

The Role of Women in Securing Peace, Justice and Well-being

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by

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H.E. Ms. Elisabeth Rehn was Minister of Defence of Finland from 1990 to 1995, and also held the position of Minister of Equality Affairs from 1991 to 1995. Subsequently, she was appointed as the UN Special Rapporteur for the Situation of Human Rights in the Republic of Croatia, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, a role she served from 1995 until 1998 when she was appointed as the UN Under-Secretary-General and Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

From 2001 to 2003, she was UNIFEM independent expert on the impact of war on women and co-authored the report "Women, War, Peace: The Independent Experts' Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women's Role in Peace-building." In 2004, she was appointed by the UNDP to provide an Independent Expert Review on the Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People in the Occupied Territories. In 2011, she was a member of the UNHCR High-Level Panel on reparations to victims of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Your Royal Highness,
Your Excellency,
The Minister for Foreign Affairs,
Secretary General of the Thai Red Cross Society,
Distinguished Guests,

I would like to begin by expressing my sincerest condolences for the passing of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej. His devotion to improve the lives of the Thai people will long be remembered in the Kingdom of Thailand and around the world.

It is a great honor for me to have the opportunity to present you my experiences and thoughts. Throughout my life and my career, I have witnessed how important international humanitarian law and human rights law are for the protection of individuals.

The situation of human rights, both in Finland and worldwide is close to my heart. Today there are no barriers to information, what happens in Finland or Thailand; Syria or Yemen, reaches us on prime time with an almost frightening speed. I will take a special focus on the situation of women and children in wars and conflicts, but will of course also look into the developments in peacetime. I am grateful for having experienced so many positive achievements, which of course makes every step backwards even more sad.



The lecture will be given in the form of a narrative. I hope that you will not find this method of presentation self-praising, that is absolutely not the intention. Milestones of my life and my work will be covered in a greater context and also described through detailed stories. I hope they will explain why I highlight some of the national and international tasks that I have had over the years in the field of human rights, especially women's rights, and international humanitarian law. Whilst the main focus of the lecture will be on conflict situations, I wish to start by addressing women's role in the society in general. Evidence shows that gender equality is a powerful tool for conflict prevention, as I will discuss in more detail later on.

Women in Finnish Politics

Let us begin with Finland. I wish to pay tribute to my own country, celebrating the 100 years of independence achieved in 1917. Already eleven years earlier in 1906, Finnish women got their full political rights through universal suffrage and - as the first women in the world - the right to stand for elections. The following year, 19 women were elected to the Parliament (altogether 200 members). Every woman who made her way to a seat in the Parliament, had only her own energy and expertise, and some networks of likeminded women to thank for the achievement. Things were certainly not easy and straightforward for these Finnish female pioneers - on the contrary, they had to suffer not only a lot of direct criticism, but also talks

behind their backs, whispers and misbelief in their political capacity. I am sad to admit that this still is not past history. Generations of women politicians and women leaders from other branches have experienced some of the same mistrust. The official attitude and legislation acknowledge absolute equality. However, I believe that women will always meet some hidden male, and also female, skepticism, which of course makes women try even harder to testify that women leaders are as capable as men.

The way men and women make decisions differ - various studies have exemplified this. A recent study commissioned by Grant Thornton covering 10,000 companies worldwide gave an interesting result. Under stress, men seem to go for quick solutions, with less time for consultations before. Women take some time to get an overview of how the decision will affect more widely, including consultations. Both approaches have their advantages and disadvantages: women's way mostly guarantees sustainability, but might come too late to be efficient. The lack of hesitation, on the other hand, might make decisions taken by men too

hasty, causing unforeseen problems. The study therefore strongly recommends boards to include both men and women in the leadership, to gain the advantage of decisions based on a variety of experience and facts. The same works for peace negotiations, women must be present at the table. I will come back to this.

