



**The role of women and men
in intercultural and interreligious
dialogue for the prevention
of conflict, for peace building
and for democratisation**

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**Final report of the Group of Specialists
on the role of women and men in intercultural
and interreligious dialogue for the prevention of conflict,
for peace building and for democratisation**

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CONTENTS

Introduction.....	9
I. Intercultural and interreligious dialogue: Meanings, concepts, implementation	12
1. The importance of dialogue	12
2. The concept of dialogue	12
3. What is dialogue all about? Hearing/understanding the content	15
4. Dialogue facing gender imbalance	17
5. Bringing about dialogue	19
II. The role of women and men in intercultural and interreligious dialogue	22
1. The role of women and men in dialogue	22
2. The role of women and men in conflict prevention and peace building	22
III. Obstacles to the role of women and men in interreligious and intercultural dialogue in conflict prevention, peace building and democratisation	28
1. Stereotyping	29
2. Obstacles	30
IV. Good Practice.....	40
1. Organising dialogue.....	40
2. Dialogue: models and potentials	42
3. A new era: Challenges, opportunities and steps towards dialogue as a means of achieving gender equality and "En-gendering" peace	46
Conclusions and recommendations	53
1. Conclusions	53
2. Recommendations.....	61
Appendix I List of the Members of the Group of Specialists on the role of women and men in intercultural and interreligious dialogue for conflict prevention, for peace building and for democratisation (EG-S-DI)	65
Appendix II Terms of Reference for a Group of Specialists on the role of women and men in the intercultural and interreligious dialogue for conflict prevention, for peace building and for democratisation (EG-S-DI).....	67

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Women can play a significant role in peace building nowadays and their participation in all levels of dialogue is essential to conflict prevention, sustainable peace and global justice.

Despite many examples of women's powerful engagement in favour of peace building and dialogue across religious/national/cultural divides, women's contributions are not yet authorised and acknowledged.

Women suffer more from the effects of war/conflict than men, constituting the vast majority of refugees, along with children and elderly people. In addition, women are subjected to especially odious forms of violence, in particular sexual violence used as a weapon of war. Although they are the principal victims of conflicts, women have no power to influence politics of decision-making within war circumstances, nor in post-conflict situations. In terms of gender inequality they very often face under-representation, violation and/or reduction of women's human rights, exclusion from official negotiating tables, ignorance of women's capabilities and skills and limited access to resources.

The lack of gender balance on mediation and negotiating committees, in the peace process or the settlement of conflicts, is particularly striking. In spite of Article 8 of the *United Nations Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women*², women are hardly ever represented at the negotiating table. The skills, experience and knowledge they gained during the conflicts are completely ignored, despite the fact that their presence during peace negotiations might well make it possible to achieve peace more swiftly, while respecting equality between women and men.

To help remedy this situation, in September 2001 the CDEG held an international seminar³ on *"The participation of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts"*. Its objective in holding the seminar was to initiate a discussion on various questions regarding women, activities for peace and the reconstruction of post-conflict societies. The main purpose of the seminar was to study and highlight women's involvement in peace building in Council of Europe member states and in conflict prevention activities, in particular those conducted by local NGOs. The seminar also looked at women's role in the reconciliation and post-conflict reconstruction processes and at the need to increase the number of women in decision-making at all levels of society.

At the same time the seminar prepared the ground for the 5th European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men, which was held in Skopje in January 2003 on the theme: *Democratisation, conflict prevention and peace building: the perspectives and the roles of women*.

During this conference, the issue of intercultural and interreligious dialogue was also discussed as regards conflict prevention and peace building. The need to put an end to conditions which gave rise to irreconcilable differences and often led to conflicts, and the need to find peaceful solutions to differences were affirmed. Participatory governance rallying the nation and the protection of human rights were the main challenges on the

² Article 8:

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure to women, on equal terms with men and without any discrimination, the opportunity to represent their Governments at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations.

³ Seminar on the participation of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, Strasbourg, 20 and 21 September 2001.

democratisation and peace building agenda. Even if countries were not involved in conflict, their societies were now facing ethnic, cultural and religious diversity, and contradictions between globalisation and local societies, often presenting a threat to the progress achieved so far. Partisan identity policies could undermine women's civil rights, in particular those of women belonging to minorities, who must then endure discrimination on several counts.

At the end of the conference, a Declaration on "*Gender equality: a core issue in changing societies*", a programme of action and a "*Resolution on the roles of women and men in conflict prevention, peace building and post-conflict democratic processes: a gender perspective*" were adopted.

These texts encouraged the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to take all the measures necessary to achieve the objectives stated in the Resolution, and in particular to "*invite the Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men (CDEG) to develop its activities regarding the roles of women and men in conflict prevention, peace building and post-conflict democratic processes, including activities related to women's contributions to intercultural and interreligious dialogue.*" The programme of action⁴ also stipulated, among other things, that the CDEG should undertake "*work on women's contributions to conflict prevention, peace and security issues, including intercultural and interreligious dialogue, and in particular examine the possibility of defining common policies with a view to ensuring balanced participation of women and men in decision-making regarding peace negotiations, conflict prevention and resolution and the rebuilding of post-conflict societies*".

The CDEG has also closely followed the United Nations' work in this field. The Platform for Action of the 4th World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) devoted a whole chapter to women and armed conflict. The adoption by the Security Council of Resolution 1325 on *Women, Peace and Security* concerning the need to increase the representation of women in institutions and bodies responsible for managing and resolving conflicts was a major step in the right direction. The resolution states that the reinforcement of the rule of law necessarily entails protecting the human rights of women by emphasising the need for equality in constitutional, legal, judicial and electoral reforms. All states and international organisations have a responsibility to undertake such democratic reforms. At the ministerial conference in Skopje, it was agreed that regional documents such as the Final Declaration of the Conference: "*Gender Equality: a core issue in changing societies*" supplemented the United Nations resolution very effectively.

In order to promote the equal representation of women and men in the political and public decision-making process, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe also adopted in 2003 of a Recommendation⁵ on balanced participation of women and men in political and public and decision-making, which stipulated to take due account of gender balance when appointing representatives to international mediation and negotiating committees, particularly in the peace process or the settlement of conflicts;

As a follow-up to the ministerial conference, the CDEG decided to set up a *Group of specialists on the role of women and men in intercultural and interreligious dialogue for the prevention of conflicts, for peace building and for democratisation (EG-S-DI)* – comprising experts from several Council of Europe committees and observers from other international organisations see the Group's composition in Appendix I). The terms of reference of the Group were adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 12 March 2003 at their 831st meeting.

⁴ See document MEG-5 (2003) 3

⁵ Recommendation Rec (2003) 3 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making, adopted on 12 March 2003.

THE GROUP'S OBJECTIVES

The Group's main objectives, as set out in its terms of reference (Appendix II) were:

- to draft a study on the role of women and men in the framework of intercultural and interreligious dialogue in order to contribute to conflict prevention, peace building and democratisation;
- to identify the obstacles to the participation of women in intercultural and interreligious dialogue and propose, if necessary, mechanisms to reduce and/or eliminate these obstacles;
- to draft on this basis a guide to good practices on the roles of women and men in intercultural and interreligious dialogue for conflict prevention, peace building and democratisation;
- to examine the opportunity to draft a recommendation on the roles of women and men in intercultural and interreligious dialogue for conflict prevention, peace building and democratisation.

THE GROUP'S WORKING METHODS

As a first step, the Group decided to define more clearly the various elements involved in their terms of reference, namely the role of women and men, intercultural and interreligious dialogue, the mechanisms for instituting dialogue, obstacles and good practice and agreed to proceed along two parallel tracks:

- to conduct a series of hearing of invited experts and activists in the field, including representatives of women's groups, religious and ethnic community groups and the media;
- to ask a consultant expert to present an extended study on the basis of which particular issues were identified for individual group members to draft additional texts.

Based on these considerations, the Group decided to draw up a report that should describe intercultural and interreligious dialogue, women's and men's roles, obstacles and mechanisms for implementing dialogue. The report would also include examples of good practice, which would be analysed and recommendations.

All of these contributions were discussed and revised by the Group over four meetings organised between 18 June 2003 and 5 November 2004 as a basis for the drafting of their report. This report is the outcome of the work of the Group of Specialists on the role of women and men in intercultural and interreligious dialogue for the prevention of conflicts, for peace building and for democratisation (EG-S-DI).

The Group was also informed on the work carried out in this field in other sectors of the Organisation, in particular the Parliamentary Assembly and the Directorate of Culture (Directorate General of Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport - DG IV) and in other international organisations such as UNESCO.

I. INTERCULTURAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE: MEANINGS, CONCEPTS, IMPLEMENTATION

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF DIALOGUE

Intercultural and interreligious dialogue makes for respect for other cultures and religions, exchange, confidence and mutual acknowledgment, and provides the opportunity to share differences. At the same time, these forms of dialogue are seen as “*ever more essential tools for human development and peace building*”,⁶ in that they facilitate and establish peaceful and creative contact between peoples of various religions and with different beliefs, cultural and spiritual traditions, values and world visions. Dialogue as such serves and enhances intercultural communication⁷ by providing an opportunity for discussion involving representatives of various religions and cultures, activists and experts in conflict prevention and human rights, and for presenting, sharing and introducing good practice and drawing up joint action plans to affirm the virtues of peace and prevent conflicts.

Intercultural and interreligious dialogue is increasingly important, but often represents a difficult undertaking. In recent decades there have been a number of examples of fruitful intercultural exchange and coexistence in many countries, but there have been far too many examples of conflict, divisions and wars that have come about in the name of religion or through the use of religion as a manipulative tool. The political world might be anxious about the phenomenon of religion, its institutionalisation and its use as a political instrument, but it was also necessary to consider religious phenomena as they were frequently integrated within a culture, and were difficult to separate from it.

Interreligious dialogue has developed in various circles, and ranges from theoretical and comparative studies involving intellectuals with different beliefs, through multifaith consultation concerning religious education and training in conflict resolution and conflict prevention, to co-operation and networking among activists in pursuit of peace and justice. Such dialogue, which is now being organised at international, regional, national and local level, focuses on a variety of topics and concerns, such as the need to deepen understanding, share spiritual concerns, pass on values, respect one another's faith, prepare for social action and learn to live in a multireligious, multicultural society in lasting peace.

There are four concerns that can be identified as important for approaching intercultural and interreligious dialogue: the problem of defining such dialogue within determined conceptual and historical framework(s), ambiguities around understanding the contents of dialogue, the ways of implementation and finding models for balanced participation of women and men as an essential precondition to dialogue.

2. THE CONCEPT OF DIALOGUE

The concept of intercultural and interreligious dialogue was often used but rarely defined. The concept of dialogue suggests something rather more specific than mere conversation, or even the diplomatic negotiations of the international community, when it is associated with the words ‘intercultural’ and ‘interreligious’.

⁶ See: unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001271/127158e.pdf – 211k – An International Survey on Education and Teaching of Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue (1999-2001).

⁷ See: CDCULT – PREV (2002)1, 8 April 2002 – Intercultural Dialogue and Conflict Prevention, Action Plan for 2002-2004, p. 3.

The prefix 'inter' indicates a programme: there is an explicit or implicit agenda. Insofar as the dialogue is between religions and/or cultures, the agenda is one of improving relations. This is to be achieved through broader and deeper mutual understanding with the aim, at least, ensuring that religions or cultures are no longer sources of conflict and, at best, making them contribute actively to the construction of integrated pluralist societies and the development of a 'culture of peace'. The point of the dialogue is, somewhat ironically, to encourage religions and cultures to become the instruments of peace which they often claim to be, all too often even as their adherents are busy fomenting conflict.

However, dialogue in this sense is not a modern invention. Intercultural dialogue is in a way at the core of all human history – even though very few people knew that this was what they were engaged in until the word came into fashion in recent decades. Historically, it has been when cultures have mingled that humanity has experienced innovation and the peaks of civilisation which stand out as shining lights in our history books. Such intermingling has come about through major historical events, such as mass migration and conquests, and these are the events that become lodged in the collective historical consciousness of peoples and nations. But, if we think seriously about it, it is obvious that the mingling actually takes place at the human level, with people working together, living together, trading with one another and, sometimes, inter-marrying. The big events which we remember, although pivotal, merely create the context in which such everyday contact and interaction can take place. The context is important, because it is the context that encourages interaction and makes it possible, or creates obstacles to it.

Similarly, dialogue among the adherents of the major world religions has always taken place, especially, but not only, among the Abrahamic faiths: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Excellent examples of this are to be found in shared histories, where we are more often presented with a record of conflicts. The high points must be the enormously rich and creative interactions which took place in mediaeval Islamic Spain and southern Italy and at various times in places as far apart as Central Asia, Baghdad, Delhi and Cairo and in the Ottoman Empire.

But as a movement with its institutions and full-time professionals and its networks of activists, interreligious dialogue is primarily a phenomenon of the 20th century. It is the pressures of that century that required us to mobilise the resources of the great religions for dialogue and peace, for purposes which have often seemed marginal in historical terms. In India the realisation that a reasonably unified independence would be achieved only if the religions could work together provided significant impetus for the co-operation of religious leaders and institutions. The horrors of Nazi genocide in Europe spurred post-war generations towards a radical review of traditional Christian attitudes towards Judaism.

Lebanon was one of the focuses of the early phases of Muslim-Christian dialogue and a number of regional and international consultations have taken place since the late 1950s, involving both the World Council of Churches and the Vatican. During the 1970s and 1980s representatives of the religious communities of Yugoslavia, especially from Bosnia and Herzegovina, made much of the co-operation of the various communities in local projects, including joint involvement in the building of mosques and churches. Tragically, this did not stop either country from collapsing into bloody conflict, leading many to accuse interreligious dialogue of naiveté. But out of these regional tragedies have come renewed efforts across the social spectrum to disarm religious hatred.

Above all, the necessity of responding to the processes of globalisation and the threats of ecological disaster have led to a fast-growing realisation that religions are relevant only to the extent that they can work together for humanity and cast aside the contentions of the past. Globalisation and migration mean that no community can live in isolation any longer: even in

countries where there is only one religion, religious pluralism enters through migration, travel, trade, the media and the Internet.

It is in response to such processes that movements for interreligious dialogue have gained growing support. After 1945, Jews and Christians entered into dialogue at a variety of forums, some of which grew into independent agencies and NGOs or were incorporated into existing religious institutions both nationally and internationally. The settlement of Muslim immigrants in Europe led, in some cases, to this being expanded into a Jewish-Christian-Muslim (JCM) movement, with regular programmes and events now having taken place for several decades. During the 1960s and 1970s the World Council of Churches and the Vatican embarked on major moves towards interreligious dialogue, which have left their mark on the whole Christian Church and hence on the societies in which the churches are located. Virtually all the main national and international Muslim organisations, along with many prominent Muslim leaders and scholars, have unequivocally expressed support for the principle of dialogue and been actively involved in moving such dialogue forward.

The resurgence of political radicalism motivated by religion and expressed in religious terms in the last couple of decades has led to a renewed awareness and experience of destructive interreligious relations in all continents. It was noteworthy that virtually every speaker at the 10th annual general Islamic conference hosted by the Egyptian Ministry of Religious Affairs in July 1998 spoke of the priority of a dialogue with the Christian West in the coming century. The World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP) is an organisation in which all the major world religions have been very actively represented, with Buddhists and Hindus playing a proactive role, like the Abrahamic faiths. After several decades during which it went almost unnoticed, it has, since the 1990s, gained major public prominence and the support of significant religious leaders. In regions and countries which have suffered from lengthy civil conflicts, it is often in the coming together of the 'moderate majorities', prompted by desperation at the destruction and suffering, that hardliners and extremists have been marginalised and conflict alleviated, if not stopped altogether.

But only part of the picture is positive, and to assume that the way forward is easy would be naive, just as it would be naive to assume that anything like the majority of believers have been convinced. People of religion are readily tempted into presenting religion as offering solutions in spite of all the historical and contemporary evidence that religions are perhaps more often a significant cause of conflict or, if not the cause, are easily prompted to take part, with destructive consequences, when a conflict starts brewing for social, economic or political reasons. Lebanon, Yugoslavia, the Caucasus and the Indian subcontinent are immediately obvious recent examples.

The problem arises because adherents of religions, people of faith, are also members of communities with shared material interests and emotional identities, which in some circumstances can be perceived to be literally matters of life and death and are certainly often matters which determine comfort and security. Of course, the religious professionals - the priests, rabbis, imams and theologians - are also members of such communities and share these interests and fears. In places where we have recently seen religious conflict, it is therefore hardly surprising that religious institutions have sometimes become actively involved on one side or the other.

This also goes some way to explaining two things about dialogue among religions. Firstly, one begins to understand why so many regard it as a threat. People and institutions whose position relies on their recognised right to speak authoritatively in areas of religious teaching and practice see their positions as being challenged, and communities feel inherited certainties being taken away. Secondly, this very situation accounts for the sense of urgency being expressed by supporters of religious dialogue. In past centuries, religious

exclusiveness caused enough suffering locally, but today clashes between religions have global repercussions.

The overlap of the intercultural and the interreligious in the approaching dialogue is unavoidable, as is the greater attention given until this point to the religious dimension. Religion and culture are inextricably entwined. Religious belief, rites and ethical norms are expressed and exist within a human culture – culture being understood here in the widest sense, as including everyday customs and lifestyles. In times of peace and stability, few think of giving explicit philosophical or ideological expression to a particular culture or way of life. But when cultures encounter one another, religion (which, in modern Europe, is often entangled with nation) can often offer an ideological framework which provides legitimisation for the defence or development of a particular way of life. It is when particular ways of living to which people have been accustomed – cultures – find ideological expression in terms of religion or the nation or, even more dangerously, in both, in some kind of combination, that we can expect trouble.

Underlying all this there are questions relating to the structures and processes of social and political power. Religious leaders cannot claim to be innocent of such charges. Most religious communities still vest authority in male hierarchies. The theological grounds for such traditions can be discussed endlessly, but one can wonder how often the holders of power within religious institutions seek to scrutinise their own structures, which are akin to political bodies – with all the dangers associated with holding power.

3. WHAT IS DIALOGUE ALL ABOUT? HEARING/UNDERSTANDING THE CONTENT

Although the question, “What is dialogue all about?” could easily be rephrased as, “Why hold dialogue?” or, even more challengingly, “Who should be involved in dialogue?”, there is an obvious need and human desire for dialogue regardless of the great uncertainty and various prejudices stemming from ignorance.

