



WOMEN IN RELIGIOUS PEACEBUILDING

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ABOUT THE REPORT

To recognize and understand better the role of women in religious peacebuilding, the United States Institute of Peace, the World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD), and Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs launched an initiative with a symposium on July 7 and 8, 2010, at Georgetown University. It focused on the ways in which women inspired by or linked to religious ideals and institutions worked for and maintained sustainable, positive peace. The symposium brought together practitioners, academics, and policymakers from several distinct fields and backgrounds. The investigation also involved a series of in-depth interviews with invited participants and other leaders in the field and drew on the experiences of several programs, such as the University of San Diego's Women Peacemakers Program and the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, that seek explicitly to honor the peace work of women inspired by religious ideas or communities.

This report highlights the initiative's main findings to date, building on the major themes that emerged from the interviews and from the July 2010 exchange. The interviews that formed the basis of much of the exercise are available on the Berkley Center website (<http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/projects/women-religion-and-peace-experience-perspectives-and-policy-implications>). The Berkley Center and USIP are working jointly to develop a knowledge resources segment of their websites to make available relevant material (<http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/networks/women-religion-and-peace>).

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[Focusing on women deepens
and broadens the narrow and
traditional view of peace.]

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Summary

- Women involved in peacebuilding around the world often draw inspiration and support from religious sources and organizations. However, little attention has been paid to these actors and the religious dimension of women's work for peace, even though the role of religion in conflict and peacebuilding has received greater attention in recent years, as has the role of women in promoting peace. This is due, in large part, to the relative invisibility of their efforts.
- Across religious traditions, women are often marginalized in formal religious spaces and rarely hold leadership positions, meaning that they do not receive the recognition that male clergy do. This marginalization, however, have freed women from institutional constraints, and behind the scenes, they have worked creatively to build peace. In addition, pathbreaking women have attained some formal recognition in religious institutions and have used it to bolster peacebuilding work.
- Women involved in peacebuilding tend to gravitate to efforts that entail sustained interfaith and intrafaith relationship building, approaching peace work from a holistic perspective that highlights the community. Women's abilities to reach across lines of difference in tense environments, lead nonviolent protests, and mobilize communities, as well as their engagement with the theological aspects of gender roles in peace, holds the promise to change discourse and preconceptions about how religious organizations can be involved in peacebuilding work.
- Because the peacebuilding work of women is relatively unrecognized, support from outside sources, including resources and training, has been lacking. The lack of attention also has led to failures in understanding the nature of the conflict and has hidden from view potential avenues for resolving conflicts and promoting postconflict healing and reconciliation.
- To change this situation, donors and international organizations can create and support networks of women peacebuilders across religion and culture and help train local organizations and actors to better advocate their positions to politicians and government officials. Simultaneously, international actors could be better educated about the peace work that women do within faith organizations and the ways that their work could be amplified. Building bridges among women's organizations and networks, especially secular and religiously inspired, offers considerable promise. Such efforts could strengthen existing peacebuilding efforts and improve our understanding of what can be done to create more sustainable peace in different regions.

Introduction

The work of women building peace from within religious communities has been largely overlooked in analysis, policy, and practice. At first glance, this can seem counterintuitive. Women's roles as peacemakers and builders of peaceful societies generally—that is, considered apart from religion—have in recent years become subjects of active study and policy reflection. A burgeoning array of organizations and movements are highlighting the part played by women and their potential in thinking about and taking action on peace. Likewise, scholars and practitioners are beginning to pay sharper attention to the roles of religious leaders and communities in conflict situations, both in instigating and prolonging violence and in negotiating and building peace. Yet women who work for peace from within religious institutions and communities have received little attention, as has the role of faith in motivating some women to become involved in both secular and religious peacebuilding. This has led not only to failures in understanding fully the nature of the conflict; it also hides from view potential avenues for resolving conflicts, promoting postconflict healing and reconciliation, and building sustainable peace.

In large measure, women's engagement in religious peacemaking is often invisible because, in much of the world and in many contemporary faith traditions, men tend to dominate formal religious leadership. Investigations of religion and conflict thus tend to focus on men's perspectives and roles. Women's perspectives, needs, and unique leverage are often downplayed or ignored by policymakers and scholars (including in religious and feminist institutions) in the design of traditional religious peacemaking initiatives. Historical tendencies of male domination in security matters—and violent conflict specifically—accentuate women's invisibility. Even so, a small but growing number of observers acknowledge that women are crucial in conflict situations, and that these women's inspirations, motivating frameworks, and active community roots often have faith dimensions. This suggests new ways both of understanding peace processes and make them more effective.

How Should We Define Peace?

Understanding how the insights and work of women—especially women inspired by their faith—can affect peace processes must begin with a more expansive understanding of what constitutes peace. Narrowly defining the work of peace as bringing armed groups into non-violent processes fails to account for the elements that constitute a peaceful society. A broader conception of peace, one that is often termed positive peace,¹ is in many ways synonymous with social justice. This approach takes into account a wide range of fields in which women are often better represented—from development and public health to political advocacy—all of which contribute to creating stable, just, and peaceful societies. Women who provide social services or assistance to the needy, engage in trauma healing or reconciliation, and help in rebuilding communities by caring for marginalized groups such as orphans, informal workers, and widows, or providing microfinance, are considered builders of this definition of peace. A more comprehensive approach to peace also means that violence indirectly related to war and civil strife, especially domestic violence and trafficking, is taken into account. Such a peace even envelops work on climate change, given the potential for environmental factors to foment conflict, such as has been seen in places like Sudan where the amount of land suitable for agriculture and grazing is shrinking. At the same time, however, this approach encompasses something more quotidian. As Ela Bhatt puts it,

[Peace] is about the ordinariness of life, how we understand each other, share meals, and share courtyards. And that is what women do. That very ordinariness and the kinds of

livelihoods that so many women pursue are absolutely central for life. That is what keeps communities together.²

Broadening the definition of peacemaking to include a large array of interventions has its pitfalls, first among them a potential loss of focus. One means of counteracting this is to better understand how best to integrate and create complementarities between these various aspects of peacebuilding. We believe this extra effort is necessary to understand properly women's peace work and improve the theory, policy, and practice of creating and maintaining sustainable, just, and peaceful societies.

Dena Merriam argues that by peace, "we really mean that we are looking at consciousness change and at underlying values. Thus we are looking at peace in its broadest definition: the development of sustainable, inclusive, balanced societies that are truly prototypes of more peaceful, harmonious ways of living."³ Such an understanding, according to Joyce Dubensky, helps us see that "people, women, are doing something everywhere, in very small villages and towns, at border crossings, in so many places."⁴ Scott Appleby insists on using the term peacebuilding rather than peacemaking or conflict resolution, highlighting not only the multifaceted dimensions of work for peace, but its continuing and long-term nature.⁵ Similarly, Dekha Ibrahim Abdi argues that peace should be seen as an egg, fragile and fertile at the same time, with conflict resolution just the beginning of a process that needs care and nurturing at every stage.⁶ The veracity of these statements is evidenced in the research of Paul Collier, who pointed out that half of all civil conflicts that end in a negotiated peace agreement fall back into violence within five years.⁷ Creating peace clearly depends on more than a negotiated agreement.

Under the broader definition of positive peace, the scope for looking at women's roles expands. Even when women are less engaged in traditional track I peace processes, such as diplomatic negotiations, their work is crucial to building societies in which violence is well controlled and people and communities are thriving. This report uses the work of women of faith from Northern Ireland to Liberia, their absence from negotiations in the Middle East and elsewhere, and their direct roles in grassroots mobilization to illustrate women's actual and potential long-term involvement in building positive peace that takes into account the tenets and institutions of their religions. This offers much promise to broaden the current theoretical conception of peace work and to suggest ways that governments, donors, and international organizations can support and amplify the work done by women of faith to create a stronger and lasting peace.

Women and Peacebuilding

The connections among women and peacebuilding are not difficult to make. As mentioned above, scholars and practitioners alike understand that peacebuilding efforts are more likely to be sustainable if they include women generally, and that focusing on women deepens and broadens the narrower and more traditional view of peace work.⁸ On October 31, 2000, the United Nations Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 1325 (SCR 1325), focused on women, peace, and security. SCR 1325 recognizes that women have important roles to play in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding, and that armed conflict affects women in particular ways.

Women and men have different experiences in violent conflicts. To begin, women very often suffer more than men and are more likely to be victimized. As Ralph Pettman observes, "In nearly every sphere of contemporary experience, women are made more vulnerable than

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men, and more susceptible to threat.”⁹ Jacqueline Moturi Ogega gets more specific: “Women face the trauma of rape, sexual slavery, and child motherhood.” She points out that

orphaned families headed by girls are more vulnerable. Female orphans are more disadvantaged because they take care of the family and therefore are more likely to skip out on school, are prone to facing sexual abuse, and are generally part of unsecured child-headed homes.¹⁰

Accounting for the different experiences of women in conflict—and their responses to conflict—helps to break free from traditional, and often limited, approaches to conflict resolution that tend to be dominated by elite perspectives. As David Smock argues, “To exclude women is to neglect a particular set of opportunities that have often been neglected.”¹¹ Women’s skills and social positions give them different perspectives on issues of peace and conflict, and across the globe, women have demonstrated their abilities to achieve common ground and work effectively to better their communities in instances where men have failed.

During both the first and second civil wars in Liberia, local women bridged ethnic and religious divides to push their country toward peace. The Liberian Women’s Initiative (LWI), developed in 1994, was a movement born of frustration and hope. Ruth Perry, a founding member of LWI, said at the time when the organization was founded: “Enough is enough. We are tired of hiding in the bushes, eating grass and burying our dead.” Though some women were at first reluctant to join such a risky and uncertain enterprise, they overcame their fears. Another member, Mary Brownell, recalled, “Some of us weren’t sure we’d make it because [the warlords] fight us with their guns and we have nothing . . . so I said let’s go in faith.” LWI asked its members to pray for peace every night at ten o’clock in their respective homes.

