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## Women's contribution to a culture of peace

*"I did not raise my son to be a soldier  
I brought him up to be my pride and joy.  
Who dares place a weapon on his shoulder,  
to kill another mother's darling boy?"*

Adela Pankhurst: UNESCO publication "Women say no to War"

The International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World (2001 – 2010), "established" by the UN to inspire people and governments to build a culture of peace in the new Millennium, is coming to an end. The decade did not keep its promise, as the September 11, 2001 events and the aftermath became a serious set back to the agreed plan of action for a culture of peace. Since then, fear and the fight against terror have dominated both the international discourse and the use of resources.

A seemingly growing use and acceptance of violence worldwide, coupled with the impotence of "the international community", both to meet the needs and interest of the majority of the world's population and to tackle problems and conflicts in a non-violent manner, is alarming. The old Roman devise, "if you want peace, prepare for war", seems to continue to be (often unconsciously) echoed in international relations. The gap between the global military and social expenditure continues to widen with military budgets well beyond 1.5 trillion dollars (SIPRI year-book 2009), thereby largely exceeding even the peak Cold-War military budgets. According to UN estimates, only 10 % of this sum is needed in order to meet the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), agreed upon by all the world's leaders (UN 2000) and to be achieved within 2015. Despite the internationally agreed MDGs, injustices and the gap between the rich and the poor continue to grow, both between and within countries. "The world" seems to be more willing to pay the costs of war than the costs of peace.

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## 1 The Culture of Peace Vision

The culture of peace concept, initiative, program and movement, developed by UNESCO in the 1980s and 1990s, opened up a broad-based reflection on a possible new vision or scenario for the future, involving researchers, teachers, artists, politicians, activists, organisations and governments, who found a platform within a culture of peace allowing fruitful exchange and mutual inspiration. Highly diverse groups and initiatives dealing with issues such as environment, human rights, development, disarmament, human security, gender equality and youth are all constructively related to the culture of peace concept, which encompasses not only peace as the absence of war, but focuses on the content and the conditions of peace.

UNESCO spearheaded the culture of peace initiative in the United Nations system and was designated by the UN General Assembly, as the focal point, both for the International Year for a Culture of Peace (2000) and the following International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World. In September 2009, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration and Program of Action on a Culture of Peace that serves as a background document for the decade. This document provides us with an agreed definition of the concept of a culture of peace. In this context, it is important to note that the document also includes "Actions to ensure equality between women and men".

The programme analysed and confronted commonly held beliefs or myths, such as

- if you want peace, prepare for war,
- nothing can change, because violence is inevitable and intrinsic to human nature, and
- violence is an efficient method for solving problems and disputes.

The scientists who developed the UNESCO Seville Statement on Violence (1989) refuted such hypothesis and advanced that: "It is scientifically incorrect to say that war or any other violent behaviour is genetically programmed into our human nature."

It was also stated loud and clear that if we want peace, we must prepare for peace. We should not only have ministries of defence or security, but ministries of peace or a culture of peace; not only prestigious military academies, but obligatory peace education at all levels of the school system; not only peace research which is preoccupied by following the developments of new weapons and armed conflicts, but peace research that truly helps us to understand and to solve conflicts creatively and in non-violent ways.

The goals, ideals, and strategies that aim to transfer the initiative and movement from a culture of war and violence into a culture of peace and non-violence are drawn from, and seek to revitalise major international normative instruments, which are basic to the United Nations' mission "saving future generations from the scourge of war".

In the vision of a culture of peace, dialogue and respect for human rights would replace violence, intercultural understanding and solidarity would aim to redeem enemy images, sharing and free flow of knowledge and information would supersede secrecy and egalitarian partnership and full empowerment of women would replace male domination. Such a vision is necessarily seen as utopist by those who align themselves with a more predictable, status-quo, "tooth-for-tooth" real-politics, in accordance with the negative connotation, that utopist or visionary thinking presently has in mainstream politics.

Individual women, women's networks and women's organisations have taken a special interest in the culture of peace from the very beginning on. The relationship with UNESCO was felt as very rewarding for both sides, especially because the very charismatic Director General of UNESCO at the time, Federico Mayor, strongly encouraged and highly valued women's contributions.

