

WHY I PERSEVERE IN ADVOCATING A UNITED NATIONS 5TH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN

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January 30, 2009

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Nobel Peace Prize recipient and Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, wrote: "Jean Shinoda Bolen's *Urgent Message from Mother* is a book whose time has come. Our earth home and all forms of life in it are at grave risk. We men have had our turn and made a proper mess of things. We need women to save us. I pray that many will read Bolen's work and be inspired then to act appropriately. Time is running out."

Women who stand together for justice and peace are a moral force. The United Nations now has moral authority greater than any government or institution. This is an alliance that may save us, especially with America's support. This is a time to be an advocate for a 5th United Nations World Conference on Women, which would be the most influential and far-reaching women's conference ever held. If the decision to hold it were made in 2009, it could take place in 2012, and be the first with widespread use of the internet and other 21st century technologies. In the three years it takes to plan, there would be local, national and regional meetings. Interest would grow in the conference and the possibility of going or being represented could be generated in all of the 192 countries of the UN.

Whenever possible meet in circles: Circles are an egalitarian form that helps people know each other, and fosters trust and authenticity especially when the circle has spiritual values such as compassion and wisdom, or moments of silence for prayer or reflection. Each circle is also an archetype that contributes to collective consciousness and morphic field. When a critical number of people change an attitude or perception, what was resisted becomes normal. This is how consciousness-raising groups became the women's movement and brought personal, political and economic changes for American women in the 1970s. The tipping point is the metaphoric "millionth circle," the one which added to all the rest, balances masculine and feminine, circle and hierarchy.

OVERCOMING RESISTANCE TO A 5WCW AT THE UN

A fifth World Conference on Women can only be convened by the United Nations. The four major women's conferences, including the one in Beijing, were convened by the UN, and NGOs were invited to attend, to host parallel events and to have input into the final documents. Not everyone in the UN was initially happy with the idea that the NGOs would participate in these ways and opposed inviting them. (Not everyone has ever been happy to give women a place at the table.) Most of the 40,000 people who came to Beijing in 1995, who took up the idea that "human rights are women's rights" were NGO women. Some people in the UN fear that if we had a 5th women's conference, that "the fundamentalists would dismantle the Beijing Platform for Action," which set forth premises and goals that (if followed) would result in a safer, more secure and equal world for women and therefore for children.

The eight years of Bush's people at the UN is past history. Obama has selected Hillary Clinton to be Secretary of State and Susan Rice, UN ambassador. At the 2008 CSW, Ban Ki Moon, as the new Secretary-General announced that his personal project would be to end violence against women, ending his talk by blowing a penny-whistle (symbol of Uganda's grassroots effort to stop domestic violence). Domestic violence and wars are psychologically connected, reducing one can affect the other. A campaign began for UN gender equality architecture reform (GEAR) for a stronger, well-funded women's agency, similar in concept to UNICEF for children, headed by an Under Secretary-General for

women. The momentum has since bogged down. Both a 5th women's conference and reforming the UN to create gender equality, gender mainstreaming, and human rights for women are needed. Neither will happen without effective advocacy. Both together would accomplish more for women than either alone. When implementation depends upon political will, a 5WCW could certainly help the reform efforts and implementation of the Beijing *Platform for Action*.

NOW IS THE TIME TO BE AN ADVOCATE FOR A 5WCW

I believe that the time to advocate for a 5WCW *is now*, before and at the UN CSW (Commission on the Status of Women, March 2 –13, 2009) and at ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council, July 2009). This is the year that could revive a proposal for a 5th women's world conference. In 2003, Finland proposed a UN 5th women's conference. This proposal was tabled until 2009 where it will either die on the table or be resurrected. If a 5th UN women's conference is supported, it will go to the General Assembly. Three years of planning later, there would be a 2012 conference. Many anticipate that 2012 will be a significant year, with either a golden era or the end-days the direction history will take. The four previous conferences laid a foundation or morphic field upon which the 5th conference can build. There will be American Obama appointees on CSW (2009 –2012). "Promoting a United Nations 5th World Conference on Women," a July 2005 report from a standing committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe could be a template for a new proposal, and a thorough discussion of the history and need for a conference. (documents on www.5wcw.org)

The Beijing Platform for Action (1995) set forth premises and goals that if implemented would change the world for women. It could lead to gender balance and end the mistreatment of women and children, from trafficking to sharing responsibilities and power at all levels. In 2000 however, the focus of the UN became implementing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The third of eight broad goals was "Gender equality and empower women." The MDGs is a massive plan that took 21 quantifiable targets, measured by 60 indicators. Reproductive rights which is in the Beijing Platform for Action was not one of them. Nor were women's concerns on the top of the "to –do" lists of governments or political leaders. Ten years after Beijing, the women's agenda had taken a slide backwards, women's circumstances had worsened, and there was a need for a 5WCW, as reported to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. The need is even greater now.

Beijing and Seneca Falls: I see parallels between the 1995 Beijing women's conference and the first American Women's Rights Conference held in Seneca Falls, NY (1848). Each conference produced inspired, landmark statements on the rights of women. The right to vote was the first of fifteen women's rights in the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments. The specific focus on the rights of women was lost through joining forces with the movement to abolish slavery (in the UN, it's the MDGs) In 1868, men who had been slaves were granted the right to vote. It would take women seventy years after Seneca Falls to gain this, with the passage of the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution in 1920. The Beijing PFA needs to be the focus now and only another UN women's conference can make this happen and create an even greater momentum besides.