According to an international survey conducted by UNESCO, there are two major reasons for organising such dialogue: the fact that conflicts involve cultural and religious issues: *“Cultural and religious issues are significant factors within violent conflicts in our society worldwide”* and, consequently, such *“dialogue is urgent”*, and the need to understand human behaviour: *“Once we understand different cultures and beliefs, it becomes easier to understand human behaviour. [Such] dialogue should have an ethical orientation.”*⁸

A more detailed examination of the “essence” of dialogue would lead to greater knowledge and a better understanding of other cultures and their riches and wealth of diversity, their distinctive features and similarities, the importance of living together and respecting different opinions and beliefs, and the value of religious choices, as well as providing an opportunity for interfaith and intercultural learning. Although new doors have certainly opened, providing an opportunity for mutual influence and dialogue in this context, the potential markers of confrontation rely on a certain ambiguity, reflected in the script rather than the context of dialogue, although the two notions are sometimes inseparable.

If we attempt to address the question of ambiguity in dialogue in the very modern sense, three issues seem relevant today.

⁸ See: unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001271/127158e.pdf – 211k – An International Survey on Education and Teaching of Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue (1999-2001).

The first concerns our perspective and our perceptions of interreligious and intercultural issues. To what extent can we ascertain whether such dialogue includes the concept of dialogue among civilisations?⁹ In other words, when we talk of such dialogue, can we describe it as dialogue not only between religions and cultures, but also between civilisations, so that “*we can move from the path of conflict to tolerance, from tolerance to acceptance and from acceptance to mutual respect*”?¹⁰ And, if so, how can we situate the role of women, bearing in mind the context of moral inclusion/exclusion?

In asking questions of this kind, we are getting away from an oversimplified, black and white approach based on the concept of civilisation versus anti-civilisation. We are actually ensuring that civilisations, like cultures, are historically flexible, open to dialogue on an equal footing, and ready to transcend the boundaries between civilisations/cultures and put history and historical trauma behind them.¹¹ In this context, a study of “Islam” and the “Ottoman Empire” in relation to secularism and its “organic development in the West” could offer a different approach to this problem.¹²

On the one hand, the new multi-religious and multicultural situation resulting from globalisation, migration and growing pluralism is forcing us to make a further effort to understand and situate religious authorities and faith-based/religious/spiritual communities as they pass on their culture and messages. On the other hand, this new situation also obliges us to acknowledge the increasing diversity of belief systems and approaches to life, and explore the dynamic interaction between different religions and the issue of secularism versus religion.

This focus brings us to the second issue, which concerns the content of dialogue and the question of identity and belonging.

This is something that requires several levels of approach to, and acceptance of, “acknowledged” ambiguity, which may be traced back to the main issue at stake in dialogue. “Translating” differences in faith, culture, beliefs or national identity into a framework for sharing/understanding and accepting/acknowledging entails the vast process of recognising and carefully distinguishing between our identities, or aspects of them, in historical and cultural terms, with regard both to distinctive features and to openness to change. More precisely, the question which, according to theorist Tariq Ramadan, appears to be *fundamental to the whole problem* is the following: In the event of conflict, does religious allegiance or allegiance to the state take precedence? Or, in other words, whether someone would be the first and foremost Muslim or French citizen and whether the law of someone’s religion takes precedence over one’s own allegiance as a citizen?

Although, on the face of it, these questions have a simple answer - which is that one’s own faith concerns one aspect of one’s identity (religious, historical, and cultural) and that one’s allegiance as a citizen is to one’s own state and community, as well as reflecting the fact of belonging to a culture - the matter is extremely complex. To take another example

⁹ Although the notion of civilisation is highly contentious and very ambiguous, it has been used for political and cultural ends in such dialogue. The United Nations designated 2001 International Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, and, within the framework of the Global Agenda, many events, gatherings and dialogues were organised, such as the Regional Forum on Dialogue among Civilizations held in Ohrid, Macedonia, in August 2003.

¹⁰ See: www.nation.sc/archives/40201003.html – Mancham stresses the role of NGOs in promoting dialogue.

¹¹ “We must never underestimate the great and very real fear of a painful past which could return, when the question of religious allegiance or of religion itself is raised. We must simply bear in mind that sometimes certain questions seem aggressive, but they have the honesty of fear. The great problem which we can encounter, in relation to these questions coloured by genuine fear, is to consider only their aggressiveness.” See: Ramadan, T., “Religious Allegiance and Citizenship,” Occasional Papers, No.8, September 2001, p.5, University of Birmingham.

¹² Gayatri C. Spivak is right when she argues against simplifying Western Christianity and turning it into secularism, with the rise of industrial capitalist imperialism, just as she is right in arguing against imposing “Islamic” politics today “in the naïve conviction that the Muslim masses are still living in the religious atmosphere of the Middle Ages”. See: Spivak Gayatri C., “Scattered Speculations on the Question of Cultural Studies”, in Simon During (ed), The Cultural Studies Reader, Routledge, London and New York, 1999, pp.176-177.

concerning women's position in times of war¹³ (as in the former Yugoslav states), a similar question, as to whether one's identity as a woman took precedence over one's membership of a national/ethnic group, sparked off a divide rather than dialogue. And when it comes to mingling religious and national values connected with, for instance, care for other people, sacrifice and patriotism, there is widespread misunderstanding that needs to be explored and much that needs to be learned.

The third issue addressed in dialogue, as a result of the diversity and unequal status of cultures/religions and their representation, is cultural differences. Culture is not only concerned with identity politics: it is also a disruptive factor that conjures up the cultural displacement and exclusion of those who are in a minority. It also, however, has a constant potential for bringing about a new form of co-operation between peoples, between the sexes, between citizens and between religious believers.

How can we mediate and negotiate in this area and acknowledge or "interpret" the symbolic features of cultural communities and cultural differences (those that are very obvious, such as the wearing of headscarves in Muslim cultures, and those that are not so visible), and in what area of human activity should we do so?

There is an urge to transcend simplistic ideas about dialogue on this issue and "colonise" the process with a "civilising" outside input in order to provide a dignified setting for the discussion of a whole range of subjects and the fears, ambiguities and identities attached to them. When people have the opportunity to deal directly and openly with their differences, experience shows that they learn to appreciate and respect one other. They may also discover common concerns and develop initiatives and opportunities to work together on these concerns. The issue of language also becomes crucial in such dialogue, in terms not only of "*pure translation*" but also of contextual understanding.¹⁴

Finally, there are two criteria¹⁵ that enable intercultural initiative: recognition that all societies are multicultural and that the specificity of cultural identity is the complex relationship between ourselves and others.

4. DIALOGUE FACING GENDER IMBALANCE

Although there are numerous associations, educational institutions and community organisations that provide training in, and resources for interreligious dialogue, cross-cultural co-operation and community-based mediation, there is an indisputable gender imbalance¹⁶ in favour of men, especially when one looks at the pattern in the religious institutional hierarchy and the gender stereotyping reflected, for instance, in the phrase "power over mind".

¹³ An identity can be very flexible in that "it can be inflected towards and attached to a lot of other identities in such a way that its meaning changes. One can be Serb, or Cypriot or English in many different ways – traditionalist ways, aggressive ways, subversive ways, women's ways." (...) struggles between identity groups (...) are also interwoven with other exclusions, marginalisation, rejections and identifications in a very complex web. For example, you cannot separate the Jewish/Palestinian, or Catholic/Protestant dimension from the struggle between the sexes." See: Cockburn, Cynthia and Mulholland, Marie, "Women Building Bridges: An Action Research Project," in Biljana Kašić (ed), *The Women and the Politics of Peace, Contributions to a Culture of Women's Resistance*, Centre for Women's Studies, Zagreb 1997, p. 91.

¹⁴ In addition to the need to check that the language used is in keeping with the ethical guidelines for dialogue (for example, the use of a certain language as a starting point for dialogue can be hurtful, as was the case on a few occasions when Albanian women from Kosovo refused to speak the Serbian language on very sensitive grounds), an understanding of the metaphors we use in everyday life helps us to ensure that they are used positively, to negotiate cultural differences and to incorporate these metaphors in positive negotiation practices.

¹⁵ Perotti, A., *The case for intercultural education*. Council of Europe Press, 1994, p. 31.

¹⁶ This was a theme which constantly came up in the discussions of the Group of Specialists and in the evidence presented at two sets of hearings of invited witnesses.

Nevertheless, it is clear that women intend to contribute more effectively to multicultural and interreligious dialogue through networking, peace building, research and facilitation or by putting forward new ideas concerning intercultural cohesion and a just society. Their efforts have been noticed and reported and are gaining ground in many ways, although they are not appropriately acknowledged.

While various mechanisms for interreligious and intercultural dialogue exist, it is difficult to find many where the role of women is specifically identified. Therefore rather than defining these concepts it would be useful to consider what form an intercultural and interreligious dialogue that took women's role into account could take.

The process of building bridges between local communities in the midst of strife is often primarily in the hands of women. They have different motivations: a shared concern to protect family and neighbourhood, or a fear that fathers, brothers and sons will be recruited into the army to fight in doubtful military escapades, and so on. What they have in common is the desire to soften the impact of conflict and preferably to put an end to fighting. The problem arises when these hopes and this experience gradually migrate up the social and political hierarchy. Typically, once the process reaches the level of formal peace negotiations, the holders of power have taken over, and they are usually men.

There is clearly a perception among those involved in the various situations and projects in this area that the 'soft' community-based activities are predominantly the domain of women, while the 'hard' activities of policy development, project management, community leadership and community political representation are predominantly male prerogatives. This is reflected in the media, where not only are women's issues relegated to their own special programmes and pages, but the interpretation and communication of events is guided by the (mainly male) perceptions of the holders of social and political power. So, to take an extreme case, the mass-rape victims of numerous recent conflicts are only momentary news items, while the manoeuvrings of military and political leaders and their followers attract much more continuous attention – reports of the incidents of rape are heard not in their own right but as just one aspect of the manoeuvrings of the leaders.

More broadly, there are two other dimensions which complicate discussion and warn against oversimplification of the issues we are dealing with. In many parts of Europe, women have in the last generation or so gained increasing access to traditionally male professions and fields of endeavour. This is obviously to be welcomed and should be taken further, simply on the basis of the principles of equity and maximising equality of opportunity for all. But it appears that, on the one hand, the feminisation of a profession often leads to a relative depreciation of salary levels in that profession, and, on the other hand, that as women move into positions of institutional power they often adopt the attributes commonly associated with men in power. To what extent are we in fact dealing with the characteristics of holding power rather than with gender-specific characteristics?

Interreligious and intercultural dialogue has become 'politically correct' at national and international levels, as has the empowerment of women. But it seems clear that, more often than not, governments respond only in symbolic and token ways to the expectations of these agendas. Women's committees are appointed and intercommunal dialogue forums are set up with the obligatory quota of women. Often one is tempted to see such initiatives as moves to marginalise the proposed activities and constituencies. The main sections of this report aim to record and recommend ways in which substance can be given to these processes.

5. BRINGING ABOUT DIALOGUE

5.1 Definition

A mechanism for promoting dialogue is a means by which different religious or cultural groups can meet and discuss issues that are of common interest or on which they differ.

The purpose of such dialogue may not be to draw a particular conclusion but to establish a process that provides the opportunity to challenge the arrogance of certainty. In this regard, it must be viewed not only “[...] *in terms of its cultural and social implications vis-à-vis the public sphere*”¹⁷ but also in how to respond to deep human inner concerns and security. Intercultural dialogue can also be considered as an approach to conflict and it might help to manage them.

It requires tolerance and above all a willingness to listen and to learn. Otherwise dialogue can cause existing attitudes to become entrenched and exacerbate feelings of oppression. For such a mechanism to work effectively, there must be respect for the fundamental human rights of all the sides engaged in dialogue.

5.2 Mechanisms and approaches to implement dialogue

There is still relatively little information on mechanisms¹⁸ for implementing dialogue as well as on ways how to ensure long-term, effective policies in this field.

How can dialogue make headway, so that religions can become the effective forces for peace which so many of their adherents proclaim them to be? There must be two parallel, interactive approaches to this task, namely that of taking religion as a cause of conflict out of political and community relations and rehabilitating it as a factor making for reconciliation and communal development. Both approaches must be pursued simultaneously at all levels, from the street to the palace, so to speak, with universities, religious institutions, schools and the media having particular roles to play along that spectrum.

The first approach has to do with the urgency of defusing current and potential community conflicts. A number of different projects are taking place and can be taken a stage further, and more such projects can be set up. In some countries local interfaith groups are making a noticeable contribution, while in others growing interreligious involvement has shown itself to have the potential for success. Political action against discrimination in employment and to provide access to education, health, social welfare etc. is another mechanism by which people with different religious commitments have come together around a shared sense of justice.

But urgency also requires that the media - print and electronic - be persuaded to look beyond the immediately sensational. The media are often condemned for their sensationalism, lack of responsibility and dependence on one or other centre of power, and numerous recommendations have been made for the improvement of their conduct. The media are an easy target, precisely because they are still often guilty as charged. However, virtually nothing seems to have been achieved by condemnation and through recommendations.

¹⁷ See: DGIV/CULT/PREV (2004) 1E (Declaration on Intercultural Dialogue and Conflict Prevention, p.9)

¹⁸ The Secretariat had submitted examples of the introduction of such mechanisms, such as the recently established National Council of French Muslims, which acted as the elected representative structure for Muslims in France and interlocutor with the government. In Romania too, where the minorities were Hungarian, Catholic, Lutheran, Roma and Pentecostalist, and the majority was Orthodox, women's NGOs and the churches had set up joint activities; there were also wives of Orthodox priests involved in the welfare work in the community, and the government was developing a policy to integrate the Roma population. In Bulgaria, a process for peaceful dialogue had been initiated between Muslims and the Roma.

There are those who have sought instead to recognise those newspapers, journalists or programme-makers that actually want to act with a degree of responsibility and impartiality, and co-operate with them by involving them, engaging them in conversation and helping them to understand what they are trying to write about. Such approaches have worked successfully in many instances, but require patience: results are not achieved overnight.

There is also work to be done in the universities, especially by social and political scientists and probably also by psychologists, although here one is treading on explosively sensitive ground. In Europe and North America, especially, the social and political sciences have until recently tended to ignore religion as a dying ember of the past: here were the secular sciences par excellence. As a result they were often taken completely by surprise when religion suddenly returned to the forefront of some political event. They have thus had great difficulty in coming to terms with, for example, the political resurgence of Islam. But the situation is changing and, increasingly, scholars in these disciplines are beginning to take religion seriously as a factor to be reckoned with.

The second approach is based on a long-term vision. The Abrahamic faiths, like, for example, in Hinduism, Sikhism and Islam, have accumulated centuries of baggage, and we tend to remember the bad times and use them as ammunition against one other in subsequent conflicts. In good times this unfinished business is stored away, but it does not take much to recall it, so that a battle in 1389 in the Balkans again becomes a live landmine in modern times, or one in Ireland in 1689 becomes the central symbol of conflicting community identities three centuries later. There are many similar past events which refuse to remain safely in the history books. The long-term plan must be to change that baggage. It cannot be discarded, and the human need for a sense of identity rooted in shared symbols and experiences means that such baggage is needed, but conscious efforts can be made to change it, or rather to change its significance, just as it has been changed in the past.

In the first instance this is an academic activity involving, first and foremost, historians and theologians. The historians have to rediscover and reinterpret our various histories and the histories of their interaction. Very few historians would still make von Ranke's claim that it is possible to rediscover the past as it really was, and most would admit that they cannot isolate themselves from their own times and its perspectives, assumptions and preoccupations. Through their emphasis on real and imagined differences between different entities in Europe, historians were major contributors to the growth of nations and nationalism, and the requirements of the nation in turn set the research agendas of the historians. The 20th-century interest in the Crusades in the Middle East can be directly attributed to 20th-century preoccupations, which have influenced both the choice of research subjects and their interpretation. And so one can go on. We see nothing wrong in encouraging research into that shared history for the purposes of present-day needs, so long as one does allow bias to get the better of critical standards.

Similar comments can be made about theologians and religious thinkers. One can look at the tenets and founding texts of most religions and discover aspects which have been subjected to highly developed scholarship over generations, while others have hardly moved beyond the original bare statements of belief, injunction or advice. The choice of topics to be elaborated on, and the ways in which they have been developed, can usually be shown to have been a response to particular needs of the religious community at a particular time. And so other aspects, other dimensions, have, in a sense, lain dormant, held in reserve until such time as they might be needed.

At this point recruiting teachers and educationalists to the project is needed. It is they, their teaching, especially in primary and lower secondary schools, and their textbooks that have in the past handed down ideas from one generation to the next. They must now be persuaded and trained to pass on interpretations and approaches which are more appropriate to the

21st century. This is a particular problem in terms of politics, logistics and resources. It takes a long time for the results of academic research, especially in the arts and humanities, to filter through to the school curriculum, teacher training and the production of teaching aids. While politicians may find it safe to leave academics to get on with their work, it is much less safe to let their ideas take over among the teaching profession: this would provide direct access for the future majority of the population and often upset the parents in the process. And if the government does decide that a new approach to a subject is required, it takes an enormous amount of investment¹⁹ and time before the change can be reasonably successfully achieved.

It is worth drawing special attention here to the impact of the training of religious professionals: priests, imams, religious teachers, etc. This is a particularly sensitive field and few governments relish the risk involved in trying to interfere here. Clearly it is an area where patient persuasion and dialogue are required, where an overlap between universities and the religious training provided in seminaries creates a direct link which is more likely to make the undertaking a success.

In both of these approaches - the short-term and the long-term approach - dialogue is the end but also the means. All such projects have to be shared by people from the faiths concerned. This is obviously the case in the practical, academic and educational projects indicated. But it must also extend to the theological task which entails scholars and thinkers from the various religions working together not only on their respective views but also to involve outsiders in their own internal theological reflection. Only by bringing in outsiders can a religion become a permanent, fully-fledged protagonist in a peace culture.

¹⁹ In Britain it took two decades of teacher training and curriculum development before a multifaith religious education curriculum eventually became accepted as the norm.

II. THE ROLE OF WOMEN AND MEN IN INTERCULTURAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

1. THE ROLE OF WOMEN AND MEN IN DIALOGUE

Women and men are nowadays involved in interreligious and inter-cultural dialogue in different capacities and scope of actions, locally and internationally. A lack of recognition for women's role is nevertheless still evident.

There are two underlying reasons: one is that conflict is a gendered activity in its fundamental meaning and the other is that women and men have *"different access to resources, power and decision making before, during and after conflicts"*²⁰ accompanied by stereotypical practices and variety of patriarchal patterns.

Along with the general exclusion of women from leading decision-making positions prior to, during and after war/conflict, there is an absence of substantial analysis of causes of gender imbalance structure as well as lack of gender-specific data in this regard. In examining this, it is understood that gender specificities are not isolated from gender power relations and that interaction of gender power patterns and cultural power patterns (including nationalism or militarism, for example) in a wider sense, has historically been mutually supportive.

