

## **Gender and Militarism**

### **War Resisters International, New Profile, and the Coalition of Women for a Just Peace**

#### **Subject: Gender in Nonviolence Training**

#### **Speech by Isabelle Geuskens, Program Manager IFOR-WPP**

Thank you for inviting me to speak here this morning!

My remarks here today are from the perspective of peace movement that holds active nonviolence as its core value since 1919, the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR). They are largely based on the experiences of one of its programs, the Women Peacemakers Program.

The International Fellowship of Reconciliation is one of the oldest peace movements in the world, and has branch, group and affiliate organizations operating in more than 60 countries. Our international secretariat is based in Alkmaar in the Netherlands. The WPP has been training women in active nonviolence since 1997.

I would like to speak about **three things**:

- First, a brief introduction to the Women Peacemakers Program,
- Then I will address gender-sensitive nonviolence training,
- And finally a few comments and recommendations for peace organizations to think about when it comes to supporting women's organizations and training.

**Why does the WPP focus on women?** Because women are often among the first to cross the lines between divided communities. Yet this work is often not recognized, nor on a governmental level, nor within peace movements. This despite United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which urges all UN member states to:

- Increase the number of women at all decision-making levels in conflict prevention, management and resolution;
- Increase support for women's peacebuilding activities;
- Support equal participation for women in peace negotiations at all levels;
- Address the specific protection needs of women in conflict situations;
- Prosecute war crimes against women.

The idea of the Women Peacemakers Program is a direct result from the fact that within IFOR, women were not represented equally during its quadrennial Councils, where all important policy decisions are made. In the early nineties one woman from Uganda pointed this out during the Council in Ecuador: "Women are working hard for peace in our communities and organizations, but where are they now, when IFOR is making the decisions?"

Thus the WPP was born (1997), in the belief that women need to be empowered, so they can claim their role in peacebuilding, and convince others of the need to do so.

## **The Women Peacemakers Program**

### **How does such a program look like – what do we do?**

We focus on:

- A) Nonviolence Education
- B) Capacity Building
- C) Engendering Peace

Let me start with **A) Education**:

Since 2002, we have been organizing **Training of Trainers (ToT)**, during which a group of women activists receive two-weeks training on topics such as active nonviolence, gender, women's leadership, fundraising, and working with the media.

After the two weeks training, the women return home, and practice their skills by organizing a nonviolence training for their own community. For this, WPP provides them with some seed funds, and a mentor, who gives them feedback on their performance as a trainer.

After a year the women return for another two-weeks training in the Netherlands, to share their experiences, and to address the challenges they experience as trainers.

The multiplying effect of our Training of Trainers program is remarkable. Since 2002, we have trained 42 women, who in turn have trained approximately 1700 people (a third of them men and boys).

We also support **women's nonviolence trainings**, either by providing seed funding, or by linking them with nonviolence trainers in their region, as well as training materials.

WPP-supported nonviolence trainings have been taking place all over the world, from Aceh, Kenya, Thailand, to the DRC and Colombia.

In our own office, we have established an **annual international orientation program** for two young women activists, who stay with us for six weeks to get acquainted with international peace work. WPP also supports women activists who lack the financial means to attend conferences or trainings abroad, so they can have the international exposure that often is reserved for their male colleagues in their own organization.

Next to **Education**, another important aspect of our work is **B) Capacity Building**.

We do this by:

**Establishing regional desks in Africa and Asia.** The desks in India and Ghana have just started, and will run their own regional women's programs. WPP has been very active in these regions the past 8 years, and with the demand growing, the time has come to address the needs from African and Asian women peacemakers in the regions themselves.

On a daily basis, we receive many emails, and refer women to relevant materials (books), or donors to support their work, as well as nonviolence trainers. Basically what we do here is **networking and information-sharing**, so women have access to the latest information that can help them in their work.

Secondly, we make sure that we **document women's opinions and experiences**, both their successes, and obstacles in peacemaking.

Finally, next to **Education and Capacity Building**; WPP's mission is to **C) engender the peace movement**.

WPP believes that gender is at the heart of violence, and should also be at the heart of nonviolence.

