

# How can societies end violence against people with disabilities? A #YALICHAT with Judy Heumann

Judy Heumann joined the YALI Network team to answer questions about how to end violence against persons with disabilities. As the special advisor for international disability rights, Heumann fights for the civil rights of the disabled community and disadvantaged people. She has worked internationally with disabled people's organizations and governments for over 30 years.

How can you protect the rights of people with disabilities?

Discrimination against persons with disabilities in the workplace violates Article 27 of the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Heumann, herself, has been the victim of workplace discrimination. To hear more about her personal experiences, watch her recent [TEDx talk](#).



Some people falsely believe disabilities are a result of being cursed and therefore shun the disabled community. This international concern comes from a lack of exposure to disabled people, fear of difference and fear of acquiring a disability. Community leaders, local organizations, the media and disabled people play critical roles in advocating for the end of this stigma and violence against disabled people.



Disabled people not only battle the stigma placed on them by their community but also the stigma they place on themselves. A support system helps them feel like part of a larger community of people who can fight alongside them for the rights of persons with disabilities.



The best way to enact change at the governmental level is to include disabled people's organizations while working to hold your government accountable.



Since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, countries have begun developing and revising their laws to protect the rights of persons with disabilities. Organizations of persons with disabilities should always be included in the conversation when considering new legislation.



Disabled individuals can be proactive and protect themselves by knowing their rights and reporting acts of violence made against the disabled community.



People with mental disabilities are at an increased risk of abuse. Heumann said it is your duty to ensure these people are supported, protected and welcomed into the community.



To learn more about how violence against persons with disabilities is a global human rights issue, read [this blog post](#) from the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor at the U.S. Department of State.

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## [YALI Voices Podcast: You're not born with self-confidence. You build it, says Ugandan entrepreneur.](#)

(Courtesy of Jamila Mayanja)



Jamila Mayanja started her working life by boldly approaching a prospective employer and telling him she could do anything his company required. “Teach me and I will learn it in 30 minutes,” she said.

It was an unusual move for a woman in Uganda, where “the survival mode is be beautiful, get ready for marriage, stay in marriage, be respectful,” she told the State Department’s Macon Phillips in a YALI Voices podcast.

The 2015 Mandela Washington Fellow went on to found [Smart Girls Uganda](#), where she empowers young girls and women through training to build their self-esteem.

Many have the impression that self-confidence is something you are born with. “No, you can actually build it,” she told Phillips. Her passion has been to encourage girls to pursue their dreams and create their own initiatives.

Mayanja shared a funny story about how her aversion to doing laundry led her to start a franchise company through Smart Girls Uganda called J Mobile Laundry Services that is helping to address women’s unemployment in Kampala. With the help of the YALI Network, she plans to open the country’s first laundromat, consulting with other Mandela Washington Fellows to make it environmentally friendly as well as incorporate it into her training center, where women are planning their own businesses.

“Everything is quite YALI-branded,” she said.

Learn more about Mayanja and her remarkable achievements, including the [Haven Anti-AIDS Foundation](#) she co-founded to empower youth in the fight against HIV/AIDS, illiteracy and poverty.

Don't have access to SoundCloud, iTunes or Google Play? Read a transcript of the podcast below:

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE

BUREAU OF INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION PROGRAMS (IIP)

“YALI Voices Podcast: Jamila Mayanja”

[MUSIC PLAYING]

♪ Yes we can. Sure we can. ♪

♪ Change the world. ♪

[MUSIC CONTINUES]

MACON PHILLIPS: Greetings, young African leaders. This is the YALI Voices Podcast, your home for sharing the best stories from the Young African Leaders Initiative Network. I'm Macon Phillips and I'm happy to have you here with me today. Before we get started, don't forget to subscribe to the podcast on iTunes and Google Play. And visit [YALI.state.gov](#) to stay up to date on all things YALI. And if you like what we're doing here, take a moment to recommend this all to your friends.

Today, I'm joined by Jamila Mayanja. Jamila is the CEO of Smart Girls Uganda, a company that not only trains women and girls in entrepreneurship, but also in life skills, to empower them and build their self-esteem. In addition to that, Jamila created a franchise company, founded an organization that sensitized youth about AIDS, and organized Uganda's first father-daughter dance to showcase the importance of fathers in their daughters' lives. Now, my conversation with Jamila Mayanja.

So hello everybody. This is Macon Phillips. I'm here in Washington, DC, with Jamila Mayanja, who is a 2015 Mandela Washington Fellow, but has come back to the United States for an entrepreneurship conference that we'll hear a little bit more about. Really excited to have you here in our offices here at the State Department. Welcome. It's good to have you, Jamila.

JAMILA MAYANJA: It's good to be here. I'm so excited to meet the YALI Network people behind the scenes.

