



## IPI MEETING BRIEF

### **Women and Peace in the Great Lakes Region: Special Envoy Mary Robinson at IPI**

After almost twenty years of continual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region, the February 24<sup>th</sup> Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework could be a game changer. With the signatures of eleven heads of state and support from four international organizations, the framework brings a renewed sense of purpose to the peace process. Women, who have been disproportionately affected by the ongoing violence, can play an important role in advancing peace at all levels.

The UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region of Africa, H.E. Mrs. Mary Robinson, shared these key messages at the International Peace Institute (IPI) on September 20, 2013. An engaging discussion with an audience of diplomats, UN personnel, and members of civil society produced the following insights.

1. Mrs. Robinson works with regional heads of state to implement the framework agreement, which she has deemed the “Framework of Hope.” But she is also working closely with women’s groups, young people, and others in civil society, through a bottom-up approach to implement the agreement and create a “peace dividend” to benefit the people of the region.
2. A ten-member technical support committee has established implementation benchmarks, including on issues regarding regional cooperation and accountability for war crimes, which were approved by the heads of state of the signatory countries during the meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism held on the margins of the General Assembly on September 23<sup>rd</sup> in New York. Mrs. Robinson intends to call for the participation of women on this high-level committee, which has no female members.
3. In July, Mrs. Robinson presided over a conference of 150 women from the region in Bujumbura, Burundi, to increase their knowledge of the framework agreement, hear their input on its implementation, and work on a regional action plan for Security Council Resolution 1325. A regional communication platform to support the continued engagement of women’s groups is needed, to highlight their priorities across socioeconomic and security issues.
4. An inclusive approach is critical, and women are already active in peacebuilding—particularly in community-based processes and reconciliation. Youth also have a central role to play in the DRC, where 50% of the population is less than 19 years old. Mrs. Robinson also emphasized male champions for women, citing Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa as an inspiring voice.
5. Mrs. Robinson suggested that the UN Intervention Brigade, in pushing back the M23 rebel group, has helped the people of Goma feel more secure. This has changed the dynamic, opening the possibility for the Kampala dialogue and peace talks to be revitalized. It has been challenging to persuade some on the ground that a military-only solution will not lead to sustainable peace.

Mrs. Robinson discussed additional pressing issues in the region, including the actions of armed groups, the humanitarian crisis and safe return of refugees, and the defense of human rights. She insisted on the urgent need for economic development, which could create a peace dividend for the local populations. The event was part of IPI’s Women, Peace & Security Series.

– Andrea Ó Súilleabháin & Marie O’Reilly