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Women Waging Peace: Inclusive Security

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Women Waging Peace

You can't end wars simply by declaring peace. "Inclusive security" rests on the principle that fundamental social changes are necessary to prevent renewed hostilities. Women have proven time and again their unique ability to bridge seemingly insurmountable divides. So why aren't they at the negotiating table? | **By Swanee Hunt and Cristina Posa**

Allowing men who plan wars to plan peace is a bad habit. But international negotiators and policymakers can break that habit by including peace promoters, not just warriors, at the negotiating table. More often than not, those peace promoters are women. Certainly, some extraordinary men have changed the course of history with their peacemaking; likewise, a few belligerent women have made it to the top of the political ladder or, at the grass-roots level, have taken the roles of suicide bombers or soldiers. Exceptions aside, however, women are often the most powerful voices for moderation in times of conflict. While most men come to the negotiating table directly from the war room and battlefield, women usually arrive straight out of civil activism and—take a deep breath—family care.

Yet, traditional thinking about war and peace either ignores women or regards them as victims. This oversight costs the world dearly. The wars of

the last decade have gripped the public conscience largely because civilians were not merely caught in the crossfire; they were targeted, deliberately and brutally, by military strategists. Just as warfare has become “inclusive”—with civilian deaths more common than soldiers’—so too must our approach toward ending conflict. Today, the goal is not simply the absence of war, but the creation of sustainable peace by fostering fundamental societal changes. In this respect, the United States and other countries could take a lesson from Canada, whose innovative “human security” initiative—by making human beings and their communities, rather than states, its point of reference—focuses on safety and protection, particularly of the most vulnerable segments of a population.

The concept of “inclusive security,” a diverse, citizen-driven approach to global stability, emphasizes women’s agency, not their vulnerability. Rather than motivated by gender fairness, this concept is driven by efficiency: Women are crucial to inclusive security since they are often at the center of nongovernmental organizations (ngos), popular protests, electoral referendums, and other citizen-empowering movements whose influence has grown with the global spread of democracy. An inclusive security approach expands the array of tools available to police, military, and diplomatic structures by adding collaboration with local efforts to achieve peace. Every effort

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The Weaker Sex...

During a peace march to a village in western Chechnya that was the scene of an alleged massacre, mothers of Russian soldiers confront Russian troops.

to bridge divides, even if unsuccessful, has value, both in lessons learned and links to be built on later. Local actors with crucial experience resolving conflicts, organizing political movements, managing relief efforts, or working with military forces bring that experience into ongoing peace processes.

International organizations are slowly recognizing the indispensable role that women play in preventing war and sustaining peace. On October 31, 2000, the United Nations Security Council issued Resolution 1325 urging the secretary-general to expand the role of women in U.N. field-based operations, especially among military observers, civilian police, human rights workers, and humanitarian personnel. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is working to move women off the gender sidelines and into the everyday activities of the organization—particularly in the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, which has been useful in monitoring elections and human rights throughout Europe and the

former Soviet Union. Last November, the European Parliament passed a hard-hitting resolution calling on European Union members (and the European Commission and Council) to promote the equal participation of women in diplomatic conflict resolution; to ensure that women fill at least 40 percent of all reconciliation, peacekeeping, peace-enforcement, peacebuilding, and conflict-prevention posts; and to support the creation and strengthening of NGOs (including women's organizations) that focus on conflict prevention, peace building, and post-conflict reconstruction.

But such strides by international organizations have done little to correct the deplorable extent to which local women have been relegated to the margins of police, military, and diplomatic efforts. Consider that Bosnian women were not invited to participate in the Dayton talks, which ended the war in Bosnia, even though during the conflict 40 women's associations remained organized and active across ethnic lines. Not surprisingly, this exclusion has subsequently char-

Women Should Be Seen but Not Heard...



Clockwise: A Chilean woman speaks out against former dictator Augusto Pinochet; Indonesian women call for peace as they protest the parliamentary committee investigating President Abdurrahman Wahid for alleged corruption; Japanese activists demand the withdrawal of U.S. Marines from Japan.



