

Women Building Peace

“While entire communities suffer the consequences of armed conflict and terrorism, women and girls are particularly affected because of their status in society and their sex. Parties to the conflict often rape women with impunity, sometimes using systematic rape as a tactic of war and terrorism. The impact of violence against women and (the) violation of the human rights of women in such situations is experienced by women of all ages who suffer displacement, loss of home and property...and who are sexually abused in situations of armed conflict... This is compounded by life-long social, economic and psychologically traumatic consequences of armed conflict and foreign occupation and alien domination.”

- Beijing Platform for Action, Critical Area E: Women and Armed Conflict

Yet, around the globe and against all odds, women and women’s organisations have initiated dialogue and reconciliation in their villages and communities. In recognition of these peace-building efforts by women, International Alert launched its “From the Village Council to the Negotiating Table: Women in Peace Building” campaign at the Hague Appeal for Peace Conference (Hague, 11-15 May 1999) to highlight women’s experiences and perspectives of peace, and to make their contribution central to peace-building processes.

The centennial of the First Hague Appeal for Peace was a civil society initiative that offered a window of opportunity for civil society organisations to push the agenda for peace and justice in the 21st century, and to present their concerns to the International Community and governments. For International Alert, it was an opportunity to collaborate with other civil society organisations and international non-government organisations (INGOs) on particular issues (women, conflict and peace building, light weapons and private military), to push for a strengthened focus on human security, and to highlight the importance of women in a sustainable and inclusive peace.

To date, over 100 NGOs and individuals from

the North and the South have joined forces on this campaign which now includes organisations such as the Centre for the Strategic Initiatives of Women, the Centre for Women’s Global Leadership, the Hague Appeal for Peace, the Federation of African Women’s Peace Network, the Asian Centre for Women’s Human Rights and a large number of other regional organisations based in the South and in Eastern Europe. The idea for the campaign came out of an international conference on “Women and Violent Conflict: Global Perspectives” organised jointly by International Alert, the Council for Arab-British Understanding and the Centre of Defence Studies/King’s College London.

A quadripartite structure of an international secretariat, an advisory committee, an international consultative committee and a group of imminent patrons will oversee the campaign, its management and activities. Queen Noor of Jordan, Ambassador Swanee Hunt, and Ambassador Nancy Rubin are patrons of the Campaign. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has also been approached to become a patron.

A systematic series of consultations with NGOs, governments, UN agencies and parliamentarians have taken place in the past half year. Consultative meetings with NGOs to clarify the aims, objectives and focus of the campaign, the position of governments on women, security and peace building, the views of UN agencies, the activities of parliamentarians and widen ownership of the campaign have been held in South Africa (Johannesburg), East Africa (Nairobi, Addis Ababa), South East Asia (Bangkok), the Caucasus (Tbilisi, Sukhumi), Western Europe (London), and North America (New York, Washington). As a result there is now a comprehensive strategy for the campaign.

“Women Building Peace” and the Beijing+5: How to Affect Global Policy

The campaign secretariat has engaged with external strategic purposes to launch and mobilise support for the campaign. The Beijing+5 review processes (“Women: 2000: Gender Equal-

ity, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century”), particularly the regional intergovernmental preparatory meetings, have provided opportunities to meet with NGOs from various regions and sub-regions, learn about issues relating to the campaign, and discuss how support can be mobilised for the peace building initiative.

Staff from the international secretariat were at the Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP, Bangkok, October) and Economic Commission for Africa (ECA, Addis Ababa, November) to launch the campaign, gather signatures for the postcard petition to the UN and to dialogue with NGOs on their involvement in the campaign.

European Union: Putting Women, Security and Peace Building on the Development Agenda

The campaign’s policy focus seeks commitment from governments around the world to put women high on their agenda and to recognise their unique peace-building skills. Many European Union governments support the initiative and the call for a more systematic and coherent European Union development policy that will put women at the heart of development. Under the EU Presidency of Finland, a Parliamentary Hearing that focused on the gender perspective to the new paradigm for peace, security and development was financed by the Finnish government and hosted by the Speaker of the Parliament. Ministers, parliamentarians, NGOs and representatives of the media attended the hearing. Dr. Rita Rahman, director of the Women in Development Unit in the Dutch Ministry for Foreign Affairs, called for a paradigm shift and exhorted governments to pay more attention to women. She said, “The relationship between women, leadership, development, security and conflict resolution is a critical one. If the process of setting priorities in a country is to be democratic and sustainable, it should reflect the priorities and the potentials of all people, including women. If mainstreaming of gender equality in decision-making is a priority, the focus should not only be on increasing women’s participation (but also on transforming) the mainstream agenda and mainstream activities in order to appeal to women’s potentials, their comparative advantages and their contribution to sustainable development of the community as a whole.”

This means involving women at all levels of the peace process, especially in decision-making, and ensuring that all peace building and recon-

struction activities fully integrate a gender perspective. For this purpose, International Alert, in consultation with a broad cross section of individuals and institutions including the European Commission and representatives of Member States, prepared a proposal for the European Union. The document makes recommendations on:

- ♦ the critical role of women in conflict areas and peace building
- ♦ dialogue with women in policy formation
- ♦ support for women in reconstruction
- ♦ enhancing opportunities and education for women post-conflict situations
- ♦ increasing awareness and strengthening the capacity of the Commission to integrate women’s perspectives

The Netherlands in collaboration with the Finnish and Portuguese governments are taking a co-ordinating role in ensuring that the resolution is passed. You can help by writing to your government (the ministry or department which deals with international development) and asking them to support the call for this resolution.

