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Invest in Peace: Say NO TO WAR

The definition of Peace is as elusive as the quest for it in these trying times. One definition says it is the freedom from or cessation of war, either within the country, between two nations or among many.

This last point is important to note because of the fashion to form international coalitions for war.

2. If Peace is the absence of strife, then it must be a state of friendliness. In this state we feel safe and secure to go on with our daily lives, in the understanding that nobody will blast the roof over our heads, that we have safe water to drink and food to eat. With Peace our children can go to school and play safely out of doors. Peace means that we have basic health care to prevent and cure illnesses, we have markets to sell our wares and services, we have the freedom to move and express our views and we are guaranteed justice when seeking protection of our human rights.

3. On the contrary, the situation in war is grim and harsh. Some of you may have experienced war. I know it as a young girl during the Japanese Occupation of our country during World War II. The suffering then is no different from what we see in today's wars. Please allow me to relate to you my observations of the life of the Iraqi people who are suffering the humanitarian effects of war and prolonged economic sanctions. I visited Iraq in March 2000, leading a group of 10 women from socially active NGOs. What we saw was an Iraq that used to enjoy one of the highest socio-economic growth in the region reduced to a state where the development process has been interrupted or even halted. Her people suffer from insufficient food and health care, unsafe water, poor sanitation and inadequate infrastructure.

4. Children are dying from preventable diseases such as diarrhoea and respiratory infections. Their death rate has doubled. Mothers die giving birth because of anaemia and inadequate drugs as well as equipment for proper care during pregnancy and delivery. Malaria, tuberculosis and other infectious diseases are re-emerging because of the lack of resources for prevention and treatment.

5. Instead of being in school a significant number of children are working to supplement the family income.

Schools are in deplorable conditions. The people suffer from daily electricity cuts, deteriorating quality of water and unhygienic sanitation standards because the infrastructure is severely damaged. Families share homes on an eight-hour shift. Many young couples postpone marriages because weddings are too expensive and performing the obligatory Haj is out of reach to many Iraqis. A whole generation of innocent Iraqi children are being brought up and are learning about life in an unhealthy social and psychological environment, which does not nurture their development.

There is already evidence of juvenile delinquency, depression and intense hatred for the west.

6. War has many other adverse impacts on women, children and families. Women constitute 70 percent to 80 percent of the world's refugee population\*. At least two million Arab children are refugees, and nearly four million are displaced. As internally displaced persons (IDPs) or refugees, women's dominant struggle is how to cope with extreme poverty and to stretch meager resources to reduce their children's hunger of poverty.

They are often exploited to perform menial tasks or forced to sell their bodies. They are also more vulnerable to domestic violence.

7. Female-related diseases are often left untreated in situations of war, because male combatants are accorded priority. Diseases may be the result of rape (e.g. HIV and AIDS), malnutrition, extreme work loads, the hardship of a conflict and prolonged stress. Women and children who are victims of chemical warfare such as agent orange and landmines struggle with their crippled lives. Radioactive materials such as depleted uranium in warheads cause leukemia and congenital anomalies, stillbirths and missed abortions. During war, victims are also exposed to abuse, torture, psychological trauma, imprisonment and separation from their families.

8. If they are not killed, women are at risk to rape, forced to serve as prostitutes over extensive periods of time or live with enemy soldiers and threatened with death if they attempt to leave. The UN Human Rights Commission has estimated that for every 100th pregnancy during a conflict, rape has been committed. These figures do not give a full picture, as they do not include rapes, which did not lead to pregnancy, rapes which led to pregnancy, which was followed by abortion, and rapes followed by killing or death. More disturbing is the use of rape as a weapon of war. In the ethnic cleansing war in the former Yugoslavia, rape was not only a catalyst for deporting non-Serb inhabitants, but was also used as a genocide tool to destroy the biological basis of a given nation's culture, either by a forced pregnancy or by inhibiting women from having children in the future. Many women had to undergo the life-long torture of bearing the enemy's child and nurturing it for years to come.

9. With these grim pictures of war in mind we now have to deal with the war against terror. War against terror is such a misleading expression because the terror is in human hearts. The roots of terror are misunderstanding, intolerance, hatred, revenge, greed and hopelessness that take control of human hearts.

This root cannot be located by the military. Bombs and missiles cannot reach it, let alone destroy it. How do we remove this terror from human hearts? We don't do this by striking at another human life because it will only sow more terror, hatred, suffering, bloodshed and more enemies. When we act without understanding and out of hatred, in the end whole societies will live in constant fear of being attacked at any time and any place. Such a state of violence, confusion, fear and anxiety is extremely dangerous. Further, many parties to conflict are known to possess nuclear, chemical or biological weapons, which might be used, with devastating consequences and another world catastrophe.

Military threat and action will only increase the likelihood that these terrible events will come to pass. We must strike against the real cause or the root of terror.

10. This can be done if we work hard to build and maintain peace in our countries, between nations and among nations. Peace is made by people. People are the ones who sow the seeds of peace in their communities and in their children. These are the same people who will be leaders and role models of peace in their communities and nations and who will forge international relations for peaceful co existence between and among nations. From these seeds of peace carefully sown and nurtured in families and communities, will grow an enduring peace for the world.

We must equip the next generation with the tools to end violence and to continue building peace when they become the leaders of tomorrow.

11. As mothers, wives, community leaders, activists, professionals, widows and breadwinners women have the undisputed potential to build a lasting culture of peace. Women's morality is dominated by love relationships, an ethics of care and considerations of how our decisions would affect the community at large.

