

Inspiring Women Speaking Up For Women by wearesalt.org

This list of inspiring women who are championing women has been selected from Salt magazine's May 2015 cover story, '100 Inspiring Women'.

In the face of adversity, these 23 female change agents are making a transformative impact on the lives of women around the world. We applaud them. While the equality movement is empowered by both men and women, this article highlights the extraordinary women doing extraordinary things for equality issues.

Malala Yousafzai

In 2012 at the age of 15, Malala Yousafzai, was shot in the head by the Taliban in Pakistan. The assassination attempt was a response to her stand for the right of girls to gain an education after the Taliban had banned them from attending school. She is now one of the world's most iconic female change agents and in 2014 became the youngest ever Nobel Peace Prize laureate. Yousafzai leads pioneering change in attitudes towards women, children, inequality and education in Asian countries.

Germaine Greer

Australian academic and journalist, Germaine Greer, was one of the most influential feminists of the 20th century. Her 1970 book 'The Female Eunuch' was an international bestseller which created a new wave of feminism. A controversial figure, Greer's work focuses on women's liberation rather than inequality with men. She argues that it is best to celebrate gender differences in a positive fashion. She holds an emeritus professorship at the University of Warwick and continues to inspire the feminist movement with her books and speeches.

Humayra Abedin

Dr Humayra Abedin from Bangladesh, is one of the major success stories of 21st century women's rights. In 2008, while working for the NHS in London, she was tricked into returning to Bangladesh by her Muslim family, after they claimed her mother was seriously ill. Upon arrival, the family stole her passport and return plane ticket, held her captive and forced her to marry a man they had chosen for her. She managed to get a message to friends in the UK and in a landmark case, the High Court in London ordered her release under the Forced Marriage Act - the first use of the Act for a foreign national. Once back in the UK she instructed her lawyers to annul the marriage. The outcome of Dr Abedin's ordeal is a beacon of hope that has helped many women in forced marriages to come forward and seek help.

Zahra' Langhi

Zahra' Langhi is a Libyan gender specialist and political activist advocating peace, human rights and women's equality. She is the co-founder of the Libyan Women's Platform for Peace, an organisation pushing for women's empowerment in both politics and society as a whole, and promoting the role of women in peace building. Langhi has also worked with UN Women and other organisations to help integrate females into the democratic process in post-revolutionary Libya.

Wajeha al-Huwaider

As co-founder of the Association for the Protection and Defense of Women's Rights in Saudi Arabia, Wajeha al-Huwaider is at the forefront of the fight for female rights in the region. She leads campaigns to earn women the right to drive cars and challenges the domestic abuse of women in Saudi Arabia, often risking sanctions from the government. Al-Huwaider is also a prominent Saudi author and journalist, but her liberal views have led to a ban on her work being published in Saudi Arabia. In 2006 she was arrested and banned from travelling after she organised a women's rights protest. However, none of this has dented her determination to improve gender equality.

Naomi Wolf

Naomi Wolf is one of the founding third-wave feminists, with a unique and open-minded view on gender issues, notably pornography. Her 1991 bestseller *The Beauty Myth* is her defining work, and she continues to write about inequality and human rights. She was employed as a political consultant by Bill Clinton and Al Gore and is hugely respected as a change agent in the drive for gender equality.

Sampat Pal Devi

As founder of the Gulabi Gang, also known as the Pink Sari Brigade, mother of five and former child bride Sampat Pal Devi is one of the most hands-on change agents in India. The Gulabi Gang have been active since 2010 in northern India and are famed for their opposition to domestic and other violence against women. Wearing pink saris and armed with bamboo sticks, they visit abusive husbands in an attempt to help the men change their ways. To date 270,000 people have joined the cause, in a country where everyday violence against women reaches the headlines all too rarely.

Sarah Tenoi

Activist Sarah Tenoi is leading the charge against female genital mutilation (FGM) in Kenya. She is a project manager for the 'Sponsored Arts For Education' (SAFE) peace program and works countrywide to promote positive social change through peaceful protest and education. Sarah is also a post-trauma counsellor for the charity and is helping to bring a positive energy to her conflict-torn country.

Pauline Tangiora

New Zealand Maori elder Pauline Tangiora is a lifelong peacemaker. She is a justice of the peace, a member of the Earth Council, and vice president of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Aotearoa. Her work with several NGOs and international organisations seeking peace and respect of indigenous peoples has led her to becoming one of the pioneers of Rising Women Rising World movement.

Helena Morrissey

Helena Morrissey is a British businesswoman and mother of nine who is helping to change the face of British boardrooms. As the CEO of Newton Investment, she became a founder of the 30% Club, a movement which wants to see women make up 30% of all British boardrooms. Although the numbers are nowhere near that yet, the club continues to campaign for female equality in top firms. In 2012, Helena was awarded a CBE for her contribution to British business, and is celebrated as one of the FTSE 100's top women.

Daysi Flores

Daysi Flores is a civil engineer by trade and an eco-feminist by passion. The Honduran co-founded the Young Women's Network of Honduras in 1998 and became a leading member of Feminists in Resistance, which was founded after the 2009 military coup in Honduras. She is also leader of the National Network of Women Human Rights Defenders in Honduras and is the Honduras country co-ordinator for JASS Mesoamerica, which campaigns for environmental protection in the region.

