



WOMEN AT THE PEACE TABLE



Making a Difference

Sanam Naraghi Anderlini



United Nations Development Fund for Women



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UNIFEM is the women's fund at the United Nations. It provides financial and technical assistance to innovative programmes and strategies that promote women's human rights, political participation and economic security. UNIFEM works in partnership with UN organizations, governments, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and networks to promote gender equality. It links women's issues and concerns to national, regional and global agendas, by fostering collaboration and providing technical expertise on gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment strategies.

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Women at the Peace Table: Making a Difference

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*“Human beings are like parts of a body,
created from the same essence.
when one part is hurt and in pain,
The others cannot remain in peace and be quiet.
If the misery of others leaves you indifferent
and with no feelings of sorrow,
you cannot be called a human being.”*

—Saadi (C13th Persian poet)

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Lysistrata: In the last war we were too modest to object. . .

Magistrate: Quite right too, by Zeus.

Lysistrata: Right? That we should not be allowed to make the least suggestion to you, no matter how much you mismanage the City's affairs? . . . That's why we women got together and decided we were going to save Greece. . .

Magistrate: But the international situation at present is in a hopeless muddle. How do you propose to unravel it?

Lysistrata: Well, take a tangled skein of wool for example. We take it so, put it to the spindle, unwind it this way, now that way. That's how we'll unravel this war, if you let us. . .

Magistrate: Are you such idiots as to think that you can solve serious problems with spindles and bits of wool?

Lysistrata: As a matter of fact, it might not be so idiotic as you think to run the whole city entirely on the model of the way we deal with wool. . . The first thing you do with wool is wash the grease out of it; you can do the same with the City. Then you stretch out the citizen body on a bench and pick out the burrs – that is, the parasites. After that you prise apart the club-members who form themselves into knots and clots to get into power, and when you've separated them, pick them out one by one. Then you're ready for the carding: they can all go into the basket of civic goodwill. . . Not only that, Athens has many colonies. At the moment these are lying around all over the place, like stray bits and pieces of fleece. You should pick them up and bring them here, put them all together, and then out of all this make an enormous great ball of wool – and from that you can make the People a coat.

—From 'Lysistrata' by Aristophanes (c.447 B.C.- c. 385 B.C.)

Preface

*“We need to build
bridges and strengthen
partnerships between
the United Nations,
governments and civil
society organisations in
our collective effort to
build sustainable peace
and human security
throughout the world.”*

—Noleen Heyzer
Executive Director, UNIFEM

Women Making Peace

The end of the Cold War sparked hopes of new possibilities for higher levels of cooperation among countries. Instead, the number of nation-states has increased, breaking along the fault lines of ethnicity, language and religion, and fueling more intra-state conflicts than at any time in human history. The battlefield has moved to the village, the street and the home. Civilians represent the overwhelming majority of the victims of war, with women and girls targeted for special forms of attack. They are raped, forced into marriages, abducted by warring groups and exposed to the scourge of HIV/AIDS.

Even as women around the world are finding many new platforms to express their ideas and concerns, women's priorities in countries suffering armed violence continue to be largely marginalized. This occurs in large part because women's voices are rarely heard at the peace table. To change this situation and to curtail the cycle of poverty and violence that results, we must continue to support women's leadership in times of peace, but we must also make greater efforts to assist their attempts to participate as decision-makers in times of war.

An important first step is to recognize that despite the many challenges they face, women across Asia, Africa, Europe, and North and South America are already at the forefront of many peace efforts. At the grassroots and community levels, women have organized to resist militarisation, to create space for dialogue and moderation, and to weave together the ripped fabric of society. They have spoken against the use of violence as a strategy for personal or communal gain, and they have fought for recognition of the fact that violence can never be compatible with human development. Women's commitment to peace also remains critical to ensuring the sustainability of peace agreements signed by political and military factions.

Within the UN system, UNIFEM is playing a lead role in highlighting the different ways in which women can be empowered to become leaders at all levels of peace-building. Since 1993, the fund has supported a comprehensive programme

aimed at cultivating the leadership and peace-making skills of women in all phases of the conflict and peace continuum. Initiatives in Africa include assistance to Burundian women's peace efforts, such as their attempts to participate in the Arusha peace talks; support to build the capacity of women from the Sudan to influence peace negotiations at both the community and national levels; and facilitation of the establishment of the Federation of African Women's Peace Networks, whose activities to date have included missions of preventive diplomacy to countries such as Ethiopia and Eritrea. In South Asia, UNIFEM has assisted in the creation of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Women for Peace Network, which represents a strong advocacy platform for peace. In Eastern Europe and the Countries of Independent States (CIS), UNIFEM is supporting efforts to strengthen networking and dialogue between women leaders who are able to influence the peace and security agenda in the region. Similar initiatives are currently being developed in Central America and the Andean region, in consultation with UNIFEM's partner organizations in Colombia and Guatemala, who are promoting peace and women's human rights efforts.

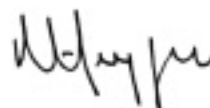
UNIFEM's cross-regional experience highlights the wealth of knowledge and expertise on peace-building issues that exists among civil society groups around the world. It also confirms that sustainable peace is in many ways dependent on local involvement and ownership of the process. Women have found ways to integrate their experiences at the ground level into peace-building efforts. The role of the United Nations and the global UN conferences in supporting networks that link local, national, and international initiatives is critical to this process.

In May 1999, UNIFEM joined forces with a number of international and local non-governmental organisations at the Hague Appeal for Peace Conference in the Netherlands. Organized by civil society groups, the conference marked the centennial anniversary of the first international peace conference held in the Hague in 1899. Women peace activists and leaders from around the world, many supported by UNIFEM,

gathered to exchange their experiences on the effective strategies that they have developed to influence peace processes within their nations and communities. The gathering reinforced UNIFEM's dedication to strengthening the pool of transformative women leaders within countries in transition from war to peace. Equipped with the requisite vision and commitment, and with continued support from international partners such as UNIFEM, these leaders are working to reinvent the systems and structures that still impede social justice and gender equality.

Women at the Peace Table: Making a Difference is part of UNIFEM's ongoing commitment to promoting women's leadership through cross-regional learning. By drawing on interviews with prominent women peace leaders in different parts of the world, it highlights the strategies that women have employed to make a positive impact on peace negotiations. The publication goes beyond elaborating what women stand to gain from their full inclusion in peace processes to focus on what peace processes stand to lose when women's wealth of experiences, creativity and knowledge are excluded.

A world of sustainable peace – a world without war – is too heavy a burden to be left in the hands of any one institution, government or gender. All human resources and creativity must be pooled together, and the burden should be shared. We need to build bridges and strengthen partnerships between the United Nations, governments and civil society organisations in our collective effort to build sustainable peace and human security throughout the world. Women and men must work together to shape the kind of future that they, their families and communities need – a future free of violence, hatred and fear, in which all people can live their lives to their fullest potential.



Noeleen Heyzer
Executive Director, UNIFEM

"We looked at peace-making not as a personal agenda for power, but as issues dealing with life and death. We did not try to appease each other. Most of our dialogue was very, very difficult. We described things as they were. We were honest with each other. We clashed, we argued, some cried, some fought, some walked out, but when we got back together, we said that means these are the real issues..."

—Hanan Ashrawi

Introduction

“Peace accords are often seen as a culminating point of a peace process. In the language of governments and the military, the accords are referred to as an end-game scenario... In reality, the accords are nothing more than opening a door into a whole new labyrinth of rooms that invite us to continue in the process of redefining our relationships.”

—John Paul Lederach¹

The negotiations leading to peace are never simple. They are wrapped in history and identity, in the struggle for power and the quest for justice, in personal loss, grief, fear and uncertainty. In contemporary civil wars and internal conflicts, where violence reaches into homes and villages, sometimes pitting neighbours against each other, peace cannot be imposed from above. The burden of peace-making and peace-building must be shared by all members of society.

Yet from Dayton to Rambouillet, Arusha to Colombia, it is predominantly male leaders of the fighting parties who are negotiating an end to war and laying the foundations for peace.² The justification often given is that the peace table must bring together those who have taken up arms, because it is up to them to stop the conflict. While this argument may hold true for negotiations to secure an end to hostilities, it cannot be sustained for the discussions that build the framework for a new society. The process of reconstructing a society emerging from war requires the equal contributions of men and women. Ensuring women’s participation in such negotiations enhances the legitimacy of the process by making it more democratic and responsive to the priorities of all sectors of the affected population.

The peace table is not a single event. It spans the entire process of negotiations, often beginning in the midst of war, and continuing through the various phases of the transition to peace. It is the pivotal component of a process that addresses all aspects of peace-making, and provides a platform for negotiating agreements on new legislation, structures of governance and social institutions. The wide spectrum of issues covered under the agenda of peace negotiations can include: power-sharing agreements; economic reconstruction; demobilization and reintegration of soldiers; legislation on human rights; access to land, education and health; the status of displaced people; and the empowerment of civil society. These issues have long-term effects on the lives of every man and woman, not least because the civilian population is largely responsible for translating the agreements reached into concrete initiatives

for reconstruction long after the ink has dried on the accords themselves.

The aim of this publication is to advance discussions on the impact of women's contributions to peace negotiation processes. Through a series of interviews with women who have played prominent roles in peace processes around the world, it outlines the challenges they have faced, the strategies they have developed to bring their voices to the decision-making arena, and the difference that they have made through their efforts. *Women at the Peace Table: Making a Difference* is far from being a definitive study, and it does not presume to represent the views of all women participating in peace processes. It seeks simply to explore the issues through the perspectives of women leaders who are breaking new ground in peace-making, shaping civil society and strengthening democracy in their countries.

The Case for Women's Participation

Some observers argue that women who participate in peace negotiations behave no differently than their male counterparts. They may not represent the views and concerns of women at large; they are often divided along political, racial and ideological lines; and they may not be more competent peace-makers than men. In reality, both men and women exert positive and negative influences on peace talks, and often individual personalities sway the dynamics of the

process. The case being put forth here is that women with an understanding of social justice and of the ways that gender inequality hinders human development can make peace negotiations more constructive, more inclusive and more sustainable. Their absence from this process results in setbacks to the development of society at large and undermines democracy.

International consensus has already been reached on the need to include women in all aspects of decision-making related to peace. The UN General Assembly has passed resolutions calling for women's increased participation.³ The Beijing Platform for Action, signed by 189 countries at the 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women, promotes women's equal participation at all stages of the peace process, including at the level of decision-making.⁴ The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, ratified to date by 165 countries, calls for using quotas and reservations to increase the number of women at all levels of political decision-making.⁵ Various regional organizations and national governments have taken important steps to implement these agreements.

International resolve to safeguard women's human rights in conflict situations has also been strengthened in recent years, in response to the increased targeting of women as weapons of war. The ad hoc criminal tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia have made unprecedented

progress in prosecuting gender-based crimes, including acts of sexual violence. The statute for the establishment of the International Criminal Court⁶ has recognized gender as a basis for persecution and has listed rape, enforced prostitution and other forms of sexual violence as war crimes and as crimes against humanity.

The consequences of war on women and the need for their participation in conflict resolution processes is reiterated in the 1996 UN-commissioned study *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*.⁷ In reviewing the plight of children in conflict zones worldwide, the study calls upon the international community to take action to ensure greater protection for both women and children. It recognizes the critical roles women play during conflict and in post-conflict reconstruction processes, and calls for the inclusion of women as key members in the planning and implementation of relief, rehabilitation, peace-making, reconciliation and reconstruction programmes.

Women in conflict situations around the world are drawing on international commitments and policy guidelines such as these to advocate for their participation in peace processes at regional and national levels. In situations of war, women have assumed new activist roles in the process of holding together their communities. They have recognized that while they often bear the sole responsibility of providing for their families, educating their children and caring for the wounded, they have

little control over the systems of decision-making that determine the course and the duration of the conflict. Women's efforts to influence these systems have been stepped up in the aftermath of the Beijing conference, which has heightened awareness of the extent of women's under-representation and marginalization in peace negotiation processes.

There exists a well-documented body of knowledge on the range of approaches and strategies that women have employed to build and sustain peace at community levels.⁸ By bringing these experiences to the peace table, women can inject the negotiations with a practical understanding of the various challenges faced by civilian populations and the most concrete and effective mechanisms for addressing them. This can advance the prospects for sustainable peace by ensuring that the paper agreements signed at the table respond to the daily realities on the ground.

Women's experiences during conflict can also imbue them with a deeper understanding of the social, economic and gender inequalities they face in society. Within the context of defining the economic and social reconstruction agenda, they can effectively articulate and redress these disparities. Participation at the peace table can offer women the opportunity to secure political gains on a wide range of issues that are related to the advancement of women's rights and gender equality. These include economic security, social development and political participation. In this sense, the

peace table becomes a platform for transforming institutions and structures, and opening the door to greater social justice.

With a clear international mandate and a wealth of knowledge derived from their practical experiences in building peace within communities, women have a strong justification for claiming equal participation at the peace table. Many of the women taking the lead in promoting visions of peace and social justice are emerging through community-based groups, women's movements and civil society organizations. Some are now making their way into the arena of political decision-making. Their efforts in this direction would benefit from increased national, regional and international support.

The women interviewed for this book form part of a growing movement that is determined to push forward an agenda advocating inclusion, equality and a notion of peace defined in terms of human security.⁹ In working to strengthen partnerships between governments and civil society, these leaders are helping to transform the structures and institutions that perpetuate the injustices and inequalities often lying at the root of war.

A Brief Outline

The chapters presented here cover three broad areas based on the narratives of the contributors. Chapter One provides an overview of the obstacles that these women have faced and the strategies they

have adopted in their efforts to reach the formal peace table. Chapter Two reflects on their experiences at the peace table itself, including the contributions that they have made. Chapter Three is a brief survey of international commitments to increase women's participation in peace negotiations and related decision-making processes. It offers examples of concrete ways in which women have harnessed these agreements to advance the peace agenda at national and international levels.

Inevitably, this discussion will raise far more questions than it can answer. The views expressed here are those of a small number of women speaking on the subject of strengthening women's leadership in peace-making. Some observers would argue that the contributions of women from one side of a conflict should be matched with those of women from the other side; that the views of these women should be compared to the those of men; and that grassroots perspectives should be given as much prominence as the reflections of women in higher levels of political leadership.

