

# **A REPORT ON THE 2008 FEMRITE WEEK OF ACTIVITIES**

**Theme of the Week: Writing the Unfamiliar Story**  
**Date 14TH - 18TH JULY 2008**

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## ABSTRACT

FEMRITE – Uganda Women Writers is a pioneer women writers’ organization that was launched on the Ugandan literary scene in 1996. Since its inception it has realized resounding successes for almost every programme it has undertaken both at national and international levels.

One of its most acclaimed annual international programmes is the Week of Activities. It is designed to be a time of interaction and sharing for the literary fraternity. It is a time of rekindling our spirits and rejuvenating the creativity that makes one a writer, performer or artiste.

Each day of the Week carries its sub theme and is aimed at building up to the achievement of the overall theme of the Week.

The 2008 edition took place from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> of July. Its theme was: **Writing the Unfamiliar Story.**

## 1.0 BACKGROUND TO THE WEEK

### 1.1 Introduction

FEMRITE – Uganda women Writers initiated the idea of holding an annual Week of Activities in the year 2000. The purpose was to bring together writers, artists, dramatists, performers, teachers and lecturers of literature and any other person interested in the arts to come together in a week of celebrating creativity and of sharing ideas related to the literary world.

The 2008 Week of Activities therefore is the 9<sup>th</sup> edition of this event. Since it was initiated, a number of celebrated writers have attended as special guests. These include Ama Ata Idoo, Taban lo Liyong, Okee Ndibe, the late Ugandan playwright John Ruganda, the celebrated Malawian poet Jack Mapanje and Professor Akatchi from Nigeria.

During the weeklong celebrations, FEMRITE normally holds a special event like launching of new publications or honouring outstanding achievers or those that have contributed to the successes of FEMRITE in one way or another.

For the 9<sup>th</sup> edition of the Week of Activities, there were more than one special event: the very first special event was the presentation of a Memorandum to the Director of Education asking that the ministry should include a specific section on Ugandan literature on the school syllabus.

The second one was Women Writing Africa which was aimed at the formation of regional network of women Writers organizations on the African continent. The third one was the launching of the audio stories based on the war in Northern Uganda, entitled Stories of Women in Armed Conflict.

On the whole some of the events were new having been included in the Week of activities for the first time. For the first time there was a day devoted to Literature Seminar. This Seminar was not the usual ‘stay in one place’ event. It was broken into three parts. The first was a Breakfast Meeting which held at Africana Hotel. The other two sections were held under the theme: *Meet Your Writer*. The morning to lunch session focused on primary school students whereas the afternoon was devoted to secondary school students. These two sessions provided a platform for interaction of writers with both primary and secondary school children and both took place at the Femrite offices.

## 1.2 Justification for the 2008 FWO

Femrite celebrated her 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2006. Therefore 2008 marked her 12th year of existence but the 9<sup>th</sup> edition of the Week of Activities. It was therefore a time of soul searching for the organization, to ensure that this was not just a repeat performance.

What came into mind was the good number of books that Femrite had managed to publish during her short existence. But surprisingly the nation had **not** given Femrite her due recognition to the immense contribution to literature by including any of her books on the curriculum! So this was the right moment to include this in our 2008 Week of Activities, to petition the Ministry of Education and Sports to include, not only Femrite books but all Ugandan authored books, on the school syllabi.

Secondly, it was also observed that since the general reading culture of this nation was still quite low it was imperative for Femrite to improve her partnership with both primary and secondary schools to encourage them early enough to be not only good readers but also to believe that they can be writers. That was how the program of meet your writer came about.

The Tuesday workshop was to rekindle the interest in creativity and to make writers understand the power of synergy that is when working together as a team on certain issues, using the power of the pen, more can be achieved.

The Public Dialogue focused on writing stories that were based on political backgrounds, something that Femrite had not yet done. This tied in well with the Friday event when the stories based on the Northern Uganda war were launched. This was a joint venture between Femrite and IRIN.

The teleconference that took place on Thursday at the American Embassy was to emphasize the international dimension that Femrite has achieved. Femrite members , members of the Readers/Writers Club and other partners of Femrite, gathered at the American Embassy for an hour of interaction with award winning American author Tayari Jones.

