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From peace torch to peace treaty: Ugandan women promote an inclusive, sustainable peace

The signing of an Agreement on Comprehensive Solutions to the Causes of War by the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) on 2 May 2007 in Juba, Sudan, has been hailed as the first step towards a final peace agreement to end more than 20 years of conflict in the nation's North. Yet for women in Uganda and the region, this significant step is part of a long journey towards a peace that includes the perspectives of women.

When a coalition of Ugandan women embarked on a five-day journey in November 2006 to carry the Women's Peace Torch to the site of negotiations in the Southern Sudan capital of Juba, they bore a beacon of hope that the outcome would include women's experience. Six months later, the negotiating parties have signed an agreement that embodies commitments to gender equality and women's rights.

The Agreement on Comprehensive Solutions commits both parties to such principles as the need for broad-based democratic governance, which includes the participation of all citizens at all levels. It states that the composition of the Government shall be broadly representative of the national character, reflecting gender and social diversity. It commits the Government to taking affirmative action in favor of groups marginalized on the basis of gender, age or disability, and ensures appropriate provision for vulnerable groups such as widows and female-headed households. Moreover, the Agreement reaffirms the new Equal Opportunities Law, which aims to eliminate gender-based discrimination and ensure the equal treatment of all groups within Uganda.

This landmark agreement reflects the tireless efforts of UNIFEM staff in Uganda, Kenya and Sudan, as well as the diplomacy of UNIFEM Goodwill Ambassador Hon. Phoebe Asiyo, who handed the Women's Peace Torch to the Ugandan Parliament in 2006, in imploring parties to the Juba peace process to consider the impact of conflict on the mothers, sisters and daughters of Uganda.

In the wake of a civil war that has left tens of thousands dead and more than 1.7 million displaced, the Women's Peace Torch has helped to light the path to an

inclusive peace. The UNIFEM regional team and the Uganda Women's Coalition for Peace will continue the journey towards a final settlement.

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