## 2 The Women and A Culture of Peace Programme

The UNESCO statement on Women's contribution to a Culture of Peace was developed in connection with the Beijing Conference and signed by almost all the women heads of state and government at the time, and underlined the intimate link between gender equality, development and peace: "There can be no lasting

peace without development, and no sustainable peace without full equality between women and men." This was in line with all the four world conferences on women (as of 1975), which were titled: Equality, Development and Peace, thereby insisting on a comprehensive approach. The statement, which has been translated into many languages, continues to be broadly used by NGOs and peace groups.

The UNESCO Women and a Culture of Peace Programme, which I was fortunate to head, was established after the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing 1995, with the primary objective of mainstreaming a gender perspective on the major UNESCO transdisciplinary project: Towards a Culture of Peace. But serious work had already started prior to the Beijing Conference, which *inter alia* resulted in the concept of a culture of peace being used in the Beijing Platform for Action as the first official use of the term in the UN system outside UNESCO.

The priorities of the Women and a Culture of Peace Program were:

- to support women's initiatives for peace,
- to empower women for democratic participation in political processes and to increase women's capacity and impact on economic and security issues and
- to contribute to gender sensitive socialisation and training for non-violence and egalitarian partnerships with a special focus on young men and boys.

The programme attracted a lot of attention worldwide. Due to the great number of conflicts in Africa at the time it had a special focus on that continent. It was most rewarding to be in a position to assist those strong and courageous women to meet, to network, to strategise, to learn from each other, to develop policies and didactic material that at least sometimes would help them in acute difficult situations or to tackle or transform deeply rooted conflicts.

Most studies on women and war/peace focus on women in conflict or post-conflict situations. A gender perspective on the culture of peace would seek to inspire the strengthening of policies of prevention, of non-violent conflict resolution, peacemaking and peace-building.

### 3 Unfinished Democracies

It is still a political fact that the great majority of the poor, the illiterate and those who suffer discrimination are women and that the great majority of the world's economic and political leaders are men.

Women make up more than half of the world's population, yet, on a global level, women's intellectual and creative potentials largely remain under-utilised, not least in relation to decision-making in foreign affairs, security and defence issues. This situation is often obscured, even down to frequently used terminology, such as "the international community", "the people," "the nation", "we", which might not be covering the situation of both women and men, but mostly only relate to "the powerful", whereas female concerns and viewpoints are not necessarily taken into consideration – nor are those of many men.

The world is actually full of alarmingly "unfinished democracies", with only 1 % of women in political and economic top positions, with some 13 % of women in governments and about 17 % female parliament members, as the global average shows (IPU 2007). Consequently, we do not have irrefutable evidence that women make/can make a difference in positions of political power. However, research from a few countries shows important gender differences when it comes to issues of foreign policy and defence, thereby questioning the legitimacy of decisions related to foreign policy, security and defence, as these tend to be almost exclusively made by men, even within quite democratic societies.

Feminist research indicates that a minimum of one-third of any minority is needed for a group to be able to influence the majority. A few separate examples of "hard-power" female leaders just remain separate examples. Sometimes, women in position of power might have "inherited" their position (mostly from a father or a husband), or they might have been (s)elected, because they were neither seen as a threat to patriarchal structures, nor were they expected to keep particular contact with women constituencies.

A study of Norwegian women parliamentarians in 1989 (H. Skeie) indicated that women have/can have both different working methods and different political agendas from those of men. According to the study, women work more easily than men across party boundaries, while values and issues traditionally linked to

women, such as social welfare, health care, education, environment and international co-operation and solidarity are higher on their political agendas.

A study on differences of Swedish women and men concerning attitudes towards foreign policy and defence issues showed considerable gender differences (SOM study, referred in "Kon och politisk vald", Bjereld 1998). Women had a more positive stance than men regarding to continuing foreign aid/development cooperation, to receiving refugees in Sweden, and to decreasing defence costs. Women felt more negatively than men about the Swedish participation in European defence co-operation and about peacekeeping operations, if they meant a risk of involvement in acts of warfare. The largest difference was found on the issue of the export of war-material, where much more women than men wanted a total ban on Swedish arms export. This result corresponds to a wider, popular perception of many women's anti-military stand.