During all these events, Femrite was able to bring together all who could make it in the literary scene in Uganda and elsewhere.

## **2.0 DAY ONE – LITERATURE SEMINAR**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The first day of the Week of Activities was the Literature Seminar. This seminar was different in that it had three sections taking place in two locations. The first section was the Breakfast meeting that took place at Africana Hotel, the second section was the Meet your Writer sessions. The first of these sessions focused on primary school students and the second one focused on secondary school students.

### **2.2 The Breakfast Meeting**

This was a new initiative for Femrite and it was very encouraging when the American Embassy showed interest in it. The unique Breakfast meeting took on a lobby issue with regard to the position of Ugandan literature on the National School Curriculum. It was held at Hotel Africana under the theme: Harnessing Uganda's Literary Heritage. The major objectives of the Meeting were:

- To present a memorandum to the Director of Education requesting for the inclusion of Ugandan Literature on the school syllabus.
- To advocate the reading and teaching of stories written by Ugandan authors, so that learners start with the familiar before they proceed to the unfamiliar stories from authors in Uganda.
- To create a platform for writers, students, teachers and policy makers to interact and share information about the importance of Ugandan literature in harnessing national identity.

The event was presided over by the Director of Education, Dr. Mbabazi.

### **2.3 Brief Report about the Breakfast Meeting**

The function started at 9am and it presented the following features:

Welcome remarks, opening statements, Main presentations, and a Panel discussion.

### **2.4 Welcome Remarks**

The chairperson of Femrite, Ms Jocelyn Ekochu, gave brief welcome remarks in which she thanked the American Embassy for the financial and moral support accorded to FEMRITE since 2001.

## **2.5 OPENING STATEMENTS**

Four dignitaries gave opening statements.

### **(1) Ms Keresia Chateuka From Zimbabwe Women Writers**

Her Statement was entitled: **Importance of Literature in Nurturing a Nation's Identity.**

She talked about the importance of literature in inculcating values among children and adults. She also decried the disappearance of oral literature while at the same time she celebrated the growth of African creative writers who are writing about Africa and Africans.

She called upon writers to truly play the role of the watchdogs of society in order to guide the values of the society towards. She pointed out that in Zimbabwe; the government had already created space for local literature on the school curriculum. She encouraged Ugandans not to give up on the issue. She concluded by urging writers to remember that they are the builders and constructors of their nations' identities.

### **(2) Mrs Karoro Okurut, President of Femrite**

Hon Karoro applauded FEMRITE for choosing such a relevant and timely theme for the Breakfast Meeting, which she said, captured the essence of what is expected from the writers in Uganda and elsewhere. She urged writers to write stories that draw society attention to the moral and ethical decadence that is surrounding the world today.

She in particular urged women writers to tell their stories over and over so that the world may get to hear them and stop regarding their stories as unfamiliar. She called upon the Ministry of Education to save the nation by reaching out to Ugandan writers and availing their works to schools.

Hon Karoro appreciated the American Embassy for believing in FEMRITE and for giving her support to advance literary issues that are important for social development.

The next speaker was the represented the publishers' views:

### **David Kibuuka from Longhorn Publishers**

He said that as a publisher, he was honoured to be part of the 2008 FEMRITE Week of Activities. He said that although Universal Primary Education (UPE) has helped the publishers to grow, he said that government still needed to come up with a book policy to cover the whole book industry in Uganda.

He said that Femrite had joined other earlier voice to request government to introduce a section on Ugandan literature. He said that this had already happened in Kenya. As a publisher, he said this would among other things boost the publishing industry as well as increasing the reading culture.

The next speaker was:

**Mrs Dorothy Ngalombi** from the American Embassy

She thanked Femrite for organizing this event and pointed out that this was not the first time that the Embassy had worked with Femrite. She assured Femrite of their partnership. She also said that she appreciated the work that Femrite was doing and pledged that the embassy would support such initiatives whenever they are able to do so.