Women's perception of peace, security and violence differs from that of men, opens up new opportunities for dialogue and paves the way for new negotiation models.

A willingness to engage women on an equal basis with men in this dialogue means developing an understanding which would acknowledge different viewpoints and positions based on gender roles and simultaneously of acknowledging the often undervalued results achieved by women and their efforts and their potentials as peace keepers.

In order to understand which type of role women and men should play in intercultural and interreligious dialogue, there is a need both to review the roles traditionally attributed to women and men in society and to explore creative potentials which both sexes/genders might bring towards long-lasting peace. Both women and men should be involved in dialogue integrating a gender perspective and with full respect relating to their gender-shaped experience, feeling and cultural behaviour in order to provide a framework for transformative and just 'engendering' cross-cultural relationship.

There is also a need to highlight a number of mechanisms enabling women and men to play a part in establishing effective, lasting dialogue between women and men, between generations and between population groups with different beliefs, religions and cultures.

2. THE ROLE OF WOMEN AND MEN IN CONFLICT PREVENTION AND PEACE BUILDING

2.1 General Remarks and Background

Across the globe, in various communities, women are closely involved in conflict resolution and peace efforts in an attempt to rebuild society, restore a peaceful climate, introduce a wider human rights perspective and promote justice and democracy.

²⁰ Doc.10117 rev., of 5 May 2004, "Conflict prevention and resolution: the role of women" Parliamentary Assembly, p. 2.

Within international context, many types of conflicts and violations that have been escalating over the last decade (armed conflict, aggression, ethnic and religious cleansing, terror, violations of basic human rights, exclusion and loss of citizenship rights), as well as more gender-specific violations (such as trafficking in women, systematic rape and forced pregnancy, forced prostitution and sexual slavery) are affecting women in different countries and regions. These conflicts often go hand in hand with all kinds of racism, racial and sexual discrimination, xenophobia, religious and ethnic intolerance and human degradation and not only constitute serious obstacles to women but also have life-long social, economic and psychologically traumatic consequences for the communities concerned.²¹

Women are not just victims of wars and conflicts worldwide, they can also be sometimes combatants. In most cases women are used as human shields, sex slaves and porters.

First of all women are key survivors and key peace-keepers in their communities, and in many situations they are actively involved in peace efforts²² and peace dialogue as well as in rebuilding their communities. They have a crucial role in assisting humanitarian aid groups, providing refugees with a wide range of support, including action to promote self-help and empowerment and confidence-building measures, while at the same time being great "healers", care-givers and peace educators.

Women's growing involvement at grassroots level in conflict resolution and the peace process reflects the emergence of the recognition that women can have a crucial interpretive role and play a key part in solving problems connected with peace and security, especially by building confidence within local communities.

Despite the fact that peace-makers are overwhelmingly female at grassroots level and women take the initiative of setting up non-governmental peace organisations, there is a lack of public acknowledgment of their contribution and of respect for, and in-depth analysis of, the roles women play. On the one hand, numerous international agreements recognise the importance and, indeed, the necessity of including women in peace negotiations, conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction processes.²³ On the other hand, "*most analysis and policies have been gender-blind*"²⁴ and people have been less inclined, if not outright reluctant, to recognise real women's roles as peace-builders in the field.

Another example of these double standards as far as women are concerned is the fact that women, in many cases outstanding women peace leaders, are included only sporadically in official processes. Women are still under-represented in the decision-making process and peace negotiations at both national and international level²⁵. This is not only undermining their potential to bring about cultural change but is also an obstacle to the urgent need to involve women on an equal footing with men in conflict resolution and peace building.

²¹ See: www.moznostvolby.sk/peking.htm - Proposals for Consideration in the Preparation of a Draft Declaration, Draft Platform Preparation (see Beijing Conference).

²² See: Enloe, Cynthia (1993), *The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War*, University of California Press, Berkeley; Eisenstein, Zillah (1996), *Hatreds: Racialised and Sexualised Conflicts in the 21st Century*, New York, NY, Routledge; Elstain, Jean Bethke and Sheila Tobias (1990) (eds.), *Women, Militarism and War: Essays in History, Politics and Social Theory*, Rowman & Littlefield, Savage; Freeman, Marsha, "International Institutions and Gendered Justice (1999)", *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 52 (2)(Spring): 513-532, 1999; Mertus, Julie, (1999) ed., *The Suitcase: Refugees' Voices from Bosnia and Croatia*, University of California Press.

²³ See: www.peacewomen.org/resources/1325/1325index.html, - European Parliament Resolution on Gender Aspects of Conflict Resolution and Peace-building: A Summary, 2000.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ In the UN Security Council there is still one woman Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the existing field missions. There is an urgent need to appoint more women as Special Representatives and Special Envoys to achieve a gender balance (the target being thirty per cent by 2005) and to implement Resolution 1325. See: NGO Statement to the UN Security Council, 23 October 2002.

Given that a female perspective would make for a more constructive approach to the wielding of power, conflict resolution and conflict-prevention programmes, and that a gender-balanced approach to peace and security is urgently needed, any efforts to achieve this must take account of crucial obstacles preventing women from fulfilling their roles and of the vital contribution women can make.

Over the last decade women have, through civil initiatives, NGOs and networking nationally and internationally made significant progress in affirming the global agenda in such a way that they should be included at all stages of peace-making, peace keeping and peace building.

The Platform for Action of the 4th World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) singled out an increase in the participation of women in conflict resolution as a strategic objective and urged governments and international and regional intergovernmental institutions to incorporate a gender perspective into the settlement of armed and other conflicts and situations of occupation.

The role of women in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post-conflict peace building was emphasised in the final document of the 23rd Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly, *Women 2000: Gender Equality Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century*. It reaffirmed this objective and called on governments to “*ensure and support the full participation of women at all levels of decision-making and implementation in development activities and peace processes, including conflict prevention and resolution, post-conflict reconstruction, peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace building*”.

In October 2000, the Security Council of the United Nations adopted Resolution 1325 on *Women, Peace and Security*, which paid special attention to the role of women in negotiation processes, conflict prevention and peace building. Resolution 1325 recognises that civilians - particularly women and children - are the worst affected by conflict, and that this is a threat to peace and development. The resolution calls for women's participation in conflict-prevention and conflict-resolution initiatives, the incorporation of a gender perspective into peace building and peacekeeping missions and the protection of women in regions of armed conflict.

Despite the progress made with the adoption of international instruments, women throughout the world face many obstacles in terms of exclusion and invisibility when negotiation processes start as well as ignorance of their capability in this regard. Therefore, recognising the urgent need to give women a proper role has been merely the start of a much wider effort.

2.2 Roles women and men play in peace building

Men and women experience conflict in different ways; they also react to them differently. Their roles are considered very often within presumed “gender regime(s)” in respective cultures and without nuances as well as tied in with archetypal positions.

Although war is considered a male domain, women are involved in numerous ways both in their gender traditional and gender transformative roles: from being soldiers or mothers, wives or nurses of soldiers to “mothers advocating for peace”; from being victims of rape and other war crimes to war survivors; from breadwinners and heads of households to peace negotiators in their own communities and so on.

Men's roles also differ although they have been less resistant against traditional militarised gender regime and power leadership positions. Therefore the main image is one of the soldier defender of his state/nation/community, or powerful hero.

Also different sacrifices are expected of women and men during war and after that contribute to oversimplified division between men's public duties and women's family duties and also an exaggerate gender difference and inequality and dictate perceptions of expected gender potentials.

It is crucial to consider the concepts of masculinity and femininity in connection with war and conflict. War has been regarded as the cornerstone of masculinity or in other words, boys become men through, among other things, military service and by going to war.

Motherhood is usually regarded as the core aspect of femininity. When femininity is conceived of as being inherently peaceful, it is based on the concept of motherhood. There is one element that is singled out by some scholars as contradicting the assumption of the inherently peaceful nature of mothers. Many mothers encourage their sons and husbands to go to war (for example, in Azerbaijan the calls to "fight back" in the occupied territories come not only from men, but also from women).

Women can be as warmongering as men, just as men can be as peace-loving as women.

In order to articulate the new role of women and men in peace building programmes there is a need to take into account the problem of the dominant forms of masculinity embedded in violence and femininity connected with victimisation that appear in time of conflict to a large extent.

A new approach goes along with a new awareness of women's and men's roles in terms of expectations, presentations and discourses including a respect for plurality of masculinity and femininity, question of transforming attitudes on traditional norms as well as an issue of various choices. Also, giving women more access to decision-making bodies might make it easier to change the value system and rhetoric that justify war and just opposite, opt for peace.

2.3 Why should women be involved in peace building?

Women are closely involved in peace efforts in the most violent parts of the world, developing novel strategies and creating new approaches to conflict prevention and peace building.

There are many reasons why increased participation of women in conflict prevention and peace building is important.

Regardless of the facts that the nature of wars has changed in modern times, that targeted civilian violence has become its main characteristic, and that most casualties (80 to 85%) are women, children and the elderly, there are some more substantive arguments in favour of women's participation in peace building.

There are widespread types of arguments of importance for claiming women's position at all levels of conflict solving:

- women constitute half of society, and for the sake of social justice they must be partners with men in the peace building process ;
- women are excluded from public decision-making, leadership and educational opportunities in many communities around the world that block gender equality achievements;

- women play a significant role in various types of dialogue and peace building efforts at community as well as at cross-border levels; therefore specific expertise provided by women should be a part of official negotiations and diplomacy at national and international levels;
- the issue of women's human rights is a core problem and requires the full participation of women ;
- active engagement in peace building will in the long term contribute to eliminating violence against women during conflicts and in post-conflict situations;
- women play a particular role in the prevention of conflicts, as they are the main bearers of tradition and educators of youth and their knowledge can be of greater use for peace education and peace building;
- women have the capacity, tools and creative potential for a peace agenda and must be encouraged to use their specific peace building skills.

2.4. Main challenges faced by women in peace building

In order to articulate their own role in peace building, women nowadays face two parallel processes: the complexity of a multicultural existence - including cultural exchanges and dialogue, the identity aspects and development, the differences, barriers and threats within a demanding international context - and mainstreaming a gender perspective into the peace building process.

While the dialogue around multicultural coherence and ambiguities involves various perspectives, actors and numerous different features, intersectoral links and steps, working on how to incorporate gender mainstreaming into peace building needs to address some concrete and crucial areas of gender specific concern.

First and foremost, it is important to include a gender analysis in all peace building processes. Such an analysis requires data on the different way in which war affects women and men, the differences between female and male roles and experiences, as well as gender outcomes of women and men in local cultures and gender-sensitive indicators that are referred to specific situations in the respective countries. Special attention should be given to the connections between violence against women in war time, male violence against women in a form of "domestic violence" and structural violence, etc.

The strategy of the gender equality agenda should be seen as most important for all concerned in a peace building process. On the one hand, it has to be defined by women and men in different cultures while respecting their cultural specificities and diversity; on the other hand, the integration of a gender perspective will be needed as an ultimate goal at all stages of the peace building process including conflict prevention and resolution and post-conflict peace building and reconstruction and also within different fields of concern for women. The gender aspect of this complex area, which encompasses participation of women in decision-making processes, peace-keeping operations, diplomacy, humanitarian assistance, combating violence against women, education etc, constitutes a separate problem to be solved.

As women and men do not have equal opportunities, peace building programmes need to ensure that this inequality is remedied.

Another important gender-mainstreaming issue is women's representation. Women leaders and women's organisations need to have an active relationship with all those responsible for peace building, build bridges with other groups, devise strategies and set priorities. There is evidence that women can influence political decisions and agendas when they constitute the "critical mass" in decision-making.

Although there is a committed network of women and men carrying the “women in peace building” agenda forward, much remains to be done. The following measures might help strengthen the movement:

- in line with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, build and support women’s leadership skills and develop their leadership potential;
- train both governmental institutions and non-governmental organisations in gender awareness, including awareness of the ways in which men and women experience conflict and violence and can work for peace in their communities;
- continue and expand training programmes specifically catering for women in order to increase their sense of empowerment and knowledge of peace building processes; the training should involve men as well;
- develop approaches designed to make an impact on policies and reforms;
- build a strong partnership involving women engaged in training, research and peace building in various domains, such as diplomacy, peace education, mediation and peace advocacy in order to share best practices and increase the knowledge in different approaches to conflict prevention and peace building.

III. OBSTACLES TO THE ROLE OF WOMEN AND MEN IN INTERRELIGIOUS AND INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE IN CONFLICT PREVENTION, PEACE BUILDING AND DEMOCRATISATION

The purpose of this chapter is to address the major obstacles and challenges that women and men face in interreligious and intercultural dialogue in connection with conflict prevention, peace building and democratisation in times of war, especially in post-war and post-conflict situations.

Despite peace activism in its multiple dimensions, which involves women and men in pursuit of a broader aim, there is still very little knowledge of gender-specific outcomes, approaches and challenges and of the obstacles affecting them. In addition, there is a very poor understanding of the gender aspects of the issue, or of the changes in gender relations and in the positions of women and men, and the underlying reasons for these.

Although the roles of women and men are crucial and complex, emphasis has been placed here on the role of women, whose efforts are of indisputable value and significance but are less frequently acknowledged.

In this chapter we shall therefore pay particular attention to the obstacles preventing women from performing their roles, bearing in mind that enhancing women's participation in peace negotiations, decision-making processes and peace building is the "*key to the effectiveness of conflict prevention and the sustainable transformation of violent conflict*"²⁶ as well as to lasting peace. Once we recognise that the values of peace, a culture of human security and women's ability to prevent conflict are intrinsically interconnected, gender-blind policies will give way to the affirmation of women's role and these obstacles will be addressed.

In exploring the role of women and identifying their specific behaviour, attitudes and experiences in peace building and democratisation processes, we have to face the fact that there is no comprehensive analysis and there are no appropriate methodological tools for exploring gender specificity in a way that goes further than over-simplified assumptions. We also need to reframe the concept of peace building and take a new look at the problem of obtaining knowledge about security, justice and global human togetherness.

One of the first steps, which is linked to the fact that women's role is inextricably entwined with the obstacles to their fulfilling it in this complex context and that the two must be addressed together, is to compare real and potential obstacles and constraints that exist in peace time and war time, in everyday life, politics, media images and people's attitudes and as a result of ignorance.

²⁶ See: www.peacewomen.org/un/ngo/ngostatements/Oct03.html - The Role of Women in the Transformation of Violent Conflict, Statement by the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security in support of the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325 - October 2003.

1. STEREOTYPING

Stereotypes appear as a widespread obstacle and concern for achieving conflict resolution and peace building process since they influence the way in which people (that is nations, sexes/genders, religious and cultural communities, etc) perceive, remember, think about and respond to other people.

The process of stereotyping is also involved within the intercultural and interreligious dialogue as a way of positioning and arguing, identifying and even constructing the other party (its collective portrayal, attitudes, beliefs, cultural customs, role, etc) as well as 'judging' balance of recognition, difference and distance.

One of the most common definitions is that a stereotype is an exaggerated, rigid and over-simplified generalisation shared by a group of people about themselves or about another group. When another group is the target, to stereotype means to label, i.e. to associate certain attributes, usually personality traits that may be either positive or negative (e.g. intelligent, lazy, energetic, penny-pinching, sexually potent, stupid) with a particular population, gender or ethnic, religious or other community.

On the one hand stereotypes may serve to differentiate groups from each other; on the other hand they can also support the process of divisions, tensions and even conflict becoming both a part of broader process of social, cultural or religious differentiation²⁷ and distortion of others. Stereotypes may lead to discrimination, stigmatisation and exclusion, especially when stereotypical attitudes are accompanied by strong feelings such as fear or even hatred as well as manipulative tools led by political authorities which are strengthened in time of war/conflict. Also, they influence intolerance of difference and distrust towards other people, nations, religion communities, "strangers" etc.

It seems that numerous stereotypes are involved in this regard in relation to gender, especially to women, ethnic/nation origin, religion, and so on, based on both group schemes and prototypes linked to threats to self-esteem, remembrance of former conflicts and trauma as well as particular experiences and examples, namely memories of specific individuals that are activated through encounters with others who are in some way similar to those persons.

Concerning gender stereotyping related to women in addition to general stereotypes by which women are perceived as passive, dependent, weak-willed, and less capable of leadership positions, and that cause women to devalue their own potential and end up as low achievers, there are some particular ones linked to women's role in the field of war and conflict. The most accurate stereotype is "women are only victims of the war/conflict. Despite the fact that women face victim experiences to a large extent during war time and in the post-conflict period, reinforcing the stereotyping role of "woman victim" is risky in two ways: it makes it possible to freeze woman's identity within biased unchanged positions perpetuating victimisation pattern and, consequently creates obstacles to affirming women in an active and responsible leadership role.

In the context of war/conflict or ethnic rivalry and hostility, some media propaganda contributes to a large extent to the process of stereotyping either by reducing and simplifying the portrayal of the respective parties and their roles or directly by disseminating information more deliberately and selectively in favour of one of the involved parties. Accompanied by a sensationalist approach and war pornography, instead of affirming a culture of peace and human togetherness through dialogue it very often play just the opposite role by reporting

²⁷ DGIV/CULT/PREV-FORUM (2003) 10E - 1st Intercultural Forum, - (Re) Thinking Stereotypes -Constructing Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue, Council of Europe, p.15.

exclusively on inter-group conflict and omitting examples of inter-group co-operation and by creating a distorted understanding of both people's role and past events, facts and memories.

In this regard the media legitimises at the same time stereotypical representations of history, peoples and women in particular.

2. OBSTACLES

There is a wide range of obstacles, both obvious and hidden, preventing women from performing their roles and interfering with, undermining or destroying women's ability to use their powers and capacity for action and to bring about change in peace building processes in general and in media-related and gender-specific contexts in particular.

Addressing these obstacles and raising awareness of their frequency and consequences in this field would not only make it easier to understand the gender hierarchy problem that permits male political domination and global oppression²⁸ and discrimination, but also give rise to a new pattern of knowledge and elicit acknowledgment of the potential of both sexes.

2.1 General obstacles

- The imbalance of power between women and men in all spheres of political life and society, especially within top-level decision-making bodies. This imbalance encompasses, inter alia, women's positions and representation, leadership opportunities, opportunities in general and women's influence.

On the one hand, this power set-up stems from a lack of political will to change existing patriarchal patterns²⁹, based on ongoing hierarchies, in favour of women. Very often, these patterns take no account of cultural, religious and social specificities or conditions. On the other hand, it relies on the perpetuation of general stereotypes concerning sex/gender roles that permanently undermine opportunities for women to be more fairly represented.