Unified by a common experience of suffering and war fatigue, Liberian women came together to pressure the warring factions to make peace, and organize, demonstrate, and raise money to attend peace talks across the country. Though LWI never had a seat at the negotiation table, its initial efforts helped pave the way for the Mano River Women’s Peace Network (MARWOPNET), a regional movement with links across Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. MARWOPNET was an official signatory to the Liberian peace accords in 2004.

Another Liberian grassroots women’s group—the Liberian Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET)—brought Muslim and Christian women together in 2003. Like LWI, it was launched out of frustration. Many women, who had been advocates for peace during the first civil war, joined WIPNET for the same reasons they had joined LWI a few years earlier, using slogans such as “Does the bullet know a Christian from a Muslim?” to emphasize commonalities. There were some setbacks. A few in the community refused to pray with women who were not of the same religion, asserting that it would dilute their faith. However, they all came together to advocate for peace.

Pressure from WIPNET helped force Charles Taylor to attend peace talks in Accra with the rebels and a delegation of women from WIPNET, headed by Leymah Gbowee, monitored the negotiations. When the accords stalled, Gbowee and the other women surrounded the building where the talks were being held and looped arms. When some warlords tried to jump over the human barricade, the women pushed back. As Gbowee said then, “We are going to keep them in that room without water, without food, so they at least feel how we feel.” When policemen approached Gbowee and told her she and her women were obstructing justice, Gbowee began to remove her hair tie and threatened to strip naked. In Liberia, tradition dictates that if an older woman willfully undresses in front of a man, the man’s family will be cursed. Instead of arresting Gbowee, the policeman backed away from her and called his men off. Two weeks after WIPNET’s barricade and Gbowee’s unthinkable threat, the terms of the

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peace treaty were announced. Similar stories of women banding together are told in Sierra Leone and Angola.¹²

Indeed, some scholars and practitioners argue that women have a particular ability to facilitate peace work. Marc Gopin observes that,

Women seem to have a capacity to make connections and to use many means to achieve that, including film, arts, and music. They are often able to connect, in places like Somalia, on a totally different level. Women there have been able to make connections between warring parties in a different way. There is a different level of seriousness and respect that they bring.¹³

And, as the Liberian example above demonstrates, women often seem better able and more willing to reach across religious and cultural divides to find common ground. Manal Omar observes, that following the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, women “did it instinctively. And it wasn’t the case that it was safe for them to do so—it increased their vulnerability. . . . I think there is a natural desire for inclusiveness amongst women. . . . There is recognition of other viewpoints.”¹⁴ Dena Merriam concludes that there are differences in the way men and women participate in peace processes. Women, she argues,

are simply more finely tuned to how family structures are suffering, and how the different layers of society are damaged. They are also . . . more prepared to plunge in to try to solve the problem, more prepared to sacrifice for the solution. They have less need to hold onto positions. That applies even to the hardest core women, who are deeply set in conflict modes, and have suffered terribly. Even they can focus on the issue of children and look for common ground. I have seen this again and again.¹⁵

Some of the characteristics of women’s approaches to peacebuilding can perhaps be ascribed to the particular experiences women face in conflict zones. Elana Rozenman reports that, in meetings with Israeli and Palestinian women,

we find we are dealing with the same issues—our families, communities, about the problems of men dominating women, about sexual abuse and domestic violence, that have to be addressed also in terms of all the religions. . . . When women get together, they immediately want to find out about personal issues, to share information about our families. Then immediately we move on from these personal topics and start work, far more easily.¹⁶

More broadly, Maryann Cusimano Love describes the strengths of religious women as a “fingerprint:”

in terms of process, women’s religious groups tend to have greater networks and be more relationship-based. This is very helpful in creating trust in postconflict societies, and with refugees, IDPs [internally displaced persons], and other victims of conflicts. It is a very effective way to build movements for peace.¹⁷

Perhaps paradoxically, the marginalization of women—in society and within religious institutions specifically—also gives them opportunities, and in some cases, an advantage over men, for action in peacebuilding work. Considered outsiders to conflicts, women are often considered more impartial or less threatening. Sanam Anderlini argues that “because women are regarded as less threatening to the established order, they tend to have more freedom of action. In some instances, they can make public pleas for peace by taking advantage of sexist notions that for the most part discourage retaliation against women.”¹⁸ Virginia Bouvier suggests that women’s marginalization from leadership in social or political institutions often encourage them to reform the institutions they belong to: “Women tend to have different institutional limitations—the fact that they are often not at the top levels of institutions may mean that they are more open to institutional change.”¹⁹

The danger of defining women’s peacebuilding skills, as we have done above, is that we can reify the overly broad generalizations about women that already exist and often serve

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to keep them disempowered. As Scott Appleby observes, “a central dilemma is how we can avoid gender stereotypes while acknowledging different aptitudes, experiences, and skill sets, some of which, fairly or not, get attached to a particular gender.”²⁰ Karen Torjesen suggests one way to navigate this tension: making clear that social realities, and not inherent characteristics, are responsible for the different qualities women bring to peacebuilding work. She notes that “it is not women’s nature, but women’s social place, their connectivity, and the resulting sensitivities that offer different perspectives and tools.”²¹

Also, women’s roles in conflict situations are by no means universally positive and consistent. Azza Karam highlights that violent women—such as guerrilla fighters, suicide bombers, and mothers that promote a culture of martyrdom—need to be analyzed alongside women engaged in peace work:

We’re seeing women as the alternative, the other, the potential peacemakers. Even if we don’t say it, that is the subliminal message we’re trying hard to come up with. It’s been part of my battle with this new paradigm, because it really means accepting and coming out publicly to say, “we’ve got huge responsibilities in peacemaking—as women. But we also are part of conflict itself.”²²

Virginia Bouvier relates that in Latin America, the advantages and power some women achieved, did not always lead them to enact social change. Women are not always progressive, and sometimes, have been a conservative force protecting the status quo.²³

The issue of motherhood adds complexities to women’s peacebuilding work. Clearly childbearing and child rearing are significant in many ways in conflict situations. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, general secretary of the World YWCA, observes caustically that conflict situations always become about “women and their children”²⁴—a fact that women in some situations have taken advantage of to arouse sentiments of both sympathy and respect, as with the mothers of the disappeared within the Latin American Catholic Church²⁵ or the Association of War Affected Women in Sri Lanka.²⁶ Drawing on women’s moral authority as mothers to advance peace can cut both ways, legitimizing the cause, including within religious circles, but also contributing to stereotyping and marginalization. In either case, focusing exclusively on traditional roles can push aside or postpone the work of potentially changing those roles by tackling gender inequalities. As Jacqueline Ogega observes,

The work of [women’s peacebuilding groups] has been mostly oriented towards women’s reproductive roles, to nurturing, prayer, and care of children. They have seen themselves less in transformative roles or intervening on strategic questions.... They tend not to progress to roles at a more strategic level, looking to the root of causes of violence including gender inequality.²⁷

Just as women’s groups—religious or not—do not operate often enough at the level of politics and policy, those at the center of the peace process often pay insufficient attention to healing and building communities, and the “softer” peace work, ranging from dialogue initiatives to community building, does not translate into robust processes that transform conflict-sustaining institutions. This highlights Scott Appleby’s constant admonition that peacebuilding needs to be strategic at every level, from the local to the international, and involve both men and women working in grassroots communities and at the center; it “must leverage constructive personal relationships into political change and social transformation.”²⁸ Women and men both need to be power brokers, mediators, development czars, prophets, prophetesses, and long-term builders of communities—though doing so within a religious tradition, for most women of faith, adds another layer of complexity to the work.

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Women and Religious Peacebuilding

Religious peacebuilding is hardly a new phenomenon; religious communities and actors have long been involved in building peaceful and just societies. However, within the discipline of international conflict resolution, the contemporary field of religious peacebuilding theory and practice emerged in the 1990s. The greater attention paid to identity-based conflicts after the end of the Cold War shed a far brighter light on the ways in which religious identity, motivation, and motivational language cast in religious terms—the most blatant examples are calls to crusades and jihad—could legitimize and compel violence. In response, scholars and practitioners argued for supporting religious leaders who sought reconciliation, including reconciliation through interfaith dialogue.²⁹ The diplomatic and the international relations spheres, particularly in the United States and Europe, at first tended to shy away from addressing religion and its role in the larger political dynamics, but the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the Danish cartoon crisis, and the heightened focus on religion around the world led even this historically secular realm to take seriously religion's part in securing peace.³⁰

Mohammed Abu-Nimer points out that religious values, like other values, can motivate people to fight or to reconcile.³¹ Reporting on faith-based peacebuilding, Tseard Bouta, Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana, and Abu-Nimer outline the varied ways in which faith-based actors have contributed to peacebuilding: “They have provided emotional and spiritual support to war-affected communities, have mobilized their communities and others for peace, have mediated between conflicting parties, and have promoted reconciliation, dialogue, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration.”³² Emma Leslie warns that if the role of religion in peace work is ignored, those who have ties to faith can be excluded or their ideas and contributions muted.³³ Manal Omar puts the challenge starkly: “If you want numbers for your cause, and if you want to work in the grassroots, you need to be able to use the religious framework—both to understand people and to recruit.”³⁴

Such statements reflect the growing awareness that religion must play a part in peacebuilding. But for a wide variety of reasons, religion's role in driving conflict and its potential to open up avenues for peace and reconciliation is often viewed through a male prism, limiting comprehension of both the causes of and the solutions to the conflict. It also affects the peacebuilding field's ability to bring the next generation of women into the fold. As Emma Leslie argues, many younger women peacebuilders “also come out of a strong religious perspective. How do we foster and nurture that if we are not talking about what is important and relevant to them?”³⁵ The inspiration and ability of women to work for peace through religion—as well as the barriers preventing their work from being more visible and effective—appear at both personal and institutional levels and parsing the differences between them can improve the ability of outside actors to support peace work.