## **2.6 Presentation by the Coordinator of Femrite- Ms Twongyeirwe**

Her presentation was entitled: **Harnessing Uganda's Literary Heritage: Positioning Uganda's Literature on the National School Curriculum.**

In it, she defined literary heritage as the body of creative fiction and creative non fiction of a community. She said the theme was intended to make a call to policy makers in the education sector to start recognizing Ugandan literature as an important tool for social, cultural and political mobilization and as an expression of national identity. She emphasized that the reason for meeting was to put in place ways of reclaiming Uganda's literary tradition and ensuring that it is heard especially in the Ugandan classroom. As a way of demonstrating FEMRITE mandate, she gave brief information about FEMRITE and her literary achievements. In addition she gave brief remarks about existing gaps in Uganda's literary heritage and its effects and suggested measures to address the issue and close gaps. Lastly, Ms Twongyeirwe, quoted the UNESCO Convention 2001, where it was pointed out that culture is increasingly being recognized as the fourth pillar of development. She made a call to Ministry of Education and sports and the national Curriculum Development Centre to come up with the following and any other reforms that may harness Uganda's literary heritage:

- That the Ministry of Education and Sports, the National curriculum Development Centre and National Examinations board create an independent and examinable section/paper of Ugandan Literature on the National School Curriculum for both Ordinary and Advanced Levels
- That Colleges and Higher institutions of learning Mainstream Ugandan Literature on their teaching syllabi and set examinations on it.
- That Teachers of Literature and English Language in Uganda be actively involved in the promotion of Ugandan Literature.

## **2.7 Panel Presentations**

### **Introduction**

The major purpose of the Breakfast Meeting was to advocate for the positioning of Ugandan Literature on the schools curriculum. Femrite as a body of Ugandan women writers felt that those concerned with the selection of what is to be read in schools had neglected the Ugandan literature for too long, and yet it is an established fact that there are now over 200 titles by Ugandan authors.

To get a fair understanding of what others think about the absence of Uganda's literature on the school curriculum, a panel was selected. It was composed of a university lecturer, a secondary school teacher, a Ugandan author, a student and a policy maker. Unfortunately the policy maker who should have been from the Uganda Curriculum Development Centre did not make it, but those who were present shared diverse information about the issue:

Panelists gave various suggestions to revamp Uganda's literary heritage:

- Organizing literary festivals
- Including Ugandan literature on syllabus right from primary level
- Making of Ugandan literature a compulsory subject at O level
- Availing to schools novels, plays, and poetry and short story anthologies written by Ugandans.
- Reviewing Ugandan books in newspapers and journals
- Dominating Uganda's syllabus with Ugandan works
- Organizing competitions and other activities based on home grown literary works.

**Keynote address by the Guest of Honour for that event:  
Dr. Geoffrey Mbabazi, Director of Education.**

He said he appreciated the event that allowed such a discussion and said that the Ministry of Education and Sports gives importance to the literature of Uganda. He informed participants about a number of developments in the Ministry and said that the Curriculum Development Centre was carrying out a review of the school curriculum and that bringing up such an issue was timely

He informed the meeting that there was a shortage of trained teachers because literature requires teachers who are trained.

He also shared some of the ministry's concerns such as the high cost of readers.

He agreed with the rest of the speakers that most of the time teachers too suffer from a weak reading culture and dread reading and teaching new materials/books, a fact that contributes to failure to include new books on the curriculum. He was concerned that even when new books are included, they are ignored by the teachers.

Responding to the Coordinators presentation with regard to the inclusion of a section on Ugandan Literature and to mainstream it on the school curriculum, he said that it was a timely idea but warned that the exam oriented education could pose danger to the education system.

The director also appreciated the ideas from the panelist and added that there should also be literary exhibitions similar to those held by science students and teachers. In addition, he appreciated literary activities such as the Breakfast Meeting, as vehicles towards raising awareness about literary levels in the country.



He commented that literacy levels for P3 and P4 is 45% and that it gets worse by O' Level and deplorable by University. He ended his address by appreciating the work of Femrite, teachers and other stakeholders in the book industry. He pledged to remain in contact with Femrite in order to explore further the issues raised at the Breakfast Meeting.

## **2.8 Call to Action**

This was the Highlight of the Breakfast Meeting where FEMRITE handed a Memorandum, which had earlier presented by the Coordinator Ms Hilda Twongyeirwe.

## **2.9 Breakfast**

Participants were treated to a breakfast after the discussions.

## **2.10 Evaluation of the Event**

This was a successful event despite the morning downpour.

