

FILMMAKER'S STATEMENT

We've been asked how we came up with the idea for *Women, War & Peace*. As usual, it was over a meal.

In 2007, while overseeing the international current affairs series *Wide Angle* for PBS in New York City, Pam produced an interview with Iraqi-born Zainab Salbi, founder of Women for Women International. Zainab's book, *The Other Side of War*, vividly portrays what she describes as the unreported "backlines" of war, where women keep life going in the harshest of circumstances. For Pam it was a profound paradigm shift. In *Wide Angle's* six seasons on the air, war stories always seemed to focus on men and guns. "Who's doing the documentary about the other side of war?" she asked Zainab, certain that such a film must be in the works. "No one," was the reply. "We have to do something about that," said Pam.

Meanwhile, Abby and Gini were in an editing room across town working on *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*, the story of how a group of Liberian women came together to bring peace to their country after years of war. As Gini and Abby looked for archival footage to tell the women's story, they found it was surprisingly scarce—yet videotape featuring combat, warlords, and the risks taken by journalists in the field was abundant. Despite the fact that every eyewitness to the events in Liberia confirmed that the women's peacebuilding work was transformative, their contributions had only intermittently—or mistakenly—been captured on tape.

A few weeks later, all three of us got together. As we recounted our strikingly similar experiences, the conversation became electric. Within minutes we were finishing each other's sentences. We all agreed that the need to address the media's blind spot for the momentous change in women's roles in conflict was great. The reporting gap was enormous, and the opportunity to do something together was compelling. We knew we were on to something—and *Women, War & Peace* was born.

From the outset, we knew that *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* would be one of five films in the series. The question immediately became: what other stories should we tell? All of us had been deeply moved by the U.N. testimony of Patrick Cammaert, a former commander of U.N. peacekeeping forces. He had observed from his own experience in multiple war zones that, "It has probably become more dangerous to be a woman than a soldier in an armed conflict." So we decided to focus on the period in which that has happened—the last 20 years—when frontlines disappeared and civilians became primary targets.

The women targeted in Bosnia's war in the 1990s immediately came to mind. They, along with women who survived Rwanda's genocide, were the first women ever to testify at an international tribunal about what happened to women during war. They were also the first to successfully demand the prosecution of perpetrators of systematic

rape. Due to their willingness to step forward and take the witness stand, rape began to be seen as a war crime rather than an inevitable byproduct of conflict. When Pam began delving into the transcripts from The Hague, she came upon an extraordinary trial focusing exclusively on war crimes against women in a small town in southeastern Bosnia. The second film in the *Women, War & Peace* series, *I Came to Testify*, began to take shape.

As we were in the midst of discussing Bosnia, Gini heard a report on the radio about Secretary of State Hillary Clinton acknowledging four Afghan women who had pushed their way into a meeting in London. The international community had convened there to begin to lay the groundwork for ending the war in Afghanistan, but not a single Afghan woman had been invited. During the conference, attendees learned that peace talks with the Taliban were on the horizon. Afghan women wanted to make sure they were at the table. We decided to find out who these meeting-crashing women were and follow them. Our third film in the series, *Peace Unveiled*, was born.

We knew that another underreported issue is that today's conflicts are uprooting millions of civilians—the largest number in history—and turning them into refugees within their own countries. The majority are women. Abby had recently received an email about death threats against a Colombian human-rights lawyer working with two Afro-Colombian women to stop the seizure of their community's gold-rich land. A showdown was imminent. The women were vowing to fight to the death to avoid displacement—a fate already known to 4.5 million people in Colombia, where a modern-day gold-rush is igniting land grabs across the country. Production on *The War We Are Living*, our fourth film in the series, swung into gear.

With production on four films now underway, we decided to round out the series with a final film that would rigorously explore the themes and ideas that had emerged from our global research on women and conflict. We invited Women for Women International's Zainab Salbi to participate alongside a chorus of leading experts, political leaders, and war survivors to probe the impact of today's wars on women in conflict zones. We asked them to help interpret for our viewers the oft-unexplored roles women are playing to change the rules of engagement.

To borrow a phrase from Hague prosecutor Peggy Kuo, it's our hope to "shine a spotlight on women's experience in war" with this series. With the aid of that spotlight, we hope viewers will finally be able to see what happens when we look at war as though women matter.

