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Fighting for justice, peace and human rights of the LDCs

# LDC5

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# NEWSLETTER

*Fighting for peace, justice and human rights*

## AT A GLANCE

- Happy Women's Day
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## Happy Women's Day



Today, March 8th, is International Women's Day, and we are celebrating this with a photo of the giant spider, which you will all have noticed in the conference centre. This is a sculpture by the French/American sculptress Louise Bourgeois, called 'Maman' (the French for Mummy). It has been interpreted as an ode to her mother, with whom she had a loving but tumultuous relationship, and is a memorial to all mothers. If you look carefully you will see that the spider holds eggs below her stomach, just like a mother expectant does.

# Gender Inequality in Cambodia

***As a tribute to International Women's Day, our first story is about an organisation that is confronting gender inequality in Cambodia***

***I'm talking to Norm Sina from Cambodia. So Norm, can you tell us who you work with?***

I'm working with Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC) based in Phnom Penh, Our mission is to advance gender equality as a fundamental human right, and our goals are. gender equality, justice, empowerment and inclusion. GADC works with local stakeholders, CSOs and community leaders to ensure our participants come from diverse backgrounds. Given the high prevalence of disability in post-conflict Cambodia, GADC works with older women with disabilities to improve their access.

GADC recognizes that addressing the root causes of male violence means changing social norms around men's attitudes. GADC's Cambodian Men's Network (CMN) consists of men working to promote positive masculinity, and between 2016 and 2019, it worked in three provinces to change men's attitudes on gender equality.

GADC is a leader in Cambodia using and training well-tested models such as a Gender Road Map (addressing gender norms within the family unit) and the Gender Action Learning System (addressing gender norms at the community level as an enabler for change).

Our advocacy work through the Gender and Development Network (GADNet), works with its 44 members. We have provided new draft wording for the Domestic Violence Law, mobilised resources to conduct campaigns and prepared joint statements to ask policy makers to address inequality issues.

***So what is women's position in Cambodia?***

The number of women elected in commune council elections has increased from 16.76% to 22.04%, but there are still so many things to do to reach gender equality. It is not only about the number of women but also about their power in taking decisions.

According to the Ministry of Women's Affairs the number of female government officers reached the target of Cambodian Sustainable Development Goals (CSDG) of 48% in 2023. While this is quite high, these women are at the lower level, and the Cambodian Prime minister has been pushing relevant ministries to ensure there are more women in leadership positions.



### ***Are many women active in Cambodia?***

Through our intervention, women have become empowered. They have come out of their so-called 'closed door', or household, to society so they are now known by their local community.

As a result of our young women's internship programme the local authority recognises women's capacity and their potential, so when there is a new position or a new job at the commune level they are appointed. We also have an internship programme that paves a way for young women to become leaders at the commune level. As a result almost 80 women in our 3 target provinces got elected as commune councilors in local elections (2022).

The women's commune core group is now able to challenge or negotiate with the local authority, or the commune police. It used to be the case that when local police addressed gender based violence they would often blame the women victims; now women have the power and knowledge to challenge this. For instance, if a young girl is sexually harassed she can now say to the local authority or local police 'this is wrong'.

### ***How long have you been involved with LDC Watch? And is this your first UN conference?***

This is my first time as an LDC Watch representative. I feel so excited and have a lot of things to learn and to share from our experience of having implemented activity at the subnational and national levels. This includes building women's leadership, preventing, and eliminating gender-based violence and networking with stakeholders.

### ***Is this the first time at the international level?***

Yes, this is my first time being involved at the UN level, and I know I will get more involved. I used to join online meetings with the Generation Equality Forum and the ILO. My team has worked regionally and internationally with the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and Commission on Status of Women (CSW).

### ***What are you hoping is going to come out of this conference?***

I will collect the major achievements from this conference to share with my team and community. I hope there will be financial support for the climate change crisis and the conference decides to put more budget for the climate change crisis.

One more thing about gender inequality. I know from working with the local authority, that some people still have a traditional mindset about gender and gender inequality, so as an implementer, I would like a bigger budget for this activity. We need to educate the local authorities to change their mindset to support gender equality. It is very important to close the gap, and learning about gender sensitivities helps to do this and to change the mindset towards women's leadership.

Right now there's a big gap, the leader in political party is always a man. So one big request is to have many women candidates and place them in the top ranking of election list. Government, political parties and relevant stakeholders should have what we call special intervention action to build women's capacities and to recognise that woman is capable in their positions.

