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Dignity, essential to find one's identity as a woman

Basic thoughts on Dignity

Ladies and gentlemen,
I am honored to be with you for this important gathering of singularly accomplished women. I want to take this opportunity to help frame the connection between dignity of women and empowering women to form alliances to create a culture of peace.

In 2000 the Security Council adopted resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. The resolution was a landmark in many aspects. It emphasized the importance of women's full and equal participation in all efforts for peace and security -- before, during and after conflict.

At the 2005 World Summit held at the United Nations, leaders declared that gender equality and human rights for all are essential to advancing development, peace and security.

Let us see, what the situation today is: Reality lags far behind the rhetoric of declarations. For example:

- Two-thirds of the world's 876 million illiterates are women, and three-fifths of the 115 million children out of school are girls;
- Just 15.6% of members elected to parliaments (both houses combined) in the world are women;
- There is no country in the world where women earn as much as men. On average women earn from 50% to 80 % of men's wages;

- Since the founding of the United Nations, of the 49 presidents of the General Assembly elected since 1945, only two were women;
- There has been no woman Secretary General of the United Nations, nor has there been a woman Director General of UNESCO.

Women's work continues to be undervalued, underpaid, or not paid at all. Out of more than 100 million children who are not in school, the majority are girls. Out of more than 800 million adults who cannot read, the majority are women. Violence against women and girls continues unabated in every continent, country and culture.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, launching a global campaign to end violence against women, (Febr.25th 08) said:

"I call on men around the world to lead by example: to make clear that violence against women is an act perpetrated by a coward, and that speaking up against it is a badge of honour."

WFP Europe is committed to the advancement of women for peace and security; recognising each person's individual value. We promote activities that encourage development towards meeting Millennium Development Goal No.3, of Gender Equality and Gender Mainstreaming in all fields of life.

WFP Europe contributes to this goal with the "Dignity of Women" campaign.

I would like to brief you with some basic thoughts on the relationship of MDG 3 and this project.

Each Woman's situation is different, according to the society, religious, cultural and racial background and the development

of the country where she lives. Therefore to empower women, we need to meet their needs accordingly.

Firstly: women need to receive basic nutrition, education, health care and financial support.

In Europe and the States the Women's Movement has inspired a paradigm shift in society. Just think about the right to vote, the right to receive education and the right to gain full employment.

However in Europe violence towards women up to today constitutes by far the most frequent violation of human rights.

We are faced with the continuous degradation of women in many areas, such as prostitution, pornography, advertisement, FGM, widow burning, honor killing and rape as part of war strategy

Within Europe, the sex trade has an annual turnover of billions of Euros. According to estimations by the UN with regard to Europe, 500.000 women – mostly Eastern Europeans- are being abducted yearly and forced into prostitution.

At no other time in history, has such a proliferation of pornography in books, magazines, videos, films and television existed. With the help of the media, a billion dollar industry conveys the message that the brutalizing, torture, enslavement, mutilation, contempt and humiliation of the female sex are equivalent to sexual pleasure.

Domestic violence is an issue many times ignored – yet, since decades homes exist for battered women and children, taking refuge from the dangers of violence, sexual intimidation and bodily and psychological abuse.

The view of woman is distorted and she is degraded merely to the role of sexual object. This opens the door to violence against women and offends the very dignity of woman. The

misuse of woman's body and the degradation of sexuality in media are just the beginning of the most common human rights violation in the world today - the abuse of women.

These are urgent problems in the field of the status of women requiring immediate attention. Considering the amazing God-given human potential in each woman this state of affairs is unforgivable.

The awareness of dignity in the human society, especially regarding the dignity of women is therefore one of the most important prevention aspects regarding all kinds of violence against women, men and children such as trafficking, forced prostitution and domestic violence, physical and /or psychologically.

The dignity of women is, first and foremost, a human right.

The Vienna Declaration and Program of Action (adopted in 1993) stated that the human rights of women and the girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of human rights.

Please allow me to give a short overview of what we have discussed in the previous WFWP conferences on the Dignity of Women in detail.

Goal of Campaign

Building upon the remarkable framework of human rights legislation to prevent conflict and promote peace and prosperity among and within nations and

Knowing that human trafficking, sexual exploitation, domestic violence and all forms of abuse constitute an unacceptable violence against women and children that damages the whole fabric of the society and is irreconcilable with a culture rooted in

the dignity and value of the human being, the goal of the campaign "Dignity of Women" is first of all *creating awareness of human dignity*

How do we define "Dignity"?

My mother tongue is German. From the old German language, 'wirdi', or 'wirde' we recognize a linguistic connection with the term 'value'. Surely similar clues can be found in different languages and provide insight into content and significance.

The first to have formulated the term 'dignity of the human being' was the Renaissance-philosopher Pico della Mirandola in his speech 'De hominis dignitate' (Latin translation: "About the dignity of the human being") (1486/87).

Dignity is an inherent nature, an innate character of humans, independent from any other characteristics such as age, intelligence, abilities and sex. The philosopher Immanuel Kant spoke of the universal dignity within each human being.

There are two definitions of dignity which complement each other: Dignity as a feature and dignity as commission, in the sense of civic participation.

