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## ROLE

### DIRECTOR OF THE NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION, WOMEN ADVANCING THROUGH EDUCATION AND RESISTANCE (W.A.T.E.R.)

You were delighted and very much surprised to receive the invitation from the Director of Public Works, Water and Sanitation, which was sent by the office of Mayor Zambene of Urbana.

As a member of the multi-stakeholder group, you will take part in a dialogue with the Director of Public Works, Water and Sanitation to assess the mayor's proposal to develop a program to create incentives for people to build toilets in their houses and construct piped water systems in selected sites with money coming from the proposed community savings and loan associations.

You are a native of the municipality of Zealandia within the city of Urbana. Five years ago, you started W.A.T.E.R. to mobilize the community against the atrocities committed by water truck drivers and operators. The issues that you see every day are not a question of equity, but are issues of sexism and institutionalized harassment of women, especially young women who are forced to stay home to assure water supplies for their families.

What you want more than anything is to fix the broken water system because you recognize that this is the greatest problem facing women in your community. There's no way to deal with the sexism until the question of water is addressed and solved. You have been harassed in the past by the operators of the water trucks. You have found yourself denied access to water because your political affiliation card was not the same as those controlling the water. According to government records, the poorest communities pay five times more than the wealthier sections of the city. Where potable water is scarce and must be bought, women wait in line through the night to plead with truck drivers for water. Drivers often pit one family against another to gain the highest price. Delivery can take from 3 to 30 days, forcing residents, mostly women, to wait at home because water will not be delivered if no one is home. Girls under 15 years of age are twice as likely to have this responsibility than boys. In many areas dependent on water trucks, women will ride with drivers to assure that the water is delivered, resulting in many sexual attacks.

You have never had the opportunity to have a place at the table when discussing these critical issues. You see some progress now that you will be able to argue for and protect the rights of the women of Zealandia. You also see this as a next step to advance your own public image so that you will be able to challenge the current chair of the *Community Action Committee* that has been established in your community over the past several years. You have been asked several times to join this group but have refused because their issues are not focused directly on THE issues of women and water. You are also against the committee because you feel that they have diverted attention from your mission and depleted valuable resources that should be deployed to address the core issue of women and their abuse by the men involved in regulating water. The

*Community Action Committee's* focus on many issues appears to you to be a terrible distraction, diluting political will and weakening valuable publicity from the issue of water and women.

You have suffered both political and physical harassment from the mayor of the city as well. You have been arrested and jailed several times as a result of your role in demonstrations against the inept water supply system. You know Mayor Zambene well because you have gone out of your way to humiliate the mayor in the eyes of the public. As you prepare for next week's meeting with the Director of Public Works, Water and Sanitation, you are looking around for allies among those invited.

You truly believe that women are the victims of an abusive male-oriented system. It is time to use this political leverage to begin to change the public's view of your municipality. You also recognize that you are seen by the public as inflexible and by politicians as being too focused on just the women's issues at hand. You need to be able to attract men to your cause, especially those with political influence. You believe this should not be that difficult because you are convinced that you have the moral 'high ground' and that this issue will open opportunities for you to gain a position of higher importance and visibility. You have strong self-esteem and a clear vision based on the history that you have within your community. You are seen by your community as a true champion for the women but also looked up to by many of the men in their families.

One of the options you want to work on is to see if you can become a bridge between the local women who are harassed and a few of the truck operators you have befriended who have not been abusive to women. How can you do that? You have to figure out how to work within the system, but not through protests, because while you understand that demonstrations threaten authorities, you recognize that your long-term political goals may be damaged.

But despite your ambitions, you have relatively low influence and few resources. Your funding comes from community contributions and periodically from some international NGOs that support your fight for equity and for women. You have strong legitimate power because you have sustained leadership in fighting against violence, and your followers strongly believe in your role. You know almost everyone who is willing to fight for the rights of women within your community. You also know your chief enemies. Your information comes mostly from your network of individuals working and living in key areas of the community that supply you with formal and informal information. You know a lot of the 'dirt' that exists in communities. One piece of information that you are certain about is the suspicious relationship between the mayor and the owner of the water trucks. You know that this relationship has been more than just friendly. Even though you have evidence, you also know that there is a time and place when that knowledge will be of great value to you. You doubt that anyone else is aware how scandalous this could be. Most importantly you have the charismatic power of conviction and passion. While this passion may not be evident when working in small groups, it is widely known in the community that you have many committed followers among the women of Zealandia.

