

CSW Networking Event: Opening Remarks

This year's CSW has been devoted to an examination of the issues that impact rural women. Next year, the CSW will examine women and security. These concerns are fundamentally connected.

Our own lens on women, peace and security is a participation lens. Not because we believe that women are innately superior, and not because we discount the many ways that women continue to be violated, denigrated, and humiliated in far too many contexts.

We preach participation for the simple reason that the solution to many of our global problems – and to many of the legacy abuses that continue to impact women's lives – lie in the abundant application of what we continue to discount at our peril – so many women's skills, so much women's energy, so many women's dreams.

You are not in this place, advocating at the heart of global governance, because you are a woman. You're here because you're good. You are highly skilled. But you're not skilled at everything. We all are far from being good at everything. Here, our skills are generally biased by urban culture, sanctioned mostly by school, and elitist in their value assumptions. We know how to write briefing papers and schmooze with diplomats. We know how to launch outreach campaigns and create brands for our issues and organizations. We're very good at avoiding conflict and keeping up walls that divide our personal and professional lives. We embrace the anonymity of the city, but still expect lots of positive attention on the job and in our relationships.

Rural women often have a different skills set. They raise more children. They have a closer relationship to the land. They fix

things instead of replace them. They take care of older relatives and cover up for abusive ones. They watch other people make change on television. They also watch the values that guide their lives get ridiculed – including on television. They make more time for religion. They don't whine when life gets tough on them. They want things for others as much as they want things for themselves. They generally don't forget where they came from. They have a (sometimes overly) humble view of their place in the world.

And in too many cases, they are very insecure. Natural catastrophes like the tornadoes that ravaged states from Indiana to Alabama and the huge waves that crushed rural Japan are part of that. Poor harvests and disappearing manufacturing opportunities are another. Inadequate access for sick children to capable doctors and hospitals is yet another. And guns. From Libya to Oklahoma, lots and lots of guns in all types of places where they probably don't belong.

From our standpoint, there is perhaps no obstacle to women's full participation quite like an unreliable security sector. In many parts of the world, in some parts of this country as well, the risks that women take to claim their place at the policy table are simply too high. Too high for themselves. Much too high for their families.

And the risks in rural areas are generally higher than in urban ones. In the countryside it is harder to be anonymous. There are fewer places to hide, fewer ways to blend. I was stalked once by a couple of ex-cons while living in a cabin at the end of a long North Carolina road. There was no one to call out to and no one to call. There is a deep and often menacing nighttime darkness in rural areas that feeds an active fantasy life and that city folks simply cannot imagine.

Many of the most gruesome atrocities that have recently taken place

in the world occurred in rural areas – in the Eastern DRC, in Darfur, in the Tamil areas of Sri Lanka and in many other places beyond the glare of media and policy. There is a vulnerability in these places that is simply beyond our knowing. But we must not lose sight. We in the cities who too often make nothing but money, grow nothing but hair, preserve nothing but good parking spaces, owe much to the areas that produce our food, our drinking water, our minerals, our recreation. We also owe much to the women who raise sturdy kids of character who will continue to produce our necessities while we, too often, mock their lack of sophistication and income.

If we want to ensure full policy participation by women, we must do more to guarantee predictable, transparent, accountable security. And the places that need it the most are often the rural places. Thus, there is a link between the concerns of this year's and next year's CSW – a link that binds disarmament and gender advocates, and brings culture and agriculture into some healthy symbiosis.

These are the links that Melina and others will pursue over the next year. These are the links that will define the success of our efforts to fill policy to the brim with women's skills. These are the links that help make spaces for the women who grow their own beans, and mend their own dresses, and travel for hours to care for a sick friend (or go to Walmart), and who are usually too tough to think of themselves as only a victim. Our task is to help lower the security risks to participation for these women and ensure that a place is set for them at the policy table. Thank you for your involvement in work that may well determine whether we solve our most glaring problems, or are overcome by them.