Women Leaders

Networking for Peace and Security in the Middle East

30–31 May 2007, Vienna Hofburg Palace

Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs
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Conference participants from politics, media, economy and civil society shared the same analysis: The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a political issue which can be solved through political effort. Without meaningful political dialogue, experience shows that violence takes over to fill the vacuum. No conflict is too complex or too hard to durably resist dialogue. Ursula Plassnik
The search for peace in the Middle East is the most urgent endeavour in international politics today. We all have to contribute to this effort, each of us according to his or her means and possibilities. It is with this in mind that I took the initiative of hosting the international conference “Women Leaders – Networking for Peace and Security in the Middle East” on 30–31 May 2007 in Vienna.

Women in the Arab world and throughout the Middle East have become a driving force for the political, social, economic and cultural development of their respective countries. The Arab Human Development Report 2005 “Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World” very directly addresses both the achievements and the deficits which still exist. Women have become central agents of change but are still not realising their full potential in contributing to progress and prosperity within their societies.

The conference brought together women leaders from the Middle East and other conflict and post-conflict regions for an open and direct exchange of views on possibilities for conflict solution and peace building in the Middle East. It showed that women are ready to reach out to each other in search for dialogue, to overcome distances and barriers and to establish innovative networks. Networking creates empathy and understanding that are essential steps towards peace and reconciliation. Amazing as it may sound, the conference also provided the platform for the first ever personal encounter between Tzipi Livni and Hanan Ashrawi.

At a meeting of the Women’s Empowerment Network of women ministers held in the context of the conference in Vienna on 31 May, we adopted recommendations to ensure that women’s voices are heard more effectively in conflict resolution and peace building. We noted the fact that there is currently no woman among 54 United Nations envoys to conflict and post-conflict regions. In a first response, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has assured us that he will work to address this imbalance.

The political situation in the Middle East has once more dramatically evolved since
the Vienna Conference. But have hopes for the Middle East Peace Process and the stability of the region been shattered? Whatever developments we have witnessed since, the sense of urgency felt by all conference participants prevails and will certainly keep us alert in implementing the results of our meeting in Vienna. I am convinced that we have set in motion an important process.

The two-state solution is supported by a great majority of the people concerned on both sides. The international community has been determined to encourage, promote and support efforts leading to such a solution.

However, we can only encourage and promote, we cannot substitute direct dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians.

Conference participants from politics, media, economy and civil society shared the same analysis: The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a political issue which can be solved through political effort. We must not allow it to be highjacked by extremists or turned into a religious cause. Without meaningful political dialogue, experience shows that violence takes over to fill the vacuum.

No conflict is too complex or too hard to durably resist dialogue.

It is this conviction to which we dedicate this conference booklet, a conviction we would like to share with a broader public in order to make peace and stability in the Middle East come true. We want to encourage women to take their rightful place in society and get engaged in public affairs including peace negotiations in the Middle East as well as worldwide.

Dr. Ursula Plassnik
Vienna, August 2007
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Empowerment of Women in the Area of Conflict Resolution and Peace Building
Women are basic agents in bringing about change and not passive recipients of the assistance offered by development.  

Arab Human Development Report 2005, p. 10
Conference Programme

Wednesday, 30 May 2007

12:30–14:00
Welcome and Opening Lunch for the participants of the Workshops
hosted by H.E. Ursula Plassnik, Federal Minister for European and International Affairs of the Republic of Austria

14:30–16:30
Workshop 1
Media (and) War – Women’s Counter-Strategies
Chair: Gudrun Harrer, Austrian Daily Der Standard

Workshop 2
Economic Development and Conflict Resolution – Women’s Training and Business Strategies
Chair: Ana Gallo Alvarez, European Commission Representation to the Palestinian Authority, Jerusalem

Workshop 3
Politics and Civil Society – Women’s Networking Strategies
Chair: Angela Williams CMG, retired senior UNRWA official

17:00–18:30
Meeting with Austrian media representatives
Chair: Katinka Nowotny, Austrian Broadcasting Corporation ORF

19:30
Dinner for the Workshop participants hosted by the Austrian Ministry for European and International Affairs
Conference Programme

Thursday, 31 May 2007

09:00
Meeting of the Women's
Empowerment Network
Empowerment of Women in the area of
conflict resolution and peace building

Chair H.E. Ursula Plassnik
Federal Minister for European and International
Affairs, Austria

H.E. Hero Talabani
First Lady of Iraq

H.E. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa
President of the UN General Assembly, Bahrain

H.E. Tzipi Livni
Dep. Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs,
Israel

H.E. Benita Ferrero-Waldner
Member of the European Commission for External
Relations

H.E. Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of State, United States of America

H.E. Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic
Minister for Foreign Affairs and European Integration,
Croatia

H.E. Antoinette Batumubwira
Minister for Foreign Affairs, Burundi

H.E. Kinga Göncz
Minister for Foreign Affairs, Hungary

H.E. Fayza Aboulnaga
Minister of International Cooperation, Egypt

H.E. Sumeira Malik
Minister for Women’s Development and Youth, Pakistan

10:15–10:30
Press Briefing by the Co-Chairs

11:00–12:30
Round Table Discussion
Women Leaders – Networking for Peace and
Security in the Middle East
H.E. Nouzha Chekrouni  
Minister Delegate at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Morocco

