

The Role of Women in Peace-Building

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I feel extremely honored to speak at this wonderful gathering focusing on the role of women in world peace. My warmest thanks to the organizers, Lehman College and the International Health Awareness Network, for having made today's event possible. It thrills me immensely to recall that the U.N. Security Council's first meeting in the U.S. took place on the premises of Lehman College. My association with IHAN and its President, Sorosh Roshan, is long, and I am proud of all their work for the women and children of the world.

No words can describe how delighted I am to greet in this forum the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Madame Shirin Ebadi and pay tribute to her sustained and courageous efforts, over many years, for human rights and democracy and for the rights of women and children.

Madame Ebadi: your name shines in the annals of the Nobel Peace Prize. We have a special feeling of pride because you represent the developing world, but the whole world is proud of you. The Nobel Committee has very appropriately described you as "truly a woman of the people." Your clear voice, as lawyer and judge, as author and activist, powerfully inspires the determination to change in millions of people worldwide. Your exemplary work serves as guiding light for all those who are campaigning for human rights and democracy. I would also like to take this opportunity to offer my deep appreciation for the excellent work being done by my dear colleague Under-Secretary-General Olara Otunnu, as an advocate of children whose rights and well-being are continuously violated in conflict situations. This morning I have been asked to present some remarks on "The Role of Women in Peace-Building." It is encouraging that during the last years, there has been an increasing recognition by governments, international organizations and civil society of the importance of

gender equality and empowerment of women in the continuing struggle for equality, democracy and human rights and for poverty eradication and development.

In nearly every country and region of the world, we can point to areas in which there has been progress on achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. Yet, this progress has been uneven, and the gains remain fragile. Virtually nowhere are women's rights given the priority they deserve. And, despite increased global awareness, in many countries the rights of women are still under threat. Intensified efforts from all of us are needed to promote women's rights at the national level and to develop effective mechanisms to fully ensure them and to monitor their enforcement.

Equally challenging is the growing violence against women and girls in armed conflict. In today's conflicts, they are not only the victims of hardship, displacement and warfare, they are directly targeted with rape, forced pregnancies and assault as deliberate instruments of war. Women are deeply affected by conflicts, which they have had no role in creating. Women's interests have been neglected by the peace process, which has resulted in male-centered approaches to peace and security.

The intrinsic role of women in global peace and security has remained unrecognized since the creation of the United Nations. The inexplicable silence of 55 long years was broken, for the first time, on the 8th of March 2000, on International Women's Day, when the President of the U.N. Security Council issued a statement that recognized the underutilized and undervalued contribution women can make to preventing war, to building peace and to bringing individuals and societies back in harmony. I consider it my proud privilege that as the Council President I could take that initiative. It was this statement that played the most crucial role in the process of adoption of the now famous and unique Security Council Resolution well known by its number 1325. My proposal attracted the enthusiastic support of many NGOs. Among my Council colleagues, I recall the full support of Ambassador Durrant of Jamaica and Ambassador Andjaba of Namibia under whose Presidency the landmark 1325 was adopted by the Security Council later in October of that year.

The potential of Resolution 1325, its implications and its impact in real terms, are enormous. Women and many men all over the world have been energized by this resolution, and political support for its implementation by U.N. members, international organizations and, most importantly, civil society is growing every day. Progress has been made in *six broad areas*:

- awareness of the importance of gender perspectives in peace support work,
- development of gender action work plans in disarmament and humanitarian affairs,
- training in gender sensitivity,
- deployment of gender advisers,
- prevention and response to violence against women; work on codes of conduct, including sexual harassment; and
- support for greater participation of women in post-conflict reconstruction, post-conflict elections and governance.

That women make a difference when they are in decision- and policy-making positions is no longer in dispute. When women participate in peace negotiations and in the crafting of a peace agreement, they keep the future of their societies, their communities, in mind. They think of how their children and grandchildren will be able to live in their own homeland in a peaceful and secure environment, how they will benefit from the structure of peace envisaged in the agreement. They have the broader and longer-term interest of society in mind. whereas, historically in post-conflict situations, men are interested in ensuring that the peace process will give them the authority and power that they are seeking.

Let me mention one shining example. The Mano River Women's Peace Network brings together women from the West African nations of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. In pursuing their vision of peace, the women rallied together to call for disarmament and played a crucial role in paving the way to solve the conflict by having the three heads of government of these countries sit at the same table. This joint peace initiative by the women of the Mano River region was awarded the U.N. Human Rights Prize for 2003 in recognition of the Network's outstanding achievement.

A lasting peace cannot be achieved without the participation of women and the inclusion of gender perspectives and participation in peace processes. Informal peace initiatives of grassroots women's groups and networks, organized across party and ethnic lines, have carried out reconciliation efforts and have been increasingly recognized by the Security Council. The Council has met with women's groups and representatives of NGOs during its field missions to the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kosovo and Sierra Leone.

Much, nevertheless, remains to be done. We continue to find reports that women are still very often ignored or excluded from formal processes of negotiations and elections. Gender perspectives must be fully integrated into the terms of reference of the Security Council resolutions, reports and missions that are related to peace operations. Peace support operations should include gender advisers and specialists and ensure consultations with women's groups and networks. Full involvement of women in peace negotiations at national and international levels must be provided for, including training for women on formal peace processes. Gender perspectives should also be an integral part of post-conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction programs. A no-tolerance, no-impunity approach must be used in cases of violation of the code of conduct in peacekeeping operations. And gender sensitivity training must be provided to the peacekeepers before they arrive in the zones of conflict.

But, above all, peace education is the most important ingredient in all these efforts and in the endeavor to build a culture of peace in all parts of our globe. I am absolutely delighted to see so many bright young people gathered here this morning and I dedicate my remarks to them.

Let me conclude by stressing again that sustainable peace is inseparable from gender equality. In coming years, women must play a most significant and substantive role in making the transition from the culture of violence to the culture of peace. We should not forget that when women are marginalized, there is little chance for an open and participatory society.

I thank you, Madame Ebadi, for your continuing inspiration to all of us. I thank you all for your gracious attention.