

PEACE & PRESERVATION

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For

Women's Vision Forum

Framing the Future: Militarism or the Common Good

Sponsored by

Women Speak for a Sane World

Thank you, *Women Speak for a Sane World*, thank you so much for doing the work that you do. I have attended your meetings in preparation for this forum. You are informed, dedicated and, like so many of us in this room today, you know that the time for change is NOW!

It is NOW because we can't wait any longer. Our earth's climate is warming, we have reached peak oil and are going to war because of it, and people all over our beautiful green and blue globe are suffering – disease, famine, xenophobia – it is time for us to come together.

It is also NOW because people are ready. All of you in this room today are ready, and I believe that deep in their hearts, if we can penetrate through the scar tissue, those who say “Bring it on!” know that it is time to change course, not just in Iraq but in our response to the challenges to the mother earth we all share.

It is time because we must respond to the February 2nd, 2007, report from the United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The IPCC is comprised of scientists from 113 countries and they state: "Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, as is now evident from observations of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice, and rising global mean sea level."

And there is yet one more powerful reason for NOW! It is that the time has come for women around the world to lead once again in a major paradigm shift. Women have led before – the suffragettes never gave up in the face of criticism, ridicule, jail time – they knew women should be voting and they made sure we did. I am always amazed when I hear anyone taking this responsibly lightly; my mother was 10 years old when we got the vote. 1920 was not all that long ago!

Women took this power and marched on to the women's movement, at first making sure that women belonged in the work place, and then moving on to support all women whatever their circumstances – in the work place by choice and passion, in the work place because of financial necessity, or working in the home raising children full time. (Quality child care that works for all families isn't quite accomplished yet, but we will get there – I love the child care, with an educational component, that I have built at my business – family friendly, a place where the children know numerous people love them and care about their future; every child deserves this cushion of love and nurturing).

One day last week, at the end of the day, a father came to get his daughter. I was in the hall way, and when his daughter came out of the child care, she saw me and RAN to me, jumped up into my arms, and we hugged each other. Her father said how much he loved a place where everyone, even those who did not work in the child care, loved his daughter. The combination of that comment and the love from the little girl made it clear to me that my money was being spent in the best possible way.

Consider also how mothers have gotten drunk drivers off of our streets. How women have fought and won the control of our own bodies. How much healthier, both physically and mentally, men are when the male/female relationship is equal in power and financial burdens can be shared, when plans are made together.

I know that women throughout our nation and around the world are forming circles of vision and determination to solve our urgent challenge. We are doing it right at this very moment. It is like throwing rocks in the lake each rock forms its circle, and as the circles widen they combine with the other circles until a critical mass is formed.

Critical masses are amazing and powerful. Let's think about the impact that large groups of people can have on our society. I remember that my husband and I were in college during the beatnik years – long conversations about changing the world. I'll share a quick memory with you; my husband and I couldn't afford a car, so bikes were our mode of transportation.

I was taking a sculpture class and because we were plaster casting, I wore a huge grey sweatshirt of my husbands since I only had a couple of maternity tops and I didn't want them to get full of plaster. I was on my bike at the stop sign after class, jeans, plastered sweatshirt on a pregnant body, pony tail, and the woman in the car next to me said to her husband, "Oh look, there's a beatnik!" "Wow", I thought, and turned to find the beatnik, only to realize that I, Becky the Methodist from Little Falls, Minnesota, was that beatnik. So, I guess I was; but we were a small generation, we did not comprise a critical mass. It wasn't until the next wave, the hippy generation, came along that changes were achieved because they were that critical mass.

There are critical masses right now on this planet that make our resolve for peace and preservation so intensely urgent. It is a fact that huge groups of desperate people do desperate acts. Therefore, it is obvious that we must create a society, a world, where there are no huge groups of desperate people – and we will all be safer, happier!

I stopped by Senator Norm Coleman's office on Thursday to thank him for his vote to take up the Senate resolution against the surge in Iraq. As I walked out of his office, I encountered three men (around my age) who asked what I was doing with Norm. Their response to my answer is exactly what we must address: they said, "If we leave Iraq, we'll be playing into the hands of the communists" and "They are all killer Moslems – Christians don't kill" and "Dialogue doesn't work".