CLOCKWISE: J. R. RIPPER/SOCIAL PHOTOS; ACHMAD IBRAHIM/AP; TOSHIYUKI AIZAWA, REUTERS

acterized—and undermined—the implementation of the Dayton accord. During a 1997 trip to Bosnia, U.S. President Bill Clinton, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and National Security Advisor Samuel Berger had a miserable meeting with intransigent politicians elected under the ethnic-based requirements of Dayton. During the same period, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton engaged a dozen women from across the country who shared story after story of their courageous and remarkably effective work to restore their communities. At the end of the day, a grim Berger faced the press, offering no encouraging word from the meetings with the political dinosaurs. The first lady's meeting with the energetic women activists was never mentioned.

We can ignore women's work as peacemakers, or we can harness its full force across a wide range of activities relevant to the security sphere: bridging the divide between groups in conflict, influencing local security forces, collaborating with international organizations, and seeking political office.

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

The idea of women as peacemakers is not political correctness run amok. Social science research supports the stereotype of women as generally more collaborative than men and thus more inclined toward consensus and compromise. Ironically, women's status as second-class citizens is a source of empowerment, since it has made women adept at finding innovative ways to cope with problems. Because women are not ensconced within the mainstream, those in power consider them less threatening, allowing women to work unimpeded and "below the radar screen." Since they usually have not been behind a rifle, women, in contrast to men, have less psychological distance to reach across a conflict line. (They are also more accepted on the "other side," because it is assumed that they did not do any of the actual killing.) Women often choose an identity, notably that of mothers, that cuts across international borders and ethnic enclaves. Given their roles as family nurturers, women have a huge investment in the stability of their communities. And since women know their communities, they can predict the acceptance of peace initiatives, as well as broker agreements in their own neighborhoods.

As U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan remarked

in October 2000 to the Security Council, "For generations, women have served as peace educators, both in their families and in their societies. They have proved instrumental in building bridges rather than walls." Women have been able to bridge the divide even in situations where leaders have deemed conflict resolution futile in the face of so-called intractable ethnic hatreds. Striking examples of women making the impossible possible come from Sudan, a country splintered by decades of civil war. In the south, women working together in the New Sudan Council of Churches conducted their own version of shuttle diplomacy—perhaps without the

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panache of jetting between capitals—and organized the Wunlit tribal summit in February 1999 to bring an end to bloody hostilities between the Dinka and Nuer peoples. As a result, the Wunlit Covenant guaranteed peace between the Dinka and the Nuer, who agreed to share rights to water, fishing, and grazing land, which had been key points of disagreement. The covenant also returned prisoners and guaranteed freedom of movement for members of both tribes.

On another continent, women have bridged the seemingly insurmountable differences between India and Pakistan by organizing huge rallies to unite citizens from both countries. Since 1994, the Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy has worked to overcome the hysterics of the nationalist media and jingoistic governing elites by holding annual conventions where Indians and Pakistanis can affirm their shared histories, forge networks, and act together on specific initiatives. In 1995, for instance, activists joined forces on behalf of fishers and their children who were languishing in each side's jails because they had strayed across maritime boundaries. As a result, the adversarial governments released the prisoners and their boats.

In addition to laying the foundation for broader accords by tackling the smaller, everyday problems that keep people apart, women have also

taken the initiative in drafting principles for comprehensive settlements. The platform of Jerusalem Link, a federation of Palestinian and Israeli women's groups, served as a blueprint for negotiations over the final status of Jerusalem during the Oslo process. Former President Clinton, the week of the failed Camp David talks in July 2000, remarked simply, "If we'd had women at Camp David, we'd have an agreement."

