



## Australian Bahá'í Community Office for Equality

### Women and the Peace Process

*“So it will come to pass that when women participate fully and equally in the affairs of the world, when they enter confidently and capably the great arenas of laws and politics, war will cease; for woman will be the obstacle and hindrance to it.”<sup>1</sup>*

The Australian Bahá'í Community Office for Equality is pleased to see that the Commission on the Status of Women will address the important theme of women's equal participation in conflict prevention, conflict management and in post-conflict peace-building at its 48th session in March 2004. Owing to their particular experiences, women bring to the peace dialogue certain qualities and perspectives complementary to those of men and essential to successful outcomes. Bahá'ís, therefore, take seriously the challenge of bringing women as equals of men into the mainstream of decision making.

The report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the theme "Peace: Women and the Peace Process" points out that women have historically been at the forefront of peace movements. It carefully documents their courageous and unflinching efforts to end war through the channels available to them, which have been mostly non-governmental. The report also notes that women, as peace researchers, generally take a holistic approach to peace - based on the assumption that real peace requires the elimination of all forms of oppression and discrimination. This approach is particularly well suited to dealing with the interconnected problems of this age. Yet, as the report sadly notes, "women are virtually absent from the peace process at the official level."<sup>2</sup>

Peace-building over the long term requires the transformation of society, a transformation based on justice, involving education for all, the alleviation of poverty and the abandonment of deeply rooted prejudices. At a time when conquest and aggression have lost their credibility as means of solving difficult problems, qualities in which women are strong, such as the capacity to link intuition to the other rational processes, and facility with networking and cooperation, are gaining importance. Thus as increasing numbers of women are admitted into centres of decision-making, fresh perspectives are enlightening consultation; a new moral and psychological climate is spreading, enabling new dynamics of problem-solving to emerge. Women's advocacy over the last few years has dramatically changed the way the world looks at international economics, sustainable development, and human rights. The changes women have promoted in these areas are critical elements in the foundation for peace

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<sup>1</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace, Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, 1982, p 135

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in *Written statement to the 37th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. Agenda item 5 Priority themes: Peace: Women and the peace process, Vienna, Austria, 15 March 1993* BIC Document #93-0315 UN Document #E/CN.6/1993/NGO/7

and prosperity and the inclusion of women directly affects the pace and success of the peace-building process.

Members of the Bahá'í Faith, who today compose a worldwide community of more than five million individuals in some 232 countries and territories, are united in the view that men and women everywhere must begin to forge a new and equal partnership. This is not only a matter of justice but the key to the realization of the age-old dream of universal peace and prosperity. The progress of humanity and the achievement of peace depend on men and women working together; therefore, both must be equally developed. Men must encourage and facilitate the full development of women, as women must support men in their development towards this new condition of society<sup>3</sup>.

Despite rational arguments for including women in decision-making, there is an almost involuntary resistance. The exclusion of women from important consultations is so deeply ingrained in most cultures that change is unlikely without a conscious, deliberate effort to involve them. Change, even when undertaken voluntarily, is rarely perceived as positive at first; rather it is often profoundly disturbing. Bahá'ís acknowledge that fundamental changes in the way human beings relate to one another are both necessary and inevitable, but will not occur overnight. The transition to full equality between women and men is an evolutionary process requiring education and patience with oneself and others, as well as an unswerving determination.

Within the worldwide Bahá'í community, efforts have long been underway to bring women into the mainstream of collective decision making. Participation by women is understood to be an integral part of a dynamic that is gradually transforming Bahá'í communities all over the world. The fundamental power this generates is most evident in the Bahá'í decision-making process, a methodology that is consultative and participatory in nature.

We pay tribute to the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) for its creative efforts to integrate women into all aspects of society and acknowledge the work being undertaken by many women's organisations in support of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. It is vital that concrete actions, which will involve women in increasing numbers at every level in the peace process and society in general, are strengthened, for it is "only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavour will the moral and psychological climate be created in which international peace can emerge."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Australian Bahá'í Community Office for Equality paper *Commission on the Status of Women 48<sup>th</sup> Session - The Role of Men and Boys in Gender Equality*, October 2003

<sup>4</sup> See Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, 1986