

Hillary Clinton: Including Women in Peace Processes Is Strategic and Necessary

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Sojourners

Hillary Clinton might be out of the woods, but the media coverage she attracts serves to remind us that we, as a nation, are not.

The former secretary of state and presidential nominee returned to Washington, D.C., in late March **to present awards** to four Colombian peacemakers who played a key role in achieving last year's peace agreement between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, ending the longest-running conflict in the Western hemisphere.

In one of her first public speeches since her stunning loss in last year's election, it would be easy to focus on the shade she threw Donald Trump's way (admittedly, in just two choice quips: once sarcastically stating, "There I go again, talking about research, studies, and facts," and later declaring that the claim that women are naturally more peaceful than men belongs in the realm of "alternative facts"). And underlying these comments was a real message of warning: If global progress depends on the progress of women, the new administration's proposed budget cuts to diplomacy signals a shift that should concern us all.

Most of Hillary's speech was spent using empirical evidence to present a consistent, classic message: Including women in peace processes is strategic and necessary.

It isn't flashy, and it isn't new — much of Clinton's career has been dedicated to advocating for international women's rights. Her message emphasized that having women at the table is pragmatic in any sustainable peace process. Of course Clinton likely knew that paying lip service to her rivalry with the president was a way to get people's attention; media coverage of the event so far is indicative of this. Violence is, after all, much more attractive.

But the most notable part of the event happened after Clinton's speech. In a panel discussion that followed, all four peacemakers preached Clinton's doctrine as one they had experienced: Including women in their peace process eventually became logical and inescapable — and it had worked.

Perhaps this is the most lamentable part of the way the media has covered Hillary Clinton's re-entry into the public eye. By only focusing on conflicts in our own country, we miss the glimpses of peace right in front of us.

Like Jineth Bedoya Lima, human rights journalist and sexual violence survivor who worked tirelessly to document Colombian women's stories of sexual assault and fight for

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the government to take these cases seriously. Thanks to her work, the crime of sexual assault is now openly addressed by the peace accords. “I believe this is the most important thing Colombia can leave for the world,” Bedoya remarked during the discussion. “This peace process has made it so women can no longer be invisible.”

Like Humberto De la Calle, lead negotiator for the Colombian government, who supported the creation of the Gender Sub-Commission to ensure that a gender perspective be represented in all agreements. It was the first in documented history exclusively dedicated to issues of gender in armed conflict, and the U.N. has praised it as a “unique method in the history of conflict transformation.”

Or Maria Paulina Riveros, who co-chaired the Gender Sub-Commission alongside her FARC counterpart. Recognizing the need for written agreements to protect women and LGBTQ rights, together they outlined **eight thematic areas** for the inclusion of a gender perspective in Colombia’s peace accords, and worked to implement best-practices in the transitional justice process, including a creation of a special unit to investigate sexual violence crimes.

Or like Elena Ambrosi, thematic director of the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, who for years worked behind the scenes to draft official documents for proposals discussed at the negotiating table and ensure that gender issues were represented in negotiations.

Of course, we should not presume that the contributions of women in Colombia only exist under the surveillance of white Western eyes. Just as it would be careless to assume this is a full perspective of the story. (No FARC members were present in the conversation, the struggle for greater women representation in the peace talks was achieved on the backs of hundreds of women, including those who gathered at the 2013 National Summit of Women and Peace in Bogota to demand inclusion in the peace process, and the peace accord settlement remains a highly divisive issue throughout Colombia).

This is instead a choice of how we, as American consumers, want to exist in the world. In this case, it is we who lose if we do not pay attention, if we fail to learn from the peacemaking strategies of our neighbor because we are too consumed with our own fights to reinforce anything but media that caters to a thirst for blood.

It isn’t easy to love peace, though I think most at their core would say they want it. Peace is gritty, practical, and naked. It means surrendering to the idea that women are vital, powerful, necessary. In a global patriarchy, it will take storytelling like this to help us admit we need women to make us well. Hopefully these are the kinds of stories Hillary Clinton will continue to elevate in the future, and hopefully we will have the audacity to listen.