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Letter from Zainab Salbi Gratitude, Forgiveness and Love



Zainab Salbi in Rwanda

I remember right before my mother died, she wrote a letter to everyone in her life declaring forgiveness, apologies, and love everywhere she felt they were needed. I was 29 at the time and remember being so touched by what she was doing. I promised myself that day that I will not wait till my death bed to try to have clarity

The Story of Sadije Bublaku— A Kosovo Woman Who Triumphs Against All Odds

Picture yourself living in Kosovo in 1997. You have a good life. You're married; you have four wonderful children – 2 boys and 2 girls. Your husband has a good job. He is a successful farmer with all the equipment he needs.

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and closure.

In her book "The Second Half of Life," Angeles Arrien inspires readers to reflect on the meaning of their lives and of their legacy with the words, "may we all remember that to leave the world a better place for future generations is to have lived a meaningful life, and to have succeeded." As I reflect back on 2007 and consider the vast potential of what lies ahead I am overcome with gratitude.

Thank you to every woman and man who has chosen to be a part of Women for Women International as a volunteer, donor, sponsor, supporter or participant. In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, you are the reasons behind our attempts "to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition; to know even one life has breathed easier because you live. This is to have succeeded." Together, we are building a global community, a movement that articulates solid ways of building peace and stability while bridging the gaps between women all over the world.

I am so deeply grateful to the staff of Women for Women International, who often risk their own lives to save the lives of others. Their dedication and service to women survivors of war is overwhelming and deeply touching, and has no price tag. I am also deeply grateful to Women for Women International's Board and Council members for their leadership, commitment and wisdom as they help the organization improve the efficiency and sustainability of its services.

I am grateful for the women we serve. They have taught me so very much about resilience, courage, strength beyond all odds, beauty, smiles, joy and even dancing despite all pain. Every time I get the chance to be in their company, whether I am in Bosnia and Herzegovina or Sudan, I am reminded why what we do is so very important and why the world is so very beautiful despite the pain and the sorrow in it. They embody life in its fullest meaning...in its pain, joy, sorrow, hope, beauty, ugliness, strength, and weakness...but they always go forward with hope.



Sadije Bublaku

Then within a year your life is changed forever. It's 1998. Your country is at war. You're separated from your husband and children and forced to endure the touches and taunts of men from foreign armies. In 1999 you're forced to leave your home. You take refuge in villages and end up hiding in a cave deep within the mountains.

Serbian forces keep your family apart. And when they do reunite you it is only to force you and your small, helpless children to watch their father being beaten. Their attack is so brutal and harsh he is left deaf in one ear. These horrors are so unspeakable that even nearly 10 years later, your children are suffering the psychological consequences. Even your own memories haunt you. You recall these savage attacks and you sit shaking and frightened, just as if it is happening again.

What would you do? Sadije Bublaku found the conviction and strength within herself to push past her own fears, and join Women for Women International.

Sadije received important rights training and education so she could help prevent these atrocities of war from ever happening again. But helping herself and her own family was not enough for this caring and courageous woman.

Afghanistan Director Speaks to International Group

International Women's Day

Dinner with a Purpose



Walk into to Angie's Restaurant in Logan, Utah, and you see what you would expect to see in any small town restaurant: good food and good people. What makes Angie's Restaurant remarkable is how that combination came together to help women survivors of war a world away in Afghanistan.

For Angie's Restaurant owner, Saboor Fahely, Afghanistan is not a far-off world. For Saboor, Afghanistan is home. He moved to Logan 30 years ago as a college student to attend Utah State University. To support himself, he worked at Angie's as a dishwasher and slowly moved up to positions as a cook and in management. Eventually, he bought the restaurant. Along the way he married and raised a family in the safe college town, thousands of miles away from the violence and intolerant rule of his homeland.

"I still have family members living in Afghanistan and am keenly aware of the problems the people face..."
- Saboor Fahely

When there is so much love out there in the world, when people are showing us love without even knowing us, we are forced to ask ourselves who are we not to love each other? Who are we not to love our neighbors?

And last but not least, I am truly grateful to you; the one who is sponsoring a sister, the one who is recruiting another sponsor, the one who provides donations to help us train the women we serve, the one who helps pay for some of our logistical needs so we may deliver our program efficiently. You are the teachers of generosity and beauty. You are the teachers of love as so many of the sponsored sisters say. My favorite quote is from a Rwandan woman who, when commenting on how she feels about the sponsorship program, said “when there is so much love out there in the world, when people are showing us love without even knowing us, we are forced to ask ourselves who are we not to love each other? Who are we not to love our neighbors?”