MR. PHILLIPS: Yes — see the actual sausage being made, as it were.

MS. MAYANJA: Yeah. It's so cool.

MR. PHILLIPS: And we are really excited to have you here because there is oftentimes this distance, geographical and —

MS. MAYANJA: Huge distance

MR. PHILLIPS: — and otherwise, yeah, that we want to have this relationship with young leaders across Africa and we've developed a program that has this exchange program that brought you here,

that has the Regional Leadership Centers in Africa in a number of different locations — Dakar, Accra, Nairobi, Johannesburg. And we also have this virtual network, the YALI Network. And each of these areas has been really exciting, but it's sometimes difficult to really keep that connection when a key part of the relationship is so far away.

MS. MAYANJA: Yeah. That's so true.

MR. PHILLIPS: So it's nice to have you here in person.

MS. MAYANJA: I'm so happy to be here.

MR. PHILLIPS: Yeah. How long have you been in the States this time?

MS. MAYANJA: Just a week.

MR. PHILLIPS: This is your — is this your second time? Was the Mandela Washington Fellowship your first time in the United States?

MS. MAYANJA: Yes, actually, yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS: So this is one of the things that I'm always curious about, which is as someone who had never been to the United States before but probably paid attention to it and was interested in it, what was the biggest surprise to you, you know, getting off the plane at the airport and kind of spending the first few days here?

MS. MAYANJA: The biggest surprise was the fact that there were homeless people in the United States. People don't actually believe it back home, but there are actually homeless people in the United States. They actually were in the streets begging. When we were in Dartmouth, when they took us for the community service, which is the best thing I think that YALI does for the community service, there are actually people who starve. So it is amazing to see some of the problems that happen in Africa actually happen in the United States. And also there were jobless people, people who were looking for jobs. Now that bit me off. I thought everybody in the U.S. had a job.

MR. PHILLIPS: Now, one of the things that you may not know about me is that I actually lived in Norwich, Vermont —

MS. MAYANJA: Oh, yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS:—which is where Dartmouth — it's across the river from where Dartmouth is.

MS. MAYANJA: We actually visited Vermont.

MR. PHILLIPS: Yeah, and so Dartmouth University is a great school that's located in Hanover, New Hampshire. And as part of your Mandela Washington Fellow experience, you spent six weeks there with 24 other young leaders.

MS. MAYANJA: Yes.

MR. PHILLIPS: And in 2002, I lived in Norwich, Vermont. And what brought me there was being in AmeriCorps VISTA. And AmeriCorps is a program that actually works on poverty in the United

States. And so I spent my time working with young children who lived in government-funded housing projects in that area. And we actually would find students at Dartmouth and match them up as mentors to these young people so they had a good example of what to do. So I actually know the issue of poverty in the Dartmouth area firsthand and I can confirm that has been the case for quite a while.

MS. MAYANJA: Yeah. It was amazing. I really loved what Dartmouth did for us, for all the charity work that we did there, visiting the different people who wouldn't survive in winter, visiting with people who didn't have access to food. It was quite amazing. Then we visited a city called Burlington, I think.

MR. PHILLIPS: I lived in Burlington for four years.

MS. MAYANJA: Yeah, and there were so many homeless people on the streets. And you'd think those things wouldn't happen in that, like, powerful United States.

MR. PHILLIPS: Well, why do you think it does?

MS. MAYANJA: I think it's the world. We are all the same people, and not everybody has the same status. Like, you think you live in — we—the world is like one bubble, one — actually one bubble. You'd think there is nobody who is higher, who is better. Every part has its own challenges and—yeah, actually, every part has its own challenges. So it's the way — how we overcome them, and in Uganda how we also try to make sure we overcome them. So you'd think there's no perfect place, there's no perfect bubble. It's how people actually work out their problems in whatever part of the world they are in.

MR. PHILLIPS: Yeah, that's right. That's — I couldn't agree with you more.

So let's use that as a jumping off point into your own life. And you talk about, it's not about the circumstances you're in but how you respond to them, how you overcome those challenges. And you've certainly become quite an accomplished entrepreneur and a leader, someone who's quite inspiring to Americans, to Ugandans, to girls, to —

MS. MAYANJA: Oh, wow.

MR. PHILLIPS:—to people trying to clean clothes, and all the way to the president of the United States. And we'll get to that in a second. But I imagine it wasn't always that glamorous and awesome.

MS. MAYANJA: Yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS: Tell us a little bit about where you are coming from and how that's something that's motivated you.

