

# **The Hague Declaration on Women and Peace-building**

Conference  
The Role of Women in Peace-Building and Reconciliation  
June 12, 2003  
Institute of Social Studies  
The Hague, The Netherlands

In today's warfare, 90 to 95 percent of the casualties are civilians, and the majority of them are women and children. Other estimates reveal that 80 percent of the world's forty million refugees are also women and children. These victims of war and aggression are often deprived of the most basic needs of existence, in addition to being subjected to physical and emotional abuse, such as forced separation from their loved ones, and, in many cases, more brutal violations, such as rape.

Women from all over the world have traditionally been looked upon as victims, but many evidences indicate that women play an effective role in peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peace-building. Women take on a number of formal and informal peace-building activities. These include the initiation of reconciliation processes and the formation of grassroots organizations that carry out relief aid, restore community safety through the development of self-governing mechanisms (from the neighborhood level to higher levels), and create new income generation projects.

Many migrant and refugee women in the Netherlands as well as in other countries are actively involved in promoting a culture of peace and achieving a just and lasting peace in their countries of origin, but a lot of effort and support is still required to achieve this. Furthermore, in many societies, repressive cultural traditions still prevent women from gaining full access to education and to social, economic, and political leadership opportunities.

Peace is the cornerstone to any development process, and the role of women in this process is fundamental, as they constitute the bulk of the population and the workforce. Increased and strengthened intervention of women is needed to bring about a positive change in social values – values that affirm peace rather than war.

Concerned over the very low level of participation of women in the official peace and negotiation processes, both on the side of government and that of armed opposition groups, and alarmed by the increasing number of civilian casualties resulting from war, the majority of whom are women and children,

WE, the 130 women and men peacemakers from various countries all over the world, convening in The Hague this June 12, 2003 for the conference on

"The Role of Women in the Realm of Peace-Building and Reconciliation", hereby declare the following findings and recommendations:

Women, as well as men, have the potential for peacemaking and a responsibility to build and keep peace; however, there is urgent need to recognize women's creative and effective contributions in waging peace, since their capacities are too often overlooked and under-utilized;

Through cultural experience, women have developed skills of conflict management and resolution that come from the practice of nurturing, both at home and in the society at large. Due to their intimate knowledge of social and commercial interactions, women can play an important role in early warning as proven in many countries;

Women are concerned about the impact armed conflict has on their own lives, their families, and nations and are steadfast in addressing the issues arising from the post-conflict settlement phase;

Conflict resolution not only requires political negotiation but also personal healing and genuine reconciliation. When it comes to peace-building, women and men united have a stronger capacity for emotional integrity and can deal with the issues in a more honest, courageous, and compassionate way;

Although women successfully pave the way towards peace negotiations by resisting oppression and creating an atmosphere in which reconciliation between opponents can take place, their good deeds are rarely covered by the press, radio, and other media. History has yet to reserve a place for women's contributions to peace, while the signing of a peace treaty by military leaders or warlords is widely publicized.

In view of this tremendous capacity of women for peacemaking, we call on nations in conflict – their governments, their armed groups, and their societies – to:

- Give women access to formal education, health services, and economic self-improvement, as well as leadership roles and mass media and information projection;
- Integrate gender perspectives into social transformations;
- Allow women to participate in all stages of peace negotiation and conflict resolution, policy-making, reconciliation, and healing;
- Liberate women from cultural constraints that impede their full growth and development as human beings and from those that deny them their human rights;

- Promote daily dialogue amongst people from diverse social, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds and levels;

**We call and encourage women to:**

- Continue to empower themselves, cultivate their self-esteem, and increase their aptitude for peace-building, peacemaking, and peacekeeping;
- Liberate themselves from some cultural or traditional practices that have negative impact on them and impede their full development as human beings;
- Advocate that women have the opportunity to participate in all levels of decision-making for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict;
- Reinforce peace-building efforts through deeper study, reflection, and documentation; network with other women's organizations to exchange experiences and insights;

**We call on the Dutch multicultural society, in particular, to:**

- Strengthen North-South collaboration and solidarity. Promote, enhance, and strengthen co-operation between Dutch citizens and migrant communities in the Netherlands based on equal partnership;
- Strengthen co-operation between migrant communities in the Netherlands and other countries and peace-building groups in the countries of origin.

**And finally, we call on the United Nations, member-states, development organizations, business sectors, and all multilateral agencies to:**

- Commit more gender-sensitive resources to support the peaceful resolution of conflict;
- Address the root causes of armed conflict. These roots often lie in structural violence, such as unjust socio-economic policies. Peace without justice is not sustainable. Without justice, the peace may only be a pause between wars;
- Ensure the full and meaningful implementation of UN Resolution 1325, which calls for a greater role for women in all levels of decision-making for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict.

- Call for the reduction of all arms worldwide, the elimination of the arms trade, and the conversion of the military industry to development purposes.
- Stop abductions, forced recruitment, and deployments of children and minors as combatants or child soldiers.

We end this declaration with the realization that peace is not an issue but a duty. Therefore, we are urging all people of the world to take hold of this duty for our survival.

Signed this 12th day of June 2003, in The Hague, the Netherlands.

Women and men participants representing various Dutch and migrant women organizations, peace-related organizations, development funding agencies, and social institutions from:

Afghanistan	Ghana
Belgium	Netherlands
Ethiopia	Nigeria
India	Panama
Iran	Philippines
Iraq	Somalia
Indonesia	Sudan

**Co-operating Organizations:**

- Mujadilah Development, Inc. (Philippines)
- Coalition of Grassroots Women Organisation (Somalia)
- Coalition for Peace and Unity (Afghanistan)
- International Fellowship of Reconciliation's Women Peacemakers Program (IFOR-WPP)
- Komnas Perempuan/Baileo (Indonesia)
- Multicultural Women Peacemakers Network (Netherlands)
- Nederlands Expertisecentrum Alternatieven voor Geweld (NEAG)
- Novib
- Vrouwen voor Vrede op de Molukken
- Vrouwen voor Vrede Nederland
- Tiye International

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