



FOR PEACE+EDUCATION

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## VANCOUVER PEACE SUMMIT 2009

Tuesday, September 29, 2009 – Orpheum Theatre, Vancouver, B.C.

### **Women and Peace-building**

**Dialogues between: Maria Shriver and Jody Williams; Maria Shriver and His Holiness The Dalai Lama. Panel discussion: His Holiness The Dalai Lama, Ela Bhatt, Fazle Hasan Abed, Swanee Hunt, Kim Campbell, Peter Buffett. Moderator: Susan Davis.**

These sessions featured dialogues among global leaders in the fields of education, politics, arts, philanthropy, business, and community activism. The heart of their conversation was women's contribution to creating a peaceful and compassionate world.

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 "We're the architects of change." – *Jody Williams*  
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The first dialogue was between author, journalist and humanitarian, Maria Shriver, First Lady of California and recipient of the 2009 Shinnyo-en Foundation's Pathfinders to Peace Award, and Nobel Laureate Jody Williams, Founding Coordinator of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. In response to Shriver's question concerning what blocks women from making change, Williams pointed out that so many people have been instilled with the belief that there is no point in trying. "I disbelieve that. If each of us were to take on one thing and turn our passion into action, the world would change dramatically. Go do something. There's no excuse in today's world." In keeping with this message, Williams pointed out "the elephant in this room" and called for support for the people of Tibet, now in its 50th year of exile.

### **Maria Shriver and His Holiness The Dalai Lama – A Continuing Conversation**

Maria Shriver began the dialogue with His Holiness The Dalai Lama with a question arising from his comment in 2006 about the need for women to be in more influential positions: "Are women making a difference in the world?" His Holiness wasn't certain of women's broader impact but noted their increased self-confidence and willingness to step forward. He also noted a growing emphasis on qualities such as sincerity, truthfulness, and honesty among the global community. He put the onus on women themselves to step into positions of power, particularly those living in democracies that reward individual initiative and ability.

In response to Shriver's observation that many people view the qualities needed to succeed in business and politics as being the opposite of compassion, His Holiness said,

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“This reflects a misinterpretation of compassion.” He explained that while we must always demonstrate compassion for the person, sometimes an individual’s destructive actions call for a harsh, even angry, response. “You have to oppose anything that is harmful to others’ welfare – and not always passively. If a mad dog is coming, sitting in a state of compassion would be foolish.”

Asked about his fears for the future, His Holiness highlighted environmental issues, as well as the gap between rich and poor. “Poor people feel helpless, which gives rise to frustration, anger, and ultimately violence. That’s really sad.” He very much supports investing in and empowering young girls as a way to alleviate this wealth disparity. In keeping with the notion of female empowerment, when Shriver asked about the possibility of a female Dalai Lama, he said he would have no problem if circumstances dictated that a woman in that role would be more useful.

Shriver asked for his input on an issue raised by her children who often ask for examples of successful people who practice forgiveness and compassion – other than him! His Holiness pointed to Mother Teresa, but also to the thousands of people in the slums of India and Africa who sacrifice their own well-being for the sake of others who are suffering.

This gave rise to a discussion about the media needing to draw attention to such people and to positive events in the world. His Holiness said that because of the media’s almost exclusive focus on negative events, people get the impression that the world is a terrible place.

Nonetheless, the Dalai Lama feels optimistic about the future. He views human nature as essentially compassionate – “Peace starts with the self. People feel it and respond accordingly.” He also feels a great deal of hope when he meets young people. Although the adult brain is more complex and sophisticated, His Holiness pointed out that when knowledge is guided by loving kindness rather than hatred, it can serve society. By way of example, in response to Shriver’s question about what he had learned from his time at the Vancouver Peace Summit, His Holiness cited BRAC, formerly the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee founded in 1972. In his view, BRAC, now a global non government organization (NGO) that provides micro-financing, schools and health care to poor people throughout Asia and Africa, is “a wonderful initiative that can benefit millions of people.”

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**“A gender-balanced panel of extremists ...” – Susan Davis**  
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*“Mao Tse-Tung said,  
 ‘Women hold up half  
 the sky.’ Unfortunately  
 it’s the heavier half.”*

Kim Campbell

### Panel Discussion

Susan Davis, Founder, President, and CEO of Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) USA, moderated a panel of men and women whom she characterized as “extremists” in the sense that “Jesus was an extremist for love and justice.” After pointing out that the empty chair on the stage was for Nobel Laureate Aung Sun Suu Kyi, who is under house arrest in Burma, Davis began the conversation by inviting the participants to speak about the significant influences on their lives.



