

How Peace Education can help prevent war and protect women....and other living things.

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Happy International Women's Day, everyone.! Never forget that International Women's Day was proposed so that women could combine gender specific struggles with the struggle for world peace.

There are thousands of wonderful women here for this 54th annual event. Their presence has inspired me. I hope they do not go home discouraged.

We are 15 years out of Beijing, the theme of which stood on a three legged stool, equality, development and peace. The peace leg seems to already be broken.

You've no doubt sung, Rogers and Hammerstein's "You've got to be taught, before it's too late", Join me and let's sing it together. It's a participatory meeting. "Before you are six or seven or eight, to hate all the people your relatives hate, you've got to be carefully taught."

Conflict is the great teacher of hate, peace is the best teacher of understanding, said Canadian professor, Stephen Scheinberg, and I say, we'll never get to peace without peace education. And the full implementation of SC Res 1325 on women peace and security is one way to help that happen. 1325 is also built on a 3 legged stool, the 3 P's, Participation of women, Protection and Prevention of violent conflict. Participation is the essence of democracy; it is the essence of peace education and the essence of non violence. As soon we do not participate, as long as we are not at all decision making tables we are marginalized, humiliated and alienated. We don't exist.

We've been struggling for years for gender equality...unconditionally..and we've come a long way, although our supposedly gender sensitive president has only 4 women in his cabinet of 20. And we could spend the rest of the day speaking about the absence of women in important positions around the world representing the UN and the SG, and in decision making positions at headquarters. But this is a tricky issue. Women have been excluded from decision making from the get go. We keep looking and asking, where are the women? It took a woman to write the words We, the Peoples, the opening of the Charter of the United Nations. Virginia Gildersleeve, then president of Barnard College was one of only 4 women of the 160 signatories of the Charter in San Francisco 65 years ago. But what if a president had sent Sarah Pallin instead?

We're not the only country with a Sarah Pallin, or with tea parties or their equivalents run by women. We have women supporting the carrying of concealed weapons into bars; we have

women who support the death penalty, who oppose health reform and women who vote for astronomic sums of money to build omnicidal weaponry and nuclear bombs.

I used to say women count only if you count the women. Or women women everywhere and not enough in power. NO MORE. It is true that women, as a group, are more affected by violence, war, climate change, and discrimination in the work place. But is it true that women as a group, or as I have said, women women, would be better at decision making tables. It depends.

The women's movement has become sophisticated. It's time to separate the caring women who chose peace, who are sensitive to the need to reverse climate change, who support sustainable development, alternative sources for energy, who want to reduce military spending so it is never more than budgets for health and education, who work for the elimination of nuclear weapons, who want to exhaust talking before they start shooting, and who want gender equality, of course....equal pay for equal work. But put any woman in office or at a peace table without knowing her values? Put women in positions to represent other women who don't support gender equality, who won't push the envelope? Who don't keep the three legs of equality development and peace together in dynamic progress? We need peace and peaceful women, and peaceful men. I am sorry to say I believe we are going backwards.

The best part of the word equality is quality. We should start spelling it with a small e and capital Q.

At the recent meeting of the NGO Committee for the CSW, Stephen Lewis, Canada's former amb to the UN and formerly deputy chief of UNICEF, was by far the most progressive feminist on a panel with 5 or 6 women. His views on getting into gear with the new UN gender architecture with a serious budget, and an operational on the ground mandate, not an advisory role, and naming a woman to the Under Secretary General position, now, was the strongest, clearest statement and most useful and helpful for women, men and other living things everywhere.

I believe that peace education, teaching for and about, human rights, disarmament, non violence, social and economic justice, gender eQuality, sustainable development, and traditional peace practices must be integrated into all curricula. It needn't be a separate subject. The methodology is important..how we teach is as important as what we teach. Participation, critical thinking, independent inquiry, are steps to peace because they reject authoritarianism.

Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire, said William Butler Yeats

We need to work with teacher training colleges, as well as with teachers and parent organizations...we need to work in the formal sector, the educational system and the informal sector, wherever people gather they learn. We need to work with teachers who on a daily basis

encounter bullying in class, witness discrimination and humiliation, and plain hatred. We need to educate for peace. Most important, we need to support young people who share these values, and give them opportunities to teach and organize and express their passion for their future – a future free of war and poverty and discrimination.

We need to replicate the Betty Reardons of this world in all colors, sizes, and ages and send them out. We need to get out from behind our computer screens, give our ears a rest from wires, let the birds do the twittering.

I worry that more people may be educated, but what have they learned? More people may be vaccinated, but are they healthy? Is there clean water, adequate sanitation and food?

We are laden with numbers, reports of quantity. Where's the quality? Stephen Lewis claims "there is an infinitesimal difference in improvement for the condition of women since Beijing 15 yrs ago". That's a very sad state of affairs.

I spent the entire day yesterday at an International Tribunal listening to the stories of 12 brave courageous Burmese women about the atrocities, horrific abuses, perpetrated on women and men by the Burmese military regime. I will spare you the graphic details. But Chevron, China, France, Thailand, maybe others, all enjoy building pipelines, extracting oil, gas and gems from Burma, exploiting people who are victims of forced labor, rape, imprisonment, war crimes and crimes against humanity. And the international community is silent. Women in power, powerful women even sitting at the Security Council table aren't stopping business as usual to force the world's attention to war crimes and crimes against humanity in all the places where they occur.

This morning's front page of the NY Times brings news of the aspiring 14 yr old tennis star lured to the office of the president of the tennis club who was also a senior police official and groped. She committed suicide. The story says her ordeal is hardly unique. Girls are molested all the time in India; powerful officials abuse their office to avoid criminal prosecution, sclerotic courts are painfully slow and often corrupt..or as in the Burma case, nonexistent. We don't have to look far..NY State is losing a governor because of a domestic abuse scandal. He's not unique. Just because these stories are common, and are seen as normal by many does not make them normal, not acceptable, not to be tolerated at all. It has taken 20 years, but the good news is that India's middle class finally seems to be enraged at the "broken system".

In her report to the CSW, the woman representative of the Pacific island states was reported to be " "silent on the work women are doing on peace building and conflict prevention and recovery related to UNSCR 1325 etc."

There are fantastic stories of wonderful women working on post conflict reconciliation and on the prevention of armed violence. Our own peace educators, a woman from Israel and a Palestinian man have written an important section for any peace agreement on the need to review text books for presence of hatred; to hold student and teacher exchanges; and to re-

educate teachers so they help to implement the peace agreement by using it as a teaching resource in the classroom.

We can't stop. Every step forward should produce another forward step. We need to integrate the values of non violence and eQuality into our education and find the women and men who espouse those feminist progressive values to be our representatives at all tables where the fate of humanity is at stake.

Happy International Women's Day everyone.