

Dear friends

1 October 2007

This Rwanda update on development issues and my activities is sent from time to time. Please feel free to forward it to anyone you think would be interested. You should let me know if you want to be taken off the mailing list. If you receive this e-mail direct from me and you wish to keep receiving it, you need to say so once every three years, as the list is updated annually to remove any people who have been silent for that time.

Work challenges

I have just returned from three days gender and development (GAD) training for water, sanitation and hygiene (WaSH) officials high in the mountains of Ndiza in Muhanga province. We were able to enjoy the splendour of mountain views with terraced gardens and pine plantations while we revised the GAD manual we had prepared in French and English, away from mobile phone and internet contact. At the Rwanda Institute of Administration and Management (RIAM) in Kigali I gave a presentation on mentoring to a fine group of senior politicians, diplomats, business people and NGO leaders who have agreed to mentor 120 middle-senior level women leaders, undertaking a Canadian Cooperation-funded course on Career Management and Leadership. The project has been jointly organised by RIAM, SNV and the Rwanda Association of University Women (RAUW). Prior to that, I attended a Netherlands-funded, UNICEF WaSH project planning seminar at Gisenyi on Lake Kivu, at the border of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

We drove through flooded roads past submerged houses, where nearly 20 bodies have been found and 500 homes have been destroyed. The heaviest rains in memory have hit a great swathe of the continent, from the Sahel to the Horn of Africa. 18 of the poorest and normally driest countries from Senegal in the west to Ethiopia in the east have been seriously hit by months of torrential rains which meteorologists forecast will continue in places for many more weeks. At least 700,000 homes have been destroyed, 1.7 million people affected and more than 200 people drowned so far. This is harvest time for many African countries and there are already food shortages. The rains linked to ocean temperature changes of El Nino have caught governments off guard. Floods are also traumatic again in Bangladesh, which is bracing itself for a potentially devastating second round of floods in the monsoon season this year. More than one million Bangladeshis have been evacuated or are stranded as major rivers in the country and the neighboring north-eastern region of India have again risen to alarming levels and begun to inundate nearby countryside.

Other Travels

United Kingdom

I have had two trips out of Rwanda since my last update. In August I accompanied five members of RAUW to their first International Federation of University Women (IFUW) triennial conference at Manchester, UK. RAUW was admitted as a full member of IFUW, and many national federations and associations praised its success in attracting over 260 members in one year, many of whom are under the age of 30. This was in contrast to many older NFAs whose membership is aging and declining in numbers. I was elected International Vice President for 2007-2010, an honour for me and Rwanda. I reported on my work over the last three years as International Projects Convener and shared the delivery of a preconference leadership training program for over 100 young members. At the British Federation of University Women's 100th birthday party, the Rwanda delegation, in their colourful *umishinana* were a great focus for many photographers (pictured). RAUW delegates especially enjoyed meeting members from the Netherlands, Canada and Britain Associations who had helped them to travel to Manchester. While in the UK I gave a seminar on 'Recovery in Rwanda' at the University of Sussex's Institute of Development Studies, organised by a former Bangadeshi colleague and Rwandese friend studying for their masters degrees in gender and development on Chevening scholarships. A less formal occasion was a visit to British Friends of Vanuatu over a wonderful lunch at Pamela Clunies Ross' home, where I was able to share news of my recent visit to Vanuatu as well as developments in Rwanda. I had a magnificent few days with Peter and Wilma Shakespeare at Bray and other friends in London, and took the opportunity to visit Aunty Sue in Newton Ferris in Devon on the way to Manchester

Senegal

Earlier this month I traveled to Dakar Senegal as a representative of IFUW to participate in the UNESCO Education for All conference. I stayed with Rwandese friend Eunice Kabanyana, who had helped me settle in to Kigali last year. We visited the island from which slaves were transported from Africa for so many years. I was interested to hear the story of Senagalese, Marietou Ndiaye, who two decades after the death of her daughter in a pre-marriage ceremony known as "female circumcision," has become a leading campaigner for the eradication of female genital mutilation (FGM). Her village is one of many being educated in human rights by a local aid group Tostan, which received on 12 September, the world's largest humanitarian award, the USD 1.5 million Conrad N. Hilton Prize, at a ceremony in New York. Tostan uses traditional song, poetry, theater and dance to educate some of the region's poorest villagers. Over 100 million women have been subjected to FGM, a practice that still puts up to 3 million girls at risk each year. UNICEF has called for pressure to be maintained to stop FGM in Egypt, where more than 77% of 15 to 17 year-old girls and 60% of those under the age of three are subjected to the practice. This year, authorities in Egypt have clamped down on the practice, which dates back to the pharaohs, is prevalent in all classes, all levels of society, urban and rural areas. Affecting both Muslim and Christian women, it was banned in Egypt in 1997 with doctors allowed only to operate "in exceptional cases", but as in other countries the tradition dies hard.

