

How Do You Build A Lasting Peace? Include Women!

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BY CHRISTINA HOLDER

What do women from Afghanistan, Burundi, Iraq, Bosnia, Argentina, the United States and every country in between have in common? One thing is that they are celebrating a year of increased attention to an important issue that often has been ignored—including women at every stage of the political process.

October 30, 2003 marked the third anniversary of a groundbreaking resolution, passed unanimously by the United Nations Security Council, in which UN member states made a commitment to achieve gender parity in political decision-making and governmental representation. Known as S.C. Resolution 1325, this agreement officially recognizes the key roles women play in building peace after conflict, as well as preventing armed disputes from occurring in the first place. Women know the intimate details of conflict, and often are charged with holding families and communities together during times of instability. Yet despite their intimate knowledge of conflict, women historically have been excluded from the negotiating table for agreements designed to prevent aggression or to reconcile warring factions.

But the tides are turning. Women are “waging peace” everywhere from Afghanistan (where they have demanded a voice in the new constitution and interim government) to Burundi (where previously opposed Hutus and Tutsis are healing communities by adopting each other’s orphaned children). These women have brought their stories to the international community at events like the anniversary of Resolution 1325. The roles of women in conflict prevention and peace negotiation was further highlighted in March 2003 at the 48th annual United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. These women lift up creative alternatives to violence with their own weapons—compromise, reconciliation and community building.

Christina Holder is the Web designer and researcher for the Presbyterian United Nations Office.



Patricia Smith Malton, Executive Director, PeacexPeace.

Hutu and Tutsi women participate in Positive Solitary Day organized by the Women's Peace Center in Burundi.

- Communicate with women who are building peace. PeacexPeace, an organization with the mission of linking women around the world and promoting cultural harmony, provides technical assistance to promote sustainable cultural exchange. Visit www.peacexpeace.org to find out how your group can join the “sister circle.”
- Celebrate the fourth anniversary of S.C. Resolution 1325 in October 2004. Contact the Presbyterian United Nations Office, 212/697-4568 or unoffice@presbyun.org to learn about service ideas and educational materials related to women, peace and security.
- Participate in Worldwide Ministries and International Mission programs. Nurture existing relationships with sister churches or create new ones. Visit www.pcusa.org/wmd/partnerships.htm to learn more.