

Draft Final Report of the
Asian Women for a Culture of Peace Conference

Hanoi, Viet Nam, 6-9 December 2000

The Asian Women for a Culture of Peace conference was organized by the Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam in cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in Hanoi, Viet Nam from 6-9 December 2000. It was convened as an Asian celebration of the International Year for the Culture of Peace (2000) and also as part of the UNESCO initiated culture of peace process, as well as in preparation for the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010).

The primary aim of the Conference was to provide a forum for Asian women to share their visions, experiences and strategies on the theme of peace building and non-violence in Asia, and to coordinate their actions for the promotion of a culture of peace as a prerequisite for sustainable and environmentally sound development.

The Conference was attended by 150 delegates and observers from 35 countries in Asia and the Pacific, as well as non-Asian countries, organizations of the UN System, national government and non-governmental organizations and regional institutions. It was also attended by a number of Guests of Honor from the Parliament and Government of Viet Nam and the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, as well as Ambassadors and Representatives of funding countries and agencies. A List of Participants is attached (Annex I).

At the opening session after the introduction by Mr. Chu Tuan Cap, President of the Viet Nam National Commission for UNESCO and Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs in Viet Nam the following persons delivered addresses:

Ms Nguyen Thi Binh Vice President of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam

Ms Sonia Mendieta de Bardaroux President of the Executive Board of UNESCO

Mr. Koïchiro Matsuura Director-General of UNESCO

Dr Hoang Van Nghien Chairman of the Hanoi People's Committee

All speakers unanimously highlighted the pressing need to integrate a gender perspective into peace building and increase women's participation in decision making at all levels. The necessity to mobilize women and men for the transformation of societies away from war and violence towards a culture of peace, respect for human rights and sustainable

development were also emphasized. The texts of the addresses delivered at the opening are attached (Annex II).

Following the inauguration, the Conference participants joined Ms Nguyen Thi Binh, Vice President of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam and Mr. Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO in opening the Exhibition on the Visual Introduction of Viet Nam Culture.

The conference proceeded to adopt the Program and Agenda, and the Organization of Work and Rules of Procedure. The following persons were then elected to constitute the core of the Conference Bureau:

President Ms. Ha Thi Khiet, President of the Viet Nam Women's Union

Vice Presidents H.E. Ms. Mu Sochua, Minister for Women and Veteran's Affairs,
Cambodia

Ms. Margaret Alva, Member of Parliament, India

Rapporteur General Ms. Savitri Suwansathit, Inspector General, Ministry of Education,
Thailand

It was also accepted that the Moderators of the Working Groups be part of the Conference Bureau as well as the four (4) Rapporteurs elected in the Working Groups and serving as Assistant Rapporteurs to the Rapporteur General.

On the evening of the Inauguration Day, the Conference participants were invited to an official dinner with traditional cultural performances, hosted by H.E. Mr. Nguyen Dy Nien, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, who also delivered an address of welcome and in support of the conference on Asian Women for a Culture of Peace and Sustainable Development. The text of his address is attached (Annex III).

Keynote Address:

Ms Ha Thi Khiet, President of the Viet Nam Women's Union delivered the keynote address in which she joined women from around the world in expressing pride in the countless achievements made in the past century by women for "equality, development and peace". She called on Asian women to prepare themselves even further for the new opportunities and challenges of the twenty-first century.

She also stressed the importance of the women's networks and organizations at the local, national, regional and international levels, which have been cooperating with the governments, NGOs, the UN agencies and social and civil organizations for women's empowerment and gender equality seen as a prerequisite for peace and development. She cited in particular, the example of the Viet Nam Women's Union, a Think Tank on

women related issues which enjoy the support of eleven million women members from all strata and has been most effective in mobilizing the support of the whole society for the development of women's education and quality of life, as well as the development of children and entire communities in Viet Nam.

She further introduced four priority objectives of the Union for the implementation of the Viet Nam National Action Plan for the advancement of women, namely,

- a. Enhancing women's economic status through job creation and income generation
- b. Promoting equal access to education at all levels for women empowerment
- c. Supporting women's health care
- d. Promoting women's participation in political and social affairs

Ms Khiet also stated that the Union now has links with more than 300 organizations in 60 countries, and again called on the Asian women to join hands and cooperate with women and men for a culture of peace. The full text of her address is attached (Annex IV).

