

## *NGO leaders influence global change – lessons learned*

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Our culture is deeply steeped in violence from its very origins. That's part of the challenge I want to talk about this morning when we talk about issues of violence, women's leadership and how we move forward. I want to start by sharing what I think is the contradiction or the difficulty, the question that keeps me awake at night. I don't know about you, but I continually struggle to understand how a movement and feminists who have so profoundly changed so much over the past 50 years-- and we really have created a revolution in what people understand to be important public policy issues even in the ways that many women can live their lives-- can at the same time have so little impact on international global foreign policy and how the world is conducting itself. We find ourselves in 2005, 10 years after the Beijing World Conference on Women, 30 years after International Women's Year, at a moment when violence is growing. Racist and sexist and homophobic intolerance escalates, fundamentalism and militarism are on the rise, and backlash has been made more urgent-- not only by terrorist attacks but by a superpower that undermines progress on international law, human rights, multilateralism, the UN itself and uses women's right to choose as a key global policy in doing so.

When we hear about the clash of civilization and clash of culture, I think the major clash of culture today is between feminism and pro-human rights and pro-social justice people in every country who are seeking to advance and to call into question this kind of militarism and violence and those who have invested in its continuation. Yet this particular clash of cultures is not one we get to see highlighted in our debates around the world. It brings to us a real challenge as feminists which is how do we build on that incredible activism and thinking of more than 50 years? Starting from this moment, how do we build on those gains? How do we build on the leaps forward we made in defining reproductive rights, in sexual rights, in putting a vast array of issues of violence against women from domestic violence to date rape to so called honor killings, sexual slavery, and rape in war? These have all been made visible by our movement over the past decade. And yet, we find ourselves in a position where these forms of violence show no sign of decreasing—where, in fact, there are signs that new forms of violence against women are emerging, particularly to punish women for their activism. Acid burning in some parts of Asia has been a sign of this; date rape is often referred to as “putting her in her place.” These are all forms of violence that are emerging ways to put back those advances that women have made, to remind us that violence against women doesn't exist in a vacuum. It's not an individual thing that happens to you. It happens because it is a part of a system rooted in the violence against women, a system that is rooted in the notion that women should be kept in their place, but not only as women but as people who should not be trying to change the social order.

As women seek to change the social order, we see a great deal more violence against many women. One of the challenges that many of us have been trying to address lately is How do we defend the defenders of women's rights? What do we need to do as a movement and as women concerned to check our tendency to always be critiquing each other? We miss the fact that in this moment that many women are on the front line of many these struggles and do not always feel that they have the support of the movement behind them. This is one of the challenges I'd like to put on the table in terms of both violence and women's leadership. I don't want to sound only the negative tone. I do believe that we can build on the incredible advances we have made, and in particular, because I work now on the global agenda, the ways in which women have been recognized as a part of the global agenda, the kind of possibilities that we have through the United Nations, though the international arena to have our voices heard. I believe the global arena has become a part of our thinking of avenues and venues for activism, but I want to remind us that the global arena can never solve those problems. The United Nations or the global arena is one more strategic place to be. It's not going to take away the issues or the problems. We must always remember that that implementation happens at the local level, at the national level. And the global arena is a place that we set standards, where we try to influence our governments

through the way we put demands on them, but if we don't keep the global and the local level connected, we will not have the strength of either.

In this time of trying to figure out what do we do in a moment of backlash, I was working on the Beijing Plus Ten process, and some of us were thinking very hard about how do we both defend the gains we made which were under attack in that conference but at the same time not become defensive to the point where we cannot advance new thinking and new issues. This is where many of us see the challenge today. How do we defend women's rights against the attack but also continue to be proactive? I think we've sort of got a litany in the women's movement now of all the major challenges and obstacles, what I sometimes call the Big Three: inequitable globalization, fundamentalisms and militarism. These have all made it more difficult. They have combined in a way to increase the culture of violence rather than the culture of peace today. Particularly, one of the pieces of inequitable globalization that we don't discuss enough is the way it has created gaps between women--the inequitable way in which it has been a possibility for advancing for some women but not for many women. That has actually made it harder sometimes for us to build the solidarity that we need because women are further apart from each other in their situation globally in terms of economic resources than we were 50 years ago.

Secondly, fundamentalisms is a problem that we need to address because it is about the use of religion by political movements. It has chosen to steal away from women the real genuine relationship to spirituality and religion that many people feel. The use of religion by political movements is nothing new. It's been going on for a long time. But if we want to claim to have a different vision we must address that use, we must counter that use, we must talk about other forms of religious, ethnic and national identity that do not play into the agendas of fundamentalists who have chosen to make women's rights and women as the holders of their traditional cultural ideologies.

Finally, I want to speak about what I think is the fourth big challenge, sometimes left off that agenda, which is the persistence of patriarchy. In women's studies over the last decade and a half, the term patriarchy went out of style, but I find lately people wanting to bring back the concept, not as a precise definition but as an understanding that violence in daily life and the persistence of the negation of women as leaders, the negation of women's voices is much more deeply rooted culturally than we often thought. I particularly look at this in relation to the topic today, violence against women in the home. In spite of all that we have done to give a few women more options to leave violent homes, we have not even cracked the culture of impunity towards violence against women. Everywhere, north, south, east and west, in spite of changes in laws, men who are perpetrators of violence in the domestic sphere whether against their wives, their children, their domestic servants, view themselves as having immunity, view themselves as actually not expecting anyone in their families or in the culture to call them to account. As long as that culture of impunity continues--not even primarily legally because in many places the laws have changed--but in the eyes of the family and the community, there has not been that change. We need to look at what is the depth of a culture of violence that is so perpetrated at the core of the society, in the home, and how and what role does that play in the effort to create a culture of peace in the world.