WPP activities in this area focus on:

- A **pilot project**, in which WPP co-operates with Peace Brigades International/Indonesia, to investigate a gender-perspective in civilian-based peacekeeping. The expected outcome is a publication, which documents current practices, and recommendations for civilian-based peacekeeping.
- We also work hard on **engendering IFOR**. A Gender Policy for IFOR was adopted at its 2006 Council, and we have now started working on implementation. For this we co-operate with the IFOR Gender Working Group. One strategy is to provide gender training for IFOR's member organizations. These trainings explain to activists the need for peace organizations to incorporate a gender perspective in their work, in order to be more effective, and truly "gender-just".

### **Gender-sensitive nonviolence training**

At the WPP we believe for a culture of peace to take root, boys can no longer be taught that violence is a measure of manhood, or that war is a proving ground for masculinity. The link between femininity, passivity and women needs to be erased, and girls must be raised to reject violent definitions of masculinity.

Peace and nonviolence organizations have often an excellent analysis of conflict and how to address it, but a gender-perspective to conflict is often lacking.

When the WPP started developing its gender analysis, many in the movement were supportive, but there was also opposition. People felt that gender was not an important topic for the nonviolence movement, that it was even divisive, this focusing on differences between men and women. And this opposition came from both men and women.

The fact that domestic violence was raised as a topic for the NV movement to look at also raised eyebrows! This was a private, not a political matter! And how nonviolent was this feminism actually – was it not just about demonizing men as perpetrators? Something the men in the nonviolence movement could just not identify with...

And what about respecting our cultures, traditions, religions, nature: men and women are just different, and hence have different roles in society. Is it not arrogant to start telling people to change their ways?

Just to name a few of the **obstacles** we face(d) along the way...

How can we speak about peaceful societies when women are facing violence behind closed doors? We put a lot of effort into explaining how violence in the home is connected to violence on a political level: it is rooted in structures that justify domination of one group over the other, and which carries the message that men should be in control, always, both in the private and the public sphere in order to be real men.

These structures leave women **disempowered**. This is why *training women* is such a high priority in our work, and should be in all **peacebuilding agendas**. Women in many cultures are operating from a disadvantaged position: Their rights are not being respected, they have been taught from early age on that they don't have the capacity to make the decisions men make, that the opinion of a man in the end weighs more than a woman's.

Hence nonviolence training for women is essential, as it provides women with **social empowerment**: It deconstructs the gender roles that limit them; increases their self-confidence as actors of change; provides them with role models, and confirms that they do have a voice that should be heard, as well as provides them with the skills and analysis to increase social mobilization and resolve conflicts peacefully.

**On a practical level**, it is important that nonviolence training is rooted in women's everyday reality and language –addressing the gender injustices in the society they operate in.

The **training setting** is also important: The length and location of trainings need to be examined so that they have the greatest possible impact. Family responsibilities already overburden many women, and physical danger or lack of money often prevents women from traveling to trainings.

It is important to consider details such as: Where do I organize my training; at what time - because all these elements determine whether and how many women will show up at the training.

In the WPP, we feel it is important that women can have a **training space for themselves**, where they can analyze their own situation, the complexity of the context from which they have to operate. Not that mixed trainings should not take place, but women need a space to open up first, to share, to understand, to feel empowered, before they can start talking on equal levels with men. And we have found that this applies to all women, wherever they come from: North, South, East, West: we have had all of them in our trainings and all experienced disempowerment because of being a woman.

**Men as perpetrators...** That is **not** what a gender perspective is about! It is about realizing that both men and women have been socialized into roles that in the end disadvantage both of them. Nonviolence theory here offers the perfect framework of

analysis: not the person is the problem, but the system. Not men are the problem, but the patriarchal systems we live in! And in order for change to take place, men need to be involved in this process, and need to understand how they are also being disadvantaged by the system.

A gender-perspective in peacebuilding hence needs to point out how men are **disadvantaged** by current gender roles: For it is men who are expected to de-humanize the “other”, to step out in a combat suit and enter fearlessly into warfare. And if they manage to get out alive, they often have to suffer their traumas in silence.

