Highlights 2020

There would have been good reasons to celebrate in 2020: 25 years of the Beijing Platform for Action on Women’s Rights, Peace and Gender Equality; 20 years of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on “Women, Peace and Security”; and 15 years of PeaceWomen Across the Globe. Then the coronavirus struck and put an end to the celebratory mood.

But could it be any worse? It is true that many had been justified to celebrate the anniversaries of these two major human rights instruments? We don’t think so. For every step forward in the past few decades, there has been half a step back.

At the Fourth Beijing World Conference on Women, women’s civil work was recognised as a critical factor for peace and development. The pandemic has shown that this work remains primarily women’s work and that it is still undervalued.

The UN resolution calls for “the equal participation of women in all aspects of peace negotiations to a standstill and has also slowed down peace work.

The pandemic has cast a spotlight on existing inequalities. Violence against women has increased markedly in many places. Billionaires have become richer, while their employees continue to lose their precarious employment. It was mothers, not fathers, who adjusted their workload to their children’s distance-learning.

At the same time, the pandemic has caused the world to think. Thanks to new technologies, activists have been connecting around the globe, including in our own webinars. The Colombian Truth Commission has been able to continue its work on dealing with the past by gathering the experiences of conflict-affected women, albeit at a slower pace.

The coronavirus has slowed down peace work, but did not bring it to a complete standstill. It has reminded us of the necessity of solidarity. In 2020, our global network was solidarity in action. In 2021, it will build peace with more vigour.
Peacebuilding during the coronavirus pandemic

What are the requirements for peace? In bioids, women’s and civil society organisations, as well as those affected by conflict, once again addressed this question in 2020. This group in western Kenya has for years been considered a conflict hotspot, the causes of which are manifold. The structural poverty goes back to the presence of the organisation at the national level and the state’s interests; hospitals, roads and roads exist. Conflicts arise over natural resources and land, while climate change and water scarcity can be a root cause of conflict and violence. Some join the Islamist Al-Shabab militia, extreme violence is on the increase. The families left behind by missing relatives are stigmatised and demonised. In bioids, women’s and peace organisations speak out against such an unnatural state. Unless these causes are addressed and the wounds healed, there will be no sustainable peace.

On recommending the use of an earlier Women’s Peace Table, we developed a follow-up project with our partner Coalition for Peace in Africa, “Strengthening Local Capacities for Peace”. This ongoing cycle consisted of two thematic blocks: processing trauma and seminars on the local implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on “Women, Peace and Security”.

Over four days, individuals who had been directly affected and representatives of organisations discussed their three traumatic experiences, learning to recognise trauma and to understand the link between trauma and cycles of violence and of developing strategies that empower communities to break free from these cycles. “I now understand that healing from trauma is a delicate process,” said one participant, “in order for us to heal, we have to be ready to talk.”

The second part was attended by 27 people from 22 organisations, including staff from the National Police Service who assist families of Al-Shabab re-turnees. The focus was on how the participants can use the new power of the national Police to promote and protect peace for their local and national demands. The training also focused on strengthening concrete skills, visioning project proposals and reporting, conducting needs assessments and the inclusion of gender aspects in project planning.

Further projects

In several partner countries, face-to-face meetings have not been possible due to the pandemic in Colombia, Nepal and the Philippines; however, we were able to continue our projects with the help of virtual platforms, including the participation of our network.

In Afghanistan, participants in a “Gender and Peace” course at Gawaharish University in Kabul (see cover story) expanded their knowledge of this topic and planned campaigns as part of the peace negotiations.

In Burundi (picture), participants in a workshop run by our partner organisation, Centre Gituka, developed strategies for the effective participation of women in elections, learned about national and international instruments for the promotion and protection of women’s rights and addressed violence against women as an obstacle to personal development.

So what is required, among other things, for peace? Healing processes, civil society strategies and cooperation. The revised annual financial statement can be found on our website under Activities. [Under Publications.]

The 2020 financial statement has been duly audited by the independent auditors BOG-AC. It complies with Swiss law and is in line with our bylaws. The financial statement has been prepared in accordance with Swiss GAAP FER 21 accounting recommendations and the Swiss Code of Obligations and are presented in Swiss francs.

The annual financial statements are positive with a profit of 6.7% of the total expenditure. Through the support of our projects – a great deal of work is also done voluntarily. Some activities had to be postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic. Thanks to stable partnerships with institutional and private donors, it has been possible to increase income this year. This allows for the further development of peacebuilding projects and of our worldwide network of peace activists.

It is important to us that no one who is affected by violence, conflict, or trauma feels left behind. We wish to contribute to this development and the peacebuilding process. The revised annual financial statement can be found on our website under Activities – Public Financial Statements.

Our sincere thanks!

Without the cooperation of long-standing funding partners and generous private donors, our work for a more peaceful world would not be possible – our heartfelt thanks! Thanks to your support, together with our partner organisations from around the world, we can ensure that women have access to peace and conflict transformation. Please help us to shape it. We are also able to ensure that the knowledge of women peace activists is shared within the network and that women’s peace work becomes visible.

In particular, we would like to thank the Federal Department for Foreign Affairs Human Security Division and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the Wills Foundation and the following foundations for their substantial institutional contributions: CASIRAS, FONDS FASLUN and Co-yrbay. We would also like to thank the World Bank, Protestant Women Switzerland and World Wide Day of Prayer fund, the Roman Catholic Parish of Mensingen and the Reformed Churches of Nidwalden and Work for their solid contributions.