

# WOMEN IN DIPLOMACY

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CENTRE FOR AFRICAN JUSTICE, PEACE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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INTERVIEWS WITH  
AMBASSADORS

A LEGACY OF  
LEADERSHIP



SPECIAL ISSUE:  
**AMBASSADORS**

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## FROM THE TEAM LEADER

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Women are powerful leaders and change-makers. Still, they need to be more represented in leadership positions and in decision-making processes. The need to prioritize and support efforts to increase women's representation is undeniable, and so is the need to establish policies and practices that encourage women's leadership and promote gender parity. However, this largely depends on the recognition of the benefits of diversity and gender parity in leadership and decision-making, which is often overlooked.

In Diplomacy, women remain underrepresented in Ambassadorial positions across the world as this field has traditionally lagged behind many other sectors when it comes to gender balance. Undeniably, some progress has been made, with many countries appointing a larger number of women to diplomatic and consular services. However, significant barriers and challenges remain, such as traditional gender stereotypes, cultural norms and over discriminatory practices of the gatekeepers at foreign policy institutions. Besides, although more women are entering Foreign Service fields, a larger number of women are still concentrated in lower positions. Women working in diplomacy have made critical contributions to shaping the multilateral system we have inherited today, yet their contributions have often been overlooked.

On 22nd of June 2022, a resolution was adopted by the General Assembly where it was decided to declare 24 June of each year the International Day of Women in Diplomacy. This is indeed a remarkable feat in the recognition of the crucial role played by women in the field of diplomacy, which continue to shape international politics and relations. According to H.E. Mr. Abdulla Shahid, President of the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly; this resolution, opens the door to discuss the challenges women in diplomacy face and with this celebration of women in diplomacy, it inspires the next generation.





## FROM THE TEAM LEADER

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We applaud women's leadership, participation and the great achievements of women in diplomacy. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical role of women in diplomacy. Women ambassadors and diplomats have been at the forefront of the response, working to secure supplies, coordinate relief efforts, and advocate for the most vulnerable. It is clear that further progress needs to be made to make Diplomacy a more gender-inclusive gender field. But in order to move towards a more gender-equal gender reality, it is necessary to address the various factors that prevent women's effective participation, such as the lack of female mentors. Their leadership and vision will be critical to addressing the challenges of our time and creating a more peaceful, just, and equitable world.

In light of this, our edition of this Women Empowerment Team Magazine, titled "Women in leadership positions - Diplomacy" focuses on the experiences and inspiring stories of two African female Ambassadors who are playing a crucial role in empowering women through their remarkable presence within their community: H.E. Dr Eniola Ajayi and H.E. Ms. Berta Celestino Cossa. Because women need role models and these strong female Ambassadors understand this need and enjoy inspiring other women, they are uniquely positioned to mentor and empower others.

By sharing their stories, we aim to provide women with the knowledge they need to achieve their life and career goals, whilst giving light on the various obstacles they may encounter along the way. The results of the interviews, as well as other content in the Magazine, are intended to serve as an empowering tool to help women recognize their potential and the resources that lie within them. After all, empowered women empower women.

With that being said, we would like to thank H.E. Dr Eniola Ajayi, Nigerian Ambassador to The Netherlands; H.E. Ms. Berta Celestino Cossa, Mozambique Ambassador to Belgium for sharing their personal stories and insights on women empowerment. Furthermore, we thank the Ambassador of the Republic of Rwanda to the Kingdom of the Netherlands Mr. Olivier J.P. Nduhungirehe for his contribution to this issue with his insight on the importance of African Women in Diplomacy. Also, I would like to thank our readers for taking the time to read these inspiring interviews and articles. We hope to have encouraged, motivated and inspired you.

Finally, I also would like to thank the CAJPHR Board members and all the Women's Empowerment Team members who have helped to produce and publish this Magazine's issue. We look forward to further talking about women empowerment and sharing the stories of successful African women who are thriving in their careers, by providing them with a platform for their stories to be heard.



**AZIZAT SULAIMON**

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT  
TEAM LEADER

## THE AMBASSADORS

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H.E. MRS. BERTA CELESTINO COSSA



H.E. DR. ENIOLA AJAYI



H.E. MR. OLIVIER JEAN PATRICK NDUHUNGIREHE

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**Women who get to the top must also seize the opportunity to lift up other women, by speaking up for women and making room for them.**

**-H.E. Dr Eniola Ajayi -**

## DR ENIOLA AJAYI

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Dr. Eniola Ajayi, former Nigerian Ambassador to the Netherlands, started working at the Nigerian Airforce as an Optometrist and an Ocular Pathologist and stayed there until 1997 when she started her practice. She then ventured into private practice but was later called into the public service to serve as the Commissioner for Education, Science, and Technology in Ekiti State, and afterward as the Commissioner for Environment. Furthermore, the All Progressive Congress nominated Dr. Eniola Ajayi as an ambassador and that started her Ambassadorial career. She was the Nigerian Ambassador to The Netherlands until 2023. Former Nigerian Ambassador to Hungary with concurrent accreditation to Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

# INTERVIEW WITH H.E. DR. ENIOLA AJAYI



**Could you please give us a brief history of your professional path, starting with your educational background?**

I started my primary education in Ekiti, at St George's Anglican Primary School, and then I went to Christ's School, for my secondary education. Before moving on to the University of Benin for my first degree in Optometry, I had a Bachelor of Science in Optometry.

Later I got a sponsorship to do a Master of Philosophy in Ocular Pathology under the University of London, with a postgraduate research and training at the Moorfields Hospital, and later St. Thomas' Hospital, in London. After that, I went back to Nigeria and I got a Doctor of Optometry in 2000. And that was my educational career.

As for my professional career, I started working at the Nigerian Airforce as an Optometrist and an Ocular Pathologist, and I stayed there until 1997, when I started my own practice. I then ventured into private practice, but was later called into the public service to serve as the Commissioner for Education, Science and Technology in Ekiti State, and afterwards as the Commissioner for Environment.

Later I was called by my political party, the All Progressive Congress (APC). After winning the elections at the Centre, the State was asked to nominate one candidate for the position of Ambassador, and that is how I got nominated as an Ambassador.

I served initially in Hungary, with concurrent accreditation to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia. This is where I began my Ambassadorial Career. When the term ended, some of us were retained, and I was one of those. I was appointed to the Kingdom of The Netherlands in May 2021. And that is where I am until today (until 2023). That is my career path.

**Becoming a medical doctor requires a lot of studying and hard work. Looking back at your career history, do you regret your medical career path or do you think being a medical expert positively contributed to who you are today?**

I do not regret being a Doctor, at all. Being a Doctor has always been something I wanted because I've always wanted to look after people and it was through my profession that I was able to achieve that. It gave me a lot of joy to get people to see what they couldn't see, who had one problem or the other with their eyes, and to know that I was able to resolve all of those things, to the best of my abilities.