It seems evident that there is a lack of political commitment on the part of governments and decision-making bodies (at both national and international level) to promoting changes in favour of gender equality in order to achieve a gender balance and increase the number of women in high-level positions, and to integrate a gender perspective into all strategic programmes and policies, measures, action and analysis.

- A reluctance to acknowledge the importance of women's role in peace building efforts and initiatives, which is at first glance mirrored in the widespread gender-blind approach and ignorance of this issue, as well as in the lack of recognition for, and insufficient participation of, women in the respected roles of peace-builders and peace experts in national and international institutions that influence strategic policy in the areas of peace-keeping, preventive strategy and security, as well as in peace mediation and negotiation.

"(..) Women were [not only] excluded from negotiation tables and marginalised in post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation efforts, which reinforced their victimisation"³⁰, but their voices went unheard on the grounds that they were of no political relevance, just as

²⁸ The pressures of the globalised economy have led to ever-greater violence, especially against women and children.

²⁹ In all societies, however, deeply entrenched cultural norms such as sexism and patriarchy prove highly resistant to change, but without such change women's access to power and its transformation will inevitably be limited.

³⁰ Schieder, Open Colloquy on "conflict prevention and resolution: the role of women"; see: AS/EG (2004) PV 3, Appendix 1, 26 March 2004.

their peace efforts during conflicts were often characterised as “inimical”, “unpatriotic” or a “betrayal”.

It might therefore be worth questioning the credibility of, and political justification for, such strategic peace programmes and negotiations, given that women are excluded in this way.

There is another set of constraints that it is important to mention briefly. They include the lack of a supportive environment³¹ encouraging women leaders, women’s organisations and outstanding women peace activists to strengthen their capacity by promoting and affirming women as role models, ensuring equal access for women and men through adjustments to national and international peace building budgets, and more particularly through gender-equality funding, especially for gender-related means of fostering the implementation of a peace agenda³². There is, moreover, no programme designed to bring about changes in men’s attitudes and get away from traditional male roles, behaviour and action in respect of war, the security agenda, identity politics, the power set-up, and so on, and introduce a new, comprehensive and just gender-sensitive programme based on a creative and peaceful image of society.

- The lack of a comprehensive, systematic national strategy for implementing all the measures connected with a peace building agenda (highlighting the link between micro and macro levels) that both incorporates a distinctive gender-specific approach and co-co-ordinates gender-related, ethnic/national, religious and cultural aspects.

In many countries, the lack of such a strategy stems from, and creates, numerous obstacles, including the fact that the political authorities lack the capacity to and/or are unaware of the need to address peace building projects as a national priority and mobilise resources for a gender-impact policy analysis and/or gender-awareness training, and are unable to influence policy at community level. It is very often the numerous scattered and uncoordinated parallel or separate initiatives, with the same goals and the same results, that reveal the absence of both a coherent mission and efficient co-ordination, and this often thwarts or undermines active democratisation, peace building and confidence-building measures.

One interesting point is that the approach to harmonising peace building, collective security and multiculturalism is very often misguided because there is a lack of understanding and awareness of the sensitive nature and complexity of multiculturalism. Past experience can provide valuable information and resources here. It is apparent from former Yugoslavia and other post-war examples that such harmonisation is particularly affected by war atrocities, the exclusionary politics of national political leaders and constant public stereotyping of other nations, the other sex and people with different religious affiliations, but it is also influenced by a misconception of what multiculturalism entails, especially in the context of a divided community.

- A lack of gender awareness among those responsible for gender mainstreaming in government bodies and in public administration, and a lack of imagination when it comes to ensuring the development of long-term partnerships between members of civil society, gender-equality experts, experienced women peace-makers, those responsible for educating the public and community leaders in their respective fields of expertise.

³¹ For example, women gathered together in the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition had been involved in political peace-oriented activities since the 1960s, but for most of those years it “was only men who held actual political office”. (See: Murices, Open colloquy on “conflict prevention and resolution: the role of women”, in AS/EG (2004) PV 3 Appendix I); in the case of Cyprus, women activists have been discouraged from participating in political life because of traditional roles and patriarchal beliefs.

³² See: www.peacewomen.org/un/ngo/ngostatements/Oct03.html - The Role of Women in the Transformation of Violent Conflict, Statement by the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security in support of the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325 - October 2003.

Despite the existence of gender-equality legislation in most of the countries underpinning the measures that need to be implemented, gender-mainstreaming bodies generally lack a vision of how to address gender-equality issues and what concrete measures to take, and do not know how to devise an appropriate policy, particularly as regards women's role in connection with the peace building agenda. Rather than devise a proper gender-mainstreaming programme taking account of the specific context and particular situations and fully involving the best-qualified, most experienced members of civil society and academia, they co-operate with them on an *ad hoc* basis, very often unwillingly and without an appropriate agenda framework.

Gender-mainstreaming policies therefore result in scattered, uncoordinated and in many cases artificial activities and there is a tendency for bodies dealing with gender issues to dwell on the technical side and introduce a plethora of piecemeal measures and instruments rather than a properly conceived long-term policy, especially in view of the current backlash and the return to patriarchal and traditionalist values. Unfortunately, this only strengthens the politics of hypocrisy rather than making for a gender-sensitive, ethical approach to a human society that respects both sexes.

- The lack of openness and clarity in the position of the religious authorities (including churches) in interreligious and intercultural dialogue, which is very often exacerbated by ambiguous policies towards peace and towards a culture of tolerance, especially in highly conflictual situations such as war or in the context of ethnic cleansing, and an attempt to preserve the patriarchal hierarchy.

In other words, men are accepted with much greater respect as peace leaders, mediators and educators than women. Although the reason for this particular gender imbalance has not been explored in any great depth, it may lie in religious philosophy, traditions³³ and values, or in the long history of women's exclusion from positions of responsibility in religious institutions.

- When it comes to the roles of women and men, one general constraint is the failure to co-ordinate the different aspects, perspectives and solutions when it comes to interreligious dialogue and peace processes (encompassing human rights, the concept of sustainable peace and security, religious and cultural diversity, collective traumatic historical experiences, demands for a "just history" that heals memories of old wounds, and socio-economic and cultural factors that could empower communities).

If the challenge of eliminating these obstacles were taken up, it would make it easier to address a number of important collective concerns and might actually help the peace process to move forward.

- The absence of comprehensive, gender-sensitive teaching within the education system that particularly emphasises the culture of peace, non-violence and peace building as a specific prevention-oriented concept. A related obstacle is the fact that, because of the lack of education, there is no framework for positive female role models in peace building. Existing teaching materials do very little to document women's skills, negotiating styles and means of facilitating dialogue, and pupils are

³³ Let me give an example: In contrast to its stance on such issues as national identity, where the Catholic Church in Croatia has changed its views in favor of a culture of tolerance between nations and citizens with different national identities, the attitude of the Church towards gender issues is steadfastly traditional and is becoming even more radical in this respect (for example, in a public statement issued by the Croatian Archbishops' Conference in November 2003, there is a direct appeal to all citizens not to vote for the political parties that advocate women's reproductive rights, including the right to abortion, or same-sex partnerships).

not exposed to women as great peace-makers. Other problems include the fact that female grassroots activists do not get the recognition they deserve, and there is a general lack of provision in the curriculum for linking gender research, professional mediation/negotiation practice and theories of conflict prevention, management and resolution.

Most of the educational measures and training in peace negotiation, mediation skills and intercultural dialogue reflect an enormous contribution by alternative peace organisations and women's and community-based organisations and provide a wealth of new knowledge in this field, but they are extremely limited in scope and impact because they are not part of the official curriculum.³⁴

2.2. Specific obstacles

Alongside the general obstacles, an analysis reveals many specific obstacles connected with particular situations and stages in peace efforts and conflict resolution, the status of the various national groups and religious authorities in conflict areas and divided communities, the scale of conflict or the steps taken towards a peace settlement, in the broader context of the issues that concern us.

The types of obstacles differ according to the situation: for example, the peace building process has a different impact in a situation that is mid-way between war and peace, when the aim is to reach a final peace settlement but a ceasefire has given citizens some "breathing space", from the impact when war or conflict is still in progress³⁵ and when negotiations between the different sides involved in the conflict need to be renewed. The impact is different again when the signing of the cessation of hostilities does not lead to sustainable peace and a return to normal in all parts of the country.

Particular obstacles have emerged more recently, as in Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, where peace is, in some cases, interpreted as a "*zero sum game*", and where "*many believe that 'peace' necessarily involves losing something.*" Another example is that brutal, long-term human right violations, as in Chechnya, have prompted women to sacrifice themselves by committing suicide or using their bodies as military weapons³⁶.

These situations present different challenges, necessitate efforts of different types and throw up various potential obstacles that need to be overcome by women and men engaged in drawing up a peace building agenda. Here are some examples.

- One of the major obstacles to the peace building process, and especially the role of peace-makers, is the failure not only to acknowledge and accept the respective interests and priorities of all the parties concerned and their willingness to negotiate, but also to "neutralise" behaviour that tends to hinder negotiations, by developing partnerships based on mutual confidence, an understanding of diversity and respect for cultural and religious needs and considerations, and/or to devise means of bringing about some sort of shift in attitude. Both the transition from the "absence of war" to proper peace and the achievement of a lasting and just peace entail many different approaches and measures and cannot be achieved without taking advantage of the best practices of non-governmental organisations and without giving women and men a role.

³⁴ Although sporadic experiments have been carried out in school curricula in some post conflict communities, for example, in ex-Yugoslav states, yet peace and antireligious dialogue are not compulsory subjects or taught consistently.

³⁵ The opportunities for dialogue depend on the situation: in times of conflict, parties who are interested in dialogue, like those pursuing grassroots peace initiatives, are very often perceived as traitors by their own communities.

³⁶ AS/EG (2004) PV 3 Appendix 1, 26 March 2004, aegapv03addl_2004 (Minutes of the meeting, p.4).

- These obstacles are compounded by the limited number of people in positions of responsibility who are fully committed to unconditional, ethical peace building. Moreover, in any war or post-war situation, the process of identifying and involving those who need to be involved in prevention, peace building and intercultural dialogue is a very complex one. On the one hand, there is the question of how to enlarge the circle of those seeking peace within one's own community, acknowledging an individual responsibility for peace building that transcends historical, national and cultural obstacles and differences. On the other hand, there is the question of how to get through to those who are not yet convinced of the importance of interreligious and intercultural dialogue: those who are reluctant or not ready to engage in such dialogue because of the post-war trauma syndrome, personal factors, their ethnic/national or religious background, their vulnerability, their beliefs or their hostile attitudes. The question is, therefore, how to keep "a back door open" at all times for all the other parties in peace building processes and to move forward in order to achieve a just peace.
- As regards the church authorities and religious beliefs, it is necessary to touch on two issues that may create obstacles and have a negative impact.
 - a. One is the fact that church authorities tend, in seeking to preserve and pass on their own religious and cultural traditions, to confuse these with pure nationalist ideology; this generates overlapping and deliberately forged national and nationalistic identities and affiliations, each with its own religious beliefs.

In the case of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches³⁷ in the countries of former Yugoslavia, this is blatantly obvious. The fact that religious affiliation is still closely linked to the politics of national identification undermines potential co-operation through interreligious dialogue, especially in the post-war crisis areas in Croatia. There are some cases where the situation is still very uncertain and where, despite clear messages from the clergy in favour of peaceful coexistence, some local priests tend to take a line of their own. This can lead to the misuse of religion and generate intolerance and restlessness among believers.

- b. Another is the ambiguity surrounding the role of religion today and the misuse of religious pluralism, with the contestation of ideas, freedom and differences in beliefs, views and ideas within interreligious movements and established multireligious cultures.

One of the main challenges to emerge in the wake of the September 11 attacks is, according to A. Omar Rashid, how to transform extrinsic motivations for interreligious dialogue into intrinsic motivations and reasons, to be found "*within faith commitments for promoting good relations with people of other religions*", and deal with the "*challenging questions of evangelism and d'awah*."³⁸ In addition, therefore, to protecting religious freedom, ensuring it of a secure environment and combating new opportunities to reaffirm negative stereotypes concerning Islam and Muslims, it is necessary to address a number of obstacles, especially in the form of theological interpretations and deep-seated beliefs, and their role in dialogue and confidence-building.

³⁷ The Catholic Church, as well as putting across a peace message, played a significant role in rallying national sentiment to patriotism and Catholicism. The Orthodox Church was even more active in identifying the religious and national interests of the Serbs in former Yugoslavia, and this prompted the Croatian Serbs to affirm their national identity as well.

³⁸ See: Omar, A. Rashid, "Opportunities and Challenges for Muslim Peace-Building After September 11: From Extrinsic to Intrinsic Motivations for Interreligious Dialogue", *Current Dialogue*, Issue 41, July 2003.

- A climate of intolerance towards others and insecurity affecting a large number of citizens (including women, sexual and ethnic minorities, refugees, displaced persons and war veterans) may persist and become a major obstacle once a peace agreement has reached in the communities concerned. Not only do attitudes towards others reveal the existence of various types of prejudices, including national and religious prejudice³⁹ but, because they lead from negative emotions and hatred to the demonisation of whole cultures and ethnic communities, they can be a major disruptive factor in peace building. They also reflect a social situation which may undermine democracy by causing people to distance themselves from member of national/ethnic minorities and people with different religious affiliations.

In order to take the analysis a stage further, it is necessary to introduce a critical approach in order to help get rid of stereotypes concerning those representing the other party in dialogue and in the peace building process in general.

- One of the obstacles to the promotion of a multicultural community that is open and tolerant to all in the post-war period is the often confused, ill-prepared and uncoordinated national policy on such sensitive and complex issues as forgiveness⁴⁰. In an effort to return to "normal" life as soon as possible after the conflict, there is often undue impatience to achieve reconciliation, especially as a result of misunderstanding and efforts to force people to forgive despite the fact that they are not ready to do so. Forgiveness takes place, as it were a political imperative in response to an "ultimatum", whereas it is necessary, in multicultural and multireligious countries, to foster an in-depth understanding of the meaning of forgiveness and provide opportunities for it by carefully introducing all the aspects of lasting peace and taking small, very careful chosen steps towards social, cultural and individual reconciliation and neighbourly relations.
- Also, different generational approach, namely the interpretation given to religion by different age-groups, and different positioning towards religion during specific periods of time and settings, seems to be also one of the obstacles. For example, although interreligious groups in the United Kingdom experienced difficulties in recruiting young people, there was, in contrast, a revival of interest in religion in the ex-communist/ ex-socialist countries, particularly among young people.
- The scope of intercultural and interreligious concerns now transcends the traditional approach to pre-conflict and post-conflict situations and peace building and touches on the existential meaning of peace, the various approaches to peace and the culture of peace and coexistence. In response to new types of hatred and fear, misunderstanding and the lack of the political will to understand the culture of other people, the new "security system", based on simplistic ideas, along with inappropriate behaviour reflected in such ideological messages as "democracy versus terrorism" and "Christianity versus Islam", is already throwing up numerous new obstacles.

The obstacles encountered in discussions on Europeans and "other people" include the questioning of European identity, and especially the pointing of a finger at Christianity, self-centred feelings of uniqueness and cultural practices that discriminate against others⁴¹.

³⁹ See: www.gfk.hr, Perception of the Social Distance of Croatian Citizens towards the Nations of Former Yugoslavia, Centre for GfK, Centre for Market Research, Survey, September 2002.

⁴⁰ Reconciliation and forgiveness are two processes that are imperative for the purposes of rehabilitation and a return to normal after conflict or war. Forgiveness is "an individual act of freeing oneself from the burden of hate and the desire for/right to revenge. It also has the potential to free the other side from the burden of guilt and fear." See: www.transnational.org/forum/Nonviolence/Nonviolence.html - Supporting Reconciliation and Forgiveness.

⁴¹ See: Paper: Introduction : Building bridges to raise mutual understanding and collaboration (Fatmagül Berktaş, İnci Kerestecioğlu, Özlem Terzi, Sevgi Uçan, Zeynep Kivılcım Forsman).

Nowadays the call for interreligious dialogue centres on core issues pertaining to Muslims, European identity and Islam. There is a wide array of attitudes and/or responses to the challenge of being Muslim in a European context, ranging from the questioning of religious allegiance and citizenship by Tariq Ramadan⁴² and different cultural patterns, which Anne Sofie Roald, in her study of Muslim women in the West, called an “Arab cultural base pattern” and a “Western cultural base pattern”⁴³, to facing up to, confronting or inventing one’s own cultural tradition with its own connotations, perceptions and values. But what is crucial, according to Jorgen Nielsen, is the basis for such responses, which rely on “concepts and ideas to provide ... ‘theological’ or ideological substance”⁴⁴, shifting from the concept of the source as the reference point to the new place of residence and to the concept of Islam. There is also a more determined effort to replace “untranslatable” historical contexts by new ones, as Tariq Ramadan pointed out when situating Muslims within Europe.

The major dilemma is how to forge a European identity⁴⁵ that on the one hand respects and ensures equal treatment for all the cultural communities involved and, on the other, provides for the expression of cultural/religious differences and diversity within this context without eliciting prejudice against such differences.

This dilemma may give rise to obstacles in various sectors and to varying degrees.

The “vulnerability of modernity” (to borrow Robin Wilson’s expression) is reflected in a wide range of ongoing practices, an example being the wearing of the headscarf, which became a live issue among decision-makers in French schools in 2004, centring on the symbolic choice between freedom of religion and the secular nature of the state⁴⁶. It generated new divides between communities (the Muslim community being the worst affected), which are exacerbated by government immigration policies, the media, neighbourhood rumours, and so on.

The media have an important role and wield immense power at local, national and international level, deepening divides, exacerbating conflicts, especially by causing tension to escalate, exaggerating differences and making opposing sides more radical, as well as portraying people who are different in confused and rudimentary ways. In many cases, the media also convey stereotypical roles for women and men, often portraying women as sex objects and as passive victims or in “traditional” roles, undermining their worth and worsening the political and social situation in the various communities in which they live.

The national and local media, by taking sides and stereotyping people generally and parties involved in conflicts in particular, especially according to their gender, and by oversimplifying international news, can contribute to a lack of understanding of the complexity of conflict situations and this may, to some extent, have an effect on the resolution of conflicts.

“Very often, the integrated nature of a society [disappears] during a conflict and population ‘labelling’ [appears] as in Bosnia and Lebanon, whereas the people [share] the same culture”⁴⁷ and “extreme groups are more visible than people presenting average opinions.”⁴⁸

⁴² Ramadan, T. (1999), To be a European Muslim, Leicester, Islamic Foundation.

⁴³ Roald, A.S. (2001), Women in Islam: the western experience, London, Routledge.

⁴⁴ Nielsen, J., New centres and peripheries in European Islam? Islam and the Shaping of the Current Islamic Reformation, Mediterranean Politics, Vol.7, No.3 (autumn 2002), pp.64-81.

