



Dining for Women

Program Fact Sheet: August 2008

Featured Program: Women for Women International

Although WFWI is a larger organization than DFW normally supports, WFWI was our very first program in January 2003 and continues to be a frequent recipient. Marsha chose WFWI as our first recipient after it was featured on Oprah. This year we are supporting its programs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Web Site: <http://www.womenforwomen.org/index.htm>

Mission: Women for Women International provides women survivors of war, civil strife and other conflicts with the tools and resources to move from crisis and poverty to stability and self-sufficiency, thereby promoting viable civil societies.

War issues: Across the globe, undeclared wars and internal armed conflicts have reached an unprecedented number. There have been more than 250 major wars since the end of World War II, resulting in over 23 million casualties. Modern warfare is no longer confined to battlefields. Around the world, noncombatants are finding themselves in the direct line of fire, suffering greatly and becoming the anonymous and undercounted casualties of violent conflicts. In today's wars, 90% of casualties are civilians, 75% of whom are women and children; a century ago 90% of war casualties were male soldiers.

As never before, women are disproportionately affected by war and civil strife. Women are targeted for ethnic cleansing and subjected to rape as a tool of war. They lose male family members who leave to fight and are killed. Many are displaced from their own homes. When widowed by war, they are thrust in the role of sole provider, often without marketable skills or a viable means to earn an income and often in communities that do not value their place in society.

History: WFWI was founded in 1993 by a wife and husband, Zainab Salbi and Amjad Atallah, who were motivated to act after learning of the plight of women in rape camps in the former Yugoslavia and the slow response of the international community. WFWI launched its activities by creating "sister-to-sister" connections between sponsors in the U.S. and women survivors of war in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In its first year, WFWI worked with eight women, distributing about \$9,000 in direct aid. Later they began programs to help these women develop marketable skills, cultivating an understanding of women's rights and potential, helping them secure ways to earn an income for years to come. In doing so, women gradually built the strength necessary to survive the horrors of war and become active members of their communities.

Since 1993, WFWI has expanded its operations to serve 120,000 women survivors of war and distributed \$33 million in direct and micro credit loans.

In 2006, WFWI received the Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize, an award presented annually to an organization that significantly alleviates human suffering.

Where they work: WFWI serves women in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Columbia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Kosovo, Nigeria, Rwanda and Sudan and builds one-to-one connections with more than 23,000 sponsors in all 50 states of the U.S. and 55 other countries.

Dining for Women's donation will support programs in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo.**

Brief country history: Established as a Belgian colony in 1908, the Republic of the Congo gained independence in 1960. The government has been marred by violence beginning with a 1962 coup when MOBUTU Sese Seko declared himself president and changed the country's name to Zaire. MOBUTU retained his position for 32 years through sham elections and through the use of brutal force. Ethnic strife, civil war, and a massive flow of refugees from the neighboring Rwanda genocide in 1994, led to the eventual toppling of the MOBUTU regime by a rebellion backed by Laurent KABKILA (he later renamed the country the Democratic Republic of the Congo). The civil war, involving seven African nations and many groups of armed combatants, was the deadliest in documented African history. It was fueled by ethnic rivalries and control over Congo's mineral deposits. A United Nations peacekeeping force continues to monitor the eastern regions of the country where sporadic militia attacks against civilians persist.

After Laurent KABKILA was assassinated in 2001, his son, Joseph KABKILA was named head of state. The country held its first election in December 2005 and KABKILA was inaugurated as president in 2006. (sources CIA World Factbook website and WFWI website)

