

WOMEN'S VOICE AND POWER AS AGENTS OF CHANGE



Strengthening the Continental African Women's Movement towards
a New Value-Based Eco-System



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Johannesburg South Africa



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MESSAGE FROM THE FOUNDER



Dear African Women in Dialogue

During our breakfast with women leaders, surrounded by a high number of ministers, I was reminded how, in the African tradition, respect is typically given to “identified” leadership. Within SAWID, we have always chosen to disregard hierarchical protocols. From the beginning, we believed that we were all women, and therefore, we needed to treat everyone in the room with equal respect. As a result, we found ourselves at times sitting with a President in the same row, rather than placing her at the front, as we consciously avoided engaging in power games.

This is the third time we are hosting an AfWID event. When we started, it was a very small initiative. Initially, we gathered at a workshop of the Global Shapers, a group of young African leaders selected by Klaus Schwab in Davos. Their meeting took place at the Southern Sun Hotel, where I met Mrs. Emma Kaliya from Malawi. During

our discussions, the idea emerged that we could bring together the women of SADC to convene and establish our own agenda, rather than merely adopting externally imposed agendas. These external programs, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the AU Agenda 2063, are indeed valuable for the continent. However, grassroots women also needed to have the opportunity to voice their lived experiences so that any interventions devised could be truly effective.

At the hotel, we began discussing how to bring together all the women of SADC. We were unaware of how expensive this endeavour would be! However, since then, our efforts have expanded to encompass the entire continent. Many significant initiatives start small. I cannot recall the exact number of participants at our first gathering, but it was a modest meeting focused on strengthening the women’s movement across Africa. The goal was to develop

effective projects and interventions in key areas. Our approach included regional dialogues to identify pressing issues, which would then culminate in larger continental dialogues.

Of course, financial sustainability is a key challenge. While we could discuss how we raised the necessary funds, I also believe that such efforts do not always require physical meetings. By utilising the small, lined book that each participant received, we can collect regional contacts and create an online dialogue. As we get to know one another, we strengthen our connections. This hybrid approach will allow us to maintain continuity without incurring excessive costs.

A crucial agenda point this year is addressing conflicts in Africa. Conflicts are prevalent not only on our continent but globally. On Day One we observed a moment of silence in solidarity with the women caught up in ongoing conflicts in thirty five countries. But beyond silent acknowledgment, how can we intervene?

Historically, South African Women in Dialogue played an active role in conflict resolution in the DRC. We invited all parties to South Africa, emphasizing that problems cannot be solved when stakeholders remain divided in separate spaces. Our approach was to share South Africa's experience of transitioning from a divided nation into a unified one. We encouraged parties to find common ground without forcing any single perspective upon them. Initially, when we met with women, they were deeply angry and distrustful of one another, even expressing hostility. The stories they shared were harrowing accounts of atrocities inflicted upon pregnant women and other unimaginable suffering they had endured.

However, by the fifth day of the workshop, there was a shift. A conflict resolution expert led an exercise in which participants were asked to write down their aspirations for their country. As they reported back, they all realised they shared the same vision. This commonality became a starting point for reconciliation and collaboration.

Reflecting on this experience, we must consider what interventions are possible for Mozambique, for example. Reports suggest that key political figures are now open to collaboration and dialogue. Can we, as women, build upon this momentum?

In the case of the DRC, we organised a workshop that included representatives from the military and police

leadership. We advocated for 30% representation of women in parliament, but when one of the MPs spoke, he committed to 50% representation—surpassing our initial proposal. This demonstrates that targeted interventions can yield significant results.

President Masire expressed his gratitude for our efforts. He had observed peace negotiations at Sun City, where women initially sat separately. However, following our involvement, these women began engaging with all parties, facilitating dialogue and progress.

We have heard from many activists and peace advocates who feel a deep sense of urgency. We cannot ignore the crises unfolding at our borders. We received numerous messages of concern, and as fate would have it, we received a timely call from Phumzile Mlambo Ngcuka, who reached out just as we were deliberating on possible actions. Some suggestions included forming a delegation of women leaders to visit affected areas or creating a safe space similar to what we established for the DRC. However, such an initiative would need to be coordinated with local women to ensure that meetings are meaningful and impactful.

Mozambique has never experienced a multi-party democracy before. Transitioning into such a system requires immense effort, understanding, and cooperation. Political shifts do not happen spontaneously—they require ongoing dialogue and strategic engagement. As we assess the situation, we must ask ourselves: What concrete steps can we take?

As sisters, we stand at a crossroads. While we may not have all the answers, we must at least start the conversation. Can we convene and determine what role we can play?

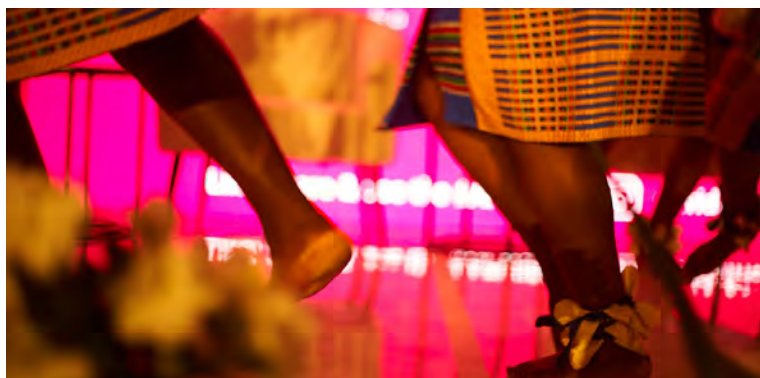
We are here, and we must act. Let us discuss and see how we can contribute to peace and stability in our region.

Zanele Mbeki, Chairperson WDB Trust and Founder of AfWID



CELEBRATING WOMEN THROUGH DANCE AND DEVOTION

BY LEOGANG MATHEBULA



The air was filled with anticipation as ladies from all walks of life came to join the 3rd installment of African Women in Dialogue (AfWID) at Birchwood Hotel in Johannesburg. The delegates from all 55 African countries graced us with high fashion, color and vibrant energy as the week's activities kicked off. A Vanda dance group set the tone for the week with their captivating singing and dancing.



Makona Zwothe, which celebrates the rich Vanda culture, helped usher the participants into the venue as the dialogue was set to begin. Precious Maphakela, who is the leader of the group, says their mission is not only to entertain but also to bring women together through their art. There is no denying that their form of expression is not only entrancing but also inspiring. The ladies of the group passionately displayed their talent at the entrance of the main hall while delegates were introduced and engulfed by the drumming and movement. The performance embodied the spirit of joy and unity that flows through Africa and the conference. One of the aims of this dialogue is to open a safe, easy and happy space for women in the continent and the dance group personified just that. The performance was not merely for entertainment; it was a piece that represented solidarity and hope.



After the conclusion of the performance, the 1000 participants were ushered into the main hall for the official start to the day through multi-faith devotions. Imphepho (sage) was burnt to appease the ancestors, and prayers were conducted by members of the African traditional, Hindu, Christian and Muslim faiths. The devotions were done in honor of all those who were present in the plenary, including all 55 countries in attendance. This segment was a staple for the week, anchoring and centering women before they would later open up about the struggles they face in their respective countries on a daily basis.



With the melodic tunes and powerful prayers of the morning, the conference was off to a powerful start, demonstrating that AfWID 2025 would truly prove to be a transformative and magical event for all involved.

DISABILITY AND INCLUSION AT AFWID 2025

BY JODI A. LAWRENCE



Disability, and how to include those who live with it in our society, has been a topical issue as of late. At this year's Afwid 2025 conference, we had several delegates from all over Africa who have visible disabilities, and also those who have disabilities that only manifest themselves when there are bright lights or loud sounds.

A 2021 study conducted by Marianne J.W.A Vanderschuren & Obiora A. Nnene shows that between 10% and 20% of people in Africa are affected by disability. A lack of understanding of the needs and challenges faced by people with disabilities has led to increasing isolation. Furthermore, most countries on the continent only superficially include people with disabilities in their laws or city planning, making it increasingly difficult for people with disabilities to travel to work, school or even out for entertainment. The study reached the conclusion that people with disabilities travel significantly less than their abled counterparts.

That is why the venue for the Afwid 2025 conference has ensured that several accommodations be made to consider these challenges, such as wheelchair ramps, wheelchairs and shuttles to transport delegates. Interviewing Rose R. Rapuo, a delegate from Kenya, she stated that she had not felt excluded from any of the activities that had taken place over the course of the past two days. Rose uses crutches to aid her mobility and stated that the ramps placed in strategic areas around the conference venue have made her time more enjoyable.

However, Rose stated that simple things such as a chair being placed in the bathroom, have been overlooked, as is the case with many of us who do not normally consider the constraints people with disabilities face. While Afwid and the hotel have integrated people with disabilities into the various programs with aplomb, there is obviously still a need for disability-inclusive planning.

FACING CONFLICT AND DISPLACEMENT

BY HAWA MAYERE

Eritrea

Eritrea is located in northeastern Africa, along the coast of the Red Sea, bordered by Sudan, Ethiopia, and Djibouti. The country's ethnic demographics include groups like the Tigrinya, Tigre, Saho, Kunama, Rashaida, Bilen, amongst others, and the country's religious demographics are Christian (Coptic, Roman Catholic, and Protestant), Muslim, and folk religion.