Women have a long experience in being marginalised. They neither have a lot of stake in existing power structures or in the war economy, nor do they have major income from peace-keeping and emergency-relief operations. Nevertheless, women also have developed useful survival strategies and have learned to be solution-oriented. In general, women count less than men on their physical strength to solve conflicts.

It is absolutely necessary to gender and democratise the security discourse, which is, up to this date, the most opaque and patriarchal part of the political system. Furthermore, it is probable that overcoming the existing democratic deficit, notably in areas of foreign policy and defence issues, would have positive implications for world peace. Some international studies show, that societies with a high level of gender equality have a low level of violence (e. g. UNV-Wider report, June 2006). A few other studies confirm the general popular opinion that women have more of a "dovish" or "soft-power" approach to issues related to war and peace than the generally more "hawkish" and "hard-power" attitudes of men, notably men in decision-making positions. A key question therefore is, whether or not the world would be different – more just and peaceful – with better gender balance in governance at different levels. Would overcoming the existing democratic deficit have positive implications for world peace?

Much more research is needed within and across different disciplines, in order to try to answer such questions and to deepen our understanding of a field that traditionally has been narrowly reserved for some inner, "expert", political and patriarchal circles. These typically under-researched issues are complicated, complex and intertwined, and perhaps even afflicted with some taboos.

#### 4 The Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995, and the Beijing +5

The Beijing Platform for Action (1995) underlines how important it is to consider women as important agents of change, not only as victims. This is particularly important as we want to know how the human potential for building a culture of peace can best be stimulated and put to use.

Following the 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995), the United Nations system and its member states committed themselves to gender equality and the empowerment of women, including the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in policies and activities. Mainstreaming a gender perspective requires the compilation and analysis of statistical data, showing the life conditions of women and men, how women and men are involved in society at different levels, what they each contribute, their common and particular needs and interests, and how women and men benefit or suffer from policies and projects, including how resources and power are distributed and used. A true gender perspective would ensure that the needs and interests of girls and boys, women and men would be catered to in the same manner.

Some countries have yet to comply with the decision to provide reliable gender-disaggregated data. Data related to foreign affairs, security and defence issues are less accessible and available than other data, and less gender-disaggregated. Foreign affairs and defence issues are usually remote from democratic decision-making and popular involvement; an issue that is frequently raised by feminist peace researchers.

Equal rights and opportunities for women and men, girls and boys, are essential, and a precondition for the full realisation of the vision of a culture of peace (as defined in UNESCO and UN recommendations, strategies, plans of action and reports).

## 5 Alternative Approaches

Women might have different perspectives, alternative visions and methodological approaches, as well as distinct contributions to make to the traditionally male-dominated and male-defined political scene, due to factors such as: their experience gained from gender-specific roles assigned throughout different life stages; demands related to their "mothering and caring functions" (providing valuable training in empathy, patience, dialogue and cooperation); often practically oriented collective experiences from family and community work; the fact that women in general can count less on their physical strength to help them solve conflicts than men, and that women have less of a stake in existing power-structures or in the war economy and do not gain major incomes from peace-keeping or emergency-relief operations.

It might be seen as old-fashioned and even essentialist, but I would still like to make the postulation that women may have a special approach to conflict resolution and peace-building, without wanting to enter any on-going debate on "nature versus culture" or relating to new biological and socio-biological research on genes, chromosomes or hormones. Biological research has sometimes been misused to reinforce stereotyped expectations of women and men respectively, undermining the potential for each person to develop his or her personal potentials properly.

There is, however, one clear biologically given fact of interest in this context: 100 % of the world's mothers are women, as are all those who are pregnant, give birth and breastfeed. In addition, most women are menstruating some 35–40 years and are in general being mentally prepared for motherhood from early age on, whether that is to materialise or not. We do not know enough about how strongly this preparation to give birth influences women's minds, but there are many indications of its importance, also in the way modern women prepare their careers, while trying to combine it with family care and obligations.