⁴⁵ See: Intercultural dialogue and conflict prevention, Action plan for 2002-2004, CDCULT-PREV (2002) 1, 8 April 2002, pp.1-4.

⁴⁶ The European Court of Human Rights explained its decision to uphold the ban on Muslim headscarves in schools and state universities (Turkish ones as it happened) on the basis of the principle of the division between church and state. See: Euro Rights Court Backs Ban on Muslim Scarves, Reuters, 29 June 2004.

⁴⁷ See Jorgen Nielsen’s contribution: EG-S-DI (2004) RAP 3, Group of specialists on the role of women and men in intercultural and interreligious dialogue for conflict prevention, peace-building and democratisation (EG-S-DI).

⁴⁸ Intercultural Dialogue and Conflict Prevention, Action Plan for 2002-2004, DGIV/CULT/PREV/ICIR (2003) 1, p 7.

With the domination of the global media, sensationalism has become the order of the day while, at the other extreme, images of people and their various situations have been simplified. The media as such have become an obstacle to the promotion of dialogue and peace values because of the loss of journalistic independence and the decline in investigative journalism, direct/indirect censorship, the marketing of information, the phenomenon of selective memory and the public's thirst for exotic news. A connected dilemma is what the main role of media journalists should be today: to provide information within these constraints or to educate, raise awareness and practise ethical, responsible journalism.

2.3 Gender-specific obstacles

Although all the above-mentioned obstacles and constraints affect women's roles in peace building, it is necessary to look at some particular obstacles more specifically related to women in order to obtain an overall picture.

- With a few exceptions, there is a huge discrepancy between women's achievements and experience in peace building and interreligious and intercultural dialogue at all levels (local, national, regional and international) and the recognition and creative use of women's capabilities and skills. This discrepancy is even more evident when it comes to the position of women peace leaders in their respective national decision-making bodies and institutions when a national peace agenda is at stake. Despite their vast knowledge and experience, women are rarely invited to take part in mediation or intercultural dialogue of national significance; nor are they involved in drawing up gender-sensitive national training programmes or peace building and democratisation measures and instruments.

Although women activists made a valuable contribution to the advancement of peace, non-violence and multiculturalism at grassroots level during the war, their experience, knowledge and fertile imagination when it comes to exploring peaceful solutions are often ignored in political peace processes. There is a strong tendency worldwide to consider it normal that peace negotiation tables should take place in the absence of women, even those who have battled at the forefront of the peace movement in their own communities. When it comes to official policy on peace negotiating tables, it can hardly be said that women are welcome to be equally represented, or that there is a gender-sensitive approach that favours women.

When female peace activists are invited⁴⁹, it sometimes happens that they are invited not because of their acknowledged expertise or as official delegates, but rather to obtain consultancy services or useful information from the grassroots.

- Experience shows that using only male consultants and experts and being unwilling to acknowledge civil society's best practices (especially those pursued by women) and avoid top-down approaches to peace building leads to piecemeal results and contributes to a lack of confidence in the possibility of rebuilding multicultural, tolerant societies.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ On the basis of personal evidence, women have very rarely been invited at national level, although over the last two years some female peace activists have become members of parliamentary bodies concerned with human rights or interethnic/national issues. At community level there are some good examples of co-operation with the political authorities or civil servants, occasionally with the support of international mediators on the ground.

⁵⁰ See: www.peacewomen.org/un/ngo/ngostatements/recsSGreport.html, - NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, Recommendations for the Secretary General's Study on Women, Girls, Peace and Security.

- Even when there is a clearer political consensus in favour of the crucial need to involve more women in peace processes, there is very often a lack of knowledge and understanding of the way in which a female perspective could make for a more constructive approach to mediation and conflict resolution and prevention.⁵¹ When women's views and experience are excluded, the whole perspective is flawed.
- The long-standing assumption that women are by nature peace-oriented (a widespread prejudice) and the idealisation of "female" values should, however, be challenged, just as those who ignore women and exclude them from peace processes on the basis on their gender should be challenged.
- Patriarchal cultural patterns that rely on certain traditional beliefs, assumptions and expectations with regard to men's and women's role in dialogue and peace building may become a major obstacle in affirming new gender roles and approaches.
- Regardless of the increase in the number of female students in the different theological faculties, a gender balance is lacking and approaches differ according to sex, being biased in favour of male students, although in certain institutes women are the majority. This is not, however, reflected in the religious professions.
- The fact that women are more vulnerable in situations of war/conflict may be an additional constraint. War/conflict often increases women's vulnerability more than men's because of sexual exploitation⁵² through rape, forced pregnancy, etc. The same is true in post-conflict situations, when women seem to be more vulnerable to different types of exploitation (for example, economic exploitation) as well as violence (for example, family violence).
- A major concern is how to find new ethical approaches designed to link specifically female issues (sexual slavery, war rape, trafficking during military occupation etc.) resulting from or affected by war and violent conflict worldwide with women's potential to lead and enhance interreligious and multicultural dialogue. The question is also how to incorporate the above concerns within the whole complex range of issues, challenges and perspectives connected with peace building programmes in general and the measures called for on the part of religious,⁵³ cultural and political authorities. It is also necessary to remedy the lack of knowledge as to how to pursue a new gender-sensitive strategy addressing all the obstacles by means of a peaceful programme.
- The question is, therefore, how to integrate a gender perspective into traditional approaches to peace, conflict and security, acknowledging the different perceptions, interpretations and experiences of women and men and, at the same time, how to transform stereotypical gender roles and enhance the image of women and men in new peace building roles.

For example, there is an urgent need to transform the prevailing image of women in times of war (as humiliated, powerless victims) and create a potentially powerful and dignified image.⁵⁴

⁵¹ See: www.moznostvolby.sk/peking.htm, - Proposals for Consideration in the Preparation of a Draft Declaration, Draft Platform Preparation (See: Beijing Conference).

⁵² See: Skjelsbaek Inger (1997) Gendered Battlefields A Gender Analysis of Peace and Conflict, International Peace Research Institute, Oslo.

⁵³ One of the major objections to the church's role was its silence in respect of such atrocities as rape, incest, female genital mutilation, violence, sexual slavery and the exploitation of women. See: Religion and Women: An Agenda for Change, Women and Religions: Advancing Gender Equity in a Globalised World, Chiang Mai, 20 February – 3 March 2004.

⁵⁴ It is also necessary to transform the image of women's role, which is seen by religious associations as being oriented predominantly towards charity and aid.

- Differing gender approaches to the concepts of national, international and human security and the world order cause a great deal of controversy in peace building and in the perception of sex/gender roles. How to harmonise a system based largely on gender-specific values and reach a consensus over an alternative concept of peace and security? This is a live issue, and a very important one.
- In addition, there are many aspects of peace building and democratisation where gender issues matter and, on a deeper level, where such values as trust, a culture of non-violence, peaceful security and support for others rank with equality as the norm. Paradoxical though it might seem, advocating equality between women and men and strengthening the processes of reconciliation and understanding have something in common. Peace building is mainly about opening up all sources of human communication, at least through the best gender-sensitive approaches, methods and mediation practices.

Lastly, in order to produce a better gender-based analysis of any peace building agenda, certain assumptions need to be checked. On one hand, it is necessary to devise an appropriate model for carrying out a comprehensive gender analysis based on the most valuable existing material and authentic experiences. On the other hand, a distinctive perspective that might make it possible to come up with new approaches and solutions needs to be adopted.

IV. GOOD PRACTICE

There are many examples of good practice across the globe that bridge the divides of conflict. They bear witness to the affirmative role of women from different religious, national/ethnic and cultural backgrounds and those involved in peace dialogue in paving the way for an inspiring role model for the prevention, mediation and solution of conflicts and misunderstanding. They differ from one situation to another and are very often based on a diversified network of national and international initiatives, organisations or individuals (both men and women)⁵⁵ providing the ground work for enhanced intercultural dialogue in pursuit of gender-aware peace building⁵⁶ based on knowledge, wisdom, a philosophy of non-violence and peace-oriented values.

Despite different contexts and different specific reasons for contributing to co-operation and dialogue, there are some human and gender-specific (or, to be more precise, specifically female) motives for doing so. The first is an awareness of the close connection between war and structural and gender-based violence against women, and this awareness is strongly ingrained in patriarchal civilisation models. The second is connected with women's self-knowledge and experience and the lessons they have learned from history, which have convinced them that a deeper understanding of the various aspects of peace prevention, plural histories, religious pluralism and multiculturalism, along with open-mindedness and tolerance towards others, can bring people to the politics of peace as the only global alternative. The *Women's International League for Peace and Freedom*, as one of the oldest women's organisations advocating peace, founded in 1915, *Jerusalem Link*, *Women's Coalition in Northern Ireland*, *Women in Black*, the *Gender Task Forces*, the *Women's Peacemaking Council* (Georgia), the *Mano River Women's Peace Network* (West Africa), the *Women and Military Conversion Association for Russia*, *Kvinna till Kvinna* (Sweden)⁵⁷, *Women for Mutual Security* (Greece), *Dones per Dones* (Spain) and *Frauen und Krieg* (Austria) have all worked on peace plans designed to bring women to official negotiation tables on the grounds that gender equality, justice and global peace are inextricably entwined.⁵⁸

1. ORGANISING DIALOGUE

This material of good practice entails not only presenting concrete examples that can bring about progress, but also attempting to address the very essence of dialogue in order to elicit some new approaches and appropriate answers.

International level

The Stability Pact Gender Task Force set up in 1999 runs schemes on the theme of women, conflict prevention and peace building. It supports regional networks and projects promoting dialogue between women from different ethnic and religious groups and was set up specifically to address the absence of women's involvement in formal peace processes.

⁵⁵ See: Address by Ms. Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, 5th European Ministerial Conference on Equality Between and Men - Proceedings, "Democratisation, conflict prevention and peace-building: the perspectives and the roles of women", Skopje, 22-23 January 2003, pp. 9-15.

⁵⁶ "Peace-building is a two-fold process requiring both the deconstruction of the structure of violence and the construction of the structures of peace." NGO Statement to the UN Security Council, Arria Formula, 23 October 2002.

⁵⁷ See: Rethink! A Handbook for Sustainable Peace, Kvinna till Kvinna, Women's Empowerment Projects, Stockholm 2004.

⁵⁸ "For me as a Palestinian and a woman, peace means being equal to Israeli women and equal to my brother, a Palestinian man. If this does not exist, it is not peace." (Statement by Manar Hassan of Al Fanar, the Israeli-based Palestinian Feminist Organisation) in Lentin, Ronit, "Women, War and Peace in a Culture of Violence: The Middle East and Northern Ireland", in Biljana Kašić, ed., *Women and the Politics of Peace*, Ibid, p. 64.

There are many instances in which the SP GTF has helped women to take part in political processes by running confidence-building and other specific forms of training, such as media training to help women become more involved in the electoral process. Because of its work, the number of women in elected office both in parliament and at local and regional level has increased in such countries as “the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”.

There have been several European initiatives to promote interfaith dialogue, one example being the Interfaith Europe Project⁵⁹ hosted by the city of Graz as part of its programme as European City of Culture for 2003. This project involved the activities such as an examination the day-to-day lives of members of different religious communities, especially minority groups in European cities, sharing their problems, conflicts and experiences of interreligious dialogue, production a handbook for interreligious co-operation that can be constantly expanded etc.

One specific example where women play a central role is the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women, which is based in Brussels but has branches in many European countries. It involves women from the Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic traditions and its priorities include combating trafficking, eliminating violence against women, and conflict resolution. It runs leadership training for young women so that they can take on roles as leaders both within their own religious organisations and in their local communities.

National level

There are a number of examples of formal schemes set up at national level in Europe to enable governments to meet representatives of religious and/or cultural organisations.

The *Northern Ireland Women's Coalition* was formed in response to the lack of women's involvement in the Peace Talks. It is a cross-community group of women who became involved in the political process by standing for election as delegates to the talks. The women were active in the local community, and by standing for election they were able to meet and hold discussions with a large number of women in different communities. Two women were subsequently elected and took part in the Peace Talks, and were later elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Coalition took part in the new elections scheduled for November 2003.

Even if Council of Europe's member States are not involved in conflict, their societies are now facing ethnic, cultural and religious diversity, and contradictions between globalisation and local societies, often presenting a threat to the progress achieved so far. The sharp increase in migration might in fact give rise to internal tensions. Partisan identity policies can undermine women's civil rights, in particular those of women belonging to minorities, who must then endure discrimination on more grounds than one. Initiatives are developed to remedy this situation and to support the empowerment of migrant women or women from minorities.

In Portugal several projects were launched in the framework of the Community Initiative EQUAL. For example, the project “Migrations and Development” promoted by the General Directorate of Consular Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which brings together different partners, including the Committee for Equality and Women's rights (CIDM) and the Committee for Equality in Work and Employment (CITE), aims to create positive feeling towards those who are “different”, promote more efficient cooperation between civil servants in both national administrations and at local level, who are in daily contact with migrant populations, ethnic and cultural groups and to support equal access to employment,

⁵⁹ There is no specific mention of the role of women, and it is not clear from the information available whether this is a dimension that is being addressed.

education and active citizenship, in order to overcome prejudices and stereotypes which are obstacles to their social and economic integration.

Another project “Equality – Citizenship” promoted by the IOM also includes, in addition to the two equality mechanisms, the General Union of Workers (UGT) and the municipality of Vila Franca de Xira, an important municipality of the urban area of Lisbon. This project aims to promote non gender discriminatory policies in recruitment, selection processes, access to further education, career advancement, access to senior posts and higher wages. It also aims to reduce unstable contracts in particular with a view to equal opportunities between women and men, encourage adoption of good practices in companies and stimulate the introduction of a non discriminatory culture, interculturalism and active citizenship. Another objective of the project is to combat a phenomenon which provokes a double discrimination in work – on grounds of race and sex - and promote the implementation of non discriminatory policies and measures for migrant women.

The UK government has set up a Faith Community Liaison Group to advise on policy in relation to police matters, education, trade and industry, the media and culture. There are Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Jewish and Christian representatives. Along with the state's role in the United Kingdom the Interfaith Forum has worked with the Local Government Association to draw up a manual of good practice for local government (for example, 44% of local authorities in England and Wales have an officer responsible for such work and 13% support a local interfaith group or forum.)

In France, the French Council⁶⁰ for the Muslim Religion elected its first 18 members in April 2003. It will represent the Muslim community in discussions with the Government.

2. DIALOGUE: MODELS AND POTENTIALS

2.1. Dialogue as a means of bridging divides to bring peace through maintained communication

To take this analysis a stage further, some examples of good practice in this area over the last decade are presented below as powerful models of women's engagement, with an emphasis on vulnerable/crisis regions in Europe (more specifically, the former Yugoslav region).

Example One

Women involved in various aspects of peace building during war and conflict in the former Yugoslav countries have expressed the desire that the politics of peace and a culture of non-violence should be broached from a female perspective. In doing so they have chosen to take personal responsibility for combating war violence, destroying and humiliating others.

Women in Croatia from the Anti-War Campaign and the Centre for Women War Victims, together with *Women in Black* from Serbia and women from the other countries of former Yugoslavia, were among the first to initiate dialogue across religious/ethnic divides. Women's groups have not only opposed war on the basis of their own values of non-violence, human rights and tolerance, but also set up or led most of the anti-war and peace initiatives since 1991, while at the same time carving out an ever-larger place for themselves in society. Women have been involved in a wide range of initiatives and efforts that can be classified as

⁶⁰ None of these two bodies, namely the French Council for the Muslim religion and the Faith Community Liaison Group, appears to have any members specifically representing women, or a remit to raise women's issues.

“peace building”⁶¹ in connection with conscientious objection in a non-partisan way. In addition, they have been engaged in interreligious dialogue concerning male behaviour and personal ethics in times of war, provided support to the victims of war, especially displaced persons, refugees and women who have been raped, offered humanitarian assistance to the victims of conflict and kept cross-border communication alive. Women have taken an active role in numerous national and international gatherings. In addition, they started the first educational sessions on peace and non-violence in the complex situations resulting from war.

Female peace activists have also run a series of activities (including peace-education gatherings, peace building programmes and education in tolerance) focusing on the direct protection of the human rights of civilians belonging to ethnic/national minorities⁶², and these activities have provided a safe haven for a number of people, regardless of their ethnic and religious background. It is interesting that most of them, although practising believers, never stressed their beliefs as a reason for their activities. The peace issue united different activists, and these groups were open not only to Christians and atheists but also to Bosnian Muslims who came to Croatia as refugees. For them, the existence of the Anti-War Campaign Centre meant there was a real human space where they felt welcomed, integrated and psychologically secure.

It was important to institute dialogue between groups that found it difficult, if not impossible, to communicate in situations where sharp divides existed.

The perspective was highly contextualised, subjective and emotional. A willingness to open the door to communication and share their own pain, experience and difficulties laid the foundations for a transformation that made it possible to envisage peace. It has been mainly women who have had the task of taking on these facilitating roles and have dared to do so.

Example Two

Whether it was possible to live together at all, or only to live side by side, was an upsetting uncertainty that hung over the first gathering held in Srbinje (previously called Foča) in the Serbian part of Bosnia and Herzegovina by women from Srbinje (of Serbian nationality but Bosnian citizens), returnee Bosnian and Muslim women and women from Srebrenica and Bratunac (mainly Bosnian Muslims) who were displaced persons living in Sarajevo.

The main topic at this gathering was the various aspects of reconciliation, in its different forms. It elicited mixed feelings as the discussions progressed, ranging from refusal and despair to hope. A closer analysis of the discussion revealed three stages. The first was when women accused one other, drawing attention to atrocities perpetrated by the other side, their losses, detention camps and displaced persons, expressing their hatred and anger using “objective”, cold, bureaucratic language. The second was when women started crying, recounting their own stories and expressing their own pain. This was a turning point: the warm, emotional and personal female outpourings facilitated a change of attitude. The third was when, having confronted one another in the context of war/ conflict, the women slowly became aware of the absurdity of violence and aggression. Finding reconciliation within themselves, in their heart of hearts, they were able to address the question of warmongering and violence, casting aside their own national/ethnic identity and religious affiliations.⁶³

⁶¹ Despite the great difficulty of gauging the real extent of women’s involvement in peace throughout Croatia in comparison with men’s involvement, it can be said that women undoubtedly contributed more than men, accounting for 60% to 70% overall.

⁶² Quite apart from national and religious identity, there were a variety of reasons that prompted people to withdraw into their own group and establish a safe haven within a group of “similar” people, which afforded protection and warmth within a small community of “like-minded” people. Other people were usually perceived with fear and distrust, regardless of whether they were Croats or Serbs, Catholics or Muslims, displaced Serbs or displaced Croats.