Dignity as a feature:

Dignity as a feature is stated in the preamble of the declaration of human rights:

Whereas *recognition of the inherent dignity*, and of the equal inalienable rights of all members of the human family: *is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world ...*,
Article 1. *All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.*

Dignity as commission/ civic participation is the idea of ethical autonomy of people as we find in the Enlightenment and also in the philosophy of Kant. Dignity as civic participation can be directed to the individual as well as to society.

Dignity as civic participation directed to the society is defined in the Human rights declaration: "The dignity of human being is inviolable. It is the duty of all governmental institutions, to respect and protect it. "

In the preamble is stated:the peoples of the United Nations have ... reaffirmed their *faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women* and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.

Article 7 of the UNHRD says:" *All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of the Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.*

The "Dignity of Women" project has basically two aspects.

One is restoring the image of womanhood in society. Our slogan is "Let us awaken human awareness fully to the original value and the original beauty of the woman!"

The other is inspiring women to feel the beauty and value of true femininity, to discover their immanent, God given dignity and to live it.

How can we find a way of relating to our dignity?

We need to think about our unique and precious personalities, no matter how ideologies or religions have portrayed women historically.

It is the time to learn to cherish ourselves and realize that we possess special values, capabilities and talents which our society desperately needs.

Becoming aware of our specific feminine qualities will strengthen our self-respect and understanding, that without women and feminine qualities in men respectively, there can be no peace, and no sound development in the society and world. As soon as we manage to embrace these qualities within our consciousness, we will find our dignity. The discovery of our qualities and development of our talents requires our concentration and investment.

Let us look at a few milestones which we discuss in our seminars as orientation along the way to discover our dignity.

One step to discovering our dignity is to be authentic.

What can one lose by living in a genuine way? Someone might reject us because we don't correspond to their concept of womanhood. However, we are ourselves, we are honest and our life becomes valuable and dignified.

Our universal, God-given dignity is much stronger than any evaluation that anyone else can give us. It is our right, to be appreciated as a woman.

We will come to realize that our happiness does not depend on others but rather that it is to be found in ourselves. By awarding ourselves the esteem, confirmation and love which we have previously demanded from others, our heart's desires will be fulfilled and we will be at peace with ourselves, which is the

ideal base for working for peace, we will emanate this peace without fail to our surroundings and be able to see corresponding changes.

Accepting ourselves

In Buddhism, deep empathy for our own humanity is a high aim which entails redemption at the same time. Jesus said: Love your neighbor as you love yourself. This presents a challenge – to accept oneself, on a daily basis, with unconditional love, without placing conditions on oneself, the fulfillment of which, ‘supposedly’, would render us amiable. However, to accept oneself is the most important prerequisite when aiming for success in treating others with more love and care.

Do not remain trapped in feelings of guilt

For centuries, feelings of guilt have accompanied women. The search in the religious interpretations of the Holy Scriptures, about the origin of all difficulties of human life, leads us to the woman being the initiator of the separation from God, the first sinner.

In the Greek Philosophy, too, we find a strong degradation of the woman. Patriarchal education has reinforced this notion. Therefore, it is obvious that we are always very aware of our shortcomings, our guilt and sometimes allow this awareness to stifle us. It is important that we forgive ourselves and do not remain trapped in feelings of guilt. It is healthier to see mistakes as lessons to learn from.

Exploring the aim of our soul

Once we have found the way to our inner queen dignity, all that remains is to discover which strengths, dreams, abilities and desires are within us. I refer to this as exploring the aim or goal, of our soul which means to give a deeper meaning to our life, quite apart from the external responsibilities we have.

Women often suffocate their desires and visions right at their infancy with thoughts such as: 'I cannot do this anyway, I don't have time for this, this is not realistic, I am not strong enough for this, nobody would understand this, and nobody would accept this!' Throughout history, women have experienced many dismissals, have been hurt so frequently that, unconsciously, this became a part of us. That is often the reason, why we cannot realize the goal of our soul! Therefore, let us learn to wish and desire.

The power of a personal vision

I would like to quote Angelika Alliti, an American author and healer.

“What, however, do we find when looking ahead? What remains to be done? Are there unfulfilled wishes lingering? What remains, is the longing for a world which is not dominated by fear, but, by the joy of living.”

Visions and desires are like a fire within us. We do not need to fear it. Let us set them alight and burn brightly.

Living our dignity we become free to walk the path we choose, free for vision, free for vitality. This will strengthen us to fully dedicate ourselves to the task we decide to take on. The free woman within us is a woman who is decisive.

The greatest, internal strength arises from the power of a personal vision. Vision, definite, clear ideas and wishes give us

courage and help us avoid being dominated. These visions may vary greatly in contents, for example regarding our personal future or changes in our town, global themes such as the dignity of humanity, peace in the world, protection of the environment, and the efforts for solving world hunger.

This is the effect of empowering women through helping them to discover their Dignity. Discovering and living our dignity will bring inner peace.

Having inner peace, we live our dignity, live our visions and thus contribute to create the culture of peace.

Therefore the slogan of this conference among the organizing team is:

Dignity goes Peace!

Raising awareness about and “living our dignity” are the first steps of any further steps, the cornerstones for the creation of a “culture of peace”.

I thank every one of you for your commitment, and I look forward to working in partnership with you.