
PEACE IS THE WAY TO PEACE

Margaret Fulton

Le thème central de la Décennie pour les femmes de l'ONU était celui de la Paix. Un atelier après l'autre conclut que, tant que la militarisation globale persiste, tant que la violence institutionnelle faite aux femmes et à l'environnement continue, tous les efforts faits pour apporter de véritables réformes sociales seront superficiels. La Tente de la paix, érigée au campus de l'Université de Nairobi, servait de symbole de l'engagement des femmes envers la non-violence. Margaret Fulton, qui a joué un rôle actif dans la Conférence internationale des femmes pour la paix, tenue à Halifax en juin 1985, examine les activités concernant la paix à Nairobi, en portant une attention particulière à la contribution canadienne.

Embracing, dancing, quilting, making banners and singing slogans were as much a statement of the UN Women's Conference held in Nairobi in July 1985 as were the actual workshops, seminars, lectures, discussions, affirmations and resolutions. Women of the world had gathered together for the third time in ten years: the greatest of all "happenings" of this century occurred.

In Mexico City in 1975 the theme of the first ever international women's conference was established: Equality, Development, Peace. While the many aspects of "equality" and "development" formed the basis of the majority of the discussions in 1975 – and again in Copenhagen at the Mid-Decade Conference in 1980 – it was clear that "peace" was the central theme and the central issue in Nairobi. None of the multitude of problems facing women can be solved until a climate of peace stabilizes our global society. Workshop after workshop – whether designed to discuss issues related to equality, economics, health, agriculture, education, literacy,

religion, sexuality, political structures, refugees, technology, or ecology and the environment – invariably concluded that, until the threat of nuclear war is removed from the planet, until the militarization of the globe is stopped, until the institutionalized violence against women and our environment is ended, any efforts to bringing about real social change would be superficial at best, and meaningless at worst.

Although no formal agendas were established for the Forum, an examination of workshop, seminar, and forum titles indicates that despite the tremendous number and variety of workshops scheduled, all discussions took on an urgency because of a shared awareness that not only women, but all people in our multi-cultural world civilization face total destruction. Group discussions on any topic seemed to stem from three common assumptions: 1. destruction of the planet through nuclear war; 2. destruction of ourselves through genetic engineering and manipulation; 3. destruction of the delicate ecology of the planet through pollution, acid rain, or other careless handling of toxic wastes.

The underlying sense of imminent destruction unless things change informed every meeting. The linking threads in all discussions wove a pattern of awareness best described by Sister Rosalie Bertell in her book *No Immediate Danger? Prognosis for a Radioactive Earth*:

The global sickness has a name. It is called violence, whether manifested within a nation or between nations. Its presence puts a premium on strength and makes 'blooming' an expendable luxury. It rears its head at the devaluation and distortion of women, either through virtual slavery, exaggerated equality with males (military services, heavy manual labour) or rape. It leads to rape of the land, violence towards the poor, oppression of the weak. It thrives on feats of extraordinary power, mega-projects, technological egotrips and requires the passive co-operation of the weak and ignorant. It is unable to survive in the face of truth, human solidarity, compassion and non-violent action (p. 313).

In the midst of Forum '85 on the University of Nairobi campus stood a "Peace Tent," the ultimate symbol of "truth, human solidarity, compassion and non-violent action." The activities coordinated within the tent became the focus of both the NGO and the official government

conference. Outside the big blue and white tent was a huge globe symbolizing our world, our planet. On top of it was the symbol of the UN Women's Decade, and prominently displayed in the many posters and banners hung without and within the tent was the dove of peace. The concept and genius behind the "Peace Tent" (and a full credit for its implementation, programming and staffing) goes to a growing network of international women's peace groups – a network that had begun to build before 1975, and which had strengthened sufficiently during the decade to become the centre of the global consciousness permeating not only the thinking and activities of those representing non-governmental organizations, but also affecting the mind-set of the official government delegations. As workshop after workshop documented the spread of the many forms of violence around the globe, violence so well described by Rosalie Bertell, the peace tent activities communicated a sense of hope against the inevitable – a hope summarized as women's alternatives to violence – women's ability to heal, to nourish, and to use Sister Rosalie's phrase "to bloom" again.

