

## **IPB MESSAGE TO VOICE OF WOMEN FOR PEACE, CANADA**

**On the occasion of their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Nov. 2010**

Dear pioneers, members and friends of the Canadian Voice of Women for Peace. Happy Anniversary and happy and rewarding continuation! Best of greetings from my co-president in the International Peace Bureau Tomas Magnusson, Secretary General Colin Archer and myself! IPB considers the Canadian Voice of Women for Peace as a pillar among our 320 member organizations – and we were very happy to see you so well represented recently at the celebration of IPB's Centenary for the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo. Personally I have known and been inspired by your work since I headed the Women and a Culture of Peace program in UNESCO. I would have loved to be with you today to meet with friends and get this feeling of belonging and of sense of meaningfulness that is so vital to keep up the energy when we sometimes feel alone confronting powers and priorities not favoring peace.

Instead we are now testing new technology and I just hope it is not felt as intruding. New technology opens up new avenues for communication, for learning and for participation. This is not least important for the many women's initiatives, which have lots of energy, insight and needed alternative visions and practical solutions, but often lack financial resources. Imagine if this new technology was not mainly a bi-product of military research, but that all these researchers who are overpaid for developing lethal weapons instead would use their scientific minds for the wellbeing of people! Then, perhaps the *www* may come to mean the same as IPB's motto: *world without war* – and not only *world wide web*.

We are, as you know, at the end of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World (2001 – 2010). We had celebrated the change in Millennium with the year 2000 being the International Year for a Culture of Peace, with hopes for a new era. 70 million people had signed the UNESCO Manifesto on a culture of peace, and already at the Beijing conference in 1995 a series of prominent women – and some men- had signed the UNESCO Statement of women's contribution to a culture of peace. The cold war was over and we believed in a peace dividend – in welfare and not warfare, in taking the time necessary to help solve problems at the roots and provide long-term solutions and attention to the needs of women and men – old and young around the world. However, 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001 and its ensuing focus on terrorism undermined the intentions of the Decade and undermined our high hopes for disarmament. According to SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) the world now spends more than 1.5 trillion dollars per year for military purposes, more than at the peak of the Cold War period. Half of it is spent by the USA alone. According to the figures of the UN, only 10% of this expenditure would be enough to meet the Millennium Development Goals, agreed by all world leaders.

Our biggest challenge, as far as I can understand, is to educate the world about how incredibly unwisely we spend our resources and how urgent it is that we change direction. Regional and sub-regional groupings of the richer nations try to take over decision-making from the more democratic UN in many important areas. Women have previously fought for the UN, we may have to do it again. We need to tackle conflicts and disagreements before they turn violent.

Also the UN presently spends too much on humanitarian aid and peace keeping, whilst the main focus should be on peace building. I also see with sadness how SCR 1325 on women, peace and security is used much more for security in traditional terms than for prevention and peace-building. Some national plans of action even use it as an excuse to get women into the military, in a misconceived understanding of gender equality. If we believe that women have something special to bring to peace, also because of their socialization over centuries for caring functions, then military training would just be what takes away that potential for alternative thinking. We thereby also fail the boys and young men who want and need to get out of the straightjacket of traditional expectations to what it takes to be a man.

We also need to address the false perception that peace is boring and war and violence exciting. So let us talk and write about all the challenges we have, how exciting ideas and actions we have witnessed or participated in - and offer both young people and retired people a platform to grow, to act and to make a difference.

It gives me strength to know you are there. Happy and exciting celebrations – of peace – and of your contribution!

Kind regards,

Ingeborg Breines

Co-President IPB