



## EDITORIAL

BY VASU GOUNDEN

**H**istorically, gender-based exclusion, including women's absence from peace negotiating forums, has resulted in damaging setbacks in reconciliation and post-conflict recovery efforts. Our work at ACCORD with women in the Somali, Burundi and DRC conflicts bore testimony to the crucial role that women play in peace negotiations. The women of Somalia played a critical role in brokering peace in Mogadishu in 1998. When the city was besieged by opposing militia groups, the women negotiated a ceasefire to allow men, women and children to go about their daily lives. In a similar display of iron will in 2002, the women of the DRC barricaded their men-folk inside the Inter-Congolese Dialogue venue and demanded that they do not leave the venue until they sign the peace agreement!

As steps are taken on the continent to address the difficulties that women face in conflict situations, and to achieve the objective of increasing women's participation in peace processes, awareness needs to be raised on, firstly, why women are particularly at risk and the challenges they face on the continent, and secondly, what achievements have been made to mainstream gender at decision-making levels of sub-regional organisations. This special edition of *Conflict Trends*, on Women, Peace and Security, seeks to illustrate and analyse these issues and stimulate debate on the continent regarding the positive contribution that women make on peace and security issues.

Conflict results in significant transformation and disruptions in the structures and culture of society, including gender relations that determine

access to resources and control. These disruptions tend to continue after a peace agreement has been signed, and they negatively affect the long-term resolution of the conflict. Women have generally been viewed as vulnerable and in need of protection during these destabilising times. Although women often do need special consideration for protection, they are also powerful forces for change and play an important role in regaining a balance in gender relations and bringing long-term peace and stability to their war-torn communities.

This edition comes at a historical moment in Africa with the recent adoption of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa by African Union Heads of State and Government. This recent development is indicative of the African Union's commitment to the advancement of gender equality and the recognition of the role that women play in conflict resolution.

At ACCORD we applaud the adoption of the Protocol and other achievements gained by women's groups in placing women's issues squarely on the African and international peace and security agenda. We also continue to support women's lobbying efforts to mainstream gender in the African Union and NEPAD, through our various networks and affiliations. We are thus pleased to partner with UNIFEM on this special edition of *Conflict Trends* and trust that it will further the debate and raise awareness of the links between women, peace and security.

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