Within the constraints of space and time, we have attempted to draw upon experiences and perspectives from diverse regions and sectors. The contributors to this publications include government representatives, civil society leaders, and some who have served in both capacities. Some have been most active in the pre-negotiations phases, others have been negotiators or played consultative roles,

and a few have contributed to the reconstruction of their countries. Together, they represent a small cross-section of all those who are working to advance the agenda for human security. It is our hope that their reflections will enrich our collective understanding of the many ways in which women contribute positively to the process of building and sustaining peace.

Notes

¹ John Paul Lederach, "Just Peace - the Challenge of the 21st Century," from *People Building Peace* (Utrecht: European Centre for Conflict Prevention, 1999), p. 33.

² At the Dayton Peace Talks, there were no women present in the regional delegations. At Rambouillet, there was one Kosovar woman. At Arusha, the women's delegation continues to have only observer status. In Tajikistan, there is one woman on the 26-member National Reconciliation Commission.

³ Available at gopher://gopher.un.org:70/00/ga/recs/37/63

⁴ Fourth World Conference on Women, The Beijing Platform for Action (New York: United Nations, 1996). Available at www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/.

⁵ See www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw.

⁶ The ICC Rome Statute currently has 94 signatories and 6 ratifications. Sixty countries must ratify the statute before the court can be established. See the home page of the Coalition for the ICC at www.igc.apc.org/icc/index.html.

⁷ It was authored by Graça Machel, the internationally renowned Mozambican advocate for women's and children's rights. *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children* (New York: UNICEF, 1996). Available at <http://www.unicef.org/graca/>.

⁸ Birgitte Sorensen, *Women and Post-conflict Reconstruction* (Geneva: UN Research Institute for Social Development in War Torn Societies Project, 1998).

⁹ Lloyd Axworthy, *Safety for People in a Changing World* (Montreal: Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 1999).

I. The First Steps to the Peace Table

"The people who know war, those who have experienced it...are the most earnest advocates of peace in the world."

—Dwight D. Eisenhower¹

Whether or not they are invited to the peace table, women in war zones around the world are mobilizing to assert their right to participate in a process that bears consequences affecting all aspects of their lives. For them, the peace table is a forum not only for negotiating the end to war, but also for laying the foundations of a new society guided by the principles of social justice, human rights and equality. Women are making clear that they will no longer shoulder the responsibility of supporting their families and communities, serve at the forefront of anti-war movements, or fight alongside male combatants² without an equal opportunity to voice their ideas in official peace negotiations.

Although there is an emerging international consensus that women have the right to participate in political power and decision-making processes, most of the opportunities that have arisen in recent years have been confined to peacetime politics. Women's efforts to participate in peace negotiations processes have met with more limited success, in part because the obstacles in many cases are greater. The polarized and tense atmosphere of conflict negotiations tends to reinforce prevailing social attitudes that exclude women. Political power usually rests firmly in the hands of an exclusive, predominantly male elite. They regard the concerns and actions of women, be they public marches or cross-community development projects, as separate from the formal political processes. "Gender is an issue that has little or no interest to the political parties and has even less appeal to the instigators of war," says Senator Piedad Cordoba Ruiz, a staunch champion of both peace and women's rights in Colombia. A clear demonstration of this occurred at the Burundi peace talks, where male delegates told the facilitator, "The women are not parties to this conflict. This is not their concern. We cannot see why they have come, why they bother us. We are here and we represent them."³

Resistance to women's participation in peace negotiations is evident across regions and sectors of society, and throughout various stages of the transition process. Many within Guatemala's indigenous communities perceive the political mobilization of

women as a direct threat to their culture and traditions. Long-time peace activist Emma Chirix says that even a significant number of indigenous women themselves express little interest in the goal of women's empowerment and education. In the ex-Soviet republics, although women attained equal access to education during the communist era, a combination of economic decline and nationalism has today increased the marginalization of women in political decision-making, including in national and regional peace-making fora.

Even women who have played an active role in conflicts have found themselves pushed aside with the advent of negotiations. In Kashmir, the justification for excluding women, says human rights activist Rita Manchanda, is "that their involvement would make them more vulnerable."⁴ She argues that they are already targeted by militias on all sides, but that at least by being involved in the political dialogue they have a voice. In Palestine, although the peace process is not yet complete, women are once again experiencing pressure to return to their traditional roles. Veteran peace activist and negotiator Hanan Ashrawi says that when

the immediate dangers receded, the men adopted a very patronizing, patriarchal attitude of "good for you, you've done your national duty, now go back to the kitchen."

Women's efforts to participate in formal peace processes are often curbed by security concerns. In Colombia, Senator Cordoba Ruiz was abducted and physically threatened for her efforts to facilitate a dialogue process for peace among parties to the

conflict. In Georgia, peace activist Nani Chanishvili, now a Member of Parliament, was held hostage by Abkhaz separatists. Although such concerns are not limited to women, the culture of militarism that permeates societies in conflict can reinforce gender-based discrimination. In

Cyprus, says Sevgul Uludag, a journalist and founder of the Women's Research Center, members of the Women's Movement for Peace and a Federal Solution in Cyprus were derided by local newspapers as "sexual maniacs" and were told to sit at home and care for their children.⁵

Since women's peace activism has been largely confined to grassroots and civic organizing, women often face an uphill struggle to reach official political



Women's peace activism is paving the way for new laws and policies that emphasize women's rights and equality.

structures, partly because they lack resources or experience in developing effective strategies for engagement. The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition barely had sufficient funds to publish a manifesto and campaign effectively during the 1996 elections, and despite an estimated 400 women's groups working on peace-building and reconciliation in the region there is still limited participation of women in political power structures. In Bosnia, says Mevlida Kunosic-Vlajic, a former chemical engineer turned parliamentarian and peace activist, women actively supported the war effort by caring for soldiers and becoming the primary income earners for their families. They were excluded once the peace process began in 1995, however, because they had little understanding of how to strategize politically. Kunosic-Vlajic recalls, "We kept asking ourselves, what is our role in society now? What is our role in the family? We are not needed."⁶

Women's Activism

In spite of the obstacles they encounter, women in all regions of the world are devising creative and effective strategies to advocate for peace and to participate in peace-making processes. In the Philippines, women initiated village peace zones to protect their children from recruitment by militias and the state army. In the Balkans and the Caucasus,

women resisted the military recruitment of husbands and sons through hiding them, lying to the authorities and even arriving at the front lines to take them home.⁷ In Colombia, women walked together to the most violent regions in the country as part of the Peaceful Road of Women campaign.

Women's peace activism is fostered in some places by the more general women's movement and the struggle for women's rights and gender equality. In other cases, it is simultaneously paving the way for women's involvement in official peace negotiations and nurturing women's activism on a range of other development issues. A common theme that emerges through this publication is that strong women's civil society organizations cultivate skills and broaden opportunities for women to gain entry to the peace process. In the turmoil of conflict, women's activists are coming together to articulate new social agendas that link peace to critical development issues. They are mobilizing public support and swaying powerful political structures to create new laws and policies.

They are also forming strong coalitions that use gender to bridge deep political, ethnic and religious divides. In protracted conflicts such as the one in Northern Ireland, women collaborated on cross-community programmes relating to child care, health and micro-enterprise. In Rwanda, Burundi and Bosnia, they have been at the forefront of

community-based conflict resolution and reconciliation projects. For Mevlida Kunosic-Vlajic, the gender dimension in Bosnia became clear after the war, when Serb and Moslem women met for the first time in five years. "It was like looking into a mirror," she says. While there was shared anger and disillusionment in their leadership, the women also felt a strong sense of belonging among themselves.

Forming women's organizations and alliances can be a process fraught with difficulty, especially where women are divided along political lines. Women's groups first have to strengthen gender awareness within their constituencies. Palestinian women started attempting to build a coalition during the 1970s, Hanan Ashrawi recalls. "Most of the women's organizations were extensions of the political organizations, and they competed," she says. "We thought we could deal with women's issues as a unifying factor, an area of convergence, rather than subject our commonality as women to the divisions of factional politics and rivalries." The approach did not work. Many of Ashrawi's most vicious detractors were women who rejected the notion of a negotiated peace with Israel,

and were unwilling to support a broad-based women's peace movement. It took a decade and the events of the Intifada to galvanize Palestinian women into forming a strong cross-party coalition.

The task of building gender alliances across the Palestinian-Israeli divide was equally daunting. "At first, we had a very hard time," Ashrawi says about an initiative that led to the formation of the influ-

ential Israeli-Palestinian group Jerusalem Link. "They would say, 'This is a political issue, you can't bring women's issues into it.' We said, 'You belong to a military system that is extremely male-oriented, male-dominated. We come from a patriarchal society too, but we have to articulate our own message.'"

In many cases, a broad-based coalition gives women a powerful voice and a platform for wider political influence. The challenge then becomes to convince their male-dominated political parties

that women have a right to be present at the peace table, that they bring different perspectives, and that they make contributions critical to the building of sustainable peace. In South Africa, says Cheryl Carolus, now her country's High Commissioner to Great Britain, "a big part

"We thought we could deal with women's issues as a unifying factor, an area of convergence, rather than subject our commonality as women to the divisions of factional politics and rivalries."

Hanan Ashrawi

of the negotiations process was held in our own political party structures and in our own civil society organs.” Having seen other women’s liberation movements fall by the wayside when the peace talks began, the South Africans were determined to secure their place in the official negotiating teams. She says, “We were not going to allow ourselves to be treated so badly, after we had made equal contributions and sacrifices to the struggle for liberation.”

Drawing on the Strength of the Women’s Movement

The existence of a strong women’s movement can provide important opportunities for women to enter political processes. Where there is a tradition of women’s activism, there tends to be a higher level of consciousness regarding political, cultural, economic and social issues. This can be mobilized for peace activism, while existing networks and political experience can provide a platform for women to lobby for access to peace negotiations. Women’s civil society organizations are also critical to the development and the realization of women’s full capacities for leadership. Reflecting on her experiences in South Africa, Cheryl Carolus says, “My main line of organization was always in the women’s movement. I really grew and developed because of the way women in these organizations nurtured me and gave me opportunities.”

As the following cases from South Africa, Northern Ireland and Guatemala indicate, existing networks of women’s groups can assist in activities such as launching a political campaign, rallying support for anti-war actions and advocating for participation in decision-making processes.

❖ *South Africa: The Principle of Inclusion*
South Africa’s apartheid policy started in the 19th century, when white settlers adopted a policy to exclude the indigenous black population. During the 1940s, a system of oppression came into full force, with every citizen in the country classified according to race: black, coloured, Asian, or white. The categories determined people’s place of abode, their education, the professions they could enter, whom they could marry, and their political rights. The majority black population was forced to live in townships, often far from their place of work. Between 1945 and 1991, an estimated 11 million people were arrested for violating the segregation laws.

The government policy was to keep the black population oppressed and under-developed, but available for menial work. Uprisings and protests were violently suppressed, and countless black leaders of the battle for freedom were killed and arrested, but the struggle to end apartheid never died. By 1990, the weight of international pressure and sanctions had forced President P. W.

de Klerk and moderates in the ruling National Party to concede that the exclusion of the majority from political processes was no longer feasible. After 27 years in prison, independence leader Nelson Mandela was released. In 1991 a national peace accord was signed, followed by a draft Constitution in 1993. In 1994, Mandela and the African National Congress won the country's first free and fair elections.

Women were extensively involved in the political struggle, and reached high level positions in major political organizations such as the African National Congress (ANC). For many women, the tradition of local activism became a training ground for work in larger arenas. In the early 1980s, community organizations for women grew out of concerns over housing and safety issues. "Women were more likely to join women's organizations, because if they belonged to general civic groups with their husbands and they disagreed with him, they couldn't say so," says Cheryl Carolus. "We spent a lot of time talking about the status of women in transformation at the community level and our involvement with the liberation movement. At some point, women started moving into broader civic structures, and we felt dispirited. But then we realized that maybe this was an important role of the women's movement."

The anti-apartheid struggle brought women from across the social and racial spectrum together around common

issues. Carolus remembers what happened when an organization called Black Sash, which consisted mainly of the liberal wives of English speaking big businessmen, found itself in an anti-apartheid federation with the Domestic Workers' Union. "It would never have occurred to them to speak to their domestic workers at home," Carolus says. "Now they were part of a coalition where the president was a domestic worker. Together, both the rich and poor women became aware that they had suffered in many of the same ways. They realized that rich and poor men can treat women with the same humiliation. So it was coming together around the issue of dignity."

In the years leading up to the 1994 elections, activists formed a strong National Women's Coalition that cut across racial, social and political lines. Realizing that women had an historic opportunity to contribute to reconciliation through the writing of South Africa's Constitution, the coalition mobilized grassroots political support around an ANC proposal that women should be equally represented among the negotiators. Despite shouts of tokenism, the resolution passed. Today, South Africa has one of the most democratic governments in the world, and a constitutional guarantee of equality. Attitudes have started to change too. "If women aren't part of some important body or activity, people ask why they aren't there," Carolus says.

She adds, "I cannot overemphasize the need for women to organize together as women, to make sure that there is a coherent movement, that we listen to one another, that those of us who are sitting in the process are considering the needs and concerns of all women. Everything else flows from there."

❖ *Northern Ireland:*

A Women's Political Party

While they were outside of the political hierarchy, some 400 grassroots women's peace organizations were active in Northern Ireland for over a decade before peace talks began in 1985. Working on issues such as childcare, education, health, and micro-enterprise, women from both the Catholic and Protestant communities came together for dialogue and collaboration. When it became necessary for women to launch a formal political campaign for participation at the peace table, the women's movement proved to be a powerful force.

Although the Northern Ireland conflict dates back to Anglo-Irish disputes that began in the 12th century, the latest cycle of violence between Catholics and Protestants was re-ignited in 1968 when Catholic civil rights activists confronted the Royal Ulster Constabulary. In

1969, a campaign of violence began. At the heart of the conflict lay the identity and ownership of the province, with Catholics hoping for reunification with the Republic of Ireland and Protestants seeking to remain loyal to the British government. The conflict, characterized by public bombing campaigns in the province and in mainland Britain, continued for many years, with failed attempts at bringing

resolution. In 1985, the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed, and although the violence did not cease, it set the stage for exploratory talks. The Downing Street Declaration followed in 1993, and although neither the Republicans nor the Unionists were fully satisfied with it, a cease-fire was declared the following year.⁸

In 1996, international mediator George Mitchell entered the process, declaring that a primary condition for participation in the

official talks was that parties had to be elected; the top ten parties in the region would be included. For smaller political parties and community-based action groups, the six-week preparation time for the elections was daunting. However, for the countless women's groups and organizations that had spent years working across communities, breaking new ground and building peace at that level, the idea of

"I cannot overemphasize the need for women to make sure that those of us who are sitting in the process are considering the needs and concerns of all women."

