

Building a Culture of Peace: Some Priorities

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If anybody had told me back in the 1960s, when I first got seriously involved in doing research on what women were really doing in the world, that in the year 2000 we would have to hold a session like this, I would not have believed them. Back in the 1960s we were beginning to uncover data that showed the amount of the basic work of the planet that was being done by women. Eighty percent of the farming was being done by women and anything that had to do with protecting the environment: the forests, the waters—you name it—much of our research showed that it was women who did it. Yes, and that it was women who managed that kind of diplomacy that would keep groups from fighting each other too much. So, I naturally expected that women would be sitting at the decision-making and policy-making tables by now, particularly on issues of national security and international security. But what we have never done, and it makes me depressed about the human species, is overcome the gendered power structure. We seem to be stuck at a certain point, and that is not a point where we should be. It is sheer craziness that at the same time the United Nations has declared an International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World (1998), the United States government's insistence on the antiballistic missile shield is about to launch us into a new arms race. All public opinion polls show that there is a great longing in this country for disarmament and a wish to be much more involved in the U.N. as well as a willingness to give up nuclear weapons. But we are stuck in our decision making by a concept of national security that is completely militarized. And the women who do all the peace work, they are invisible. I would not have believed it was possible.

So what do we do now with this year and decade in the face of this absence of women from the decision table? You will remember that, under stress, women are inclined to "tend and befriend." Where is that inclination to "tend and befriend" under stress more needed than at the tables where international negotiations take place? At the Dayton Accord Conferences, at all these places where we try to make decisions about handling conflicts turned violent: Ethiopia, Eritrea, anywhere you name in the Balkans, anywhere you name in Africa, in the Middle East, in Asia, not to mention Latin America. The skills for these negotiations are women's skills, not for biological reasons, but because they have developed in our *experience world*. We have got to share our experience world with men. But in the meantime we are not at the table. So what are we going to do with this U.N. International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence?

I would suggest what we need to do is to concentrate on certain parts of the culture of peace, parts that I am going to talk about. But just to explain what a culture of peace is, in case anybody is wondering: the main point about a culture of peace is that it deals creatively with difference and conflict, and it is a listening culture. A culture of peace needs lots of space for problem-solving. So what we need to do is create a lot of spaces for problem-solving. What I am going to suggest is that we concentrate on three things. The first is to make intensive demonstrations of what women actually are doing, because you do not read about it in the *New York Times* or the *Boston Globe*, you do not hear about it on television. The second is to mobilize a public peace process to change the paradigm inside people's heads that maintains that security comes through power over others. It never did and it never will. This paradigm that is shaping so much of our thinking could be challenged village by village, community by community, state by state, around the country, and around the world, by an intense dialogue about what peace really entails. And third and last, what we need is an intensification of all of the special peacemaking programs that are now found in a growing number of schools: peer mediation, conflict resolution, conflict transformation. These skills need to be developed from kindergarten on.

So, for the first strategy: how do we do a decade of demonstrations? Let me point out that, traditionally, women have always been peacemakers. In all the African countries that now have experienced genocide, who are the people who are bringing the genocide perpetrators and the genocide victims together? They are circles of women. And there are now two Africa-wide federations of women peacemakers working village by village to build a critical system of local peacemaking. The central theme of this process is that we have to sit together, all those who have been fighting. We have to sit together, we have to listen to each other. An important part of this system that came into being in 1985 at the Nairobi International Women's Conference is the Grassroots Organizations Operating Together in Sisterhood (GROOTS), founded at that conference. GROOTS moved the women's NGO (non-governmental organizations) world from city gals down to the village and the urban neighborhoods of cities to the poverty neighborhoods of cities. So here we have a network now of women who, wherever there is violence, implement a practice of sitting in a healing circle with the perpetrators and the victims and talking, listening, talking and dialoguing with the chiefs and going through the different levels of authority and decision making within these countries. GROOTS now has a very strong infrastructure in many African countries. But, do you ever read about them in the paper? Are they ever sitting at the table when men have their conferences? Rarely, if ever. So we need an intensive campaign to show what it is that women are doing. Who reintegrates the guerillas into civil society? It is the women. Who takes the child soldiers who have

been badly traumatized and recreates their humanness? It is the women. Who takes the soldiers who are demobilized from the governmental army and helps them become civilians, civil people? It is the women. So this is enormous work that must be given visibility. And this work must be linked with the other levels so that, for example, the Women's Committee for Peace Development can talk to the decision makers in the Organization of African Unity.

Regarding U.N.-level activities, I recently read a very encouraging piece by Judith Speen who has studied U.N. peacekeeping operations in a dozen sites where the U.N. now has peacekeepers. She finds that where there is a woman officer who has a key role in organizing and coordinating peacekeeping operations, they work better. There is a quality of calmness and sensible decision making at such sites. Yes, these teams are in constant crisis, but when there is a woman officer with authority to coordinate in those situations it makes a difference. More cooperation takes place. So, more women are very much needed in all of the U.N. peacekeeping establishments. The rest of us need to support all those groups from outside: the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom is helping support these teams; the International Fellowship for Reconciliation has a Women's Peace Project; of course United Nations Development Fund from Women (UNIFEM) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); Habitat for Humanity; a Super-Coalition; the Committee for Strategic Initiatives for Women; and many more. There are lots of groups on the outside who are sending in support. What we need to do is increase that level of support and increase the visibility of those activities so that people can see them, film them, write about them, talk about them. We have to make visible that the ones who are the most effective peacemakers in all the most genocidal and disturbed conflict areas of the world are women. It is not that men could not learn. And some men do know.

