

Civil Society Hold Landmark Conference on Conflict Prevention at UN Headquarters

"Conflict prevention indeed is possible. We need systematic collaboration... to monitor situations and develop effective strategies to prevent and transform violent conflicts," stated Emmanuel Bombande, Executive Director of WANEP and leader of the West Africa Delegation to the Global Conference for the Prevention of Armed Conflict.

In a regional message to the conference, Mr. Bombande remarked that, *"systems need to be rooted in the unique knowledge and capacities of local people in conflict-affected communities while emphasizing that the ownership of the process of peacebuilding resides in these communities."*

He gave this message to the over 800 civil society leaders who gathered at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from July 19-21, to discuss how civil society can best collaborate with the UN to **"save succeeding generations from the scourge of war"** and to advocate for policy change in the area of human security.

A twenty-member delegation, led by WANEP (West Africa Network for Peacebuilding) represented West Africa at this largest gathering ever held by Civil Society Organizations engaged in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The **Global Action Agenda** for the Prevention of Violent Conflict was presented to the UN Secretary General, represented by the Special Adviser, Mr. Stephen Stedman.

In a message to the conference, the Secretary General, Mr. Kofi Annan, accepting the completed Global Action Agenda for the Prevention of Violent Conflict, admitted that, *"violent conflict is a 'threat multiplier', not only within the country of where it happens, but beyond. None of us can afford to wait passively until it erupts."* He therefore, reiterated the need for the creation of a sustainable network of individuals and groups- including partnerships with governments and UN agencies-committed to prevention and peacebuilding at global, regional, and national levels.

Members of the WANEP delegation played key roles such as resources persons in various thematic group discussions: Early Warning and Early Response, Women in Peacebuilding, and Civilian Peace-Keeping. For the West Africa delegation, the highlight of the Conference was when Ms. Thelma Ekiyor, the founder and pioneer Regional Coordinator of the WANEP Women in Peacebuilding Program (WIPNET) was presented with the one of the first two copies of the book "People Building

Peace", in which she contributed a chapter. Ms. Ekiyor was honored for her contribution toward the advancement of women's involvement in peacebuilding process in West Africa.

Recounting the story and phenomenal growth of WIPNET from 10 women to thousands of women groups spanning 12 countries in West Africa, Ms. Ekiyor explained, *"we started with nothing but sheer grit and conviction that we could contribute to constructive change in our sub-region... We believed and still do that if we advocated for peace in our communities it could be a platform for addressing all other injustices that plagued not only women but all West Africans."*

In a closing remark to the conference, Mr. Ibrahim Gambari, Under Secretary-General for Political Affairs emphasized that development must be regarded as the *"first line of defense"* in defusing potential conflicts and building world peace. He however warned that the need for global solutions and strong global institutions must not divert attention from the need to understand individual regions, countries and societies and appreciate local history and culture.

The landmark conference held under the theme: **"From Reaction to Prevention: Civil Society Forging Partnerships to Prevent Violent Conflict and Build Peace,"** was initiated by the European Centre for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, and co-sponsored by the United Nations Department for Political Affairs.

For further information on this conference, please visit GPPAC online at www.conflict-prevention.net and WANEP at www.wanep.org, or contact the WANEP Regional Secretariat located at Ampomah House, 37-Dzorwulu Road Accra.

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