

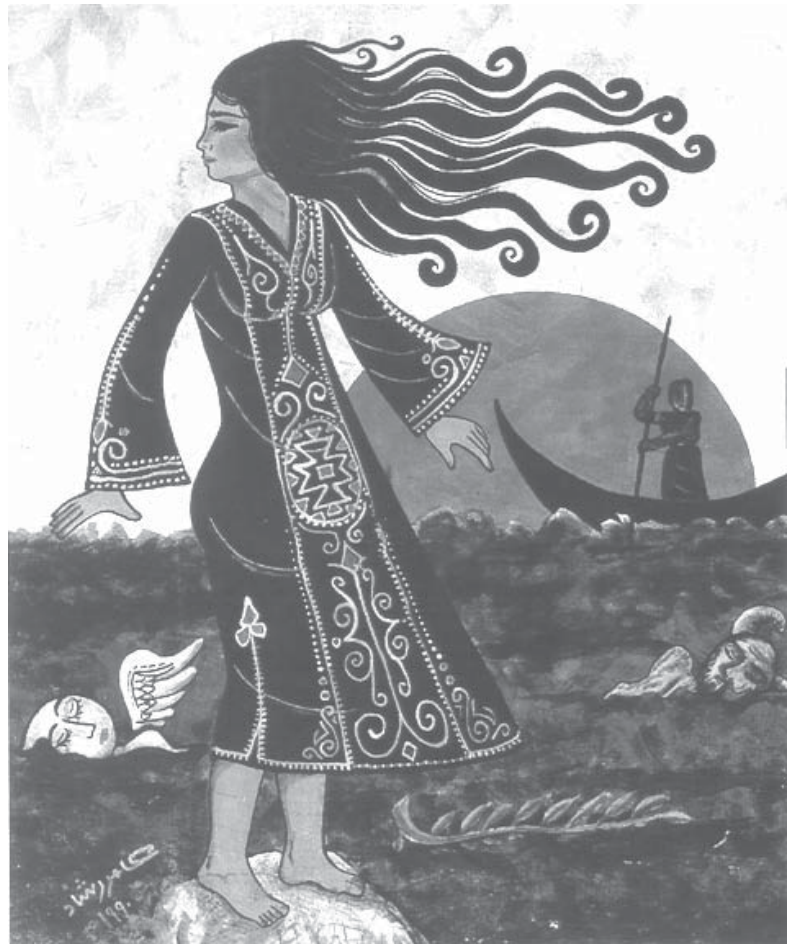
International Women's Day for Peace and Disarmament

May 24 — 2004

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*This action pack is also
available in Arabic*



Painting by Iraqi artist, courtesy of Women of Iraq Tour of the United States 2003,
organized by Fellowship of Reconciliation/USA

ifor



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May 24: International Women's Day for Peace and Disarmament

BUILD BRIDGES, NOT WALLS

How do you define security? Women in Iraq and Afghanistan, as the articles in this issue explain, might share one definition: the knowledge that when you leave home, to go to work or school, to the mosque or the market, the chances are good that you will return home again safely. Returning home unhurt, or even alive, is not a given for these women. Nor, as a matter of fact, for women in Palestine or Zimbabwe, as other articles illustrate.

The term 'human security' is heard often these days in conflict resolution circles. Some researchers and activists think there is a gender difference, that women and men define security in different terms. Women may tend to define security as based upon trust and good relationships, while a traditional masculine definition bases security on military and political superiority. True or not, it is increasingly clear that building trust and confidence between opponents is an essential part of building peace.

The desire for security has moved Israeli politicians to build a 220-mile long wall between Israel and Palestine, in order to protect Israelis from Palestinian terrorists. Israeli peace activists believe the wall will be a prison for Palestinians and a ghetto for Israelis. Palestinians point out that the wall is illegally swallowing up more Palestinian land, separating farmers from their land, villages from their water supplies, and students from their schools. Will concrete and steel, guns and military checkpoints, help create the security both Palestinians and Israelis need?

Basing security on fire power can backfire. The article on women's work against small arms, supported by the International Action Network on Small Arms Women's Network, shows this. The only real chance for peace lies in the risky, long term struggle to build a culture of nonviolence. This year's May 24 pack is proud to highlight a few of the many nonviolent initiatives women in the Middle East and elsewhere are engaged in.

May 24 International Women's Day for Peace and Disarmament began in Europe in the early 1980s, when hundreds of thousands of women organized against nuclear weapons and the arms race. Since the 1995 UN World Conference on Women in Beijing, the International Fellowship of Reconciliation and the International Peace Bureau have published this pack to raise awareness of and increase support for women's peace initiatives.

International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR)

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IFOR, founded in 1919, is a network of people who believe in the power of active nonviolence to change the world. Fundamental to IFOR's work is its spiritual basis. IFOR's members include Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Muslims, Bahá'ís and Hindus, and members whose philosophical understanding leads them to a commitment to active nonviolence. IFOR has branches or contacts in over 40 countries.

International Peace Bureau (IPB)

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IPB is the world's oldest and most comprehensive international peace network. With 19 international and 141 national/local member organizations (and 120 individuals) in over 40 countries, it brings together people working for peace in many different sectors: not only pacifists but also women, youth, labor, religious, political and professional bodies. IPB was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1910.

We welcome your feedback, comments and suggestions on this information pack. The next pack will look at women and peace in the Pacific area.

Editor: Shelley Anderson, IFOR; proofreading: Joyce Mumford; layout: Françoise Pottier. Copies of the information pack and brief follow-up reports from previous years are available from IPB and IFOR (see addresses above.)

Beacons of Hope

by Lucy Nusseibeh

The situation in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem deteriorates daily. The economy continues to plummet, and the eight-metre-high cement separation barrier is being constructed at top speed. This wall will divide Palestinians from each other, from their lands and livelihood, and from all hopes of peace. Once the wall is completed, the vast majority of Palestinians will be sealed into de facto prisons. For many, life is already unliveable. The only future for one's children is emigration. An example of this "voluntary" ethnic cleansing comes from Qalqilya. This West Bank town is completely surrounded by the wall and Israeli soldiers. More than 20 per cent of the population has abandoned their homes in the last six months.

In the past, there was always hope for a peaceful shared future, and confidence that active nonviolence could be counted on to make a difference. Now nonviolence is understood more and more to be the only possible way to peace, but at the same time it feels too late.

Promoting Nonviolence

The nongovernmental organization Middle East for Nonviolence and Democracy (MEND) is expanding its nonviolence training programs so that people, even in isolated rural locations, can be empowered. Such empowerment is crucial if people are to be helped to cope with the overwhelming violence of the past three years. Help is urgently needed from the international community to raise awareness about the inhumane situation, and to break the unfair but increasingly rigid stereotype of Palestinians as terrorists who deserve the collective punishments inflicted on them.

MEND has extended its reach throughout the West Bank and included a training in Gaza last year. This is an attempt to counteract the increasing fragmentation of Palestinian society, and to make available to as many activists as possible at least the basics of active nonviolence. We organized the first stage of a training of nonviolence trainers program in

Jerusalem, Ramallah, Tul Karem and even Jenin (despite curfews and incursions) and a basic training for peace mobilizers in Gaza and Bethlehem.

Libraries/community centers have also been established in schools or unused buildings in eight rural locations in the southern West Bank. In one center, in Battir, we have organized extensive counselling and training in gender, information technology, conflict resolution, and finance management, along with an intergenerational skills exchange program.

Youth for Nonviolence

We are continuing to work in schools, in partnership with the German-based nonviolence training center Kurve Wustrow, on a training program for school counsellors on conflict resolution and nonviolence. This includes producing a manual. Since this program is coordinated with the Ministry of Education, we have high hopes that this manual will eventually be used throughout Palestinian schools.

MEND also works with Sesame Workshop on producing outreach materials to accompany the popular children's television series "Sesame Stories". Our volunteer youth group, "Menders", has been extended to Ramallah, and will be working with MEND nonviolence trainees on a variety of local activities to promote nonviolence in addition to producing their regular newsletter, "Impact".



MEND is also promoting active nonviolence nationwide via an experimental radio soap opera. This soap opera is entering its second series in response to popular demand.

Working with Women

Women have been affected by the violence in many ways. Domestic violence has increased with the high levels of unemployment (average 65%), the huge increase in poverty (more than half the population lives on less than USD 2 per day) and with prolonged curfews, when no one in the family is allowed to leave the house for any reason. Women bear the brunt of the family and social frustrations while struggling to hold their families together. Increasingly women are pressured to drop out of school (by sixth grade) and to marry early (often by age 15). It is all most women can do to simply carry on, and women's health is severely affected.

MEND works on two specific programs for women. One project is about the empowerment of Palestinians, while the other brings Palestinian and Israeli women together to learn about and work with active nonviolence.

The very successful project for the empowerment of Palestinian women provides training in active nonviolence and video. Funded by the United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM), this project works in the Bethlehem area and involves 25 women (tragically one participant, a young law graduate, was killed early in the violence while sitting at home nursing her baby). Participants include police women, educators, community activists and unemployed mothers. Throughout the project's two years they have continued to travel to Bethlehem from the surrounding areas where they live, in itself an achievement given the constant restrictions on movement. They receive training in women's rights, communications, gender and gender based violence, health and crisis management, and nonviolence.