MS. MAYANJA: I come from a family of 14 brothers and sisters. My dad had three wives. My mom was the second wife. And later, my dad died in my first year, first semester. And when he died — he was quite an amazing guy. I always was quite — quite wondered how he took us all through good schools, the 14 kids. And he actually had more kids he was looking after. So I was quite amazed at how that one man managed to do all that. Good kids and we still got fed. But when we lost him in —

first I lost my real mom when I was in S3 and now I stayed with my amazing other mom, who is the heart and body and soul of everything that I breathe right now. But the biggest challenge was losing my dad in my first year, first semester at campus. He had just taken me to a very expensive university, that was Makerere Business School, and a very expensive hostel. And there he dies and the money just somehow disappeared. I really had to survive. And I noticed—I couldn't try and get back to my mom, tell her, "You know what"—because she also was depressed. How is she going to take care of all these other kids?

And I think that motivated me. But even before that, when I was in school, I was in an all-girls school. I lived with girls that came from, like, all different backgrounds, and I somehow would pull them towards me. I would always give a listening hand. I was on every cabinet of every club in school. And I even started, I remember, an AIDS club that later I called the Red Ribbon Club because when I called it the AIDS Club, nobody actually came to the first meeting. So I had to rebrand it. They kept on saying, since I called it the AIDS Club, it's only people with AIDS. Yet I just wanted to show these people because they're young, they can get AIDS. So when I rebranded it, so —

MR. PHILLIPS: That's a — let's just dive in on that for a second.

MS. MAYANJA: [LAUGHING]

MR. PHILLIPS: I think that's a really important lesson is that sometimes the way you present something —

MS. MAYANJA: Exactly. Exactly.

MR. PHILLIPS:—is really, really important. So I think that's a good takeaway for people who want to — if you want to fight AIDS and you want to focus on that issue, maybe don't call your mission the AIDS Club.

MS. MAYANJA: Yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS: Maybe think of a much more interesting way to approach that.

MS. MAYANJA: [LAUGHING] I remember sitting in the classroom for my first meeting after putting up flyers and everything, because after being on every cabinet of every club, I wanted something of my own that I've studied in school. And I was there alone, literally. Not even my best friend came. But later, when I talked to the [INAUDIBLE], it's like, maybe it's the name. And then I went to lead a survey and asked the students, "Why didn't you come to my meetings?" Like, "My dear, there's a rumor going around that you started the AIDS Club because maybe you have AIDS or you're actually looking out for AIDS people, people with HIV/AIDS, and it's going to make us so unfamous." So I went back and rebranded.

So I think my zeal to try and create different, to try and be different, was from school.

MR. PHILLIPS: I think that there's also another lesson in that, leaving aside the branding itself, it's something that the American technology sector is really focused on right now, but in general, which is this idea of really understanding your target audience, I mean, really actually understanding your mission, what you're trying to do, addressing a certain issue, but having the humility and the

curiosity to actually talk to the people you're seeking to motivate and ask them what they think of it and then design something that meets their needs. And I think too often — and I say this as someone who's seen this a lot in the U.S. government and other places — we all sit around and try to cook up what we think is going to be great without talking to the people we're trying to reach in the first place. And that kind of feedback is really important at all steps of an organization, whether you're doing a high school club or you're trying to start a business or otherwise. So I think that's a really important lesson for people to take away.

MS. MAYANJA: Thank you. And I think also that bonded my relationship with the headmistress of my high school, and whatever program I bring to the school, I'm always welcomed with open arms, yeah, because I left a huge impact in the school. And later, as much as I also later a club still—also the A-level counselor. So I was literally always someone's, like, mother all over the school. And also the teachers themselves and even the staff — right now I go back and I start working from the gate.

MR. PHILLIPS: Right.

MS. MAYANJA: Which is very cool. But all that, when I reached campus, really kind of faded away when I lost my dad. I thought when I would leave high school, I would still carry on what I was doing back in school, but I couldn't now. I moved into survival mode. I had to survive because now I had really nothing. I was glad that my uncle, like, my dad's brother took up to pay my tuition. But that's all he could do. I had to look for upkeep.

So, one of these days — I woke up one day and I was like, "Let me go and look for work." I walked into someone's office, my first boss ever, the first job I've ever looked for. I told him, "I can do anything that what your company is doing. Teach me and I will learn it in 30 minutes." And he was amazed this young girl who is in first year. She doesn't even have any papers and I'm telling him that. He's like, "First, have these flyers and go down there and try and get 10 clients. If you get 10 clients, actually more than 10, you have the job." And I got them in, I think, two hours. When I got them in two hours, he's like, "Sit down, let me teach you the software," and I learned it in 15 minutes. He was amazed. Then he made me the receptionist and the sales girl.

And from that day on, I kept on climbing ladders in his company and helping grow his company. But still when I was in that company, I wasn't satisfied. I would always volunteer, go volunteer in stuff that are organized by the U.S. Embassy. I co-founded an organization that now I'm a board member of, called Haven Anti-AIDS Foundation.

