

Women's Peace Committee Leader (F)

Background

You lived in the city of Laag when your family, who is Nurul, was displaced and moved to an IDP camp just north of the city. In the war, you lost your father and brother. Your mother is currently ill and struggling with deep depression. You have lived in this IDP camp since the early 2000s and have witnessed many violent outbursts as a result of ethnic rivalry within the camp. Because of the rising tensions in the camp, the grounds are divided along ethnic lines; the Tarim are separated from the Nurul and Warod communities. The ethnic rivalries brought the war into the camp; the devastation is unescapable. Unable to tolerate this kind of division, you started a movement within your camp by inviting Tarim women to join you and other Nurul women for tea. Over tea, you each shared your experiences of the conflict and this provided the foundation for a growing sense of rapport and mutual respect. Your "women's tea" initiative grew quickly and eventually evolved into the Women's Peace Committee (WPC).

The WPC gained popularity in the camp among women as a place to share stories of loss, but also as a forum for women to plan small peacebuilding activities. For example, when an act of violence would occur within the camp, often between ethnic groups, the WPC would bring members of each group together to discuss the event and engage in dialogue. As a result of these efforts, WPC mediated a number of disputes in the camp. WPC also began to advocate to the camp directors for specific women-centered services, such as escorts when leaving the camp to find food or firewood, women's health supplies, and psychosocial training for WPC members to counsel other camp members. WPC gained considerable respect from all sides for their commitment to peace and reconciliation.

As WPC's elected chairwoman, you have been chosen to represent their demands at the peace talks. Most of what you know about the peace talks is what you have heard from the Open Hands representative. You hope that you can represent the WPC and camp residents well, but you are also very nervous; the upcoming trip to Abayo (the capital of Trumont) will be your first time on a plane and you've heard there are very important people at the talks.

What you hope to accomplish

You worked with Open Hands to organize consultations with over 100 IDP camp residents and, from those consultations, developed specific requests or demands to be considered in the peace negotiations. Your demands include: the resettlement of IDPs into their home communities; reparations for villages and farms destroyed by the government and Alliance for Freedom and Democracy (AFD); and increased funding and supplies (shelter, food, water, health services) for the IDP camps until the plan for resettlement is implemented. Members of the WPC have also asked you to communicate the plight of IDP women to the international community. Many women and girls were raped during the civil war and, further, rapes and assaults are common in the IDP camps. In Danaanian culture, rape is a social taboo and victims, as well as perpetrators, are ostracized from their communities. The WPC demands that the peace process take into account these women and girls and provides for their wellbeing.

You have never conducted high-level advocacy like this, but you are willing and ready to take on the challenge. You have the support of Open Hands and they have set up meetings for you with the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Trumont and the UN Senior Mediation Expert. You also hope to speak to other major players at the talks, like representative from the US, so you can inform them of the challenges in the camps and the need for a peaceful resolution to this conflict.

You are aware that the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Trumont is advocating for the repatriation of refugees from Trumont and you look forward to your meeting with him. You hope he will be similarly supportive of the resettlement of IDPs. You are also excited to meet the UN Senior Mediation Expert. The Open Hands representative told you that she is compassionate toward the plight of refugees and IDPs and is a brilliant advocate for the inclusion of marginalized voices. You hope she will carry your message to other international actors.

You are interested in meeting with the representative of the Danaan Interfaith Dialogue Group; there are many parallels between the reconciliation and dialogue work of the DIDG and WPC. You've also heard of the great work that 4Peace has done with women across Danaan and believe that the Executive Director will be open to meeting with you and supporting your concerns, especially as it relates to the victims of sexual violence.

Capacity to create change

As a representative from the IDP camp, you are the voice for thousands of others who have been neglected by the parties to the conflict. You represent an important segment of Danaanian society that is currently being ignored. You need to figure out who will listen to you and take your concerns seriously.

WPC's activities also illustrate that reconciliation is possible. You have already managed to bring separate communities in the camps together, and your knowledge from this experience is something you can offer to the major stakeholders in the peace agreement and other civil society groups.

Relationships with others

You have a close relationship with the Open Hands representative who has helped you put together your agenda. Other than her, you do not know any of the actors present at these talks. You are nervous about being in this environment, but excited to get your message out and meet other people working for peace in Danaan.