As I think back to my mother's letters and the closure and peace that I hope they afforded to both her and their respective readers, I recommit myself to such expressions as a way of life. Please, allow me to thank you for the LOVE you have. May it spread tenfold, may it overtake the world, may it be what we read about, what we breathe, what we see in our news. May women show the world that love is much more powerful than hate, that peace is much more attainable, sustainable and cheaper than war. May every woman's voice be heard, loud and clear, and our cries echo throughout the world so wars may stop. This, my friends, is how we can not only bring new meaning to our own lives but leave the world a better place for future generations. For each of us, may this be our legacy.



Kosovar women participating in the cross-country graduation trip in Kosovo

Sadije no longer attends Women for Women International programs. She runs them. Sadije is a community leader and conducts the programs in her own home. When asked why she would hold meetings in her own home Sadije answers, “I don't want to see women with dropped hands. I want to see women working to improve their lives. I want to see them help themselves and their children.”

She is so inspiring that women travel for 30 minutes or more on foot, just to attend the programs.

But Sadije is a remarkable woman who stops at nothing. Not too long ago Sadije did the unthinkable for a Kosovar woman. She took 90 women from her village who were graduating from their Women for Women International training programs on a trip around Kosovo.

Typical graduation, right? Not so in Kosovo. In a country where women are not allowed outside their homes alone, or their villages for that matter, this was an unheard of, unthinkable journey.

Yet Sadije collected money. Organized buses. And 90 remarkable women took a 12-hour trip around the country – many seeing outside their own homes and villages for the very first time. When they reached the village of Iscog for lunch, a group of men asked if they were

To express how thankful he is for his adopted home, Saboor opens the doors of Angie's every year to provide free Thanksgiving dinners with all of the trimmings. The event draws about 1,000 people from all walks of life—families with children, senior citizens, single people with nowhere to go. But this isn't just a community feast. It's dinner with a purpose.

For 20 years, Angie's Thanksgiving diners have not only enjoyed a traditional meal with their community, they have raised money each year for a featured charity by dropping a donation in the fishbowl placed on the counter. This year, Saboor chose Women for Women International as the featured charity.



Saboor Fahely, owner Angie's Restaurant

Although Saboor lives a comfortable life in Utah, he hasn't forgotten what the women of Afghanistan are living through. He chose Women for Women International because he wanted to give the women tools to start their own businesses and the opportunity to obtain emotional support and counseling.

“I still have family members living in Afghanistan and am keenly aware of the problems the people face there... I've lived here for 30 years. I'll probably die here,” he said. “But a part of my heart and a part of my soul is still there. You can't divorce yourself from where you're born and raised.”

The money raised from the dinner will enable the enrollment of a number of women in Women for Women International's program as well as support the microcredit program in Afghanistan. The event also raised awareness in the Logan, Utah, community about the plight of women in

Zainab Salbi



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teachers. And they said, "No. We are not employed. We are graduating from our Women for Women International training program and wanted to see our country." The men were shocked. They said, "No. It isn't possible." And so Sadije showed them her ID as proof. This identification card not only showed these men who they were, but who they had become.

You might expect that these women are facing difficult times in their own village and their own homes. But this is truly a story of triumph, because thankfully the opposite is true. The men are seeing that the women are happy. And they are realizing that when a woman has confidence, self-esteem and feels happy that their families and communities are happier too.

When asked about her life in 2007 Sadije says, "I feel so good. My life has changed so much. I am so happy to work with the women that I don't ever get tired. Thank you to people who have helped me so much."

Afghanistan. As Women for Women International Grassroots Marketing Officer Patty Pina said, "Hosting an event to benefit Women for Women International not only raises awareness about women survivors of war, it gives your community the opportunity to do something about it. An event in your living room or neighborhood can change the lives of women worlds away."



Money raised at the restaurant supports women in Afghanistan (Photo Credit: Lekha Singh)

Bosnian Director Advises the United Nations on Responding to Rape in the DRC

On October 16, 2007, Seida Saric, Country Director of Women for Women International in Bosnia and Herzegovina, traveled to the United Nations to participate in a panel discussion hosted by the U.S. State Department on the use of rape as an instrument of state policy, with a particular focus on the ongoing sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).



The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina began in 1992 when Serbia's president, Slobodan Milosevic, and leaders of the Bosnian Serbs launched a hate-filled propaganda campaign to revitalize Serb nationalism. Bosniaks, mostly Muslim, were portrayed as dangerous fundamentalists who needed to be destroyed and eliminated.

As a result, more than 200,000 people were killed and another 200,000 were seriously injured. Millions of people were forced to flee their homes, as they had become targets of a systematic campaign of psychological terror and physical violence. Some 20,000 to 50,000 Muslim women were raped by Bosnian Serb soldiers.