Cheryl Carolus

being excluded from the official talks process was unacceptable.

A small group of women activists convened a meeting, inviting representatives from over 200 women's organizations to strategize and intervene in the elections process. The result of this meeting was the creation of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC). It was the first women-dominated political party, with members from both the Catholic and Protestant communities. To manage the diversity of their constituency, the NIWC declared that its three guiding principles would be inclusion, equality and human rights. By galvanizing women at the grassroots, the NIWC succeeded in winning two seats in the local elections. It came in ninth overall, but this was sufficient to secure a seat at the peace table.

❖ *Guatemala: Visibility for All*

In Guatemala, women were active in all aspects of the 36-year-long civil war, and a politically-inclined women's movement existed with links to the formal political parties. As the peace process commenced, women began to play key roles in both civil society forums and at the peace table. The existence of a cross-party and cross-sectoral women's coalition enabled the nascent indigenous women's movement to gain entry to the peace process, giving voice and visibility to the needs of Guatemala's indigenous women's population.

The conflict in Guatemala was typical of the cold war era. It began in 1960 as a

struggle between the US-backed military and a variety of rebel and guerrilla forces, and escalated throughout the 1970s. The country's large indigenous population was already oppressed and poverty-stricken, but as the war seeped into the countryside, indigenous people too were recruited by the guerrilla forces. In 1982, the rebels united to form the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG). In the months that followed, the army intensified its efforts, and the scale of terror and destruction reached new heights. By 1983, the URNG was weakened, and, with US encouragement, the army agreed to return the country to civilian rule. Presidential and legislative elections were held in 1985. Peace negotiations began in 1987, with the final peace agreement being signed in 1996.

In the decade long process that led to this final agreement, civil society organizations joined together with political parties to identify issues of concern and draft proposals at the Assembly for Civil Society (ACS). These were presented to the parties directly involved in the negotiations. The presence of women in the ACS and also at the peace table created a number of opportunities for women from all sectors of society, says Luz Mendez, the coordinator of the National Union of Guatemalan Women. The Coordination of Organizations of the Mayan People of Guatemala (COPMAGUA), representing over two hundred organizations, also played a critical role in advocating for and securing rights for indigenous peoples.

In March 1995, largely due to its efforts, the Accord on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples was officially signed by all parties.

While indigenous groups first began condemning the war and making a claim for equal treatment in the early 1980s, the rights of indigenous women were overlooked until the 1990s. With little or no access to health care or education, these women are among the most disadvantaged sectors of Guatemalan society, says Emma Chirix, a founding member of Kaqla, the Guatemalan Indigenous Women's Organization. Through her affiliation with COPMAGUA, Chirix succeeded in speaking out about the rights of indigenous women. However, the main breakthrough came when the national women's organizations embraced their cause. Within the ACS, a women's sector was formed to bring together different women's groups, including those representing indigenous women. This acceptance and support was critical. "It was through (the women's movement) that the indigenous women gained entry into the peace process," says Chirix. Their presence in civil society forums and at the peace table subsequently drew attention to their living conditions and need for legal and

development aid, and led to the establishment of the Office for the Defense of Indigenous Women.

Building Peace Movements in the Midst of War

The chaos of conflict sometimes sweeps aside traditional structures and norms, bringing women into the public sphere. This can occur regardless of whether there

is a well-developed women's movement already in place. As conflict fatigue sets in, the momentum for peace activism builds. Ruth Perry, a founding member of the Liberian Women's Initiative and later Head of the National State Council of Liberia, says there comes a time when women say, "Enough

is enough. We are tired of hiding in the bushes, eating grass and burying our dead."

Women often take the lead in movements that arise in the midst of a conflict partly because men are away fighting or face greater risk of persecution and arrest. Ironically, because women are regarded as less threatening to the established order, they tend to have more freedom of action. In some instances, they can make public pleas for peace by taking advantage of sexist notions that for the most part



Social and political transformation often begins in the midst of conflict, when women assume new leadership roles.

discourage retaliation against women. In Liberia, Burundi, Georgia and Palestine, conflict galvanized women not only to form new alliances based on gender, but also to lobby with growing determination for their place at the peace table.

❖ *Liberia: They Have Guns, We Have Faith*

The conflict in Liberia erupted on Christmas Eve 1989, when a few hundred armed men, calling themselves the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), launched a campaign against the regime of the dictator Samuel Doe. The war spread quickly as the national army, the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), counter-attacked. By June 1990, the NPFL, led by Charles Taylor, had control of Monrovia, the capital city. In September, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sent in its Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) to stop the violence. The ceasefire broke down in 1992, and over the next four years, three interim governments were installed, and over a dozen peace accords were signed and broken. The war finally ended in 1997.⁹

In 1993, as the war was still wreaking havoc and destruction across the country, Mary Brownell was a retired school

teacher with no aspirations of becoming a public figure. But, she says, watching people suffer as the regional peace talks faltered was becoming intolerable. In particular, she was struck by the silence of women. "For five years the war was going on, but there was nothing being done in terms of speaking out, making our voices heard. We had women's organizations, but they were largely concerned about

relief," Brownell says. She came up with a "wild idea:" to form a women's pressure group to speak out against the war. After discussing it with friends and a larger group of women, the idea began to take shape. "Some of us weren't sure we'd make it, because they fight us with their guns, and we have nothing" recalls Brownell. "But I said let's go in faith."

The group ran an advertisement on national radio appealing to women to attend a public meeting at

Monrovia's city hall. "And they came out in full," says Brownell. "We told them we can't just sit still any longer. We must get our voices heard and make our presence felt. We have to say we are tired of sitting on the fence and looking up to the men. We want to be a part of this peace negotiation. We want to be a part of the decision-making policies governing our country."

"We are tired of sitting on the fence and looking up to the men. We want to be a part of this peace negotiation. We want to be a part of the decision-making policies governing our country."

Mary Brownell

The women 'caught the vision,' and by January 1994, the Liberian Women's Initiative (LWI) was formed. The movement was open to all women, regardless of ethnic, social religious or political background. "Once you wanted peace in Liberia, you were part of us," Brownell says. "So we had the illiterate women and those with doctorate degrees. All of us made up the LWI."

The strategy they adopted was to take a unified stance on issues that affected everybody. "We needed to have one voice, and we chose disarmament before elections as our point for advocacy," says Ruth Perry. The group was strengthened in its resolve in 1996 when it witnessed the breakdown of the Sierra Leonean peace accords. "Sierra Leone had the best agenda in terms of what they were doing for peace," says Perry. "Unfortunately, the Sierra Leoneans did not go all over the country to talk about disarmament. So they had the election and they had partial disarmament, and then the peace process failed. We learned from them."

Having defined their mission, the LWI developed a strategy to target all parties to the talks and to initiate a programme to physically assist in the collection of small arms. Women even went to the disarmament sites to give the fighters a glass of cold water and a sandwich and thank them for giving up their guns. The movement struck a chord with men too. Brownell says, "When we were demonstrating in the streets, men came and they

bought poster sheets and made posters so that almost every woman could have one. They said, 'Please stop the war. Please stop the fighting. We are dying.'"

The primary goal of the LWI became to attend the regional peace talks and advocate grassroots perspectives directly to the faction leaders. In the early days, funds were raised by auctioning cakes and organizing other informal events. Eventually, assistance came from a variety of sources, including international donors, and the women were able to attend regional peace talks. The war lords were reluctant to acknowledge their existence, says Brownell, and wondered where "we were getting money from to be travelling everywhere!" But the women's persistence paid off. The LWI representatives, although never official participants at the peace table, proved to be highly influential consultants during the process, and acted as monitors to ensure that promises were kept. The initiative has also been a catalyst for bringing women and gender issues into the national political arena.

❖ *Burundi: Mobilizing International Support*

Burundi has suffered from a cycle of ethnic and political violence since the 1960s. The current round was triggered in 1993 with the assassination of Melchior Ndadaye, the first Hutu elected as president. With support from the United Nations, a power-sharing government was established in 1995 between members of

opposing political parties, but in 1996, it collapsed when a Tutsi-dominated military coup brought the current president, Pierre Buyoyo, to power.

Neighboring governments imposed economic sanctions and called for a return to constitutional order. Their initial attempts to initiate a peace process, however, were thwarted in August 1997, when the Burundian government demanded the removal of sanctions as a precondition. Following informal negotiations, the Arusha peace process began. It was facilitated by ex-Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere, since deceased. In July 1998, 17 different political parties met for the first round of the Arusha talks. Five commissions were established to address the issues of democracy and good governance; peace and security for all; the nature of the conflict; reconstruction and economic development; and guarantees for the application of the peace agreement. No civic organizations were allowed to participate.

With the violence continuing unabated and the sanctions taking their toll on civilians, Hutu and Tutsi women from across the social and political spectrum started a protest against this exclusion. They joined together in calling for a place at the peace table, and adopted a strategy of seeking support from regional heads of state. At a sub-regional meeting of women's organizations in Uganda, the Burundian delegates sought President Yoweri Museveni's endorsement. With the blessing of his

government and financial assistance from international donors, the women traveled to Arusha and put their case to ex-President Nyerere. "We said that women represent 52 percent of the population in our country, so how could the problems of our country be discussed when our presence and opinions were being neglected?" recalls Imelda Nzirorera, who works in the Burundian government's Ministry of Human Rights. "We told him that we wanted to present our point of view on peace, because when there is a crisis, we as the women, pick up the pieces." The women told Nyerere that they would no longer accept being just the victims of the conflict. Nyerere was sympathetic, says Nzirorera, but in the end reported back that "your own brothers from Burundi will not accept your participation."

Despite this opposition, the Burundian parties eventually relented and allowed the women to remain as temporary observers at Arusha. They have received support from the international community to sustain their advocacy activities, and have participated in the Commission on Economic Reconstruction and a number of informal seminars and workshops. They have also used the opportunity to establish links and raise awareness of their concerns among international observers. The women's coalition has become a strong rallying point for women throughout Burundi. "There are so many women who encourage us to continue putting on the pressure to participate in the negotiations," says Nzirorera.

❖ *Georgia: Building Equality Step by Step*

In the ex-Soviet republic of Georgia, although women technically had equal opportunities and access to education and employment, there was no tradition of an independent civil society or women's movement. Nevertheless, through their determination to participate in the peace process, women managed to lay the foundations for peace activism and to make their presence felt within the political arena.

The breakdown of the centralized Soviet Union in 1989 led to disputes between and within satellite republics. Tensions mounted between Georgia and the republics of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and North Ossetia, with Tbilisi withdrawing South Ossetia's autonomous status in 1990. A strong nationalist movement within the republic was marginalizing ethnic minorities. As the threat of civil war increased, Nani Chanishvili, then a professor of linguistics, joined with colleagues to form a non-governmental association to campaign for the prevention of armed conflict. Initially, the group captured the attention of political figures and the media.

"They wanted to speak with us because we were politically neutral, a very strong group that included respected women from the university," Chanishvili recalls, adding that many of the women drew credibility from the fact that they were older in age, with families and careers. They sought to mobilize women across ethnic and national divides, and

not just around the issue of peace. The group also spoke about culture, education, health, and women's movements, and organized summer schools, medical clinics and even a peace train. "The best way to make peace is to focus on common activities, common life." Chanishvili says. "If you only speak about peace, no one will tell you they want war. What counts is how you go about bringing peace."

In the end, the nascent movement was not strong enough to influence the course of Georgia's political events. Conflict broke out on three fronts, with the Georgia-Abkhazia war of 1992-93 resulting in the death and displacement of thousands. "We tried to have demonstrations, to engage with political groups," says Chanishvili. "But we could not pressure the political process very much. The women's movement was simply not strong enough."

Her experience, however, led Chanishvili to seek and win a seat in Parliament. She is learning from the inside that the political system provides little opportunity for women to participate in the ongoing peace negotiation process, but she has not been deterred. Chanishvili continues to play a key role in establishing the Gender Development Association of Georgia, and strengthening the foundations of the women's NGO movement across the Caucasus. "We're working through legislation, step by step, to make gender equality visible," she says. A new decree on gender equality is still far from implementation,

she admits, but still the commitment itself is an important beginning.

❖ *Palestine: Collective Power*

For Palestinian women, the Intifada was the catalyst for strengthening women's gender-based alliances, and bringing women's peace and political activism to the fore. Beginning in December 1987, the Intifada was the spontaneous uprising of the Palestinian people living in the Occupied Territories. For the most part, ordinary civilians, shopkeepers, women and children protested non-violently. However, over three years, thousands of Palestinian men and boys were arrested. Women came to the fore, taking up the responsibilities of earning an income, caring for the families single-handedly, and taking the opportunity to enter the public domain.

The uprising also triggered the mass mobilization of women. "They had to come into the open, to take the risks themselves," Hanan Ashrawi says. They seized the opportunity to speak out collectively against the Occupation, and their resistance and active engagement became a source of empowerment and unification. "Women would face the [Israeli] army," says Ashrawi. They were aware of the ingrained sexism of the soldiers, which largely prevented them from firing at women. Even when the shooting began, however, the women were not deterred. "We took the risks. We went ahead. We were beaten up and tear gassed and spat at. It was incredible. But there was

so much collective power," recalls Ashrawi. "The women's demonstrations were the most meaningful, because it was as if they came face to face with issues of life and death – for ourselves, for our children, for our daughters, for generations. It was women who would grapple with the army to rescue people. As one soldier said, he couldn't stand the look of contempt in Palestinian women's eyes, and he knew that we weren't scared."

The Intifada was also a time when women began to challenge prevailing attitudes and perceptions regarding gender roles. In the case of a woman released from jail for political activities, for example, the traditional response would have been to question her virginity. Ashrawi says the activists subverted these norms. "We would celebrate a woman who was in jail and came out of jail, or women who struggled. It meant you paid your debt or duty, it was a source of tremendous pride."

It was during this same period that the ongoing dialogue between Palestinian and Israeli women was also transformed into a political discourse. This was not a simple process. Ashrawi recalls that the women did not try to appease each other, but in the end, they were able to develop a common framework through which the conflict could be understood. "We started with self-determination, and said that a people fighting for self-determination cannot deny it to women, at the individual or the collective level," Ashrawi says. "We had a rally on no-man's land with

Israeli women leaders. We described that area as women's land because it was no-man's land. We gradually developed a common agenda."