Country Facts

- Population is 66,514,506 (This July 2008 estimate takes into account the effects of excess mortality due to AIDS)
 - Child mortality: 205 deaths per 1,000 births
 - Geography: situated in central Africa, bordering Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia
 - Size: slightly smaller than 1/4 of the United States
 - Life expectancy at birth: total – 53.98 years; males – 52.22; females – 55.8
 - Ethnic groups: over 200 African ethnic groups with Bantu the majority
 - Religion: Roman Catholic 50%; Protestant 20%; Kimbanguist 10%; Muslim 10%; other 10%
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- The map shows the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in central Africa. Major cities marked include Kinshasa (the capital), Gbadolite, Bumba, Kisangani, Mbandaka, Kindu, Goma, Bukavu, Kalemie, Lubumbashi, Likasi, Kolwezi, Mbuji-Mayi, Kananga, Ilebo, Kikwit, Matadi, Boma, and Banana. The Congo River and the Zaire River (Lualaba) are shown. Neighboring countries are labeled: Cameroon (CAMER.), Central African Republic (C.A.R.), Sudan, Gabon, Republic of the Congo (REP. OF THE CONGO), Angola, Zambia, Tanzania (TANZ.), Burundi (BURU.), and Rwanda (RW.). The Equator and Lake Tanganyika are also indicated. A scale bar shows 0, 200, and 400 km and 0, 200, and 400 miles.
- Literacy: total population – 67.2%; males – 80.9%; females – 54.1%
 - Economy: The economy, endowed with vast potential wealth, is recovering from two decades of decline. Conflict has dramatically reduced national output and revenue, increased external debt and resulted in deaths of more than 3.5 million people from violence, famine and disease. The government's implemented reforms and improved security may lead to increased revenue, budget assistance, and foreign investment although an uncertain legal framework, corruption and lack of transparency in government policy are continuing long-term problems.
 - Industries: mining (diamonds, gold, copper, cobalt, coltan zinc), mineral processing, consumer products, cement and commercial ship repair
 - Exports: diamonds, copper, crude oil, coffee, cobalt
 - Export partners: Belgium 29.3 %, China 21%, Brazil 12.3%, Chili 7.8%, Finland 7.2%, US 4.9%

WFWI Programs: WFWI supports socially excluded women emerging from war and community violence through a multi-layered core program of direct aid and sponsorship, rights-based education and economic development.

WFWI works with women participating in a one-year program launching them on a journey from victim to survivor to active citizen. As women go through the program they assume leadership positions in their villages, actively participating in community reconstruction, building civil societies, starting businesses, training other women and serving as role models.

Women begin in the *Sponsorship Program* where direct financial aid from a sponsor helps them deal with the immediate effects of war and conflict such as lack of food, water and medicine. Exchanging letters with sponsors provides women with an emotional lifeline and a chance to tell their stories.

The sponsor provides \$27 per month for financial aid and training. Today there are more than 19,000 sponsors in all 50 states as well as in 53 other countries. Last year, WFWI facilitated the exchange of 47,000 letters.

While continuing to receive sponsorship support, women embark on the next leg of the journey and participate in the *Renewing Women's Life Skills (ReneWLS) Program* that provides them with rights awareness, leadership education, vocational and technical skills training. Women build upon existing skills and learn new ones in order to regain their strength, stability and stature on the path to becoming active citizens.

WFWI believes that establishing a means to earn a sustainable living is critical to being fully active in the life of a family, community and country. To help women transform their new skills into financial independence, WFWI offers job skills training to strengthen women's existing skills and introduced new skills in traditional and nontraditional fields so women can access future employment opportunities.

Building on the skills training program, WFWI offers comprehensive business services designed to help women start and manage their own micro-enterprises. (WFWI microcredit programs in Afghanistan and Bosnia and Herzegovina operate with an overall repayment rate of 98 percent) WFWI provides women with access to markets by facilitating product sales through outside retailers and their online Virtual Bazaar. They provide expertise in product design, production assistance and business development workshops. They also help women form micro-enterprises such as production facilities and cooperative stores to sell the goods women produce.

In 2007, WFWI served 2,964 women in their core program.

How success is measured: WFWI measures their success through notable achievements:

- * Linked more than 120,000 women survivors of war with sponsors worldwide
- * Facilitated the translation and exchange for thousands of letters of support between sponsors and sponsored women
- * Enrolled and graduated more than 93,000 women in Renewing Life Skills for Women
- * Helped thousands secure employment and establish their own income-generating businesses
- * Distributed more than \$33 million in direct aid and micro credit loans, maintaining a 98% repayment rate
- * Facilitated hundreds of group therapy sessions for war survivors by providing a venue for women to share their experienced and build bridges between women survivors of different ethnic backgrounds

Fiscal efficiency: WFWI reports 79% of contributions are directed to programs. For three years in a row, WFWI has received a four-star rating from Charity Navigator, the highest possible ranking given.

Past DFW support:

2003	\$	600
2005	\$	840
2006	\$	6,023
2007	\$	14,968

Sources: *(There is a wealth of WFWI program and country specific information on the organization's website)*

www.ciafactbook
www.wfwi.org