



**23 May 2006**

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**Subject: Statement on Negotiations for Preservation, Protection of Cultural Heritage**

Dear :

The Women's Peace Coalition, which represents women from Serbia and Kosovo, is writing in regards to the "preservation and protection of cultural heritage," which will be discussed as part of the negotiation process on 23 May in Vienna.

Despite our many advocacy efforts and United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, War and Peace, which calls for women's inclusion in post-conflict decision-making, the coalition members feel that our respective governments have failed to involve women as equal partners in the negotiation process concerning Kosovo's final political status. Thus, the Women's Peace Coalition, representing women from Serbia and Kosovo, has decided to hold parallel meetings where its members discuss topics for the negotiation process and issue statements with joint recommendations.

The second Women's Peace Coalition meeting, held in Prishtina on 7 May 2006, resulted in the following points for consideration and recommendations for decision-makers while negotiating the "preservation and protection of cultural heritage."

#### **I. Cultural monuments are a universal cultural heritage**

Numerous cultural monuments in Kosovo have served various functions as geopolitical circumstances have changed over time. Almost all monuments – including churches, cathedrals, and mosques – have been protected as cultural monuments and do not only have value for one religion or ethnicity. They have artistic, historical, and cultural value, as well. Thus, we do not think that it is possible to label cultural monuments as the exclusive property of one ethnicity or religious community. To maintain the universal value of the monuments in Kosovo, it is necessary to preserve them as cultural heritage sites and to undertake the conservation, restoration, and curatorial efforts needed to preserve them. It is also important to recognize the historical value of these monuments. A comprehensive history of the area, one that is not ethnically or religiously exclusive, must be collected. For example, Visoki Decani and Sinan-Pasha Mosque should have the same treatment and protection in regions and towns like Prizren. Our basic belief is that all cultural monuments should be protected, not because of their ethnic and religious significance, but because of their artistic, historic, and cultural value.



## **II. Leaders' responsibility in relation to cultural heritage**

The Women's Peace Coalition, like many citizens of all ethnic groups, condemns the destruction that has occurred to cultural heritage sites in the past. The coalition believes that such incidents can be prevented in the future if cultural and religious sites are disassociated from politics.

Therefore, we recommend:

- The geographic location, preservation, and protection of cultural heritage sites should not be politicized.
- Politicians and decision-makers in Serbia and Kosovo, as responsible leaders, should not use churches, cathedrals, mosques, or other cultural heritage sites as instruments for gaining political clout, as this will deepen divides between ethnic communities and lead to violence rather than cultivate peace, security, and understanding through a mutually respected heritage.
- Cultural sites should not be used as political tools towards the homogenization of communities in Kosovo. This will lead to the isolation and division of communities, which could contribute to future violence. Instead, cultural sites should be considered part of a heterogeneous history that involves all ethnic groups and be used to promote joint ownership in communities' inter-ethnic heritage as well as their shared future.

## **III. The future of cultural heritage in Kosovo**

Towards the preservation of cultural heritage sites in Kosovo, we propose the following:

- Maintaining the existing preservation policies in Kosovo, according to which cultural heritage sites are identified, developed, and managed by local authorities or the central government (which determines the level of protection afforded to each site). Heritage protecting activities should still be performed by professionals employed by local and regional agencies, in accordance with the resolution of the European Conference of Local Authorities on the role of local authorities in implementing policies for the preservation and use of historical monuments, building sites, and places with historical and artistic values, and the Declaration of Amsterdam, which is the most comprehensive European platform for "integrated protection of cultural heritage." The Declaration includes protection and preservation of cultural heritage, regardless of the size of the site, and includes sites from the modern era and their surroundings. It emphasizes the value of protecting objects along with their surrounding landscape.
- Involving all interested communities in decisions regarding the establishment of protected heritage sites. If the site is located on territory belonging to two or more communities in Kosovo, the interested communities should jointly oversee its protection, regardless of who owns the site.
- Establishing independent professional organizations to manage heritage sites owned by religious communities in Kosovo. This should occur for financial and cultural reasons. Direct religious oversight would lead to further degradation of cultural heritage.
- Including the wider community in Kosovo in protecting cultural heritage through public debates on plans for certain city zones, suburbs, and surrounding areas.



In conclusion, we wish to emphasize that churches, cathedrals, mosques, and other cultural sites are linked to the cultural heritage, history, and communities of *all* ethnic groups, and thus *all* ethnic groups have the right to share, preserve, and protect these heritage sites.

We thank you in advance for your consideration of these points, which we believe will promote peace, security, and cooperation for a future shared by all ethnic groups.

### **About the Women's Peace Coalition**

The Women in Black Network in Serbia and the Kosova Women's Network launched a Women's Peace Coalition in March 2006 as an independent citizen's initiative founded on women's solidarity that crosses the divisions of ethnicity and religion, as well as state borders and barriers.

The Women's Peace Coalition strives towards just and sustainable peace and works for the inclusion of women in peace-building processes as equal partners, stressing the fact that women are not only victims of war, but dynamic actors in peace movements.

The Women's Peace Coalition strongly advocates for the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and the advancement of women's economic and social position, while opposing country-specific tendencies and regressive processes which are detrimental to our goals.

The Women's Peace Coalition works with and includes all allies relevant to its cause, while simultaneously maintaining its autonomy. To achieve this, it forms alliances with those who accept its principles.

### **About Women in Black Network**

Women in Black Network (WIB), Belgrade has been active since 1991 as a peace group. It has been particularly conspicuous in denouncing war crimes committed by the Milošević regime, as well as in cooperating with peace and civic movements and groups in other war-affected countries of the former Yugoslavia. In 1998, The Women in Black Network – Serbia was initiated. It is an informal, decentralized, non-hierarchical network of activists from more than 20 towns in Serbia who jointly participate in activities. On October 9<sup>th</sup> 1991, Women in Black Network in Belgrade began a permanent, public, nonviolent protest against war, against the nationalistic and militant regime in Serbia, against ethnic cleansing and all forms of discrimination. It has been very successful in organizing and reaching out to women from all sides of the conflicts regardless of their ethnicity, religion, political and/or educational background. WIB has achieved recognition on the international level: it was awarded the UNIFEM Millennium Peace Prize in March 2001 and was twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

### **About the Kosova Women's Network**

The Kosova Women's Network (KWN), established in 2000, was originally an informal network of women's groups and organizations from various regions in Kosova. Since its inception, KWN has developed into a network that advocates on behalf of Kosovar women, at the local, regional, and international level. Representing the interests of 85 women's organizations of all ethnic groups from throughout Kosova, KWN is a leading network in Kosova and the region. Several of



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KWN's network members have over ten years of experience in community development. Network members contribute to changes in their communities by focusing on issues such as education, health, public participation, violence against women, trafficking, economic development, and support for people with disabilities. They also provide diverse services to women and men in their communities, which include courses, trainings, counseling, and the exchange of information. As needed, KWN members unite to advocate on behalf of citizens' interests at the local and central level.