Bombardments, Armored Cars and Video Cameras

The nonviolence trainer originally invited to give the training was forced to take shelter in a cellar in Bethlehem in order to escape an Israeli bombardment. He was able to leave Bethlehem when it was still under siege by escaping in a diplomatic armored car. The training was postponed until eventually it was given by Stephan Clauss, of Kurve Wustrow. The training's experimental part involves instruction in participatory video and the production of two short films on women role models in crisis. This project has empowered the women to start breaking the barriers between themselves and the outside environment.

However, as the project specified that the film/s should be shown on local television, it proved difficult to find women willing to be filmed as role models against violence. Most women were reluctant to expose themselves or risk further hardships by being seen and speaking up openly on camera. Nevertheless, the women succeeded in making two excellent films: "The Death of Dream" is about a woman who lost the baby she waited for for six years when she was forced to give birth at an Israeli checkpoint. "Where there's a will there's a Way" is about a woman's ability to make her own way in life and stick to her choices through her strength of character. The women are all engaged in helping others whether individually or in groups via their newly acquired skills.

Meeting Neighbors Halfway Around the World

The second project is also nearing completion. The fact that it happened at all is also a major achievement. It was not easy to find a group of eight mid-level and active Palestinian women interested in working with a similar group of Israeli women on issues of nonviolence. While cross-community joint projects do exist, it is increasingly harder to find participants and to implement such work. Yet such a highly committed group was found, despite serious impediments. The group could only meet abroad and only then after inordinate amounts of planning and diplomatic intervention. The two groups (16 women altogether) met with women's activists and peace movements such as Vital Voices and Women Waging Peace in Northern Ireland and in Washington DC. They underwent training in many aspects of nonviolent conflict resolution, advocacy, and media work, with experts from leading organizations abroad. The women will have one more workshop together, hopefully in Palestine, in order to come up with their own action plans.

In spite of difficulties, the group wants to continue to work together to change the stereotypes each side has of the other. This stereotyping is now one of the key problems in this increasingly inhumane conflict. Such projects and such women are beacons of hope.

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Salfit Women Resist the Apartheid Wall

Since September 2003, the International Women's Peace Service (IWPS) has supported Palestinian women in the district of Salfit to mobilize in opposition to the apartheid Wall. The Wall will sever access to land for most of the villages in this district. IWPS created an educational exhibit, using photographs and other documentation collected about the Wall by IWPS activists, which gave rise to informational meetings and solidarity visits by Salfit women to families affected by the Wall. Ultimately, a women's committee against the wall in Salfit was formed. Over 400 women from 11 villages in Salfit district have participated in women's committee activities. According to organizer Fatima Khaldi, this is the only district-wide activist project undertaken by the women of Salfit during the second Intifada.

The women's committee believes that nonviolent action is the most strategic way to make gains and oppose the Israeli Occupation and the wall. Additionally, the committee believes that women have an active role to play in organizing against the wall in the district. They are committed to raising awareness about the wall through the media and to promoting the idea of large-scale collective action and resistance to the Occupation and its new face, the wall.

The committee's first public action was planned for the International Day of Action Against the Wall, November 9. The newly formed Women's Committee Against the Wall, Salfit District, chose this date to respond to the call to action against the wall all over Palestine and the world. They chose Mas'ha as the site for a demonstration. Mas'ha is a small village in the district. It is six kilometers east of the Green Line and has seen some 70% of its land devoured by the wall. Mas'ha is currently the southernmost point of the wall's snaking path. Women from the villages of Rafat, Bidya, Mas'ha, Qarawat Bani Hassan, Marda, Yasouf, Iskaka, Qira and Hares met in Mas'ha in order to express opposition to the wall that is disrupting their village and their lives.

Fifty women and 15 men gathered at the municipal building, and using consensus, went over the plan for the day. The group then walked in a silent procession along the wall's fence. We walked hand in hand toward the final rallying point: a house that is isolated on the other side of the wall from the village, completely fenced in between an Israeli settlement and the wall. Photographers and journalists waited for us at the top of the hill. We were also met by soldiers who told us we could not walk through the gate to get to the isolated



Photo: IWPS

Palestinian women protesting the Wall, which is illegally swallowing up Palestinian land.

house. Palestinian and international negotiators demanded access and we stood our ground. Finally, due to the pressure of the peaceful demonstrators and the watching media, the soldiers stood aside. We walked through the gate to meet the house's owners, Munira and Hani A'amer, who were overcome with emotions.

After we arrived, the joyous group stood in a circle outside the house of Munira and Hani in the shadow of the wall. Fatima spoke about the commitment of women and men in the district to rise up against the wall. Everyone sang together, people crying as they sang. The women returned home with the feeling that they had taken a first step toward holding their heads up. Those that had been unsure about their participation in the morning left at the end of the day asking about the committee's future plans. They left the signs they had brought on Munira's house, as a reminder that the family still has friends and neighbors, even though they cannot see them.

The demonstration came at a crucial time for Salfit district. As Phase I devastated Qalqilya, Phase 2 will carve Salfit up into dozens of tiny islands, cut off from one another and from the land which sustains them. Salfit is the home of Ariel, the largest settlement in the West Bank, which stretches from the village of Marda in the east to the village of Hares in the west. Fifty trees in Kifl Hares, directly across from the entrance to Ariel, were cut down several months ago to make a "security zone" and the entrance to the village, which includes a popular plant shop, was declared a closed military zone. The villages of Refat, Deir Balut and Azawiye are to be isolated from the rest of Palestine, in between the Wall and the Green Line. Some participants in the demonstration from these villages had not seen the wall before November 9. The concrete wall in Munira's front yard vividly showed them how important it is to take action.

A Nation of Hostages

These demonstrations are a call to the world community to condemn and take responsibility for the human rights crisis in Palestine. The latest manifestation of this crisis is the apartheid wall. As women continue to organize a grassroots movement against the wall, they open a new chapter in the annals of the second Intifada.

Nijmie works with the IWPS.

ABOUT IWPS

The International Women's Peace Service (IWPS) is an international team of 16 women based in the village of Hares, in the Palestinian West Bank. IWPS began in August 2002. The women produce regular detailed reports on their work, which includes nonviolent actions against house demolitions, removing roadblocks, accompanying ambulances and Palestinians while they farm, and taking food and water to communities under siege.

Email: iwpspalestine@netscape.net

Web: www.womenspeacepalestine.org

For more about volunteering with IWPS, email: iwpsvolunteers@yahoo.co.uk. IWPS produces regular email updates: subscribe by sending an email to iwps-pal-reports-subscribe@lists.riseup.net, or unsubscribe by sending an email to iwps-pal-reports-unsubscribe@lists.riseup.net

NEW RESOURCES

Two new IWPS videos (a donation of GBP 10, made payable to IWPS-Palestine, is requested) about Palestine are now available. Contact Laura, tel. +44 7789- 845-315 (UK); +39 333-344-25 (Italy); email: laura@maritano.freeserve.co.uk

"No one need cry" by Maren Karlitzky-Suttvess (30 min/colour/DV/Italy/2002). Images and voices shot just after the Jenin attack (April 2002), which try to reconstruct the events. Palestinians, in shock after an attack by Israeli forces, look among the rubble for the bodies of their relatives. But the pain does not come with resignation.

"The Right to Education" by International Women's Peace Service (IWPS)—in collaboration with the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) (20min/color/UK-Italy-Palestine/2003). This documentary looks at how the Israeli military occupation disrupts the Palestinian educational system through curfews, checkpoints and roadblocks, preventing students and teachers from reaching schools and universities. Birzeit University, Palestine's most respected seat of learning, is consistently disrupted. Closures, incursions by the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) and the severity of the checkpoints approaching the university all contribute to ongoing pressure. The policy regarding closure and the destruction of schools and universities is pursued throughout the West Bank and Gaza.

For A Just Peace: Resources

The following are a few of the many groups working for nonviolence and a just peace between Israel and Palestine.

ISRAEL

Checkpoint Watch—Three Israeli women began Machsom Watch in January 2001 in response to media reports about human rights abuses of Palestinians crossing Israeli army and border police checkpoints. The action group, which sends Israeli women daily to checkpoints in order to monitor the human rights situation, now includes 150 women in Jerusalem and throughout Israel.

The women have three goals: to monitor the behavior of soldiers and police at checkpoints; to ensure that the human and civil rights of Palestinians attempting to enter Israel are protected; and to record and report the results of their observations to the widest possible audience, from the decision-making level to that of the general public.

”Machsom Watch is open exclusively to women,” write the organizers. “Our, quiet but assertive, presence at checkpoints is a direct challenge to the dominant militaristic discourse that prevails in Israeli society. It demands accountability on the part of the security forces

towards the civilian estate, something hitherto almost unheard of.” *Contact: Machsom Watch, PO 8083, 91080 Jerusalem, Israel. Tel. +972 055 300 385. Email: machsomwatch@hotmail.com; website: www.machsomwatch.org*

Coalition of Women for Peace—The Coalition works for an end to the Occupation and for the full involvement of women in peace negotiations. In addition, members believe that “the militarism which permeates Israeli society must also come to an end. As long as the governments of Israel continue to be dominated by generals and a belief in violence as a political strategy, we will never get to peace.” The Coalition consists of nine Israeli women’s peace groups, including Women in Black, Bat Shalom, NELED, the Fifth Mother, TANDI, NOGA, Machsom Watch, New Profile and the Israeli section of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. *Email: mail@coalitionofwomen4peace.org; website: www.coalitionofwomen4peace.org*

Israeli military checkpoints mean daily humiliation, separation of family members, and lack of access to health facilities for Palestinians.

