



On June 9-11, 2011, thirty feminist activists, academics, and experts from around the world met at Rutgers University to participate in a “Strategic Conversation on the Intersections of Militarism and Violence Against Women” organized by the Center for Women’s Global Leadership (CWGL). The importance of this conversation was reinforced by a number of events that were happening around the world simultaneously:

- *7 June 2011 in Medellin, Colombia: Ana Fabricia Codoba, a committed women human rights defender and peace advocate, was assassinated while traveling on a bus because of her outspoken advocacy for the rights of displaced persons and victims of violence.*
- *10 June 2011 in Baghdad’s Tahrir Square, Iraq: Demonstrators were brutally targeted with sexual assaults and beatings by men who were reportedly bussed in by the thousands to disrupt the weekly protest. The activists, who work with the Organization of Women’s Freedom in Iraq, report that their attackers were organized and paid by government security forces, which used the un-uniformed men to avoid accountability for the violence.*
- *10-12 June in the Nyakiele area, South Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo: Reports of rape of more than 100 women as part of the ongoing conflict in the region.*

Each of these attacks provides a snap shot of different aspects of militarism and violence against women and can be tied to the prevalence of militaristic mindsets, the availability, threat and use of weapons, and gendered power relations. These cases also capture how militarism as an ideology creates a culture of fear and supports the use of violence, aggression, or military interventions for settling disputes and enforcing economic and political interests. It becomes clear that militarism is an ideology that often has grave consequences for the safety and security of women, girls, and society as a whole. Participants in the strategic conversation discussed how these issues arise and set out to investigate what the feminist response to this ideology is and should be.

Participants at the Strategic Conversation spent three days in small group sessions and report-back plenaries, brainstorming about the conceptual framing of these topics and strategies for moving feminist analysis and advocacy forward. Some of the key discussions centered on: the importance of redefining security in terms of human rights and non-military solutions, the manner in which patriarchy, militarism, and big business interests intersect, and the normalization of violence and the socialization of people to militaristic ideologies from a young age. Participants also debated about working with police and military vs. challenging current structures, possible strategies for supporting women human rights defenders and women political actors and peace-builders as they are involved in peaceful protests and social/political change efforts, and the importance of compiling both quantitative data and personal stories that help illustrate the global interconnections of militarism and violence against women.

A number of strategies emerged from the meeting, and CWGL will be working to incorporate these suggestions into its activist toolkit for this year's 16 Days Campaign. For example, CWGL plans to launch a participatory project that asks people to share, "What does security mean to you?" through short video and written entries. During the campaign, activists will also be asked to do an analysis of their country's national budget, detailing the percentages spent on military vs. spending on achieving economic and social rights. The final step will be to compare whether people's priorities regarding security match up to their government's spending.

CWGL's multi-year project on militarism and violence against women began in 2010 as the thematic focus for the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence Campaign. The initiative is part of an ongoing effort to utilize the campaign to bridge movements, organizations, and activists working on different facets of violence against women and girls. Based upon feedback received from campaign participants in 2010 and ongoing consultations with activists, CWGL will continue its work to support the development of a global, feminist critique of militarism and the violence it perpetuates. The recent Strategic Conversation centered on five crucial points of intersection of violence against women and militarism, which were drawn from last year's campaign activities. These issues included: Political violence against women, including electoral violence; Proliferation of small arms and their role in domestic violence; Sexual violence in and after conflict; Sexual and gender-based violence committed by state agents (i.e. the police or military); and finally, Bringing together women, human rights, and peace movements to challenge militarism.

To learn more about plans for the 16 Days Campaign in 2011 please visit the [campaign website](#) and read the [Theme Announcement](#), "From Peace in the Home to Peace in the World: Let's Challenge Militarism and End Violence Against Women!" A more detailed report of this Strategic Conversation and several short advocacy videos are forthcoming.