

The bulk of my present work here in Indonesia is focused on providing physical relief to victims of natural disasters. In less than two years, I have seen the devastating effects of tsunamis, earthquakes, floods and now most recently over-active volcanoes. It's no wonder that Indonesia is referred to as 'the ring of fire.'

Repeatedly I see that it is the women and by extension their children who are most affected and upon who the demand is to keep life going as it were during and in the aftermath of these disasters. It is the women who must fend for food, clothing and shelter for their loved ones.

In Indonesia, Int'l Women's Day is not officially recognized. Rather they observe Kartini Day – the life of a young woman who was afforded the liberty of an education by virtue of her father working for a Dutch aristocratic family and being 'allowed' an education.

Then there is the issue as my own role as a woman in a predominantly male working world. I often wonder when people first meet me whether my gender or my skin colour plays a more defining role in how I am stereo-typed. Again and again, I see that it is my skin colour. As Danica once said in an article that we collaborated on, white women are treated differently and differentially.

My message to all women but particularly to women of colour is that we cannot and must not fall into the trap of self-victimisation. Ignorance gives rise to fear – human tendency is to fear what we are un-familiar with. Each day I am not to fall into the trap of other's ignorance but when faced with discrimination to raise the level of awareness of the other. Oftentimes, this is easier said than done. Each opportunity, each situation is a lesson – for me and the other.

The bottom line is that women across the globe face the same issues – the pressure to be mothers, wives, girlfriends, sisters, providers, business successes in the working world. We have GOT to raise our levels of empathy and compassion for each other. This is especially poignant for women from LDCs who are economically dis-enfranchised.

There is another war taking place which for me seems to go largely ignored: it is the subliminal one that we wage against each other. Organisational structure, based largely on a male normative model breeds this – it is actually an under-handed way of keeping us 'productive.' It reminds me of the slavery tactic that is part of the post traumatic slavery syndrome – built-in insecurity which then leads to a twisted paranoia.