

Portrait of Penda Ly



Ms. Penda Ly is currently posted to MONUSCO-Dungu office as Chief of civil Affairs Section. She previously assumed similar offices respectively in Kananga and Mbandaka. She joined ex-MONUC (renamed MONUSCO) in 2008.

Ms. Penda started her career in the UN with the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haïti (MINUSTAH). During the last humanitarian crisis in Haiti, Penda was the focal point between the humanitarians and the UN Mission. In this capacity, she was one of those who, for days on end, under heavy rains, joined efforts to save human lives in danger. Then she served as child protection coordinator where she did

an outstanding job as team leader within the framework of the fight against child trafficking in the Grand `Anse department. All this earned her respect and admiration from all her colleagues.

A quick glance into her remote past shows that before joining the United Nations, Penda had a rich and varied professional career in her country, Niger. She holds a graduate certificate in Human Resource Management from the "Centre africain d'études supérieures en gestion (CESAG)" in Dakar, Senegal; she initially worked for 12 years for « Société nationale des transports nigériens (SNTN) », where she respectively served as Management Assistant and Deputy Chief of Maradi center. She later on joined a Belgian microfinance NGO (AQUADEV) where she spent a year and a half as Assistant-Accountant. For the next two years she worked for *Bank of Africa* (BOA) as Bank counter Manager. Furthermore, she spent two more years as head of Netcom Human Resource, a private transport company.

What did prompt Ms. Penda Ly to embark on a career with the UN? She was moved by the intent to make her contribution to the peace-building and global development efforts, she said: ***"Peace is key to any development. Hence the importance of peace-keeping missions to assist conflict or post-conflict countries in restoring State authority and initiating their own development."*** Richard Tshibassu, one of her colleagues, portrays the affectionately called ***"maman Penda"*** as ***"a very***

PROTECT

STABILIZE

CONSOLIDATE PEACE

conscientious and fully dedicated staff, mindful of well-done job. She is the embodiment of the perfect image of a committed woman, i.e. she is always ready to make her contribution to efforts aimed at responding to the populations' needs. Her long experience within the United Nations' family helped to gain flexibility and skills necessary to provide lasting solutions to the problems arising." In conflicts resolution in the Democratic Republic of Congo, "mama Penda" made countless contributions as civil affairs coordinator to stabilization efforts for lasting solutions in the Kananga crisis caused by massive deportation of Congolese from Angola (2008-2010), the Mbandaka conflict between the Monzaya and Enyele communities (2009). Besides, she contributed to the protection of the Salonga National Park (in the Tshuapa province) listed as natural heritage, through the restoration of the State authority undermined by poachers and other gangs' activities.

In Dungu, Penda Ly maybe credited with several concrete actions, namely *"contributing and facilitating peaceful settlement of the Mbororo pastoralists, thereby reducing markedly the conflicts-related risks between the nomads and the autochthons,"* another colleague said. Portraying Penda as an *"outstanding team leader, always very close to her staff and the partners of the civil Affairs Section placed under her leadership,"* he underscores her *"humble nature"* which makes her *"ever ready to learn from others and willing to receive advice whenever necessary for the advancement of the collective work"*.

Ms. Ly's outspokenness has earned her respect not only within the Mission but also from civilians and military partners. As a result, she was nicknamed the *"Iron Lady of Dungu"* by her friends who describe her as *"true to herself, brave and tenacious lady."* Her entourage says she is very meticulous on the quality of work and cooperation to be maintained between her team and the internal and external partners as well as the local authorities and associations. There are lots of testimonies in this respect.

Jean-Tobie Okala, currently the head of the Public Information/Uvira who had the privilege of working closely with Penda in Mbandaka, looks at her as a woman who is *"true to herself and fully-fledged, bold enough to speak out when something is wrong."* He further says *"Penda is an easy-going and good-natured person. Endowed with a genuine maternal instinct, she is very bountiful. She is very tough when it comes to work, but remains very nice..."*

Mamy Bahemurwaki, one of her colleague describes her as: *"big gender equality, justice and equity defender who is very strict that all UN staff members' conduct should be correct at every respect. For Ms. Ly, her team is like her family. For the purposes of advancing the work, she gives everyone the opportunity to express themselves."*

Ibrahima Diouf, the former Chief of MONUSCO-Dungu office describes Penda as *"a real fighter, and principled woman."* He further says *"it was a real pleasure for him to work with her and hails her personal and professional qualities."* He confesses she is running a challenging section and Dungu's context adds to the complexity. *"But with her strong character, she knows how to keep on*

the right track,” highlighting that “Ms. Penda is an outright woman, always ready to defend her views and stay the course.”

Naturally endowed with qualities such as bountifulness, courage, meticulousness and tenacity, it is quite normal that her colleagues have designated her head of FSU. FSU is the international staff committee tasked to promote and defend their rights, interests and well-being through mechanisms like consultations, negotiations and mediation with a view to making their voices heard by the Mission's management. It is not exactly a restful task, she said. *“Staff members have so many expectations in a system where the established regulations are often trampled – and far from satisfactory, which is a source of injustice as far as the staff members are concerned...There is a crisis of confidence between the two parties,”* says Penda. The staff members want to see the injustice stopped, to be consulted and to see decisions made in all transparency; they also want to see the services rendered them improved, likewise communication between the staff and the management. *“There is every reason to improve relations between the management and the staff, knowing that the latter being central to all the Mission's activities, to avert the risk of having demotivated staff,”* says Penda, taking advantage of this interview to appeal to all the staff to stand united. *“Staff representatives cannot achieve anything alone; we need your support to do a better job, we must show solidarity with each other and stand united,”*



Penda Ly is married and has four children. When asked to give her view on the African woman, the role currently played by them in the society and what role should they actually play, she responds: ***“African women do have a spirit of entrepreneurship; they are dynamic, hard-working but often marginalized. They provide livelihood for families in most African countries. As an example, the informal economy rests on women. Unfortunately, they are put in the background, in every respect. Illiteracy must be eradicated to advance and empower the African woman.”***

When asked to know about her hobbies, she replies: ***“I am very fond of reading and television. I love African literature, and with regard to the television, I am a person with eclectic tastes: scientific documentaries, televised serials, etc. She goes on: “I love cooking and when on leave, I spend most of my time cooking. In the shops, cookbooks are one of the shelves I visit the most. I also love doing house chores, making my house cleaner and nicer.”***

Ms. Penda Ly's most cherished dream is to see the Democratic Republic of Congo is to see this country unified, developed and at last prosperous!

Lansana Dabo/MONUSCO-Dungu/Translated by Alphonse Yulu Kabamba