



Femmes Africa Solidarité



PRESS RELEASE

Liberia wins the African Gender Award 2011

Liberia wins the African Gender Award (AGA) 2011 from the PanAfrican Center for Gender, Peace and Development (PAC), the centre of Excellency of the NGO Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS).

This announcement was done by Mrs. Gertrude Mongella, former President of the Pan African Parliament, accompanied by Mrs. Bineta Diop, Executive Director of Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS), and Mrs. Elisabeth Rehn, former Minister of the Defense of Finland, after the meeting of the Selection Committee at the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), in the margins of the 17th Pre-Summit Consultative Meeting on Gender Mainstreaming in the AU.

Through this award, PAC wished to acknowledge the progress made by Liberia in providing 'genuinely' free education to the children of poor Liberian women and also establishing women market fund. Also, it recognized the efforts of Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first female President of the country, in protecting women rights in Liberia by implementing international conventions.

"The main objective of the award is to appreciate African presidents and honor their country for what they have done to women. This recognition is given to a country with a very strong commitment in gender equality", explained Mrs. Gertrude Mongella.

According to Mongella "we don't discriminate countries by the level of their development but we look at the actions they have carried out regarding the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa". She also explained that with this award "we encourage African Presidents to implement agreements in integration of gender mainstreaming in the policies of their countries".

In 2005, Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf conceived the Liberia Education Trust Fund and launched a scholarship program for women and girls, which enabled them to attend secondary and post secondary schools. In 2006, the Government of Liberia launched the Education Law, the National Girls Education Policy and one year later the Free Compulsory Primary Education Policy.

"Some African countries say that they are providing free primary education, but it is not correct because when we look at it, it is not genuinely free", explained Mrs. Elisabeth Rehn, who also highlighted that "school fees and school uniforms cost too much for mothers and parents in general who have many children to afford".

In 2007 the Gender Based Violence Secretariat of Liberia completed a National Action Plan. The same year, the Ministry of Gender and Development organized several workshops and seminars to popularize and sensitize on the need to eliminate violence against women. Liberia

also ratified the *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, with the aim to put an immediate end to the involvement of children in armed conflicts.

In addition, the Liberian Government has taken effective measures toward the systematic prohibition of trafficking of women and girls as the Anti-Human Trafficking Act in 2005, followed by the creation of the Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force, which has been responsible of the development and implementation of a national plan on strategies to stop human trafficking.

This award is given by a Selection Committee chaired by Mrs. Gertrude Mongella and composed of eminent personalities from civil society, a representative of the Economic Commission for Africa (UN ECA), a representative of the African Union and the Press.

The work of this Committee is to evaluate, every two years, the improvements that African countries have carried out in the implementation of the Solemn Declaration. According to Mrs. Bineta Diop, “we name and shame African countries and their Head of States when they are not doing well, but also, through this award, we recognize and reward those who have demonstrated outstanding achievements in gender mainstreaming and women's advancement”.

It should be recalled that the African Gender Award is awarded every two years to an African Head of State which has outshone in supporting gender in his country. The first African Gender Award was assigned in 2005 to the President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal and President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa for their efforts in favor of adopting the principle of gender equality in the African Union.

In 2007 the President Paul Kagame of the Republic of Rwanda was awarded for his significant achievements for gender mainstreaming in programs and policies in his country. In 2009, the Selection Committee wished to acknowledge the efforts made by Mozambique to mainstream the participation of women in politics and in economic and social development programs, under the leadership of President Armando Emilio Guebuza.

The Award Ceremony will take place in Dakar, Senegal, and it will be presided by H.E. Abdoulaye Wade.

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