World Progress

Despite daunting challenges posed by global warming, water, energy, unemployment and terrorism, the world faces a brighter future with fewer wars, higher life expectancy and improved literacy, according to the 2007 State of the Future report. People around the world are becoming healthier, wealthier, better educated, more peaceful, and increasingly connected and they are living longer; but at the same time the world is more corrupt, congested, warmer, and increasingly dangerous. Although the digital divide is beginning to close, income gaps are still expanding around the world and unemployment continues to grow. The global economy grew at 5.4 percent in 2006 to USD 66 trillion (purchasing power parity). The population grew 1.1%, increasing the average world per capita income by 4.3 percent. At this rate, world poverty will be cut by more than half between 2000 and 2015, meeting the UN Millennium Development Goal for poverty reduction except in sub-Saharan Africa, which is off-track for reaching a single one of the ambitious goals the world set itself for slashing poverty, hunger, disease and illiteracy by 2015. Although the majority of the world is improving economically, income disparities are still enormous: 2 percent of the world's richest people own more than 50 percent of the world's wealth, while the poorest 50 percent of people own 1 percent. And the income of the 225 richest people in the world is equal to that of the poorest 2.7 billion, 40 percent of the world.

Rwanda

Rwanda is the most improved sub-Saharan nation according to a survey looking at performances over the past five years. The Ibrahim Index, financed by Sudanese mobile phone magnate Mo Ibrahim, names Mauritius as the best-governed and Somalia as the worst-governed state. Countries are measured under categories like "Safety and Security" and "Human Development." Harvard University academics analyzed the criteria used to rank countries.

Transparency International has ranked the perception of corruption in Rwanda at 2.8 up from 2.5 in 2006, jumping some 10 points to 111 of 163 countries covered. This comes in the wake of corruption scandals reported in the Ministry of Commerce, a World Bank supported project and a TIG project that managed programs of the genocide detainees. The Auditor General's report last year highlighted irregularities in government procurement leading to the loss of millions of tax payers dollars. Businesses have also reported occurrences of petty corruption in the customs clearing process. TI says that the bribe money that buys a champagne lifestyle for corrupt officials in the poorest nations often originates in multinational companies based in the world's richest countries. Many countries ranked among the cleanest are facilitating bribery and plunder in the impoverished nations at the bottom of the list. Rwanda has signed and ratified the UN Anticorruption Convention. It is a signatory of the OECD Convention on Combating Bribery and the African Union Anticorruption Convention. The Police force is currently investigating several officials on corruption allegations. Government has a zero tolerance of corruption and the

Ombudsman, Auditor General, National Tender Board, Rwanda Revenue Authority and National Examination Council are some of the institutions that government has established to combat it.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Dr. Louise Arbour has hailed Rwanda's recent abolition of capital punishment, calling it a powerful endorsement of the importance of pursuing justice while repudiating violence in all its forms. "A country that has suffered the ultimate crime and whose people's thirst for justice is still far from quenched has decided to forego a sanction that should have no place in any society that claims to value human rights and the inviolability of the person. Rwanda is demonstrating leadership by action". The death penalty ban should allow the extradition to Rwanda of persons accused of genocide in order to stand trial in the national courts. Many countries refuse to hand over suspects to jurisdictions in which they may face capital punishment" it adds.

Women

Aung San Suu Kyi, Nobel Peace Prize winner and leader of the legitimately elected government of Burma has been under house arrest for nearly 11 years and recently transferred to Insein Prison, called by one former prisoner "the darkest hell-hole in Burma. This courageous human rights defender, the more than 1000 political prisoners detained, and the hundreds of thousands of people in Burma engaged in peaceful protests against an oppressive military regime, deserve the freedom and democracy they have struggled for since the 1988 uprising, which ended in the slaughter of 3000 people. Women have suffered in terrible and specific ways. Media coverage of the brave saffron protest currently raging in Burma tends to pay scant attention to the courageous Buddhist nuns rallying alongside the monks, or to the bravery of Burma's women activists who have long been at the forefront of their people's struggle against the military junta. Women played a central role during the initiation of the protests and led many of the first marches against fuel prices. Several high-profile women activists have been forced into hiding as authorities have raided their homes and distributed "wanted persons" leaflets to checkpoints throughout Burma.

