

The Global Women's Peace Network a New Culture of Leadership and Living

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Speech at Opening Session by Carolyn Handschin, President WFWP- Europe



What qualities of leadership are needed in these challenging times? To answer that, we need to ask, "What are the challenges" of our day? Poverty, loneliness and depression, juvenile delinquency, unemployment, corruption and bad governance, low quality education- and access, materialism, apathy, violence at school, work and home, lost childhood and early maturity, substance abuse, peer pressure- and all accelerated by the speed of the social media. Can women's leadership and more feminine attributes in governance help prevent or solve today's problems? Do we believe that? Why? If we aren't convinced, no one else will be either.

Most of the issues we are confronting today and many of the choices we make can be traced back to the influence of parents and family. Arguably the leadership role that has the potential to most profoundly influence the life course of another individual is that of a parent or early childhood nurturer.

It is therefore not only that feminine leadership and wisdom is needed in government policy-making or corporate management, but that feminine

leadership in families, specifically, the role of mother, must be clearly understood and protected. In some nations in Europe, the notion of mother (and father) is being replaced with a generic noun. Who could come to such a conclusion without anticipating the long-term dangers to our children and to the future of our world? If mothers themselves or grateful sons and daughters who value their mother's influence do not organize themselves and fight for what their mind, heart and soul tells them is so critical, then who will? I have read so many autobiographies of women and men that I admire. Without exception, the guidance, love and example of parents have played a large part in their achievements and quality of character development.

There are many issues like this- where the solutions seem to be worked out in a vacuum by "experts" who are lost in their own theories and experiments. They keep pushing their theories further, but who have unfortunately lost any sense of essential, long-term life priorities. Almost without the general population realizing it, over the recent decades, some of our most fundamental norms and values

have been relativized. And because we've taken so long to wake up, much has been already institutionalized in our schools' curricula, and policy law. For some of us, the real wake-up call is in seeing how our children have been affected by the years of trying to justify the ethical or religious values they learned at home with the rigorous effort made to remove values in school and society- but actually ending up by vigorously promoting confused and destructive values and behaviors. It is a dangerous time and the leadership that is needed is that which understands what is good and recognizes that the most perilous threats are those that attack our core value systems.

When things are in motion sometimes the current seems unstoppable. Now, however the political and social landscape is shifting -and that' can be good if it allows reflection and regrouping. People in the USA and in some European nations are realizing that a decision -making elite has been deciding their future without taking their real concerns to heart- and are finding strength to raise their voices and demand change. Leadership is critical in this moment and it is a time of opportunity to appeal to common sense and innate goodness of people. Should we leave this up to populist leaders who have caught the ear of the people- or should we continue to insist upon the agenda we want?

Part of our agenda for this meeting is to compare, develop and distribute curricula counterproposals to our confused western value system.

We cannot all be politicians or public figures, or but we all are influencers in our circles.

This is a rallying call and a time for women of good conscience, concern, talent and experience to sit together in thought and to separate the right from the wrong ideas and then to move together in action. Our strength will be in our "right" and our numbers.

During our WFWP-Europe annual meeting in Prague last year, we visited the Czech Parliament. We had a chance to speak with some women parliamentarians there. During one discussion over coffee, our delegation shared some of these same ideas. Just before getting up to leave, this very reputable woman MP thanked us for giving her hope and quietly confessed that she had a similar vision and passion upon entering politics. She realized how she, as a woman without much support in her concerns, had to compromise or reset her goals along the way- and regretted it.

And again, just 2 weeks ago in Zurich, Switzerland, our Women's Federation President, Goya

Cheytanov arranged a luncheon for our WFWP delegation with a current Swiss Parliamentarian from the Christian Democrat Party. It was a very similar experience as we shared our vision, strategy and some projects of the Women's Federation. She told us that her course as a young woman politician had been very difficult. She was again just re-elected and she seems to be very successful.

Although she didn't give up she said sadly that she did have to give in for less than she had hoped to change. We listened to each other and went deeper and deeper into what we as women leaders really want to provide to our communities -and what are the obstacles. Probably our most profound moments were when we spoke at the end about our children and could sense an automatic transferal of that longing for the happiness and success of our concerns and joy's as parents to our concern and strategy in politics and activism. When I came home and shared this with one of my daughters and saw how she was moved, I was reminded that this isn't just something triggered when we give birth, but something deeper about femininity and the capacity to care in a unique way, perhaps also a preparation for eventual motherhood. Nature is like that.

After 20 years building up grassroots programs and developing personal leadership skills, WFWP Founders gave a new mandate to WFWPI in July 2012. We were asked to dare to reach out beyond our "comfort zone" with the creation of a "Global Women's Peace Network". Our reach should go much further and deeper and we should seek partnerships with like-minded women and their organizations because we need a global mobilization that would start small but powerful. Dr. Moon often spoke to us about the dawning of the Era of Women and the importance for the shift from logic of power to logic of love. We were warned that we would see the opportunities and that we shouldn't shy away. I see this happening around me- at the UN, in my local community. Humanity- and even God, they would say, is hoping we can rise to the occasion. Women were given their intuition for a reason- to be developed and finetuned the more we use it wisely. We've all experienced that raising our children or caring for those around us. I am still in the process of helping my last 2 girls though their teenage woes- and as you know, it requires incredible wisdom, delicacy and concern for detail. There is no guidebook.

Is it different in the broader sphere of governance and politics? One can sense: leaders need to be able to navigate through the daily opportunities and dangers- finding the right time and words to

convince, to mediate, to disagree but always with concern for their constituents wellbeing foremost in mind. If women of today can catch the spark and help one another to bring in those vital, but sorely missing elements to leadership, there is a hope for transformation. It isn't guaranteed, nor easy that we can cultivate such empathy, concern, willingness to sacrifice- beyond our own families. The call is here and the opportunities seem to be growing.

Instructions for the building up of the GWPN were basic:

- Education: Protect and promote the natural goodness of youth by providing a safe and environment that will prepare them to live in a culture of peace and shared prosperity, which they should have been trained for in their families.

- Advocacy: Non-governmental organizations, especially women's should Influence governance and policy making, as well as spread awareness in society about the priorities that have been shuffled.
- Networking: lead by example with a paradigm of one human family in mind.

Men and women have different ways of problem solving, but the starting point of shared leadership is common concern- as in a family. I see it with my husband, the moments that I feel the most love and warmth for him isn't necessarily when he brings me flowers, but when I see him in action loving others. Can bring that love-ability out in one another? My thinking is that we women, given our capacities for child bearing and as nurturers and peacemakers, have the greater portion of responsibility to make this work!!!



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