

HAMSATU ALLAMIN, 2016 Woman PeaceMaker



Hamsatu Allamin of Nigeria is a trusted negotiator and peacemaker between militants and security forces in her country's conflict-ridden and impoverished North East region. She serves as the regional manager of the North East section of the Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP), and a national executive member of the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria.

Allamin is an educator by profession. After getting her education at the University of Maiduguri, she relocated to a small village where her husband had inherited his father's position as a traditional leader. Allamin began teaching at a community college, and also started organizing forums for grassroots women to gather and discuss issues arising within the community.

With the rise of the militant group Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (JAS), commonly known as Boko Haram, Allamin was compelled to become a human rights defender and women's activist. She witnessed the violence escalating with the counter-productive strategies that the government and security forces were employing. "It was then that I took it upon myself to visit [the areas where JAS was recruiting] and know who these boys are, identify with the parents, sympathize with them, with the conviction that someone has to engage with them to stop the violence," she has stated.

Many of the communities, and the young men in particular, were skeptical of Allamin because she was a woman. But they eventually began opening up because she was one of the only people listening to their needs and grievances.

Allamin's deftness in listening, analyzing, and initiating new strategies led her to call on the Interfaith Mediation Center in Kaduna to intervene in what was happening in her region, which eventually led to the Presidential Committee for Dialogue — bringing national and international attention to the situation.

Allamin also created the Network of Civil Society Organizations for Peace, in the states where JAS originated, Borno and Yobe. After the abduction of nearly 300 schoolgirls from Chibok in 2014, the network was the first to hold a press conference — in Maiduguri six days later — effectively launching the Bring Back Our Girls campaign.

Through the NSRP, Allamin is implementing a project on countering violent extremism, focused on restoring social norms, changing the narrative of apathy toward the West, and developing a module for teaching peace and setting up peace clubs in Islamiya School in the state of Borno. Allamin is also the country representative of the Network of Women Activists Against Violent Extremism, an affiliate of the International Civil Society Action Network.



JANE ANYANGO, 2016 Woman PeaceMaker



Jane Anyango of Kenya is a grassroots peacemaker and the founding director of the Polycom Development Project, based in Africa’s largest informal settlement, Kibera. She is also the founder of Kibera Women for Peace and Fairness, which has since expanded to other settlements in Nairobi.

Anyango founded Polycom in response to the sexual violence and exploitation faced by young girls in Kibera, in particular a case in which a 39-year-old man was caught in a sex act with an 11-year-old girl. Polycom provides access to education, sports activities and sanitation for young women, enabling them to understand themselves and make informed decisions about their lives and bodies.

During violence surrounding the Kenya presidential election in late 2007, a young girl who Anyango had been working with was killed by the police. She and a friend decided to organize women in Kibera to protest and express their anger about the violence and killings they were witnessing. “In less than one hour, more than 200 were holding hands and marching,” she said. Within two weeks, more than 800 women from Kibera were gathering every week to protest and to keep the men in their lives from committing violent acts. Anyango became known as *Mama Wa Amani*, or “Woman of Peace”, and Kibera Women for Peace and Fairness was born.

In anticipation of the 2013 elections — the first since the disputed and violent polls in 2007 — Anyango launched a campaign entitled *Nena Tenda Amani*, promoting peace through action and advocacy. It divided Kibera into four regions and trained 50 women per region on peacebuilding and conflict mitigation, successfully diffusing many tense situations during the election. In 2014, during a standoff between the government and opposition, Anyango gathered more than 15,000 signatures calling for peace.

Anyango was nominated by the U.S. Embassy in Kenya for the International Women of Courage Award, and has received numerous recognitions for her grassroots peacebuilding work. She and her work with Kibera Women for Peace and Fairness were featured in the 2014 documentary *I Will Not Be Silenced*.



KHURSHID BANO, 2016 Woman PeaceMaker



Khurshid Bano of Pakistan is the founder and CEO of Da Hawwa Lur (Daughter of Eve), a women-led NGO that campaigns against gender-based violence and discrimination of women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Province, a deeply conservative and conflict-affected region of Pakistan. The organization provides free legal, psychological, and capacity-building support to women facing any kind of violence, and to those who have been displaced by violence or natural disasters in the province.

An activist and leader since 1986, Bano became the first woman union leader elected in KP and helped implement laws to end discrimination and violence against marginalized groups, particularly women, in the workplace. Recently, she launched the first all-women's union in KP, which creates awareness of the challenges faced by women working in all fields, from doctors and engineers to domestic and factory workers. Its agenda includes equal pay, prevention of harassment in the workplace, safety and security, and the health of women workers.

During the height of extremist activity in KP, in 2008, Bano initiated the Peace by Peace Campaign to get women and youth involved in maintaining peace within their own communities. Approximately 500 boys and girls were educated on conflict transformation and religious tolerance; dialogues were held with scholars from different religions and sects; and rural women were trained on their role in transforming the mindsets of their children away from radicalization.

The campaign also featured, on the initiative of Bano, an inter-religious celebration of the Hindu festival Diwali — which her colleague called “a very daring decision” given the intolerant and extremist hold that the Taliban and other militants had in KP. Hindus from Sind Province joined with Muslims in Peshawar, the provincial capital, to go to the temple to pray and celebrate the ancient festival together in peace.

In addition to her work with Da Hawwa Lur, Bano is an active member of the Pakistan Alliance against Sexual Harassment, which has been working for the implementation, drafting, and lobbying of laws on the topic. She has helped implement laws in 32 departments of KP. Bano is also a member of the Gender Working Group of the international CIVICUS alliance.



FATMA MEHDI HASSAM, 2016 Woman PeaceMaker



Fatma Mehdi Hassam of Western Sahara has been a refugee in Algeria for nearly 40 years because of the largely forgotten — yet longest-running — territorial conflict on the African continent. For 30 of those years, she has been raising the voices of fellow Saharawi women and advocating for their inclusion in governance and the peace process.

After fleeing her home in Western Sahara at the age of 7 while bombs fell around her, she walked without food or water for days through the desert with a small group of men and women. Mehdi arrived in the Saharawi refugee camps in Tindouf, Algeria, and has spent the rest of her life there. She has since become the president of the National Union of Saharawi

Women (NUSW); chair of the Women and Gender Cluster of the African Union’s Economic, Social, and Cultural Council; and the North Africa regional coordinator of Women Advancement for Economic and Leadership Empowerment in Africa.

Mehdi was a prominent student leader while studying in Libya, organizing cultural activities and educational opportunities for fellow Saharawi students to learn about their history and the dynamics of the conflict. She returned to the refugee camps determined to educate and organize those who were marginalized. Her first action as president of NUSW was to support people with disabilities to ensure that all members of society were being treated equally, and so all could be active participants in the daily life of the camps.

While the armed actors in the conflict negotiated a ceasefire and anticipated a resolution to the conflict in the 1990s, but which has failed thus far, Mehdi has focused on creating a culture of peace and collaboration within the camps, so that true peace could take hold in the aftermath of the war. She established “women’s houses” where women could engage in self-organized activities — everything from language courses to sports — and has worked tirelessly to empower women to take active roles in the governance of the camps. According to one statistic, today 85 percent of the administrative positions in the camps are occupied by women.

Mehdi continues to advocate for women’s inclusion in the peace process, government, and public life, and with NUSW has created an additional strategy of organizing women’s groups across borders throughout Africa to find new solutions to the stalemate her country finds itself, and to discuss issues of culture, religion, and women and resistance. The most recent international conference the network held was in April 2016, in the Sawahiri refugee camps, with women from places as diverse as Nigeria, Algeria, and Namibia.

