

We've Come Engendering Peace-Building

JANIS ALTON

Construire une culture de la paix, ce mouvement complexe fait de gestes qui tendent à nous éloigner de la culture

The process badly needs strengthened partnerships between, and among, governments and civil society organizations.

envahissante de la guerre, n'est pas nouveau. L'auteure assure que les femmes ont déjà implanté des éléments en vue de cet objectif et quoique leurs efforts fussent généralement marginalisés, elles ont connu quelques victoires.

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, and the burden should be shared together. We need to build bridges and strengthen partnerships between the United Nations, governments and civil society organizations in our collective effort to build sustainable peace and human security throughout the world.

—Noyleen Heyzer,
Executive Director, UNIFEM
(qtd. in Anderlini 3)

Voice of Women for Peace (VOW) has a long history of active association with the United Nations (UN) and in promoting our unflagging goal of moving women's voices from the margins to the centre of decision-making concerning peace with jus-

tice. I have been fortunate to contribute to this as a UN representative for VOW since 1987, guiding many UN study/lobby tours for Canadian women, linking repeatedly with international peace women's similar efforts, and devising many more. My continuing work in the national and international peace movements, particularly the women's peace movement, has provided me with many opportunities to see and hear a continuous stream of ideas from participants, men and women at all political levels, in our long struggle to break away from the prevailing global culture of violence. I will convey something of the influence of two old, non-governmental organization (NGO)/civil society organization (CSO) propositions which, of late, refreshingly merge with high-level official commitment and promise of implementation. That is: that the process badly needs strengthened partnerships between, and among, the United Nations and its system, governments and civil society organizations—the essence of “new diplomacy”—and that women's full inclusion in peace processes is essential.

The recent convergence of these two propositions has quickened the political pace to mainstream women in peace-building and delivered to us the historic victory of the unanimous adoption of the United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 1325 in which women have gained a new international right to systematic inclusion in peace-building. With historical “snapshots” from around the world and Canada, and drawing on my own experience, I will illustrate some women's insights and activism particularly related to demilitariza-

tion and security which clearly helped to forward women's long marginalized record as peace advocates into this binding international policy and the new struggle for its implementation.

Early Leadership

Many women have laboured to stop or abolish war. One outstanding leader was Bertha von Suttner. Her mammoth portrait hung at the Centennial Hague Conference to Abolish War held in May 1999. A century before, she began a tireless crusade for alternatives to stagnant and oppressive military values and practice. Her special tools were her pen, her diplomatic acumen, and her personal contacts with European aristocracy gained through her marriage into Austrian nobility. As author of one of the world's best-sellers, *Die Waffen Nieder* (Lay Down Your Arms), published in 1899, Baroness von Suttner expressed her contempt for the pervasive system of militarism. Behind the writing of this novel was her intent to broaden the international peace movement and to capture interest in specific non-violent alternatives to unending war—the use of arbitration, the rule of law, and a federation of European states.

Its impact was felt by the great men of that time such as Leo Tolstoy and Alfred Nobel. Modern-day peace educator, Birget Brock-Utne, writes that the first Hague Conference, called by Tsar Nicholas II of Russia, the greatest autocrat in Europe, might not have happened if he had not been deeply influenced by von Suttner's enormously popular book. It is this amazing conference for statesmen,

A Long Way and the New Diplomacy



Geneva, March 14, 1988. Visit to the Soviet Union Mission. Photos courtesy of Janis Alton.

accredited to Tsar Nicholas's court at St. Petersburg, that is much better remembered than the early peace activism of Betha von Suttner. Representatives from 26 countries met and, in spite of much time spent on the laws of war, the result was the institution of an ad hoc tribunal (The Hague Tribunal) in 1899 for the arbitration of conflict. From the second Hague Conference in 1907 came the Permanent Court of International Arbitration—a centre for continuous effort to substitute arbitration for militarism, inaugurated in 1913.

The extent of male dominance which maintained the practice of women's outside relationship to foreign affairs and defence was reflected in their minimal authority even in mixed-sex organizations. This fired many women to come together in a

new stage of all-women societies. For many, their platforms combined pacifism with an aspiration for the vote and a share in political responsibilities. Broadly, those who helped shape this wing of the peace movement were concerned for human life and used a varied set of non-violent techniques.

All-Women Peace Societies

The Congress of Women opened in April 1915, after only ten weeks of hasty planning following their war-aborted suffrage meeting. Although thousands of women were prevented from attending by their governments or stopped at the frontier, approximately 1,200 women, chiefly women suffragists and social reformers from a dozen western countries, both "en-

emy" and neutral countries, succeeded in coming. The meeting was flush with the best-known radicals of the day, all with a declared dedication to the settlement of international disputes by peaceful means and to the suffrage of women. They focused their discussions on the foundations for lasting peace. What was new among their ideas was their plan, refined by a Canadian, Julia Grace Wales, professor at the University of Wisconsin, to undertake continuous mediation, now called "shuttle diplomacy" to put an end to the first world war. They were well received over the course of 43 private conferences, meeting with Prime Ministers, Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Pope Benedict XV and the King of Norway, but no leader acted to fund and support the proposal (Costin).



