



NEWS FOR RELEASE

(LONDON, Monday 11th October 2004)

MARY KAYITESI BLEWITT RECEIVES AWARD FOR COURAGE AND DETERMINATION

at the
Women of the Year Lunch & Assembly 2004
Sponsored by Good Housekeeping

Presentation of the 'Pilkington Window to the World Award' 2004

WINNER

MARY KAYITESI BLEWITT

A highlight of the 49th annual Women of the Year Lunch and Assembly today was the presentation of the 'Pilkington Window to the World Award' to Mary Kayitesi Blewitt, Director of Rwandan Survivors Fund, SURF

Mary Kayitesi Blewitt, originally from Rwanda, founded **SURF** at the behest of survivors after losing 50 family members herself during the Rwandan genocide in 1994. Her support for survivors started back in 1995 after returning from eight months working for the Rwandan Ministry of Rehabilitation. In 1997 Mary formally established **SURF** to continue to aid, assist and support survivors in the UK and Rwanda. **SURF** is supported amongst others by Comic Relief; The Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund and the Elton John AIDS Foundation.

The Pilkington 'Window to the World' Award is a salute this year to a woman whose work and courage, in often dangerous or intimidating circumstances, has opened all our eyes to a world we otherwise would not have seen and understood. **Presenting the award Lorraine Clinton, Pilkington Architectural and Glazing Director** and a member of the Women of the Year Executive Committee, said: "Given the stated objectives of the Pilkington award it is hard to imagine anyone who could better fit the description or be more deserving of this recognition than Mary Blewitt. It is therefore with a great sense of honour and privilege that we declare Mary the recipient of this year's award."

On receiving the award Mary Kayitesi Blewitt said: "By recognising my work today, you recognise the importance of ensuring the survivors, and victims, of the Rwandan genocide are never forgotten." She added: "This award is not for me. It is for the hundreds of donors and volunteers who have given their precious time and money to ensure that **SURF** can make a difference. It is for the women of this great country who have shown their solidarity with their sisters in Rwanda by acknowledging their plight and supporting our Campaign for Free Antiretroviral

Treatment for Women Survivors of the Genocide. And it is for the thousands of widows and orphans who entrusted me with the only hope they have left: a better future.”

Gayle Morrison, Executive Chair of WOYLA, says of Mary Blewitt:

“It is an incredible honour for the Women of the Year Lunch and Assembly, to recognize Mary Kayitesi Blewitt, who in her life and her work has shown extraordinary personal courage and determination and who is a living example of the hope and promise the women and children of Rwanda hold for the future”

Testimonial from FERGAL KEANE BBC Foreign Correspondent, BBC News:

“Mary Kayitesi Blewitt is a quite remarkable human being, one of the most remarkable I have ever met. Her work with the survivors of the Rwandan genocide has involved extraordinary personal sacrifice; every minute of her life is taken up with thinking of their needs. To confront the horror of genocide every day demands deep reserves of emotional commitment due to the terrible experience of her own family in the genocide. Mary draws her commitment from a very personal source. Her initiative in launching SURF has brought love and hope back to the lives of many survivors; those of us who witnessed genocide in Rwanda know that Mary Blewitt stands among the bravest of the brave, the kindest of the kind.”

SURF - FACTS

- An estimated one million Rwandans died during the 100 day genocide in 1994
- As a direct result of the genocide in 1994, there are more than 60,000 widows living in Rwanda caring for more than 200,000 orphans
- More than 67 per cent of women who were raped in 1994 are now facing death from HIV/AIDS.
- It would cost only £8 million a year to buy the antiretroviral drugs and oversee the distribution of treatment to help the target group of 25,000 women survivors

SURF - AIMS

- To improve the lives of survivors and to give them hope for the future
- To ensure that the:
 - Voices of survivors of the genocide are heard
 - Memories of the genocide are kept alive
 - Victims of the genocide are never forgotten

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For further information on the Survivors Fund (SURF) visit www.survivors-fund.org.uk

NOTES TO EDITORS

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What is the Women of the Year Lunch and Assembly?

Set up to celebrate the achievements of women in every working field, The **Women of the Year Lunch and Assembly** was created in 1955 by a group of visionary women headed by Lady Antonia Lothian. Their objective was to bring together a wide cross-section of women who had distinguished themselves in their careers, at an annual lunch to hear the views of world-famous women on life-changing issues – and award them for their work. Since its foundation, the **Women of the Year Lunches** have been a sell-out, raising over £1 million for charity. Bringing together doctors, nurses, politicians, actresses, business women, authors and musicians – The **Women of**

the Year Lunch now calls together one of the most significant assemblies of women in the world. The **Women of the Year Foundation** was launched in 2001 by the **Women of the Year Lunch and Assembly**. Its mission is to support women by offering grants that fund the opportunity to fulfill their dreams and ambitions.

The **Board of Directors of Women of the Year Lunch and Assembly** represent 40 categories of work and influence and it is they who nominate representatives in their own field to attend the Lunch.

Members of this year's **Nominating Council** include Eleanor Angel, Dr Joan Armatrading MBE, Charlotte Paden-Powell, Floella Benjamin OBE, Baroness Howells of St Davids, Glenys Kinnock MEP, Doreen Lawrence, Maureen Lipman CBE, Lady Ruth Morris of Kenwood, Eve Pollard, Esther Rantzen OBE, The Countess of St Andrews, Francine Stock and Virginia Wade OBE. There are 57 women total on the Nominating Council.

The Acting President of the **Women of the Year Lunch and Assembly** is The Hon Diana Makgill CVO. Gayle Morrison is Executive Chairman and Nicky Oppenheimer is Vice Chairman.

Good Housekeeping magazine is the lead sponsor for **Women of the Year Lunch and Assembly 2004**. This year's Assembly debate **Fighting Back: Women's Voices in the aftermath of war in Iraq** is sponsored by **Reuters and Noor Media** (a new establishment specialising in commercial advertising and public relations in the fast-growing market in Iraq). Further Awards are sponsored by Good Housekeeping and Judy Craymer.

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