



# International Solidarity Reflection

Celebrating the Strength of Women

*Shalom*

School Sisters of Notre Dame

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## Introduction

We celebrate the gift of all women and the contributions they make in society, at home and the workplaces as mothers and caregivers, wives, daughters, and sisters, farmers, laborers, teachers, lawmakers, and leaders. We embrace the women of the world in their struggle for equality, justice, peace and development.

## Call to Prayer

Called to solidarity with all of God's creation and with a keen awareness of women as beings created in God's own image, we celebrate the gift of womanhood. We pray for an end to all forms of discrimination and violence perpetuated on women throughout the world. We support all efforts to bring freedom, peace, healing, and transformation of a world where men and women are valued equally.

## Experience

In solidarity with all the women of our world we share in their struggles.

**Story 1:** Fifteen-year-old Angie feverishly holds her tiny HIV positive baby conceived following a gang rape in January 2008. The callousness of young men taking turns to violate her body as they said "It is our right!" is still fresh in her mind. How was it their right to rape and poison her body?

**Story 2:** Like many women in developing countries, Mazoe Gondwe is a small scale farmer and her family's main food provider. Lately she has struggled to farm her land due to the unpredictable rains, which make her hard life even tougher. "Now we can't just depend on rain-fed-agriculture, so we plant two crops: one watered by rain and one that needs irrigation. But irrigation is back-breaking and can take four hours a day." Speaking at the UN climate change conference in Poland in December, Gondwe said that she wanted access to technology that would help her situation. "As a local farmer, I know what I need and I know what works. I grew up in the area and I know how the system is changing."

**Story 3:** Sisters Marie Teresa Olivero (60) and Catrina Giraudo (67) members of the Contemplative Missionary Movement of Blessed Charles De Foucauld were kidnapped on November 9, 2008 from the small, isolated town of El Wak at the Somalia-Kenyan border. Left behind were orphaned and abandoned children, poor women, TB patients, and co-workers, with whom they shared their compassionate hearts.

## Reflection

"Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts." (*Romans 5:3-5, NRSV*)

**Reader 1:** "Man and woman have the same dignity and are of equal value, not only because they are both, in their difference, created in the image of God, but even more profoundly because the dynamic of reciprocity that gives life to the "we" in the human couple, is an image of God." (*The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, #111*)

**Reader 2:** “When women are able to fully share their gifts with the whole community, the very way in which society understands and organizes itself is improved, and comes to reflect in a more comprehensive manner the substantial unity of the human family ... The growing presence of women in social, economic and political life at the local, national and international levels is thus a very positive development. Women have a full right to become actively involved in all areas of public life, and this right must be affirmed and guaranteed, also, where necessary, through appropriate legislation.” (Pope John Paul II, *World Day of Peace Message, 1995, #9*)

**Reader 3:** “The School Sisters of Notre Dame are committed to ensuring that all people have the opportunity to develop their potential as individuals created in the image of God. This requires that governments invest in girls and women by providing quality education, addressing discrimination, enforcing existing laws, and establishing a safety net for the most vulnerable. As members of an international community, SSNDs have a special opportunity to remind governments of their obligations to women and girls.” (Ann Scholz, *SSND, Director of the UN/NGO Office for SSND*)

### Questions for Reflection and Prayer

In our various countries and continents

- ❖ What are the issues that negatively affect the dignity of women?
- ❖ What can we do to bring hope to our oppressed women?

### Action

During the month, celebrate the **Strength of Women**.

- ❖ Join the women of the world in celebrating **International Women’s Day** on March 8, 2009. Several activities may be found on the [UN Women’s Day website](#).
- ❖ Each day in prayer remember those women in your country who weep due to discrimination or violence.
- ❖ Prepare a get together and share with friends stories of women who have influenced your lives and that of others in your society and world.
- ❖ Organize teach-ins, workshops, cultural events and other activities around women’s accomplishments and concerns.
- ❖ Encourage teachers, campus ministers, and youth leaders to explore ideas about women and girls with young people.
- ❖ Write letters and send emails to elected officials and leaders at local, national or international levels, who can improve the situation of women and girls.
- ❖ Help promote the accomplishment of the Millennium Development Goals, especially those directly related to women and girls.

### In Solidarity we bless all the women of the world.

May the God of Eve teach your broken bones to dance.  
May the God of Hagar bring you comfort in the desert times of your life.  
May the God of Miriam bring companions to you on your way.  
May the God of Deborah grant you courage for your battles.  
May the Christ who knew Mary and Martha show you the way of balance.  
May the Christ who healed the bent-over woman heal your pain.  
May the Christ of Mary Magdala send you out to proclaim your story.  
In the name of Christ who is the memory, hope and authority of the future. Amen.  
(Mary Zimmer, *Women Psalms, 1999*)