This attentiveness to life may as well give women an asset in regard to the "supreme human right", the right to life, and it may be at the core of a humanistic approach to conflict resolution, peace-building and development. The demands traditionally related to

women's "mothering and caring functions" provide valuable training in empathy, patience, dialogue and cooperation – important factors for conflict resolution.

The impressive action of some Rwandese women trying to build a future for Rwandese children after the genocide in the early 1990s, regardless whether they were Hutu or Tutsi, can be seen as a societal broadening of their mother roles. The Pro Femmes Twese Hamwe, which organised both women whose husbands or sons may have been killed by the perpetrators of the genocide and mothers, wives or daughters of the perpetrators themselves, got UNESCO's prize for the Promotion of Tolerance and Non-violence for building houses and homes for the children, including young boys, who they even fetched from the prisons (see the UNESCO video: *The doves of Rwanda*). It is also an extraordinary example of creativity and courage.

However, as men are encouraged to take on more practical caring functions and responsibilities and as they dare to confront the traditional, hegemonic type of masculinity and its ensuing "enforcement attitude", they are also likely to strengthen their humanistic side. Simultaneously, women may lose some of their alternative visions and methodological approaches to the traditionally male dominated and male-defined political scene, as they gain access to more decision-making positions and thereby "risk" becoming part of the establishment with its rules and "self-surviving" structures. This, however, in most parts of the world, belongs to the future.

## 6 Women's actions for peace

Women's peace initiatives often stem from frustration and anger over decisions that they could not influence, while they too have had to bear the consequences. These actions for peace are manifold and often provide alternative visions and approaches. Examples include Colombian women refusing to give birth to children as long as violence is prevailing, inspiring themselves from the mythological figure from ancient Greece, Lysistrata, who according to Aristophanes, managed to stop the war between Athens and Sparta through convincing all women to refuse to make love with their husbands until they stopped fighting; Russian mothers

of soldiers refusing to send their sons to war (Chechnya) and rejecting the hero-status medal, which of course can never be a substitute for a living son; Liberian women initiating a broad disarmament process; South African women insisting on gender equality in the parliament (no gender apartheid should replace the racial apartheid); the Mums Against Arms in the USA; or the Mothers of the Plaza del Mayo, in Buenos Aires, demonstrating for human rights and justice, who received the UNESCO Peace Education Prize (1999).

The Pan-African Women's Conference on a Culture of Peace in Zanzibar in May 1999, where about 300 women from 49 African countries gathered, also turned out in favour of demilitarisation and disarmament. It was regretted that peace negotiations are male-dominated, regardless of women's efforts and initiatives to resolve conflicts and promote peace on the continent, notably through consensus building and dialogue (The Women's Agenda for a Culture of Peace in Africa, UNESCO 2000).

Individual women and women's organisations remain the strongest supporters of the culture of peace initiatives, often showing "active disgust for war" to use the terminology of the first female Nobel Prize Winner, Bertha von Suttner, in her book from 1889, *Lay Down your Arms*. Bertha von Suttner inspired Alfred Nobel to add a peace prize to his scientific prizes. She was also prominent in the world's oldest existing peace organisation, the International Peace Bureau, IPB, which received the Nobel peace prize in 1910.

Also the "muse" of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Eleanor Roosevelt, showed a strong anti-war attitude e. g. in her statement: "Nobody won the last war, nobody will win the next", as have a long list of eminent women, working with the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF).

Yet, only twelve women have received the Nobel Peace Prize so far: Bertha von Suttner (Austria) 1905, Jane Addams (USA) 1931 (shared with Nicolas Murray Butler), Emily Greene Balch (USA) 1946 (shared with John R. Mott), Mairead Corrigan and Betty Williams (Ireland) 1976, Mother Theresa (Calcutta) 1979, Alva Myrdal (Sweden) 1982 (shared with Garcia Robles), Aung San Suu Kyi (Burma/Myanmar) 1991, Rigoberta Menchu Tum (Guatemala) 1992, Jody Williams (USA) 1997 (shared with the International Organi-

zation against Landmines), Shirin Ebadi (Iran) 2003 and Wangari Maathai (Kenya) 2004. These women, together with other major peace promoters, have important functions as role models and inspirations.

