

# **OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN IN DIPLOMACY**

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## Background

When I did some research on the Internet on the first women in diplomacy, I came across an interesting document issued by the British Foreign Office according to which Spain appears to have pioneered the employment of women as diplomats in the modern period when, in 1507, Ferdinand of Aragon sent his widowed daughter Caterine formal credentials as his ambassador in England and instructions to negotiate with Henry VII about the delay in her proposed marriage to Prince Henry. France soon followed suit. The Treaty of Cambrai (1529) was popularly known as ‘The Ladies’ Peace’ because it had been negotiated and drafted by Louise of Savoy, mother of King Francis I, and Margaret of Austria, aunt of the Emperor Charles V, on behalf of their respective countries. Later that century Madame Delahaye-Vautelaye was appointed French Ambassador to Venice, while the Maréchale de Guébriant became the French Ambassador to Poland in the early years of the seventeenth century. The Duchess of Orleans acted as Louis XIV’s representative when negotiating the secret Anglo-French Treaty of Dover with her brother in 1670. France subsequently discontinued the practice. In the eighteenth century, we know of only two examples of a woman acting as her country’s representative.

One such woman was the widow of the British Consul at Tripoli. When her husband died in office in November 1763, Mrs. White took on the management of consular affairs. Around the same time, following her husband’s death in 1771, Mrs. Marguerite Wolters carried on the British spy network in Rotterdam.

In 1933, 13 countries including Nicaragua and Turkey had admitted women to their Diplomatic and Consular Services. Spain again was one of the pioneers of women in diplomacy, with the appointment of Isabel de Zulueta as Chancelier of the Spanish Legation at Panama in 1933.

During the inter-war period, the United States and the Soviet Union were the most enterprising in the appointment of women as diplomats, even if the numbers involved were small. Mrs. Ruth Bryan Owen served as American Ambassador to Copenhagen from 1933 to 1936, and the British representative in Finland admitted that he had known an American woman Secretary at Berne “with whom one could talk as if she were a man”.

From the earliest years to the mid-twentieth century, the most extensive contribution made by women to diplomacy was as the wives of diplomatic and consular officers. In this capacity they supported their husbands by running large diplomatic households presiding as hostesses, making

their own range of contacts to complement the official work of the embassy and in many instances, distinguishing themselves by local voluntary and community work.

Times have changed and there are many more wives and husbands nowadays who have chosen another pattern for their life as a diplomatic spouse. Women are now as well educated and qualified as their husbands, sometimes more so, and many have careers of their own. Nevertheless, (largely) unpaid contributions to the work of diplomatic missions still continue to be made by many wives (and the occasional husband).

What is the situation of women in diplomacy today? Let me give you some information against the background of my own situation: there are presently 11 women Ambassadors serving as their country's Permanent Representative at the United Nations in New York, in Washington we are 15. These numbers are slightly higher than a few years ago but seen against the background of presently 189 United Nations member countries, it means not even 6%. In Liechtenstein, the right for women to vote and to be elected was introduced in 1984 – which explains to a certain extent that there are still improvements necessary with regard to the representation in Parliament (presently 2 out of 25), in Government (presently 1 out of 5), on a communal level and in the private sector. When it comes to diplomacy, however, we have a good record: Out of 20 diplomats, 9 are women, which is 45%.

Let me in this context mention a few facts with regard to the status of women worldwide – and I am basing these remarks on findings by the United Nations (some of the statistics are, however, date back to 2000 or even 1999): During the first part of 2000, only nine women were Heads of State or Government. In 1998, 8 per cent of the world's cabinet ministers were women, compared to 6 per cent in 1994. Sweden was in 2000 the only country with a majority of women ministers – 55 per cent. Worldwide, more progress has been made in the appointment of women to sub-ministerial positions, particularly in the Caribbean and the developed regions outside of Europe, where women hold approximately 20 per cent of sub-ministerial positions.

