

Toward Delegitimizing War, Draft Background Paper

In March 2003 the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security together with women from around the world, assembled for the 47th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, issued an urgent statement to the UN Security Council. The statement expressed their concern that a pre-emptive attack on Iraq would generate violent retaliation and abuse of human rights. The women called on the Security Council to support Iraqi disarmament through robust inspections, diplomatic talks, non-violent solutions and the participation of civil society, including women's groups and networks. Their statement also included a request that the UN Security Council respond to the civilians it represents internationally by taking into account the opinion of millions of individuals who had expressed their opposition to pre-emptive attacks and war during peace demonstrations in the month of February [2003].¹

This statement, together with hundreds of others, is only a small fraction of the civil society voice that emerged during the protests against the current war in Iraq. What makes this voice unique is that it reflects a larger, far more fundamental concern than the apparent illegality of this specific military intervention. The multiplicity of demonstrators, across ethnic and country borders, and the surge in peace activism since last fall, in fact, represent a general opposition to resorting to the means of war as a legitimate tool for solving interstate conflict. United States' disregard of international law triggered not only protests and demonstrations throughout the world. It created a renewed interest in the efficiency of existing structures and the rationale behind specific international norms of conduct. Most importantly, however, when the United States administration failed to hear the concerns of the international community, it inadvertently created the impetus for the crystallization of a sentiment that under no circumstances should war be legal. At a time when UN reform has become inevitable, it is important for peace activists and advocates to seize the historical moment and to re-unite in another global effort to delegitimize war, i.e. lobby governments and international institutions to declare war illegal.

As the war is taking an increasingly devastating toll on Iraq, it is important that people of the world are reminded of the destructive impacts of war and militarism. 110 million people were killed in wars in the 20th century—three times as many people as all the war deaths since the first century A.D.² At the beginning of the 20th century 90 per cent of war-related deaths were of military personnel; by the end of it, 90 per cent are of civilians—80 per cent of these being women and

children.³ Furthermore, over 300,000 children under the age of 18 have been recruited as soldiers; during the 1990s more than 2 million children died as a result of armed conflict; more than three times that number were permanently disabled or seriously injured; and an estimated 20 million refugee and displaced children were made homeless by armed conflict.⁴ To make matters even worse, the development of nuclear weapons continues to be a substantial part of military industries. An estimated \$8 trillion has been spent on nuclear weapons since 1945⁵, there are still around 30,000 nuclear weapons—equivalent to about 300,000 Hiroshima bombs.⁶ Proponents of militarism have continuously pointed out that contemporary warfare is more precise in its targeting and, therefore, less objectionable. Such claims are, first of all inaccurate and second of, if not legally, then morally problematic. In fact, the current trend in weaponry becoming increasingly sophisticated *and* lethal is hardly debatable. Furthermore, recent studies have shown that armed forces are the single largest polluter on earth⁷ and that, often, destruction of the environment has been consciously used as a method of warfare. The Gulf War, for example, created a massive environmental disaster. Bombs, shells, and tanks destroyed the desert ecology. Oil spills and fires caused severe atmospheric pollution and soil contamination.⁸ Also, the North American Treaty Organization admitted in December 2000 that US planes, in air strikes sanctioned by the United Nations, fired 10,800 Depleted Uranium (DU) shells in Bosnia in 1994-95, to punish the Bosnian Serb forces for attacks on civilians and peacekeepers. It also admitted that during NATO's 78-day Kosovo campaign in 1999, US jets fired about 31,000 rounds of DU shells 21,000 pounds of DU ammunition were dropped in Kosovo and Yugoslavia. On striking a target, DU ordnance can burn, releasing into the air tiny ceramic particles of radioactive uranium oxide to be wind borne (potentially for over 42 kilometers), stirred up in dust, and re-suspended by wind and human activity. DU has thus contaminated soil, food and water supplies. There are reports that it has caused serious health problems (cancer, leukemia, kidney and liver failure, depressed immune system, birth defects) among civilians as well as military personnel.⁹

What is even more disturbing is that all of the above facts and figures do not even take into account costs of war that are not obvious and cannot be addressed by reconstruction projects. Such hidden costs include the effects of destroying societal relationships, the disintegration of the social fabric, trauma, humiliation, confusion and destitution, i.e. the emotional and psychological chaos in the physical chaos instigated by warfare. The one and only logical conclusion that can be extracted from the discussion above is that humanity simply cannot afford militarism. Therefore, all our efforts

need to be directed toward delegitimizing the cause of all the suffering and destruction; we need to work toward delegitimizing war.