An establishment conducted in 2006 by the "Nobel Women's Initiative, united for peace with justice and equality" is interesting. How would the six female Nobel Peace Laureates, who are free to express themselves, want to (possibly) distinguish themselves and their work from the male laureates? So far, they seem to be paying particular attention to combat violence and not to violence against women.

Some Swiss women came up with an interesting nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005. They suggested "a collective prize" to 1000 female peace activists from around the world, an initiative in line with feminist, non-hierarchical thinking and with the peace movement.

## 7 Security Council Resolution 1325

The Security Council passed an unprecedented and historical resolution on Women, Peace and Security, on October 31, 2000 (SC 1325), strongly encouraged by women's organisations, feminist researchers and women peace activists and with the attentive and supportive Bangladeshi ambassador, Mr. A. Chowdhury in the Security Council. This resolution is particularly important because it was passed by an organ with high status among the UN member states, and it is a potentially important step towards a gender perspective on security issues – which again may lead to a stronger emphasis on human security (as opposed to or complementary to national security) in the future. The resolution has been translated into a various number of languages and several countries have made national 1325 Action Plans. The plan, however, pays more attention to women in conflict and post-conflict situations, and is weaker when it comes to practical and political measures for the strengthening and use of women's potential for peace building, negotiation and prevention. Women, despite the existence of the resolution, still remain largely outside the arenas, where it is decided how a given conflict is to be tackled (see the article of Manuela Mesa in this book).

## 8 Male roles and masculinities

Rigid and stereotyped gender roles prevent individuals, both women and men, from realising their full potential and run counter to the principle of participatory democracy. Whilst women's roles and status have been broadly debated over the last decades, men have been seen as the standardised human being – the norm – and men's roles and positions have, until recently, hardly been discussed and even less been questioned.

One of the first international conferences on male roles and violence was organised by UNESCO in Oslo in 1997. Connections between certain types of masculinity and violence and how masculinities can change in ways favourable to peace, were discussed, notably the social, cultural and economic conditions producing violence and political and practical strategies for reducing men's violence and ways of raising boys that emphasise qualities such as emotional response, caring and communication skills, that are vital to a culture of peace.

Statistics gathered by the researchers, however insufficient, showed that men (often young men) are responsible for almost 90 % of all physical violence. Participants emphasised that most men are not violent, nor have natural violent inclinations. It was argued that men, in general, through their upbringing, feel entitled to dominant positions in the family, in work and political life, and react negatively when this entitlement is not fulfilled. Young men may feel marginalised and disempowered when they, e. g. due to the globalisation process, do not, in the same way as before, inherit work from their fathers and dominant positions in the family and in society. These reactions might lead to domestic violence, violence in schools or in the street, adherence to extremist gangs and sects, or wanting to join institutions, which may use force, such as the police and the military. Some groups of men are becoming a risk, for themselves as well as for society at large.

Given the existing gender imbalances, it is important that men, who are the current power brokers, participate actively in the discussion about the development of equal partnerships and reducing violence and force.

Jonathan Power (The Transnational Foundation for Peace and Future Research) has raised the question of whether a surplus of

men will lead to a deficit of peace. Worldwide, the human sex ratio is 104 women to 100 men. A few countries have an inverse gender ratio, primarily due to son preference. He estimates that there are some 62–68 million "missing women" in Asia, a situation which risks to gradually undermine everyday life equilibrium, including the stabilising factor which some research findings indicate women have on men (less criminality among married men, mixed workplaces being healthier, etc. ...).

"The hegemonic masculinity" is a straight jacket for many men with its insistence on stereotyped expectations for men to be the breadwinner, to be "over-decisive", forceful, non-emotional, aggressive, etc. In addition, men showing "traditional female attitudes" tend to be perceived negatively since "the female" has a lower status in society. The contrary is applauded when women take on traditional male roles and behaviour. Dr. R. Connell, one of the leading researchers on boys, men and masculinities, underlines how much men would be able to gain, if we were to get rid of the "gender toxicity", which implies e. g. that "boys will be boys". The hegemonic type of masculinity broadly defines itself in relation to its ability to use force. Countries/states also tend to define their strength in terms of traditional hegemonic masculinity. The hegemonic type of masculinity defines itself mainly in relation to its ability to use force and have power (R. Connell in Breines/Connell/Eide 2000).