I was never satisfied when I was doing, like, business for my former boss because — later, in my third year, he promoted me to being marketing manager of his company, but even when he was — he wasn't doing any corporate social responsibility. It's me who introduced it there. To say it, I was never satisfied as much as now I was able to look after myself, give some more money to my mom so that my siblings can go to school. It was never really satisfying in my heart. I did a lot of back and forth courses to improve myself in being a counselor, in being a trainer online.

So, in 2012, before I — after I graduated, I decided to quit my job. My mom was in shock. [LAUGHING] She told me, "Are you crazy?" And I'm like, "I'm not crazy." She told me, "But you are getting money; you can look after yourself. You don't need anyone." I'm like, "But I'm not happy." As much as I loved my work so much — because later, the guy who had set up the company, we had

built it so much, he sold it for so much money, and my new bosses were also amazing, but I was never literally fully satisfied. And I remember, she almost — in Islam, we call it a dua. She almost did for me a dua to stay and to actually change my decision. And I told her what I was going to do. She told me, “But you’re already giving back in your own way.” I told her, “I’m not happy.”

So I started Smart Girls Uganda after that. I noticed even when I was at my company, I always had girls around me, talking to girls. I liked — I felt bad that even the girls I was working with didn’t have enough confidence to speak out, to chase for their dreams. I met so many brilliant girls who couldn’t get out of the job market to start and create their own initiatives. So I was, like, let me start Smart Girls Uganda to empower girls in all aspects of life.

MR. PHILLIPS: You don’t strike me as someone who has that problem yourself.

MS. MAYANJA: I had it when — somehow all the things I did, I was kind of hiding my self-confidence issues a bit, because being in a big family, you tend to try and close yourself. So I would use cool to try and build my own confidence. I didn’t know that in the things that I was doing, I kind of was building my own confidence in a way, I think.

MR. PHILLIPS: And so what do you take away from your own style and your own background as you’re trying to grow the capacity of these young girls to be as confident as you are? What’s the quality you’re trying to pass along to them?

MS. MAYANJA: The quality mostly is don’t be afraid to accept that maybe you have loss of esteem and you can build it yourself. People say having self-confidence is — you’re actually born with it. No, you can actually build it. And don’t be afraid to fail, to get up. Don’t be afraid to use the problems in your life to actually push you beyond your own capacity.

MR. PHILLIPS: Are there any tricks or any sort of very specific tips that you have for people who are struggling with their self-confidence? You know, look in the mirror and yell at yourself —

MS. MAYANJA: [LAUGHING]

MR. PHILLIPS:—and say, “You’re great!” or whatever? You know, what are some tips and tricks you tell people?

MS. MAYANJA: Oh, you are so cool. What I used to do at school, whenever I was walking to class, I’d say, “Hi Jamila. You are amazing. Oh my God!” [LAUGHING] I’d literally shout a hallelujah for myself when I was walking. And then I would tell people, “You know I’m amazing?” Like, I would literally stop people and, “By the way, seriously, I’m so cool. I can’t even believe myself.” So, I would assure myself by telling other people. And people believed it, like literally. And in the morning, whenever I would wake up, I don’t wake up myself by grueling. I wake up to, “You’re amazing Jamila.” So I would give myself those things I felt other people did have.

I remember I’ve always been, what in our country would say small. I was always bigger than the people in my class. So I would call myself — I watched this movie. I called myself “fat beautiful Madame.” So — and always called myself like smart. So whenever I was walking, I would always acknowledge myself, and whenever I was in the presence of other people, before they acknowledge me, I would really tell them, “I’m actually amazing. You really don’t have to tell me, but thank you so

much. I'm cool." So I think you just have to acclimate yourself before others do, so.

MR. PHILLIPS: That's really interesting. I mean, that's — yeah, I think that's really good advice for people to think about the fact that they're amazing, but also one level underneath that, what makes them amazing, you know, to drill in on, you know, your different skills and the things that really make you stand apart and be proactive and own that. That's yours.

MS. MAYANJA: Thank you.

MR. PHILLIPS: It's something to be proud of, you know.

Okay, so you weren't satisfied and then you left and you started Smart Girls Uganda, really focused on how you can empower young girls and women.

MS. MAYANJA: Yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS: Paint a picture for me about the world that a young girl finds herself in in Uganda. I've been there and I don't think the United States is perfect by any means, but I know that, in many ways, Uganda is more challenging for young girls and women.

