

Voices

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Cindy Sheehan and Iraqi Women Speak in New York in Code Pink's "Women Say No to War" Campaign

by Janet Eaton



On March 5th Cindy Sheehan spoke in the Unitarian Church on 39th Avenue in NY along with four Iraqi women brought to North America as part of Code Pink's *Women Say NO To War Campaign*. I was fortunate to be able to attend and to meet Medea Benjamin of Code Pink, and talk briefly with Cindy Sheehan, Amy Goodman and the Iraqi women, some of whom had just arrived from Baghdad for their speaking tour.

Cindy's address provided context and background on the Bush administration's bogus War on Iraq. She ably related the reasons we routinely hear advanced for discrediting George Bush's war based on "imaginary and false premises" and she spoke compellingly about the devastation being wreaked on North America, which she said was in a shambles. "We don't have a constitution: We have to take our country back."

But she also spoke from her heart as a mother who has lost her son in a needless war. She spoke

of her correspondence with an Iraqi mother whose son was killed in the same battle her son was killed in. The Iraqi woman, whose son was an insurgent, told Cindy "We don't want to kill Americans; we just want you out of our country." Cindy told us that the Iraqi women told her she was considered a sort of hero in Iraq because "I have stood up and said I don't blame the Iraqi people or the insurgents who killed my son for his death. I think George Bush might as well have pulled the trigger that put the bullet in my son's brain." Cindy connects her audience to the realities of the lives of the Iraqi women in Baghdad. "Why?" she said, "are their babies less precious than ours?" She concluded: "We have to reach across the artificial borders that are just lines on a map. We Americans are very arrogant - we have to do this - we have to reach across these borders to forge the bonds that bind us together and we have to realize that we are members of the

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Canadian Voice of Women for Peace / La Voix des Femmes Canadiennes pour la Paix
203 – 761 Queen Street West, Toronto, ON,
M6J 1G1, Canada. Phone: 416-603-7915.
Fax: 416-603-7916. E-mail: vow@ca.inter.net.
Website: www.vowpeace.org.
Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday:
9 am – 5 pm or by appointment.

National Board:

Co-Chair:

Janis Alton (905-274-6191; janis.alton@sympatico.ca)
Janet Eaton (902-542-1631; jmeaton@ns.sympatico.ca)

Secretary:

Brigid Grant (506-455-6915; cleasby@unb.ca)

Treasurer:

Noemi Volovics (416-927-9962; volovics@sympatico.ca)

International Issues:

Hannah Hadikein (250-352-3609; h_hadikin@yahoo.ca)

Membership:

Kate Brookfield (519-837-2915; kbrookfi@sympatico.ca)

Members:

Maureen Adelman (514-487-3208; amoceanmtl@aol.com)

Sarah Bollozos (905-828-4591; s.bollozos-alumni@lse.ac.uk)

NS-representative:

Carolyn Green (902-453-0699; cgreen@csbfacmgt.csbfm.dal.ca)

Past-Chair:

Marion Pape (250-537-4567; marionpape@telus.net)

Circles:

Culture of Peace:

Anne Goodman (416-657-8095; anne.goodman@sympatico.ca)

Joy Warner (905-521-0017; jw4peace@cogeco.ca)

Groundswell – Women’s Peace Exhibit:

Janis Alton (905-274-6191; janis.alton@sympatico.ca)

Middle East:

Lyn Adamson (416-596-7328; ladamson@idirect.com)

Karin Brothers (416-964-6190; kbrothers@sympatico.ca)

Nuclear Issues:

Eryl Court (416-368-3270; ekort@sympatico.ca)

Support for the Women of Afghanistan:

Kate Brookfield (519-837-2915; kbrookfi@sympatico.ca)

UN Circle:

Janis Alton (905-274-6191; janis.alton@sympatico.ca)

Cheshmak Farhoumand-Sims (416-361-2050; cheshmak@yorku.ca)

Voice of Somali Women for Peace:

Amina Sharif Hassan (905-290-9575; bodaye@sprint.ca)

Membership in Canadian Voice of Women for Peace is open to all women who share our goals to work for peace, social justice and disarmament.

human race first and Americans second – in all things... Our very soul and humanity are in jeopardy right now.” Cindy’s address can be viewed and heard at the following URL:

<http://www.wolfville.org/shared/sheehan.wmv>.

Following Cindy’s address, the four Iraqi women spoke eloquently and with candour about the situation they face as women and mothers in Iraq. They described the limited hours of electrical service, limited access to water, lack of medical supplies and drugs, lack of any semblance of democracy (contrary to US media reports), streets so violent children cannot be sent to school, and the imminent threat of civil war, which they said was being fuelled by the US. One of the women, Faiza Al-Araji, an engineer, recounts the realities of life in Iraq on her site at www.afamilyinbaghdad.blogspot.com/: “People no longer send their children to schools, because of the spreading terror ... Life is coming to a halt, and dying... There is no longer a meaning to life... You live here in safe, beautiful cities; you have security, water, electricity, hospitals, schools, restaurants, and clubs... People there are imprisoned in their houses, terrified...”

In the short video clip shown at both the beginning and end of Cindy’s speech, you will see the courageous Iraqi women who risked their lives to be in North America to tell their message in an 80 city speaking tour which Code Pink had organized.

