

Euroasian Women's Forum
Towards Peace, Harmony and Social Well-Being
Panel Discussion: "Women and Power: World's Agenda of Sustainable
Development"

15:00. Thursday 24 September 2015, Doumskiy Hall

Today, the link between development and peace is well established; without peace, development is not sustainable, and without development, peace is not achievable. The central role of women in conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding is equally recognized through many international agreements and resolutions. Women in peace-building bring different perspectives and priorities, and their role in re-establishing social fabric in the aftermath of conflict is vital.

2015 is a key year for gender equality. It marks the twentieth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the adoption of the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda with a stand-alone goal on gender equality based on the recognition that "realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress across all the Goals and targets".

This means that gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but also a necessary condition for achieving the broad range of different development goals.

Without the full contribution of women, no society can achieve its full potential.

Progress has been made since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration but there are still huge gaps which remain to be addressed and multiple forms of gender inequality. Among the biggest challenges is the question of education: 35 million girls of primary school age and 37 million girls of lower secondary school age are out of school. Women still represent two thirds of the world's illiterate population. Furthermore, women remain underrepresented in the top levels of decision making in all domains – political, economic, and cultural – and one in three women worldwide will be a victim of violence during her lifetime (WHO global survey).

Indeed, the value of education in peace processes is too often overlooked. For this reason, UNESCO has made gender equality one of its two global priorities and gender is mainstreamed across all programmes, in addition to a wide variety of initiatives with a specific gender focus.

Two major problems for girls and women's education still remain to be resolved: enrollment in secondary education and literacy. Secondary education remains a weak point in the learning cycle of girls as they are significantly more likely to drop out of secondary school than boys. Literacy is a development accelerator; it empowers girls and women equipping them with the skills and confidence to seek out vital information and to make informed choices that have a direct impact on their families and communities. Literacy is also a condition for women to effectively participate in the economy, to have access to quality employment and to be able to become entrepreneurs.

Once literacy levels have been raised, it is important to continue supporting women in their career development. Through initiatives such as the L'Oréal-UNESCO 'Women in Science' initiative, visibility and support is given to the work of exceptional women scientists, who advance scientific knowledge and

serve as role models for young women and girls, who will become the next generation of scientists. Faced with global challenges like climate change, loss of biodiversity, the need to build green economies and societies, these women researchers will have a major impact on society and lay the foundations for the future. UNESCO and L'Oréal seek to contribute to their recognition and provide them with the means to continue their commitment to science with energy and passion.

Inequality also persists with regard to who participates in, contributes to and benefits from culture. Far more must be done to harness culture for the empowerment of women, and for this, UNESCO's standard-setting instruments provide a unique springboard. The implementation of the World Heritage and Intangible Heritage Conventions shows the importance of understanding gendered roles in safeguarding heritage and fostering dialogue and empowerment. Work undertaken in the framework of the Convention for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions – especially in least developed countries – have generated positive social changes, such as enhancing gender equality through cultural entrepreneurship.

The central role that women play in the establishment and maintenance of the community structures which are central to development and peacebuilding efforts is also something that is often given too little attention. Through their involvement in creating the social structures, cultural traditions and personal relationships which constitute communities, women and girls become key actors in developing the stability, cohesion and social reciprocity that is key to preventing conflict. Additionally, in post-conflict situations women are uniquely placed to address the specific needs of female ex-combatants within communities, make peacekeeping forces approachable, support victims of gender-based violence, improve access for local women to community services,

provide role models for women within broken communities and heighten the psychosocial sense of 'security' amongst women and children. These are realities that UNESCO projects have clearly acknowledged.

The Underground Sociabilities project, a ground-breaking research project in the favelas of Brazil, highlight the important role of women in creating the alternative, non-state community structures which organise social activity within the favelas. Key to this was their role as role models within 'enabling families', familial structures which conveyed positive messages to impressionable youth who may otherwise be led towards lives of crime and violence.

UNESCO is moreover working to promote the valuable contribution of women migrants and refugees within their new communities with the aim of combatting the denial of their human rights. While globalization may benefit trade and investment, it does not necessarily create an environment that protects female migrants and refugees social and physical security. More than 50 percent of the migrant workforce in Asia are women (source: UN Women) and, often, they become subject to exploitation, discrimination and abuse, and more and more to the sex trade and trafficking for the purpose of sexual slavery. In Asia, UNESCO has launched the "Internal Migration in India Initiative" which includes the development of community radios for and by women migrants.

Similarly, the importance of women's inclusive participation in the humanities for forging a new-humanism that is needed to shape attitudes and values of persons, especially youth, away from extremism and radicalisation must be made clear. Women, who are often at the heart of family and community structures, have a crucial role to play as mentors of the values of inclusion and respect for human rights which must characterise every community. As such, it

is very important that women and girls are provided with the opportunities and resources to play a positive role within their communities.

The key lesson is clear – we need to recognize women and girls agents of change within their communities and value their achievements. This must include post-conflict situations, where we can draw on the leadership of women in rebuilding peace and in forging equitable public policies. Building a better future for all requires the full and equal participation of all women and men in the cultural sphere. As we move forward, every society must support the empowerment of all of its citizens as sources of innovation and dynamism.

It is time for women's perspectives, concerns and contributions to move from the peripheries to the centre of the processes that create, interpret and shape our societies. States must take the necessary measures to ensure that women are equal spokespersons vested with the authority to shape the communities they desire to be a part of.

This is a must have conversation, which should take place on the basis of the principles of dialogue and the related tools and values, mutual respect, tolerance, human rights and dignity.

Indeed, dialogue of precisely this type has become ever more urgent. This is the spirit of the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures (2013-2022). The objective of the Decade is to promote mutual understanding and respect for diversity, rights and equal dignity between peoples, through intercultural dialogue and concrete initiatives. The current surge of conflicts, acts of violence, extremism and intolerance pose a threat to peace, undermining the unity of humanity and calling on us all to redouble our efforts and sense of responsibility.

Farida Shaheed, Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights, underscores the importance of dialogue as follows (“Agree to Differ”):

“As it is never abstract ‘cultures’ or ‘civilizations’ that meet, but individual people, this demands particular attention to ensuring concrete possibilities for women and other marginalized groups to fully engage in cultural processes in their societies and the world at large. To enable all of us to truly help to build shared values and social cohesion, we must ensure safe and welcoming public spaces for interactions and creative expressions to enrich our world”.

“Safe and welcoming spaces....”. This brings us back to the peace agenda and to the need for just and inclusive societies, which is central to the Post-2015 Development Agenda. UNESCO stands ready to work with all relevant partners and stakeholders to this end.

Thank you.