

# Women, Third World and International Peace

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## Introduction

There are four crises endangering the planet: depletion of resources; the population explosion; pollution and other dangers to the ecology and large scale violence among human beings. The first three dangers to our planet need institutions of global supervision and control. But the worst danger concerns large-scale human violence, including the danger of nuclear war.<sup>1</sup>

Peace is the one human condition that is most desired and yet has proved most elusive at all levels of human interactions. In this regard, when we talk about "peace," we are not merely referring to the absence of war in the conventional sense, we are also referring to the absence of all other forms of violence—be they physical, systemic, institutional or psychological. Thus a given country that may not be engaged in any military confrontation with another, may be said to be at "war" within itself and/or between itself and others, if non-military human conditions and interactions are taken into consideration. In this connection, we cannot have International Peace as long as, for example, mass poverty, coupled with mass illiteracy, population explosion and food crises abound in most regions of the underdeveloped world. Indeed in situations such as those of the Sahel and Ethiopia, where human survival is threatened by starvation, it may be virtually impossible to convince the victims that the greatest threat to peace in the world is nuclear war. In other words, it is only well fed, well sheltered, well clothed and well informed human beings who would be disposed to deliberate over issues of international peace, particularly matters pertaining to the negative effects of nuclear technology. Their opposites are likely to be too preoccupied with the local social, economic and political problems that affect their basic survival, to be bothered by a relatively distant threat, such as nuclear weapons. The majority of "Third World" peoples are in this category.

This is not to underestimate the fact that nuclear weapons pose a very serious threat to human kind as a whole. Rather, it is to underscore the fact that, if we have to seriously consider ways and means of averting a nuclear war, we have also to consider and deal with the more basic forms of human vio-

lence, as exemplified by the gross inequalities and social injustices that exist at all levels of human interaction.

What is being suggested here is that, as long as the majority of humanity remains impoverished and marginalised, tensions and conflicts that have become such a familiar feature of many Third World countries are likely to continue and to deteriorate, with negative implications for global security and peace. Similarly, the attainment of lasting peace would require not only substantial women's participation in peace negotiations, but more fundamentally, that the existing social, economic and political structures perpetuating sexual inequalities and unfair division of labour favouring the male gender should be abolished.

## Poverty and Militarisation of the Third World: Implications for World Peace

That the world is divided into North and South as well as into First, Second and Third (and possibly even Fourth) Worlds, is in itself an indication, on the one hand, of the differences in power and wealth that separate the "haves" from the "have nots," and on the other, the ideological differences that form the basis of East-West conflicts and contribute to the impoverishment and militarisation of "Third World" countries.

Comprising more than two-thirds of humanity, Third World countries have the unenviable distinction of being most populous as well as being super poor. This reality is most glaringly manifested in all manner of economic, social and political crises ranging from food and energy crises, civil wars, military coups, social disintegration and economic collapse in the post-world war two era.

Ironically, it has been precisely during this post-world war two period of upheavals in Third World countries, that some Westerners, quite understandably, have boasted of having enjoyed the longest period of peace in history, because of the deterrent effect of the presence of nuclear weapons:

The longest period of peace in European history is inconceivable without the war preventing effect of nuclear weapons. During the same time span more than

a hundred wars have taken place in Asia, Africa and Latin America, where the numbers of dead, wounded and refugees run into millions.<sup>2</sup>

Besides the fact that the continuous increase of nuclear weapons has led many people to cast serious doubts on their future effectiveness in preventing a major conventional war, and hence the concern over the imminent possibility of their being employed in such a war, there is also the fact that arms race in the First and Second Worlds has contributed to the impoverishment and militarisation of the Third World countries.