Amy Goodman, host of *Democracy Now*, the media heroine that all progressive New Yorkers listen to, was there and spoke briefly at the end of the event about the importance of preserving independent media space noting that the critical part of any movement is independent media which can amplify the message many, many times over. She also reported the stories of the Iraqi women with a live interview the following morning on *Democracy Now*. The website for the radio show is worth visiting at: <http://www.democracynow.org/>.

We heard how Cindy, Code Pink, the Iraqi women and others planned to march to the US–UN mission the next day to deliver the petition with 100,000 signatures. (Many of us in VOW signed online.) But, Cindy was arrested the next day, manhandled, and in considerable pain as she was wrenched by her arm to a paddy wagon. One of the Iraqi women was punched in the stomach by an officer of the New York police. The following day a petition against the brutality of the New York police was circulated amongst the NGOs at Church Centre.

Cindy Sheehan is coming to Canada for four days in May and will visit Vancouver, Ottawa, Toronto and Montreal. VOW will be a national co-sponsor of Cindy’s visit and we hope that VOW members will be

able to connect with her when she is here and to perhaps co-host local events as Ontario VOW is planning to do. Cindy Sheehan and Code Pink's Medea Benjamin will be attending the World Peace Forum the Women's section of which VOW members are helping to plan.

The Board of the Canadian Voice of Women for Peace (VOW) has signed on to *Women Say NO To War* Campaign and feels there is a good fit between Cindy Sheehan's message as a mother who lost her son to George Bush's senseless war and the perspective of VOW members across this country. For as Muriel Duckworth, co-founder of NS VOW and 1000 women Nobel Peace Prize nominee, stated in regard to the origins of VOW as cited in Judy Rebick's insightful analysis of feminism in Canada *Ten thousand Roses*:

"Voice of Women founders had the idea of women as life givers. That was the basis on which a lot of women joined: accepting that women are life givers and therefore we cannot go out there killing people.

Voice of Women had our first international conference of women for peace in 1962. Almost as soon as we were founded, we began connecting with women all over the world. One of the chief underlying principles was that the women of the world were not our enemies, and we were not going to behave as if they were. We were going to make contact with them no matter where they lived."

Other References:

Go to www.democracynow.org. Under Archives search for Iraqi women and the article entitled *Iraqi Women Make Rare Trip to U.S. to Tell Their Stories of Life Under Occupation* will come up.

<http://www.villagevoice.com/news/0610,ferguson,72438,2.html>

Free Cindy Sheehan! Peace mom, three others held overnight after protest bust by Sarah Ferguson March 7th, 2006 11:36 AM.

<http://www.womensaynotowar.org/article.php?id=818>
Posted by on March 8th, 2006. We did it "Delivering 100,000 signatures to the Whitehouse."

<http://www.womensaynotowar.org/downloads/IraqiWomenReport.pdf>
Iraqi Women under Siege, Marjorie P. Lasky with contributions from Medea Benjamin and Andrea Buffa. A Report by CODEPINK: Women for Peace and Global Exchange.

from the Co-Chairs

Optimism and Momentum in VOW and UN CSW Meetings

by Janet Eaton and Janis Alton

As March draws to an end a relatively mild winter—seemingly affected by global climate change—we write with optimism amidst the pessimistic sounds of sabers rattling over Iran.

Having just returned from the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) meetings, we find it is easy to be enthused and encouraged—for in spite of the ongoing wars and conflicts that continue to rage and ravage young girls and women and the horrendous trafficking and torture to which women are being subjected in an unfettered global economy wherein unethical practices abound—in spite of it all, some wonderful and inspiring stories have emerged.

Photo by Linda MacDonald



CSW 2006. VOW Co-Chairs Janis Alton (seated far right) and Janet Eaton (next to her on left) with other Canadian women after meeting at the UN Mission with Deputy Ambassador, Gilbert Laurin. Behind Janet is Jean Sarson (see article on Ritual Abuse).

We heard stories of women being elected, in larger numbers than ever, to parliaments in many countries; women being elected as Presidents in some five countries; and on IWD, we heard an indigenous woman elected to the government of Venezuela speaking with amazing wisdom—and another incredible woman elected in Namibia speaking with such profound insight and humanity that you wanted to cheer and shout with joy.

We also heard stories of tremendous courage from African women who are making UN Resolution 1325 work for them as they go out into villages to educate the women of Liberia and West Africa on the crucial role they have to play in the future of their States as they undergo reconstruction.

Finally, we saw an astounding movie which showed a woman judge in a small town in Cameroon, dealing out justice with compassion and humour to a village accustomed to customary law and having to accept the new meaning of civil law. All of these stories bring hope that women are indeed beginning to assume decision-making positions which will bring change at the societal level. Our meeting with Judge Navanethem Pillay, presently a Judge for the International Criminal Court and who was the leader in designating rape as a war crime, has encouraged us to add to our anti-war tool chest her idea that we present a brief to the International Criminal Court.