Today, the coalition of Israeli and Palestinian women is fully established and recognized in the form of Jerusalem Link, a non-governmental organization that advocates policies on every aspect of the peace process. A number of its founding members, including Ashrawi, participated in the pre-negotiations mediated by the US government, and have been active in the ongoing peace process that was agreed on in Oslo in 1994.

Negotiating Equality During Post-Conflict Reconstruction

Too often, the violence that comes with warfare continues into the private sphere long after official ceasefires are signed. In many cases, the intensity of war and the oppression imposed by fighting factions provides no chance for civil society mobilization or women's peace activism in the time leading up to the peace table and ceasefire agreements. Even if women are excluded from the actual peace talks, however, it remains equally critical to draw on their contributions in shaping longer-term reconstruction and reconciliation programmes. Women's participation

in the peace process can foster a wider popular mandate for peace and contribute to making it more sustainable. Women's peace activists around the world have also found new opportunities to address women's development issues in this context, and in ways that promote women's rights, advance social justice and benefit societies at large. In Cambodia, women first created a vibrant

civil society movement, in part through the intervention of the international community, and then went on to build a comprehensive new programme for women's development.

❖ Cambodia: From Stained Cloth to Precious Gems

Cambodia's decades of devastating conflict began with the spill-over of the Vietnam War in the 1960s. The country, already divided politically, slid into turmoil. With the rise of

Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge's Year Zero programme, Cambodia experienced the genocide of an estimated two million people. Superpower interventions and foreign occupation contributed to the upheaval; there was no opportunity to settle the conflict until the end of the Cold War. In 1991, Cambodia's four warring factions signed a peace accord in Paris, agreeing to a ceasefire and

"I am mobilizing politicians so that we can have a bigger voice, a bigger pool of women leaders to transform the politics of conflict into politics for development."

Mu Sochua

the presence of the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) until elections could be held.¹⁰

Prior to the 1991 agreement, the chaos in Cambodia had allowed no opportunity for a women's movement to emerge. With UNTAC's support, however, the first wave of civil society organizations appeared, and the task of creating a new constitution and rebuilding society began. For Mu Sochua, who had lived in exile for 18 years and worked with Cambodian women in refugee camps along the Thai border, this was the first opportunity to contribute to peace building and women's development inside her country. She says, "When I started organizing projects for women, I realized that our people had suffered a lot, but had no voice."

Mu Sochua founded the first Cambodian NGO, which was called Khemara or Cambodian Women, in 1991. Like the activists of the Liberian Women's Initiative, she chose to campaign around a single issue that was of common concern: elections without violence. The peace in Cambodia was still fragile, however. The accord had not addressed the issue of justice, and many of the perpetrators of the violence were still in power. To bolster the nascent women's movement and to maintain civil society activism, grassroots groups drew on the influence and protection of the religious community.

In 1993, Khemara and other non-governmental groups joined with Buddhist monks in a walk for peace.

Thousands of people spent months crossing the length and breadth of the country. "The government at the time was not open to talking about human rights," says Mu Sochua. "So we mobilized the forces of the monks. They were our shield, so our voices could be heard." But this was just a first step. "I realized, when we were marching with the monks, that our voices, as women, were not being heard at the higher level," she recalls.

Despite numerous setbacks, including the withdrawal of the Khmer Rouge from the peace process in 1992, elections took place in 1993, and the National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC) won. The promise of stability and democracy was shattered, however, when the previously ruling Cambodian people's Party (CPP) forced itself into a power-sharing agreement. This fueled instability over the next four years. In 1997, CPP leader Hun Sen ousted the sitting prime minister, Prince Norodom Ranariddh, and launched an attack against members of FUNCINPEC.

For Mu Sochua, a supporter of FUNCINPEC, this proved to be a turning point. Her own reluctance to enter the "dirty game" of politics gave way to the realization that politics "is not dirty unless you want to make it so." Mu Sochua decided to stand for elections, and won a parliamentary seat in the province where her parents had died of starvation. Working as an advisor on

women's issues to FUNCINPEC leaders, she eventually became head of the Ministry for Women's and Veteran's Affairs.

Her goal there, she says, is to initiate a transformation from within the establishment with the aim of redressing structural inequalities and altering cultural perceptions of women. In Cambodia, cultural norms not only reinforce gender inequalities, but also discourage confrontation. So the challenge is to develop an approach that addresses issues such as violence against women, and raises the awareness of men, without being overtly confrontational and threatening. Mu Sochua says, "I am mobilizing politicians so that we can have a bigger voice, a bigger pool of women leaders to transform the politics of conflict into politics for development."

The aim, she says is not to overturn the cultural identity of the nation, but to focus on the elements within it that oppress women. "There is a Cambodian saying that men are a piece of gold, and women are a piece of cloth," she explains. "The piece of gold, when it is dropped in mud, is still a piece of gold. But a piece of cloth, once it's stained, it's stained forever. If you are a prostitute, if you have been raped, if you are a widow, you are no longer that virginal piece of cloth. But men, whether they are criminals or have cheated on their wives, they are still a piece of gold. When there is such a saying, a perception, then there is something wrong with that culture, and that's when you want to change it."

The ministry has devised a five-year plan called Women are Precious Gems. It places women's development into the wider framework of social justice and universal human rights. Using simple reasoning, rather than confrontation with male colleagues and established local authorities, the ministry is advocating education, health care, economic loans and better living conditions for women. "We ask, 'Can you say that female workers do not deserve better living conditions? Or rural women do not deserve better education? Can you say that?'" Mu Sochua says, adding, "These are things that are very simple. How can you argue with them? You go to the men and women and say, 'Can you argue against them? No one would disagree. So from there you build. The process is very important."

The programme works with youth, gives lectures, and organizes question and answer sessions on issues such as HIV/AIDS and violence against women. Mu Sochua points out that although it has been a slow process, support is growing throughout the country. "There are more and more men who say, 'We want to help. We are with you. We can no longer watch our children being sold, being kidnapped. We're aware that members of our own families are dying of AIDS.'" Implementing the programme is "like a dream with a plan and a roadmap," Mu Sochua says. The ultimate goal is the empowerment of women. "We cannot bring in the answers for them, but we can give them opportunities that they do not have," she says. "It's all about how you are going to change this for yourself."

Notes

- ¹ M. John Pusey, *Eisenhower the President* (New York: Macmillan, 1956).
- ² Dyan E. Mazurana and Susan R. McKay, *Women and Peacebuilding* (Montreal: International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, 1999), pp. 18-19.
- ³ Imelda Nzirorera quoting the response of the Burundian delegates given to the late President Julius Nyerere, the mediator of the Arusha peace talks.
- ⁴ Rita Manchanda, "Armed Conflict and Violence: Women's Experiences in Kashmir," presentation at the Women and Violent Conflict: Global Perspectives conference, London, May 1999.
- ⁵ Sevgul Uludag, "Obstacles in Gender Discrimination," October 20, 1999, in Womenwatch's Women and Armed Conflict discussion at <http://sdnhq.undp.org/ww/women-armdconf/msg00085.html>.
- ⁶ Presentation given at the European launch of the international campaign From the Village Council to the Negotiations Table: Women Building Peace, Geneva, January 20, 2000.
- ⁷ See Mazurana and McKay, pp. 18-19.
- ⁸ Information found at "A Brief History of Northern Ireland," <http://members.tripod.co.uk/~northernireland/nihist.htm>
- ⁹ Information provided in Accord 1, *The Liberian Peace Process 1990-1996* (London: Conciliation Resources, 1996). Available at www.cr.org/accord/sesay1.htm.
- ¹⁰ For more information on the Cambodian conflict and peace process see Accord 5, *Safeguarding Peace: Cambodia's Constitutional Challenge* (London: Conciliation Resources, 1998). Available at www.cr.org/acc_cam/intro.htm.

II. Women at the Peace Table

"Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the minutest details in the activities of man, and she has an equal right of freedom and liberty with him."

—Mahatma Gandhi

At the Dayton Peace talks that ended the Bosnian conflict in 1995, there were no Bosnian women in the delegations, even though the international community was well-aware of the trauma that women had experienced and the responsibilities that they would be shouldering during reconstruction. Four years later, prior to the NATO bombings of Kosovo, there was only one Kosovar woman at the Rambouillet negotiations. In Sierra Leone, five and half years of civil war were marked by particularly vicious attacks against women and young girls. The 1996 peace accord² addressed many key issues regarding reconstruction, power-sharing and disarmament, but overlooked the rights and interests of women.³ In Tajikistan, there is only one woman in the 26-person National Reconciliation Commission, although the war has left some 25,000 widows to cope with the upbringing of their families and the reconstruction of their communities. At the first Arusha peace talks on Burundi, only two of the 126 delegates were women. In East Timor, the recently established consultative group of the National Council of Timorese Resistance has only two women representatives out of a total of 15.

The growing recognition that women have a right to participate in political structures and decision-making is increasingly supported around the world by positive action programs and other mechanisms. As the examples above show, however, official peace processes remain almost an exclusively male domain, and little has been done to encourage women's equal participation. Even among the dedicated and experienced women peace advocates who were interviewed for this project, those who served as members of official delegations, such as Hanan Ashrawi, Luz Mendez and Cheryl Carolus, were exceptions rather than the rule. The Burundians only have temporary observer status at the Arusha peace talks. Members of the Liberian Women's Initiative were allowed to act only as consultants, and were never accorded full rights. "We wanted to get to the peace table, because to us, we were a part of the decision-making," says Mary Brownell. "The amazing thing was that the war lords didn't want us at the peace table, but they were asking us what we thought about (the issues)."

A Hostile Reception

Women may overcome the more general obstacles to their participation in formal peace negotiations, but once they reach the peace table itself, as either informal or official participants, they encounter additional barriers. Those interviewed here in general agreed that their male colleagues have reacted negatively to their presence, and in some cases are openly hostile. “The most difficult moment for us was when we arrived at Arusha and saw that no one wanted us,” says Alice Ntwarante, a member of the Central Committee of the Front pour la Democratie au Burundi (FRODE-BU). “We were like orphaned children.”

The official delegations not only refused entry to the women’s cross-party coalition, but also attempted to break up the alliance. “They tried to separate us,” recounts Ntwarante. “They asked, ‘Why are you together as one? You should be supporting your own parties.’”

When the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition won seats in the election and gained access to the Forum, an arena where the political parties aired their views, they encountered a heavy mix of

sexism and sectarianism. Men labeled them the “ladies coalition,” and addressed them with a mixture of ridicule and hostility. “Whingeing, whining, silly, feckless women,” says Monica McWilliam,⁴ were just some of the insults thrown at her and her colleagues in the Forum. “Calls of ‘sit down you silly woman,’ and being told that it was the duty of the good loyal Ulster woman to ‘stand by her man’ did not make for a good working environment,”⁵ Kate Fearon writes.

Discrimination and a sense of being patronized have prompted a range of reactions from women. Ashrawi says that men will often perceive women as a threat and deliberately go out to pull them down. “Many women get intimidated and don’t

put up with it, so they step aside,” she says. The discrimination that Luz Mendez encountered during the Guatemala talks made her only more determined to prove her capabilities. “I moved in a world of men, and I soon realized that the main challenge I had ahead of me was to convince my colleagues that I had the capacity to contribute,” she says. “So I dedicated a lot of time to studying the topics of the negotiating agenda and to performing the duties and jobs I was in charge of.” Women at the



Hanan Ashrawi and other women who have participated in peace negotiations draw strength from partnerships with broad-based coalitions.

peace table must also contend with an environment that is not conducive to respect for women's rights. Nani Chanishvili, reflecting on the discussions held by Georgian parliamentarians on the repatriation of refugees, recalls talk about returning refugee and internally displaced women to the same people who had killed and raped them. Decisions were being made in consultation with the military officials who bore responsibility for the atrocities, but not with the victims. "As a Member of Parliament, I had the opportunity to attend these meetings," says Chanishvili. "I told them, 'Don't you think that you have to ask these women whether they want to go back under the general who killed their children and raped them? You are speaking with this general, negotiating with him, about returning her, but you're not speaking with her.'"

In South Africa, where women were welcomed to the peace table and sat in half the seats, they still faced the burden of expectations from their own families. The negotiations lasted long into the night, recalls Carolus. Every woman had supposedly achieved full status, but in reality, "nobody has done anything about her husband and her children who still expect her to be home, doing the cooking. They are very proud of their mothers, but they still expected that there would be food and that somebody would sort out their socks and washing." As a result, by ten o'clock at night half

the room was tense and anxious, looking at their watches and wondering where the children were. Carolus says, "We saw first hand that when you impose equality in a situation of inequality, you entrench and deepen that inequality."

Confronting Discrimination

To cope with discrimination at the peace table, and to secure the power and respect necessary to carry forward their agendas, women have adopted different approaches. Carolus says that in South Africa they went and spoke to the husbands and children of the women who were in the negotiations and who were under a lot of pressure. "We named and shamed the men," she says. "The advantage was that these men were also active members of the same political organizations. The minute they knew that other people knew how badly they were behaving, they changed. It was just straight education."

Like Luz Mendez, Mu Sochua has simply made sure that the quality of her work and the work of the women in her ministry is beyond reproach. "I am very aware of the stigma," she says. "That's why everything has to meet a standard. I want the women in my department to speak with competence. If you go to defend something, you better have the statistics behind you. You better have the facts behind you. You better speak with a competent voice."

Carolus points out the importance of ensuring that women delegates enter the talks process with confidence and a firm mandate, especially from their female constituencies. It is not enough to assume that women's issues will be supported simply by having a delegation that is 50 per cent female, she says. Women must maintain contact with their primary support base, and have regular debriefings with women in their political parties and their constituencies. "It's very important to make sure that women are part of the process of shaping the mandates that go to the table," Carolus says. "In political parties, women themselves must make sure that the candidates they put forward are actually empowered to be part of the processes inside the party itself. The mandating process must be very rooted."

In Liberia, Mary Brownell says that women won the respect of the dominant political factions by their scrupulous adherence to honesty and transparency. "We were sincere. We were not after financial gain," says Brownell. "They couldn't buy us off by offering us a few thousand dollars to close our mouths. We rejected those who attempted it. What we had to say, we said, whether they liked it or not. This is why the war lords respected us."

Some women have successfully used coalitions and partnerships to strengthen their presence in peace talks. The LWI reached out to press its case with both the international media and the representatives of influential donor countries. The

Burundian women's coalition sought the support of regional governments and international delegates at Arusha. Cambodian women used the presence of UNTAC to form the country's first civil society movement. In the Balkans, women's organizations created a regional alliance and called upon the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to support their demands for participation in the South-Eastern Europe Stability Pact, which is currently being drawn up for the region's economic, political and social recovery.

