“What is most important is to empower women and to ensure they are not experiencing violence, so that women can return to being solidarity makers.”

– Hikmah Bafagih

“Our vision is to create an inclusive Islam, having people oppose me is very common,” says Hikmah Bafagih. Bafagih is a professor, community organizer and peace-builder in East Java, Indonesia. She guided community discussions on women’s contributions to peace as part of UN Women’s new regional programme on preventing violent extremism in Asia. “We do a lot of programmes to prevent radicalization and intolerance […] we can’t just expect that to happen, we must do something today,” she says.

“All the training sessions [I received] have helped me understand that women can be independent and can make their own decisions.”

– Rabiha Khalloof

Rabiha Khalloof is a 47-year-old Syrian refugee who fled to Lebanon three years ago. “The war swept everything away,” she says. She is among 520 Syrian women refugees who have received training and economic assistance from a UN Women project. Today Khalloof is earning an income for the first time and aspiring to teach other women to start their own businesses. She discusses her return to Syria. “Our society needs women to help future generations succeed. I will share the knowledge I have gained in Lebanon with other Syrian women when I go back to my hometown in Syria.”
Democratic Republic of Congo

Nahimana Fainesi, age 30, fled her native Burundi in July 2015 and has since been living in the Lusenda refugee camp in Fizi, Democratic Republic of Congo. She works as a farmer in a UN Women cash-for-work programme there. “When I got to the Lusenda Camp [in Democratic Republic of the Congo], I had no hope. UN Women gave me hope, motivation and empowerment. After some time, I was appointed committee member of the women’s group. I found a job [through a cash-for-work programme] and that money helped me cross back to get my children,” she says of her experience.

At 47, Emm Ali* has experienced the immense loss of her two sons. A Syrian refugee living in the Za’atari Refugee camp in Jordan since 2013, she found a sense of purpose as she joined UN Women’s cash-for-work programme weaving carpets. The programme is the largest employer of women refugees in the camp. “When I arrived at the camp in Jordan, it was not what I had expected [...] I fell into depression and grieved for my boys.” She said. “I heard about the cash-for-work programme run by UN Women at the camp, and decided to enroll. The work shifted the bitterness of loss and gave me a sense of purpose. Today I teach other refugee women to weave and counsel them.”

*Name has been changed to protect the privacy of the individual.

“I kept walking forward, thinking a better life must be waiting for us at the end of the journey.”

— Emm Ali

“One must always think about how you can get your hands dirty to attain your goals.”

— Nahimana Fainesi

Photos: above left: UN Women/Catianne Tijerina; above right: UN Women/Christopher Herwig