

Cross the lines # 33

Cruzar las fronteras
Franchir les lignes



[January / March 2008]

Women's Reality in Afghanistan: Voices from Dutch Afghan Women

By: *Gabrielle Folkers*



Malalai Joya Photo: WCCN

The United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 in 2000. 1325 calls for the enhanced involvement of women in peace building. However, seven years later, there is a big gap between the pioneering aims of 1325 and reality.

For example, intervention in Afghanistan by military troops, foreign donors and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) is often legitimized by pointing to improvements in the situation of Afghan women. But do Afghan women really feel that their voices are heard?

The Women Peacemakers Program (WPP) works on the practical implementation of 1325 and would like to find an answer to this question. In search of this, I interviewed four women living in the Netherlands. Two women, who for security reasons prefer to remain anonymous, are part of SCAN, an Afghan organization in Heerlen. The other two, Jamila Talai and Harir Faqiri, are members of Rabe i Balkhi (RB), a nation-wide organization of Afghan women. The WPP is currently exploring possible cooperation with the Rabe i Balkhi. These women also wanted answers to questions. Questions such as: are Afghan women really involved in peace building? What is the situation in Afghanistan in regards to violence against women? What needs to be done to address these issues?

All four women agreed on the fact that it is very difficult for Afghan women to gain access to foreign NGO networks and official aid channels.

Harir Faqiri points out, "For reasons of accountability, foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) prefer to operate through networks of people who they are already familiar with. I know people living in Kabul who are part of such a network. They distribute the available jobs of official NGOs amongst each other. Initiatives of women who are not part of the network do not get any money."

Jamila Talai said, "In Afghanistan we say: 'These NGO people are the jobless of their home countries.' They just write a proposal, get a budget, carry out their project and then say: 'Look how generous we are!' Most NGOs don't go for long term projects that are really owned by the women themselves."

Lack of access is also caused by lack of safety as the women of SCAN point out. "When an NGO starts a home for battered women, a woman can decide to go there with her children. But her family does not let her go. They are afraid the home will be attacked, because it is set up by foreigners," they say.

When it comes to issues of safety and protection against violence, many Afghan women are desperate. Domestic violence is rampant.

Harir Faqiri says, "Psychologically, the permanent war situation has a very big impact on the population: if violence becomes part of the nature of people, it also becomes part of domestic relationships. Within Afghan culture, moreover, domestic violence is a big taboo. Therefore, women organizations try to change the situation from within, while taking very small, cautious steps forward. The only thing they usually do is to help the victims. It doesn't help women when you publicly accuse the male perpetrators. This only will stigmatize their husbands and then the situation of women will only become worse. This is because in a war situation, divorce for women is no option at all."

While some men beat their wives, there is also violence between women themselves, as Jamila Talai points out. "When the husband in a family dies, the family-in-law usually not only takes care of the widow, but also of her children. That often leads to severe conflicts between the widow and the family. Then the women are going to beat each other," she says.

Because women in Afghanistan are often dependent on male relatives, this kind of dynamic even appears in Parliament.

Jamila Talai says, "Some women in Parliament have become the spies of their thoroughly conservative men. The latter know very well how to use women for their own purposes. A woman in Parliament, Malalai Joya, said: 'You are warlords, you killed many people, you have to appear before the International Court of Justice in the Hague!' The other women in Parliament then started to beat her. Men are not allowed to beat a woman so that is why the women beat her instead. **When a man wants to beat a woman he usually does this by encouraging other women to beat her.**"

The women of SCAN say, "The men in Parliament and government are exactly the same persons as eight years before. When the Taliban took power, their beards were only a little bit longer. Now their beards are short, but they are doing exactly the same."

What needs to be done to change the situation?

Harir Faqiri says, "The Dutch government should mainly support Afghan women organizations which are independent of government." The women of SCAN have the last word, "Organizations should not only ask us what has to be done, they have to act accordingly!" □

Gabrielle Folkers is an activist and a volunteer with the WPP in the Netherlands.



