



News from our Partners

March 2018 – Julienne Lusenge (representing the Fund for Congolese Women) and Zawadi Albertine Mambo (representing SOFEPADI) at the UN Commission on the Status of Women.



Their participation in the UN Commission on the Status of Women was an opportunity to better understand international dynamics around women's protection in conflict situations. It was also an opportunity to deepen relations with the *Global Network of Women Peacebuilders* (GNWP), of which they are members. GNWP is an international network actively involved in advocacy and action for the full and effective implementation of the Security Council resolutions on women and peace and security. During the panel organized by GNWP, Julienne and Zawadi were asked a lot of questions, given the armed conflicts that have continued to seriously compound the humanitarian situation in the province of Ituri and in northern North Kivu since the beginning of the year.

Julienne also participated in a panel hosted by Global Affairs Canada on female participation in peacekeeping missions and the barriers to a more meaningful involvement of women. Alongside Minister Chrystia Freeland, Julienne explained that among MONUSCO contributing countries, there is a serious misunderstanding of and disrespect for women's rights and gender equality. In these countries, women are absent from military forces and are still viewed as weak beings. Furthermore, the troops deployed in DRC are all commanded by men. There is thus a need to develop a strategy for recruiting women, together with robust training on gender and UNSCR 1325 for commanders of the various contingents. She encouraged Canada to deploy troops trained on women's rights and gender equality, as they could influence the troops already on the ground.



Julienne's visit to Ottawa, April 3-5, 2018

With support from Match Fund for Women and Nobel Women Initiative, Julienne was invited to a conversation by the Offices of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ms. Freeland, and the Minister of International Development, Ms. Bibeau. She talked about the situation of women in RDC, the challenge that democracy issues pose to women, as well as the upsurge of sexual violence and women's rights violations due to ongoing armed conflict in certain areas of the country. She also met with the Director General of Global Affairs Canada's West and Central Africa Bureau, Ms. Jennifer Goosen, with whom she discussed about women in electoral contexts. On each occasion, she presented the partnership and CSIW project. It was also an opportunity for her to meet with two members of the federal parliament, Ms. Mona Fortier and Ms. Anita Vandenberg, to raise their awareness on women's rights violations in DRC. Her visit concluded with two public presentations with civil society members from the Outaouais region.





Sierra Leone – Women's Forum engagement in national elections highlighting the role of women

By Rosaline McCarthy

Sierra Leone held its fourth cycle of national presidential, parliamentary and local council elections on 7th March, 2018. The outcome of the elections was largely peaceful and there was a large voter turnout. A little over three million voters who had registered cast their vote. According to discussions at various fora, there was a large turnout of women voters.



Prior to the elections, Women's Forum engaged the victims of sexual violence during the war at Grafton War Wounded Camp on the importance of women in elections as part of the CSiW project intervention. The women recognized their right to vote and be voted for. They also said that elections were part of the governance process which gives citizens the opportunity to choose their leaders at national and local government. They opined that as victims they looked up to governments to ensure that their needs were met.

The Women's Forum used an holistic approach to women and youth contribution to violence free elections in Africa, the WSR (Women's Situation Room), that has been acclaimed by the

African Union and the UN. The WSR is a women's peace building mechanism that takes its cue from the UNSC Resolution 1325 which flags the need for women's active participation in peace building and conflict prevention, conflict management, conflict resolution and mediation.



In order to disseminate its message throughout Sierra Leone, WSR has availed itself of a variety of methods including: Radio programmes; visits to the Sierra Leone Police, political parties, Office of National Security, the Political Parties Registration Commission, the Inter-Religious Council, The National Elections Commission, His Excellency the President of Sierra Leone and others; and interaction with foreign observer mission, protest marches against hate speech and tribalism; training of observers and observing the elections; and press releases.



To conclude, it should be noted that concerns are being raised about the decreasing number of female candidacy in elections, the low representation of women in parliament and the lack of political will

to comply with national and international instruments for gender equality and human rights. The role of women in political parties is yet another concern especially in relation to male domination of awarding committees; and the issue of the best means of empowering women to secure appreciable number of votes in their constituencies in future elections.

Special thanks to Gisèle Eva Côté for collaborating on this issue of the newsletter.