Prof Miriam Were was born in 1940. She obtained a degree in Natural Sciences from William Penn College, IOWA USA in 1964 and postgraduate Diploma in Education from Makerere University in 1966. Thereafter she taught High School Chemistry and Biology. Miriam qualified as a medical doctor from the University of Nairobi in 1973 and was cited as the overall best-graduating student. Subsequently, she obtained both the MPH (1976) and Doctor of Public Health (1981) from the Johns Hopkins University in the USA. During her PhD studies, she was also awarded the George P. Tolbert Health Award for outstanding contribution to International Health.

Prof Were joined the University of Nairobi as a lecturer in the Department of Community Health in the Faculty of Health Sciences in 1974. While in the Department, she initiated the Community-Based Health Care (CBHC) project in Kakamega of which she was the Director in the period 1976 to 1982. This project won the UNICEF Maurice Pate Award of 1978, the first time an African institution had won this award. She left the university in 1985 when she became the Chief Health and Nutrition/Senior PHC Adviser, UNICEF Ethiopia, a position she held until 1990 when she was appointed the Representative and Chief of Mission, World Health Organization to Ethiopia in Addis Ababa. Miriam served in this position until 1993 when she was elevated to become the Director, United Nations Population Fund Country Support Team Addis Ababa (UNFPA/CSTAA), a position she held until 2000.

Miriam has also served on the boards local and international organizations such as UZIMA Foundation, AMREF, National AIDS Control Council (NACC), Kenya Anticorruption Commission (KACC), MAP International, Global Health Workforce Alliance, and Action Africa Help – International, among others.

Prof Miriam K. Were has been recognized for her work in community health by many institutions. Recently, she received the Hideyo Noguchi Africa Prize for medical services because of her efforts to bring basic medical services and health rights to women and children in the villages of East Africa. She has been a beacon of hope for millions of people in Africa and the world.

She has also been commended for her battle against HIV and AIDS, utilizing a unique style of work through the direct engagement of the youth, sex workers, intravenous drug users, homosexuals and others to encourage openness and frank discussion on sexuality and HIV and AIDS. This has galvanized communities in Kenya in the fight against AIDS and has also
contributed to the reduction of stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV and AIDS. Prof Were is a dedicated advocate for the vulnerable populations, especially the poor and the marginalized. She is also committed to the empowerment and development of all voices across lines of sex, tribe, and age and class background. Widows and orphans severely affected by HIV and AIDS are amongst those most positively touched by her contribution to expanding access to medical services.