

COMMUNITY CORNER: PEACEBUILDING: THINK GLOBALLY, ACT LOCALLY



Over the last two decades, I have been working in the field of family conflict resolution as a family lawyer and mediator. I want to share my journey from local to global-acting locally with my gender equality work, and thinking globally for sustainable development and peacebuilding work.

Mediators Beyond Borders International

When I joined an international not-for-profit organization "Mediators Beyond Borders International" ("MBBI"), I committed to building a more peaceable world, to building local skills for peace, and to promoting mediation worldwide. I was attracted to MBBI for its people-centric approach and emphasis on collaboration and inclusiveness.

Through MBBI, I became part of a global network of peacebuilders. I learned the revolutionary concept of "Positive Peace": "justice for all" that involves the unfolding of conflict in a constructive way, which is broader than "absence of violence". Peace is the process of building resilient and just societies.

Consultative Status to United Nations

MBBI invited me to the United Nations ("UN") Working Group. MBBI has a special NGO consultative status with the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). This led me to participate in activities at the UN platform. In 2018, I was part of MBBI's delegation for two major events held at the UN Headquarters in New York: Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62), and the High-Level Political Forum 2018 (HLPF).

Sustaining the Peace Agenda

The fundamental shift in the UN's approach to peace and conflict came in April 2016 with the concept of "Sustaining Peace", adopted in resolution of the Security Council and General Assembly. This new agenda required a change in mindset from reactive to proactive. Although conflict prevention and Positive Peace are two sides of the same coin, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres has openly told the Security Council that the UN must be "bold and creative" in harnessing the avenues and capacities available for mediation and make prevention its priority.

Symbols of Peace and Non-Violence

When I stepped into the UN Headquarters in New York, I could feel history breathing through the iconic building. It reminded me why the UN is described as a "Parliament of Nations", a voluntary forum created to avoid future wars through preventive diplomacy and dialogue amongst nations. The UN is built on three pillars: peace, human rights, and development.

At the public entrance, a sculpture captured my attention. Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd's "Non-Violence" was a gift of the Government of Luxembourg to the United Nations. It symbolizes non-violence by replicating the revolver with a knotted barrel, with the muzzle pointing upwards, standing tall for peace. The "Meditation Room", a quiet space dedicated to world peace, is known as "a room dedicated to silence in the outward sense and stillness in the inner sense."

CSW62

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is a global policy-making body, dedicated exclusively to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Commission's mandate is to prepare recommendations on promoting women's rights in the political, economic, civil, social, and educational fields. Representatives of Member States, UN entities, and NGO's gathered at the UN Headquarters for the Commission's annual session.

.../continued on page 15

PEACEBUILDING: THINK GLOBALLY, ACT LOCALLY - continued

I attended CSW62 with two other Canadian delegates from MBBI, Mina Vaish and Tricia Morris. At the opening ceremony, the General Assembly Room heard statements from various countries sharing their national policies, legal frameworks, and strategies to accelerate progress on gender equality.

HLPF: Sustainable Development Goals

In 2015, the General Assembly agreed on the *Global Agenda 2030*, with 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are the development targets for 2016 to 2030. The *Agenda 2030* pledges "to leave no one behind".

The Agenda 2030 explicitly recognizes the strong impact of violence and insecurity on development, and vice versa. Particularly, Goal 16 is to "promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels".

In July 2018, I attended the High-Level Political Forum, which is the main UN platform on SDGs for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda at the global level.

Canada's Voluntary National Review (VNR)

On July 17, 2018, Canada presented its first VNR Review report at the HPLF, which highlights Canada's progress and action plan to achieve the 2030 Agenda. According to the SDG Index and Dashboards Report 2017, Canada ranks 17th on SDG index ranking. However, Canada's Voluntary National Review underscores the Canadian government's commitment to implement all 17 SDGs.

Rule of Law and Women's Participation

The Rule of Law is the bedrock upon which the UN is built. In 2012, this high-level declaration covered the importance of judicial systems to informal justice systems, and reaffirmed that the Rule of Law is indispensable for upholding peace and security, encouraging sustainable development, and respecting human rights.

The UN has also recognized that certain obstacles prevent women from accessing their legal rights, resulting in discrimination and inequality, which in turn hampers their ability to live free of violence and contribute to society as full and equal citizens.

The UN Security Council has also recognized the importance of increasing women's participation in resolving conflicts and building peace, particularly at decision-making level, since its landmark Resolution 1325. The Sustaining Peace Agenda recognizes that women's rights are vital to achieving peace and justice, so that all individuals can fulfill their potential with dignity and equality. New evidence from the Geneva Graduate Institute's Broadening Participation Project shows that when women's groups were able to effectively influence the process, a peace agreement was almost always reached and the agreement was more likely to be implemented. The project examined the roles of women's groups (and other groups) in forty peace and transition processes. New statistical research involving a larger dataset also shows that women's participation increases the probability that the peace agreement will last longer.

One important lesson I have learned from this volunteer work is that we have to break down the silos amongst various professions and take an integrated approach for sustainable development and peacebuilding.



Archana Medhekar, B. Sc. LL. M., is a Certified Family Law Specialist and Accredited Family Mediator practicing in Toronto, Ontario. She is a co-chair of the SDG Action Group of MBBI as High Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2019. You can reach her by e-mail at: amlaw@amlaw.ca. Archana is also an AFCC-O Board member, and Newsletter Committee member.