



# INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN RWANDA

**The 3rd Muslim-Christian Women's National Seminar:**  
*Theme: "Rwandan women's participation in decision making in their family, in politics, and in their religious denominations."*

The 3rd Muslim-Christian National Seminar took place from May 25<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup>, 2009 in Kigali. Since 2003, the Program for Muslim-Christian Relations in Rwanda has also held a national seminar for Muslim and Christian women. The seminar is organized by the women's division of the National Committee for Muslim-Christian Relations in Rwanda.

### Participants

There were 60 participants: 19 Muslims, 8 Catholics, 3 Anglicans, 25 Presbyterians, 2 Pentecostals, 2 members of the Nazarene Church in Rwanda, and 1 member of the Baptist Church. There were 16 men and 44 women. There was a delegation from the neighboring country of the Republic Democratic of Congo consisting of 2 Catholics and 3 Protestants. The presence of Honorable Kanakuze Judith, member of the Rwandan Parliament is worth mentioning.

### The conferences

We followed eight conferences: 1. Presentation of the problematic (Rev. Désiré Rutaganda); 2. Participation of the Rwandan woman in decision making, the biblical point of view (Sr. Maria Venanzia); 3. The participation of women in the decision making bodies at the base level, constraints and perspectives (Mme Rutayisire Georgette, Vice mayor); 4. The role of the religious denominations in the promotion of women's implication in the

decision making bodies (Mgr Mvunabandi Augustin, bishop of the Anglican Church of Rwanda); 5. The participation of Rwandan women in decision making, the Islamic point of view (Sheikh Khaled Gatera); 6. The participation of women in decision making bodies at the political and developmental level, constraints and perspectives (Honorable Kanakuze Judith,

member of the Rwandan Parliament); 7. Strategies for fostering women's participation in decision making both at the family and political level (Ms Kamashazi G Donnah, Unifem) 8. Specific actions for the promotion women's implication in the decision making bodies (Mr Gad Runezerwa).



### Some questions debated

1. A new bill gives only 12 weeks of leave to the woman who gives birth and stipulates that if she does not return to work after 6 weeks she will receive only 20% of her salary. How could such a bill be passed when women constitute the majority of the Rwandan parliament (there are indeed 45 women and 35 men in the parliament)? Are women the worst enemies of women? 2. We speak a lot about promotion of women in Rwanda. However, in reality some are called "business women" while in fact they do not have any investment capital. There are worse examples. Those who sell little things along the streets are

chased by the security forces all day long. Some women are called “farmers”, yet they do not have any piece of land to till. What is the government doing concretely for the economic development of Rwandan women? 3. Women leaders, we need them more and more. But is it not at the expense of the education of children? Who is now taking care of the children in our families?

### Group sharing

Six groups of ten people were formed.

We shared about those questions: 1. Women have been created, according to Holy Scripture, to be Men’s aid. If a woman is excluded from decision making structures, has she not become an inconvenient aid? 2. When women are excluded from decision making structures who can give them back their rights? 3. After this seminar, which strategies would you take in view of promoting the participation of women in the structures of decision making?

### Some answers of the groups.

To be able fulfill conveniently their role as Men’s aid, women must participate in decision making at all levels (family, politics, society, and religious denominations). Women are no longer a convenient aid when they are never consulted and when their ideas are not taken into consideration. Women can perform all kind of duties related to decision making that men currently occupy. Women can sometimes perform better than men in the same position. The responsibility to free women from exclusion is incumbent upon all. However, women remain the first agent of their fight and liberation. They certainly need the help of men but men should not consider themselves as the main liberators of women. Concerning the strategies to be taken, the participants mentioned : sensitization at all levels in view of encouraging people to change their mentality, beginning with families and religious communities ; promotion of education for women ; increasing women’s financial capacity ; building up



self-confidence ; calling on women to create associations and cooperatives stores.

### Final Declaration

At the end of the seminar, participants committed themselves to be the yeast for change in Rwandan society by stimulating men and women to participate in the promotion of women ; to mobilize women to intervene actively in all the areas of social life ; to organize women in defense and promotion of their rights ; to organize women in associations and cooperatives for the promotion of women ; to build up women’s self-confidence, by not underestimating their capacities ; to promote education for girls and to fight stereotypes about women. The participants wished: such an organization at the district and sector level; a seminar for men on the same topic of including women in the structures of decision making. The participants call on the different religious denominations to be involved in the promotion of women’s participation in decision making by including them in the structures of decision making.

### The new national committee in charge of Muslim-Christian relations in Rwanda

At the end of the seminar Christian women elected a new national committee of women for the promotion of Muslim-Christian relations in Rwanda. The committee consists of 9 women. The new committee is : President : Pasteur Rose Marie Ibyishaka, Presbyterian Church; Vice-president : Sister Spéciose Nyirampakaye, Catholic Church ; Secretary : Mrs Louise Mushimiyimana, Anglican Church ; Treasury : Rev. Dative Nkundizana, Anglican Church ; Advisors : 1. Rev. Judith Nzisabira, Nazarene Church, 2. Rev. Ruth Nyiramana, Methodist Church, 3. Mrs. Janvière Nyirahabiyaremye, Catholic Church, 4. Mrs Kantetere Espérance, Pentecostal Church, 5. Mrs Florence Mukaremera, Presbyterian Church.



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