Do Women Make a Difference?

In spite of many setbacks, the women interviewed here, as well as many others, have persisted in their attempts to contribute to peace negotiations and to assert their right to be there. Their experiences and reflections raise many questions. Does the presence of women influence the course of peace talks and the agreements reached? Can it be assumed that the increased participation of women at the Dayton Talks or in Sierra Leone would have brought the rights and needs of women into the agenda? Rigid distinctions clearly cannot be made about the actions and interests of all men and women in peace talks. However, the testimonies of women regarding their roles in negotiations can provide some insight into the perspectives that they bring to the peace table, the processes that they seek to undertake, and the gender-based differences that they perceive.

Stereotypical notions of women as nurturers and peace-lovers have been debated for many years, and the women interviewed here were unwilling to claim that women make better peace-makers than men. "Depends on the woman," Mary Brownell says bluntly. Nani Chanishvili points out that there are plenty of women in politics who have no interest in promoting gender-awareness or women's interests. She and others, however, stress that women do bring different perspectives to peace negotiations. Some of these may be related to socialization, others to women's long years as grassroots activists or as family caretakers. Gender-awareness can also make a difference says Hanan Ashrawi, but for many women, this stems from their own living conditions, not from exposure to particular trainings or theoretical discussions. It is clear that many of the women who survive the difficult path to the peace table are not afraid to speak their minds, both to those in power and to their constituencies. While women may not always be supporters of opportunities for other women, in general they are still the main proponents of agendas that include gender.

The women interviewed here often stated that women articulate conflict and peace differently than men. Having dealt with the

severe human consequences of conflict, they believe that exposing the "underbelly" of war is a critical first step toward peace. Nani Chanishvili notes the importance of speaking openly about pain and fear as essential to building trust between adversaries. Hanan Ashrawi emphasizes the need to talk directly about the most difficult issues, rather than postponing them or mirroring them in rhetoric. "When we understood

that we were being open with each other, it meant we respected each other enough to begin articulating the issues," she says, describing negotiations between Palestinian and Israeli women. "I think this created a qualitatively different type of dialogue and approach."

Helen Jackson, a British Parliamentarian who has worked closely with women's organizations in Northern Ireland, says that the concerns and perspectives on peace that women put forth

are often diametrically opposite to those being discussed at the male-dominated national level. "The official political echelons seem to get bogged down in the old historical issues," she says. "The women in the community feel that their housing, education and childcare are the important things."

She suggests that although there was public acknowledgement of the importance of constitutional and political issues,

"The official political echelons seem to get bogged down in the old historical issues. The women in the community feel that their housing, education and childcare are the important things."

Helen Jackson

these were 'abstract' for many people. The women's peace movement gave a human face to the conflict, and highlighted the personal consequences of the violence. "The women would come and talk about their loved ones, their bereavement, their children and their hopes for the future," recalls Jackson. By drawing attention to these tangible factors, the women succeeded in showing that "living and the quality of life in Northern Ireland were the issues that mattered." This vision of peace and the future eventually gained widespread public acceptance.

Given the stark realities faced by many women caught in the midst of conflict, it is not surprising that women tend to articulate peace in terms of meeting basic human security needs. Their vision may be based on a combination of the political, economic, personal, community, food, health, and environmental issues that arise in their daily life experiences.⁶ As Mary Brownell says, "We wanted to walk down the street and not look behind us for stray bullets. We wanted our children to go to school, to be educated. We wanted to move about freely, attend our business, make our market, live a normal life."

Defining peace in terms of basic universal human needs often leads women to advocate practical solutions in the building of peace. In South Africa, says Cheryl Carolus, the women's coalition lobbied hard for measures that would make the new government open to constituencies that had traditionally been excluded from

the political process. They successfully fought for participatory mechanisms in the Constitution that would require the government to consider input on policies from the population at large, and worked to ensure that legislation would be accessible. "We asked 'Why do we need rights?'" says Carolus. "It wasn't just a question of putting laws down on a piece of paper. It was about more practical things, such as how the right to land would allow a female-headed household in a rural area to have a sustainable livelihood. It was about being respectful of people's right to choose the life they want."

Women also reported that men and women frequently understand the purposes of peace talks differently, and come to the table with different motivations. Reflecting on the Arusha peace talks, Imelda Nzirorera says, "What worries us most is that our Burundian brothers, who are members of political parties, are putting the division of the national pie first. In other words, they are thinking, at the end of the negotiations, what position and post will we get?"

Hanan Ashrawi echoes this criticism, suggesting that there was a qualitative difference between the dialogues of Israeli and Palestinian women leaders and their male counterparts. "We looked at peace-making not as a personal agenda for power, but as a set of issues dealing with life and death," she says. "So while the men would postpone difficult topics and adopt the American paradigm of 'let's deal with

these little things,' piecemeal, we unloaded all our historical, existential, human luggage. Nobody was there saying what's in it for me? What position will I get? We just wanted to discuss the real issues that make a difference to human life and realities, not to individual careers."

Ambassador Georg Lennkh of the Austrian Development Co-operation Agency suggests that women are still less enmeshed in politics, and thus they bring a more neutral perspective to peace talks. Hanan Ashrawi, Cheryl Carolus and others who have played major roles in the political leadership in their countries agree that women's perspectives differ, but refute the notion that it is a result of women's lack of involvement in politics. "Some of us were affiliated to powerful political groups," says Ashrawi. "We knew that if you lose your credibility, your base, your constituency, you lose a lot." Nevertheless, she says, she was committed to developing a dialogue about the peace process, based on honesty and openness, regardless of personal power and position.

Sustainable Peace, at the Grassroots

Women are not necessarily better connected to the grassroots or more committed to

conveying the concerns of marginalized people. As Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King exemplify, men have led some of the world's most powerful grassroots campaigns. Women, like men, may easily become entangled in political, ethnic, religious and other forms of rivalries that may cause them to embrace a partisan agenda.

There is no evidence to suggest that women at the peace table are more committed than men to promoting the greater good of the population at large. However, women are more likely than men to have arrived via civil activism, often with first-hand experience of the brutal consequences of violent conflict. Both men and women suffer during war, but women are more likely to be the targets of gender-based violence. Often they are able to see more clearly the continuum of conflict that stretches from the beating at home to the rape on the street to the killing on the

battlefield. Women also bear the extra burden of a vastly lower social and economic status. They witness vivid links between violence, poverty and inequality in their daily lives. "Women come face to face with the realities that are created by decisions made at the peace table," says Hanan Ashrawi. "They bear the brunt,

"We are very conscious about the fact that we want to ensure that the grassroots women are able to contribute effectively to the success of these negotiations."

Alice Ntwarante

they pay the price, they don't always reap the rewards. The rewards are for the men; the consequences are for the women."

It is therefore not surprising that many initiatives supported by women tend to stress inclusion, participation and consensus building. In Colombia, according to Piedad Cordoba Ruiz, individual women like herself were instrumental in initiating dialogue with the guerrilla forces that eventually persuaded them to join the wider peace talks. In Guatemala, the women's coalition supported the Indigenous Women's Movement and enabled them to actively participate in the peace process. Reflecting on the work of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, Kate Fearon asserts that "we argued consistently that a peace settlement stood little chance of success if parties were excluded. All parties were part of the conflict, and all parties had to be part of the solution."⁷

Many peace activists and conflict analysts, regardless of gender, believe that the peace being negotiated at the political level must be rooted and accepted by the people who have to live it in the future. In the cases presented here, women's organizations were often at the forefront of initiating public mobilization and consultation. The NIWC, for example, created an organization called the Civic Forum. It was "a body composed of representatives of civil society which would complement and assist the work of elected politicians, broadening and deepening our democracy," Fearon says.

In Burundi, aware that women are among the least informed members of society, the women's coalition has made significant efforts to reach out to the provinces and inform them of events in Arusha. Alice Ntwarante says, "We are very conscious about the fact that we want to ensure that the grassroots women are able to contribute effectively to the success of these negotiations." Similarly in Cambodia, women have been instrumental in institutionalizing the public consultation in decision-making processes relating to post-conflict reconstruction. The women's ministry, says Mu Sochua, regularly consults on policy decisions with over 30 women's organizations.

In the Middle East, Hanan Ashrawi and other women leaders have played a pivotal role in maintaining the public space for participation in the on-going peace negotiations. They emphasize that the process of consultation is a means of identifying and prioritizing the core issues, and agreeing upon the negotiable and non-negotiable points from the perspectives of experts, the public and the politicians. It also strengthens the bonds between the formal and informal sectors, and ensures transparency in the process. At a recent conference organized by Ashrawi, government ministers chaired nine committees, where 45 experts were discussing issues relating to the final round of the peace talks in front of a public audience. "They had to interact. They had to listen," Ashrawi says. The findings

of the conference are being distributed and discussed in town halls and other public forums. If the people are not involved in the decision-making, Ashrawi maintains, the official talks process is “a useless exercise.”

Standing Up for Women's Rights

Women at peace tables are often the sole voices speaking out for women's rights and concerns. Since the peace and reconstruction process sets the tone for the political, economic and social institutions that follow, women with an understanding of gender issues can make critical contributions to the longer term goal of women's development and equality. “The direct participation of women at the peace table is the only way to ensure that women's demands are incorporated in the agreements,” says Luz Mendez. In Guatemala, the women's groups not only made a point of allying with the indigenous people's groups and other excluded sectors, but were also determined to get an official acknowledgement of women's roles and experiences in the country's war and development process. They ensured that not only would they have a place at the peace table, but that they would also be able to use the

peace accords to address the fundamental factors contributing to women's oppression. As a result, the accord supports women's rights to land ownership, access to credit, health care and participation in political processes.

Mu Sochua maintains that women participants in decision-making processes have the responsibility to ensure that the voices of women as a whole are not lost.

Where men can be dismissive or simply unaware, women should draw attention to the problems of other women, and stand firm on subjects relating to their rights. “On issues like violence against women, trafficking, exploitation of women, men are not the victims. Women are the victims, so they cry out,” she says. “Women like myself cry out because it is not acceptable. It's not a principle that I want to negotiate or compromise.”

The actions of Mary Brownell, Ruth Perry and

the LWI were a clear statement of women claiming their general right to be heard and treated equally. “We didn't think that they should leave us out of the peace negotiations, because we are all part of the country,” she says. “We struggled against the marginalization of women in decision-making. We didn't want the men

“The direct participation of women at the peace table is the only way to ensure that women's demands are incorporated in the agreements.”

Luz Mendez

to tell us all the time 'we're doing this' or to hear it on the radio or in the news paper."

Self-determination lies at the heart of much of the struggle for women's rights and gender equality. In Palestine, women used the parallels between self-determination for the people and self-determination for women as both a point of advocacy and a rallying call. In South Africa, the parallels between racism and sexism became very important. Ultimately, says Cheryl Carolus, gender equality is inseparable from the wider peace and development goal. "When you exclude 53 per cent of your population from playing a meaningful role in the transformation of your society, you are doing that society a huge disservice," she says. During apartheid, it became clear that under-educating and under-developing 80 per cent of the people was eventually going to harm even the privileged few. When some of those who opposed racism were later reluctant to acknowledge that sexism was a similar form of unjustified exclusion, women reframed the debate in terms of equality for all. "We said that for the same reasons that you can't exclude me from the full benefits of my society purely on the basis of one biological fact, like the colour of my skin, you can't use another one, like the sex in which I was born," Carolus explains.

Communications

Some research has claimed that men and women communicate differently, although

no in-depth analysis has been done to confirm that women use these different skills in peace talks to become better negotiators or peace-makers. Are women better listeners? Do they foster a more conciliatory atmosphere? Do men shout louder and more often than women? The evidence available is only anecdotal, but in the interviews undertaken here, similarities and common experiences emerge.

Some women suggested that experiences and skills gained from their roles as mothers and caretakers enhanced their abilities to engage in peace talks. For Cheryl Carolus, one of the distinct features that women bring to negotiations is their people skills, acquired through daily tasks such as managing children or caring for the sick and elderly. Acknowledging the danger of stereotyping women as "nurturers," she maintains that in the negotiations and the drawing up of the South African Constitution, "the fact that the women were nurturing and caring became hugely positive attributes. The process became one of listening to what other people were saying, listening to their fears even if you disagreed with them. People came out feeling that their concerns were being dealt with. It wasn't just posturing."

Ruth Perry attributes much of her influence over the war lords and the trust she garnered from them to her identity as a mother. "They considered me an experienced mother with many children," she says, drawing attention to her own seven

children. "I told them I was a disciplinarian mother," she adds, explaining that her ground rules were that once issues were agreed upon in private talks, no side could renege on them "I told them if you try to change, well, you don't get me to change. I'm a firm mother."

Reflecting on Mo Mowlam's influence in the Northern Ireland process, Helen Jackson suggests that her ability to listen and empathize contributed to breaking down barriers and tackling core issues. "I think there was a gender aspect to her style," Jackson says "She related very quickly and naturally with the sort of issues that the women in the community wanted to raise. She listens and hears without wrapping things up in political jargon."

Mowlam, while sceptical of attributing any of her own skills to gender alone, acknowledged that one of her contributions to the Northern Ireland peace process was to look beyond the façade. "You have to ask, 'Why do they need to shout?'" she says, referring to the male-majority political leaders. "If you are trying to make peace, the 'blame culture' doesn't work. You have to see in what ways you can build trust and confidence to make progress. I believe you can only do this if you give people a sense of hope.

Then the fear and distrust begin to decline. The aggression declines too."

In peace talks, when sensitive issues are being addressed, anger, fear, aggression and frustration are commonplace. "There are people who shout a lot," says Mowlam. "Because it's mainly men, people associate it with male behaviour. I don't think that women would necessarily behave in the same way. It's abusive, unfair and difficult to cope with." This behaviour can be destructive to the process, says Ambassador Georg Lennkh of Austria, who has chaired the Commission on Reconstruction and Economic Development in the Burundi peace talks. "Men have a habit of getting carried away," he says. "They feel aggressed by someone; they have to retort. It becomes very acrimonious very quickly."

Cheryl Carolus says that "by working around the areas of commonality, women deal with conflict differently." In Liberia, for example, the LWI sought not only to find areas of convergence, but also implemented programmes to foster cooperation. Countless regional peace conferences had been stalled because the factions refused to compromise, and would be sent home to iron out their differences. In seeking to

"If you are trying to make peace, the 'blame culture' doesn't work. You have to see in what ways you can build trust and confidence to make progress."