In recent days we have seen the continued threats to stability in the Middle East and the world at large as the Bush administration renews the rhetoric of the right to pre-emptive strike in the latest reiteration of the US National Security Plan. We hope that all of you will join us in letter writing campaigns to the Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister to keep Canada out of any war on Iran. This was one of five issues we brought before our Deputy Ambassador when we met at the Canadian Mission in NY. All the while, the US economy that Bush has nearly destroyed with the massive war debt has brought the country close to the brink of collapse.

Meanwhile VOW continues to look at renewal as spring approaches—renewal of our office, our Board and our membership base. We welcome Irene Seay our new highly skilled and qualified office staff person who has replaced Noemi whose talents will be sorely missed, but fortunately not all of them, since she has

offered to come on board as National Treasurer. We are truly grateful for all the work Noemi has done to bring order to our office and organization and in assisting with the office transition.

And as for membership base VOW is active right now encouraging younger women, law students, and others in Women's Studies programs to join with us to advance some of the issues they are most concerned with in regard to women's human rights, peace and security. This was one of the objectives of the women's 25th anniversary ad hoc conference in the West block organized by Marilou McPhedran, at which Janet representing VOW, spoke in a plenary session about VOW's work and interests in bringing younger women into the movement. We are presently following up with the McGill Women's Law Caucus members who joined our delegation at the UN and several of them have expressed a keen interest in joining VOW and in volunteering research time to help with special projects. We hope that some of them and other young women from other areas and regions will also be joining us in Vancouver in June for the World Peace Forum.

We also urge all VOW members to spread the word about the World Peace Forum 2006 (See www.worldpeaceforum.ca/) and to make every effort to be there for our General Meeting as well as the WPF. An exciting WPF program is emerging with much assistance from VOW members and our General Meeting will be an important time to review VOW's new strategic plan, and to hear our keynote speaker to be announced.

New Office Administrator

by Noemi Volovics

In January, Irene Seay started working as the new office administrator in the national office of Canadian Voice of Women for Peace. She was born in Hamilton, Ontario and obtained a degree in Russian Studies at the University of Western Ontario and after moving to Halifax in 1991 a business degree at Dalhousie. She moved back to Ontario in 2002.

In 2003-04 Irene became involved with various peace groups in the Hamilton area. She did research in the field of peace studies and attended a number of events where she met Voice of Women co-chair Janis Alton. When the VOW Board was looking for a replacement for the office administrator last December, Janis remembered Irene and contacted her to see whether she was interested in the position.

In general, Irene aims to use her business skills to promote non-profit organisations and performing arts



Photo by Noemi Volovics

organisations. The job at VOW appealed to her because she wants to work for an organisation whose mission she can agree with. She considers it important to maintain her own integrity and part of that is to work for causes she believes in strongly. She was particularly impressed by VOW's work at the United Nations.

As office administrator, Irene aims to help take Voice of Women to a new generation. She believes Voice of Women deals with timely issues that need to be addressed like the militarism and unstated colonialism of the United States. She is also convinced it is time for women to have a more public and unified voice and feels strongly that in order to achieve this women need to organise themselves in

their own way, different from the existing patriarchal power structure.

Apart from the regular administrative tasks, Irene would like to devote her time at the office to help develop the VOW website. She regards the internet as a crucial means of communication in this day and age to link likeminded people all over the world. She also wants to focus on membership development through our website and through representing VOW at events where we can draw new members. Finally, she offers to assist in fundraising efforts for specific projects.

After having spent some time with Irene showing her the administrative ropes and seeing her in action I am confident the Board has picked the right candidate for the job and Irene will make a great contribution to VOW. Welcome!



column Talking Peace

by Brigid Grant

Differing opinions about the deployment of Canadian troops to Afghanistan are in danger of fracturing the peace movement just as

disputes about the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia did once before. It is no accident that inflammatory slogans like "support our troops" are heating the emotional climate and making more strident the debate between those opposing Canadian military involvement in Afghanistan and those supporting some peace making military actions. Weakening the solidarity of the peace movement can only strengthen those who, like our present government, support Bush's "Long War."

Most of us recognize that the mass media manipulates us, most obviously through advertisements which attach our desires, contrary to any logic, to products: sex to cars, care of family to unhealthy fast foods, and furry kittens to toilet paper. It does not take the Pentagon planting "news" stories without attribution in the press in Iraq to remind us that the emotional stew and misdirection of advertising exists in other aspects of the mass media as well.

We know manipulation is taking place when people, who get their information primarily from the mass media, unexpectedly get hot and bothered about a simple but absolutely nonsensical narrative with strong emotional triggers (for example, that Iran needs to be attacked now, perhaps even with tactical

The Rosalie Bertell Resource Centre

by Norla Antinoro, curator

The Rosalie Bertell Resource Centre is located in Guelph, Ontario. The Centre is getting off the ground again and the collection can be viewed or borrowed by appointment.

We are offering a DVD called *Invisible Ballots* for viewing by individuals or groups. It is an op-ed piece about the problems inherent in the use of electronic voting machines, which has happened in several states in the US and stands a chance of being done in Canada too if the companies that sell these things can get the powers that be convinced that they are good. That would be a terrible shame, because electronic voting machines mean there is no verifiable record of the way people voted. If the machine crashes or someone hacks them, there is no paper trail to verify the votes. No recounts are possible in case of error.