Introducing: WPP Regional Desks in Africa, Asia

The Women Peacemakers Program's (WPP) regional desks are now up and running! The WPP is proud to announce that its partner in Africa, the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), now hosts the WPP Africa Regional Desk. Based in Accra, Ghana, WANEP has long-standing expertise in active nonviolence and in empowering African women peace activists.

Contact: Africa Regional Desk Coordinator, Women Peacemakers Program, West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), PO Box CT 4434, Cantonments, Accra, Ghana. Tel. +233 21 221318. Fax +233 21 221735. Email: edzathor@wanep.org

The Cultural Academy for Peace (CAP) in Kochi, India, is WPP's partner in Asia and the host of the WPP Asia Regional Desk. CAP has a long relationship with the WPP, organized the WPP Asia consultation in 1998, and has extensive experience in both nonviolence and women's empowerment.

Contact: Asia Regional Desk Coordinator, Cultural Academy for Peace, 41/1964, Piyolli Road, Ernakulam North, Kochi-682018, India. Tel. +91 0484 2369433. Fax +91 0484 2369562. Email: wppasiadesk@gmail.com OR brssuganthi@yahoo.co.in

The regional desks are now conducting annual regional trainings of trainers.

2007 was the last year that the WPP's international training for nonviolence trainers took place in the Netherlands. Gender-sensitive nonviolence training in Africa and Asia is now the responsibility of the regional desks.

While applications and dates for the regional trainings can be found at www.ifor.org/WPP, completed applications for these trainings must be sent to the respective desk. The regional desk coordinators direct the selection of applicants, not the WPP office in the Netherlands.

Financial support for gender-sensitive nonviolence trainings in these regions is the responsibility of the desk. Funding proposals for trainings in Africa and Asia must now be submitted to the regional desk concerned.

Funding proposals for trainings in other parts of the world (e.g., Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and the Pacific) should still be submitted to the WPP office in the Netherlands.

In order to promote South-South solidarity, internships for African women activists are available at the WPP Asia Desk in India. Internships for Asian women activists are available at the WPP Africa Desk in Ghana. Contact the concerned regional desk for more information. □

WPP Regional Coordinators in Africa and Asia

The WPP is very proud to introduce the new Regional Desk Coordinators for Africa and Asia.



Ms. Euphemia Akos Dzathor is the WPP Africa Regional Desk Coordinator. The West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) hosts the Desk in Accra, Ghana. Ms. Dzathor has over eight years experience working in development nongovernmental organizations. She has a wealth of experience organizing and participating in local and international training and facilitation programs. Her specialty is in facilitative approaches to training and learning as well as participatory strategic planning.

Previously, Ms. Dzathor was the Program Manager of Women's Initiative for Self-Empowerment (WISE). She coordinated all five WISE program areas. For two years she also coordinated a peace education program in the Liberia Refugee Settlement at Buduburam. As a peace educator, she provided learning opportunities for the refugees to practice the attitudes and skills of conflict prevention and peaceful co-existence. Additionally she facilitated the resolution of conflicts between several women's groups in the settlement.

Ms. Dzathor has studied in Ghana and the USA, and is an alumnus of the University of Ghana, Legon (M. Phil) and the University of Education, Winneba (B. Ed). Ms. Dzathor is also the Queen Mother of her hometown under the stool name of Mama Akosua Awanyo I. She has a keen interest in promoting gender issues, especially those pertaining to the advancement of women and children.

Ms. Suganthi Subramanian is the WPP Asia Regional Desk Coordinator. The Cultural Academy for Peace (CAP) hosts the Desk in Kochi, India. Ms. Subramanian has 18 years of experience in the field of development. She worked last with Oxfam India Trust as Program Coordinator for the South India Tsunami Response Program in Chennai. Her previous positions include Head of Gender Division at Caritas India in New Delhi and social scientist with the Tamil Nadu Empowerment and Poverty Reduction Program. She has also been the South Asia Regional Coordinator for Caritas Asia Network. Both Oxfam and Caritas consider gender as a crosscutting issue. Ms Subramanian was responsible for developing gender specific components and was innovative in devising suitable gender-sensitive approaches in close consultation with the concerned communities.