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*"The dreams of poor people are the same everywhere."*

Fazle Hasan Abed



Vancouver Peace Summit 2009: Women and Peace-building.  
Sarah Murray photo

*"We're swimming in top-down hierarchical thinking. We have to jump out of the fish bowl."*

Peter Buffett

Ela Bhatt, Founder of India's Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), attributed her passion for social and economic justice to her experience living among the poor as a college student, something her teachers and parents had encouraged her to do.

Fazle Hasan Abed, Founder of BRAC, honoured his mother as "the embodiment of compassion" who would send kerosene as well as medicine to the ill so that they could light their lamps and not suffer in darkness. Witnessing the devastation of the 1970 cyclone in Bangladesh and the struggle for independence that followed a few years later, caused Abed to question his life path working for an oil company, and to devote the next 37 years of his career to alleviating poverty.

Swanee Hunt, Founding Director of the Women and Public Policy Program at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, had an 'Aha!' moment when negotiating between warring factions in Yugoslavia as the US Ambassador to Austria. "I looked out among the crowd and saw all grey suits in the audience. Not one woman on the negotiating team." It inspired her current passion to get women into senior political positions where they can support essential peacemaking and educational initiatives.

Kim Campbell, Canada's first woman Prime Minister, Past President of the International Women's Forum and former Chair of the Council of Women World Leaders, accredits her lifelong belief "that girls can do anything" to the influences of her mother, a radio operator during WWII, and her grandmother, who resumed her teaching career after raising her family.



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*"If we shortened the war in Afghanistan by one week, we could educate every woman in the world."*

Swanee Hunt

Peter Buffett, an Emmy Award-winning musician and Co-chair of the NoVo Foundation with a mission to improve the status of women and girls as primary agents of change, was inspired by his mother, a 1960s civil rights activist who supported religious diversity, and by his father, Warren Buffett, who deliberately invests in undervalued companies that he believes in.

His Holiness The Dalai Lama spoke of his mother, who never displayed anger in his presence, and whose kindness extended to her family and community. She would frequently take beggars and refugees into her home and offer them food.

Bhatt called attention to the powerlessness that is synonymous with poverty, to the many women in her country and elsewhere who work very hard and yet still live on the margins. SEWA enables self-employed women workers – “the unprotected labour force of our country” – to market their products in the local and global marketplace without requiring a middleman.

*"I believe in economic freedom. We can't enjoy the other freedoms without it."*

Ela Bhatt

Campbell wants to “change the landscape of how the world works” and to increase the visibility of female change agents. The unique qualities of female leadership were underscored by Hunt, who spotlighted Ellen Johnson Sirleaf – the first woman President of Liberia who bases her management style on her background as a technocrat in the finance sector – as a woman who cares for her people with a mother’s heart, and as a grandmother who cares about future generations.

When asked about the role of women in forging peace between Tibet and China, the Dalai Lama said that there are heroines on both sides, but that in an authoritarian system such as China’s, “There is too much control and therefore fear. In order to encourage creativity, there must be freedom.” This observation was echoed in Hunt’s experience visiting China and having been denied the opportunity to meet with a woman leader in the peace movement because it would be too dangerous.

As a final question, Davis asked the panelists to offer their views on what ordinary people can do to further the cause of peace. Bhatt said that hunger is the most serious problem and we need to encourage “the ancient link between the local food producer and the consumer.” Campbell and Hunt both emphasized the need to support women’s participation in peace negotiations and other leadership roles. Buffett said, “What are viewed as feminine qualities ought to be considered human qualities.” Abed highlighted the need to narrow the gap between men and women in countries like Afghanistan, where girls care for younger siblings at a very early age and then marry young and have responsibility for managing poverty in their households. “Men have nowhere near as much responsibility ... we need to secure gender equality as soon as possible.”

His Holiness supported everything that the panelists had been saying while cautioning against generalizing as to what methods people ought to use to address these problems. While the world is one community, local conditions such as climate, economy, religion, etc. may dictate different methods to achieve the same aim. He also said that research and education are essential, and that the contributions of the Peace Summit’s panelists should be more widely known.