death knell. I can't breathe!!

Lying in bed at night with the ache of
worry in your head; a pinch of worry
keeping you awake. A sneeze or a cough
more terrifying than the sound of a
gunshot.

Another case, another statistic; now you
understand why they say 'bless you' after
a sneeze for it sure was a clear sign of
death, a sad goodbye during the Spanish
flue.

With a virus refusing to put down its
crown, taking away the very social
construct of human freedom; together
we fall and alone we now stand.

United we must still stand yet we must
stand apart.

Love that held power, love thy neighbour
is to kill thy neighbour; of broken bonds
and families ripped apart.

Masked faces that was terror now but
the symbol of safety; how life has been
flipped over in our very own time.
Boundaries brought right onto our faces.

What a virus, what a disease; that which
is cured by hiding but until when?

1914, 1945, 2020 as humanity continues
to fight for survival. I can't breathe

The was Covid-19! United we trudge on.

Alice Diouf

wax jamm

def jamm

dox jamm

dund jamm

ngir jamm sakh

Dominique Chaby COLY

PAIX, tu es Sourire sans arme,
PAIX, tu es Amour dans les coeurs,
PAIX, tu es la Joie des enfants,
Jaam mo gueune !
Jaam tchi Aduna !

Ngozi Amu

The astronaut's perspective
That we begin to see the world like an
astronaut descending
In perspective
Amazed at how small we are
Yet fighting, deceiving and hurting
One another
When all the gains are elsewhere
To care, empower and help
Each other
To form part of something bigger
Like when a thousand stars align



Angelita

Un monde immonde
Les hommes inondent les ondes de comble
On trompe les comptes, infox ou intox
Peu importe, une ombre éclaire et elle est
paix !
Salut à tous ceux-là qui sèment (la paix)

Kouider

Paix- quatre lettres suffisent.
Des rêves, des espoirs Et des guerres- et
encore des guerres-
Le souffle du vent ne chante plus,
Le soleil froid, souvent timide enveloppe
l'air que tu respirez-
As-tu peur des lendemains incertains ou
veux-tu accompagner l'inconscience d'un
oiseau voyageur.
Il cherche, il scrute, les parcelles de cette
terre oh combien tourmentée.
Qu'avez-vous fait de vos rêves ?
Réveillez-les- dites-leur que- ELLE- vaut les
combats et les espérances-
Dites-leur qu'elle s'appelle la PAIX-

Anonyme

Paix que nous désirons tant
Paix qui tarde à venir s'installer
définitivement
Paix qui s'avance à petits pas timides
Nous te supplions de ne pas te faire
attendre.

Patrick Buse

Strategies

carefully crafted, spider's network swings
in the wind, waiting to entangle the
proudest envoy.

Gazelle, better avoids drinking where the
lions bath.

leaving no chance, the ants encircle
the wounded cockroach, all protocols
observed.

rattling his majestic antlers, elk steps out
from behind the trees.

the mighty shark dumbfounded by the
smokescreen squeezed out by Mr. squid.

even chameleon is envious.

the busy bees swarming around queen
at headquarters, returning from their
missions pressing out the sweetest
honey; exchanged for sugary water.

meanwhile out of the sea crawls the
turtle, burying her eggs in the sand.
most perish, eaten, stolen, or trampled
upon. but with luck, on a stormy night,
one cracks open, to pursue her solitary
journey across the oceans' depths for
a hundred years. the cuckoo, as for
him, leaves the hatching to his regional
counterparts.

the cuckoo, as for him, leaves the
hatching to his regional counterparts.

lost in the Sahelian sands, scorpion waits
for better times. over him, in beautiful
formation, fly the blackbirds, with their
tiny hearts, reaching where the rainbow
ends. how infallible their internal
compass.

struck down by deadly venom, so end
the longest terms. don't forget about the
three little pigs!

it's all about prevention