It is a good film. If anyone is interested in viewing it, they can contact me by email and we can arrange it (norla@mytown.ca).

We also have a small selection of books by Dr. Bertell and others that can be borrowed by VOW members.

nuclear weapons, because it is probably thinking of making a nuclear bomb someday).

The narrative usually brought forward in support of Canadian military activity in Afghanistan is that we are building and protecting schools available to girls and boys alike, while the enemy, the Taliban, blows up schools and denies girls education. We forget that Canadian soldiers are serving under American command and that American forces are using torture and bombardments, usually involving depleted uranium and the death of civilians, to suppress resistance to their occupation. Surely Canada would help more girls go to school if, instead of waging war beside the Americans, it gave the cost of the deployment to UNICEF, which had plans in March, 2005, to educate an additional 500,000 girls in that year alone.

Easy as it is to disentangle the kittens from the toilet paper in the case above, it is harder to tease apart deeper manipulations. Few of us question the simple good of schools, even after we learn that the textbooks UNICEF is distributing come from Columbia University to replace texts prepared by the University of Nebraska for the US government to give to their clients, the Mujahideen, during the war against the

Soviets. These are the textbooks (later used by the Taliban) from which, according to Dr. Sima Samar, both boys and a few girls did their math by adding and subtracting bullets and calculating the weight of bombs needed to flatten a house. Those texts, in turn, replaced the ones the Soviet-supported socialist government used for the secular education of both girls and boys. Yet few of us, even those who have read about the Madrasses, seem to be able to keep in mind that schools are always ideological and never simple.

It has never been more important than it is now for the peace movement to cut through prevailing narratives to find a firm footing for our decency. We must not conduct our discussions using the terms thrust before us by the media, but must drag into the light of day fundamental ethical concerns such as the dichotomy between private property and the commons, the conflict which lies at the root of our deep concerns about poverty, health care, climate change, the right to water and so much else. Above all we must resist all temptation to support any kind of war as a path to peace.

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Peace Exhibit Circle

by Janis Alton

We are a circle of participants which stretches from Saltspring Island to Nova Scotia intent on mounting an exhibition portraying a century of Canadian women's work for peace. The detail of the exhibition has been completed for some time and after many tries to secure a national venue we have succeeded. The Canadian War Museum will include the exhibition story into the larger story of the Canadian peace movement. The promised opening is July 2009, and will occupy all of the temporary gallery space, which is considerable. The CWM also tells us they expect to be able to create smaller exhibits from the grand one, suitable for travel.

In the meantime, the World Peace Forum (WPF) affords yet another opportunity. Inspired by a Bertha von Suttner exhibition viewed in Prague, we will mount an abbreviated version of our "*Groundswell: Women Building A Culture of Peace*" story using ten fabric panels with select images and text. We welcome to our team former VOW staff person Noemi Volovics, wearing her photographers hat, Irene Seay, Noemi's replacement, as our WPF exhibit coordinator, and Linda Fitzgibbon, a new VOW Ottawa member already busy uncovering some VOW history for her PhD thesis, as a research assistant. Can you see our smiles?

from the Circles

UN Circle

by Janis Alton and
Cheshmak Farhoumand Sims, co-chairs

Our ten UN representatives form the "backbone" of VOW's UN Circle along with an informal group of interested supporters, largely based in and around Toronto. Representing us are: Anne Goodman (ON), Stella LeJohn (MN), Shirley Farlinger (ON), Madeleine Gilchrist (ON), Amina Sharif Hassan (ON), Joan Russow (BC), Janet Eaton (NS), and we two Ontario-based co-chairs. Our meetings resemble a spider web of connections by phone and e-mail and the occasional external meeting to share information more widely. From these, largely, we have gathered the list of interested others.

Every four years, since 1997, we submit to the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) a detailed listing of our activities undertaken such as attending conferences and other UN meetings, our links with specialized agencies such as UNESCO, actions we have undertaken in the implementation of UN resolutions, consultation and cooperation with officials of the UN Secretariat, preparation of papers, and other examples of consultative and substantive activities. We even surprise ourselves with the accumulation of evidence we submit! Each time, the member governments of ECOSOC scrutinize our reply and determine if we can remain affiliated. Our latest quadrennial report is available from the office.

Since 1995, a favourite VOW activity has been to "watch-dog" the work of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and to find the inroads into its work, which fit our ever-expanding niche of building sustainable peace. This year was no exception. Look for a story or two in this issue. To share this experience further, some of us organize local "UN Talk-Back" sessions such as the one held in Toronto March 22 entitled "No Woman? No Peace or Development!" For the first time, we partnered with some non-VOW members for an even broader grip on the kaleidoscope of events that make up this annual, two-week meeting. Once more in early September, because of our UN affiliation, any VOW member can participate in the free, three-day UN conference for non-governmental organizations. Can we give you more details?



VOW Members Celebrating International Women's Day

2006 International Women's Day Celebrated in New Brunswick

by Beth Paynter

On March 8, New Brunswick Voice of Women hosted one of its most successful International Women's Day Potlucks. Aboriginal elders, students, pensioners, recent immigrants, long term city residents and a handful of children, about 120 women altogether, contributed to the astonishing feast this occasion always produces.