Since gaining independence in 1993, Eritrea has been ruled by President Isaias Afwerki, who holds absolute power. There has been little political freedom, and opposition parties are banned. This has led to frustration among the people, who feel they have no voice or means of influencing the government.

The unrest in Eritrea primarily stems from a combination of political, social, and economic factors. Over the years, the country has faced widespread discontent, not least because the government practices a form of indefinite national service, often referred to as "national slavery." For example, young people are conscripted into military service, and many are forced to work in harsh conditions with little pay and no clear end to their service.

Eritrea's economy remains underdeveloped, largely due to a combination of sanctions, a lack of investment, and government policies that limit them. There are widespread reports of human rights abuses, including arbitrary arrests, torture, and restrictions on freedom of expression. Journalists, activists, and critics of the government are often imprisoned or silenced.

This imposed silence and imprisonment has forced many people to seek political asylum or to become refugees in other parts of Africa. Many such individuals resort to smuggling to exit the country, and they often do so at night due to the risks of death or imprisonment. This mass exodus has left the country with a significant brain drain and has created a deep sense of instability.

One Eritrean attending the Afwid Conference, Dimiana G Habtemariam, 23, who has sought refuge in the USA, noted:

“My dream for Eritrea is that the freedom those before us fought for, is attained in this lifetime. I pray that we will be able to see Eritrea flourish.” She further added that “being here at this conference, it is inspiring to see and learn firsthand the experiences of women across the continent. It's amazing to see all the different innovative ways women are pushing for change in their countries.”

Conflict started:

The roots of the current conflict lie in the long-standing tensions between Eritrea and Ethiopia, which started after Eritrea gained independence from Ethiopia in 1993 following a 30-year war. However, a border war broke out in 1998 and lasted until 2000, when a ceasefire was signed but no peace agreement was ever reached.

Issue:

Several issues drive the conflict: Border disputes, ethnic and political tensions and human rights violations

Death Toll:

The Tigray War alone, involving Eritrean forces, has resulted in an estimated over 600,000 deaths by 2023.

Displacements:

Over 5 million people have been displaced due to the fighting, with 2 million internally displaced in Ethiopia and a significant portion fleeing to neighbouring countries



Sudan

Sudan is ethnically diverse, with more than 500 ethnic groups. Some of the major groups include; Arab, Sudanese Nubians, Beja, Baggara, and other ethnic Nilo-Saharan peoples in the south, such as the Nuer and Dinka, with these groups predominantly residing in the areas that became South Sudan.

Sudan is predominantly Muslim (around 97% of the population), with most adhering to the Sunni Islamic faith. There is a small Christian minority (about 3% of the population.) Sudan is located in Northeast Africa, bordered by Egypt to the north, and Eritrea and Ethiopia to the east. Sudan has a long Red Sea coastline on the east, offering access to vital maritime trade routes.

The unrest in Sudan has been ongoing and is deeply complex, especially since April 2023 when fighting erupted between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), two powerful military factions. This conflict has its roots in the power struggles following the 2019 overthrow of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, who had ruled the country for nearly 30 years. After his ousting, Sudan entered a period of great volatility.

“

My wish for my country Sudan... I would love to see that there is everlasting peace because we the Sudanese, we have suffered, especially the women and children, violence. I just wish that there should be a lasting peace in that country so that we can live happily and the women will never suffer again politically, with civilian leaders sharing power with the military.

Kaka Jackline Diffala, 29.

”

The violence has intensified, especially in urban areas like Khartoum, disrupting everyday life. International efforts to mediate a ceasefire have largely failed, and the situation remains volatile, with significant challenges in providing aid to affected populations.

Conflict Started:

The violence began on April 15, 2023.

Issue:

The immediate cause of the conflict stems from a power struggle between the two generals who had been in a fragile alliance since 2019. Both factions were competing for control over Sudan's transition to a civilian-led government.

Death Toll:

As of early 2025, the death toll has surpassed 100,000. Additionally, millions have been displaced both internally and to neighbouring countries.



Mozambique

Mozambique is a country located in southeastern Africa, bordered by the Indian Ocean to the east, Tanzania to the north, Malawi and Zambia to the northwest, Zimbabwe to the west, and South Africa and Eswatini (formerly Swaziland) to the south.

Mozambique is ethnically diverse, with several major ethnic groups, including the Makua, Tsonga, Sena, Ndau, and the Shona. Mozambique is predominantly Christian with 60-70% of the population identifying as Christians. There is also a significant Muslim population, especially along the coastal regions, making up about 20% of the population. Traditional African religions are practiced by a smaller percentage of the population.

The unrest in Mozambique, particularly in the northern region of Cabo Delgado, has been a significant and complex crisis that began around 2017 and continues to cause widespread devastation.

Economic disparities and local grievances — despite Mozambique being rich in natural resources—particularly offshore natural gas reserves—have long plagued Cabo Delgado, one of the poorest regions in Mozambique. As the conflict escalated, extremist groups, including ISIS-affiliated factions, began to take root in the region.

The Mozambican government has struggled to control the insurgency, relying heavily on military responses. The security forces have been criticized for committing human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings and forced displacements. In 2021, the government invited foreign assistance, notably from Rwanda and SADC (Southern African Development Community) forces, which helped retake key towns and restore some semblance of stability.

The situation is still highly unstable, and while there are efforts to bring peace, a lasting solution seems elusive as long as the underlying issues—economic inequality, local disenfranchisement, and extremism—remain unresolved. The conflict has devastated local communities, leaving millions without basic necessities, and severely impacting the lives of everyday Mozambicans. For example, the delegate Celina Benjaminim Dos Santos Mataka, 49, says:

“*Everything is very expensive: food, energy, water... In my dream for my country, I wish prices of things to get low so that everybody can buy them. Today, you can't buy things like chicken, as it's too expensive.*”

Conflict started:

The violence began in October 2017.

Issue:

he conflict is fuelled by a combination of factors, including economic and social inequality.

Death Toll:

As of 2025, estimates suggest that over 4,000 people have been killed, and nearly 1 million have been displaced due to the violence.

DRC

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is home to over 200 ethnic groups. The largest groups include the Luba, Mongo, Kongo, and Tutsi, among many others.

Throughout the years, the conflict in the DRC has seen widespread human rights abuses, including mass killings, sexual violence, and forced displacement. The UN has maintained one of its largest peacekeeping missions (MONUSCO) in the DRC since the early 2000s, but despite their presence, violence has continued.

The DRC has struggled with weak governance, corruption, and ineffective institutions. Notably, the DRC is incredibly resource-rich, with vast deposits of minerals like coltan, diamonds, and gold. However, these resources have attracted both internal and external actors, fuelling resource-based conflicts.

The conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is multifaceted and deeply rooted in a combination of historical, political, economic, and social factors. Here are the primary reasons behind the ongoing conflict; including its colonial legacy, ethnic tensions and identity politics, foreign interventions, rebel groups and armed militias, just to mention a few. The conflict in the DRC can therefore be summarised as being the result of a combination of deep-rooted historical grievances, a fight for control of resources, ethnic tensions, weak governance, and foreign involvement.

The demographic makeup of the DRC, combined with historical, political, and economic factors, has created a

volatile environment where various actors, both internal and external, have contributed to the ongoing conflict. Resolving these issues requires addressing governance weaknesses, promoting national dialogue, and managing the competition over resources in a way that benefits all Congolese people, not just elites or foreign interests. Bambi Cikunda Annie expressed her desire that “In short, I would like to see my country, the Democratic Republic of Congo, a country where peace reigns. Where women and girls live with dignity, and violence against women and rape no longer exist in my country, the DRC.”

Conflict Started:

The roots of the current conflict trace back to the aftermath of the Second Congo War (1998-2003), which involved multiple neighbouring countries. The current rebellion itself began in April 2012

Issue:

The conflict in eastern DRC is fuelled by a combination of factors, including ethnic tensions, control over resources, weak central government and regional interests

Death Toll:

The death toll in the eastern DRC conflict is difficult to estimate precisely due to the prolonged nature of the violence. However, it is believed that since the start of the conflict in the late 1990s, over 5 million people have died.



THE ZAMBIAN DELEGATION BRINGING ATTENTION TO SPECIAL NEEDS

BY NONKULULEKO MURAVHA



The Zambian delegation experienced a brief disruption during their boarding process before landing on South African soil for the 3rd Annual AfWID Conference.

As we welcomed the Afwidian delegates to South Africa, receiving them at our international OR Tambo airport, and meeting them for the very first time, we were able to recognize each other by our beautiful brand and their beautiful smiles.

In celebratory mood and more than excited to have landed in the Motherland, the Zambian women nevertheless recounted a disruptive experience they had with accessibility of accommodation for their disabled delegates.

According to one of the Zambian delegates, Muka Nyambe, 33, who is also the coordinator of the Zambian delegation, as they were about to board the flight, they didn't think that there would be any challenges for the

participants in wheelchairs, but as soon as they were on the flight, difficulties emerged, as they couldn't access wheelchair services and that almost delayed the flight, but luckily the South African Airways staff acted promptly on their side, apologized, and provided the necessities for the special needs of the passengers.

Muka shared a few words for people who are boarding a flight for the very first time. One of the tips she shared was that you should always carry the essentials like medication for headaches and fever and that passengers should listen carefully to all the instructions given by the crew and adhere to all the prompts.

She added, "There were no weather issues reported, and the conditions were favourable" which resulted in them landing safely and even 20 minutes prior to the estimated time, allowing the delegates to meet and greet and enjoy the conference together.

