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A Sustainable Peace Demands an Understanding of Women's Human Rights, Gender, Equality and Social Justice

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Civilians are the victims of contemporary wars. These wars are fought against the civilians and **the aim** of the war is to destroy the civil society.

In WWI 10 % of the victims were civilians. That figure increased to 45% in WWII, and in contemporary wars more than 90 % of the victims are civilians. The warriors direct their guided missiles, the Drones in a safe distance from the affected civilians.

Women and children are those most exposed to violence. Rape is used as a tactic of war and the sexual violence is horrifying. In DR Congo and earlier in Rwanda HIV-infected men used rapes as a calculated violence towards the enemy. There are reports from Amnesty International stating more than 40.000 women were raped in the wars of DR Congo. Tragically, this continues, also in Kenya, Burma, Colombia and other theaters of war.

Women are mostly described **as victims** in war and conflict situations, but their situation is mostly highlighted when it can be used as propaganda to demonize the enemy. It has never been appropriate, from a power perspective, to discuss rape as a tactic of war.

The situation for women in Afghanistan was suddenly identified as a huge problem and placed on the agenda when the US wanted to justify their military intervention – though the Taliban had been in power for years, and their way of treating women was well known. Although the situation for women in Afghanistan has hardly improved, and the exposed situation for women in Iraq, is not on the agenda as an important issue.

How do we create security? What do we mean by security?

Well, it depends on who is defining the security.

Today the world-leading political elite defines security in military terms. Which leads to militarization of the civil society – which means more violence especially for women.

If I ask my friends in refugee camps in Sudan who are surrounded by fully armed UN soldiers and who get raped or are afraid to get raped by warriors when they are collecting woods for their families. Do they think more soldiers would give them security?

So, what do we achieve then by military means – (military violence)?

Kosovo is an example close to my heart.

We had a war in the middle of Europe. I visited the area several times during the conflict. I was in Prishtina in Kosovo before Nato's intervention. The situation for the Albanian population was terrifying. There was violence everywhere. People were harassed. They were afraid and could not move freely. Children were not allowed to enter schools and there was no healthcare. The only hotel in Prishtina was full of Serbian people and no Albanians were allowed.

Then, I came back after the Nato intervention. I met Albanians all over the place. The Hotel was full of Albanian people; everything seemed to be open, people moved freely. But then I saw a convoy with military APC in front of a UN vehicle. A small bus was in the center and then another APC. I asked, "What is that?"

"Oh, it is only the Serbs going shopping," was the answer.

What had we achieved? Not security–only a change of the power structure.

It's not difficult to imagine better ways to use thefive hundred billions of dollars that was spent on the massive bombing of Kosovo also with depleted uranium.

And what is the situation today in the former Yugoslavia?

All that remains in many areas is destruction. Houses and whole villages are still destroyed as well as destructed relations. There is a massive unemployment, crime and violence. In many villages there are only elderly people left because the younger generations see no future in the area and leave if they have the possibility. It is essential in peace building to restore the civil society and give people back basic social conditions to enable them to create a better future for themselves. Many young unemployed men with no hope of a better future – they are very easy to recruit for armed conflicts and warfare.

People who used to live together, despite ethnic or religious affiliation, are now divided in separate villages, schools, and kindergartens even different countries. **Is this peace?**

It is not ethnic or religious differences that cause war. There is always peoplewho has something to gain from conflict. It is very easy to divide people, spread fear and fuel that fear with distrust against the "Other."

In my Research Project in a town in former Yugoslavia we tried to find the path that led to war and conducted interviews with people from one specific town. We asked them about their situation and thoughts before, during and after the war. One of our questions was:

When did the situation change? When did it start to get hostile?

The answers we got were surprising. Most people answered – "When the first democratic elections started."

How come? "The political leaders told us that we had to stick to our ethnic group and vote with them. If we continued to socialize with the "others" we were to be treated as traitors. And it soon became dangerous to socialize outside your own ethnic group."

