

2022 Feminist Voices

Collection of speeches and interviews conducted by the RAJA-Danièle Marcovici Foundation



In 2022, the RAJA-Danièle Marcovici Foundation collected the testimonies of a dozen contemporary feminist figures from all over the world: activists, doctors, journalists...

You can also read the speeches of the Foundation's President and the Executive Director.

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1. Bouchera Azzouz:

Professional integration of women in the disadvantaged neighbourhoods



A feminist activist, Bouchera Azzouz is a film director and essayist from Bobigny. Through her writings and movies, she questions the question of identity, integration and citizenship, as well as the systemic struggles for equality and emancipation of women. She was general secretary of the movement Ni Putes Ni Soumises from 2007 to 2009, and then founded her own movement, Féminisme Populaire. She then focused her action on supporting women's autonomy but also on political advocacy work. She is committed to women from working-class neighborhoods, convinced that they are a powerful vector for the transformation, but also bearers of a "popular" feminism, a feminism of urgency, a feminism that is pragmatic and united. To demonstrate this, she wrote and directed a series of three documentaries that form a trilogy exploring the genesis of popular feminism, *Nos Mères Nos Daronnes*, *On nous appelait beurettes* and *Meufs de (LA) Cité*.

The Foundation wanted to know more about the situation of women in the Priority Urban Neighbourhoods .

In the disadvantaged neighborhoods, what observations do you make about the professional integration of women?

For a long time, women from working-class neighborhoods were left out of the mainstream of public policy, and alexaon the subject of economic emancipation. At best confined to social benefits, it has been necessary to fight for and advance the issue of equality, so that little by little, women are considered to want and to be the bearers of emancipation dynamics, pushing them to fully take their place outside the private and family spheres in which they have been kept.

The figures speak for themselves on this subject and women living in priority neighbourhoods face greater difficulties in finding work. The unemployment rate for women living in a disadvantaged neighborhoods is 2.6 times higher than for women in other neighborhoods.

“Women living in the disadvantaged neighborhoods of the city’s policy suffer from a double inequality, both territorial and gendered. In terms of employment, they are in a less favorable situation than men living in the disadvantaged neighborhoods and women in the surrounding urban units. Therefore it is essential to carry out actions to promote the professional integration of women living in the disadvantaged neighborhoods. The mobilization, investment, and coordination of as many people as possible is essential to facilitate access to employment for these women. (Prefect of the Ile de France Region, Press release Paris, 19 February 2018).

What are the main obstacles that these women face?

They suffer double or even triple discrimination due to their situation as women, as people living in difficult socio-economic conditions and often being of foreign origin. In addition, there are difficulties with childcare, transport, and the roles assigned to women and men: the pressures are exerted, among other things, by the marital situation, as women living in a couple are less likely to have paid work or to be looking for it, to look after the household. As a result, when they work, they must take on the remaining family burden. Getting into employability is a real obstacle course due to the complex access to information and job opportunities. Lack of self-confidence and self-esteem can also be an obstacle to mobilizing on a professional project.

How to promote their professional integration?

Promoting the professional integration of women is first and foremost a necessity. We cannot advocate gender equality without paying major attention to the emancipation of women and the means given to them in view of the difficulties and obstacles inherent in the very fact that they are women. There is also a need for strong advocacy for the economic empowerment of women. The experience acquired through our programs to support women's autonomy has led me to advocate the establishment in each municipality of places dedicated to this subject. Places that can understand women and their projects in a global way, to give each of them the means to overcome the multiple obstacles that keep them in poverty or exclude them from employment.

2. Anne Barre:

A look back at COP 27



Anne Barre coordinates the gender and climate policy of the WECF network - Women Engage for a Common Future, an ecofeminist NGO, member of the Women and Gender Constituency of the Climate Convention which defends women's rights and gender justice in the implementation of the Paris Agreement. Involved for 20 years in the WECF network, Anne has contributed to the implementation of numerous field projects in the areas of access to water, sustainable agriculture and energy, and environmental health. In 2008, she founded the French branch of WECF, which she chaired for 8 years. Since the COP21, Anne coordinates the organisation of the Gender and Climate Solutions Award, which promotes and supports the scaling up of exemplary initiatives demonstrating the need to fully integrate gender justice into national and global climate policies.

The Foundation spoke to Anne Barre following COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, between 6 and 18 November 2022.

What is your overall feedback on COP27?

This COP took place on the African continent, a continent that is currently facing multiple large-scale crises. First, a climate crisis that is hitting hardest countries and populations that contribute the least to global emissions. There are also economic and social crises, resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic that has severely affected the poorest, especially women, who live mostly on informal incomes, and are confronted with increased gender-based violence. Finally, the continent is plunged into a major energy crisis fueled by conflict, in particular Russia's war with Ukraine.

In this context, it was essential that the international community priorities the needs of this region, and recognize the demands of African women and girls as actors in the fight against climate change.

In this sense we can say that the main positive result of COP27 is the decision to establish a loss and damage fund to financially compensate the poorest countries that face irreversible damage from climate disasters and long-term impacts. We can also welcome the progress on the governance and operationalization of the loss and damage assistance mechanism. A new advisory board will be set up, in which representatives of the Women and Gender, Indigenous Peoples and Youth watchdog groups will have a seat.

However, we are very disappointed by the lack of political will of world leaders on climate mitigation. Indeed, this COP did not result in a commitment to phase out fossil fuels, while science, the IPCC, keeps warning us about the increase of CO2 emissions on a global scale. The heads of state, like bad doctors, are focusing on band-aids without providing a cure for the disease.

On the other hand, more than 600 lobbyists from the fossil fuel and nuclear industries walked the corridors of the COP to promote their false solutions. For example, the press reported that some 20 climate change agreements on oil and gas were signed during the conference.

What progress has been made on gender and climate? What are the points of attention?

The revision of the Paris Agreement's Gender Action Plan, which was the subject of fierce negotiations, was approved only in the final hours of the COP, but it does not provide any breakthrough. The decision contains no concrete proposals to address the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has hit women and gender minorities much harder, as several UN reports have shown.

Nor does the text respond to the gendered impacts of the war in Ukraine, or the resulting soaring food prices, or the blatant rollback of women's rights around the world.

Worse, in Sharm-El-Sheikh, the voices of local and indigenous women were ignored, even though we had fought in Madrid in 2019 for their inclusion in this gender action plan. In addition, many women faced racial discrimination, surveillance, harassment, and intimidation throughout the COP, from the visa application process to the last day of their participation in the conference. How can fair participation of civil society be ensured under these conditions?

We also invited to COP27 all the winners of the Gender and Climate Solutions Award since 2015, more than 20 people who were able to meet with policy makers and donors in order to have their expertise and action recognized. We presented the FAREDEIC project in Morocco, the FEDIAAC project in Senegal and the REGAIN project in Cameroon, Colombia and the DRC. The REGAIN project is now being implemented by WECF with some of our laureates thanks to the co-financing of the French Development Agency, and the RAJA-Danièle Marcovici Foundation, and which stems from the Gender and Climate Solutions.

For example, the director of ENDA Colombia, Maria Victoria Bojaca Penagos, presented the work of women waste pickers in Bogotá, who contribute to the city's climate policy while strengthening the solidarity and circular economy in their neighborhoods.

What is your analysis of the mobilization of feminist civil society?

This mobilization was very strong. The Women and Gender Constituency brought the voice of African feminists to COP27, who came in large numbers to shout out their demands: the need to strengthen the equitable participation of women in decision-making processes at all levels, the urgency of supporting a fair and equitable transition for all and of moving away from fossil fuels, and the need to access adequate financing, focused on human rights. They also demand the realization of their land rights so that they can protect their forests and lands; the integration of the ancestral knowledge held by indigenous peoples and women, so that it can be safeguarded as a key climate solution.

Every day in Sharm-El-Sheikh, we demonstrated against neo-colonial discourses on imported development models and risky technological solutions such as carbon capture and storage, or ‘net zero’ offsets that impact indigenous territories without having been able to demonstrate a real benefit in terms of emission reductions. Within the new 5-year program on climate technology development and transfer – adopted and launched at COP27 – we have succeeded in strengthening the place and expertise of women, indigenous peoples and youth, through the valorization of their knowledge and actions.

How can civil society prepare for COP28?

We cannot accept that the COPs become “trade fairs” where juicy contracts are negotiated, to the detriment of ambitious decisions that must enable people to face the climate cataclysm that awaits us.

Therefore, civil society organizations, in particular members of the observer groups of youth, indigenous peoples, women and gender, trade unions, and environmental organizations joined together in Sharm-El-Sheikh to present a People’s Declaration for Climate Justice on November 18 during the Peoples’ Plenary. The ceremony, which took place in one of the large plenary halls of the conference center, began with the words “We are all connected, human and non-human... everything is sacred and what has been created cannot be part of a market. Nature is life.

To prepare for COP28, we will continue and amplify this collective mobilization, both on the ground, by strengthening feminist climate actions implemented with our partners, and by promoting exchanges of experience within the powerful networks of which we are members. We will also be present in global governance, by continuing our involvement in all national and international political processes -including the UN-related to the climate convention, the 2030 Agenda of the SDGs, women’s rights, and gender equality.

We count on the support of philanthropic actors who are committed to strengthening the means of civil society that acts concretely and daily for climate justice.

3. Anne Bideau:

International Day of the Girl



After several years as director of the Solidarités International offices in Indonesia, Liberia and Macedonia, Anne Bideau joined the French Red Cross in 2006. She was first in charge of the regional office of the organisation in Asia, then in the Middle East and in the Horn of Africa. She then became head of the technical expertise and emergency response department for international operations, and finally director of volunteer activities and engagement for France. In July 2021, she took over the management of the NGO Plan International France.

The Foundation spoke to Anne Bideau about the origins of International Girls' Rights Day, celebrated every year on 11 October, and the actions undertaken by Plan International on this occasion.

Can you introduce yourself?

After several years as the Director of Solidarités International offices in Indonesia, Liberia and Macedonia, I joined the French Red Cross in 2006.

First, I oversaw the regional office of the organization in Asia, then in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa. Later on, I was in charge of the technical expertise and emergency response department for international operations. Finally, I was the Director of volunteer activities and engagement for France. In July 2021, I took over the management of the NGO Plan International France.

Can you introduce Plan International France?

Plan International France is an independent international solidarity organization, member of the Plan International network, which works for the defense of children's rights. Created in 1993, Plan International France fights for the respect of children's rights, particularly those of girls. In the context of development or in emergency situations, Plan International France intervenes in Asia, Africa and Latin America and supports children and their communities with sustainable solutions adapted to their needs.

To implement its programs, the NGO can count on the support of 32,000 sponsors belonging to a loyal community of more than 40,000 donors, on committed companies and foundations, as well as on public grants.

In France, Plan International France also lobbies political and institutional decision-makers and raises public awareness of girls' rights and international solidarity issues.

What is your assessment of girls' rights around the world?

Even today, being born and being a girl does not offer the same opportunities, the same conditions, the same life perspectives as those of a boy.

School drop-out, excision, street harassment, online harassment, forced marriages, sexist and sexual violence, early pregnancies... Girls' consent is ignored, they are victims of inequalities, exclusion, discrimination, and violence, which hinders their rights, their emancipation and has serious consequences on their lives:

- 12 million girls are married each year, nearly 1 girl every 2 seconds.
- 200 million girls and women have been excised worldwide. 2 million cases of genital mutilation could occur by 2030, whereas they could be avoided.

- In France, 82% of women began experiencing street harassment before the age of 17. Of these, 65% claim to have been harassed before the age of 15.
- In 2020, 58% of girls aged 15 to 25 have already been victims of harassment or abuse on social networks.

How is Plan International working for girls' rights around the world?

Plan International works locally with communities through development and mentoring programs, as well as emergency humanitarian aid. These actions aim to enable girls to know and defend their rights, to improve their access to safe, quality education and vocational training, and to enable them to decide for themselves about their future. We ensure that boys, families, teachers, and local authorities are included to change attitudes and gender relations in communities.

Plan International also works to influence public policy and advocate with decision-makers at local, government and international levels for laws that protect girls' rights. As a result of Plan International's work, child marriage has been banned in over 10 countries:

- Zimbabwe in 2016
- El Salvador, Niger, Malawi, Guatemala, Honduras in 2017
- Tanzania and Mozambique in 2019
- In Dominican Republic in 2021
- In the Philippines in January 2022

Our advocacy work in France and internationally is helping to raise awareness of the importance of promoting girls' rights and gender equality, and the role of education in achieving this.

Why was the International Day for the Girl created? What does Plan International do on this day?

Even today, girls' rights are violated, and their consent ignored. Discrimination, gender-based violence and inequality prevent girls from becoming free women. That is why in 2012, at the initiative of Plan International, the UN recognized 11 October as the International Day for the Girls. On the 10th edition of this day, the NGO Plan International France alerts on the non-respect of girls' consent and launches the mobilization campaign "We didn't say yes" to say STOP to gender-based violence and YES to the respect of their consent in France and in the world.

4. Aya Chebbi:

The pan-African feminist movement Nala



Ms. Aya Chebbi is a multi award-winning Pan-African feminist. She rose to prominence as a voice for democracy and shot to global fame as a political blogger during 2010/2011 Tunisia's Revolution. She received the 2019 Gates Foundation Campaign Award and was named in Forbes' Africa's 50 Most Powerful Women and New African Magazine List of 100 Most Influential Africans.

Following its intervention at the Generation Equality Forum (FGE) in 2021, the Foundation wanted to know more about its commitment and the Nala collective it created with other pan-African feminists.

You have an impressive record of activism, and you are one of the most prominent advocates for gender equality. For our readers who may not know you, could you present yourself and tell us more about what you do and why?

I am a pan African feminist which means that I live every day to mobilize for the integration of Africa, and continue to unite around our agenda. For me, it's about female liberation and liberation from inequality and injustices. My work is all around Pan African mobilization and solidarity. I served in the African Union where I focused on how to mobilize young people as our demographic power that represents the continent. Now I founded Nala Feminist Collective to focus on young women particularly and how we can unite as a continent for women to be free.

You were part of the opening Ceremony of the Generation Equality Forum 2021 last year and gave an inspirational speech. What did this event mean for feminist organizations worldwide? What did it mean for you?

France hosts many conferences in the name of gender equality and as part of the President's Agenda. But this one is about generational transition. We are reflecting on the 25 years since Beijing to implement the vision for the next few decades, including a commitment for the next five years.

It was so important that the young African women's voices and agenda were included. Because of COVID19, the forum was held over two years instead of one: it gave us more time to do consultations; to mobilize on the ground; to have more participation; more critical voices; to get more time to raise consciousness around the issues of Beijing +25. The event itself can be regarded as the arrival, the destination. It was very important for us to be on the platform to push decision makers. It was important to challenge the narrative and to avoid the feminist agenda being a club of male politicians discussing feminism and foreign policy.