Adapted from the *Women, War & Peace* Blog, July 20, 2011
by Abigail E. Disney, Pamela Hogan, and Gini Reticker,
Executive Producers



THE FILM

Pray the Devil Back to Hell tells the remarkable story of how the women of Liberia brought an end to the civil war that had wracked their nation for fourteen years. On one side was Charles Taylor, the brutal and repressive president of Liberia. Opposing Taylor was the equally ruthless Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), an organization of rebel factions trying to gain control of the country. Through a combined effort of Christian and Muslim women, the fighting factions came to the peace table and negotiated an agreement, setting the stage for democratic rule.

Leymah Gbowee, the leader of the women's peace efforts, lists the root causes of the war—power, money, ethnicity, greed—and describes the hellish conditions the population faced in trying to escape the fighting. Working with the women who found shelter in refugee camps, Gbowee was “baptized into the women's movement” and decided to do something to stop all the killing and suffering. She began organizing through the churches, calling on women to rise up and protest against the war. Her call to activism caught the attention of Asatu Bah Kenneth, a Muslim woman, who joined the campaign and spread the word to women through the mosques.

The first step taken by the group Gbowee and Kenneth founded—the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET)—was to appeal to the bishops and imams to persuade the combatants to stop fighting. The women then organized a rally, marking the first time Muslim and Christian women had come together in a joint activity. Their rallying spot was the fish market, strategically chosen because it was on the route President Taylor traveled daily. The women gathered there every day, dressing simply in white clothing, wearing no make-up or jewelry. After getting no response from Taylor, the women brought the protest home with a “sex strike” against their husbands, engendering a good deal of sympathy from their husbands for the cause of peace.

As the war worsened, the international community began calling for peace talks, which emboldened the women. They wrote a position statement demanding peace, and they presented it to the Liberian parliament and to President Taylor. The daily demonstrations at the fish market resumed, and the number of participants swelled. Seeing that popular sentiment was with the women, Taylor agreed to attend the peace talks, to be held in Ghana. The women then convinced the rebel leaders to join the talks. To keep the pressure up, they also raised money to send their own representatives to Ghana.

The peace talks began in June 2003 and included dozens of African leaders. Early in the proceedings, the delegation from Sierra Leone dropped a bombshell by announcing the indictment of Charles Taylor for committing war crimes in that country in the 1990s. Instead of being arrested, Taylor fled back to Liberia, and full-scale war broke

out in the capital, Monrovia. In spite of worries about their families in Liberia, the women kept strategizing and meeting with the various rebel factions to discuss what they could bring to the negotiations. The rebels, however, were more focused on orchestrating the war from their Ghana hotel and on the positions they would occupy after deposing Taylor.

After six weeks with no progress toward peace, the women felt angry, bitter and enraged. They staged a sit-in, locking arms, determined to keep the men from leaving the negotiating room until they had an agreement. When security came to arrest Leymah Gbowee, leader of the sit-in, she began undressing (an action that represents a curse in African culture) and said all the women would undress, if necessary. General Abdulsalami Abubakar, former president of Nigeria and the chief mediator at the peace talks, intervened and met with the women. They demanded serious negotiations, threatening to stage a much larger sit-in. Two weeks later, a peace agreement was signed, Taylor was exiled to Nigeria, U.N. peacekeeping forces entered Monrovia, and a transitional government was set up.

The women then turned to the process of building peace and monitoring the peace agreement. They helped to calm a chaotic U.N.-led disarmament and began accepting former combatants back into society. And with their enthusiastic involvement in the election process, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf became the first female head of state in Africa.



Portrait of Leymah Gbowee
Photo Credit: Michael Angelo for Wonderland

INDIVIDUALS FEATURED IN *PRAY THE DEVIL BACK TO HELL*

Leymah Gbowee—social worker; women's rights peace activist

Etweda "Sugars" Cooper—community activist; secretary general of Liberian Women's Initiative

Vaiba Flomo—secretary; president of the Christian Women's Peace Initiative

Asatu Bah Kenneth—assistant director, Liberian National Police; president of the Liberia Female Law Enforcement Association

Etty Weah—peace activist

Janet Johnson Bryant—radio journalist

Charles Taylor—president of Liberia, 1997–2003

Sekou Conneh—national chairman, LURD

Joe Wylie—brigadier general, LURD

General Abdulsalami Abubakar—chief mediator; former president of Nigeria

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Capsule History of Liberia

The Republic of Liberia is a country on the west coast of Africa, bordered by Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast). Founded in 1820 as a colony for freed American slaves, Liberia's population of four million comprises sixteen indigenous ethnic groups and various foreign minorities. Only five percent of the population are Americo-Liberians—descendants of the freed slaves who settled there in the nineteenth century. These early settlers remained an elite group who did not assimilate with the indigenous Africans and excluded them from citizenship. The country was run as a one-party state from the time it declared independence from the American Colonization Society in 1847 until 1980 when Samuel K. Doe, an ethnic Krahn, seized power in a military coup. This began a period of instability, marked by ethnic conflict, attempted overthrows of the government, and Liberia's first civil war, which lasted from 1989 to 1996.