If we define security in human rather than military terms then it is obvious that we need to create:

-States with democracy and working justice where crimes are prosecuted and where the civilians can trust the police force

-Communities with gender, ethnic and religious equality

-Fair and equitable distribution of global resources

-Reprioritize military expenses to address poverty, lack of water, HIV/aids…and other global challenges.

And how do we create democracy today?

Peace enforcement – democracy enforcement. Is that how we build democracy in the 21st century?
Sounds more like Clausewitz definition of WAR. We are using war as conflict resolution. In Afghanistan or Iraq … Areall these soldiers bringing security to the women of Afghanistan or Iraq?

Conflicts have to be dealt with in a professional manner and with proper analyses. What is the conflict about and the knowledge that the roles of victim – perpetrator – victim changes over time.

Enormous recourses are poured into military interventions and into bombing communities to dust and ash. Then a fraction of those resources goes into trying to re-build those very same communities! Imagine that if instead these enormous resources were used to build up and strengthen collapsing states!

In the last 20 years we have witnessed military actions, which have not lead to peace or permanently better conditions for people.. However, we have witnessed a de facto increase in nonviolent change. For example: India, Philippines, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Germany, the former Soviet Union, Serbia and Georgia as well as in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011.

(In addition, there is a rapid growth of peaceful social change movements - such as those in support of the environment, women, peace, human rights and alternative economics – that are indicators of how powerful nonviolence can be. The nonviolent methods of Ghandi and Martin Luther King are still powerful and peace by peaceful means is possible. However, mainstream media, education and political discourse very seldom focus on the nonviolence within these huge change movements. This remains a mostly un-researched field for international understanding and theories.)

While nonviolence generally opens doors to a better future, wars and other types of violence tend to close them. It is certainly questionable whether the wars in Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, etc. have opened doors to a better, more peaceful and democratic future for the people of those countries.

What roles do women play?

Many women play an active role in peace building during wartime while also taking on the huge responsibility of their family's survival. But that's not all. These women are also sweeping up what is left4 of the civil society in order to create new social structures.All of these roles they play are seldom recognized.

Through the peace movement, women have shown another and better way – one of conflict resolution and concrete measures to bring about peace.

"*Stop Rape and Gender Violence in Conflict*" is a global campaign aimed at highlighting rape and gender violence while calling for both accountability and justice. The campaign is initiated by Nobel Peace

Laureates and they also demand states that women are to take part in all negotiations and conflict resolutions and in all peace building efforts.

The UN Resolution 1325 highlights the vulnerable situation of women in armed conflict **and also the need of women's participation in peace negotiations and peace building.** This resolution has been implemented in many countries, education has been set up and leaders from all over the world talk about the resolution, but has it changed anything?

Some women have been allowed to take part in negotiations while others have received leading positions, however it remains in male structures. Women are not getting positions that enable them to set the political agenda, set priorities, allocate resources and power, or to demand accountability.

Meanwhile, women are creating peace by peaceful means, for example: women in Africa. We have a lot to learn from them. They support each other over ethnic and state boundaries, they protest against injustice and violence with nonviolence. They organize themselves, create cooperatives, and build societies from the ground up and using lobbying when they do not have power. Some of these women have been paid tributes and got prices – some with the Nobel Peace Price, which was very important.

Women have the capacity to actively work towards democracy and peace building, and their experiences are necessary in creating a sustainable peace. Women have to be not only included in the peace building but also in high level positions leading the negotiations and reconstruction of war torn societies.

We know the facts and we have the means to create a sustainable peace, but there is a lack of political will, and the prevailing underrepresentation of women in politics is one critical factor of this.

A sustainable peace has to be built up – from the ground – in the civil society where women have their experiences, knowledge and working methods for peace-building.

But when women demand influence and power necessary to enable a change in priorities – then in the best case they get award.

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