Photo: Peace Begins with Myself/Israel



Women Against the Wall—“We do not agree to take part in or to permit the annexations by the Wall which go against all principles of justice, morality and law and which harm Palestinians and Israelis. We do not agree that in our name parents are being separated from their children, pregnant women from their hospitals, farmers from their land and students from their universities...” reads part of a letter to Israeli Prime Minister Sharon from the group Women Against the Wall. The group has organized demonstrations against the wall, such as the September 2003 demonstration in Abu Dis, and the October 2003 demonstration in Asawahra, and initiated petitions and letters to Prime Minister Sharon and to the United Nations. *Tel.* +972 056 403 429. *Email:* women-against-the-wall@yahoo.com

Bat Shalom—Bat Shalom is an Israeli national feminist organization of Jewish and Palestinian Israeli women committed to a just resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and full respect for all women’s human rights. Bat Shalom together with the Jerusalem Center for Women (a Palestinian nongovernmental organization in East Jerusalem) forms the Jerusalem Link.

Bat Shalom organized the Women’s Emergency Network (WEN) initiative during the first days of the war on Iraq. The network was created to address the concern that while world attention was focused on Iraq, the Israeli government and/or settlers may undertake acts of violence and direct or indirect “transfer.” Eye-witness accounts of Palestinian women were recorded by Israeli women activists “in an effort to get a big picture and overall understanding of what our Palestinian neighbors are experiencing.”

The first WEN report found that life changed little for Palestinian women. Women spoke of feelings of humiliation, fatigue, frustration and fear for their families’ safety and especially the safety of their children. It was difficult to “get into your pajamas and lay your head on the pillow, believing that any moment the soldiers will bang on the door.” Unemployment created great suffering. “The financial strain on many of the women, as well as the daily violence, is exhausting. One woman told her Israeli contact that she wants peace, after recounting the sleepless nights for her and her children because of a tank shooting rounds outside her house during the hours of midnight to eight a.m.”

The opportunity to speak to an Israeli woman gave some women a much-needed opening to speak of their personal views and dreams. One woman shared that she tries to teach her children not to hate Israelis, based on their interactions with soldiers, but it is difficult. Another woman was passionate about continuing her struggle for an independent democratic state. She said, “We live with frustration but we don’t give up. It’s a strange world we live in and the women’s organizations

have not yet found the right strategy for doing something. We must feel our sisterhood, and we must work together, not only for our own society, but for all women.” *PO Box 8083, Jerusalem 91080, Israel. Tel:* +972-2-563 1477; *fax:* +972-2-561 7983. *Email:* info@batshalom.org *Website:* www.batshalom.org

PALESTINE

The Jerusalem Center for Women, founded in 1994, works for Palestinian women’s human rights and for a just peace between Palestine and Israel. *Web:* www.j-c-w.org

Middle East Nonviolence and Democracy, founded in 1998, has many projects (see article on page 3), including the *Alternative Resistance Project* which promotes nonviolent resistance to the Occupation. *PO Box 66558, Shu’fat. Tel.* +972 2 656 7310. *Email:* mend@alami.net

The Palestine Monitor: The Voice of Civil Society, it provides an alternative media view of news and opinion. *PO 1351, Ramallah, Palestine. Tel.* +972 2298 5372; *fax* +972 2298 5917. *Email:* hdip@hdip.org

Wi’am Center/the Palestinian Conflict Resolution Center promotes active nonviolence (based on traditional nonviolent mediation practices such as *sulha*) through trainings, youth activities and community outreach projects. *PO Box 1039, Bethlehem, West Bank. Tel.* +972 2 647 0513. *Email:* alashlah@planet.edu

INTERNATIONAL

The **International Solidarity Movement** (ISM) works to raise awareness of the struggle for Palestinian freedom and an end to Israeli occupation. ISM sends long-term volunteers (willing to serve three months or longer) to Palestine to support nonviolent, direct action. Such actions include the protection of Palestinian civilians (during which ISM activist Tom Hurndall was shot in Rafah, in the Gaza Strip), accompaniment of Palestinian activists; harvesting olives; and stopping house demolitions. It was during an attempt to protect the home of a Palestinian doctor from demolition that ISM activist Rachel Corrie was crushed by an Israeli military bulldozer. *Tel.* +972 2 277 4602. *Web:* www.palsolidarity.org *Email:* info@palsolidarity.org

Women Against Occupation is a Canadian-wide women’s group dedicated to ending the Occupation and to promoting peace in the Middle East. *Email:* wao@igs.net (for Toronto residents, contact the Toronto branch at wao.to@sympatico.ca). *Website:* www.nonprofit.ca/wao

Widows in Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Lessons from Afghanistan and Iraq

by Margaret Owen

“Sometimes I think I am the most unfortunate woman in the world. But next to me in the camp lives a woman who has lost her mind after her daughter was raped by fundamentalists. I go to her every day, and, upon seeing her anguish, I forget mine, which is insignificant compared to hers.”

Wahida, aged 45, war widow from Afghanistan, 1998

“I lost my husband in the first gulf war. My two older sons in the Iraq-Iran war. My youngest son was taken away from me in 1982. I do not know where he is. My father and brothers and nephews are all dead. I am old now, quite alone, and have no one to care for me. Nobody wants me. Where will I die?”

Nazreen, 79, Iraqi widow, 2003.

Armed conflict has created millions of widows and wives of the ‘disappeared’. These women and their dependents are the most vulnerable population in war’s aftermath. Yet little effort is made to identify them, address their needs or hear what they say.

Most recent conflicts have occurred in patriarchal cultures where the status of widows, even in peace time, is low. Generally, widows enjoy no rights to inheritance or land ownership; they may be inherited by a brother-in-law as part of the estate; or subject to degrading traditional

practices. They face severe restrictions and discrimination under traditional laws. The marginalization of widows becomes even more extreme with the breakdown of infrastructure and traditional support systems and the extreme poverty and social instability which follow war.

The violence continues after a cease fire. In post-conflict Bosnia, Kosovo, Rwanda, Afghanistan, Angola, East Timor and Iraq, gender-related violence escalated to unprecedented levels. Women, such as widows, without any male protector, are the most vulnerable in the unstable, militarized environment of the ‘reconstruction’ period where male perpetrators have been brutalized from decades of war. In Rwanda, widows are blamed for the spread of AIDS, stigmatized because they are rape survivors, and threatened with death if they testify in war crimes tribunals as witnesses. In Zambia, illegal refugee widows from the Congo, Rwanda and Angola are routinely arrested because they have no papers and thrown into prison. In Bosnia, Muslim widows are still living in inadequate temporary buildings a decade after the Dayton Accords, afraid to return to homes in Republica Serpska because of threats from those now occupying their property.

Yet we rarely hear widows’ voices. Some programs may address immediate short-term emergency needs, but there is a failure to meet their medium and long-term requirements, or to acknowledge widows’ valuable potential role as peacemakers and contributors to development through their economic activities. Widows are made invisible and abandoned when they should be supported as decision makers. UN Security Council Resolution 1325, intended to ensure women’s involvement in peace processes, has remained silent on the needs and roles of widows.

An Afghan widow in old Jalozai refugee camp.



Photo: M. Owen

Widows in Afghanistan

Afghan widows in refugee camps on the Pakistani border dreaded a forced return to their villages. In the camps, the Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) had organized health care, education and training. Girls and boys from different ethnic groups were learning together and widows were acquiring skills for income generation.

They had well-justified fears about the return to their villages: “*Who will rebuild our houses? Give us work, income and food and educate our children? Who will protect us from violence?*”.

Widows forced to return to Kabul from the refugee camps in Iran face homelessness and discrimination. Without a male relative as intermediary, they are unable to rent accommodation. There were often insurmountable problems in claiming rights to their old homes. Their children are not in school, because it is children’s labor (begging, selling water, collecting firewood) that sustains these families. Outside Kabul the lack of security and continuing Taliban-style attitudes to women expose widows and their daughters to violence. Poor widows are forced to sell daughters to richer families as child brides; young widows are trafficked into prostitution or ‘inherited’ by their husband’s male relatives, against their will. The Minister for Women in Afghanistan acknowledges the urgent need to focus on widows and estimates that the numbers are huge, given the millions who died over the years of conflict. Mapping and profiling of widows has not happened in Afghanistan, nor are there proposals to undertake this essential activity in Iraq.

Years after conflicts ended, widows continue to live in extreme poverty. In Bosnia, Kosovo, Rwanda, Angola, Afghanistan and Iraq widows are still without proper shelter, nutrition, health care and education for their children. Many, including refugee widows returning from camps in neighboring states, are destitute and exposed to violence. Widows’ children are routinely withdrawn from school, not only because there is no money for school fees, uniforms and books, but because reliance on child labor is an essential strategy for survival. Children that grew up during and after war are ill equipped to enter the labor market, unable to support their widowed mothers, and may be easily coerced into crime or involvement in further conflict. Impoverished young widows and widows’ daughters are easy fodder for traffickers who sell them into prostitution or as domestic slaves. Threats of violence from relatives may impede widows seeking their rights through the courts. The price of this neglect is a huge social cost for governments striving to rebuild society and a threat to peace.

