

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

Newsletter 2/2013

TOPIC Women's Rights Convention CEDAW

Dear Readers,

There is no shortage of declarations of intent by the international community undertaking to strengthen women in their rights. If all of these resolutions were put into practice, the world would be a wonderful place for women!

Unfortunately, this is certainly not the case. Although new resolutions on the protection of women are constantly being adopted, the existing ones remain as urgently needed as ever.

This newsletter provides information on one of the most important conventions on the elimination of discrimination against women, CEDAW. We explore the impact of this treaty by looking at developments in Colombia.

The newest member of PWAG's international board, the peace activist Alejandra Miller, also comes from Colombia. Her thoughts on the situation facing women in her country complete our report on CEDAW. We look forward to welcoming Alejandra as a panelist at a *matinée* screening on December 7. You will find information on the event in the enclosed flyer.

I hope that this newsletter will provide you with food for thought!

MEIKE SAHLING, PWAG DIRECTOR

Protection against discrimination – or merely a paper tiger?

The international Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has been signed by 187 nations, making it one of the most highly ratified treaties of the United Nations. The convention arose in 1979 from the need for a specific instrument to protect women and has been in force since 1981. The aim was that CEDAW would achieve what formal equality before the law had not yet brought about – namely, the prevention of actual discrimination against women in all areas of life. The 56th session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women provided us with an occasion to examine how effective the treaty really is. We took a close look at Colombia – a country in conflict, where sexual violence and discrimination are a sad reality for many women – to illustrate our findings.

From the Palais des Nations in Geneva...

On October 2, 2013, Colombian government officials presented their report on the situation of women in their country to the CEDAW Committee. Such hearings form part of the control mechanism laid down in the convention obliging the treaty members to produce a report every four years on the measures undertaken to tackle discrimination against women. The national reports are inspected by an independent committee of experts, which asks questions, expresses criticism, and makes recommendations that form the basis for the evaluation of progress in the following inspection. Non-governmental organizations are asked to submit a shadow report to the committee. An alliance of 27 women's rights organizations prepared an alternative report on Colombia.

Colombia's national report is very detailed. It lists a large number of new laws and is filled with statistics that record progress. However, the committee criticized the report's blanket statements that were not backed up with concrete explanations. They also said that it is easy to lose the focus on what is really important in the 160-page report. Nevertheless, the report shows that the state recog-



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CONTINUED > nizes the fundamental role of women for the development of the country and that it has taken action to tackle discrimination. The government officials reported on the gender policy that has been adopted by eight of the country's 16 ministries, announced that further legislation would be adopted in order to be able to address gender equality even more comprehensively, and enthusiastically noted the programs to promote female participation. Asked why there are no women at the highest level of the peace negotiations despite positive discrimination, the government delegation assured the committee that the government was aware of this situation and that the president was personally endeavoring to bring about gender equality.

The shadow report addresses all of CEDAW's fields of application in detail and also makes concluding recommendations. Its main point of criticism is that although Colombia has many regulations to promote women and to tackle discrimination against them, hardly any of the women affected have seen a notable improvement in their situation. According to the shadow report, this lack of concrete progress is due to insufficient political will to implement the laws, to inadequate funding for the equality commission, and to a lack of coherence among the powers.

... to Cortaderas in Colombia

On September 30 – two days before Colombia's hearing in Geneva – 36-year-old Adelina Gómez Gaviria, a human rights activist and a mother of three, was murdered by two armed men in the town of Almaguer in Cauca Department. Adelina had been threatened many times in the past, as she was campaigning against the destruction of her community's living space by the mining industry. So far this year, six female activists have been brutally murdered in Cauca alone – without any consequences for the perpetrators. Although a law passed in 2008 obliges the state to actively

address discriminatory practices and violence against women, there has been no significant progress in the battle against the almost total impunity for perpetrators of violence against women so far.

Is CEDAW changing the world?

Adelina's alarming case is a sad example of how CEDAW is still a long way from achieving its goal of halting discrimination against women for all time, despite the broad support for the convention in the international community and despite the critical voices in the committee of experts.