H.E. Souad Bendjaballah  
Minister Delegate for Scientific Research, Algeria

H.E. Alifa Chaabane-Farouk  
Ombudswoman in the rank of Minister of the Republic of Tunisia

H.E. Hanan Ashrawi  
Member of the Palestinian Legislative Council

H.E. Karen Koning Abuzayd  
Commissioner-General to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency

H.E. Alia Hatough-Bouran  
Ambassador of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to the UK

12:30
Lunch discussion among the participants of the Round Table and the Workshops

14:30
Press Conference
Condoleezza Rice, Ursula Plassnik

Hanan Ashrawi, Antoinette Batumubwira, Sheikha Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa, Ursula Plassnik, Tzipi Livni, Hero Talabani, Benita Ferrero-Waldner
Women in the Arab world and throughout the Middle East have become a driving force for the political, social, economic and cultural development of their respective countries. Ursula Plassnik
The cause of women is a global issue and not one that pertains only to the Arab world. *Arab Human Development Report 2005, p. 61*
Round Table Discussion “Women Leaders – Networking for Peace and Security in the Middle East”

On 31 May, Women Leaders from the Middle East and conflict and post-conflict regions met in Vienna for a Round Table discussion with an open and direct exchange of views on possibilities for conflict solution and peace building in the Middle East, each bringing in her specific experience and expertise in contributing to her respective country’s stabilisation, development and prosperity. However unique each conflict’s history might be, they all have one thing in common: there is no peace without dialogue, there is no solution without negotiation.

As chair of the discussion, Austrian Minister for European and International Affairs Ursula Plassnik welcomed the high-ranking politicians: “I know that some of you had to overcome great distances, barriers that normally separate us. I see your presence here as an expression of your commitment in the search for peace in the Middle East, but also as a sign of commitment to the cause of women, the contribution women can make.” Minister Plassnik on the premises of the meeting: “We have no illusions, we know that there are many obstacles to overcome in the Middle East. Women are realists, keeping their feet on the ground. But this conference, although it focuses on the Middle East, takes place in a larger context, the contribution of women to conflict resolution around the world.”

Minister Plassnik reiterated that this conference should encourage women in the Middle East in the first place. But it was essential to have women leaders around the table also from Burundi, Pakistan, Croatia or Hungary – to give participants the chance to share experiences, to learn from one another. The strength of this meeting was, Minister Plassnik said, “that we talk to each other and not about each other. Women might not be the better peace-makers per se and cannot produce miracles either. But women can take their rightful place in society, they can and do increasingly get engaged in public affairs.”

Before asking the Chairwomen of the three Workshops on Media, Economy and Education and Civil Society to present their recommendations to the Round Table,
Minister Plassnik stressed the importance to learn from civil society, to network and to encourage each other. “I hope that the message coming out of this meeting will be a message of encouragement to the women all over the region”.

Gender equality is a basic principle of the United Nations. The Charter of the UN affirms that one of the organization’s central goals is “faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women”.

In 1946, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was established. Women and children often represent the majority of the victims in today’s conflicts. However it is important to recognize that women are also combatants, participants, leaders, negotiators, peacemakers, and activists.

Gender-specific challenges in armed conflict are not biological but cultural and historic.

Regional challenges in the Middle East are:
• Resolving the political disputes in the region, namely the Arab Israeli conflict.
• Educational reforms that foster critical thinking and break these traditional gender roles.

To succeed in sustainable peace and security, the following is key:
• Ensure the presence of a critical mass of women at all levels of conflict prevention, peace processes and conflict resolution.
• Remove barriers to women’s participation in the armed forces and increase the number of women in peacekeeping operations.
• Ensure that women participate in formal
 peace processes on an equal footing with men.
• Redouble our efforts to fight violence against women.

Tzipi Livni
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Israel

When I decided to enter Israeli politics, gender was not part of my agenda. I wanted to be part of and contribute to the peace process, to finding a solution. But now I see that there is a connection between conflict resolution and empowering women. The situation of women tells us something about the values of a society. Women can be agents of change in society.

Women are looking for common interest rather than seeing conflict as a zero sum game. In the Middle East there is a common interest between Israel and pragmatic leaders in Palestine, Lebanon, the Arab world. We share the same goals: a two-state solution. On the basis of the understanding that it is not a zero sum game, we can work together to achieve this goal, to achieve the same common interest. As women, we can promote this understanding.

Women are multi-tasking rather than employing a narrow focus. We are facing a complex situation with no easy solution. This requires different levels of solution. We need a dual strategy, that is to empower those who believe that it is not a zero sum game but there is common interest, and to weaken the others. We have to promote political understanding when it comes to education. Stop incitement, stop hatred. It is not easy to grow up in our region, but we can teach our children that there is hope. That hatred is the cause of the trouble we
We need to take a broader regional view. The Arab world will not dictate the outcome of the process. There needs to be some compromise, and the Arab world needs to support it.

Women show more empathy for problems of others, rather than to blame the other. Suffering of Palestinians and Israelis, we can share empathy for. In my dialogue with women I found out that we are more interested in understanding the other’s reasons rather than to present take-it-or-leave-it proposals.

Networking is important. The problem is that the perception of women and of the above-mentioned characteristics of dialogue is one of weakness. We must change that by using our collective understanding and power. If we use these characteristics and achieve something successful, we can show that these traits are not weak traits.