Gender parity in parliamentary representation is also still far from being realized. In 1999, women represented 11 per cent of parliamentarians worldwide, compared to 9 per cent in 1987. Women's representation, on average, was highest in Europe (21 per cent) and in the developed regions outside Europe (18 per cent). Only the Nordic countries and the Netherlands have at least one third women parliamentarians.

Women are faring no better in the corporate world. For example, in 1999, women accounted for 11 to 12 per cent of corporate officers in the 500 largest companies in the United States. In Germany, in 1995, between 1 and 3 per cent of top executives and board directors in the 70 000 largest enterprises were women.

It is absolutely clear that women's equal access to education is the key. Whereas in the industrialized countries this means increased representation in decision-making positions within Governments, Parliaments and the private sector, it has a very different meaning in developing countries. There is still a persistent and very slowly closing gap in education. At the UN Women's Conference in Beijing, in 1995, the Governments agreed to close the gender gap in primary and secondary levels of schooling by the year 2005. It is unlikely that this target date can

be met. In 22 countries of Africa and in 9 countries of Asia, the gap is still wide, with data showing enrolment ratios for girls less than 80 per cent that of boys. Furthermore, girls' access to and completion of primary and secondary education are still limited, particularly in rural areas, and girls are more likely than boys to drop out of school – except in the developed regions.

Nearly two thirds of the illiterates in the world are women. Improvements in school enrolment over the years have resulted in generally higher literacy rates among younger adults but a large gender gap in favour of men continues to disadvantage women. The populations for which the gender gaps in enrolment and literacy are the widest – Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa – are also among the fastest growing. This suggests that there will continue to be enormous numbers of illiterate women in the world – many more than men.

In higher education, women have made significant gains in enrolment in most regions of the world – their enrolment surpasses that of men in the Caribbean and Western Asia and is now equal to that of men in South America. Enrolment ratios are higher for women than for men in many countries of Europe and in the United States and New Zealand. Enrolment in third-level education is the highest in the world in Australia, Canada and the United States. The lowest ratios of third-level education enrolments are found in many countries of sub-Saharan Africa – 4 third-level students per 1,000 men and 2 or less per 1,000 women.

Within the United Nations secretariat, as of 30 November last year, 40.4 per cent of professional and higher-level staff are women. However, women account for only 10 per cent of the staff at the ASG and USG levels. In peace-keeping, there are only 25 per cent overall and 6.6 per cent women at the D-1 level and above in peace-keeping missions, the area which has seen the greatest expansion in posts and numbers of staff within the Secretariat in recent years. There are still no women Special Representatives of the Secretary-General and no Special Envoys either.

### Women, Peace And Security

Recent events including the terrorist attacks of September 11 and the situation of women in Afghanistan bring to mind that the situation of women (and children) in conflict situations urgently needs to be addressed.

The United Nations' engagement in peace operations has evolved from peacekeeping, in its traditional sense, towards multidimensional peace support operations. Despite this, the gender considerations in peace processes have not been adequately addressed. A full understanding of the impact of armed conflict on women and girls is necessary in order to effectively promote and maintain international peace and security. Any generality, such as the statement that women are peacemakers, is subject to exception. Some women are ethnic factionalists or national leaders who make war, other women are militarized by conflict and fight alongside the men as guerillas and rebels. However, almost no women are military commanders and they are rarely found in other military leadership positions. But women and children do constitute a disproportionate number of civilians affected by armed conflict. An estimated 80% of all internally displaced persons and refugees are women and children. During armed conflict, women and girls are threatened by rape, sexual exploitation, trafficking and sexual humiliation. Every setting presents

risks, whether at home, while fleeing or in camps for displaced persons. Sexual violence has a devastating effect on the life of women and children, ranging from sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS to humiliation and trauma.