According to an information brochure by the Swiss Confederation, CEDAW is changing "the world". This may be the case on paper, but in practice women continue to suffer discrimination, rape, murder, and torture all over the world simply because they are women. This is not surprising, as CEDAW does not provide a forum where women affected by violence or discrimination can be heard. The treaty members do not face any consequences for failing to uphold the convention. This just leaves civil society, which can use critical reports and concrete demands to ensure that CEDAW does not become a paper tiger. Governments must be reminded about their obligations to finally implement laws to protect women in an effective way.

above left: March against violence and armed conflict in Colombia.
above right: The CEDAW committee consists currently of 22 female and one male expert.



PEACEWOMAN

Alejandra Miller Restrepo, Colombia

The regional coordinator of the feminist peace network, Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres, became a member of PWAG's international board this year. Alejandra Miller Restrepo was involved in preparing the shadow report by NGOs for Colombia's country report on CEDAW and is a well-known expert on women's participation in the peace process.

You campaign vehemently against discrimination. Have you personally experienced discrimination because of your sex?

I frequently encounter discrimination in everyday situations. Subtle discrimination in the form of sexist jokes is particularly common. As a woman in senior management, it is often difficult to make my views heard as regards my male colleagues. Patriarchal structures play a major role in this.

How do you rate CEDAW's work in Colombia?

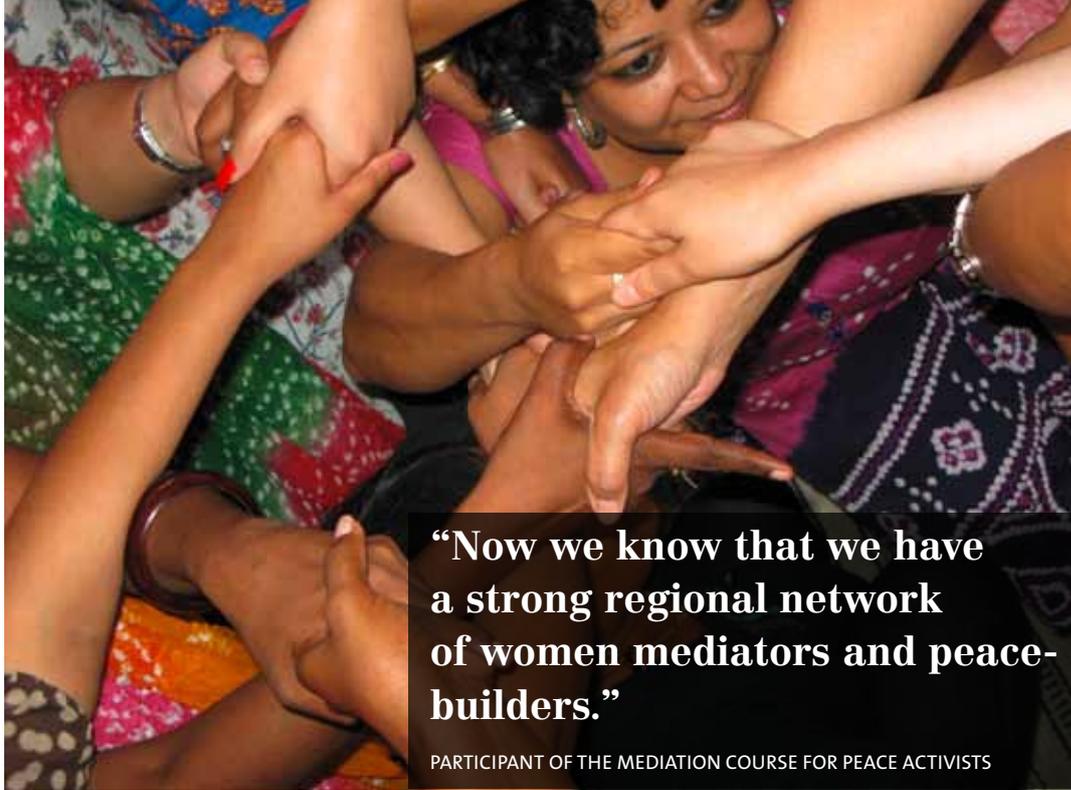
The convention has definitely had an impact on legislation. In 2000, the government passed the "quota act" for positions in public administration. And a ruling by the Constitutional Court led to the introduction of programs for internally displaced persons that specifically address women's needs. A law to prevent violence against women has also been in place since 2008. However, concrete measures are hardly ever put into practice. Women affected by discrimination and violence have very limited access to jurisdiction and the perpetrators are hardly ever prosecuted. CEDAW's impact also depends on whether or not the government manages to inform people about women's rights.