It meant to me that our message was clear. Not only me, but many young feminists who spoke that day. Our message was clear and loud, that: nothing for us without us; things are not business as usual; African young feminists are bold, and we know exactly what we want, and we will pursue it. We are watchdogging you; we are holding you accountable; we're not letting anything go by without having justice and having accountability.

How did the GEF help you and your organization to collaborate deeper with other organizations?

I've been in diplomacy and intergovernmental spaces for a few years. It was important to see who the leading actors on this agenda are and what they are committing because it was a defining moment to the next five years.

According to you, a year after the launch of the GEF, what are its main achievements?

In August 2021, we organized 6 intergenerational dialogues for accountability to ask African governments who are in GEF Action Coalitions "You committed this million. What are you doing with that money? Where will it go?"

At the intergovernmental, global and UN levels, I haven't seen much. That is dangerous because we cannot allow for these big moments to go away. \$40 billion U.S. dollars were committed but there are no structures, no clear accountability framework yet.

Of course, I cannot say nothing happened. On the UN's side, Action Coalitions continued to work. The issue is that these bureaucratic institutions are not working with the pace of the challenge we're facing. They are not working with the speed of the technology we have and the expectation of our generation.

Then you go on the national level and if the country has elections, everybody is focused on that. We are being told "the administration might change or now the leadership is busy...". But gender is mainstream. You cannot pause it and do your election and then come back to it. That's unacceptable. Many of these governments use the feminist agenda for their election, and then once they're elected, what did they do?

What are you expecting from the GEF for the 4 years to come, when the action coalitions will end?

I think we need to be more serious about the feminist agenda and not just use and misuse feminism. All male leaders now, which is most of the world rulers come out and say they're feminists. But you look at their cabinet, at their programs, at their accountability on the national planning you don't see anything feminist about what they do. We need to take that seriously. World leaders need to be accountable if they say they're feminists, they must act as feminists. They must budget as feminists. They must fund feminists. They must pass feminist policies and if they don't do that, they shouldn't say they are feminists.

The second thing we must follow is the money. Where is the money going? There is no transparency around these \$40 billion. When they were committed, they didn't say where each chunk of money was going. We must be able to index it and track it.

You are the founder of the pan-African feminist collective Nalafem. Could you explain to us what is it about? How is this related to GEF?

We launched the initiative in Paris Forum, on the 1st of July and we just came back from Abuja celebrating one year. We also organized our first summit to hold the government accountable. We take it every year to a different African country and try to mobilize in support of young feminists doing the work on the ground in their communities. Nala Feminist Collective came out of Africa young woman Beijing+25 manifesto, which is a manifesto developed by 1500 young people in Africa and the diaspora. It has 10 bold demands, and the idea was to mobilize and advocate for those demands. We mobilized 10,000 signatures and we took them to UN agencies and African Union and different stakeholders. We succeeded to include eight out of the 10 demands into the action coalitions, except mental health and education. Naturally we launched officially in Paris, and we announced our Nala Council, which has 17 African women leaders under 40. We are the youngest parliamentarians, policymakers, ministers, diplomats on the continent and many of our Council are very radical, bold feminist voices and activists. The idea is to bring all of us together to push the agenda because together we do have a lot of influence, whether in government, in the community or on social media. Secondly, it's easier to track what is happening nationally and to influence policy change when we have a Council member who is part of the global conversation there.

You organised the Inaugural Nalafem Summit on the 1st of July to celebrate Nala's 1st anniversary and launched a collective book "I am Nala". Could you tell us more about this?

It's our first book in celebration of one year. The book has 7 chapters about the leadership journey of members of Nala Council. They tell the stories of their personal learnings, the challenges they face and what each of them is advocating for. The seven chapters advocate for seven demands of our manifesto, the sustainable development goals and Agenda 2063.

You'll find in the book for example, the story of the Chief of Staff of the Chief Justice of Kenya, Rose, talking about access to justice from a feminist stance, and what she's faced in her life. She's been part of the 2010 constitutional change. She also helped set-up Kenya's First Specialised Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Court.

When we launched the book, we also hosted some dialogues with UN agencies where we discussed the book. We want to bring all this policy level work back to our lived experiences and the story of why we do what we do, why we fight for our rights as young women. It's because you cannot, not be a feminist when every day reminds you of your own gender and you face hardships from the moment you are born, in your family, in school, in the workplace, everywhere.

We're also using the book to fundraise for the collective because Nalafem is not an NGO, it's a platform. We're not registered. We are a coalition of young feminists trying to shift things, shake things up and challenge the status quo.

When we grew up, we didn't find many stories of African women. They were erased from history. African women fought with men in revolutions, in the liberation movements. But then history just made them invisible, and we don't want that for us and our mothers and grandmothers. We want to make sure that our generation documents their own struggle so we can inspire girls and future generations to make this world a better place, an equal just and peaceful place.

5. Erica Hensley:

Abortion rights under threat



Erica Hensley is a journalist with The Fuller Project specializing in data analysis and public health in the United States, with a particular focus on reproductive health and equity. Before joining The Fuller Project, she freelanced and worked as an investigative reporter focusing on public health for one of the first Southern non-profit digital outlets, Mississippi Today, where she was a Knight Foundation fellow and her COVID-19.

In her interview with the Foundation, she discusses the consequences of a potential reversal of *Roe v. Wade* by the Supreme Court. A few weeks after this exchange, the Supreme Court made the reversal official, thereby acknowledging that from now on the right to abortion will no longer be protected by the federal Constitution.

Could you explain to us what is the actual legislation regarding abortion in the United States? Is abortion easy to access?

In the US access really depends on where you are. The federal legal regulation is that states can restrict abortion, but they cannot ban it before viability (about 24 weeks), and that was from a Supreme Court case in the 1990s Planned Parenthood v. Casey, that really upheld the 1973 Roe v. Wade case, which pretty much established a woman's right to choose an abortion. I think that language gets confused a lot. And to me during this period I think important to draw attention to the fact that we never really codified the right to an abortion in the US.

In the 70s we interpreted the Constitution to mean that women had that right to make that decision, and then in the 1990s the Supreme Court upheld that decision and made it a little bit more advanced, saying that states, they're allowed to restrict abortion – like enforcing waiting periods, requiring abortions be performed by a doctor – but they cannot outright ban it before viability. So that's been the standard for decades. The access really depends on where you live. Mississippi has only had one abortion clinic for years, and this is about the size of Greece. If you are not in Jackson, the capital you must travel, either to the capital or out of state to get the procedure. And that of course, brings up all kinds of other complications. If you have a transportation, if you have childcare.

It is also not free, the average is about 500 dollars for pill abortion but can be much more later in pregnancy. Some insurance providers will cover it, but for example if you're on Medicaid, which is our state sponsored health insurance if you're low income, they cannot cover it unless there's extreme reasons or medical emergencies. We have the right in the US, but it has never been easy to access for everyone and it all depends on where you live.

There was a leak a few days ago about the Supreme Court wanting to strike down the landmark Roe v. Wade decision. Could you tell us more about this?

The leak was basically a drafted opinion that said Roe v. Wade should be overturned, and what we've learned since and what those of us who've covered politics here before have known is that the Supreme Court is this very veiled operation. There's not a lot of public interface. There's not a lot of public access. They are not elected but appointed by the President so it's really this important institution in our government but there is not a lot of oversight. There are nine Supreme Court justices. They have a lifetime appointment, so they have to either die or step down.

It's interesting because Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who was a long-time serving justice who passed away in 2020. She was a champion for abortion rights. But she died while on the court and while President Trump was in office, so that appointment automatically became open, and it went to a very different ideological Justice. Even though our Justices are supposed to be nonpartisan, they're still appointed by a partisan president. They're appointing people who tend to agree with their interpretation of the law. You know, for Republicans, it's the right to bear arms, sort of conservative when it comes to financial and privacy rights of people. It's ironic because the abortion decision was originally a privacy decision, the right chose for oneself.

Once Justice Ginsburg passed away, that just kind of opened the floodgates for what Republicans already wanted, which was a majority on the Supreme Court. And now they have it with 6 Conservatives and 3 Liberals. It's just heavily conservative, and unless one of the conservative justices moves to the middle, the decisions are kind of cut and dry.

About the leak, they work on these drafts internally and this is something that has always happened. They write things up, they send it to the colleagues to decide. Is this your interpretation of the Constitution? You know that it was not a surprise to me that this piece of paper existed.

What the surprise was is that it got out because that is unprecedented. To me it doesn't really matter why it was leaked. It matters that it jolted people upright to know this is maybe coming in a month that could reverse 50 years of federal abortion protections. But we do want to be very clear that it the draft still could change.

Roe v. Wade case was an interpretation of our 14th amendment of our Constitution, which said that abortion is basically a private decision between a patient and a provider, and the US government can't interfere with that. So again, it was never really a solid right to abortion. It was an interpretation that that should be as private decision. And it was not until the 1990s with the Planned Parenthood v. Casey case that the US Supreme Court made it more concrete. States can restrict abortion, but they cannot outright ban it.

What is happening now is the result of a move Mississippi made in 2018, betting that it will go up to the Supreme Court, who by then would be Conservative, and would be more likely to overturn abortion. In 2018, Mississippi passed their 15-week abortion ban, making most abortions illegal after 15 weeks of pregnancy, about two months earlier than Roe. They passed that law knowing it was unconstitutional, they knew that it would be blocked because they cannot ban abortion before viability, which is around 24 weeks. And they knew it, they wanted this to go to the Supreme Court.

President Trump was in office and had already appointed one Supreme Court Justice. They thought there will be other openings and Trump was openly against abortion.

The timing on Mississippi's part was very purposeful. They passed the law in 2018. Local courts immediately blocked it, it's unconstitutional, so this law has never been in effect in Mississippi. There are three levels to courts, all got blocked. The state appealed to the Supreme Court, and that was the real shocking moment for me last year because the Supreme Court agreed to hear this case. For two decades states have tried to get the Supreme Court to take up an abortion case like this and they've always said no, because it's decided per that Planned Parenthood v. Casey case.

For me when they said yes, we will take this, was when it was kind of like this is real. It also really opened the floodgates for other states to start passing all these bans you see right now: six-week bans, total bans, 15-week bans. 2 years ago, none of these existed, but it's just been this flood. All because of just one little Mississippi case, and I don't mean little to degrade it. It had a huge impact, but I don't think most Americans at the time were paying enough attention to realize what it could do.

And in one month you might not be able to get an abortion in half of our states, as the Supreme Court decision is due for next month. We have 50 states here. 13 of them have what's called a trigger law, which means automatically in those states, abortion will be illegal. Some have different caveats where it has to be 30 days, some need the state attorney to like sign off on it, some say immediately. So again, it comes down to where you live, where you were born and maybe where you cannot afford to leave, or maybe where you've chosen to be because you love the place. All this will determine your access to abortion.

In total, there are about 26 states that have said they will quickly move to ban it.

If the Supreme Court overturns abortion rights, what would become the legislation regarding abortion? What would be the consequences for women? For society?

The consequences for women will be the state will decide if you are able to get an abortion or not legally. And I think it will reinforce self-managed abortion by pills. Is not a medical risk for earlier pregnancies, so your risk will be mostly legal. The state that you live in determines your rights with regard to your reproductive freedom. Which is unprecedented in my lifetime.

For example, there were about 55,000 abortions in Texas per year for the past decade.

And they have a trigger law. So that's 55,000 pregnant people who will have to either self-manage at home or leave the state. In Mississippi there was about 3000 abortions, so that's still 3000 people who won't be able to get access anymore. Mississippi is much poorer. It's the poorest state in the nation. There's a lot of health disparities. We don't have great access to sex education or birth control. We have more unplanned pregnancies. We're just going to see that the state is not ready to take care of that.

It just carves out more health disparities. Either you have the money, the time off work, the support from a partner or a family member to take care of the kids you already have, and you can get a plane ticket or you can take the long drive out of state. Or you don't and you have no option by no fault of your own. The state is telling you because you might not have the money right now or a car, you can't get an abortion where you live. It kind of pushes folks into the shadows more.

Self-managed is safe but your risk will be legal. And I do talk to obstetricians who say this has a sort of chilling effect on women. You're not going to be as honest with your provider that you might have self-managed an abortion because you're worried about your own risk. You're now worried about their risk because a lot of these penalties are on the providers, not yet the woman. It's just pushing women and pregnant people into the shadows in an already vulnerable time because we have the highest maternal mortality rates in the developed world. In the Deep South where I live, we aren't able to even take care of people who want to give birth. We have the highest infant mortality rate in the developed world. We're not doing a good job of taking care of our pregnant people in this country. Yet by default we might have more pregnant people who don't want to be, and that's dangerous here. And I don't say that from an subjective place I say that statistically because we have so many people that die during and after childbirth year.

According to you, was this move something to expect from the Supreme Court? Why?

The information and the drafted opinion to overturn Roe V. Wade was not a surprise to me because President Trump said this is what he was going to do. Republicans, in very conservative states, have said, this is what they wanted to happen.

Most states in the Deep South have passed a ton of laws in the last 20 years to restrict or limit or unconstitutionally ban abortion. Most of those laws have been blocked, which has had this like weird reverse effect where people in states like California and New York who have never really had to worry about what was happening because they never saw these laws take effect because it was always blocked right away.

The Mississippi law never stopped winding through the courts for 4 years, and I think for a lot of progressive folks, especially on our coasts of our country, it has been out of sight out of mind. They have very robust access in their states. They know abortion is not banned in the South even though it's not quite as easy, but I think a lot of people have just considered abortion access a done deal.

Where I work and with advocates I talked to and doctors I talked to Roe v. Wade case has never really been a guarantee in the South. People who didn't take it seriously before were wrong and are now very surprised. But I was not.

Since the leak, how have women and feminist movements reacted? How have they put pressure on the Supreme Court?

There has been a lot of outrage which is expected. But again, most of my sources on the ground here have been planning for this for some time. This wasn't a surprise and frankly some of them are kind of upset because they've been yelling about this for long time, down here and a lot of the mainstream movements kind of started talking about it when President Trump was elected.

But I don't think people took it seriously. A lot of my reproductive justice organization sources who like work at the intersection of race and gender and all the barriers to accessing a fulfilled life much less a pregnancy or a parenthood decision have been saying for a long time that the mainstream movement hasn't done enough to protect our right to abortion. Some of them are a little exhausted by the fact of having to at best comfort a lot of sad Democrats. People that didn't think this was coming are now so upset and they're marching with signs. And that's their right and important in some ways for free speech. But for people that have been screaming about this for decades don't have time to be explaining this to other people when they're having to figure out maybe how to funnel people to other states to get abortion care in less than 30 days potentially.