I remember being in Northern Ireland, where one young girl told me that at least she was glad to be a woman in the sense that “when the paramilitaries knock the door, they don’t come to recruit me.”

Many men face enormous pressures to conform to using violence, as this supposedly proves their manhood.

Pointing this out during training will help making men allies for more gender-sensitive peacebuilding – as men not seeing gender as an issue that concerns them, is one of the biggest obstacles women peacemakers face.

We have been incorporating this analysis in our trainings for several years now, and in 2009 we will be pioneering a Training of Trainers in gender-sensitive nonviolence for male trainers, as part of our strategy to involve more men in our work.

## **Recommendations**

Now let’s get practical: some concrete recommendations!

1. **Money matters!!** Support women’s peace initiatives financially: Even small amounts of funding for community-based women’s groups can already be very effective– from literally 150 Euros up to 15,000 Euros. E.g., WPP supported a hugely successful nonviolence training for indigenous women in Nepal. The grant for this training: USD \$600... The 20 women who attended the training went back to their local communities and replicated the training in their communities.
2. Support **translation of important UN resolutions** into local and accessible languages, and use it in your trainings. A good example of this is UN Resolution 1325 – which legislates increased representation of women at all decision-making levels. Also, there is a great need for training materials or any kind of materials such as newsletters, documentation of women’s efforts, etc. to be translated into local languages. This is needed for activists to **effectively mobilize women**, and demystify UN documents.
3. **For NGO’s** trying to get women activists to come our speak at their events, start organizing early - some women might have never traveled abroad- explain the visa processes to them thoroughly, and be prepared to jump in when women face problems at the embassy –this might require overtime work because of time differences.

4. Support women in **getting access to donors** so they can continue their work: Women activists often don't have access to deep-pocketed donors, and might need some guidance here – your reference might do the trick!
5. Most **women the WPP works with** are not conference-savvy professional NGO types. Most of them got involved in local peace initiatives because of war, and they want to do something to stop it. They're doctors, they're housewives; they're teachers. In Nagaland (in India) an informal, well-organized group of such women recently sat down in the middle of the road to stop troops from entering their village. When the WPP invited the leader of this group to our Asia consultation, she almost didn't come because she seriously couldn't believe someone would pay for her ticket. She thought that she wasn't worth it and didn't know there existed similar types of informal organizations like hers.
6. Invest in **gender training**. This is an ongoing activity as the knowledge often evaporates when people leave the organization or move on to other programs/departments. Make it a standard practice for your entire staff.
7. Invest in **nonviolence training for women** – it is a great investment in our society! We have started to do impact measurement of our Training of Trainers, and the first results are showing that women's involvement in peacebuilding and activism increased because of the training. Their increased confidence also shows in the fact that they now train others; several trainees have mobilized other men and women for peace in dangerous political situations. Despite the fact that they are often misunderstood as gender pioneers, they do not give up. Many mentioned that the training helped them to break their sense of isolation: It helps them to keep going on, knowing there are other women doing the same all over the world.
8. **Involve men** in your gender work; address the topic of **Masculinity** in your nonviolence trainings, your publications – make men see that gender is also about them, and that a gender perspective on conflict and peace is to the benefit of both men and women.

Thank you again for this opportunity to speak about the work of the WPP. There are a lot of women who would love the opportunity to share with you their stories ... Women are becoming increasingly well organized and creative. They are crossing lines and demanding to be listened to. Thank you for listening here this afternoon.

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## OVERVIEW PRESENTATION

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#### **I. Introduction**

#### **II. The Women Peacemakers Program**

- A. Education and Training
- B. Capacity Building
- C. Engendering the Peace Movement

#### **III. Gender-Sensitive Nonviolence Training**

#### **II. Recommendations:**

- 1. Money Matters
- 2. Translation of UN Resolutions
- 3. Go The Extra Mile
- 4. Help Women Get Access To Funding
- 5. Look Beyond The Obvious
- 6. Invest In Gender Training
- 7. Invest In Nonviolence Training For Women
- 8. Involve Men