

**UWE 2008- "Women's Role in Creating Peace" - 11-14 September 2008- Kyrenia**

**“.....The full and complete development of a country, The welfare of the world and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields.”**

This was the caption that was used at the **4<sup>th</sup> World Conference and Forum on Women-Action for Equality, Development and Peace** in Beijing, China in September 1995.

And I have embraced it in its entirety. For me, it basically means that the evolution of equality for women’s rights and their actual enforcement can only begin at the domestic level in order to be affective globally.

What is necessary for women to play a role in peace making?

No different then what it is for a man. It is **leadership**. This is not just leadership of other people, a country or of countries but first and foremost, of oneself.

I have always felt that women are less obvious than men when it comes to leadership skills. This is a valuable asset to be harnessed.

As Parker Palmer once noted,

**"A leader is a person who has an unusual degree of power to project on other people his or her shadow or his or her light. A leader is a person who has an unusual degree of power to create the conditions under which other people must live and move and have their being-conditions that can either be as illuminating as heaven or as shadowy as hell. A leader is a person who must take special responsibility for what's going on inside him or her self, inside his or her consciousness, lest the act of leadership create more harm than good.**

**The problem is that people rise to leadership in our society by a tendency towards extroversion, which means a tendency to ignore what is going on inside themselves. Leaders rise to power in our society by operating very competently and effectively in the external world, sometimes at the cost of internal awareness.**

**I've looked at some training programs for leaders. I'm discouraged by how often they focus on the development of skills to manipulate the external world rather than the skills necessary to go inward and make the inner journey."-**

As if to reiterate and enlarge this exposition His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama added:

**“Responsibility does not only lie with the leaders of our countries or with those who have been appointed or elected to do a particular job. It lies with each of us individually. Peace, for example, starts within each of us. When we have inner peace, we can be at peace with those around us.”**

In a world where almost all thinks that power is the only way to secure peace, talking about inner peace and leadership of oneself may sound a little naïve and off the point and even maybe considered “typically female”. This is of no concern to me, for this is my truth .

The reign of Global Power has diminished, it is at an end.

Whatever gender we are, man or woman, it does not matter. ....We are all particles of this universe, are all human beings, just happening to be born a woman ; A woman, is what I am, and how I tackle the problems and hardships I face along the way makes me into the way I am today.

I know there may not be great differences in substance and outlook on general gender based issues in the Turkish-Muslim society of North Cyprus and those of European or more western countries. In this northern part of Cyprus, local religious norms and culture have not played an important a role in the implementation or development of women’s rights, as it may have done in other less developed or religious countries. Our society evolved through secularism, not religion. As is the same elsewhere, it is still mainly the political and economic factors that are the main stumbling blocks to equality for women. I was given the opportunity and as I see it, being a woman on the Bench is an asset to the judiciary and society in general. The female gender brings a different perspective when dealing with issues and women’s sensitive intuition and perceptions are a valuable addition to the knowledge which they have acquired through their legal education and training. This I would presume is the same in peacemaking and women’s empowerment activities, where the roles of NGO such as yourselves play a pivotal role in leadership.

Islam accepts the equality of women with men and the woman’s role is approached with more reverence in that it must be harnessed to maintain the moral, physiological and psychological demands of both the male and female gender. It enunciates the reasons why women should be protected. It is a noble teaching and unfortunate too that these same factors may, without realising, impede the women from decision making roles and positions of influence, subordinating them to man.

There are many truths that one has to find in life. The paths are not easy to follow. Each and every one of you here today have your own truth about what women can do and what can be done in our role in peacemaking? We are all here to see, listen and hear all truths. For it is only then, by understanding and actually accepting all realities, that we may find the correct way to solving this dilemma of non-peace that has plagued this part of the

world for so long. And hence find peace and harmony. One has to be open, yet firm in one's conviction.

At a time when negotiations for a solution to our island's political problems have once again been initiated, may all leaders, who and wherever they are, big or small, find guidance in a passage taken from the **Bhagavad Gita**<sup>1</sup> beginning with the line **"Those who realise true wisdom" (IX.13-34)**. It runs something like this:-

**"I am justice: clear, impartial,  
favouring no-one, hating no-one.  
But in those who have cured themselves of  
Selfishness, I shine with brilliance." (X.20)**

I would like to thank you for your presence in this part of our island for coming and sharing with us its beauty; and for giving me this brief opportunity to address you here today. I wish a successful outcome to this General Assembly. In the limited time I could only but briefly touch upon what I feel is important for the theme of this conference. I would like to end with this note taken from a **Zen** invocation:-

**"The Way is long - let us go together.  
The Way is difficult - let us help each other.  
The Way is joyful - let us share it.  
The Way is ours alone - let us go in love.  
The Way grows before us - Let us begin."**

**Gönül Erönen  
Turkish Cypriot Supreme Court Justice  
North Cyprus**

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Mitchell, "The Enlightened Heart"-An Anthology of Sacred Poetry, HarperPerennial publications, 1993.