If you only look at numbers, Finnish women's political glory was a period after 2007, when the President of the Republic, President of the Supreme Court, and 12 Ministers of the Government out of 20 were all women. The Parliament had over 40% elected women, as it has today as well. Finland also has a law requiring a 40% quota for the gender less represented in government committees, advisory boards and other similar bodies. Not a "women's quota" as often named. From experience we know that men traditionally dominate the committees for Foreign Affairs, Finance, or Defence. At the same time, you find the number of women dominating the committees for Health and Social Affairs, Education, Gender Equality. Through the quotas, we try to get a gender balance in the various committees.



In spite of their strong participation in the political life, Finnish women are not as equally represented at the highest levels of business, at the boards of companies. I acknowledge that many countries have a rather opposite situation to Finland when it comes to women's positions in leadership. There is a high participation of women in the economic life, less in politics. I'm told that women leaders are highly appreciated in the economic life of Thailand. As the national elections are scheduled for next year in Thailand, now is the perfect time to encourage more and more women to stand for elections also here in Thailand.

Politics or economy, it is important that women participate in building the society. Women have a special role beyond other roles, investing in health care, fighting infant mortality, working for reproductive health care, cultural tolerance, and not least for compulsory education, values Thailand and Finland share. We can of course ask ourselves what has been achieved by the many Finnish female politicians? Reaching over the party lines, women in the Finnish Parliament, like in many other countries, have established networks which cooperate on issues like length of parental leave and children's day care, making it possible for both parents to work outside the family with as equal conditions as possible.



I would like to present to you a video featuring the first woman as Minister in the Government of Finland. We can also listen in the video to the first female President of Finland, President Tarja Halonen.

My Own Experiences

My own journey started as the youngest of three daughters of a rural medical doctor, the only one for 10,000 citizens and presumptive patients. It is a very long time ago, but I learned what caring about people means in real life. I got many lessons following my father's work. My mother was engaged in the civil society - one of the important organizations was the Finnish Red Cross.

To take an example: today we all know how important it is to vaccinate all children, how many lives have been saved, how many babies have grown up to be healthy adults. During my childhood, it started in Finland too. My father travelled with a nurse to the village schools of our municipality, where children were brought by their parents to be vaccinated against the most common child diseases. My sister and I, young girls ourselves, wrote the names, birthdates, parents' names in reports. Sounds not very professional in today's efficient data-ruled Finland, but it worked during these circumstances. We used to help in the household, why not then also for a common good?

Those diseases are now almost eliminated in Finland, as long as parents understand to let their children be vaccinated. There are unfortunately tendencies amongst modern young parents not to let their children be immunized as "those diseases don't exist anymore". It is very dangerous thinking, and could jeopardize the achieved good health situation.

Globalization has many good values, but connecting people means also sometimes connecting diseases. The wonderful work UNICEF and others are doing when vaccinating the world's children, must not be undermined by less thoughtful people.

But there were other lessons to be learned too. During World War II, in my childhood, Finland was at war with the Soviet Union, and every citizen, even a young child like me tried to be helpful for the country. I became very patriotic (not nationalistic) when faced closely with our losses. It gave me a strong understanding of the situation of today's victims of wars and conflicts. Due to the terms of the 1944 Peace Agreement, Finland had to give up much of our territory at the eastern border. 400,000 of our citizens had to leave their homes to be re-settled elsewhere in Finland. I think it was quite unique that Finland left de-populated land to the victors, no-one was left behind, all were taken care of within the borders and their own country. My husband, then 11 years old, was one of those who had to leave their homes in 1944. The traumas of my husband's family, together with all the other evacuated men and women, elders and children, taught me to understand the feelings of today's millions of refugees and asylum seekers. Nobody wishes to leave their homes under pressure, the longing for a return seldom fades.

Minister of Defence

As a mother of four, working with my husband in his small enterprise, following the example of excellent women, I was drawn into politics in 1975. After 16 years in Parliament, Minister of Defence for five years, also working as the Gender Equality Minister at the same time, the road took me to the international arena.