- All invited presenters made it except one.
- The Chief Guest attended the meeting and promised to follow up the issues raised.
- The event attracted the media
- It was featured on NTV & UBS News
- A comprehensive article on the position of Ugandan literature on the school curriculum is being put together by the Monitor Newspaper.

## **2.11 MEET YOUR WRITER SESSIONS**

There were two session of Meet Your Writer, and both were held at the Femrite Offices at Plot 147, Kiira Road.

### **Session One**

This session focused of primary schools and the session started at 11am Three schools had been invited. These were: Kitante Primary School, Cleveland P. School and Buganda Road P. School.

The childrens writers that attended this session were:

Nancy Orola and Christine Sempebwa.

Margaret Ntakalimaze and Glydah Namukasa were the coordinators of this event.

The writers read for the children from their books. Afterwards, they organized the children in groups and played word games and also did joint story writing. The session closed at 1pm.

### **Session Two**

This session focused on secondary schools. Three secondary schools had been invited, that was, Kitante Hill School, Trinity College Nabbingo and Kajjansi Progressive S. School.

Only Trinity College Nabbingo turned up, but despite that the session took place. The writers that interacted with the secondary schools were: Dr. Patrick Mangeni, Lillian Tindyebwa, Glaydah Namukasa and Ernest Tashobya.

The writers read from their works and answered various questions from the students. The students also tried their hands at story writing. The session closed at 5pm

## DAY 2 OF THE 2008 FEMRITE WEEK OF ACTIVITIES

### Morning Session

## 2.0 WRITERS WORKSHOP

### **Introduction**

The Theme of the Writing Workshop was: **Rekindling the Writing Spirit.**

In planning for this workshop it was observed that Femrite had already held about 13 Creative Skills Workshops in the past and that for some time the impact was great and easily measurable because a number of books were written by members and published by the organization. And 5 members went ahead to win major awards in the literary world including the 2007 Caine Prize for Africa. This Workshop was held at the Uganda Museum and it started at 10.00am.

### Facilitators

Eresina Hwede - (Zimbabwe Women Writers)

Doreen Baingana - Femrite

Glydah Namukasa – Femrite

Ms Eresina Hwede from Zimbabwe women Writers took the first session with:

### **Empowering Yourself**

She said it was important to:

**Know Your Subject:** She said that one of the most important things in empowering yourself as a writer was to know your subject well, so that you do not have to lie about it. Secondly, she emphasized the importance of knowing the facts of what you wanted to talk about in your story.

**Language:** She told the eager listeners that there is nothing new about a story but that a talent or trained use of language is one of the tools that would help in enabling the writer to narrate the story so as to make it unique.

**Enrich Your Language:** A rich language can make a great difference, she said. She emphasized the importance of having a good ear for the various ways people speak and be able to bring it out in your writing.

**Story Technique:** She said that this refers to how your story is told. Is it in linear form or is it in flash back? If used properly techniques enrich the story.

**Aspects of a story:** A writer can start with or can just observe society and write. If one writes about a character, it is called:

**Character Theory:** In character theory she said that the needs of the protagonist are pitted against the needs of society.

Then there is also the:

**Prophetic Theory:** is when a writer plays the role of a prophet in the society. She or he points out those things that are going wrong.

The best way however, is to use a bit of both theories.

**Creating Barriers:** A writer needs to master the technique of creating barriers that the protagonist must overcome, in order for the story to progress

**Hand of God** (or coincidence). This is when a writer creates an unexpected event that will help the protagonist to achieve his/her objective.

**Difference between a radio or TV script and a novel:** is that for a novel the character grows with the story whereas in a script, the writer has to write a description of the character before hand so that the director can be able to select the right person for it.

### **Rekindling the Writing Spirit**

**By** Doreen Baingana

Why does a writer fail to write when he/she would like to write? Does he/she have a reason?

**Have a reason for Wanting to Write:** The participants heard that whether they were writers who had taken long without writing or those who wanted to write and had not

been able to; that the biggest motivation to cause them to write was to know why they wanted to write.

She then asked participants to jot down why they wanted to write, the answers were quite interesting but the most common were:

- To release inner tension
- To earn money
- To change society
- Leave a legacy

Secondly, she said that the failure to write could lie in the writer's failure to: create a structure for her/his writing schedule.

