

Indeed for a Noble Cause: Women's Voices for Peace

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Just hours before the announcement of the Nobel Peace Prize 2005, Lalita Ramdas, one of our peacewomen from India, wrote to us, the following *"It is nearly midnight and later today we will know if the decision makers in far away Norway were bold enough to decide in favour of the collective women power for peace or they will settle for the conventional wisdom."*

We now know what they did. They settled for conventional, pro status-quo, pro industrialized world wisdom. The Nobel Peace Prize for 2005 is to be shared, in two equal parts, (concern for money or credit or both?) between the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and its Director General, Mohamed El Baradei. To most peace loving people of the world the choice is neither wise nor quite noble.

Bakhita Mohamed Osman, one of the peacewomen from Sudan said *"It is not only a matter of not getting the prize, it is the fact that it went to IAEA and Mr.El Baradei. This decision clearly demonstrates that the world desperately needs what we women do. This announcement gives us yet another reason to continue working together."*

Not just those of us advocating for the 1000 women, but many other peace lovers choked a bit. In fact, the COMPLETELY lukewarm response even of the mainstream media to the Nobel Peace Prize 2005, also speaks volume about the decision to award these two recipients.

People are feeling this because the work of Mr.Baradei and IAEA, which has been the world's most effective agent for increasing the spread of nuclear weapons around the planet with its concept of *"peaceful nuclear technology"*, is controversial to say the least. Under the disguise of peace the world has witnessed many countries like South Africa, Argentina, Brazil, India, Pakistan amassing nuclear weapons and technology *"to preserve and protect peace"* for its citizens. Is this the peace the world wants and strives for?

The IAEA is also seen by many as being totally dominated by the industrialized nuclear power countries and also biased in its inspections and warnings. *"It haunts Iran but doesn't question Israel"*, points a peace activist.

We are sad but not surprised or disappointed. The Nobel Peace Committee did not go along with our radical and feminist notions of peace. We are sorry they missed the opportunity to recognize and honour thousands of women redefining, building, crafting, creating, nurturing, promoting peace. Women who are saying peace IS and HAS TO BE a collective effort.

Asha Elkarib, the Coordinator of the 1000 Women for the Nobel Peace Prize 2005 from Sudan responded to the announcement thus *"This decision shows the world is not ready to change yet. They stick to the normal and conventional. We think the majority of the world which is suffering in the present unjust economic and political system sees the need for radical changes but the powerful countries and people who benefit from the present unjust systems, do not yet see the need to transform."*

Asha, (whose name in Hindi means *hope* goes on to say *"one lesson we have learnt is that we have to continue and not give up. Our work will continue, our dream for making*

the world a safer and better place to live in will stay alive and we will work for with all our energy of love, solidarity and unfailing faith. Together we will challenge the masculine mind and together we will realize our dream."

A women (not Amen!) is all we can say to these strong sentiments for our collective and committed efforts for just peace.

Maren Haartje, the European Coordinator of our initiative feels *"They did not have the courage to honour women's work for peace. But we will go on."*

To give the prize jointly to a 1000 women of the kind we have selected did indeed require courage and perception. The women we have selected are questioning many systems and hierarchies, they are protesting against the unjust neo-liberalism and free market terrorism. They are rejecting Bushful thinking which believes in and promotes the use of violence and war to resolve differences. These women are proclaiming loudly and clearly that peace is not possible without justice; that peace is not possible while millions go hungry; while inequalities between people and countries constantly escalate.

We have not won the prize, but we have not lost anything. By recognizing, making visible and celebrating the unstinting work of thousands of peacewomen we have given ourselves the PRIZE of dreaming and working together for peace across borders.

Speaking of what our initiative 1000 Women for the Nobel Peace Prize 2005 has already achieved, Ruth Gaby Vermot-Mangold, the initiator of the project and a Swiss Politician says, "we are proud that within less than three years we have brought attention to the outstanding work done by millions of women in the cause of promoting peace". Many significant goals of the project have been accomplished. There are new women's networks everywhere: between South Asia and Australia, Africa and China, in the Balkans and in Europe, between Kyrgyzstan and Brazil through which women exchange their experiences and their peace work becomes evident.

The peace work of these 1000 women, along with their various strategies, methods and knowledge, will be academically analyzed and documented. The results of these studies should give new impulses to governments and the civil society. It is important to draw lessons from these experiences.

A book portraying the work of all the 1000 women and titled, *1000 Peacewomen Across the Globe*, has been released in Switzerland. An interesting exhibition of the work of the 1000 peace women and their life histories has also been opened in Zurich, Switzerland since October 14, 2005. This exhibition will soon travel to other parts of the world.

At the South Asian level, Diamond Publications, Delhi along with two journalists is compiling a book in Hindi on the 91 women nominees from India. This book will be released by December 2005.

The united and spirited efforts of women in creating, conserving peace in India have been documented in a film titled: *"Redefining Peace: Women Lead the Way"*, produced by SANGAT and Visual Aids Productions and directed by renowned, activist film maker K.P.Sasi from India. This one hour documentary showcases the history of the 1000 Women for Nobel Peace Prize 2005 initiative and profiles ten peacewomen from different regions of India, connected to various people's movements namely Magline Peter from the Fishworkers movement, Medha Patkar from Narmada Bachao Andolan, Teesta Setalvad, lawyer-journalist and her struggle against the fascist state and fundamentalist political forces. It features C.K.Janu who is struggling for rights of

indigenous people and adivasis, Sharmila Irom, a young woman who is using non violent mechanism to challenge and demand repeal of draconian laws in North East India. The film highlights the work of four grassroots women Lataben Sachde, Parmeben Sava, Alkaben Jani, Meghiben Samariya from Kutch Mahila Vikas Sanghthan, Gujarat and their struggle for sustainable health, education and livelihoods for masses.

In conclusion, for those of us involved in the 1000 Women for Nobel Peace Prize 2005 initiative, the process has been a journey of and for peace. Connecting locally and globally with like minded people has strengthened our resolve and reenergised us. For us this has been also a fight against defeatism and cynicism. It is about fighting the debilitating TINA (There is No Alternative) syndrome. 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*".

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