This is the first time I am meeting with Hanan Ashrawi, this is an opportunity. I want to see more women in those places where they have an impact. Even if we cannot overcome all problems, we can work together to find a common denominator. Conflicts in our region are being changed from national conflicts to religious conflicts. If we talk about national conflicts, we have answers, for example the two-state solution. If we talk about religious conflicts, we cannot find any solution. I don’t know if women are better in resolving conflicts but we should try. It is our responsibility for the generations to come.

Hanan Ashrawi
Member of the Palestinian Legislative Council

I believe that the workshops have given us quite significant recommendations. The
women and peace journalism proposals are important. Women can explode misconceptions from within if they are empowered to speak up as journalists.

We must avoid the convenient excuse of cultural sensibilities. Women's rights, human rights are global issues. And peace is a most basic and essential human condition. This is a right of everyone. It has a value on its own. Peace is not a charity by the powerful to the powerless, it must be achieved together.

Women speak a different language, they don't play the power game. We can work in partnerships such as the Israeli-Palestinian women's dialogue. Through decades, this dialogue was the most intense one, and it persisted. Women try to understand the other. This is important, and we must maintain it. Women do not try to dehumanise the other. This is not because we are mothers or wives, but because we are women. Women look at the substance, at the core issues, and not “what is in it for me.”

We must take initiatives to work on a peace agenda. The International Women's Commission on Sustainable Palestinian-Israeli Peace is doing very good work. We must dismantle the logics of violence. We must re-legitimize the language of communication. We should follow the recommendations we have heard here today: to have a conference with civil society, politicians, the private sector. This may be pioneering to show men that women can produce results where men only sustain war.

The conflict is a bilateral one, and occupation is bilateral. But third party intervention is crucial, we cannot resolve this situation by ourselves. We have tried, Dr. Rice, we failed. We need third party intervention in effective, substantive way. Not just bringing parties together and then leaving.

We do not have time. There is a sense of urgency. With anger, hatred, war, we are losing our constituency that still believes in peace. We are part of an endangered kind: the people who still believe in a two-state solution. Many say it is too late for this, due to the settlements, the anger, the hatred. Many say it is impossible. I still believe in the two-state solution if third parties get
involved, who look at the situation in a realistic and comprehensive way.

This is not a religious conflict, we must not allow it to be hijacked by religious extremists. If you bring God into it, there is no solution. If we claim a divine right, you can claim whatever. This conflict must be solved politically, legally, according to international law and legitimacy, and including the territorial issues. We have a possibility here and we should seize it and bring together like-minded people.

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**Condoleezza Rice**

Secretary of State, United States of America

Tzipi Livni and Hanan Ashrawi are two of my most frequent interlocutors and that they are not frequently interlocutors with each other is rather startling to me. Listening to them just now it is clear that there are people on both sides of the conflict who have similar views about its resolvability on the basis of politics and compromise and who do not allow it to be hijacked by extremists.

Women need political rights. It is not democratic that half the population cannot vote. The rights of women in civil society and the role of women in power structures is also important. Women do not want to be judged on their gender, but what they can bring to political life.

Key to all of this is women’s education. If there are barriers to women’s education, there are barriers to women’s hopes and opportunities.

I agree with what Hannan Ashrawi said: If conflicts are turned into religious ones,
it is impossible to solve them. This also makes it difficult for women, because according to the extremists’ view, women have no part in conflict resolution or in society in general.

I will do everything I can to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the remaining months in Washington and to help pave the ground for democracy in countries like Lebanon and Pakistan. Those living in democratic societies should be held accountable to defend those values.

**Benita Ferrero-Waldner**
Member of the European Commission for External Relations

I agree with Hanan Ashrawi who said that we cannot achieve anything alone, we must work together.

There are moderates and extremists. I am convinced there is common ground among the moderates. We have to see this common ground: we must not abandon the Arab peace initiative which provides an opportunity to build lasting peace.

Conflicts are increasingly couched in religious terms and becoming more irrational. In conflict situations women always pay a higher price. We have to address this issue.

The European Commission will produce a study which shows what we have achieved so far in the field of women’s empowerment. I will be happy to share it with all of you as soon as it is completed. With this in hand, we can then work together in building a better future for the women of this region and beyond.
I lived in war and conflicts almost all of my life, I can’t even remember a childhood without it, and it is therefore evident to me that it is impossible to think about peace when one is in the midst of war, since one’s main concerns are to find shelter from bombardments and to ensure one’s own survival.

Traditionally in war-ridden countries, it is women who raise the following generations while the men are out of the house and when one bears in mind that currently only 24 percent of Iraqi women are able to read and write, the ongoing educational catastrophe becomes clear since it is all but impossible to bring up children to understand notions of peace and equality under these circumstances. Therefore, in order to solve these problems, there need to be better schools and improved education.

This conference is a success and full of promise. In addition to being a productive discussion, the Round Table meeting also functions as an ice breaker and I am looking forward to participating in the process that was started during this conference.

Antoinette Batumubwira
Minister for Foreign Affairs, Burundi

The role of women, what we can do as women in powerful positions, is important. I am coming from a war-torn country, ten years of war, a political ethnic war. This awakened women. I want to highlight this. For women in the Middle East this is important thing: awareness raising. This is what happened in Burundi: women woke up and they realised that peace is needed. Women stood up and fought for rights and peace.
Also in the guerrilla. They took on a role in the peace process, first as observers, and then they pushed to be included in negotiation groups. Now we have at least 35 percent of women in parliament. We have 8 female Ministers out of 20 Ministers, there are women heading the Treasury, Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Justice.