Canadian women have worked constructively to create a new belief in alternative action. Our presence and activities in Nairobi contributed to an awareness not only that Canadians have given leadership in the past, but also that Canadians must assume even more leadership responsibilities in the future. We are a rich nation, and we are perceived by many nations as a neutral power. While our government does not accept that we are a neutral power, it does at least contend that we are a non-nuclear power. Although many Canadians accept the government's position on neutrality and therefore continue to perceive us as being puppets of the United States, unable to make any decisions independent of American approval, many other people – both in Canada and from a wide number of other nations – perceive us as ideally situated to lead a third group of nations anxious to form an alternative to the world being divided into the confrontational blocks of those aligned with the USA and those aligned with the USSR.

Over and over again women stated the need to go beyond political ideologies, beyond national and racial differences, beyond religious creeds, beyond commer-



Participants at the Women's International Peace Conference, Halifax

Credit: Shelagh Wilkinson

cial and economic interests – indeed, beyond all forms of power which dominate, oppress and repress – in order to find alternative systems to those presently propelling us toward disaster. Alternatives can be found, and Canadian women are leading the way.

At Nairobi, Canadian delegates made three very specific contributions. At the NGO levels significant involvement occurred in:

- the Peace Tent and other workshops connected with the final pre-Nairobi Women's International Conference held at Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia on June 5-9, 1985, "The Urgency for True Security: Women's Alternatives for Negotiating Peace,";
- in all aspects of women's studies through the distribution of the "International" issue of *Canadian Woman Studies* (Vol. 6, No. 1) at the official UN Conference, and;
- our Canadian delegates to the official UN Conference, led by Maureen O'Neil (Co-ordinator of Status of Women Canada), gave outstanding leadership on the "Forward Looking Strategies" – strategies which reflect belief in the capability of the human race to find alternatives, to go beyond negative power struggles.

There was reason for considerable national pride the day the Honourable Walter McLean, Secretary of State, visited the Peace Tent and formally presented

Dame Nita Barrow, the Forum Convenor from Barbados, with the statement on peace written and agreed upon by the 350 delegates from 33 countries present at the Women's International Peace Conference in Halifax in June, 1985. This statement reads as follows:

We 350 women of the world community, from 33 countries, meeting at the Women's International Peace Conference in Halifax, Canada, June 5-9, 1985, affirm the overwhelming need and desperate urgency for peace, which we believe is both the process we live and the goal for which we work.

At this conference, women from diverse racial, cultural, ethnic and political backgrounds representing different sides of conflict areas, came together as a living example of women negotiating peace. Some of us compromised our own safety to make this commitment.

Although women's voices have not been heard and women have not participated equally in peace negotiations or in formulation of the institutions and the cultural fabric in which we live, we are more than half the world's population; we do have power; and we are shaping it for peaceful living.

We reject a world order based on domination, exploitation, patriarchy, racism and sexism. We demand a new order based on justice and the equitable distribution of the world's resources.

We condemn militarism. Militarism is an addiction that distorts human development, causing world-wide poverty, starvation, pollution, repression, torture and death. Feeding this habit robs all the world's

children and future generations of their inheritance.

We all live in the shadow of the threat of nuclear war. We demand an end to research, testing, development, and deployment of all weapons of mass destruction, to the militarization of space and to all forms of violence. As a first step, we call for a comprehensive test ban treaty.

We support the rights and the efforts of all peoples to self determination and to freedom from military and economic intervention. As an example, we cite Nicaragua as a new kind of society, and as a symbol of hope which must be allowed to live.

We will continue to communicate and join with women all over the world in our struggle for peace. As a result of this conference, we are developing a world-wide women's peace network. Our first act has been to pledge our vigilance in monitoring the ongoing safety of our sisters who are at risk as a result of attending this conference.

We are committed to acting globally, nationally, locally and individually for peace. We will not compromise our commitment to the survival and healing of this planet.

We affirm the right of every human being to live with dignity, equality, justice and joy.

While this statement lacks any official Canadian government approval, it is certainly becoming the basis of similar statements coming from the international peace networks. Initiation for the Halifax Conference came largely from the Canadian Voice of Women, who formed a coalition of Canadian women to sponsor the Conference. While Murial Duckworth, Ursula Franklin, Marion Kierans, Kay MacPherson and many others primarily responsible over the years for women's peace networking in Canada were unable to be in Nairobi, Barbara Roberts, Alice Wiser, and numerous newer peace workers kept alive in Nairobi the fundamental search for alternatives begun at the Halifax Conference. Shelagh Wilkinson distributed hundreds of copies of *Canadian Woman Studies* and the contents of this "International" issue formed the basis of ongoing discussion.

