



Is Peace Possible? A Summit of Peacemakers on Today's Frontlines

Monday, Oct. 22

In an introductory session prior to the start of, “Is Peace Possible? A Summit of Peacemakers on Today’s Frontlines,” representatives of five years of the Women PeaceMakers Program of the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice (IPJ) at the University of San Diego (USD) gathered to share their individual and collective experiences in the field. As this was the first forum in which Women PeaceMakers from varying years of the program have been brought together, a palpable energy infused the room as the women met for the first time and, in some cases, were reunited. They were joined by experts and practitioners from international peacebuilding organizations who had come to contribute their experiences and knowledge. As heads of civil society organizations, authors, journalists, lawyers and as women working toward peace with justice in their respective communities, all participants brought their voices to one another, sharing their past experiences, the current situations in their countries and the challenges they have faced. This first meeting provided the basis for connection and deeper understanding of the issues they confront as women and paved a path for dialogue in the context of the summit itself. While many of the peacemakers, such as Raya Kadyrova of Kyrgyzstan, expressed exhaustion from their continual efforts, many also conveyed sentiments of invigoration from this opportunity to unite. Sanam Naraghi Anderlini, author of *Women Building Peace: What They Do, Why It Matters* agreed that the environment of the summit was re-energizing and expressed her belief that, in such a new field, women had already made great strides in their efforts toward creating a presence for themselves in traditionally male-dominated environments.

Documentary Viewing

The Women PeaceMakers Program not only records the peacemakers’ stories through written narratives, but also through the production of documentaries by Sun & Moon Vision Productions. A viewing of the documentaries for the 2003, 2004 and 2005 programs inspired vibrant discussions among the women of ways to bridge the divide between civil society organizations and international donors, while maintaining the integrity of the formers’ agendas. Recognizing technical language and varying perspectives on best approaches as barriers between the local, national and international levels, the conversation focused on the importance of integrity and remaining true to the needs of the communities. Discussions also focused on the importance of documentation in a variety of forms to reach visibility at the international level. Additionally, the issue of articulating the question, “Why do we, as women, think we can make a difference?”, became a source of dialogue. In light of cultural norms and existing structures which deny women a role in decision-making processes, it is important to define for themselves, and for their opposition, the attributes women possess which can have a significant, positive impact on deteriorating conflict and human rights situations.

Tuesday, Oct. 23

In spite of wildfires spreading throughout San Diego County and with USD closed for the week, the official summit, “Is Peace Possible?”, opened at the Hacienda Hotel in Old Town San Diego with a warm welcome from Joyce Neu, executive director of the IPJ; Dee Aker, deputy director; and Gail Dimitroff, representative of the Fred J. Hansen Foundation. The Women PeaceMakers were joined by authors of *The Faith Club* – Ranya Idliby, Suzanne Oliver and Priscilla Warner – as well as members of the local community and representatives of four generations of Peace Writers from the Women PeaceMakers Program.

Peacemaking: Defying in the Face of Conflict

The opening panel of the summit, entitled “Peacemaking: Defying in the Face of Conflict,” focused on the challenges the Women PeaceMakers have faced and the strategies they have employed while working within conflict zones. Exploring work being done on the ground in areas as diverse as Somalia, the Philippines, Afghanistan, Palestine and Sri Lanka, many themes emerged in the challenges the panelists have confronted in their attempts to mitigate conflict. These common obstacles included overcoming cultural norms and stereotypes of gender roles in order for women to have a voice in decision-making processes and within governmental structures, the continuing escalation of violence and the struggle to bring to light sexual violence abuses committed during conflict.

In light of these challenges, the panelists each shared strategies they have used to tackle seemingly insurmountable obstacles. One commonly shared approach takes the form of uniting women across conflict divides, and thus, defying conflict-imposed segregation. While working together to transform the structures that have brought violence and disintegration into their communities and nations, women are also demonstrating the possibility of divided communities to peacefully coexist. Additional strategies included creating safe spaces for women to take respite from the atrocities of war and adversity – such as Shreen Abdul Saroor’s Model Resettlement Project in Sri Lanka and Palwasha Kakar’s gardens for women in Afghanistan – and forging alliances with men currently in decision-making posts who understand the importance of inclusion of women and gender-sensitive approaches.