For women, the promotion of economic, social and cultural rights as well as participatory democracy and non-discrimination is more important than developing new and more sophisticated forms of weapons. We prefer to share wealth and prosperity, not weapons and guns.

The values that women bring to their families and communities can replace oppression, racism, extremism, fanaticism, violence, greed, hatred and enemy-images with inter-cultural understanding, solidarity and respect for human rights and dignity. Women can transform the view of power, security, disarmament and world order. Women's way of thinking brings hopes and better opportunities for lasting peace.

12. In the family and community we can build Peace by teaching our children to develop trust and empathy for one another as well as to respect and celebrate their differences. We can do this by making our children learn to live together through activities that make them eat together, play together, learn about each other's religion, traditions and cultural heritage, as well as to find their creative expression through music, drama and fine arts and state of the art computer classes. In expressing their thoughts and feelings about the conflicts that affect their lives, and in reflecting critically, children develop deeper understanding, trust and compassion for others. They thus nurture lasting friendship that becomes the basis for mutual understanding, honesty and respect. We must also provide enough challenges to our children to foster self discovery, confidence, team spirit, cooperation, leadership, group process and communication skills that are necessary for discussing contentious issues in a productive and meaningful way, as well as to promote strong bonds of coexistence and to reinforce peace.

13. At national and international levels we must forcefully articulate our views on peace building and peaceful solutions to conflicts around the world. This role is in accordance with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

14. Thus our first call should be to ask international organisations and States to adopt programmes and set targets for including women's views, their concerns, initiatives, experiences and equal participation in conflict prevention, peace building, peace keeping, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts.

15. In speaking out for Peace, we must not forget to ask why some countries are pushing for war and unilateral pre-emptive strikes as the answers to conflict resolution. Ask why seemingly normal individuals are driven to self-sacrifice as lone suicide bombers, why young men would readily perish by crashing aeroplanes into the Pentagon and the World Trade Centre and why holiday makers are bombed in idyllic holiday resorts. More importantly we must ask why States are not sanctioned when they blast ordinary people out of their homes from helicopter gun ships, bomb impoverished countries to smithereens, shoot stone-throwing children and deny people the exercise of their basic human rights. All these acts create immense fear in all our hearts because we never know when we could become victims of terror. Ask who will be next? 16. Collectively we must say NO TO WAR. We must ask our Governments to devote resources to building and sustaining peace and preventing armed conflicts through a comprehensive approach that includes poverty eradication, promotion of economic, social and cultural rights, participatory democracy and using peaceful settlement procedures when conflicts occur. We must insist that neither the rule of law nor civil and human rights be sacrificed at the altar of misguided concepts of security.

17. Let us as mothers promote education and capacity building for peace, conflict resolutions and gender sensitivity in the family. Let us ask the mass media, all our schools and higher institutions of learning as well as other social institutions to do the same so that people can gain the values, attitudes and behavioural patterns of a culture of peace, tolerance of diversity and different perceptions of power and security based on gender equality and empowerment of the marginalised.

18. At the international level, let us ask for all conflicts to be resolved through the UN system only, based on respect for international law and treaties, with no recourse to unilateral actions. In resolving the conflicts we must strongly ask that the UN respond to the conditions of conflict and the nature of the disputes that originally gave rise to violence, to provide immediate humanitarian assistance and the means for legal redress, compensation and reparation according to international standards of justice. Let us call for a new security framework that will serve all humanity by stemming the tide of economic inequity and lack of social justice among the vast majority of the earth's people whilst a few of the powerful maintain their access to world resources and their unsustainable levels of consumption. Resources spent on warfare deprive children of developmental rights and opportunities in health, education, social welfare and basic human needs. The imminent threat to global peace is the millions of people who suffer from inadequate health care, from under nutrition and the ravages of unemployment.

19. The International Court of Justice has affirmed that the threat or use of nuclear weapons is illegal.

We must call on all Governments to embrace a universal non-discriminatory, time-bound compliance

regime to eliminate nuclear weapons, other weapons of mass destruction and excessively injurious weapons as well as to totally ban the development, production and sale of land mines. We should also call for an international public register of arms sales.

20. We should also urge the US to rescind the Nuclear Posture Review which expands the role of nuclear weapons in US military planning and the National Security Strategy, which claims a US right to take military action pre-emptively and unilaterally in the name of self-defence. There is no precedent in international law for use of force as a preventive measure in response to a potential threat of violence.

Preventive war is not permitted under the UN Charter and should not be considered by the Security Council.

To the contrary, the Charter emphasises the peaceful resolution of disputes and the non-use of force. Though nuclear weapons represent the ultimate form of violence, they cannot and should not be eliminated through the use of force. They must be abolished through a multilateral process of consensual negotiations. The use of force to achieve disarmament is counterproductive, discriminatory, illegal, immoral, inhumane, and unnecessary. We dearly wish to see the US government return to a democratic tradition, because it is a nation of people who love liberty and whose sons and daughters sacrificed to maintain that democracy.

21. Today we have a chance of sharing our ideas about investing in Peace and Saying No to War with many others. In a world where it is so easy to kindle violence, terrorism, and mutual distrust, let us reflect deeply for our insight to reveal and identify root causes of terror so that we can ensure that the way we live our daily lives does not create more terrorism in the world. Let us listen to each other to see how intolerance, hatred, revenge and greed can be dissolved and transformed, with compassion and understanding.

22. Let me conclude by saying that we must speak out for peace now, in this dangerous and pivotal moment of history. Let us display our light and offer it so that the world will not sink into total darkness. The seed of awakening in our hearts can touch others so they in turn have the courage to speak out. We need a collective awakening to stop this course of self- destruction. Real security can be achieved only when we achieve peace.