SAWID MESSAGE OF SUPPORT TO AFWID



Message of Support for AfWID 2025

The South African Women in Dialogue (SAWID) Board of Trustees writes to you with great admiration and respect as your proud sister organization at national level. We extend our heartfelt congratulations to you and your team for the extraordinary achievement of gathering 1, 000 women from 55 African countries for the second time in six years.

At a time of confusing geopolitics and the impact thereof on women, with the daily erosion of the principles of justice and solidarity, and the visible backlash against gender equality and the feminist agenda, which aims at silencing the voices of women, we are greatly inspired by this demonstration of African women, gender activists and feminists making efforts to join hands and work together.

It is so easy to be discouraged by the global decline in peaceful coexistence and the rise in gender-based violence and femicide, yet you are guiding us to notice the increase in the numbers of women leaders in various areas of the African continent and the world.

The Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2024 of the United Nations showed that women now hold one in every four parliamentary seats in the world, and the number of women and girls living in extreme poverty have fallen below 10%.

Yet, unfortunately, none of the indicators of SDG goal 5, the Gender Equality goal, have been met. About one in 4 girls continue to be married as children, and it will take about 137 years to lift all women and girls out of poverty.

Your remarkable accomplishment therefore not only underscores the strength and unity of women across the continent but also reflects the power of collaboration and your vision of investing in the voices of African women

to address the many critical challenges still facing our country, continent and the world today, including the glaring levels of inequality and poverty, and the rising socio-economic challenges which daily impact on the lives of African women and their families.

Your initiative to bring together women's voices from across Africa is a profound recognition of the pivotal role women play in effecting change, not only within their communities, but on a global scale. To us as Sawidians, this dialogue therefore serves as both a celebration of the incredible strides women has made, and as a continuous call to action, since the journey towards a fair, equal, peaceful, and compassionate world remains ongoing.

We deeply value the emphasis WDB Trust and AfWID have placed on peace as a cornerstone for women's development. The foundation of peace begins the family unit, where women often serve as the primary nurturers and peacemakers. By fostering environments of understanding, harmony, and resilience at this level, we can build a stronger and more equitable society for future generations.

Furthermore, we applaud your dedication to finding tangible solutions that will enhance the overall wellbeing of African women and their families, addressing their holistic needs for growth, equality, and quality of life.

At SAWID, we are committed to standing alongside you in this noble endeavor. We pledge our unwavering support to contribute to the success of this initiative. We seek to actively engage in the conversations before, during, and after the event, lending our voice, resources, and solidarity to advance the shared goals we hold dear.

Your work is an inspiration to us all, reminding us of the transformative power of women united in purpose and action. Please count on us as steadfast allies in your mission to uplift, empower, and bring lasting change to women and their families across the continent and beyond.

With warmest regards and in solidarity.

Mrs N.F. Thoko Mpumlwana
SAWID Board Chair

Mrs Vatiswa Moea
SAWID Executive Director



AFRICAN WOMEN UNITE AT THIRD GATHERING OF AFRICAN WOMEN IN DIALOGUE

BY NKHENSANI NKHWASHU



The third gathering of the African Women in Dialogue (AfWID) kicked off on Monday bringing together influential voices and change-makers from across the continent.

The event began with welcome remarks from Riah Phiyega, CEO of the WDB Trust. Phiyega highlighted that the theme “Women’s voice and power as agents of change” underscores the urgency of collective action as a priority for all women. “As we gather here, we are reminded of the strides we have made and the challenges that still lie ahead. Our collective efforts have brought us this far, but there is still much more to be done. We must continue as women to push for policies that empowers us economically, socially, politically and otherwise. We must challenge the systemic barriers that hinder our progress and we must unite in our fight against exclusion and gender based violence.”

Phiyega spoke about the challenges faced by women in rural villages across the continent. “These women are the backbone of their communities yet people won’t know, they toil tirelessly and often with limited access to education, healthcare and economic opportunities. They are disproportionately affected by poverty, lack of infrastructure and the impact of climate change. Their voices are often unheard and their needs unmet.”

She spoke about the importance of creating safe spaces for women to heal and be empowered to be agents of change. She also urged women to inspire each other to be catalysts of transformation.

In her message of support, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, former chairperson of the African Union, highlighted the challenges faced by most women in the continent that prevent their voices from being heard. She said many

women are unable to have a voice because of poverty, emphasising the need to work hard to get out of poverty.

Furthermore, she emphasized that accessing education and acquiring relevant skills pose significant challenges. She noted that it is crucial that these skills translate into economic opportunities, as women in most countries face a major obstacle which is limited access to financial resources.

She also supported Phiyega’s stance that lack of access to healthcare is a major challenge.

The chairperson of the South African Women in Dialogue (SAWID) which is AfWID’s sister organization, Thoko Mpumlwana said: “This meeting happens at a time when geo-politics are challenging sisters in our continent, especially in the Middle East. What we are scared of, is erosion of justice, solidarity and backlash on gender equality and the feminist agenda. So as we gather here, we remind ourselves that we must hold hands and be in solidarity with each other at all times. The sustainable development goals have told us that we have to ensure that at least poverty, amongst many other things, is combatted ”

She also urged the delegates to keep fighting for gender equality before pledging SAWID’s solidarity and support to AfWID. “We will be there at all times, lending our voice, resources, solidarity with you. Your work inspires us and we wish you well, Africa is our home - let us make it work.”

Addressing the delegates, Dr Stellah Bosire, human rights activist, physician, and author from Kenya thanked the veterans who paved the way for the young women. “I am because you are and we are because you are.



These women have given us the voice, presence and confidence.”

She said their legacy has inspired the women to gather in the room boldly redefining the landscape of women’s leadership and amplifying the voices that have been silenced for far too long. “Thank you for paving the way.”

She also thanked the women whose tirelessly efforts continue to fuel determination to carry to work forward. “Your strength, your vision and your courage inspire us all.”

Dr Bosire also spoke about the attack on the bodies of women and gender-diverse individuals saying it is not an isolated issue, but part of a broader, deeply troubling global trend.

“Women in all their diversity are facing increasing violence and oppression, driven by powerful forces within the anti-gender movement. This movement, fuelled by fascist and authoritarian leadership, is driven by a coalition of three conservative groups: governments, religious institutions, and civil society organizations. Together, they have formed national and transnational alliances with a shared agenda aimed at rolling back the rights of women and gender-diverse individuals.”

THE SPIRIT OF UNITY REFLECTED IN COLOURFUL MATCHING OUTFITS

BY LINDOKUHLE MAINDY MABENA

The day’s theme reflected African beauty, the spirit of unity, and ubuntu as the delegates from 55 countries in Africa landed at the OR Tambo International Airport.

Sunday, January 26, 2025, saw women landing in groups of 16 in the early hours of the morning, as early as 03:55 am, in colourful and themed outfits. The delegates of many of the countries appeared in one colour, symbolizing unity among the delegates who all arrived in the same spirit, filled with excitement.

Maimuna Secka, 48, from Gambia shared that this was her first time experiencing an African Women in Dialogue gathering, but she felt warmly embraced by all the sisters from other countries as they all landed at the same airport and all the delegates soon became one, regardless of who arrived from where.

Sinah Masemola, a South African Women in Dialogue Coordinator from Limpopo, 55, said being African to her means unity, and therefore, “if women are not unified, nothing gets solved,” she added that this is a very rare opportunity where women get to show pride, freedom and black excellency.

Dumi Gatsha, 34, the founder of a company called Success Capital in Botswana, said they were glad that there are so many other queer feminist activists that they have met in these past five years and appreciated not being the first non-binary, gender diverse individual to attend AfWID, “I think it’s so important, just to reflect five years later, on being here and connecting with other Pan-African individuals.”



INFLUENTIAL AFRICAN WOMEN DELIBERATE ON THE FUTURE AT AFWID 2025 BREAKFAST

BY AKHONA VALASHIYA

The second day of the conference kickstarted with a breakfast attended by the WDB Board of Trustees and women leaders from the 55 African countries represented. Under the banner 'Women's voices and power as agents of change,' the discourse began on a laid-back note with the participants reminiscing about the Beijing Platform of Action. Discussions then escalated to strengthening the African Women's Movement and explored the continuation and sustainability of AfWID as a platform to contribute to conflict resolution and peace building in Africa.

(In brief, the 1995 Beijing Declaration and its Platform for Action was adopted by 189 countries in the world as a wheel to drive the empowerment of women and girls.)

Among many of those present at the breakfast was the Nigerian politician and idealist, Dr Agary Timiebi Augusta Koripamo from Nigeria, who spearheaded the Programme of Action in Beijing in 1995. Dr Timiebi is a big supporter of women dialogues. This was evident in her words when she

said, "We must continue as women to push for dialogues and there must be no substitute for dialogues."

Welcoming the delegates, Ma'Mbeki urged all present to encourage the application of equal efforts in the attempt to resolve the conflict in Mozambique and other countries at war as was done in the Democratic Republic of Congo peace negotiations.

On the birth of AfWID, Ma'Mbeki, shared that it was a concept that came out of the first meeting of women in the Southern African Development Countries (SADC). "It came to mind that we must put the women of SADC together so that we can converse and have our own agenda rather than that imposed by others", said Ma'Mbeki.

This breakfast served as a galvanizing platform for the passionate souls of the heroines who do not wear capes - women leaders throughout the African continent.