Introduction to the Conference Themes:

Ms Ingeborg Breines, Director of the Women and a Culture of Peace Programme, UNESCO, presented a short version of the UNESCO paper entitled "The Culture of Peace from a Gender Perspective", which is the main theme of the Conference.

She stressed that the Culture of Peace initiative is a revitalization of the basic moral and intellectual mission of UNESCO as is enshrined in its Constitution, and should be seen in relation to present geopolitical situations. In the vision of a culture of peace which is to be widely shared, dialogue and respect for human rights would replace violence, inter-cultural understanding and solidarity replace enemy images, sharing and the free flow of knowledge and information replace secrecy and egalitarian partnership and full empowerment of women replace male dominance. To build a culture of peace first entails unlearning the codes of war and violence.

She referred to the UN Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, and stressed that contrary to previously held belief, we must prepare for peace instead of preparing for war, if we want peace. She called for peace education at all levels of the school system, as well as peace and conflict resolution skill and research to be made obligatory in this new millennium. Education, she emphasized, must include girls and women, and must be gender sensitive to enable inter-personal, inter-cultural and international dialogue, hence learning to live together as proposed by the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century (UNESCO, 1996).

Referring to the five-year assessment of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action, Ms Breines stated that despite some achievements, many obstacles to gender equality remain and violations of women's human rights as well as denial of equal opportunities for women and men abound.

Women's peace initiatives in many countries often stem from frustration and anger that they feel from being denied the opportunity to influence decisions although they suffer the consequences of wars and conflicts. Their activism often draws on their traditional roles and skills in conflict management and sometimes revive traditional rituals.

Male roles and masculinities in relation to a culture of peace was an important issue raised, particularly in light of statistics revealing that men are responsible for 90% of physical violence, including domestic violence, violence in schools, streets and in society at large. "Masculinity Trends" in some societies have young girls adopt violent behavior in their search for equality and recognition, while in other societies; this has led to the creation of anti-violence networks of young men.

She concluded by making a strong appeal for partnerships, networking and commitments for a culture of peace where people can live free from fear and want. The full text of her speech is attached (Annex V).

Ms Thelma Kay, Chief of the Women in Development Section, ESCAP, presented a paper on the Role and Status of Women in Asian and the Pacific in Building Peace, in which she outlined the various issues identified by ESCAP Meetings as being the fundamental and structural causes of civil and armed conflict in the region - namely deprivation, human rights violations, competition for scarce resources and most explosively, the inequality resulting from unequal distribution of power and resources. Faulty development strategies can sow the seeds for future conflict, discord and tension.

Long-term conflict prevention therefore needs to focus on balanced development and alleviation of poverty while ensuring equal sharing of benefits among all members of their society. Gender inequality and the lack of empowerment of women have direct and negative impact on the development of societies as a whole. With globalization intensified, women have increasingly become victims of problems like trafficking, sexual exploitation, irregular migration, violence and insecurity.

With regard to peace, significant efforts have been made by women in the ESCAP region characterized by (i) women's perspectives in rebuilding society and calling for an end to gender-based brutality and abuse, (ii) women's peace activism, creative and effective strategies for peace and development and (iii) women's civil society organizations in promoting human security.

However, ESCAP's statistics reveal a larger gap in gender equality at decision-making levels. Therefore, she invited the conference to pool collective wisdoms and experiences to address the issues of women's role and potential in shaping the direction of local, national and international development processes, in promoting women's voices in decision-making, ensuring accountability in the use of resources, and drawing up an action plan that focuses on development as a critical means of conflict prevention and peace building. The full text of her presentation is attached (Annex VI).

Presentation by Countries and Organizations

Twenty four speakers from regional and national organizations and countries took the floor to share their countries and organizations experiences and challenges on the theme of the Conference, particularly taking stock of the achievements made and obstacles encountered since the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995). The list of speakers is attached (Annex VII). The following common concerns and challenges were explicitly expressed in most presentations.