The Middle East conflict is one of the most important, but in the future we should also look closer at other conflicts. We should continue networking, to exchange our experiences.

Kinga Göncz
Minister for Foreign Affairs, Hungary

Regrettably, women are still “underrepresented” in leading positions in governmental institutions of international diplomacy. In general, women are more engaged and more numerous in international NGOs in particular concerning humanitarian aid or human rights. There is no doubt that international NGOs make an enormous contribution to peace and stability in the world.

However, for the peaceful shaping of international relations it is essential that women get enhanced access to leading positions in the field of governmental and international diplomacy. The informal network of women foreign ministers in the framework of the United Nations can be mentioned as such a positive example. This informal network plays an important role in the early warning and prevention of conflicts. In particular more initiatives like this are required in order to give women more leverage in international affairs and peace processes.
Pakistan is going through a critical phase of its history these days. Our country is confronting innumerable challenges and impediments at the same time. The government is combating so many issues, like terrorism, extremism, health, education, development and empowerment of women in Pakistan.

The most important thing in any conflict resolution is the need for flexibility which we have to develop. This global world has a demand for peace now. We have to be alarmed and concerned about the future of our upcoming generations. This matter is very pertinent to Pakistan, where we are fighting terrorism and extremism. Though women are currently not yet flourishing to the desirable extent, we are struggling hard to contribute and play a constructive role.

Pakistan is developing and progressing towards a moderate democratic system. Pakistan is in the process of formulating and executing the best piece of legislations to provide rights and protection to women. Women have been treated awfully in the name of Islam. This was condoned to some extent by the law in the past. Now a considerable participation of women exists in Pakistan in different fields, and the country is moving towards accomplishment of her goals regarding political, social and economic empowerment of women.

We have to be flexible and adaptable in tackling diverse problems and seek their peaceful resolutions with a view to creating a harmonious and peaceful world.
Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović  
Minister for Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Croatia

Croatia, as a country that painfully experienced a recent armed conflict, is cognizant of the importance of promoting and protecting human rights. Years after the war, we are still addressing the consequences of the conflict. Of the 7,666 persons that were exchanged and liberated from captivity during the war, 932 were women, representing 12 percent. In many cases these women were physically, psychologically and even sexually abused while in captivity.

Today, many of these women are trying to rebuild their lives and those of their families in communities like Vukovar – a community that is a testament to survival, peace, reconstruction and reconciliation. It is Vukovar, with its female Mayor Zdenka Buljan, herself a conflict survivor, which provided the Iraqi delegation to Croatia with that ray of hope – of which we are all speaking today – that one day the people of Iraq and other conflict-ridden areas could live in peace, rebuild their country and reconcile with their neighbours.

Vukovar and all of Croatia provide living proof of what is possible, not only to the people of Iraq and Afghanistan but to all those nations faced with conflict.

I am proud that my nation is now in a position to share its experiences and help the children and women of Afghanistan, Iraq and others in conflict areas.

Having hosted four UN peacekeeping operations on Croatian soil in the 1990s, we are particularly aware of the vulnerability of women and children in conflict situations. That is why for a number of years now, Croatia has been organizing international peacekeeping training with particular emphasis on the human rights component of the training program. Croatia’s future international peacekeepers are thoroughly educated about child protection, suppression of trafficking and Croatia’s zero tolerance policy towards sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations.

My hope is that women in Afghanistan, Iraq and other conflict zones, will look to
the Croatian experience and take from it confidence that there is light at the end of the tunnel, that we can all respect our past, but also put it aside, leave it to historians – and that we can all overcome our differences, consciously, for the sake of our future.

Fayza Aboulnaga
Minister of International Cooperation, Egypt

Egypt attaches great importance to such types of conferences, in particular to those with a focus on women issues. Moreover, the fact that participants include women playing vital roles in the decision-making process in the Middle East and elsewhere renders this conference of great significance, not least because it targets the Middle East region and the Arab-Israeli conflict and women’s role in the region and elsewhere in driving the peace process forward.

The absence to date of a just, peaceful and durable settlement of this conflict and the consequent violations committed against the rights of the Palestinians and their sufferings have all given rise to a sense of oppression and despair. This in turn gives extremists and fundamentalists on both sides, Arabs and Israelis, the chance to take advantage of these circumstances.

Nouzha Chekrouni
Minister Delegate at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Morocco

Morocco has for decades undertaken endeavours at all levels to reach a final and just solution based on the cohesion between all peoples and countries of the region.

In this context Morocco has always been convinced that a military or unilateral solution to this complex conflict, which affects
the entire international community, would not achieve the desired results.

Your presence today demonstrates that there is reason for hope of new peace prospects, and the idea of emphasising the role of women in these prospects is courageous and promising. We are of the opinion that the role of women consists in their ability to constitute a strong backbone for the civil society, resolve the human side of problems and favourably influence business relations. For us, this is a fundamental basis upon which all societies and all forces involved should contribute to the peace process. Indeed, we are convinced that there is no alternative to negotiations and dialogue.

We should like to emphasise once more that the marginalisation of women and their displacement from public life can have nothing but negative effects. For this reason, the means of communication play an extremely important role in strengthening the situation of women. Women must make use of these means in associations and political organisations in order to play their part as an active factor in society and offer prospects for the resolution of highly complex issues.