Personal Factors

There are signs of growing curiosity about the work of religious women in peacebuilding. Organizations and individuals have set out to explore the ways in which women with links to faith are working for peace, and women's roles in interfaith work are acknowledged more frequently in grassroots settings and among networks of peacemakers, if not in formal literature. Noting the importance of women as spiritual peacebuilders, the Center for Religious Tolerance organized a women's interfaith leadership development workshop in Amman, Jordan, in September 2007. In November 2009, at a conference on women, religion, and globalization

held by the MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies at Yale University, a panel focused specifically on women, religion, and peacebuilding. Organizations such as the Global Peace Initiative of Women (GPIW) and World Conference on Religions for Peace (WCRP) are working to bring women into the spotlight and increase the influence of their voices in the interfaith world.

For many women, the personal inspiration to be involved in peacebuilding is tied in important ways to their religious faith. Among the many female peacebuilders she has encountered, Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana observes that “many of these women see their peace work as a service to God, which keeps them motivated to continue, despite the challenges they face.”³⁶ Denise Coghlan, who has worked in Cambodia for more than two decades on reconciliation, peace, justice, and human development, is a vivid example of the powerful religious dimension of one woman’s drive to work for peace and social justice:

When they asked me why I wanted to go to the camps, I said that wherever suffering is present in the world, the cross of Christ is mysteriously present. That was my motivation. It was difficult for many interviewers to hear this, I think, because they thought I should say that I wanted to return to help refugees in Australia, but in reality it did not have anything to do with that. It really was about following the cross of Christ.³⁷

Many others highlight their own ties to faith. As Marilyn McMorrow observes,

My own approach to peacemaking comes from Vatican II and Catholic Social Justice tradition, particularly the Social Justice Encyclicals, from Pope John XXIII through Benedict XVI. I take this to mean that, along with all Catholics including the members of my religious order, I am called to work for “justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.” In my religious order, we emphasize each one’s call to become “a woman of communion, compassion, and reconciliation” who “seeks justice with the heart of an educator.”³⁸

Even as women are motivated by their faith to become involved in peace work, it seems that once involved they prefer to remain out of the limelight. Filiz Odabas-Geldiay raises the tendency of women she has worked with to keep a low profile and take pride in the quality of modesty. She comments that “women are already involved in the peace process but they work quietly so they are not noticed as much.”³⁹ Marie Dennis uses her own experience as an illustration of the tensions women face between working quietly and taking a more visible and active role:

I see that I need to rethink my own approach and roles at a personal level. I am most comfortable in a background role, and have very little personal need for recognition but I appreciate that in my Pax Christi role, my challenge is to step into that function and claim the space that women should have.⁴⁰

Working out of the public eye, women are less likely to face resistance from detractors and can hence be more effective. But this also makes their work harder to document, and thus more of a challenge for outside institutions seeking to support religious women in peacebuilding efforts. There are ways around this problem, however. Several peace-prize processes seek to ensure that women are not ignored in reviewing candidates for various honors. Still many see a need for greater affirmative effort to identify and recognize women peacebuilders.

Joyce Dubensky—who is executive vice president and chief executive officer of the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding—became troubled a few years ago that very few women were being nominated for its peace prize. She suggests that the dearth of female applicants was partially caused by women self-selecting out of the process, not viewing their own work as substantial or “risky” enough. “We actually found that women who we would consider peacemakers actually nominated men who they considered to be worthy rather than naming themselves! We have had more than one man self-nominate,” Dubensky recalls.⁴¹ To address this disparity, the Tanenbaum Center created a new prize—the Women’s Peace

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Initiative Award—focused on the Middle East and North Africa, and began proactively seeking women nominees throughout the world. The result was a record number of women nominees emerging, it seemed, from out of the woodwork. In 2009, the Center’s main peace-maker prize went to a woman.

Awards can help shape the conversation about the demands of peace and the meaning of leadership. The Niwano Peace Prize, which each year honors an individual or organization devoted to the cause of peace, honored Ela Bhatt, founder of the Self-Employed Women’s Network, in 2010. This made a statement that addressing structural poverty is an essential aspect of building a comprehensive peace and that the involvement of women is crucial. In addition, Bhatt’s emphasis on broad Gandhian values (and especially nonviolence and social justice) in describing her motivation also conveyed a message about how faith and peace are linked.⁴²

The Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice selects four women peacemakers each year. They are given space for rest and reflection as well as resources to document their personal stories and share their experiences of peacebuilding and advocacy. Though religion is not a factor in the selection process, many nominees credit their beliefs as a vital part of their motivation.⁴³ More spaces are needed to give voice to women’s successful work for peace and remove the blinders on secular institutions that have obscured the role of faith in their work. Marc Gopin suggests the establishment of a peace prize constituted by “a properly funded system, along the lines of the MacArthur genius grants,” that would ensure a broad and rigorous effort to identify worthy candidates—both male and female—and award a larger group. “That way we would know far better who is doing important work and we could also support them.”⁴⁴

Institutional Factors

Even as faith inspires many women, quietly or not, to engage in peace work, women tend to be marginalized in formal religious spaces. First, many religious traditions are patriarchal, denying women leadership positions in their organizations. Women are often prevented from gaining access to senior formal clerical roles or pursuing education that allows them to interpret their religious traditions with authority. Some of these barriers are justified by scripture as well as precedent. As Kathryn Poethig observes,

The role of religion is particularly problematic because of the lack of women’s presence in hierarchies and in the formal structures of most communities. This issue came out strongly at the conference of women on religion in Geneva that followed the 2000 New York/UN Millennium Summit of Religious leaders. It highlighted the problem of the invisibility of women and their very [absence] in religious organizations and meetings.⁴⁵

One need not look far (one can take photographs, for example) to document the very limited involvement of women in high-level faith-based or interfaith initiatives. When they are present, women are often active at the local level, but far less so nationally or internationally. David Smock points to many examples of the invisibility of women in formal processes. In the Alexandria Process, a now defunct initiative of Israeli and Palestinian religious leaders supporting the Middle East peace process—among them, Orthodox rabbis, bishops, and imams—no women were involved.⁴⁶ The 2000 Millennium Summit of Religious Leaders, one of the largest contemporary gatherings of religious leaders from across the world, engaged many different perspectives and appears to have spurred a new commitment to a multilayered approach to peacebuilding. However, this highly visible and publicized event, held in part in the UN General Assembly hall, also brought the absence of women into the spotlight and exposed the stark fact that women’s voices are marginalized in discussing links between religion, conflict,

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and peace. This was one of the spurs to creating the Global Peace Initiative for Women which, since 2002, has built a network of spiritually motivated women through international summits, focused dialogues among women in conflict areas, and concerted efforts to bring women's voices to global issues such as climate change.⁴⁷

In addition to more formal institutional restrictions, women's exclusion from arenas discussing religion and peace can also result from what might be better termed culture and tradition. Wendy Tyndale worked with WFDD in 1999–2001 to support an interfaith process in Guatemala that aimed to nudge forward some of the ideals and agreements of that country's peace accord. Women were to be included in the process, but as Tyndale notes,

that was very difficult, and the meetings themselves tended to be rather dominated by the older male leaders, in keeping with the tradition. As the group's focus turned to ethics and education, it was rare that women's issues or voices truly came into the conversation.⁴⁸

Moreover, though the idea of religious peacebuilding has begun to gain acceptance in more secular circles, international organizations are often wary of engaging with religious ideas and institutions explicitly. Emma Leslie observes that in the Action Asia Network (linked to Action International) there was a marked tendency not to talk about religion in the network discussions and workshops, even though the group heard narratives that made clear that women active in peace work derived much of their inspiration and understanding from their religion:

Many in the network had their formation in a religious framework. One woman from Burma, for example, was raised as a strong Baptist, led services, preached, and taught in a theological college. That empowered her to be a leader and gave her the skills that allowed her to take on peace work. The same is true for some Buddhist women, from Sri Lanka for example, who have found that their work with monks has inspired them. And Dekha Ibrahim would describe her framework as drawing much from her faith. Her Islamic background has equipped her for her work. We hear this more and more, not so much in formal presentations, but in the off-the-record informal chats over coffee, where women share how they see their work. Religion keeps coming up. I have seen that women in our network who are inspired by their faith to do peace work are more inclined to see and reach out to the religious sector as a resource or partner for their on-the-ground peace work.⁴⁹

Women Outside of Religious Leadership

Given the limited presence of women in formal religious leadership, several different ideas have been advanced to address how to engage women, give them credibility and authority, and recognize their roles in religious peace work. Agnes Abuom is forthright about the need to change the way participants in peace discussions are selected. Sometimes that means constructing a parallel process that can involve women who are part of religious communities even if they do not hold formal positions: "When you bring women to the table, you get a totally different narrative."⁵⁰ It is an increasingly common practice to refer to them as *religious actors* rather than *religious leaders*. Marc Gopin suggests a shift in focus toward the term *religious representatives*, which opens up recognition of work across all segments of religious society:

This makes it possible to reframe who is empowered and authorized to represent a religion. Using language and tests of eligibility that focus on women "religious leaders" is simply a nonstarter at the global level, because of the barriers that block women's participation in several traditions. It is important to look for women clerics, to have affirmative action to bring them in, but that should not be the central focus, and it simply excludes, for example, most of Islam and Orthodox Judaism. Some refer to "religious actors" but to me that tends to trivialize their roles and work and it lacks clarity.⁵¹

