

## **“Us and Them: The Role of Women Today in Peacemaking”**

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I went to a play by Eve Ensler. I can't shake it loose.

We make decisions all the time.

Decisions about them. Them is always different than us. Them has no face. Them is disembodied. Them is a little bit deserving of all the bad that happens to them. Them made it happen based on their histories. Them is used to violence – it's in their blood.

There are intractable rules about them. We keep them over there, out of sight. We keep them conceptual. We do not get close enough to touch or smell or really know them. We do not want to see how easily them becomes us – how quickly violence arrives, how swiftly people turn – embracing racist hate. We do not want to know or touch the parts of ourselves that are capable of destroying and being destroyed like them.

Sometimes, an image pierces our perception. We suddenly stare down at a photograph on the cover of Newsday – six young Bosnian girls just returned from a rape camp in the former Yugoslavia. Their faces are little and beautiful and young and destroyed. We see their utter incomprehensibility and terror. We feel their shame.

I have been to the refugee centers there, a mother and six children and one son who lies suspended in a bed, mute from three months in a concentration camp, a place where woman after woman shake, pace, smoke, choke, weep as they describe the gang rapes, the public rapes, the rapes of mothers, sisters and grandmothers. They have lost their home, and identities. They do not eat or cannot stop eating. We learn how they did not expect this, how desperate they are to create another sense of “being,” and our secure us-ness, our little us-ness begins to unravel.

It is for them that everyone in this room has committed themselves. And while unimaginable atrocities continue on our watch – Rwanda, Kosovo and East Timor to

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name but a few – we must also recognize that at long last the labors of those in this room are beginning to bear fruit.

In the past few years the international community has considered the powerful role women can play in peace-building and conflict resolution.

As recently as 1993 at the World Conference on Human Rights, the international community was focused solely on women as victims of armed conflict. This is understandable given that, in 1993, world attention was focused on the war in the former Yugoslavia. And delegations were intent on ensuring that the Vienna Program of Action addressed systematic rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy.

At the Fourth World Conference on Women, in 1995, in Beijing, the international community began to address women’s contribution to fostering a culture of peace. Certainly the Beijing Platform for Action continued to focus on violations of women’s human rights during times of war, condemning rape.

But the Fourth World Conference on Women also recognized that women had to be fully involved in preventing and resolving conflicts – and that their involvement was essential for maintaining and promoting peace and security. Perhaps the greatest outcomes of this global platform was world awareness – a forward looking platform of action – and a strengthening and sense of efficacy of the women’s movement.

We are witnessing today a dramatic proliferation of women’s local grassroots movements and national and international organizations, in a process that is both more coherently organized, more inclusive and representative of the interests and needs of diverse communities of women. The global women’s movement is poised at the edge of a new millennium. It offers a holistic vision of social transformation, articulating new norms, linking issues of development, the environment and human rights with standards of participation, transparency and accountability in decision-making. Its role in conflict and peacemaking is less developed.

But NGOs have many challenges – easy money, easy decisions, easy compromises are scarce. It is difficult intellectually and politically for single issue groups to adjust their rhetoric in the ways necessary for a grand synergy to emerge.

NGOs must focus on building partnerships and collaborations with each other. NGOs must focus on encouraging sectoral expertise and funding. NGOs must focus on

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the need for high-tech skills and high-tech equipment. NGOs need to lobby for political involvement. NGOs in the United States need to assure UN arrears are paid and CEDAW passed.

During times of armed conflict and social collapse, women play an indispensable role in preserving a semblance of decency and order. They hold community together – they step out of socially ascribed roles and transform gender stereotypes and open opportunities for empowerment – which can’t be taken away when the fighting ends.

NGOs’ roles are changing as well. In Ethiopia, where the NGOs brokered agreements between warring factions to get humanitarian assistance across the front lines of war to the rebel held areas and ran tucking companies, In Burundi, an NGO ran a radio station. In Sarajevo, an NGO rebuilt the water and gas line system.

The United States government is also playing its part through AID and USIA in a multitude of programs such as supporting the Rwandan Women’s Initiative and, in Bosnia providing substantial funding to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to support the Bosnian Women’s Initiative – to secure the rightful place of women in the Bosnian economy. It is important to note that these programs don’t just aim to reintroduce grassroots women to the world as it was before the conflict, but instead aim to integrate women into the political and economic lives of their countries. These programs don’t just rebuild, they build for the first time a structure to encourage rights that women in these nations have never enjoyed.

