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Women Re-energize Zimbabwe's Global Political Agreement

"The coming together of Zimbabwean women across their diversities provides a new impetus and bridge for implementation of the Global Political Agreement." — Mary Robinson

(*Harare, Zimbabwe—April 30, 2010*) Last evening in Harare, the leaders of the women's wings of the three main political parties signed a resolution to work across their political divides to accelerate implementation of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) and build a common agenda for women's empowerment. The signing of this historic resolution was witnessed by Olivia Muchena, Minister of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development; Sekai Holland, Minister in the Organ on National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration; Mary Robinson, President of Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalization Initiative, former President of Ireland and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights; and Lois Bruthus, Ambassador of Liberia to South Africa and Zimbabwe. The resolution was immediately endorsed by the Women's Parliamentary Caucus of Zimbabwe and welcomed by the women's organizations.

Emilia Muchawa, President of the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe, expressed enthusiasm for the resolution and noted, "I am pleased to report that there is a strong commitment to developing a roadmap for dialogue and action for women over the next two years that will include the civil society voices of the Women's Coalition as a key partner with the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development and the Organ on National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration."

This resolution and commitment to a roadmap for women were outcomes of a meeting called the *High Level Dialogue on Women's Empowerment in the Political and Economic Arena*, co-hosted by the Zimbabwean Ministry of Women, Gender and Community Development; the Organ for National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration; and the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe.

This dynamic dialogue was held on the occasion of a five-day solidarity visit by a delegation of eminent African women leaders led by Mary Robinson and organized by the Women Leaders Intercultural Forum of Realizing Rights. The objectives of the mission included sharing global experiences on women's empowerment. President Robinson was joined on the visit by:

- Dr. Brigalia Bam (South Africa), Chairperson, Independent Electoral Commission, South Africa; former General Secretary, South African Council of Churches
- Dr. Achola Pala (Kenya), former Africa Chief, UNIFEM; former Senior Policy Advisor, Africa Bureau, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- Dr. Thelma Awori (Uganda/Liberia), President of the Board, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Market Women's Fund; Member, Civil Society Advisory Group on UNSCR 1325, United Nations; former director of UNDP's Africa Bureau; UN Resident Representative in Zimbabwe; and President of Isis-WICCE

- Ambassador Counsellor Lois Bruthus (Liberia), Liberian Ambassador to South Africa, former President of the Female Lawyers Association
- Mrs. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda (Zimbabwe), General Secretary, World Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA); former Regional Director for East and the Horn of Africa, UNIFEM; and Human Rights Officer with UNICEF in Zimbabwe and Liberia. Founder of Rozaria Memorial Trust (Zimbabwe).
- Ms. Elizabeth Lule (Uganda), Manager, Operational, Quality and Knowledge Services for The World Bank; former manager of the World Bank's program on HIV/AIDS, where she managed the Bank's HIV/AIDS work in Africa.

The delegation was warmly received by the women of Zimbabwe and the leadership of the Inclusive Government, including the President, Vice Presidents, Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister. Listening and learning was at the center of the delegation's active engagement with women. During their visit, the delegation met with women in the rural areas and talked to advocacy groups, civil society organizations, courageous human rights defenders, young women, the UN country team and the diplomatic community.

Dr. Achola Pala noted, "Despite the challenges, we were impressed by the determination and courage of the Zimbabwean women as full and active participants in the process of transformation of their society. We saw the innovation and resilience of women, particularly women in the rural areas, in providing for their families. We listened to their collective acknowledgement of the need for healing and their acceptance that Zimbabweans have wounded each other."

The women in the leadership of the country expressed a deep commitment to bring an end to violence. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda noted, "It was a high point when the Zimbabwean women political leaders acknowledged to each other that violence against women had occurred and the nation must provide support urgently to survivors, as well as define ways for justice and healing."

The delegation was pleased to observe that mechanisms and institutions are in place for redress and reconciliation, such as the Global Political Agreement (GPA) and its monitoring mechanisms, such as the Joint Monitoring and Implementation Committee (JOMIC); the Organ for National Healing, Reconciliation, and Integration; and the Human Rights Commission. Dr. Thelma Awori stated, "These efforts by the Zimbabwean people, and Zimbabwean women in particular, require international acknowledgement and support, both moral and financial. The urgency of seizing this window of opportunity in Zimbabwe cannot be overstated. If these efforts are not supported or nurtured, we run the risk of the efforts losing momentum."

The delegation of eminent women identified two critical issues:

- 1) The constitutional reform process is pivotal to the success of the Global Political Agreement. The delegation highlighted how important it is, therefore, that women fully participate in this process so that their rights are enshrined in the new constitution.
- 2) Given the present economic constraints, resources are required to stimulate women's economic activities so as to better position their participation in the economy and development.

In view of all that the delegation heard and learned from the women in Zimbabwe, members of the delegation found good reason that the way the world talks about Zimbabwe should take into account the progress that has been made here on the perspectives of women. The delegation urges the regional and international communities to support the efforts of the women of Zimbabwe.

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For more information on the Women Leaders Diplomacy Mission to Zimbabwe visit Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalization Initiative at <http://www.realizingrights.org>.