

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING EQUITAS

Members of the Equitas team often mention that their work with human rights defenders around the world makes them so grateful for what they have, and for having the very good fortune of living in Canada.

We are very fortunate to have all the freedoms and rights that we do; the right to vote; freedom of expression; freedom of association; the right to practice our religion... the list goes on and on.

Some stories truly touch our hearts and remind us of our fortune in so many ways. Let me tell you the remarkable story about Joséphine Yameogo, from the West African country of Burkina Faso, and how **your support has helped Equitas make an incredible difference.**

JOSÉPHINE'S STORY – INSPIRATION IN ACTION



Outskirts of Ouagadougou, near Joséphine's garage. (Photos: Natalie Doyle, Equitas staff)

Our story begins in a garage in the outskirts of the capital city of Ouagadougou. Running the garage is Joséphine Yameogo.

Born in a small village into a very large extended family, in a society where "girls were expected to serve the boys," Joséphine has been fighting for equality her entire life. At the age of just one month, she was promised in marriage to a man over 40 years her senior.

When she turned 17, she was taken to meet her 60 year-old future husband. Understanding that marrying him would take away her own freedom, Joséphine did the unthinkable: she refused her family's wishes, and instead married another man of her own choice.

The consequences were grave. Joséphine was disowned, banished by her own family, unable to return to her village.

However, Joséphine Yameogo is one extraordinary woman. Facing tremendous opposition, and with limited resources and three small children at home, she continued to defy expectations, choosing to pursue her interests and a career traditionally reserved for men. She decided to train as a mechanic.

Joséphine became the first woman in the country to work in this trade and open



JOSÉPHINE'S GARAGE

her own garage. The impact this had on her life and circumstances was considerable. Now actively contributing to the family income, she could help to send her children to school and provide a better life for them. She was also being included in the decision making within her household. Joséphine began to become aware of the broader potential of what she was doing. **If women had access to more professions, more women would have an income and security.** They would also have greater control over their lives and be able to participate more actively in the development of their communities.

Realizing that she had to change more than her own personal situation, Joséphine decided to form a group called the *Association of Lady Mechanics of Faso (A.M.F.)* to help women from very poor areas of Ouagadougou, often with limited schooling and families to look after, to try and gain access to non-traditional professions. She began to organize informal meetings to raise women's awareness of their rights. But with no resources and no training, her impact was limited. Frustrated with the lack of

progress, Joséphine was certain of one thing: "If these women knew their rights, they would fight to succeed!"

EQUITAS AND YOU CHANGING THE WORLD TOGETHER

Fortunately, one of Equitas' local partners met Joséphine, and saw the extraordinary potential in her and her work. He recommended that she participate in Equitas' regional training session for community trainers. While she was very keen

"Before the training with Equitas, I couldn't even express myself when it came to my rights. Now I know my rights - our rights - and my mission is to share this with everyone, to advocate in the community and beyond for the rights of women to work in all trades. Since the training with Equitas, we feel liberated, and like we're truly flourishing for the first time."

to attend, it was not an obvious match. A mechanic at a human rights training program? Our partner persisted... and we took a chance.

Joséphine did not disappoint. Her participation in Equitas' program taught her about the **tremendous power of human rights education to transform attitudes and values.** Armed with the knowledge and skills to make

human rights education more 'user-friendly', she set out to turn that knowledge into action in her community.

Leading by example and using the Equitas model, Joséphine made it her mission to create new opportunities for women and support women who wanted to break free from the stereotypical roles society imposed on them. She coached women through difficult situations with their spouses and parents. She went from garage to garage, doing what she calls "garage advocacy", to help find employment for women who had trained as mechanics but had never worked in the field. She began working to change men's attitudes towards women, to dismantle stereotypes

and to increase men's willingness to allow their wives and daughters to attend meetings and go to trade schools. She promoted the creation of additional women's associations - of industrial painters, and electricians - to provide a nation-wide network of support and solidarity, to promote equality, and to make people aware of the discriminatory sexual division of labour in her country.