Caring for people is something that has helped me a lot and paying attention to details is something that being a Doctor helps you to do, because you look at things a bit more deeply and see that not everything is the way it seems. If a patient has a headache, you have to think of like ten different reasons why they could have it. And that ability to do what we call a 'differential diagnosis' makes you look at things more deeply than most people would.

So, being a Doctor helps me to pay attention to details, and it has helped me during the course of my work. So that's why I would say I don't regret it at all.

**What inspired the change in your career path? What inspired you to be involved in your political party and to eventually accept this challenge to become an Ambassador?**

Changing my career path was not intentional, it was an accidental thing that happened in the course of my life. It was the trajectory of my service to humanity in general that brought me here.

I am someone who believes in giving my best anywhere I go, whatever it takes. So, overtime, everywhere I went I was recognized. They kept putting me up for different things: Chairman of this, President of that. So that is what changed my career path: it was one thing leading to the other.

I often tell people: I started out my career in the military as a civilian staff, I became an entrepreneur, and then a Public Official of Government, as an Executive Council Member in the State Government; I then went on to become a full-blown politician, and was later nominated as a Diplomat. I've traversed around all the different types of professions anyone could have!



**"WOMEN DO NOT NEED TO LOWER THEIR STANDARDS. IF YOU FIND YOURSELF IN A POLITICAL PARTY THAT REQUIRES YOU TO LOWER YOUR STANDARDS, THEN THEY ARE NOT WORTHY OF ASSOCIATING WITH."**

**What are the legal requirements for becoming an Ambassador in Nigeria? Are there special concessions for women?**

There are no legal requirements for becoming an Ambassador. The only requirement that an Ambassador needs is education. People can become Ambassadors through two different means: one, as a career diplomat; and one as a non-career diplomat.

I am a non-career diplomat. Career diplomats are employed in Foreign Service, and are sent to a Foreign Services Academy. There, they are taught the norms and the etiquettes of diplomacy, they learn about policies and international diplomacy, and in some cases may also have the opportunity to study a foreign language. And then with time they start moving in the Foreign Service's structure and may eventually be appointed as an Ambassador.

So what is needed in the process is not any legality, it is just education. And that is why many countries have both career and non-career Ambassadors: because they know that once you get the minimum level of education to be able to function as an Ambassador, you can do it. And all that is left to do is to train; you will be given some training, but you will need to do a lot of self-tutoring as well.

Whether any special concessions are given to women: there's none at all, right now. Speaking for my country [Nigeria], in my own State Government, they do pay a lot of attention to matters of gender equality. But, generally speaking, there are no concessions to women. But any country that would do well, would make room for their own women to excel. That's my own thought on the matter.

**Based on your experience, what additional qualifications, skills, or special training can be of advantage to African young women aspiring to become Ambassadors?**

I don't know because I never aspired to become an Ambassador. But what I would say to anyone who wants to make a difference in their lifetime would be to just do their best wherever they find themselves, because people will recognize that talent and dedication anywhere you go. That is my own advice.

**Women remain underrepresented in Ambassadorial positions and continue facing stereotypes and inequality. Based on your experience, what are appropriate measures that can be taken to make Diplomacy a more gender-inclusive field? What changes would you advocate?**

The only way to make Ambassadorial and any other positions in Governments more inclusive is to make a deliberate effort, for example through quotas for women representation. Each political party should be mandated to have at least one woman out of three representing them during election. That way, whether by a stroke of luck, or by providence, more women can get elected. But if there is no deliberate effort to include women, women will not be able to participate effectively.

Women by nature are not aggressive and that is the reason for our underrepresentation in Governments. Women who get to the top must also seize the opportunity to lift up other women, by speaking up for women and making room for them.

I was at an event yesterday where they said, to my surprise, that "International Women's Day was being celebrated this year as the 111th International Women's Day". Today we are still asking for the same things we have been asking for over a century! So women who eventually get to the top must find a way to fight like a man and win like a woman, and make sure that women are included. And by this I mean: they must speak out like a woman would do, but they also must find a way to convince men to support us. Because unfortunately they are in the majority in those houses, and they are the ones who call the shots.



**In the course of your life/career have you faced any life or career-related challenges that could have limited you in some way or prevented you from becoming who you are today? If so, how have you been able to overcome them?**

One of the challenges I faced was being vilified as Commissioner for Education, Science and Technology in Ekiti State for wanting to do what we called the "Teacher's Development Needs Assessment". We wanted to do this to find out the best way for our teachers to be properly trained; we wanted to know their standards so that we would know how to tailor their training needs.

Unfortunately, it was misconstrued: the opposition told the teachers that we wanted to use it as an excuse to retrench them. So everybody called for my head, literally. No one wanted to have anything to do with me. I overcame this situation by presenting myself to run as a candidate for the House of Representatives, because that gave me the opportunity to interface with people directly, and it made them realize that I actually meant well.

Another challenge I faced was in my personal life. I had the unfortunate incident of losing my daughter in 2018. And I almost gave up on being an Ambassador. But I realized that I needed the job to distract me from the pain. When I went back to work my colleagues could not understand, but the other option was to sit down, cry and mope around, and the pain would still not go away. So I realized that I needed to go back to work. And over time, even though the pain does not go away, I've come to live with it, to accept it. I also realized that my daughter was so proud of me in her lifetime, that she would have wanted me to carry on.

One day I told one of my daughters "I wish God had taken me in her place" and she replied "No Mommy, please. We need you". And because of them, I live.

**You have been distinguished with multiple awards in the various fields you have worked in. Can you tell us about them and what motivates you?**

I've gotten awards in many fields: in personal, professional and academic settings, in my community, and in corporate organizations. Every time I got these awards, I did not set out to get them: I just set out to do well and to serve, and I got recognized. I'm not one for being attached to any awards.

I appreciate those awards and I am grateful when I receive them. But then I move on. They don't change the very fabric of who I am. I just do my work as I think it should be done. If I'm recognized, fine. If not, fine. That's just my attitude.

**You wear many caps including that of a Minister of God. Do you think this may have contributed to making you successful in your career despite any challenges you may face?**

First and foremost I am a child of God. And this also about serving people for me. Serving people is almost second nature to me, so anywhere I find myself, rather than complaining, I serve. My most rewarding assignment in church was looking out for women who were believing in God for children, and those who were already pregnant. Because I am a scientist, I taught them the practical things to do: I taught them how to pray and trust God, and I was with them through the whole process.