Indeed, if one considers that most of the post-1945 regional wars in Third World countries have been fought with arms supplied by the industrialised countries and that these major powers have on many occasions militarily intervened in these localised Third World conflicts, one is bound to cast very serious doubt as to the "peacefulness" that some Westerners claim to have characterised post world war two Western societies. In this connection, it could be argued that, although post-1945 regional wars have tended to take place within the countries of Latin America, Africa and Asia, they have often been instigated by the same major nuclear powers who would want to keep the Third World as a nuclear free zone. Indeed, there have been numerous incidents since 1945 in which external powers have sought to influence the outcome of events in the Third World through the use of military power. For example, the 1950 North Korean invasion of South Korea prompted a significant use of American and other Western armed forces (particularly British and French forces). In the 1960s, there was significant American military involvement in Indochina, as was British, French and Belgian involvement in their former colonies, where they sought to influence the outcome of local political conflicts following the granting of formal independence to the latter. Such influence in some cases continued into the 1970s and 1980s, as exemplified by the use of Belgian troops in Zaire's Shaba Province in 1978 and French involvement in Chad since the mid-1960s through to the 1980s.

Besides Western powers, Eastern Block countries, particularly the Soviet Union, have also become increasingly involved in Third World countries, particularly since the mid-1960s, as depicted by Soviet military intervention in Angola in 1976 and Afghanistan in 1979.

The point to be underscored here is that, while the major nuclear powers may not have been directly engaged in any conventional war within or between themselves, they certainly have been far from peaceful as they obviously have been

engaged in wars by proxy with Third World countries serving as their "playground(s)." Further, the major powers have continued to employ Third World countries as testing grounds for new nuclear weaponry. This habit has continued despite the 1968 Test Ban Treaty, of which many of the nuclear states are signatories.

To the extent then that the major nuclear states continue to promote rather than discourage limited wars in Third World countries, in addition to exposing millions of local people to the dangers of radiation resulting from nuclear tests, any attempts to restore international peace and preempt a global (nuclear) war would have to seriously consider a long-term solution to the problem of major power intervention in Third World conflicts, as well as their nuclear presence in the form of conducting nuclear tests.

Apart from the militarisation of Third World countries that result from major power military involvement and intervention in local conflicts, there is also the traditional super-power competition in search of spheres of influence in small underdeveloped countries. Despite their nonalignment policy, some of these small countries act against their better judgement and grant military bases or facilities to one of the major nuclear powers. More often than not, a military base is granted in exchange for economic or military "aid." Thus, for example, much as African states at independence wanted to keep the Indian Ocean as a "Zone of Peace"—free from American and Soviet military installations—they have not succeeded in keeping it so. Indeed, some of the African states which border the Indian Ocean have themselves ceased to be, as it were, zones of peace since they not only house some of the major power military installations, but they are also likely to have joined the arms race.

Joining the arms race is partially a response by Third World leaders to growing conflicts and instabilities characterising their societies. Unable or unwilling to deal with the underlying problems of mass poverty that cause these conflicts, they turn themselves into military fortresses, in search of elusive peace and security. Again the major nuclear states which may have vested interests in maintaining the status quo in a given Third World country, foster the dictatorial regime and even encourage it to increase its military expenditure in the midst of what might be a serious economic crisis.

But the militaristic tendency of Third World leaders has to be viewed not only as a consequence of their political insecurity, but also as deriving from frustration and feeling of powerlessness in global relations. In this connection, they generally believe that their poverty, which is their major source of

powerlessness and internal conflicts, can largely be blamed on the more industrialised countries, whom they accuse of having robbed them of their wealth through colonialism and imperialistic relations. In this regard, the partitioning of the colonies without any regard for the existing cultural and linguistic affinities is blamed for many of the border and ethnic conflicts in these underdeveloped countries. Further still, the colonially generated incorporations of Third World countries into the world capitalist system is singled out as largely contributing to the general underdevelopment of these countries and to their inability to effectively participate and influence global decisions, even on issues that directly affect them, for example, food and energy issues.

Thus, Third World countries—*cum*—“South” states, since the beginning of the 1970s, have been demanding a New International Economic Order. This would involve the “North”—*cum*—industrialised states agreeing to a more equitable redistribution of world resources, as well as the establishment of trade, aid and tariff relations that favour the now disadvantaged “South” countries.