Contrary to popular opinion, such an effort is far from being unrealistic. It might indeed take years or decades before war became illegitimate, however, there is nothing about the goal in and of itself that is not grounded in reality. As a growing number of nations regard war as legitimate under fewer and fewer circumstances, wars *will* become rarer. The logical endpoint of such a progression is that there will be no circumstances under which war will be seen as legitimate, and hence wars will not recur. In *Nine Paths to Peace*, Richard Smoke and Harman point out that there is growing evidence showing that this long-term trend to delegitimize war is already occurring.¹⁰ Firstly, people's attitudes toward offense and defense have changed tremendously since the beginning of the 20th century. Until 1914, offensive wars were generally considered permissible and legitimate. Since mid-20th century, however, almost every military engagement around the world has been justified on defensive grounds (even though some of it was really, offensive.) This change in language reflects a deep and general shift in public attitudes and some attempt to limit warlike behavior. Nowadays, not only must defensive grounds be found for war, but the definition of legitimate defensive grounds is narrowing. Secondly, the increasing number of areas that have achieved the state that Kenneth Boulding has called stable peace: two nations are in 'stable peace' when no plausible conflict can be sufficiently intense to overcome the peaceful bonds between them. Thirdly, there is a tangible change in the image of military combat. Fighting is no longer regarded as a glorious and heroic thing to do. We no longer remember/have 'war heroes.' No songs glorifying war have achieved popularity. Indeed, popular anti-war songs have grown in popularity. Additionally, the increased interest of people around the world in a wide variety of campaigns addressing the causes or impacts of war is evidence showing that popular attitudes are changing. Particularly encouraging is the large number of people involved in various anti-nuclear weapons programs. Such involvement over the issue of a potential, as opposed to actual or imminent, war is unprecedented. Finally, there is an ever-growing number of international peace institutions that specialize in the creation of a culture of peace and non-militarization. Conventions and statements have been produced, organizations have been created. The United Nations, in particular, has been the main instrument of the international community for countering repression and war. A huge amount is expected of it, but it is understaffed and underfunded. Its failures are remembered, its successes often overlooked. Current trends toward reforming

and strengthening the UN, however, present yet more evidence that the international community is committed to incessantly working toward the goal of sustainable peace and conflict prevention.

In relation to history, the delegitimizing of war is taking place with exceptional rapidity. And activity—war—that humans have engaged in for thousands of years has lost a surprising amount of support in only a relatively few decades.

The claim that this trend exists is relatively uncontroversial. The real debate is how far the trend can go. Skeptics claim that the delegitimization of war will stop short of forcing the outlawing of war because war is seen as necessary. The complete abolition of war cannot take place as long as there is no replacement for this ultimate arbiter. If more powerful, more effective means of resolving conflicts can be developed and become widely accepted, those means can increasingly substitute for war as a means of reaching a decision.

The final point that I would like to make is:

C: Total delegitimizing will not occur until good alternatives have been developed

I plan to talk about the following:

- No war does not mean no conflicts between states
- Alternative conflict resolution techniques in combination with traditional means need to be utilized
- Need to constantly work in order to solidify and re-energize the network of organizations and individuals working toward the goal of delegitimization
- Peace research needs to be better funded
- Culture of Peace

Conclusion: Delegitimizing war requires a whole-system change.

- Whole-system changes have happened before. It is the responsibility of everyone, especially NGOs to help bring about this change in attitudes.

(Footnotes)

¹ Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, "Women Say 'Yes' to Disarmament by Peaceful Means", Press Release, March 6 2003

² Douglas Roche, *Bread not bombs: a political agenda for social justice* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1999), p. xi

³ UN Security Council, 31 Oct. 2000, in presentation for Resolution S/RES/1325

⁴ "Athens Conference on children and war" and "Reviewing progress for children," *Peace Matters* (Hague Appeal for Peace newsletter), (New York), spring 2001, pp. 2, 4

⁵ *The ACTivist*, November-December 1999, p. 6

⁶ Project Ploughshares estimates, Bill Robinson, May 2001

⁷ Ruth Leger Sivard, *World military and social expenditures 1991* (Washington: World Priorities Institute, 1991), p. 5

⁸ *Taking stock: the impact of militarism on the environment* (Toronto: Science for Peace, 1992), pp.2-3

⁹ *The Guardian*, 4 January 2001; CADU News. Campaign against Depleted Uranium, Manchester, no.4, p.1

¹⁰ Willis Harman and Richard Smoke, *Nine Paths to Peace: An Exploration of the Feasibility of Sustainable Peace* The Institute of Noetic Sciences, 1986