

WOMEN AS PEACEBUILDERS

Women, according to the participants of the International Consultation, make good peacebuilders. According to Ging Deles, women have a longer perspective about peace and war because they know that peace is a necessary condition for bringing up their children. Women, because of their role as housekeepers, are also more attuned to conserving and judiciously using resources and this gives them a different view of what matters and should matter. This inclination of women towards peace because of their traditional role as primary care-givers is dramatically captured in the words of Olive Schreiner (1911):

"There is, perhaps, no woman, whether she has born children, or be merely a potential child bearer, who could look down on a battlefield covered with the slain, but the thought would rise in her. 'So many mothers' sons! So many bodies brought into the world to lie there! So many months of weariness and pain while bones and muscles were shaped within; ...so many baby mouths drawing life at woman's breasts; --all this, that men might lie with glazed eyeballs and swollen bodies, and fixed, blue unclosed mouths, and great limbs tossed --this, that an acre of ground might be manured with human flesh!'"

The capacity of women to be good peacebuilders stems from the very conditions of marginalization and invisibility in which they have been forced.

Because they have been shut out of the power centers and the competition inside these centers, women have less emotional baggage and are more inclined to work out a compromise even in difficult situations. Their marginalization gives women a distinct perspective of power and conflict which enables them to act and speak out with less consideration for the status quo. "Women are freer to recognize the peace solution and not to be afraid to work for it," Ariella declared.

The participants in the International Consultation may have stressed the particular characteristics of women as peacebuilders, but they also addressed the question of women's role in the perpetuation of structures and values that sustain and perpetuate war. After all, women are often the transmitter of values and social codes within the family. In the document which they signed at the end of the Consultation, the participants resolved to "further the cause of peace" not only in the national and international levels, but also at the level of the home. They also raised the issue of women's part in the running and maintenance of the war industry and military establishment. In fact, one of the consensus points in the Consultation is a call for "dramatic action(s) to withdraw women workers in (the) war industry, and to condemn war firms."

The International Consultation ended with a declaration of the participants to further strengthen and intensify their peacebuilding efforts. They also resolved to carry the peace agenda to the Beijing Conference and beyond.▲

WHAT DID THE MEN DO?

Even in situations wherein family members are dispersed and whole communities are sundered, the gendered roles of men and women persist. Shanti recounts her experience with women refugees in her country:

"In 1992 there was complete devastation in the eastern province. In one area, the military during their flushing out operation against the militants were also killing villagers as they moved on. Villages along a 50 kilometer stretch were affected. On the eighth month every person, dog and cat had evacuated the villages and sought refuge in the jungles. These people were very poor--most people affected in war are the poor, women and children--and had no means, no savings, no skills for employment. The women built temporary shelters. They went to these field and collected grains of palay and organized a community kitchen. They cooked for their people and looked after their children. Snakebites were rampant because it was a rainy season and when the rain comes, the snakes also come out searching for a higher ground. To have other food stuffs, the women sold some of their palay grains and bought corn which they planted and harvested. What did the men do? Well the men had certain responsibilities too. They brought the Red Cross people. Once, they caught a wild boar which the women cooked."