I've trusted God for everything I've achieved. There is nothing I want to do, that I do not firstly talk to the Lord about it. Most importantly, I have God as my greatest source of strength. Anything that I do, it has God at the very centre. Even when I was starting out my journey in Diplomacy I asked the Lord "What would you have me do at this job?", and He said "Your journey will rest on three i's: inclusion, investment and image-building for Nigeria". And that was how I knew what to do. And when I was coming on the second journey to The Netherlands, I asked again and He told me to continue with the three pillars, and add "innovation". And as the Lord speaks to my spirit, to my mind, I am able to function well in my capacity as an Ambassador because I am not relying on just my knowledge, or diplomacy, or science: I am relying on the person who knows more than I do, to be able to do well on this job. So, yes, God has helped me to be able to sort many things out.

**If you had to give one piece of advice to young women in the field of Diplomacy, what would it be?**

When you are in this position, of an Ambassador or any Public Office, the first advice I would like to give is to make yourself accessible. Diplomacy is about people and building relationships, especially when you don't need them. There are many things that you wouldn't know, that the people that are subordinate to you, would know.

If you don't make yourself accessible, they will leave you on your pedestal. And sometimes they will leave you there until you fall. But if you make yourself accessible, and you make yourself a listening leader, they will tell you the truth. And then you will be successful, all of you together.

It is very important to give access to people. When you give access to people they are not uncomfortable around you. Many times you don't need to defend yourself, they will defend you. This is the advice I would give to anyone who is in a leadership position: make yourself accessible and make yourself a listening leader. If you listen sincerely to people's advice you will do better as a Leader.

**Nigerians are known for their penchant for seeking quality education abroad. What message do you have for young Nigerian female students who are studying and seeking to develop their careers in the Netherlands and other European Countries?**

My simple answer would be 'go for it!'. I believe in education, wherever you decide to pursue it: in The Netherlands, in Europe, in America, in Nigeria or in any other African country. Education is crucial; having enough exposure is crucial. Not just in Africa. When you are educated, when you have exposure, you can achieve so many great things. So my words to them would be: apply yourself, and in everything you do, give it your best shot! Always give your best. Don't stop for second best.

The title of the book I'm currently trying to write about my life is what you call "staying the course": completing the task. What that means is that anything I want to do, I make sure that I go step by step until it is achieved. I make sure that every task is completed. I go through everything to make sure that there are no gaps left. And once you are like that, you are bound to succeed. You just create this habit of excellence.

So just go for it! When I applied to get the scholarship to study in England and I got it, I later noticed they were giving a small grant as well and I decided to apply, even though my supervisor thought that I wouldn't qualify. I remember thinking "What is the harm in trying?". So I did. And I got the grant, and I used it to buy my first laptop. The ability to just give, serve, apply yourself, and give everything your best shot, is my simple answer.

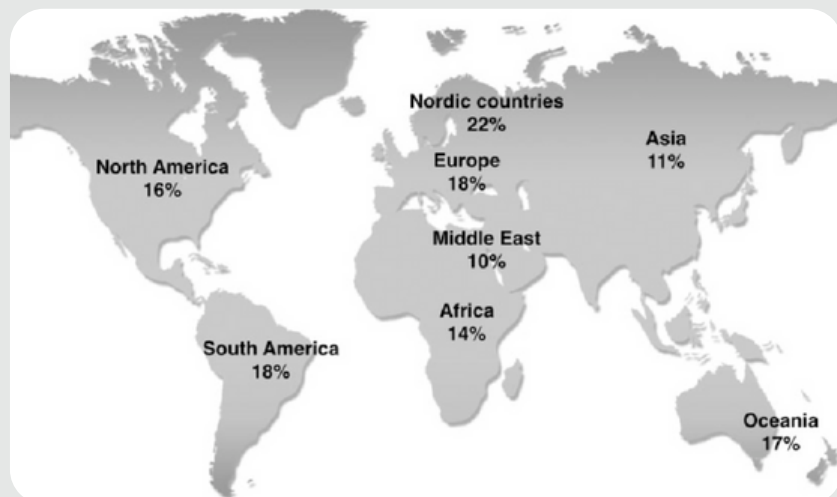
**Is there a career success story that you would like to share with us?**

The one success story I will share will be that of my relationship with my dear students abroad. When I was in Hungary, they were not calling me "Excellency", they were calling me "Mommy". Because that was how they perceived me. When somebody would tell me that a student was hungry I would buy food stuff, and I would dispatch it to be given to them.

There was one particular student who I was told was indigent and was having difficulties because of lack of funds. Long story short, I realized that sending 100\$ monthly to this woman would make a lot of difference. So I did. Even when I got here [to The Netherlands] I continued. And for me this is one success story.

Throughout my whole stay in Hungary, my students only have positive things to say: I was there at their graduation, I was there when they lost their parents, I was there when they were sick in the hospital. And this is one story that I'm happy to share: the wonderful story of my relationship with Nigerian students abroad, who stopped calling me "Excellency", and started calling me "Mommy".

### Share of women (%) ambassadors received by different regions (2016)



**Source:**

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301335224\\_Gender\\_International\\_Status\\_and\\_Ambassador\\_Appointments](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301335224_Gender_International_Status_and_Ambassador_Appointments)



**What challenges should African women expect when venturing into politics? Do they have to lower their standards?**

A challenge we face in politics is thinking we do not have the guts, the grit, and the brains, required for holding our place in campaigns and in public offices. What we need to do is to show men that we have the capacity to deliver. When I was running for the House of Representatives in Nigeria, to be elected, I had to defeat four men. So I showed them I had the guts, I had the grit and I put in the grind.

I was the only candidate who visited all the units within my constituency. I told them what I had planned to do if I was given the chance to be at the House of Representatives, and I made a good impression. I did all my homework, I went around. I visited all the artisans, visited all kinds of groups, just to tell them about my mission, and the more they listened to me, the more they liked the idea of having me representing them. So at the end of the day, I got my party ticket through a free and fair primary elections.

Another challenge we have to face is the lack of access to capital, since running a campaign is not cheap anywhere in the world. What I would encourage women to do is to build up their social capital, because at the end of the day it translates to real capital when you need it. And I'll give you my example. My life is a life of service (I've served in Church, in my children's schools, in my profession, in my organization, etc) and I've always done it with everything I had: my resources, my time, my knowledge. So when I ran for House of Representatives, I went back to those people. They knew they could trust me because they knew the kind of person I am, so they gave me their support, even financially. Besides, you need the structure of a Party behind you as well, which I did. So I was able to leverage on those things and having enough capital to run my campaign was not an issue.

