



FOUNDERS:

Betty Williams, Ireland - 1976
Máiread Maguire, Ireland - 1976
Rigoberta Menchú Tum, Guatemala - 1992
Prof. Jody Williams, USA - 1997
Dr. Shirin Ebadi, Iran - 2003
Prof. Wangari Maathai, Kenya - 2004

united for peace with justice and equality

Media Release

--For immediate release--

“There is a Partner in Peace”—Women Key to Peace in Israel and Palestine

(Tel Aviv), October 6, 2010 –A women’s peace delegation—led by Nobel Peace Laureate Jody Williams—today wrapped up a seven-day tour of Israel and the Palestinian Occupied Territories. The delegation of 10 women—mostly American—traveled to Jerusalem, Ramallah, Hebron, Haifa and Nazareth, and met with women peacebuilders, as well as the Israeli military, members of the Knesset, lawyers, Israeli settlers, staff from the United Nations and community leaders. Their goal was to learn first-hand the challenges to peace—and how some women are overcoming those barriers.

“We learned that there is a partner in peace,” said Williams. “Against the backdrop of violence and daily humiliations, there are women working on the ground in both Israel and the Palestinian Occupied Territories who use nonviolent protest and dialogue as a means to building a more just and equitable situation. For real peace to happen, these women must be part of the official peace process.”

The delegation visited the region as the US-brokered peace talks between Israeli and Palestinian officials—which began on September 2—continued without much substantive progress. Most of the women’s groups the delegation met with have called for civil society, including women’s organizations, to be an integral part of that process. They are also calling for the negotiations to be more ‘transparent’.

“Most of the people in power derive their power from the conflict,” noted one activist from Isha L’Isha, a grassroots organization based in Haifa that includes both Israeli and Palestinian women. “We need to ensure that people without power—but committed to ending the conflict—are also heard in the peace process.”

The group—along with other women’s groups in Israel—has called for no less than 30 percent of direct participation by women in all level of negotiations to ensure greater transparency and more attention to the needs of civilians, including women. As well, they are asking that a plan for reconciliation between the two communities be part of any final agreement.

The women activists in the Palestinian Occupied Territories and Gaza echoed the words of their Israeli counterparts during meetings with the delegation in Ramallah, and during visits to three well known sites of non violent resistance to occupation: Bi’lin, Ni’lin and Hebron.

“When I am alone I feel weak,” one woman in Ramallah told the delegation, which was hosted in the West Bank by Palestinian leader Dr. Mustafa Barghouti. “But here together with [all of you] I feel strong.” The delegation heard testimony from 300 women who joined the delegation at a conference on gender justice organized by the Palestinian NGO, Health Development Information Policy Institute (HDIP). The conference also connected with women in Gaza through a video-conference.

Earlier in the week, staff at the UN told delegation members that the situation in Gaza is a

“dignity crisis” and noted that most residents of Gaza are refugees. They estimate that 80% of the people in Gaza are reliant on UN food aid. Babies die at the checkpoints waiting to get into Israel for medical help, and thousands of children are not being educated because of the ban on bringing new building supplies into Gaza to build new schools. On top of all that, with an unemployment rate of close to 45%, Hamas leadership is making things worse by closing businesses that employ both men and women.

Yet, the delegation heard that despite all these obstacles—women are not deterred.

“A high point for me was hearing all these Palestinian women saying ‘Don’t be diverted. We can have peace, a strong democracy’”, said Janaan Hashim, a delegation member and lawyer from Chicago. “Women will be a major part in [making peace] happen.”

Towards the end of the week-long visit to the region, the delegation met with women settlers in Gush Etzion, located in the southern part of the West Bank. Their goal in visiting the settlement was to better understand the scope of the settlement issue.

“The settlements are a much larger machine than I had realized,” said Jody Williams. “They are a massive apparatus—and now I understand much more clearly what a serious impediment to the peace process these so-called ‘outposts’ really are.”

The day the delegation arrived to Israel, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu lifted the freeze on building settlements—one of the most contentious issues in the US-brokered Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

“A visit to Hebron painfully revealed the way in which the commercial center of this Palestinian city of 400,000 had been virtually closed down by the Israeli authorities in order to protect freedom of movement for 450 radical Jewish settlers, provocatively living in the middle of this Palestinian city,” said Rabbi Amy Eilberg, a delegation member from Minnesota, in an opinion editorial she wrote for the *Star Tribune*.

Settlement Watch, a project of the Israeli group Peace Now that monitors and protests the building of settlements, estimates that settlers have built 100 ‘outposts’ on occupied territories—at the cost of approximately 556 million dollars a year.

“The route of the wall/separation barrier is frequently determined by the needs of expanding Jewish settlements in the West Bank rather than by security needs alone,” noted Rabbi Eilberg. But Eilberg is not discouraged.

“As Palestinians and Israelis alike wait to see whether the latest round of talks will finally chart a course toward the end of the conflict, I leave the region with both deep pain and profound respect for the many unsung heroes on the ground who courageously work for a just peace,” said Eilberg.

Mairead Maguire, who won a Nobel Peace Prize in 1976 for her work in ending sectarian violence and bringing peace to Northern Ireland, had planned to be part of the women’s peace delegation. However when she arrived to Tel Aviv’s Ben-Gurion airport last week, Israeli officials refused her entry into the country and tried to deport the 66-year-old activist. Maguire’s lawyers appealed the deportation. Seven days later—in which Maguire lived in a detention cell at the airport—the Israeli Supreme Court refused Maguire’s appeal and she was deported.

The delegation plans to release a full report on its visit to Israel and Palestine.

For more information, please contact:

Rachel Vincent

Nobel Women’s Initiative

613-276-9030 or 613-569-8400, ext. 113.