Additional Liberia Facts

Area: 43,000 square miles (slightly larger than Ohio)

Religions: Christian 85%, Muslim 12%, other 1.5%, no religion 1.5%

Literacy rate: 58% (2008)

Life expectancy: 58 years (2008)

Charles Taylor Era

Taylor supported the coup led by Samuel Doe, but he was fired in 1983 for embezzling almost \$1 million from the Liberian government. He fled to the United States, where he was arrested and detained in a Massachusetts prison; he escaped a year later in 1985. He spent some time in Libya as a protégé of Muammar Gaddafi, undergoing guerilla training. In 1989, he launched an armed uprising from Côte d'Ivoire to overthrow the Doe regime. The resulting civil war turned into an ethnic

conflict, with seven different factions fighting for control of Liberia's resources. After the intervention of other West African states, the war ended and Taylor was elected president in 1997. During his tenure, Liberia experienced a precipitous decline in all indicators of economic and social well-being. Taylor became involved in the civil war in Sierra Leone, supporting that country's Revolutionary United Front (RUF) by supplying arms in exchange for diamonds, and aiding the RUF in committing atrocities against civilians and recruiting child soldiers.

A Second Civil War and the Indictment of Charles Taylor

By 1999, a rebellion against Taylor was taking shape in northern Liberia, led by Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), a group backed by neighboring Guinea. This uprising was the beginning of the Second Liberian Civil War. In 2003, a second rebel group, backed by Côte d'Ivoire, emerged in the south to challenge Taylor. Both rebel factions and the Liberian government were finally brought together in peace talks in Ghana, where the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) publicly indicted Taylor for war crimes. Under international pressure to resign and leave Liberia, Taylor received safe exile in Nigeria. In early 2006, Taylor was arrested trying to cross the border into Cameroon. He was extradited to The Hague, where the SCSL tried him for crimes against humanity—altogether eleven counts of murder, rape, pillaging, and deploying child soldiers in Sierra Leone. (He has not been charged in connection with offenses committed in Liberia.) The three-year trial of Charles Taylor ended on March 11, 2011; a verdict is expected in late 2011 or early 2012.

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf - Biographical Information

Born: In Monrovia on October 29, 1938, of mixed Liberian (Gola and Kru) and German ancestry.

Education: Attended high school at the College of West Africa in Monrovia; undergraduate degrees in accounting from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and economics from the University of Colorado, Boulder; Master's degree in Public Administration from Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

Personal: Married James Sirleaf in 1956, later divorced; four sons, eleven grandchildren

Career highlights:

1970s—Held several financial posts in the Liberian government.

1980s—Worked for the World Bank, Citibank, and Equator Bank, a subsidiary of HSBC.

1990s—Appointments to post of director, United Nations Development Programme's Regional Bureau for Africa, and to an international group mandated by the Organization of African Unity to investigate the Rwandan genocide.

1997—Ran for president as the Unity Party candidate, losing to Charles Taylor.

2005—Ran again as the Unity Party candidate for president, winning in a run-off election and becoming Liberia's 24th president and the first elected female head of state in Africa.



Child Soldiers

It is difficult to arrive at an exact number of children involved in armed forces, but the Child Soldiers Global Report 2008 estimates that there are “many tens of thousands” in all regions of the world. According to that report, children were actively involved in armed conflict in government forces or non-state armed groups in 19 countries or territories between April 2004 and October 2007.

Child soldiers are formally considered to be all soldiers under the age of 18, but most are between the ages of 8 and 15, participating as combatants in government forces, illegal militias, and other rebel groups. Some join armed groups “voluntarily,” seeing no alternative after family members have been killed and social structures have collapsed. Many are kidnapped and forced to participate in hostilities and atrocities.

In Liberia, child soldiers have played a significant role in the country's civil wars, as members of both government forces and rebel groups. Former president Charles Taylor recruited children into his movement against the government of Samuel Doe in the late 1980s, and even formed a special brigade for them in his rebel army, calling it the “Small Boys Unit.”