Maryann Cusimano Love similarly argues that it is necessary to look beyond ordained religious leaders and toward a broader religious community engagement, as women are of-

ten deeply involved in faith-inspired organizations, working in grassroots peacebuilding and reconciliation, especially health care and education. Women are involved in shaping religious interpretations and responses to the conflict in their communities in other ways. They play important roles in their local places of worship or in their family's religious life, and so shape religious traditions in less obvious but influential ways. "That's not captured if you only do religious leader engagement," says Cusimano Love. "You miss out on community leaders who may not have the title in the religious hierarchy."⁵²

Elana Rozenman describes how the tenets of a faith can turn women to focus on the local, community level, as opposed to more formal structures of power:

Our work, we say, is not political—it is holy work. We are focusing on religion, finding women of faith, and coming together around our faith. In doing so, we are working to reinforce nonviolence, and to bring all the wisdom and truth in our religions together for that purpose. Our meetings are to study, to celebrate holidays together, to strengthen our sisterhood. During Ramadan we break the fast together in the home of a Muslim woman. We celebrate Sukkot, the Jewish holiday, in the sukka at my home. We see the Christmas trees in our Christian sisters' homes at Christmas. We make food together so we can share meals. We bring each other to each others' homes and invite our friends and relatives to meet us all the time.⁵³

Groups working in Israel and the Middle East—prominent among them the Interfaith Encounter Association, an Israel-based organization that fosters dialogue among religions in the Holy Land—focus on personal contact and learning about different faith traditions in daily life as a central element to addressing the roots of conflicts and building understanding. It is most often women who are involved in these activities.⁵⁴ The social roles that women play, down to caring for basic needs like food and shelter, can be pivotal even in the most political settings and should thus not be discounted as insignificant elements in the process of building peace. In addition, women are involved in overtly spiritual matters that can strengthen existing peace processes if they are included. According to Jacqueline Moturi Ogega,

Women are often recognized as the spiritual leaders for healing and cleansing. This takes on special importance in situations where there have been extreme atrocities against the people and communities, and where healing is extraordinarily difficult. Women are also given leading roles in prayer and worship rituals in many faith traditions.⁵⁵

Women are particularly prominent in reconciliation and healing work, and while trauma healing is certainly not always associated with religion, spirituality seems to positively affect the process. As Andrea Blanch comments, "Religion and faith tap into people's deepest beliefs and can provide one tool to begin addressing the trauma and the conflict at a personal and societal level."⁵⁶ Cusimano Love draws on the experiences of women in the Democratic Republic of Congo as an example:

In issues of trauma healing, especially when the victims of conflict are primarily women and girls, women in faith-based groups can be very effective. This is especially true in places like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where rape and mutilation of women are being used as tools of conflict by armed groups trying to access natural resources. Women's groups are very well situated to help these victims, and are working in areas where the state is either absent or predatory, reaching out to victims of what the UN calls war crimes and crimes against humanity. They are doing effective engagement to give these girls and women healing support, but also in addressing how to integrate them back into the community when they've been stigmatized.⁵⁷

The challenge is to find, describe, and build on this and other aspects of the peacebuilding work that women do. Andrea Blanch suggests that we need to ask a different set of questions to understand what leadership, in practice, looks like for religious women. She points to "the real power that women actually have within religious communities and institutions, as well as the culture. Even though they do not have formal titles, they have influence."⁵⁸ Farina So, speaking

The social roles that women play . . . can be pivotal even in the most political settings and should thus not be discounted as insignificant elements in the process of building peace.

from her experience with the Muslim Cham community in Cambodia, describes “women’s roles at home in terms of education and the preservation of religion, culture and identity” as places where women have real influence outside the public face of religion.⁵⁹

In many religious institutions, women have been influential leaders outside the traditional male hierarchy. Cusimano Love described this phenomenon within the Catholic Church:

On the one hand, we have a male hierarchy. On the other hand, there are many institutional arms of the Church in which there are opportunities for women to lead. . . . Because many of these women are leaders in institutional roles—at schools and hospitals and NGOs [non-governmental organizations] and so on—they have access to male religious authority.⁶⁰

While leading conflict resolution trainings in a number of Muslim countries, Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana observed that “because [women] were not always engaged at the formal tracks of peacemaking, they had created informal mechanisms and processes.” She described a Kurdish Iraqi woman who provided *shura*, or conflict resolution, even though she was not officially trained to do so. “She was one of the traditional community leaders who provided conflict resolution. . . . The community recognized her capacity to do this, because of her personal qualities.”⁶¹

As mentioned above, working outside institutions limits the recognition and support women might receive for their efforts. Dee Aker observes that, while many of the women peacemakers are religiously affiliated and inspired by their own faith, “the vast majority do not play formal roles in their religious institutions” and thus can be overlooked by initiatives that are looking specifically for religious leaders.⁶² On the other hand, working outside formal structures can, at times, be beneficial as institutions have well-known disadvantages of rigidity and resistance to new ideas. Dena Merriam notes:

Women together can go further than any institution. And there may well be a real benefit that so few spiritual women are tied to positions of institutional leadership. . . . We can go much further if we step away from institutional positions.⁶³

Mari Fitzduff observed this dynamic in Northern Ireland from the 1970s to the 1990s, when nuns often had the freedom that priests did not:

The nuns became much more radical than many of the priests, particularly the diocesan priests who were more grounded in the conservative local institutions. The nuns were more free to offer their services in ways that the priests could not. So you saw some of them doing the interfaith work, or getting involved in other issues where the priests were absent.⁶⁴

Moreover, by working on the periphery of formal religious structures, women have access to different negotiation spaces than does the male leadership; for example, women are often better positioned to reach other women. Kadayifci-Orellana pointed out that in many countries she had access to Muslim women engaged in their communities that her male colleagues did not. “In Saudi Arabia, we went to visit the women’s campus,” she observed. “The men were not allowed in, so I visited.”⁶⁵ Yehuda Stolov noted that “women-only groups are desirable as they allow for traditional women to join.”⁶⁶

Significant numbers of women have deliberately taken advantage of their lack of institutional constraints to take steps toward peace. According to Fitzduff, when the Catholic Church refused to provide chaplains for integrated Catholic-Protestant schools in Northern Ireland, nuns became chaplains for these schools on their own initiative.⁶⁷ A number of interviews suggest that religious women and women’s groups, freed from institutional constraints, show extraordinary courage and creativity in acting for peace, going against traditionally imposed limits. They may also function more efficiently than these male-dominated

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avenues might. Bilkisu Yusuf relates the experiences of the Federation of Muslim Women of Nigeria (FOMWAN):

For a long time the women of FOMWAN have spoken on behalf of Muslims when there was some issue the government wanted to address, because it was easier to work with us than with the men's organizations, where there is so much bureaucracy they can't respond promptly. The men do not have a rapid response like we have, so the government has turned to us to speak for Muslims. . . . The male leaders are under the Supreme Council, the highest Islamic body. The group is led by the Sultan, the emirs, the clerics. Bureaucracy has made them not as effective as they ought to be, and they don't seem to be implementing projects in their communities. All they do is just meet and discuss the sighting of the moon for the month of Ramadan and the start of Eid al-Fitr, and when to break your fast. The Supreme Council has its own niche; it is seen as the policymaking body, but that is about it. In times of building communities, it is FOMWAN who will look out for you. Increasingly we have been invited to take up positions in government committees and have input into policies, because the government recognizes the work we are doing—building hospitals, addressing development issues, et cetera.⁶⁸

Scilla Elworthy echoes the assertion that women manage despite many obstacles and offers an important “bottom line” judgment: “the most efficient institutions, the most effective approaches, do seem to be led by women.”⁶⁹

Women in Religious Leadership

While religious institutions tend to marginalize women, some women—exemplars and pioneers—hold formal leadership positions. Many of the women consulted as part of this initiative are such leaders: Sister Joan Chittister, Agnes Abuom (who works within the Anglican Communion and the World Council of Churches, often involved in negotiations involving the Horn of Africa), bold Buddhist nuns like Damananda, and Muslim *alimat* (women religious scholars) are among those who work doggedly and effectively for peace. Buddhist and Catholic nuns, Protestant and Muslim female preachers and teachers, Jewish female rabbis, and female shamans in many indigenous cultures do visible and important work in shaping religious traditions and their community's religious response to conflict and peace. Women are also pivotal in some interfaith organizations, where the creation of new leadership models and criteria opens up, at least in its potential, opportunities for more gender-balanced leadership.

In recent years, Muslim *ulama* (religious scholars and leaders generally) have begun to address the cycle of violence and conflict in the southern Philippines, both at the grassroots and broader level. Amina Rasul-Bernardo observes that “there are thousands of *ulama* in the Philippines who provide spiritual assistance to communities and wield great influence.”⁷⁰ This body of religious leaders already includes women—the above-mentioned *alimat*—who have, like the men, received training in Islamic law at al-Azhar and other respected institutions. Over 150 women are part of the National Network of Muslim Leaders, and women are active participants in the National Ulama Conference of Philippines (NUCP), an organization of Muslim clerics formed in 2009 to work on peace and development. The group's by-laws reserve two seats of the fifteen-member board for *alimat*.