Geneva. Meeting with Ambassador and First Secretary of India Mission.

The power of the women at the Hague appears essentially to have been only that of the spirit but even this strength influenced others. They wrote of continuing resistance in their concluding declaration calling on all women to work for their own enfranchisement and unceasingly to strive for a just and lasting peace. They themselves proceeded to establish a permanent peace organization still in existence today—Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). With disarmament a central pillar of WILPF's history, it currently holds a vital steering position with the governmental Middle Powers Initiative for nuclear abolition giving it "push from below." To its outstanding record of peace initiatives is its two new web sites: *Reaching Critical Will*—on disarmament and international security and *Peace Women*—for breaking news related to Security Council Resolution 1325 which reliably connects the UN, various governments and NGOs.

Shedding the patriarchal practice of isolation of women's peace efforts from the political mainstream has been slow. Forty-five years after WILPF's emergence in 1915, this

fact propelled Canadian Voice of Women for Peace (VOW) onto the Canadian landscape. Its beginning met with some outright public derision carried in the press:

There is something pathetically foolish in the appearance at the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa the other day of a group of matrons styling themselves with the pompous and absurdly unappealing title of the Voice of Women. ("Voice of Women: The First Thirty Years")

The Voice of Women is a fine example of a bunch of hens running around with their heads cut off. The world must pity a nation fallen so low with the government bedeviled by wailing women and afflicted with indecision.... ("Voice of Women: The First Thirty Years")

The government of the day was not quite as dismissive. VOW's founders were told to "go home and organize" after their daring first visit to Parliament to ask that Canada declare itself a non-nuclear country and that Canada urge the U.S. to

stop atmospheric nuclear testing with its assault on health, particularly the young. Organize they did! The issue drew in thousands of women like a magnet, including Marion Pearson, wife of the then Opposition Leader Mike Pearson (MacPherson). Today, VOW's consultative relationship with Canadian officialdom is modest despite its record of achievements—enough to garner almost 50 percent of the distinguished Person's Award. After four decades, VOW's peace work can best be said as voluminous, volunteer and shoestring-based—as observers in Burnt Church, New Brunswick to multiple non-violent "crusades" here and around the world, from Baghdad to Burundi.

Women Lobby for Demilitarized, "True" Security

An early idea of Voice of Women's was to convene an International Conference of Women to consult about what could be done about the nuclear threat. From this 1962 conference came a request to the United Nations for an International Year of Peace, later proclaimed as International Cooperation Year in 1965, and, a request to the Canadian government for Canada to support the international appeal for a Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. In 1985, a Women's International Peace Conference, coordinated by VOW's Marion Kerans, was one of a world series of events that marked the end of the United Nations Decade for Women. The conference drew to Halifax 350 women from around the world to dialogue about "the urgency of true security" and "women's alternatives for negotiating peace." Six weeks later, Margaret Fulton (VOW member and then President of Nova Scotia's Mount Saint Vincent University) delivered the powerful Conference statement in the famous Peace Tent in Nairobi, the site of the Third World Conference on Women. The limitations on NGO access to the "official" conference stood in the way of similarly alerting governments.

Of the multiple conference outcomes, VOW committed itself to a worldwide network of women working for peace and, significantly, re-appropriated the word “security,” defining it away from the distortions by the military, linking it instead with poverty, militarization, and violence. This was some nine years before a UN Secretariat team within the United Nations Development Program released their 1994 Human Development Report laying out “new” views on human security. They, too, redefined security away from the narrow concept of national security to the “all-encompassing concept of human security.” This, they said, meant moving away from the nuclear threat, armaments and force but they did not address the harm of the war *system*, a feminist security understanding by then circulating in the women’s peace movement (24-60).

United Nations Links

As recently as 1989, a VOW intervention in New York at the UN Third Special Session on Disarmament illuminates still-prevailing official interest in peace women’s views. Thanks to the invitation of the NGO Committee on Disarmament, a small VOW team painstakingly prepared a statement for oral presentation to the meeting. It was not well-received—even before a word was spoken! There was a predictable departure of most official delegates as soon as it was time for NGOs to speak; nonetheless, VOW carried on. VOW asked:

That this session direct the Secretary General to prepare a report on measures that could be taken by the United Nations and its system to increase the participation of women in its peace and disarmament processes.

VOW further proposed how the report should be followed up within the system. Although VOW found an ally in the most senior staff within



VOW members at Mexico Mission with Senator Sylvia Hernandez.

the Secretariat of the Division for the Advancement of Women to give us precision regarding its framing, VOW’s contribution was never acknowledged at any level.