MS. MAYANJA: For young girls, yeah. Why I did that mostly — when you're young, the girls, you are, practically in Uganda, you're brought up for marriage. Can you imagine most men in Uganda, fathers, educate their girls because they want to make them, like, have a good CV for marriage, that when a man comes to marry them off, they tell them, "You know, my daughter even has a degree, so that counts for big dowry." So there is this picture already painted for girls' future that — I actually tell fathers, "I don't know why you're educating your girl to actually go for marriage. Educate her to have her career and be successful."

And even when girls, yes, you know, when hormones kick in and maybe you get a baby very young, there you have no ticket to actually finish your career. You're tarnished in the environment. If you do not get a rich man to marry you, to actually get you your own business, you're actually a failure in the community. And then so many girls have what is shown on internet, what is shown on media. The girls are taken to be branded that that's all they are supposed to be is marriage material. And if you are marriage material later on and you also don't look after yourself, then the man is actually going to get another woman and add on to you. So the survival mode is be beautiful, get ready for marriage, stay in marriage, be respectful. And even some girls, when they get into marriage, they never — when they decide, "We are done and out," they never come out with anything. When they leave the family because they are put into marriage, it's like you no longer have access to your father's property, and then you become the property of the guy, and the guy himself doesn't sometimes in the end doesn't like you, gets you off, then gender-based violence. It's too much.

And then also for the rural girls, since — if they don't have enough money to take the girls in school, to take the whole family in school, it's the girl that will stay home. So the boys go to school because they believe later, they will easily get jobs. Oh, it's so much. And even girls if they are educated and they fight the gender norms of not getting married, getting jobs is actually hard. They use their bodies to survive, to get jobs, to survive into the job industry. It takes a strong, smart girl to actually survive in Uganda.

MR. PHILLIPS: So, you paint a pretty dark picture there, but having been working in the space for a while and having grown up in Uganda, do you feel like things are getting better?

MS. MAYANJA: Yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS: And why? I mean, what are the — we talk a lot about the problems, but what are some of the solutions? What are some of the things that you think have made a very positive impact on this larger problem?

MS. MAYANJA: What is getting better now also are parents now. Most people who are parents now are educated, are now informed, and now they know better. The religious leaders also now know better, I would say. So many organizations and so many people like me who are fighting this issue. So there is this quite good awareness that is going around, I would say.

Let me say, actually the education, the fact that people — the media itself has penetrated even the rural areas. So the picture's been shown that this is bad and you need better. And now also the survival mode has kicked in. Most people — men who are getting married now realize it's not only them to work. It's okay to let your wife work. And they see they can live better that way. So people are being educated more and being informed more now, yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS: Got it, okay. And so, your work on the Smart Girls Uganda really focused on this issue of women's empowerment, but then you moved beyond simply this company focus on building self-esteem into a company focused on cleaning clothes.

MS. MAYANJA: Yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS: So how did you find yourself in the laundry business?

MS. MAYANJA: So, get this. While I was doing my work — because with Smart Girls, I give them life skills training and business and entrepreneurship training, right? When I was doing that business and entrepreneurship training, I noticed that the ladies and the women were not actually implementing what I was doing. But I was kind of trying to ignore it. Later in the process, I got married, my amazing, handsome husband. And when I got married, I had to do chores, and the chores meant I had to wash clothes, and I really hate washing clothes, oh my God. I told my husband, if he has to divorce me, I think that's one thing he would divorce me for. And then he's like, "No, there's a solution. Let's get a lady to wash your clothes and it's okay. We'll pay her some little money." And that's what I did. I got a lady in the neighborhood and she did my washing, hand-washing, because, you know, dry cleaners are quite expensive.

So, three months down the road, the lady comes back and tells me, "Oh, Madame, by the way, I think I'm going to get you someone else to wash your clothes because with the money that you've been paying me, I've started a market stall." I was like, "What? Seriously?" [LAUGHING] She's like, "Yeah. Yeah, I've saved up and I've actually started that." And that's when I got the "aha" moment." I was like, "Do you know what?" I told her, "Do you know what, we can start this into a business. Let me test it because I have gotten so many ladies telling me you're training us but we don't have the capital to actually start." And that's — and I've been being messed up with—I had [INAUDIBLE] and were trained to figure out how the youth and the women can start businesses at a very low capital. And it was also working out.

So I sat down with this lady, got 10,000 shillings. That's like three dollars, and I gave her 6,000 to go and look for, like, five more ladies. And then I used the 4,000 for air time to call a few of my friends to see if they needed the service, like, if they hated washing like how I did. And I was happy to get, like, — it was mostly men who were full bachelors, were like, "Oh my God, what have you been waiting for? I've been dying here actually, have two week's clothes." And then that's when I started J Mobile Laundry Service. And the ladies started slowly, slowly doing door-to-door laundry service for the clients I would get. And on the weekends, I would do entrepreneurial and employable skills training for them, tell them how to save the money that we're getting from the business to later start their own initiatives. So it kind of became like a franchise for Smart Girls. I'm still doing the training and still getting them business and I was also kind of getting some little bit backside money for myself. Yeah. And then YALI happened in the process. [LAUGHING]

MR. PHILLIPS: And so with the YALI that you came over here. You spent time at Dartmouth.