Manal al-Sharif

Saudi activist Manal al-Sharif has directed many equality campaigns, including helping found Women2Drive, a group aiming to gain the right for women to drive cars in Saudi Arabia. She was arrested in 2011 after the campaign was started, but was bailed on the condition that she remained silent in the media. In the face of threats to her freedom, she continues to tweet her criticisms of the Saudi regime, and her story is held up by many as a microcosm for the wider opposition to oppression seen in the Arab Spring.

Leymah Gbowee

Liberian peace activist Leymah Gbowee is one of the most influential women in her nation's history. After working with groups that helped victims of trauma, she went on to head a peace movement called Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace, which helped bring an end to the second Liberian Civil War in 2003. In 2011, she became a Nobel Peace Prize laureate for her efforts, and she remains an icon for peaceful activism and women's equality, not just in Liberia, but across the whole of Africa.

Sarah Hesterman

As the founder and acting president of Girl Up in Qatar, Sarah Hesterman works with the UN to provide young girls with education in developing countries. Hesterman hopes that

providing greater opportunities will allow these girls to become part of the next generation of leaders. Girl Up in Qatar encourages students to achieve their goals, and the branch is one of only four in the Middle East.

Diana Nammi

Kurdish women's rights campaigner Diana Nammi fought against Islamic militants in her youth, and went on to campaign for peace in adulthood. After arriving in the UK in 1996, she founded the Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO) which campaigns against forced marriage, honour killings and FGM - all tragically common in parts of her native Iran. IKWRO aims to provide culture-specific support for women in the Middle East and Afghanistan, which can be more effective than worldwide campaigns. In addition, she campaigns against the repressive Iranian regime, which she likens to Islamic State. Her work has seen her win several awards including Barclays Woman of the Year, and she campaigns tirelessly for the day when Kurdish women have equal rights, not only in Iran but also in vulnerable communities within the UK.

Yolanda Wang

Chinese women's rights campaigner Yolanda Wang formed a Lean In circle in Beijing that is now one of the most popular in the world. Lean In is a non-profit-making organisation and online community dedicated to helping all women achieve their full potential. The members of Wang's circle meet monthly and have over 10,000 followers on their blog. Wang is creating a community of professional and educated young women in Beijing who support each other to achieve their ambitions in the world's fastest-growing major economy.

Alma Gomez

Mexican Alma Gómez is a prominent 'anti-femicide' campaigner in the northern Mexican state of Chihuahua. Gómez co-authored a chapter in the popular anti-femicide book *Terrorizing Women* and has contributed many articles on the murders of women in Mexico. Alma fights against what she claims is institutional sexism, claiming that huge numbers of rape and murder cases are ignored simply because the victims are women. She works with numerous equality campaign groups, both within Chihuahua and around the world aiming to raise awareness and put an end to the atrocities.

Dwi Rubiyanti Kholifah

Dwi Rubiyanti Kholifah is the Indonesia country director for the Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN), an organisation which focuses on the role of women in peace-building and promotes an enlightened approach to Islam. She stands up for women's rights, equality and for modernisation in Indonesia, as well as democracy. Through AMAN, she works to further female engagement in society and encourage their involvement in cross-faith peace processes.

Mu Sochua

Cambodian politician Mu Sochua has worked tirelessly for women's rights. In 2002 she mobilised 12,000 women to run for local elections, with more than 900 winning and promoting women's rights at a grass-roots level of politics. She also masterminded the passing of a law that imposes severe penalties for perpetrators of domestic violence. In her time in office, she has worked hard against the spread of HIV/AIDS, promoted women's equality in business and helped improve sanitation.

Nimco Ali

Somalian social and women's rights activist Nimco Ali has worked on some of the country's most important feminist campaigns. Having endured FGM while on a family holiday at the age of seven, she co-founded the anti-FGM group Daughters of Eve in 2010. The organisation campaigns to end the practice by educating people about the risks of FGM and providing support for victims. Ali also works on the End FGM/C Social Change Campaign, which is sponsored by the UK government.

Maria Acha Kutscher

Peruvian María María Acha-Kutscher is an activist, feminist and visual artist. Her work focuses on how women have been marginalised throughout history and the ways in which they are held back in modern society. She says moving away from Peru made her appreciate the constraints on women in her homeland.

Esther Gatuma

Kenyan activist Esther Gatuma has done marvellous things for women's rights. She is co-founder of Woman Of Paradise, an organisation that supports women's and children's rights, especially in opposing FGM and forced marriage. Esther is also pushing to end poverty and the trafficking of children, while Woman Of Paradise has taken part in campaigns to end electoral violence. Her inspirational leadership has seen her win numerous accolades across the world and she is regarded as one of Africa's most influential women.

Bineta Diop

Bineta Diop is a Senegalese woman who has peace and the power of women at the top of her agenda. She is founder and president of Femmes Africa Solidarité, an international NGO that promotes the role of women in resolving conflicts and aims to give women a voice in African policy-making. Bineta is also special envoy for women, peace and security to the African Union, a role that has seen her oversee elections in post-conflict states to ensure transparent democracy.