



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

Kamla Bhasin

Women in Their Thousands Loving, Living and Creating Peace

This year 1000 women from 153 countries have been jointly nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Their nomination was officially handed into the Nobel Peace Prize Committee in Oslo in January 2005. On June 29, about 50 press conferences were held in different parts of the World to publicise the names of the 1000 women. In South Asia alone we organized 12 press conferences in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka to release the names of 157 South Asian Women who are amongst the 1000. South Asia has the largest number of peace women from any region and India's 91 peace women are the maximum from any one country. There are 29 peace women from Pakistan, 16 from Bangladesh, 12 from Sri Lanka and nine from Nepal. These figures speak for the amazing work being done for peace, justice, rights and sustainable livelihoods by women in South Asia and the resilience of the people's movements of which women are an integral and big part.

The nominated women have committed themselves to the cause of peace and justice, often under the most difficult circumstances. About 20 percent of the nominated women are from the grassroots level. They are fighting against totally unnecessary and avoidable poverty, hunger and disease; Struggling to get access to clean water, control over land and other resources; struggling against big dams, and big multinational corporations destroying local diversities, both biological and cultural. These women are trying to build bridges between conflicting communities. They are working to protect the human rights of women, minorities, Dalits, HIV positive people, sex workers etc.

In our list are several illiterate but «life-educated», wise women. There are highly literate lawyers, doctors, social scientists, physicists. There are writers, poets, theatre women. Many of these women have turned their personal tragedies into social activism. Each woman is inspiring, each committed and focused. Each woman's work is sustainable and long term; it is exemplary and worthy of emulation. These women have been leading by example, acting with moral courage and responsibility.

Peace has many names

This innovative and very political project began in 2003 with the objective of making visible and acknowledging the peace works of women in different spheres and at different levels. Four Swiss feminists and peace activists thought of this idea and then identified 20 women in different parts of the world to join the team as regional coordinators. It was as if the time was ripe for this initiative. Every one could see that without a strong and global peace movement human survival itself was at stake. This initiative, we felt, would strengthen the urgent need, the passionate desire and committed and



Unter der Schirmherrschaft der Schweizerischen UNESCO-Kommission – Under the patronage of the Swiss Commission for UNESCO

sustained action for peace. A legal entity called the Association 1000Women for the Nobel Peace Prize 2005 was registered in Switzerland. Swisspeace, an experienced and reputed organization in Berne, provided the Project a home. Impressed by the objectives and commitment of the people involved, the Swiss government, individuals and foundations provided the financial resources.

When invited to be the coordinator for South Asia, I embraced the initiative without a moment's hesitation. I thought advocating for giving the prize collectively to a 1000 women will state loudly and clearly that peace cannot be achieved by one individual. Peace IS and HAS to be a collective dream, process and task. In fact, the number 1000 is also only symbolic. It is symbolic of the millions who want and are working for peace and justice. For example, those millions who came out against the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the millions asking the G8 countries to make poverty history, the millions participating and supporting the World Social Forums and saying ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE.

I joined because I felt through this initiative we could show different faces of war and peace. For example, totally avoidable poverty and disease are the most debilitating and dehumanizing wars; patriarchal violence is a war against half of humanity. Then there are caste and racial wars; wars against the OTHERS, like in Gujarat or Sudan or Bosnia. Such class, racial, patriarchal, anti-immigrant wars are present also in the so called developed countries like the US, UK, Russia, Japan. This is why we have peace women also from these countries. For us in this project peace is not just the absence of war. Peace for us is comprehensive human security. Peace, for us, is not possible without justice.

The Process

The most important tasks for the team implementing this initiative were- to define peace, to decide the criteria for selection, to make detailed nomination forms, to fix quotas for different regions and countries and then to invite nominations. These decisions required long discussions. The 20 coordinators and the team of eight women from Switzerland have had four meetings since 2003 to take this project forward. Each time we talked for 3 or 4 days from early morning till late at night.

In their regions, the coordinators had to publicise this idea as widely as possible. We did this through our existing networks, internet, our website and through the local media. The most challenging was to get those nominated who work silently in remote areas, and have no access to electronic media. The existence of effective networks, enthusiastic response from most people to the thinking behind this initiative and committed work by every one involved, got us over 2000 nominations.

An Opportunity to Connect

After the short listing and final selection of the 1000, started the tedious task of making short and long, interestingly written profiles of each woman. In most cases the information provided in the nomination forms was not enough. We had to go back to most women for additional information. Fortunately for us in South Asia, the efficient and committed team of the Women's Feature Service, New Delhi took over the task of writing the profiles and they did a very good job.

For taking photos of the selected women we got in touch with women photographers in different parts of South Asia. Gauri Gill, Sonia Jabbar, Sheba Chhachhi and Neelam Gupta from India; Munira Morshed Munni from Bangladesh and Anoma Rajakaruna from Sri Lanka took photos of many peace women.

This initiative gave us another opportunity to connect and cooperate with a large number of people and organizations. Several thousand contributed in myriad ways to take this initiative forward. Recently individuals and organizations willingly came forward to help organize the 12 press conferences held in South Asia. Both women and men gave freely of their time and resources because they liked and supported the politics of this initiative.

For all of us working on this initiative has itself been a journey of and for peace. Connecting locally and globally with like-minded people has strengthened our resolve and energized us. For us this initiative has also been about fighting cynicism and defeatism. It is about fighting the most debilitating syndrome called TINA or There Is NO Alternative. It is about saying in Pablo Neruda's words – *they can destroy all the flowers there are, but they cannot stop the spring from coming*. It will be nice if our 1000 Peace women do get the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005, which is the 100th Anniversary year of the first woman (Bertha von Suttner from Austria), getting the prize.

Even if we do not get the prize, women's peace work would have been made visible and celebrated. By October 2005 there will be a book about the 1000 Peace Women, presenting their visions, their work and their life stories. To do the same, a travelling exhibition will open in October. There will be a website with details about the work and strategies used by the 1000 women, which can be used for networking and research. There will be several films too to inspire and energize everyone, but specially the younger generation, AND there will be a stronger and shared hope and resolve for peace.