Dorothy Rosenberg from Montreal was indefatigable in her organization of a panel discussion, which I chaired, on "Women's Education for Policy Change Towards Peace and Development." Our three-hour session attracted over 350 dele-

gates who listened attentively (many of them using ear-phones which picked up translations in five languages – English, French, German, Spanish and Swahili). Panelists included the well-known Norwegian feminist Birgit Brock-Utne, peace researcher and educator. Lyse Blanchard, Director of the Women's Programme for the Government of Canada and without whose help many of us would not have been in Nairobi, gave a feminist's examination of systems analysis on the decision-making process and military thinking. Anne Sisson Runyan, who has also devoted herself to researching international peace issues from a feminist perspective, and Dorothy Rosenberg addressed themselves to questions of how to bring about policy changes, particularly in regard to economic conversion of military budgets to spending on social developments. Carmencita Hernandez spoke for immigrant women and exposed their exploitation in the spiralling militarization of the globe.

Keeping in mind that the world spends one trillion dollars a year on the arms race, it was not surprising that workshops dealing with women's strategies to divert military spending to the basic needs of women and children for clean water, adequate food and shelter were well attended. Nor is it surprising that more women the world over are coming to realize that educating women just to participate in and become part of the patriarchal and hierarchical structures which are now reinforced by science and technology, will change nothing. Those who espouse a feminist ideology of equality which demands a woman's equal right along with men to a combat role in the military are only assisting in retrenching the militaristic goals of domination which threaten the survival of the planet. Such women are only supporting male systems of violence. Violence used in an effort to stop violence will only breed worse forms of violence. Violence is embedded in much of our modern technology, and the ultimate mega-project, as Ursula Franklin has pointed out, is war. War supposedly is designed to bring about peace, but only new and more sophisticated forms of violence result.

Out of the many heated discussions on the issue of male dominance and male power structures – symbolized by the mega-projects of the multinationals, the



The Peace Tent, Forum '85

Credit: Nikita A. Crook

banks, and the politically powerful groups – came this growing awareness that if the world is to survive, women must go beyond all political or religious ideologies to form a new kind of world order, one based on a sense of nurturing and conserving, collaboration and cooperation, and not on competitiveness and conquering. As Solange Vincent from Montreal has so clearly stated, "the way ahead for women is not to join in the oppressive structures, but to fight the militaristic aspects of society." According to Mme Vincent, feminists who promote a philosophy of education which supports individual achievement within the concept of the survival of the fittest only fall into the trap of the current male systems. If any policy changes for peace and development, or any alternatives to existing systems of international negotiations are to be found, then women must be educated and given management training that will promote the collective interests of women, and that will espouse values designed to transform society by sharing the world's resources, rather than exploiting them for privilege, power, and profit.

By no means were all of the discussions on peace held in the peace tent, and by no means were they all peaceful. The somewhat turbulent history of the tent began, ironically, over a battle for space. It seems that Coca Cola had determined to set up their red and white tent in the space allocated to the organizers of the Peace Tent. When the dove of peace flag finally flew

over the blue and white peace tent, it signalled that women can negotiate for space and win even against the multi-nationals.

At times the debates were so heated that the tent was being dubbed the "war tent," and some Iranian national delegates (well coached by their male attendants) determined to post their banners declaring war as their guiding principle for life. Their war cries interrupted more than one peace session, but their shouts were often drowned out by song and their posters replaced by banners declaring "Women Unite:"

*And they shall beat their pots and pans
into printing presses*

*And weave their cloth into protest
banners*

*Nations of women shall lift up their
voices with nations of other women*

*Neither shall they accept discrimination
any more*

(Mary Chagnon)

The sense that peace is a subversive activity, however, was apparent by the number of CIA and KGB representatives who seemed always to be lurking nearby. They were in particular evidence when the Russian women debated with the American women. Indeed, the Kenyan Government officials became so nervous of an international incident developing that they determined to close the tent. Dame Nita Barow demonstrated her metal by declaring that if any such action were taken, she would close the Forum. Peace networking and plan-

ning continued without further harassment. Russian and American delegates pledged to work together for joint peace demonstrations.

