

Dignity in human relationships as a cornerstone for a culture of peace

I am honoured to be with you for this important gathering of singularly accomplished women. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to help frame the connection between dignity and the culture of peace.

What is a Culture of Peace?

I wish to reflect with you now together on the meaning of a Culture of Peace. What is a Culture of Peace? Without defining this we cannot know the direction we heading in, what we wish to achieve and what we wish to prepare for our children.

The UNO Resolution for the decade suggested the following definition:

A Culture of Peace is characterised by “Values, attitudes and behaviour patterns which reflect social interaction and promote willingness to share based on the principles of freedom, justice and democracy, all human rights and on tolerance and solidarity.

Creating a definition is not so easy. We have never experienced a Culture of Peace until now and do not have any experience to fall back on. However, if we can imagine this world and describe it in concrete terms then we will find the ways to get there.

I would like to read out a passage to you: (partial quote from "The Mother" from Maxim Gorki)

"The time will come, I know, when all mankind will be able to find peace with his neighbour, when everyone will be a star to the other and everyone will listen to his friend as he does to music.

Free people will walk the earth, human beings - great in their freedom.

They will go forth with open hearts and the heart of every individual will be free of greed and envy, so the whole of mankind will be without malice; nothing will exist which could separate the heart from the head. The life of all people will be a great kindness!

Life will increase immeasurably since free people can reach the greatest heights.

We will live then in truth, freedom and beauty and those who embrace the world with their hearts the most, those who love mankind the deepest, will be seen as the best in whom lies the greatest beauty! Life will be magnificent and magnificent will be the people who lead this life. “

In July 1997 Nobel Prize winners from all over the world signed a call to the United Nations to declare the year 2000 as a year for promoting non-violence and the years 2000 to 2010 a decade of a Culture of Peace and non-violence for the benefit of the children of the world. In their declaration they wrote:

“The future of the world hangs on our willingness to really change...

We must dare to tell young people, even in history classes, that they will contribute more to the world by living in dignity than by dying heroically ...

Persons who signed this declaration included: Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa, the 14th Dalai Lama, Mikhail Gorbachev, Shimon Perez, Rigoberta Menchú, Yasser Arafat and Lech Walesa.

The Manifesto 2000, which was surely signed by many of you, brought the basic ideas underpinning this culture to people throughout the whole world.

The first point of the manifesto stated:

1. Respect for the dignity of each human: I will respect the life and dignity of each human being without discrimination or prejudice.

What is the meaning of dignity?

The first to have formulated the term 'dignity of the human being' was a Renaissance-philosopher, Pico della Mirandola. In his speech 'De hominis dignitate' (Latin, translation: "About the dignity of the human being") (1486/87), he exposes that man is free to determine his nature in accordance with his own will. He emphasized man's freedom and God-given ability to rise to the vision of the deepest secrets of the universe. Literally, he says: 'what an enormous and admirable happiness of the human being, to whom it is given to have what he desires and to be what he wishes to be'.

The philosopher Immanuel Kant spoke of the universal dignity within each human being. He said: 'Each person honours the human dignity through his/her own person;, has the right to receive respect from others, for the said human dignity ; and is in turn, obliged to respect the human dignity in those nearest to him...'

Dignity is within us from the very beginning of life.

Therefore it is important to grant dignity first to myself and to be free of any doubt concerning it. Dignity is an immanent nature, an innate character of humans, independent from any other characteristics such as age, intelligence, abilities and sex.

There are two definitions of dignity which complement each other: Dignity as a feature and dignity as commission.

Dignity as a feature we find in the Christian teaching of man being created in the image of God and in the Declaration of Human Rights: - "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."

The very first Declaration of Human Rights is found in the Old Testament,

„So God created man in His own image,
in the image of God he created him,
male and female He created them." Genesis 1:26, 27.

This Bible passage has been nominated by Michael Horowitz, a leading US Human Rights Lawyer, as the greatest revolutionary statement ever made.

Dignity as commission is the idea of ethical autonomy of people as we find in the Enlightenment and also in the philosophy of Kant. Dignity as commission can be directed to the individual as well as to society.

In his discourse on “Grace and Dignity” (1793) Friedrich Schiller defines dignity as commission directed to the individual as follows:

“The control of sense drive through moral strength is freedom of spirit, and the expression of this phenomenon is called Dignity. Dignity has various degrees, approaching grace and beauty, it is called noble and touching (at the verge of)

awe, it will be called sovereign. The highest degree of grace is "magical", and the highest degree of dignity is Majesty.”

Dignity in the Human Rights Charter

I want to briefly remind us of the importance given to human dignity in the Human Rights Charter.

In the Preamble we read:

- Whereas *recognition of the inherent dignity* and of the equal inalienable rights of all members of the human family *is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world ...*,
- Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their *faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women* and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.

Article 1 of the Human rights declaration says: *All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.*

Dignity of Women as a cornerstone of a Culture of Peace

As this is a conference of the Women's federation of World Peace, I will now have a look at the special relation of implementing these statements regarding the dignity of women as a cornerstone of a culture of peace.

I believe that the Culture of Peace is a culture of synthesis.

A declaration from UNESCO on the contribution of women to a Culture of Peace says:

“Only as women and men together in equality and partnership can we overcome the difficulties, silence and desperation and secure the understanding, political will, creative thinking and concrete activities which are necessary for the global transition from a culture of violence to a Culture of Peace.”

Every contribution is important. Men and women have different abilities, talents and interests. Only both working together will be able to build a culture of peace. When both men and women have attained 'heartistic' maturity, this unity will be of cosmic significance. A culture of peace can only come about, when both aspects, masculine and feminine work with each other on an equal-value basis.