It did, however, succeed in inspiring VOW to combine continued lobbying for this recommendation in Vienna at the 1990 UN Commission on the Status of Women¹ and to invite ourselves to speak directly to diplomats nearby engaged in the “Vienna Talks.” These were on issues of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)/Warsaw Treaty Organization troop reduction and transparency. While VOW had been given access to the UN system, there was no apparent interest in its views. At the outside appointments, however, there actually was some good dialogue.

It was an improvement over 1975 when some women’s peace groups requested member states to put peace issues on the agenda of the intergovernmental conference in Mexico City. And, some requested to have programs on disarmament in the plenary sessions of the parallel sessions of the non-governmental forum, the Tribune. With one exception these requests were rejected (Reardon).

The surge of global policy conferences of the 1990s amidst dreadful warring and rising cries for environmental and economic security, women’s rights as human rights, decent habitats, the abolition of landmines and the establishment of a permanent court for the prosecution of war crimes, including gender-based crimes—all these not only generated a rush to document more about women’s contribution to peace-building but also brought about leaps in partnership processes, particularly between a new post-Cold War floodtide of civil society organizations and governments. The decade’s motion could be highlighted in the unequivocal gain for new diplomatic practice that characterized the overflowing, international, civil society-led Hague Conference to Abolish War in May 1999. In contrast with its exclusive, governmental forerunner of 1899, its 10,000 NGO and government delegates mingled freely; the agenda stressed the interdependent components of human security and included the launch, by royal and grassroots women, of the “Women Building Peace” global campaign. In July 1999, the 50-point action plan, “The Hague Agenda for Peace and Justice for Peace

and Justice for the 21st Century” was accepted as an official UN document.

Beijing, 1995—A Milestone

But, it is the massive Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 that was, at least, equally significant—especially its enormous contribution to human security perspectives and promotion of women as peace-builders. Thousands of non-governmental women took up the UN regional opportunities to actually help draft its dramatic outcome document—the Beijing Declaration and *Platform for Action*. Bella Abzug (U.S.A.) led the women’s movement to adopt an influential and exacting line-by-line critique process.

Soon, many UN personnel, peace researchers, and leaders of the women’s peace movements who participated in the Beijing process acknowledged that they shared some core assumptions about world security:

- that military “addiction” is detrimental to security;
- that women are excluded from decision-making;
- that the United Nations conferences have led to the development of the global women’s movement where the security challenge is an integral part.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) takes the *Platform for Action* as its chief reference tool in its women and culture of peace program and in the world of international law, it became the tool to measure the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Women and Governmental Inertia

What is very clear seven years later is that the importance of the Beijing *Platform* is not on everyone’s lips.

Governments have been slack, resources for implementation slim everywhere—within the United Nations, and practically every country

Women, Sustainable Peace and the Security Council

If we need examples of resourcefulness we can look elsewhere. NGO women around the world on the front lines of hardened conflict—in South Africa, Burundi, Guatemala, Cambodia, Liberia, Israel and Northern Ireland have secured a place at the peace table. Imagine their struggle and tenacity. One instance is from Northern Ireland. Although there were some 400 grassroots women’s groups from both the Catholic and Protestant communities working on peace-building and reconciliation for a decade before the peace talks began in 1985, there was *no* place for them in peace negotiations until they represented a political party. They set about to successfully form one—the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition, the first women-dominated political party, with members from both the Catholic and Protestant communities. With its electoral success came a seat at the peace table (Anderlini 16-17).

In most cases, even when women get to the peace table they experience the cold shoulder treatment and sometimes open hostility! Perhaps one day we’ll hear the details from the one Kosovar woman at the Rambouillet negotiations before the NATO bombings of Kosovo. What we do know is *not* the end of the debate about whether women make better peacemakers than men but that they *are* the main proponents of agendas that include women and children—housing, education, childcare. We know they articulate peace in terms of meeting basic human security needs. They typically advocate practical solutions in the building of peace. They prescribe “psychosocial reconstruction”—attending to the trauma, depression, and war-related stresses which re-

duce people’s ability to make decisions or heal relations. They propose laws supporting equality for women and other social sectors. They initiate new development strategies and programs that benefit both women and society at large; they open opportunities for women’s participation in a wide spectrum of political institutions and alter the understanding of roles women can play. For example, 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.

By 1999, there was open UN acknowledgement that women’s participation in sustaining peace seemed essential. Ambassador A. K. Chowdhury of Bangladesh, perhaps prodded by his female Prime Minister, H. E. Sheikh Hasina, who participated in the 1999 Hague Conference, stunned me and the hundreds of women attending celebrations for International Women’s Day, 8 March, 2000 at the UN (New York). As President of the Security Council for the month of March he delivered a Presidential Statement about the valued role of women in peacemaking and peace-building and hinted openly that further affirmative steps by the Security Council were possible (see Hasina). With haste, an international coalition of NGOs, of which Voice of Women was a part, busily assembled lobbying data including a daring draft text for a possible resolution. In it were pages of justification—all UN-based legal obligations or commitments and concrete ways to move forward.

