



**Remarks by Stephen Lewis, Co-Director of AIDS-Free World,
at the 10th annual Policy Forum of The Institute for Inclusive Security
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“No funding for peace talks unless women are at the table,” Lewis says.

This is a difficult speech to make: timing, content, language, rhythm. It’s almost sacrilege to attempt to put words to paper after so remarkable an inaugural address, and the subsequent waves of incandescent euphoria.

But this is a most serious gathering, and it may also be perfect timing, coming as it does right at the outset of an administration of which so much is hoped and so much is expected.

And there is for me --- and for the organization I represent, AIDS-Free World --- another unanticipated happenstance. I had not met Ambassador Hunt before today, nor --- however embarrassing the admission --- did I know much of the Institute for Inclusive Security, or indeed, the work of Women Waging Peace that preceded it (albeit I’d certainly heard the name on many occasions). But I have to say that reading the material that was sent to me spawned an instant sense of solidarity, and my colleagues and I really felt drawn to the advocacy on behalf of women that lies at the heart of the IIS. It’s an advocacy that we not only endorse, but that sustains our own work, and frankly I feel more than a little foolish to have come to this discovery so late.

And by the way, I’m not shamelessly currying favour; I’m too old to curry favour.

As I read through the avalanche of briefing notes that Jacqueline O’Neill sent to me on behalf of the IIS, two things struck home. First, the simple, unvarnished truth that men make war, and women lead lives without resorting to violence, so it makes unassailable logic to have women at the centre of peacemaking and peacebuilding initiatives. They are indispensable to negotiating peace agreements that last, and indeed, will never be sustained without the leadership of women.

But the other item was in a way transformative. In a Christian Science Monitor op-ed back in October, 2007, written by Carla Koppell, Director of the Initiative for Inclusive Security, she argues, and I quote “We could reserve seats at the table for those who have not borne arms but have a stake in peace. Most radically, mediators could invite non-belligerents to the table first and have them set the agenda for talks.” It means, says Carla “... that those who haven’t picked up weapons get to choose priorities.”

I love it. Of course it's radical: it would induce cardiac arrests in every warlord from Sudan to Zimbabwe. But it's brilliant in the way it captures the quintessential fact that in every existing or anticipated peace negotiation, in every conflict everywhere, the women are missing. Oh to be sure, there are the obligatory tokens. But everyone must surely acknowledge that the implementation of the famous Security Council Resolution 1325 has been a cosmic bust. And it's more than eight years.

In a recent representative sample of 35 major peace negotiations since October of 2000 when 1325 was passed, it was revealed that 1.2% of signatories to peace agreements had been women, and not a single woman played the role of lead mediator in any of the negotiations. How do you define discrimination?

So here we have a world awash in conflicts from Afghanistan to Iraq to the Middle-East; two weeks ago the Lord's Resistance Army from Northern Uganda attacked a village in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, killing 620 men, women and children, savagely raping nearly one hundred of the women before inflicting dismemberment and death upon them, and just yesterday morning up to two thousand Rwandan troops crossed into the Eastern Region of the Congo to hunt down, it is said, the Hutu genocidaires.

It never ends. And because it never ends, we will always, as an international community be engaged in seeking peace where blood and terror reign.

But lo and behold, at this most perilous of times, there is a new administration in the United States of America. There is a President of unusual sensitivity who speaks of equality in the most inclusive of ways. There is a woman Secretary of State, there is a woman Ambassador to the United Nations. The time has come to change the world. I've always believed, to the depths of my viscera, that the most important struggle on the planet is the struggle for gender equality. Now is the time to give that struggle meaning.

If it isn't presumptuous, allow me to suggest some policies and initiatives for the new administration ... in no particular order.

First, the United States should refuse to fund or support any UN-sponsored peace negotiations that do not have women as leading participants at the table. I would think that Ambassador Susan Rice would enjoy presenting that dictum. It would be as bracing a message to the multilateral system as could be delivered.