The First Lady, Hillary Rodham Clinton, and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Theresa Loar, have traveled the globe speaking women’s rights and human rights – they have added energy and a sense of efficiency in building the global women’s movement and they have launched Vital Voices, creating unprecedented partnerships among government, non-governmental organizations and the private sector to support the full participation of women in the economic, social, and political progress of their countries.

Peacemaking depends on ensuring opportunity for equality. As we end conflicts, we must do all we can to empower the women who have lived through them, giving them access not only to decision-making, but to land resources, health care and rewarding employment.

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But the UN cannot effectively encourage nations to further bring women into the decision making, peacemaking and political process if the UN itself does not make women more involved in its own peacemaking efforts. As of January 1999, of 14 special representatives, envoys, or deputies appointed by the Secretary General, only two were women. That's gender inequality – women should be at the core of all United Nations activities, dealing with conflict and reconstruction.

The Security Council has affirmed the need for the international community to assist and protect women affected by armed conflict and has expressed its willingness to respond to such situations. That means the full participation of women in all aspects of the peace process from village level reconciliation to national peace negotiations.

In response to the Beijing agenda on armed conflict on women and girls and in preparation for Beijing Plus Five and the forthcoming UN Millennium Assembly, much is happening. Here are some suggestions that the Security Council could make to improve women's protection in armed conflict and ensure their centrality to actions that promote peace, implement peace agreements and resolve conflicts:

- The Security Council may wish to call on all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect girls and women from rape and other forms of sexual abuse and gender based violence.
- They could call for the establishment of clear and easily accessible systems for reporting on sexual abuse. They should provide resources to establish enforcement and monitoring mechanisms for peacekeeping personnel.
- Urge that human rights verification and observer components of peacekeeping operations focus attention on gender based violence and women's human rights.
- Strengthen the legal protection of women and girls; the full compliance of all parties to a conflict with international humanitarian and human rights standards is essential to the protection of women and girls in conflict situations.
- Call upon member states to establish measures to address non-compliance.
- Strengthen early warning mechanisms.
- Additionally, they should call for the inclusion of peacebuilding elements in the process for consolidating a peace agreement and in the mandates of peacekeeping operations. These should include

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1. Measures that give support to rebuild or restore basic public security institutions including the police, prisons, and the judiciary.
2. Measures that prevent the resurgence or escalation of conflict, giving special emphasis to training in human rights.

Perhaps most importantly to achieve all that I've discussed, is political will and advocacy by women's grassroots organization is critical for progress to occur.

The Kosovo efforts present an opportunity for change. The UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) must ensure that Kosovo becomes an example for women's full integration into the reconstruction process. A Gender Advisory Unit will be established within the Executive Office of the Special Representative to the Secretary General to mainstream gender issues into the mandate and activities of UNMIK.

A coalition of humanitarian and human rights NGOs has made some very positive recommendations on how to ensure the effectiveness of the unit by:

- Encouraging collaboration between the head of the gender unit and the Senior Human Rights Advisor.
- Having a significant number of human rights monitors and advisors in the unit be women.
- And ensuring that the unit is sufficiently staffed to address the protection and needs of Kosovar women and girls.

While this is a most positive development, what is needed is more rapid intervention strategies to prevent social unraveling. It is essential to have both human rights monitors in place, as well as adequate resources to help governments manage equitable human resource programs. The lack of political will of donor nations to invest in preventive measure will result in increased chaos. Global security requires more substantial investments in people. We need a whole new approach to how we think about development as a first step toward crisis prevention.

We must develop better ways to take advantage of the tools we already have on the shelf, such as early warning systems, and apply them before disasters take place.

But this is post-conflict resolution. Must we not address root causes of conflict? From where I stand, nothing is more fundamental to peace and to women and their families than the full realization of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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For those who care about peace, it is clear that patterns of gross human rights violations are a primary cause of war. For those who care about sustainable economic development, it is now clear that promoting the human potential of women and men, and engaging citizens' groups in policy making are not only foundations of human rights but also foundations of sound economic and social policies. For those who care about justice, it is now clear that there can be no justice without respect for basic human rights worldwide.