Ms Subramanian has a post graduate degree in Social Work, with a specialization in community development from the Madras School of Social Work, University of Madras, India. She completed an additional course on Women and Society at the Institute of Women Studies, Manila, the Philippines. She is a specialist in Gender and Development.

She has a wealth of experience in program management at the intercountry level and in building good professional relationships, particularly networking, advocacy and resource mobilization. □

Contact details of both Ms. Dzathor and Ms. Subramanian can be found at www.ifor.org/WPP.



News

Gender and Militarization Conference

by Isabelle Geuskens



"When men spend a formative period of their lives in the military they are likely to receive positive reinforcements for the use of brute power and violence. I cannot join an organization, which either directly or indirectly, encourages violence – of any form and kind – against women. ...I cannot live in such flagrant denial of my conscience." These words are from Idan Halili, a 19 year-old Israeli woman. Halili made history by becoming the first conscientious objector to be exempted from Israeli military service based on her feminist beliefs.

She was speaking at an international conference on gender and militarization which took place August 23 to 26, 2007, in Israel. The goal of the conference was to bring together groups, individual peace activists and academics working towards demilitarization and peace, in order to develop gender analysis and feminist action, and to improve future cooperation. Isabelle Geuskens and Banafshe Hejazi of the Women Peacemakers Program (WPP) participated in the conference, which was jointly organized by War Resisters International (WRI) (www.wri-irg.org), New Profile (www.newprofile.org) and the Coalition of Women for a Just Peace (www.coalitionofwomen4peace.org).

"It is becoming increasingly clear that consistent feminism cannot do without a thorough analysis of militarism and that consistent antimilitarism cannot do without a deep understanding of gender issues in both theory and practice," noted a WRI organizer. Panelists made this connection even clearer. Boro Kitanoski of Peace Action Macedonia spoke about the right wing group Obraz, which has stirred nationalism in Serbia and contributed to polarized gender roles in society. Obraz portrays men as soldiers and defenders and women as sisters of the nation, too weak to protect themselves. Consequently, serving in the army is still considered a test of one's masculinity. In some communities in the Balkans, military service is considered a pre-requisite for marriage.

Others panelists linked a violent form of masculinity with militarism. Laura Pollecott of South Africa's Ceasefire Campaign reflected on how guns have become a symbol of liberation there, and how many men feel that guns enhance their masculinity and their control over family and life.

Yet ideals of violent masculinity can turn against men. Many men suffer physical, emotional and sexual abuse while in the military. Such abuse is rampant in the Russian military, according to Olga Miriasova from Autonomous Action.

Others explained how women in the Israeli army are seen as both sexual objects and as cheap labor, often unequal to men. Israeli society has allowed militarization to enter into the public sphere in the form of many plazas decorated with military artifacts such as missiles.

WPP Program Manager Isabelle Geuskens pointed out that gender bias exists both in the military and in peace organizations. It is extremely important to invest in women's peace initiatives and to gender-mainstream peace organizations for this reason. A more complete report on this inspiring conference will appear in the next issue of Cross the Lines.

European Feminist Forum

Various European women's networks, including the Netherlands-based WPP, are organizing a European Feminist Forum (EFF), to be held June 13 to 15 in 2008 in Warsaw, Poland. EFF is both a process and an event. It aims to re-politicize the feminist movement in Europe and explore feminist agendas for Europe today. In this phase of the process, Affinity Groups are being formed. These groups will work on a subject of their choice, to develop substantive content to make discussions during the European Feminist Forum even more fruitful. WPP is member of the EFF Steering Committee and participates in the Affinity Group on Peace and Security. For more information please see the various affinity group topics on the EFF website at: www.europeanfeministforum.org

Help the Women of Burma

The rising costs of living, which sparked recent mass protest in Burma, have a disproportionate impact on the women of Burma. Buddhist nuns and long-time women activists participated in great numbers in the protests, although the media often ignored them. Below is a sampling of women's groups which have long struggled for gender equality and democracy in Burma.