The combination of Defence and Gender Equality seems certainly quite odd, but in reality, it was excellent. I could look into the gender equality from different perspectives. The position of defence minister was quite special - I was not only the first female Defence Minister in Finland, but also worldwide. There had been excellent women earlier like Presidents Bandaranaike, Chamorro, and some others managing the post, but in combination with a Presidency or of Prime Minister. This brought me in a position in Finland where many eagerly hoped for my success, as many feared and even wished that I will be a total catastrophe.

After my appointment, the old veterans of war were shaken, asking “Is Finland short of men when we have to appoint a woman as Defence minister?” Some radicals in the women’s movement disliked the appointment, “again a woman falls in the trap built by men!” In spite of that,

looking back at those five years, I believe they went quite well both for Finland and myself.

The main duty of the Defence Minister is responsibility for the security and defence of our country in all situations. This is something much more than buying F/A 18 - fighters or other military equipment. Caring in all situations about the people who we train to defend our country must be one of the priorities, otherwise security will not be achieved. In all surveys about the Finnish attitude to the defence of our country, the positive rates have been very high. For instance, more than 70% of the young men are prepared to defend the country in all situations. The conscripts can make a choice of civil service, but the percent is not very high. It was important for me to care about those who made the military service and their physical and mental well-being. I did not accept offending and unfair methods in their training. There were

many touching stories about the relationship with the conscripts. A woman as a Defence Minister is met with respect and honor - but at the same time she seems to be closer as a human being to the conscripts. I got private letters asking for help to solve their problems, sometimes I got just postcards with “Elisabeth how are you, we are fine?” signed by the conscripts of a unit. They came especially from peacekeepers out in missions.

Peacekeeping Missions

When I served as the Minister of Defence, military voluntary service was made possible for women. Women were also trained for participation in the Finnish peacekeeping missions. The first women joined UNDOF on the Golan Heights and UNIFIL in South Lebanon. Today we have had numerous women out in the missions - in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Afghanistan, Kosovo to mention a few. Female peace keepers are needed in the missions not least to learn about the situation of women, to communicate with the local women. Many cultures don't allow women to be in touch or report to male strangers. Therefore, if a peacekeeping mission wishes to implement its mandate effectively, it is necessary to have female staff.

I was pleased to learn that the female peacekeepers from Thailand are especially trained to work with the local women, to learn about their thoughts and needs when affected by a conflict. There is a strong need for more female peacekeepers, and as strong need for getting more female civil police to the missions.

I am very proud that Ms. Tarja Raappana, one of the first trained women, was recently chosen by the Finnish Union of Peacekeepers as the Peacekeeper of the Year. It is an acknowledgement of the important values women are standing for in the missions.

Finland has a very long history of peacekeeping. We participated in the first UN mission 1956-57 in Suez, with more than 400 soldiers. Through the years Finland has participated under the UN-flag in numerous missions. Operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo were under the command of NATO, but mandated by UN resolutions. Today Finland participates also in peace missions authorized by the European Union and OSCE. Two Finns have

had the honor to serve as UN Special Representatives of the Secretary General in peace missions; President Martti Ahtisaari in Namibia leading UNTAG, the first UN peace operation covering both military, police and election observers 1989-90, and myself leading UNMIBH, a CivPol mission in Bosnia 1998-99. Before that appointment I worked from 1995 as UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Territory of Former Yugoslavia, an honorary mission.

Regardless of the nature of the missions, it has been of utmost importance for Finland to train the young men and women to have a sufficient preparation for the new duties. Until now Finnish Peacekeepers participate voluntarily, they have done their military service, and some have the ranks of officers. In addition to military experience, all the peacekeepers have to go through a country specific preparatory course focused on the situation in the conflict area. In addition to the military skills and strategies, the lectures include topics like history, culture, religion, traditions, gender equality, minorities, and

of course human rights and international humanitarian law. We count on our young men and women to fulfil their duties also as a kind of ambassadors for Finland, respecting the people they are sent to protect. The training includes not only general introduction to humanitarian law and human rights law, but also practical guidance on for instance how to act when meeting a child soldier, or a victim of rape.