Sometimes conflict resolution requires unshackling the media. Journalists can nourish a fair and tolerant vision of society or feed the public poisonous, one-sided, and untruthful accounts of the "news"

Nelson Mandela suggested at last summer's Arusha peace talks that if Burundian men began fighting again, their women should withhold "conjugal rights" (like cooking, he added).

that stimulate violent conflict. Supreme Allied Commander of Europe Wesley Clark understood as much when he ordered nato to bomb transmitters in Kosovo to prevent the Milosevic media machine from spewing ever more inflammatory rhetoric. One of the founders of the independent Kosovo radio station RTV-21 realized that there were "many instances of male colleagues reporting with anger, which served to raise the tensions rather than lower them." As a result, RTV-21 now runs workshops in radio, print, and tv journalism to cultivate a core of female journalists with a non-inflammatory style. The osce and the bbc, which train promising local journalists in Kosovo and Bosnia, would do well to seek out women, who generally bring with them a reputation for moderation in unstable situations.

INFLUENCING SECURITY FORCES

The influence of women on warriors dates back to the ancient Greek play *Lysistrata*. Borrowing from that play's story, former South African President Nelson Mandela suggested at last summer's Arusha peace talks on the conflict in Burundi that if Burundian men began fighting again, their women should withhold "conjugal rights" (like cooking, he added).

Women can also act as a valuable interface between their countries' security forces (police and military) and the public, especially in cases when rapid response is necessary to head off violence. Women in Northern Ireland, for example, have helped calm the often deadly "marching season" by facilitating mediations between Protestant unionists and Catholic nationalists. The women bring together key members of each community, many of whom are released prisoners, as mediators to calm tensions. This circle of mediators works with local police throughout the marching season, meeting quietly and maintaining contacts on a 24-hour basis. This intervention provides a powerful extension of the limited tools of the local police and security forces.

Likewise, an early goal of the Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace was to meet and talk with the military leaders of the various rebel armies. These contacts secured women's access to areas controlled by the revolutionary movements, a critical variable in the success or failure of humanitarian efforts in war zones. Women have also worked with the military to search for missing people, a common element in the cycle of violence. In Colombia, for example, women were so persistent in their demands for information regarding 150 people abducted from a church in 1999 that the army eventually gave them space on a military base for an information and strategy center. The military worked alongside the women and their families trying to track down the missing people. In short, through moral suasion, local women often have influence where outsiders, such as international human rights agencies, do not.

That influence may have allowed a female investigative reporter like Maria Cristina Caballero to go where a man could not go, venturing on horseback alone, eight hours into the jungle to tape a four-hour interview with the head of the paramilitary forces in Colombia. She also interviewed another guerilla leader and published an award-winning comparison of the transcripts, showing where the two mortal enemies shared the same vision. "This [was] bigger than a story," she later said, "this [was] hope for peace." Risking their lives to move back and forth across the divide, women like Caballero perform work that is just as important for regional stabilization as the grandest Plan Colombia.

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

Given the nature of “inclusive” war, security forces are increasingly called upon to ensure the safe passage of humanitarian relief across conflict zones. Women serve as indispensable contacts between civilians, warring parties, and relief organizations. Without women’s knowledge of the local scene, the mandate of the military to support NGOs would often be severely hindered, if not impossible.

In rebel-controlled areas of Sudan, women have worked closely with humanitarian organizations to prevent food from being diverted from those who

need it most. According to Catherine Loria Duku Jeremano of Oxfam: “The normal pattern was to hand out relief to the men, who were then expected to take it home to be distributed to their family. However, many of the men did what they pleased with the food they received: either selling it directly, often in exchange for alcohol, or giving food to the wives they favored.” Sudanese women worked closely with tribal chiefs and relief organizations to establish a system allowing women to pick up the food for their families, despite contrary cultural norms.

In Pristina, Kosovo, Vjosa Dobruna, a pediatric

The Black and the Green

Grass-roots women’s organizations in Israel come in two colors: black and green. The Women in Black, founded in 1988, and the Women in Green, founded in 1993, could not be further apart on the political spectrum, but both claim the mantle of “womanhood” and “motherhood” in the ongoing struggle to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

One month after the Palestinian intifada broke out in December 1988, a small group of women decided to meet every Friday afternoon at a busy Jerusalem intersection wearing all black and holding hand-shaped signs that read: “Stop the Occupation.” The weekly gatherings continued and soon spread across Israel to Europe, the United States, and then to Asia.