The North-South dialogue which arose out of this demand for a New International Economic Order has been largely unfruitful as the Northern countries do not feel indebted or in any way obligated to comply with the wishes of the Southern states, nor are they willing to give up their economic affluence and world political dominance in the name of such moral considerations as the need for global equity.

Having failed then to impress upon the North countries the need for a New International Economic Order, the Third World countries, in frustration, have considered and even attempted various ways of marshalling enough bargaining power. For example, they have considered and attempted forming commodity cartels along the lines of OPEC, but they have not been successful as the majority of them have nothing similar (in terms of strategic importance) to the OPEC oil weapon. Lack of similar leverage to enable the rest of the Third World to alter effectively the distribution of world resources and power within the existing institutional framework has led some of these countries to consider the path of confrontation under the umbrella of “Trade Union of the Poor.” In President Nyerere’s words:

to what extent the cooperation among the poor becomes a Trade Union of the poor, acting in combination against the rich, depends to a great extent on the actions of the rich world. Confrontation is not a desired strategy of the weak; but if reason, justice and dialogue all fail to bring international changes needed to win the war

against world poverty, then economic conflict is bound to follow.<sup>3</sup>

This strategy of confrontation, in some cases, has taken the form of a more deadly weapon than oil power—nuclear power. Indeed, the steady increase in the number of Third World countries that have acquired nuclear capability or declared their intention to go nuclear<sup>4</sup> makes it rather obvious that these small weak states are determined to enhance their power and bargaining position with industrialised states, even if joining the nuclear arms race is what it takes. Even countries of Black Africa which, at independence in the 1960s were vehemently opposed to nuclear proliferation and even signed the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, no longer seem as convinced of the wisdom of remaining out of the nuclear arms race. Apart from the perceived necessity of improving their individual and collective power positions, African countries have been given added urgency by the nuclearisation of their most immediate enemy—white ruled South Africa. Thus, among those often mentioned in the line up for nuclear status are Nigeria, Egypt, Libya and possibly Zaire as well.<sup>5</sup>

In this connection Third World countries, and Black Africa in particular, seem to be caught in the dilemma whereby there is the obvious need to spend their scarce resources to improve the living standards of their poverty stricken populations. There is also the need to attain a substantial power position as leverage to enable them to become effective and influential participants in global forums where decisions regarding such important issues as the ways and means of attaining international peace and equitable distribution of world resources are made. In the words of Tunde Adeniran:

Africa is indeed caught in a dilemma because the reality that must be faced, is that this being a world in which the positions of states and the interrelationships among them are definable mainly in terms of power relations, no state or group of states can negotiate on, or put a stop to, nuclear proliferation from a position of absolute weakness. Substantial power is needed before successful bargaining or deterrence can be ensured—especially in view of the domino effect of South Africa’s capability. But what seems to be mostly at stake now is survival and self-determination.<sup>6</sup>

But some observers do not even see why Africa should be caught in a dilemma, since they view nuclearisation as a logical and necessary step in the context of the contemporary global economical power structure. Those who subscribe to this view argue that the idea of keeping the Third World as a

Nuclear Free Zone is not only paternalistic, but is also a subtle strategy by the major powers to keep the world divided into the (nuclear) "haves" and "have-nots," thus ensuring the former of perpetual military monopoly. Indeed, according to this view, the strategy of nuclear nonproliferation in the Third World subtracts from, rather than adds to, the chances of attaining world peace. In other words, world peace in the coming decades may, to some considerable extent, depend on nuclear proliferation in the Third World. In the words of Ali Mazrui:

The Third World can force the north to retreat from the brink of this global genocide only by engaging in a Nuclear Russian roulette for a short while. The Third World must briefly encourage nuclear proliferation as a strategy of shocking all nations (including the super powers) to give up the nuclear game altogether. Big Power opposition to nuclear proliferation is not merely a special case of military monopoly and imperialism. It also encourages the massive nuclear powers to underestimate the dangers of the game. Only when unstable Third World rulers acquire these dangerous toys will the super powers be converted to total military denuclearization. Nuclear proliferation, dangerous as it is, is the inescapable culture shock needed to force a really fundamental reappraisal. Modern genocide thus demands a Nuclear Russian roulette by the Third World to create a climate of hopefully manageable crisis. Only then will this most dangerous of the traditions of combat (the genocide tradition) be forced back from the brink of homicide.<sup>7</sup>

Those who subscribe to the above view point to India as a case in point that has benefitted from going nuclear. It is thus argued that, whereas the death of Nehru reduced India's stature as a Third World leader, the explosion of a nuclear device ten years later helped to restore it.

A nuclearised India is an India with additional credentials to help control the destiny of South Asia as a whole.<sup>8</sup>

Whether or not one shares the views of Ali Mazrui and other like-minded scholars regarding nuclear proliferation in the Third World, one would still have to face up to the fact that there is a trend towards nuclearisation of Third World countries, although the current capability of these countries may not pose any significant threat to world peace at the present time.

Nevertheless, the point that needs to be underscored is that, if the leaders of the First and Second Worlds continue to be

insensitive to the basic issues affecting the survival of 80 percent of the world's total population who live in the Third World, then nuclear proliferation in the South is likely to continue, thus, further reducing the chances of attaining international peace through denuclearisation and nuclear nonproliferation. Indeed, as one scholar has rightly put it:

the contemporary world's greatest challenge lies ultimately in the discovery of a formula to integrate science and technology into the struggle against misery, poverty and the misuse of economic and military power.<sup>9</sup>

What is being suggested here is that, as long as the majority of humanity remains impoverished and marginalised, the tensions and conflicts that have become such a familiar feature of many Third World countries are likely to continue, with serious negative implications for global security and peace. In this connection, while the major burden of developing the Third World countries lies with these countries themselves, the success of any development efforts made would not only require a restructuring of their local, economic, social and political orders, but it would also require an alternative structure of world political, economic and military order. The latter would require greater appreciation and emphasis on the basic economic and technological issues that face the world and keep it divided and less emphasis on sheer military force as the basis of power.

If and when this new economic, political and military order is realized,

(even) the Third World countries can also feel more secure and, instead of turning themselves into military fortresses in the sea of economic misery and underdevelopment, can direct their energies to discovering latent resources that lie beneath their lands and oceans, utilize their immense manpower for their economic betterment, and eventually achieve a standing in the world that is based on their own strength and dignity. The rhetoric of confrontation that now envelops a deep sense of inferiority and frustration in the Third World can end only when a new framework of relationships at the global level emerges, and the world as a whole can turn away from the suicidal logic of an arms race escalating all over the place, to a logic of survival based on clear appreciation of the real issues that divide the world.<sup>10</sup>

Towards this end, the peoples of Eastern and Western Europe have a lot they can contribute, for example, by disengaging themselves from military alliances with the two super powers who have held the world at ransom for more than a

quarter of a century and instead, joining forces with the people of the Third World to create a new structure of unity, based on the acceptance of the diffusion of power and differentiation within each power bloc. This would eventually make obsolete the ideological division between capitalist West and socialist East, as well as make military power less and less relevant in the ordering of interstate relationships. When the basis of power shifts from sheer military force to a new economic and political order, it may also become possible to reduce the importance of military superiority and move towards global disarmament.

The diffusion of power within the new international order should be democratic enough to incorporate not only all nation-states into global decision making, but also various nonstate actors, such as women, who so far have been largely excluded.