Mo Mowlam

break the deadlock, the LWI set up a number of workshops, inviting representatives from all factions. "We came up with different games, such as puzzles that you cannot complete unless you get help from somebody else," explains Mary Brownell. "We were trying to tell them that they need to rely on each other." In the course of the workshops, the representatives not only began to discuss some of the more contentious issues, but also reached a number of agreements. "A week after that we had a consultative ECOWAS regional meeting here in Liberia," recalls Brownell. "They used the findings from the workshops as part of that agenda."

Transforming the Process: Women's Achievements

If it is difficult to define the qualitative differences that women make at the peace table, it is not so difficult to see the concrete results of their actions. As is the case with women in decision-making roles in other kinds of institutions, women at the peace table bring change. They propose laws supporting equality for women and other social sectors, and initiate new development strategies and programmes that benefit both women and society at large. They also open opportunities for women's participation in a wide spectrum of political institutions, and they alter understanding of the roles women can play.

For South Africans, writing their new Constitution was a critical step in the

battle against discrimination. It provided a lifetime opportunity to establish a system of laws and values that would influence the future of the nation. Cheryl Carolus says, "We felt quite determined that the document that was going to be the law-based value system for generations in our country had to take on board the kinds of things that half the population was fighting against." In part because of the vigilance and activism of the National Women's Coalition, the Constitution now outlaws unequal treatment against any sector of society on any grounds.

By successfully advocating for having women well represented in the peace negotiations and the process of drafting the Constitution, the coalition also opened the door to the more general acceptance of women in power and decision-making positions. Women are now well represented across all levels of government. Five of the seven ambassadors to G7 countries are women. Even the hours of Parliament have changed to allow members to combine their private responsibilities with their public duties.

In Guatemala, women incorporated a range of issues critical to women's development into the peace agreement. They included equal access to land, credit and productive resources, health care, and education and training. The agreement affirmed women's right to a paid job, eliminated legal discrimination and imposed penalties for sexual harassment. It also set

up new institutions such as the Office for the Defense of Indigenous Women's Rights and mechanisms to promote women's political participation. Although these measures are all targeted toward women, if they are implemented they will benefit the longer social and economic development of the nation as a whole.

Within the context of reconstruction in Liberia, the Liberian Women's Initiative has successfully advocated for a new unit for women and children in the Ministry of Planning, and is proposing the establishment of a separate women's ministry. The group has also convinced the Ministry of Education to start a mass literacy drive, called Each One Teach One, that is aimed at women and girls. One

of the LWI's founding members is now the Minister for Education, and several members serve in the legislature.

In Cambodia, women's organizing led to their participation in the drafting of the new Constitution, where they won constitutional guarantees of equal rights, including the right to vote, the right to participate in politics and the right to choose their professions. Another new law guarantees that the Ministry for Women and Veteran's Affairs will be led by women.

"In the past it was led by a man," says Mu Sochua, "and it was a disaster." The law was criticized for being discriminatory against men, and Mu Sochua had to spend two full days in Parliament defending it. She argues that the law was needed to ensure social justice, and to back up the constitutional guarantees.

The ministry is also drafting a proposal to create a new National Council for

Women. It will collaborate with non-governmental groups to monitor the performance of the government on improving the status of women. Mu Sochua points out that institutionalizing this process in the post-conflict environment will introduce a new level of transparency, create checks and

balances in the system, and deepen the democratic process.

Reflecting on events in Northern Ireland, Mo Mowlam suggests that through their decade of cross-community work, women there created space for moderation and compromise. "Attitudes, the hardest things to change in politics, slowly began to change," she says. In 1998, the Good Friday Agreement, which is the basis of the current peace process, was submitted for a public referendum. An



The adoption of positive action programmes in the new South Africa is widening the space for women to participate in charting the country's development.

overwhelming 70 per cent voted in its favour in Northern Ireland, and over 90 per cent supported it in the Republic of Ireland. Mowlam attributes much of this to the persistence of women's canvassing and lobbying throughout the region. "In my view, women have been crucial in getting to where we are in Northern Ireland," she says.

By campaigning for disarmament and publicly monitoring the war lords, the Liberian Women's Initiative contributed to breaking the cycle of Liberia's dozen failed peace agreements. Without women, says Ruth Perry, "the war would have just continued and continued." Perry's own combination of words and actions prevented the resurgence of violence in the aftermath of a shoot-out in Monrovia, during the most critical phase of the Liberian talks. "I was on my way to work," she recalls, "but was told by the security forces to return, because there was a shoot-out." Her instinct was to contact the faction leaders and inform them of the events. "I told Charles Taylor to please calm his boys down. I went on national radio appealing to those that were involved to please give peace a chance. My physical presence

meant a lot to the people. I started making visits and encouraging State Council members to return. If I hadn't done that, the whole process would have been derailed. Instead, everybody went back to work. We moved on."

For many women working in peace processes, there is a feeling of personal responsibility and accountability toward those who have supported them. Hanan

Ashrawi says a sense of the public trust still infuses all of her work. After being voted into Parliament, she resigned her post as Minister for Higher Education, maintaining that she can work best to build a sense of public partnership outside government structures. "Once I took the bus from the bridge, and people clapped, saying, 'She's the one who tells the truth!' Another time this peasant woman who was illiterate said, 'I came all the way just to vote for you.' These moments are the real vindication of what we're doing," Ashrawi says. "The reward is not the big boss

patting me on the back. It's the person who tells you, 'You've spoken on my behalf. You were my voice. You protected my rights. I trust you. I've used you to empower myself.'"

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***Instead, everybody
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We moved on. "

Ruth Perry

Finally, women's participation at the peace table has changed perceptions and entrenched attitudes about women's leadership and decision-making capabilities. This is a critical step in the struggle for gender equality and the process of building more inclusive societies. "Gender equality... Some men are naïve. They will try to oppose it," muses Mary Brownell. "They think we want to take their places. But we have broken that culture of silence, where we just sat down and said 'yes, yes.' Now we ask, 'Why? Why should we accept this?' Some men don't think this is right, but the rest are beginning to see our point."

Notes

- ¹ Available at www.mahatma.org.in/antho.htm
- ² Although the conflict flared again in 1997, the earlier peace agreement was retained as a model for subsequent agreements in 1999. The Lomé Peace Accord calls for "special attention to be given to women's needs and potential in the moral, social and physical reconstruction of the country." But it makes no mention of the need to include women in decision-making processes.
- ³ Yusuf Bangura, "Reflections on the 1996 Sierra Leone Peace Accord," in *Voices from Africa: Conflict, Peacekeeping and Reconstruction*, Issue No. 8 (Geneva: United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service, 1998).
- ⁴ Monica McWilliam based on an interview in the *Irish Times* (March 30, 1998) at <http://members.tripod.co.uk/~northernireland/nicom12.html>.
- ⁵ Quoted in *Women and Peace: A Practical Resource Pack*, ed. Gillian Anderson (London: International Alert, forthcoming 2000). Selected text reproduced with kind permission from International Alert.
- ⁶ See *Safety for People in a Changing World*.
- ⁷ See *Women and Peace: A Practical Resource Pack*.

III. The International Community: Matching Words with Actions

*“In war-torn societies...
women often keep
society going. They...
are often the prime
advocates of peace.
We must ensure that
women are enabled to
play a full part in
peace negotiations, in
peace processes, in
peace missions.”¹*

—Kofi Annan

For women in countries affected by conflict, support from the United Nations, partner organizations and the international non-governmental community can be critical for their struggle to gain access to the peace table. Contact with the international community can be a means of ensuring that their voices and calls to participate are heard and taken into account both within and outside the boundaries of their own country. In Burundi, women peace activists strategically combined support from international organizations with that of influential women politicians and leaders in the region in order to gain entrance to the Arusha peace negotiations as temporary observers. The women have taken the opportunity to initiate informal consultations with the various parties to the conflict, whom they have been lobbying to adopt a peaceful settlement, and have also persisted in their efforts to secure permanent representation.

In Liberia, by ensuring that ambassadors and delegates from the Organisation for African Unity (OAU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) received their position statements, the Liberian Women's Initiative succeeded in contributing to high-level regional meetings, and in garnering the support of regional leaders and international officials. Mary Brownell recalls the first time that the LWI spoke openly at a formal ECOWAS meeting. “We began lobbying the heads of states, we pleaded with them to please give us this opportunity to be heard. The next day, before they could start any official business, they said, ‘We’ll hear from the women in Liberia.’ We informed them of our mission, and the situation on the ground. They were so moved, we saw some of them wiping their eyes.” To ensure the LWI's credibility and to raise awareness at the policy level, it was critical to maintain links with the media, the diplomatic community, the United Nations, the European Union and the regional organizations, says Brownell. “We kept them informed of everything that was happening and all the moves we made. So there was nothing hidden.”

External support also means access to much-needed technical and financial resources. Given the difficult and challenging circumstances under which women's groups work, this can be crucial to their survival. The LWI used external funding to train hundreds of women in election monitoring, and sent them across the country to mobilize other women to vote. In Georgia, Nani Chanishvili speaks of the international assistance women's groups received in establishing information technology systems that linked them to the international arena, thus enabling them to share experiences and strategize on a wider regional level. In Burundi, international organizations have provided training to enhance women's skills in conflict resolution among local communities.

For some women's activists, ties to an international network can provide communication with the outside world in order to obtain information, support and encouragement. In the case of Afghanistan, although women's groups inside the country have been silenced, a chain of organizations outside has ensured that the plight of Afghan women is not forgotten. Networks can also become the basis for regional coalitions and platforms through which women articulate their demands collectively. In the words of Hanan Ashrawi: "Women need concrete support systems, wherever they are. They need the collective drive, and the sense that you mess with me, you're messing with everybody."

The Commitments

The issue of women's participation in peace processes has been addressed within various international resolutions and agreements. In 1982, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 37/63, the Declaration on the Participation of Women in Promoting International Peace and Cooperation. It calls for greater national and international efforts to increase women's participation in decision-making processes related to peace and development, including through providing practical opportunities for women to ensure such participation. It makes a commitment to promoting equal opportunities for women in the diplomatic service; in national, regional and international delegations; and in the secretariats of the UN and its agencies.

The UN Security Council has passed seven resolutions addressing women in situations of armed conflict and peace.² Resolution 1265 (1999), The Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, welcomes a gender perspective in humanitarian assistance. It acknowledges the importance of including special provisions for women in the mandates of peace-making, peace-keeping and peace-building operations.

A number of international agreements on women's rights and development affirm the importance of women's participation in peace processes. The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All

Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is a valuable mechanism that has provided women with a framework to structure their own national debates and advocacy related to attaining the goal of gender equality. Ratified by 165 countries, it is the first legally binding international convention that sets out principles on the rights of women. It prohibits discrimination, seeks to eradicate it in all areas of women's lives,³ and prescribes the measures needed to ensure that women worldwide are able to enjoy their rights.⁴

CEDAW stipulates that signatories should raise women's participation in decision-making processes by using temporary special measures such as quota systems. This guideline is being employed by a significant number of national and local governments, as well as regional intergovernmental organizations. In 1997, for example, the member states of the South African Development Community (SADC) committed themselves to increasing women's representation in all decision-making to 30 per cent by 2005.

The 1985 UN Third World Conference on Women provided explicit recognition of the role of women in peace and

development through the adoption of the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies. This principle was reaffirmed at the 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women, which adopted the Beijing Platform for Action. The platform recognizes women's rights as human rights and, in the chapter on women and armed conflict, it states that the "full participation [of women] in decision-making, conflict prevention and

resolution and all other peace initiatives [is] essential to the realization of lasting peace."⁵ It acknowledges that women are beginning to be more active in conflict resolution, peace-keeping, and foreign affairs structures, but emphasizes that they are still underrepresented

in decision-making positions. It further states that "if women are to play an equal part in securing and maintaining peace, they must be empowered politically and economically and represented adequately at all levels of decision-making."⁶

The platform reiterates the need to protect women in situations of armed conflict in accordance with the principles of international human rights and humanitarian law, and recognizes women's roles in caring for their



The Beijing Platform for Action is an important reference point for women leaders and peace activists from around the world.

families in times of war as well as their contributions to peace. It calls for a gender perspective to be incorporated into all policies and programmes in all aspects of peace and security. It requests governments to take action to promote equal participation of women in all forums and in peace activities at all levels, particularly at the decision-making level. (See box).

Catalysts for Change

Women the world over have drawn on both CEDAW and the Beijing platform in pressing their case for participation in peace processes. In countries emerging

from conflict, CEDAW recommendations have proven particularly effective in establishing new mechanisms to promote gender equality. Mu Sochua notes that CEDAW and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child have provided concrete principles on which the politics of Cambodia is being transformed. "The principle is that men and women are equal in front of the law, and partners in developing their own country," she says. Given the number of Cambodian women suffering from violence and abuse, she emphasizes, it is very clear that unless women are in politics, the country is not going to change for them.

Beijing Platform for Action: Women and Armed Conflict Strategic Objective No. 1

Increase the participation of women in conflict resolution at decision-making levels; protect women living in situations of armed and other conflicts or under foreign occupation.

Actions to be taken by governments and international and regional intergovernmental institutions:

... Promote equal participation of women and equal opportunities for women to participate in all forums and peace activities at all levels, particularly at the decision-making level, including in the United Nations Secretariat;

... Integrate a gender perspective in the resolution of armed or other conflicts and foreign occupation and aim for gender balance when nominating or promoting candidates for judicial and other positions in all relevant international bodies as well as in other bodies related to the peaceful settlement of disputes;

... Ensure that these bodies are able to address gender issues properly by providing appropriate training to prosecutors, judges and other officials in handling cases involving rape, forced pregnancy, indecent assault and other forms of violence against women in armed conflicts, including terrorism, and integrate a gender perspective into their work.

CEDAW proposes quota or reservation systems to increase the number of women in decision-making positions. Proponents of these systems maintain that without a critical mass of women in decision-making, the few who do make it will hardly be effective. Mu Sochua says, in reference to the Cambodian political scene prior to her own involvement, “the women who were at the top did not speak because they were so outnumbered by men.”

Women who advocate the use of reservations recognize that there is no guarantee that all women in decision-making positions will necessarily be proactive and supportive of efforts to improve the general conditions of life for other women. Nevertheless, says Nani Chanishvili, the quota system is one means of tilting the balance in favour of women who want to enter the political fray with an agenda based on social justice and gender equality.