While the movement was originally dedicated to achieving peace in the Middle East, other groups soon protested against repression in the Balkans and India. For these activists, their status as women lends them a special authority when it comes to demanding peace.

In the words of the Asian Women’s Human Rights Council: “We are the Women in Black...women, unmasking the many horrific faces of more public ‘legitimate’ forms of violence—state repression, communalism, ethnic cleansing, nationalism, and wars...”

Today, the Women in Black in Israel continue their nonviolent opposition to the occupation in cooperation with the umbrella group Coalition of Women for a Just Peace. They have been demonstrating against the closures of various Palestinian cities, arguing that the blockades prevent pregnant women from accessing healthcare services and keep students from attending school. The group also calls for the full participation of women in peace negotiations.

While the Women in Black stood in silent protest worldwide, a group of “grandmothers, mothers, wives, and daughters; housewives and professionals; secular and religious” formed the far-right Women in Green in 1993 out of “a shared love, devotion and concern for Israel.” Known for the signature green



hats they wear at rallies, the Women in Green emerged as a protest to the Oslo accords on the grounds that Israel made too many concessions to Yasir Arafat’s Palestinian Liberation Organization. The group opposes returning the Golan Heights to Syria, sharing sovereignty over Jerusalem with the Palestinians, and insists that “Israel remain a Jewish state.”

The Women in Green boast some 15,000 members in Israel, and while they have not garnered the global support of the Women in Black, 15,000 Americans have joined their cause. An ardent supporter of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, the group seeks to educate the Israeli electorate through weekly street theater and public demonstrations, as well as articles, posters, and newspaper advertisements.

While the groups’ messages and methods diverge, their existence and influence demonstrate that women can mobilize support for political change—no matter what color they wear.

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A Woman's Place Is in the Home...

Top: Rebel leaders of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia shake hands with peace negotiator and former Foreign Minister María Emma Mejía. **Below, left to right:** A female member of the Swedish Infantry Battalion, which is part of the United Nations peace-keeping force in Cyprus; Nobel Peace Prize winner Mairead Maguire of Northern Ireland meets with Palestinians. **Bottom:** North and South Korean delegations hold peace talks.



TOP TO BOTTOM: RICARDO MAZALAN/AP; UN; NOEL JABBOUR/AP; RICHARD DREW/AP

neurologist and human rights leader, is now the joint administrator for civil society for the U.N. Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (unmik). In September 2000, at the request of nato, she organized a multiethnic strategic planning session to integrate women throughout unmik. Before that gathering, women who had played very significant roles in their communities felt shunned by the international organizations that descended on Kosovo following the bombing campaign. Vjosa's conference pulled them back into the mainstream, bringing international players into the conference to hear from local women what stabilizing measures they were planning, rather than the other way around. There, as in Bosnia, the OSCE has created a quota system for elected office, mandating that women comprise one third of each party's candidate list; leaders like Vjosa helped turn that policy into reality.

In addition to helping aid organizations find better ways to distribute relief or helping the U.N. and OSCE implement their ambitious mandates, women also work closely with them to locate and exchange prisoners of war. As the peace processes in Northern Ireland, Bosnia, and the Middle East illustrate, a deadlock on the exchange and release of prisoners can be a major obstacle to achieving a final settlement. Women activists in Armenia and Azerbaijan have worked closely with the International Helsinki Citizens Assembly and the OSCE for the release of hostages in the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh, where tens of thousands of people have been killed. In fact, these women's knowledge of the local players and the situation on the ground would make them indispensable in peace negotiations to end this 13-year-old conflict.

REACHING FOR POLITICAL OFFICE

In 1977, women organizers in Northern Ireland won the Nobel Peace Prize for their nonsectarian public demonstrations. Two decades later, Northern Irish women are showing how diligently women must still work not only to ensure a place at the negotiating table but also to sustain peace by reaching critical mass in political office. In 1996, peace activists Monica McWilliams (now a member of the Northern Ireland Assembly) and May Blood (now a member of the House of Lords) were told that only leaders of the top 10 political parties—all men—would be included in the peace talks.