THE FUTURE WE WANT: Q & A AND RECOMMENDATIONS

BY HAWA MAYERE

Question

"Michal, as someone who comes from a country you deeply care about, but can no longer access due to conflict, how can you inspire other refugees—those who've been forced to flee or remain distanced from their homelands because of governmental instability and disruption? How can we continue to fight for and support our homelands from afar?"—Marie Justine Mpano Mutabazi, 21, Rwanda

Answer - Michal Petros

"Storytelling is more than a way to preserve culture; it's a powerful tool for survival and expression, especially in the face of oppressive regimes. Diaspora media plays a vital role in giving voice to those silenced at home. Engage with outlets that offer a lifeline—spaces where you can critique and discuss paths forward.

Turning pain and struggle into your personal narrative is a profound act of defiance. By sharing your story, you not only preserve your culture, but also keep the fight for your homeland alive, even from afar.

Question:

"How can we further amplify the voices of women with disabilities in discussions, and what steps can we take to ensure true inclusivity and equality for all women living with disabilities?"- Maseray Brima, 41, blind delegate from Sierra Leone

Answer: Jennifer Abomnger

While people with disabilities are often represented in discussions, they are not always fully included or able to participate in meaningful ways. The focus tends to be on showcasing abilities rather than providing the necessary accommodation for diverse disabilities. In many contexts, including in Africa, the understanding of disability remains limited, with the emphasis primarily on physical disabilities. This overlooks other important forms of disability, such as mental, intellectual, and psychosocial disabilities. To ensure true inclusivity and equality, it is essential to recognize and address the unique needs of all women with disabilities, advocating for accessible spaces, tailored support, and the active inclusion of diverse voices across all platforms.



Recommendations on the way forward

Recommendations by Advocate Thando Gumedé:

She emphasized the need to restore the respect and value of women, who have historically been key to the stability and economic sustenance of African families.

She further added the need to revitalize African families and communities, stressing the importance of each individual understanding their role and responsibility within the community. This includes working together in unity, organizing for progress, and acknowledging that not everyone will hold high positions, but every role is important.

She stressed how young African women needed to take leadership, plan for the future, and use technology and resources responsibly to drive change.

Yvonne Muma Bih from Cameroon advocated for a borderless Africa, where African children can freely travel, trade, and gain education across the continent. She believes that a united and stronger Africa, with the leadership and voices of women, will overcome the barriers of neocolonialism and lead the world toward a brighter future.



CONNECTING TO SELF AND OTHERS

BY LINDOKUHLE MABENA



Monday, 27 January 2025, marked the first day of the third gathering of the African in Dialogue forum, during which participants were divided into groups to attend healing break-away sessions intended to connect them to themselves and others.

In these sessions, participants got to reflect deeply on their inner selves and on their relationships with others through exercises that stimulated their thoughts and experiences to provide healing.

During the sessions, incense was burned, and candles were lit, each symbolizing a different meaning according to their colour, according to one of the facilitators...

- A green candle symbolizes prosperity, success, and health.
- A yellow candle symbolizes intelligence, focus, learning, mental blocks, wisdom, clarity, confidence, and logic.
- A pink candle symbolizes unconditional love, warmth, self-love, reconciliation, friendship, and happiness.
- A blue candle symbolizes emotional healing, communication, creativity, focus, justice, inspiration, harmony, and peace of mind.
- A white candle symbolizes serenity, healing, renewal, and cleansing.

The emphasis was on life as a journey, including one's past, and maybe any traumatic experiences that one would like to heal from. Participants were tasked to trace the foot that they lead with, and then colour it according to the way they wanted. This task was intended for the participants to reflect on their life journey, where they have been, where they have never been, and where they would like to see themselves. A South African Women in Dialogue Coordinator in the Free-State Province (South Africa), Francinah Sehlabaka, shared that it is important to have structures where women get to enjoy a safe space of healing their inner wounds, share love, and empower each other. Sehlabaka said how we feel determines what we can and cannot do at any moment, hence it is essential for individuals to have a private space for reconnecting to self and a safe space for reconnecting with others.

The third session involved writing down things the participants wanted to leave in the past and opening some space in their souls to receive unconditional love from their fellow sisters. They were each given a clean paper to write all that should be left in the past, folded the paper, and tore it into pieces. The tearing symbolised breaking a chain of bad habits or other things that might have been an obstacle in their lives. Anago Judicial Grace, 40, from Benin, said attending the breakaway session is something she should have done a long time ago because talking things through paves the way to healing and also sheds light on life as a journey.

WEARING OUR STORIES WITH STYLE

As we gathered together in the spaces and places of Birchwood, our home for five glorious days of powerful women interaction, reflection and wisdom, we brought this place alive with our outfits. Around every corner, AfWIDians showed off stunning patterns and colours - from bold prints to flowing dresses and glittering beadwork. We carried our personal style with such ease, bringing our own interpretation of elegance to this gathering and showing that fashion isn't about labels, but about the confidence with which we wear our stories.





ECONOMIC PROSPERITY IN A CAPITALIST WORLD: CAN AFRICAN WOMEN TRULY THRIVE?

BY HAWA MAYERE

In 2025, it is almost rhetorical to ask whether African women can genuinely thrive and participate fully in what is often termed a “thriving economic system.” However, given the historical and structural realities that have shaped the global economy, it remains evident that access to resources and opportunities has been disproportionately limited for African communities. For marginalised groups of African women, these limitations are compounded by multiple layers of disadvantage.

For African women to truly thrive, they must navigate systemic barriers, foster solidarity, and seek pathways towards empowerment, sustainable development, and innovation. During the session, two critical questions emerged, offering valuable insights into how African women can progress within a capitalist world.

What Does Economic Prosperity Mean in Your Personal Life?

Economic prosperity is not merely about financial wealth; it is about breaking cycles of poverty, creating generational stability, and contributing to a broader cultural shift where women play pivotal roles in shaping economies. True prosperity means living with purpose, having access to essential resources, and achieving one’s vision without systemic hindrances.

Several participants shared their perspectives on the matter. Advocate Brenda Madumise, 60, from South Africa, stated, “The system was designed to perpetuate inequality.” She emphasised that current economic structures were deliberately crafted to subjugate, leaving Black women particularly vulnerable to cycles of poverty and exploitation.

Echoing this sentiment, Lando Dlamini, 35, from Eswatini, noted, “Economic prosperity is not just about wealth creation; it is also about valuing diverse contributions and dismantling systems that have historically excluded or marginalised certain groups.”

What Does Economic Solidarity Mean, and How Does It Manifest in Real Life?

Economic solidarity refers to collective efforts among women and communities to build financial strength together. A well-established example in South Africa is the

Stokvel—a community-based savings club that fosters financial resilience and cooperation within local groups.

To further strengthen economic prosperity within a capitalist society, several key strategies were discussed:

- Digital platforms for economic solidarity – These platforms can facilitate crowdfunding for women-led businesses and mobilise resource-sharing networks, enabling greater participation of African women in the economic system.
- Skills and knowledge exchange spaces – Creating environments where individuals can trade services and expertise fosters an economy based on mutual support and empowerment.

Conclusion

A central recommendation from the discussion was the importance of fostering greater collaboration among women across the continent. Traditional savings groups can be adapted into modern community lending circles, where small collectives pool funds to offer zero-interest loans to members in need. This approach is particularly vital for marginalised and economically vulnerable groups, ensuring that financial inclusion and empowerment are accessible to all.

Through solidarity, innovation, and intentional economic participation, African women can not only navigate but also redefine their place within the capitalist world, creating sustainable pathways for future generations.



REIMAGINING OUR 'FUTURE BEYOND BEIJING' BREAKFAST

BY LINDOKHULE MABENA

Programme Director Mildred Ngesa, an award-winning journalist, media and communications expert and a transformational leadership coach, was the moderator of the panel discussion on the conference's second day, and she opened the session by quoting the phrase, "Youth can walk faster, but the elders know the way." She then introduced the panellists, along with the legendary women who played a key role in the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (PFA).

The year 2025 marks exactly 30 years after the Beijing conference, which established strategic goals and actions for the advancement of women and the achievement of gender equality in 12 essential areas of concern such as women and poverty, education and training of women, women and health, violence against women, women and armed conflict, women and the economy, and women in power and decision-making.

The panel reviewed the progress made since the declaration and also explored new corridors for advancing gender equality across Africa.

The panellists were Dan Entseya an Economist, Public Policy Analyst from Senegal, Jennifer Abomnger a Disability Inclusion and Diversity Advocate, Sexual and Reproductive Health facilitator, and climate justice advocate from Nigeria, Michal Petros, a Photographer, Project Manager involved in Community Building from Eritrea, and Advocate Thando Gumede a South African Commissioner for Gender Equality and Nagwa Ibrahim, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of the Edraak Foundation for Development and Equality, from Egypt. She also coordinates the Young Feminist Group.



MEN AS ALLIES OF AFWID

BY LEOGANG MATHEBULA



In a continent grappling with violence against women, poverty, and gender inequality, support for women is an essential stepping stone towards eradicating these pressing issues. Women in Africa continuously face a multitude of challenges, not only in broader society but often within their own homes. However, the persistent mobilisation of women through movements and platforms such as AfWID has demonstrated a ripple effect, inspiring men to become allies of the cause. This was evident when AfWID welcomed its first infant participant, who attended alongside the Sibanze family.

