

Ute Scheub

**1000 Peace Women Across the Globe Exhibition in Berlin**

Dear friends,

On behalf of the “German Women’s Security Council” and the “1000 PeaceWomen across the Globe” I have the great pleasure to welcome you here today. “1000 PeaceWomen across the Globe” is an emerging network of PeaceWomen in over 150 countries. Some of them are present here at this conference, and I welcome them warmly. I am one of twenty-three coordinators of the 1000 PeaceWomen. Since the autumn of 2006 I have been responsible for the West-European region. I am also a founding member of the Women’s Security Council and of its steering group. The Women’s Security Council is a network of peace-activists, peace-researchers and women in political organizations and foundations who are working honorary as a lobby for the national and international implementation of UN-Resolution 1325 - which demands equal participation of women at all levels of the various peace processes. We have worked for a long time to finally bring about this conference, and I am really happy to be here with you all.

What we are trying to do is to build and strengthen our network. This is symbolised here by the network of strings and wires with cards of the 1000 PeaceWomen. On the front of each card is a picture of each PeaceWomen with her name and on the other side a brief description of her work.

The Swiss Designers “Atelier Oi” were responsible for the exhibition concept. The idea was that it should be cost-effective to produce, flexible and light-weight so that it could be shown – at minimum cost – wherever there was a demand. The cards can be attached to a specially designed metal stand, or hung at eye-level from a fishnet or from a sun-shade. Having been shown at many schools, city halls, museums, libraries and other public places the exhibition made the PeaceWomen visible. Since 2005 it has been shown in two-hundred locations in over thirty countries of the world including Austria, Bangladesh, Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, China, El-Salvador, Germany, the Fiji Islands, India, Italy, Luxemburg, Mongolia, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Palestine, Singapore, Tanzania and the USA.

You can also purchase the exhibition catalogue “1000 PeaceWomen across the Globe” for the price of 25 Euros. It is written in English and over 2000 pages long. It contains a photograph, short biography and description of the work of each PeaceWoman. So it provides useful information for everyone involved in peace work – whether it be at the grassroot, national or international level. The catalogue also won the Swiss Ministry of Culture’s award for “one of the most beautiful Swiss Books in 2005”.

This wonderful worldwide project was initiated by Ruth-Gaby Vermot, a member of the Swiss parliament and the European Council. Vermot – a committed member of the Swiss Social Democratic Party – has made countless visits to refugee camps in Bosnia, Kosovo, Georgia and Chechnya where she has met many women refugees,

about whom she said: “They carry out peace work in incredibly difficult situations. They work under seriously hazardous health conditions, look for lost ones, demand food for the hungry, and fight for better accommodation for refugees. They help abandoned or orphaned children to come to terms with the awful devastation that wars have inflicted upon them. They outrightly condemn kidnapping, torture and murder and document the savagery inflicted on peoples by warring parties. And when they make their position public they face threats to their own safety and their lives from the authorities. These are women who are victims of war, women who mourn their dead. They are the survivors and they are calling for peace. Courageously, with determination and without thought for themselves these women are taking small and big steps to build peaceful societies.”

They are peace queens rather than warlords, queens without kingdoms and without power. The work of these women is not recognised and not valued as leading to the creation of peaceful societies; they are not the kind of women who would be nominated for big prizes. And their work - especially those who work at the grassroots - has no place on the international stage. Seeing all this and more, in the spring of 2003 Gaby Vermot called a meeting with other like-minded people. At that meeting, the idea of “1000 PeaceWomen for the Nobel Peace Prize, 2005” was born.

The idea was that the work of PeaceWomen would gain public attention and secondly, that if the prize was won, the money would finance the very much needed continuation of the work. In accordance with the regulations of the Nobel Peace Prize Committee three women from the 1000 had to be selected for the nomination of the prize. These were named with the understanding that they represented all of the 1000 women, and indeed, that the 1000 PeaceWomen themselves represented the hundreds of thousands of women world-wide engaged in such work. The 1000 PeaceWomen were not awarded – although they were rated highly by the selection committee. In 2005 the prize went to Mohammed el-Baradei and his International Atomic Energy Organization. In 2006 it went to Mohammad Yunus from Bangladesh. It is interesting to note that since the Nobel Peace Prize was first initiated in 1901, it has been won eighty times by men and only twelve times by women.

Each year a new nomination has to be made. And nominations for the prize can only be submitted by public figures like former prize-winners, government ministers or university professors. In 2005 the Swiss Foreign Minister, Michelle Calmy-Rey, submitted the 1000 PeaceWomen nomination and in 2006 the nomination was submitted by the German Minister Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul, with the support of thirteen other members of parliament of all political parties. In 2007 the PeaceWomen were not nominated and we shall have to see what happens in 2008.