WOMEN AS A MORAL FORCE THAT CAN END ARMED CONFLICT: The Example of Liberia

While we are well acquainted with images of women and children as victims of conflict, we need to see that women have qualities that can end armed conflicts when the psychology of the men involved,

cannot. The women of Liberia (Christian and Muslim together) brought peace to their country, following a horrific civil war where indiscriminate killings, burning homes and rape became everyday events. Grassroots women got together, sang, prayed, spoke for, demonstrated and demanded peace. Their efforts got international attention, led to peace negotiations in which women facilitated the discussion by bringing talking points from one side to the other when the men initially would not sit down in the same room. (In Northern Ireland, women did the same, which made peace negotiations possible and led to the Good Friday Peace Accords). When it became evident that the Liberian peace process was going nowhere, women locked arms together and kept the men from leaving the building until they signed the peace treaty. The women were the moral force, could not be ignored, brought international attention, and provided leverage for peace negotiators. Women from Sierra Leone and Ghana joined Liberian women in this effort, supporting each other across national boundaries as well as religious ones.

In 2003, the treaty was signed, the president was given safe-passage, the UN Secretary-General sent an envoy and 9000 blue-helmeted peacekeepers entered the capitol. The women then played another critical role in disarming the rebels, after the experts who had earlier discounted their suggestions failed. Women saw that forgiveness, reconciliation and re-entry into community of the disarmed boy-soldiers was necessary for peace. Next came democratic elections in 2005. The women of Liberia supported Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, who became the first woman president (of Liberia and in all of Africa) heading a government known for its lack of corruption among other qualities. Rebuilding a devastated, impoverished and war-torn country is being done in Liberia as it was in Rwanda after the genocide. The documentary *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* tells how women did this in Liberia.

When this film was initially shown, Sara Gould, president of the Ms. Foundation for Women said: As demonstrated so powerfully in *Pray the Devil*, women have the courage and deep commitment to pursue just solutions against all odds. **We must create connections with women's movements across the globe, to be inspired, and to learn from and support one another, as we build the collective power of women to create a better world."**

I believe that this could be best accomplished through a UN 5WCW.

Oxytocin antidote: Women such as those that ended the conflict in Liberia or the Women in Black who began as the Mothers of the Disappeared in Argentina, meet each other as if in circles rather than in hierarchies. Someone will take the lead in a specific situation, but she cannot give orders. Women who are in a risky situation together bond with each other as women do, through the stories they tell each other. Physiologically, there is an increase in oxytocin—the maternal or bonding hormone, which reduces stress and increases trust. The world needs more oxytocin, which is enhanced by estrogen, and in times of conflict and fear, there needs to be less flight or fight adrenaline, which is enhanced by testosterone.

Wars and conflicts, like gang wars in the neighborhood, are usually led by men who seek power and control, who are driven by fear of humiliation or fantasies of retaliation. The fate of the neighborhood or the world is often in the hands of psychologically adolescent, high adrenaline-testosterone men, who avoid any identification with weakness and aren't able to feel compassion. The oxytocin antidote to this is the power of women who come together to keep the children safe, who can draw upon "enough is enough" mother-bear energy and work for peace when men do not see anyway out of the conflict. Such is the situation in Gaza, the latest round in the nobody-can-win, middle-east conflict. Such were the brutal years of civil war in Liberia with 200,000 deaths without hope of a sustainable peace until women became involved.

In Liberia, a critical number of grassroots women made alliances, demonstrated, sang, talked and

prayed. Muslim and Christian women did not make religion divisive; as they saw it—they prayed to the same god and given their realistic fears and the suffering they endured, probably prayed for the same things. Women organized a peace protest that involved thousands of women and sustained it over time. Dressed in white and carrying signs for peace, they were a moral force who appealed to the combatants and to the African and International community who responded.

The women mobilized in large numbers and put pressure on men combatants and their leaders to stop the conflict and enter a peace process, while peace negotiators brokered the accords. Neither could have succeeded without the other. The moral force of UN Security Council Resolution #1325 passed in 2000 aided them. It specifically addressed contributions to conflict resolution and sustainable peace that women can make, as well as the impact of war on women.

***Women who stand together for justice and peace are a moral force.
The United Nations now has moral authority greater than any government or institution.
We need each other and the world needs us to come together for there to be peace.
We need a UN women's conference so that the Beijing Platform for Action and Resolution 1325
will become an implemented worldwide women's agenda.
We need to gather the women, save the world.***

Yes We Can!

*The moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves, too.
A whole stream of events issues from the decision.
~W.H Murray, the Scottish Himalayan Expedition*

*Whatever you can do or dream you can. Begin it.
Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.
~Goethe*

*If ever the world sees a time when women shall come together
purely and simply for the benefit of mankind,
it will be a power such as the world has never known.
~Matthew Arnold*

www.jeanbolen.com • www.millionthcircle.org • www.5wcw.org