Seeking Human Security: Crossing Conflict Lines

The “Seeking Human Security: Crossing Conflict Lines” panel highlighted the work being done on the ground in Cameroon, Indonesia, Uganda, Serbia and Kyrgyzstan to deconstruct damaging stereotypes of the “other” and to create situations of inclusive human security. Strategies to address these issues represented a breadth of approaches, including women’s empowerment and education in human rights. One unique approach is taking place in Indonesia, where Latifah Anum Siregar is using traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in Papuan communities to peacefully breach conflict, in contrast to structurally violent methods such as imprisonment. Additional strategies focused on the successful reintegration of child soldiers into their communities, the use of theater in reconciliation processes to create a forum for dialogue, and getting women in place to negotiate peace settlements.

Sanam Naraghi Anderlini, author of Women Building Peace: What They Do, Why It Matters

The “Seeking Human Security: Crossing Conflict Lines” session closed with a presentation by Anderlini, who explored the importance of small-scale initiatives to be visible and recognized at the national and international levels, as well as strategies for those initiatives to achieve that visibility. As a woman who has witnessed first-hand the gaps between civil society and the international

community, she acknowledged that “the level of resistance to women is profound and deep and exists at every level.” She encouraged each woman to “go home and advocate for civil society forums that are recognized.” In closing, the IPJ gave a copy of Anderlini’s recently published book to each Woman PeaceMaker.

Distinguished Lecture Series

The day’s events concluded with a Distinguished Lecture Series panel which brought together the perspectives of Joyce Neu; Lt. Gen. Joseph Olorunbun Owonibi, former force commander of the United Nations Mission in Liberia; and Priscilla Hayner of the International Center for Transitional Justice. While Neu focused on the need for a paradigm shift which includes women in peacemaking processes at all levels, similar to the recent shift in development work, Owonibi examined the inner workings of U.N. peacekeeping operations and addressed the issue of the traditions and cultures that would need to be broken and then rebuilt to allow the acceptance of women in decision-making roles. Hayner explored the role of gender in transitional justice and justice issues in peacemaking, and articulated the reasons behind her belief that women need to be central players in these processes, including women’s inherent listening skills and elevated levels of comfort in discussing sensitive issues such as sexual abuse.

Wednesday, Oct. 24

Peacebuilding: Fostering Civic Trust

The second day of the summit opened with a panel entitled “Peacebuilding: Fostering Civic Trust,” which examined the work of women in building and promoting peace as well as the development of structures which allow for that peace to be sustained. Panelists discussed their efforts to advance agendas of peace even in the most tenuous of environments, such as Nepal, Kosovo, Sierra Leone and Sudan. Panelists agreed that peace is indeed possible, yet the question of sustaining that peace is of utmost importance.

Panelists shared effective tools they have employed on the ground, including demanding women’s representation within government at all levels and encouraging women to take on leadership within their communities and governments, illustrated by Shukrije Gashi’s work in Kosovo. Additional approaches discussed in the panel included holding decision makers accountable for implementation of peace agreements and women uniting to prioritize demands, as in the example given by Rebecca Joshua Okwaci of Darfuri women who are currently working toward this aim in Sudan.

Media as a Tool for Peacebuilding

Media has the capacity to play a large role both in times of conflict and times of peace. When used in the processes of building peace, it has the ability to provide essential information while uniting communities and creating a space for the voices of marginalized populations. Several journalists addressed this issue in the final panel, “Media as a Tool for Peacebuilding,” and explored the past, present and future of its effective uses. Panelists from Sudan, Kosovo, the United States and Mexico illustrated the use of documentaries and film to educate, open forums for dialogue and generate community involvement, and explored the importance of maintaining a vital women’s press throughout the world to increase capacity for communication and awareness-raising. Panelists also discussed the use of radio as a means of civic education and women’s empowerment. Lilia Velasquez, attorney and media advocate, in discussing her work on immigration issues, stressed the importance of creatively using media while matching message to target audience. The session closed

with Kathy and Becky Sangha of Sun & Moon Vision Productions providing the generous gift of digital video cameras to each Woman PeaceMaker so that they may be able to return home and document the current situations in their individual environments and the work they are doing to better those situations.

Summit Closing

The public summit closed on Wednesday afternoon. The Women PeaceMakers and their work were acknowledged with certificates and tokens of remembrance. Following this, a private, intense interaction and dialogue began, allowing the PeaceMakers to forge the [Declaration](#) and to clarify how their global network would move forward.