It is also worth noting that there seems to be a trend towards a general "masculinisation" of society. This is reflected, for example, in the emergence of militarised masculinities in communities under threat and has also reached young girls in some societies, who have started using violent methods in their search for equality and recognition. This has notably been observed in schools in more democratic societies, where girls have started to feel entitled to a gender equality that may not be provided in satisfactory and practical terms.

Even though changing the traditional male roles still remains highly political and sometimes controversial, some excellent initiatives have been developed, such as state-supported parental leave for fathers, research and training-courses in non-violent conflict resolution and conflict transformation on different levels of the educational system. It is particularly encouraging to follow the es-

establishment of a number of groups and networks of young men working against violence, including violence against women, inspired by initiatives such as "Pro-feminist men" or the "White Ribbon Campaign".

## 9 Humanistic or humanitarian?

The preamble of UNESCO's Constitution, which states: "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that defences for peace must be constructed" (1945), conveys a belief in the importance of education and socialisation in changing mind-sets and attitudes. A relevant question in our context is: do women tend to be more inclined to the principles of a culture of peace/do they feel more affinity with the culture of peace? If so, are we socialising girls for a culture of peace and boys for a culture of war and violence? If this is proven to be correct, how do we socialise both girls and boys, women and men for peaceful conflict resolution/tackling, dialogue and a culture of peace?

Perhaps there is a need to reinforce both a humanistic approach and an attitude towards conflict resolution, peace building and development? Too often we see mechanical, preconceived, uncreative, culturally and linguistically insensitive, gender-blind, uninformed, a-historical and undigested "real-political" approaches to solve conflicts. Are we drifting towards measuring and weighing, instead of focusing on the essential? Are we more into competition (for funds and fame), than into seeking cooperative models? Do we involve the locals, local competence and culture properly in our attempts to help? And if we involve the locals: are they representative and are women and women's insights, experiences, talents, needs and interests taken into consideration? Are we too fragmented and not sufficiently comprehensive in our approach to really making a sustainable difference to the lives of people in conflict and war zones?

The peace-building arena seems to be dominated by some kind of emergency thinking of short-term relief, stabilisation and efficiency. The long-term and preventive aspects are less in the forefront. In addition and increasingly, both the immediate emergency and the middle-term humanitarian work are dangerously getting mixed up with military actions and operations. The lines between

military and emergency operations are getting blurred – with all the potentially negative implications.

It may be important to distinguish more clearly between a humanitarian and a humanistic approach. This little anecdote about a fisherwoman may help clarify the difference: A woman was standing on the shore of a river, unable to fish because she constantly had to rescue drowning people in the river rapids. After doing this for a long time with no abatement in the flow of victims, she was about to leave, when another person arriving tried to stop her by insisting that she had to continue to help people about to drown. However, the woman responded that she had to go up-stream to see who was throwing these people, who had not even learnt to swim, into the water. Perhaps women are the strongest protagonists of a most needed humanistic perspective on conflict resolution and peace building?

The vast amounts of resources used for military purposes, peace-keeping and in conflict and post-conflict humanitarian assistance, depict our failure to meet basic human needs and concerns in an adequate and timely manner. Instead of trying to tackle problems and conflicts at the roots, we mainly deal with symptoms and undertake "stop-gap" measures in times of crisis. Acting in a timely manner with long-term preventive measures to radically address the root-causes of violence (poverty, exclusion, ignorance, inequality and injustice) would be more human and less costly. Prevention is better than cure, also in this context. Hence the importance of re-instituting the humanistic long-term values, lest we all have to become part of an unsatisfactory and mostly unsuccessful humanitarian fire-brigade – always coming late, after the suffering and the destruction.

