



## Femmes Africa Solidarité

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### INFORMATION NOTE

#### FAS Executive Director Visits Refugee Camps with Seven Other Notable Women: Solidarity Mission to Push for Ceasefire in Darfur, Chad

Bineta Diop, Executive Director of Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS), has just returned from a solidarity and fact finding mission to eastern Chad along with seven other prominent women including Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and Benin singer Angelique Kidjo.

The mission was organized with logistical support from Oxfam International. The delegation visited refugee camps in eastern Chad between 2 and 4 September. The visits to the refugee camps allowed the eight women to collect first-hand accounts of the violence faced by displaced women from Chad and Sudan's Darfur region.

Mme Diop was invited to take part in the mission because of her extensive experience in gender-sensitive conflict resolution in Africa. She and the other seven delegates visited the refugee camps of Djabal and Gossire in Chad's Goz Beida region. In the camps they met with *umdás* (traditional leaders), women leaders, youth, educators, and local government authorities.

In small-group discussions, refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) were able to share first-hand accounts of their experiences in the conflict and in the camps. The mission met with a group of women who were victims of rape. Violence against women was a major theme in several other meetings, as well.

Musimbi Kanyoro, the Secretary General of the World YWCA, told the media, "As a mother, I cannot listen to Hawa's story without being affected. Her only son was decapitated in her arms. After this visit [to eastern Chad] I want the whole world to help Hawa and the women of Darfur so that this will never happen again. Hawa's story will become my story, so that everyone will become as deeply affected as I was."

The atrocities faced by these women cannot go overlooked. For this reason, the mission is committed to relaying the stories of refugee women to the international community, in the hope of accelerating progress toward a ceasefire.



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“This has to be the moment when world leaders use their power and influence, unite and press all parties in Darfur to agree to an immediate ceasefire to stop the suffering of millions of people,” said Mary Robinson, at the mission’s concluding press conference in Paris.

Lack of adequate security and protection for women and girl children was a major concern voiced in the meetings at the refugee camps. Therefore, the women of the mission are addressing this concern by urging the deployment of the EU protection force, and requesting that it contain a battalion composed of women officers. Mme Diop and her colleagues are calling for a political, rather than military, solution to the conflict in Darfur and eastern Chad.

At a press conference, Mme Diop told journalists, “It’s absolutely essential that European nations now step up and commit troops for the promised international protection force with a robust mandate to protect civilians so that it can be deployed in Chad as soon as possible.”

The mission returned to Paris on 5 September and met with French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner and the Secretary of State, Rama Yade. Other meetings were held shortly thereafter with members of the German Bundestag, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, Karl Bildt, Foreign Minister of Sweden, and Salim Ahmed Salim, the African Union Special Envoy for Darfur.



The mission delegates meet with French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner (from left to right: Bineta Diop, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Angélique Kidjo, Bernard Kouchner, Mary Robinson, Musimbi Kanyoro, Jane Wales), 5 September 2007.

The mission returned in time for the meeting of EU foreign ministers on 7 September. Several of the prominent women from the mission will also be in New York for the meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on the situation in Darfur on 21 September.



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Mme Diop will be making an oral statement about the plight of women in eastern Chad to the United Nations Human Rights Council, which is in session until 28 September at the United Nations Palace in Geneva, Switzerland.

Approximately 230,000 refugees have escaped across the Sudanese border into Chad, and 180,000 Chadians have been displaced and forced to flee to IDP camps. The majority of these refugees are women, children, and elderly people.

The delegation of prominent women was composed of:

**Dr. Herta Deaubler-Gmelin** – Member of German Parliament

**Bineta Diop** – Executive Director of Femmes Africa Solidarité

**The Honourable Asha Hagi Elmi Amin** – Member of the transitional parliament of Somalia

**Musimbi Kanyoro** – Secretary General of the World YWCA

**Angelique Kidjo** – Grammy-nominated Benin singer and UNICEF ambassador

**Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala** – former Minister of Foreign Affairs and former Minister of Finance of Nigeria

**Mary Robinson** – former President of Ireland, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, President of Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalisation Initiative

**Jane Wales** – President and Executive Director of the World Affairs Council of Northern California and co-founder of the Global Philanthropy Forum

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