As Rasul-Bernardo points out, “There is still the challenge of working to give these women religious leaders more meaningful roles.” Traditionally, the *alimat* have supported the *ulama*-headed organizations and taught at Muslim schools, and have been “largely overlooked by institutions providing capacity building for civil society organizations, including other women's organizations.” That has changed in the past few years, however, as a number of *alimat* have actively sought larger public roles. At the first National Ulama Summit in 2008, the women

organized a parallel program to focus on peace and development as a unified group. At the following year's summit, thirty-one *alimat* participated in a formal workshop on women's rights and other issues. The year 2009 saw the formation of the organization Nur es Salaam (Light of Peace), which helps organize female Muslim religious leaders, allowing them to become more active and effective. A major part of these initiatives is a project called Empowering Women as Peace Advocates which focuses on encouraging women religious scholars to collaborate with Muslim civil society organizations in peace efforts. Amina Rasul-Bernardo describes the results of these meetings:

In many ways this is the very first time the women have been involved in civil society. Thus there is a lot of focus on implementation and the how-tos. We focus on education about human rights and the rights of citizens. We are providing support so that they can become financially independent. Project management skills are important. We help to bring them together with potential development partners, which is part of helping them to become self-standing and self-sustaining.

The women's agendas are clear and basic. They want a more peaceful community so that their families can survive, and not just survive but have a peaceful, decent existence. In the south of the Philippines life is oppressive and dangerous. They see it and have lived it. And they want to change it.⁷¹

Amina Rasul-Bernardo herself is active across many spheres of politics and civil society in the Philippines and the East Asia region, and brings this experience to bear through her personal outreach.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), an array of women-led organizations work for peace in a wide variety of ways. They are also responding to a particularly grievous situation. Though the Second Congo War officially ended seven years ago, conflict persists in the eastern provinces of the DRC, and the violence that dominates life in the provinces of North and South Kivu affects women disproportionately. Combatants systematically have raped tens of thousands of women. The extremely high instances of sexual assault have both physical effects—many of the rapes involve extreme brutality, and access to hospitals and medical attention is limited—and social and psychological consequences that are likely to persist over years.

Women peacebuilders in the DRC are combining direct action to support the victims of violence with powerful advocacy for action at national and international levels. Many of these efforts involve alliances among religiously inspired and secular organizations. The Centre Olame, a Catholic social assistance agency of the Archdiocese of Bukavu, South Kivu, provides psychological and practical assistance to victims of sexual violence, empowers women to fight against pervasive discrimination and abuse, and promotes local peacebuilding and community reconciliation in the province.⁷² Its work includes improving the health and well-being of children, nutrition and community health programs, job training, microfinance programs, and mobilization against harassment and sexual exploitation through political action. Centre Olame's director, Mathilde Muhindo Mwamini, has worked on behalf of women in the DRC for more than thirty years. She joined Centre Olame in the mid-1980s, moved by the high death rate of children in her country.

Another woman leader working for peace in the DRC is Justine Masika Bihamba, founder of Synergy of Women for Victims of Sexual Violence, a coalition consisting of thirty-five women's organizations that help victims of sexual violence. Honored by the Catholic movement Pax Christi International for her advocacy work on behalf of women affected by violence and rape as a weapon of war, she recently visited Washington to bear witness and call for action. She criticizes the culture of impunity that surrounds sexual assault and the dearth of accessible

Women peacebuilders in the DRC are combining direct action to support the victims of violence with powerful advocacy for action at national and international levels.

judiciaries to prosecute offenders. She urges more pressure from the international community on the governments of the DRC, Rwanda, and Burundi, as well as the presence of an international tribunal in the DRC.⁷³

Civil society organizations in the DRC work under conditions of persistent insecurity and constant threat. But leaders in Congolese civil society stress that more Congolese women must become involved in the search for solutions to conflict; as a network, their voices can be heard. The Congolese example of women leaders working together across the divide between religious and secular to build such a network is a model for women in other parts of the world to follow. It also suggests a way for international organizations to lend a hand by providing resources, forums, and other means to make network building among women easier. Such work has taken place in Sri Lanka, as women peacebuilders have formed organizations that combine local services, national-level advocacy, and coordination with international actors. Amid the brutality of Sri Lanka's protracted conflict, women were sadly perhaps best known for their suffering. Many have died and lost family members either in fighting or from civil strife. Many others were the target of widespread rape. But Sri Lankan women have also participated as fighters—the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam had a large number of women fighters. As noncombatants, they helped life continue during conflict; they worked actively for peace and were involved in reconciliation efforts.

In the Tamil community, cultural and religious traditions accentuate women's roles. Female goddesses are the focus of devotion, and women are key to social organization. This tradition has shaped and supported women's peacebuilding work; drawing from strong community ties and traditions, this spontaneously created and strengthened networks initiated and led by women. Many of them have risked their lives to work for peace and development, and many work under the public radar in their villages and communities.

The Suriya Women's Development Organization, a Tamil civil society entity, was formed in the early 1990s and expanded over the decades, from a small organization helping displaced women around Colombo, Sri Lanka's capital, to an internationally known body with extensive networks, both national and international. Suriya built a capacity to reach isolated communities in Sri Lanka and connected them with international organizations. It became an effective political actor, delivering services and communicating the suffering and wishes of women in Sri Lanka and overseas.

From the outset, it adopted a flexible, multisectoral approach to meeting the needs of displaced women. Initially it focused on staffing medical clinics, establishing schools, and offering vocational training, legal counseling, and health education workshops. Suriya later shifted its focus to the war zones around Batticaloa and the situation of victims. It fought cases of arbitrary arrest, abduction, disappearances, and battering of women, and also worked to provide jobs for widowed women.

A central Suriya objective was to make the government and military more accountable for acts of injustice against the population. In the late 1990s, it organized a clothesline project to protest the lack of accountability for criminal acts perpetrated by the military. Colorful sari blouses, each representing a female family member who had been killed, were strung in public places, broadcasting that "women's domestic space is no safer than the streets of the war zone."⁷⁴ In Colombo, Suriya lobbied to prevent government closure of refugee camps. When the government rounded up refugees in the middle of the night, Suriya women followed them to Batticaloa and organized highly visible camps. With the affected people immediately present and close to government officials, it made it difficult to deny arrests. Suriya

also organized public protests in the form of silent vigils to challenge the use of torture and abduction by the government.

Suriya's domestic and international outreach programs strengthened networks of Sri Lankan women, such as Freedom from Fear, which addresses dangerous and insecure conditions by focusing on the media, silent vigils, and other public events. Suriya gave a sense of common purpose in a dangerously demoralized and fragmented social situation. Its collective prayers for peace helped build this sense of community and its transnational connections strengthened local effectiveness and gave credibility to its efforts to bridge the different women's networks in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka's Muslim Women's Research and Action Forum (MWRAF) began in 1976 as an informal gathering of Muslim women and evolved into a registered NGO by 1990. The organization, headed by Jezima Ismail, defines its aim as empowering and mobilizing Muslim women in particular, and all women in general. It focuses on both community and national development. The organization pursues a vision of "upholding equity and justice for all women (whatever their ethnic origin) free of violence against women and exploitation of women by all patriarchal structures including the family, society, custom, religion and the state."⁷⁵

MWRAF focuses on Muslim personal law, both its application and reforms, to enhance equity and justice. Through legal means, it seeks to ensure the protection of women's rights in national and local governance, supporting Quranic interpretative study with male imams and women that highlights a religious mandate for gender rights and protection. MWRAF also seeks to bring women and men together across the Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim ethnic communities to strengthen the adoption of a Sri Lankan identity. Its view is that there should be no concept of majority and minority and all citizens should be of equal status. This interethnic and interfaith peacebuilding work is conducted through community dialogue forums. Finally, MWRAF compiles and produces research material on issues relevant to their ongoing work, including publications on gender equality, peacebuilding, and customary law practiced throughout the Muslim world.

The Sinhala-Tamil-Muslim Rural Women's Network (STMRWN) is based in Trincomalee, a region historically sacred to both Hindus and Buddhists. It brings together women from different ethnic and religious communities, promoting political involvement, empowerment, and human rights. STMRWN's efforts cover poverty alleviation, micro credit, health, education, environment, and peace. It has 29,000 members from across the country's diverse ethnic and religious groups.

Sri Lankan women have rarely contested local elections because political tradition favors the established political parties. STMRWN was among the first women's groups to contest provincial council elections in 1999, addressing above all the marginalization of small farmers. The group did not win a seat in council, but the effort mobilized women and unified different ethnic groups to speak with one civic voice. STMRWN was also actively engaged in tsunami relief, both immediately after the disaster and in the longer term. It has found the means to support a series of livelihood and infrastructure schemes, focusing on poor fishing villages that the larger aid agencies and government neglected in their response to the 2004 tsunami. Finally, STMRWN works with ActionAid on land-title issues that have exacerbated conflict in a region slowly emerging from civil war.