Widows in Iraq

This scenario repeats itself in Iraq. Take the case of Shatha, 17, who in 1982 had only been married for eight months when her husband was taken from their home by secret police. She never found out what happened to him. In the intervening two decades she has lived in depression and despair. Without proof of death, she has never legally been classified as a widow, therefore remarriage is impossible. Her husband’s brothers and father exploited her as an unpaid cleaner in their houses, treating her

like a slave. In the last months, as mass graves are discovered and opened Shatha began to hope and dread that she would find answers to his disappearance. None have come. Shatha is still under 40 with a long life before her. She needs help now to rebuild her life and settle her personal status in law.

The repressive nature of Saddam Hussein’s regime meant a drastic curtailment of women’s rights and the introduction of new rules and policies that badly affected widows. Iraqi women traditionally enjoyed protection against the infringement of their rights. The 1970 Constitution had confirmed women’s equality. Saddam brought back polygamy, sanctioned ‘honor killings’, decreed the public beheading of women prostitutes (false allegations were common, as a way of destroying suspected dissidents) and closed down women’s organizations.

To avoid paying war pensions to widows of the Iraq-Iran war, in which millions of Iraqi soldiers died, married men were paid to take the widows in forced marriages. These widows were later abandoned and desperately need help. Today, six months after the invasion, rapes and sexual attacks on women have escalated so much that mothers fear leaving their daughters in school or university unless there is a male relative to escort them home. Widows without adult sons fear walking the streets or going out to work and so keep their daughters home.

Widowhood: a Social Issue

In several countries emerging from conflict it is estimated that well over 30% of all adult women may be widowed. Women in these countries now outnumber men: in Iraq, for example, women are 56% of the population. Possibly, more than a quarter of all children are dependent on widows for their survival. As so many of all ages are widowed—child widows, young mothers and elderly grandmothers—widowhood issues should be a concern for all of society and not seen simply as ‘women’s issues’. Yet there are no statistics on widowhood and neither the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) nor other major agencies working in post-conflict environments have made any systematic effort to gather data on this important sector of the population.

This neglect of widows has an irrevocable long-lasting impact on all of society. This is because widows are the sole supporters not just of their own children, but often of other orphans, and the sick, wounded, or elderly. Seeing widows as only ‘vulnerable victims’ is a mistake. We thwart all other conflict prevention and poverty alleviation efforts when widows are denied their basic human rights. Widows can play a crucial role in reconstruction. The children of widows, growing up in poverty, are vulnerable to recruitment into crime and

prostitution. Such wide-scale poverty breeds conflict. The term 'post-conflict' seems unduly optimistic when the desperate hopes of such social groups are not addressed.

Banding Together as Agents of Change

Widows are beginning to organize themselves. Around 50 widows' groups, mainly from Africa and South Asia, have joined the international networks of Empowering Widows in Development (EWD) and Widows for Peace and Reconstruction (WPR), sharing information on best practice and strategies to bring about widows' empowerment. In Rwanda, the organization AVEGA (Widows of the Genocide of April 1994) has done ground-breaking work in supporting widows to give evidence at the International War Crimes Tribunal for Rwanda. AVEGA helps them too with housing, child-care, training and dealing with AIDS. It has successfully campaigned for equality in inheritance and succession law and the right of women to own land. AVEGA's respected achievements demonstrate the gains to be won if widows join together.

It is both significant and moving that war widows in every post-conflict situation are demanding the same things. They share common feelings of loss and suffering and a strong desire for security, peace, and an education for their children—girls as well as boys.

What Needs to be Done

In order to ensure that the voices of widows are heard, especially in Afghanistan and Iraq, the following must be provided:

- Support for widows to form their own organizations in order to articulate their priorities, identify their basic needs and express their long-term aspirations as equal citizens in the post-conflict state.
- A National Widows' Organization as an umbrella group for grassroots widows' groups to partner with EWD and WPR.
- Establishment of a Widows' Resource/Information Center within the Ministry for Women.
- Data on widowhood to be collected by all parties involved in peace negotiations and reconstruction, in liaison with civil society organizations, especially women's and widows' groups and associations.
- Representation of widows' concerns in the Law Reform Commission so that widows' rights, in



Photo: M. Owen

A widow in Iraq, interviewed by the author.

keeping with international standards, such as the UN Convention on Ending All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and UN Security Council Resolution 1325, are enshrined in the Constitution and in civil and criminal law.

- Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and actions to implement the Beijing Platform for Action must accommodate the special situation of widows.
- Support for mapping and profiling projects, undertaken by widows' groups so as to provide information for a situational analysis of widowhood in post-conflict reconstruction.
- Widows' representatives on decision-making committees at every level.
- Funding by special scholarships for the education of widows' children.
- The UN Secretary General should appoint a Special Rapporteur to study the situation of widows in armed conflict and post-conflict reconstruction and to make recommendations.

Margaret Owen is an author (World of Widows, Zed Books, 1996), founder of 'Empowering Widows in Development' (EWD) in 1996, and convener of the network 'Widows for Peace and Reconstruction,' which was set up following the September 11 attacks to represent the millions of women widowed in armed conflict. EWD, in consultative status with the United Nations, has some 50 partner widows organizations throughout the world. EWD campaigns for widows' rights in the context of human rights, poverty reduction and the Beijing Platform for Action. Owen was a consultant to UN DAW for their publication Widowhood (available free from UN information centers). Contact: www.widowsrights.org

New Afghanistan Constitution: Room for Women?

“During the Taliban era if a woman went to the market and showed an inch of flesh she would have been flogged, now she’s raped.”

International NGO worker, quoted in Amnesty International’s *Afghanistan: No one listens to us and no one treats us as human beings. Justice denied to women*, October 2003

The security situation remains unstable inside Afghanistan, with warlords still in power in many parts of the country. In 2003, some 30 schools for girls were burnt down by extremists opposed to female education. A pre-Taliban law of the 1970s has been used to expel some 2,000 to 3,000 married young women from secondary schools, allegedly to ‘protect’ unmarried girls from hearing details about sex from married classmates. Given this, it is not surprising that mandatory education for women through secondary school is the first right listed in a new Afghan Women’s Bill of Rights.

The Women’s Bill of Rights was drafted and signed by 45 women activists from all corners of Afghanistan, during the third annual conference of Women for Afghan Women (WAW). The WAW conference “Women and the Constitution” was held in Kandahar, September 2-5, in cooperation with Afghans for Civil Society and the Afghan Women’s Network. The bill listed 16 rights for women the activists wanted secured in Afghanistan’s new constitution.

These rights included the criminalization of domestic violence, sexual harassment and “bad blood price” (the use of women as compensation for crimes by one family

against another); a minimum age of 18 years for marriage; equal pay for equal work; the right to vote and to run for public office; and the provision of up-to-date health services for women, with special attention to reproductive rights. The handwritten bill was presented to President Hamid Karzai.

The women’s conference was timed to provide input in to the drafting of a new constitution for Afghanistan. A draft of this proposed constitution was circulated in October 2003. Over half a million questionnaires were distributed in order to solicit ideas for the constitution. Some 100,000 of these were returned with reactions to the draft. Peace and security were the overwhelming concerns, along with an end to the rule of warlords, to crime and gun violence. Public meetings to discuss the draft continue.

Afghan women’s groups, and human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, have expressed disappointment over the draft proposal. WAW points out that the draft constitution, “is weak in its affirmation of women’s human rights. We are worried that conservative elements entrenched in the sacred processes of nation-building are gaining political strength and that the on-going constitutional process of ratifying the document through a 500-member Loya Jirga (Grand Assembly) will further erode the rights accorded to women. Our overriding concern is that the draft constitution with its heavy reliance on Islam leaves the law of the land vulnerable to extremist religious interpretations that are in opposition to women’s human rights.” (see Women for Afghan Women website: www.womenforafghanwomen.org)

Photo: M. Owen



Resources

Afghan women’s groups continue operating schools for girls, providing health care and support for women’s (especially widows’) small businesses. The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), which has continuously warned the international community against the power of the warlords and religious

A meeting of widows in an Afghan refugee camp.

extremists. Four new books have documented RAWA's pioneering work:

- *Meena, Heroine of Afghanistan: the martyr who founded RAWA* by Melody Ermachild Chavis (2003, St. Martin's Press, NY).
- *With All Our Strength: the RAWA* by Anne Brodsky
- *Zoya's Story: An Afghan Woman's Battle for Freedom* with John Follain and Rita Cristofari
- *Veiled Courage: Inside the Afghan Women's Resistance* by Cheryl Benard with Edit Schlaffer. For these and other items for sale which support RAWA's work, see their website www.rawa.org

The first feature length Afghan film after the fall of the Taliban is based on the true story of a 12-year old Afghan girl and her mother trying to survive the Taliban years. The Taliban shuts down the hospital where the mother worked. As they have no male guardian to accompany them in public, it is illegal for them to leave the house. They face starvation, until one of them decides to dress as a man, call herself Osama, and go out to work. *Osama* (82 minutes), by Siddaq Barmak, won several awards at the 2003 Cannes Film Festival.