We were pleased to be joined for the celebrations by Senator Sandra Lovelace Nicholas, a driving force in securing rights for aboriginal women in Canada. Representatives from the New Brunswick Aboriginal Women's Council attended the potluck and presented Senator Lovelace Nicholas with a hand carved plaque. Two of New Brunswick's most influential politicians in terms of women's issues were also on hand: the leader of the New Brunswick New Democratic Party, Allison Brewer; and the new Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, Joan MacAlpine-Stiles.

The evening was a blend of socializing, great food, music, reflection on accomplishments and reenergizing for continuing the work for peace and social justice. The Raging Grannies, always a highlight of this event, sang in support of the grandmothers of Africa and against nuclear weapons and war. Representatives of the New Brunswick Coalition for Pay Equity presented an ironic account of the economic position of women in this province where women earn 88% for work of equal value done by men and where pay equity legislation for the

private sector does not exist. The 2006 Report Card on the Status of women in New Brunswick was available and can be viewed online at www.acswcccf.nb.ca. There were several opportunities for those in attendance to sign anti-war petitions.

Senator Lovelace Nicholas.

More than 20 years ago, Lovelace Nicholas challenged discriminatory provisions of the Indian Act which deprived aboriginal women of their status when they married non-aboriginals. She was instrumental in bringing the case before the United Nations Human Rights Commission and in lobbying for the 1985 legislation that reinstated the rights of First Nation women and their children. Named a senator in September 2005, Lovelace Nicholas was awarded the Order of Canada in 1990 and the Governor General's Award in commemoration of the Persons Case in 1992.

The featured speaker, Karen Seabrook, talked about the work of *Inter Pares* both in Canada and with women refugees in Thailand, many of whom are victims of rape by the Burmese Military. *Inter Pares*, which means Among Equals, is an international organization based in Ottawa that addresses social justice issues in Canada and overseas through advocacy, research, support and accompaniment. They support alternative approaches for equitable social, economic and political development by addressing present needs while advocating for permanent change. To learn more about *Inter Pares* see their website at

www.interpares.ca. The evening ended with dancing to live music by a women's band, ERA, who describe their music as Rock Music for Social Change.

This event was an opportunity to bring together women who are otherwise separated by the divisive forces of patriarchy and its companions, injustice and war. It showed us that feminism is alive and well in New Brunswick and that our humble potluck supper can be a springboard for change.

International Women's Day: Prince Edward County

by Myrna Mather

Once again this year, the International Women's Day Committee of Prince Edward County, Ontario has turned to Voice of Women for inspiration. Along with a celebration of women's talents and accomplishments, it was decided to contribute to the Girl-Child Project in Kenya and to the Relief Kits for a Family of Four. Both of these projects were described in recent VOW newsletters. On March 8, approximately 120 people

gathered at the Bloomfield Town Hall to be part of singing, drumming, drama and dancing.

Interspersed among these activities, we were reminded that around the world, women are in need of attention and support. Cash donations were requested in order to build latrines in Kenyan schools for young girls so that they will be encouraged to go to school and complete their education. In addition each person was asked to bring an item on the list for

the relief kits as they came in the door. (The poster advertising the event listed the kinds of items needed.) At the end of the day, \$2,000 was raised, (enough to build two latrines), and over 300 items were collected for the relief kits. The organizers were heartened by the generous response of this small community.

This year, the event was sponsored by the Women's Institutes of the County. They provided money for refreshments, hall rental and advertising. This group has a long history of supporting and

encouraging the advancement of women on many levels: education, awareness and economic security, and we are hoping that this partnership will continue. The IWD committee would like to thank VOW for the information necessary to carry out these projects. Two days later on March 10, Prince Edward County women heard speaker Nancy Ruth, Senator and member of VOW, as a fundraiser for the local organization that supports women who are victims of domestic violence.

VOW Member Addresses Canadian Parliamentarians

On International Women's Day, March 8, 2006, Julia Morton-Marr gave the keynote address to Canadian Parliamentarians: House of Commons, The Senate, and the Parliamentary Library. The full text of her speech *Beyond Laws: The Right to Be Me /Au delà des lois: le droit d'être moi* is posted on our website www.vowpeace.org. Select "VOW IN ACTION" from tabs on left and then select "Reports" at the top of the page showing National Circles.



Ritual Abuse-Torture and Human Trafficking: Making the Connections between Relational Non-Violence and World Peace

by Jeanne Sarson, MEd, BScN, RN and Linda MacDonald, MEd, BN, RN

The reality of a connection between relational peace and global peace surfaced repeatedly, during this year's Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, February 27–March 13, 2006. That is, it was being acknowledged that the girl and boy child needs parental or guardianship relationships committed to relational non-violence and that focused efforts to eliminate violence against women—relationally, locally, and globally—are essential for the promotion of world peace and human rights. Human trafficking was seen as one form of relational violence that caused carnage and destruction to victimized persons, families, and communities; however, it is also beginning to be recognized as a global form of violent organized crime that is threatening to undermine democratic and peaceful development transnationally. Human trafficking presently stands as either the second or the third (depending of which data one refers to) largest transnational organized and profitable crime after either drug or gun running, with cancerous corruptive tentacles reaching into many levels of governance.