In South Africa, the adoption of a quota system proved highly effective. Women pursued a policy of positive action that called for 50 per cent representation in Parliament. They succeeded in getting 25 per cent. “People said it was tokenism,” says Cheryl Carolus. “But we said, ‘No, it’s a mechanism.’ It forces us to give perfectly capable people

an opportunity. It also forces us to look at widening the range of skills that people bring into a process.”

Hanan Ashrawi postulates that without an initial quota system, the playing field will never be leveled, and only a few women will find their way into the political process. Those who complain that quotas are discriminatory may be correct, she argues, but the fact remains that

women should be treated differently. “We have to undo the damage of generations,” she says. When she led the Palestinian Ministry of Education, Ashrawi implemented a quota-based plan. “I made sure that we were almost 45:55 in decision-making, not among secretaries and clerks, but at director level and above. We need to give more opportunities to women. That’s why I say, all things being equal, give the priority to the woman.”

The adoption of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action reaffirmed the importance of CEDAW as a mechanism for attaining women’s human rights and gender equality. The platform outlined a series of concrete and specific actions that governments, the international community and civil society should take as part of this process. Women peace

“(Quotas) are a mechanism that force us to give perfectly capable people an opportunity. They also force us to look at widening the range of skills that people bring into a process.”

Cheryl Carolus

activists in all regions gained renewed strength from Beijing and the commitments made by governments and international organizations to advancing women's participation at all levels of peace-making.

Since 1995, new local, national and international initiatives have emerged to advance the agenda for building women's leadership for peace. Networks spanning Latin America, Europe, Asia and Africa have formed, linking women's peace organizations regionally and globally. In the Balkans and the former Soviet Union, numerous women's organizations have mushroomed since 1995, with a strong focus on increasing women's participation in decision-making and reconstruction processes. In Africa, a vibrant movement of women peace advocates from across the region has taken root and is making its mark in many sectors.

The force has been equally strong at the national level. In Cambodia, the Ministry for Women's and Veteran's Affairs and local women's development organizations have initiated programmes related to some of the priority issues identified within the Beijing platform. Reflecting on the influence of the Beijing process on Guatemalan women's participation in peace negotiations,

Luz Mendez says, "The fact that women's issues were present at the international level had a positive effect on the Guatemalan negotiating table. The Beijing Platform of Action was a source of strength and inspiration, because it deepened our capacity to make proposals at the negotiating table."

Within the UN system, the Beijing platform is informing the development of new initiatives to promote women's participation in peace-making, and is guiding efforts to ensure that women's contributions to peace processes are accorded a prominent place on the international peace and security agenda. In Africa, UNIFEM has supported the establishment of the Federation of African Women Peace Networks (FERFAP), which was formed by 13 women's peace organizations from war-affected countries across the region. As part of a

regional peace advocacy platform, FERFAP members have initiated dialogue with governments and inter-governmental organizations that are promoting peace in a number of countries, such as Eritrea and Ethiopia. The federation is committed to advocating gender-sensitive approaches in the planning, implementation and evaluation of peace and reconstruction programmes.

"The Beijing Platform of Action was a source of strength and inspiration, because it deepened our capacity to make proposals at the negotiating table."

Luz Mendez

Women leaders across Africa have also joined together to press for the establishment of a women's committee on peace and development issues under the auspices of the Organisation for Africa Unity (OAU) and the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). The African Women Committee on Peace and Development (AWCPD) was born in 1998. It intends to work in partnership with sub-regional entities, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the South African Development Community (SADC) to mainstream women's perspectives at all levels in conflict resolution and decision-making processes, and in development initiatives throughout the continent. At the time of writing, AWCPD had completed its programme plans and was preparing to begin full operations during the year 2000.⁷

In South Asia, UNIFEM has been working in partnership with 60 non-governmental groups to form a network of women peace advocates. Collaborating with the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the network lobbies for gender responsive approaches to peace and human security issues within the region. In Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, UNIFEM is facilitating closer cooperation among women leaders to introduce gender-responsive approaches within the regional peace and security agenda. In the South Caucasus,

UN partners are encouraging governmental and non-governmental actors to create strong advocacy and networking platforms that facilitate women's participation in peace building.

An important example of a partnership to engender the peace process was initiated by inter-governmental institutions and women peace activists in south-eastern Europe in 1999. Following the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) attacks on Serbia and the Kosovo conflict, the European Union called upon the international community to devise the South-Eastern Europe Stability Pact to promote economic and democratic development. Concerned that the perspectives of women would be ignored, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the non-governmental Central and Eastern European Network for Gender Issues sent out an appeal for the integration of a gender task force in the stability pact. They called for the direct and active participation of women in the development and implementation of the pact. By August 1999, some 150 women's civil society groups from ten countries in the region had signed the appeal. The European Union's special coordinator for the stability pact welcomed the initiative. It was agreed that a programme of gender equality should be developed for incorporation into the stability pact as a whole.

By October 1999, the Ad Hoc Stability Pact Gender Task Force (GTF) had presented its recommendations to the pact's special coordinator. Its primary goals are to promote women's political participation at national and regional levels and to provide capacity building measures; to increase women's chances of standing for elections; and to strengthen national mechanisms for the promotion of gender equality in the region. The GTF seeks to work in close partnership with both state and non-governmental organizations throughout the region and internationally.⁸

The Challenges Ahead

Despite progress made in the five years since the Fourth World Conference on Women, there remains a paucity of women in peace negotiations and a resistance on the part of political decision-makers to mainstream gender and women's perspectives in peace processes. Women peace activists express concern that governments and policy makers are reticent or, in some cases, unaware of the need to take action. They point to the absence of political will as the main barrier to the full implementation

of commitments made in the Beijing platform. Those governments and international organizations that have taken steps to advance women's participation in peace negotiations provide positive examples and models for wider replication.⁹

It is important to remember, says Hanan Ashrawi, that actions taken at the international level do resonate at the local and national levels. The time has

come to build awareness among policy makers, non-governmental activists, journalists, academics, church leaders, and mediators or facilitators in peace talks. Ashrawi maintains, "They should be asking, 'Where are the women? What do they need? How are they affected by the conflict? How

can we ensure that they are protected? How can we provide justice and care for those who have been raped and violated in the name of war?'" The international community has a paramount role in addressing these questions.

Grassroots activists themselves are calling for more proactive international support, contending that the work of women's groups in their communities is at the heart of efforts to build sustainable peace. A greater commitment of



Dame Margaret Anstee is one of the few women who has been appointed as a special representative of the UN Secretary General. She served in Angola from 1992 to 1993.

resources on the part of the international and donor communities would enhance the impact of these initiatives. Erika Papp, a peace activist in Serbia, points out, "At the grassroots we have the commitments and are willing to work, so seek us out and listen to us."¹⁰ Ruth Perry maintains that international organizations should give women a chance to share the lessons they have learned. "Send us to help the various countries, to see what impact we would have out there," she says. "We believe that when we meet these people one-on-one, we know what to advocate, we know what to say. We want them to use us, for national support, and for moral support."

In practical terms, the international community's actions should begin with the promotion of gender balance at all levels of decision-making within the internal hierarchy of the international organizations that oversee peace and security issues. This is in keeping with agreements that have been made to build a critical mass of women in decision-making positions across governmental and intergovernmental institutions. At the time of writing, there are no women among the 34 special representatives and envoys of the UN Secretary-General appointed to countries and regions of conflict.¹¹ Across the various missions of the UN Department of Peace-keeping Operations in early 2000, women had assumed an average of 20 percent of all professional positions. They made up an average of

12.6 percent of all personnel, including professional, field, local and military staff.¹² The situation is little different within the structures of other regional and intergovernmental institutions.

Angela King, the Special Advisor to the Secretary General on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women, notes that the presence of women makes a substantial difference to peace-keeping missions. King led the 1992 UN mission in South Africa, where women made up 53 per cent of the personnel. "Having a woman chief and a number of women team leaders creates an attitudinal shift, even among women themselves," she says. In the town of Port Elizabeth, for example, women teachers had appointed men from outside their ranks to negotiate with the government over working conditions. It took a woman staff member with the UN mission to point out that perhaps they should appoint representatives from among themselves, who would be best qualified to identify their needs and goals.¹³

There is an important case to be made for strengthening the role of the United Nations as an advocate for women at the peace table. In recent years, the financial pressures confronting the UN have challenged the organization on a number of important levels. With the requisite technical and financial resources, the ability of the UN to support the engendering of peace processes could be further enhanced. In the words of Piedad Cordoba Ruiz, UN and international

support is a tremendous source of encouragement for women working in conflict areas, but it would be of greater assistance if it could be used to facilitate women's fair representation in national and regional negotiations.

While CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action demonstrate that progress toward gender equality can be achieved by employing statements of international agreement, renewed commitments and the exercise of political will can strengthen women's attempts to expand their participation in peace processes. As the pivotal body overseeing international peace and security issues, the UN Security Council is best placed to take up this challenge. With Security Council resolutions existing on the protection of children and civilians in armed conflict, and recent debates exploring new and nontraditional security issues such as the spread of HIV/AIDS, the next step forward could be a resolution that grants official recognition to women's peace-building work and supports their increased participation in

related decision-making processes. Like CEDAW and the Beijing platform, this high level international commitment could become another source of strength and legitimacy, and would provide women with a resource to advance their work at the ground level.

In the end, ensuring women's equal participation at the peace table requires political will, resources, effective partnerships and the adoption of multiple strategies. "We need global legislation and mechanisms, and you have to make sure that in all these, there is recourse and accessibility and affirmative action," Ashrawi contends. "Without that comprehensive view, your vision is distorted." The international community has already articulated a commitment to ensuring women's participation in all aspects of the peace process; the next step is to set up action plans, mechanisms and benchmarks to measure

progress and ensure accountability. "We have to create expectations and systems," Ashrawi emphasizes, "and we must not accept the results of negotiations if half the people are left out of them."

"Having a woman chief and a number of women team leaders creates an attitudinal shift, even among women themselves."

Angela King

Notes

¹ Kofi Annan, United Nations press release SG/SM/6179, WOM/957.

² See UN Security Council Resolutions 918, 1076, 1193, 1208, 1214, 1231, 1265.

³ See Mazurana and McKay, pp. 66-69.

⁴ See www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw.

⁵ Fourth World Conference on Women, The Beijing Platform for Action: Global Framework, Article 23 (New York: United Nations, 1996). Available at www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/plat1.htm#framework.

⁶ See paragraphs 131-141 of the women and armed conflict chapter of the Beijing Platform for Action. Available at www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/armed.htm.

⁷ Information provided by Bineta Diop, executive director of Femme Africa Solidarité and member of the AWCPD.

⁸ Sonja Lokar (ed.), OSCE Stability Pact Gender Task Force First Plan of Action 2000 (Sarajevo: EDAC 2000).

⁹ For more information, refer to the national action plans prepared for the Beijing +5 review. Available at www.un.org/womenwatch/followup/national/natplans.htm.

¹⁰ Speech made at the Plenary Session of the Economic Commission of Europe, Beijing +5 Preparation Conference, quoted in European Women in Action, Geneva ECE Conference, *Daily News Brief*, No. 4, January 21, 2000.

¹¹ In 1999 there were two: Elizabeth Rehn, the SRSG in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Dame Ann Hercus, the Deputy SRSG and Chief of Mission of the UN Operation in Cyprus. See www.un.org/News/ossg/srsg.htm for details on recent appointments.

¹² UN Department of Peace-keeping Operations.

¹³ Women's Feature Service, "United Nations: Making Peace with Women," March 10, 1997.

Conclusions

“When eventually men see the point they support it, and support it so well that you begin to wonder: Was it just ignorance? Was it that they always thought that women couldn't think well enough and had no ability? Or was it just that they were so filled with themselves that they couldn't see women and their needs? I wondered.”

—Justice Annie Jiaggio¹

The narratives presented in this publication offer a brief insight into the experiences of women leaders and activists who have sought to influence the agenda of peace negotiations within their countries and regions. The challenges they have overcome and the achievements they have made draw attention to a number of critical lessons, reflections and questions. These in turn shed new light on the strategies and mechanisms required to assure women a greater voice and a place at the peace table.

A strong argument for increasing women's participation in peace processes derives from international commitments that have been agreed upon by most governments and international institutions. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Beijing Platform for Action provide clear statements of political will that emphasize the need to assure women's access to and full participation in all areas of political decision-making. These agreements have outlined the concrete actions required to fulfil this goal, including the use of positive action programmes and policies that promote gender balance at international, regional and national levels.

As Mu Sochua, Luz Mendez, Hanan Ashrawi and others have demonstrated, women draw on international agreements such as the Beijing platform and CEDAW to advance their struggle for gender equality within national and regional contexts. This process could be further strengthened through renewed commitments that build on existing agreements. The international community has the responsibility to reaffirm its commitment to supporting women's participation in peace processes, and to place this issue firmly on the agenda of powerful international peace and security organs such as the UN Security Council.

Notwithstanding the agreements already reached, resistance to women's presence at the peace table remains strong. The reason often presented for excluding women is that only the warring parties are required to engage in negotiations to end hostilities, and that the issues of women's participation and gender equality bear little relevance to this process. This argument, however, fails to acknowledge that the peace table

is not a single event, but rather a process that holds the potential to transform institutions, structures and relationships within society. The contributors to this publication have shown that women's participation, whether formal or informal, has contributed to ensuring that social justice and gender equality remain central both to the agreements reached at the peace table and to the ensuing process of reconstruction and reconciliation.

In South Africa, for example, women's participation in the negotiations to dismantle apartheid helped to secure a constitutional guarantee of equal treatment for all sectors of society. Women also lobbied for the adoption of positive action programmes that have expanded their access to political decision-making structures. During the peace negotiations in Guatemala, women successfully advocated for incorporating within the agreement a range of issues critical to women's empowerment and gender equality. The agreement affirmed women's right to a paid job, eliminated legal discrimination, imposed penalties for sexual harassment, and set up new institutions to promote women's political participation, including the Office for the Defense of Indigenous Women's Rights. In Cambodia, although women did not participate in the official peace negotiations, they have actively sought to influence the political process in the period of transition to reconstruction and development. They have won constitutional guarantees of equal rights,

including the right to vote, the right to participate in politics and the right to choose their professions. The Ministry for Women and Veteran's Affairs now actively collaborates with non-governmental groups to measure the impact of government policies and programmes on improving the status of women.