Poverty and inequalities erode the goal of human security. Poverty data are so appalling that we are hardly able to take them in: 2.8 billion people have to live on less than two dollars a day. Thirty six million people die of hunger or its consequences every year. Every three seconds, a child dies as a result of poverty and of women's low status in many societies. Contaminated water kills 10.000 people a year. Almost 100 million children are out of school and nearly 800 million adolescents and adults are illiterate. Nearly two thirds of these are girls and women (UN figures 2004). This impoverishment is undermining our societies and even eroding the idea

of human security. Conflicts and wars may be the result of poverty – or of greed – and poverty may again be the result of wars and conflicts. Eradicating poverty is an indispensable requirement for peace, security and sustainable development. Abject poverty is also morally and politically unacceptable. The present financial crisis may perhaps lead us out of the capitalistic growth syndrome, through which globalisation and its effects have exacerbated inequalities, and allow the introduction of new, more just, more human focused and viable paradigms.

Perhaps it is time to revalue the human sciences? The human sciences are primarily interested in understanding individuals or groups of people and/or their products in a given context. This would normally entail openness to new situations, to languages, to cultural expressions and to comparing a given situation to its historic development. Maybe the human sciences are particularly apt to put forward questions, which cannot be answered that easily. Probably, the humanistic inclined scientists accept and understand the complexity of the human mind, society and its structures and do not easily fall into the trap of (over)-simplifications.

## 10 Education and competence building

Education, competence- and institution-building are essential factors for peace-building. Investing in relevant quality education for everybody is an investment in a better and more peaceful society. Rebuilding and strengthening the education system, getting rid of intolerance and "national self-service" in curricula and teaching material, are important aspects of peace-building and nation-building. Education is important for empowerment, for creativity, for unlocking human potential and for getting us out of stereotyped perceptions and expectations. Imagine all the wrong perceptions existing between the West and the East! If, in addition, the tool of literacy is also lacking, then it is easy to become dependent on the closest authority – whether wrong or right – without a possibility for the illiterate to check for him-/herself. Yet, education – and certainly peace-education – is mostly forgotten and strongly under-funded as a tool for peace-building.

Education is a very important process, in which people can attain the values, attitudes and behavioural patterns consistent with

a culture of peace. Learning may give meaning and normalcy to young people from war-torn societies. Additionally, it is a great preventive tool against the relapse into violence and conflict. In the report on education for the Twenty-first Century: Learning, the treasure within (UNESCO 1996), four pillars of education were outlined: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together. Learning to live together peacefully is seen as a "second literacy", as indispensable to a culture of peace as literacy itself.

### 11 Women's voices for disarmament in Afghanistan

Representing the United Nations' Organization for Education, Science and Culture in Pakistan as of September 11, 2001, I also had responsibilities in Afghanistan until UNESCO, as the rest of the UN system, bilateral embassies and international NGOs moved their offices from Islamabad to Kabul.

In 2002, the international celebrations of the International Women's Day, on March 8, took place in Kabul in an attempt to support a more progressive view on women's role and status than under the Taliban regime. Several UN organisations joined hands with the newly appointed Minister of Women's Affairs, Ms. Sima Samar, to organise this historic event in the ruins of a cinema house. Those of us who came from the outside were full of optimism and expectations for a new era. It was, however, resignation we could mainly see expressed in the faces of the Afghan women.

Women from different parts of the country were invited to a 2–3 days seminar. They arrived in their burkas, which they took off once inside only with women. Their male partners were waiting outside. It soon became evident that these women did not believe in any quick solution to the social and political difficulties in Afghanistan. They had experienced the Taliban coming as liberators, after the violence and rivalry of the Mujahideen and the local warlords. Communism and the Soviets had brought ideals of women's emancipation and women's education in the 1970s and 1980s. This had also been tried in the 1920s. It seems that never before so many teachers have been killed and schools have been destroyed, as in the times, when extremist religious groups started to see the Soviet building of schools as a manipulation to

undermine Afghan culture and religion – and the traditional role of women.

The seminar participants were very clear in their description of "reality" and their priorities, despite the lack of enthusiasm and hope for an early improvement of their situation. They complained about a general lack of respect for women, about poverty and an excessive workload, about restricted freedom for women within the family, no freedom of expression, severely restrained possibilities for geographical mobility, a pervasive preference for boys, and that all decision-making remained with the men. In short, they complained about the patriarchal power structures.