**Creating a Writing Structure** - She said that a writer has to set up a writing structure/schedule. She reminded the participant that in writing one is on her/his own but that still one has to handle the business of writing like an office. She said that in most cases the writers create excuses that become a barrier to their writing.

**Time and Space motivation:**

She said that human beings are creatures of habit and for that reason if they do something in the same way at the same time it sticks. So she recommended that each writer should have a physical space.

If you are writing at home decide on the time you want and the space that gives you freedom to think. It could be your kitchen table or your bedroom. Let the writing be like a ritual. Make that space a 'shrine' for your writing

Time: Look at your day and say see what you spend your day doing. You will definitely find gaps in which you can fix the writing time. Of course our normal work should not be affected because we have to earn our living.

**Creating the Mental Attitude**

When you are settled at your table, you may still find it hard to create the necessary mental attitude that will usher you into creativity from whatever else you have been doing. Do this by either reading a poem or reading what you have already written.

Or take a walk round the building thinking of what you are going to write. Switch off your phone!

You could also get yourself a 'how to' about writing. This could be useful.

When you practice the ritual of a fixed time and space for fifteen days, it will begin to work.

**Know thyself** - Knowing yourself helps when making the difficult decisions, for example if you know you are not an early riser, then you know the only way is to say up late.

So it is important to find out what works for you. Does coffee for instance help to stimulate your creativity?

Do you work better with fixed schedules, then fix your 'ritual hours' and maintain them so they become a habit.

If you know that the people you give to read through can discourage you, then be careful whom you give your work to, to read through.

You could have a group of people with whom you could share your writing. This group has to be committed to improving each other or else it will not work. It could even be two to three people.

Internet sites – There are internet sites like ‘zeotrope’ where you can submit your work to be critiqued. You also have to critique theirs in turn.

You can also get some online magazine, such as ‘Poets & writers’. These are interested in the African story and would have a slot for a good one. It helps of course to write for a magazine or a journal. You can also google for fiction and poetry competitions.

So you have to create for yourself the right environment.

Know if you are inner directed – that is – self motivated, or if your outer directed and you have to depend on outer forces to function in the way you want to.

Create punishments for yourself when you fail to keep your ritual time and space.

Avoid the ‘if’ I was in a writers’ residency attitude because in a residency, things are programmed, and it may not be necessarily about inspiration.

### Afternoon Session

#### **(1) TOPIC: Information sharing – Insights into Writers’ Residencies**

The afternoon session started at 2.30.

The facilitators were:

1. Glydah Namukasa
  2. Doreen Baingana
- They told the participants that writers’ residencies are meant to provide space for writers to write.

In order to do this, the organizers arrange a programme for each day, for example in the residency that the two attended in Nairobi in 2007, they had the following structure for the day:

Morning – 1pm            Private time (to do your own writing/or reading)  
                  2 – 4pm            Group Discussions that included critiquing, or sometimes classes conducted by the members. For these classes, a member thinks of a topic and proposes a class. The topic and time are displayed and people sign up for the class. The person also gives a brief about the proposed topic. For instance Glydah informed the participants that she carried out a class on the topic: Challenges in Using Metaphors.

- Workshops are also organized according to genres – that is- fiction, non fiction and travel writing etc. These re facilitated by the Supervisor and various are discussed.
- One on One sessions with the facilitators are also time allotted for the facilitator to meet the writers.
- At times the participants could be required to present a paper on a given topic. For instance Glydah told the members that for the IOWA writers’ residency where she will be going soon; she had already received the topics that she would presents about.
- They said that members are also given chance to meet editors and publishers
- A lot of networking and sharing especially at the Breadloaf Writers’ Residence.

### Application Process for a Writers' Residency

One of the ways of finding out when these are due is to surf the internet. Some of the well known residencies include:

Breadloaf Writers Residencies

Michael & Mary Writers' Residencies

Lancaster University

- From the experience of Glydah Namukasa, it was seen that it was quite a difficult task to be admitted to residency

### **Recommendations:**

- Femrite members could organize their own residencies.
- Funding could be solicited locally from companies such as Wavah Holdings
- Embassies such as French and American could consider such a proposal
- A regional residency could be considered afterwards.
- The idea of a website was also proposed and it was also to be discussed further.

