



Newsletter 2/2019



PeaceWomen Across the Globe
FRIEDENSFRAUEN WELTWEIT
نساء من أجل السلام عبر العالم
Femmes de Paix Autour du Monde
Женщины мира за мир на земле
MUJERES DE PAZ EN EL MUNDO
Mulheres pela Paz ao redor do Mundo
DONNE DI PACE NEL MONDO

ピースウーマン—国境を越え平和をつくる女たち
全球和平妇女

FOCUS AFGHANISTAN

“Peace means living with dignity and access to equal rights”

If peace in Afghanistan fails, the women stand to lose the gains they have made since the collapse of the Taliban regime. Sima Samar, Coordinator for PeaceWomen Across the Globe and government official in Afghanistan speaks out for women’s rights and their inclusion in shaping her country’s peace and future. For this she has paid a high price. And yet she remains steadfast and cautiously hopeful.

She removes her headscarf, then her overcoat – and reveals a shirt emblazoned with the words: “This is what a feminist looks like.” That’s not necessarily what you might expect an Afghan woman to wear. But the statement exemplifies just what kind of a woman Sima Samar is: committed, unflappable and unapologetically feminist.

Sima Samar, a medical doctor, is Special Envoy for Human Rights and State Minister for International Affairs in the Afghan government. As PeaceWomen Across the Globe’s Coordinator in Afghanistan she has organised several Women’s Peace Tables. For decades she has been an outspoken advocate for human and women’s rights, opening secret schools for girls in Afghanistan during the reign of the Taliban and the first women’s hospital in Pakistan. After the collapse of the Taliban regime, she was the country’s first female vice president and the first Minister of Women’s Affairs in the interim government. In this role she paved the way for girls to return to school and women to the workforce. In her 17 years as chairperson of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, she managed to head a truly independent organisation, promoting and protecting human rights in the conservative and conflict-affected country.

The price she has paid for her commitment to gender justice is high. Since receiving numerous death threats, she is driven around Kabul in an armoured vehicle, body guards protect her 24 hours a day. Many of the schools and clinics she opened were attacked or looted. Yet she says: “The work I do is nothing exceptional. Just the environment in which I work is difficult.” This was also her response when she received the alternative Nobel Peace Prize, the Right Livelihood Award, in 2012.

“You can’t exclude half the population”

In the past 18 years, Afghan women and girls have regained freedoms stolen by the Taliban. Women’s equality is now enshrined in the Constitution and a law criminalises violence against women. In education, the economy, health care and in politics, women’s gains have been significant – but they are fragile. Work remains to ensure that the laws become a daily reality for Afghan women. Much hung on the peace negotiations between the USA and the Taliban that came to an abrupt halt in September. At the time of writing, it is unclear whether they will continue.

At the start of the negotiations a year ago, not one woman sat at the table. Women’s groups, civil society organisations (CSOs) and activists like Sima Samar pushed for the inclusion of women, of victims of human rights violations and of CSOs. Thanks to their persistent advocacy, a few women and CSOs joined the latest rounds of peace talks. How meaningful their inclusion truly was, is questionable.



Sima Samar, long-time women's rights and peace activist in Afghanistan.

Women's rights are an integral part of sustainable peace

At the conference "Women, Peace and Security: Reclaim Prevention", Swiss and international experts from politics, civil society and research discussed gender justice, peacebuilding and the "Prevention of Violent Extremism". The conference dealt with the implementation of UN Resolution 1325 and the future of the agenda "Women, Peace and Security".

More than 130 people attended the conference in Bern on 18 September 2019, which PeaceWomen Across the Globe organised together with the Swiss Platform for Peacebuilding KOFF and the cfd. We talk to our Director Flurina Derungs about the importance of this agenda for Switzerland and the international community.

What is UN Resolution 1325 about?

The UN Security Council pursued several objectives with the adoption of the resolution "Women, Peace and Security" in 2000. It obliges UN member states to ensure the equal participation of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding and to protect women from sexualised violence in conflict situations. The resolution is regarded as a milestone because for the first time women are a focus of the international security agenda.

Why was it important to hold a conference on "Women, Peace and Security" now?

Ten follow-up resolutions have been adopted since 2000. The participation of women in peace processes is still minimal, violence against women in conflicts is on the rise, and the funding of programmes under this agenda is abysmal. Then, in 2015, this important agenda was first linked to the "Prevention of Violent Extremism".

Unquestionable is that "you can't exclude half of the population from peace negotiations," Sima Samar says. "That's not peace." Should a previously planned intra-Afghan dialogue take place, it is clear that women must be included, otherwise "the peace process will be incomplete".

She also dismisses arguments brought forth by many men: women should give up some of their rights in order to secure a peace deal, or that ending the bloodshed takes priority before women's rights. "If we have to give up our right to choose what we want to wear or our freedom of movement that is not peace for us," she says. "Peace means living with dignity and access to equal rights."

Role of Women's Peace Tables

The Women's Peace Tables play an important role, particularly at this juncture in Afghanistan's history. The last Peace Table was organised by Gawharshad University, founded by Sima Samar. It provided a safe space where women could talk about what peace is – not simply the absence of war – and discuss whether peace without justice or accountability can be sustainable.