⁶³ “Two weeks after the first gathering, the women from Sabine were the guests of the women from Srebrenica and Britannic in Sarajevo, and they continued to talk about their own lives and problems in a more open manner. Communication, which had

Example Three

The Macedonian Women's Lobby is a network of women from different bodies (NGOs, political parties, governmental structures, parliament, local governments, media, trade unions, experts) with different political, ethnic and religious backgrounds. Set up on March 2000 as an initiative of the Gender Task Force-Stability Pact, in order to step forward and to improve gender equality, it contributed to peace building and post-conflict reconciliation in order to obtain more stability and greater cohesion within the country and society by crossing political, ethnic and religious borders while working together on gender equality issues.

2.2. "Dialogue can be a liberating experience for women" (Anne Hege Grung's idea)

Example 1

Women have opposed war by making space within themselves for their own values and tolerance, from which they draw strength and the incentive to cast aside the role of victim and take responsibility for their own lives. Dialogue between women across war divides (women from Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina) was organised on various occasions throughout the war. This collective experience rekindled past traumas but was an opportunity for reconciliation with a view to peace building. For all the misunderstandings and obstacles, the dialogue pinpointed two inter-related issues: women's awareness of their own power, which enabled them to continue along the path they had marked out for themselves, making use of their own strengths and supported by a wide network of women, and the deliberate promotion of women's leadership in peace efforts and in life in general. The mere fact of witnessing concrete situations could dispel their own uncertainty and the ambiguities surrounding peace and their own identity. As Lepa Mladenović, a feminist from Belgrade, said at the Conference on Women and the Politics of Peace in Zagreb 1996, *"When a woman who lives on the other side of the divide tells you about her life, the facts of her life attenuate your hatred and ignorance – her public biography makes it possible to do away with the national biography."*⁶⁴

Women have learned about self-esteem and self-respect in their capacity as women, and become aware that their "female" qualities are assets when it comes to transcending stereotypes concerning femininity and masculinity and ethnic/national groups in the context of the divides resulting from war.

Example two

There are a number of organisations belonging to specific religions, such as the organisations of Jewish women and of Catholic women, which serve as a place where women can get together. They sometimes act as a lobby, pressing, for example, for the ordination of women priests, but it is quite difficult to ascertain the role they play and the influence they have on the internal structure of religious bodies.

been cut off for years, first because of the war and violence and then because of the fear of not being accepted, was slowly renewed, as hurt was cast aside and the women felt the need to be of help to those on the other side." This statement comes from Manna Zvizdić, from *Žene ženama* (Women to Women), Sarajevo, who moderated the gatherings.

⁶⁴ Mladenović, Lepa, "We met in Zagreb", *Women for Peace, Women in Black*, Čigoja Štampa, Belgrade 1997, p. 192.

2.3. Dialogue as a tool enabling women to support one another and share responsibility in a region on the threshold of inter-ethnic crisis and violence

Four feminist/peace activists from different countries (a Croat, an Albanian, a Serb and a Bosnian Muslim)⁶⁵ organised a multiethnic dialogue in order to protest jointly about the potential conflict in “the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia” (between Macedonians and Albanians). The main purpose of this event, held in Kumanovo in April 2001, was to support women from various women’s groups in “the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia” (Macedonians, Albanians, Roma and Serbs) by sharing their own experiences of similar situations and addressing burning issues.

The women discussed and questioned their identities and fears, women’s sources of trust, mutual understanding, the impact of stereotyping (based on national/ethnic identity), female solidarity, the situation of women in multicultural crises and the building of bridges to preserve the community from war.

Each woman was honest with herself, facing up to the fact that by stereotyping others she also hurt herself. Taking responsibility for one’s own words and behaviour was therefore the first step towards peace building. Despite all the criticism, mixed feelings, and mixed messages about power, righteousness and the “honesty” of their respective nations, the women were partially receptive to being urged to shift their positions and attitudes⁶⁶ and accept the “truth” of the other side or at least be able to listen to it. The message from Igballa Rogova, an Albanian woman from Kosovo, concerning her own experience of a minority that became a majority, was a very good and clear example: *“I opened my heart to myself by communicating with the enemy (a Roma woman), and I rediscovered both myself and that enemy.”* She also spoke about the Serbian group they had started supporting, and how much it had helped her to adopt a reconciliatory approach.

2.4. Dialogue as an intrinsic factor making for interreligious solidarity

Example One

A couple of Catholic peace activists from Croatia organised, in conjunction with the “TABITA” organisation in Vojvodina, Serbia, basic training in non-violent action/engagement under the banner “With the Power of Non-Violence for Peace” for a group of religious women from Vojvodina, Serbia, Belgrade and “the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia” in Novi Sad in October/November 2003.⁶⁷

The climate was tolerant until the point when, in one exercise, a small group reached deadlock over the question, “What is the difference between us?” One participant, of a more secular persuasion, found herself at odds with a devoutly religious woman. In the plenary session their differences escalated into a conflict, because the religious woman could not bear to listen to someone who did not accept God as the greatest good. She simply did not know how to tolerate someone who did not recognise this. The discussion flared up during the plenary session, as there were women who took one side and women who took the other. Some sympathised with the “religious” position, while others chose to reject it for the first time because it had been forced upon them and was therefore foreign to them. The conflict died down and they continued with their work.

⁶⁵ The gathering was sponsored by Kvinna till Kvinna, a Swedish women’s peace organisation and foundation.

⁶⁶ For example, a feminist activist from Serbia dispelled the myth that Serbians are, a priori, the “brothers and sisters” of, or collaborators with, the Macedonian nation and automatically support the Macedonians. She herself actually supported the Albanian side, and raised the problem of the Constitution. The Bosnian Muslims supported the Orthodox Macedonians, and the Albanian activist helped the Roma in the group.

⁶⁷ This is a personal example recounted for the purpose of this paper by Ana and Otto Raffai, who organised the training.

The woman who had taken the “religious” stand did not attend the second part of the training, having told one of the organisers that the training was too difficult for her. The organisers felt it did not live up to her expectations as regards absolute religious truths. She was also bothered by “the political connotations of the interpretation of the Bible”. Then came a turning point.

During the workshop at the end of the second training session, there was an evaluation and mutual farewell session at which each participant was asked to tell another what she valued about her. They drew names by lot. As chance would have it, the woman from the small group in which the conflict had arisen who represented the “secular” view drew the name of a participant who was devoutly religious. The latter approached the first woman and said, *“I find it difficult to accept your view of God. Even now I don't find it easy. But I can see that the time we have spent together has been useful to me. I realise that I'm changing and I'd like us to have the opportunity to continue our dialogue, because I think it helps me to mature and that I'm truly learning to be more tolerant. And that is what I have always tried to do in my faith.”*

Example Two

A conflict-resolution course for trainers entitled “Transforming Attitudes”, organised by the World Conference of Religions for Peace with the support of the Interreligious Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina in autumn 2003, was attended by 20 young people from Muslim, Catholic, Orthodox, Jewish and Protestant communities.

Alongside the various gatherings and joint projects initiated or organised by women from different communities that have strengthened the role of women, focusing both on current social problems and on the rights of women in social reconstruction and peace building (one example being “Tea Time”, which provided a platform for Bosnian and Kosovar women, among others), one of the most striking experiences concerns a young Orthodox woman from Sarajevo. As everyone was introducing themselves at the start of the event and voicing their expectations, she spoke very openly about her despair and lack of hope for the future of Serbs in Sarajevo. During the two days, however, it became clear that she was establishing relationships and opening up. By the end of the seminar, she was one of the most committed young people, speaking enthusiastically about future events for the newly established group. During the evaluation, she expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to meet young people from different religious communities and a new optimism as regards not only her own future but the future of all citizens in Bosnia.⁶⁸

3. A NEW ERA: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES AND STEPS TOWARDS DIALOGUE AS A MEANS OF ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY AND "EN-GENDERING" PEACE

Since 2000 great strides have been made in the acknowledgement of the significance of women's roles in conflict prevention and peace building⁶⁹. This acknowledgement extends to decision-making, the rebuilding of societies and the management of relief efforts, and has made it possible to co-ordinate and boost women's actions in a more efficient and empowering manner within their respective communities as well as internationally.

⁶⁸ See: www.wcrp.org/RforP/Conflict/SEE/balkans_update_fall%202003.html. – Update From the Standing Commission on Conflict Transformation.

⁶⁹ It is worth noting the new steps taken in the context of the activities of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which pursues a comprehensive, co-operative and consensual approach to a wide range of security-related issues, including arms control, preventive diplomacy, confidence- and security-building measures, human rights and economic and environmental security.

When the Security Council unanimously adopted *Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security*⁷⁰ in October 2000, a gender perspective was adopted for the first time and attention was drawn to the need to involve women in decision-making at all stages of armed conflict, including pre-conflict situations and post-conflict reconstruction. The resolution provided a political framework that not only acknowledges women as key protagonists who are “*relevant to negotiating peace agreements, planning refugee camps and peace operations and reconstructing war-torn societies*”⁷¹ but provides a guarantee that all peace agreements will include the issue of gender equality, gender-related concerns and a gender perspective, and affirm and protect women⁷².

In order to implement Resolution 1325 with the help of the United Nations and member states, various types of co-operation and further work have been initiated, organised and supported through UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women)⁷³ and European bodies⁷⁴ or undertaken independently by women’s organisations and peace and human rights groups in a specific regional context or in local communities.

Pursuant to Resolution 1325, not only have a wide range of women’s peace building initiatives and groups emerged in areas of conflict and border regions, but there are many examples of good practice that bear witness to admirable efforts, an endeavour to ensure accountability and a widespread commitment to peace building.

For example, in September 2002 twenty-two women representing all sections of society in Azerbaijan (representatives of governmental organisations, women’s NGOs, political parties and the media and a number of outstanding individuals) organised *Coalition 1325* to foster peace efforts by means of three concrete proposals: recognising gender equality in all peace building processes, agreements and transitional administrative bodies, taking account of the gender perspective by involving women in the negotiation process, and ensuring women’s involvement as consultants in post-conflict development issues. The Coalition has broadened its activities and taken on a very active role, raising awareness of peace issues in the media and through its monthly magazine, *Coalition 1325*, in Azeri and Russian, carrying out educational activities and demonstrating a political commitment to fostering tolerance, mutual understanding and regional co-operation at local level.

Another example is *Hands Across the Divide (HAD)*⁷⁵, a group of Cypriot women living to the north and south of the Green Line and abroad, who are calling for lasting peace, working towards gender equality and disseminating the values of democracy, inclusion and non-violence. It deliberately called itself a women’s organisation because it has incorporated an approach generally lacking in Cyprus, namely a gender perspective that takes account of the situations of women and men, of the feminine and the masculine, and of the relations between them. Women involved in this group feel that this new viewpoint can help address the issue of conflict in Cypriot communities today, advance the long-drawn-out peace process and help achieve a peace settlement for the whole of Cyprus.

⁷⁰ See: www.womenwarpeace.org/csw/1325_home.htm – United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

⁷¹ See: womenwarpeace.org/feedback.htm – Portal on Women, Peace and Security.

⁷² See: www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2002/sc7467.doc.htm – Press Release SC/7467 – Council hears arguments for broader, more systematic participation of women in peacekeeping and peace-building operations.

⁷³ For example, an Inter-Agency Task Force involves NGOs in co-ordinating UN programmes in the field and at the UN headquarters; a “Friends of 1325” group tracks progress and supports the implementation of the Resolution, and an independent experts’ assessment of the subject of women, war and peace was commissioned by UNIFEM as a contribution to the advancement of the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

⁷⁴ This brings to mind the European Parliament Resolution on the participation of women in peaceful conflict resolution and the Resolution on “the roles of women and men in conflict prevention, peace-building and post-conflict democratic processes – a gender perspective”, adopted at the 5th European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men in January 2003 with a view to the incorporation of a gender perspective into all conflict-prevention and conflict-resolution activities. See: Conflict Prevention and Resolution: The Role of Women, Doc.10117, 5 May 2004, p.2, paragraph 5, www.assembly.coe.int

⁷⁵ Imagining a post-solution Cyprus: The Gender Dimension by “Hands across the Divide”, Women’s NGO.

The group's fundamental purpose is to incorporate a gender-equality programme, which is important to all Cypriot cultures, in the peace programme agenda: *"We aspire to live in a united country and to create a democratic society, where there is equality, including equal access to resources and gender equality, and respect for all, irrespective of differences. Our mission is to contribute towards a culture of peace and multiculturalism."*⁷⁶ The aim is to bear in mind the connection between gender-based violence at the personal level and violence in armed conflict and to address the clear links between the ideologies of militarism, patriarchy, nationalism and capitalism.

A strong commitment to peace is reflected in a very powerful statement concerning a new concept of security that does not involve the military but is the responsibility of gender-aware civil servants. Such a set-up cannot be envisioned without women. *"We believe one reason peace has been so long in coming to Cyprus is that women and women's organisations, along with the rest of civil society, have, despite the explicit requirement of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, been excluded from peace negotiations. HAD, along with other women, have been deprived of the opportunity to introduce a feminist perception of security – instead of the build-up of armaments for national 'defence', true human security, the guarantee of psychological, economic and social well being. Security for women means feeling safe not only from the threat of war, but from risk of harassment or violence, at home, at work and on the streets."*⁷⁷

One outstanding example of peace as a highly political issue involves women activists from Northern Ireland. Gathered together in the *Northern Ireland Women's Coalition* (NIWC) set up in 1996, which fought in the elections for the right to be represented in peace negotiations, they have, despite all the obstacles, fostered ongoing reconciliation processes and pursued a new approach to the implementation of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement.

Pursuing an agenda based on *"reconciliation through dialogue, accommodation and inclusion"* and based on a broad coalition of women with a variety of political backgrounds and religions, the NIWC supported Resolution 1325, linking the principle of gender equality with broader civil, social, religious and cultural rights, pursuing a community development approach and enhancing cross-border co-operation between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. Women's groups in the South have also entered into alliances with women's organisations in the North, supporting their efforts to build and maintain a peaceful society and taking action at many levels locally to promote relations between the two communities and restore a sense of community.

In 1999 *International Alert* launched a global *"Women Building Peace"* campaign with the support of 100 NGOs around the world. The campaign aimed to address women's exclusion from decision-making processes connected with peace, security and development.

"Women Waging Peace", a global initiative by the Women and Policy Program of Harvard University John F. Kennedy School of Government, was launched in 1999 to connect women working in conflict situations with one another and with policy-makers. The Waging network now has more than 300 members from 31 countries, who attend annual colloquies to share strategies and experience, build skills, foster critical thought and meet in small groups with influential policy-makers to discuss specific initiatives and collaborative ventures.

As tension and conflict escalated in the Middle East and Iraq, initiatives such as those taken by the *Women's Council on the Middle East* and the *Offices for Women* in both Afghanistan

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Linking reconciliation and forgiveness, HAD pointed out that, "(...) 'reconciliation' should and could be interpreted by the whole of Cypriot society as a process of bringing to light, speaking honestly about, and finally putting behind [one] (along with ethnic conflict) the oppression, inequality and violence that sadly, much too often, cast a shadow on relations between men and women." Ibid, pp. 4-5.

and Pakistan, which work together, played a vital role in encouraging recognition for women's status and supporting women's organisations on the front line, which hold communities together.

There are demands worldwide for the involvement of women's NGOs and an acknowledgment of their role and expertise where peace issues are concerned.

In addition to women-only activities, there are numerous projects that encourage both sexes to take responsibility for peace building and reconciliation, such as the *Conflict Prevention, Effective Communication and Democratic Citizenship Capacity Building Project* carried out in conjunction with the New School University (NSU) and the International Centre for Human Development (ICHD) in Turkey. The main objective of this project was to devise and implement a joint conflict-prevention strategy and an effective communication strategy for women and men.

UNESCO, as one of the organisations that has done the most outstanding work in promoting cross-cultural and interfaith understanding and respect at international level, highlighted as its main objective, at a meeting in Oslo on the subject of "Teaching for Tolerance, Respect and Recognition in Relation with Religion or Belief" (2-5 September 2004)⁷⁸, respect for human rights, in particular freedom of religion or belief, as a precondition for ensuring equal human dignity and for peaceful co-existence in pluralist societies. In the education field, therefore, governments, international institutions, educationalists, NGOs and experts should study best practices in education in these areas and encourage research and the dissemination of knowledge and experience, as well as devising relevant educational material, curricula and teaching methods, motivating teachers and inculcating appropriate attitudes and skills among them.

A good example of conflict prevention in schools is provided by the various schemes run in German schools at all levels and for pupils of all ages to train pupils to act as mediators for their own class or school. The student mediators are trained by the police or other trained mediators in preventing and resulting conflicts. They work in the classroom as well as on school buses. No general standards or rules for mediation have yet been drawn up in this specific context. In recent years, this strategy of using student mediators has been very effective and well-accepted, and there is substantial interest among pupils. Since 2003, a national mediators' congress has even been held for pupils, teachers and mediator trainers. Seminars are organised to teach them more about mediation and allow them to share their experiences and discuss the most prominent problems. Both boys and girls are trained as mediators, but gender-specific roles are not stressed and do not seem to be reflected in the theory behind the training. Nevertheless, the whole concept of student mediators is a good example of conflict prevention, because it starts at an early age and is therefore probably more effective in changing conflict-prone behaviour and gender stereotyping, which are closely linked to the way in which people deal with violence and conflict. Furthermore, in some cities affirmative action has been taken to provide special mediation training for young foreigners in order to improve integration.

This is a good example of a successful network involving a number of NGOs⁷⁹. It has, moreover, been recognised and supported by the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth. Because this co-operation between NGOs and a government

⁷⁸ See: "Teaching for Tolerance, Respect and Recognition in Relation with Religion or Belief", UNESCO (Division of Cultural Policies and Intercultural Dialogue) document, 2004, p. 2.

⁷⁹ One of the four NGOs that prepared the congress is "Stiftung Mitarbeit" (www.mitarbeit.de), which is dedicated to the "development of democracy from below". It wants the mediation programme to have a long-term effect on democratisation. In Nuremberg, one school's mediators have received an award for their work from Federal Minister Renate Schmidt (www.bmfsfj.de/Kategorien/reden,did=6014.html).

body was a success, the media took an interest and a broader audience has been informed about it.

Alongside the enormous efforts made at community and national level, there are dozens of parallel activities designed to foster peace building and have an impact on peace processes, organised by UNIFEM, international and regional networks and European and governmental bodies and agencies.