- Violence against women both outside and within the family,
- Trafficking in women and children,
- Economic vulnerability caused by poverty, lack of education and training, transition to a market economy, threat of HIV/AIDS, as well as environmental degradation,
- Social vulnerability caused by the break up of the family support systems, the impact of wars and conflicts on refugees and displaced women, and increased intolerance of differences

On the basis of their experiences and achievements, many recommendations were made and appear also in Annex VII.

Women's role and potential in peace building and non-violence in Asia

Prior to the Working Group discussions on Women's role and potential in peace-building and non-violence in Asia, the Moderators introduced to the plenary the themes and goals of the Working Groups.

Working Group I: Education, Training, Socialization and Research: Learning the tools for living together peacefully and with respect for differences. Moderator: Ms Diane Bretherton

The almost invisible struggle of ordinary women for peace is heroic. Their approaches and visions of a culture of peace differ from those of male decision makers. For many women peace begins in the family and is extended in an outward motion, from the home to the neighborhood, community and the nation. In the peaceful family there is equality between men and women, between young and old, and harmonious relationships with neighbors. The children in this setting could learn peace by example. The father respects the mother and both parents respect those who differ from themselves, be this difference in language, religion or culture. However, a family does not live in isolation. To be at peace the family needs security, economic well-being, respect, freedom from conscription into violence, laws which prevent abuse as well as media and toys which promote peace and knowledge of others.

Women need to be active outside as well as within the home. Due to their lack of equal representation in government, women need to work together through other channels to achieve change. Through the fields of education, training, socialization and research, we need to learn the tools for living together in the family and in the wider society. Women's strengths need to be taken to the wider arena to be the "ordinary heroines" for peace.

Working Group II: Engaging women in the mass media and communication in Asia against violence and for peace building. Moderator: Ms Susanna George.

Even as it reflects commonly held values of a given society, the potent role of media institutions in shaping and giving rise to new norms and standards is a fact that both social justice activists and those interested in maintaining the status quo of the elite have recognised. In any given situation of armed conflict, mainstream media implicitly distinguishes for us the "victim" from the "aggressor," and ultimately shapes public opinion of whom to support and whom to oppose. Rarely does mainstream media reporting provide a total picture of the historical, geo-political and socio-cultural reasons behind a conflict situation. What viewers contend with are sensationalised moments of violent events that lose their news worthiness within days and drop out of the public's sight.

Violent images are rampant in the television and film industry, so much so that people living in conditions of peace can also become familiar and desensitised to the violence, horror and gore that they witness in their entertainment including in games and toys. Stereotyped messages about the "other", i.e. anyone outside of our own framework of socio-cultural understanding is a common "sin" of mainstream media. It is easy to slip into ready stereotypes simply because stereotyped, biased, intolerant attitudes already exist to varying degrees in society.

Women who are no strangers to the experience of being stereotyped, misrepresented or made invisible by mainstream media are in some senses in the best position to help change this trend in mainstream media and all forms of communication towards creating a culture of peace. Women also have the experience of being a most significant "Other" in societies that are patriarchal and male-dominated. Women media practitioners and communicators as well as women's activists have sought out strategies both within and outside of mainstream media to transform media from an artillery of stereotypes, violent and denigrating images to a reliable source of information that promotes and defends values of equality, justice, tolerance and peace. Women have also sought to promote alternative streams of information and communications, utilising all forms of communication including street theatre, songs, poetry, posters, websites and whatever is most effective in ensuring women's advancement. Women have seen how various media tools can promote networking, solidarity building and consciousness raising and are thus interested parties in transforming all media and communication channels into vehicles for bringing about greater gender equality, social justice and a culture of peace.

Working Group III: Identifying strategies, initiatives and partners that promote access to greater economic opportunities for women and reduce poverty, focusing on the family and community. Moderator: Ms Roza Otunbayeva

The face of poverty in Asia - 70% of the world's poor - is female. The number of poor women has increased recently as a result of the regional financial crisis. Poverty is spreading to include some countries in transition towards market economies. Poverty reduction strategies call for labor absorbing economic growth to generate income -

earning opportunities for poor women, for improved access to education, health care and other social services to help the poor to take advantage of these opportunities.

