

"Strengthening women's role front and center of atrocities prevention"

Commission on the Status of Women

March 18, 2021

Azza Karram - Sec Gen of Religions for Peace - Moderator

The event was co-hosted by the UN Office for Genocide and UN Women.

The general theme for this event is the importance of women's participation at all levels of governance, especially in regards to the restoration of peace in a country. Too often around the world, women do not have a seat at the table where critical conversations, affecting large numbers of people, are taking place. For instance, the Syrian conflict, which has been happening for 10 years as of this month, has disproportionately affected women and girls. If women and girls were represented in equal numbers in government, this conflict most likely would not have grown past a spark. It has been proven that when women participate in peace and security issues, resolutions have a better chance for success.

Perm Rep of Canada to the UN - Jacqueline O'Neil

- Canada is strengthening their stance on gender equality with their **Feminist Foreign Policy**. This policy is focused on advancing gender equality and promoting equal rights for women and girls, which is the most effective way to reduce poverty. Moreover, Canada believes that society is more prosperous, peaceful, secure and united when women's rights are respected and women are valued and empowered in their communities.
- Canada has seen an increase in hate crimes against women and also Asian Canadians. Hate crimes against Asian Canadians have increased by 600%.
- Canada is very clear that in order to address and solve these atrocities, women need to be included in the conversation and be part of the solution.

The moderator asked some very interesting questions to the international activists that were in attendance. Their answers provided a real look into the realities of the citizens of the following countries.

Question 1: There's so much information and proof that women's participation in solving countries' issues is critical and undeniable, yet we know that women are rarely in these conversations. What are the challenges that keep this from happening?

- **Myanmar - Wai Wai Nu - Burmese Activist - Very Inspirational speaker and work!**

- Burma is going through the darkest moment of its life. Genocide is actively taking place against the Rohingya. A military coup has detained civilian government leaders including Aung San Suu Kyi, state and regional authorities, ethnic leaders, writers, and democracy activists.
- Wai Wai started her work in 2012, after seven years in prison. She was imprisoned because of her father's activism work and participation in the National League for Democracy. When she was released she had hoped that Burma had become a democracy. Realizing that this wasn't the case, she became an avid activist for democracy. A couple of months later the government began targeted violence against the Rohingya.
- Before the attacks on the Rohingya, her ethnic identity was not a big deal but now it has become a major part of her work. Because she is Rohingya people started to question her and her citizenship. A lot of large institutions, including the UN have not made it easy for her activist organization to be recognized.
- Wai Wai started the Women's Peace Network, an organization focused on peace-building in Myanmar, which is building peace for all people of any gender. She started this organization because women's voices in regards to the injustices against the Rohingya were not being heard at all.

- **Sophie Acherman - Switzerland**

When the lockdown started there was a big wave of solidarity in Switzerland and then a big wave of hate, which has stayed until now. Online hate speech has grown during the Covid-19 pandemic as people spent more time at home. In Switzerland people will speak up if they see racism in person, but they don't do anything when it's online. Her organization, Alliance F, started something called "Stop Hate Speech." They have an algorithm that she likes to think of as a little puppy (Bot Dog) that sniffs out hate speech on the internet. It brings the hate speech back to the community, so then the community can respond.

- **Peace Activist - Nyachangkuoth Tai**

- South Sudan - One of the biggest issues for women in South Sudan is that they are rarely represented in their courts or governance. Women are more likely to speak about their issues and needs if there is a woman in power. If there is not, they do not feel comfortable and refrain from participating in their government. It is essential that women have a seat at the table.

- **Olla Alsakkaf - Peacebuilder from Yemen**

- The situation in Yemen is at its worst. Five years of ongoing armed conflict have exhausted not only the infrastructure and systems of health, education, economy, etc. but also the people.
- Child marriage and honor killings are a part of normal life.
- Yemen is one of the worst places to be a woman.
- Most importantly, women are excluded from the peace process, conversations, and solutions.
- For the first time in 20 years there are no women in government.
- There is a silver lining - The war has created opportunity for women. Women have started their own organizations focused on peace. Women are now speaking out and feel like they can make a difference.

Question 2: What has been very helpful to you, in your respective efforts, that has been provided by the UN, another NGO, or a local civil society group?

Wai Wai Nu

- This was very insightful, Wai Wai feels like she hasn't been supported by the UN. Once a community is marginalized within a country, large institutions, do not support them.. it's hard to register and be heard. One area that has been helpful, is being asked to speak and share her story at this event and similar events. It's impactful to be given a voice within the international platforms like the UN.

Report submitted by:

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