We were privileged to be able to participate in the CSW from two perspectives—as novice and as experts. As novice members of the Canadian Voice of

Women for Peace, we enjoyed and learned from breakfast strategy meetings and were present when VOW members effectively presented their concerns to Ambassador Gilbert Laurin, Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations. As experts, we had been invited by the NGO, US Federation for Middle East Peace, to be presenters on their panel addressing, *Human Trafficking in the 21st Century*, to provide brief insights into the human trafficking that ritual abuse-torturers commit.

In-a-nut-shell, ritual abuse-torture specifically refers to parents, families, guardians, and like-minded adults who abuse, torture, and traffic children using organizing group ritualisms. Captive girl children can and do remain captive enslaved, abused, tortured, and exploited women. Their state of captivity created and enforced by the organized family/group violence that is inflicted upon them. Ritual abuse-torture is a transnationally occurring crime that, in 1993, was first reported to be present in every region of Canada.¹ In a global first, we began tracking, in 2003, the transnational occurrence of ritual abuse-torture as shown on this global map. Mapping represents 123 persons who placed their icons on our map between April 23, 2003 and May 1, 2004, which is on our website: www.ritualabusetorture.org.



Persons Against Ritual Abuse-Torture. (2003). Global map of the prevalence of ritual abuse-torture trafficking from 23 April, 2003 - May 1, 2004.

Ritual Abuse-Torturers: The 'Invisible' Abusers, 'Non-State Actor' Torturers, and Human Traffickers was a white paper we wrote to accompany our panel presentation and have ready to use for educational and lobbying interventions. The paper made it to the office of H.E. Mr. Jan Eliasson, General Assembly President, when we and other panelists met with him to lobby that attention be given to the many forms of human trafficking; the paper made it into the hands of Yakin Ertürk, the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, and the Deputy Director of the New York Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Craig Mokhiber, who were panelists discussing the due diligence of state governments in eliminating violence against women. Their presentations also included "non-state actor" torture, thus our paper was most appropriate.

White papers were given to NGOs as we lobbied them for endorsement letters to support our goal to have ritual abuse-torture recognized as an emerging human rights violation and identified as a newly acknowledged form of torture that is inflicted by "non-state actors" onto the girl and boy infant, toddler, child, youth and captive enslaved woman. Our lobbying continues, having e-mailed many more NGOs. The Angel Coalition, Moscow, has already e-mailed us a supportive letter which we will include in our presentation planned for the human rights lobbying process in Geneva.

Presently, we have 40 signed Canadian and transnational statements from persons who have survived ritual abuse-torture which give testimony to the commonalities of the atrocities committed onto them. Common violent thematic issues involved in ritual abuse-torture victimization are: child abuse including rampagous pedophilia, constant terrorization and horrification to keep victimized persons silenced and enslaved, human-animal cruelty including bestiality, physical, sexualized, and mind-spirit torture, necrophilia and pseudo-necrophilic acts such as inducing "death-like" immobility in the

victimised by suffocating them into unconsciousness or by over-drugging then raping their immobile body, enforcing suicidal and other self-harming acts (dead victims cannot talk), trafficking into the pedophilic and adult pornographic and sexualized exploitation trade, and using violent family/group ritualisms that function as bonding and like-mindedness mechanisms that reinforce the normalization of family/group torture and raping of a toddler, for example. This like-mindedness is local, national and transnational. It violates human rights and if left "invisible" and unexposed will continue to feed the intergenerational cycles of relational and human violence that contributes and hinders global non-violence and world peace.



Brigitte Polonovski, UN Representative, is our and Madeleine Gilchrist's contact in Geneva, seen here in the middle with Linda on her left and I, on her right.

With the transforming of the Human Rights Commission to a Council our plans will not happen in June as scheduled. All events have been stopped until the re-organizational restructuring is completed.

Peace—relational and global—does not simply appear so we will continue to prepare!

¹ Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women. (1993). *Changing the landscape: Ending violence ~ Achieving equality* (ISBN # 0-660-15144-8). Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada.

VOICES is the newsletter of Canadian Voice of Women for Peace / La Voix de Femmes Canadiennes pour la Paix, founded in 1960, a network of women across Canada linked with women from many countries working individually or in groups to help build a world founded on peace and justice for all. VOW / VdF does not necessarily share the views expressed by contributors to VOICES.

Newsletter submissions to Kate Boorkfield (kbrookfi@sympatico.ca). Deadline next newsletter: 15 October 2006.

column

A Peaceful 21st Century Social Revolution

by Hannah Hadikein



When I arrived in Caracas, on January 20, 2006 to participate at the VI World Social Forum 2006, (WSF) I did not expect to receive the double bonus of having the opportunity to see a social revolution in the making.

Depending on who was doing the counting, the numbers of participants at the Forum were estimated anywhere from 70,000–100,000. In a city of 5 million, these numbers did not appear to strain the available services, such as the ultra efficient and free to the delegates, Metro system (otherwise, 30 cents could get you a return ticket anywhere in the city). What was of significance was the fact that some 150 countries and close to 2,000 civil society organizations were represented, all with the aim of having their voices heard against neo-liberalism, and the immeasurable economic and social repression of powerful nations. Over the course of a week, hundreds of seminars, workshops, activities and forums, offered the broadest variety of topics.