Building Stronger Links between Religious and Secular Organizations through Women

As noted above, most secular organizations, especially in Europe and North America, have only recently begun to recognize the positive roles that religion can play in conflict situations,

The Sinhala-Tamil-Muslim Rural Women's Network . . . brings together women from different ethnic and religious communities, promoting political involvement, empowerment, and human rights.

and many are still skittish about working with religious organizations. In many cases, this is due to a lack of knowledge. While working for the United Nations in Afghanistan during the rise of the Taliban, Paula Newberg noted that international institutions “were not at all good at understanding the concepts or language of religious discourse and precepts, and thus how seriously to take them: what they should respect and what they could and should ignore.”⁷⁶ Manal Omar cites several examples of the blind spots of secular institutions regarding religion:

For [OXFAM’s] work in Yemen, one of the indicators in the minds of some of the program officers of success for a public health program was how many women would take off the *niqab*! We had these amazing photos of women who had graduated from midwife training up in the office, but they were wearing *niqab* and so people lobbied to take them down. This was really my first exposure to the very secular development world. We had one project that worked on adjusting the marriage law to the age of eighteen. It was called the anti-early marriage project. But the religious leaders resisted the project, and we weren’t getting anywhere. So finally we engaged the religious leaders, who told us that way we were framing the project—its title—rubbed them the wrong way, although they were supportive of the objective of the project. They suggested we change the name to “safe marriage project.” We did, and the project took off. The process of approaching, taking seriously, or asking permission from the religious leadership was a huge shift for the organization.⁷⁷

Too often, secular and religious work for peace, justice, and women’s rights are not well integrated and coordinated. Sister Joan Chittister, among several participants in our consultations, referred to “theological moats”⁷⁸ and other factors separating certain groups, especially secular and religious, but also different religious communities and tendencies. For Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana, the divide between religious women and secularists is especially true in Turkey:

If you identify yourself as a Muslim actor, you are automatically seen as against political secularism. So there is an internal challenge—with education, city centers—they are often associated with secularists although more and more religious girls enter universities and work in cities. Whereas, if you are religious, you are seen as backward, uneducated, lower class, a traditional villager. In my observation, many of the secularists (some call them radical secularists) have internalized the orientalist discourse and project it onto those who are associated with village, religion, and tradition. So there is a self-orientalization which creates a deep divide.⁷⁹

However, several interviewees observe that the divides may be less pronounced than they appear on the surface and can be bridged with dedicated efforts, which are worth making when greater collaboration between secular and religious groups allows for more effective work overall. As Amina Rasul-Bernardo points out,

I began from a rather secular perspective, but the more I have learned about the way women see realities on the ground, the more I have come to see that building bridges between secular and religiously inspired groups and approaches is an essential path we must follow on the road to real peace.⁸⁰

That said, bridging the divide is not always easy, and donors and international organizations can do much to help. In Iraq, after the 2003 invasion, Manal Omar reports that women were some of the first to come together across religious and political divides, but by 2008, that early cooperation had given way to polarization between religious and secular.⁸¹ “When women got into political power, they tended to reach across these divides less often,” Omar says. This fragmentation and distrust persists today. On one side are women who follow what they perceive as a clear secular path. Taking their cues from the UN Declaration on Human Rights, they argue for equality under the law. They tend to be highly skeptical of religion and Islam, terming them oppressive to women. On the other side are women who see their identities and organizational support in their religion. They are negatively inclined toward talk of human rights, saying that it is largely a Western imposition and denigrates Islamic values.

To address the divide, USIP recently launched a Toolkit for Women’s Leadership on Collaborative Problem Solving, bringing together women from different political parties to enhance coalition-building skills. In the first phase of the project, Iraqi women from both secular and religious backgrounds gathered in Beirut to discuss how they might work together for social and political reforms. At first, says Omar, “very harsh comments were made by women on both sides. Both sides couldn’t recognize that the other women were their neighbors.”⁸² But over the four days of the workshop, women began to build personal relationships and find common ground, creating a foundation to work together on social change. Qamar-ul Huda highlights the importance of bridging such divides:

A lot of the religious communities [in Afghanistan and Pakistan] already have social services, but they are isolated and contained. They see NGOs as competitors. So I’m trying to push them to cooperate with others. To be less isolated, more engaged. What’s wrong with collaborating with others who have similar objectives? What’s wrong with sharing resources and materials?⁸³

Priorities for Research and Action

It is both just and desirable to realize more fully the potential of women with links to faith to improve peacebuilding efforts—but how can this be done most effectively? The process of working through religious traditions or institutions is often more complex than donors appreciate, and differs from their preconceptions of what religious institutions can offer. For their part, policymakers currently tend to apply a single approach to dealing with all faith-inspired organizations. They should not fail to recognize the enormous diversity of religious institutions across regions, traditions, and communities. Government agencies should avoid taking unilateral action in areas where partnering with faith institutions might be more effective, and in doing such work, the emphasis should not be on using religion as an instrument, but rather on finding ways for religious and secular organizations to build a stronger peace together.

Similarly, the gulf in understanding that separate many—though by no means all—secular women’s organizations from those grounded in religion are regrettable and quite often colored by preconceptions and misunderstandings. These hurdles prevent all actors working toward peace from being as effective as they might have been. These can be overcome, however: first, by documenting more fully and specifically the ways that women have used the precepts and institutions of their faiths to work for peace; second, by reconceptualizing the traditional peacemaking agenda so that it incorporates a greater understanding of women’s roles in fostering peace; and third, by building networks connecting religious with secular organizations, advocates with political leaders, and donors and other international organizations interested in sponsoring a more stable and lasting peace with women working through religious organizations to achieve it.

Documentation

As mentioned above, working away from the public eye can often be more effective. But it also means that the results tend to go undocumented and this can affect the abilities of women to sustain their efforts over the long term. How can outside organizations support their work if they are unaware of it? Scott Appleby emphasizes the need for “first-rate social scientific studies of what is actually happening in these so-called invisible realms of peacebuilding, conducted by women standing in some critical but positive relationship to the traditional religious community.”⁸⁴ Jacqueline Ogega notes further that

Scott Appleby emphasizes the need for “first-rate social scientific studies of what is actually happening in these so-called invisible realms of peacebuilding, conducted by women standing in some critical but positive relationship to the traditional religious community.”

the work women do is in many areas . . . tends to be very local, very real, and very tangible. . . . Women have been acting in so many places, but there is in truth very limited documentation about what exactly they do. So what we are drawing on is largely ad hoc or anecdotal information, stories from our own direct experiences that can make it appear that we are romanticizing women's roles. We need more credible evidence to prove what women of faith and their organizations have done.⁸⁵

Filiz Odabas-Geldiay argues that the work women do “is usually taken for granted.”⁸⁶ For Marc Gopin, this contributes to a paucity of thoughtful and professional evaluation:

The problem is that we have no systematic country analyses in this area. What we know about the nature of peace processes, especially in an area like this one is piecemeal—what we happen to hear. . . . We lack any systematic gathering of experience and resources, and far less do we have any real assessment of the impact.⁸⁷

Such documentation and analysis could help tackle one of the largest challenges facing women of faith doing peacebuilding work—a lack of resources. Jacqueline Ogega points out that it is often extraordinarily difficult to mobilize support for critical local community-based work, which is often driven by women of faith:

We have found through our work at Religions for Peace that women of faith continue to be unrecognized, underfunded, and unsupported in their efforts to build peace. It is difficult for the media to pick up the story that women of faith are leading change by organizing peace committees at the village level, and that their work contributes to the overall efforts to build peace. . . . The lack of resources is the central challenge. The way religious women's organizations are structured, even well organized women's groups, limits the possibility of getting resources to them in any significant way. Available resources tend to go to mainstream religious groups. Women may be asked to organize local communities, but that is very limited in terms of resources and also limited in terms of building organizational capacity.⁸⁸

In conjunction with the Catholic Peace Network, Cusimano Love has researched how different government bureaus and organizations define peace and their priorities for peacebuilding and postconflict reconstruction.⁸⁹ She notes that there is much that government and multilateral peacebuilding efforts—for example, the UN Peace Building Commission and the stability, security, transition, and reconstruction (SSTR) activities conducted by the U.S. Defense Department and State Department—could learn from the approach of Catholic organizations, including a greater emphasis on participation and reconciliation.⁹⁰

Documenting and analyzing religious women's peacebuilding efforts, according to Marc Gopin, could shed light on important and effective work not only advancing the field but also directing resources more efficiently:

We have in the United States, with the Obama administration, a real window of opportunity—a rare and important era of government seriousness. And so we face the question of how we can use something like the MacArthur model of selecting for excellence, and how we can advocate for a paradigm shift that is not doling out dribbles of money but instead is asking, what money will it take to bring peace? Sometimes we hear that the money is there but I just don't believe it. What we want is to put money in ratios that support cutting-edge work, that give peace a fighting chance.⁹¹

At the same time, those seeking to encourage women religious peacebuilders must consider how best to offer that support in a way that will not put women at undue risk or undermine their effectiveness.

Setting an Agenda

As mentioned at the outset, identifying the work of women—and women of faith, in particular—that can best benefit peacebuilding efforts involves clarifying what constitutes peacebuilding in the first place. Gender-based domestic violence must be part of peacebuilding

agendas much more frequently, forcefully, and effectively. Almost by definition, this would mean involving women more directly in agenda-setting discussions. In describing her community-based peace activism in Kashmir, Ashima Kaul notes,

In our early work it was very difficult to raise the issue of domestic violence. There was denial even from women, but especially from men, who said that this does not happen in Kashmiri society. Women denied it also, saying that Islam gives equal status to men and women, using quotations from the Koran to show that domestic violence could not be. We continued to press on the issue, continued to engage with them, and slowly the space has opened up. Now, domestic violence is written [about] and discussed in the media, and people are reporting it. There is no longer the assumption that, if you are a Muslim and follow Islam, violence will not happen to you.⁹²

Beyond the issue of domestic violence, however, are the broader concerns of development and community stability that are crucial for any peacebuilding effort. Though they are often considered as separate problems in the abstract, they dovetail in practice, and women stand at the place where they meet. Women thus have much to add to the traditional understanding of the problems of peacebuilding, and an interfaith dialogue, when it is led by women or has strong female participation, may take on a different character than when it is led by men. As Qamar-ul Huda observes,

Men like to start with theology, scriptural reasoning or, more accurately, scriptural support for their arguments. They will talk about how the Prophet is a peaceful example, we are peaceful, et cetera. Women teachers will start with theology, but it has a conservative slant: “we must do this work of Islamic peacemaking in order to preserve a strong family, which preserves a strong community and society.” They are doing more than just teaching young children; they see themselves as keeping the society together.⁹³

For donors and international organizations, women’s analyses and understandings of peace work, especially viewed through a religious lens, can constitute a new approach to the old and persistent problem of fostering long-term peace. But to be truly effective, these understandings and analyses must translate into action. Women working through religious institutions must be able to participate in far more than setting the peacebuilding agenda; they must be able to advocate their positions to political leaders and coordinate their efforts with other women and men working for peace in both the religious and secular arenas. Outside actors looking to support peacebuilding efforts can offer much, in resources, advice, and other kinds of support to make this work possible.

