

Dear All,

Just to let you all know that I have now returned from the D.R.Congo safe and sound after an extremely successful trip that took me on a special journey from the capital Kinshasa (the West of the DRC) to Goma/Rutshuru/kiwanja /Bukavu (war affected cities in the East of the DRC) as well as in Gisenyi (Rwanda) from 23 November to 10 December.

Over 65 women were connected to WILPF over the course of five WILPF Connection sessions that took place in the towns cited above. An evaluation meeting and restructuring of roles within the current DRC group also took place.

I was able to join Congolese women in different rallies/marches or meetings in different towns during the 16 days of Activism against, particularly those organized by Jeanine Ngungu of the "We can Campaign", as well as visit the DRC Senate and attended high level meetings organized by the DRC minister of gender to launch a strategic action plan to reduce VAW and increased women participation.

Words are not enough to express my gratitude to all the members of the UK section who generously contributed in order to allow these WILPF Connect sessions to take place in the DRC. This gesture from the UK section reached the DRC group in a chain of great solidarity that will remain forever in my best memories because it has demonstrated that "another world is possible." With a strong will and small means, WILPF women were once more able to overcome cultural differences and fear of the unknown, in order to reach out to communicate and share a vision in which gender, social justice and disarmament are central for a peaceful and better world.

I am extremely grateful and will always remain in admiration for the assistance and love that I received from all members of the DRC group named below who provided time, food, accommodation, transport, guidance, advice and support. I am extremely grateful to DRC member Jeanine Ngungu for making my trip to the Eastern DRC possible. I was able to take part in so many activities with grassroots women in the East and in Kinshasa that I will not have enough space to write about these interesting, challenging and enriching experiences. Jeanine made sure that transport, accommodation, security and all meetings with various women's groups in the different towns in the East were possible, even with high level officials in the territorial administration, the police and military. I will cherish the support, love and solidarity received from Chantal Malamba, Moseka and Jeanine during the dangerous road trip from Goma to Rutshuru in which we faced so many challenges.

I am also grateful and sincerely congratulate DRC members from the East, Drocele Mugomoka and Venantie Bisimwa, for their leadership and organisational skills that made it possible for us to have such a successful Connect session in the Eastern town of Bukavu. We met with a wide range of women inside the UN mission's, which was possible thanks to a letter from Susi from the WILPF Geneva office to the MONUC-UN Mission. We were able to receive a room from 10-17hr and transportation for all the

women present at the successful connect session in Bukavu. I thank the UWAKI women's groups and maman Willy/Conader for their assistance with accommodation and food.

I am sincerely grateful to the Kinshasa based WILPF members, especially the DRC senator Eve Bazaiba for providing transportation, logistics, and renting the room for the Kinshasa WILPF Connect session as well as offering valuable advice and a tour of the DRC Senate. I was able to rely on Eve at a moment's notice for transportation and facilities assistance at the airport.

I am grateful and congratulate DRC Chairwoman and Vice-Chairwoman, Annie Matundu and Georgette Biebié, for their leadership and organisational skills, food and accommodation that made the evaluation meeting possible and provided for a successful preparation of the Connect sessions in Kinshasa. Last but not least, I would like to thank the new WILPF DRC group secretary Kenneth Ampu and her colleagues at the "Femmes des Media pour la Justice au Congo," for their great support, journalistic skills and connections. They provided me with access to local women in Kinshasa to talk about the WILPF vision and a air time on the DRC media on a special TV program to talk about the 16 days of activism and the WILPF vision. I am also grateful to all the extended members of DRC group (the new and current ones) for their support enthusiasm and solidarity.

All the evaluation and monitoring forms demonstrated that the 5 Connect sessions were highly successful and appreciated. The DRC group leadership and all members are engaged in making sure to promote WILPF's vision, objectives and methods in their ongoing work with women and in their research and lobbying work for peace and justice in the DRC. This vision has always greatly been shared by all of them and they are all pleased to be part of such as international organisation that gathers women from different cultures/tradition to share and work globally for that vision. They all hope that by the next WILPF International Congress, the DRC group would be eligible to become a full operational WILPF section in Central Africa.

WILPF DRC leadership and members copied to this message send warm greetings to all UK based WILPF members as well as WILPF international leadership and members. Jeanine Ngungu is still hoping to represent WILPF DRC group at the January 2010 WILPF International Board meeting in India as she is now free to organize that trip (to get a new passport, as the DRC has now changed to a biometric one).

I sincerely hope that more communication and collaboration will continue to be possible between WILPF women in the world. Wishing you the best for the festive seasons and the New Year 2010!

In peace, solidarity and great gratitude to all,

Marie-Claire Faray
Executive member-UK WILPF