**You mention a lot the importance that serving others has for you, and you are indeed very popular for mentoring and empowering women. In your opinion, what is the role of African female Ambassadors in mentoring and empowering young African women who would like to follow in your footsteps? What motivates you to do that and what are the gains of supporting women?**

Mentoring is a major part of my life as a person. I believe that if anybody is brought on under my sphere of influence, I must make them the best they can be. I will challenge them to bring those talents, and if there is anything that they need to work on I will tell them as nicely as possible and help them be the best version of themselves, because I believe that greatness does not consist in being great, but in the ability to make others great. I believe that if you light up many people's lights, yours will also shine brighter.

For women in particular, I believe in showing them that I have time for them, that I will be there if they need me, and I will offer whatever knowledge I have with as much humility as possible, because people really don't care what you know, they just want to know how much you care. It's a cliché, but it's true.

When I was in Ekiti State, I had housemaids in the four years that I was there. And in those four years I was able to send three of those girls to a College of education, and the fourth one to the Federal Polytechnic. And today they are all graduates. Mentoring women, and people in general, has always been a part of my life. And I must give credit to my parents because I got it from them.

As they were both teachers, they trained a lot of people and many of them are successful today because of them. And I've also trained many people. An orphan boy that I trained has just graduated as a medical doctor. So for me, helping people and making them better is just a lifestyle. It is not even something I struggle to do, it is something that brings me much joy. And it's not only women: I believe in people, women and men. But if any woman is within my circle and I am able to influence her, that is something that gives me joy, pure joy.

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**"To anyone who is in a leadership position: make yourself accessible and make yourself a listening leader. If you listen sincerely to people's advice you will do better as a leader."**

## H.E. BERTA CELESTINO COSSA

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In September 1989 she was admitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mozambique as Attaché and marked the beginning of her career as Diplomat. Furthermore, from 1992 to 1997 she was posted to the Mozambican Embassy in Washington D.C. as Third Secretary. In 1997 she decided to continue her career as a diplomat and is currently the Head of Mission of the Republic of Mozambique to Belgium (Benelux countries).



# INTERVIEW WITH H.E. MRS. BERTA CELESTINO COSSA



**Can you please give us a brief background about your education and your journey to becoming an ambassador?**

While living in Mozambique I did my primary and secondary studies in Mozambique. Later on, I applied and was accepted at the Instituto Superior de Relações Internacionais in Maputo, Mozambique.

In my opinion, I became a diplomat by chance because when doing my secondary studies I never thought I would become a diplomat, but when I heard about the opening of the Institute I decided to try and got admitted.

In September 1989 I was admitted in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mozambique as Attaché, and marked the beginning of my carrier as Diplomat. Furthermore, from 1992 to 1997 I was posted at the Mozambican Embassy in Washington D.C. as Third Secretary. The first years were very hard, and there was a time when I did question myself if I had made the right decision. Everything was new to me: from speaking Portuguese to now English, the weather, the working environment and living by myself for the first time. However, with determination and the support of my colleagues, I got used to it and it became familiar. It was a very good experience to me and it gave me the opportunity to get to know myself better and to understand better what diplomacy is all about.

Before arriving in Washington, D.C. I had made a decision that before going back to Mozambique I had to be clear about what I wanted for my future. In 1997 I decided that I would continue my carrier as diplomat and looking back I have no regrets.

**In the past years, you have shown countless times that it is possible to achieve anything you put your mind to. If you could give your younger self advice, what would it be?**

I would say, no matter the challenges or the society you are in, in your professional life or in general, remember to always focus on what you want because you will be faced with a lot of challenges and disappointment, and sometimes negativity.

**What advice would you give young ladies and women in general who dream of becoming a woman in leadership?**

Number one: You should have determination. If you decide this is the career you want, ask yourself what kind of help or support you will need to achieve it. Remember that you will need to work very hard compared to your male colleagues, because sometimes their mistakes are acceptable while for us female professionals it is not. But we need to keep working hard regardless of these challenges that might come.

And number two: Because you will sometimes be far from home, the support of your family is very important. Furthermore, one of the biggest challenges women professionals face is to conceal family and carrier, meaning partner and children. Sometimes some men would be intimidated and insecure by the position their wife has and question if they should follow their wife because of how society will see them. Therefore, it is important to have a partner that will continue to support you along the way. Lastly, consider that sometimes you will be confronted with a situation in which you are asked to choose between family and progression in your career. It is unfortunate but a number of women have to face this dilemma.

**Women working in diplomacy have made critical contributions to shaping the multilateral system we have inherited today. On 20 June 2022, the Resolution on the “International Day of Women in Diplomacy was adopted which now every 24 June we celebrate. I would like to ask you, what is your thought on this Resolution, and do you believe more countries should adopt this resolution and what do you think the next step should be?**

Yes, it was a good start because it is broader. Most of the countries are part of the UN, so we have an instrument that we can use and should and must use. It gives a voice to women all over the world, to say to the governments and decision-makers that we have an instrument that shows that it is a concern for us, and it is part of our right. Furthermore, I do think we need to encourage, not only by laws but in practice too, by implementing the Resolution.

**Women are underrepresented all over the world in different sectors. Why do you think women are still underrepresented in 2023 and what do you think would be a way for us as a society to change the spectrum?**

I would start by saying Education because education would open doors for us. We need to encourage women, society, and communities that women need to have the same opportunities as men. It should start from an early age because in some societies boys are the ones that are granted education whereas when it comes to girls this is not the same case. Even for those who choose to be housewives, they should be given the opportunity to have basic education so they can be in a better position to support themselves and their families.

Secondly, Gender equality. We recognize that a lot has been done but we are still far from fully benefiting from gender equality. In some areas women are not given the same opportunities as men, particularly when it concerns positions of leadership and pay – in some countries men and women do not get the same pay even when occupying the same position. I am happy to say that in Mozambique both men and women get the same payment when being in the same position.

We, the ones who have achieved high positions in our careers, should advocate and open doors for other women. One specific area that women all around the world should advocate for is access to education for girls.

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**"In pursuit of your dream, we should never accept disrespect and humiliation just because we are women. Women deserve respect, recognition and above all equal treatment."**

**We often hear that women cannot have it all, meaning they cannot have a successful career and family life. What is your opinion on this and how do you balance both?**

I would start by saying yes, it is not easy, but it is possible. I remember a conversation with my brother regarding my career path and I knew what was his concern and my answer to him was: "My dear brother's marriage is not my ultimate goal in life, it is part but ultimate".

From the beginning, I always wanted to have both: career, and a family. I had also made a decision that in the ministry I was someone that was recognized professionally, and who could take high responsibility. When I had my daughter I did not travel for one year because I knew the value and the responsibility of me as a mother. However, I kept working very hard because I did not want my minister to think that I started to give up on my work.