Iraq: No Security for Women

The self proclaimed greatest military power in the world has been unable to provide security for women in Iraq. "Under Saddam we could drive, we could walk down the street until two in the morning. Who would have thought the Americans could have made it worse for women?" a woman in Baghdad said (see 'Veiled and Worried in Baghdad', by Lauren Sandler, *The New York Times*, September 16, 2003). She was referring to the increase in crime, which has resulted in an increase in rape, murder and abduction for Iraqi women.

Over 400 Iraqi women have been raped and abducted since the US occupation in Iraq began, said the newly formed Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI). According to OWFI, founded in Baghdad in June 2003, the occupation has led to an 'unprecedented' explosion of violence against women, which US forces are doing little to control. A July 2003 report by Human Rights Watch, 'Climate of Fear: Sexual Violence and Abductions of Women and Girls in Baghdad', confirms the lack of security (see www.hrw.org). OWFI is calling for an international campaign to stop violence against women in Iraq. OWFI operates a shelter for women in Baghdad and publishes the newspaper *Al Mosawat* ('Equality'). For more on the campaign, email the Iraq Women's Right Committee at iraqwrc@hotmail.com.

Political Exclusion

The newly appointed Iraqi Constitutional Commission, organized to draw up a new constitution, does not

include any women. Prior to this, in July 2003, the US had handpicked a 25-member governing council of Iraqis to serve as the local administrators of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to govern the country. Only three women were appointed to the CPA. One of the three women, Aquila Al-Hashimi, died from gunshot wounds after an assassination attempt in September 2003. Some fear she may have been murdered by extremists as a warning to other women not to become politically involved.

The OWFI had made an appeal to CPA administrator Paul Bremer before the assassination to pay more attention to the security situation for women. The appeal was ignored by the CPA.

Iraqi women continue to push for their rights. In October, 150 Iraqi women met at the All Iraq Women's Conference, to discuss ways to increase women's political participation. Their demands included a quota of 30 percent of women in all government positions, more women involved in drafting the new constitution, and a special division in each government ministry devoted to women's issues. Democracy, the women pointed out, must include everyone.

Solidarity

A peace group in the United States, the **Fellowship of Reconciliation** (FOR), organized a speaking tour in October 2003 of two Iraqi women leaders. Amal Al-Khedairy and Nermin Al-Mufti travelled throughout the US raising awareness of the current situation for ordinary Iraqis. The purpose of inviting Al-Mufti, a journalist, and Al-Khedairy, founder of the Baghdad cultural center *Al-Bait Al-Iraqi*, is to "create deep and lasting relationships between American and Iraqi women, men and children based on our shared humanity and common desire for global peace," said a tour organizer. Inquiries, and donations for, about the video documentary of the tour can be sent to FOR. *Fellowship of Reconciliation, Box 271, Nyack, New York 10960, USA. Tel. +1 845 358 4601, ext. 39 (fax 358 4924); email: packerman@forusa.org Web: www.forusa.org. The Middle East Digest, with up-to-date English-language translations of Arabic news media, is also available through the FOR website.*

Code Pink is an international women's action group for peace. They have sent delegations of women to Iraq and work for an end to the military occupation of the country. *Code Pink, 733 15th St., NW 507, Washington, DC 20005, USA. Tel. +1 202 393 5016 or +1 310 827 3046. Email: info@codepinkalert.org; web: www.codepink4peace.org*

Also see www.occupationwatch.org which exposes the impact of the military and economic occupation of Iraq.

Islam and Nonviolence: An interview with Rabia Terri Harris

Rabia Terri Harris is a founder and coordinator of the Muslim Peace Fellowship (MPF/Ansar as-Salam). MPF began in 1994 and is a US-based international network of Muslims who organize conferences and seminars, operate a speakers bureau and email discussion groups, publish a newsletter, and conduct nonviolence trainings. Violence: a technique of the weak

The latter activity flies in the face of attempts to portray Islam as synonymous with terrorism and holy war. “Muslims are the enemy now,” Rabia states. “When Communism collapsed, the US needed to find a bad guy quickly; otherwise the military-industrial complex might have been dismantled. If the US doesn’t have an enemy, we Americans are lost, because if there is no bad guy, how can we be the good guys?” Terrorism, including state terrorism, is commonly used by many non-Muslims, she points out. Like other forms of violence, “it is a technique of the weak.”

And holy war? “*Jihad* in Arabic means ‘effort’ or ‘struggle’. It cannot be translated as ‘holy war’. Mohammed, peace and blessings be upon him (pbbh), started using this word during the 13 years of unarmed struggle in Mecca. It did not refer at all to military engagements; the height of *jihad* was abstaining from military engagements. The intention was to contrast efforts, such as working for the welfare of the poor, with the tribal warfare that was going on all around the early community. The central point during the Prophet’s (pbbh) later ten years of armed struggle was always to contain violence, to fight in such a way that the opposition should want to join the community.”

“*Jihad*,” she continues, “can only be a struggle for social justice. It can never be a partisan struggle for power. There is no Qur’anic verse that can be used to justify war in the contemporary world. Self-defense can be legitimate, but Muslims cannot kill civilians or other Muslims. All modern weapons kill civilians as a matter of course. Talk of collateral damage is nonsense. So the armed struggle of the Prophet (pbbh) is no longer available to us. Now, *jihad* has to be unarmed struggle.”

Training Together

This means learning how to fight using nonviolent means, which points to the training aspect of MPF’s work. MPF’s nonviolence training programs illuminate the traditional call to *jihad* in consistent and provocative nonviolent terms, both for Muslims and for those of different faiths. The bi-religious nonviolence trainings, discussed between MPF and the Baptist Peace Fellowship prior to September 11, 2001, received an added urgency after the attack on the World Trade Center. The Bush Administration’s response to the attacks have targeted Muslim migrants and naturalized citizens throughout the US and created much mistrust and alienation.

Rabia Terri Harris, Islamic scholar
and coordinator of the Muslim Peace Fellowship



Photo: S. Anderson

The trainings, conducted by Muslim and Christian co-trainers, begin with crucial trust-building exercises. “We begin with a skit on converting each other,” Rabia says. “We overdo this so it becomes funny, but it puts an essential element out on the table.” The skit helps alleviate the fear on the part of both Muslim and Christian participants that the training may be a veiled attempt at proselytization or conversion to the other faith. The day-long training introduces peace games and the concepts of mainstream and marginalization. It continues with sections on the peace building inheritance in each religion and on fundamentalism. Depending on the time available, the group may study each other’s scriptures, or visit a mosque and a church. “We always set time aside for Muslim prayer,” said Rabia, “which is very appreciated. This also gives Christian participants a prayer break of their own.”

Making People Think

The trainers work in pairs for the bi-religious trainings, and are different genders. “We try to model women’s leadership,” said Rabia, “People who come see women in training positions.” Rabia, an Islamic scholar, refutes patriarchal interpretations of Islam. “In the Qur’an, the word for ‘wrongdoing’ is really ‘tyranny’. The education of women is the greatest tool in the Islamic experiment. Whoever stops, or tries to stop a woman from learning, is a tyrant in the Qur’an.”

It is mostly younger Muslims who participate in the trainings. Younger women especially respond to Rabia’s scholar-activist approach for a transformative Islamic theology, though “young Muslim men feel validated by what I say,” Rabia continued. To many, however, “I am a puzzle. I don’t fit anybody’s category. It is useful not to fit because this introduces the possibility of something new. It jolts people and makes them think.”

MPF would like to hear from Muslims working on nonviolence training, or collecting Islamic writings on peace and nonviolence. If you are interested in becoming an MPF ally, in creating a local MPF chapter, or in subscribing to MPF’s newsletter As-Salamu ‘Alaykum (USD 25 for six issues, or by donation), contact: Muslim Peace Fellowship/Ansar as-Salam, PO Box 271, Nyack, New York 10960, USA. Tel. +1 845 358 4601; fax +1 845 358 4924. Email: mpf@forusa.org; web: www.MPFweb.org

The Five Pillars of Muslim Nonviolent Action

1. The will to disobey.

Muslims are willing to disobey because for them, God alone is supreme. This total submission to Allah means a rejection of any other form of absolute authority, including the State’s. (Derives from *shahadah*).