Their statements became a jolt committing me to the devotion we must apply to our work ahead. But having just returned from the National Convention for the Department of Peace in Washington, D.C., I know we can prevail!

It was tough being in D.C. – in the same city with Arlington Cemetery where my son, Matt, is buried. I stayed with his widow, my beloved daughter-in-law, and took the metro into the Rayburn Office Building to lobby. Tears streamed down my face as the conductor called out, “Next stop, Arlington Cemetery”. Contained sobs silently shook my body and I recalled the country western verse about Arlington sung by Trace Adkins, “I never thought this is where I’d settle down; I thought I’d die an old man back in my home town”.

Going to Matt’s grave is even more horrible because of the new rows and rows of graves since Matt was buried. Each grave represents agony, heartbreak, lifelong burdens – and the horrible thing is that these numbers are miniscule when compared to the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi lives lost.

The recently released Pentagon Report is only more proof of the lies that lead to this illegal and immoral war. Not only are we less safe today because of these lies, each lie rips away our Nation’s faith in its leaders, compromising the soul of a nation just as a lie told by one individual to another erodes the joy in their relationship.

So let me tell you about the Department of Peace and why I am so proud of our Congressman Jim Oberstar who is an author of the bill in the U.S. House of Representatives.

When this proposal becomes law, there will be a Cabinet level Secretary advising the President, the Secretaries of Defense and State, and others on root causes of violence, plus practical ways to dismantle violence while still in a formative phase. The Department of Peace will support the military by providing cultural, ethnic, and psychologically insightful information, education and technology; by offering practical skills (conflict resolution techniques, etc.) for the amelioration of violence among adversarial factions; and by the training and support of civilian peacekeepers to participate in multinational nonviolent peace forces.

I know many of you are wondering how we can have peace when we can't control violence in our own homes where every 14 seconds a man is beating a woman. The FBI has released figures that 66% of all men lift a hand to their woman partner at one time or another. Thus, on the domestic front, the Department of Peace will develop field-tested educational programs promoting conflict-resolution and peer mediation among school-age children; provide violence-prevention programs addressing domestic violence, gang violence, drug and alcohol related violence; and provide assistance to city, county and state efforts to eliminate violence from our lives.

Imagine effectively treating and dismantling negative gang psychology. You know, everybody likes to be in a gang; a place where they feel welcome and comfortable. You could say we all, here in this room, are members of a gang. You could say the Chamber of Commerce is a gang. We just have to make sure that kids have “gangs” to join that do productive versus destructive activities. When my son, Nondo, was 14 years old, he, his brother Nick, age 12, and I read an article about a 12 year boy in Chicago. This boy came from an intact family; both of his parents were working long hours and they expected him to be home at night doing his homework. Because he received good grades, they thought he was. But he could make more money guarding a crack house after school than both of his parents made each working full time jobs with overtime. So, he guarded this crack house. He said in the interview that it wasn’t dangerous; besides, he wanted to help his parents and he wanted the right kind of tennis shoes and the correct jacket – and they were expensive. Then, before that article went to press, he was killed in a raid at that crack house by a rival gang. His parents were devastated!

Later, as I was driving Nondo to school one day, Nondo said to me, “Mom, I would never do that – guard a crack house.”

I looked over at him, looked at him up and down. I said, “Nondo, how do you know that you wouldn’t. Look at you, you have those tennis shoes, you have that cool jacket. You don’t know what you would do until you walk that mile in someone else’s shoes”.

Yes, we must make sure there are exciting, adult supervised activities - activities that kids can afford, that they can get to, that they are excited to do after school and on weekends.

Imagine effectively rehabilitating the prison population. A dynamic speaker at the Department of Peace Convention delighted us all. He said, “I just got out of prison and I’m working to keep others from going in!”