What is women`s situation in this partnership for a culture of peace?

In 2000 the Security Council adopted resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. The resolution was a landmark in many aspects. It emphasized the importance of women's full and equal participation in all efforts for peace and security -- before, during and after conflict.

At the 2005 World Summit held at the United Nations, leaders declared that gender equality and human rights for all are essential to advancing development, peace and security.

However, reality lags far behind the rhetoric of declarations.

Women's work continues to be undervalued, underpaid, or not paid at all. Out of more than 100 million children who are not in school, the majority are girls. Out of more than 800 million adults who cannot read, the majority are women. And violence against women and girls continues unabated in every continent, country and culture.

Shelters for women are a warning sign about the continuing oppression of women within the family.

Pornography, human trafficking for sexual exploitation, pornography, rape as a weapon of war, FGM, widow burnings, honor killings and sexualized advertisement, they all constitute violence against women, and are absolutely irreconcilable with the dignity and value of the human being, the maintenance of which is guaranteed by the International Human Rights

WFPW Europe's campaign for the Dignity of Women

I had the chance to participate in the assembly of the Commission on the Status of women in 2010 in New York and I learned that we still have a long way to go to implement the statement of The Vienna Declaration and Programme of

Action, adopted in 1993 that the human rights of women and the girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of human rights.

Faced with the continuous degradation of women in many areas, one requirement has to be met – that of discovering, nourishing and valuing this dignity within ourselves. This means that we find ourselves at a point where our personal inner development stands in direct connection with our influence on society. In other words, as soon as we have discovered the dignity within us, we have to live it, we have to carry it out to the world and begin to invest ourselves in society with our individual and different capabilities and interests.

To restore the dignity of woman in the consciousness of the society we need

- self-affirmation of being a person with a unique and valuable personality, as a being in whom divinity resides,
- consciousness that we possess special values, capabilities and talents which our society needs,
- understanding that without women there can be no peace and no further development of our society.

WFWP Europe decided to support women to rediscover the value of their original femininity, to connect to their original mind and to gain the strength to live their dignity.

How can we find a way of relating to our dignity?

We need to think about our unique and precious personalities, no matter how ideologies or religions have portrayed women historically.

It is the time to learn to cherish ourselves and realise that we possess special values, capabilities and talents which our society desperately needs.

Becoming aware of our specific feminine qualities will strengthen our self-respect and understanding, that without women and feminine qualities in men respectively, there can be no peace, and no sound development in the society and world. As soon as we manage to embrace these qualities within our consciousness, we will find our dignity. The discovery of our qualities and development of our talents requires our concentration and investment.

In July 1997, the Nobel Prize winners wrote: “The future of the world depends on our willingness to really change.” Only internal changes within us will bring about changes in the people around us. Once the internal self-perception is undergoing these changes, so will the perception others have of us. More than that – it is only based on changes within ourselves that changes will occur in the outside world.

Alliances for a culture of peace

This requires all of us -- women and men -- to work for enduring change in values and attitudes. It means working in partnership. Therefore it is logical that the relationship between man and woman should not be burdened by hostility and competitiveness. Each has their own good qualities and they complement each other. Through this unity something greater and more beautiful is created than just the sum of their individual strengths and characteristics.

Fortunately we live in a culture in which we can be easily aware of this, for which we can be grateful. But there are still many women in this world who do not have a chance to find and express their true identity. In these situations it is

necessary to give a good education to both genders to help them discover and practice the great potential of equal partnerships.

You have so much to contribute -- in leading by example, in raising awareness, in identifying women candidates for leadership positions and in helping us to be bold in our thinking. Drawing on the expertise and experience of women leaders such as all of you, with your resources, your vision and your wisdom, you are all wonderfully placed to give life to the theme of this

Peace is a special issue for women

What is the role of woman in this kind of partnership? Why are women so important for world-peace? What point of view would be most suitable to research, form and realise the potential for peace? Who would be best equipped to gain peace and to educate the next generation to build a culture of peace?

Chris Griscom says in her book, "The Feminine Way" that the feminine energy creatively strives to find and unite the common points in all ideas, by discovering the connections in seemingly opposing views, as well as finding solutions in various ideologies and philosophies. By bearing and nourishing humanity as

mothers we carry the future of humanity in our womb. Motherliness is an essential characteristic of women. Even if a woman does not bear children herself she can express this quality. Why do we call a woman who cares for others, "Mother", like "Mother Teresa"? Mother Teresa did not give birth to a child, but she was a mother to thousands of suffering people and many young women, who have wanted to follow her example.

An appeal by the West German Women's Peace Movement in December 1956 stated that peace is a special task for women. "It is women's nature to care for and protect, and we are aware that women have a responsibility in public life that no one else can fulfil."

It was the pacifist Klara Maria Fassbender's conviction that women have a special task to stand for the peaceful coexistence of all people. At the 5th anniversary conference of the West German Women's Peace Movement in 1956 she said:

"It is impossible to maintain peace and to create a new world if humankind is not filled with a new spirit. We have the responsibility to allow this spirit to

develop within us. Men must also be enlightened. We especially need a revival in political thought, in order to move away from the old political mind-set of “friend-enemy thinking”, and to realize that it must be possible to solve conflicts of interests on a higher level. As women we have the task to develop our hearts and to be open to all these things.”

Raising awareness about and “living our dignity” are the first steps of any further steps, the cornerstones for the creation of a “culture of peace”.

Let us start here and now! I thank every one of you for your commitment, and I look forward to working in partnership with you.

Thank you very much for your attention.

