

**A CALL TO ENGAGE
from the U.S. Section,
Women's International
League for Peace and
Freedom (WILPF), Spring 2007**

A Coordinated Strategy to Prevent War: A Women's Agenda

These are frightening times. The treaties put in place to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons are being undermined. There are currently fourteen ongoing armed conflicts of significant scale in the world, and the U.S. government is openly contemplating yet another military invasion. Shooting deaths are up in all our major cities. The national debt rises to support war and weaponry while the social safety net, educational equity and access to health care continue to deteriorate.

A recent *Ms. Magazine* poll shows that a majority of U.S. women wants an immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq and is opposed to a U.S. invasion of Iran. Enduring women's peace organizations, such as WILPF and WAND, and new activist pathways for anti-war women, such as CODE Pink for Peace and Women in Black, gain momentum daily.

Preventing war rests on the twin cornerstones of protecting women's human rights and maximizing women's political power. Women's political empowerment, in the context of accountability to a participatory women's

"Women are more likely to make an impact on negotiations when they convene as a constituency of women with a common agenda for peace."

— Securing the Peace, UNIFEM, 2005

Even as Congress debates exit strategies for Iraq, U.S. women hold the keys to preventing war. Women's political empowerment and the protection of women's human rights are the cornerstones of sustainable peace. By acting together in solidarity, we can prevent future wars.

movement, will ultimately protect the full range of women's human rights by preventing future wars.

Comparative studies have shown that transformative change through women's political empowerment can be hastened by a robust and inclusive women's agenda, autonomous of existing political parties. Autonomy from partisan politics means this agenda can serve as a resource for politicians within *every* party, while simultaneously staking a claim for goals and objectives that might remain beyond any single party's platform. U.S. women developed such an agenda through the 10 regional prepcoms leading up to the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995.

A unique opportunity: The time is now!

Since the dismantling of the President's Interagency Council on Women in 2001 and the downsizing of the Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor, there has been no official means of convening women from across political, ethnic, racial and religious lines. With its over 200 member organizations and reach of 10 million women, the National Council of Women's Organizations (NCWO) is the existing entity best positioned to take on the convening and harmonizing role abandoned by the federal government. It is politically and philosophically nonpartisan and well respected within the

national power centers. While supportive of this effort, NCWO relies on its powerful, diverse constituent groups to advance major projects through their own structures and memberships.

A way forward

A harmonized agenda is the first step to intervene —strategically, effectively and systematically —in the negotiations that will set policies shaping the demobilization of U.S. troops in Iraq; UN resolutions and official statements shaping encounters with Iran and Syria; and our national budget.

A harmonized agenda will be a tool and touchstone for elected officials, government appointees, and career public servants, if there are millions of women behind it!

In October 2000, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 calling for better protection of women’s interests in post conflict situations and for women’s full inclusion in reconstruction efforts. SCR 1325 has been applied by the U.S. in its operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, and used by women’s organizations on the ground in Liberia, Rwanda, East Timor and elsewhere. UNIFEM’s comparative study of these contexts, *Securing the Peace* (October, 2005), distills action steps for laying the foundation for sustainable peace and conflict prevention in the immediate aftermath of armed conflict. U.S. women can draw on these lessons learned to secure the material and social well-being of our country and prevent future military aggression by our elected government.

Together, we can do it

Women from across the 50 states will converge in Atlanta June 27-July 1 for the first U.S. Social Forum. The National Women’s Studies Association, the American Association of University Women, and the National Organization of Women will all be holding their annual conventions at approximately that same time. The process of creating a national women’s agenda will be familiar to most members of the National Council of Women’s Organizations as well as to many women’s groups operating outside that context, none of which may have the capacity to convene such a process but all of

which have something important to bring to the table. We propose convening this peace table through calls at these and myriad women’s meetings across the country and virtually, through online spaces maintained by Circle Connections and U.S. Women Connect. The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, U.S. Section, can help connect action groups eager to take this forward, to join in planning an inclusive, transparent harmonization process and to invest in its implementation.

Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, Peace x Peace, Women Waging Peace, and the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice are all intimately familiar with the research on SCR 1325 implementation in numerous countries amid conflict situations. We need to connect this new knowledge with the seasoned knowledge of countless organizations working domestically to advance women’s rights.

U.S. women are organized and they share priorities that promote peace. In this election cycle we need to amplify our voices; we need to bring it all together into a harmonized agenda backed by a unified constituency of women.

We must assert our place at the peace table to ensure that never again will the vast resources of our country be squandered in needless carnage. Let’s begin today!

If your organization is willing to play a role in helping to harmonize a women’s agenda for peace, please contact:

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