The World Social Forum was positioned as a space for sharing ideas, proposals, and experiences, as well as developing strategies in opposition to “imperialist domination based on militarization and destruction.” Space in this column does not permit detailed coverage of the workshops, seminars, and dynamic and colourful events, in which I participated. Rather, I will provide some insight into a remarkable political process, which is ameliorating poverty, bridging the inequality gap, implementing policies to foster social inclusion and proudly claiming title to a country, which is now 99% literate. Not to mention that it is primarily grassroots women whose activity is taking this revolution forward.

President Chavez was first elected in 1998. He survived both a coup in 2002 that was supported by the United States, and a referendum to recall him in 2004. Venezuela for the first time in the country’s history has a president who promotes an inclusive society. Venezuela’s political policies are based on social development such as offering free primary and post-secondary education to all students, free health and dental care to 14 million people who previously had little or none and policies to create more jobs, higher wages and lower inflation.

While the current system in Venezuela is capitalist, the President has undertaken important steps towards a post-capitalist system. He recognized, for this transition to be successful, that there must be changes in the social, economic, political, territorial and international arenas. To this end, the new constitution has at its core democratic changes, especially with regards to the rights of women, working people and social minorities, such as indigenous peoples, gays and lesbians and those that have been traditionally marginalized.

Out of recognition for the work women do in the home, President Chavez announced that portions of oil revenues will be distributed to women on the basis of a monthly income equivalent to 80% of the minimum wage or about \$180, starting with the poorest households. He also announced minimum wage and pension increases. Furthermore, entrenched in the Venezuelan constitution, Article 88, recognizes the economic and social contribution of women’s un-waged work in the home, and on that basis grants homemakers a pension!

“The State will guarantee equality between men and women in exercising the right to work. The State will recognize housework as an economic activity that creates added value and produces wealth and social welfare. Housewives are entitled to social security in accordance with the law.”

I attended a workshop with Nora Castaneda, the first president of the publicly owned Women’s Development Bank (Banmujer) which has since 2001, granted over 50,000 micro-credit loans to women, as part of a process of ending poverty. (This scheme is totally financed by the State.) This too is part of the revolution, and as Nora put it “women are the carers of the species, and of the environment no work is more important, society has a debt to women.” An example of a micro-credit loan is for women to start a food growing cooperative. GM crops have been banned in Venezuela and replaced with native crops, along with forming a seed bank. Legislation gives rural people the right to idle land for growing crops.

In Venezuela “60% of poor homes are headed by women, to overcome poverty we must invest in women” (Nora) “...social security in our country is guarantee of healthcare, education (totally free) decent housing, training, the right to work, the right to time off and leisure.” Venezuela’s vast oil reserves, now state owned, provide the means for social spending. For decades a small elite directed the country and reaped the oil wealth. Since becoming President, Chavez has directed billions into social spending such as the creation of thousands of workers cooperatives, subsidizing small and medium businesses with loans and steering growth outside of urban centers. Chavez has called on the assistance

of Cuba to help blueprint "Missions," which are designed to transfer control to the local communities away from government bureaucracies. One example is "Mission Habitat," which under current Venezuelan law allows those people who live in homes built on occupied lands (nearly all of the poor) to petition the local councils for title to the land (affecting 60% of the population) and giving the poor the legal right of ownership, for the first time ever. Under this Mission, communal land titles are also restored to the indigenous people. Another of the government's initiatives is to provide free public housing to those without homes. This program has over 5,000 land committees responding to 5 million people or 20% of the population.

Privately owned enterprises are not illegal in Venezuela. I visited a furniture-making factory, where the unionized employees are encouraged to be more involved in the management. In return the government provides added working capital. I was told that some 200 mostly small firms have voluntarily taken part in sharing profits and co-management. In 2004, the average income of workers had increased by more than 30%. Chavez has institutionalized a zero tolerance for tax evasion for those multinationals who have been in the country for long periods of time, and

who now are compelled to enter tax repayment schemes.

In addition to this, the government is implementing a platform built on local power, participatory democracy and regional cooperation. Chavez is also constructing a model of exchanging goods and services not based on the traditional international banking and corporate trading systems but on in-kind trade exchanges. For example, in exchange for oil and building materials supplied to Cuba, 20,000 Cuban doctors and specialists are staffing free, comprehensive, and high quality health clinics. Similarly, Argentina is supplying dairy products to Venezuela in exchange for oil.

Whereas the neo-liberal agenda manifests itself in the exclusion of populations, marginalization, suppression of cultural values and identities and technocratisation of public management, the Venezuelan people's experience is becoming more securely rooted in social and political inclusion, community building and participatory democracy. With these values as their guiding principles, the country and its people deserve the peace they crave. It is the responsibility of the rest of the world, to give peace a chance in Venezuela and to raise our voices in unison at any threat to this peace.