Burmese Women's Union, PO Box 45, Chiang Mai 5000, Thailand. Tel. +66 98500963.
Email: bwunion04@chmai2.loxinfo.co.th

International Women's Partnership for Peace and Justice conducts gender equality and active nonviolence training for women throughout South and Southeast Asia. PO Box 3, Mae Rim, Chiang Mai 50180, Thailand.
Email: info@womenforpeaceandjustice.org
Web: www.womenforpeaceandjustice.org

Nobel Women's Initiative. Six (of the total of 12) women Nobel Peace Prize Laureates work together to highlight social issues, including human rights abuses in Burma.
Web: www.nobelwomensinitiative.org

Shan Women's Action Network, PO Box 120 Phrasing Post Office, Chiang Mai 50200, Thailand.
Email: kenneri@shanwomen.org
Web: www.shanwomen.org

Women's League of Burma is an umbrella group of 12 different ethnic women's organizations.
Email: wlb@womenofburma.org
Web: www.womenofburma.org

Action: Write to Burmese leaders to express your concern for the safety and humane treatment of all those in detention. Ask them to respect freedom of religion and open the monasteries they closed.

Foreign Minister Nyan Win, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Naypyitaw, Union of Myanmar. Fax: +95 1 222 950 OR +95 1 221 719. Email: mofa.aung@mptmail.net.mm

General Than Shwe, State Peace and Development Council, Naypyitaw, Union of Myanmar.



Resources

New Books

Women in an International Perspective by Elisabeth Porter (from the Routledge Advances in International Relations and Global Politics series, London 2007) highlights positive examples of women's peacebuilding in comparative international contexts. Drawing on feminist ethics, the book develops a politics of compassion that defends justice, equality and rights and the need to restore victims' dignity. The arguments developed demonstrate how peacebuilding must be defined more broadly than current United Nations and military usages so that women's activities in conflict and transitional societies are valued.

"I Will Never Be Silenced": Voices from Colombian Women (Fellowship of Reconciliation and American Friends Service Committee, USA 2007) documents the words and work of 17 women peace and justice activists from throughout Colombia—rural, urban, Afro-Colombian, indigenous and mestizo, religious and feminist.

FOR, Box 271, Nyack, New York 10960-0271, USA.
Web: www.forusa.org

Stolen Angels. The Kidnapped Girls of Uganda by Kathy Cook (Penguin Group Canada and Singing Pebble Books, Canada 2007). These are the stories of 30 Ugandan school girls who were abducted in October 1996 by the Lord's Resistance Army. Sexually abused, then forced to become soldiers, this book brings together a group of the surviving girls and their mothers to raise awareness of the ongoing tragedy.

New Documentary on Kashmir

Women between the Frontlines explores the 60-year-old conflict between India and Pakistan in the Kashmir region. Four women relate how it is to live in the militarized zone, how the militarization influenced their public and private lives in a negative way, and how they developed personal and political strategies to challenge the violence and threats to their autonomy.

Made by Initiative: voices from the women of Kashmir, a cooperation of activists from Kashmir and Germany. DVDs can be ordered for 12 euros (**individuals**) or between 30 to 100 euros for **organizations**.

Initiative: ***voices from the women of Kashmir***,
c/o Ella von der Haide, Ulmenstr. 1, 82049 Pullach,
Germany.
Email: kashmirivoices@gmx.net.
Web: www.womenbetweenthefrontlines.wordpress.com

Women and Media: Internews

Across the globe, women journalists and media professionals work, many times under difficult circumstances, to bring light to the issues that affect all women. Internews media projects aim not only to open eyes to gender issues, but also to give voice to women so that they can change their lives for the better. Internews works to foster women's leadership in the media industry so that issues of vital concern to women are integrated across all programming and not relegated to a niche market.

In communities where specific gender issues are underreported, such as gender-based violence or women's health, Internews has developed special programs produced by and for women. Internews' work with women has involved training women media professionals, fostering their leadership skills, and programming involving women's issues in Chad, Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Southern Caucasus.
Web: www.internews.org

New UN Website on Human Security

The Human Security Unit at the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has launched a new website, which serves as a platform for the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS), the Advisory Board on Human Security (ABHS) and for the work of the Unit as focal point on human security within the UN system. The site has been redesigned in order to enhance the user's experience, and includes new and upgraded features including a photo gallery, sitemap, as well as a worldwide overview of UNTFHS projects.