With only six weeks to organize, McWilliams and Blood gathered 10,000 signatures to create a new political party (the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, or niwc) and got themselves on the ballot. They were voted into the top 10 and earned a place at the table.

The niwc's efforts paid off. The women drafted key clauses of the Good Friday Agreement regarding the importance of mixed housing, the particular difficulties of young people, and the need for resources to address these problems. The niwc also lobbied for the early release and reintegration of political pris-

The grass-roots, get-out-the-vote work of Vox Femina convinced hesitant Yugoslav women to vote for change; those votes contributed to the margin that ousted President Slobodan Milosevic.

oners in order to combat social exclusion and pushed for a comprehensive review of the police service so that all members of society would accept it. Clearly, the women's prior work with individuals and families affected by "the Troubles" enabled them to formulate such salient contributions to the agreement. In the subsequent public referendum on the Good Friday Agreement, Mo Mowlam, then British secretary of state for Northern Ireland, attributed the overwhelming success of the yes Campaign to the niwc's persistent canvassing and lobbying.

Women in the former Yugoslavia are also stepping forward to wrest the reins of political control from extremists (including women, such as ultranationalist Bosnian Serb President Biljana Plavsic) who destroyed their country. Last December, Zorica Trifunovic, founding member of the local Women in Black (an antiwar group formed in Belgrade in October 1991), led a meeting that united 90 women leaders of pro-democracy political campaigns across the former Yugoslavia. According to polling by the National Democratic Institute, the grass-roots, get-out-the-vote work of groups such as Vox Femina (a local ngo that participated in the December meeting) convinced hesitant women to vote for change; those votes contributed to the margin that ousted President Slobodan Milosevic.

Argentina provides another example of women making the transition from protesters to politicians:

Several leaders of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo movement, formed in the 1970s to protest the “disappearances” of their children at the hands of the military regime, have now been elected to political office. And in Russia, the Committee of Soldiers’ Mothers—a protest group founded in 1989 demanding their sons’ rights amidst cruel conditions in the Russian military—has grown into a powerful organization with 300 chapters and official political status. In January, U.S. Ambassador to Moscow Jim

women would emerge as the more logical choice). But the key reason behind women’s marginalization may be that everyone recognizes just how good women are at forging peace. A U.N. official once stated that, in Africa, women are often excluded from negotiating teams because the war leaders “are afraid the women will compromise” and give away too much.

Some encouraging signs of change, however, are emerging. Rwandan President Paul Kagame, dismayed at his difficulty in attracting international aid to his genocide-ravaged country, recently distinguished Rwanda from the prevailing image of brutality in central Africa by appointing three women to his negotiating team for the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In an unusually healthy tit for tat, the Ugandans responded by immediately appointing a woman to their team.

Will those women make a difference? Negotiators sometimes

worry that having women participate in the discussion may change the tone of the meeting. They’re right: A British participant in the Northern Ireland peace talks insightfully noted that when the parties became bogged down by abstract issues and past offenses, “the women would come and talk about their loved ones, their bereavement, their children and their hopes for the future.” These deeply personal comments, rather than being a diversion, helped keep the talks focused. The women’s experiences reminded the parties that security for all citizens was what really mattered.

The role of women as peacemakers can be expanded in many ways. Mediators can and should insist on gender balance among negotiators to ensure a peace plan that is workable at the community level. Cultural barriers can be overcome if high-level visitors require that a critical mass (usually one third) of the local interlocutors be women (and not simply present as wives). When drafting principles for negotiation, diplomats should determine whether women’s groups have already agreed upon key conflict-bridging principles, and whether their approach can serve as a basis for general negotiations.

Moreover, to foster a larger pool of potential peacemakers, embassies in conflict areas should broaden their regular contact with local women leaders and sponsor women in training programs, both at home and abroad. Governments can also do their part by pro-

International security forces and diplomats will find no better allies than these mobilized mothers, who are tackling the toughest, most hardened hostilities.