For me, things were not easy because we are both diplomats and sometimes we had to travel at the same time but fortunately I had a very good support system in my family. I always had good support from my husband and we managed our carriers and at the same time raised our daughter. Good partnership is key to success.

**Society has taught and made us believe that women are not capable of being in leading roles, such as being the head of a department, but you proved that it is indeed possible. In 1999 you were head of department in your ministry. Would you say that you were treated differently as the head of the department compared to when you were a junior diplomat a few years before that?**

Yes, as a junior diplomat you have someone to tell you what to do, but when you have a higher position, you have more responsibility and have to make decisions. Consequently, I had to work harder, prove that I deserved that promotion, and I could lead the department in terms of good performance by working with the rest of my colleagues. What has always motivated me is that I love what I do.

**Since you started, would you say there has been more progress regarding opportunities for women in diplomatic careers?**

If you look back at foreign service in most of the countries we barely had women in high positions. However, the good thing is that the situation is changing which is fantastic as we now have women ministers of foreign affairs. I am proud to see African women being ministers of foreign affairs because they participate in the decision-making and contribute to change the world. They are now role-models for other women.

**Can you elaborate on how your diligent work with the EU is shaping the future of Mozambique?**

The EU is one of our main partners in Mozambique. For so many years we have received the support of the EU in many areas such as good governance. In terms of financial aid, the EU is the top one, in the areas such as health, education, and infrastructure. We do have specific support coming from the EU and we discuss/engage which are the main priorities we have, and they make sure to consider them.

Regarding my work, I interact with the External Service of the EU and we discuss our bilateral cooperation.. This is the role I have to play, engaging regularly in terms of advancing the priorities of my country in our bilateral cooperation.

At this specific moment, we have very important support from the EU to fight terrorism in Mozambique. The EU is there supporting us by providing training to Mozambican defense forces and providing critical humanitarian aid to the affected population in the Northern part of Mozambique.

**Have you ever been subject to harassment or discrimination; and, if so, how do/did you handle it?**

For some of our male colleagues, they see us as either easy or weak. Sometimes you will hear some comments that for them are not negative but for us they are unacceptable. For example comments such as: "You are not only beautiful, but you are also smart" This is unacceptable because they do not make the same comments when dealing with male counterparts.

Furthermore, sometimes they ask how come you are an ambassador or director and what about your husband. So it shows that in some cases men are more interested in making you feel uncomfortable than in what you have to say. It is up to us women to show them that we know why we are in certain positions and that we can be better professionals than them.

**What advice can you give young women looking to follow a similar career path as yours?**

A lot of times, questions such as "Are you sure you will be able to balance career and family?" arise when pursuing a career like diplomacy and if you are someone who does not have determination you might start doubting and think that you should give up or change your career.

My advice is, never give up no matter what. Keep trying regardless of the obstacles. Give the best of yourself and perform as best as you can. In pursuit of your dream, never accept disrespect and humiliation. It is not because we want to succeed, we should accept disrespect and humiliation, just because we are women. Women deserve respect, recognition and above all equal treatment.

**Based on the research regarding your professional experience it is visible that you have excelled in your profession. Would you say that you have had to fight for a seat at the table? And would you say that you had to fight to be considered an equal to your male coworkers?**

In my case, I was very fortunate due to the laws in Mozambique that promote equality between men and women. From the beginning we are given the same opportunities. However, as we progress in our career women have to face a number of challenges to prove that they are as capable as their male colleagues. For example, when it comes to nominations for leadership positions, despite working hard and doing their best, there is always reluctance in appointing women to high positions.

I do believe that women should be the ones contributing to change this situation by continuing to work hard and fight for their recognition. Women should prepare very well academically and technically so they can build their self-confidence and perform well. Women should never use arrogance to prove who they are and what they can accomplish.

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**"No matter the challenges or society you are in, in your professional life or in general, remember to always focus on what you want because you will faced with a lot of challenges and disappointment and sometimes negativity."**

**H.E. OLIVIER JEAN PATRICK  
NDUHUNGIREHE**

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In May 2007, H.E. Mr. Olivier Jean Patrick Nduhungirehe became a Counsellor at the Embassy of Rwanda in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia). In August 2010, he moved to New York, first as a Counsellor, then as Minister Counsellor in the Permanent Mission of Rwanda to the United Nations. In May 2015, he was recalled back to Rwanda and appointed Director General of Multilateral Cooperation in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. After 7 months (December 2015) he moved to Brussels as Ambassador of Rwanda to Belgium, with jurisdiction over the European Union and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. Furthermore, in August 2017, he was appointed Minister of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, in charge of the East African Community, which was his last position before he was appointed as The Ambassador of the Republic of Rwanda to the Kingdom of the Netherlands from November 2020, with jurisdiction over the three Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, until 2024. He is currently the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Rwanda.



# INTERVIEW WITH H.E. MR. OLIVIER JEAN PATRICK NDUHUNGIREHE



**Can you please give us a brief background about your education and your journey to becoming an ambassador?**

My name is Olivier Jean Patrick Nduhungirehe, I am the Ambassador of the Republic of Rwanda to the Kingdom of the Netherlands since November 2020, with jurisdiction over the three Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. I am a Bachelor of Law from the Catholic University of Louvain (Belgium) and I have a Master in Tax Management from the Solvay Business School (Brussels).

Following my graduation, I successively became Personal Assistant to the Rwandan Minister of State in charge of Industry and Investment Promotion, Personal Assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, and a Member of the Business Law Reform Cell before starting my diplomatic career.

I started this career in May 2007 as a First Counsellor at the Embassy of Rwanda in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia). In August 2010, I was moved to New York, first as First Counsellor, then as Minister Counsellor in the Permanent Mission of Rwanda to the United Nations. In May 2015, I was recalled back to Rwanda and appointed Director General of Multilateral Cooperation in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. I held this position for only seven (7) months, and I moved to Brussels in December 2015 as Ambassador of Rwanda to Belgium, with jurisdiction over the European Union and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

In August 2017, I was appointed Minister of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, in charge of the East African Community, which was my last position before I was appointed Ambassador to the Netherlands.

**Based on the research regarding your professional career it is visible that you have excelled in your profession. The question is what is your biggest achievement as the ambassador of Rwanda to the Kingdom of the Netherlands, with jurisdiction over Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania?**

It's difficult to tell because I arrived in The Hague in the middle of COVID-related restrictions, which continued until mid-2022. Almost all meetings and activities were online. However, over the past year and a half of "full" diplomatic activities, the Embassy was able to showcase Rwanda's export commodities, mainly coffee, and flowers, at the Amsterdam Coffee Festival and the International Floriculture Trade Fair in Vijfhuizen (twice). We are also organizing a Rwanda-Netherlands Business and Investment Forum in the fall and considering doing the same for the Baltic States.