Working Group IV: A gender perspective on peace building and political decision-making. Moderator: Ms Anuradha Chenoy

Women see peace not as an absence of war, but as a process that enables them to transform their lives and control their choices. As wars and conflicts continue in Asian countries, women experience that these are not isolated events but processes that begin before and continue long after the conflict situation. It is the ideology of militarism that brings militarist values into civil society and legitimizes the use of force that lies behind these conflicts. Traditional notions of national security and conflict resolution have been unable to solve these concepts and give a just solution.

Women are committed to a culture of peace and believe that a gendered human security approach would offer more viable and long-term solutions. This will involve issues of social justice, political negotiation, demilitarization, gender-balanced participation and rehabilitation as a cohesive part of security and conflict resolution.

Report of the Working Group discussions

The Working Groups submitted the reports of their discussions and recommendations to the Plenary who agreed that these recommendations were to form the base of the Plan of Action for a Culture of Peace and Sustainable Development for Asian Women.

Address by Ambassador Gertrude Mongella, Member of Parliament, Tanzania

Ms Mongella shared with the Asian Conference the experiences of the African women in the Pan African Women's Conference on a Culture of Peace, which was held in Zanzibar (1999). She informed the meeting that African women have greatly suffered from wars and armed conflicts and strongly felt that it was timely for them to set their own agenda for peace and development. This consequently led to the adoption of the Zanzibar Declaration and the African Women's Agenda for a Culture of Peace, the text of which she was happy to note has been displayed at this conference. She expressed the willingness of African women to work in close collaboration and solidarity with Asian women in promoting a culture of peace and non-violence and thanked the Government of Viet Nam and UNESCO for extending an invitation to the African Women Committee for Peace and Development (AWCPD) and to her as President of the Zanzibar Conference and Secretary General of the Fourth World Conference on Women.

Cultural Activities:

At the invitation of the Chairman of the Hanoi People's Committee, the participants attended a Water Puppet Show put on by the Thanghong Troupe. The Water Puppet is an ancient traditional folk performance and communication enjoyed by the wet rice cultivation people in the Red River Delta. It also reflects the people's love for peace and

sustainable development. The participants also had the opportunity to visit the Ethnology Museum in Hanoi, which displays the ways of life and cultural diversity of the people of Viet Nam.

Adoption of the Hanoi Declaration and Asian Women Plan of Action for a Culture of Peace and Sustainable Development

The Conference unanimously adopted the Hanoi Declaration and Asian Women Plan of Action for a Culture of Peace and Sustainable Development by acclamation. The Conference also adopted the Final Report of the Asian Women for a Culture of Peace Conference.

Vote of Thanks and Closing Ceremony

The Conference adopted a Vote of Thanks and Appreciation to the Government of Viet Nam, UNESCO and ESCAP. In her closing address Ms Kayoko Mizuta, Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCAP thanked the host country for their generous hospitality to the participants and observers attending this conference. She congratulated the Conference Bureau and participants for their fastidious efforts in developing and adopting the Hanoi Declaration and Asian Women Plan of Action for a Culture of Peace and Sustainable Development. Ms Jaroslava Moserova, President of the General Conference of UNESCO expressed her pleasure in participating in the Asian Women for a Culture of Peace Conference. She declared that women have the power to break the vicious circle of prejudice, hatred and distrust and that the best way was through the establishment of a culture of peace.

Madame Ha Thi Khiet, President of the Conference warmly thanked the participants for their rich and useful contributions as well as for the cordial cooperation, which enabled the Conference to be successful. She also thanked the Vice Presidents and the Rapporteur General, as well as all the Chairs, Moderators and the Rapporteurs of the Working Groups for their assistance and hard work. Finally, she thanked UNESCO, ESCAP and the other UN Agencies, as well as all the funding countries for their support and encouragement to the Asian Women Conference for a Culture of Peace.

Madame Nguyen Thi Hoi, Secretary General of the Viet Nam National Commission for UNESCO, expressed her sincere thanks to everybody for their friendship and cooperation in making this Conference a success, and in contributing to the Asian Women's Movement for a Culture of Peace and Sustainable Development. She looked forward to further cooperation with all the participants in implementing the adopted Plan of Action for a Culture of Peace and Sustainable Development for Asian Women and the Hanoi Declaration.

The Conference was concluded on the note of women solidarity and friendship.

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