International Experience

Outside the politics, I chaired UNICEF and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in Finland for many years, and I am proud to have been the Vice-chair of the Finnish Red Cross. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Geneva Conventions and other sources of international humanitarian law have been leading me. Partly through my contacts to WWF, I am very much aware of the challenges the climate change will bring us. More people have to leave their homes and home countries, in the worst case even to new armed conflicts.



“The most important question is: Do we prefer peace or justice – or can we have both?”

It is interesting how much direct confrontation changes your mind. As an example, as Minister I accepted the fact that anti-personnel mines could be used at our borders if so needed.

As UN Human Rights Rapporteur in the Former Yugoslavia I met daily with mutilated civilians, many of them children, who had stepped into mines. When visiting Cambodia, I visited workshops for hundreds of victims of landmines. These confrontations with reality totally changed my mind. I am glad that my country has since joined the Ottawa Convention Against Anti-personnel Mines.

The conflicts of today have changed their nature, soldiers used to fight soldiers - today most victims are civilians, and especially women and girls are direct targets of warring parties and extreme terrorist groups. The strategy of war includes sexual violence and mass rapes. A few years ago, we were shocked by the news about the 200 Nigerian schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram - one of the brutal extremist groups. The sin of the girls was the wish to be educated, something so extremely important to all girls and boys. Most of them have not been released until now - it is difficult to imagine what they have gone through, and how they can cope with the future.

I have been very sad to learn that even some peacekeepers have used sexual violence against the individuals that they were supposed to protect. The scandals from the Central

African Republic where young local boys and girls were sexually violated should never be allowed to happen.

The establishment of the International Criminal Court in 2002 was a remarkable step forward also with regard to fighting sexual violence in conflict. The statute of the Court includes rape in the definitions of the gravest crimes. The statute defines various forms of sexual and gender-based violence as underlying acts of crimes against humanity and war crimes and recognizes that these may also constitute acts of genocide. The “court of last resort” has tried perpetrators with crimes that include the use of child soldiers in the DRC, sexual violence in CAR and the systematic destruction of humanity’s shared cultural heritage at Timbuktu, Mali.

Alongside the ICC, domestic and regional mechanisms, as well as *ad hoc* and mixed tribunals have strengthened international justice.

Peace of Justice - Reconciliation

The most important question is: Do we prefer peace or justice - or can we have both?

Many high-level peace mediators prefer peace, as a means to build the society again, adding that justice will be handled later on. They fear that peace negotiations will not be successful when setting conditions. The same men who started the war, the warlords, are often parties to the negotiations. They are the perpetrators who should not enjoy impunity.

But from the victim's point of view, from the community's point of view, sustainable peace cannot be achieved without justice. My personal experience, especially as member and Chair for 6 years of the Board of Directors of the Trust Fund for Victims (TFV) of the International Criminal Court in the Hague, I learned that recognition of the victims' situation is a precondition for reconciliation. The TFV has been able to assist both raped women and child soldiers, healing trauma and leading to a new life.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) and the Trust Fund for Victims (TFV) were founded under the Rome Statute, adopted in 1998. The ICC is in charge of prosecuting and judging those responsible for genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and crime of aggression. The TFV provides support to victim survivors of these crimes and their families in situations under the jurisdiction of the ICC.

The Trust Fund for Victims has two unique mandates. Perpetrators of crimes within the jurisdiction of the ICC cannot and should not escape accountability. Moreover, when convicted, they should pay for the consequences of their crimes. Within the Rome Statute, reparations to victims have become a touchstone of international criminal justice. If the indigence of the convicted person is confirmed, the first mandate of TFV will come to use. The States Parties have enabled the TFV to financially complement collective reparations to victims from its own resources. In 2015 after decisions on Court-ordered reparations, the TFV has planned the implementation assisted by a wide range of experts to find the best way to repair the harm, without causing more harm. In the Katanga case, the Trial Chamber of ICC

has issued an order for reparations, finding 297 victims of Mr. Katanga's crimes eligible for reparations. The decision States both individual and collective reparations.