Collins described the committee as a significant factor in countering the most aggressive voices promoting military force in Chechnya. Similar mothers’ groups have sprung up across the former Soviet Union and beyond—including the Mothers of Tiananmen Square. International security forces and diplomats will find no better allies than these mobilized mothers, who are tackling the toughest, most hardened hostilities.

YOU’VE COME A LONG WAY, MAYBE

Common sense dictates that women should be central to peacemaking, where they can bring their experience in conflict resolution to bear. Yet, despite all of the instances where women have been able to play a role in peace negotiations, women remain relegated to the sidelines. Part of the problem is structural: Even though more and more women are legislators and soldiers, underrepresentation persists in the highest levels of political and military hierarchies. The presidents, prime ministers, party leaders, cabinet secretaries, and generals who typically negotiate peace settlements are overwhelmingly men. There is also a psychological barrier that precludes women from sitting in on negotiations: Waging war is still thought of as a “man’s job,” and as such, the task of stopping war often is delegated to men (although if we could begin to think about the process not in terms of stopping war but promoting peace,

viding information technology and training to women activists through private and public partnerships. Internet communication allows women peace builders to network among themselves, as well as exchange tactics and strategies with their global counterparts.

“Women understood the cost of the war and were genuinely interested in peace,” recalls retired Admiral Jonathan Howe, reflecting on his experience leading the U.N. mission in Somalia in the early 1990s. “They’d had it with their warrior husbands. They were a force willing to say enough is enough.

The men were sitting around talking and chewing qat, while the women were working away. They were such a positive force. . . . You have to look at all elements in society and be ready to tap into those that will be constructive.”

Lasting peace must be homegrown. Inclusive security helps police forces, military leaders, and diplomats do their jobs more effectively by creating coalitions with the people most invested in stability and most adept at building peace. Women working on the ground are eager to join forces. Just let them in. 🗣️

[[Want to Know More?](#)]

The Internet is invaluable in enabling the inclusive security approach advocated in this article. The Web offers not only a wealth of information but, just as important, relatively cheap and easy access for citizens worldwide. Most of the women’s peace-building activities and strategies explored in this article can be found on the Web site of **Women Waging Peace**—a collaborative venture of Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government and the nonprofit organization Hunt Alternatives, which recognize the essential role and contribution of women in preventing violent conflict, stopping war, reconstructing ravaged societies, and sustaining peace in fragile areas around the world. On the site, women active in conflict areas can communicate with each other without fear of retribution via a secure server. The women submit narratives detailing their strategies, which can then be read on the public Web site. The site also features a video archive of interviews with each of these women. You need a password to view these interviews, so contact Women Waging Peace online or call (617) 868-3910.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is an outstanding resource for qualitative and quantitative studies of women’s involvement in conflict prevention. Start with the final report of the *OSCE Supplementary Implementation Meeting: Gender Issues* (Vienna: unifem, 1999), posted on the group’s Web site. **The United Nations Development Fund for Women** (unifem) also publishes reports on its colorful and easy-to-navigate site. The fund’s informative book, *Women at the Peace Table: Making a Difference* (New York: unifem, 2000), available online, features interviews with some of today’s most prominent women peacemakers, including Hanan Ashrawi and Mo Mowlam.

For a look at how globalization is changing women’s roles in governments, companies, and militaries, read Cynthia Enloe’s *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). In *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women’s Lives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), Enloe examines the military’s effects on women, whether they are soldiers or soldiers’ spouses. For a more general discussion of where feminism fits into academia and policymaking, see “**Searching for the Princess? Feminist Perspectives in International Relations**” (*The Harvard International Review*, Fall 1999) by J. Ann Tickner, associate professor of international relations at the University of Southern California.

The Fall 1997 issue of *Foreign Policy* magazine features two articles that highlight how women worldwide are simultaneously gaining political clout but also bearing the brunt of poverty: “**Women in Power: From Tokenism to Critical Mass**” by Jane S. Jaquette and “**Women in Poverty: A New Global Underclass**” by Mayra Buvinic.

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