

Statement by Ambassador Swanee Hunt
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US House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight
May 15, 2008

Distinguished members of Congress,

I would like to thank Chairman William Delahunt and Ranking Member Dana Rohrabacher for inviting me to testify about the critical role women play in preventing conflict, leading efforts to resolve it, and securing viable peace after the violence ends. I thank all the members of the Foreign Affairs committee as well as representatives from other committees here today. Considering the daily news from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Sudan, it is very timely for the US Congress to focus its attention on finding long term, sustainable solutions to deep-rooted conflicts. One such way is to highlight many contributions women make to peace and stability.

On May 1, 2008 *the Washington Post* had a cover page story about Army Specialist Monica Brown of my native Texas. Last year Specialist Brown was awarded a Silver Star, only the second women in history to be awarded such a military honor. The eighteen year-old-medic faced insurgents fire in eastern Afghanistan as she ran to assist her wounded comrades, “displaying bravery and grit.” Specialist Brown is one of 26,304 American women currently serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. As the article pointed out, these women are valued by the military not only their skills as soldiers, but also their cultural sensitivity to connecting with local women in these worn torn countries. Congresswomen Gillibrand, and other members of House and Senate, have told me repeatedly that if we value women’s cultural sensitivity as warriors, we should also value them as peacemakers.

I began promoting a more inclusive concept of security, one that acknowledges women’s contributions to peace processes, as US Ambassador to Austria. While helping resolve the conflict in the Balkans from 1993 to 1997, I became keenly aware of the unwillingness of the international community to use the enormous pool of talented, well-educated women peace builders to help resolve the conflict. Yugoslavia, the country torn apart by a bloody war that lasted a decade and killed close to 200,000 people, had the highest percentage of women PhDs per capita; yet, when we convened the parties in Vienna and later at Dayton to negotiate, there were no women on any formal delegations.

The marginalization of these experts in the Balkans was simply part of a broader problem of exclusion. To address it, in the fall of 1999 I founded a program called The Initiative for Inclusive Security. Its corner stone has been the global network of women peacebuilders, which has since grown to include over 800 women from 50 conflicts. My primary goal was to connect its members to policymakers around the world. Members of the Network, all demonstrated leaders are elected and appointed government officials, directors of NGOs and movements in civil society, scholars and educators, businesspeople, representatives of multilateral organizations, and journalists. With varied backgrounds, perspectives, and skills, they bring a vast array of expertise to the peacemaking process. Over the last decade these leaders have led major efforts to create stability in the most volatile places in the world, ranging from Guatemala to Sri Lanka, Colombia to Liberia, the Middle East to Cambodia. I am honored to have three members of our Network join me here today to testify about their personal experiences of securing peace in Uganda, Afghanistan, and Sudan.

“Inclusive security,” a paradigm I discussed in a Foreign Policy article published in 2001 and the title of a course I teach at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, recognizes the changed nature of modern conflicts. Just as warfare has become more inclusive—with civilian deaths more common than soldiers’—so too must our approach to ending conflict. The concept of inclusive security builds on a diverse, citizen-driven approach, motivated by efficiency. Our goal is not simply the absence of war, but a sustainable peace fostered by fundamental social changes. Women are crucial to this change since they are often at the center of civil society, electoral referenda, and other citizen-driven movements. An inclusive security approach expands the array of tools available to police, military,

and diplomatic structures by adding collaboration with local efforts to achieve peace.

Why Include Women in Peace Processes?

Women constitute over half the population; sidelining them is discriminatory and fundamentally undemocratic. But the rights argument is persuasive only to those who cherish fairness alone. For those who value efficacy and efficiency, ignoring them is foolish. Worldwide, women make profound contributions to peace building. If we hope to transform instability and violence into stability and prosperity, we must incorporate their expertise.

Women are still a shockingly underutilized resource in conflict prevention and resolution. By failing to leverage women's expertise and include them fully, we are squandering a tremendous opportunity. In Iraq, Sudan, Afghanistan, Rwanda, Bosnia, and elsewhere, I have seen firsthand how women prevent the eruption of violence, mediate among warring factions, and repair shattered societies after conflict.

Evidence of women's contributions is compelling. The Initiative for Inclusive Security has conducted field studies to document women's impact in every stage of conflict. It is evident they are highly invested in peace. And were they consistently at the table for strategic planning with policy makers they could have had an enormous positive impact on discussions, debates, and decisions relating to security. Instead, peace processes excluded women and conflict rages in some 50 countries today.

