



National Women's Global Open Days

Keynote Address

By

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Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very good morning to you.

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome all of you to the National Women's Open Days Conference on Peace and Security. I am honoured to have the opportunity to open this conference that addresses issues that are dear to my heart.

I commend the organizers of this event for the great effort made in ensuring that the participation today is a total of reflection of the diversity of women of South Sudan. To all of you civil society leaders, parliamentarians, activists, faith-based organizations, academics, students, and to those who continue to seek protection in UN camps: WELCOME!

You represent different constituencies but you each play a critical role in promoting peace and security through your work. Human rights monitoring, women's protection, political participation, addressing sexual

and gender-based violence, combatting impunity and education of girls are all enhanced because of your efforts.

You may have different perspectives, beliefs, and backgrounds, but your goal is common – a peaceful, strong, prosperous and united South Sudan where your children thrive.

You are here for a noble cause to amplify the voices of women and communities you represent to ensure that amidst the chaos of conflict, women's voices are not drowned out. You are here to shout out your messages loudly until the sound of gunfire ceases.

I admire your tenacity and determination to support each other to come up with collective strategies and initiatives, despite the heavy burden that you shoulder. I know it is not an easy burden.

Numerous challenges lay in your path. No doubt some struggled to travel here today due to the conflict which is tearing apart the country. Yet you carry on with dedication, resilience, and persistence in your desire to build your new and young country. When you are feeling weak, downhearted and dispirited, I want to assure you that this is when it is most necessary that you raise your voices to encourage the sisterhood.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As a fellow African, I know that the story of our lives is about the struggles, hopes and dreams of our mothers. Yet history shows us clearly that today's victims are tomorrow's peace-makers and drivers of progress. Women are the bedrock of every society. As every engineer knows, when the foundation is under stress, support pillars are required. I do hope that during these three days you feel and find that support. Because the agonies of our mothers, the cries of our sisters and the dreams of our daughters depend upon your unwavering courage.

If war is waged on the bodies of women and girls there can never be peace nor reconciliation. Without security for women and girls, our efforts to create a united, strong and prosperous nation state will be in vain. The war must stop. Reconciliation and recovery can then start. And women must have a seat at the table to ensure that their unique perspectives are heard and acted upon.

The Security Council adopted resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security for this reason. Without the sweat and toil of countless activists such as yourself, who through your strength and conviction stood up for the rights of women and girls affected by conflict, it is unlikely that the Security Council would have taken note.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have deliberated upon your recommendations from the last Global Open Days where you called upon the UN to ensure our work is decentralized, inclusive and participatory. As a result, the twelve sub-national dialogue processes and consultations carried out by UN field offices across the country last year, culminated in an exhaustive list of action points, which will inform our discussions over the next few days.

I urge you to use this forum to examine issues around peace and security from not only a community level perspective but also a national level perspective. Think of this platform as a safe space that facilitates identification of challenges as well as opportunities for your participation in the implementation of peace and reconciliation processes.

Do not be afraid to think big and consider how you can influence the big issues of the day, such as the National Dialogue. What role do you want women to play in this reconciliation process? Are there sufficient women's voices in the Secretariat? From my own personal experience in peace processes across the world, the ones with the best chances of lasting success are those where women's voices are heard loudest.

And justice is vital to this process. Brothers and sisters must together stand up against injustice and hold perpetrators of sexual violence accountable. We must encourage girls' education and the end of child marriage.

I know this is a tall order, but during the next three days you can lay the groundwork for concrete steps that will advance us closer to our goals. Our approach must be complementary, and collaborative, and within the robust framework of the Women, Peace and

Security agenda and in line with the three pillars of the agenda –Participation, Prevention and Protection.

In conflict and post-conflict context, where there is a higher representation of women in parliament, the lesser the risk of a return of civil war and the greater the prospects for accelerated recovery.

In Rwanda, women have 49 of 80 seats in the country's lower house, that is 61%. And look how that country has prospered of late. We also know that the higher representation of women in the government the likelihood of a state committing human rights violations significantly decreases. It is astonishingly clear that a political process, a peace agreement or a national dialogue cannot progress or be sustainable without the active participation of women.

We also know that when women take control of their destinies and run successful businesses, their children, families, and communities benefit in more ways than when men are in control. We know that

investments made in women and girls are great multipliers of development.

Your Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I take this opportunity to thank my UN colleagues and the Secretariat for organising this magnificent event whose numbers go from strength to strength.

As a husband and a father of an adorable young woman, allow me to share my inner sentiments with fellow men and brothers who are gathered here today as well. Often the topic we are addressing today can make us uncomfortable. Sometimes, we do not see it as men's business. However, I beg you to see it differently.

To be a real man involves taking a stance, being proactive, vocal and speaking out about the issues that are negatively affecting our mothers, sisters and daughters. To be a real man involves addressing our brothers and sons and correcting them, with the greatest of charity, to help them see the error of their

ways. If men cannot change their ways, how will society change?

As a proud African, who adores the good things in our African cultures, I find it appalling when sometimes some of us try to hide behind the mask of culture to justify violence and impunity. No African culture condones the brutalization of its women and girls in the name of culture. Without creating the space for participation and voice of women, we cannot achieve the South Sudan that we want. And neither would we succeed in unleashing the full potential of this country if we do not empower women and girls

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you again for the opportunity to share these reflections. We eagerly look forward to receiving the report of the year's National Women's Global Open Days.