### **(2) Outlets of Literary Works**

It was recommended that for outlets to one's works, it pays to associate with the right people.

Learn not to be discouraged by rejection from publishers. At times it could be true that they do not publish the kind of genre you have chosen, then you have to pick up and continue the search.

### **(3) Synergy: Voicing Your Work**

What this means is simply working together for more effect. It's popular with musicians. How? If for instance in an anthology where a popular writer is published, it could include the lesser known writers as well.

The participants were informed by the visiting Zimbabwe writers that it had been done in one of their anthologies.

The same could be done at public readings

It could also be helpful if there was a deliberate policy by the powers that be to reduce on foreign works and promote local ones. The participants were informed that this was the case in Zimbabwe and it was mandatory.

On the fact that new books are not read in schools, it was pointed out that teachers

- (a) did not want extra material to read
- (b) preferred material they were used to
- (c) wanted easy way out

but these could be overcome through working together.

## 1.3 PROSE & POETRY NIGHT

Day two of the week of Activities was crowned with a prose and poetry reading night which was also held at the Uganda Museum.

The event started at 6.30.

The President of Femrite, Mrs Mary Karoro Okurut gave the opening statement and the Coordinator Ms Hilda Twongyeirwe welcomed the guests.

Everyone who had something to read was welcome to do so.

Danson Kahyana from Makerere University, and Beatrice Lamwaka of Femrite were the joint MC s for the evening.

The evening was attended by a cross section of expatriates and some members from the diplomatic missions.

The winner of the Tusker Project Fame Miss Esther Nabasa, attended the evening and read a poem which she used had used in one of her songs in one of her songs.

The following people read from their works:

Christine Sempebwa

Namirembe Misango (daughter to Christine)

Barbara oketta

Eresina Hwede - Zimbabwe W. W.

Keresia Chateuka Zimbabwe W. W.

Jason Sabiiti

Esther Nabasa

Katwesigye Ernest

Judith Adong (Short Story performance)

Glydah Namukasa

## 3.0 DAY THREE – PUBLIC DIALOGUE

### 3.1 Introduction

The theme of the Public Dialogue was: **Writing the Unfamiliar Story: Engaging the Political Arena**

The MC for this event was Betty Kituyi, and the moderator was Nancy Orola

The Coordinator of Femrite, Ms Hilda Twongyeirwe, gave the welcome remarks. The MC introduced the topic and handed over to the moderator who concurred with her that women had to move away from writing about the domestic scene and engage with the political arena.

The moderator then introduced the first presenter, Ms Eresina Hwede from the Zimbabwe Women Writers.

In her presentation Ms Hwede said that the topic was a challenge to her and hoped that it would not turn her to her country – Zimbabwe.

She emphasized the need for women to widen their scope in as far as the topics for their writing was concerned. She said that on the whole women seemed to shun politics.

The second presenter was Dr. Kabonesa from Department of Women and Gender Studies, Makerere University.

She said that women should be part and parcel of development.

## **4.0 DAY FOUR – THURSDAY 17<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2008**

### **TELECONFERENCE WITH TAYARI JONES**

#### Introduction

The relationship between American Embassy and Femrite has been steady over the years, and the Embassy has always worked with Femrite to support various activities.

Tayari Jones was born in downtown Atlanta, Georgia. For her debut novel, **Leaving Atlanta**, she received First Prize in the Hurston/Wright Award for 2000, the Robert C. Martindale Award for fiction, the Arizona Council for Arts Fellowship, and the LEF Foundation Prize.

Leaving Atlanta is set against the backdrop of the Atlanta child murders of 1979 -1981. Jones herself was a child during these murders. Two of her fifth grade classmates, Yusef Bell and Terry Pugh, were students at the Oglethorpe Elementary School. Her second novel, **The Untelling**, tells the story of Aria Jackson, whose life turns around when her father and baby sitter are killed in an accident. It is also set in Atlanta.

Femrite members together with members of the Readers/Writers club and a few other members of the literature fraternity arrived at the Embassy at about 3pm and the teleconference was to begin at 4pm.