MS. MAYANJA: Yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS: You developed skills and connections I would imagine, some of the relationships you —

MS. MAYANJA: Oh, yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS:—you have made have been really useful. Can you talk about some of the people that you met through that experience who were really inspiring to you?

MS. MAYANJA: Oh, wow, I think YALI has been quite a life-changing experience for me. First of all, I meant, when we went to Dartmouth, they taught us this amazing thing that I'm still using up until now called Design Thinking and the Business Compass Model. That was, I think, the best capacity-building knowledge that I've gotten so far, because I'm now using it into the business and also teaching the ladies on how to use it and also with Rotary Uganda, they have adopted it in the program that we are doing.

But the best thing is YALI itself — after the people that I met there, the knowledge, the advice, the peer collaborators and how to build — do more training and capacity-building for the ladies. But the most amazing thing that I will never forget is my Obama moment, President Obama shout-out.

When I went back home — okay, I became famous because of President Obama. Yeah?

MR. PHILLIPS: So tell us that story. What's — I'm sure people want to know your Obama moment. So, paint the picture for us.

MS. MAYANJA: No, the picture is we were seated — because, you know, we have a presidential summit at the end of the fellowship and we get to meet President Obama. I went. I had just come in. I thought I had the worst seat ever. It was behind to the side. And then while I was in the hall, I got a call from the White House and they asked me, "So, how do you pronounce your name?" I'm like, "Jamila Mayanja." She kept on saying, "Okay, I think they may speak about you, but please don't tweet about it." I'm like, "What?" So the whole time, when everything was happening, it was really in my head, "Speak about me? What are these guys talking about?"

So he comes in. Everybody's shouting and he starts his — oh, God, he's amazing — starts his

amazing speech. And then he starts mentioning about the few fellows that are doing amazing work—first mentioned some gentleman from Zambia, mentioned a lady Kadijah. And next, he's like, "And we have Jamila Mayanja." Oh my God, I jumped up. I almost shouted, "Hallelujah! Mashallah! What?" But I just shut up — and modeling—and he kept on saying, "Oh, she's modeling." And it was quite funny. He mentioned the work that I'm doing. And yeah, the moment ended, but it was so cool. So, [LAUGHING] yeah, that was the picture.

When I went home, oh my God, everybody wanted to shake my hand. Everybody wanted a hug. And I could give them the hugs, but while marketing my business, "By the way, I'm doing this." [LAUGHING] So everybody who would call me up and tell me, "Come and tell us about your Obama experience," after the Obama experience, I would tell them, "By the way, do you need washing clothes services? I do this and this."

So, that experience marketed my business quite big. I got featured in BBC, media all over the country. But it came with also bad things a bit. I wasn't prepared for that quick growth of the business. Now I had so much business, my ladies were doing double work. So they were falling sick with their hands. And right now, I'm working with other fellows to try and rescale and rebrand, I would say. I'm working on building the first ever laundromat in the country, and it's going to run in containers, run on solar, use recyclable water. And next to it, I would have the training center, so my ladies won't have so much — how do you call it, manual labor? More of doing a service of maybe pick and delivery and maybe doing the laundry when people drop it off and have more time for the trainings, more time for their families, more time to plan for their businesses. And actually, some people who would come around to do their own laundry would have a chance to visit our training center. You never know, they might support someone. So, I'm consulting a Fellow who was in my — the best thing I also got from YALI was the networks. So I'm consulting a Fellow who was in our year, 2015, Daisy Karimi — she's an engineer for solar—advised on how I could work out with the solar. And also consulting another Fellow in Mauritius [INAUDIBLE] — he's an architect — to help me design out. Then I'm working with another Fellow who's a 2016. He's also an engineer, who will be also talking with also Daisy to make sure the solar panels are actually working. And I'm also working with another Fellow from 2016, Joseph Ddungu, who is very good with paperwork, to actually write out my paperwork and also working with the YALI Uganda Fellowship to help me rally and make sure the whole thing works out. So everything is quite YALI branded.

MR. PHILLIPS: It's a YALI project.

MS. MAYANJA: Yeah.

MR. PHILLIPS: Well, I have to say, it's kind of nice to hear a story that starts with you walking into school, saying, "Jamila's awesome," to Barack Obama saying, "Jamila's awesome." And I think it's a nice capstone.

Well, thank you very much for coming. It's been a pleasure to have you here. Jamila Mayanja, who has done incredible work in Uganda, both focused on empowering women, but also moving beyond simply the idea of building confidence, but also identifying the means to grow a business.