Oftentimes, the gains that women have negotiated at the peace table are largely rooted in their first hand experiences of the consequences of war. In most conflict situations, women assume expanded leadership roles in providing for their families and sustaining community relationships and structures. The break-up of families and the wide-scale displacement of communities, economic hardships, and sexual abuse and other human rights violations are among the key factors that propel women to mobilize for peace.

In placing their priorities on the agenda of the peace table, women often draw on their ties with local constituencies. This process of consultation can assist in changing public perceptions, dispelling fears, and fostering an environment of cooperation. It also serves to ensure that the peace negotiated is "owned" by the communities and people who have to make it a reality in their lives. From the Middle East to South Africa, Northern Ireland to Georgia, women are emphasizing the need to build consensus and consult with the community at large. The contributors to this publication outline a wide range of strategies that they have

employed in this regard. These include creating public forums, reaching out to marginalized groups, and strengthening links between governments and civil society in order to ensure more participatory and transparent systems of governance.

In the course of mobilizing and advocating for the right to participate in the peace-building process, many women have also formed strategic partnerships with international institutions and non-governmental organizations. This has opened up new opportunities to advance the peace agenda at national and regional levels. In Africa, women have rallied international support to bolster the development of regional women's peace networks. These include the African Women's Committee on Peace and Development (AWCPD), which is affiliated with the OAU, and the Federation of African Women's Peace Networks (FERFAP). In south-eastern Europe, women's organizations have joined forces with the OSCE to lobby successfully for the establishment of a gender task force that is working to promote gender issues within the framework of the South-Eastern Europe Stability Pact.

These examples of partnerships are all part of a growing movement that is driving women's advocacy for greater participation in decision-making processes related to peace. Ultimately, however, the challenge of ensuring women's equal participation requires a combination of strategies that stress political will, partnerships, and continued activism among

women in all arenas. The responsibility for opening new spaces for women's participation is one that must be shared by the various actors who command political clout and influence over the course of peace negotiations at national, regional and international levels. While women clearly need access to the peace table in order to advance toward the goal of gender equality, the peace table also requires women's participation to truly uphold the principle of democracy and to lay the foundations for sustainable peace.

Emerging Issues

Although this publication may give rise to more questions than answers, some of these questions provide the basis for further exploration. They may also highlight a range of critical issues that women encounter through their participation in peace-making processes.

Arguments for women's inclusion at the peace table must clearly acknowledge the reality that not all women who reach positions of power are active proponents of women's rights. For some, partisan political loyalties take precedence over ideals and goals that stress the advancement of women in society. It is therefore not enough to assume that progress toward gender equality will be achieved simply by increasing the number of women decision-makers. Avenues must be sought to build a critical mass of transformational leaders—both men and

women—who place the goals of social justice and gender equality at the center of their political motivations, and who will together assume the responsibility for moving this agenda forward.

The task of building and maintaining strong links between women political leaders and their grassroots constituencies requires focused attention. The agendas of these two groups may be widely divergent. This gap often increases in situations of conflict, when mechanisms that would otherwise promote leadership accountability have broken down. The question therefore is how to develop effective mechanisms during conflicts to ensure that women leaders are committed to presenting and defending grassroots priorities.

The difficulties inherent in developing more effective partnerships between women leaders and their male counterparts in peace-making processes has been well-captured in this publication. The persisting question is how to engage men as partners without compromising on the goal of equal rights. In the words of Mo Mowlam, "You have to take men with you. That doesn't mean you stop fighting as women. It doesn't mean you stop giving each other support. It doesn't mean you stop when you've made some progress. But you also have to say, 'Hold on a minute—this guy over here is getting very upset.' Is it going to improve the situation of women who have to live and work with that man in the future, if he feels excluded?

You have to win by accommodation sometimes. But you accommodate on one side, and keep pushing on the other."

Women who enter peace processes sometimes do so facing threats to their personal safety. Their bravery may include reaching out to build alliances with women from "the other side," or developing links with international partners and voicing opposition to a conflict. While security risks are not faced by women alone, regressive social norms that deny women opportunities to assume leadership roles may sometimes raise the stakes for those who challenge these norms in order to take part in the political process. In committing itself to supporting women's participation in peace-making, the international community must seriously consider how to express support for women leaders who dare to speak out.

Translating peace agreements into concrete development programmes during the phase of post-conflict reconstruction is invariably linked to the need to secure the requisite financial and technical investments to manage the transition successfully. The tendency to marginalize programme initiatives that relate to the advancement of women's rights and gender equality may be exacerbated in the process of drawing up development priorities, particularly when the needs are overwhelming. Even when women, through their participation at the peace table, have succeeded in obtaining paper

agreements for the advancement of women's rights and gender equality, the real test of these achievements arises during the reconstruction period. International support for women's participation at the peace table must address the question of how to ensure that sustained resources will be forthcoming to help turn the legal, economic, social and political gains enshrined in peace agreements into concrete benefits that touch the lives of most women in society.

Although this publication has highlighted women's limited participation within the formal structures of peace negotiations, it has also recognized the various informal channels that women use to exert influence over the agenda of peace negotiations. In Liberia, the persistent efforts of the LWI to contribute to the talks overcame the initial reticence of the warlords. They began consulting with the LWI, eventually even accepting proposals that the group presented. Examples such as this support the case for granting women's participation in the informal sector of peace negotiations greater recognition and support. The question that remains is how to effectively integrate women's informal contributions within the formal processes, while still affirming the value of this work and finding opportunities to strengthen it. In the end, "you can't forget about us," says Mary Brownell. "We are around, and we are a factor to be reckoned with."

Notes

- ¹ Margaret Snyder and Mary Tadesse, *African Women and Development: a History* (London: Zed Books, 1995), p. 19.

Notes on Contributors

Dr. Hanan Ashrawi: *Director of the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy, Palestine*

Dr. Ashrawi was born in Ramallah in 1947 and lives in Jerusalem. She comes from a Christian nationalist family with several members who joined the Fatah movement. She studied in Beirut, the United Kingdom and the United States before taking up her post as head of the English department at Bir Zeit University. Between 1991 and 1994, Dr. Ashrawi served as spokesperson for the official Palestinian delegation. In 1994, she founded the Independent Palestinian Citizen's Rights Commission. Elected in January 1996 as an independent candidate, she is now one of the two Christian members of the Palestinian Legislative Council for Jerusalem. Dr. Ashrawi served as Minister of Higher Education until her resignation in August 1998. She currently directs the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy. It is based in Ramallah, where Dr. Ashrawi lives with her husband Emile and their two daughters.

Mrs. Mary Brownell: *Director, Liberian Women's Initiative, Liberia*

Mrs. Brownell started her career as a school teacher. In 1993, while the regional Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) peace talks were taking place and with civil war still raging in Liberia, Mrs. Brownell helped to found the Liberian Women's Initiative (LWI). The group is dedicated to the pursuit of peace and reconciliation, and includes members from all walks of life and every corner of the country. Mrs. Brownell led a delegation of women to the ongoing peace talks to advocate for disarmament before elections. They became effective consultants during the negotiations, meeting with all parties. Today, Mrs. Brownell continues to run the LWI, and has expanded its programmes to include literacy and education for women.

Ms. Cheryl Carolus: *South African High Commissioner to the United Kingdom*

Ms. Carolus started her career in 1979 as a secondary school teacher in Liberia. In 1983, she took up the post of full-time Provincial Secretary of the United Democratic Front (UDF) Western Cape, and in 1985, she became UDF National Coordinator. In 1990, she joined the University of the Western Cape as Education Resources and Information Project Staff Development Officer. In 1991, she was elected a full-time member of the African National Congress National Executive Committee and Head of the Human Development Department of the National Working Committee. Ms. Carolus became the National Executive Committee Coordinator of ANC policy in 1992; in 1994, she was elected the party's Deputy Secretary General. She became Acting Secretary General in 1997. She assumed her post as South African High Commissioner to London on 2 March 1998. Ms. Carolus holds Bachelor of Arts degrees in law and education from the University of the Western Cape. She is married to Mr. Graeme Bloch.

Mrs. Nani Chanishvili: *Member of Parliament, Georgia*

Mrs. Chanishvili started her career as a professor of linguistics in Georgia. She was a founding member of the university's peace group, organising seminars and workshops to promote peaceful dialogue and negotiations. Currently, Mrs. Chanishvili serves on the parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee and is an active participant in the political transformation taking place across the Trans-Caucasus region. She is also a founding member of the Georgian Women's Parliamentary Club.

Ms. Emma Chirix: *Director, Kaqla, Guatemala*

Ms. Chirix began her career as a nurse, before joining a national social research centre. She was a founding member of Kaqla, the Guatemalan Indigenous Women's Movement, and she played a leading role in drafting the 1995 Accord on the Indigenous Population's Identity and Rights. She is also a member of the advisory committee of the Fund for Public Policy Research, which provides resources to civil society organisations that are undertaking research related to peace and policy formulation.

Mrs. Piedad Cordoba Ruiz: *Senator, Colombia*

Senator Cordoba Ruiz studied at the Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana de Medellin, and specialized in organizational and family law. Between 1986 and 1988, she was General Secretary of the Municipality of Medellin. She has also served as a Representative in the Assembly of Antioquia and in the National Congress. She has been a Senator since 1994, and currently heads the Senate Human Rights Commission and belongs to the Senate Peace Commission.

Ms. Bozgul Dodkhudoeva: *Former Deputy Prime Minister, Tajikistan*

As Deputy Prime Minister until December 1999, Ms. Dodkhudoeva played an active role in peace-building and reconciliation in Tajikistan. She was the only female member of the 26-person National Reconciliation Commission, which manages Tajikistan's transition to peace. She has been a strong supporter of women's organisations working in relief, rehabilitation and development, and is a prominent advocate for women's rights and inclusion in decision-making processes.

Ms. Helen Jackson: *Member of Parliament, United Kingdom*

Ms. Jackson is the Labour Member of Parliament for Sheffield, and served as Personal Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland from 1996 to 1999. Her responsibilities included consulting with women's groups and civil society organisations. In 1998, Ms. Jackson headed a cross-party group of MPs to meet political and economic experts in Eire. She was the UK representative to European Parliamentarians for Southern Africa in 1999, and observed the South African elections. Ms. Jackson divides her time between London and Sheffield.

Ambassador Georg Lennkh: *Director General, Austrian Development Cooperation, Austria*

Ambassador Lennkh obtained his law degree from the University of Graz in Austria, and joined the Austrian Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1965. He served as a diplomat in Japan before joining the Austrian Mission to the United Nations. In 1993, he became Director General for Development Cooperation in the Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Since 1998, Ambassador Lennkh has chaired the Reconstruction Commission at the Arusha peace talks on Burundi. He advocated for the inclusion of women in the commission, and initiated a number of informal seminars and roundtable sessions providing the women observer delegation an opportunity to voice their concerns and initiatives.

Ms. Luz Mendez: *General Coordinator, National Union of Women, Guatemala*

Ms. Mendez is currently General Coordinator for the National Union of Women. She is a member of the Metropolitan Committee of the National Women's Forum and participated in the 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. Presently, she is part of the Secretariat for International Relations of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity. Ms. Mendez trained in Business Administration and Social Communications.

Dr. Marjorie (Mo) Mowlam: *Minister for the Cabinet Office, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, United Kingdom*

Dr. Mowlam was appointed Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in 1997, and played a pivotal role as mediator in accordance with the Good Friday Agreement. Educated in England and America, she began her career as a research assistant to Member of Parliament Tony Benn, then became a lecturer and an administrator in adult education at Northern College in Barnsley. She has been the Labour Member of Parliament for Redcar since 1987. Dr. Mowlam was elected to the Shadow Cabinet for the first time in 1992, where she was given responsibility for women's issues and for shadowing the newly created Office of Public Services and Science. In 1993, she was appointed Shadow Heritage Secretary; she was promoted to Shadow Northern Ireland Secretary following elections in October 1994. In 1999, Dr. Mowlam was appointed as Minister for the Cabinet Office, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. She lives in London with her husband John.

Mrs. Alice Ntwarante: *Central Committee member, Front pour la Democratie au Burundi (FRODEBU), Burundi*

Mrs. Ntwarante trained as a lawyer and until recently worked as a banker in Bujumbura. She is a member of the Central Committee of the Hutu-dominated FRODEBU party, and is also part of the women's delegation to Arusha. Mrs. Ntwarante is widowed and currently lives in Bujumbura.

Mrs. Imelda Nzirorera: *Chief Administrator, Campaign Against Genocide, Ministry of Human Rights, Burundi*

Mrs. Nzirorera is a member of the women's observer mission to Arusha, and plays a key role in the National Committee of Women in Peace. She is married and lives with her family in Bujumbura.

Her Excellency Ruth S. Perry: *Chair, Perry Center for Peace, Stability and Development, Liberia*

Mrs. Perry began her career working for Chase Manhattan Bank in Liberia. Between 1986 and 1990, she was a Senator during the rule of President Samuel Doe's National Democratic Party of Liberia. She has been an active member of the Liberian Women's Initiative and was appointed chair of the Council of State of the Transitional Government in 1996 until the July 1997 elections. Currently, she is Chair of the Perry Center for Peace, Stability and Development, and is First Vice-Chairperson of the Organisation for African Unity. The widow of a prominent Liberian lawyer, Mrs. Perry has seven children.

Ms. Mu Sochua: *Minister for Women and Veterans' Affairs, Cambodia*

After 18 years in exile, and six years as a UN relief worker in the Cambodian refugee camps along the Thai border, Mrs. Sochua returned to Cambodia in 1991 and founded the first Cambodian NGO, Khemara. Its goal is to enhance the leadership capacities of women through economic, social and political empowerment. Mrs. Sochua played a key role in bringing the voices of women into the public arena. In 1995, she was appointed Special Advisor on Women's Affairs to the Prime Minister. In 1998, she became Minister for Women and Veterans' Affairs in the Cambodian government.

Acronyms

ANC: African National Congress

AWCPD: African Women's Committee on Peace and Development

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

COPMAGUA: Co-ordination of Organizations of the Mayan People of Guatemala

ECA: Economic Commission for Africa

ECOWAS: Economic Community of West African States

ECOMOG: Economic Community of West African States Ceasefire Monitoring Group

FERFAP: Federation of African Women's Peace Networks

FUNCINPEC: National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia

LWI: Liberian Women's Initiative

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NIWC: Northern Ireland Women's Coalition

OAU: Organisation for African Unity

OSCE: Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe

SAARC: South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation

SADC: South African Development Community

UNRG: Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity

UNTAC: UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia

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