The address for the site remains the same:
www.ochaonline.un.org/humansecurity

Calendar 2008

February 25-March 7: Annual Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) meeting and parallel events, United Nations Headquarters, New York, New York, USA.

The focus this year will be on "Financing for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women". For more information and to register on-line contact:

www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw

March 22: NATO Game Over: international nonviolent direct action to close down the NATO headquarters, Brussels, Belgium.

Contact: www.vredesactie.be or email: international@bombspotting.be.

March 23-24: Seminar "Military Globalization and Non-violent Resistance in Europe", Brussels, Belgium.

Organized by War Resisters International and NATO Game Over (see above). Contact: international@bombspotting.org or international@bombspotting.be

May 24: WPP seminar "Money for Women Peacemakers", the Hague, the Netherlands.

See announcement on this page below.

July 3-9: "Women's Worlds": International congress on academic research on gender, women and feminist social movements, University Complutense of Madrid (UCM), Madrid, Spain.

Mundos de Mujeres/ Women's Worlds 2008 will be bilingual (in Spanish and English) for the first time since 1981. Women's Worlds 2008 is open to proposals in all fields and themes related to women, gender and sexuality in contemporary societies.

Deadline for proposal submission is **February 28**.

Contact: www.mmww08.org



November 14-17: 11th AWID International Forum on "The Power of Movements", Cape Town, South Africa.
The forum is expected to draw 1,500 women's rights activists together.

For more information on the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) and the forum, or to submit a workshop proposal (**deadline January 28**) online, email: forum08@awid.org.
Web: www.awid.org
Tel. +1 416 594 3773.

"Money for Women Peacemakers" Seminar

In honor of May 24, International Women's Day for Peace and Disarmament, the IFOR Women Peacemakers Program (WPP) will organize the seminar "Money for Women Peacemakers" on May 24, 2008, in the Hague, the Netherlands. The seminar will also be a celebration of the WPP's 10th anniversary. It will be a unique event.

The seminar will explore the impact of investments in women activists on the establishment of sustainable peace and justice. It will consist of lectures and workshops. An exciting international group of experts, including Asha Hagi of Somalia and Elisabeth Porter of Australia, and others will speak on women's peace activism; the effects of financial support on peace work; and the opportunities and challenges of fundraising by women peacemakers.

A special guest will be Malalai Joya, activist and former member of the Parliament of Afghanistan. Joya maintains that investments in civil society at large and women in particular are a better solution for her country than foreign military missions.

The seminar 'Money for Women Peacemakers' will be a meeting among practitioners, policy makers and interested others on how investing in women peacemakers can further enhance international peace and security. During the seminar participants will exchange strategies and expertise, and learn more about peacemaking, fundraising and self-sustainability. In addition, a set of impact measurement tools for women's peace activism will be introduced and discussed. Several funders and donors will introduce themselves at a "funders' market place".

Contact: IFOR Women Peacemakers Program,
Sporstraat 38, 1815 BK Alkmaar, the Netherlands.
Web: www.ifor.org/WPP



Cross the lines is produced three times a year in English, French, Spanish, Russian and Dutch. A German edition is available on-line.

A contribution of Euro 10, GBP 5 or USD 10 will help us spread the news about women's initiatives for peace among groups and individuals unable to pay.

Cheques may be made out to 'IFOR/Women Peacemakers Program' in British pounds (drawn on a British bank) or in US dollars (drawn on a US bank)
Payment may also be made by VISA or MasterCard, or by transfer of Euros to IFOR's Postbank account 2704182 (in the name of Stichting IFOR).

The Women Peacemakers Program (WPP) is an initiative of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR).
Since 1919 IFOR has pioneered spiritually-based active nonviolence.
For more information about WPP, contact editor Mariette van Beek (m.vanbeek@ifor.org)

For information about IFOR or the IFOR branch in your country, please contact the IFOR international secretariat.

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