The Embassy also initiated and inaugurated on 19th June 2023, together with the City of Amsterdam and IBUKA-Netherlands (an organization of genocide survivors living in the Netherlands), the very first memorial to honor the victims of the 1994 Genocide perpetrated in the Netherlands. We are currently working with The Hague, Tallinn, Riga, and Vilnius to establish similar memorials in those capital cities.

**Can you elaborate on how your diligent work with the EU is shaping the future of Rwanda?**

As Ambassador to the Netherlands, I am not directly in charge of the EU, as this falls within the attributions of my colleague in Brussels. But from my time as Ambassador to Belgium, what I can say is that the relations and cooperation between Rwanda and the EU have always been excellent. Under the Multiannual Indicative Programme MIP for 2021-2027, three areas of cooperation between the EU and Rwanda were identified, which are (1) education, skills, and jobs for the youth, (2) a Green Deal for Inclusive Development, as well as (3) political and economic governance.

When I was Ambassador in Brussels, President Paul Kagame attended twice the European Development Days (EDDs) in Brussels, in the margins of which he met the President of the European Commission. Authorities of the EU (President of the Council and of the Commission) also visit Rwanda regularly, which strengthens our relations and cooperation.

**Although there has been improvement, there is always room for improvement. How do you think men can contribute to closing the gender gap? And how do you think you can contribute to it?**

There is indeed room for improvement in closing the gender gap, and women's underrepresentation in diplomacy is an example of this gap. As men, we can of course contribute to closing this gap. First, as parents, gender equality should always be part of the education we give to our children.

In this regard, we should encourage our daughters to embrace careers that are historically dominated by men, including diplomacy. Second, as decision makers, we should advocate for a "feminist foreign policy", which provides for universal rights for women, fight against discrimination and gender-based violence around the world, as well as the equal representation of women in decision-making positions.

**What do you think are the factors that hinder women from being in leading roles? Do you think it comes from factors such as patriarchy, cultural norms, etc?**

Patriarchy was the norm in all societies, cultures, and religions for centuries. This is of course the main factor that hinders women from being in leading roles. This is why it is important, on top of the positive evolution of mindsets in the 20th century, to accompany this trend with legislation protecting and empowering women in all sectors.

This was precisely the contribution of Rwanda to gender equality, which was also informed by the fact that women and girls bore the brunt of the 1994 genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi, during which they were killed (some of them while pregnant), raped, sexually mutilated, left with incurable diseases or the trauma of witnessing the murder of all their children, but also a genocide during which teenage girls were hustled to take huge responsibilities as heads of family, due to the fact that the parents and brothers of many of them had been killed.

**Have you encountered challenges, either domestically or abroad, in advancing gender equity and equality within the foreign policy realm?**

Although there are still stereotypes in Rwanda, our society quickly understood the benefits of women empowerment and gender equality, mainly because of the leadership and proactive policy of President Paul Kagame in that regard. I should add that in my 16-year career as a diplomat, I served under a female Minister of Foreign Affairs for nine (9) years, who also promoted gender equality in the Ministry.

During my service abroad, I did not encounter any particular challenge, as the countries and organizations in which I served (Ethiopia, African Union, United Nations, Belgium, and the Netherlands) largely believe in women empowerment and equal representation.

**What role (s) of educating other male ambassadors/colleagues about initiatives to help amplify women's voices have you taken throughout your career?**

My main role in that regard has been to explain to my colleagues, usually at their request, our policy and achievements in the empowerment of women and gender equality. In return, I also learn from their own experience, achievements, and challenges, with a view to coming up with best practices.

What I never do is to try to lecture other Ambassadors, because I know that every country moves at its own pace, as we all have diverse histories, cultures, and traditions. In this respect, I would recall that from 1961 to 1992, Rwanda had only one single woman in the Government, who lasted less than two years (from January 1964 to November 1965), and that the two other women who were appointed afterward were later convicted for the 1994 genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi. Therefore, the history of Rwanda in that regard shows that, with political will and perseverance, everything is possible.

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**"Women are half of humanity and have been playing an important role in politics and diplomacy for years, despite the fact that they are still underrepresented in global governance."**

## WOMEN IN DIPLOMACY



### **What do you think are the most important contributions that women have been able to make in foreign policy?**

Women's contributions in foreign policy are many and important, at both multilateral and national levels. I may recall that women played a crucial role in the drafting and adoption of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, especially former US First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who served as chairperson of the drafting committee of that Declaration.

There are other women who played an important role in advancing women's rights, such as former French Health Minister Simone Veil and former US First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, whose intervention ("women's rights are human rights and human rights are women's rights") at the Fourth UN Conference on Women in Beijing, in September 1995 remains memorable.

At the national level, female political figures also made significant contributions to the foreign policy of their respective countries, although some of their actions were of course criticised, domestically and/or abroad. Those women included Indira Gandhi of India, Golda Meir of Israel, Margaret Thatcher of the United Kingdom, Winnie Mandela of South Africa, Sadako Ogata of Japan, Madeleine Albright of the United States, Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia and Angela Merkel of Germany.

In Rwanda, female diplomats and politicians also greatly contributed to our foreign policy, some of them posthumously. I would name the late Agathe Uwiringiyimana, the first female Prime Minister of Rwanda who was killed for fighting against a genocidal dictatorship and for the democratisation of Rwanda. She is now in the highest category of heroes in Rwanda. First Lady Jeannette Kagame is also contributing to our foreign policy around the world, including by promoting the Imbuto Foundation she created, an organisation that implements different programmes in health, education, youth, and economic empowerment of families. In a purely diplomatic field, there is Louise Mushikiwabo, former Minister of Foreign Affairs for nine (9) years and Secretary General of the Francophonie since 2018. For a decade, she shaped Rwanda's foreign policy and is now promoting the French language and the cultures of French-speaking countries around the world.

### **What is the relationship between democracy and gender equality, and why does it matter that women and men alike are fully able to participate in this relationship?**

Democracy is mainly about people's representation and human rights. Empowering women and ending discrimination against them contribute to human rights, while affirmative action in their favour participates in improving the representation of a marginalised category of people. As women and men can have different interests and different approaches to addressing national and local issues, it's fair and democratic to have them equitably represented in decision-making organs.

**Women working in diplomacy have made critical contributions to shaping the multilateral system we have inherited today. On 20 June 2022, the resolution on the “International Day of Women in Diplomacy was adopted which now every 24 June we celebrate. I would like to ask you, what is your thought on this resolution and do you believe more countries should adopt this resolution and what do you think the next step should be?**

This was an excellent resolution that was long overdue. Women are half of humanity and have been playing an important role in politics and diplomacy for years, despite the fact that they are still underrepresented in global governance. 34% of women Heads of State or Government, 21% of members of Government in the world, and 26% of members of Parliament, that is definitely not enough but the figures are steadily increasing.