Afua Wilcox-Sibanze—a mother, wife, and Zanele Mbeki Fellow—attended the conference for the second time, this time accompanied by her family. She shared that she had eagerly anticipated the gathering, viewing it as a place of replenishment and healing. However, attending proved challenging as she had recently given birth. Societal norms often dictate that mothers prioritise their children over their own interests and aspirations. Even today, in countries such as South Sudan, Chad, and Somalia, women's needs and rights are frequently treated as an afterthought, leaving them without a meaningful voice. Wilcox-Sibanze, who hails from the Kingdom of Eswatini, expressed gratitude that her husband's unwavering support enabled her to attend. She emphasised that this platform has had a profound impact on her mental well-being and healing, allowing her to embrace her family life with even greater love.

"As a man, I believe that holding back women has held back half of the continent's potential." These are the words of Thamsanqa Sibanze, who, in his own right, is actively engaged in various organisations dedicated to the empowerment of women. He firmly believes that such platforms are crucial, as they allow women across the continent to flourish as individuals, which in turn enriches and nurtures future generations. A devoted father to young Iminathi Sibanze, he recognised the importance of setting aside his own commitments to provide his wife with the necessary support, understanding that the ultimate goal is to foster a strong and healthy family unit. Moreover, he is eager to collaborate with others to promote these values across the continent, drive change, and make a tangible difference. Sibanze noted the stark lack of support for women in Africa, with many still enduring immense oppression. Being in a space where women are free to express themselves has inspired him to encourage others in his own circles. He advocates for mobilisation through outreach programmes, workshops, and conferences designed to educate men on how to support women with love and intention.

Mrs Wilcox-Sibanze acknowledges that attending the conference with an infant presents additional challenges. She remarked, "I am not able to immerse myself as fully as I usually do because I have my child with me." Nevertheless, she remains grateful for the opportunity to replenish herself and heal through the programmes, even if she is unable to participate in all of them.

YEARNING FOR HOME

BY GUGULETHU MAYISELA

"Yearning - a feeling of intense longing for something."

In a continent marked by political upheaval and conflict, migration is often not a matter of choice.

Africa's history of migration is rooted in deep pain, beginning with the forced removal of our ancestors as slaves to distant lands. Today, the issue of displacement continues to be exacerbated by leaders who fail to meet the needs of their people, contributing to a global migration crisis. The term "undocumented migrant" often brings to mind the image of an African woman and child, a stark reminder of the ongoing struggles many face. Migration and human mobility are inseparable from Africa's narrative, a story shaped by both hardship and resilience.

Today, for many, leaving behind their homeland is driven by the harsh realities of war and instability. Yet, for others, the decision to move from one country to another is motivated by the pursuit of better career opportunities and a brighter future.

Migration carries with it deep emotional and psychological trauma, from the challenges of navigating documentation processes to facing xenophobia and the struggle to find a place to belong. With rising immigration, many seek a sense of home and acceptance in their new countries. In South Africa, for example, there are individuals who were

born and raised in the country, yet the government still views them as immigrants, denying them the recognition and belonging they deserve.

As Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma and others promote the Agenda 63 flagship projects for change within the African continent, a unified African passport and free movement is one of the flagship projects that has to be looked into by 2063.

The free movement and residence of people is a complex issue, especially in countries experiencing civil wars like the DRC, Mozambique, South Sudan, and others. In these places, individuals flee the trauma of conflict in search of safer, better opportunities elsewhere. Just as when visiting a neighbour's home, where there are always certain boundaries, those who migrate to South Africa in search of safety and stability often encounter limits to their freedoms.

However, once peace prevails across Africa, fewer people will feel displaced as they move within the continent. The African Union's 2018 adoption of the Free Movement of Persons (FMP) protocol holds promise for improving the situation, potentially offering greater freedom and opportunity for African citizens across the continent.



EMPOWERED WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS EXHIBIT THEIR DYNAMIC CRAFTS AT AFWID 2025 MARKETPLACE

BY THOMAS LETHOBA



At the heart of the African Women in Dialogue (AfWID) 2025 conference unfolding in Johannesburg, the spotlight shines brightly on innovative women entrepreneurs who are making an impact across Africa with their creativity. This year's event is buzzing with energy, and right outside the plenary and breakaway sessions, a dynamic marketplace brings together women from all corners of the continent to showcase their products. From vibrant handwoven baskets and unique handmade sets of clothes to organic skincare lines, the market reflects the heartbeat of the conference's theme: "Women's Voice and Power as Agents of Change."

Among the many inspiring women showcasing their crafts at the marketplace is Ida Flore Maroundou, a 37-year-old talented entrepreneur and passionate advocate for women's rights.

Hailing from Gambia, Ida wears many hats, both as a designer and as an entrepreneur. She's the proud creator behind a collection of tailored clothing, designing and making each piece by hand, blending traditional techniques with modern fashion.

In addition to her clothing line, Ida also sells sculptures that carry deep cultural and social impact in Gambia. She says her sculptures reflect African heritage, values, and the contemporary struggles and triumphs of women.

"Each sculpture I create is more than just art; it's a representation of our African heritage, our values, and the powerful journey of women today. My work tells the stories of our triumphs, our struggles, and the strength we carry within us every day," says Ida.

She began her professional career in telecommunications with Gabon Télécom, later transitioning to a multinational corporation as a QHSE manager. However, her passion for social change led her to pivot in 2020, becoming the founder of the NGO Aurore.

Through her organization, Ida has become a key figure in four Action Coalitions within the Generation Equality campaign of UN Women. Her advocacy addresses vital issues such as gender-based violence, economic justice, climate justice, and the promotion of women's leadership. Another remarkable entrepreneur at the marketplace is

Zeineb Tahri Dhabbi from Tunisia, who brings a unique touch to traditional and modern fashion. Zeineb specializes in handmade bags and shoes, each crafted with multiple designs. Her creations stand out for their quality, unique patterns, and the personal story behind them.

Reflecting on her experience at AfWID 2025, Zeineb shares, "This event has been a truly eye-opening experience for me. I am so inspired by the diverse women entrepreneurs here, and the energy is incredible. It feels empowering to be part of a space where we can share our stories, learn from one another, and celebrate our work."

Another powerful presence at AfWID 2025 is an entrepreneur from Niger, Amoussou Araoye Helene Flore, who blends culture and fashion through her handmade

bracelets and traditional cultural shoes. With a deep connection to her heritage, she crafts each piece to reflect the beauty and history of Niger.

Previously working in the aviation industry—a field dominated by men—she was driven by the challenges she faced in her career to explore new avenues and become a business owner. She explains, "Being in the aviation industry, I was often the only woman in the room. This experience pushed me to prove not only my skills but also my ability to succeed in any space. It inspired me to venture into my own business and create something that reflects my roots while empowering other women in the process."



WORDS OF WISDOM: SARA LONGWE

BY AKHONA VALASHIYA

Veteran AfWIDian and feminist activist from Zambia, Sara Longwe shared her words of wisdom with young African women on the topic of feminism and equality. When asked what words of advice she could give to young women today that can help take African women forward, she said: “Resilience, belief and protest.” “Aluta continua because gender equality is a must”. The veteran says her red hair is a symbol of her beliefs and not a mere fashion statement, “my red hair is not fashion, it’s in protest against abomination and discrimination of all forms,” she said.

Longwe has developed a method of analysing gender issues through her Longwe Women’s Empowerment Framework. She has used this framework in her numerous consultancies undertaken with African government gender departments, development agencies and civil society organisations on how to identify and address gender issues for sustainable women’s empowerment.

In her parting message she said young girls and young women need to identify their own symbols and live for them, to protest against abomination and to continue to fight for equality and happiness.



MESSAGES OF SUPPORT FROM DJIBOUTI

BY PFARELO MUTHIGE

African women play a pivotal role in shaping the continent’s future, and their empowerment is essential for achieving lasting influence and prosperity. To elevate Africa to its rightful place on the global stage, women must prioritize education and skills development. Access to quality education enables them to become leaders in various sectors, from politics to entrepreneurship, fostering innovation and driving economic growth.

Moreover, African women need to engage actively in leadership and decision-making processes. By participating in governance and policy-making, they can advocate for laws and initiatives that support gender equality and social justice. Building robust networks and alliances among women across the continent can amplify their voices and create a united front for change.

Economic empowerment is also crucial. Women must have access to financial resources, markets, and technology to start and grow businesses. Supporting women-led enterprises can lead to job creation and sustainable development.

Finally, cultural attitudes must shift to recognize and value the contributions of women. Promoting narratives that celebrate female leaders and innovators can inspire future generations. By investing in education, leadership, economic opportunities, and cultural change, African women can drive the continent toward a future of influence and prosperity.

- Neima Ben Chek



To all African women, we stand united in our strength and resilience. You are the heartbeat of this continent, and your voices are powerful instruments of change. As we navigate the challenges ahead, let us remember: "Together, we rise; together, we thrive."

It is time to harness our collective power and take bold actions. We must advocate for our rights, ensuring equal access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Let us support one another in entrepreneurship, creating networks that uplift and empower, and engaging in community leadership, where our insights can shape policies that reflect our needs and aspirations.

Moreover, let us champion the environment, safeguarding our natural resources for future generations. By fostering sustainable practices, we can ensure that Africa not only survives, but flourishes.

Together, we can redefine the narrative of our continent, showcasing the brilliance and potential of African women on the global stage. Let us rise, let us act, and let us lead. The time for change is now, and the future is ours to create.

In solidarity and strength, we will elevate Africa to its rightful place of influence and prosperity.