Join the Journey to Peace: World Peace Forum 2006, Vancouver, 23-28 June, 2006, University of British Columbia

by Marion Pape

Yes, the World Peace Forum (WPF) is truly happening and it is coming together through the efforts of hundreds of peace activists who are donating huge amounts of time and resources to realize the vision of cities and communities working together to end war and build a peaceful, just and sustainable world. The wonderful news is that the Greater Vancouver Regional District has stepped up to support *Mayors for Peace* and *Peace Messengers* events. Hurrah, to them.

Funding remains a major consideration to pay for the speakers who cannot come without support, to support staff, venue and other costs. If you can assist in any way, please contact Women's Working Group Co-Conveners Marion Pape (marionpape@telus.net or 250-537-4567), Elsie Dean (ewdean@telus.net or 604-294-5834), or Hannah Hadikein (hannahhadikein@hotmail.com or 250-352-3609). For people in the BC Lower Mainland, there is a huge fundraiser on April 22 at the First Unitarian Church on Oak St. featuring musician Sheri Ulrich and Nota Bene Choir. Volunteers are needed for this and other events.

The WPF will bring together the peace/anti-war and environmental/sustainability movements to create a numerically larger and broader international movements to learn from each other and to consciously change attitudes, city by city, nation by nation and to publicly challenge excessive military spending while the needs of people and the planet go wanting.

The Forum will be action-oriented so each program offered will be focused on what we can do. The WPF Program will have four threads to its program: the Economy of Peace, Social Justice and Peace, Environment and Peace and Culture and Peace.

The WPF will offer a comprehensive program of world class keynote speakers, panels, workshops, public forums, arts and entertainment, networking events, and exhibitions. It will bring together civic government representatives with women's groups, environmental groups, indigenous nations, educators, labor movements, business organizations, the International Association of Peace Messenger Cities, Mayors for Peace from around the world led by Mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Peace Café open discussion and performance, a visit from the Peace

Boat from Kobe Japan, a Peace Festival, and a Peace Concert in support of the Canadian Landmine Project.

We are hoping to have the 1000 Nobel Women display and several women who have been named in attendance. Organizers of VOW's Groundswell Exhibit on the History of the 20th Century Women's Peace Movement are currently seeking funding to bring that exhibit to the Forum.

The Women's Working Group is developing its own unique program with the Guiding Thread of "Women Must Participate" to Educate, Energize, Organize, Mobilize and Act.

Theme 1 is "*The Root Causes of War; a Feminist Analysis.*" Sunera Thobani will be the keynote speaker and VOW's Hannah Hadikein and Janis Alton will convene a mock trial on war. Other speakers will include: Susan Brazilli from the International Human Rights Project, Makhububa Ergasheva from Women of Central Asia for Peace and Sustainability, Dr. Ivana Milojevic and Karen Hurly on creating SHE Futures, Lauryn Oates and Gisele Eva Cote will talk on Afghanistan.

Theme 2, *Feminist Economics*, will be a participatory session to make a budget using dollars now spent on militarism to fund human and planetary needs to be displayed throughout the world peace forum.

Theme 3 is *Women Peace and Sustainability* organized by VOW's Marion Pape and Janet Eaton. Speakers will include a first nations view on women's

role in building an energy sustainable world, Janet Eaton on ways to create a paradigm shift in values and policy using a variety of frameworks coming out of the women's movement and the natural step, Gabriela Videla from Sustainable Community Nutrition Centres Initiative in Central Mexico and June Zeitlan from Women, Environment and Development Organization (WEDO).

Theme 4 is *Women Organizing Women*. Some of the confirmed speakers include Cindy Sheehan, Medea Benjamin, Cora Weiss, Beverly Jacobs and Fay Blaney. Speaker Diane Matte of the World March of Women will also be a prominent participant. Teri Wolfwood and Beth Burrows will lead a "Women in Black" event, and Janet Eaton together with Shauna Paull and Sabrina Ali are convening a roundtable on Women in Conflict Prevention; United Nations Security Council 1325. Cora Weiss, Alexa McDonough, and Mary Lou McPhedran are among the national and international speakers presenting at this event.

This is just a snapshot of the exciting program at the World Peace Forum. Do not miss this opportunity to attend. Register by going onto the website at www.worldpeaceforum.ca or telephone 604-687-3223. There will be limited billets so make sure you register asap.

Also, see accompanying article on the VOW General Meeting June 22 at the First Unitarian Church.

VOW holds its General Meeting at the World Peace Forum

by Marion Pape

This is your official notification of the VOW General Meeting being held June 22 from 9am-3pm in the Fireside Room at the Unitarian Church of Vancouver 949 West 49th Avenue (at Oak).

An agenda, and reports will be published and distributed in a special Voices issue sent out electronically prior to the meeting. Please be sure that you have given your e-mail address to Irene at the VOW office (vow@ca.inter.net) or if you prefer, give us a name of a buddy who can receive e-mail for you.

This General Meeting will be your opportunity to ask questions about the various

reports submitted, provide input into VOW's Strategic Plan and mingle with VOW members from across the country.

We are also seeking reports from the VOW Regions (due April 15) and Resolutions (due May 22). Both are to be sent to the VOW office.

We are particularly interested in inviting women from the Lower Mainland to attend our meeting and program. We have confirmed that Mary Wynne Ashford will speak on "War as a Disease" as our keynote speaker.

So spread the word, register for the World Peace Forum and see you there.