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Challenges to Women's participation in peacebuilding

Dear colleagues, I am very glad to greet you. I am glad to listen to you and I am glad to share information with you.

I would like to thank those who organized this event for the invitation and for the opportunity to take part in this important meeting.

Unfortunately a disproportional approach of the international community to the conflicting sides in all spheres of political and social life cause mistrust on the part of South Ossetia to the international institutions and the values of the western democracy.

And as a consequence – mistrust to the activities of the South Ossetian NGOs cooperating with the international organizations.

The above-mentioned situation complicates our work, while the mistrust towards us only inspires certain regret.

As for our activities in the sphere of peace building, as our experience of working in this field shows, we should not be considering it in a narrow sense. It is a more global problem than we can even imagine.

A disorderly everyday life, lack of the most basic necessary living conditions, lack of schools and hospitals – this is what the life of women in the rural areas looks like. In addition, certainly there are enough problems in the town too.

Under these conditions, women hardly even want to think about the contacts with the other side.

When there are no schools or hospitals in a village or in a town, people do not need contacts with the other side. They just do not need it.

This is true for both conflicting sides.

Contacts are needed where they are purposeful, where there are not other means to solve practical problems. On the other hand, it just will not work to keep people on friendly terms while in one house they luxuriate and in the other one they are being kept in isolation.

Therefore, we try to work in several directions:

1. socio-economical rehabilitation of the society;
2. preparation of the society (education);
3. peace-building

Men occupy more political space in our society and they act politically and in a masculine fashion, building up their work more vertically.

While we, the NGOs – as a product of democratic development, act more democratically and provide more opportunities for self-development.

Peace-building processes in our society are initiated and implemented through civil society, but not through political parties.

I do not touch upon the problem of lack of political dialogue. Unfortunately, it is non-existent.

Nevertheless, we are trying to establish dialogue at the level of civil societies.

Thanks to funding from the Swedish non-governmental organization Kvinna till Kvinna (KTK), two partner organizations: Association of women of South Ossetia for democracy and human rights and the Union of widows and wives of invalids of Georgia, headed by Manana Mebuke, it became possible to organize series of meetings between Georgian and South Ossetian women on a neutral territory after the events of August 2008. Within the framework of this project, the work is underway on familiarization of women with the peace culture, a transformation of hatred into compassion.

We also participate in the format of the "Point of View" dialogue, with representatives of the civil societies of South Ossetia and Georgia, under the aegis of George Mason University. And, if this format is successful than in the first place we have to be thankful to the professor of George Mason University, Susan Allen Nun.

Peace building is an incessant work, to which you have to devote your every second, every minute, every day, the work that no man can do. It can, and it is done in reality, only by women.

We cultivate peace building. We cherish it like a child.

Men cannot do it.

Due to certain global reasons, our society is inert.

After collapse of the Soviet Union, South Ossetia was immediately involved in a conflict which lasted 20 years.

Socio-economic and political problems caused by the conflict, prolonged isolation, closeness, full economic dependence and expectation of benefits that will come from above – contaminated the society with the disease which can be called "victim" syndrome.

Our strategy today is to work on the level of civil society, but not at a higher level.

We work to strengthen the institutions of civil society, to make it more powerful. Today, unfortunately it is weak.

Cooperation with KTK helps us to implement our strategy. Working with them helps to prepare the society, and cooperation with SAFERWORLD, a non-governmental organization based in London helps in socio-economic rehabilitation of society.

However, our work feeds politicians as well: gives basis for activity. We are the compass of their political work.

It is exactly us who work with the community and point out to the politicians clichés relevant for the society.

Severe socio-economic and political conditions at the subconscious level provoke creation of so-called personal "comfort zone."

This is the zone, which includes the family, relatives, work, source of income, personal security. It is a vicious circle.

And it is scary to go beyond this area and to do socially useful work. Because, it's all new, long forgotten ... and fear, not to lose their ZONE ...

Initiating public awareness on the necessity and value of leaving this "zone" is our most important task.

Furthermore, today's reality is that work on the conflict is not perceived as an issue of basic need. Moreover, women are engaged in it. Men say: let them do it. In any case they will not succeed! That's where they are wrong. AND WE DO NOT ARGUE.

This very erratic position of theirs creates for us a broad field for work. We quietly, unnoticed but pay attention absolutely transparently,

1. implement educational programs
2. implement rehabilitation projects
3. create the women peace clubs
4. do our best to get to the higher level – create a political party.

In fact, our work is not visible. It does not bulge out. This is a hidden job. It cannot be touched. But in today's environment, it is our NICHE, and it is more effective.

Such work allows us to sow seeds of peace, then to collect harvest.