Second, the United States should insist on the full implementation of Resolution 1325. We invoke 1325 with pride at every opportunity, and of course it was quite the achievement. But achievements are sullied to the point of dishonour when Security Council resolutions are treated with contempt. And that's what's happened. In the corridors of civil society, 1325 is talked of with reverence; in the corridors of power, 1325 is considered a trifling irritant.

Third, the United States, having characterized Darfur as a genocide, should now provide or share the funding required to finance the full troop complement from the African Union to protect the people of Darfur from the madness that regularly descends upon them. Once that has been

established, it's time to force negotiations through the Security Council with, again, the full participation of women as a prerequisite. Why wasn't it done before? Well, it's time to confess to the poisonous sleight of hand that's been at work: while labeling Darfur a genocide, the United States has been consorting with leading members of the Sudanese security apparatus in the so-called war against terror. The problem is that the charge of genocide in Darfur then becomes purely rhetorical. It's time to change the equation.

Fourth, something must be done to protect the women of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (the DRC). This is a situation of such nightmarish quality that there simply aren't words to convey it. The Obama administration must surely put the DRC at the top of the agenda.

For twelve unremitting years, sexual violence has been the driving rationale of the conflict. My colleagues and I have said it before and we'll say it again and again and again, ad nauseam if necessary: rape is no longer a weapon of war, it is a strategy of war. We don't depreciate the underlying grab for resources, nor the reality of endless warring factions. But the DRC is the worst place in the world for women because the men of the Congo have chosen to use sexual violence as the primary instrument of battle. When in God's name will that be understood or acknowledged?

Guns are a complement to rape. The levels of dementia and brutality --- and, horrifically, the transmission of the AIDS virus --- endured by the women in the course of the sexual violence make bullets a mere addendum to atrocity. The United Nations runs from the use of the word "femicide", but that's what's happening.

And in the context of the convictions and intellectual underpinnings of the IIS, the Congo has special meaning. In the so-called peace agreement that was negotiated almost exactly one year ago in the DRC, there was not a single woman in a leadership role at the table. Not one. No wonder it fell apart. There was not a single representative of the raped women anywhere in sight ... talk about moral delinquency on the part of those who organized the talks; alas, the United Nations included ... and no representative of the wonderful, activist women's groups on the ground, coveting peace, pursuing peace, collaborating in peace, demonstrating peace and never allowed to construct or implement a peace.

And what was the *reductio ad absurdum*? An amnesty for the militias as part of the settlement.

That brings me to the fifth point: the United States, with the full power of the new administration, must oppose all amnesties in such circumstances. The principles of amnesty and impunity are what deny justice to women in all conflicts. I regret having to disagree with the International Crisis Group when they recently suggested amnesty for President Mugabe: here is a man who has sanctioned murder and rape and totalitarianism and economic disintegration; watched a nation haunted by cholera, a country where people living with AIDS now die without access to drugs, more human misery than Shakespearean tragedy could summon, and we tell him, Repent or leave, and you're off the hook? Can we ever truly have peace without justice?

And if it's the women who will bring a durable peace, then let it be said that the women want justice. AIDS-Free World has, over the last three months, been taking affidavits, with the pro

bono help of American and Canadian lawyers, from women raped by Mugabe's supporters, simply and solely because those women were associated in some way with the political opposition. We've established an unassailable pattern of politically-motivated sexual violence. It is frankly unbelievable in both extent and ferocity. Our object is to preserve the evidence for some future legal proceeding. We've gone so far as to discuss the findings with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

But here's the crux: when we ask the women what they want from this process, because they came to us from groups in Zimbabwe, they invariably say --- no matter how merciless were the attacks, and how destroyed and at risk are the families ---"We want justice".