The second mandate of the Trust Fund has been very active since 2008, with more than 300,000 beneficiaries. Using voluntary contributions from donors, the TFV provides assistance to victims and their families in ICC situations through programmes of physical rehabilitation, material support and psychological rehabilitation. It serves as an immediate response to the urgent needs of victims and their communities who have suffered harm from crimes under the jurisdiction of ICC.

To give an example on the complexity of assisting victims, I will mention former child soldiers. They were forced to fight by the enemy, and are definitely victims. At the same time, they are perpetrators, who have killed in a brutal way following orders of the Commander. I have met with many of them in Northern Uganda and DRC. The community will not accept them back after the peace. For girl soldiers who have given birth to a child fathered by the enemy, the situation is even worse. How to get them back to the society?

This is one of the many reasons why women must be included in all peace processes, at the table, not as observers behind. Women and their organizations are experts on the society to be built after the peace agreement. Justice, education, social security, trauma counselling are as important as building bridges and roads. Justice is not only to get perpetrators behind bars. At best it should be transformative justice, seeking the truth and recognition of the crimes.



A well-known example is the use of Gacaca-courts in Rwanda. During the genocide in 1994, 800,000 men and boys and some women too, were killed within 100 days. At the same time around half a million women and girls were raped. It was impossible to manage trials for all the perpetrators. The UN Rwanda tribunal and national courts did their best to handle the gravest crimes, but the prisons were overcrowded with prisoners waiting for trial. Rwanda has an old tradition of justice that has functioned by bringing the people of a village together, “sitting under the tree”. Led by the old wise man of the village, victims, perpetrators, witnesses come together to work out the situation. Of course, they cannot function as a judicial court, but for less grave crimes it is possible to find the truth, to get confessions, perhaps some compensation, in the best situation even forgiveness, and most important, reconciliation, which gives the means to go forward with your life.

International Humanitarian Law

International human rights law has the aim of protecting all persons at all times. International humanitarian law (IHL) is applicable in times of armed conflicts. Both protect human rights, but the difference between them is that IHL is largely based on distinctions - in particular between civilians and combatants. The protection of civilians has unfortunately failed too often during the last decades.

The principle of distinction is the cornerstone of IHL. It requires parties to an armed conflict to distinguish at all time between civilians and combatants and not direct attacks against civilians or civilian objects, such as schools and hospitals.

IHL also prohibits indiscriminate attacks, which although not intentionally targeting civilians, are of a nature to strike military and civilian objects or persons without distinction. IHL prohibits also the use of certain weapons that are intrinsically indiscriminate or which can continue to cause injury long after their deployment, such as chemical and biological weapons as well as anti-personnel mines.

Parties to an armed conflict are required to ensure the humane treatment of all persons within their power, including security of life and person and fundamental judicial guarantees. Women must be especially protected against rape, enforced prostitution or any other form of indecent assault. Women’s personal safety is also protected by human rights and refugee law.

These are some examples on what the IHL stands for - and what so brutally is broken in conflicts like in Syria. The rules of war are not respected anymore. It is a great concern that the UN and Red Cross/Crescent/Chrystal flags are the direct targets of attacks. Too many of the brave people who serve in the conflict areas helping civilians, have lost their lives.



The representatives of the media are facing the same situation; the security of the free media reporting to the outside world has decreased. Their work is utterly important - otherwise we would not know the truth. Another source of grave concern is the frequency of attacks on health-care facilities and personnel, despite their specific protection under IHL.

The rule of law, both within the national boundaries and in the international arena, is an achievement of our civilization that we need to defend. Some practices such as torture in all its forms have been outlawed under all circumstances, be it in armed conflict or in peace time. I understand that Thailand is a party to the Convention against Torture and is currently enacting national legislation to better implement this important international treaty. This is essential if perpetrators are to be prosecuted and sentenced.