To spare succeeding generations from the scourge of war, one must reaffirm fundamental human rights, establish conditions for justice and promote social progress and sustainable development.

For those who care about peace, a participatory approach to human rights education is central to human rights guarantees, and to fostering a human rights culture.

Women's organizations are invaluable to this participatory process and for societies in transition. They give a sense of efficacy to those who have been disenfranchised and foster a belief in the legitimacy of the rule of law. The charter making process in South Africa offers a model.

The Women's Commission for Women, Refugees and Children, and the International Women in Law and Development are training women and girls on rights issues. And a multitude of Human Rights organizations and the Commission for Human Rights are continuously spotlighting violations of the Universal Declaration.

Human rights are women's rights and they provide liberation – first for women themselves, their children, their men, their nations.

In addition to beginning to recognize the crucial role of women in peacebuilding, the international community is beginning to recognize the crucial role of indigenous, grassroots organizations in rebuilding their societies. Often donors, many with the best of intentions, flood areas affected by conflict with economic assistance, without thinking about how to help end the conflict.

Usually, peace cannot be imported. It has a better chance of being sustainable, if it is built by the people themselves. And helping indigenous grassroots organizations empower societies from the bottom up. Examples: StarProt, UNIFEM, The League for

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Albanian Women and Albanian Women’s Journalist Forum. NGOs are the bedrock of civil society. NGOs mean that people are taking control of their lives.

We have new tools to empower grassroots power – as the successful campaign to ban landmines demonstrated that grassroots organizations can shape the face of peace. The explosion of communication technologies – coupled with the explosion of grassroots organizations can bring about global change in the pursuit of a more humane culture.

Although progress is slow, I am encouraged by the international community’s gradual recognition of the importance of women and of grassroots organizations in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. But as Lael Stegall says, we must boldly name what women are doing in terms of peacebuilding. “Women, worldwide, begin their work in their own neighborhood and communities – that is the strength of their leadership.” Now women are seeking the authority to match the responsibility they have always taken. This is the changing paradigm.

We must highlight the work of Mary Thornell in Liberia, a long time leader in Liberian women’s organizations, who pushed her way into the peace negotiations between the fighting forces and declared, “there will be no guns at this table.”

We must highlight the work of Piedad Cordoba, a female member of the Colombian parliament who was so successful in keeping discussion open with all the parties in the growing conflict there that she was kidnapped by rebel forces because they wanted her to learn about their perspective.

In what can only be described as a bureaucratic process, the United Nations is now lending its support to grassroots and NGOs and political processes and legal norms guaranteeing the status of women and enforcing women’s rights. Our UN Special Rapporteurs on Violence Against Women monitor and report on all violations of women’s rights to the Commission on Human Rights. The Commission on Human Rights sends monitors and TA to the field. The International Criminal Tribunals from Yugoslavia and Rwanda incorporated rape as a crime against humanity and have issued several indictments related to sexual violence.

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The UN sustains and protects women refugees, with women and children constituting around 80% of the 30 million refugees worldwide, UN agencies such as WFP and UNICEF stand between life and death for millions of women and children.

They support the efforts of women at the local levels in war-torn countries.

Recently, in 1998, the UN Commission on the Status of Women joined consensus in:

- Encouraging women to apply for judicial and prosecutorial positions on international bodies.
- Recommending that more women be appointed as special representatives in conflict resolution.
- Increasing the participation of women in peacekeeping operations.
- And in training international peacekeeping forces on human rights and gender-sensitivity.

We stand on the cusp of a new millennium. It is the personal commitment of each of us to universal justice and the full application of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that will mark the history of our times. It will tell the tale of who we are – of our love for human kind – of our willingness to take action until we get it right. It is what we shall leave behind; to do otherwise would be to deny the vision, and the goals, and the greatness of those who have dared so much for justice and equality. And finally, we must struggle tirelessly to find ways to reduce conflict and ease the vulnerability of the children to whom the next century belongs. Our efforts are sustained by a conviction that humanity’s future is indeed tied to the well being of women and children, and that our work is a path of progress towards global peace and justice. As Mahatma Gandhi foresaw – “If we wish to create a lasting peace, we must begin with the children.”