Sixth, returning to the Congo for a moment, the United States must advocate for a tripling of the UN peacekeeping force known as MONUC. It is now the largest such UN operation, some seventeen thousand peacekeepers, but they are not of sufficient number to protect the women, even though that is an express part of the Security Council mandate.

Seventh, Security Council Resolution 1820, passed just last June, directed specifically at sexual violence, and elevating sexual violence in conflict to the unprecedented level of a threat to international peace and security, must not be allowed to become a dead letter. Even though it was introduced by the United States, there is a pro forma quality about it that the Obama administration can transform. In the context of today's Policy Forum, the resolution provides yet another opportunity to put women into every aspect of peacemaking and peace-building, both in advance and in the aftermath.

Eighth, there is a principle, agreed upon by all Heads of State at a UN summit in 2005, called "Responsibility to Protect" (or in the lingo of the UN, 'R2P'). It simply means that when a government is unable or unwilling to protect its citizens from egregious violations of human rights, then the international community has the responsibility to protect. That responsibility can be exercised through diplomatic or political pressure, or economic boycott or, in extreme cases, military intervention. But something has to trigger. It would be a great boon if the United States were to insist on the implementation of R2P in instances like the Congo and Zimbabwe. It would be a first, of course, but then everything is a first for the new President of the United States. I would argue that the novelty and courage of those anticipated first responses (just think of the closing of Guantanamo) is what helped to make him President.

Ninth, and this is crucial, the United Nations has before it at this very moment a proposal, unanimously endorsed, to create a new international agency for women. It comes as the result of a recommendation, made in 2006, by a very High-Level Panel of eminent personalities (including several Presidents and Prime Ministers, past and present). The recommendation is rooted in the recognition that the United Nations has failed lamentably on questions of gender, as well as the fact that there is no powerful international agency for women akin to UNICEF for children.

There is a battle royal looming over the architecture and governance of the new agency. We believe that it should be a free-standing agency, like UNICEF, with an Executive Board, like UNICEF's, funded at a billion dollars a year (one-third of UNICEF's funding), with an Under-

Secretary General appointed after a world-wide external search, and with operational capacity on the ground. I'm going to be blunt: the structure and governance are in danger of being sabotaged, behind the scenes, by the same people, men and women, many of them high-ranking UN staff, who have been unable all these years to bring gender equity to the United Nations itself. In fact, their collective failure, internal and external, is precisely why the High-Level Panel recommended a new agency.

In truth, an agency for women could well rescue the reputation of the United Nations.

Leadership is desperately needed here. The possibilities to make decent the lives of women are wondrous to contemplate. But the voice of the new administration must be heard.

If ever there was symmetry with the IIS, this is it. The new UN agency can promote women in peacemaking and peace-building as never before, recognizing what the Institute recognizes: that women are best placed--by history, by disposition, by inclination, by experience -- to construct, implement and oversee a world of peace. Is this the romanticism of a Pollyanna? Well maybe it was until January 20th. But not today.

Tenth and finally, the new administration can show its shining credentials by funneling a tiny percentage of the money its predecessors used for funding war into funding women's participation in creating peace. There can be a revived, reconstituted, cabinet-level Office for Women in the United States as advanced by Ambassador Hunt, and there can be financial support internationally for everything from contingents of women police and others in peacekeeping operations, to financial support for the special courts on sexual violence established by the new President of Liberia, herself a member of the IIS. Even in times such as these, money should not be a bedeviling obstruction when it comes to gender equality.

Madame Chair, allow me to end on a personal note. I've spent time in my life in politics, in diplomacy, in multilateralism. I never thought I would witness, in the early years of the 21st century, such persistent and malevolent discrimination visited on the women of the world. It's incomprehensible in its awful impact. And it's crazy in the loss of so much maturity, civility, integrity and knowledge that can be brought to bear, especially in the quest for peace.

There are many measures of a political administration. I must admit, that for me, the measure of this new administration will be what is done on behalf of, and in conjunction with, the women of the world.

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