The United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners, known as the Bangkok Rules, recognize that women prisoners are at particularly high risk of rape, sexual assault and humiliation in prison. The Rules provide important provisions for the protection of women against abuse in prisons and for ensuring accountability for abuse. I know that Her Royal Highness Princess Bajrakitiyabha has been instrumental in establishing and promoting these Bangkok Rules.

I also wish to highlight the need to stop irresponsible arms transfers. They facilitate human rights abuses and violations of the IHL on a massive scale. Fortunately, the Arms Trade Treaty was adopted to stop such transfers and will therefore contribute to reducing the suffering of millions of civilians who are affected by armed conflict and violence. I was pleased to learn that Thailand has signed the Treaty and is in the process of ratifying it.

The President of the ICRC, Mr. Peter Maurer, has noted that “We have entered an era in which armed conflicts are greater in complexity and numbers of actors, longer in duration, wider in their regional impact, broader in tactics and weapons used and, above all, more atrocious in the human suffering they cause”. He also said that “We must be honest with ourselves: collectively, we are failing to protect the most vulnerable from the impact of armed conflict and violence” and urged for a renewed commitment to respect the law. I wholeheartedly join this call truly hope that the countries of this world will make every effort to enhance compliance with the law, and establish this mechanism.

I also wish to refer to a speech by UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres speaking in London after his appointment in January. “We are seeing the human rights agenda losing ground to the national sovereignty agendas. We see more and more irrational behaviours, including an aggressive nationalism”. He emphasized the three separate pillars of the UN- peace and security, human rights and sustainable development - and questioned whether these issues could any longer be addressed separately, saying “There is no peace and security without human rights.” And about

Syria, and for all wars, “we need to convince the parties of the conflict that these wars cannot be won”. When that is understood, there is a hope for peace.

Women as Defenders

Is there a hope for peace in the women’s actions for peace?

After the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security was adopted in 2000, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, today the president of Liberia, and I were asked by the UN to make an assessment of the real situation of women and girls in wars and conflicts. Commissioned by UNIFEM, we travelled to 14 regions of conflict around the world, starting in 2001 in East Timor and Cambodia. We interviewed hundreds of women and girls about their experiences. It was sad to learn that regardless of whether we were in Cambodia or Somalia, Colombia or Sierra Leone, the women had the same story to tell about armed men who raped them and kidnapped their children to be soldiers. In some cultures, the husbands left their raped wives. It was too much for a man’s pride and honor to have a wife who has been with other men.

Our report, “Women War Peace”, was presented by Secretary General Kofi Annan to the Security Council in 2002, with many recommendations. One of them was the need for National Action Plans for the implementation of SCR 1325. Finland is updating the 3rd version of the NAP, as new challenges will come. The cooperation between government and civil society during the preparation is most educating and fruitful, a positive process in itself. I am glad that our Ministry of Defence has been very actively involved during the years. I have

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learned that Thailand is now in the same process, working for your own National Action Plan. I know that the Southern Border Provinces in Thailand have long been affected by violence and I am aware that women play an important role in many civil society organizations in that part of the country. I would like to express my sincere hope that these women with their direct experience of violence will be part of this national discussion. I wish you a lot of luck with the important work, and hope for a good result. I am sure that my ambassador Mrs. Suikkari-Kleven is more than happy to tell about our experiences if you so wish.

I was also a member of the High-Level Advisory Group for an update of the situation of SRC 1325, facing its 15th birthday. A new Global study “Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace” was commissioned by UN Women with the lead author Radhika Coomaraswamy. The study is excellent, but I was saddened to find that we had to repeat many of the recommendations already presented in the report 15 years ago. Still too many of the recommendations had not been implemented.

There was some good news as well. Major advances have been made to address sexual violence in conflict through international

courts and other accountability mechanisms. The number of peace agreements that include gender specific provisions has increased compared with the time before SCR 1325. More security sector personnel are now trained to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence, and more countries are implementing national action plans or related strategies.