There's kind of like this moment of nothing left to lose within the abortion movement because there's always been very mainstream efforts like Planned Parenthood, who provide abortions and do political work. But there's a lot of people that haven't ever felt really represented by that movement, so they're kind of starting to do their own thing. Again, because there's nothing left to lose like, everything they fought for is about to crumble potentially. You're just seeing more subgroups doing whatever they have to do to care for their community, because no one has helped them before.

People have been mailing a lot of things to the Supreme Court, some coat hangers, which is a very outdated, unhelpful reference because most of our abortions in this country are by pill and not surgery anymore. This outdated idea of sort of the back-alley coat hanger abortion is unhelpful because it's not accurate. Advocates right now are more focused on getting people information about how they can safely manage.

There are a lot of protests at the Supreme Court justices' homes. But they're not elected, so they don't really bow to pressure.

How have political parties reacted since the draft was shared?

Some of that pressure has come on elected officials at the state level because most polling surveys of our citizens show that most people do not want to completely abortion ban. People want some restrictions and different parties believe that should come out in different ways. But most Americans do not support total bans. There is a lot of pressure locally.

Some of that pressure has come on elected officials at the state level because most polling surveys of our citizens show that most people do not want to completely ban abortion. People want some restrictions and different parties believe that should come out in different ways. But most Americans do not support total bans. There is a lot of pressure locally.

Of course, Democrats are upset, but I think even moderate Republicans whose party is technically anti-abortion but who understand that there certainly needs to be medical rape, and incest exceptions at the very least, and who are not so stringent on these early abortion bans – they think that should still be a woman's right to choose.

State legislators have to figure out what to do. How are we going to take care of more pregnant people? And we're certainly not prepared to do that financially in the South. We already struggle to like take care of who we have here now.

If a clinic closes in Mississippi, there is no abortion access in Mississippi other than self-managing. I think some Republicans are just now realizing what this means for their States and their constituents, and their pregnant people.

The Democrats really quickly pushed an act to like, codify abortion rights, but they've never had the majority to do that, so it was really kind of just a vote in appearance. We do that a lot in politics, but there was no real chance of that happening and there won't be for some time.

There was a lot of surprise on all sides. I think Democrats really didn't think it would ever get this far and I think many Republicans as well didn't think they would get this far because it's been a sort of campaign promise for so long and all of a sudden, it's a reality and then things just moved really, really quickly.

If abortion is banned, will it be seen as a victory for Trump?

I think he will certainly see it as one. And I think the hard-line Trump supporters who maybe voted for him because of this will see it's as a victory.

But there's a lot of Trump voters who voted for him for his fiscal conservative policies and not so much for his social ones. And that's probably because they've seen his record and know that he wasn't anti-abortion a few decades ago. Some of our fiscal conservatives are having a moment of concern that the anti-abortion, super pro-gun, very far right, nationalistic folks have gotten too much power in the party. Because not all of our Republicans are completely anti-abortion, they are pro-life, and they want certain restrictions. But they don't want this either.

It will be a victory for some, but for other Republicans I think it will be a moment of concern that they let this kind of get out of hand, and now it's going to be really hard to correct. Once it goes back to the states, the only thing that could change that is if the

Supreme Court, then takes it away from the states again. It'll be years before they could reassess this completely.

6. Lone Hummelshoj: For the recognition of endometriosis



Lone Hummelshoj has been an advocate for endometriosis in the past 25 years. She co-founded Endometriose Foreningen (the Danish Endometriosis Society) in 1997 and worked with politicians to change legislation and allow women with endometriosis to be treated in one of two designated national centres with specialised expertise. Denmark is the first, and only, country to offer such treatments. She is an executive director of the World Endometriosis Research Foundation that she co-founded in 2006. Its main goal is to facilitate research to improve knowledge and treatment(s).

For the Foundation, she looks back on the evolution of the treatment of endometriosis. Still largely unknown, this disease, which can be extremely painful, nevertheless affects 1 in 10 women throughout the world.

Could you explain to us what endometriosis is, how many women are affected and what are the consequences?

So, endometriosis is defined as tissues similar to that which grows in the uterus but is found outside of the uterus. It has been found everywhere in the body but is mainly confined to the pelvic area, where it attaches itself to the peritoneum, to the ovaries and fallopian tubes. It can also go deep down behind the uterus and affect the bowel and bladder.

Endometriosis needs oestrogen to grow. And I tend to describe it a little bit like throwing water on a rusty car. You know, the more insults, these lesions or growths are subjected to the bigger they grow. In fact, they grow quite similar to cancer. It isn't cancer, but the way it behaves is similar to the way that cancer grows. We estimate – that's the World Endometriosis Research Foundation – that roughly 190 million women and girls worldwide have endometriosis. That's about one in 10, during their reproductive years.

This number is absolutely crazy, and for most of them it'll start when they're teenagers. It'll start with their first period and then gradually progress into more severe disease, which is why it is so important to reduce the current diagnostic delay and get these women diagnosed and treated or managed early. We use the word manage because there isn't a treatment that will cure the disease, but it can be managed and tempered.

The symptoms of endometriosis are painful periods or pelvic pain, when it becomes more chronic. It is also fatigue, being really really, tired. It can be painful to urinate. It can be painful to defecate. It can be heavy periods, and it is also the most common cause of infertility in women. About 1/3 of those with endometriosis will have difficulties conceiving a child, but it means that 2/3 will not. Getting endometriosis does not equal infertility.

The consequences are: women living with pain, which is never good as you would know if you've ever broken an arm or had had a bad headache or a migraine. Imagine having that every single day? We see quite a lot of absenteeism, with young women or girls not being able to go to school, to go out and have fun with their friends and, later, not being able to go to work every day. Endometriosis can lead to having an immensely compromised quality of life, during what should be the prime years of girls and women's lives.

Sex can be painful so it can affect your relationships. I always feel so sorry for the young girls who may be affected by sex hurting, imagining them having to have their first experience, which should be a wonderful and lovely thing, and for that to be painful. And it might scare them off physical relationships. And that again can result in the breakup of relationships and marriages. The consequences are really bad.

It is different for the individual woman how the disease affects her, but it's typically during their periods and, for many, also during ovulation. But then again, as I said, if that goes on for years and years, that ongoing insult or onslaught of pain can lead to a damage in the nervous system. That means that they become so sensitized to pain that they end up with chronic pelvic pain.

This does not happen to everybody; just as painful sex does not happen for everybody. Just as not everybody has problems going to the toilet. It varies enormously. From, I don't like using the word, mild, but to manageable symptoms to unmanageable symptoms.

How long does it take to determine if a woman has endometriosis?

At the moment, the average diagnostic delay tends to be around 7 or 8 years from when the woman or girl first presents to a doctor with symptoms. She typically has to see five or more different physicians before she gets diagnosis. So that's not good.

Denmark has become the country offering the best practises for endometriosis. It came after years of fighting. Could you tell us more about this journey and how you achieved such results?

My background is in sales and marketing, with IBM, and so I'm forever a salesman. 20 years ago I called the Minister of Health and I asked for an appointment. I got one, which was really surprising to everybody. We had a meeting together with one of the Danish professors, who had taken a specific interest in endometriosis. We talked about what I just told you, the impact on quality of life, the hidden mistreatments, and we could only then hypothesize what this would cost society. Our argument to the minister was that we will save money by having treatment of endometriosis centralise and specialised, ie. designating this disease to requiring specialist care. Just like we require with cancer and many other diseases, so that they don't have to go through a lot of hidden mistreatments, that are costly and that they don't have to miss school and work which cost society money. And he said, what do you want? We said, we want treatment centralised and he turned around to the representatives from the National Institutes of Health and said 'do it'. And that was it. It was me just saying "I'm going to make this happen!"

It is so interesting, especially because this speech about money could be replicated in many countries.

Absolutely, and since then the World Endometriosis Research Foundation ran a study called EndoCost. You can go to endometriosis.org and you'll get all the highlights from the paper. It showed the cost of endometriosis, which is about €9000 per year per woman. So it is billions of euros.

What was interesting was that 1/3 of the costs were direct health care costs and 2/3 were due to the loss of productivity. Not necessarily absence from work but less productive at work because of pain. We have those numbers now in that study and they can be extrapolated to any country really. And I think that's the argument,

because even though everybody should care about quality of life and women and girls not being in pain, reality is that they care about what it costs society.

What are the different existing treatments, both in Denmark and in the rest of the world? How effective are they?

We could start with the basics, which are painkillers. What's typically used in endometriosis is called nonsteroidals, like ibuprofen or diclofenac that treat inflammation. They, unfortunately, can be addictive. They can destroy the lining of your stomach and they inhibit ovulation. If you want to get pregnant, you shouldn't be taking those drugs. Then there are various hormonal treatments and they're available pretty much in all countries in the developed world. They have the same thing in common, and that is to stop menstruation so that you don't have that monthly insult or onslaught that exacerbates pain. That ranges from progestins, which can be titrated to different amounts, like very small amounts to higher amounts. It can go to a simple thing like the birth control pill which is taken continuously or the Mirena coil, which releases progesterone locally and is a form of contraception that prevents ovulation and having a period, to more brutal ones called GnRH analogues. The latter come in the form of agonists and antagonists, and they will put you into an artificial menopause for six months, and the side effects can be pretty bad – for some of the side effects are as bad as the disease itself. However, they work for some, and they don't work for others. Therefore, I like to not refer to any of this as “treatment”, because it doesn't treat the disease. Once you stop the medication, the disease will be right there and come right back. I prefer the phrase “management”, so managing the disease – tempering it – for awhile to give the girl or the woman a break from her symptoms.

The other treatment is surgery, and that's where specialisation comes in, and that's where it becomes incredibly important, because endometriosis really should only be undertaken by those who are specifically trained in doing endometriosis surgery. It's highly complex. Again, comparing it to cancer surgery is what many, many do, and you would never have surgery for cancer and not go to a cancer specialist. I would urge the same for endometriosis: that you really must see somebody who does surgery regularly, because otherwise you could end up with incomplete surgery. Surgery can do damage as well. It cuts through your muscles and your nerves and if you have too many surgeries then it that in itself can contribute to additional pain. We want these women to have one really good surgery with someone who really knows how to cut the disease out.

Besides implementing treatments, what other policies should be taken to tackle this issue?

In terms of management, I want to go one step further as well and to talk about a more holistic approach, because each woman is individual and reacts individually to the disease and its management.

I think it's very important that she might benefit from a healthy diet. There isn't a specific diet associated with endometriosis, it's just a healthy, you know, a good sense of healthy diet. It won't cure the disease, but if she has bowel issues, it might ease up on some of those symptoms. Physical therapy and exercise release endorphins that are natural painkillers. But again, if you're in a lot of pain, you might not be able to exercise, so we have to bear that in mind as well.

What should happen from society? I really think we need to start in the schools. We need to start to educate girls and boys about what periods are and what is normal and what isn't normal. A little bit of period pain or discomfort is probably "normal"; I think we all have that. But there's a difference between having period pain and having pain so that you can't go to school. You can't socialise. If you have to take a lot of painkillers that's not normal.

Whatever people say, pain is your body's way of telling you that something isn't right.

I think we should be teaching girls and boys what is normal and what isn't normal and in parallel remind primary physicians that the prevalence of endometriosis is very, very high and to perhaps have alarm bells go off, when someone presents with symptoms suggestive of the disease. If a woman goes to the doctor with period pain that is stopping her from living her life or she's taking too many painkillers, she should get referred to a specialist so that the disease can be managed early and prevent damage to her abdomen later on and to not impair her fertility.

We should be allowed to take a day or two off every month if that is needed. If employers could allow that it would be fantastic. In fact here in the UK, Endometriosis UK, which is the national advocacy organisation, has a friendly employer scheme. Companies can sign up and say they are endometriosis friendly employers. I think that's the only country that's actually done that.

How do you explain that so many countries seem reluctant to treat endometriosis?

Endometriosis affects women. Women's health is under prioritized in every single country in the world. In fact, it is a sad state of affairs when there is more research money given to study erection in men than there is to study pelvic pain in women. I'm afraid that's the only answer. Women's health is under prioritized, and this means that we do not have sufficient funding to carry out the research that will enable us to discover why endometriosis develops and how it progresses so that we can start to develop targeted treatments. We think we know that endometriosis is more than one disease, just like breast cancer is more than one disease, so one type of breast cancer may need one type of treatment, and whereas another one might need another type of treatment – it's exactly the same for endometriosis. We just don't know yet what these subtypes are.

As mentioned earlier, one treatment will work for some and won't for others. But we need to find out for whom it would work and why it works. And then find other treatments for where we have nothing.

Finally, with endometriosis it is a normalization of pain that results in little investment, and as I said earlier: pain is not normal. We have to teach everyone that pain is not normal.

Could you tell us more about the World Endometriosis Research Foundation, its goals, and activities?

The foundation was created back in 2006 by myself and some very passionate researchers and clinicians because we felt there was a need to standardize and harmonize the way in which we do research in endometriosis. Again, because of the very limited funding we often see very small research projects where the results are not significant, simply because there was not enough subjects involved.

If a study is carried out on 200 women, it means nothing, absolutely nothing. You need 200,000 for it to be significant. And for a disease that is as prevalent as diabetes - endometriosis is as prevalent as diabetes - we see only a fraction of comparable investment in research. We decided to develop standards, from which researchers, clinicians, scientists could collect clinical data in exactly the same way and pair that with surgical findings, as well as standardized operating procedures for how to collect biospecimens, such as saliva, urine, blood, as well as tissue samples.

From the premise that if everybody does it the same way, then all of a sudden, the 200 people here and the 150 people there and the 2000 subjects somewhere else could all be compiled into one big data set and then we can start to actually really learn something about the disease. What we're doing is to harmonize research standards and to foster collaboration amongst centers. For this particular set of tools, we now have 51 centers around the world in 22 countries using these tools, which are available in 16 languages. That's really started to change the way we do research because we now have more bio-specimens and clinical data that has ever been collected before in the world and that is easily comparable. We're currently in the process of harmonizing standard operating procedures for how to deal with experimental models and endometriosis, as well as how to do imaging, and something as basic as how to perform a clinical exam.

Before we were able to do that, WERF carried out the first and only prospective study looking into the impact of the disease. It was called the Global Study of Women's Health and, again, if you go and search on that on endometriosis.org, you'll see the summary from that, which documents the diagnostic delay and how pain affects women, etc. The EndoCost study I mentioned before was also carried out by WERF, because we needed those numbers in order to be able to go to governments and legislators to argue that this is a disease worth investing in.