In recent years, a number of efforts have been mounted to protect children from involvement in armed conflict. Most notably, the U.N. mission in Sierra Leone has been engaged in an initiative called DDR, designed to “disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate” children to society. Helping child soldiers rejoin normal civilian life is challenging. Getting families to accept children back can be difficult, especially if the child has killed people or committed atrocities. Former child soldiers trying to rebuild their lives must deal with psychological trauma, broken relationships, feelings of anger at what has happened to them and their families, and suicidal tendencies. They contend with a heavy burden that calls for focused intervention, counseling, and constructive activities, all of which require resources that are usually in short supply, as is the case in Liberia. Nonetheless, rehabilitating her country's former child soldiers remains one of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's top priorities.

Sources: www.cfr.org/liberia/liberia-child-soldiers/p7753 and www.child-soldiers.org/home

Nonviolent Struggle and the Power of Women

To end the conflict and violence in Liberia, the participants in the Women in Peacebuilding Network engaged in nonviolent action, using tactics that have been successful in numerous “people power” movements throughout the world. Some well-known examples include the struggle for independence in India led by Mohandas K. Gandhi in the 1930s and '40s, the Solidarity movement in Poland in the 1980s, and the U.S. civil rights movement in the 1960s. For the Liberian women, organizing their efforts along gender and religious lines provided a commonality that lent a basic strength to their activities. As mothers, sisters, and wives, they brought the authority of caretakers and the spirit of nurturers to their demonstrations. As observant Christians and Muslims, they represented the country's major religions and showed a unity of purpose that transcended religious beliefs.

Tactics

The women of Liberia employed a number of nonviolent tactics in working toward their goal of peace:

- **Built bridges between women from all walks of life**—Worked within religious institutions to unite women from opposing sides of the conflict and from different religious, ethnic, and class backgrounds.
- **Appeals for help from authority figures**—They enlisted the help of bishops and imams to persuade the government and rebel forces to cease their hostilities.
- **Simple message**—They did not mix politics into their demands or take sides. Their message was simply, “The women of Liberia want peace now.”
- **Demonstrations**—They brought public attention to their message by rallying at the fish market, dressing simply, and carrying signs stating their goal.
- **Personal noncooperation**—They withheld sex from their husbands to gain their sympathy for the cause of peace.
- **Petitions**—They wrote a position paper stating their demands and presented it to the government.
- **Appeal for outside intervention**—They picketed the American embassy.
- **Sit-ins**—They occupied the building where the peace talks were taking place, refusing to leave until their demands were met.

More information and a list of methods of nonviolent action are at www.einstein.org.



TOPICS AND ISSUES RELEVANT TO *PRAY THE DEVIL BACK TO HELL*

A screening of *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* can be used to spark interest in any of the following topics and inspire both individual and community action. In planning a screening, consider finding speakers, panelists, or discussion leaders with expertise in one or more of the following areas:

- Political activism
- Women's issues
- Nonviolent protest
- Civic education
- Community organizing
- Female leadership
- Truth and reconciliation
- Child soldiers
- Blood diamonds/conflict minerals
- Democratization
- Religious tolerance



Photo credit: Pewee Flomoku

THINKING MORE DEEPLY

1. Why were the women effective in bringing an end to the fighting in Liberia? What was the source of their power?
2. How do the demonstrations and protests staged by the Liberian women compare to the recent anti-government protests that have taken place in Middle Eastern countries? Do you see any similarities? How are they different?
3. When Leymah Gbowee spoke in church about protesting against the war, why did she direct her remarks to women, even though men were clearly present? Why didn't she invite men to join the movement?
4. Do you think nonviolent action is an effective way to end war? Why or why not?
5. Would the outcome have been the same if the demonstrations and other appeals for peace had been carried out by another group, e.g., young people/students or business or community leaders? How would a movement by another group have been different?
6. In the film, Vaiba Flomo talks about how difficult she found it to forgive those who had committed atrocities. What is the role of forgiveness in achieving a lasting peace? What is the responsibility of those who receive forgiveness?
7. Does this film change the way you think about women's role in war? Do you think the women of Liberia's roles as wives and mothers affected their ability to promote peace?
8. Does having a woman as the head of a country's government make a positive difference for women living in that country?
9. Why is it important for women to be involved in their country's politics? What do women bring to political life? Why do you think they have often been shut out of political negotiations and elected office?
10. Now that the civil strife in Liberia has died down, how can the women who worked for peace help their fellow citizens build and maintain a strong democracy in that country?