The Beijing+5 Global Forum

From September to December 1999, WomenWatch, the UN information gateway for women’s issues, is holding the Beijing+5 Global Forum, a series of Internet working groups to provide input into the Beijing+5, the review of the implementation of commitments made in the 1995 Platform for Action.

In collaboration with the UN WomenWatch team, International Alert, as the international secretariat of the Women Building Peace campaign, participated in monitoring and contributing to a 6-week global forum on women and armed conflict that feeds into the UN review. The forum lasted from 11 October 1999 to 19 November 1999, and solicited comments from members all over the world. The discussion included

1. Women as peace-builders: What roles and positions on all levels (as mothers, managers, policy-makers, etc.) do women hold as peace-builders before, during and after wartime?
2. War crimes against women: the rise of crimes committed against women during wars and what actions are being taken regarding these. Rape, specifically, is increasingly being utilised as a weapon of war.
3. The role of gender: What should women accept responsibility for regarding the cause of war and their participation in it?

With over 100 messages, the Women and

Armed Conflict concluded on an analytical and exciting note. Messages from members included stories of organisations making a difference in war-torn countries and introduced us to women of every walk, some participating in the peace-building process for over 20 years. In addition, the forum was also used to generate interest in other similar campaigns and to raise support for projects that many members were involved with.

Forthcoming Events for the Women Building Peace Campaign

18-19 January 2000, Geneva: Preparatory Meeting for Europe for the Beijing + 5 Review (Economic Commission for Europe). The campaign organises a panel of speakers to highlight women's concerns in armed conflict situations, and push for necessary policy changes.

24-28 January 2000, Guinea/Conakry: West Africa Peace Conference organised by the Forum of Parliamentarians and Ministers of Guinea-Conakry. Two representatives from each West African country and five each from Liberia and Sierra Leone will be attending the conference as these countries will serve as case studies for the conference. The Women Building Peace campaign aims to attend this meeting to dialogue with NGOs and agencies that will be present at the meeting.

27 February - 17 March 2000, New York: Global Preparatory Meeting of the Commission for the Status of Women for the Beijing + 5 Review. The campaign will invite a group of 10 experienced women peace-building leaders from conflict regions, and organise at least one high profile panel discussions.

April 2000, Cairo: EU-Africa Summit. This is a policy event that sets the agenda for future co-operation between Europe and Africa. The campaign secretariat aims to work with sympathetic NGOs and governments to bring women involved in conflict and peace building to the meeting where they can discuss issues affecting them with policy makers and decision takers.

22-26 May 2000, New York: The Millennium Forum ("The UN in the 21st Century: We the Peoples..."). As part of the preparations for the Millennium Assembly and Summit at the UN (September 2000), civil society will organise a Millennium Forum to discuss and firm up innovative ideas and proposals of non-governmental organisations and civil society from all levels, seeking to create not only a new vision for the future but also a new organisational structure to effectively participate in global decision-making. The cam-

paign will actively participate and take forward its concerns. For more information, visit <<http://www.un.org/millennium>>.

1 June - 31 October 2000: Hannover Expo: UN Pavillon ("Humankind, Nature and Technology"). This event will have a strong focus on peace. A major launch of the campaign is planned.

5-7 June 2000, New York: Beijing +5 Review, Special Session of the UN General Assembly ("Women: 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century"). The campaign brings a number of women peace builders from various conflict regions worldwide and will give them a forum to present their work.

5-12 September 2000, New York: UN Millennium Assembly and Millennium Summit. Most likely to become the largest-ever gathering of Heads of State and Heads of Government, the Summit will be a historic occasion for the 188 Member States of the Organisation to address the challenges facing the United Nations in the 21st century. The 5 Millennium Peace prizewinners will receive their Prizes from UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. An exhibition and video presentation of the work of the women is also planned. For more details, visit <<http://www.un.org/millennium>>.

Receive a Campaign Pack!

Leaflets for the campaign, which include a postcard with five key demands addressed to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, are now in print. Order them from the Campaign Secretariat, and disseminate them as widely as possible!

A campaign pack including a CD-ROM, a framework paper on Women and Peace Building, a guide through the Platform for Action from a conflict transformation perspective and a poster, are available from January 2000.

The Women Building Peace website is currently under development but will be accessible soon. The address is <<http://www.international-alert.org/women>>. For more information, please contact: Women Building Peace Campaign Secretariat, c/o International Alert, Luitgard Hammerer, 1 Glyn Street, London SE11 5HT, UK, Tel: (44-171) 793-8383, Fax: (44-171) 793-7975, E-mail: <gendercampaign@international-alert.org>.

Sources:

Women Building Peace Campaign Update No.1, an electronic newsletter published by International Alert, received on 13 January 2000

"Peace Initiative," E-mail received from International Alert on 16 November 1999