Law and Order Police in Zimbabwe have gone from door-to-door arresting members of Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA), even women playing football. They are usually released a few days later but are reportedly beaten and tortured while in custody. WOZA now has a countrywide membership of over 35,000 women and men. It was formed in 2003 as a women's civic movement to provide women from all walks of life, with a united voice to speak out on issues affecting their day-to-day lives, empower female leadership for community involvement in pressing for solutions to the current crisis, encourage women to stand up for their rights and freedoms, and lobby and advocate on those issues affecting women and their families. The group is one of the few that have stood up to the regime there on a consistent basis, demonstrating against human rights abuses, forced evictions and food shortages in Zimbabwe.

A new report from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights that details cases of abduction, rape and sexual violence in South Darfur, says that the Government of the Sudan must protect women and children from sexual and gender-based violence. The report, a follow-up to one issued in April 2007, contains testimonies from victims and eyewitnesses describing how women were abducted, kept as sex slaves or subjected to other human rights violations in Deribat and surrounding towns by the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and affiliated groups. Sexual violence thrives on armed conflict. UN has called on the international community to take urgent action to eliminate rampant sexual violence in war-torn eastern DRC, where various militia groups continue to terrorise civilians. Advocates are calling for an international agency for women to be created within the UN system, headed by an under-secretary general, to ensure that women's issues are not ignored. An unprecedented number of women candidates and voters turned out for the Jordanian municipal elections this year with more than half receiving training from UNIFEM to build women's capacity to promote and enhance their role in public life.

The United Nations all-female Indian police unit in Liberia, the first such unit deployed in peacekeeping missions, not only demonstrates gender equality but also serves as an encouragement for Liberian women to become police officers. Medals have been awarded to members for their work in responding to emergency situations, crime prevention, and the support given to Liberia's National Police. Though a new beginning for gender equality in peacekeeping,

this deployment is a continuation of India's consistent commitment to peacekeeping operations. Their presence is an encouragement for Liberian women to come forward, and help rebuild their country by participating in the forces of law and order after a devastating 14-year civil war. Out of more than 3,500 new police officers who have so far received training, only 203 are women, well below an agreed target of 20 per cent. A special programme to encourage more women to join the police was launched earlier in the year.

Center-left political candidate Clara Luz Lopez has been shot dead in Guatemala, amid a wave of violence ahead of elections scheduled for next month. She was running for a local council seat in the south-east and killed while driving home after campaigning. Luz Lopez was a member of the party of presidential candidate Rigoberta Menchu, a Nobel Peace prize winner. More than 40 people have been killed since the poll was announced in May, the most violent campaign since the civil war ended a decade ago.

Noeleen Heyzer, a national of Singapore, courageous and accomplished leader of UNIFEM responsible for so many advancements in support of women's empowerment and gender equality, has been appointed Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in Bangkok with the rank of Under-Secretary-General. Ms. Heyzer is the first woman to head ESCAP, which is the biggest of the UN's five regional commissions, both in terms of population served and area covered.

In other news, Josette Sheeran is Executive Director of the World Food Program, which feeds 90 million people world wide, including over 2 million in Darfur, providing emergency food aid and helping people to return to economic self-sufficiency. Justice Susan Kiefel has been promoted from the Federal Court to become Australia's third female High Court judge and joins Justice Susan Crennan to make it the first time two women have served on the bench together. Sumayya Hassan Nasser Al Rashid has become the first Qatari woman to be promoted to the rank of a Colonel at the Qatar Armed Forces. She currently heads the Internal Diseases Section at the Medical Services Department of the Armed Forces. Katrine Camilleri, a Maltese lawyer with the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), who has tirelessly lobbied and advocated for the rights of boat people fleeing across the Mediterranean Sea, including victims of torture and survivors of sexual violence, sometimes in the face of great danger to herself, has won the most prestigious UN refugee award.

Peace and strength to you,
Shirley