Afghanistan Director Speaks to International Group in London

Sweeta Noori, Country Director for Women for Women International in Afghanistan, traveled to England in October where she had the privilege of attending Chatham House's Second Annual Women's Rights Lecture given by Cherie Booth, wife of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair. Chatham House, the home of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, is



Sweeta Noori, Country Director for Women for Women International in Afghanistan

located in the center of London. More importantly, Chatham House is a center of foreign policy analysis for experts across the world. Its members are known for their creativity in addressing international problems. Since its creation in 1920, Chatham House has worked to stimulate debate and research on political, business, security and other key issues in the international arena. Sweeta's invitation to the lecture signaled the world community's interest in the plight of the women of Afghanistan and how Women for Women International is a leader in amplifying their voices.

Women for Women International was started 14 years ago in response to the impact that the Bosnian war had on Bosnian women. Since that time, we have learned many things about how war victims recover and build a future. As the world continues to hear of the horrible violence and trauma carried out against women in the DRC, Seida's UN comments offer some insight as to how a society should react to the widespread use of rape during conflict:

- 1) The post-war society should address a rape victim's needs holistically. She needs psychological support as well as medical support. She needs shelter and job opportunities.
- 2) Civil society leaders should help communities understand that a rape victim is not responsible for her rape. It is not her fault. They must work to change the attitudes of men and other community leaders to help them accept the women as victims.
- 3) The post-war government must recognize that it has a responsibility to these victims. The government must work with NGOs and other institutions to make sure that these victims have reparations. They must be given health and medical services and economic support.
- 4) All members of society must openly discuss what has happened during the war and how to deal with it. More than 12 years after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the rape and ethnic cleansing that occurred during the war is still not really discussed openly.
- 5) The post-war government must ensure aggressive prosecution of the perpetrators. If there is anything that the international community has learned from the experience in Bosnia it is that war criminals must be prosecuted for their crimes. Impunity is wrong. When Bosnian women spoke out about what happened to them, the International Criminal Court declared rape to be a war crime.

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... socially excluded Afghan women need Women for Women International's support to rebuild their lives, the wider Afghan society needs the right kind of support from the international community to rebuild the country.
- Sweeta Noori

As part of the event, Sweeta participated in a panel discussion on developments in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban. In her comments, Sweeta said that there continues to be two Afghanistans—one that is gradually improving in the eyes of the international community, and one that is still in the shadows and very unsafe for women. She stressed that while the international community should not plan to maintain its current presence in Afghanistan indefinitely, now is not the time to relax or withdraw resources from Afghanistan just because there have been two successful elections. Sweeta added that what Afghanistan needs most is real investment in local capacity and the facilitation of a political solution to the ongoing conflict. In the same sense that socially excluded Afghan women need Women for Women International's support to rebuild their lives, the wider Afghan society needs the right kind of support from the international community to rebuild the country.



S. Noori, J. Corbin, and A. Khan sit on the panel at the Second Annual Women's Rights Lecture at England's Chatham House

International Women's Day Is March 8 — Join the Celebration!

Since 1908, International Women's Day has been a day to celebrate the achievements of women around the world without regard to their national, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, economic or political differences.

To honor this day, on March 8 our Women for Women International offices around the world hold events ranging from quiet and reflective meetings to loud and festive celebrations. In Baghdad, women have rallied at the capitol for equal treatment. In Afghanistan, women pray, hold poetry readings and have martial arts demonstrations to show empowerment. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, women parade and protest against unpunished sexual assaults. And in Kosovo,



Afghanistan (Photo Credit: Lekha Singh)

women are given flowers and free food.

This year, Women for Women International is creating a bridge between the women we serve in the field and the women who support them. We're reaching out to our supporters, bloggers and sponsors to host their own events for International Women's Day. By participating in a dynamic celebration of women, you will create a link between your friends and families and the millions of women celebrating in the world. Some of our supporters have already signed up to be a part of this special day by hosting house parties, holding open dialogues about violence against women, organizing a Run for Congo Women, and hosting an art exhibit.

Consider hosting an event and this year you will be invited to join a conference call with Women for Women International founder and CEO, Zainab Salbi, and Chief Marketing Officer, Trish Tobin, to hear about how Women for Women International is playing an integral part in the advancement of women in war-ravaged parts of the world.

Add your name to the list of women who will be celebrating on March 8 by contacting our Grassroots Marketing Officer, Patty Pina, at ppina@womenforwomen.org or 202-737-7705. Also visit our events page at www.womenforwomen.org/iwd for more information on how to host an event and ideas on the type of event to host. Be sure to send us stories about your event so we can share it with our Women for Women International community.

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Rwanda

What you can do for International Women's Day:

1. Contact Patty Pina, our grassroots marketing officer, at 202-737-7705 or ppina@womenforwomen.org to sign-up and receive your planning kit and all the materials you need.
2. Select a location to host your event, like your home, a local restaurant, or a community center.
3. Invite your friends, family, co-workers and community to join the celebration of International Women's Day.



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Rwanda



Afghanistan (Photo Credit: Lekha Singh)



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For the fourth straight year, Women for Women International has received a four-star rating, the highest possible ranking given to a nonprofit by Charity Navigator, outperforming over 5,000 other charities.