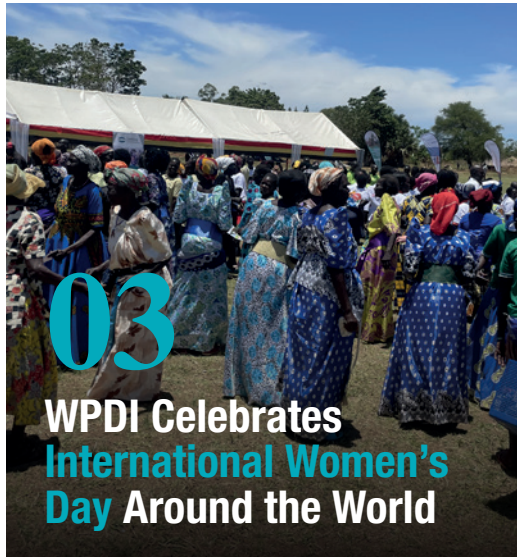




WHITAKER PEACE & DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

Newsletter Spring 2023



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Foreword

Caroline DESCOMBRIS
Executive Director of WPDJ

For WPDJ, 2023 began on **a very positive note**, as this year marks the first of our second decade of operation. Last year was decidedly unique and radiant, with the **celebration of our ten-year anniversary** and the launch of **a new long-term strategy for the next ten years**.

In this light, the topics covered in this newsletter build on **the great work that WPDJ staff and peacemakers have carried** over the past years. Our participation in international events, either through Forest Whitaker, myself, or Rajab, a Youth Peacemaker from Uganda, the renewal of agreements with major partners, the celebration of International Women's Day across different countries and continents - all of these speak of **our momentum and growing recognition around the world**.

As we embark on a new decade, **our foundations are stronger than ever**, and we can see more and more how the efforts of the past are paying off. From day one, our ambition was to develop and implement a theory of change based on the idea **that sustainable development is not just a goal, but also a process**. Sustainable development calls for sustainable change. This is one of the reasons, for example, why the training of trainers of our Youth Peacemakers lasts for one year - without counting the various refresher and update courses that they receive over time.

Such a process takes time, but it also ensures that **we have assets on the ground that are going to be active for years**, with a multiplier effect as they train more and more residents of local communities. This is to say that, as we are now well into 2023, our potential for transformation has reached new levels and will, as we hope, **continue to grow for the benefit of our beneficiaries and their communities**.



WPDI Celebrates **International Women's Day** Around the World

With WPDI realigning **our strategic focus on female empowerment to mark our 10 year anniversary, International Women's Day 2023** was another opportunity for us to highlight our commitment to the promotion of women's rights and the **creation of opportunities for them to thrive.**

In **Uganda**, **1,300 attended** a special event in the Gulu district, Acholi Sub-Region, with a **focus on the agenda for female empowerment, and the eradication of gender-based violence in the local community.**

In **South Sudan**, WPDI conducted an **advocacy campaign** in Yei River County, Central Equatoria State, with an aim of **advocating for women and girl's rights**, the increased enrolment of girls in schools and creating a conducive environment for girls and women to flourish in school and in the wider community. The event drew together **800 participants** from six schools in Yei River County.

In the **United States**, WPDI's team **running the Domestic Harmonizer Program** ran a t-shirt design competition in local schools focused on inspirational women. To participate, the students submitted t-shirt design ideas showing a woman leader they find inspirational. **The winner of the contest submitted a t-shirt with the American memoirist, poet, and civil rights activist Maya Angelou.**

In a blog post published on the occasion of International Women's Day, WPDI President and Founder, Forest Whitaker, said: *"At WPDI, this is one reason we have prioritized female empowerment and access to education in the underprivileged communities where we operate. I have seen first hand the intrinsic power that can be unleashed in a community when its women take the lead. I've seen it in Uganda, in communities rebuilding after years of internal conflict. I've seen it in South Sudan, the world's youngest country, where female peacemakers are playing an active role in building sustainable peace in their communities. I've seen it in Mexico, where gang violence is rife and female survivors of violence have been able to turn their lives around and become breadwinners for their families, helping lift them out of a cycle of instability and poverty. Peacebuilding needs women at the heart of the process."* •



WPDY Youth Peacemaker Emad Rajab Said Participates in Nairobi Peace Process Event

WPDY was proud that one of our Youth Peacemakers from Uganda, Emad Rajab Said, traveled to Nairobi, Kenya, to participate in a special **UN International Symposium on peace planning**. Notably, the event was focused on the issue of child soldiers, and how to manage their reintegration into society.

The Nairobi Process was established with the aim to **fill a void that has existed in consulting stakeholders directly regarding reintegration programming for children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups (CAAFAG)**. The aim of the Nairobi Process to collect and use input from these stakeholders to inform future reintegration initiatives, including during policy making processes.

During the 4-day event, the steering committee of the UN international Symposium met physically for the first time in Nairobi to discuss the recommendations offered by different partners hailing from countries such as Uganda, South Sudan, Nigeria, Liberia, Colombia, Sri Lanka among others. This was a unique opportunity for the different partners **to meet and share experiences** which helped them to learn from each other, expand on program generation with activities tailored to help in the **reintegration of the former child soldiers**.

