

The header for the 'MISSION STORIES' section. It consists of two light blue squares followed by a dark blue rectangular box containing the text 'MISSION STORIES' in white, uppercase letters.

MISSION STORIES

Yamoussoukro: Let's give tradition a try, the women say

«When, in a given situation, the elders came back and introduced their verdict with the words ‘The old woman has said’, that meant that there was no appeal possible against their decision,” Professor Henriette Diabaté told participants in the UNOCI colloquium on ‘The role of women intellectuals in the development of peace, held in Yamoussoukro on 24 October 2005.

Ms Diabaté, one of six panelists at the colloquium, was giving an example of traditional mechanisms for conflict management and prevention. Within this framework, she highlighted the role which alliances between peoples played in anticipating and preventing crises in pre-colonial Africa.

Some 450 representatives of women’s NGOs, youth associations, the United Nations, Ivorian state institutions, the Forces Nouvelles and the diplomatic corps attended the colloquium, held at the Felix Houphouet Boigny Foundation.

In his opening address, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Côte d’Ivoire, Mr Pierre Schori, stated that UNOCI attached great importance to a dynamic search for peace that includes all strata of Ivorian society. He stressed that women had to be involved in all mechanisms, in keeping with UN Security Council resolution 1325 of 31 October 2000.

He also declared the establishment of a year for peace, from 31 October 2005 to 30 October 2006, which, he said, would be a year of reflection and action to develop a culture of peace.

The moderator of the colloquium, Mr Ahmedou Ould Abdallah, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for West Africa, said that peace was a necessary condition for the well-being of West Africa’s populations.

Professor Jacqueline Oble, president of the Réseau des Femmes Anciens Ministres de Côte d’Ivoire [Network of Former Women Ministers of Côte d’Ivoire] spoke of the links between laws and the culture of peace. Using examples drawn from modern Ivorian history, she showed that laws can spark conflicts as well as defuse them. Ms Oble said she hoped resolution 1633 would be the last on the Ivorian crisis and that it would be implemented “in good faith” so as to restore peace to Côte d’Ivoire.

Ms Mariam Dao Gabala, head of the Coalition des Femmes leaders de Côte d'Ivoire [Coalition of Women Leaders in Côte d'Ivoire] spoke on the role that women can play in situations like the Ivorian crisis.

Ms Salimata Porquet, president of the International Federation of Women for Equality and Development launched an appeal for women to be included in decision-making. Pending gender parity, more women should be involved in the processes of negotiation, resolution and management of the crisis, she said.

Ms Fatoumata Traoré, a member of the political directorate of the Forces Nouvelles, focussed on the role which the media should play in times of crisis.

The colloquium was also addressed by Ms Saran Daraba, a founding member and former chairperson of the Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET), who demonstrated how determined women armed with resources drawn from the culture of their regions can resolve even serious problems. MARWOPNET played a key role as mediators in the conflicts between Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone .

Following the plenary session, which included the exposés by the panelists and a debate, the participants broke up for discussions in four workshops on : Women and Culture of Peace; Arts and Culture of Peace; Youth and Culture of Peace; and Media and Culture of Peace. During these discussions, the importance of both formal and traditional education was highlighted, as was the need for a greater measure of responsibility by opinion leaders. Participants also underscored the fact that developing a culture of peace in Côte d'Ivoire required the use of traditional conflict prevention and management mechanisms.

A joint declaration was adopted by acclamation at a late-evening plenary following the presentation of the reports of the various workshops.

The colloquium was accompanied by a number of other activities, including an art exhibition on the theme of 'Raising Awareness', performances by local drama groups and a fashion show that highlighted the work of a designer from the town of Daloa.

An exhibition involving NGOs and UN bodies, including UNOCI, WFP, OCHA, UNDP and MARWOPNET, enabled participants and visitors to obtain on-the-spot information on the action of these bodies.

The event was capped by a concert featuring a band made up of Bangladeshi soldiers and Ivorians, Malian singer Amy Koné, and Ivorian singers Aicha Koné and La Tigresse Sidonie. About 2,000 persons attended this event, held in the main hall of the Felix Houphouet Boigny Foundation.

Both the colloquium and the concert were broadcast live by ONUCI FM, and shown on national television, the RTI, as well as TV Notre Patrie in Bouaké.



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