SINCE 1967, EQUITAS HAS HELPED OVER 3,500 HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS LIKE JOSÉPHINE **BRING ABOUT INCREDIBLE AND TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGES TO TENS OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE**

Joséphine and other women like her in Burkina Faso are incredible trail-blazers. Thanks to all their efforts and dedication over the past decade or so, there has been a **truly remarkable increase in the number of women working in non-traditional professions, from 15 to 1,500 across Burkina Faso.**

And it is **thanks to your support** that Equitas is able to provide the world-class training that gives the tools to and motivates people like Joséphine to create incredible change in their community. Throughout West Africa and beyond, thousands of people are being empowered to make change a reality in their communities:



Joséphine leading a workshop with parents and husbands

IN HAITI

Together with our local partners, Equitas is working to involve displaced persons in post-earthquake reconstruction, with a citizen participation program to help them take control of their lives, speak up against violence and actively participate in local efforts to rebuild and develop the country.

IN EGYPT

Following his participation in Equitas' International Human Rights Training Program, a participant and his organization have been working tirelessly in a conservative and poverty-stricken region to increase women's political participation. Of the 30,000 women he reached, 19,550 cast ballots in the following elections, a resounding success given the region's previous low voter turnout of 17%.

IN CANADA, over 70,000 children learn how to *Play it Fair!* each year in over 350 day camps and after-school sites across the country. *Play it Fair!* is an

innovative program that equips staff working with children with the skills to lead activities that promote respect, fairness, acceptance, inclusion and cooperation encouraging the healthy development of children and building stronger more inclusive communities. Children play the games, discuss how they feel, and work together to solve conflicts.

THIS IS WHAT YOUR DONATION SUPPORTS. THIS IS HOW YOU ARE HELPING TO CHANGE THE WORLD!

The human rights education programs you support help vulnerable and marginalized people take control of their lives and become active participants in shaping their future.

EQUITAS – YOUR CANADIAN SUCCESS STORY

Since 1967, Equitas has helped over 3,500 human rights defenders like Joséphine bring about **incredible and transformative changes to tens of thousands of people**. Following participation in Equitas programs, they are better able to protect the rights of marginalized and vulnerable groups, hold governments accountable for human rights abuses, and empower their communities to participate more effectively in decision-making processes.

But the fact is that for far too many people in far too many places, international human rights standards and laws remain just words. And due to illiteracy and a lack of education, many remain unaware of and unable to defend their basic rights.

This is why it is imperative that, like for Joséphine and the women of *A.M.F.*, human rights principles and values take on even greater meaning in our daily life – everywhere. For this, **Equitas needs your support. We need your help.**

With your help, we can do much more. Just think how the world might change if we could replicate Joséphine's success in even more communities!

Joséphine says: **“I have a message for all Canadians: It is thanks to Equitas that so many more women now know their rights. This knowledge has enriched us, and helps us work towards building a peaceful world where women are full and equal participants. I urge you to support Equitas and help us work towards this goal.”**

Your support is so important, so vital, and so appreciated.

While our programs are having a considerable impact in many parts of the world, we simply cannot do it alone.

Please consider a tax-deductible gift to Equitas this holiday season.

Giving is so easy and takes only a moment. You can give online by visiting our website at www.equitas.org, by calling Ronit at 514-954-0382 ext 241, or by using the enclosed reply card and envelope.

Please help Joséphine and thousands of other brave human rights defenders around the world and at home.

The women from *A.M.F.* and many others like them around the world are accomplishing miracles with so little. **During this holiday season, please help spread the miracles of equality and human rights.**

On behalf of Joséphine, and so many more: **Thank you.** May the holiday season bring you miracles, too.

Very sincerely,



Ian Hamilton
Executive Director

Please consider making a **monthly tax-deductible donation!** Monthly giving is an easy way for you to generously support Equitas!

Celebrate the holidays by giving a gift of human rights. Make a donation in the name of a loved one and we will send them a beautiful card featuring Equitas alumni putting human rights education into action in Uganda.

For more information visit our website equitas.org or call 514-954-0382 ext 241

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