



## Press Release

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### **SIE Awards its 2017 Peace Prize to Gégé Katana Bukuru**

Soroptimist International of Europe (SIE) has awarded its 2017 Peace Prize to Gégé Katana Bukuru of the Democratic Republic of Congo for her remarkable and courageous commitment to the fight for the women's rights in her war-torn country for over a quarter of a century. She has remained steadfast in her efforts despite death threats, arbitrary arrests, robbery and the systematic looting of her belongings and the inability to travel for almost ten years. This year's prizewinner was announced at the 21st SIE Congress, held in Florence, Italy, and attended by over 800 women from all over the world.

Submitted by SI Belgium at the recommendation of SI Club Marche-en-Famenne, Gégé Katana Bukuru was selected by an international jury consisting of Austrian Edith Schlaffer, 2015 Peace Prize Winner and founder of 'Women without Borders', Caterina de Albuquerque, UN Special rapporteur on the right to safe drinking water and sanitation from Portugal, Hege Braekhus, Law Professor at UiT the Arctic University of Norway, Róża Gräfin von Thun und Hohenstein, Member of European Parliament for Poland and SIE President elect and Chair of the Jury Renata Trottmann Probst from Switzerland.

Known as Maman Gégé or the Iron Lady of the DRC, Gégé fights for the rights of all women – regardless of race, political or religious affiliation – in Uvira, South Kivu. The particularly violent rebels in this region are a constant threat, and women are regularly subjected to sexual assault, forced displacement, arbitrary arrest and torture.

Gégé Katana Bukuru was born on December 31st 1963 in the DRC. She is the eldest daughter of a traditional chief, and her father instilled in her a strong sense of responsibility for her people. She studied at the Université Lumière Lyon 2 and trained and/or conducted research at the Centre de Formation et de Recherche Coopératives, the Rwandan Association for the Promotion of Integrated Development and the Pan-African Institute for Development.

She has worked with the Women's Network for an Associative Development, the "Nothing Without Women" group, the Global Fund for Women's "Women's Platform for Peace", the Institute of Development and Adult Education for Africa and the Synergie des Organisations Féminines Contre les Violences Faites aux Femmes in South Kivu, among others.

Amnesty International has recognized and supported Maman Gégé for her dedication. In 2007, Gégé became the first woman to receive the Front Line Defenders Award for Human Rights Defenders at Risk, which aims to provide protection for non-violent human rights defenders and uphold the rights guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In 2001, she founded the Solidarity of Women Activists for the Defense of Human Rights (SOFAD), a grassroots network of over six hundred women that fight for women's economic, socio-cultural, civil and political rights in East Africa – a region where sexual violence against women, including elderly women and very young girls, is considered by both sides of the military to be a legitimate "spoil of war".

SOFAD provides psychosocial, intra-community, medical and legal support to survivors of rape and sexual assault. SOFAD also works towards broader economic, political and social empowerment of women by organizing workshops and training that teach and encourage women to participate in peace and other



political processes, run their own businesses and use communication technologies to access information and the media.

SOFAD supports and encourages these informed and empowered women to establish “peace clubs” or “peace cells” in their own neighbourhoods, whenever possible. These serve as a first line of defense for local women; informing them about their rights and putting an end to sexual – including conjugal – violence. In the meantime, 625 SOFAD-trained activists have established around fifty peace cells in the Uvira and Fizi regions.

Soroptimist International of Europe introduced the Peace Prize in 2005 to honour visionary women for their outstanding achievements in promoting or maintaining peace in their communities and beyond. Previous Peace Prize recipients are Vera Bohle (2005), Carla del Ponte (2007), Valdete Idrizi (2009), Sylvia Borren (2011), Silvia Arbia (2013) and Dr. Edit Schläffer (2015).

As the largest of the four Federations of Soroptimist International, SIE is a network of more than 34,000 women in business and professions who work at local, national and international levels to educate, enable and empower women and girls to improve their lives. Every year Soroptimists support, finance and/or implement around 4,500 projects, and some 1.7 million women have benefited from these efforts in the past five years. Soroptimist International of Europe holds general consultative status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and participatory status at the Council of Europe and the European Women’s Lobby. Through its representatives at these institutions, SIE acts as a strong advocate for women’s rights.

*Soroptimist International (SI) is a Non-Governmental Organisation with general consultative status at the United Nations and participative status at the Council of Europe. Soroptimist International of Europe, one of SI’s four federations, is formed by 62 countries in Europe, Africa, the Middle East and the Caribbean, with 34,000 members. Soroptimists plan, raise funds for and implement projects and advocate at local, national and international levels in the interest of human rights and gender equality.*