2. Personal discipline.

Only strong personal discipline allows nonviolent actions to be carried out coherently and effectively. This quality of discipline bears little relationship to the leadership of a group, because it takes time to cultivate such a collective trait. Muslims, however, are already disciplined in their everyday life; that they pray five times a day contributes to this quality. (Derives from *salat*)

3. Commitment to action.

Islam repeatedly encourages action. Although jihad can be performed by the heart, the tongue, or the hand, the important requirement is that it be performed. Two out of the three ways of performing jihad are action-oriented. Action, therefore, is of paramount importance for Muslims, just as it is at the core of the modern theory of nonviolence. (Derives from *zakat*)

4. Courage in the face of severe repression.

Because they submit to Allah alone, Muslims do not have to fear any mortal. Muslims believe as a precept of faith that all the good and bad incidents of their lives are bestowed upon them by God. As a result, resignation while working for a just cause, without fear of punishment, becomes possible. In the final analysis, they believe God will take care of them. (Derives from *sawm*)

5. Community solidarity.

The concept of ummah (community) is very strong among Muslims, who find this unity expressed in the Qu’ran: “*And hold fast, all together, to the rope of God, and be not divided among yourselves.*” (3:103) (Derives from *hajj*)

adapted from *The Nonviolent Crescent: Two Essays on Islam and Nonviolence* by Chaiwat Satha-Anand (Qader Muheideen). *Patterns in Reconciliation* #3, IFOR Occasional Papers Series, Alkmaar, the Netherlands, 1996. Distributed by The Muslim Peace Fellowship/Ansar as-Salam, PO Box 271, Nyack, New York 10960, USA. Tel. +1 845 358 4601 Fax +1 845 358 4924. Email: mpf@forusa.org; web: www.MPFweb.org

“Arrested for anything, anywhere, at any time”: Action for Zimbabwe

“The police can arrest you for anything, anywhere, at any time.” This is the current situation in Zimbabwe according to one woman. “Prices rise almost every day, there’s no bread and no petrol to deliver goods. There is a shortage of maize meal, our staple food,” stated another Zimbabwean, who added that many ordinary people can now only afford one meal a day.

Humanitarian agencies fear that more than half of Zimbabwe’s 12 million people are threatened with starvation. Many hold President Robert Mugabe responsible for the deteriorating situation. “His policies have really destroyed the country,” said one Zimbabwean who wishes to remain anonymous. “It’s the politics of patronage. He is using the colonial card very well, claiming he is not afraid of any whites, whether British or American, then grabbing farm land and giving it away to buy support. He is using the police and army to block the people, who are feeling the pinch of all of this. The people are suffering. There’s little access to health care and serious food shortages. Mugabe is hanging on to power with bloodied hands.”

The roots of the crisis

Whites form less than one percent of Zimbabwe’s population, yet owned 40 percent of the land in 1980, when the country won its independence. White-owned land included the vast majority of prime agricultural areas. Correcting this injustice was slow work, due to a lack of funding to buy farms back and, some critics claim, a lack of political will on the part of Mugabe’s ruling party, the ZANU-PF. Then in 2000 Mugabe lost a referendum for a new constitution that would have expanded his powers. Blaming both the opposition and white farmers, ZANU-PF supporters began a violent occupation of white farms. A severe disruption in food production has been only one result. Some 250,000 farm workers have lost their jobs. Political violence is on the increase, and inflation is over 300 per cent.

The situation has “eroded the women’s empowerment movement,” said one activist. “Fifty-six percent of Zimbabwe is women,” said another activist, a member of Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA). “It is mothers who must provide sustenance despite meager budgets. It is mothers who must stand in queues, only to learn there is no food.” Increasingly, it is also women who face political violence. According to South Africa’s Institute for Democracy, between the years 2000 to 2001,

40 percent of the victims of political violence in Zimbabwe were women. Most were beaten and humiliated by being stripped naked. In June 2001 the violence took a turn for the worse, with rape by police and security forces becoming more common. Rapes are often perpetrated in front of family or community members, to intimidate opposition supporters. Women and girls are also abducted by security forces and sexually abused. The Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association estimated that in 2002 some 1,000 women were being held in militia camps.

Roses, brooms and valentines

Despite this, women are pressing for good governance, documenting human rights abuses (including the use of rape to terrorize opposition supporters), and confronting the violence.

“There are many women in the Zimbabwe Elections Support Network. Other women’s groups are documenting political gender violence or organizing marches. A new public security act now forbids meetings of over three people, without permission. The leader of the opposition has declared that we should have a nonviolent movement. Our protests now take the form of mass stay aways and peaceful marches. It is difficult to find the courage to go out on the street when soldiers are there with guns, but nonviolence will work, although there will be a lot of casualties,” said one woman in Harare.

One new women’s network, formed in 2003, is Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA). This network of black, white and Asian Zimbabweans organized their first public action on February 15. Armed with valentine notes and roses to give passers by, WOZA members marched under the banner of ‘Yes to love, No to violence’ in the capital city of Harare, in Bulawayo and in Victoria Falls. Despite their peaceful protest, the marchers in Harare was ordered to disperse by riot police—to which the women responded by sitting down on the pavement and singing the national anthem.

In Bulawayo the walk included almost 300 women, some of whom beat empty pots with cooking spoons to draw attention to food shortages. Police charged into the gathering, and 15 women were hauled to jail and held overnight. They were released the next day, and stepped out on to a pavement in front of the jail that supporters had strewn with roses.

'Mothers, stand up!'

WOZA was back again on May 10 for Mother's Day, where 400 women gathered in the public square in front of the Parliament building. They prayed and sang and swept the square with grass brooms, under the slogan 'It's time to sweep away the violence.' In Bulawayo women sang while sweeping the street, 'Mothers, stand up! Stand up and work, for life is tough and it needs work for it to be sorted out.' Forty-six women were arrested this time "for standing up for our right to say it is time to put our house (Zimbabwe) in order, time to sweep away the violence and suffering," said a WOZA activist.

The arrests did not stop the women. "WOZA is a civil action and community platform, formed to break the silence and to lobby on the bread and butter issues affecting women and their families," said one member. On 24 July, WOZA members organized another protest, this time calling for the repeal of the draconian Public Order Security Act (POSA). "We do not want POSA as it is used to stop us from grouping and talking about our problems," said a WOZA spokeswoman, arrested along with 47 others during the protest. "Since the beginning of the year about 200 women have been arrested and charge under POSA. They were peacefully trying to propose solutions, as women should. With God's help we will continue our fight for democracy, for freedom of speech and for all our rights." *Contact Women Of Zimbabwe Arise at wozazimbabwe@yahoo.com*

Resources

Inside Zimbabwe

www.daily-news.co.zw offers news and analysis by Zimbabwe's independent newspaper.

www.kubatana.net provides information on NGOs in Zimbabwe working on human rights, women's rights, development and democracy. Includes new legislation and press statements from civic groups. *Contact: The NGO Network Alliance Project, tel/fax: +263 495484. Email: nnap@kubatana.org.zw; website: www.kubatana.net*

Are they accountable? Examining alleged violators and their violations pre and post the Presidential Election March 2002, 170 pages, published in December 2002 by the *Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum*, PO Box 5465, Harare, Zimbabwe, or the *London Liaison Office*, 33 Islington High Street, London N1 9LH, UK. Tel. +44 20 7239 1194. Email: zimbabwe@article19.org; web: www.hrforumzim.com

www.zvkwana.org carries up-to-date news and debate on the crisis in Zimbabwe, plus suggestions on nonviolent actions.

Outside Zimbabwe

Isis-Women's International Cross Cultural Exchange (Isis-WICCE) is documentation and action center in Africa. The center organizes an annual training on documenting abuses of women's human rights in conflict situations, and regular exchange programs for women peacemakers together.

Isis-WICCE publications include the *Women's Peace Monitor*, *Women's World* (in French and English), and *Impact*. Isis-WICCE initiated studies and videos on women in war situations in Gulu and Teso (Uganda) are also available. *Plot 32 Bukoto Street-Kamwokya, PO Box 4934, Kampala, Uganda. Tel. 256 41 543 953. Fax 256 41 543 954. Email: isis@starcom.co.ug; web: www.isis.or.ug*

Akina Mama wa Afrika conducts an annual leadership training for young African women (between the ages of 25 to 40 years) who work with civil society. *Plot 18 Bukoto St, PO Box 24130, Kampala, Uganda. Tel. + 256 41 543 681/3 (fax 543 683); web: www.akinamama.org*



Women Uniting Against Armed Violence

by Katerina Lecchi

Women's campaigns against gun violence are dynamic and creative. The issue has become part of the agenda of many women's groups, who are taking their concerns and stories to national, regional and international forums. Women are addressing the impacts of licit and illicit firearms and gun violence both within the public sphere and at home, as well as highlighting the differences and connections between women's experiences of armed violence in the North and the South, during wars and peacetime. They are being helped by the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) Women's Network.

Gun Violence in the Home

The primary risks of violence to women come from their intimate partners. The home is much more likely to be the scene of violence than anywhere else. Gun violence can be part of a cycle of intimidation and aggression that many women experience from an intimate partner. Worldwide, at least one in every three women will be physically abused at least once, usually by an intimate partner. Most will experience multiple instances of abuse.

IANSA Director Rebecca Peters, who led the Australian campaign for tougher gun control, believes that women's organizations (in particular domestic violence support groups and women's shelters) were instrumental in the campaign's success. Over 200 groups undertook a public education and lobbying campaign to take guns away from domestic violence offenders and prevent them from acquiring new firearms. A series of family violence shootings with legally held weapons had exposed the inadequacy of existing laws. The lack of firearms registration in some states made it impossible to identify and remove firearms held by domestic violence offenders. The multi-state coordinated campaign by women's groups helped secure comprehensive firearm registration as a part of Australia's new national uniform gun laws.

'It's the Gun or Me'

A number of women-led initiatives against gun violence are happening around the world. In Brazil, outraged by the high rates of gun violence in Rio de Janeiro, the public education campaign, 'No Guns! It's the Gun or

Me' works to disarm the city. The aim is to mobilize women against armed violence and to increase popular pressure on the government to pursue rigorous disarmament initiatives. The Viva Rio campaign spreads the word that, contrary to media and cultural messages, guns do not make men sexy or desirable to women. Activists hope to expand the campaign to other states in Brazil and throughout South America.