The representation of women in diplomacy is crucial and beneficial to global governance, as women bring their specific leadership in negotiations and also a particular approach to issues under consideration. I would then call on all UN Member States to celebrate the “International Day of Women in Diplomacy” and continue to improve the representation of women in diplomacy and politics, with a view to reaching equality in the coming years.

**How do you think your path to becoming an Ambassador has been different from your female colleagues? Do you believe women and men face the same obstacles?**

The percentage of women Ambassadors in Rwanda is only 20.5%, which is under the 30% threshold set by our Constitution in decision-making organs. Here, I believe that the difficulty resides in the specificity of the position, which requires the Ambassador to move abroad with his/her spouse, compelling the latter to leave his/her job and travel abroad with the Ambassador.

Given our history of male dominance in senior positions in public and private sectors, there are many more men than women with established careers. And with the fact that Ambassadors are usually seasoned diplomats or public servants in their late 40s or 50s, this means that their spouses have reached an advanced level in their career, which is difficult to discontinue.

For me, this is the major obstacle to the insufficient number of female Ambassadors in Rwanda. However, as gender equality is progressively being implemented in all sectors, I believe that Rwanda will reach gender equality in diplomacy by the end of the decade.

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**"As women and men can have different interests and different approaches to addressing national and local issues, it's fair and democratic to have them equitably represented in decision-making organs."**

**Rwanda stands out globally for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment, particularly in political participation. Rwanda is leading globally in terms of women's representation in Parliament, 2nd African country to close gender gaps, and 7th globally (World economic forum 2021). Therefore, do you think closing gender gaps is important all across the world, and if so, why?**

As I previously mentioned, our Constitution provides for 30% of women in decision-making organs, but the Government did much more, as Rwanda is indeed ranked the first country in the world with the highest percentage of women in Parliament, with 61%, not to mention that 46.8% of the Cabinet is constituted of women.

This affirmative action was beneficial to the whole society and to women in particular because, first, it shattered all stereotypes against women, second, it gave role models to young girls, who are also encouraged to perform and, third, with the regular rotation of MPs and Cabinet ministers, the experience of former female ministers and parliamentarians benefited the country in many other sectors. This is why I firmly believe that closing the gender gap is crucial in all countries across the world.



# THE IMPORTANCE OF AFRICAN WOMEN IN DIPLOMACY

By: DR. Primose Z.J Bimha

Effective gendered transformation in policy making spaces can only be achieved by ensuring the equal participation of women. Therefore, the inclusion of women, as diplomatic representatives, is an important step in the process of reforming the male dominated arena of diplomacy. The African Union (AU) gender barometer targets 30% female diplomatic personnel.

Many member states are far from this standard which does not ensure 50:50 participation. South Africa and Rwanda, which are leading the way on the continent, have just below 25% female heads of missions, above the international average of 14%. African women are still underrepresented, particularly in senior positions. It is important for African women to participate in diplomacy as ministers of foreign affairs, ambassadors, and heads of institutions of global governance.

Advancing their role(s) promotes transformation in the policy directions and cultures of such institutions. This paper advances the argument that it is not simply about adding more women. Governments and institutions of global governance should address the inequalities perpetuated by dynamics linked but not limited to gender, race and nationality. Ultimately, diplomacy should cease to be what presently appears as a club of mostly elderly male political and business elites, with white non-African men occupying most top seats.

The World Economic Forum's ("WEF") Global Gender Gap Index tracks progress towards closing gender-based gaps based on four indicators, namely: Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment. Women's participation in diplomacy is not directly examined in WEF gender gap reports. However, assessments of the status of African women in diplomacy indicate that there are more male ambassadors and senior foreign affairs officials because women who qualify for such positions are few and mostly constrained.

Interviews conducted with some Human Resources managers from foreign affairs departments revealed that even when recruitment processes ensure a 50:50 balance, fewer women stay on long enough to be promoted, thus fewer stand the chance to be appointed as ambassadors or candidates for positions in international institutions.

Furthermore, those who stay on and rise up the ranks often face the challenge of being deployed to less significant duty stations. Some female ambassadors I interviewed indicated that women are often posted to economically insignificant duty stations. On the other hand, more men had the opportunity to exercise economic diplomacy as representatives stationed in key capitals of the global political economy.

There is no doubt that when campaigning for a position at the World Bank, World Trade Organisation (WTO), or United Nations, a senior official with experience working and networking in Beijing, New York, Paris, London, or Brussels, would stand a better chance than one who only has experience from the African continent.

Prospective female diplomats face various political and patriarchal hurdles linked to appointment. Usually the president, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Parliamentary Committees on Foreign Affairs have to be in favour of a female candidate before she can be appointed to represent the state at a diplomatic mission. Oftentimes these sources of approval are male and they tend to express concerns regarding gender and age.

Some states consider posting female representatives as downgrading their relationship with host states, and in some instances receiving states reject female ambassadors. Those who make it often have to deal with being ignored or undermined because of their gender identity. That notwithstanding concerted efforts to include more women in foreign policy institutions should continue.

As earlier noted, it is not simply a numbers game. Representation should not only be about accurately reflecting the composition of society. Cultural changes are important. Historically, patriarchal values relegated women to the domestic arena whilst males have always been perceived to be natural players in the game of politics. Even when women enter the work force, patriarchal standards may dictate their professional decision making.

When I worked in the foreign affairs sector I witnessed many women turning down offers to be deployed to distant diplomatic missions, opting instead for regional positions (close to their home country). Some women had to forgo the option of foreign deployment to cater for their matrimonial and mothering duties. Instead, they chose to stay at the head office, travelling occasionally to regional and continental summits, as well as the UN General Assembly.

As a result, if one stays close to home, or forgoes deployment, their international experience and opportunities for career advancement remain minimal. There were positive stories of women whose male partners chose to join them as accompanying spouses, but these were few. Shifts in cultural perceptions of women considering positions in diplomacy is vital. Supportive partners and families are important because there is no way to fully balance domestic and professional commitments.

In some instances one has to choose to focus on career development at the expense of family duties. It is rare for men to be ridiculed for doing so but women who do are often chastised for being uncultured. Liberia's former president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (also first elected female Head of State in Africa) noted that her pursuit of political goals cost her time away from raising her sons, and her family was not happy with that.

Sexism is also a major challenge. For example, in 2013, then Zimbabwe president, the late Robert Mugabe, rejected Lindiwe Zulu's advice to postpone the holding of general elections. Even though Zulu spoke in her capacity as international relations advisor to then South Africa's President, Jacob Zuma, Mugabe publicly defined her as a "stupid idiotic... little street woman". Mugabe had never hurled similar insults at South Africa's male representatives who sought to restore political stability in Zimbabwe.

