

## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2021 IN SWITZERLAND

### "Celebrating African Women Heroes in Development Process"

Saturday, 6<sup>th</sup> of March 2021, 4:00pm-7:00 pm, Zoom

Officially recognized by the United Nations in **1977**, International Women's Day first emerged from the activities of labour movements at the turn of the twentieth century in North America and across Europe. The first National Woman's Day was observed in the United States on 28 February 1909. The Socialist Party of America designated this day in honour of the 1908 garment workers' strike in New York, where women protested against working conditions.

But the first milestone in US was much earlier - in 1848. Indignant over women being barred from speaking at an anti-slavery convention, Americans **Elizabeth Cady Stanton** and **Lucretia Mott** congregated a few hundred people at their nation's first women's rights convention in New York. Together they demand civil, social, political and religious rights for women in a Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions. A movement was then born.

Established on 24 October 1945 to promote international co-operation following the devastation of World War II, the UN has since its inception enshrined the equal rights of men and women at the heart of its *raison d'être*. Less than a year later during the inaugural session of the UN General Assembly in London, U.K., **Frieda Dalen of Norway** becomes the first woman delegate to address it and **Eleanor Roosevelt of U.S.A.** famously reads an "open letter to the women of the world" urging for their increased involvement in national and international affairs.

In Africa, there had been organized movements of women resistance, freedom and development activists acting to defend their rights and promote equality and better socio-economic and political life. Among them, Hatshepsout, Queen of Saba, La Kahena, Yennega, Chajar Ad-Durr, Ruwej, Nzinga, Béatrice of Congo, Lalla Khenata, Saran, Queen Pokou, Gankabi, Naga, Ranavalona III, Sarraounia, Kanjogera, Mekatilili, Hoda Chaaaroui, Alinsiitowe, Funmilayo Kuti, Hajia Gambo Sawaba, Les Djamila, Awa Keita, Anuarité, Alice Lakwena, Helen Suzman, Ellen Kuzwayo, Mariama Bâ, Zena M'Dere, Agathe Uwilingiyimana, Césaria Evora etc. The **Aba Women's Rebellion of November 1929**, popularly known as Aba Women Riots, is more aptly considered a strategically executed revolt organised by women against the British colonial authorities to redress social, political and economic grievances in the then colonial Nigeria. In the modern Day Africa, the likes of **Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala**, **H.E. Ambassador Dr Arikana Chihombori Quao** etc continue to make Africa proud.

Whether in the management of family households, economic exploitation in both the formal and informal sectors, in political leadership, social enterprise, African women continue to set the space. Thus, African Diaspora women continue to initiate projects and send remittances that continue to touch lives both in the rural and urban areas in Africa and thereby energizing development in Africa. This conference seeks to explore, highlight and honour the contributions of African women in development within the framework of International Decade for People of African Descent.

In Switzerland, women gained the right to vote in federal elections only after a referendum in **February 1971**. The first federal vote in which women were able to participate was the 31 October 1971 election of the Federal Assembly. Before then, women were largely absent from Switzerland's political life until 1971. **Tilo Frey** of African origin, was one of the remarkable personalities in this feminist struggle. It was one of the last countries in Europe to grant women the right to vote. Women in Finland were the first to be granted the right to vote in 1906, and in Germany women have been casting their ballots since 1918. What took Switzerland so long? The simple answer is a lack of political will according to **Zita Küng**, one of Switzerland's most influential feminist activists. **Isabel Rohner**, an expert on feminist issues and co-author of the book *50 Years of Women's Suffrage*, said that traditionally Switzerland, similar to other countries, was based on a patriarchal system, in which public and private spheres were strictly separated. Politics and the military were a man's domain, whereas taking care of the household and family was the responsibility of women (dw.com). 50 years on, what has changed is also a topic of discussion. English and French are official languages with simultaneous translation.