## Parliamentarians call for a fossil fuel free future to save humanity



Doha, March 6 – Parliamentarians from the UN-defined Least Developed Countries (LDCs) have called for fossil fuel free future to save humanity.

Taking part in a panel discussion they called for collective action to combat the devastating impacts of climate change especially on millions of poor people in global South.

Nusrat Shaaban Hanje, an MP from Tanzania, said that as a parliamentarian she carries the agenda for youth and women, who are most affected by climate change. “As parliamentarians we hold our governments and parliaments accountable so they won’t add any new fossil fuel projects and don’t overreach the 1.5 degrees Celsius, said Nusrat adding, ‘In our parliament, we have a movement for climate justice, and its aim is to introduce laws about climate justice, so that by 2040 we know we won’t exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius. I call upon everyone to make sure our governments abide by the agreements in our protocols.’”

### ***Climate crises have no boundaries***

Parliamentarian from Liberia, Johnson Gwaikolo, said a parliamentarian’s role is implementation, oversight, law making and protecting the safety, security and wellbeing of the citizens. “Parliaments should introduce appropriate legislation that moves away from using fossil fuels. LDCs are looking at creating partnerships and taking concrete steps that lead to sustainable development,” he added. “Parliamentarians must add voices to other partners from north and south. Climate crisis has no boundaries, but LDCs are most affected.”

Biyika Lawrence Songa, Ugandan MP, said that climate change affects everyone particularly women and children. While talking about fossil free future it is important to know who is producing and using most of the coal, petroleum and natural gas. He said, “We must answer these questions and look for alternatives. We need transparency and

openness. The rich countries expressed commitments during the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement to provide \$100 bn dollars to the Green Climate Fund every year, but how much money has been raised by now? How many LDCs benefited from that money? We call upon the developed governments to put their money as per their commitment.”

### ***Governments need to be compensated to leave oil in the ground***

He explained that Uganda can generate \$89.5 bn from its oil field, but wants to keep it in the ground, so countries need to be compensated so that they could leave their oilfields under the ground, said Biyika.

Maria Angelina Lopes Sarmiento, Vice-President of the National Parliament of East Timor, said that her country gained independence in 2002. ‘We have plenty of oil and gas in the Timor sea. An estimated 8 trillion cubic field of natural gas has been discovered. But the question is how to transition to a fossil fuel future?’ asked Ms Sarmiento adding, “There was a need to strike a balance between aspirations of developing countries and the need to go for a fossil fuel free future.”

Rebecca Yel Kamara, an MP from Sierra Leone, said that she has been calling upon her government to cut down subsidy on fossil fuel and use it on solar panels. “Governments should prioritise national projects to pay more attention to climate resilience and adaptation. We, parliamentarians, have our role. During elections, what is your message to the people? We have to talk to them to know where the suffering is coming from?” she asked.

“Poorer countries suffer because of barriers put up by bureaucracies to get funds. Please reduce too much bureaucracy so that we LDCs should have access to funds and can save our people’s lives” she said.

Dr Arjun Karki, Global Coordinator of LDC Watch, said that transition to 100% renewable and clean energy systems requires urgent actions but governments, businesses, workers and communities tend to protect the status quo and keep carbon-intensive industries alive.

“Governments including the US, Russia and European countries, provided subsidies worth \$5.9 trillion in 2020. A recent UN report says that for every dollar pledged to tackle the climate crisis, four dollars are spent on fossil fuel subsidies that keep the climate crisis alive,” said Dr Karki. “Across developing countries, about half of the amount of public resources to support fossil fuel consumption benefits the richest 20% of the population.”

“A people-centred just energy transition is critical to addressing current and future challenges. The concept of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) needs to also contribute to enhancing a just energy transition,” says Dr Karki.

The panel discussion was organized jointly by the Parliamentarians for a Fossil Fuel Free Future and the LDC Watch- a network of civil society organisations from global South.

# Experiencing Climate Change first hand – Wilfred Luirama, The Solomon Islands

Interview with Wilfred Luirama from Solomon Islands about the effects of climate change, as this is a country going to be affected by climate change....

'In fact, the Solomon Islands has already been affected. We have six main islands, and those in small islands are most affected, particularly those along the coast. Climate change really affects our people by displacing them, and when there is a sea level rise, it also affects our food security, as it heats up the ocean temperature and some of the marine species have to look for safe habitats somewhere.

Climate change has affected employment because people have to move from place to place and they have to leave their jobs and the normal part of their lives. How to earn money or how to adapt in a new environment is challenging for them. But when looking at climate change from the country's perspective, I think the Solomon Islands government and its people are battling that climate crisis.