Does the state involve the women's rights movement in its work?

The government has set up an equality commission with an advisory function that also works on the reports for CEDAW. There are only isolated cases of dialogue with civil society. The most active and dedicated authority is the Constitutional Court, which has turned out to be an ally of the women's movement by issuing progressive rulings in the past years. However, the government does not provide enough resources to protect women's rights effectively.

Violence in Colombia tends to be primarily associated with the armed conflict. How can women's rights also be perceived and protected outside the conflict?

It is a fact that the armed conflict makes violence against women worse. However, the violence will continue to exist even when the conflict ends at some stage. We women must be included in a post-conflict phase and we must help to overcome the patriarchal structures that are anchored deeply in our society. Otherwise, a situation could arise in which violence and discrimination against women increase rather than decrease, as is the case in Guatemala and El Salvador, where more women are now murdered than during the civil war. Women's participation in the conflict transformation is not only crucial as regards their own rights, but also for the successful implementation of a peace treaty. Peace is only possible if there is no gender-specific violence.



title: Symbolic image from Kenya

left: Real networking at the mediation course for peace activists in October 2013.

“Now we know that we have a strong regional network of women mediators and peace-builders.”

PARTICIPANT OF THE MEDIATION COURSE FOR PEACE ACTIVISTS

Resolution 2106

Tackling sexual violence

In adopting Resolution 2106 on June 24, 2013, the UN Security Council has given the highest priority to tackling sexual violence in armed conflicts and is thus sending a clear signal to national governments to take on greater responsibility in fighting against sexual violence in conflicts.

Resolution 2106 significantly extends the earlier resolutions 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), and 1960 (2010), and calls for more consistent action against sexual violence in armed conflicts in the future. In particular, it calls for targeted sanctions against the perpetrators and for greater and professional support for the victims.

In adopting the new resolution, the UN has recognized the sad fact that sexual violence is systematically used in conflicts as a brutal tactic to demoralize opponents – as was the case in the past 20 years in Liberia, Bosnia, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Sexual violence leaves behind a traumatized civilian population that has great difficulties in returning to a peaceful everyday life.

Like previous resolutions, 2106 resolution will not implement itself alone. The UN's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Zainab Hawa Bangura, needs the support of all governments and, above all, of civil society so that the resolution can be implemented effectively and rapidly.

News

International network

Elisabeth Decrey Warner, a PeaceWoman and a member of our international board, has been awarded the Legion of Honor, the highest decoration in France, for her lifetime's work.

We are saddened by the deaths of the PeaceWomen **Sunila Abeysekera from Sri Lanka** and **Issam Abdul-Hadi from Palestine**. Their commitment to peace will continue. May they rest in peace.

Team in Bern

PeaceWomen Across the Globe would like to wish **Shazia Islamshah**, who left the Secretariat at the end of August, all the best for her future career and to thank her for her hard work and dedication. Shazia worked as a project manager with responsibility for projects in Latin America, Indonesia, and Sudan.

PeaceWomen Across the Globe would like to thank **Claudia Blaser** for her valuable support and work in the International Secretariat from January to August 2013. We were pleased to welcome **Kathrin Wartmann** as our new intern and **Annina Gonzenbach** as a project assistant in September.

Events

November 23, 2013, 3.00 – 4.30 p.m.

Stand at Bundesplatz in Bern national rally and kick-off event for the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence campaign.

December 7, 2013, 1.00 p.m. Xenix cinema in Zürich
Screening of the film “We Women Warriors” (“Tejiendo Sabiduría”) followed by a panel discussion on violence against women in Colombia and women's participation in the peace process. Our board member Alejandra Miller will be a panelist.

Solidarity

Peace needs us – and we need you! Please support our work by making a donation or by buying a “peace share” for PeaceWomen Across the Globe.

Many thanks!

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