Building Networks

Women working for peace emphasize the importance of networks—from highly focused efforts that address specific regions to broader networks that aim at a general sharing of experience and reinforcement of community—as sources of support and inspiration and as ways to amplify their voices. Scilla Elworthy observes that what is needed is “an overall strategy for the building of peace worldwide.” She continues:

There are so many effective grassroots initiatives that do not get a fraction of the resources they merit; there are marvelous UN declarations that do not really deliver; there is excellent research coming out of university peace departments; there are even great initiatives on the part of governments, but all these are fragmented and do not work together as joint stakeholders in the building of peace.⁹⁴

Ashima Kaul mentions the benefits networks offer in training as well as capacity and skills building, but also stresses the moral support they provide. As Dee Aker points out, “Women very often feel very alone and isolated. They are not aware that they are not the only ones caught in seemingly impossible situations.”⁹⁵

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Increased communication and collaboration can enable organizations to explore better ways to help their communities recover from war.

The calls for more and stronger networks present both a challenge and an opportunity for donors and international organizations interested in supporting women in religious peace-building. In describing her work, Marie Dennis outlines the complexities that networks might address as increased communication and collaboration can enable organizations to explore better ways to help their communities recover from war. Networks can also help individual groups focus their work, share ideas, and garner support from other organizations. Dennis notes:

I have seen more and more the connections among issues and the importance of creating viable networks that can link many different kinds of structures, to help people who are working for peace to sing in harmony with each other, and to work together. . . . We need to find better ways, more opportunities, to lift up the terrible realities that we see, the effects of war and violence, in a more coherent way. That must shape how we focus our work, what we propose, and what we advocate, individually and collectively.⁹⁶

Emma Leslie, who has considerable experience working with networks, highlights some of the lessons her team has learned:

We have invested a lot in learning about how to build meaningful and useful networks, and we are learning all the time. One lesson is that we establish strict rules from the beginning, on who joins and how we manage communication. This has particular importance for people in sensitive, tense situations, where communications can be not only a nuisance but simply dangerous. Another lesson we found is that having someone in a network representing an organization does not work well. People move on, the new person is not integrated well, and the momentum and energy and above all the trust and relationships are dissipated. So membership in our networks is personal and individual.⁹⁷

New social media open new means and channels that offer significant potential. Kathryn Poethig discusses the potential of social networks for young leaders:

One of the most interesting areas where much is happening that is worth focusing on is in the colleges, thus looking at the next generation. How do people in their twenties see these issues? What kinds of programs are they initiating? And what programs serve them well? The potential of social networking is really exciting and worth exploring.⁹⁸

This kind of networking is increasingly powerful across widely separated societies—both rich and poor—especially as access to social media spreads and opportunities to engage open up.

At the same time, the need for personal interaction should not be discounted. Dena Merriam observes that “networks are vital because they are about seeing people as the most important thing. That means that they simply must involve face-to-face meetings. And that means being willing to travel.” This applies as much to the religious world as the secular and in bridging the divides between them as well as between religious faiths. “Building trust is what is important also in religious worlds,” Merriam says.

“It is important to have networks that go across faiths. I have found that it is possible to work deeply with different faiths, in part because I show such interest in different faiths. That interest and curiosity are a critical ingredient to the effort to be able to cross over and share experience.”⁹⁹

By creating broad networks of people—across generations, communities, organizations, and beliefs—who support each other, it is easier to work toward common goals, brainstorm new ideas, and collectively advocate for change. In several faith traditions, important changes in women’s roles, and thus in their potential to work for peace, center on intrafaith work that challenges through theological dialogue the assumptions and teachings that affect women negatively. Such work has appeared markedly within several Muslim communities, for example, Pakistan, Indonesia, and the United States. A long-standing African women’s association—the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians—has worked in this direction for over a decade. Efforts along these lines deserve more focus, recognition, and support.

In addition to helping secular organizations and authorities appreciate the work of faith-based organizations, networks can also help religious institutions deal more effectively with the world of public policy and government. As Denise Coghlan puts it,

Perhaps some faith-inspired organizations could pay more attention to advocacy, but they have to know their stuff! If you are going to advocate you have to be knowledgeable. It is no use saying faith-based organizations should do this or that if they do not know their topics. They need to be prepared to work diligently on the subjects they choose. Another thing faith-inspired organizations can help on is aligning the interests of the people with the political interests of the leaders. . . . Faith-inspired organizations can work to see that politicians recognize better the real needs and wishes of the people they are supposed to serve.¹⁰⁰

Networking also needs to take place across disciplines. If peace is defined as more than the absence of violence, it encompasses women working in numerous and related fields. An integrated, multidisciplinary approach to the challenges of peacebuilding can encourage practitioners and researchers to tap into the experiences of more individuals and offer ways to establish better forms of communication and collaboration. Kathryn Poethig observes:

My concern is that we are not linking fields well enough. We are not looking at all the sources of wisdom, at how we connect, how we can take the discussion to the next level. . . . We need the three levels, activist, practitioner, and theoretical, but we need to bring them together to get to another level of understanding of what we are doing and can do. . . . We need to focus on curricula around human rights and around peace education networks, again building on remarkable things that are being done.¹⁰¹

Ela Bhatt urges that, even more than networking, cooperation—across cultures and religions as well as from leaders and citizens—needs to take place:

All my life I have worked to change concepts, and that begins with how people see and understand the problems. The biggest obstacles, obstruction, and opposition come from blockages among the policymakers and the educated. That is why we need to organize at different levels, across borders of all kinds, building on relationships and on people, from the grass roots to the international, from cooperatives to Cornell University, because we need the knowledge as well.¹⁰²

To facilitate such cooperation, many participants pointed to the importance of recognizing the diversity of thought within religious traditions as well as among them. Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana notes:

Even within the same community of women of faith, there are many differences in the way they understand peace and their religious tradition. Age, personal experiences, ethnicity, race, are also categories that may play an important role for the construction of identity of these women. Understanding these differences and constructively managing these complexities are critical for a sound theoretical perspective.¹⁰³

These ideas and recommendations are moving toward recognizing, understanding, and building on the advantages that women's social positions allow them within the peacebuilding process and the traditions of their religious institutions, while at the same time encouraging moves beyond traditional gender roles. As Kathleen Kuehnast, gender adviser to USIP, asks:

How do you bring the top and the bottom closer together? How do we bring women into formal leadership of religion and how do we bring men into the local-level of women involved in religious peacemaking? It has to go both ways.¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

Many women are working within very different faith traditions to create peace in their communities and across the world. In doing so, they are also beginning to redefine understandings of their roles in society. This process has yet to become entirely formal—whether for religious, cultural, or personal reasons, much of the peacebuilding work that women do has been out of

the spotlight and behind the scenes—but it has become visible enough to complicate understandings of what constitutes an effective peacebuilding process, and suggest ways to improve it in order to build a stronger peace.

Donors and international organizations looking to aid peacebuilding could learn about, support, and publicize the efforts of women working within faith traditions for peace through two parallel tracks. First, networks could be created or strengthened among women peacebuilders across religions and cultures, and women could be trained to better advocate their positions to politicians and government officials. Second, policymakers could be better educated about the peace work that women do within faith organizations and the ways their work could be amplified. These would require sustained effort, but it is worth it for the real prospect of improving the process of peacebuilding and thus our chances of creating lasting peace both in the present and for the next generation.

Notes

1. See Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969), 183: "Peace also has two sides: *absence of personal violence*, and *absence of structural violence*. We shall refer to them as *negative peace* and *positive peace* respectively" (italics in original).
2. Interview with Ela Bhatt, May 17, 2010. Unless otherwise specified, the texts of the interviews cited in this report can be found at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, Georgetown University, <http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/projects/women-religion-and-peace-experience-perspectives-and-policy-implications> (accessed February 3, 2011). Ela Bhatt founded the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India and in May 2010 received the Niwano Peace Prize, the criteria for which center on faith inspiration and work for peace.
3. Interview with Dena Merriam, May 17, 2010. Merriam is founder of the Global Peace Initiative of Women.
4. Interview with Joyce Dubensky, June 4, 2010. Dubensky is executive vice president and chief executive officer of the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding.
5. See interview with Scott Appleby, July 7, 2010: "Peacebuilding is the envisioning, nurturing, and sustaining of compassion-filled human relationships that are essential to authentic human flourishing. Peace is never fully made, but always being built." Appleby is director of the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame.
6. See interview with Dekha Ibrahim Abdi, May 29, 2010: "An egg is life, delicate and fragile, but if given the right conditions, it gives life. Nurturing the fragile potential for peace is crucial. During the negotiation phase and in the signing of peace agreements, people think that is the end. Our lesson is that it is just the beginning. So it is just like the chicken producing her eggs: one has to nurture to bring to life the chicks, and then continue to support and sustain them over their lives." Dekha Ibrahim Abdi, a peace practitioner from Kenya, is a too-rare example of a woman celebrated for her work for peace. Among other awards, she received the Right Livelihood Award, known as the alternative Nobel, in 2007 and the Hesse Prize in 2010.
7. See Paul Collier et al., *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2003).
8. For specific examples, see Maria Butler, Kristina Mader, and Rachel Kean, *Women, Peace and Security Handbook* (New York: UN Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 2010), http://www.peacewomen.org/security_council_monitor/handbook.
9. Ralph Pettman, "Human Security as Global Security: Reconceptualising Strategic Studies," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 18, no. 1 (April 2005), 137–150.
10. Interview with Jacqueline Moturi Ogega, May 27, 2010. Ogega directs the Women's Program at the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP).
11. Interview with David Smock, May 18, 2010. Smock is USIP's associate vice president of the Religion and Peacemaking program.
12. On Sierra Leone, see Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff, "Sierran Leonean Women and the Peace Process," *Accord* 9 (2000), <http://www.c-r.org/our-work/accord/sierra-leone/women-peace.php> (accessed February 3, 2011); on Angola, see Horace Campbell, "Angolan Women in Search of Peace," *African Journal of Political Science* 3, no. 1 (1998): 70–81, <http://archive.lib.msu.edu/DMC/African%20Journals/pdfs/political%20science/volume3n1/ajps003001006.pdf> (accessed February 3, 2011).