The initiative was, we believe, very important. It was not a Euro-centric project but a global one. And being a global project the first question the Bern office had to deal with was: how does one contact women in, let’s say in the rural regions of Africa or Latin America? From this was born the strategy of selecting regional coordinators who knew their regions and who had good contacts with women’s groups and peace groups in their own locality. Some of the regional coordinators are renowned PeaceWomen in their own right: for instance, Sima Samar who was Afghanistan’s

first Women's minister and Fadila Memisevic from Sarajevo who is greatly admired for her work on human rights in the Balkans.

In 2004 the search for the 1000 PeaceWomen began in earnest. Flyers, questionnaires and information were sent by the coordinators to women's groups in their regions requesting nominations. Nomination forms were available in the following languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German and Russian. In total, within four months the project received over 2000 nominations from women in 153 countries.

In October 2004 the project team in Bern met with the regional coordinators to discuss what next steps needed to be taken. The criteria for nomination were strict and complicated. It was suggested that a quota be allocated for each country based on its population size and the intensity of its conflict situation and this suggestion was accepted unanimously. So the largest number of nominations was set for India and China - both with 91. Brazil follows behind with 53 nominations. European countries had correspondingly smaller quotas. For example, in Germany, the largest country in Europe, 15 women were nominated. The criterion women had to fulfil was that their work be non-violent, have been long-lasting and transparent – especially with regard to financial resources. And finally the candidates had to be tolerant and altruistic.

Another criterion was a wider concept of peace and security – which we use also in the German Women's Security Council. And another important point for the selection committee was the work at the grassroots level. More than half of the present 1000 PeaceWomen are working in independent initiatives and NGO's. We have also some prominent nominees, for example Luisa Morgantini, member of the European Parliament, who unfortunately is unable to attend this conference due to pressure of work, or the Indian environmental activist Vandana Shiva or the Canadian UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour. But such public figures make up only the minority.

In many conflict regions women are the first to shake hands with the “enemy” behind the conflict lines; it is the women who initiate a political dialogue and the process of reconciliation. Some examples: in the eighties all political contacts between Israelis and Palestinians were forbidden. But women from both sides met secretly in Jerusalem. They weren't arrested because they were “only women” and pioneers of rapprochement. They founded the “Jerusalem Link” between two women's centres in Western and Eastern Jerusalem which repeatedly makes public suggestions for conflict solutions. In Rwanda there were some Tutsi and Hutu widows who met in 1994 under a tree. Directly after the genocide of nearly one million Tutsi they founded an ethnically-mixed network of self-help, which now permeates the whole nation and is regarded as the most active part of the Rwanda civil society.

Another famous women's initiative are the mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina. They demanded an explanation what had happened to their children who had disappeared during the period of military dictatorship. Others are working in a similar way: the group “Mutual Support” in Guatemala, the “relatives of arrested and missing people” in Chile or the “association of the women of Srebrenica”. In Israel the “Women in Black” hold a demonstration every Friday – and this has developed

into a world-wide movement with groups in Ex-Yugoslavia, Colombia and other countries.

For 2006 and 2007 we originally planned twenty conferences in all twenty regions of the world, where the PeaceWomen would have met one another and been able to develop a “vision for peace” for their own region. But we don’t have the necessary financial resources. For comparison: with the money spent in the Iraq war and ultimately for the breeding of a new global caste of warriors and warmongers we could finance half a million of such conferences – or alternatively, all projects of the PeaceWomen in this century. Or the whole process to retard global warming.

It can be observed that worldwide nearly all women projects are suffering from a lack of financial support – a consequence of the continuing oppression and underestimation of the female sex. The total costs for the originally planned activities for 2006 and 2007 amount to about four million Euros, but at present we only have about 200.000 Euro. I don’t want to wail, I am angry and furious about this. Perhaps you are familiar with the quotation published by the United Nations in 1978: “The female half of the world’s population does two thirds of the work, earns a tenth and owns one percent of the property.” This statement was made by Krishna Ahooja-Patel, who was then an employee of the UN Labour Organization ILO, and later the president of the International Women’s League for Peace and Freedom - and also one of the 1000 PeaceWomen. I asked her if these numbers are still valid today and her response was that “globalization made the women even poorer”.

The motto for our project for the next two years is “visibility and connectivity”. The project team will be occupied with strengthening the networks of solidarity, also because there are some PeaceWomen in danger. For one of the most courageous journalists of the world this work comes too late: Anna Politkowskaja, also one of the 1000 PeaceWomen, was shot on the 7<sup>th</sup> of October 2006 because of her research into the Chechnya situation. Another PeaceWoman from Uzbekistan, the lawyer and defender of human rights Mutabar Tadschibaeva, has been in prison since 2005. Only hours after the declaration that the Peace Nobel Prize did not go to the 1000 PeaceWomen she was arrested and the contents of her office were confiscated. Since then a media campaign has been going on, declaring her as an “enemy of mankind”. At our website [www.1000peacewomen.org](http://www.1000peacewomen.org) all of these women in danger are listed under “women at risk” and I appeal to you all to visit this website from time to time and to support these women by letters or mail messages. And if you can contribute financially to the project – that would be wonderful, we need it so much.

Thank you very much for your attention.