The Mano River Union Women's Network for Peace, with members from Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, has brought women together to find ways to end the debilitating conflicts in their countries. Campaign members include grassroots organisers and women working within formal political processes nationally, regionally and internationally. Says Isha Dyfan of Sierra Leone, "Women's networks have been pivotal in the resolution of the conflict in Sierra Leone and getting negotiations started between the Mano River Countries."

Activism and Lobbying—Worldwide

From South Africa to the United States and Papua New Guinea, hundreds of thousands of women have taken to the streets to say no to gun violence. Mass protests have been organised by the Million Mom March in the United States and by Gun Free South Africa. Combined with lobbying and community education these huge public displays have highlighted women's security concerns.

In recent years, both small arms and gender perspectives in conflict prevention have found a prominent place on the international agenda. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, adopted in October 2000, emphasizes the need to incorporate a gender perspective in all areas of peace support operations, including disarmament, demobilisation and rehabilitation initiatives.

At the first US-sponsored meeting in Iraq to discuss the development of an interim government, only four out of 123 participants were women. At a subsequent meeting there were only three, out of approximately 300 participants. Not one woman is included in the legal team of lawyers and judges appointed by the US-led Coalition to develop a new legal code for the country.



The exclusion of Iraqi women from decision-making processes undermines UN Resolution 1325. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom spearheads a campaign to mobilize action around Resolution 1325 in order to increase women's access to decision making.

In the 2001 Conference on the Illicit Trade of Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects, women's issues were largely ignored. In the lead up to the 2006 Conference, women's organizations will be urging governments to integrate gender issues into their regional and international small arms initiatives. Women's organizations will continue working for strong domestic gun laws in order to stop the proliferation of firearms in their homes and communities.

Get Active

The IANSA Women's Network supports organisations working on women and violence prevention, to organize and resist gun violence. The Network connects organizations, provides a clearing house of resources and is building a united women's movement to resist gun violence around the world.

The IANSA Women's Network works to:

- Strengthen IANSA's gender sensitivity and capacity to address women's concerns
- Educate women's groups about small arms availability and misuse, and encourage them to participate in IANSA's global network
- Ensure that international disarmament forums emphasise gender perspectives and promote the priorities of women
- Raise public awareness about how gun proliferation and misuse affect women's human rights.

Katerina Lecchi works with IANSA. Contact: IANSA, 50 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7QY, UK. Tel. +44 20 7953 7648. Fax +44 20 7953 8222. Email: women@iansa.org Web: www.iansa.org/women. To subscribe to IANSA's Women's Network email list, contact IANSAwomen-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Resources:

The Office of the Special Advisor on Women's Issues (2001) Gender and Disarmament Fact Sheets. Department of Disarmament Affairs, www.disarmament.un.org/gender.htm

Armed Conflict and Women's Access to Health: Another Battle to Win

by Nadia van der Linde

The international community used the argument that the recent war in Afghanistan was fought, in part, to support women in realizing their rights. Colin Powell, US Secretary of State, declared that "the recovery of Afghanistan must entail the restoration of the rights of Afghan women." However, recent findings by Amnesty International (see www.amnesty.org) show that the international community and the Afghan government have been unable to protect women. Armed conflicts around the world deny women their right to health. The Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights urges governments around the world to take responsibility for women's health: Health for All, Health for Women.

Health for All

In 1978 governments from around the world came together and signed the Alma Ata Declaration, which committed them to provide 'health for all' by the year 2000. Alma Ata signatories recognized health as a political issue related to socio-economic justice. They agreed that the root causes, and not just the symptoms, of ill-health need to be addressed. This commitment has not been fulfilled. Indeed, for many people—especially for women—access to health has deteriorated.

Health is a basic human right, recognized in international conventions and declarations. Yet access to health for women has been ignored and even directly violated by governments and international institutions. The last two decades have seen both the simultaneous rise of privatization, structural adjustment programmes, unfair trade agreements and drug patents, and an increase in religious fundamentalism, terrorism and genocide. International and national policies that result in greater poverty or promote violence and militarism have a direct impact on women's possibilities to stay healthy and enjoy their sexual and reproductive rights.

Women's Access to Health

In order to emphasize the relevance of the Alma Ata Declaration and to highlight the importance of women's reproductive and sexual health and rights, the Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR) launched the international Women's Access to Health Campaign. This three-year long campaign, organized

in collaboration with the People's Health Movement, demands that primary health care be provided to all people everywhere, taking into account women's reproductive and sexual health and rights needs. The campaign goes beyond merely demanding access to health services, but addresses the *enabling conditions* that are essential for women to enjoy good health, like equal social, economical and political opportunities and peace.

Reproductive Health and Rights

Reproductive health is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as "the ability to have a safe, responsible and fulfilling sex life, and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to have children and to avoid to become ill or die due to a reproductive cause". In addition, sexual health "requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free from coercion, discrimination and violence." For sexual and reproductive health to be attained, the sexual and reproductive rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled. Generally speaking, these rights include the rights of all women and men to sexuality education and information, access to reproductive health care services, choice of partner, choice of whether or not and when to have children, and pursue a satisfying and safe sexual life.

Armed Conflict and Women's Access to Health

Armed conflict seriously affects women's health and reproductive rights. War causes greater health needs as a result of injuries from violent conflict, lack of hygiene and lack of access to proper water and food. At the same time, wars reduce access to health services because of lack of transportation, road blocks, curfews, closures and lower mobility of women due to lack of resources, socio-cultural stigma and care for family members. Both the quantity and quality of health services greatly decrease during violent conflict as funds are spent on the war rather than on developing health services. Health centers and related infrastructure may be severely damaged, looted or completely destroyed. War is expensive. It is funded at the cost of health care and education.

In wartime, women face extra risks of abduction, sexual violence, trafficking, slavery and harassment. Rape is

well known as a tool of ethnic cleansing and a weapon of war. Examples of rape as genocide or a strategy of war include the 1970s Bangladesh-Pakistan war and the 1990s wars in Bosnia and Rwanda. Rape not only results in trauma and possible psychiatric disorders but also in physical injuries, including possible sexually transmitted infections that will have grave consequences for the woman's health if not treated. Violence against women limits women's access to health and demands specific kinds of medical care. Women who have survived sexual violence need to be protected from further attacks and need appropriate treatment for the physical and psychological consequences. There is often ignored and very few programs, aside from those set up by women, have been developed to deal with war traumatized women.

When war is over, violence against women continues as the following experience from women in Mulukku, Nicaragua, shows: "In our region, violence has been incredible, brutal, because it has been the scene of war. Men were trained for war and violence, and we [women] had to live with them.... The war of bullets is over but these men who were in the war on one side or the other are messed up, they are frustrated, they are sick with violence and the ones who have to endure are the women, the girls and the boys." (From May 2001 WGNRR newsletter).

Armed conflict often compels women to flee their homes. Displacement can have life-threatening implications, as many people are highly dependent on the land as a source of livelihood. Displaced populations face unhygienic circumstances resulting in illness and a higher risk of sexual abuse. Health services are often not accessible and inadequate. In Senegal, for example, refugee women were only admitted to a health centre if they possessed a 'certificate of admission', which was difficult to acquire.

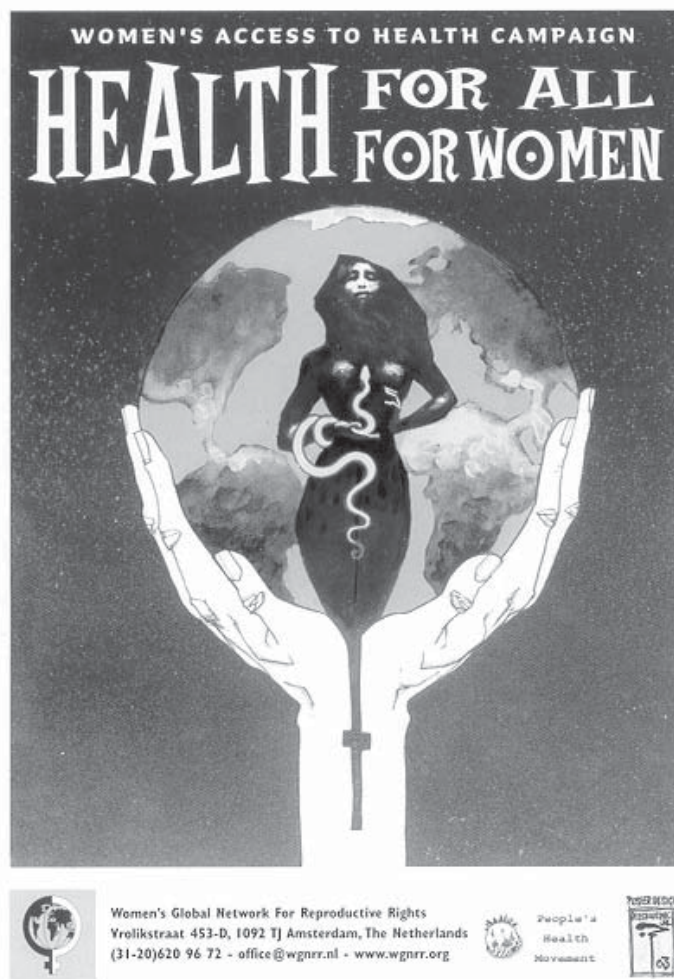
The Population and Development Program at Hampshire College has published a comprehensive document about

why militarism is bad for reproductive freedom ("Ten reasons why militarism is bad for reproductive freedom" relates to the North American situation and can be accessed at www.hamp.Hampshire.edu/~edu/~clpp/popdev.html). The reasons include the reproductive health damage that is caused by military toxins, increases in prostitution, violence against women and spread of HIV/AIDS as a result of military presence, budget cuts in social sectors to pay for war, and limited mobility as a result of militarism and increased population control. And finally: war kills people.