Our research proves:

- 1. Women lead conflict resolution efforts throughout periods of armed conflict; and women's groups often lead the call for negotiations and an end to violent conflict.**

Nothing illustrates this point better than the work of Ana Teresa Bernal in Colombia. As coordinator of the National Network of Initiatives Against the War and for Peace, Ms. Bernal mobilized 10 million people to vote for peace in a 1996 national referendum. She helped create a vehicle for civil society and government to bring their interests into the negotiations between the government and the guerillas. Today she is one of two women representing civil society on the recently established National Commission for Reparation and Reconciliation.

- 2. Women play an important stabilizing role during the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) process.**

Though women and girls were active militarily in the conflict in Sierra Leone and twelve percent of all combatants were women, they were mostly excluded from official reintegration programs. Nonetheless, women supported the reintegration of former fighters and filled many gaps in official programs, such as community reconstruction efforts, in addition to opening their homes to former child soldiers.

No one can tell Sierra Leone's story better than its Foreign Affairs Minister Zainab Hawa Bangura, who ran for president and was arguably the driving force behind the signing of the peace accord. Ms. Bangura mobilized thousands of women to confront armed soldiers in pro-democracy street protests. With little experience confronting thousands of unarmed women, the confused soldiers found themselves receiving orders from Ms. Bangura. "We are your mothers, your sisters, your wives and your daughters," she told them. "If you are going to shoot us, then do it now. But remember, the whole world is watching."

- 3. Women capitalize on their traditional roles to reach across conflict lines as mediators and promoters of dialogue.**

More than 65,000 people have lost their lives and nearly one million have been displaced during two decades of war in Sri Lanka. Fighting between the Tamil minority and the Sri Lankan government intensified in the 1990s; in 2002, the Norwegians brokered a cease-fire and parties committed to sign

a peace agreement. However, large-scale violence resumed after Sri Lanka's 2005 presidential elections and subsequent talks have failed. Still, national and international women's organizations have advanced important peace initiatives. On the national front, Sri Lankan women have been active in campaigning for an end of the war, reaching across conflict divides to advance dialogue through specific peace initiatives.

After Visaka Dharamadasa's son, a soldier in the Sri Lankan army, disappeared while fighting, she traveled into Tamil territory to negotiate with the Sri Lankan army and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to ensure the identification and return of soldiers' bodies. She advocated for combatant use of identification tags and for adherence to international laws addressing the proper treatment of prisoners of war. In the process, Ms. Dharamadasa gained the trust of LTTE leaders; and so when talks were floundering and Tamil representatives refused to speak directly with negotiators, they asked her to carry messages to the government.

4. Women are at the forefront of good governance efforts and often serve as a bridge between government and civil society, working across political lines to achieve important policy priorities.

No example better highlights women's contributions to governance than Rwanda, where women now hold 49 percent of the seats in Parliament—the highest percentage in the world. They are playing a significant role in politics and governance in the country, thanks to women like Aloisea Inyumba.

At the age of 26, Ms. Inyumba became Rwanda's minister of gender and social affairs after the genocide. She designed programs to bury 800,000 corpses, and designed a national adoption campaign to find homes for 500,000 orphans. As head of the Commission for Unity and Reconciliation, she went village to village helping victims dramatize their tragedies, preparing them for the reintegration of perpetrators. She created women's councils that fed into the parliament, resulting in the highest percentage of women legislators in the world.

What Congress Can Do?

These women are not exceptions to the rule—they are but a few examples of the valuable contributions that millions of women make everyday to peace building in their homes, communities, and countries.

Despite all this evidence, policymakers and practitioners rarely include women in stabilization and reconstruction processes. A quick scan of today's major conflicts reveals that from Darfur to Afghanistan to Iraq, women continue to be marginalized and underrepresented in everything from peace negotiations and constitution drafting committees to service provision and peacekeeping missions.

We all recognize the pressing need to employ new tactics, policies, and strategies to resolve the scores of intransigent conflicts raging around the world. I believe that from a purely utilitarian standpoint we need to push to ensure that more than half of the population is represented at the table.

Particularly important is ensuring that sufficient number of women are integrated in peace building. In Liberia, a critical mass of women mobilized across sectors, ethnicities, and religions. When negotiations floundered, the women literally locked warring factions in the room to ensure they remained until a peace agreement was signed. The women's efforts culminated in the election of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first female president in Africa and the appointment of women to several key positions in the administration. We now see the fruits of Liberian women's labor as the country is on its way to becoming one of the few African post-conflict success stories.