- Sabira Ibrahim

“EMPOWERING VOICES: THE RISE OF THE AFRICAN WOMEN’S MOVEMENT IN SHAPING THE FUTURE”

BY PFARELO MUTHIGE

A Conversation on the African Women’s Movement: Is the African Women’s Movement Fit for Purpose?



The African women’s movement is a powerful and dynamic force that has shaped the political, economic, and social landscapes across the continent. From fighting for independence and democracy to advocating for gender equality and human rights, African women have been at the forefront of transformative change. This article explores the challenges facing the African women’s movement, possible suggestions for its strengthening, and whether it is fit for purpose.

The African women’s movement has made significant progress over the years in advocating for gender equality, women’s rights, and social justice. However, several challenges continue to hinder its effectiveness and growth. Some of the key challenges include:

- Many African societies remain deeply patriarchal, with traditional customs and beliefs limiting women’s roles in leadership, education, and economic participation.
- Gender pay gaps and employment discrimination limit women’s financial independence.
- The delegitimization of indigenous knowledge systems: The West does not recognize the knowledge held by African women, or understand the invasive nature of western medicine on African bodies.
- High rates of domestic violence, sexual harassment, and human trafficking threaten women’s safety.
- Gender disparities in education persist, with many girls dropping out due to early marriage, pregnancy, or financial constraints.

The effectiveness of the African women’s movement depends on how we define its “fitness for purpose.” If women consider its goals as being that of achieving gender equality, political representation, economic empowerment, and social justice; the movement has made significant strides, being successful in many areas, but it still faces major challenges.

To be fully “fit for purpose,” it needs stronger institutional support, better funding, and more unified strategies across the continent. It is evolving but still has a long way to go to achieve true gender equity.

The African women’s movement has made remarkable strides in fighting for equality and justice. While challenges remain, the resilience and activism of African women continue to inspire change. By working together, women across the continent can build a future where gender equality is not just a vague ideal, but a vibrant reality.



ABSTRACTS: REIMAGINING A FUTURE BEYOND BEIJING

BY LINDOKUHLE MAINDY MABENA

Advocate Thando Gumede

Advocate Thando Gumede perceives herself as both a citizen of this world and as a spiritual being, with law as merely a superficial mantle. By profession, she is an advocate of the High Court of South Africa and a lecturer in Law and Human Rights. Her expertise extends to anti-racism, anti-gender-based violence, pro-Black decolonisation, and the reconstruction of the African continent. She is also the founder of a private medical laboratory in South Africa, dedicated to providing high-quality healthcare to marginalised groups, particularly women, queer and LGBTQIA+ individuals, and Black communities.

If that were not impressive enough, she also holds the distinction of being the youngest National Commissioner for Gender Equality in South Africa, appointed by the President. Yet, even this she regards as a mere title, for at her core, she identifies as a healer—her true, divinely bestowed vocation. Gumede offers healing through consciousness-raising, problem-solving, and creation.



What is your call to action?

“What drives and motivates me? It is encapsulated in the Arabic term Ibadah, which means divine submission to God. I am here on a mission to submit wholly to the divine will. I was created to fight, to serve as a foot soldier, and to lead—and that is precisely what I will do, regardless of the obstacles that patriarchy may place in my path. I have been preparing for this moment. Every time I speak and educate, I define what feminism means to me. Feminism, to me, is the unwavering, unapologetic pursuit of equity among all human beings, irrespective of their superficial differences.”



Michal Petros

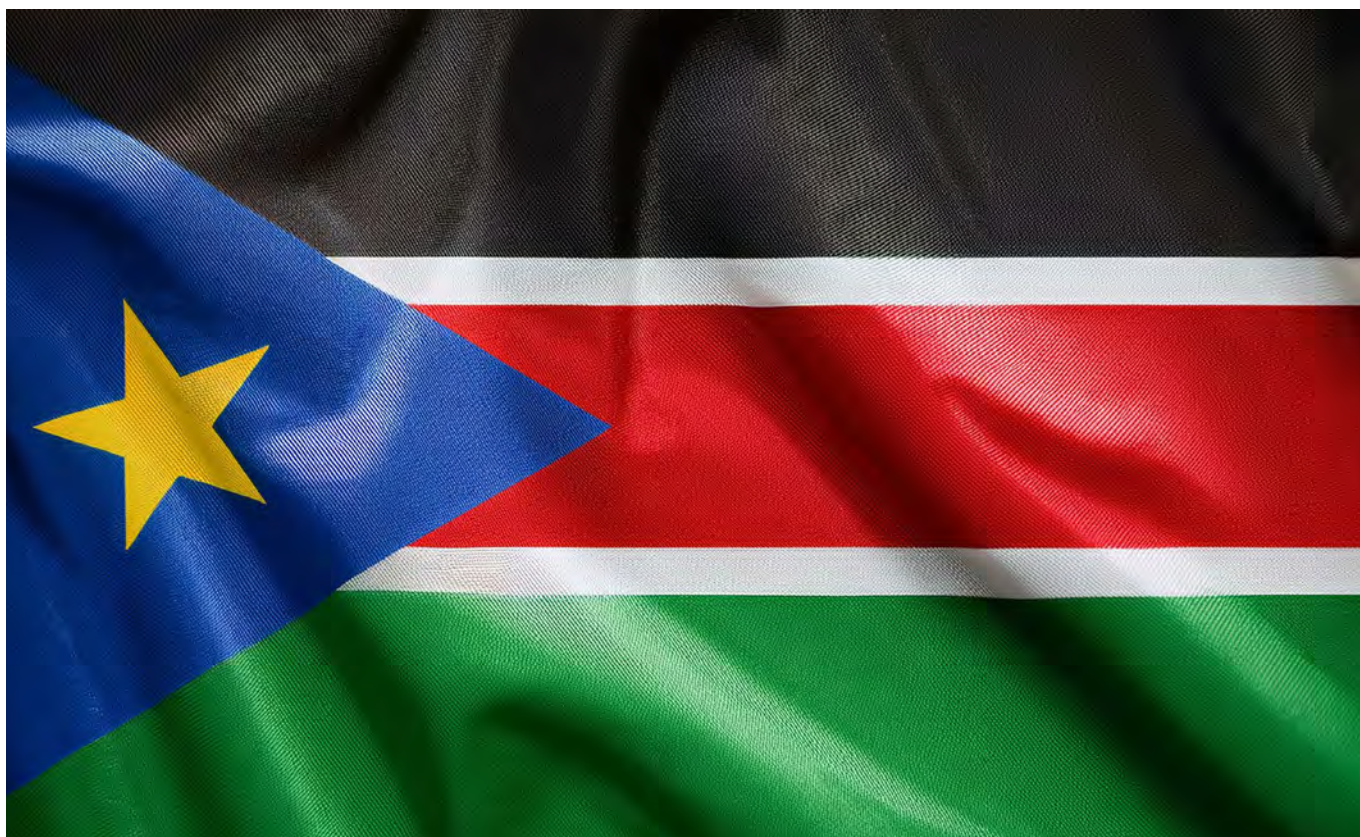
Michal Petros, a photographer and project manager committed to community-building, is Eritrean-American. She identifies foremost as a storyteller, with an academic background in International Affairs, focusing on identity and governance in Africa. Her career has been centred on fundraising and development for non-profits, and she has worked and lived in Kenya, Eswatini, and Algeria. Her passion for human rights stems from her Eritrean heritage.

Eritrea gained independence in 1991, and Michal was born in 1997. “Today, we spoke about honouring our elders, and what truly breaks my heart is that those who fought for our freedom have never known a free Eritrea. Since 1991, our country has remained under dictatorship, and since 2001, there has been no press freedom—arguably even before then, but legally since 2001. There is forced national conscription, including for young women, and tens of thousands flee each month, primarily to escape military conscription in search of education and livelihood beyond Eritrea’s borders.”

What is your call to action?

“As a member of the diaspora speaking out, I cannot return to Eritrea. However, I am deeply committed to being a force for change within the diaspora, supporting those who are enacting reform and assisting those fleeing the country. Much of the work in the diaspora focuses on refugee resettlement, and we now have a new generation of Eritreans who can speak for themselves—those who have directly experienced the dictatorship. We are working alongside them to amplify their voices. As an Eritrean-American, I recognise my privilege, and I am here to use that privilege to elevate the stories of those enduring oppression at home.”

SUDANESE WOMEN'S STATEMENT AT THE AFWID CONFERENCE



Peace be upon you, esteemed members of the African Women's in Dialogue Conference.

Greetings and respect.

It has been our pleasure to meet with you in this place to discuss issues of women's empowerment in Africa across all fields of security, peace, health, and economic empowerment. However, we come to this conference bearing deep wounds due to the suffering of Sudanese women as a result of the long-standing war in Sudan, which has caused great pain to all of us.

During this ongoing war, Sudanese women have faced various forms of violence and humiliation, including rape, forced displacement, forced labour, and being coerced into sexual acts in exchange for food and protection, leading to the displacement and refugee status of millions of Sudanese women, as well as a loss of support. The current war particularly targets women, and on top of this, Sudan is experiencing a severe famine described by United Nations reports as the worst in the world, affecting over 26 million of Sudan's population. Despite this, there are significant difficulties in delivering humanitarian aid to those in need, compounded by a widespread outbreak

of diseases and epidemics, alongside neglect from the international community in all its forms.

