



A Feminenza Publication

Humanity & Gender Utu na Undugu

A Gathering of Vision in a Time of Change

Speeches from the Conference, Nairobi, Kenya 2006

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Speeches from the Conference
Nairobi
2006

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INTRODUCTION

In January 2006, a conference took place in Kenya, at the United Nations headquarters in Nairobi, hosted by Feminenza International in association with UNESCO PEER, entitled 'Humanity and Gender, a Gathering of Vision in a Time of Change' (Utu na Undugu). Speakers and delegates came from all over the Great Lakes region of East Africa and from around the world, and during four days of intensive process, many vital issues were raised which affect both men and women - now and into the future. This book is a record of the keynote speeches and other presentations given at the conference by invited guests, many highly distinguished figures in their own field.

Much of the content of this conference is still very relevant today, five years later, and indeed the realities highlighted by some of the speakers have subsequently proved to be only too poignantly and tragically true. Many of the issues remain to be addressed, and the events of the intervening years – particularly the political and tribal violence in Kenya in 2008 – have increased the importance and urgency of conflict resolution in all aspects of life.

Feminenza International is a not-for-profit network of volunteers, with representatives in many countries across the world, who work together to create opportunities for women of all backgrounds to realise their true potential, and also to promote a greater respect, understanding and mutuality between the genders. The aims and principles which underpin all Feminenza's work are set out on page 131.

On a visit to Kenya in 2005, Mary Noble, a co-founder of Feminenza, and two colleagues, Marian Verweij and Saiija Toth, encountered many NGOs facing gender-related problems in their work; trying, in isolated circumstances, to help communities break free from traditional restrictions and harmful practices. It was clear that gender-related issues are pivotal to all human, social and economic development, and in a meeting with Mr. Emanuel Muamba, the coordinator of Culture of Peace for UNESCO PEER, it was agreed that a conference to open up some of these key issues, bringing people together from all over the region, would be very beneficial.

No book of speeches could convey the very special atmosphere of this conference: the meeting of old friends and the making of new ones; the singing and dancing; the honesty, respect and openness; the inspiration and hope that was expressed in the many discussion groups; the space for each voice to be heard. Amongst its many successes, the conference offered an opportunity for all the NGOs and organisations represented to discover and meet each other, to forum issues intrinsic to a number of social and economic programmes, and to exchange experiences and perceptions. Thus many individuals and groups struggling to make a difference in their communities were able to share in the warmth and strength of a common endeavour, and know that they were not alone.

The speeches in this book – which were originally given in either English or French – have been edited where necessary with great care to preserve content and idiom, whilst making live, verbal transmission readable and easier to follow in this context.

This was the first major conference orchestrated by Feminenza International in Kenya, and it established a platform for a continuing programme of meetings, workshops and engagements in the region. During 2010, in the wake of the violence that erupted in Kenya in 2008, Feminenza International, in part supported by UN WOMEN, embarked on a pilot programme to train grass roots women leaders in the Rift Valley and Western

Kenya as Forgiveness and Reconciliation Counsellors. This programme, run by volunteers and partially financed by donations, is ongoing.

Acknowledgements

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Debbie Felber
Editor