Edith Ballantyne, General Secretary of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) stressed the fact that women were the initiators of many new forms of action, such as peace marches, peace camps, schools of peace, and peace studies and research. The Scandinavian women have initiated and organized international peace marches to Paris, and from Stockholm to Moscow and Minsk. In Nairobi the UN Secretary-General Mr. Perez de Cuellar met with women who had participated in "The Great Peace Journey" and encouraged their efforts and plans to visit as many UN countries as possible in 1986 during the UN-sponsored "International Year of Peace." It is most important for women in all countries to support those peace initiatives. They are a genuine alternative to arms talks. The NGOs in the world can create a new basis for international negotiations for disarmament and development. In the long run, the purpose of the peace marches is to create a new security system and a world where nobody goes hungry because we spend millions on armaments.

Women are becoming more comprehending, more conscious. We want to be heard, and that in itself is very different to what has gone on in the past when only men held arms talks behind closed doors. Women must be included on government negotiating teams. Only when women are included at the United Nations and the Geneva talks will a true alternative for negotiating peace emerge. Women are the catalysts for bringing about change, but if we are not heard, not included at international meetings, there will be no change. And as women in the Peace Tent stated over and over again, the real alternative to violence and nuclear war is not to commit such acts.

One of the last major sessions in the Peace Tent was chaired by Fran Hosken, the editor of *WIN* (parts of this session are included in the Autumn 1985 issue, Vol. 11, No. 4). The discussion confirmed that the Peace Movement, the Ecology Movement, and the Feminist Movement are all parts of a fundamental social revolution which is really the only true revolution because women are involved: it is a genuinely different revolution be-

cause it is bloodless. No group has done more to demonstrate the effectiveness of non-violent action than the Greenham Common women. The women gathered in Nairobi were there to learn and to share with each other, not to compete with each other. Women's studies and peace studies are opening up new concepts of conflict resolution and demonstrate the need for alternative educational programs at all levels. Non-military solutions to international conflicts must be learned. Much of what was said by Ursula Franklin at the Halifax Conference in June about alternatives was repeated by other women present in Nairobi. Hilka Pietila, the Secretary-General of the Finnish United Nations Association, reminded us that we must renew efforts to make the UN work:

This year we are celebrating the 40th anniversary of the UN, which provides a good opportunity. We do not need all kinds of additional agreements – all the negotiations about disarmament and arms reductions have only led to increases in the arms race. Peace is the way to Peace, not discussions about arms. The women's peace movement needs to get back to basics, we should not get involved in complicated discussions about different kinds of armaments. That, as the record shows, does not lead to peace. Peace is the only way to peace.

It is up to women to find the way to peace. What made the experience at Nairobi so exciting and so positive was that the Conference took place in Africa. The women of the world were together for the first time. The Conference in many ways belonged to the African and Asian women. They were there in great numbers, and their rejection of sophisticated Western technology as being of little use in solving their needs, became their statement on peace. Women need good garden tools, not computers. Having their land turned into cash crops – which are used in turn to buy military goods – in no way serves their needs to find nutritious food for their children. As women from all parts of the world shared their problems in Nairobi, the sense of sisterhood and solidarity strengthened. The women of the world were at peace with each other; they can and will find the way to peace for the planet.

Margaret Fulton is President of Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax. She is a feminist peace activist.

THE SUN, MY COMPANION

My country is hot
And burns my hands.
My country is hot
And scorches my feet.
My country is hot
And blisters my body.
My country is hot
And has melted my roof.
My country is hot
And has ignited my walls.
My country is hot
And keeps my children parched.
My country is hot
And forces me to go naked.
My country is hot
And that is perhaps why
I cannot know of rains
Or floods.
Money lenders and beasts and
calamities
And self-styled leaders
Come to ruin my crops.
Tell me not to hate my country.
Let me dry my wet clothes in these
courtyards.
Let me grow gold in these fields.
Let me quench the thirst of
its rivers.
Let me breathe in the shade of
its trees.
Let me wear my country's dust and
its weariness.
I do not want the shade of its
lengthening shadows,
For I have the rays of its rising sun.
The sun spends itself in
my country.
The sun and I
And you
Cannot walk together,
For the sun is my companion.

Kishwar Naheed
Lahore, Pakistan