We cannot only fight climate change in workshops or in meetings, we need to act, we need everyone to take responsibility. And while the majority of the citizens most times will blame the government, I think we, the people, must take ownership of the situation and responsibility to ensure we do some of the strategies or approaches to mitigate climate change within our control.

People have to accept that they have to move out of their comfort zone and move to another place, but some people can't adapt quickly to the new environment. The crisis is coming. I don't believe we can avoid climate change. It's coming. But what we need to do is come up with strong strategies, ideas and policies to work on relocation and mitigation.

## ***What mitigation policies is the government putting forward?***

One approach is to try to control the use of fossil fuels, and the government is taking a lot of positive actions. It's also creating a dialogue with affected and vulnerable communities, who have to move. Of course, to fix the climate issue is not an overnight thing because it has been happening over decades. So we have to be very mindful and smart as the climate crisis has multiple effects. When one part of the chain is affected, the rest are affected too.

## ***And what is your role?***

I founded a local NGO called Ocean Servant Foundation. We believe that we are the servants of the ocean. We



must be the servants. No rubbish, no tin, or any other form of littering should be done to the ocean. Of course, any injustice to the ocean is injustice to humanity.

### ***And what activities have you been carrying out?***

It's part of our Constitution that we have to take action. Firstly, we do practical work to pick rubbish, plastics and all forms of flotsam from the coast. People just carelessly throw away everything. But we pick them up and put them in the rubbish. The other part is to raise awareness. Try to educate people – the civic part of it is very important. If we educate people about not throwing diapers in the ocean, some of the plastics in the ocean and they understand that, they won't do it.

We need to talk with schools, so last year we organised a competition during the Independence Day for students to talk about how the ocean is helping them or how they benefit from it. It comes back to the idea that if we have clean ocean we will continue to have benefit from.

### ***Do you think this is an issue people are listening to at Doha?***

I can't speak to everyone about it, but those who feel the effect of climate change negatively, will definitely listen. But everyone is coming from their own perspective, so what affects the small islands might not affect people there.

### ***Is there anything in the Doha Programme of Action that is going to work for you?***

I believe very strongly in the fight against climate change. And I believe that if leaders in weak states, or in LDCs aren't taking a strong stand, those big countries will still be moving forward. And the rest of the LDCs will be losing like the past 50 years.

## **Interview: Muluberhan Berhe Hagos, Eritrea**

***Can you tell me a bit about your background? You're obviously an author, I believe you've published a number of books. Can you perhaps describe what you do and tell us about the organization you're with?***

My name is Muluberhan Berhe Hagos . I'm now a refugee activist. I used to be High Court judge, lecturer at the University of Asmara, Faculty of Law, and also I was freelance researcher and legal counsel. I published three books which focused on gender equality, rights of children, women, human rights and humanitarian law. It's what I did, and what brought me here, and my refugee rights' activism in relation to this conference. Moreover, I am a PhD candidate at the University of Tilburg.



## ***Can you tell me a bit about your background? Because obviously you've been a High Court judge and now you're a PhD student. So it's quite a difference. Why the change? What happened?***

I left Eritrea in late 2015 because of my activity, because of the publishing I did. I was actually in Eritrea when I did this research, initially I published it in the local language and I paid the price. It was not easy. Publishing itself was difficult and then after publishing, also because it deals with the customary law and with human rights, personal human rights issues, and gender equalities, which are part of human rights issues. And some higher government officials felt this was against the policy of the government, which I said was totally ridiculous. And I paid the price. But I still continue. I have people who helped me.

## ***And the book you published?***

The book (about gender equality in law) was published in the local language and now it's published in English so that people like you can understand it. And publishing this work needs help from people like you - Europeans or Americans. So this brought me into problems. People said it was some kind of infiltration but I was not doing anything. This cost me a lot. And finally I had to flee the country. This was in 2015. I have been outside of Eritrea ever since and now I'm very active working with refugees particularly.

## ***And where are you living at the moment?***

I'm living in Kampala, Uganda. So I worked as a volunteer in Uganda, West Africa for about four years. Now I'm doing my PhD in the Netherlands as well as living in Kampala. We have quite a big number of refugees in Kampala, who were like a ship without a chief because they barely know they have legal rights, they can barely defend themselves. That's briefly what we are doing. We have an organisation called Voice of Refugee and I'm the chairperson of the Voice of Refugees.

## **Reach Out**

For questions, feedback, article ideas, or story contributions, email [ldcnewsservice@gmail.com](mailto:ldcnewsservice@gmail.com) and we'll be in touch.

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