#### **Women and International Peace Negotiations**

While acknowledging the fact that in any organised community there have to be leaders who should guide and act for and on behalf of the entire community, there is no inherent justification for the fact that worldwide it is men who dominate almost all the vital decision-making positions. Thus, in the global distribution of resources and power, women have for centuries occupied a very peripheral and powerless position. In this respect, women have a lot in common with the Third World countries. For one, they form more than half of humankind—outnumbering men by at least one percent in most countries. More important, perhaps, is the fact that like Third World countries, they share a great sense of grievance derived from the exploitative and subordinate position they have been accorded historically since the beginning of class society.

In accordance with the role and status that history has allocated to the female gender, they have consequently been largely excluded from participation in negotiations and decision making on all major international issues such as peace negotiations.

And yet, democratic principles alone would suggest that women should be accorded equal representation with men in such vital negotiations, not only because they form more than half of humanity, but also because issues of peace are of as direct relevance and consequence to them, as they are for men. Indeed, one could go further to argue that, in terms of man's inhumanity to his fellow man, women in general have experienced worse forms of violence (be they physical, systemic, institutional or psychological) than their male counterparts.

In this connection, the female gender has historically endured all manner of exploitation and oppression at all levels of human interaction—sexual, racial, national and class levels. This reality is nowhere more glaringly manifested than among Third World women who are subjected to many forms of oppression:

as virtual slave labour in households, unpaid for their work as mothers who create new generations of workers, and as wives or sisters who succor the present ones, as workers, often in marginal jobs and more underpaid than men; and as members of racial minorities or of semi-colonial nations, subject to various economic, legal and social disabilities.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, it is the very totality of women's oppression and its deep entrenchment in the entire economic, political and social structure of the contemporary class society that gives them a special and central role in any struggle that requires fundamental change of the size and magnitude of, for example, global restructuring, in a manner conducive to the attainment of a new, equitable and peaceful international order.

In negotiating peace, therefore, women should be full participants, first and foremost in their capacity as fellow human beings with the men who now patronise these peace forums; secondly, in their capacity as women, with special appreciation and intense desire for peace; and thirdly, in their capacity as mothers, equipped with the special traits of patience and endurance, all of which could become useful in deadlocked and protracted peace negotiations.

Women all over the world are increasingly gaining awareness of the potential they possess and are, hence, combining the struggle for the liberation of the female gender along with that of the rest of humanity. Indeed, through much of the second half of this century women, particularly in the more advanced Western countries, have organised themselves into liberation movements and have individually and jointly fought for the restoration of their rightful position in society, where they can become full participants and realize their full potential in public life in an atmosphere of peace. In recent years they have also organised themselves into peace movements dedicated to finding a peaceful solution to the danger posed by the continuous improvement in the development of both larger and more destructive nuclear weapons. The Coalition of Canadian Women's Groups is one such peace-oriented movement. It is nonpolitical peace organisations such as this which should pressure the political power brokers of the world back to their senses and make them see just

how futile, wasteful, and dreadful this whole exercise in nuclear arms race has become, even from a purely political perspective. In other words, in a nuclear war there would be no winners and, hence, the traditional political goal of war, which was the continuation of politics through military means, would not be realized.

Women's peace groups can, therefore, engage in mediation and even exert political pressure by struggling for greater representation in international forums where these issues are deliberated, and by organising their own international conferences aimed at bringing greater awareness and unity among women on nuclear and other issues that affect peace, development and equality of humanity.

### What is Wrong with Present Peace Negotiations?

The shortcomings of the current peace negotiations viewed from the perspective adopted in this paper include the following:

(1) They are too militaristic and are based on the assumption that the greatest threat to peace in the world today is nuclear weapons. Due to this militaristic conceptualisation of peace and security, vast resources have been devoted to (wasted on) military weapons and personnel in the name of peace keeping around the world.