13. Interview with Marc Gopin, May 21, 2010. Gopin is director of the Center on Religion, Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University and board member of the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding.
14. Interview with Manal Omar, June 5, 2010. Omar is director of Iraq programs at USIP.
15. Interview with Merriam.
16. Interview with Elana Rozenman, June 30, 2010. Rozenman is founder and executive director of TRUST–Eman.
17. Interview with Maryann Cusimano Love, July 6, 2010. Cusimano Love is associate professor of politics at The Catholic University of America.
18. Sanam Narghi Anderlini, *Women at the Peace Table: Making a Difference* (New York: United Nations Development Fund for Women UNIFEM, 2000), 18.
19. Interview with Virginia Bouvier, July 2, 2010. Bouvier is senior program officer at the Center for Mediation and Conflict Resolution at USIP.
20. Interview with Appleby.
21. Interview with Karen Torjesen, June 30, 2010. Torjesen is professor of women's studies at the Claremont Graduate School.
22. Interview with Azza Karam, April 29, 2010. Karam is senior advisor on culture at the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).
23. Interview with Bouvier.
24. Interview with Katherine Marshall, November 24, 2010.
25. Interview with Bouvier.
26. Founded by Visaka Dharmadasa in 2000, this group of bereaved Sri Lankan mothers arranged dialogues with women on the other side and meetings that helped lead the way to the 2009 cease-fire. Interview with Dharmadasa. November 26, 2010.
27. Interview with Ogega.
28. Interview with Appleby.
29. The United States Institute of Peace's Religion, Ethics, and Human Rights research program, led by David Little, explored this phenomenon in *Sri Lanka, Sudan, and the Balkans*. See also Doug Johnston and Cynthia Sampson, *Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), and Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999).
30. See, e.g., Madeleine Albright, *The Mighty and the Almighty: Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007).
31. Mohammed Abu-Nimer, "Conflict Resolution, Culture, and Religion: Toward a Training Model of Interreligious Peacebuilding," *Journal of Peace Research* 38, no. 6 (2001): 686.
32. Tsjard Bouta, Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana, and Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Faith-Based Peace-Building: Mapping and Analysis of Christian, Muslim, and Multi-Faith Actors* (Washington, DC: Netherlands Institute of International Relations "Clingendael" in Cooperation with Salam Institute for Peace and Justice, 2005), ix.
33. Interview with Emma Leslie, May 1, 2010. Leslie is director of the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies, a not-for-profit organization that promotes research and action on peace building initiatives throughout Asia.
34. Interview with Omar.
35. Interview with Leslie.
36. Interview with Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana, May 18, 2010. Kadayifci-Orellana is associate director of the Salam Institute for Peace and Justice.
37. Interview with Denise Coghlan, May 28, 2010. Coghlan is director of Jesuit Refugee Service.
38. Interview with Marilyn McMorrow, June 23, 2010. McMorrow is visiting assistant professor in the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service.
39. Interview with Filiz Odabas-Geldiay, July 1, 2010. Odabas-Geldiay is director of government relations for the Art of Living Foundation.
40. Interview with Marie Dennis, April 29, 2010. Dennis is co-president of Pax Christi, a global peace network, and director of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.
41. Interview with Dubensky.
42. Interview with Bhatt.
43. Interview with Dianne (Dee) Aker, June 30, 2010. Aker is deputy director of the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice at the University of San Diego.
44. Interview with Gopin.
45. Interview with Kathryn Poethig, May 2, 2010. Poethig is professor at California State University, Monterey Bay.
46. Interview with Smock.
47. See interview with Merriam.

48. Interview with Wendy Tyndale, April 1, 2010. Tyndale is former coordinator of WFDD.
49. Interview with Leslie.
50. Interview with Agnes Abuom, July 3, 2009. Abuom is executive committee member of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and a leading figure within African ecumenical circles.
51. Interview with Gopin.
52. Interview with Cusimano Love.
53. Interview with Rozenman.
54. Exchange between Katherine Marshall and Yehuda Stolov on May 21, 2010. Stolov is founder and executive director of the Interfaith Encounter Association.
55. Interview with Ogega.
56. Interview with Andrea Blanch, June 13, 2010. Blanch is president of the Center for Religious Tolerance and trained as a social psychologist.
57. Interview with Cusimano Love.
58. Interview with Blanch.
59. Interview with Farina So. December 10, 2010. So is head of the Cham Oral History Project at the Documentation Center of Cambodia.
60. Interview with Cusimano Love.
61. Interview with Kadayifci-Orellana.
62. Interview with Aker.
63. Interview with Merriam.
64. Interview with Mari Fitzduff, June 17, 2010. Fitzduff is director of the Program of Coexistence and Conflict at Brandeis University.
65. Interview with Kadayifci-Orellana.
66. Email exchange between Katherine Marshall and Yehuda Stolov on June 9, 2010.
67. Interview with Fitzduff.
68. Interview with Bilkisu Yusuf, July 8, 2010. Yusuf is founder and executive director of the Federation of Muslim Women of Nigeria (FOMWAN).
69. Interview with Scilla Elworthy, July 16, 2010. Elworthy is director of the Oxford Research Group.
70. Interview with Amina Rasul-Bernardo, July 8, 2010. Bernardo is lead convenor of the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy.
71. Interview with Rasul-Bernardo.
72. *Olame* means “live in dignity and prosperity.” Catholic Relief Services (CRS) supports the center’s work.
73. For an account of a visit to Washington, DC, in September 2010, see Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, “The Congo Crisis: Women and War,” <http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/events/the-congo-crisis-women-and-war> (accessed February 5, 2010).
74. Drawn from Patricia Lawrence, “The Watch of Tamil Women: Women’s Acts in a Transitional Warscape,” in Monique Skidmore and Patricia Lawrence, eds., *Women and the Contested State: Religion, Violence, and Agency in South and Southeast Asia* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007). The account also draws on the author’s experience in Sri Lanka.
75. See the organization’s website at <http://www.mwraf.org> (accessed February 5, 2010).
76. Interview with Paula Newberg, August 23, 2010. Newberg directs the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy at Georgetown University.
77. Interview with Omar.
78. Interview with Sister Joan Chittister, June 21, 2010. Chittister is executive director of Benetvision.
79. Interview with Kadayifci-Orellana.
80. Interview with Rasul-Bernardo.
81. Interview with Omar. Omar lived in Baghdad from 2003 to 2005 as Women for Women International’s regional coordinator.
82. Comments made at a conference entitled *Women as a Barometer of Success and Stability? Sharing “Lessons Learned” from Iraq to Afghanistan*, U.S. Institute of Peace, Washington, DC, September 27, 2010.
83. Interview with Qamar-ul Huda, June 8, 2010. Huda is senior program officer in the Religion and Peacemaking Program at USIP.
84. Interview with Appleby.
85. Interview with Ogega.
86. Interview with Odabas-Geldiay.
87. Interview with Gopin.
88. Interview with Ogega.

89. See, e.g., Robert Schreiter, R. Scott Appleby, and Gerard F. Powers, eds., *Peacebuilding: Catholic Theology, Ethics, and Praxis* (South Bend, IN: Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, Notre Dame, 2008).
90. Interview with Cusimano Love.
91. Interview with Gopin.
92. Interview with Ashima Kaul, June 24, 2010. Kaul is an independent journalist and peace practitioner.
93. Interview with Huda.
94. Interview with Elworthy.
95. Interview with Aker.
96. Interview with Dennis.
97. Interview with Leslie.
98. Interview with Poethig.
99. Interview with Merriam.
100. Interview with Coghlan.
101. Interview with Poethig.
102. Interview with Bhatt.
103. Interview with Kadayifci-Orellana.
104. Interview with Kathleen Kuehnast, June 8, 2010. Kuehnast is gender adviser to USIP.

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Women are involved in peacebuilding efforts across the world, often drawing inspiration and support from religious organizations. But their efforts are largely invisible. This report sheds light on the religious peacebuilding work that women do, offering both a better understanding of the effects of peace work generally and a way for donors, international organizations, and others to support women who are building a more sustainable peace.

Related Links

- *Averting Hell on Earth: Religion and the Prevention of Genocide* by Susan Hayward (Special Report, September 2010)
- *Women and War* edited by Kathleen Kuehnast, Chantal de Jonge Oudraat, and Helga Hernes (2011)
- *The Role of Women in Global Security* by Valerie Norville (Special Report, December 2010)
- *Religious Contributions to Peacemaking: When Religion Brings Peace, Not War* edited by David R. Smock (Peaceworks, January 2006)
- *The Role of Women in Stabilization and Reconstruction* by Camille Pampell Conaway (Special Report, August 2006)
- *Women in War and Peace: Grassroots Peacebuilding* by Donna Ramsey Marshall (Peaceworks, August 2000)