### **Reading From Her Works**

Despite the failure of the TV connection, the audio conference was very captivating. The author had a warm and clear voice. She first gave the background to her first novel **Leaving Atlanta**. She explained that it was based on true events that took place near her home in Atlanta, Georgia in 1979, when she was aged 8 years. The events referred to were the Atlanta child murders. She said that two of the bodies were found near her home and two members of her Elementary class were victims of the murders. She said that at that time she did not understand it to be part of history.

The murders spread from 1979 to 1981 and then they ended and nobody mentioned anything about them again.

As she was growing up, she was much aware of the injustice to know that twenty nine black children were killed and everything was forgotten. Normally if a white child got lost it would be treated as a national tragedy.

She said that what made the murders peculiar was that at that time which was immediately after the Civil Rights Movement; Atlanta was like the 'Promised Land' of the black people, with a black mayor and black head of police.

Then there were the murders and it was terrible because they were never solved and she said that she did not believe that the right person was arrested.

So it was important that the context be understood.

She first read from her first book **Leaving Atlanta**, and pointed out that the time she was trying to capture in the novel was that of a very frightening period.

After the reading, the audience was invited to ask questions. The question varied from difference between memory and history, to the character in that novel called Tayari Jones. She said that the character in the novel indeed happened to her.

On whether she always wanted to be a writer, she said that she always did but that nobody thought much of it and so she never started seriously until she bumped into a professor in an elevator. The professor happened to have read her work and offered to help her.

On the impact the success of her first novel made upon her life as writer, she said it was important because it established her and she gained recognition, especially from those people that had been affected by the murders and had no memorial to their children.

On initial rejection from publishers, she said she handled hers very badly but eventually had to pick up again. She compared to love, saying that people get rejected many times in love but that they always have to try again.

On success, she said that when the book is finished and is out of the computer, then it is art and also when the readers write to say that that they like it.

On whether she writes to empower the girl child, she said that she does it all that time and that she is not afraid to be a writer with an agenda and that she believes that art has a purpose.

Although she said she did not read from **The Untelling**, she answered a few questions about it

Altogether, the Teleconference ran for 1 hour and twenty minutes and was closed at 5.30 pm. The teleconference had to stop because the Embassy staff had to close, but otherwise the audience was still enjoying the interaction with Tayari Jones.

## **4.0 WOMEN WRITING AFRICA**

### **4.1 Introduction**

After 8 years of organizing an international Week of Activities, Femrite realized that much more tangible results were not only needed but also expected from this 9<sup>th</sup> edition.

The two meetings therefore between the representatives of the Zimbabwe Women Writers and Femrite took place at Femrite offices.

The two agreed to:

- Set up a Centre tentatively in Uganda
- Set up a Board to be composed of Chairperson from Uganda, a Vice Chairperson from Zimbabwe, Treasurer, Secretary and committees consisting of 4 members each from ZWW and Femrite.

Responsibilities of the centres will be to:

- Pick a patron
- Hold meetings to inform their members and get their approval
- Hold members and inform each other (Zimbabwe & Uganda) about the outcomes of these meetings.
- Do Research: About registration procedures (laws of OAU, Constitution etc.
- Make strategies for sources of funding
- The committees to come up with aims, objectives, mission & vision
- Approach other countries that have Women writers' organizations like Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya, Ghana and Malawi, to join the network. For those that do not have associations, the network could work with individual writers from those countries.

## **5.0 LAUNCH OF AUDIO STORIES FROM NOTHERN UGANDA**

The function took place at Africana Hotel on 18<sup>th</sup> July 08. The guest of honour was the German Ambassador in Uganda who hailed the cooperation between IRIN and FEMRITE. Femrite and IRIN had cooperated on this project to produce women's experiences in conflict areas.

IRIN was represented by Jackie Christie and Louise...

The audio version of the stories was launched at this function, together with an illustrated booklet. This booklet and copies of the disc were given out free. After the function, the guests were treated to a reception.

## CONCLUSION

The Femrite 2008 Week of Activities was successful because all that was on the programme was carried out.

It was also different from the others in that for the first time there was a meeting aimed at establishing a network for African women Writers.

The guests from Zimbabwe were actively involved in all the activities, and their participation heralded the formation of the African women writers' network