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION

Together with other audience members, brainstorm actions that you might take as an individual or as a group. Here are some ideas to get you started:

1. Support peacebuilding organizations and other groups working in Liberia and West Africa. Find a list of organizations at www.praythedevilbacktohell.com/links.php.
2. If violent crime or even minor law-breaking activities are taking place in your community, consider following the example of American grassroots group Mothers in Charge to help put an end to such activities. Bring together mothers, sisters, aunts, and other female relatives of crime victims to work with local government and other agencies to support safe neighborhoods and advocate for families affected by violence. Visit the Mothers in Charge website (www.mothersincharge.org) for more information.
3. Join the campaign to adopt the U.N. treaty banning the use of children in conflict. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been ratified by two-thirds of the world's countries, but more than sixty countries have yet to ratify the treaty. Make your voice heard by writing to ambassadors of key countries, which you will find listed on the Human Rights Watch website (www.hrw.org/en/topic/children039s-rights/child-soldiers). Other organizations that seek support for work rehabilitating former child soldiers are Save the Children, International Rescue Mission, and the Catholic organization Don Bosco Homes.
4. Is there an issue in your community that needs attention? Tackle it by organizing the community to take specific action. Two handbooks offer guidelines that can get you started. One is from Resources for Organizing and Social Change (ROSC) in Maine (www.abilitymaine.org/rosc/cog.html); the other is from the Indianapolis Community Resource Center (www.inrc.org/Assets/docs/workbook/2_organizing.pdf).
5. Learn about the work of organizations that promote democracy and human rights, such as Freedom House (www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=1) and the Carter Center (www.cartercenter.org). The Council on Foreign Relations lists more democracy-promoting organizations at www.cfr.org/democracy-promotion/soft-power-democracy-promotion-us-ngos/p10164.
6. Use the resources of the International Museum of Women to spark a conversation in your community. Its current online exhibition, "Young Women Speaking the Economy" (www.imow.org/home), can be a starting point for women in your community to examine the current economic crises and debates taking place in the US and around the world and the specific challenges those crises present for women and men.

For additional outreach ideas, visit www.itvs.org, the website for the Independent Television Service. For local information, check the website of your PBS station.



RESOURCES

www.praythediabacktohell.com – Official web site of the film; contains resources, action items, and biographies of the activists featured in the film.

Information about Liberia

news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country_profiles/1043500.stm – This BBC site provides a country profile and recent news articles about Liberia.

www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/6618.htm – This State Department site contains a history of Liberia along with other detailed information on geography, the economy, and more.

www.emansion.gov.lr/content.php?sub=President's%20Biography&related=The%20President – This Liberian government site contains a brief biography of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

www.charlestaylortrial.org – This Open Society Foundations website provides information about Charles Taylor, as well as background and details surrounding his trial in The Hague.

www.usip.org/publications/truth-commission-liberia – A brief history and a report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, which was in operation from February 2006 through June 2009.

Power of Women

www.imow.org/wpp – *Women, Power & Politics* is an online exhibition at the International Museum of Women.

www.eomega.org/omega/womensinstitute/ – The Women's Institute at Omega sponsors the Women & Power conference series and in 2012 will open the Women's Leadership Center.

www.usaid.gov/our_work/cross-cutting_programs/wid – The Office of Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment at USAID focuses on development assistance and the advancement of women worldwide.

www.guide2womenleaders.com – The Worldwide Guide to Women in Leadership contains both historical and current lists of female heads of state, political candidates, and other major leaders.

Nonviolent Action

www.aeinstein.org – The Albert Einstein Institution is a nonprofit organization advancing the study and use of strategic nonviolent action in conflicts throughout the world.

www.peacemagazine.org/198.htm – This website lists 198 methods of nonviolent action from *The Methods of Nonviolent Action* by political scientist Gene Sharp.

www.lysistrataproject.org – The Lysistrata Project is an educational resource dedicated to peace.

Child Soldiers

www.cfr.org/liberia/liberia-child-soldiers/p7753 – This short article from the Council on Foreign Relations addresses questions about child soldiers.

www.child-soldiers.org/home – The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers works to prevent the recruitment and use of children as soldiers, to secure their demobilization, and to ensure their rehabilitation. The website contains facts about child soldiers, reports, and additional resources.