For example, to ensure that women were included in the peace building and peace-keeping process and to enhance their ability to hold positions of responsibility, UNIFEM launched the project “*Women for Conflict Prevention and Peace Building in the Southern Caucasus*” (2001-2004) in Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan⁸⁰. It included various programmes: research and development into conflict prevention and peace building, incorporation of a gender dimension, educational activities, including training in negotiation, management, leadership and diplomacy skills, public education campaigns designed to foster a popular culture of peace and develop and/or strengthen mechanisms for dialogue between parties in existing and potential conflicts, and so on. In affirming “women and peace” agenda fruitful links have been established among women’s groups and between individual women, including female parliamentarians, women members of political parties, NGO leaders and members, female decision-makers, community figures, young people and people living in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

A gathering of peace activists organised at the Eco-Peace Village in Cyprus in 1998 to train young people of both sexes in conflict prevention and conflict resolution and the First Intercultural Forum, held in Sarajevo in December 2003 and supported by the Council of Europe, reveal that people are becoming more willing to communicate with one other to maintain peace and security and to share responsibility for a secure and less violent world.

In the last decade, a wide range of networks have been set up with similar missions/visions. One of better known is “Transeuropéennes”, which brought French peace activists and visionaries together with feminists, journalists and women’s groups from the Balkan countries (between 1999 and 2004) in an effort to find, through a multilateral approach, a peaceful solution to the problems of nationalism, war, and reconstruction.

One original project to secure justice and peace by challenging patriarchal violence in its various forms and encouraging cross-cultural dialogue is the *Courts of Women* project organised by *El Taller*⁸¹. The *Courts of Women*, which started in 1992 with the *Asian Court of Women on Violence* (Lahore/Pakistan), are public hearings of victims/survivors/women who resist oppression and violence in search of the seeds of alternative concepts of justice and new visions of peace.

Another example is an ongoing global initiative designed to give women a higher profile in connection with the peace agenda: the “*1000 Women for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005*” project (Initiative of Ms Vermot-Mangold, member of the Swiss parliament, member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe), which involves women activists across the globe.

⁸⁰ The programme’s overall goal is to foster a peace agenda for the Southern Caucasus. Its objectives are to ensure that women’s organisations, including those representing internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, have the skills and co-ordination needed to work effectively towards peace and the inclusion of women’s vision and issues in peace-building and conflict-prevention processes; to develop and strengthen capacities and mechanisms for dialogue and co-operation between decision-makers, civil society and international stakeholders to ensure the inclusion of a female perspective and women’s concerns in policy-making agendas, and to create a climate that enables young people actively to promote a culture of peace and respect for human rights.

⁸¹ See: www.eltaller.org, – home page of El Taller.

There are a number of examples of gender equality becoming a core value in a peace agenda and part of governmental policy and development co-operation, as in Scandinavia, for example in Norway and Sweden, especially in connection with the strengthening of women's role in partner countries. *Kvinna till Kvinna* (Sweden) has been supporting feminist and women's groups since 1993 in the Balkans, in Georgia and in the Middle East, and is currently closely involved in the implementation of Resolution 1325 with its partners.

The Federal German Government⁸² has supported the strategy of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in implementing Security Council Resolution 1325, both by increasing the representation of women in national and international institutions and task forces and by endorsing the underlying objective of the resolution, which is to enhance the status of women in peace building dialogue⁸³ in partner countries by providing support in a manner appropriate to the communities concerned.

Germany also supports efforts to improve co-operation among governments, civil society organisations and the United Nations system in the area of conflict prevention and interreligious dialogue. It strongly supported the Global Conference on 19-21 July 2005, convened by the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) in partnership with the United Nations Department of Political Affairs that brought together over 900 governmental and non-governmental representatives from 118 countries. The participants agreed, among other issues, on the fundamental role women play in conflict prevention and peace building and demanded to incorporate gender equality and sensitivity into all peace operations. As a member of the organisation committee, Germany also supported the Conference on Interfaith Co-operation for Peace on 22 June 2005 that developed strategies to enhance interfaith co-operation, promoting the culture of peace and dialogue among civilisations, as well as translating shared values like the equal dignity of men and women into practical action."

In the Netherlands, an autonomous Task force was set up that operates independently for three years under the responsibility of the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment. The Task force draws attention to women in humanitarian campaigns and peacekeeping missions, conflict situations, violence in asylum centres, focusing particular attention on the mandates, procedures and training for police and military personnel. This applies to the composition and preparation of Dutch contingents that participate in military and police missions or who are involved in starting up demobilisation and reconstruction programmes, or the availability of knowledge in the area of sex-specific violence against women and girls in conflict situation. This Taskforce "Women in Conflict Situations and Peacekeeping" is also responsible for monitoring the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 by the Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs.

As a member of the Security Council, the United Kingdom is also continuing to push for full implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 by systematically looking for opportunities to ensure that gender concerns are properly addressed in resolutions, mission mandates and progress reports and by developing gender-budgeting specifically designed to encourage women's participation in peace negotiations, conflict prevention and resolution and the rebuilding of post-conflict societies.

It is also strengthening women's contributions at all levels to prevention, resolution and peace building by providing more information about women, war and peace building,

⁸² See: German Government's reply to the Council of Europe on Good Practice concerning the Role of Women and Men in Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue for the Prevention of Conflict, for Peace-building and for Democratisation (July 2004).

⁸³ For example, in May 2004 the conference "Women in the Islamic World – Muslim Women in Germany: Positive Role Models" hosted by the Federal Foreign Office gathered together more than 20 professionally active Muslim women from 20 predominantly Islamic countries and Muslim women from Germany to discuss the issues of professional success, the enforcement of their rights and ways of achieving the goals they were pursuing in their societies.

pursuing various approaches to the protection and assistance of women affected by conflict and enhancing UNIFEM's capacity⁸⁴ to deliver peace and security.

Through funds allocated to UNIFEM, it supports the empowerment of women around the world, including Arab women in Israel, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kosovo and Iraq⁸⁵ in particular, focusing on strengthening women's groups by running training seminars for women on democracy, democratic values and leadership skills in the run-up to elections, thus combining women's rights with long-term conflict prevention and improving cross-regional unity. Workshops on democracy and democratic values are also being held for women in Baghdad and Basra, combining women's rights with long-term conflict prevention.

To conclude, what is crucial to ensuring a comprehensive peace agenda with a gender perspective ("en-gendering" peace) in the long run is not only a clear political will to implement Resolution 1325 and all the measures and mechanisms it entails but, first and foremost, a gender-aware programme advocating constructive action to bring about a transformation of global (male/militaristic) power and a just redistribution of, and fair compensation for, material resources.

Linking movements in favour of peace, the environment, justice, women, indigenous peoples and all minorities within a global approach to security paves the way for respect for, and dialogue with, other religions⁸⁶ and cultures and at the same time makes such dialogue more meaningful.

⁸⁴ The UK has helped UNIFEM to put together a programme of work on women, peace-building and gender justice, pledging £3million towards this work. See: Report of 2 August 2004 by the Women and Equality Unit (EU and International Team), London/ Great Britain, produced for the purpose of this paper.

⁸⁵ "We have supported the NGO WOMANKIND in several projects addressing women's participation in civil and political structures and the Afghan Judicial Commission in its work to improve access to justice for all Afghan communities, taking into account the special needs of women". See: Report of 2 August 2004, Ibid.

⁸⁶ "We came together as women and men to explore how the positive powers of religion could be engaged to advance the well-being of women. Indeed, we believe that when women and religious traditions collaborate, a powerful force for advancing women's human rights and leadership will be created." Statement from the Conference on Religion and Women: An Agenda for Change, Women and Religions: Advancing Gender Equity in a Globalised World, Chiang Mai, 29 February - 3 March 2004.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. CONCLUSIONS

1.1 Conflict and dialogue

When the Group of specialists on the role of women and men in intercultural and interreligious dialogue for conflict prevention, for peace building and for democratisation (EG-S-DI) started its work, it was agreed that there had been little research in this field, especially research into gender-specific roles. Although more effort has recently been made to acknowledge and explore women's role in intercultural and interreligious dialogue at UNESCO, UNIFEM and the World Council of Churches and by such organisations as the Quakers, the EG-S-DI has the potential to carry out pioneering work in this field. This was a relatively new dimension of, and approach to, dialogue and a very complex one, in terms of content, organisation and the key significance of dialogue today. Furthermore, there were no tools for studying the nature of the role of women and men in the light of their gender-related experience and potential and no appropriate models for addressing the issue.

Bearing in mind the complexity of the topic, and the fact that it was highly context-specific and had ethical connotations, the members of the Group decided to begin by considering the issue very carefully, addressing the various aspects, the concerns voiced and the various possible approaches, and exploring potential tensions.

It is difficult to examine and document the various aspects of the impact of women's involvement in conflict prevention. It is often thought that, in a context of male domination and a male power set-up, the situation would change if more women were involved. The principle of equality between women and men is, however, considered an integral part of human rights and, accordingly, balanced participation of women and men in intercultural and interreligious dialogue for conflict prevention, peace building and democratisation is justified.

In order, therefore, to explore the significance of interreligious and intercultural dialogue within the various religions and cultures and in a broader context from a gender perspective, the Group set out to pinpoint the various sources of obstacles and conflict that prevented dialogue and, at the same time, tried to identify mechanisms of improving dialogue.

Many conflicts in the world apparently originate in tensions between two religions, as in Northern Ireland, or between different factions within the same religion, as in the case of the conflicts between Sunnis, Shiites and Wahabis under the banner of Islam. Conflicts can also be linked to the status of religion in countries where the Church and State are separate. Ethnic identity is often linked as much to citizenship as to religion and nationality. Cultural differences and separatism are another source of conflict, as are unresolved political problems and unjust decisions of the past in the post-socialist countries.

The secularisation of society can also be a source of conflict because a section of the population is ignorant of religious matters. Some social and family conflicts are linked to the wearing of religious symbols, such as the headscarf, the cross, the kippa or the turban. Equally, replication of an international situation at local and community level has become a source of tension as a result of an influx into host countries of refugees fleeing conflict.

The Group stressed that, even though, as in the case of the countries in former Yugoslavia, the consequences of past military conflicts have distorted certain concepts and images of multiculturalism and a multireligious community, the potential for peace building and reconciliation still exists.

The members of the Group decided to address the challenges and problems from the angle of the various aspects of their terms of reference, namely intercultural and interreligious dialogue in the light of the context concerned, the role of women and men, mechanisms for bringing about and enhancing dialogue, obstacles and good practice.

To this end, the Group asked a consultant to prepare a study of *the role of women and men in intercultural and interreligious dialogue for conflict prevention, for peace building and for democratisation*. This study has been supplemented by individual and collective contributions from the members of the Group, analysing interreligious and intercultural dialogue, the role of women and men, and the obstacles encountered. Examples of good practice, such as mechanisms for bringing about dialogue, were also collected.

In the course of their work, the Group's members faced the challenge of:

- addressing the meanings of such concepts as conflict prevention and resolution, interreligious and intercultural dialogue and dialogue *per se* and the models that existed in this area;
- identifying the points that the most valuable types of good dialogue practice had in common in order to suggest coherent measures and recommendations for organising dialogue.

1.2 Intercultural and interreligious dialogue

The concepts of intercultural and interreligious dialogue have often been used but have rarely been defined. In this context, rather than defining these concepts, the Group considered it would be useful to consider what form intercultural and interreligious dialogue that took account of women's role would take, and how its potential could be developed.

The Group pointed out that balanced participation of women and men is a prerequisite for intercultural and interreligious dialogue. Interreligious dialogue is currently widely discussed but the intercultural aspect is also very important. Politicians might be concerned about the phenomenon of religion, its institutionalisation and its use as a political instrument, but it is also necessary to consider religious phenomena that are part and parcel of a culture, as is often the case, and are difficult to separate from it.

Successful examples of interreligious dialogue and co-operation on the part of individuals in pursuit of peace exist, and a number of initiatives have been taken, mainly in rural areas, but they are undervalued and often invisible in the community at large, and usually separate from the official (political) peace building agenda. The point should be made that ignorance of such initiatives and the lack of political attention are far more evident when the dialogue is between Christians and Muslims or with other religious minorities or communities.

The role of religious communities is of great importance in fostering such dialogue and raising awareness of the need for tolerance and respect, especially among peace-builders (women and men alike). Interreligious dialogue as such can be encouraged by building on successful work by other peace building agencies (peace groups, women's groups, spiritual groups and public authorities) at national and local level, but also on work directly involving atheists and people who do not declare to be religious.

1.3 The roles of women and men

Women and men experience conflict in different ways and react to them differently. The Group sought to take account of a wide range of cultural and historical factors and arguments in order to highlight the importance of the role of women in interreligious and intercultural dialogue. If balanced participation of women and men is one of the main goals and a prerequisite for an understanding of women's specific role not only in conflict prevention but also in times of crisis and in post-conflict situations, the responsibilities of both women and men should be taken into account, with due regard for their experiences, capabilities and priorities.

The issue of women's and men's roles has to be clarified and, since a gender-neutral text would fail to do this, a gender-mainstreaming approach has to be adopted. Such an approach must be comprehensive and sensitive to the special roles of women and men from a wide variety of cultural and religious backgrounds, in very diverse situations. For example, when examining a document setting out statistics for the practice of the main religions in Council of Europe member states, the Group noted that the statistics were not gender-disaggregated and took no account of mixed marriages, and did not therefore make it possible to identify women's existing and potential roles in these religions or communities.

The Group also highlighted the importance of women's role in the democratisation process as a key factor in conflict prevention, without ignoring the obstacles to balanced participation by women and men. Religious influence in a community, especially with regard to women's rights, for example, can have adverse consequences for women's participation and role. For example, family voting may prevent women from participating in public life for cultural and/or religious reasons.

In contrast with other issues (for example, the issue of national identity), where religious communities have slowly shifted their stance and come to advocate a culture of tolerance towards, and recognition of, different nations and citizens with various national identities, their attitudes towards gender equality issues very often remain traditional and seem to be becoming even more entrenched in this respect. A patriarchal attitude to the acceptance of men and women in interreligious dialogue is evident from their status or role: men are much more respected as leaders or teachers than women.

The experience of religious associations shown that women's role tends to be geared more to charity and aid, while men tend to have a role as moral leaders and providers of enlightenment.

In addition, there is a tendency for the teaching profession to become "feminised" in primary and secondary schools, particularly in the field of religious instruction, and senior positions in the education system are occupied by men.

The majority of people identify themselves as believers and claim to adhere to a religion, but it is often assumed that there is no significant difference in the levels of religious belief between women and men. Women, however, practise their religion more openly (attending church services, etc).

Very little is known as yet about gender-specific outcomes, approaches and challenges, either in religious circles or more widely, in connection with the peace building agenda. Moreover, there is very little understanding of the gender dimension of the issue or of the changes in gender relations and in the positions of the two sexes, and the underlying reasons for these. The role of women and men in interreligious and intercultural dialogue for conflict prevention, peace building and democratisation therefore needs to be explored in greater depth, from both a gender-sensitive and a multicultural perspective. Much more

research, including such basic work as data collection, is needed to obtain more than a general picture and come up with hard facts. There is a lack of gender-disaggregated statistical data concerning the role of women and men in interreligious and intercultural dialogue.

In order to produce a better gender-based analysis of the peace building agenda, certain assumptions need to be checked. On one hand, it is necessary to devise an appropriate model for carrying out a comprehensive gender analysis based on the most valuable existing material and authentic experiences. On the other hand, a distinctive perspective that might make it possible to come up with new approaches and solutions needs to be adopted. If the analysis is to be taken a stage further, it is necessary to introduce a critical approach in order to eliminate prejudices and stereotypes concerning partners in dialogue.

An analysis of the role of women in peace building and conflict prevention and the outcome of public debate and of conferences and programmes has laid the foundations for what are now widely accepted views:

- women and men experience conflict and violence differently; their gender-specific experiences, approaches and responsibilities should therefore be incorporated into peace building agendas in a distinctive, creative and gender-balanced way;
- women are not only the most vulnerable targets in situations of armed conflict but also crucial parties and stakeholders in peace building;
- women play important roles in peace building and their participation in all levels of dialogue (including official dialogue) is essential to conflict prevention and long-term sustainable peace;
- violence against women is a crucial aspect of both conflict and the patriarchal power set-up, and action plans to combat violence should be included in peace building programmes;
- women's proactive and committed involvement is needed to change the culture of negotiation by using mechanisms for intercultural and interreligious dialogue taking into account mutual understanding and acknowledging and respecting their gender-specific knowledge, social ties and values.

Although there is a wide range of cross-cultural networks of committed women, along with a number of individual women and men pushing for an agenda involving women in peace building, much remains to be done. The following measures might help to strengthen the movement:

- in keeping with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, build and support women's leadership skills and develop their leadership potential so that they can perform an appropriate and constructive role in interreligious and intercultural dialogue;
- ensure that women, who are very often at the forefront of the peace movement, are equally represented at all official political levels, including national and international peace negotiation tables;
- train non-governmental organisations to gender awareness, on how women and men experience and explore both conflict and violence and how they can work together to promote dialogue and peace in their communities;

- continue and expand gender-specific training programmes for both women and men, especially political leaders and leading figures in the community, in order to enhance their knowledge, inculcate the behaviour and skills needed for peace building processes and promote responsible gender politics and security;
- devise new approaches to influencing policies and reforms in such a way that they incorporate a vision of peace and a just, gender-sensitive strategy and are in keeping with intercultural ethics;
- build a strong partnership among women involved in training, research and peace building in different areas - national and international politics, diplomacy, peace education, mediation, peace advocacy, religious communities and women's grassroots activism. This will make it easier to disseminate ideas and the lessons learned, share best practices from different regions where there are conflicts and potential crises, provide support through networking and spread information about different approaches to conflict prevention and peace building.

Women influence peace building processes through a number of activities and in various ways, very often going further than defining peace as the absence of violent conflict and introducing approaches based on inclusion, good governance and justice, which entail the elimination of unjust social and economic relations, including unequal gender relations. The idea is not to replace male rhetoric with female rhetoric, but to integrate a gender approach which supports the values of pluralism, inclusiveness and equality.

When addressing the role of women and men in intercultural and interreligious dialogue for the prevention of conflict, peace building and democratisation, the right course of action at this point in time is to highlight the position of women. The underlying principle of adopting a gender perspective that looks at both genders should not however be forgotten.

The focus on the role of women should be seen as a form of affirmative action that lays the foundations for further changes in the roles of women and men. The aim should be to avoid a dichotomy between the roles of women and men as, for example, in the image of the (active) male warrior and the (passive) female victim or peace-keeper. Instead, the idea is to enhance the impact of both male and female peace-makers.

In addition to, studies and policies concerning intercultural and interreligious dialogue need to acknowledge women's capacity to bring about change⁸⁷, highlighting women's most successful attempts, development models and good practice, and incorporating them into a broader platform calling for a new form of multiculturalism.