Do you have any tips or advice to give to women who suffer from endometriosis?

think one of the most important things is probably to allow yourself to have bad days. Rest if you are having a really bad day. Don't be a superhero and stress your body more. Allow yourself to say "I am feeling terrible and I need to lie down today" and read a book or watch videos or sleep or whatever you need to do to recover. Eat healthily, and I don't want to preach about eating because I think it's a really difficult thing to say what you should and shouldn't eat. I would say eat healthily 80% of the time and don't give a damn 20% of the time. Just as we all should. I mean, this isn't just for women with endometriosis.

There is a little bit of research. It isn't a lot, but it makes sense that shows that Omega 3 oils are anti inflammatory. Because endometriosis is an inflammatory disease, so you have this constant inflammation going on, which is also what contributes to fatigue, things like oily fish, olive oil, nuts and seeds may be beneficial in the diet. Again, it's just healthy eating really: cut back on sugar, but if you want a piece of chocolate then have a piece of chocolate and then don't worry about it. Try to get a little bit of exercise if possible. Yoga, Pilates, whatever makes you feel a little bit better you should allow yourself to do. Finally, when seeking treatment and management from healthcare professionals don't take no for an answer. Insist that you get treated by a specialist. Full stop! Your national endometriosis support organisation may also be able to aid with that.

7. Danièle Kapel-Marcovici:

Opinion column in favour of access to abortion



Danièle Kapel-Marcovici is President and CEO of the RAJA Group, the European leader in the distribution of packaging, supplies and equipment to businesses. At the head of her company for nearly forty years, she has transformed the small family business into a multinational group that is a leader in its field. Committed to women's rights, Danièle Kapel-Marcovici created the RAJA-Danièle Marcovici Foundation in 2006, of which she is President. Placed under the aegis of the Fondation de France, the RAJA-Danièle Marcovici Foundation works for the emancipation and improvement of the living conditions of women and girls in France and throughout the world. Danièle Kapel-Marcovici was named Chevalière de la Légion d'honneur et des Arts et des Lettres and received the Cultural Patronage Prize "Un projet, un mécène" (visual arts category) from the French Ministry of Culture and Communication for the RAJA Art contemporary art collection (2017).

In a global context of questioning women's rights, Danièle Kapel-Marcovici is committed to helping her staff exercise their reproductive rights, including when they live and work in countries that deny them them. Read her article published on 28 September, World Abortion Rights Day.

In Hungary, since September 15, women wishing to abort will have to listen to the fetus' heartbeats.

In the United States, since June 24 and the Supreme Court's reversal of jurisprudence, more than ten conservative states have banned abortion.

In Poland, the almost total ban on abortion has already caused the death of many women. The courts are cluttered with absurd procedures. On September 7, proceedings were initiated by the Polish public prosecutor's office against 3 doctors who had refused an abortion to a woman who had suffered a miscarriage, causing her death. The activist Justyna Wydrzynska is summoned to court in October for distributing abortion pills. And Ukrainian refugee women are losing their country as much as their reproductive rights...

As a business leader, I have always been convinced of the economic, social and societal role of companies. In 2006, I created the RAJA-Danièle Marcovici Foundation, the first French foundation dedicated to the empowerment and emancipation of women, and active in almost 60 countries around the world. The fight against violence against women and girls is our priority. However, denying them their reproductive rights constitutes unacceptable violence, because it dispossess them of their bodies and their free will.

For 40 years, I have been managing the RAJA Group, a French and independent company founded by my mother in 1954 and a European distributor of packaging and office supplies. We have been in Poland for 12 years. I was challenged by the commitment of these American companies who did not hesitate to take their responsibilities, publicly, after the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade in the United States.

As President of the RAJA-Danièle Marcovici Foundation, I am committed to helping my employees to exercise their reproductive rights, including when they live and work in countries that deprive them of such rights. I undertake to offer my help by covering the medical, transport and accommodation costs for the group's collaborators who need to terminate their pregnancy in a country where abortion is legal.

I usually prefer acting in the shadow. I am breaking this habit, on September 28, the International Safe Abortion Day, because I believe that today, the attacks against women's rights are such that we can no longer commit ourselves other than by writing and saying, loud and clear: all women must be free to dispose of their bodies.

8. Carol Mann:

The rights of Afghan women attacked by the Taliban



Carol Mann is an art historian and sociologist, specialising in the problems of gender and armed conflict, which she helped to initiate in France, based on her own work, from 1993, in Bosnia during the siege of Sarajevo. An associate researcher at SOAS in London, she created, in 2000, the Femaid association, which works with women in rural Afghanistan; author of studies, novels and numerous articles, her latest work is *Femmes dans la guerre (1914-1939)*, published by Pygmalion in 2010. She is the author of a dozen studies and novels, including *La Naine de Don Diego* (Flammarion), *Une belle nuit d'août couleur de cendre* (Calmann-Lévy), *Les Amazones de la "Kuca"*, a study on women during the siege of Sarajevo (*Svjetlost*).

The Foundation spoke to Carol Mann about the situation of women since the Taliban took power on 15 August 2021 and the actions implemented by the Femaid association, financed by the Foundation, to promote the education of young girls.

Can you describe the situation in Afghanistan, one year after the Taliban's takeover?

The already precarious economic and social situation has totally collapsed, especially since the government has not been recognized and international trade is now almost impossible. Humanitarian aid, on which most of the population was already relying, has been almost entirely stopped, with the exception of emergency food aid, which is largely insufficient. Out of a population of 41 million, 97% of whom live below the poverty line, more than half are facing famine, worsened by the drought and the consequences of the war in Ukraine.

How has the situation of women evolved over the past year?

The few young women who worked even in the most modest way in the administration have lost their jobs, as have shopkeepers and teachers. Extended families (an average of 5 children per household and elderly parents at home) live in total poverty, leading them to sell their daughters for dowries in increasingly early forced marriages. The prohibition of female mobility and the impossibility to access basic health care or even water are causing a drastic increase in maternal and infant mortality. Education beyond primary school has been banned for girls, who lose all hope of a future.

We have seen many images and videos of women demonstrating in Afghanistan against the government and for their rights. Can you tell us more about these demonstrations and the risks taken by that women who are part of them?

With the arrival of the Taliban, we saw women protesting in the cities. However, a very brutal police force is cracking down. The ban on leaving the home without a burqa or accredited male escort has led to numerous reprisals against these urbanized, middle-class, educated women. They continue to protest and document oppression through social media – when possible. But these women represent only a small minority who otherwise seek every possible means to leave the country, exacerbating the brain drain that has been active for the past year.

Can you tell us more about your organization and describe the project funded by the Foundation? What are its objectives?

FEMAID has been working in war zones for 30 years with the goal of helping girls between the ages of 11 and 18 to continue their education through clandestine classes with teachers who have lost their jobs and who are paid directly. The demand is enormous in the country. In addition, we are setting up classes that can be taken over internet with refugee teachers here or online.

How can we act from France for Afghan women?

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In your opinion, how should France and the international community act to support women's rights in Afghanistan?

The international community must not recognize the Taliban government in any way, but must continue to provide food, health and educational assistance. Nevertheless, means must be put in place. It can be done through internet or other means, to allow girls to continue their education so that this entire generation is not lost. It would also prevent the country to experience a criminal backlash so sinister for the future of the entire region, and the planet.

9. Nagham Nawzat:

Rebuilding the lives of Yazidi women



Nagham Nawzat is a gynecologist from Iraqi Kurdistan who has been fighting since 2014 for Yazidi women survivors who were abducted, tortured, raped, and enslaved by the Islamic State. In 2016, she received the American Secretary of State's International Women of Courage Award, recognizing the exceptional work she carries out. She created the NGO “Hope Makers Organization for Women” to help these women reintegrate into society and rebuild their lives. She received the 2016 Franco-German Prize for Human Rights and the Rule of Law and is part of the first promotion of the Marianne Initiative, set up by the President of the French Republic Emmanuel Macron in 2021. In 2022, she is the regional winner for the Middle East and North Africa of the UNHCR Nansen Award.

For the Foundation, Nagham Nawzat looks back at the origin of her fight for Yazidi women.

Can you tell us about your background, and how you started helping Yazidi women?

I am a gynecologist from the Yazidi community. I was born in 1976 at Baashiqa, close to Mosul.

In 2014, ISIS fighters attacked the city of Sinjar, where most of the Yazidi live community used to live. They committed horrible crimes and they killed more than 2,000 of men and old women as they refused to convert to Islam. They captured 6,500 women and children and took them to areas controlled by ISIS. I have started helping women survivors in September 2014, dedicating my life to support them.

Much has been said about the atrocities committed by the Islamic State against the Yazidi community since 2014. According to you, why is the Yazidi community, and particularly women, targeted?

Yazidi religion is peaceful religion, and it gathers only 1 200 000 people all over the world. The majority is living in Iraq and Kurdistan. They believe in God, have their own tradition and language, and have been trying to preserve their identity for a long time. They respect other religions and were subjected to 73 genocides through the history by the extremist Islamic groups.

ISIS attacked this community because they consider them infidel. When a community is considered infidel, men must convert, or they are killed. If they refuse, women and children become slaves.

For more than 8 years, you have been working alongside these women to help them rebuild their lives. How do you help them daily? Has your action evolved since 2014 and why?

Since 2014 I have dedicated all my life to support women survivors in many ways:

- Healing program the 1200 of women survivors (5 years follow-up, supporting them and visiting them in the camps)
- Concluding an agreement between the German and Kurdish governments to take 1000 of survivors and their family to Germany to be treated psychologically. I was the physician in charge of the project, and I visited some of them in Germany. I get to know them and was able to let the German government know about their difficulties.
- Supporting orphans (physical support, advice).

- Advocacy for the Yazidi community by attending conferences at the national and international Levels.
- Establishing an organization called Hope Makers to support the survivors and women in need.

Since the disappearance of the Islamic State, where are the rights of the Yazidi people? Where do they live and under what conditions?

The Yazidi genocide has started in 2014 and it has not stopped since as more than 2,700 of women are still missing. As today, 250,000 Yazidi are living in camps in extremely difficult situations. Sinjar has become an area of conflict with no services to help the community to return. There are more than 2,000 orphans who survive without any help.

There is not any justice or accountability for what ISIS committed against the Yazidi people.

What is your goal?

The psychological damages are enormous: after all they went through and that cannot be forgotten, when they are liberated, they end up in camps. Most of them lost all members of their family, and they have no one to support them economically.

My goal is to set up different projects to empower Yazidi women and to open centers for women survivors in Sinjar to be treated medically and psychologically.

Is there another other point or an issue you would like to raise?

I believe that international community and civil society must find a solution to protect women and children who are the first victims of this war.

10. Urszula Nowakowska: Women's rights in Poland



Urszula Nowakowska is a Polish lawyer, feminist and activist. Since the mid-1980s, she has been involved in the emerging independence, freedom, peace and feminist movement in Poland. After several years in the United States, where she actively participated in working groups at the US Congress, the Women's Global Leadership Institute and the Centre for Reproductive Law and Policy, she returned to Poland in 1994, where she established the Centrum Praw Kobiet (Centre for Women's Rights) Foundation. She is also a co-founder of Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE). In the 1990s, she worked in the Polish Sejm, the Commission for European Integration and the Constitutional Commission, through which several important pro-women laws were enacted as national legislation.

Since the Russian offensive in Ukraine, more than one million refugees, the vast majority of whom are women and children, have reached Poland. The Women's Rights Center, located in 7 Polish cities, helps them and offers a global support (collection of basic necessities, psychological and legal help, setting up a support phone line, accommodation, Polish language courses). The Foundation had the pleasure of speaking with Urszula Nowakowska, founder of the Women's Rights Center, to discuss the actions implemented for refugee women, but also those for sexual and reproductive rights and against violence against women in Poland.

You are a Polish lawyer, activist, writer, and feminist, and you founded the Women's Rights Center (Centrum Praw Kobiet) in 1994 in Poland. How and when did you realize the importance of feminism?

I remember being fighter for girls' rights since my early childhood. I always protested when someone wanted to limit my choices as a girl. However, I become more conscious feminist in the mid 80. I was a young activist of the independent Freedom and Peace movement while I was discriminated a woman by one of my colleagues during large international conference we have in Poland. I realize that as a woman I get less time to speak than my male colleagues. I met a Canadian writer who attended this conference and who invited me to join her to meet independent group of Polish feminists. I was later invited to go for an international camp of pacifist feminist women in Ireland. Since than my feminism became more conscious and activist.

The Women's Rights Center was born in Warsaw and is now present in 7 other Polish cities. What are your goals and how do you help women daily?

The Women's Rights Centre mission is to prevent and combat all forms of gender-based violence and discrimination in private, public and professional life and to empower women to rebuild their lives, free from violence and fear. WRC provides comprehensive support to women experiencing different forms of violence, whose rights were abused and their children. Every day we offer psychological, social, and legal counseling, and curt assistance. We operate a 24/7 helpline for women and when needed we provide women and their children safe spaces in our shelter. We also offer possibility to take part in support groups and various workshops. Each year, we help over 5,000 women. We also publish and widely disseminate manuals and leaflets aimed to raise awareness about women's rights and to equip them with much needed information to leave abusive relationships and to protect their rights.

One of the center's projects is to serve as a watchdog on femicides, in order to have a better understanding of it, and to eventually issue governmental recommendations. What difficulties have you encountered so far in tracking this widespread problem? Do you already have an idea of the number of yearly victims in Poland ?

When you work on the issue of violence against women, it is impossible not to come across the most drastic form of it, which is femicide. I remember well the first femicide case I have ever dealt with. One of the women we were helping then missed the appointment at the Center. I called her and she told me that her sister, whom she had long encouraged to come to us for help, was murdered that night by her husband,

and her seriously injured daughter was fighting for her life in the hospital. She was murdered in the morning when her husband returned home after spending several hours in the detention center. He had not been charged even though he boasted to his neighbors that he could kill his wife. That night, fearing that her husband would take revenge on her for calling the police, she called the police station again to find out if and when they would release him. She wanted to prepare herself for it somehow. The police said that they would not tell her anything because he didn't concern her. When he returned home, her and her daughters were still asleep, and he killed her.

In the following years, we have dealt with more cases of women murdered by their husbands or partners. Two of our clients, we know were killed by their violent partners. In none of these cases, police or prosecutor's office took women's complaints seriously, although threats of murder and pending cases at the victim's initiative are classic factors that increase the risk of escalating violence or femicide.

In Poland we do not have good and reliable statistics concerning violence against women and femicides. WRC estimates that every year around 400- 500 women may lose their life in relation to domestic violence. We do not only speak about killing but also suicide and those cases where legal classification was not a murder but beating which resulted in death. There are women who disappear each year, a sometimes the body is discovered after many years and police finds that the partner was the murderer.