Imagine peace-making efforts among conflicting cultures both at home and abroad. We can’t build enough prisons or drop enough bombs to make us safe; education and opportunity, food self-sufficiency, energy independence – this is what will make us safe. With the quantity of weapons of mass destruction that exists on this planet, military action cannot be the problem solving technique. You have heard the old saying that if the only tool a person has is a hammer, then every problem looks like a nail. We need more tools. Thomas Jefferson said that a change of circumstances means institutions must change.

So we will – we will be instruments of peace – oh Lord, instruments of thy peace. The peace that Jesus taught, the peace that Mohammed taught, that Gandhi taught. I heard this story about Gandhi at the convention. A powerful British Officer said to Gandhi, “Little man, do you think we are just going to give you India?” And Gandhi answered, “Yes”. Our peace will not be patterned after the old testament where, the story goes, Abraham was asked by God to sacrifice on the alter his son Isaac.

Can you imagine the anger of Isaac’s mother if Abraham had believed he was to go through with the sacrifice of his son? I recommend reading Jean Shinoda Bolen, M.D.’s book “Urgent Message from Mother; Gather the Women, Save the World” to give us another perspective. I quote from page 32,

“In *The Chalice and the Blade*, Riane Eisler synthesizes available evidence into an interpretation of history that takes into account the existence of a harmonious and peaceful age that preceded patriarchy. Scholars jumped to an erroneous conclusion that if society wasn’t patriarchal, it must be matriarchal – meaning that if men did not dominate women, women must have dominated men; or that if women didn’t dominate, then male dominance must have always been the norm. Eisler speculates from the evidence that this was not an either/or situation. Instead, neither gender was subordinate to the other.”¹

As I have observed marriages, marriages of my friends, marriages of my children, it is clear to me that gender equality creates vibrant, productive relationships. Stress levels are lower because partners can shift different burdens from one to the other in response to changing circumstances such as job loss, child care responsibilities, or educational endeavors. This is not to say that there never are arguments, but that the arguments have better outcomes.

Jean Shinoda Bolen, M.D. gave me a huge gift in her book; something I had never known before. Let me read another passage:

“The original Mother’s Day Proclamation, written by Julia Ward Howe in 1870, was not a commercial idea created to sell cards, flowers, or candy. It was a proposal to bring women of all nationalities together to bring peace to humanity.”

“the sentiments in the proclamation express what women the world over have felt since wars began. Now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it may be truly possible to bring this intention to fruition. Since the second half of the twentieth century, there has been a significant shift in the status and influence of women in the world, as well as an urgent necessity to find a means to end the threat of war, with nuclear weapons poised for use. Matthew Arnold predicted in the nineteenth century, “If ever there comes a time when the women of the world come together purely and simply for the benefit of [hu]mankind, it will be a force such as the world has never seen”. Empowered maternal concern is an untapped feminine force that the world needs to balance and transform aggression.”

“The original Mother’s Day Proclamation was an expression of the concern that women can have for each other’s children, the importance of expressing grief and sorrow, and then getting on with finding ways to bring about peace.

THE PROCLAMATION

“Arise then, women of this day! Arise all women who have hearts,
whether our baptism be that of water or of tears!

Say firmly: “We will not have great questions decided by irrelevant agencies. Our husbands shall not come to us, reeking with carnage, for caresses and applause. Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn all that we have been able to teach them of charity, mercy, and patience. We women of one country will be too tender of those of another country to allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs.”

“From the bosom of the devastated earth a voice goes up with our own. It says “Disarm, Disarm! The sword of murder is not the balance of justice.”

Blood does not wipe our dishonor nor violence indicate possession.

As men have often forsaken the plow and the anvil at the summons of war, let women now leave all that may be left of home for a great and earnest day of counsel. Let them meet first, as women, to bewail and commemorate the dead. Let them then solemnly take counsel with each other as to the means whereby the great human family can live in peace, each bearing after their own time the sacred impress, not of Caesar, but of God.

In the name of womanhood and of humanity, I earnestly ask that a general congress of women without limit of nationality may be appointed and held at some place deemed most convenient and at the earliest period consistent with its objects, to promote the alliance of the different nationalities, the amicable settlement of international questions, the great and general interests of peace.