Humanitarian assistance in armed conflict should therefore include psychosocial and reproductive health services, and relief workers have to be trained to respond to needs of victims of sexual violence. When I addressed the UN Security Council on this topic more than a year ago on behalf of my country, I stressed the need to establish systems for reporting on sexual violence, abuse, exploitation and trafficking of women and girls within military and civilian populations, to be followed by enforcement and monitoring mechanisms for peacekeeping personnel as well as disciplinary and oversight mechanisms in all peace support missions.

Peacekeeping personnel must meet the highest standards of conduct. Training in international human rights and humanitarian law, including gender training and instruction on their responsibility towards civilian communities should be an integral part of the preparatory process. We all know that violations against women and children have also been committed by UN-personnel. These offences must be investigated and the offenders punished.

The authorization or perpetration of sexual violence during armed conflict constitutes a violation of international law. If these violations happen on a large scale or as a matter of policy, they constitute a crime against humanity. Historic precedents have been set by the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda. These tribunals have for the first time in history punished sexual violence in a civil war and have established rape as an act of genocide. Liechtenstein was very active in elaborating the Statute for the International Criminal Court which will soon become operative and will have the potential to protect and promote the human rights of women and girls. The Statute also addresses trauma counseling, rehabilitation and compensation to the victims of war crimes and calls for gender and child-sensitive court procedures.

Although the contribution of women in peace-building, peacemaking and conflict resolution is being increasingly recognized, the role of women in preventive diplomacy has so far been very limited. While the particular vulnerability of women has to be taken into account, we must also emphasize that women have to play an active part in conflict-resolution and peace-building. Today there is an overall understanding that preventive diplomacy involves first and foremost "frontline diplomacy" undertaken by Ambassadors, senior foreign office officials and personal envoys of the Secretary-General. Within the United Nations, Liechtenstein, together with the other countries represented by women Ambassadors, has for now more than five years repeatedly called for more appointments of women as Special Envoys and Special Representatives of the Secretary-General. Presently there is no woman serving in this capacity and there has not been a woman serving as SRSG in many years. We strongly believe that such appointments would have an important and catalytic impact on the role of women in the conflict situation at hand. Women in decision-making positions are role models for other women, they give them hope and encourage them to take on responsibility. Women hold perspectives on conflict that differ from those of men. To a greater degree, women seek consensus. Since women disproportionately become victims of armed conflicts, finding a middle way that minimizes damage and victimization is obviously in their interest. Trying to minimize harm also reflects the traditional

roles of women as mothers and nurturers. Women also tend to believe that familiarity does not breed contempt but rather the breaking of stereotypes that prolong hostility. In Ireland, in Africa, the Balkans and Latin America, they have been willing to join or lead local groups that cross barriers. Women's responsibility for children points them toward the future, not to nursing grievances of the past.

The aftermath of conflicts is often when women come into their own as leaders. Women leaders may link all parties in order to rebuild their communities. Women as the majority of witnesses who testified before South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, outreach by Bosnian women across ethnic lines, negotiations by Sudanese women for hostage releases - all exemplify women's activism in peacemaking and reconciliation.

In particular in the developing countries, there are a number of lessons that we have learned from the ways in which women are organizing and building long-lasting peace:

1. Women are developing innovative ways of challenging the use of tradition as a rationale for continued violence. Women's groups work with religious leaders, families and communities to change attitudes and practices regarding female genital mutilation and so-called honor killings.
2. Women are investing in long-term public education and awareness campaigns to reach people's minds and hearts. Powerful messages resonate with policy makers and the public. The slogan "Free Of Violence: It's Our Right" was used for many of these campaigns.
3. Women make a difference when they are invited to the peace table. The AII- Party Burundi Women's Peace Conference in July 2000 brought together women from 19 political parties who, despite their differences, developed 23 agreements in 3 days for presentation to the Burundi peace negotiations.
4. Women are demonstrating that the struggle against HIV/AIDS is a struggle against injustice and inequality. On the one hand, women's infection and death rates are climbing at an alarming pace, on the other hand it is women and girls who are the rescue teams, pulled from their lives, their schools and their jobs to care for the sick and dying as health care systems collapse. We need to recognize the unpaid and often invisible 'care economy' that is supported by women.

