

Laudatio for Leymah Gbowee

**on Ocasion of the Bestowal of the Honorary Award
by
TERRE DES FEMMES Film Festival „Women's Worlds“
for
„Courageous Commitment to the Defense of Human Rights of Women“
on November 21st 2009 in Tuebingen, Germany**

The Laudatio is given by TERRE DES FEMMES C.E.O. Christa Stolle

Leymah Gbowee was born in Monrovia; Liberia in 1972. When she was 17 years old the civil war between Liberian dictator Charles Taylor and rebellious war lords started. Confident that the Liberians themselves, and especially the women, would have to put an end to the already long-lasting war, Leymah founded the **„Women in Peacebuilding Network“** together with other women and soon became it's leader because of her visionary power and organizational skills. From the unification of Christian and Muslim women the „Liberian Mass Action for Peace“ evolved.

With Leymah as their leader, the group forced a meeting with Taylor and made him promise to start peace negotiations with the war lords. Finally the dictator, who today is prosecuted by the International Court of Justice in The Hague, gave in and promised he would attend the peace talks. So Leymah lead a delegation of Liberian women to Ghana to keep putting pressure on the parties of war. That included locking them into their conference room by a Sit-In "...until peace is accomplished. They shall not be able to eat or drink and so only one day experience a bit of what our population has suffered from for many years!" so said Leymah during the disturbing scenes of the dispute with the war lords.

A peace agreement was signed and a provisional government was called into office. The women began to struggle for the fulfillment of the peace agreements, democratic elections and the first female president in Africa, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf - with success. As a social worker Leymah began to work with traumatised child soldiers from Taylor's army. In 2009 she founded the „Women in Peace and Security Network Africa“ (WIPSEN-Africa), a pan-African women's organisation with head quarters in Ghana. Since its foundation she is the president of this peace organisation.

Leymah was awarded by many different organisations for her outstanding commitment, among others by the University of Harvard and the White House Project. Leymah Gbowee is the main character of the documentary **„Pray the Devil Back to Hell“** that you are able to watch this Sunday and Monday at the Cinema Arsenal.

Dear Leymah, today we present you with the Award for "Courageous Commitment to Human Rights of Women" by the TERRE DES FEMMES film festival Women's Worlds.

In the long process of peace building you repeatedly proved a far forward-looking, almost visionary lucidity of what had to be done to put an end to the unbelievable violence and cruelty against women, who so dearly wished for peace. Your courageous appearance facing the ruthless dictator and sanguinary warlords was not only amazing but also an immensely important example for the women who accompany you in your struggle. You never sat back satisfied to celebrate achieved successes, again and again your foresightedness forced you to immerse yourself into more tasks – you know that “leaving things to be as they are” too easily throws us back into archaic patriarchal violence against women.

So you presently advocate for changes in the electoral laws of Liberia in order to counterbalance the discrimination of women in the political arena and that young women and girls understand, that leadership is not a privilege for men, but something that women are also entitled to! And, most important for women in the entire world, who are affected by conflicts of war: You campaign for women being more involved in peace-building processes as called for by the resolution 1325 of the UN-Security-Council.

We hope that this award will also help to improve the media coverage of your impressive contribution to peace in Liberia and Africa. In the name of the many women who struggle for peace all over the world, TERRE DES FEMMES wishes you much success and will power for your work and especially much attention from the international media!

Leymah Gbowee responded in her speech of acceptance: “The struggle for Human Rights of Women and to end violence against girls and women shouldn't be stopped by any frontier. It is important for every one of us to keep in mind: as long as even one single woman experiences violence, no woman on earth is truly free. As long as even one single woman experiences violence, no community is truly free and as long as even one single woman experiences violence, men can not boast to be free, either.”