Then the second major campaign I think we have to mount is a dialogic action process, which is a public peace process of simply calling meetings in every town in the country where the question is posed: where does security come from? Creating settings in which to talk through all of these nuclear issues and the Star Wars issues and so on. Talking them through in a dialogic manner where there can be listening so that that almost hidden longing for peace in this country is brought to another level of visibility. As I said, it keeps showing up in polls but you do not see it when our government makes security decisions.

And then there is a very special track-two kind of negotiation that goes on. The Oxford Research Group was founded by an English woman, Sylan Elworthy. For many years now she has held organized nuclear dialogues around the key nuclear decisions in all the major nuclear powers and some of the minor ones. Parties come together, off the record, where they can be calm and not interrupted, and they talk and listen. What happens in

that kind of situation is that the other person is heard. The other person's position is heard. Now, this kind of second track is going to make an enormous difference. I do not know how many of you are aware that the final passage of the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) was the result of nine years of intensive dialoguing by a small group including a woman, Miriam Levering, who was the central person in it. There is a book about the whole process, *Citizen Action for Global Change: The Neptune Group and the Law of the Sea*, by Ralph Levering and Miriam Levering (1999), which is fascinating to read. Members of this group were in perpetual motion, going back and forth, back and forth among negotiating parties, sending information, memos, and so on. As a result, a constant stream of different perspectives was coming to all the decision makers in each of the countries involved. That is a peace process that does not happen in places like Dayton, Ohio. It is important to support these kinds of initiatives, knowing that it takes a long time because each person has to state her own position and it takes a while before they are ready to listen to the other. Many people feel that the Dartmouth Dialogues, which are another example of second-track diplomacy, were what really brought about the end of the Cold War. Those dialogues went on for thirty years; they were all *off the record*.

Organizing, coordinating, and sustaining extended processes like this is something that women are very good at. What is different now is that we have—and you see them at this table and you see it in many of yourselves in this room—women professionals who have both the formal, public, nobody-can-deny credentials *and* all these skills that I am talking about which are not part of your Ph.D. The things I learned that made me a peacemaker I did not learn from my Ph.D. program at the University of Michigan. That does not mean that I am not very happy that I learned what I did, but that is not where I learned peacemaking. And so, this bringing together of professional skills and these skills in dialogue and listening, this creative ability to create space for new ideas to be heard—this is a special, special task and every woman with professional training needs to take part in it somewhere, along with everyone else who has the caring skills. Miriam Levering, who was a key person in bringing about the Law of the Sea, was not a professional woman herself. But she knew how to find those women and get them into the picture.

Finally, I am going to close by telling you about a project I am involved in now working at the level of local schools. We call it Making Peace Where I Live. This project came into being because I noticed a story a couple of years ago about something the International Red Cross was doing in the Caucasus. They were teaching courses in the humanitarian laws of war to sixth graders so that if they were snatched off to be child soldiers they would know that they were not supposed to kill civilians. And I thought, what a great idea, sixth graders, because that is the top

level of schooling available to many children in the world. Making Peace Where I Live is a project where some teachers in different countries are trying to plan a core project with sixth graders that will involve finding out what the local conflicts are. It involves asking and answering the question, "Who are the peacemakers in *this* town?" And then going and talking to them, listening to them, and learning what they do. By bringing children face-to-face with local peacemakers, we can begin to teach children, and ourselves, how the process of making peace or conflict resolution can happen in our local situations, and then explore how this relates to our national governments and to the U.N. itself. We now have a few teachers committed to doing this with sixth graders in various countries. We cannot do internationally what we cannot do locally. So a culture of peace really depends on identifying and developing these skills in our local communities, in our schools.

I will close by saying that in doing this kind of work, we certainly need great clarity of mind, keen powers of observation, good listening skills, but most of all we need a kind of grounding in what it means to be human on this planet. What is our relationship with all living things? And how do we become what humans could become? How can we grow in our humanity? It all depends on what we can do in ourselves, as much as on what we can do in the world around us.

Elise Boulding, Professor Emerita, Dartmouth College, at 80 is focused on research, education, and action in the U.N. International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence. She has recently published *Cultures of Peace: The Hidden Side of History* (Syracuse University Press, 2000) and continues to be interested in replacing local prison systems with restorative justice institutions and the international Making Peace Where I Live (MAPWIL) project. Though physically unable to travel, she has begun to explore aging as a spiritual journey. Correspondence can be sent to Boulding at North Hill I 301, 865 Central Ave., Needham, MA 02492.

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