The center recently signed the “Legal Abortion Without Compromise” civic initiative bill initiated by various women's rights groups in Poland in partnership with the opposition party Lewica. Can you tell us more about this initiative and about abortion rights in Poland in general?

Although Poland has had for over 20 years one of the most restrictive law concerning abortion – abortion was legal only in case of danger for women's life and health, malformation of fetus and rape – we have faced permanent attacks aimed to further restrict access to abortion. On October 22, 2020, the illegitimate Polish Constitutional Court ruled that access to abortion due to “high probability of severe and irreversible foetal disability or incurable disease threatening its life” is unconstitutional.

“Legal abortion without compromise” aims at liberalising access to abortion in the long run. To put it on the parliamentary agenda, we must present 100,000 signatures. When the 100,000 signatures are attached, the draft bill can be presented to the Marshall of the Sejm with a request to proceed with it.

The draft bill “Legal Abortion Without Compromise” proposes that abortion should be available until week 12th without asking women for any reason and after the 12th week in case of foetal defects or when pregnancy is a result of a criminal act.

What have been some of the concrete consequences so far of the total ban on abortion in Poland?

Abortion is now allowed only in cases of rape or incest or when the pregnancy threatens the life of the mother. It exposes pregnant women to health problems. This new law had what we call a “chilling effect”, which means that in practice doctors refuse to provide medical care for fear of legal consequences. Doctors who carry out abortions face up to 3 years in prison.

At the beginning of November 2021, Poland was shocked by the death of Izabela from the town of Pszczyna. She died of sepsis due to a medical error resulting from the chilling effect. Izabela has become a symbol of the systemic violation of reproductive rights in Poland, and the disclosure of her dramatic history quickly resulted in an avalanche of reports on the successive tragedies of women whose rights were openly violated.

One of them was Anna from Świdnica, who also died of sepsis only because the life-threatening pregnancy was not terminated at the right moment. I am afraid there maybe more of such cases.

Many women who would like to terminate pregnancy goes abroad. Fortunately, there are organizations such as Abortion dream team who helps women to find such clinic abroad and provide financial support. The rest are left without any assistance which results in leaving the most marginalised women without any help.

Since the ban passed, Poland has seen massive protests against it. Is there a future to this type of civic mobilisation, and is there a way that we, French citizen, can help?

We have massive protest after the Constitutional Court ruling and after the death of Iza but it is difficult, especially in the time of a pandemic to keep permanent mobilizations. However, positive consequence of the new abortion rules, of the backlash that followed and of the massive protests is that it has raised people’s awareness. A survey conducted last year found that over 70% of Poles were opposed to the Constitutional Tribunal ruling. It has also changed the narrative around abortion and increased the number of those who support liberalization.

We were very thankful to international community and French citizens for their solidarity with Polish women in this difficult time of attacks on women’s fundamental human rights. As we will continue to fight for the abortion rights in Poland, we need your support and solidarity. Under the French presidency to the EU, France has more power to do so. We need European Commission and Council to act and defend democratic values and to protect women’s rights to freely decide about their reproduction. We need EU and French authorities, to support civil society financially in Poland. However, not only EU and government can do it. Each person, who cares about

women's rights can do it. Every euro matters and can help us to change women's lives.

Human rights groups say women activists have faced escalating threats and repression since the ruling.

It is true. At the WRC as well as in many other women's rights NGOs we have been receiving emails for some time containing death threats if we will not give up what we do. One time during the visit of a French delegation in our office we received emails threatening us, telling us there was a bomb in the building. Women are beaten up by the police at the demonstrations, persecuted, detained illegally. It's happening and nobody is punished for doing so.

Could you please tell us, in a couple of sentences, what will you do to support women refugees in Poland ?

So far there is a lot of enthusiasm in supporting Ukrainian refugees in Poland, but system and institutional solutions are lacking. At the beginning most women and children who came here had somewhere to go to in Poland, now the situation changes. Many new refugees do not have friend nor families and they require more institutional and systematic support. They need more support. March 8th is International Women's Day. Instead of celebrating, we are launching our hotline for Ukrainian women who fled from the war.

We will offer them psychological counseling and information about resources and support available to them and their children in Poland. We are going to support not only those who fled from Ukraine because of the war but also those who stay and work in Poland but whose family are still in Ukraine. Yesterday I met with a Ukrainian woman whose two sons left Poland to fight. This situation is very stressful for her. We get information about women who were raped and need immediate support, those who stay in big groups in small apartments. People need basic items like shoes, warm jackets, diapers, personal hygiene items etc.

Apart of the hotline we plan to employ Ukrainian and Russian speaking psychologists to provide women and children direct support in all our centers (Warszawa, Krakow, Lodz, Wroclaw, Gdansk, Poznan). There are lawyers and social workers willing to work with us to help women and children access social services and housing. We plan to start Polish classes for women and children, help them to find a job in Poland. We organize collects for women and children.

11. Delphine O:

State of play after Generation Equality Forum



A graduate of the Ecole Normale Supérieure and the Harvard Kennedy School, Delphine O has worked at the French Embassy in Seoul, the French Consulate General in New York and the Stimson Center in Washington. A specialist in Iran - where she has lived - and Afghanistan, she co-founded the news website Lettres Persanes. Delphine O is ambassador and secretary general of the Generation Equality Forum (Beijing+25), the largest international summit for women's rights in 25 years, co-organised by France and Mexico under the aegis of UN Women. Delphine O was previously a member of parliament for Paris for La République en Marche, a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee and President of the France-Iran Friendship Group of the National Assembly. She was the rapporteur of the mission on "Strategic issues in the South China Sea" and of a mission on the opening of the National Assembly to civil society.

Interviewed by the Foundation, Delphine O assessed the first anniversary of the Generation Equality Forum (Beijing+25).

Can you tell us what is the Generation Equality Forum (FGE)? How was it born and what are its challenges?

The Generation Equality Forum was held in Paris in June 2021, and it has been the most important international conference for women's rights and gender equality for the past 26 years. The last conference of this type was organized in Beijing in 1995. The Generation Equality Forum was co-chaired by two countries, France and Mexico, and brought together many actors: government actors, international organizations but also many civil society actors with NGOs, private sector actors, philanthropic foundations and companies. It was a truly global conference since more than 70 countries were gathered. Several thousand NGOs and companies were also present, as well as most of the major international organisations.

The objective of the Generation Equality Forum is first political: to relaunch a dynamic in favor of women's rights and gender equality, at a time when it is clear that there is a rise in power of conservative and even regressive forces for women's rights. Since the launch of the Forum, there have been Afghanistan, Ukraine, the ban on abortion in the United States, but there were already many examples, including in Europe, where women's rights were violated. We wanted to show that the ground was not only occupied by these conservative movements, but that there were also progressive forces who know how to unite and mobilize.

Our second objective was to raise funds for women's rights. Over the past forty years, many international texts and conventions have been adopted to protect and promote these rights. However, implementation is more difficult due to lack of funding. During the 3 days of the Forum, we managed to mobilize 40 billion dollars with 1,000 commitments at the time. Since then, we have almost tripled the number of commitments with more than 2,700 commitments from different actors.

The specificity of the Forum is precisely to be multi-stakeholder. It was the first time that we had an international conference that brought together not only countries and international organizations, but on an equal level, civil society, and the private and philanthropic sectors. We succeeded in getting them to work together around 6 themes, called action coalitions, chosen after extensive consultations with civil society. Each of the coalitions has defined its own action plan for the next 5 years.

The FGE has just celebrated its first anniversary. What were his main achievements?

The commitments were announced at the Forum last year. Since implementation and monitoring are, from the point of view of civil society, often too slow because there are so many needs for women's rights. But despite everything, we can congratulate ourselves on a certain number of figures and facts.

First of all, as I said earlier, we have seen a tripling of commitments. The Generation Equality Forum as a mobilization platform continues to have a strong power of attraction with 2000 new commitments made.

As an ambassador, I represent the French government. France, meanwhile, had announced 400 million euros for sexual and reproductive rights, which are now under attack from all sides. We obviously see what happened in the United States, but also in Poland. Part of these funds is intended to feed a program of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

France has reallocated 18 million euros per year, in 2021 and 2022. This program is essential: it works in around fifty countries and its mission is to centralize the purchase of contraceptives and to reach the last mile, ie women who do not have easy access to modern contraceptives adapted to their needs.

France has also, for example, renewed its contribution to the Muskoka Fund created 10 years ago. It aims at improving maternal and child health and preventing mortality, by providing both education and care, including post-abortion care.

France has also launched, within the framework of the Generation Equality Forum, the Marianne initiative for human rights defenders. It is a reception program for human rights defenders who are threatened in their country for their militant activities. This year, the first promotion is exclusively female, made up of fifteen women. They come from Burma, Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Tanzania, Syria, Iraq... They are welcomed for 6 months in France, all their expenses are covered, and they benefit from training, are made aware of different subjects, and meet many people.

More concretely, how has the FGE helped feminist associations? What advocacy did he put in place?

To give you an example, the Support Fund for Feminist Organizations (FSOF) was launched during the Forum by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the French Development Agency, which are also responsible for the selection process. Very concretely, the fund consists of the distribution, over 3 years, of 120 million euros for feminist associations in the South. Already 40 million euros have been distributed in 2020 and 2021 to organizations whose respective themes are “gender and climate” and “sexual and reproductive rights”. It’s direct funding for those organizations that really need it.

More generally, the Generation Equality Forum is a unique and indispensable advocacy platform. It is so for feminist associations everywhere in the world, but particularly for those which are repressed because of their activities in favor of women’s rights, which do not have the right to express themselves freely or in countries where the legislation is contrary to women’s rights. I met many activists, who come from the African continent, from Southeast Asia or from Latin America. They tell me that the Forum has given new momentum and powerful impetus to the associations.

He mobilized them, redistributed funding. It is a lever to put pressure on governments so that they adopt legislative or financial measures in favor of women's rights, by showing them the interest for them to join this platform. It brings them reputation and visibility. To date, there is no other platform that allows a State, an association, or a foundation to engage within the framework of a coalition, to benefit from the exchange of good practices and the experience of other members, and to be part of a collective, international, and multi-actor dynamic.

Who are the actors that make up the Forum and how does their diversity reinforce its impact?

We wanted from the start not to remain in a purely intergovernmental mode of operation, which is the classic operation of the United Nations and diplomatic conferences. We wanted to involve civil society. The governance structure that took all the decisions during the 2 years of preparation for the Forum, the Core Group, was made up of representatives from France, Mexico, UN Women, but also representatives from civil society and the youth. These representatives had decision-making power and veto power, just like those of counties and nations. It is a first in the system of the United Nations and international conferences, to have put on an equal footing civil society on the one hand, and countries and international organizations on the other.

Governance will continue to be multi-stakeholder, this time including philanthropic organizations and the private sector alongside countries, the United Nations, youth organizations and civil society organizations for the follow-up to the Forum on next 5 years. This governance is found in all the mobilization events that we organize around the Forum, with civil society organizations chosen by UN Women for their diversity and their representativeness of the different groups that make up feminist associations. There are LGBT associations, women with disabilities, women, indigenous people, young girls and teenagers... We have tried to represent all the diversity of women and girls today.

As Secretary General of the FGE, what are the most important challenges you have taken up?

There was both a logistical challenge, a political challenge, and a contextual challenge. The logistical challenge, of course, was related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We had to postpone the Forum for a year since it was supposed to take place normally in the summer of 2020. There were a lot of uncertainties around the animation of the Forum in 2020-2021. We also had to reduce our ambitions in terms of reception since we wanted to welcome 10,000 people in Paris and in the end, we were only able to welcome a few hundred people. We had to transform the Forum into a virtual hybrid forum which made it possible to accommodate 50,000 connected people, 90 panels, 700 speakers. There was also a political and organizational challenge, which consisted of getting the private sector to collaborate with civil society, which are not used to talking to each other and even less to working

collectively on common projects. It wasn't easy to get these actors to work together, but I think that in the end, we did well. We have been even more successful since we are evolving in a context of political backlash against women's rights, regression and in particular resistance from certain countries which did not see the holding of the Generation Equality Forum in a good light.

What are your ambitions for the FGE in 4 years once the coalitions come to an end?

The objective is, of course, to have a positive result in 2026, that the commitments made are fully implemented, whether by countries, international organizations, or the private sector. It is therefore to be effective and to have succeeded in reducing inequalities.

This is a first thing, but our ambition is also that based on this, this dynamic does not end in 2026, but on the contrary, that other countries and organizations take over what has been driven by France and Mexico in 2021. It is an open dynamic, and we hope for new coalitions, new themes, new quantified objectives, and new funding programs. We have over 70 countries, but all countries are welcome to join the coalition of their choice. This is also the case for any civil society organizations, companies or foundations that can join a coalition, even halfway.

12. Sophie Pouget: Ending violence against women



Sophie Pouget is the Executive Director of the RAJA-Danièle Marcovici Foundation, with the objective of developing the Foundation's fundraising and advocacy activities. Since 2021, Sophie Pouget has also been an assessor judge at the National Asylum Court, appointed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Previously, she coordinated the advocacy and partnership activities of the Generation Equality Forum for UN Women France. Until 2017, she worked at the World Bank Group in Washington DC, where she coordinated projects dedicated to poverty reduction and economic development. A former member of the Paris Bar, Sophie Pouget is a graduate of the Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy (Tufts University, USA). She received the Henri Leclerc Prize for Human Rights from the Paris Bar in 2018, recognizing her advocacy work in defense of fundamental rights in the North of France.

She tells us more about one of the priority of the Foundation: to prevent violence against women and girls...

Sophie Pouget, you are the Executive Director of the RAJA-Danièle Marcovici Foundation.. What are the foundation's emblematic actions and supports?

The RAJA-Danièle Marcovici Foundation works for the empowerment of women and girls. Created in 2006 by Danièle Kapel-Marcovici, President and CEO of the RAJA Group, the Foundation supports non-profit projects in France and throughout the world. Its actions are organized around 4 axes: preventing violence against women and girls, education and leadership, professional integration and economic rights for women, and women's actions for the environment. This has given us the opportunity to accompany committed actors. For example, the Maison des Femmes de Saint Denis, which offers comprehensive care to women victims of violence, Rêv'Elles, which is dedicated to helping young girls and strengthening their leadership, the Centre Primo Lévi, which helps migrant women victims of violence, or, in a completely different field, the Chemin des Fleurs, which offers women in very precarious situations a chance to train in horticulture...

You have been involved for several years in the defense of women's rights, particularly within UN Women. What is the capacity of a foundation to influence and act on these issues of gender equality?