"The Peace Tables are very important. We need more such programmes, particularly with university students," she says. "The students come from different parts of the country and they take what they have learned there back to their communities in remote areas, where they can act as agents of change."

Read interviews with Sima Samar on our website under „Media – Press Review“.

What dangers does this linkage pose for women?
"Women, Peace and Security" is clearly a human rights agenda that is now being linked to issues such as terrorism and violent extremism.

“The participation of women in peace processes is still minimal.”

Activists and academics fear that women's rights and gender equality will be instrumentalised and subordinated to military interests. In addition, there is a risk that stereotypes will be entrenched – for example, that women will be reduced to their role as mothers to ensure that their children are not radicalised.

What influence can civil society exert?

Civil society holds governments to account for implementing the adopted National Action Plans (NAPs), as it did in the project "Civil Society contribution to the implementation of the Swiss NAP 1325". PeaceWomen Across the Globe, in collaboration with civil society actors in Switzerland and abroad, explored how "Women, Peace and Security" can promote a concept of violence prevention based on the principles of peacebuilding and human rights and contribute to strengthening gender justice.

What role does politics play?

An important role. Although Switzerland was one of the first countries to adopt a NAP in 2007, more work is needed. At the conference, four Swiss Parliamentarians presented Procedural Requests that were submitted in the autumn session that raise questions concerning Switzerland's responsibility in the area of "Women, Peace and Security". For example, about the connection between private gun ownership and domestic violence or about how Switzerland

promotes women's participation in peace processes abroad.

Experts from countries as diverse as Afghanistan, Kenya, the USA and Palestine took part. What connects them in relation to this issue?

Their commitment to the participation of women in peacebuilding, at all levels. In many countries where peace negotiations take place, men say, "First peace, then women's rights". These women know that women's rights are an integral part of sustainable peace, that women must sit at the negotiating table to ensure lasting peace.

“Women's rights should never be subordinated to military interests.”

Find out more about this topic on our website: the conference ("Activities – Events") and the civil society report ("Activities – Advocacy"). On our Facebook page "PeaceWomen Across the Globe" you will find photos and quotes from the conference.



Flurina Derungs, Director of PeaceWomen Across the Globe, opens the conference in Bern.



"Women must be involved in the design and implementation of security measures," Elizabeth Mesok, swisspeace.



Arrival of Pascale Baeriswyl, State Secretary in the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (third from left).

CONTINUED >

News

40 years CEDAW

Almost simultaneously with the publication of this newsletter, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) celebrates its 40th anniversary. It was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 18 December 1979 and has since been regarded as the most important binding human rights instrument for women.

CEDAW helped to define women's rights as human rights and recognises gender-specific discrimination. It offers a starting point for combating discrimination, even where there is equality at the legal level but no real change in reality.

Switzerland ratified the Convention in 1997. However, discrimination of and violence against women are still widespread in Switzerland. Furthermore, the UN committee responsible for monitoring CEDAW's implementation, recommended that Switzerland strengthens its efforts for women in conflict situations.

For PeaceWomen Across the Globe, CEDAW is an important focus of our political work.

Women peace activists in Switzerland

Representatives of our partner organisations from Colombia, Nepal and the Philippines met in Bern from 26–29 November 2019 to discuss the challenges and successes of their work in conflict transformation.

Since all three countries are currently at different points in peace processes, the project partners were able to learn extensively from each other. The Women's Peace Tables, organised by PeaceWomen Across the Globe together with the partners in the three countries, were also part of the discussions. The meeting strengthens the collaboration between these peace activists.

Read an article about this meeting on our website under "News".

A gift of peace

By investing 1000 Swiss francs you will be supporting 1000 women whose work achieves sustainable peace around the world. Through the purchase of a Peace Share you become part of the PeaceWomen network and assist the community of committed women in their daily work for a peaceful world – not only at Christmas.

Contact us for more information:
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Close Up

PeaceWomen Across the Globe's International Board*

"Whether we like armed groups or not, they're part of the problem, so they have to be part of the solution."

Elisabeth Decrey Warner is one of the 1000 PeaceWomen who were nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005. Since 2003 she has been a member of the International Board of PeaceWomen Across the Globe. As founder and former executive president of Geneva Call, an independent non-governmental humanitarian organisation, she has made a significant contribution to the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. For decades, she has been campaigning for compliance with the Geneva Conventions and against the use of landmines, child soldiers and sexualised violence. At the core of her work stands the principle to involve all actors in the dialogue – especially non-state armed actors. Elisabeth Decrey Warner has received several awards for her work, among them the Légion d'honneur, France's highest honour. She spent 12 years in the Geneva Cantonal Parliament for the Social Democratic Party and was elected President of the Parliament in 2000.

Elisabeth Decrey Warner is leaving the Board of PeaceWomen Across the Globe this year. Our heartfelt thanks for her great commitment!

*In every edition we present a member of the International Board.



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about it.**

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