Sudanese men and women, both inside and outside Sudan, are suffering from tragic and extremely complex conditions, and as Sudanese women here, we ask you to join us in demanding an immediate end to the war and for everyone to work with us to restore security, peace, and food security. We also demand that this statement reaches all African governments, the African Union, the African Peace Council, IGAD, and all United Nations organizations, as well as other international actors in the region and the world. We know that women are the most affected by wars, and we also believe that they hold the keys to peace.

With our heartfelt thanks and appreciation to the organizers of the conference for providing us this opportunity to raise women's issues in Sudan at this critical time, and to raise our voices to stop the war and end the suffering of the millions of Sudanese people especially the women, children, elderly, disabled etc.

**Delegation of Sudanese Women
January 29, 2025, Johannesburg**



WHAT WILL IT TAKE FOR PEACE TO REIGN IN AFRICA?

BY JODI A. LAWRENCE

At present, there are 35 armed conflicts ongoing across Africa, affecting regions such as Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Western Sahara, Burkina Faso, Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan.

It is deeply concerning that at the heart of many of these conflicts lies the influence of Western powers, including the United States, France, and Russia. In the case of South Sudan, the role of the United Arab Emirates in the civil war cannot be overlooked.

As with all wars, women and children bear the greatest burden, suffering the highest casualties and forming the largest proportion of displaced refugees. This year, at the African Women in Dialogue (AfWID) gathering, women have shared an outpouring of grief for their war-torn homelands and families. Many delegates have spoken of the lack of solidarity among women across the continent, highlighting the failure to acknowledge ongoing conflicts and to challenge leaders who profit from war.

Dr. Zoneziwoh Mbongdulo eloquently addressed the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which recognises the impact of war on women and calls for their equal participation in peace and security decision-making. She noted that as the 25th anniversary of this resolution approaches, many women across Africa, including those present at the gathering, have yet to see its meaningful implementation. The resolution remains far removed from the lived experiences of women in conflict zones.

During a panel discussion, Nomboniso Gasa, speaking from the audience, observed that women often play a role in upholding patriarchal power structures, at times to the detriment of other women. This, she argued, has contributed to the silencing and disenfranchisement of women who seek to challenge the agents of conflict in war zones such as Senegal, Somalia, and the Central African Republic.

A working group of women at the event reflected on the need to think beyond their own lifetimes and spheres of influence to dismantle the culture of warmongering that pervades the continent. Over the course of the discussions, delegates reached a significant conclusion: there is an urgent need for women-led peace missions to areas of active conflict and for the establishment of a separate African Union for women, modelled after the women-led directorate within the United Nations.

Furthermore, it was determined that women must be better educated on the nature of conflict—not merely as a force that impacts them physically and psychologically, but as a complex socio-political phenomenon requiring their active engagement. The path to peace in Africa must centre women in peace negotiations and conflict resolution, just as they are at the heart of daily life and societal stability.



BEIJING +30: AFRICAN WOMEN RECLAIM THEIR POWER AND DEMAND CHANGE

BY NKHENSANI NKHWASHU

The Beijing +30 review breakaway session at the African Women in Dialogue (AfWID) conference provided a vital platform for reassessing progress and accountability in Africa's gender agenda, three decades after the landmark 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. That historic gathering, which convened representatives from 189 governments and thousands of civil society organisations, led to the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action—a comprehensive framework for advancing women's rights and achieving gender equality worldwide.

Speaking as part of a panel, Amel Samoud Khamari, President of the Tunisian Association of Governance and Equal Opportunities between Women and Men in Decision-Making Positions (ATGEC), shared her experience of attending the Beijing conference in 1995.

"It was an incredible experience for me as a young journalist. I was just 28 years old and had left behind my five-year-old child. It was an honour to be chosen as part of the Tunisian delegation, especially as the youngest member of the group."

Khamari reflected on the excitement of seeing women from diverse countries, backgrounds, and religions, all speaking different languages but united in purpose. She also spoke about her experiences as a woman in the media industry and how she used her voice to fight against poverty and inequality, among other challenges. The session then opened the floor to media professionals in attendance, inviting them to share personal experiences and insights on whether reporting on women's issues has evolved since the Beijing conference. While progress was acknowledged, many expressed concern over the persistent disparities between female and male journalists, highlighting the ongoing struggle for equality within the media landscape.

"The media industry remains deeply patriarchal, with entrenched stereotypes. Stories considered 'soft news' are often assigned to female journalists, while male journalists are given 'hard news' topics like politics and the economy," observed one female journalist.

Wahu Kaara, a globally renowned Kenyan educator, activist, and campaigner for social justice, vividly recalled the Beijing conference, describing it as though it had

taken place only yesterday. She spoke of the passion and determination of the women who had gathered there, noting how language barriers had never stood in the way of their shared mission.

"Women claimed public spaces for themselves—it was never handed to them. They broke down walls to seize power."

Kaara urged that now is not the time for lamentation but for reclaiming power.

NgoN-Baba Née Noufere Céline, Chairperson of Mafubo Centrafrique, an NGO in the Central African Republic, underscored the need for women to embrace digital transformation.

She stressed that technology should be harnessed to reach women in rural areas, advocating for education and training in digital skills to empower women as champions of digitalisation and unlock their full potential.

While all agreed that significant progress has been made since the Beijing conference, a unanimous sentiment echoed throughout the discussion: despite the strides taken, much work remains. Both panellists and participants concurred that sustained effort and commitment are essential to driving further change.



GUARDIANS OF THE LAND

BY LEOGANG MATHEBULA



Food security and sovereignty have long been pressing concerns across Africa. Despite the continent's vast landscapes and rich natural resources, agricultural sustainability remains a challenge, particularly for women farmers who play a crucial role in food production and distribution.

Day three of AfWID 2025 provided a platform for African women in agriculture to voice their struggles and strategise for change. Led by Mercia Andrews, Director of the Trust for Community Outreach and Education, the workshop brought together women from various regions to discuss the critical obstacles they face. A major issue raised by women from Arabic-speaking countries was the impact of ongoing armed conflicts, which have rendered large tracts of land unsuitable for farming. In Sudan, the civil war has severely disrupted the supply chain, creating an economic shock that exacerbates food shortages.

Across the continent, the lack of funding emerged as a universal concern. Without financial support, women farmers struggle to access essential resources such as irrigation systems, fertilizers, labour, and modern farming tools. This financial gap not only hampers productivity but also limits their ability to engage in research, adopt new agricultural techniques, and compete in local and international markets. As the world advances into the Fourth Industrial Revolution, these women find themselves at a disadvantage, unable to integrate new technologies into their farming practices.

Water scarcity presents yet another formidable challenge. Many regions suffer from arid conditions that make farming nearly impossible. A significant policy hurdle was the Kenyan Water Treaty of May 19, 2010, which restricted

farmers from using water from the Nile River for irrigation. This decision created a major setback for sustainable agriculture. However, in 2025, Water Minister Charity Ngilu declared that East African nations now have the freedom to utilise water resources as they see fit, offering renewed hope for struggling farmers.

Another pressing concern is the demand for the eradication of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and the preservation of organic farming. Many African farmers believe that their indigenous seeds hold medicinal properties, are nutritionally superior, and are deeply intertwined with their cultural and spiritual identities. Mary Sakala of Zambia passionately articulated this stance: "The food that we eat is part of our identity. Our organic seeds can be medicinal, they can be food, and they can be part of our spiritual embodiment." While the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) maintains that GMOs pose no health risks, various independent studies suggest otherwise, fuelling further scepticism among African farmers.

Amid these challenges, the call for climate change funding has become more urgent, particularly for rural women who are often dismissed as small-scale farmers. Roseline Orwa of Kenya emphasized the need for women to unite and demand dedicated financial support to mitigate the effects of climate change on agriculture.

Despite the many difficulties discussed, the women left the workshop with a renewed sense of determination. Their collective voice and unwavering commitment to change signal a powerful movement toward policy reforms and increased advocacy for agricultural sustainability. These women are not just guardians of the land; they are architects of a future where food security is a reality for all.

AFWID TAKEOVER OF THE VIEWPOINT ON SAFM RADIO



The future we want—a future built for African women by African women.

AfWID took over the airwaves of SAFM Radio on day two when Taweni Gondwe Xaba hosted a takeover of popular thought leadership program The Viewpoint.

On the panel, she was joined by Nana Magomola – WDB Trust Member, Emma Kaliya – AfWID Steering Committee Member and AfWID SADC Coordinator, Saida Ali – AfWID East Africa Coordinator, and Sara Longwe – Beijing 1995 Veteran, and in the audience were women from diverse corners of our rich and beautiful continent.

The powerful and lively hour-long discussion centred on the AfWID theme of Building towards a future we want, by African Women for African Women.

Panelists weighed in on the role women need to step up to play in tackling the challenges facing the continent with regard to peace and stability, protection of resources, youth empowerment and the incorporation of grassroots voices in policy making, and economic growth among other pressing topics.

Historical milestones from past women's conferences were highlighted, including the development of frameworks

like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The conversation underscored the need for actionable solutions, sustainable financing for women-led projects, and breaking down barriers for young women to assume leadership roles. Challenges, like unstable governance in some regions, were acknowledged as obstacles to progress. There was a call for unity, self-reliance, communal saving schemes, and impactful policies to continue advancing women's rights and development.

Nana Magomola, WDB Trust Member

This idea came up about bringing together women from 55 countries to have these critical conversations, it sounded ambitious but exciting. We knew it was something we needed to support. This platform allows us to amplify women's voices and create real power in shaping solutions. For us, it was about ensuring women from all walks of life, including those in rural and underserved areas, could be part of this conversation.