This conceptualisation of peace and security has consequently tended to ignore the fact that the real and very immediate threat to peace for more than two-thirds of humanity is the crisis of underdevelopment. Furthermore, the immense technological know-how that is now being wasted on developing nuclear weapons could be diverted to solving basic problems that affect all humanity in the energy field, in the medical field (diagnosis and treatment of cancer), in industry (measurement and control of industrial materials) and in agriculture (studies of plant growth and energy absorption).<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, if nuclear technology was diverted towards these types of peaceful applications, the goal of disarmament would be realised along with that of human development. In other words, since the nuclear weapons no longer serve the original purpose of deterrence and have become wasteful and counterproductive, nuclear powers should now concentrate on converting nuclear know-how to positive use, while negotiating on the best strategy of getting rid of the existing nuclear stockpiles.

(2) They exclude too many categories of people that ought to be represented. Except for the United Nation's Committee

on Disarmament, all major peace negotiations, such as the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) meetings, have been confined to the top political and military leadership of the two super powers with a handful of carefully chosen advisors. It is as if the rest of the world's peoples have nothing to contribute to an issue that has a direct bearing on their future survival or destruction.

This exclusiveness is derived in part from the traditional assumption in international relations that, in matters of war and peace, private citizens can do little about them. Furthermore, decisions regarding nuclear weapons—their development, their deployment and the circumstances in which they might be used—traditionally have been viewed as the province of the major nuclear powers and their expert advisors, in the form of military planners and physicists, who deliberately shroud nuclear technology with mystery and secrecy, thus ensuring the exclusion of ordinary citizens. And yet, there is no other technology that so directly affects all our lives, nor are there other decisions whose outcomes have a more profound effect upon the entire fabric of international life, than the issue of nuclear weapons.

It is, therefore, being suggested here that for international peace negotiations of this scope to succeed, more participation should be included, *i.e.*, by small nuclear and nonnuclear states, nongovernmental organisations, and particularly by women's groups and peace movements.

(3) The tendency to underestimate the tensions and armed conflicts in Third World countries and, hence, the failure to take seriously the increasing military build up of conventional and nuclear weapons, may be harder to control at a later date unless measures are taken now to deal with the underlying economic and political causes.

### Conclusion

From the foregoing it becomes clear that the major threat to international peace is not nuclear weapons *per se*. Indeed, the majority of the world's peoples do not even regard the nuclear arms race as a direct threat to themselves, as they are preoccupied with more immediate and basic problems of survival. Furthermore, nuclear technology as such does not have to be employed for destructive purposes as it can be converted to positive use, which can benefit millions of people whose lives may be threatened by hunger or terminal diseases such as cancer.

The greatest threat to international peace lies within the existing global structure of power and wealth, which shapes

the attitudes and behaviour of its various actors in a non-peaceful and destructive direction. In this connection, the inequalities and competition that characterise the world community of nations have increasingly become more evident as nuclear possession (or the threat to become a nuclear power) has come to be viewed as a demonstration of strength or a symbol of national power. Even Third World countries which are already faced with the crisis of underdevelopment are slowly but steadily joining the nuclear arms race. For these poor Third World countries, whose negotiation capability with the developed countries of the North has perennially been hampered by their powerlessness, going nuclear seems to be a feasible means of becoming more effective and influential actors in the international system. In this regard, although most Third World countries have not yet acquired nuclear capability, the trend is already there; and it is, therefore, just a matter of time before most of them join the nuclear arms race.

This potentially dangerous trend can, however, be averted if the major nuclear power brokers are willing to enter into negotiations leading to the redressing of the existing imbalance in the global distribution of resources, and to shift from military to nonmilitary emphasis as a basis of power. The underdeveloped countries should not just stand by like innocent victims waiting for the world system to change in their favour. Indeed, the leaders of these states should devise ways and means of realising national self-reliance and a margin of autonomy through the mobilisation and full utilisation of all the available human and natural resources within their states. In so doing, they would raise domestic productivity and capacity which can then be converted into the negotiating power needed to force favourable changes in the world system. Towards this end, since women in underdeveloped countries already bear the greatest burden in the production of both labour and national wealth, they should be accorded a democratic environment, thus facilitating their ability for maximum contribution to both social production and decision making on developmental issues of national and international concern.

#### NOTES

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