

Advocacy Quilts Take Center Stage at the UN on International Women's Day

New York, USA: The United Nations has embraced advocacy quilting by joining with The Advocacy Project (AP) to launch a spectacular display of quilts at UN headquarters on International Women's Day (March 8th).

The event, 'Women Are the Fabric,' featured 11 quilts from AP partners in eight countries and attracted over 250 well-wishers, including several American craftswomen who helped to assemble the quilts in the US.



Over 250 well-wishers attended the March 8 celebration of quilts
(photo Whitney Kidder)

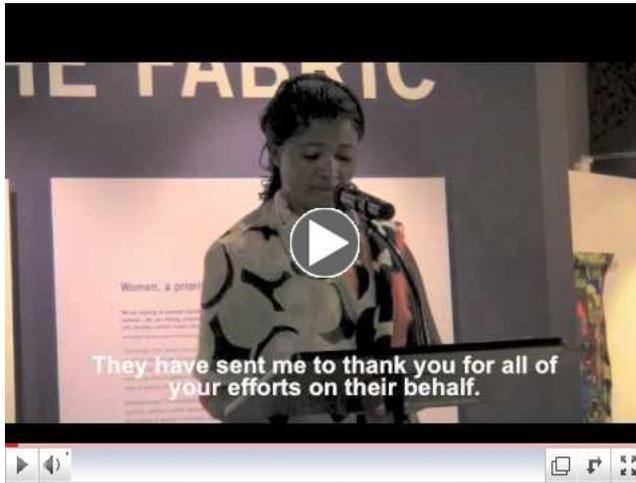
The exhibition will remain up until April 27th and is drawing hundreds of visitors a day.

The exhibits show how quilting can give a voice to disempowered women. Two quilts from [Bosnia](#) and Guatemala commemorate relatives of the weavers who died in massacres. [Roma women from Kosovo](#) quilted about Roma customs which are burdensome to women. [Maasai widows](#) from Kenya made beaded panels to protest against genital cutting. [Mayan women in Belize](#) produced embroidered profiles of wildlife which is threatened by oil companies. Women from a Ugandan slum made a quilt from 10,000 recycled straws to publicize urban pollution. [Survivors of uterine prolapse in Nepal](#) depicted the causes of prolapse in a series of paintings on cloth.

Two powerful quilts were made by [survivors of sexual violence in DR Congo](#) while recovering at a center run by SOS Femmes en Danger (SOS FED), a partner of The Advocacy Project. [Marceline Kongolo](#), 24, the founder of SOS FED, paid them tribute in her opening remarks (below video): "I work with extraordinary women," she said. "They have been subjected to sexual attacks that are cruel and serious. But they have had the courage to testify to their pain by designing the shocking images that you see before you tonight."

The event was opened by [Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin](#), Executive Director of the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), which sponsored the exhibition. The other speakers were

[Rosemary A. DiCarlo](#), Deputy US Ambassador to the UN; and [Margot Wallstrom](#), Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.



SOS FED Founder, Marceline Kongolo, speaks at the March 8 quilting event

Fifteen AP partners have now made advocacy quilts, and the March 8 event allowed several to speak directly to the UN. [Isabel Osorio Chen](#), who attended at the invitation of the UNFPA in Guatemala, contributed a panel to the Rio Negro Memorial Textile which commemorates those killed in the 1982 Rio Negro massacres. She received an enthusiastic send-off from the other weavers before leaving for New York.

Benedicta Nanyongo the mastermind behind the Ugandan straw quilt, emailed AP to say that her group - the Kinawataka Women Initiatives (KIWOI) - was "very happy" at the UN exhibition. In Kenya, several students who made panels for the [Maasai girls quilt](#) viewed their quilt on display in New York through the laptop of [Megan Orr](#), who is working as an AP volunteer at their school.

Several American quilters who helped to assemble the quilts also attended the New York event and said they had been profoundly moved by their involvement. Susan Schreurs from the [Faithful Circle Quilting Guild in Maryland](#) came to understand the devastating impact of war on women while working on the two Congo quilts. "When assembling the panels you could feel the weight of them in the room," she said.

Several Peace Fellows (volunteers) played a key role in helping their hosts to make quilts, and made the trip to New York: [Heidi McKinnon](#) (2009, Guatemala); [Kate Bollinger](#) (2010, Nepal); [Charlotte Bourdillon](#) (2011, Kenya); [Samantha Hammer](#) (2011, Kosovo); [Beth Wofford](#) (2011, Czech Republic) and [Scarlett Chidgey](#) (2011, Uganda). "When I heard about this event I knew I had to go," said Ms Chidgey. "I got a little teary-eyed knowing it (our straw quilt) would be here."



Charlotte Bourdillon (center) discusses the Rehema widows quilt from Kenya. Charlotte worked on two Maasai quilts during her AP fellowship with the Kakenya Center for Excellence (photo Brian Gohacki)

SOS FED has made experimental bags from embroidered panels, and these are being market-tested. AP has also made [greeting cards](#) from the quilts which can be purchased online. All proceeds will go to the artists.

Looking ahead, AP will now work with partners to use their quilts in campaigns. The Women's Reproductive Rights Program, in Nepal, hopes that the UNFPA's enthusiasm for the [Nepal quilts](#) will translate into a program on prolapse in Nepal. AP is also talking to *Americans for UNFPA* about showing the quilts at events in the US.

Some of the artists even see quilts as a source of income. In the Congo,

- Watch Marceline Kongolo's [keynote speech](#)
- View [photos of the March 8 event](#)
- Read [profiles of quilters](#)
- Read the [UN press release](#)
- Order [greeting cards](#)
- [Email us](#) to exhibit a quilt, apply for a fellowship, or for more information