**Souad Bendjaballah**

Minister Delegate for Scientific Research, Algeria

The national war of independence against colonialism was of formative significance for contemporary history, society and culture in Algeria.

The participation of Algerian women in this battle – even in armed conflicts – paved the way for emancipation in an archaic system and facilitated the acknowledgement of social progress without discrimination. It is in this spirit that the authorities ensure compulsory free schooling of boys and girls, equal rights when accessing the labour market and equal payment, which is also guaranteed by the Constitution.

This policy has made it possible to increase the number of women active in numerous business areas; indeed, in some fields such as education, health and the judiciary women are equally represented. The number of women in areas such as...
administration, journalism and business is also increasing.

Furthermore, the family law code, which is influenced by the Islamic religion, has been amended in order to promote women’s rights and family cohesion. There is no doubt that a lot still remains to be done to overcome underdevelopment, and above all the reactionary attitudes and archaic circumstances which still constitute threats. However, experience has shown that permanent and harmonious development requires the participation of the entire society including that of women, who, after all, account for 50 percent of the population.

Alifa Chaabane Farouk
Ombudswoman in the rank of Minister of the Republic of Tunisia

Women leaders can contribute positively to the settlement of conflicts. Women leaders can also constitute a task force to influence the decision-making process in their countries if they are powerful and numerous enough in decision-making positions and if they enjoy political, economic and social rights without discrimination.

I want to underline the words of Condoleezza Rice presenting the impediments of women empowerment in arguing that we have to advocate political rights for women, give economic opportunities to women and give women education.

I am convinced that women leaders’ networking for peace and security in the Middle East can succeed if we set steps for mutual understanding, if we ignore our differences and if we work together, dialogue sincerely with each other. Women are the real agents of change.
Women leaders have to establish linkages with already existing regional and international organisations, such as the Arab Women Organisation, the World Organisation of Women in Business, the women’s wing of the International Parliamentary Union and the Mediterranean Women Association.

Karen Koning Abu Zayd
Commissioner-General to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency UNRWA

I came to Vienna in some despair, from Gaza via northern Lebanon, finding it difficult to imagine how to contemplate peace. I go away in some hope, having observed the workshop on civil society yesterday, where a group of lively and results-oriented Palestinian and Israeli women put their heads together to challenge women leaders.

I planned to plea, as I have done so often recently, for efforts to bring all the parties to the negotiating table, to beg that the parties acknowledge that there is a partner on the other side, to ask that advantage be taken of the many peace initiatives springing up all over, proving that there is no shortage of ideas or willingness to engage, despite the questions about spreading conflict, declining living conditions and, more tersely, “what peace?”

But what I heard and saw at the workshop yesterday and over dinner was a roomful of energetic, wise and dynamic women, insisting to translate this empowerment initiative into action and results, ready to concentrate on practical steps toward conflict resolution, linking civil society, especially women’s groups, with political decision-makers, demanding a place at the negotiating table for women who are fed up with the suffering of their families and themselves, who appreciate the need for transparency, inclusiveness and consultation, and, even more important, the essential role of a rights-based approach and the need to base negotiations and actions on international law and international humanitarian law. These, too, would be new and welcome phenomena if seriously implemented, a challenge to women and men leaders.
This Round Table discussion comes at a time of great importance in our part of the world. The collective efforts and the engagement of the international community to solve the deadlock are crucially imperative. This forum is an opportunity to show how women’s leadership can move this debate forward, through encouraging dialogue and building bridges of trust and confidence.

Women leaders can be the building blocks of a power coalition to reshape political and economic priorities – building strong partnerships and networks to bring not only women leaders together, but their respective communities at large.

*The best advertisement for empowering women is an empowered woman. Jordan’s towns and villages, I am proud to say, boast numerous examples of women who have overcome challenges and redefined what it means to be a woman in Jordan in 2007.

Talented, resourceful and hard-working, these women have transformed their lives and those of their families and their communities. As women look around, they see their friends and neighbours standing tall – and often decide that it is time to invest in themselves. Success, as you know, breeds success.

Women in Jordan have the full and equal right to participate in public life. Recently we witnessed the establishment of the first political party whose secretary-general is a woman. Many of our municipal councils have women as members or mayors and our Parliament has, in both houses, a healthy representation of women.

We are also introducing microcredit and microfinance schemes that aim at empowering women in rural areas economically. Those programs are integrating women as active players in the economic cycle and improving the economic standing of their families by providing extra income while at the same time serving the objective of instilling self-confidence in the psyche of women in such areas.
Participants of the Round Table Discussion

**Ursula Plassnik**
Federal Minister for European and International Affairs, Austria

**Hero Talabani**
First Lady of Iraq

**Sheikha Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa**
President of the UN General Assembly, Bahrain

**Tzipi Livni**
Dep. Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Israel

**Benita Ferrero-Waldner**
Member of the European Commission for External Relations

**Condoleezza Rice**
Secretary of State, United States of America

**Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic**
Minister for Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Croatia

**Antoinette Batumubwira**
Minister for Foreign Affairs, Burundi

**Kinga Göncz**
Minister for Foreign Affairs, Hungary

**Fayza Aboulnaga**
Minister of International Cooperation, Egypt

**Sumeira Malik**
Minister for Women’s Development and Youth, Pakistan

**Nouzha Chekrouni**
Minister Delegate at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Morocco

**Souad Bendjeballah**
Minister Delegate for Scientific Research, Algeria

**Alifa Chaabane-Farouk**
Ombudswoman in the rank of Minister of the Republic of Tunisia

**Hanan Ashrawi**
Member of the Palestinian Legislative Council

**Karen Koning Abuzayd**
Commissioner-General to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency

**Alia Hatough-Bouran**
Ambassador of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to the UK
Media events and activities in the Arab region are characterised by great and increasing diversity and a trend towards polarisation. This results in numerous negative outcomes for the rise of women in the Arab world.