We act primarily by co-financing non-profit projects. Since 2006, we have been able to support more than 600 projects for the direct benefit of more than 150,000 women in Africa, Latin America, Asia and Europe, for a total budget of more than 13 million euros. This is important because the issue of funding is one of the main demands of feminist associations. These associations have real expertise in gender equality, but they lack resources and are underfunded. Too few sponsors make gender equality a priority. We are one of the forty or so foundations sheltered by the Fondation de France that are dedicated to this cause. Out of more than 900 foundations, this is not enough!

We also act through advocacy, particularly in the prevention of violence against women and girls. We also work to promote women's action for the environment. In this respect, the Foundation is part of several coalitions. It joined the French Coalition of Foundations for the Climate, launched in November 2020 by the French Centre for Funds and Foundations, which brings together 141 signatories committed to the fight against climate change. It is also a member of the Action Coalition on Feminist Action for Climate Justice set up as part of the 2021 Generation Equality Forum under the aegis of UN Women. All these commitments allow us to work alongside different types of actors committed to women. Thanks to the discussions we have with grassroots organizations we fund in France and around the world, we can mobilize, inform and raise the awareness of other types of actors, within French and European philanthropy or public institutions such as the Ministry in charge of equality between women and men, the regions, etc...

On November 25 [International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women], the University of Earth will take place at the UNESCO headquarters. You will be taking part in a round table discussion on the theme “Ending violence against women”. What solutions can be envisaged, particularly in France?

Harassment, sexual assault, female genital mutilation... Violence against women and girls takes many different forms. To determine the costs of this violence and assess how best to combat it, it is necessary to have precise knowledge of the extent and nature of the incidents. Encouraging the sharing of expertise and the exchange of experiences is a major lever for improving the effectiveness of actions on the ground and contributing to the scaling up of lessons learned.

The round table we are organizing is intended to encourage this type of exchange, with the participation of associations which are on the front line in supporting women and which carry out genuine public service missions. For example, 3919 – the national reference number for women victims of violence – is the result of an agreement between the Fédération Nationale Solidarité Femmes and the State.

The experts we have brought together to discuss this issue will be able to testify that the care of women victims of violence must be comprehensive: listening, psychological follow-up, housing, health, employment, and legal issues. All these aspects must be considered to enable women to rebuild their lives effectively and sustainably. The training of medical and social actors is fundamental to react appropriately and to accompany these women from care to reintegration. The training and specialization of judges is also important, as is that of the police. Finally, we must not forget the prevention actions that are essential: the education of young girls and boys is a solution to transform mentalities and behaviors.

Other countries are also sources of inspiration. In Spain, since 2004, the law against gender violence provides for the creation of courts specialized in gender-based violence as well as legal aid allowing victims to change their identity and benefit from greater protection from their aggressor. In Germany, since 2016, the notion of consent is limited to the identifiable expression of the person's will, i.e. what is not a 'yes' is a 'no'. Why not use this as a model?

According to the feminist collective #NousToutes, each year the number of feminicides increases: 102 in 2020; 113 in 2021; 98 since the beginning of 2022 (i.e. one death every two days). Despite the mobilization of numerous associations and the dissemination of information by the majority of the media, how do you explain this persistence and dramatic increase in feminicides in our country?

There is a certain failure of public policy measures. Some laws promote gender

equality and the fight against gender-based violence but encounter difficulties in application: for example, since 2018, each high school must have an Equality Referent to inform and fight against violence against women. However, 2 out of 3 high schools do not have one. Yet it is at school that gender stereotypes and the violence that can sometimes accompany them can be blocked. Education plays a major role in the fight against gender violence.

The figures on sexual violence affecting young people are alarming: 1 in 4 young people say they have already had non-consensual sex. A quarter of 18-24 year olds believe that a woman takes pleasure in being forced to have sex. 1 in 5 young women is a victim of pornodisclosure. Nevertheless, in practice, few measures are put in place: only 3 sex education classes are given to pupils throughout their schooling out of the 21 sessions provided for by the Aubry Law. It is based on these figures that the High Council for Equality between Women and Men has called for an emergency plan for equality in schools for the start of the 2022, encouraging the Ministry of Education to make sexuality awareness in schools a priority.

The subject of violence against women is too often perceived as an isolated issue: it is necessary to show that it is a cross-cutting issue that does not only affect the privacy of the home. It is a subject that concerns society, and above all it concerns women as much as men, in equal measure.

13. Dilnur Reyhan and François Reinhardt: Uyghur Women's Rights in China



Dilnur Reyhan has a doctorate in sociology and teaches at the Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales (Inalco) and at the École des Mines-Télécom. She is the editor of the bilingual journal *Regard sur les Ouïghour-e-s* and specialises in identity and nationalism in the Uyghur diaspora, and gender studies among Uyghurs. Dilnur Reyhan is also president of the Uyghur Institute of Europe, an association created in 2019 whose mission is "to represent Uyghurs not only in France but also in the rest of Europe".

François Reinhardt, director and chief of photography, began his career in 1995 as a journalist in the south-west of France. Since 2004, he has produced numerous major news reports and documentaries for French television, regularly selected by *Figra* and acclaimed by the press, including *Le Dragon à mille têtes* (2016), *La Grande Guerre des Harlem Hellfighters* (*Étoile de la Scam* 2018). François Reinhardt co-wrote the documentary "China: the Uyghur drama" broadcast on Arte in February 2022.

For the Foundation, Dilnur Reyhan and François Reinhardt revisit the mass internment, concentration camps and forced labour of Uyghurs in China and explain, in particular, the living conditions of Uyghur women.

My first question is for you Dilnur Reyhan, can you give us more information about the Uyghur people and the Chinese presence in the Uyghur country? How are the Chinese people perceived by the local population?

The Uyghurs are a people, a nation of Central Asia that was split by the Tsar and Manchu empires during the 18th and 19th centuries. The Uyghurs, like many the rest of the populations of Central Asia (except the Tajiks) are Turkic and Sunni Muslims, sharing a similar language, culture, and religion with the rest of Central Asia and very little in common with the Chinese area. They are estimated by Chinese statistics to be about 12 million in the Uyghur region and about one million in the diaspora, most of whom live in the Russian-speaking countries of Central Asia. The Uyghurs are the first sedentary populations among the Turkic populations and have set the cornerstone for the civilization of the Turkic world with a history of a thousand years.

The Qing Empire (of Manchu and not Chinese ethnicity) first colonized East Turkestan (current Uyghur territory) in 1759 and left it for more than a century to reconquer it a second time by integrating it into its territory in 1884 by naming it “Xinjiang” which means not only “the new territory” or “the new frontier”, but also “colonization, colonized territory”. The country had two short periods of independence in 1933 and 1944 under the name of Republic of East Turkestan but was finally reconquered at the end of 1949 by the Communists who took power in Beijing with the help of the USSR. Since then, China has multiplied the different strategies of colonization of the country and assimilation of the Turkic culture to the Chinese culture, by a policy of massive immigration of Chinese settlers in the country which has not only modified the demography but also increased the economic and social inequalities. This Chinese colonial presence has never been digested or accepted by the Uyghur population.

Since the beginning of the 2010s, China has been guilty of crimes against humanity in the Uyghur country against its people. François Reinhardt, can you present the military and surveillance arsenal put in place by Xi Jinping to carry out this genocidal policy?

This is the largest mass internment of a population for ethnic or religious reasons since the Second World War. The Chinese Communist Party has chosen to use, it is clearly written in the documents we have obtained, “all the tools of dictatorship” and to act “with no mercy” to bring the Uyghurs and all the ethnic minorities of Xinjiang “into line”.

This means implementing an ultranationalist vision. Officially, China claims to be fighting what it calls the “three scourges”: separatism, religious extremism, and terrorism. But it is indeed a policy of eradication, of erasing a population that is put in place. Re-education camps have been built. 1 to 3 million Uyghurs (out of a total population of 11 to 12 million) have been interned there in recent years.

The rare testimonies of survivors mention acts of torture, brainwashing, rape, forced sterilization, birth control. Families are separated, the Uyghur (Turkic) language is banned, school textbooks of Kazhak or Uyghuer children are revised, and the religion of most of the population, Islam, is widely proscribed. All this, in violation of the Chinese constitution and outside any judicial framework.

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This is the largest mass internment of a population for ethnic or religious reasons since the Second World War. The Chinese Communist Party has chosen to use, it is clearly written in the documents we have obtained, “all the tools of dictatorship” and to act “with no mercy” to bring the Uyghurs and all the ethnic minorities of Xinjiang “into line”. This means implementing an ultranationalist vision. Officially, China claims to be fighting what it calls the “three scourges”: separatism, religious extremism, and terrorism. But it is indeed a policy of eradication, of erasing a population that is put in place. Re-education camps have been built. 1 to 3 million Uyghurs (out of a total population of 11 to 12 million) have been interned there in recent years. The rare testimonies of survivors mention acts of torture, brainwashing, rape, forced sterilization, birth control. Families are separated, the Uyghur (Turkic) language is banned, school textbooks of Kazhak or Uyghuer children are revised, and the religion of most of the population, Islam, is widely proscribed. All this, in violation of the Chinese constitution and outside any judicial framework.

As a director, what difficulties have you encountered in dealing with this subject?

Our main difficulty was, and remains to this day, access to this region of the world. Xinjiang, located at the very west of China, is an open-air prison, totally closed to foreigners. It is a black hole of information. It is a taboo and dangerous subject for Chinese journalists. And all Western journalists accredited to work in China who had the courage to publish or broadcast reports on Xinjiang were not allowed to stay in China. Either they were expelled, or their visas were not renewed. So, we had to make this documentary from footage we got either from colleagues, from archive footage or from Chinese television. The most important thing for us, however, was to be able to answer a single question: why is China exercising such repression in Xinjiang? And this documentary, co-written with Romain Franklin, is the very first to scrupulously reconstruct, in a factual way, the plan put in place by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in this region of China. And to do this, we managed to get our hands on internal CCP documents, which leave no room for doubt.

And we are very happy and grateful to our producers, Découpages and Yuzu, as well as to Arte and the other partners (RTBF and RTS also broadcasted this documentary) who had the courage to accompany this project and to shed light on this tragedy that is still going on in China.

Dilnur Reyhan, it is currently estimated that more than one million women and men are being held illegally and without trial in various internment camps. From the testimonies we have, do we know what happens in these camps? What kind of violence are the women subjected to?

The UN estimated in 2018 that no less than one million Turkic, the vast majority of whom were Uyghurs, are being held in concentration camps, since then we estimate that about 3 million people are locked up in about 1400 camps and in prisons. The words are important, when many people who belong to the same group are detained, it is then concentration camps and not internment camps as there are not the same concept.

We have more than 2000 survivors of camps in Kazakhstan, all of them are Kazakhs who were able to get out thanks to the help of Kazakhstan. In the West, we have 10 survivors, seven of whom are Uyghurs. The Uyghurs do not even constitute 5% of the survivors who were able to leave the country and the seven survivors are all lucky enough to have either foreign nationality, or their spouse or children have a foreign nationality.

Thanks to the testimonies of all these survivors, we know the psychological and physical tortures systematically inflicted on the detainees: brainwashing, systematic physical punishment, torture, beatings with different sticks, leaving in hunger, in the cold in winter and in the heat in summer, torture with permanent lights, humiliation, sessions of thanks and glorification to the CCP and to Xi Jinping, sessions of self-denunciation of one's ethnicity, one's culture and one's religion, solitary confinement in tiny black rooms for days or even weeks, leaving them to die without any medical treatment especially women: systematic sterilization, rapes, collective rapes and organized by the administration of the camps.

François Reinhardt, in your documentary, you show that the objective of the government is to sinicize the Uyghur people. Can you tell us more? Besides the internment policy, how does this translate?

The objective of the Chinese government is to unify the entire Chinese population. Because China is in fact a mosaic composed of 56 ethnic groups. One of them, the Hans, represents 92% of the population. The other ethnic groups must therefore learn to behave, to think, to eat, to speak, like the Hans. This is an ultranationalist vision which contrasts with the previous policy towards ethnic minorities.

When Mao took power in 1949, he took the example of the Soviet Union, by allowing each minority an apparent autonomy. But when the USSR fell in 1991, China's leaders became afraid. In 2011, two scholars developed a new minority policy. A policy that Xi Jinping decided to apply when he came to power in 2012. The idea now is to melt all ethnicities into one. The Uyghurs, like the Tibetans, the Mongols (from Inner Mongolia) and others have been paying the price ever since. Everything that is happening today is the result. To take a concrete example, in the school textbooks of Kazhaks or Uyghurs children, whole sections of history have been replaced by patriotic propaganda images in the glory of national unity.

Dilnur Reyhan, can you explain how this sinicization affects women? Do we have any idea how many women are victims of sterilization, abortion, forced displacement or forced marriage?

We were talking about sinicization but since the end of 2016, it is about eradicating the Uyghur nation. So I'm not talking about sinicization, which is a policy that has been in place since the beginning of the annexation of the Republic of East Turkestan in October 1949, but the genocidal policy that began in late 2016. As everywhere and since always, in armed conflicts or not, women are the first victims of these repressive and genocidal policies. Women are seen by the aggressors on the one hand as a mean to humiliate an entire nation and on the other hand, the source of continuity of the enemy. This is why, apart from all the measures of surveillance of the Uyghur society which target all the Uyghur men, women and children, different campaigns to humiliate women (cutting their hair and their dresses to "modernize" them), to force them to take a distance with their origin or their culture (forced labor from a young age by threatening to send the family in camps, by monitoring them from home, by forcing them to share even the bed with Chinese officials or "cousins"), to assimilate them to the services of the Chinese nation (forced marriages with Chinese men for the reproduction of a new Sino-Uyghur generation in the patriotic service of the great China). Not only are Uyghur women forced to abandon their culture and their very origin, but they are also forced to put themselves at the service of the Chinese nation and thus sacrifice themselves to save their families from the threat of the concentration camps. They are also subjected to mass sterilization not only inside the camps but also outside.

There is no official and exact figure from China regarding the number of women held in the camps, nor in the slave labor factories. Regarding sterilization, in 2020, the German sinologist Adrian Zenz revealed that Uyghur women account for more than 80% of sterilizations performed in China (while they represent less than 2% of the national population), leading to a sharp drop in the birth rate (-50% in two years) among Uyghurs. This revelation has led researchers and jurists to speak of genocide, according to the 1948 UN definition.

Dilnur Reyhan, you talk about the need, as a woman and feminist, to mobilize for Uyghur women. How can we help?