[BACKGROUND MUSIC BEGINS]

And we wish you the best of luck with your work moving forward, and really appreciate the time you

gave us today.

MS. MAYANJA: Thank you for having me. It was quite amazing.

MR. PHILLIPS: Good. Thank you.

Thank you everyone for tuning in to another YALI Voices Podcast. And thanks, Jamila, for a great conversation. You can reach Jamila on Facebook at Jamila Mayanja. She's also on Twitter at Jamwiltshire. That's Jamila. You can find her on Facebook and Twitter.

Be sure to come back for more inspiring stories from young African leaders of the YALI Voices Podcast. Join the YALI Network at [YALI.state.gov](http://YALI.state.gov), and be part of something bigger.

Our theme music is "E Go Happen" by Grace Jerry, and produced by her friends, the Presidential Precinct. The YALI Voices Podcast is brought to you by the U.S. Department of State and is part of the Young African Leaders Initiative, which is funded by the U.S. government. Thanks everybody.

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## [Violence Against Persons with Disabilities is a Global Human Rights Issue](#)

(State Dept.)



*From the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor at the U.S. Department of State.*

Over the past two decades, the disability community has more openly discussed the issue of violence against persons with disabilities. As a result, governments and members of society in more countries are paying greater attention to the issue. This increased awareness is also the result of a stronger, more organized disability rights movement, and the impact of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the more recent Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Emerging evidence suggests that women and girls with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to violence, including sexual abuse. Women and girls with disabilities are more likely to experience abuse, and do so over a longer period of time than their non-disabled counterparts. However, they are much less likely to report such crimes to the authorities. To address this kind of challenge, the SDGs call for the disaggregation by disability of proposed indicators for gender-based violence.

Children with disabilities, persons with intellectual disabilities, and persons living in institutional settings also face a greater risk for sexual violence. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, persons with disabilities are more than twice as likely to be a victim of non-fatal violent crime than counterparts in their age group who do not have disabilities. According to a 2004 study of the European Parliament, women with disabilities in the European Union were estimated to be four times more likely to experience sexual abuse than their peers without disabilities.

Violence against people with disabilities has, in many cases, not been properly addressed by law enforcement or judicial systems. People with disabilities often do not have access to the legal system. The law enforcement community may not respond appropriately to reports of violence against people with disabilities, leading to a lack of reporting and prosecution. Governments need to be held accountable to ensure that cases of violence and abuse against persons with disabilities is taken seriously and properly prosecuted. As long as perpetrators' of crimes are not prosecuted, people with disabilities are at great risk of being targeted for violence and abuse, as abusers will know they can do so with relative impunity.

Of course, to truly end the scourge of violence against people with disabilities, we also need to address the social stigma and isolation that accompany a disabled person in far too many parts of the world. That's why the Department of State, through our diplomacy and programs, supports efforts to empower women and men with disabilities, and ensure that they are visible, active participants in their communities.

Violence against persons with disabilities has been ignored by too many for far too long. More governments and civil society are increasingly recognizing abuse on the basis of disability, and are taking action to address this form of discrimination. The women's rights community must work proactively to address violence against women and girls with disabilities. We must also remember to engage in this work those people who become disabled as a consequence of violence, particularly women and girls. It's time that we all recognize its harmful impacts. Violence against persons with disabilities denies us the inalienable human rights we all deserve; and we cannot afford to ignore it any longer.

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## **[HIV/AIDS is a human rights issue too](#)**

Students make a formation in the shape  of the red ribbon, the universal symbol of awareness and support for those living with HIV, during a campaign to mark World AIDS Day. (State.gov)

Since 1988, December 1 has marked [World AIDS Day](#) to commemorate people who have died from the disease and to show support for those who are living with HIV. Because of antiretroviral medication, HIV is no longer an automatic death sentence. But the stigma surrounding people living with the chronic medical condition and their difficulty in getting access to health care has made HIV/AIDS a human rights issue as well as a health challenge.

According to Noor Raad, an HIV/TB policy intern at Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), misinformation has led to much of the stigma faced by people living with HIV. "One of the myths is

that HIV is only for gay men, and so if you have HIV that means that you are participating in that type of behavior,” she said.

“Another myth is just the ways that you can become infected with HIV,” Raad said. Some incorrectly believe that the disease can be transmitted simply by touching someone with HIV or drinking from the same cup.

“Children who are HIV-positive face a lot of discrimination and judgment and social isolation at school because of this. A lot of their peers think that if they sit next to them they can get it, and this is an ongoing problem ... all over the world,” she said.

At the same time, she said, many people fail to understand that sharing a needle actually is a way to get infected.

