

**Article for Australasian Council of Women and Policing Journal
26 February 2007**

Women Graduates Contribute to Stunning Progress in Rwanda

The 1994 genocide in Rwanda literally left the women behind to pick up the pieces. After the violence subsided, 70 percent of the remaining population of Rwanda was women. If communities were going to survive, and if the country was ever going to recover, it was up to them to make it happen. They forced themselves to face the inconceivable and they rebuilt. It was women who cleared the dead bodies from the streets; women who rebuilt the homes and women who solved the national orphan crisis -- more than 500,000 children with nowhere to go. Nearly every woman took at least one child into her home. Now it is women graduates who are taking up the challenge to encourage girls, especially girl orphans who head families, to continue their schooling and women to go on to study for higher degrees.

The Rwanda Association of University Women (RAUW) was founded in July 2006 by a group of university women graduates living in Rwanda. The organisation was introduced by Dr Shirley Randell, Senior Governance/Gender Adviser of SNV Rwanda, and Australian expert in development assistance in Asia, the Pacific and Africa. RAUW's establishment was supported by the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, UNIFEM, the Forum for Women Educationalists and four university women's associations.

RAUW's membership has grown to 175 in the last eight months and it has a target of 300 members by the end of 2007. Members include Ministers, MPs, academics, accountants, administrators, business women, communication personnel, development specialists, educators, engineers, lawyers, medical and health professionals, public servants and scientists. While the great majority of members are Rwandese, others include residents from Australia, UK, USA, Uganda, Tanzania, South Africa, Russia, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands.

RAUW's representative Council meets monthly. It has organised a public forum on women and gender based violence and sponsors public lectures. Professor Verdiana Masanje gave the first lecture on Female Access to and Participation in Higher Education: Interventions and Challenges.

RAUW's members report back at regular meetings on their learning from attending overseas conferences and training experiences. Most recently reports were given by the President, Ambassador Joy Mukanyange and Marthe Ndayizigiye on the Pan African Women Leaders conference in South Africa, Jeanne Kagwiza on her participation in the LEAD program, Mediatrice Mukabagema on the RAUW delegation's visit to the Ugandan FUWs AGM, and Dr Randell on her participation in the World Social Forum in Kenya.

RAUW has received a grant from the Rhodes Scholars Southern African Forum to sponsor the education of ten girl orphans who are heading families to continue their schooling. This project is carried out in collaboration with the Gasabo District and Benishyaka. Other project applications are in the pipeline.

Daily information about scholarships, awards, conferences, resources and events in Rwanda, Africa and around the world is posted daily on an electronic Dgroup which has been one of the five most active Dgroups in the world since its establishment in September 2006.

Five RAUW members are currently on scholarships to complete PhD and masters degrees abroad in Costa Rica, UK, Netherlands and Tanzania. RAUW members have been hosted by university associations during their visits to Sweden, Switzerland, Netherlands, UK, Australia, Canada, Costa Rica, Uganda, Burundi, Tanzania and South Africa. In turn they have hosted a member from the Netherlands and are expecting visitors from Canadian and Netherlands federations .

Members are planning to attend the AFUW's annual conference in Cape Town in March, which will coincide with the AGM of the South African AUW. A visit will be paid to the Burundi in April. Members are currently fund raising to send a delegation to the IFUW triennial conference in August when it is hoped that several of them will be able to be present to give papers at interdisciplinary seminars.

Rwanda already has the highest representation of women parliamentarians in the world and RAUW is aiming to have an international impact as women graduates.