Every citizen has the power to act. Although eight democratic parliaments have already recognized the genocidal character of the Chinese crimes against the Uyghur nation, negationist voices still deny these crimes and carry out the Chinese crimes and carry out the Chinese propaganda. It is thus necessary to spread the voice of the victims, to give them the opportunity to testify, to inform. Uyghur women are more numerous than men in the slave labor factories which are installed everywhere in the Uyghur Region or in the Chinese cities. Each citizen has the power to be responsible for his or her own purchase. It is not only about textile products (84% of Chinese cottons come from the Uyghur Region where Uyghur women are widely used, sometimes with their young children), but also in various sectors. It is therefore important to boycott products made in China and Chinese brands (Huawei, Xiaomi, Shein, Alibaba ...). In addition, 83 international brands are accused of being tainted with slave labor of Uyghurs, among which some are particularly criminalized: Uniqlo, Zara, Hugo Boss, Nike, Volkswagen, Sketchers, Huawei...

The Uyghur diaspora and in particular the survivors of concentration camps are particularly affected by the situation, but no psychological structure has been set up anywhere to help them. Yet, this is an emergency. Psychologists and lawyers can offer support to the diaspora. Videographers, photographers, artists, writers can join Uyghur associations of the diaspora (in France, the Uyghur Institute of Europe) to offer their competences.

In the end, citizens can also help financially Uyghur associations. The Uyghur Institute of Europe has launched a funding pot since December 2019 to be able to rent a room that will be a cultural place and where the institute can continue its language and culture classes for Uyghur children and its conferences.

François Reinhardt, we recently learned that between 2017 and 2019, more than 80,000 Uyghurs were transferred to factories belonging to the supply chains of 83 world-famous brands (Apple, Uniqlo, BMW...). What leverage do we have to help, on our scale, Uyghur liberation?

It is a difficult question because it is very difficult to trace and describe all the stages of manufacture, subcontracting, to find the suppliers, in a country that cultivates secrecy and in one of the most closed regions of the world. This being said, 20% of the world's cotton comes from Xinjiang. And experts have proven that Uyghur prisoners were forced to work in cotton mills for the benefit of subcontractors of well-known brands. The likelihood of global brands using this cotton is high. However, German researcher Adrian Zenz, one of the most informed and critical experts on China, is reluctant to name brands. However, to speak only of the textile industry, we can point out that in France, a complaint was filed in June 2021 against four textile giants, and the national anti-terrorist prosecutor's office decided to open an investigation for "concealment of a crime against humanity".

It is therefore necessary to put pressure, to boycott, if necessary, these textile brands (in particular) so that they ensure that their suppliers do not use forced labor of Uyghurs.

We must act, as for the climate, as a “hummingbird”. We must do our share of the work, but it is above all up to international justice and the States to put pressure on China. To know, to recognize, the drama that the Uyghurs and the other ethnic groups of Xinjiang are living, it is already to be on the side of the oppressed. And to no longer be silent accomplices.

Dilnur Reyhan, you have been campaigning for several years for France to officially recognize this genocide, which the deputies did on January 20 by adopting a resolution “officially recognizing the violence perpetrated by the authorities of the People’s Republic of China against the Uighurs as constituting against humanity and genocide. What more do you expect from the French government?

With the Uyghur Institute of Europe and the member of Parliament Raphaël Glucksmann, we have been mobilizing French youth since late 2019 for the Uyghur cause. Throughout 2021, the Uyghur Institute of Europe led a very long and painful campaign for the French National Assembly to become the 8th democracy to recognize China’s genocidal crimes. Finally, this great battle was won on January 20th. However, it is a resolution and in France, any resolution has only a symbolic and non-binding effect on the government. From now on, we want the French government to also recognize the genocide and specially to adopt sanctions against the Chinese responsables for the genocide and to help the Uyghur diaspora.

14. Sarah Schlitz: “Stop Femicide” law in Belgium



Sarah Schlitz is Belgian Secretary of State for Gender equality, Equal opportunity and Diversity in the Belgian Federal Government since October 2020. She is a cycling, feminist and human rights activist – against racism and for LGBTQIA+ rights –, and she is known for her commitments in the field and close links with civil society across the country. Formerly a municipal councilor in the City of Liege, she became a federal deputy in October 2018, and was then elected Secretary of State by Ecolo Party activists.

Invited by the Foundation as part of the round table "Ending violence against women" that it organised for the Earth University on 25 November at UNESCO, Sarah Schlitz spoke about the situation in Belgium. Her findings are identical to those of France: an increase in violence against women and the release of words, notably with the hashtags #BalancetonPorc and #MetooAcademia. In her interview for the Foundation, Sarah Schlitz focuses on the Stop Femicide law adopted in October 2022.

The “Stop Femicide” bill has just been adopted by the Belgian Council of Ministers last Friday. Could you tell us more about its main progresses and the process of its construction?

This law has three main components: defining, measuring and protecting. The first part responds to a commitment made in our plan to combat gender-based violence adopted last year, in line with the Istanbul Convention. It involves taking over the annual count of femicides from civil society, with official statistics. Even today, it is a painstaking task carried out by volunteers who compile all the press articles on this subject. In order to keep official statistics, we realized that we had to define the phenomenon we wanted to monitor. We worked on the definition aspect, which eventually became a very broad aspect. We defined four types of femicides because we wanted to include all forms and not to make some women invisible. This also allows us to the statistics. We took the opportunity to define other phenomena related to femicide in the continuum of violence. Among other things, the law defines economic violence, sexual violence, online violence and psychological violence. Coercive control was also introduced into the definitions.

The second part concerns commitment, statistics and monitoring, with three new mechanisms introduced. Firstly, an annual report containing statistics on the number of femicides sorted down by type of femicide. The characteristics of the victim, the perpetrator and the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator will be included. It can be a family member (up to the 4th degree), a spouse, an ex-spouse. It is important to situate the femicide. The second mechanism, based on these figures, is the publication of a biannual report that will include recommendations for policy makers. The last mechanism is the setting up of an interdisciplinary committee that will include members of the justice system, the police, but also academics and members of civil society, to carry out qualitative analyses of the femicides that occurred in the previous year. We will look back at the different stages that took place in order to identify the dysfunctions and the reasons why they happened. This interdisciplinary committee will also make recommendations to policymakers.

The third part concerns concrete measures to protect victims. This is obviously very important to me.

We are going to strengthen the rights of victims, in particular by enshrining them in law and making them explicit. The law makes it compulsory to provide victims with an appropriate place that allows the necessary discretion. The hearing must be conducted by a trained police officer. Right now, this is not always the case.. There is a commitment to facilitate online filing of complaints for gender-based violence. This is still complicated for now, especially for cyber harassment and online violence, but we want to make it easier. The victim will also be able to choose the gender of the police officer who will interview him or her and will be entitled to a free translation of the documents into the language he or she speaks if he or she does not speak one of the three Belgian national languages (French, Dutch, German).

Risk assessment will be systematized through the generalization of a r tool. When a victim files a complaint, the police officer in charge of the case will assess the level of danger to which the victim is exposed on the basis of a grid and, depending on the result, will provide him or her with appropriate protection measures at each stage of the investigation: ban on contact, ban on location, etc. We are also in the process of deploying a emergency alarm for restraining orders in Belgium,. There is also a commitment to train many professionals in contact with victims of attempted femicide, including magistrates and police officers.

What will this training look like? Will it be mandatory in their curriculum? How will it be implemented in practice?

Training will obviously be mandatory in the curriculum. It will start, for the professionals in activity, with a training on the new law, and on gender violence. For example, in relation to the risk assessment tool, it is essential that they are able to spot the signs of danger in situations where there is a risk of femicide.

If, for example, the victim says that her partner has squeezed her throat, a trained police officer will write that there is a strangulation. This will set off an alarm because strangulation is an acute risk signal for femicide. The same goes for the magistrate who will be trained and will read this signal as a risk.

At the level of magistrates, how does the training take place?

Since the beginning of the legislature, we have already worked with the judicial training institute on gender violence. All magistrates have already received training on this subject. They will also receive training on the new law, which will be part of their curriculum, and which will be compulsory.

What measures will be implemented to take into account the co-victims of gender violence such as children in a context of domestic violence?

They are also taken into account, and it is also thanks to the Istanbul Convention that we have been able to do this. In the law, the child will be recognized as a victim in his or her own right: “the child, who may have been exposed without being a direct victim, but who knows the direct victim, is recognized as a victim” (Article 7 of the Stop Femicide law). At the same time, progress has been made in the penal code by also reinforcing children’s status as victims.

In France, 80% of rape complaints are filed without follow-up. Apart from the training of police officers and magistrates, are there any other solutions that you have thought of?

At the moment, we have little insight into the number of cases closed without follow-

lup, and we do not know the extent of the problem. That is why, in the annual report, one of the figures used will be the number of dismissals. It will also be interesting to study this figure geographically, because it is also a question of people and judicial districts.

There can be different levels of dismissal. The perpetrator may not be found, and so the file exists, but we cannot move it forward because we lack evidence. But this does not mean that the file is thrown away. A file can be reopened, if, for example, another victim files a complaint 2 or 5 years later, with elements that overlap and make it possible to link the 2 files. A dismissal is not a definitive abandonment of the case.

There are also cases where the case has been dropped for reasons of opportunity. The public prosecutor’s office has defined its priorities, considers that it does not have the time and therefore does not pursue the case because it chooses other battles. The higher the priority given to the issue of violence, the more we fight against this phenomenon. When we have the figures, it will be much easier to question the Minister of Justice about this phenomenon.

What is the monitoring methodology you have adopted? Are civil society, organizations, NGOs also solicited?

Monitoring will be carried out on the basis of police statistics. The Institute for the Equality of Women and Men, which is our reference institute for equality, will produce the reports.

With the plan to fight against gender violence, civil society is involved through a platform of associations. It meets every month to discuss the implementation of measures and the associations present are funded to sit on it. This is a new measure that has been put in place. This platform, because of the working time available, can be called upon at different levels and in a concrete way, and in particular for the implementation of certain aspects of the law.

This project has a real vision for women’s rights. What are the next big battles you want to fight?

I am also working on the deployment of centers for victims of sexual violence, where victims can find all the legal, psychological and medical services, 24/7 based on the model of the Maison des femmes in Saint-Denis, France. There are trained police officers on site to take complaints directly. There are 7 times more complaints than in a traditional circuit. Now there are 7 of them, and we are going to open 3 in 2023, so that every victim on Belgian territory will have a center within an hour’s drive. The fight I am leading within the government is to obtain the funding to open four more. This would allow us to have even better coverage of the territory with one center per prosecutor’s office.

On issues of economic violence, I am working to set up a system similar to the one in France, to create a universal and automatic fund to pay child support.

This would allow us to get out of the bilateral pressure that can exist between two ex-spouses. At present, when a beneficiary does not receive her claims, she must take steps to appeal to a fund that will advance the amount and recover it from the spouse. This is difficult, creates tension and the children are used as a means of blackmail.

15. Céline Schmitt:

The action of the United Nations Refugee Agency



Céline Schmitt has been the spokesperson and external relations officer for the office of the UNHCR, the United Nations Refugee Agency, since July 2015. She works on a daily basis to mobilise the different actors to create a favourable environment for the reception of refugees arriving in Europe and to develop links and common projects between UNHCR and its partners. After working for an NGO in Cape Verde and at the French Embassy in Tanzania, Céline Schmitt joined the UNHCR in 2007, alternating between the UN agency's headquarters in Geneva and the field in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

Her exchanges with the Foundation shed light on the refugee crisis fleeing Ukraine. Céline Schmitt recalls that the UNHCR works in 132 countries and is mobilised on 31 current crises. She focuses on the UNHCR's actions in Ukraine and neighbouring countries.

Can you give us an overview of the crisis as of March 21, 2022? How many people are affected? Where are they going?

To date, the UNHCR has counted nearly 3,400,000 refugees who have fled Ukraine since February 24, due to the war. This figure is based mainly on data provided by the authorities from official border crossings. Most refugees are women and children, due to the requirement that men between the age of 18 and 60 remain in Ukraine.

Nearly 2 million refugees have gone to Poland, 500,000 to Romania, 355,000 to Moldova, 290,000 to Hungary and 235,000 to Slovakia. If you were to ask me this question again tomorrow, the figures would have risen considerably, as the exodus is so massive.

In addition, almost 6.5 million people are displaced within Ukraine. In total, 10 million people have been forced to flee their homes. This is now the largest displacement crisis since World War II.

What is UNHCR doing in Ukraine?

Our work is multifaceted and depends of course on the needs and the humanitarian access. We organize numerous distributions to displaced people and civilians in areas affected by military operations when we have access (food, mattresses, blankets, first necessity products, diapers for children...) and use our experience to help the authorities organize support for refugees (thanks to our technical, logistical, legal and coordination skills). We are also working to set up various aid programs, such as a cash distribution program for refugees who have had to leave everything behind. These actions are obviously going to grow: we currently have 116 employees on the ground and we intend to increase our presence as soon as the security conditions allow it.

What are your activities in the countries bordering Ukraine, namely Poland, Romania, Moldova, Hungary, and Slovakia?

In the same way, the activities we have set up support the responses organized by the authorities of the host countries, according to the needs on the ground. For this, we develop partnerships with many local actors. In all these countries, the UNHCR's first mission is to protect refugees, whether at the borders (by setting up temporary shelters, organizing transportation to cities, informing refugees of their rights) or in the cities, by setting up legal and psychological support programs. We also have another important mission: to ensure the follow up with all our partners and refugees. It allows us to advise and guide the response and the measures put in place accordingly to the needs observed on the ground.

We have also started to set up programs in Poland and Moldova to distribute money to the most vulnerable families and to provide first necessity products (food, tents, warm clothing, etc.). We are also deploying the blue point system, which are safe places for

families and children, including children who arrive alone, in order to direct them towards child protection systems and prevent the risks of abuse, exploitation and trafficking.

UNHCR is mobilized on many other humanitarian emergencies, in 132 different countries, including Afghanistan, where the situation is critical. Can you tell us more about this?

As you say, the situation is critical in many countries, including Afghanistan. It is estimated that 24 million people need humanitarian assistance and nearly 3.4 million people are internally displaced. Since 2022, UNHCR has helped more than 500,000 Afghans, distributing food, providing financial assistance, or building water infrastructure. We are also engaged in 55 local programs to strengthen communities and build resilience. Last week, Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, visited Afghanistan to meet with representatives of the interim government as well as UN staff and NGOs who continue to provide vital assistance throughout the country. He reaffirmed our commitment to stay on the ground and provide humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people.