Workshop 1

Media (and) War – Women’s Counter-Strategies?

Media can inflame conflicts as much as they can contribute to their settlement, to reconciliation and a better understanding of the other side. How do we portray “the other”, how are stereotypes perpetuated via the media, and how do we raise the awareness of journalists to change this?

Women’s achievements in the field of media as war reporters, journalists and professional trainers are outstanding and they need more visibility. Objectives of this workshop also included raising awareness of political leaders not to reduce women in conflicts to their role as victims or as wives or mothers of soldiers but to recognise and promote women’s potential as mediators, negotiators and political decision-makers more strongly. The workshop highlighted the necessity to cover and report on women’s peace efforts more extensively, in particular with regard to the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

Presentation to Round Table

In the workshop on “Media (and) War – Women’s Counter-Strategies” 19 participants from 5 countries in the Middle East, Turkey and Austria focussed on media coverage in war- and conflict-torn regions and the role of women.

One of the participants presented the joint Palestinian-Israeli media monitoring project “Words Can Kill Too” that revealed the following aspects:
• Almost total absence of women in war coverage
• If present, women are reduced to the role of victims, and mothers and wives of soldiers
• There is a general identification of media in war with the war leaders
• Media generally do not challenge the war leaders’ allegation that violence is the only solution
• “Alternative messages” are never reflected in headlines but hidden in the text
• the world is divided into “good” (supporters of the country) and “bad”
On the basis of this input a controversial discussion followed. We reached consensus on the need of common ethic criteria and rules for more accurate and fair reporting. We reached limits concerning the will and ability of journalists to try to understand “the other side”. However, the request is “to remain a journalist” when reporting and “not to become a politician”.

We identified basic needs of journalists in the Middle East: freedom of expression, prevention of persecution of journalists, protection of journalists in their work.

**Messages and Recommendations**

The workshop issued the following messages and recommendations also to be taken up by Women Leaders:

“Conflict sells” in the media but it also reflects the “language of war” used in political rhetorics. We call upon Women Leaders to refrain from using any “language of war” and contribute to raising awareness of the necessity to use a de-escalatory language to the effect that “peace sells better than conflict”.

In order to obtain a more balanced representation of all sides in the media, participants encourage activities such as co-operation programmes among the media present in this workshop and beyond, including the exchange of articles, the development of national but also cross-cultural media monitoring projects. Co-operation with western mainstream newspapers could entail regular columns and reports of and about women in conflict areas.

We raised the idea of “Women and Peace Journalism”, using this term to underline our efforts to give space to “alternative voices”, i.e. to women’s voices promoting peace as a counter-strategy to existing mainstream journalism. We call upon Women Leaders to assist these efforts by giving also more voice to peace-building initiatives, especially women’s voices promoting peace.

In this context, we propose a “Women and Peace Journalism” website which should provide room for the above mentioned “alternative voices” of women that are not covered by mainstream media. The website would also give space to female politicians.
contributing to de-escalation and peace building.

We call upon Women Leaders to support these initiatives in various ways. If governments provide funding, however, the ownership of this project must stay with women from the non-governmental sector and with female journalists. Translation of the published texts into various languages is essential in order to make their messages accessible to the broader public.

There was a discussion about incentives for newspapers and journalists to make them publish more women’s voices, more voices supportive of peace and reconciliation. Such incentives could be media awards for exceptional performance in this field.

Some participants expressed their opinion that “Women and Peace Journalism” should be better represented in the framework of the UN, perhaps through a respective commission. We call upon Women Leaders to support media initiatives of “Women and Peace Journalism” in their respective environments, to support initiatives on the international level, such as in the framework of the United Nations, the European Union and other international fora.

A major point of recommendations concerns media training for women. We call upon Women Leaders but also upon NGOs to support initiatives in this context:

• More training of professional journalism, in particular in the Middle East and the Arab world

In order to obtain a more balanced representation of all sides in the media, participants encourage activities such as co-operation programmes among the media present in this workshop and beyond, including the exchange of articles, the development of national but also cross-cultural media monitoring projects.
We call upon Women Leaders to support media initiatives of “Women and Peace Journalism” in their respective environments, to support initiatives on the international level, such as in the framework of the United Nations, the European Union and other international fora.

- Training must include courses in human rights, and a more accurate awareness of history, sociology etc.
- Training has to be provided by independent organisations, not governments to ensure independent reporting.
- New forms of media coverage such as online journalism should be taught professionally.
- Inter-cultural and cross-border mentoring and mentorship programmes are needed.

In the discussion with Austrian editors in chief and Austrian journalists media representatives from the Middle East reported about their situation and working environment. Suggestions by Austrian media for cooperation included possible exchange of articles in print or online, the different possibilities still have to be explored. Participants planned to continue to use this media network.