Raad said HIV is prevalent among groups that are often already marginalized, like sex workers, gay men and drug addicts. She said up to 40 percent of adults in central and southern Africa are HIV-positive, and across sub-Saharan Africa the average infection rate has risen from 25 percent in 2005 to 36 percent today.

“There are a lot of human rights implications that have been raised for people living with HIV — in particular, the large and growing disparities and inequities regarding access to antiretroviral therapies and other forms of care and treatment,” including shortages of medication and an insufficient number of health care personnel, Raad said.

“What ends up happening is patients feel very isolated and they lack peer support,” she said, noting that the isolation can lead to mental health issues, in addition to the challenges of living with HIV. “A lot of the patients that I worked with, I think like 80 percent of them, were either depressed or anxious or had suicidal thoughts, or tried to kill themselves. So I think on top of all of that, if you have negative energy from your peers and you are being socially isolated, it’s just kind of a setup for disaster,” Raad said.

Despite the fact that many countries have laws protecting people living with HIV, the laws are not always enforced. For sex workers, gay men and drug users who are disproportionately affected but whose activities are often criminalized, many fail to seek help, fearing legal punishment as well as the judgment of their community. The result is that those who most need information, education and counselling will not receive it, even where such services are available.

Raad said it is usually not possible for people to hide the fact that they have HIV because it is a required disclosure at work or school, and in smaller communities people will likely know why a person is visiting a health clinic. Those living in poverty or in rural areas also have difficulty accessing medical care when facilities are far away or poorly staffed. Raad said MSF has made supplying decentralized care an important part of its mission, especially in central and West Africa.

There are several ways you can help people with HIV feel less stigmatized, she said.

- Educate yourself on the [myths and facts](#) surrounding HIV transmission.
- Speak out when you hear jokes or derogatory comments made about people with HIV.
- Join a local NGO or support group that is advocating for the rights of people living with HIV or a

support group that is actively trying to combat stigma and get medications to them.

- Organize a workshop or training session at school or work, or through your community or your religious organization, to spread the word on how to prevent infection and to better educate your peers so those living with HIV will not be targeted or judged.
- If you know someone with HIV, create a safe space for them to talk about their condition and feel less socially isolated. “The fact that they shared that information with you is a pretty big deal,” Raad said, since many don’t even tell their parents or families. “The most important thing is to gain the person’s trust and make them feel that they are not being judged,” she said.

Stay tuned to the YALI Network to find out how to participate in our upcoming human rights course. Earn your certificate and share your stories of what you are doing to promote inclusiveness and end marginalization! Learn more and get involved at [yali.state.gov/4all](http://yali.state.gov/4all)!

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## [Why equality is not the same as equity](#)

The words “equality” and “equity” look similar, sound similar, and even point to the same concept of fairness. So it is understandable if, at first, you think they mean the same thing.

As the YALI Network kicks off its #YALISTands4All campaign focused on human rights, not only the rights but also the opportunities of minority groups and other communities will be discussed in greater detail. Understanding the difference between equality and equity is a great way to start thinking about human rights in your community.

Put in the simplest terms, equality means “sameness,” and equity means “fairness.” People who grew up impoverished are probably familiar with the difference, since they had to work much harder to receive the same level of education as many of their peers or to find networking opportunities that came more easily to others.

(State Dept./Doug Thompson)



Should every student receive exactly the same amount of resources and funding for their education? That is a question of equality. Should students who come from more difficult circumstances get more in order to ensure that they can catch up? That is a question of equity. By ensuring equity, a society can ultimately enjoy equality.

Leslie Lefkow, deputy director for Africa at the organization [Human Rights Watch](#), said these types of questions fall into a broader discussion of access and the differences in how various governments deal with economic, social and cultural rights.

Unfortunately, “what we often see is an overlap between corruption and marginalization of vulnerable sectors of society and access to state attention or resources,” she said.

Governments can address equity by taking action that favors disadvantaged groups. They can devote additional resources, for example, to ensure poorer households are not disproportionately burdened with health or educational expenses, or require businesses and all public services to be [accessible to people with disabilities](#).

But there are also steps you can take for your business, organization or community to be proactive and demonstrate awareness. For example:

- Create a public statement of nondiscrimination with regard to gender, ethnicity, religion, disability or sexual orientation and include it with your written and online materials.
- Actively recruit members of marginalized or disadvantaged communities to be a part of your organization or create formal partnerships that encourage cooperation.
- Train staff, teachers and others not only to value and respect diversity, but also to see each individual as themselves — not as a category or a member of a certain group.

As an individual, don't forget about your own role as an internet user. Lefkow said the internet has "obviously been an incredible tool for people economically ... to access markets and to strengthen entrepreneurs and businesses." But "it also has real potential downsides, like being a vehicle for hate speech and incitement."

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