1.4 Obstacles and challenges

During their meetings, the members of the EG-S-DI identified a number of obstacles to women's participation in intercultural and interreligious dialogue. Some of these are general obstacles, including cultural and social patterns, beliefs and behaviour, along with stereotypes, while some are rather more specific or gender-related.

The obstacles that frequently prevent women from playing their role are as follows:

- women are frequently excluded from decision-making processes in politics and in peace negotiations, especially those at the most influential level and at the highest levels of power;

⁸⁷ There is no gender-sensitive standard by which to gauge the extent to which women and men participate in such dialogue, despite some analysis and explanatory tools available thanks to the commitment of feminists.

- the power set-up of society is still male-dominated and supported by a new form of patriarchy that hinders women's equal representation and perpetuates gender stereotypes concerning women's role that discredit women's capacity of leadership and creative potential;
- there is a lack of political will to acknowledge the importance of women's role in peace building and dialogue, along with ignorance, a gender-blind approach and a lack of awareness of women's responsibility;
- there is no cohesive strategy for implementing a peace building agenda that defines gender-specific roles and opportunities;
- there is a lack of support, education and experience among women, who are not used to taking part in public life generally;
- dialogue between women and men in consultation and decision-making processes may also be an obstacle;
- rhetoric is often based on sexist and chauvinistic attitudes towards women and on gender-stereotyped models for conflict-linked roles;
- women can be perceived within their own religions and cultures as, for instance, mothers or temptresses;
- women are often involved in religious communities but not as leaders;
- there is a lack of gender-sensitive education emphasising a culture of peace and peace building, and of positive role models for women as peace-makers;
- the media convey stereotypes based on gender, ethnic origin, religion and the traditional roles of women and men and the male perspective constantly predominates in the media in general

The Group identified a number of other factors that could prevent dialogue between communities:

- a general climate that is not conducive to dialogue between members of different religious communities, regardless of gender, stemming from the lack of a vision based on prosperity, a life together, trust and the human value of life;
- complex political and economic situations that generate many overlapping problems, including the exclusion of persons of different nationalities or the other sex, minorities, etc and, in the worst situations, widespread despair among citizens, especially as regards their own financial and human status, which slows down the peace building process;
- the discrepancy between religions' claims to be peaceful and what happens in practice, which is a challenge that needs to be addressed along with other issues internal to religious communities;
- the unclear position of religious communities engaged in interreligious and intercultural dialogue: instead of putting across a clear peace message, they pursue policies with uncertain objectives and put across ambiguous messages, especially in highly conflictual situations;

- the fact that religious communities are perceived in the media, and in public life in general, as separate bodies that have different missions and only occasionally get together (for certain religious celebrations);
- the danger that a dominant religious community will monopolise the debate on national identity in particular situations;
- the lack of impact of arrangements for dialogue (for example, interfaith organisations in the United Kingdom have only a limited impact);
- tensions between national and local religious authorities which often follow conflicts and crises; these can have both adverse and beneficial effects;
- the lack of any comprehensive education in interreligious and intercultural dialogue and the fact that these are not compulsory subjects;
- the existence of war trauma based on fear, distrust, lack of information about human losses on the different sides and even hatred towards others, including those with different affiliations, which can, in the long term divide people who are in the process of peace building and reconciliation.

1.5 Mechanisms for the organisation of dialogue

The Group noted that, despite the vast amount of information about the various topics and the growing number of information sources, relatively little is known about mechanisms for organising interreligious and intercultural dialogue. In France, provision for such dialogue has recently been made with the appointment of the National Council of French Muslims, which is an elected body representing Muslim communities in France and a talking partner for the government. In Romania, where the majority is Orthodox and there are Hungarian, Catholic, Lutheran, Roma and Pentecostal minorities, women's NGOs and the churches has organised joint activities. The wives of Orthodox priests are also involved in welfare work in the community, and the government is developing a policy for the integration of the Roma population. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Interreligious Council plays a very important role in bringing together the Muslim, Catholic, Orthodox, Jewish and Protestant communities. It also promotes the role of women. In Bulgaria, a process for peaceful dialogue between the Muslims and the Roma has been initiated.

The Group also emphasised the importance of generational considerations and the way in which different age groups interpreted religion. For example, although interreligious groups in the United Kingdom have difficulty in recruiting young people, there is a revival of interest in religion in the former communist countries, particularly among young people.

Networks interlinking the various levels of participation need to be set up/supported. One of the major obstacles seems to be that dialogue ends at local level. There is a need to connect it with the work that has already been done by the higher tiers of government (regional, national and international) in order to achieve a wider outreach and broader impact. Networks, which are usually based on personal contacts, are an excellent mechanism of enhancing the dialogue that exists at community or local level. It is especially important to co-ordinate efforts made by NGOs with those made at governmental level.

The Group stressed that member states should acknowledge the successes and expertise of women's NGOs when pursuing national policies and security programmes. As regards co-operation with other international governmental organisations, the Council of Europe should work closely with UNESCO on issues of joint concern, paying special attention to the

teaching of religion in a multicultural, inclusive context and taking advantage of the system of UNESCO Chairs in intercultural and interreligious dialogue. Work on issues of common concern, such as the role of women as peace builders, with a view to enhancing their skills and potential in conflict prevention and resolution, should be stepped up. Very often there are religious and cultural misconceptions, and it would therefore be useful to ensure that the various religions know more about other religions in a multi-cultural context.

The media are fairly influential in shaping people's perception of war and peace and the role of women and men in these contexts. The media might therefore be one of the mechanisms that could be used by the various groups involved in intercultural and interreligious dialogue and the different networks. Working together with (and not against) the media is an important mechanism of enhancing the efforts made. Furthermore, by presenting and endorsing good examples of the role of women in intercultural and interreligious dialogue for the prevention of conflict, peace building and democratisation, the media could change the widespread perception of women as victims.

Another equally important factor is media education as a means of inculcating a critical attitude towards the media.⁸⁸ Such education is necessary a) for those who are involved in intercultural and interreligious dialogue and work with the media, for the sake of effective public relations. It is only when people know what kind of information is relevant or interesting to the media that effective co-operation is possible. More generally, media education needs b) to take priority in school curricula.⁸⁹

Whilst various mechanisms for interreligious and intercultural dialogue exist, it is difficult to find many examples where the role of women has been singled out, and particularly of action to interlink the gender, religious and cultural aspects. Women therefore need to be acknowledged and given credit for their contribution and role in future recommendations.

1.6 Good practice

In seeking examples of good practice, the Group agreed that it should not confine itself to specific conflict situations but also examine some of the major concerns relating to peace and conflict prevention, identity, religion and cultural diversity in general. It was worthwhile in this context considering how the concepts of human rights, justice and peace have been understood and accepted by different cultures, particularly from a gender perspective.

In the long run, ensuring a comprehensive, gender-aware peace agenda (i.e. "en-gendering" peace) necessitates not only a clear political will to implement UNSC Resolution 1325 and all the measures and mechanisms it entails but also, first and foremost, a gender-aware programme advocating constructive action to bring about a transformation of global (male/militaristic) power and a just redistribution of, and fair compensation for, material resources.

Linking together movements for peace, the environment, justice, women, indigenous peoples and minorities generally within a new approach to global security paves the way for respect for, and dialogue with, other religions⁹⁰ and cultures and at the same time makes such dialogue more meaningful.

⁸⁸ See Parliament Assembly Recommendation 1067 (1987) "Cultural dimension of broadcasting in Europe"

⁸⁹ See Council of Europe publications on the subject and the numerous in-service training courses for teachers. Mastermen, Len and Mariet, François, *Media Education in 1990s' Europe*, Council of Europe Publishing, 1988 and 1994, and DECS/SE/BS/Donau (93) 1 and DECS/SE/DHRH (95) 15.

⁹⁰ "We came together as women and men to explore how the positive powers of religion could be engaged to advance the well-being of women. Indeed, we believe that when women and religious traditions collaborate, a powerful force for advancing women's human rights and leadership will be created." Statement from the Conference on Religion and Women: An Agenda for Change, Women and Religions: Advancing Gender Equity in a Globalised World, Chiang Mai, 29 February – 3 March 2004.

Alongside the increase in international action and in the number of networks, which has created a strong political framework for the affirmation of women's role in conflict prevention and peace building, a variety of initiatives have been undertaken at local and community level. In former Yugoslavia, for example, there have been many examples of action by women over the last decade. They include the anti-war campaign, support for conscientious objectors and women's gatherings to enhance multiethnic dialogue, interreligious communication and peace efforts across divided communities.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Group would point out that the Council of Europe has been working for many years on the issue of women's participation in all areas of public and political life, including conflict prevention and peace building, and stresses the need for the Council of Europe to continue to be actively engaged in developing new opportunities for dialogue in order to foster mutual understanding among people from different religions and cultures and with different values.

Committee of Ministers Recommendation (2003) 3 on balanced participation of women and men in public and political decision-making provides Council of Europe members states with guidelines for increasing and affirming women's participation. In particular, Article 14 calls on members states to *"take due account of gender balance when appointing representatives to international mediation and negotiating committees, particularly in the peace process or the settlement of conflicts"*.

As a first step, the Group recommends that Council of Europe member states implement these guidelines and that the Council of Europe monitor their implementation, especially as regards women's participation in international mediation and negotiating committees concerned with conflict prevention and resolution.

In this connection, the Group recommends that programmes and activities are undertaken by the following bodies in the following fields:

Public authorities

The Group recommends that public authorities:

- encourage the religious authorities to resist the pressure to allow religion to become a source of inter-community conflict;
- encourage the religious authorities to include women in decision-making bodies at all levels;
- enable women's participation in intercultural and interreligious dialogue and conflict prevention in the formal peace process on an equal footing with men, in the light of women's responsibilities, outstanding role and experience in the areas of peace building and networking;
- ensure the development of partnerships between policy-makers, religious authorities, gender-equality experts, experienced women peace activists and community leaders involved in conflict prevention, resolution and peace building;

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- strengthen gender mainstreaming policy to be integrated it in all policy mechanisms and processes associated with peace building process at local, national and international level;
 - organise training courses in intercultural learning and conflict prevention for politicians, policy-makers, police and military personnel and civil servants, especially those sitting on decision-making bodies at the highest level;
 - raise awareness and train civil servants in public administration - in particular teachers and technical and administrative staff who are in regular contact with the public, in particular with migrant women and men and members of ethnic and cultural minorities - on the culture and needs of these groups taking into account a gender perspective and involving the leaders and mediators of these groups;
 - support migrant women and women from ethnic and cultural minorities to set up their own associations and to create a national networks, and especially in their roles of giving assistance and mediating as well as in the development of projects aimed at promoting intercultural and interreligious dialogue;
 - promote the empowerment of migrant women and women from ethnic and cultural minorities by opening up access to information, employment, participation and decision-making in their associations and in society in general;
 - provide support to women's organisations involved in peace building and conflict prevention locally and internationally as well as include them in the peace building agenda in their expert capacity;
 - consider ways of promoting peace and tolerance among those in national and international seats of power and pursuing peace building projects reflecting a new approach to human security, cultural diversity and togetherness across the globe;
 - develop institutional frameworks for comprehensive, systematic research into women's participation in interreligious and intercultural dialogue, undertake a comprehensive gender-impact policy analysis, make appropriate adjustment to budgets for peace building projects and implement gender-equality schemes.

Education

The Group recommends public authorities the following action in the field of education:

- teaching of religions in an intercultural context should be included at all levels of education and in all school curricula in order to enhance mutual understanding and awareness through knowledge of other religions and more inclusive, integration-based approaches;
- the use of new and innovative teaching aids – designed to inculcate tolerance and respect and recognition for other religions and cultures - should be affirmed in order to foster a culture of peace that celebrates differences and cultural diversity. These aids should be promoted in both formal and non-formal education,

- conflict-prevention and conflict-resolution tools, such as negotiating skills and mediation, should be carefully chosen and developed and the knowledge needed to enable dialogue to be constantly enriched and throw up new ideas and solutions should be fostered;
- Conflict-prevention approaches to peace building should be designed within educational curricula with a gender perspective and by using gender-sensitive tools
- Children and young people should learn to become critical consumers of the media, which play a powerful role in shaping public attitudes towards cultures, religions and conflicts across the globe.

Media

The Group recommends the following measures in the field of media:

The media should be made to face up to their social and ethical responsibilities towards the public when it comes to presenting and dealing with key current concerns, including cultural diversity, different religious attitudes, conflicts, socio-economic disparities, the roles of women and men, discrimination and injustice.

If they are confronted with some of these critical issues, some media may abandon their sensationalist approach in favour of a more sensitive approach that reflects greater respect for others and promotes and values cultural diversity.

The training of journalists in ethical and responsible journalism should include a specific gender perspective and be based on a sensitive approach.

Non-Governmental Organisations

The Group recommends that NGOs:

- constantly develop, enrich and enhance networks involved in interreligious and intercultural dialogue in order to promote and disseminate their valuable knowledge and expertise;
- support and encourage links between women in NGOs, religious communities and gender-mainstreaming bodies on the basis of a joint peace building programme with a meaningful policy that respects and makes creative use of women's potential;
- develop mechanisms for strengthening grassroots NGOs in order to enable them to become more actively involved in gender mainstreaming the political process, in a more responsive, inclusive and sensitive manner;
- foster a critical awareness of the context of interreligious dialogue and related concerns, multiculturalism, social injustice, globalisation and the crisis in public life, in the media and in political circles.

Council of Europe

The Group also recommends that the Council of Europe:

- encourage dialogue between and within religious or/and cultural communities in Europe, with the full involvement of women as key protagonists in conflict prevention and peace building;
- share information about, and experience of, women's role in intercultural and interreligious dialogue with other intergovernmental organisations;
- collect and disseminate examples of good practice and initiatives involving women in intercultural and interreligious dialogue, promote new models for supporting/encouraging dialogue and discuss and share experience of working towards multiculturalism and of work on religious issues;
- prepare a comparative study of the impact of the role of women in interreligious and intercultural dialogue for conflict prevention, peace building and democratisation;
- strengthen co-operation between the different sectors of the organisation working in the field of conflict prevention and ensure that they act together in order to take account of all the aspects of the issue with a gender perspective;
- in the light of the work already undertaken on this issue, draft a recommendation defining guidelines to promote the role and participation of women in conflict prevention, resolution and peace building.

APPENDIX I

LIST OF THE MEMBERS OF THE GROUP OF SPECIALISTS ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN AND MEN IN INTERCULTURAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE FOR CONFLICT PREVENTION, FOR PEACE BUILDING AND FOR DEMOCRATISATION (EG-S-DI)

STEERING COMMITTEE FOR EQUALITY BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN (CDEG)

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Department for the Co-ordination of Emancipation Policy (DCE)

ROMANIA

Ms Daniela SEMENESCU
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EUROPEAN COMMITTEE FOR MIGRATION (CDMG)

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EUROPEAN STEERING COMMITTEE FOR YOUTH (CDEJ)

BULGARIA

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Ministry of Youth and Sports

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Dr. Sander GÜRBÜZ
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UNESCO

Mme Rosa Maria GUERREIRO
Programme Specialist in charge of the Interreligious
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APPENDIX II

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR A GROUP OF SPECIALISTS ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN AND MEN IN THE INTERCULTURAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE FOR CONFLICT PREVENTION, FOR PEACE BUILDING AND FOR DEMOCRATISATION (EG-S-DI)

as adopted by the Committee of Ministers during its 831st meeting, on 12 March 2003

- 1. Name of the committee:** Group of Specialists on the role of women and men in intercultural and interreligious dialogue for the prevention of conflict, for peace building and for democratisation (EG-S-DI)
- 2. Type of committee:** Committee of experts
- 3. Source of terms of reference:** Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men (CDEG)

4. Terms of reference: The EG-S-DI shall address, under the authority of the CDEG, the role of women and men in intercultural and interreligious dialogue for the prevention of conflict, for peace building and for democratisation. With this aim in mind, the EG-S-DI should take into account the work already undertaken by the CDEG in the area of balanced participation of women and men in decision-making and conflict prevention, as well as that carried out by other national and international bodies. The EG-S-DI should also take into account the conclusions and the plan of action adopted by the 5th European Ministerial Conference on equality between women and men (Skopje, 22-23 January 2003) on democratisation, conflict prevention and peace building: the perspectives and the roles of women. The group is instructed in particular:

i. to draft a study on the role of women and men in the framework of intercultural and interreligious dialogue in order to contribute to conflict prevention, peace building and democratisation, and in particular, define:

- the notion of intercultural and interreligious dialogue in this context;
- the respective roles of women and men in this field;
- the mechanisms for implementation of this dialogue, and in particular
- identify the obstacles to this implementation;
- the respective contributions made by women and men to conflict -prevention, peace building and democratisation.

ii. to identify the obstacles to the participation of women in intercultural and interreligious dialogue and propose, if necessary, mechanisms to reduce and/or eliminate these obstacles;

iii. to draft on this basis a guide to good practices on the roles of women and men in intercultural and interreligious dialogue for conflict prevention, peace building and democratisation;

iv. to examine the opportunity to draft a recommendation on the roles of women and men in intercultural and interreligious dialogue for conflict prevention, peace building and democratisation.

5. Composition:

The Group is a multidisciplinary group of specialists, composed of 8 experts and under the authority of the CDEG. The travel and subsistence expenses of the experts are borne by the Council of Europe.

The group is composed as follows:

2 CDEG members and 1 expert nominated by this Committee
1 expert nominated by the Steering Committee for Culture
1 expert nominated by the Steering Committee for Education
1 expert nominated by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance
1 expert nominated by the European Committee on Migration
1 expert nominated by the Steering Committee for Youth

These experts will be appointed by the committees in consultation with the Secretariat, bearing in mind the need to ensure an equitable geographical distribution of seats as well as a gender balanced representation.

The Congress of local and regional authorities of Europe may appoint a representative to the Group.

In addition, one representative of the European Commission will be invited to attend the Group's meetings – without the right to vote or to reimbursement of expenses by the Council of Europe.

Representatives from UNIFEM, UNESCO, ODHIR/OSCE, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), will also be invited to attend the Group's meetings – without the right to vote or to reimbursement of expenses by the Council of Europe.

6. Expert qualifications required:

Experts should be specialists on questions concerning the participation of women in public and political life, on intercultural and interreligious questions and on the mechanisms of conflict.

7. Working methods:

The Group shall elect its Chair and Vice-Chair for the duration of its terms of reference.

Within its terms of reference, the EG-S-DI may use external consultants and organise hearings with interested professionals and others as it deems necessary for discharging its terms of reference.

8. Duration:

These terms of reference shall end on 31 December 2004. An extension of the terms of reference may be envisaged if necessary.