It should not be kept a secret that the representatives of Western media in the workshop as well as in the meeting with Austrian journalists were strongly advised by their Middle Eastern colleagues to give up their illusion that their reporting is “neutral”. They were charged especially of selective reporting which is another form of bias.

Finally, the participants of the media workshop agreed on a text of a resolution in support of BBC correspondent Alan Johnston, who was abducted in March 2007 in Gaza. We urge the Women Leaders Round Table to intensify efforts for his immediate and unconditional release. * The text of the resolution will be distributed to the Round Table.

* Alan Johnston was released on 4 July 2007
Workshop Participants

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Katinka Nowotny
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Anat Saragusti
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Ferai Tinc
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Selwa Zako
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Starting from a low base, between 1990 and 2003, the Arab region witnessed a greater increase in women’s share in economic activity than all other regions of the world: the increase for Arab women was 19 percent compared to 3 percent for the world as a whole. Despite this, Arab women’s economic participation remains the lowest in the world. Arab Human Development Report 2005, p. 8
Equal access to education and equality of economic opportunity are key to women’s full political and social participation. The future of a society and a region depends on the investment in women. In times of war and conflict, women are often compelled to focus on providing basic living needs for their families. In addition, women still face legal and cultural constraints on economic activities in many Middle Eastern countries. Objectives of the workshop were to highlight discrimination against women in the fields of education and economy, to stress women’s outstanding contributions in these areas and to develop strategies that could make these efforts and contributions sustainable.

**Presentation to Round Table**

General findings:
- Women and conflict are related in two ways: on one hand, women are comparatively more affected economically by conflict. On the other hand, women’s economic empowerment can be an important tool for conflict resolution.
- Women – as mothers and wives – often see their situation in conflict deteriorate. They are compelled to focus on their role as providers of basic living needs and often see their other potential roles as economic players reduced. This issue is not properly addressed by post-conflict assistance.
- Sustainable and reliable peace and security is a precondition for women’s economic recovery and prosperity.
- In the Middle East, economic empowerment of women does not correspond to their weight in society nor even to their participation at the different levels of education. The main factors limiting women’s economic empowerment are:
  - limited access to the conditions necessary
Equal access to education and equality of economic opportunity are key to women’s full political and social participation. The future of a society and a region depends on the investment in women. In times of war and conflict, women are often compelled to focus on providing basic living needs for their families.

Recommendations

- The implementation of UN-SCR 1325 has been until now far from satisfactory. It is important to develop a mechanism that ensures ongoing follow-up, monitoring and evaluation of its recommendations, including those related to economic empowering.
- Because women are relatively more vulnerable to conflict, conflict and post-conflict responses by the international community should establish allocation criteria that take into account women’s specific needs. This is crucial to bring women back to the economic life.
- Implement programmes aiming at facilitating women’s access to finance that go beyond the more traditional micro-finance schemes. This could be done, inter alia, by creating specific credit lines catering for women projects. Programmes in this field should be part of a larger strategy, also tackling issues such as vocational training and related social services. Access to finance schemes needs to be sustainable in the long term and take into account the cultural specificities of society.
• Encourage and support the creation of business women’s networks promoting exchanges in the education/vocational training field as well as the possibilities to strengthen business relations and opportunities between women on different sides of a conflict. These networks should become powerful social and political players in conflict resolution strategies.
• Identifying and supporting specific business initiatives and activities that could involve business women from the different sides of a conflict, and that can create common links as well as yield tangible outcomes in terms of employment creation and increased living standards.
• Orienting the education and economic participation of women towards future oriented, more dynamic sectors; e.g. IT, new technologies. This would help strongly to break a circle of stereotyping women roles.
• Putting pressure on decision-makers to solve the political obstacles to women’s full participation in economy, including the roots of conflict. Lifting obstacles to movement and access and introducing the conditions for women – on different sides of a conflict – to work together, is key in this context.
• Finally, this conference proves that there is no conflict immune to dialogue, good will and hope. Thus, we are grateful for this initiative and we hope that it will be followed up.
Workshop Participants

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Antonia Stelzl
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The percentage of large female owned firms is higher in the Middle East and North Africa than in any other region. In the Middle East and North Africa, large firms make up almost a third of female-owned companies. Indeed, women own 44 percent of the large manufacturing firms in Egypt, 16 percent in Saudi Arabia, 14 percent in Morocco, and 9 percent in Syria.

World Bank Report “Middle East and North Africa: Gender Overview” 2007, p. 18/19
The region has witnessed many encouraging developments in the area of public participation and representation. For example, the percentage of seats held by women in national parliaments in the Middle East and Northern Africa region increased from 4 percent in 2000 to 8 percent in 2005.

World Bank Report “Middle East and North Africa: Gender Overview” 2007, p. 20
Workshop 3

Politics and Civil Society – Women’s Networking Strategies

Giving civil society initiatives a stronger voice is crucial to establishing efficient networks. This workshop provided the ground and atmosphere to talk openly about the existing lines of conflict and about possible strategies to overcome them. The realm of politics can benefit from the pluralism of women’s expertise and the strengths and merits of women organisations. Networking needs an atmosphere of trust. This workshop aimed to establish the ground for efficient future co-operation in order to assist conflict resolution and peace efforts in the Middle East.

Presentation to Round Table

The participants in Workshop 3 warmly welcome the initiative to convene this important conference, the first to bring together key women political leaders and women active in civil society in the Middle East region.