They wanted education for girls and women (including married girls/women), access to basic health care, including natal and pre-natal care (Afghanistan is ranking top for maternal and child mortality), access to work, to own land and to open own bank-account, possibilities to participate actively in political life, including the right to have an identity card, allowing them to travel and to vote and access to the media so that women's voices could be heard. These women also stated the need of research on the role of women in Afghan families, in working life and in society in general. They wanted a halt to child marriages, to the selling of young girls for land and to sexual abuse of children, not least of young boys.

What they insisted on most though was that the UN should help in disarming the country. They expressed a profound fear of the many weapons floating around, increasing the risk of fatal "accidents", both in the home and outside. As Mark Twain said: If you only have a hammer in your toolbox, you will be looking for nails.

Later studies have confirmed that disarmament is a top priority for the majority of Afghans (Human Rights and Advocacy Consortium, 2004). A report from the Independent Human Rights Commission of Afghanistan (January 2008) also showed that rape over the last years has mostly been committed by armed men.

To ameliorate the situation of Afghan women was a prominently pronounced goal of the attack on the Taliban-ruled Afghanistan as of October 2001. Now, some nine years later, it is time to ask why we have given Afghan women weapons for bread – the exact opposite of what they asked for and needed. Perhaps now is the time to listen to what they have to say.

The Canadian researcher Cheshmak Farhoumand-Sims wrote in the *International Journal* (June 2007) about the many unfulfilled promises to women in post-Taliban Afghanistan. She refers to one of her own studies for UNIFEM in 2003, where Afghan women express anger because "Western forces had co-opted their suffering to legitimize a strong military presence in their land and that 'the war against terror', as they have learned to know it, only would bring more suffering to the people and strengthen the insurgency." Other studies also show that the growing support for the Taliban in many regions often is due to the continued presence of foreign troops in the country, as well as to the lack of humanitarian assistance and development aid. The views of (some) Afghan women on the Western, non-Muslim, military presence in Afghanistan was expressed in the March 8 statement (2008) by women in Kandahar: "We believe that only Afghans themselves can stop the use of violence against other Afghans." The strong military presence seems to serve to reinforce the macho power structure, as well as hegemonic masculine ideals.

The Norwegian Prime Minister, Jens Stoltenberg, got standing ovation in the ECOSOC meeting in Geneva in July 2006, when he proudly claimed that Norway was not rich primarily because of the oil, but because of Norwegian women, who combine being among the most active workforce in the world with giving birth to more children than what is average in the Western world. The Norwegian government would most likely get very strong applause from peace-loving people around the world, if they were to use the same type of argument in relation to Afghanistan. Afghan women are probably a much greater asset to Afghanistan than its geopolitical situation of closeness to the Central Asian oil reserves, that so many would like to have access to.

It is getting obvious to more and more people that a military presence cannot solve the underlying problems in Afghanistan – and how could anybody be as naïve as to think so at the outset? Many, however, continue to believe in a strengthened military presence, combined with strengthened humanitarian efforts. The attempts to legitimise military presence by insisting on the need to protect the humanitarian efforts (to win the minds and the hearts) and the mixing up of military and humanitarian interventions, are highly dangerous for the humanitarian work and workers and is probably also a prolongation of the conflict.

If we consider that Afghan women could serve as agents of positive change, we should go way beyond the mere rhetoric of working for their well-being and emancipation/empowerment, which more often seems as an excuse for seeking to meet ones' own economic, political or military goals. Instead, there is a need to take their priorities seriously and to seek to enhance both their competence and their possibilities to use their insight and knowledge to create social justice and build peace.

A Norwegian female physiotherapist got international acclaim, when she presented a new thesis for healing an aching part of the body by insisting not to touch the sick part, but instead strengthen the adjacent healthy parts so that they in turn could heal what aches. If the aching part is for instance the elbow, then the upper and lower arm should be strengthened to allow them to make the elbow well again. There are many "elbows" in Afghanistan. To strengthen the "female upper- and underarm" would probably be the best help the Afghan society can get.

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