

Statement Marking the International Day of Peace

21st September 2016

Is there any need to remind us – members of the International Council of Women - that The International Day of Peace is dedicated to the absence of war and violence? Surely not! Since 1982, in fact, this Day is observed by all UN Member States. Nevertheless, sadly, and several times again this year, the world has faced many terrorist and violent attacks that have caused the death of hundreds of innocent victims who just wanted to live a normal life, to enjoy a film, theater or concert, to celebrate a national day, to pray in their places of worship, to shop, to study, in short, to live.

Indeed many, many people are dreaming about peace, working for peace, and educating towards peace. Intellectuals and free thinkers from different parts of the globe, regularly write about peace and recently, for example, an Anthology on "Anti-Terror and Peace" has been published by IFLAC – The International Forum for the Literature and Culture of Peace. Writers and poets (a big part of whom are women) from 23 different countries, contributed to its publication, with the conviction that "The Pen is mightier than the sword"... Moreover, its editor, Prof. Ada Aharoni, a world-known prominent women writer, pointed out that the idea behind the Anthology is "to promote local and world peace. But, what we see today is a cancerous spread of a fanatical lethal terrorism that endangers our world and our freedom."

We, members of the International Council of Women, naturally value life. Creating social solidarity among women around the globe is thus important for us because it leads us on to long-term measures concerning the education of the young generation in the spirit of gender equality, in the spirit of equal opportunities for men and women, and in the spirit of respect for life.

In our quest for sustainable peace, we need to create an atmosphere of hope. Paolo Freire, that great Brazilian educator, thus once said that one of our tasks is to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be. Without a minimum of hope, he stated, we cannot so much as start the struggle. But without the struggle, hope dissipates, loses its bearings, and turns into hopelessness; and hopelessness can become tragic despair. Hence there is need for a kind of education in hope.

Peace, is a broad concept which embraces many abstract values such as trust, respect, tolerance, understanding, cooperation and empathy... ICW strongly believes that peace can come through women – the most important sector of the civil society. Initiatives of women, though often small, can bring groups together. Culture, food, traditions and customs, in turn, bring about understanding of each other and also the common heritage shared by all. Women in short have a capacity to embrace each other, share a burden and survive beyond hardships along the way. But for this, they need to cross the barriers of land, race, culture, ethnicity and gender.

To sum-up, the contribution of women is an important determinant to the culture of peace and it can be enhanced and expedited by integrating women from all levels of the society, including the grassroots, poor women and victims of terrorism and conflicts, in national women's organizations, and thereby freeing them for greater involvement in peace-making activities.

World leaders this year committed to the United Nations Agenda for Humanity, which outlines shared responsibilities for restoring peace and investing in humanity, writes UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. Everyone, not just leaders, needs to act because "each one of us can do something to create a more humane world and bring hope to people in need," he writes.

Let us hope that this year's International Day of Peace will lead to a more peaceful world in the future.