The situation in the Middle East is deteriorating. Israel and Palestine mark 40 years of occupation. In Iraq, Lebanon and elsewhere in the region, violence and insecurity are daily exacting a heavy toll on peoples’ lives. Military actions have failed to resolve conflict. The only hope for peace and security in the region are political solutions, acceptable to all parties, which lead to a resolution of conflict. The peace processes hitherto set in motion are at an impasse. There is an urgent need for action employing other strategies, action which engages both political leaders and civil society, which today is often ahead of the decision-makers in its eagerness to move negotiations forward.
Charged with seeking ways in which political leaders and women in civil society can work together for peace and security, the participants in workshop 3 wish to convey the following messages and recommendations to the Round Table. These seek to build on such initiatives as UNSC Resolution 1325, the Arab Peace Initiative, and the pioneering work of women’s networks among the parties to a conflict – including in particular, in the case of Israel-Palestine, those of the International Women’s Commission for a Just and Sustainable Palestinian-Israeli Peace (IWC).

**Recommendations**

- **Addressing the core issue of Israel-Palestine:** women leaders to convene an international conference in the region within the framework of the Arab League Initiative, in which women leaders and civil society are substantially included, and in which women are involved in both the planning and implementation.

  ➜ **Follow-up action:** Establish a planning committee forthwith, with a view to taking a decision on the timing and format, etc. of the conference within the next two months.

  It is necessary to put in place consultative mechanisms which are inclusive and transparent, both within and between communities which are parties to a conflict, and multilaterally. Again, women have an important role to play.
Recommendations

- International women leaders who visit the region to consult routinely with women peace activists, including, in Israel and Palestine, the IWC
- Communication mechanisms to be established between political leaders and women’s organizations, through which the analyses and suggestions of civil society can be regularly transmitted to decision-makers, and issues and proposals raised in negotiations are presented for discussion in civil society fora
- Women leaders to establish within their own societies mechanisms to consult with and inform their constituencies

Follow-up action:
Women leaders to inform women peace activists of their visits to the region, and appoint in their own offices a liaison officer for this purpose.
Elected women representatives to be trained on peace-building processes involving consultation with civil society.

In accordance with the provisions of UNSC 1325 and other human rights and women’s rights conventions and legal instruments, more concerted efforts are needed to ensure protection for civilian populations, especially women and children, during conflicts and in the period following conflict resolution.

Recommendations

- Women leaders to hold political decision-makers accountable for compliance with their human rights obligations, including the protection of civilian populations, especially women and children
- More effective use to be made by women leaders and civil society of mechanisms for monitoring and reporting on human rights violations, to trigger interventions to stop violations, as a legal obligation
- In peace negotiations, accountability for the protection and security of civilians to be fully factored into decisions and agreements.

Given the limited time for deliberation during the workshop, some of these recom-
mendations need to be further developed for implementation to be practicable. Participants are committed to working in partnership with the conference organizers and women leaders to this end.

→ Follow-up action:
A meeting to be held later this year, to assess the progress which has been made in following up the issues raised and recommendations made at this conference

Workshop Participants

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**Samia Bamieh**
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Appointing a woman to a ministerial position has been a general rule in most Arab governments since at least the 1990s. The essential ministries that allocate resources, define foreign policy and safeguard internal and external security remain in the hands of men.

At its meeting in Vienna of 31 May, the Steering Group of the Women’s Empowerment Network of high level women politicians adopted a set of recommendations to promote effective implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security. The recommendations demanding a fair share of international mediation and peace-building positions for women were also submitted to United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro. Their implementation will be followed closely.

On 31 May 2007, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Austrian Federal Minister for European and International Affairs Dr. Ursula Plassnik hosted a meeting of the Women’s Empowerment Network Steering Group in Vienna to discuss strategies for the empowerment of women in the area of conflict resolution and peace-building. The meeting took place in the context of an International Conference “Women Leaders – Networking for Peace and Security in the Middle East”.

Women have important contributions to make to conflict resolution and peace-building, both on a local and on an international level. To ensure that these contributions are effectively heard and used, the Steering
Antoinette Batumubwira, Kinga Göncz, Condoleezza Rice, Ursula Plassnik, Sheikha Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Sumeira Malik, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic

The Steering Group agreed on the following recommendations:

• The Steering Group urges the Secretary General of the United Nations to set up a mechanism to increase the number of women among United Nations special representatives and envoys including as heads of peace operations. The fact that there is currently no woman among 54 United Nations envoys to conflict and post-conflict regions is unacceptable.
• The Steering Group commits itself to work towards the nomination of more women as envoys and mediators also in other international and regional organisations.
• Whenever visiting conflict or post-conflict regions such as the Middle East, Steering Group members will hold consultations with women’s groups and women human rights defenders.
• The Steering Group calls upon the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission to effectively integrate a gender perspective into all aspects of its work and to ensure that women are included in peace processes.
• The Steering Group reaffirmed the need to strengthen the gender architecture of the United Nations, with a view to ensure a more effective and efficient delivery of United Nations gender-related programmes and mandates in the field.

Steering Group members further decided to nominate focal points within their offices to ensure effective implementation of these recommendations and to coordinate future activities of the Women’s Empowerment Network.
Participants Steering Committee

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Federal Minister for European and International Affairs, Austria

Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of State, United States of America

Sheikha Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa
President of the UN General Assembly, Bahrain

Benita Ferrero-Waldner
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Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic
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