Most women who have occupied senior positions as diplomats or heads of institutions of global governance have been negatively stereotyped and called derogatory names. Corresponding labels for men are not used when men engage with each other socially and professionally. The insults are aimed at demoralising and undermining ambitious and successful women.

In addition to patriarchal challenges, African women also experience racism. Dr Okonjo-Iweala's appointment to the position of WTO Director General was met with racist and sexist comments. For example, Switzerland's Aargauer Zeitung published an article with a title which translated to "This grandmother will be the new chief of the WTO". Her qualifications were downplayed by highlighting her grandmother's identity. Her years of service at the World Bank, and in Nigeria's government (as Finance Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs) were not spotlighted.

Despite the reality that old white males are often appointed to hold such senior positions, they are never labelled as grandfathers. The headline was a sexist suggestion that a woman of her age ought to be focusing on the grandmother stage of womanhood. The example revealed that even if a black African woman makes it to the top, her appointment may not necessarily command the requisite respect. It is noteworthy that UN Women and the 124 Ambassadors in Geneva signed a petition calling out the racist and sexist media remarks as a show of their disappointment and support for the WTO leader.

Challenges linked to surviving in the diplomatic arena should also be addressed in order to retain talent and inspire future recruitment. In order to ensure greater participation of African women in diplomacy, African states should strategically undertake deliberate deployment of equal numbers of men and women ambassadors and senior foreign service officials. Furthermore, governments and institutions of global governance should seek evidence-based solutions to the challenges perpetuated by dynamics linked but not limited to gender, race, nationality, and nationality.



# MISS AMBASSADOR: WOMEN IN DIPLOMACY

By: Melissa Safi

Former U.S. Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright humorously said in an interview that, “it used to be that the only way a woman could truly make her foreign policy views felt was by marrying a diplomat and then pouring tea on an offending ambassador’s lap.” (Bloch, 2004) Although her statement was taken as light banter, her words have truth behind them. Women were barred from policy decision making up until the mid 21st century, taking matters into their own hands to try to contribute to the realm of international affairs. (Rahman & Stearns, 2011)

By partaking in deviations from the normal rules that govern the world of diplomacy, it was a means of communicating diplomatic messages indirectly. Although these messages were seen as having little to no impact, or just a gaffe to outside spectators, the influence these women had in their “mistakes” led to the inclusion of women in the foreign policy sphere. (Fritzsche, 2002) To understand the influence of women in the foreign policy space, one must take a look at the obstacles that women in diplomacy face in their professions; having women in these diplomatic positions is important, and ties into the endless ways their contributions can shape the international relations sphere.

Feminist scholars that study the concept of gender in international relations, state that most foreign policies were fabricated by male elites leading to the discrimination of women on a global scale. There is a certain “maleness” to foreign policy that has exacerbated the exclusion of women’s perspectives on what measures are necessary to implement in society. (Fernandez, 2011) The affairs of the state have been defined by masculine qualities such as toughness, power, control and strength. These relations have become male-defined and have been constructed around dichotomies that view females as the “other”. Therefore this ostracizes women from the public sphere and decision making processes.

Women have been marginalized in the arena of foreign policy because society is based on the deep rooted belief in the inferiority of women. (Fernandez, 2011) As a result, the inclusion of women in diplomatic decisions is imperative in bringing about effective change. International relations policies were made by men and do not include the majority of issues women face in society. For example, women do not have control over the conditions of their protection when it involves national security standards. (Lobasz, 2009) Furthermore, if women were in control of the formation of laws then there would be less of a threat towards them in society.

Women in diplomacy face many obstacles that can hinder their career goals and contributions to society. Women also continue to be underrepresented in diplomatic environments solely due to harmful gender and societal norms that edit them out of history. In 2014, 15% of ambassadors were women, and in 2021, that percentage slightly rose to 20.7%. (Towns, 2020) Female diplomats are significantly more likely to report being asked discriminatory questions such as, “how old are you?”, “who takes care of your kids?”, “what is your relationship status?”. (Rahman & Stearns, 2011)

Often, these inquiries have sexist undertones implying stereotypes that women cannot belong in such a workplace because of children and/or age. Women diplomats also encounter the patriarchal nature of diplomacy that includes being sent to work in lower status regions while their male colleagues are stationed in high status regions such as headquarters in Washington D.C.

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 include concepts that help to bring gender mainstreaming into the political agendas of intergovernmental legislative bodies. Gender mainstreaming concepts are tied closely with human rights initiatives that can ensure the increased representation of women at all decision making levels, national, regional and international. (Rahman & Stearns, 2011) Women in diplomacy are able to bring in fresh ideas and perspectives that can enable changes in states’ foreign policies by including issues and struggles that specifically fit the female experience. For example, female ambassadors are among the first to speak out against wars and have focused on maintaining peace.

Armed conflict has become notoriously harmful towards women and girls because they become victims of sexual violence, trafficking and displacement. (Rahman & Stearns, 2011) In the diplomatic world, qualities such as empathy and building and maintaining relationships with people are important and women possess that on a much wider scale than men. Women ambassadors also connect with representatives of NGOs and local organizations to achieve effective diplomacy. (Rahman & Stearns, 2011)

Women in diplomacy are able to bring in fresh ideas and perspectives that can enable changes in states' foreign policies by including issues and struggles that specifically fit the female experience. For example, female ambassadors are among the first to speak out against wars and have focused on maintaining peace. Armed conflict has become notoriously harmful towards women and girls because they become victims of sexual violence, trafficking and displacement. (Rahman & Stearns, 2011)

In the diplomatic world, qualities such as empathy and building and maintaining relationships with people are important and women possess that on a much wider scale than men. Women ambassadors also connect with representatives of NGOs and local organizations to achieve effective diplomacy. (Rahman & Stearns, 2011) Their tactics involve connecting with stakeholders to bring about change on a smaller, but more impactful scale because they are more eager than men to create links between the diplomatic side and the community.

For example, Sandra Tyler-Haywood, a British diplomat at the British Embassy in Eritrea assisted in training local women to become leaders in the workplace. Women ambassadors are noticed more in rural and local communities where women are treated as second class citizens. (Rahman & Stearns, 2011)

Women continue to be underrepresented in diplomats' environments because of their gender although they have been critical in a lot of decisions that have been taken on an international level.

Women must be encouraged to pursue careers in diplomacy, therefore, it is important to empower young girls to enter careers of foreign policy. As Clare Booth Luce once said, "women have been skilled in diplomacy for thousands of years...to learn how to get what they want for the interests of their family. Diplomacy is a **feminine art.**"

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