The US Congress must play an important role in making inclusive security an important component of its work. In particular:

1) Congress should use its oversight role to request from the Administration much more

significant political and financial attention to programs that promote women's leadership, particularly in conflict resolution and peace building. In fiscal years 2002 and 2003, US assistance to Afghanistan was close to one billion dollars; of that amount, only \$200,000 went to Afghan women NGOs, an abysmal 0.02 percent. For the past seventeen months, bill S. 147 has been in the Senate Foreign Relations committee. It calls for allocation of 30 million dollars for grants to women-led organizations in Afghanistan. That money would support human rights education for women and girls and create more opportunities for women to exercise leadership in programs that strengthen women's security and safety.

- 2) UN Security Council resolution 1325 was a first, critical acknowledgement that women must be included in all efforts to promote peace. Since its passage there has been some progress. Gender focal points are now included in many UN missions. In places like East Timor, the UN mission organized women's political coalitions to build bridges to civil society. Recognized as a stabilizing force, women were provided resources to become active participants in their country's political affairs. As a result, 26% of Constituent Assembly members are women.

Unfortunately, such examples are rare exceptions; for most part, **the UN has failed to realize meaningful inclusion of women into its core mission: peacemaking and peace building. As the subcommittee that oversees intersection of the US foreign policy with international organizations, you can advance the UN commitments by:**

- a) Holding the Secretary General and Secretariat accountable for compliance with the spirit and mandates of 1325. For example, one female Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) and two female Deputy SRSGs in 26 peacekeeping missions is indefensible; a list of dozens of qualified women has sat on the Secretary General's desk for years.
 - b) Demanding, through our influence at the Security Council, that governments, negotiators, and signators of peace agreements fulfill their commitments to include women. Request that the Secretariat publish lists of the commitments, and send monitors into conflict regions to identify and recruit talented women.
 - c) Insisting that all relevant parties include women in decisions related to constitutions, justice systems, or security sector reform. You could demand the UN withhold funding when post-conflict governing committees and commissions fail to involve strong contingents of women.
- 3) **On the political front, there are many ways in which you can press the Administration to fulfill the US commitment to implementation of Resolution 1325.** Most specifically, I recommend you:
- a) Insist that the Department of State submit lists of qualified women for key posts in UN peace missions, especially for policy-making functions;
 - b) Call for women's involvement as mediators, members of negotiating teams, service providers for reconstruction, and members of transitional and permanent governing structures;
 - c) Push for participatory, transparent, and inclusive peace negotiations that empower forces for peace, not just armed combatants, and that make greater use of Track II processes.
- 4) **I hope you will find the time on your CODELs to find an hour when you are in Bogotá, Baghdad, or Belgrade to sit down and listen to women's agendas for peace.** You would be surprised at the difference in substance and in tone. As ambassador, I worked closely with President Clinton, Secretary Albright, and Ambassador Holbrooke on Bosnian peace. We all had many frustrating encounters with stubborn local politicians who refused to support the possibility of co-existence. I always countered that resistance by meeting with hundreds of local women who had their fingers on the pulse of their communities. Each time I left inspired by their energy and motivation to rebuild their country.
- 5) **Members of this committee and other Congress members could also help in simple ways**

that can help ensure protection of these courageous women. For example, four years ago we brought a delegation of 16 leading Colombian women from all sides of the conflict to work on a common agenda for peace. One morning, Jim McGovern hosted a congressional briefing, and some of you stopped by to meet the Colombian women. I remember Ana Teresa Bernal begging our staff to take a picture with several Congressional members that morning, and I thought it would be a pleasant piece of memorabilia. But of course, Ana is always much more strategic than that—later, she told me that having a picture with four US Congress members was a major safeguard for her back in Colombia. It was a protection “chip,” one she would cash should threats against her life continue. It was a proof that she met important people in the US who would hopefully aid her in the case of an emergency.

Congress can recognize the importance of including women like Ms. Bernal, Zainab Bangura, Visaka Dharamadasa, and Aloisea Inyumba. It should regularly invite women like Ms. Amiri, Ms. Bigombe, and Ms. Okwaci to testify. Including these, and other women, is key to sustainable peace.

Thank you.