By the end of the bloodiest century in history, on October 31, 2000 the Security Council under Namibia’s Presidency unanimously adopted Resolution 1325 within one minute of convening, committing to the systematic inclusion of women in the policies and programs of this highest level, male-dominated body dealing

with matters of political conflict. Its eighteen articles underscore the importance of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programs while addressing armed or other conflicts. It sets out a number of ways the Security Council seeks women's protection in armed conflict and to ensure women's centrality to conflict prevention and peace-making, peacekeeping and peace-building. It incorporates a great deal of the NGO draft resolution but did not adopt our wording advocating women's participation in all non-violent peace processes.

Fifty-five years after the birth of the UN, this binding resolution links women to world peace. But what formal political will exists for its implementation? After consultation both inside and outside of government, on 28 October 2002, Secretary General of the UN, Kofi Annan, laid out 16 measures officially giving wide welcome for implementation to begin.

Yet, now, on the precipice of war against Iraq the pattern of isolation of peace women's efforts from the political mainstream remains. Widespread government rhetoric about the importance of supporting change in the name of Security Council Resolution 1325 has not been transformed into much action. UN copies of the historic Resolution 1325 took a year to be printed and, one year later, were unavailable. Thankfully, a free NGO version remains stocked in the New York office of the Hague Appeal for Peace. Little, if any, of women's potential to help prevent armed conflict in Iraq has been solicited. VOW's recent written offers to the offices of our Prime Minister and Foreign Minister to provide names of relevant women contacts in India, Kashmir, Iraq, USA have gone unheeded. But the lexicon of peace-building includes the wisdom that despair is a luxury. The struggle for non-governmental women's systematic inclusion in foreign affairs, and the shaping of a culture of peace and non-violence must be unrelenting.

Janis Alton has a Masters in Political Science from the University of Toronto. An active member and co-chair of Canadian Voice of Women for Peace, she is also active on the Canadian Committee on Women, Peace and Security, the Women, Peace and Security Working Group of the Canadian Peacebuilding Coalition Campaign as well as several other activist and academic organizations including the new Women's Peace Resource and Education Centre and the international peace research group Transcend. She currently mentors several younger peace women and chairs a joint committee which has submitted a detailed exhibition proposal on a century of largely Canadian women's peace work to the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa.

¹A subdued meeting with few NGOs observing, to review states' compliance with the Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2000 (Nairobi, 1985).

References

Alton, Janis. "Women Speak to Tyranny: the Struggle to Prevent War 1895—1915." Unpublished Masters' thesis, University of Toronto, 1985.

Anderlini, Sanam Naraghi. *Women at the Peace Table: Making a Difference*. New York: United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), 2000.

The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action. New York: United Nations, 1996.

Ingeborg Breines, Dorota Gierycz and Betty Reardon, eds., *Towards a Women's Agenda for a Culture of Peace*. Paris: UNESCO, 1999.

Brock-Utne, Birget *Education for Peace*. New York: Pergamon, 1985,

Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA). *The Other Side of the Story: A Feminist Critique of Canada's National Response to the UN Questionnaire on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action*. Ottawa: FAFIA, 1999.

Costin, Lela B. "Feminism, Pacifism, Internationalism, and the 1915 International Congress of Women." *Women and Men's Wars*. Judith Stiehm, ed. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1983. 301-315.

The Hague Appeal for Peace and Justice for the 21st Century. Ref: A/54/98 and available on-line at <http://www.haguepeace.org>

Hasina, Sheikh H. E. "Put Women at the Peace Table." *Christian Science Monitor* November 13, 2000.

Human Development Report, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Oxford University Press, New York, 1994

MacPhee, Susan C. *Talking Peace: The Women's International Peace Conference*. Charlottetown: Ragweed Press, 1990.

MacPherson, Kay. "Persistent Voices: Twenty-Five Years With Voice of Women." *Atlantis* 12 (2) (Spring 1987).

Mazurana, Dyan E. and Susan R. McKay. *Women and Peacebuilding* Montreal: International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, 1999.

Reardon, Betty. "Gender and Global Security: A Feminist Challenge to the United Nations and Peace Research." *Journal of International Cooperation Studies* 6 (1) (1998).

"Voice of Women—the First Thirty Years." Video by Margo Pineau and Kathy Reeves, 1992.

von Suttner, Bertha *Die Waffen Nieder (Lay Down Your Arms: The Autobiography of Martha von Tilling)*. Second ed. Trans. By T. Holmes. New York: Longman, 1908.