Julia Ward Howe, Boston, 1870²

How eloquently she wrote this proclamation; she knew what we know today. Not only are warriors killing warriors, but people are losing their spouses, their lovers, their children. Rules are thrown out: women are raped, detainees are tortured. Soldiers are coming back maimed, exposed to depleted uranium (today's agent orange). Post traumatic stress syndrome is taking its toll resulting in suicides and homelessness. The time is NOW for a quantum leap for peace.

Peace does not mean that there will be no conflict, but rather that it is possible to have conflict without violence. A poem at David Heiller's funeral, my dear friend David Heiller who was the owner and publisher of the Askov American, goes as such:

Peace

It does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hard work

It means to be in the midst of those things

And still be calm in your heart

With a calm heart, we unite in the hard work that establishes peace and preserves our planet. Is it any surprise that money ties these two initiatives together --- money and how and where we spend or invest it. The additional spending proposed by this President on a surge that is as ill-advised as the original invasion of Iraq could make the world a lot safer if spent differently. Retired Army Lt. Gen. William E. Odom and Jessica Tuchman Matthews, President of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, take no pleasure what-so-ever in being right about actively opposing the war. Lt. Gen. Odom says, "How can you be happy about being right about the disaster that's been created?"³ Jessica Tuchman Matthews suffered intense criticism for her efforts to stop the invasion. It was not unusual for even prominent, respected leaders to be called "traitor" when making valiant efforts to prevent a foreign policy crisis that has destroyed the United State's international reputation. Odom, who believes troop withdrawal and diplomatic relationships with neighboring countries in the region are our best solution, is being ignored yet again.

I listen to our Generals saying among themselves, “How did we let ourselves get talked into a policy that we knew would fail; how do we keep from ever doing this again?” Our Army is stretched too thin, the confidence of the Iraqi citizenry is gone, and they are fleeing the cities. We will have to take a new approach such as recommended by the Iraq Study Group Report, but in the meantime, more soldiers and civilians will be killed or maimed. And we are spending our money in ways that hurt not only us but the planet. Consider this: in 2006, \$75 billion (that’s with a “b”) of federal Research and Development funds were spent on new weapons systems while only \$300 million went to renewable energy.

My friend, St. Thomas Professor Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, says, “The good news is that it is still possible to make personal and public policy changes to lessen the negative consequences of global warming while enhancing the quality of our lives and insuring the health of the planet. Good values, good personal choices, and good public policies, including redirection of national priorities and a much-needed reassessment of our country’s role in the world, will make it possible for us and others to live better with less while dramatically reducing our ecological footprints”. He quotes Lester Brown of the Earth Policy Institute in *Rescuing a Planet Under Stress and a Civilization in Trouble*, “The challenge is not to provide a high-tech military response to terrorism, but to build a global society that is environmentally sustainable and equitable – one that restores hope to everyone. Such an effort would more effectively undermine the support for terrorism than any increase in military expenditures, than any new weapons systems, however advanced.”⁴ And we would get rid of large groups of desperate people.

Could singer-songwriter Sara Thomsen, a “songs for social change song leader”, mean the collective awesome power of courageous women when she writes and sings this song:

There is a giant, she is waking now

Her eyes are open, and she listens to the sound

Of the sky above her and the earth beneath

When all is quiet, you can hear her breathe

And she is rising, she is rising, she is rising, she is rising

All across the land, all across the land

¹ Jean Shinoda Bolen, M.D., “Urgent Message from Mother: Gather the Women, Save the World” Conari Press. Page 32

² Jean Shinoda Bolen, M.D., “Urgent Message from Mother: Gather the Women, Save the World” Conari Press

³ Lynne Duke, Washington Post Staff Writer, The Washington Post, Sunday, February 4, 2007

⁴ Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, Assistant Professor of Justice & Peace, University of St. Thomas, “How to Address Global Warming and Build a Better Society: A Call to Citizen Action”