16. Farooq Yousaf and Hareer Hashim :

Afghan men committed to women's rights



Dr Farooq Yousaf grew up in Peshawar, Pakistan, and is currently based in Basel (Switzerland) working as a Senior Researcher at Swisspeace (Basel). He focuses on Postcolonialism and Gender, Peace, and Security in South Asia. He has previously completed his PhD in Politics from the University of Newcastle in Australia, and his book *Pakistan, Regional Security and Conflict Resolution: The Pashtun ‘Tribal’ Areas* examines peace and conflict resolution on Afghanistan-Pakistan border. He is also one of the co-editors of the forthcoming *Routledge Handbook of Masculinities, Conflict and Peacebuilding* (2024).

Hareer Hashim coordinates WILPF Afghanistan’s Countering Militarised Masculinities initiative, building alliances between women peacebuilders and men who work for gender equality. Hareer recently left Afghanistan in August 2021. Her work now focuses on advocating for the rights and protection of human and women rights defenders, whose lives are at stake, especially with the new political regime in Afghanistan.

For the Foundation, Hareer Hashim and Dr Farooq Yousaf look back at the state of Afghan men's commitment to women's rights.

For the readers who did not read the article, could you please explain to us what it is about?

Farooq Yousaf (FY): The article is based on the Afghan Men as Allies in a Feminist Struggle project by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). Even though I originally work with swisspeace (Basel) as a senior researcher focusing on Gender, Peace and Security in South Asia, I had the privilege of consulting WILPF on this project. The project seeks to present a counter-narrative about men in Afghanistan, who are allies in a feminist struggle, which can be used for advocacy purposes. The project follows the transformation of several Afghan men and showcases their role in an Islamic feminist struggle for women's equality and gender equality. The article was the first output from the project which briefly highlights the struggles of male allies for gender equality in Afghanistan and also discusses the barriers they currently face in pursuing their mission under the Taliban regime. These men have grown up in the shadow of war, and have also witnessed the US and coalition presence in the country. Some of them saw how women within their households – their daughters, sisters, mothers and wives – were isolated and marginalised during the first Taliban regime (1996-2001). This marginalisation, therefore, left a lasting impression on their minds and encouraged them to become allies for gender equality in Afghanistan. The article also explains the “mixed feelings” that these allies in terms of the Taliban's takeover.

Hareer Hashim (HH): This article is an attempt to present a different perspective of men inside of Afghanistan than the stereotype. Our male alliance are a beacon of hope in upholding feminist peace for the women and people of Afghanistan, especially at a time when the rights of Afghan women and men are in jeopardy. This piece is a strong advocacy tool in showcasing some exemplary role models of men whose lives are at a standstill and in jeopardy with the presence of the new militarised regime, and how regardless, they still find ways to continue their struggle to ensure equality for all.

How did you meet the men you are interviewing and what kind of methodology must be used to work in a context like Afghanistan?

FY: Due to the ongoing political climate in Afghanistan, and the fact that the interviewees are based in Afghanistan, I may not be able to share too many details. However, our interviewees are male allies of Feminist peace in Afghanistan, who have worked throughout their adult lives to promote gender equality and girls' education in Afghanistan. The methodology that we used was based on conflict sensitivity analysis and ensured that the anonymity of those who wished to remain anonymous was kept intact. In terms of methods, we used different means and mediums to conduct multi-lingual text, audio and audio interviews. Moreover, the traditional and cultural values of both the country and respondents were also kept into consideration while conducting these interviews. Finally, the Afghan interviewers, while conducting the interviews ensured that their questions did not trigger the interviewees keeping in view the

different circumstances the male allies are facing under the Taliban regime.

HH: The methodology that was used for selecting the interviewees was based on the preference and interest of male allies that were open to sharing their work. We (WILPF) have a network of 6000 male ulema that are in a coalition named Nadhat Ulema Afghanistan (NUA) who are well-versed in moderate perspectives of Islam and 80 male allies from different walks of life. I have personally met them both in person and virtually and have a personal relationship with them. We continue our foundational work even from abroad to ensure that our progress and accomplishments are not wasted, especially at a time when it is needed the most. So we had consent and willingness from those who wanted to be a part of this piece as an advocacy tool highlighting the challenges of male allies working in the current political climate of Afghanistan to ensure their safety and hopefully evacuation.

To give a bit of context, how has the situation changed for women's rights in Afghanistan since the Taliban's August 2021 takeover?

FY: For the Taliban and its supporters, women's rights are defined through the prism of their own patriarchal and conservative (and often incorrect) interpretation and expectation of the role of women in Afghan society. Therefore, during the US-Taliban Doha talks for peace in Afghanistan, women were systematically excluded from the dialogue process. It was this exclusion of women and the newly gained legitimacy by the Taliban that emboldened them to side-line women from policymaking and governance positions soon after their takeover in August 2021. Shaharзад Akbar – former chairperson of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission – had then rightly predicted and warned that the extent to which women were included (or excluded) in the US-Taliban peace talks in Doha would shape the future of liberties women hold in Afghanistan. As a result, gains made by the US and EU member and associate states towards women's rights now stand at the risk of being rolled back by the Taliban. The situation for male allies for feminist peace has also become worse. These allies and gender equality activists now find it hard to continue their advocacy under the conservative Taliban regime.

HH: The situation for women's rights in Afghanistan since the Taliban's August 2021 takeover has only deteriorated. The fundamental rights of women and young girls are in jeopardy. The right to education, right to mobility, right to freedom of speech, and right to professional career opportunities are some examples of rights that are currently at stake. Afghan women inside Afghanistan are not only facing a humanitarian crisis, but they are also witnessing first-hand infringement of their social, political, and economic rights.

In the article, you speak about how the international community, especially the media, should publicize male allies' actions as a way of promoting women's rights. Could you tell us more about it?

FFY: Discussions in the west on women's rights in Afghanistan usually depict a clear gender binary: patriarchal men resisting aspirational women. Neglected in this analysis are the many men who have spoken up for women's rights. The membership of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in Afghanistan tells an interesting and more complicated story than its name might suggest. WILPF Afghanistan has 10,000 active members. Fully 3000 of them are men. In other words, 3000 Afghan men have chosen to join an organisation that has as its very raison d'être the advancement of women's rights. Remarkably perhaps, given Afghanistan's history, this is by the largest number of men in any of WILPF's nearly fifty country sections. These members are Muslim theologians, university professors and students, members of political organisations and journalists. Some, but certainly not all, are middle class and from urban backgrounds. Many are youth. Therefore, it is the role of both the international community and opinion makers to focus on these stories. In the Global North, the stereotypical Afghan man, as I mentioned, is seen as someone who is "primitive" and "ultra-conservative", and resists aspirational women.

However, as we have discussed in our blog and also through this project, many Afghan men support progressive values, particularly equal employment and education opportunities for women. With the Taliban back in power, it is now the responsibility of the international community to ensure that any engagement with the Taliban includes representation from both women and men allies of Feminist peace. Only through such an engagement and encouragement of such men can the international community help establish durable peace and gender equality in Afghanistan. Moreover, international media outlets should also highlight stories of such men to encourage and motivate other men both in and outside Afghanistan to continue this struggle for feminist peace.

HH: This article is an advocacy tool to showcase the strong backbone of Afghan society that is left behind and what a waste of an opportunity that would be. With this article, we aspire to ensure the ommitment of our international allies in support of Afghans politically, socially and economically. At this highly sensitive political time in Afghanistan, many of the deserving Afghan allies were stranded in the country and had difficulties evacuating due to logistics and lack of willingness of international countries to issue visas. We believe that the international community MUST ensure their support to Afghan HRDs, journalists, and allies whose lives are still at risk. We also believe that it is important to utilize your platforms to amplify and speak against the injustices that are taking place in Afghanistan, and hopefully to hold the Taliban accountable as they govern.

Historically, how did men help their female counterparts and what was the role of men allies in Afghanistan?

FY: As discussed previously, several binaries, even today, exist on Afghan men, many of whom are portrayed as conservative. However, most of these binaries have resulted from decades of externally imposed wars on Afghanistan since the 1970s, where stories of feminist men often go in the background and stories of war and warriors dominate the mainstream discourse. A significant portion of Afghan men have historically supported education for girls and women, and have also encouraged girls and women within their households to seek professional careers. Two major examples are the WILPF Afghanistan chapter's Hareer Hashim and Jamila Afghani. Both Hareer and Jamila come from families with a religious background, however, both were empowered by men at home to seek education and professional careers. Countless similar examples exist in Afghanistan. Moreover, for many in the west, it may be assumed that many initiatives toward gender equality were taken by the US-led coalition between 2001 and 2021. However, Afghan women had secured many privileges and rights, under male rulers, long before US-led interventions. For instance, in 1919, the right to vote, and the right to education were given to Afghan women, whereas the first girls' school in Afghanistan was established in 1921. However, these initiatives could not be sustained for a long time as Afghanistan was forced into wars in the 1970s.

HH: I believe it is a big disservice to the men who were and continue to be in support of their female counterparts when we generalize all Afghan men; I have witnessed firsthand men that stand as hindrances in the path of women's rights and men that are active supporters of women's rights, but what is crucial is to draw the line between the diverse group of men in Afghanistan. In my experience, I have seen some of my biggest allies that were men, and they have been great believers in our project. Our project *Confronting Militarized Masculinities in the context of Afghanistan* is a great example of a project that celebrates men who are allies and aspires to educate those that are not. An example would be the following: WILPF-Afghanistan has a section reserved for women ulema (scholars). During one of the conferences, some men questioned the knowledge of our women ulema, and it was our male ulema, who stood as their strongest supporters and vouched for their knowledge. That was highly impactful as those same men came afterwards and apologized to the women ulema. This showcases how significant the role of a male ally can be in support of the empowerment of Afghan women. Our male allies' main role is to allow a safe room for women to co-exist and to excel and to be their supporters, regardless of circumstances, and that is the kind of exemplary men we have in our alliance.

Has this role changed since last August and how are men allies currently promoting gender equality?

FY: Since the Taliban's takeover the situation has drastically changed. Even though there were major issues during the coalition presence and human rights activists

working for international NGOs were targeted by the Taliban, in the current situation any “activity” in this regard has nearly stopped. Therefore, our allies are trying their best to work under a certain framework that does not put their lives and their families’ lives at risk. There are still other allies who have continued their work under the framework of Islam, where they use Islamic teachings to debate the Taliban and convince them on reopening girls’ schools and colleges. In sum, however, the situation remains both difficult and challenging.

FH: We are facing many hindrances to our work, whether that is funding, open advocacy, or freedom of speech and media, but our work has continued since last August. Our strategy has been the only thing that has changed during this time, but we are continuing our efforts from both inside and outside of Afghanistan. Currently, we are relying more on our male ulema network to be most active inside of Afghanistan for more precise discussion with the Taliban. However, our male alliance outside of Afghanistan are also utilizing every opportunity available to them through social media, such as Twitter Spaces, discussions held in Georgetown spaces, meeting online with us, or any other network to continue amplifying the needs and wants of Afghans inside and outside of Afghanistan. They are the ones that are the ones that are most relevant in the current context.

How could the international community challenge the Taliban to promote gender equality and preserve gains made in the last two decades?

FY: In August 2021, after the sudden fall of Kabul, the US made a hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan. This felt nothing less than a betrayal of the values so dear to the coalition. The US, along with the predominantly male Taliban, signed a so-called ‘peace deal’ mediated by external parties including Qatar and Pakistan among others. But the deal came at the cost and exclusion of internal stakeholders such as the democratic government, civil society, and Afghan women. Recent protests by Afghan women demanding equal rights reveal the extent to which the peace deal failed them. Under the Taliban regime, the Ministry for Women has also been replaced with the Ministry of Vice and Virtue. This also suggests that the regime put women’s rights on the backburner in terms of their priority agenda. The international community, therefore, while engaging with the Taliban regime can make their engagement conditional on the inclusion of Afghan women and feminist men working for gender equality in the negotiation and dialogue process.

HH: I believe that the international community must hold their end of the bargain and be actively involved in each political discussion. Holding the Taliban directly accountable for whatever happens is crucial and therefore the international community should give their conditional support (financially, opportunity wise, the opportunity for visas, etc).

According to you, under what conditions could peace be brought back in Afghanistan?

FY: Supporters of the Taliban and Doha Talks believe that peace has already been achieved in Afghanistan, as the US/coalition forces, seen as invaders by many, have left the country. However, this is negative peace, or, in simple terms, the absence of violence. Foundations of this negative peace, in recent days, have been challenged after successive attacks by the IS-K (Islamic State Khorasan) in various parts of the country and specifically on the Hazara minority community. Therefore, those hoping for the absence of violence in Afghanistan fear that the country may head into the same spiral of violence if groups like IS-K are not controlled. These complications suggest that sustainable and positive peace in Afghanistan, at the moment, is an elusive dream in the short term. For durable peace in the country, international partners engaging with the Taliban regime need to make their support conditional on initiatives taken towards gender equality, girls' education, and freedom of speech. At the moment, expecting the regime to agree to a democratic setup would not practically be possible. Therefore, in the short term, international partners and aid agencies can at least work toward preserving the gains towards gender equality made in the last two decades. Moreover, Afghanistan, being a multi-ethnic society, is currently very polarised. To find common ground, international partners, especially the EU, can follow the Bonn Conference template and ensure that all major ethnic groups get their due representation in negotiations concerning Afghanistan. This representation should also consist of Afghan women, and not only men.

HH: I believe that we can only ensure peace if human rights, civil liberties, and women's rights are More effort should be made to ensure the betterment and security of the Afghan people, and the Taliban must gain the trust of the people of Afghanistan and must be accountable to the international community allies. I think the international community must push for a humane form of governance that upholds democracy and human rights.

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HH: I believe that we can only ensure peace if human rights, civil liberties, and women's rights are preserved. Afghan people cannot live their entire lives in fear of this regime. More effort should be made to ensure the betterment and security of the Afghan people, and the Taliban must gain the trust of the people of Afghanistan and must be accountable to the international community allies. I think the international community must push for a humane form of governance that upholds democracy and human rights.

RAJA-DANIÈLE MARCOVICI FOUNDATION

PRESENTATION

Aware of the social and environmental role of the company, Danièle Kapel-Marcovici, President and CEO of the RAJA Group, created the RAJA-Danièle Marcovici Foundation in 2006. To promote the empowerment of women and improve their living conditions, the Foundation develops partnerships with French associations that act in France and internationally, provides financial support for projects and carries out awareness and information campaigns for its partners and the general public.



Since its creation, the RAJA-Danièle Marcovici Foundation identifies and financially supports projects in favour of women and girls.

Its action falls within four priority areas of intervention: fighting violence against women and girls, promoting education and leadership, supporting professional integration and economic rights, encouraging women's action for the environment.

The Foundation has contributed to building a future free of violence, injustice and inequality for more than 110,000 women in France and around the world. A positive impact for the benefit of all society.



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