

Women as catalysts for Peace and Stability

Voices from women leaders in conflict areas

By

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Advancing gender equality and equity and the empowerment of women, and the elimination of all kinds of violence against women, and ensuring women's ability to control their own fertility, are cornerstones of population and development programs.

The human rights of women and the girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights. The full and equal participation of women in civil, cultural, economic, political and social life, at the national, regional and international levels, and the eradication of all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex, are priority objectives of the international community.

--1994 Program of Action,
International Conference on Population and Development, Principle 4

Women have demonstrated considerable leadership in community and informal organizations, as well as in public office. However, socialization and negative stereotyping of women and men, including stereotyping through the media, reinforces the tendency for political decision-making to remain the domain of men. Likewise, the under-representation of women in decision-making positions in the areas of art, culture, sports, the media, education, religion and the law have prevented women from having a significant impact on many key institutions.

--1995 Beijing Platform for Action, paragraph 183

The Beijing Platform for Action addressed the great disparity in power between women and men in public affairs. It urges governments, the international community and civil society, including non-governmental organizations and the private sector, to take action to reach the following objectives:

- Ensure women's equal access to, and full participation in, power structures and decision-making;

- Increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.

In all countries, women are still underrepresented at every level of government.

Are we there just yet?

The recognition of women grievances and needs in International Agenda and conferences have been that high in profile, and that detailed in perspective, for more than a dozen of years. So, are the improvements of women statuses in the world been positive, if there is any? If not. Then WHY?

THE WAY FORWARD still remains to be achieved:

Equality between women and men, which can only be achieved if both are equally in a position to participate in decision-making processes at all levels. Reality is, however, still very different. Efforts of many actors, therefore, continue to support change towards equal sharing of power and leadership between women and men, within the family, in the community, at the national and the international levels.

Women and Armed Conflict/ Post Conflict Peace Building

An environment that maintains world peace and promotes and protects human rights . . . is an important factor for the advancement of women. Peace is inextricably linked with equality between women and men and development. Violations of the human rights of women in situations of armed conflict are violations of the fundamental principles of international human rights and humanitarian law.

During times of armed conflict and the collapse of communities, the role of women is crucial. They often work to preserve social order in the midst of armed and other conflicts. Women make an important but often unrecognized contribution as peace educators both in their families and in their societies.

--Beijing Platform for Action, paragraphs 131 and 139

I have TWO major concerns with the above statement:

- a. Enumerating the roles of women in certain areas kept addressing the issues of women in life in terms of:
 - It is a new thing; i.e. the presence of women in this issue, and in life in general.
 - How to develop actions and strategies to add them in.
- b. Presenting women, in armed conflicts and wars zones, in stereotyped way or unified status. E.g. as peace educators in their families and societies as mentioned above, causes complications and weakening of women's roles. Because women are vital actors in all aspects preservation of life in life, which includes life in armed conflict zones. As well, many of them are war advocates, and worriers. What is needed is for these pivotal vital roles carried on daily basis by women to be seen and acknowledged, in order for women to be included in the making or breaking of war and peace.

WOMEN are not a special marginalized interest group, they are half the inhabitants of the planet in every walk of life, and they are bearers of the burdens of the reproduction for humanity.

MAKE WOMEN SEEN AS THEY ARE IN LIFE.

DON NOT ADD AND STIRR EFFORTS.

The need for new perspective on women's situation

The mainstream thought about women's status in conflict areas is perceiving and portraying them as VICTIMS only. It is not just a wrong Diagnosis for the situation of women there, but it is worse to prescribe the wrong treatment for the erroneous diagnosis already made. This statement is right even for situations the women are clearly "victims", like in the case of RAPE. In Darfur.

What they have been doing:

Preventive:

Putting them in camps, restrict movement, when move under AU guard. (Besiege them and add to their fear, i.e. make life harder).

Treatment & Rehabilitation:

Medical treatment of the women and girls, legal procedures (not a single of condemnation to a rapist) , psychological rehabilitation, reparation and compensation.

STILL those women loose their dignity & their chances in life.

This is the classical way to address the victims. The success rate of these measures is poor indeed.

Simply: because it is addressing a hypothetical situation, not an actual one.

To deal with the issue in its actual scale, as it is about time, the whole issue is to be addressed from the perspective of the raped women, their fears and agony. Added measures and concepts need to be added, e.g.

Preventive:

Train women in self defense methods, not put them under siege and limit their ways of livelihood, it is not sustainable.

Shame the male rapist, not the raped women.

Harsh punishment for the crime of rape, after redefining the proof of RAPE.

E.g. The Eritrean experience during the struggle.

Address the potential rapists by strong programs. Put them under the lights and hold them accountable before the crime is committed.

MORE THOUGHTS

Documentation for make belief

Importance of documenting different roles and experiences of women in harsh situations of armed conflict and disseminate it to women in same situation in normal life. These are the strongest proofs of women strength, resilience, and modesty. (The story of the old woman)

Acknowledge your selves as Women.

Be proud of who you are and your roles as women. Don't disgrace yourselves by denying who you are. After that no words will convince any being that you are to be acknowledged as women, because you are presenting yourself from men's perspective.