There is no doubt that the way in which a country or community treats women and children and protects and promotes their human rights is one of the best early warning indicators of their respect for international norms and standards.

I want to once again emphasize that we need to have women's voices influencing an agenda for human security and peace. If we are to find long-term and sustainable solutions to violence, all the key stakeholders must be involved. Women's perspectives will make a difference in the desperate need to craft a vision of human security, to build a global dialogue on peace, and to generate alternatives to war and violence.

## Women In Afghanistan

Despite many years of severe and institutionalized gender discrimination and gender-based violence in Afghanistan, it is only very recently that the situation of the women in Afghanistan is receiving world attention, and that Afghan women's right to the full enjoyment of fundamental human rights and freedoms is being recognized widely. We have a historical opportunity to contribute to the capacity of the women of Afghanistan to reclaim their rightful place in the reconstruction of their country, to participate fully in decision-making in transitional and elected bodies and to be present at the peace table. Afghanistan is at a unique moment in its history. Women in Afghanistan have the most to gain from new opportunities and also the most to lose if fragile communities breakdown. The following key priorities must be acted upon to support women:

The first is security. Security sector reform must consider women's protection. A professional police force must be trained and equipped to address women's special security needs. Alternative policing models, including community based policing and police stations for women should be explored. Special protection should be provided in camps and during repatriation. Reintegration, and demobilization are essential. But beneficiaries must not be limited to combatants. The wives, widows and other dependents of ex-fighters must be included explicitly.

Building a security sector that protects women also depends on the rule of law. As a consequence of decades of armed conflict, lawlessness, and oppression, the rule of law in Afghanistan has disintegrated, depriving women of protection under the law. By signing the Declaration of the Essential Rights of Afghan Women, Chairman Karzai demonstrated his support for women's equal protection under the law. Ensuring women's rights in Afghanistan's new constitution, and legal frameworks is an essential starting point and hence the second priority.

The third priority is governance. In rebuilding Afghanistan, women will need to be part of the governance structure. Women are starting to be included in the political process. There are two women Ministers in the transitional government. The challenge now is to ensure that the political support will transform the quality of women's lives. In concrete terms, it means that both women ministers need political and financial support.

Women have also identified a major problem. Only 1 to 2 per cent of women in Afghanistan have identity cards (IDs). This means that almost 98% of women are people without formal papers, citizenship and identities. If these IDs are used as criteria for participation, then women and men without IDs will be excluded from opportunities in the new governance structures. This problem must be addressed if women and men are to fully participate in the civil and political life of their country.

The fourth priority is to improve women's economic security and eradicate poverty, especially for widows, female-headed households and disabled women. More than two decades of war have brought increasing poverty along with death and destruction. This has generated tensions and violence in the home. At the same time the removal of women from the economic sphere by the Taliban meant that many women without male breadwinners were quickly turned into beggars. The eradication of poverty in Afghanistan will not be possible without involving women fully in reconstruction programs, ensuring their participation in the economy and increasing their access

to food, shelter and social services. Quick impact projects and income-generating programs are needed, furthermore a strong macro-economic framework, banking systems and employment strategies that ensure both women and men have access to the jobs being created as the economy develops. Women are optimistic about the economic future of their country. They are eager to embrace a modern educational and information system that can provide them with skills and opportunities to re-build their country and participate in a globalizing world.

Let me conclude by saying that these last 11½ years have been the most fulfilling in my life. The United Nations provides a most stimulating and challenging work environment and it gives small countries a fairly good chance to play a role that can go way beyond their political, economic and military power. The fight against terrorism is showing that this challenge can only be met if we all cooperate, big and small. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share with you some concerns regarding the situation of women worldwide and their role in particular in preventive diplomacy.