The Women's Access to Health Campaign joins women and men from around the world to raise awareness and actively promote women's access to health. This year's 'Call for Action' published by WGNRR focuses on governments' responsibility for women's health, calling on them to implement what they committed to in 1978. There are organising activities to promote women's health and reproductive rights around the world. In India, the women's organization Tamil Nadu Women's Forum has organized protests in front of hospitals to demand better quality and access to services. The Nigerian organisation WERRC has formed a national coalition for the Women's Access to Health Campaign to increase their advocacy impact. On all continents organizations and individuals have signed up to

support the Women's Access to Health Campaign. Let us know if you would like to join, too.

Nadia van der Linde works with the Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR), an international, autonomous network of groups and individuals who support reproductive rights for women. Contact WGNRR, Vrolijkstraat 453-D, 1092 TJ Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Email: wahc@wgnrr.nl Web: www.wgnrr.org Tel. +31 20 6209672 (fax: 6222450).



Solidarity Suggestions for May 24, 2004

- Issue a statement, press release or letter to the media, and to the editor of your favorite newspaper or magazine, to mark May 24, International Women's Day for Peace and Disarmament. Call for support for civil society initiatives in the Middle East, not military action.
- Organize a special interfaith worship service for women peacemakers; take a collection and send it to a women's peace group in the Middle East.
- Download the action pack of the International Women's Peace Service (www.womenspeacepalestine.org/wall_packet.htm) to stop the wall currently being built between Israel and Palestine. If you are a teacher or professor, assign one of the background articles to your class. Modify the letter to the editor for your local newspapers. Start a campaign to get your city council or trade union to adopt the resolution provided. Use the testimonials in your poetry, theater performances, and vigils. Boycott and divest in any companies that benefit from the building of the wall.
- Encourage your religious leaders to speak out in support of peace. Organize a workshop on women and peace issues at a seminary, rabbinical school, madrasa or other places where religious leaders are taught. Encourage their libraries to carry books and magazines on women and peace. Organize a peace walk between local churches, synagogues and mosques.
- Organize a celebration for peace on May 24; invite speakers from groups such as the Muslim Peace Fellowship, or from the local mosque.
- Support dialogue between Jewish and Muslim communities in your area. Encourage joint peace initiatives that challenge violence in your local community and throughout the world.
- Issue a press release rating your legislators on their efforts for women, peace and justice.
- Hold a fundraiser to jointly benefit a local peace group and a peace group in the Middle East.
- Support the United Nations 'Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World' (2001-2010). Contact IFOR for more information.
- Make a special effort to reach girls: talk with Girl Scouts/Guides or other girls' groups about how war and peace affect girls. Share an action with them like writing a letter to a government official or to women and girls in one of the groups listed in this pack. Sponsor an essay contest for girls to express their ideas about creating peace.
- Encourage groups to include ending violence in their agendas and events, and to increase their support for women in that part of the world working for peace.
- Inform your networks (your women's organization, place of worship, school, labor union or work place) about May 24 and possible solidarity actions for women peace activists.
- Hold a gathering to write legislators on topics like ratifying the nuclear test ban treaty; or the transfer of military funds to meet human needs; or whatever is necessary for your community.
- Encourage your school and community libraries to display on May 24 books by and about women peacemakers (for example, set aside a table near the entrance), violence against women, or about women as decision makers.
- Organize a public panel, demonstration, or film showing on May 24, to highlight women's work for peace. Invite women decision makers, and women leaders from different ethnic and religious groups in your community to speak about women's role in stopping violence.
- Invite local women's organizations together to speak on how women can contribute towards a culture of peace.
- Plan a photo exhibit or music festival with local artists that highlight the work of grassroots women peace activists.

- Invite women from all sides of a conflict in your community to come together on May 24 in order to explore ways to reduce tensions within the community or neighborhood.
- Create a website about what women are doing for peace and justice in your community, or link your existing site to ones listed in this pack.
- Create awareness in your community by holding marches and demonstrations for peace which call for public commitment to end violence. Carry posters, banners, etc. which contain clear messages and demands for the local government.
- Invite members of your community to write and submit poems which reflect how violence against women during conflict has affected their lives as well as the lives of close friends and relatives. Ask your local newspaper to publish some of these poems and/or ask a local bookstore to hold a poetry reading which features these poems and their authors. Hold a silent candle light vigil at the end of the readings in memory of all women and girls who have lost their lives to war.
- Work with the local or state media to acquire programming space where women peace activists can be highlighted.
- Sponsor an essay contest which focuses on the positive steps that governments have taken to ensure women's decision-making in security issues. Include recommendations for how your city, state or national government can further promote a culture of peace.
- Hold a festival with other groups or women business owners in your town to celebrate women and a culture of peace. Include music, dance and theater performances as well as information booths to create awareness of women's role in creating peace.
- Contact your local radio or television station and see if they would be willing to donate time for a public service announcement on an issue related to women and peace and disarmament. (For information about how to plan a radio campaign, contact the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (email: tachi@amarc.org.ec).
- Organize a discussion group on ways to support women working for peace in conflict situations.
- Translate and reprint articles from this pack (please credit the pack and don't forget to send us a copy!) to educate others about the issues.
- Ask stores, libraries, city government buildings, local radio stations, etc., to declare themselves 'violence free spaces' on May 24. Activities for this space might include, giving women an opportunity to talk about solutions to tensions within the community, or about international security, which they might not normally have the opportunity to do.
- Ride public transportation on May 24 and distribute information to women about local peace groups. Include telephone numbers for peace organizations and organizations that work to empower women and girls.
- Coordinate a city-wide essay contest for middle and high school students with a special focus on the work of women and girls for peace.
- Contact community organizations and ask them to feature a grassroots woman peacemaker in their newsletters.
- Learn more about the work of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation and the International Peace Bureau: write to our offices for more information.

INTERNATIONAL DIRECTORY OF WOMEN'S PEACE GROUPS

INTERNATIONAL

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Web: www.gn.apc.org/warresisters/
news/wriwomen.htm

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Afghanistan Women's Council
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bwu.htm

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Centre for Education and Counselling of Women

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Zenska Infoteka**Women's Information Centre**

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Center for Women War Victims

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Soldiers' Mothers of St. Petersburg

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Mothers Against Violence

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SWITZERLAND**Femmes pour la Paix**

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Frauen für den Frieden

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TANZANIA**Voice for Women**

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TIBET**Tibetan Women's Association**

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UNITED KINGDOM**Seeds of Hope /
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Women Against War
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Women for World Disarmament

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Women's Aid for Peace

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Women Against War Crime

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Women in Black-UK

Email: Wib-uk@gn.apc.org
Web: <http://wib.matriz.net/>

Women to Women for Peace

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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**Afghan Women's Mission**

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**Americans Friends of Negar
(Afghan women's association)**

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**Grandmothers for Peace
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Web: www.netcom.com/~lorjacy/gfp

Women Against Military Madness

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Women Strike for Peace

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Women Waging Peace

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VIETNAM**Vietnam Women's Union**

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ZIMBABWE**Women of Zimbabwe Arise**

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A woman's poem from Zimbabwe

GOD DID NOT MEAN IT THIS WAY!

The bouncing little girl
marks her entry into this world,
With a full baby cry
Is it a boy?
The mother questions eagerly
The nurse takes her time
She knows very well
The girl is not welcome
The mother curses softly
The energy, temporarily felt, all lost
It will not be a celebration after all.
But did God mean it this way?

Slowly the news spread,
It's another girl again...
Oh again—Oh my God!
My daughter is so unlucky!
Ah, my niece is so unlucky!
Another girl,
Oh my daughter-in-law is so unlucky!
If only it was a boy.
Still God did not mean it this way.

Oh, a son would have carried forward,
Carried forward the family name,
Yes, a son would look after
And protect the family,
A son would be bright in school,
He would drive a big car.
But a girl, oh my God
What can a girl do?
She can't protect and look after the family
Girls are not very intelligent, you know,
But did God mean it this way?

This girl has a real chance
Of starving in a world of plenty.
Look out, oh, look out please
Sexual abuse, even before she reaches five.
Look out carefully,
She might not go to school.
So much work in the home for the girl,
The big question stays
Did God mean it this way?

The guys will tell you,
Women are trouble, men!
They need to be disciplined.
Do this verbally,
Maybe a few slaps,
A few punches could do the trick,
If they make you angry,
Maybe the boot!
Did God really mean it to be this way?

Our God does not wish us harm.
We are created in God's image,
Our God cherishes us,
Our lives are meant to be a celebration,
A celebration of this love.
Can we ever rest then,
If some women,
Some women created in the image,
The image of our God,
Are not being treated right?



Illustration: Mithradir