Sharing his thoughts on the event, Emad Rajab wrote: *"I was able to present how WPDY is changing the lives of the communities where they are operating so effectively. Many partners were engaged in reintegration, but WPDY's approach is unique and reflects many of the main principles of the Nairobi Peace Process. It is an honor for me to be able to represent WPDY locally,*

nationally and internationally. I have been privileged to be able to meet so many other different experts from different countries. It was a learning curve for me, and I am still learning because we are continuing our reintegration process and monitoring our progress via virtual meetings." •



WPDJ Executive Director Delivers Keynote Speech at Be Philanthropy in Brussels

At the end of April, WPDJ Executive Director Caroline Descombris was invited to deliver a keynote speech at the Be Philanthropy event in Brussels. Organized by the King Baudouin Foundation, Be Philanthropy is focused **on social engagement and the promotion of philanthropy as a driving force behind societal transformation.**

The event aimed to bring together committed individuals and organizations that run initiatives for the common good. Through targeted, agile, and innovative action, these stakeholders are able to complement the efforts of governments and others in order to advance social progress around the world, notably through the pursuit of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

WPDJ had the privilege of being showcased during the opening ceremony, in the presence of Her Majesty Mathilde, Queen of the Belgians. As an eminent figure dedicated to promoting international solidarity and cooperation, the Queen is part of the United Nations Group of Advocates for the SDGs, of which WPDJ CEO and Founder, Forest Whitaker, is also a member.

Invited to share his vision of philanthropy and his personal journey as an activist for peace and development via a video interview, Forest Whitaker said *"We are all working together for the same purpose: being able to free the planet from conflict in the best ways we can,*

and allow every individual to have peace, health, happiness and prosperity in their lives. We are grateful to the King Baudouin Foundation for inviting us to share this event with so many inspiring social innovators, people and organizations that contribute to our common goal for forwarding sustainable development and peace around the globe." •



WPDl renews partnerships with Western Union Foundation, L'Oréal Fund for Women and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

WPDl's quest for lasting peace around the world involves long standing partnerships with actors equally committed to peacebuilding and sustainable development in areas that suffer from violence and instability. In this context, we are delighted to have extended our partnerships with three long-standing allies in the quest for sustainable peace in underprivileged communities: **the Western Union Foundation, the L'Oréal Fund for Women and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.**

The Western Union Foundation

Since 2017, WPDl has been supported by the Western Union Foundation for **promoting resilience and creating economic opportunity for fragile and vulnerable communities in Africa and Mexico.** Through the foundation's grant, we will be able to continue developing the deployment of the **Youth Peacemaker Network**, which includes programs delivered at our Community Learning Center, such as the Business Bootcamp, vocational training programs in ICT, Arts & Crafts, Conflict Resolution Education, community leaders training, sports programs, cinema for peace initiatives, and peace engagement days.

The L'Oréal Fund for Women

WPDl is also honored to have extended our partnership with the L'Oréal Fund for Women. The main goal of the partnership is **to strengthen the efforts of WPDl to foster the resilience of underprivileged women through an entrepreneurship and business incubation program**, as

well as another program for educational scholarships. The renewal includes the continuation of an existing program in Uganda and South Africa, as well as a new Mexico program in partnership with the UNHCR.

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

Finally, WPDl is delighted to have renewed our partnership with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) **to foster conditions for community resilience and cohesion, peacebuilding and sustainable livelihoods** in the Equatoria region of South Sudan until 2025. Our collaboration, which started in 2019 and was extended last year to strengthen our outreach to youth groups in marginalized communities, aims **to build and support a workforce of peacemakers, provide training sessions in conflict resolution, support community dialogues and promote entrepreneurship and resilient livelihoods**, notably by supporting women- and youth-led business projects. •



Youth Peacemaker Portrait

Meet Carlos Eduardo, A Youth Peacemaker from Tijuana, Mexico

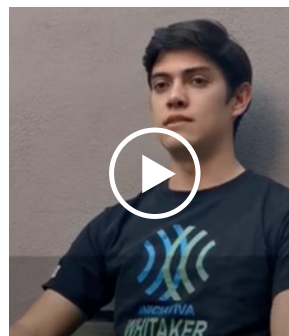
At the core of WPDI's global strategy is the creation of a network of Youth Peacemakers who are trained to disseminate a culture of peace and cohesion in their local communities. These youths, motivated and committed to becoming real agents of positive transformation, are on the frontline of our struggle for sustainable peacebuilding in marginalized communities around the world.

Carlos Eduardo is one example of a **committed, socially responsible, fully engaged Youth Peacemaker** who deeply understands the social issues holding back his community and the structural changes that need to be put in place in order to achieve lasting peace.

Originally from Guadalajara, Carlos is 24 years old and has been living in Tijuana for 18 years. **He joined our Youth Peacemaker Network program with a deep desire to become a changemaker in his community.** He felt that Tijuana is a city that needs this kind of social activism, because of the situations of abuse and violence they're facing everyday. He felt that education and training was **a solution to help communities move away from a cycle of violence and marginalization.**

In 2022, after completing his one-year training with WPDI, Carlos started training young people on peace and conflict resolution in a local detention center.

Watch his full testimony:



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