We often speak in feminist circles about a spectrum of violence, but we don't organize very well about the spectrum of violence. We say that violence in the home and violence in the military is connected, but we don't often organize strategies that show these linkages and that strengthen the understanding that they are part of the same phenomena. I believe in challenging a culture of violence in the world where fortunes are made on arms sales, wars and media violence, which is therefore a daunting task. We must also make those linkages, show people the linkage between that violence and the daily violence and the ways in which we are taught to accept violence as an inevitable and natural part of daily life. So in that sense we all say and talk about intersectionality and interrelatedness, but we need to be thinking about how do we organize in strategies that actually show this intersection, that show this interrelatedness, that build the different groups and projects we have. Sometimes I say the women's movement's strength is "we have a thousand flowers blooming." But

often those flowers are individually beautiful but they are weak when it comes to resistance because they are not brought together in a strong form; they are not supporting each other enough. I think that's one of the challenges we face today.

Now how does this connect to the UN and the international arena? I would connect it, because in the international arena one of the things that women who have worked there have learned is how to bring together our different strategies and issues... not perfectly, we still struggle to be sure that gender justice and economic justice are seen as part of the same agenda. We're still struggling to connect the issues, as women are everywhere. But there is a certain understanding that if women want to have an impact today in the global arena, what we learn through all those UN conferences is that we have to find a way to reflect our diversity while also supporting each other in some common goals. What we've learned to do in putting forward through the UN world conferences is bottom-line language that we could build upon and find the diverse expressions for or, to put another way, to find a more creative dynamic between universality of principles and goals and diversity of experience of what it takes to get to those goals and those places. We've all been able to talk about the end of violence against women and violence in our culture as a goal, but we all have many different paths to find the way to ending that violence.

In the United Nations today, I think we see a moment when there is an expectation that the women's movement will have a voice. That doesn't mean we have power. But there is some expectation that women will have something to say. Yet the processes have been taken over increasingly by those forces of backlash, by those who would like to dismantle the United Nations and multilateralism, and actually are playing out games that are very sophisticated in terms of how we actually move forward. The World Summit is actually the next stage in the contested space about what the world community believes in, whether we believe in multilateralism, whether we believe in the UN as an arena where political forces can debate the issues short of just superpower dominance; and the debates are going on right now on globalization, on governance, on poverty, on peace, security, violence and human rights. In the first rounds of those debates represented by the Millennium Development Goals, or the MDGs, women were boxed into one corner once more. Many women have objected to that. Again, women have been speaking out against a reductionist agenda; that it didn't really bring what we needed. That has not changed everything, but in the new drafts that are coming up we see continually more recognition of gender and human rights, more recognition that there must be a presence of these questions. Now will that change the situation? No. But I believe it will provide a place where we can challenge our own governments about their agenda and what's happening.

I think it's also true that if women's voices are heard in this Millennium Summit Review, we will once more face the picture of a globe in which male defined agendas dominate. So where does that leave us? It seems to me that the lessons learned are that we must have a clearer longer term strategy. Much of our advance has been based on believing that if we raised the issues and made visible the problems like violence against women, that somehow they would be so compelling, the violation, and the awfulness of what we are talking about. There has to be a power to say that this is something that we want to see end. We have to learn better how to institutionalize the changes that we see, how to build a movement that is more effective at challenging power at the national and international and local level by linking with other groups seeking to do that and by linking with each other. That involves both building women's leadership on the individual level but even more importantly collectively. Most of our organizations are very creative, but when it comes to the demand to produce the long term complex struggle, many of them are only one grant away from being out of existence. I think we have to think about how we should see ourselves in the long run building a movement with enduring power that can take up the complexity of these questions.

Finally, I think we need to understand that we are in a moment of backlash, but we are in that moment because of all the progress we have made. Whenever I get discouraged about that moment, I always try to remind myself of some other moment in history to look back at other things. Recently I came across a fabulous resource which I want to recommend to everyone who's doing women's studies and women's history: a new

book produced by the Women Living Under Muslim Laws Network called “The Great Ancestors Project,” which is based on a slideshow they did at a leadership institute that we did jointly in 1999. They show, from the eighth century to the present, women in a Muslim context who have been speaking up for women’s rights and what happened to them and what they did. In so doing, they have tried to provide a resource that would debunk the argument of women’s rights as not a natural development in the Muslim world. In fact, they go back to one of the first wives of Muhammad as one of the first people to speak for women’s rights. These kinds of resources are extremely important. I noted recently the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the YWCA and the ways in which women have tried to take that organization with a long history of organizing women and bring it to bear on the problem of HIV/AIDS in Africa, on the issues of violence against women. I think we have many resources; the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom that has been organizing for almost a century on these issues. We have many resources that are often not linked together.

One of the things that I have learned in the work I have done globally is that if we don’t bring those resources together, our voices are not heard and our strength is not there. So I am looking toward how we can keep pursuing those promises from all the world conference documents, the outlines and plans on violence against women. These do need to be implemented, but they will only be implemented as we produce a voice and force that says this is part of the agenda for a culture of peace, this is part of the agenda for reversing the trends toward violence that have so plagued our world. In this post 9/11 world, we also have to put forward a new agenda for real security that is not based on scaring each other, on fearing each other, but on actually meeting all human needs.