

# UN Women and civil society

## Views from the International Peace Bureau

The International Peace Bureau (IPB), the world's oldest international peace organization with some 320 member organizations in 70 countries, would like to express our full support to the new and promising **UN Women** and at the same time voice our appreciation of your initiative to invite inputs from civil society to your strategic planning. Please find below our reflections in this regard:

A well-functioning UN is vital to the creation of a peaceful and dynamic international society. We therefore hope for a close and interactive cooperation between UN Women and sympathizing organizations and individual women and men, eager to collaborate for a world based on the ideals of a culture of peace.

IPB has had a special legacy in respect of gender equality from its very beginning, since one of its founders was Bertha von Suttner, the first woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize (1905). Bertha von Suttner was also the one who inspired Alfred Nobel to establish a prize for peace promoters.

IPB sees gender equality as an important precondition both for sustainable development and for durable peace. The organization has therefore kept in high esteem the holistic approach of the UN to all its four world conferences on women, with their overall goal of seeing *equality, development and peace* as part of the same vision and the same struggle.

*Peace* secured a place in the **Beijing Platform for Action**. The theme needs, however, further development and it certainly needs more sustained efforts in implementation.

Equally, the very promising **UN Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World (2001 -2010)** is about to end with a huge disappointment, as the world has shifted focus from building a peace dividend for human development and human security, to a war against terror. The events of 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001 and their ensuing focus on terrorism undermined the intentions of the Decade as well as our high hopes for disarmament. They have resulted in a dramatic growth in military expenditure, which is now in excess of USD 1,5 trillion a year (according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) – higher even than at the peak of the Cold War.

The important **Millennium Development Goals** (MDGs) agreed by world leaders, unfortunately do not have a goal related to peace, despite the obvious negative effects of violence and war both on development and equality. And, strangely enough, few argue any longer for the shift of resources from military spending to social development. Is this the great taboo of our times? According to the figures from the UN itself, only 10% of the world's military expenditure would be enough to enable countries to meet the MDGs<sup>1</sup>. There is a need to greatly strengthen public opinion in order to bring about this fundamental shift of priorities.

The strong push for militarized peacekeepers and the very high remuneration for their

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1 UN Millennium Project, 2003

services, have given many countries a rationale for maintaining a full military system for national defense, even though they are unable to define any real threat to which military defense would be effective.

Arms production and sales remain highly lucrative and politically influential, keeping also a lot of scientific minds busy within an essentially destructive industry, thereby preventing these minds from contributing to making the world a better place to live in.

The world, as well as the UN, presently expends far too many resources on humanitarian aid and peacekeeping, whilst the main focus should be on prevention and peace-building. The international community tends to act too late – after conflicts have turned violent - and it becomes extremely expensive and difficult to repair the loss of lives, health, physical infrastructure and opportunities to live a decent life.

Even **Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security** is applied much more to security in traditional terms than for prevention and peace-building. Some national Plans of Action even use it as a reason to recruit more women into the military, in a misconceived understanding of gender equality. If we believe that women have something special to bring to peace, not least because of their socialization over centuries for caring functions, then military training would be precisely what takes away that potential for alternative thinking. If we go for a generalized, so called gender-neutral, military service, we also fail the boys and young men who want and need to get out of the straitjacket of traditional expectations as to what it takes to be a man. Instead of adding more women for military training, we would like to see a reduction in the number of men, allowing for more time and resources to be used for human security and different forms of civil service both for women and men.

IPB has currently a special focus on **Disarmament for Development**. The organization works constantly against the rising militarization of societies, and hopes to be a partner with UN Women in this endeavour.

As an NGO umbrella organization, IPB is more and more working with new technological means. This is also important for the many women's peace initiatives, which have lots of energy, insight and much-needed alternative visions and practical solutions, but often lack financial and technical resources. Imagine if this new technology was not mainly a by-product of military research, but that all these researchers who are overpaid for developing lethal weapons instead would devote their scientific minds to human wellbeing! Then, perhaps, **www** may come to mean the same as IPB's motto: *world without war* – and not only *world wide web*.

If we believe in welfare rather than warfare, it is necessary to take the time needed to help solve problems at the roots, and to provide long-term solutions and attention to fundamental human needs.

One of our biggest challenges may well be to educate the world about how incredibly unwisely we spend our world's resources and how urgent it is that we change direction. There is a tendency for self-selected groupings of the richer nations to try to take over decision-making from the more democratic UN in many important areas. Women have previously fought for the UN, and may have to do it again. IPB stands by and supports those who struggle to tackle the causes of conflicts and disagreements before they turn violent.

The International Peace Bureau hopes that the new UN Women will:

- inspire a new global commitment to gender equality – **in combination with** a commitment to sustainable development and peace.
- cooperate closely both with rest of the UN system, not least the specialized agencies, with the gender-sensitive forces in the national women's machinery and with relevant parts of civil society. It is often in combining these different levels that the best results are obtained.
- provide good-quality and regular statistics on gender equality and women's empowerment.
- bring up for discussion the need for a new - fifth – **World Conference on Women** with a particular focus on practical implementation of gender equality. A conference that does not reopen for debate the **Beijing Platform for Action**, but that would strengthen the process towards gender equality and provide a worldwide, a regional and a country-by-country analysis of the status of women – as well as an evaluation of the mainstreaming of the gender perspective. The key focus should be on how to advance the empowerment of women. Defining carefully the hindering factors would be important in order to find, and agree on, political, economic, structural, cultural and practical ways of overcoming them. Such a process may get us out of the present 'gender fatigue' and act as a spur to a new wave of engagement and commitment.
- put disarmament, anti-militarism and peacemaking up front in the agenda of UN Women, in accordance with the longstanding efforts and demands of the worldwide women's movement.

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