The report also demonstrates that women’s empowerment and gender equality contribute to the conclusion of peace talks and sustainable peace, accelerating economic recovery, strengthening protection efforts of peace operations and humanitarian assistance, and countering violent extremism. The findings in the Global Study highlight that when women are at the peace tables, their participation increases the probability of a peace agreement lasting at least two years by 20 per cent, and 35 per cent over 15 years.

There are many successful examples on women’s activities to build peace. The African Women’s Situation Room has achieved excellent results preparing for elections in Africa. Women are trained to function in situations before and under elections. They inform local women about the elections, your rights to vote of free will, not under pressure of male relatives.



The importance of security at the polling stations is followed up with direct connection to police stations. During the election the Situation Room functions as a central for all information. There are clear indications about functioning well, with experience from Liberia, Senegal, Kenya and many more elections. The fair voting right is elementary for women's participation in the political life.

In Colombia, the peace negotiations finally after the long civil war ended in a Peace Agreement. The Colombian women's strong activity to end the war was a clearly acknowledged cause to the final breakthrough. In Guatemala women have played a decisive role in the peace process, and the strength of the Liberian women is well known. Through silent mass protests, where the women sat dressed in white, they forced President Charles Taylor to start

peace negotiations. The methods women use in their work for peace are quite unconventional, but effective. Unfortunately, the movement of Peace Defenders is facing problems, it is important that their valuable work for peace is acknowledged.

One more very special example. Already for several years African women organizations have gathered at the African Union in Addis Ababa for a pre-meeting before the Summit of the Heads of State. During 3-4 days "Gender is my Agenda Conference" prepares the Summit Agenda from a Gender point of view. The outcome is a proposal, or list of requirements, for the Heads of State. This is quite unique, to my knowledge there are not pre-meetings on Gender in connection to the Summits of other Continents.



Some of the experiences made in other countries might be helpful in the ongoing attempts to end the violence in the Southern Border Provinces of Thailand. As I said before, women must be included at the table in peace processes, and not as outside observers, in order to maximize the chances for a successful outcome.

Where Do We Stand Today?

The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has a long experience from the field. I welcome the emphasis on human rights and prevention he has announced to be his priorities. Together with many other women, I was disappointed when UN Member States once again did not appoint a woman to the highest position of UN. The truth though is that an excellent candidate won, and we expect him to raise the credibility of the world organization. Creating peace in Syria has failed because of the difficult rules of the Security Council with the veto rights for permanent members.

The UN has weaknesses, but through the years the UN agencies, together with initiatives like Justice Rapid Response, or the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, or the quite new Sustaining Peace Framework have represented major steps towards addressing the structural shortcomings of the multilateral system.

The ICRC has recently published an interesting study called People on War 2016. People living in countries affected by armed conflict were asked if they believe the rules of war matter. They do. Over two thirds of people living in these countries think it makes sense to impose limits on how they are fought. Almost half

of those surveyed in conflict-affected countries believe international humanitarian law prevents wars from getting worse. But the study also showed that people are becoming resigned to the death of civilians as an inevitable part of war. This trend has to be reversed.

The attitudes of people all over the world seem to have grown much harder. There is more division between people than elements unifying them. The hardened attitudes, the fact that people of many countries were confronted with the enormous amount of unhappy people trying to escape from war, extremism and the negative impacts of the climate change seem to have opened for a much more militaristic attitude amongst people. To end conflicts with arms instead of through negotiations seems to have been accepted by too many. There is an increasing thinking of “us” and of “them”. A thinking that always has ended sadly.

Last week, The Baltic Sea and Gulf of Finland which we have been used to regard as the Sea of Peace, was the training areas for Russia, China, and later some NATO countries and the Nordics. All are friendly States, but massive demonstration of military power frightens civilians. And I have not forgotten that I used to be Defence Minister, and am still a patriot, and I don't like the situation.

I am a born optimist, otherwise I would not be here with you today. My address might have sounded very pessimistic, and I have to apologize for that. We must trust each other, cooperate for peace, and give our support to all of them who have the courage to personally work for bringing peace and justice to the world.

Thank you. ❖