Saida Ali

We need actionable outcomes. Women here are sharing practical strategies and demonstrating leadership. Many of them are making a significant impact in their communities, particularly young women. For example, young women from South Sudan and other regions

have been inspired to return home and organize. They're stepping into leadership roles and proving that you don't need formal education or wealth to lead. This is about creating opportunities for all women to learn and grow.

Sara Longwe

The journey began with earlier conferences, including the 1995 Beijing conference, which created the "Beijing Platform for Action." This document set the foundation for advancing women's rights globally. The African women's caucuses played a significant role in shaping key areas of focus, including poverty, education, violence against women, and economic empowerment. These issues remain central to our agenda. Over the years, we've seen many countries ratify agreements, but the challenge has always been translating those commitments into tangible actions.

Emma Kaliya

Resolution 1325 was established to ensure 30% representation of women in government, yet no country has met this threshold. This may be why conflicts continue to resurface even after efforts to suppress them. Decision-making is crucial, and women must be involved. In many cases, their absence from peace discussions undermines progress. Without women, the process is incomplete, and sustainable peace remains elusive.

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"It's about creating mechanisms for sustained advocacy. We need to ensure women's voices are heard at every level of decision-making. For instance, microfinance has been transformative in many areas, but we must also think beyond "micro" and aim for large-scale projects that benefit entire communities."

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Whenever they talk about financial empowerment for women, they only talk about micro-finance. What's micro about us?



- Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma



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Women should not ask for permission to lead; they must embrace the fact that they are leaders and the backbone of a strong Africa.

- Riah Phiyega, CEO of WDB Trust



I AM THE ONE AFRICA HAS BEEN WAITING FOR!



Personal Commitments for Advancing the AfWID Agenda

I recognise that institutions are important, but their effectiveness depends on my personal agency to drive change and influence the spaces I occupy. My advocacy for African women begins with love and self-acceptance, shared first within my own home, then extended to my community. I commit to articulating and supporting African women wherever I can, through the actions I take, the words I speak, and the spaces I engage in. As a participant in this conference, I commit to the following actions to advance the AfWID agenda:

- 1. Empowerment Through Knowledge:** I commit to actively seeking credible, verified information, continuously educating myself about the African Women's Movement and sharing this knowledge responsibly. I understand that our collective power lies in the sharing of truth and the voices of women, and I will prioritise the dissemination of verified, relevant information to empower women in my community.
- 2. Healing and Acknowledging Trauma:** I acknowledge that we all carry intergenerational trauma, and if we are to engage effectively, we must first address this pain. I commit to supporting healing processes, understanding that true change begins with personal healing and collective empathy. I will foster environments where women can safely share their experiences, and where healing becomes a part of the dialogue and activism I engage in.
- 3. Advocacy for Displaced Women:** I will advocate for displaced women, particularly those affected by migration, ensuring they have access to the resources, rights, and support they need. I will create platforms for their voices to be heard and work to eliminate the barriers to their freedom and opportunities. My advocacy will be grounded in the recognition of their inherent dignity, and I will fight for their empowerment wherever possible.
- 4. Solidarity and Personal Accountability:** I commit to thinking "woman first" in everything I do. I will act in solidarity with African women by supporting one another in tangible, meaningful ways. I will not wait for government action but will take personal responsibility for making the changes I wish to see. Collective change starts with my individual actions, and I will use my influence to bring about the positive transformation we seek.
- 5. Championing Peace and Solidarity:** I will advocate for women's inclusion in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, ensuring their voices are heard in negotiations, from grassroots to high-level discussions. I will foster solidarity across borders, supporting African women in conflict zones, and ensure that my actions reflect the values of peace, unity, and collective progress.





6. **Strengthening the African Women’s Movement:** I commit to being an active participant in the African Women’s Movement, ensuring it remains inclusive, dynamic, and responsive to the diverse needs of African women. I will support the creation of a unified platform for collective advocacy, strengthening women’s voices across the continent and recognising that the movement is as much about individual action as it is about collective change.
7. **Sustainable Solutions for Food Sovereignty:** I will support women’s involvement in sustainable agriculture and food sovereignty, advocating for policies that prioritise agroecology and women’s leadership in ecological justice. I will promote education around these issues and ensure that my actions reflect a commitment to protecting indigenous seeds, empowering women farmers, and fostering resilience in Africa’s food systems.
8. **Economic Empowerment of Women:** I will promote financial literacy and independence for African women, supporting initiatives that equip women with the tools and resources to thrive. I will resist patriarchal economic systems and advocate for policies that empower women economically. My personal commitment to economic justice begins at home, by teaching financial literacy and fostering economic independence in my community.
9. **Protection and Safety of Women:** I will advocate for stronger laws to protect women from violence and ensure that women’s safety is prioritised in conflict zones and beyond. I will act in solidarity with survivors of violence, providing both practical and emotional support where needed. My commitment to protecting women begins with ensuring safe spaces in my own life and community.
10. **Empowerment Through My Voice and Networks:** I recognise the power of my voice and networks as tools to advocate for women’s rights. I will use my influence to amplify the voices of African women, supporting solidarity and collective action. I understand that leadership emerges from shared responsibility, and I commit to taking action that furthers the cause of gender equality.

These personal commitments are a reminder that the change we seek begins with each of us. Through my actions, I aim to contribute to the AfWID agenda, knowing that individual efforts, when combined, have the power to create lasting transformation. Each step I take will inspire others to do the same, creating a ripple effect of empowerment that uplifts African women and strengthens our collective future.

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

Behind every successful event, there are unsung heroes—the ones who work tirelessly in the background, ensuring that everything runs smoothly. At this year's AfWID conference, our volunteers were the heart and soul of the event. They were the muscles, the glue, and the energy that held it all together. From the moment of arrival, they greeted us with warmth and friendliness, easing our fears and making us feel welcome. They were the first face we saw at the airport and the last face we saw on departure.

In a time when the older generation sometimes worries about how the youth will shape the future and lead our continent, it is clear that Africa's future is already in good

hands. The youth are taking charge, showing us what leadership, dedication, and service look like. Without these incredible volunteers, there is no AfWID. Their commitment and passion went far beyond the call of duty, proving that the next generation of leaders is here—and they are more than ready.

Thank you to every volunteer who gave their time, energy, and heart to make this event possible. You are the true champions of Africa's tomorrow, and we see you.

Linda Vilakazi
AfWID Program Manager



ROOTED IN ROTTING TREES

CHIGOMEZGO GONDWE, 2025

We walk a path paved with paradox,
where men are kings of borrowed thrones,
applauded for choices that break or build,
while women are sculpted into silence,
chastised for wielding the same hammer of life.

In the shadow of hollow trees,
we feed our sons the bitter fruit of patriarchy,
signing them into brotherhoods
that carve their worth from the fallacy of dominance.
Generation after generation,
we perpetuate destruction.
Mothers of the movement,
trapped in the system,
raising men to keep the same chains that twist them.

We,
the givers of life,
have become the artisans of our own oppression.
They say it is culture, this weight we bear,
but culture is the river that bends and grows,
not the stagnant pond where dreams decay.
Our fire, once a beacon,
is now only a flicker,
suffocated by the smoke of homes
ablaze with unspoken rage.

What mirror reflects us now,
chained to these roots of rotting trees
that no longer nourish,
bound to the ghosts of proverbs
that once sang of balance and bounty?

"Until the lion tells his tale,
the hunter will always be the hero,"
they say,
but what of the lioness,
whose roar is drowned in the storm of tradition?

Well,
no more drowning in rhetoric,
drinking clichés like water from poisoned wells.
With our minds we will drain these stagnant streams,
forge rivers of rebellion with our bare hands,
and flood the barren lands
with the fury of voices no longer afraid to rise.

Burn the rotting roots -
ignite their hollowness into pillars of flame.
Let the ash be our soil, fertile with resistance.
Plant the seeds of revolution in every mind,
teach our children to wield justice like machetes
cutting through overgrown lies.

Claim liberation from the rusted chains of history,
write and tell stories of our own victories.
Strip these illusions of grandeur and power
with the clarity of our gaze and ideals of Oneness.
Let the world stand naked in the Future's presence.
Overthrow the strongholds of forced silence.
Demolish the palaces built on our backs.
Say: 'Black, don't crack 'cause we are not going back!'

We know who we are and who we are purposed to be.
We are keepers of homes and nurturers of children,
custodians of wisdom and bearers of truth.
Our hands are not just for tending hearths,
charred and callused,
these are the hands that lift the nations.
In our hearts is the balm for broken spirits,
Our words decode mysteries unseen by the ages,
carving paths for futures yet dreamed.

We are more than he, she, they or them;
we are human not pronouns, labels or symbols,
we are simply man or womankind,
created in the image of God Most High.
We will not lose who we are,
our existence will not fade,
in global narratives of societal evolution
our voices will uphold the truths of salvation.

We are the firestorm,
the roar of a world unbound,
the pulse of a future that refuses to wait,
the heartbeat of generations yet unborn.
We are living testaments to Truth and Power,
created to be heard and not just to be seen.

Through cultural deconstruction
and moral regeneration,
we will unweave these tangled threads and
sew a new garment of our highest vision.
Yesterday must crumble and
The past torn apart.
So, Black don't crack, 'cause we are not going back!
Say, Black don't crack, 'cause we are not going back!

