

Women Redefining Democracy for Peace, Justice and Equality

**An international strategy meeting convened by the
Nobel Women's Initiative**

**May 10th - 12th, 2009
Hotel Casa Santo Domingo, Antigua, Guatemala**

The Context and Moment

As the financial crisis produced by Wall Street ripples across the globe, the demands for more sustainable, equitable alternatives grow louder and more urgent. With the aim of contributing invaluable but often overlooked perspectives to this important debate about our future directions, the Nobel Women's Initiative (NWI) is bringing together 85 women from around the world for a timely conference, Women Redefining Democracy for Peace, Justice and Equality. Held from May 10th to 12th, 2009, in Antigua, Guatemala, this conference convenes women's rights advocates, politicians, social movement leaders, researchers, journalists, and key policy-makers from national and international institutions – alongside Nobel Laureates and NWI staff – to examine critically women's experiences and engagement with democracy from both inside and outside the halls of power in different contexts.

While democracy is highly contentious in theory and practice, there are currently more people living in formal democracies than at any other time in history. Despite the promise of democracy during the last two decades, women are still inadequately represented or included in democratic processes and thus, unable to fully realize their rights or participate meaningfully in their own development. While women – the majority of the population – have been a vital force behind democratization efforts, in many countries democracy has served to legitimize efforts and actors committed to reversing women's rights and limiting women's freedoms. It is also in the context of democracy that a small, powerful elite produced the current financial and economic crisis, further destabilizing the world.

The many contested and unresolved elections around the world in recent years – from Kenya and Zimbabwe to Mexico and the USA – point to the limits of equating democracy with elections. Clearly, the ability of all people to exercise their rights and participate meaningfully in decisions affecting their lives is just as critical an element of the equation for successful democracy. By reflecting on women's experiences as both participants in and drivers of democratic processes and as actors resisting authoritarianism and navigating militarized and conflict situations, the conference participants will explore alternative strategies and visions for achieving meaningful democratic change for a sustainable future.

The Nobel Women's Initiative

Launched in 2006, the Nobel Women's Initiative (NWI) is a strategic vehicle of the women Nobel Peace Prize Laureates to leverage the visibility and prestige of the prize to promote, spotlight, and amplify the work of women's rights activists, researchers, and organizations worldwide addressing the root causes of violence.

In the past three years, the Nobel Laureates have been able to bring attention to urgent issues of Iran–US tensions, Israel–Palestine, the climate crisis, the protracted Burmese and Sudanese conflicts, among many others – using the print media, radio and Internet, and engaging with world leaders and activists in public fora. With the power of the Nobel Prize, these women are able to amplify and communicate new approaches to women's rights, peace and security, in ways that strengthen and expand the global movement to advance nonviolence, justice and equality.

The conference is being organized by Nobel Women's Initiative, in close collaboration JASS (Just Associates), an international network working Mesoamerica, Africa and Southeast Asia to strengthen women's activist leadership and organizing power. The local host partner is the Rigoberta Menchú Tum Foundation (FRMT), an initiative of one of the Nobel laureates, which promotes the rights of indigenous people around the world.

Conference Aims

- To assess critically women's experience with democracy in different contexts, particularly in militarized and conflict situations;
- To develop fresh visions and practical alternatives for reclaiming and reshaping democracy to make it more meaningful for women;
- To forge new connections between women inside and outside political institutions at national and international levels working to advance women's rights, peace and democracy for a more sustainable future.

In order to meet these objectives the meeting will enable participants to:

- Take stock of important achievements by and for women in strengthening democratic processes and institutions, making them more inclusive and accountable to women and other excluded groups;
- Deepen a shared analysis of the continuum of violence that women experience and the alternative ways in which women resist, negotiate, lead and mobilize solutions in militarized, conflict and post-conflict situations;
- Identify effective ways that groups and individuals operating outside conflict areas can spotlight and provide solidarity to women's organizing and agendas in those situations;
- Examine practical examples where women's rights activism has substantively contributed to democratic gains and processes that promote equality, access to

justice, accountability, and security, along with concrete steps for protecting women's rights defenders who bear the brunt of backlash for their bold demands;

- Identify effective ways to frame and communicate women's experiences, agendas and critiques of democracy to the public and through the media, clarifying the indivisible connections between democracy, women's rights, peace, justice and protection of the environment;
- Build relationships between diverse organizations and leaders operating in different institutions and contexts for continued connections and collaboration; and
- Develop recommendations for how Nobel Women's Initiative and the Nobel Laureates can put women's rights and women's rights activism firmly at the heart of agendas and support for democratization.

Communications Strategy

Four of the six Nobel Women's Initiative Peace Laureates will be at the conference; they will do media in their home countries where possible, as well as be available for international and regional media at the time of the conference. Those unable to attend will send representatives, as well as video messages. Nobel Women's Initiative's media and communications manager will coordinate a team of international and regional journalists and media specialists, carrying out interviews, and preparing key messages and talking points for the laureates. There will be a final press conference following the event featuring all the NWI Peace Laureates, and a final media release (in English and Spanish) will be distributed to regional and international media and posted to the website.

During the conference, openDemocracy will provide on-going Internet coverage of the event; this coverage will include a blog. FIRE, a well-respected global and regional media source for feminists, will also participate in the media strategy, broadcasting daily in English and Spanish from the conference. In addition, special rapporteurs will keep detailed conference notes as well as audiovisual documentation that will be summarized and captured in regular postings to the NWI web site and on YouTube; summaries and links will be distributed to a network of partners for posting and distribution. These notes will provide the basis of a conference proceedings document that will be produced after the conference, and distributed widely to participants and Nobel Women's Initiative's network of partners and alliances around the globe. The conference proceedings will also be posted to the website.

Finally, this theme – democratizing the media as a common goal of women's rights and peace activists and an essential tool for sustaining democracy – will be one of the focuses of the conference. Several journalists with a special interest in peace and women's rights will participate in the conference, including at least two who are affiliated with professional associations that work to protect journalists' rights in countries where such rights are routinely denied.

Agenda

The agenda for the meeting will be organized around the following themes over the three days:

1. The state of women and democracy: historical trends, promises, reality, and future inspirations. The first day will be spent reviewing both the good and bad news about women's experience with democracy in a variety of contexts. Presentations will assess how women have fared within the institutions and how affirmative action, quotas and other measures have helped or stopped short, and how women with different identities and contexts have organized outside of political institutions through feminist and other social movements to press for more inclusive, accountable forms of power.
2. Women's practical experiences with democracy and democratization. The second day will explore women's experience with elections and government; how women operate and organize in situations of conflict, post-conflict and militarism; and, the important role of human rights in building effective democracies.
3. Vision and alternatives for the future. How do we capture, frame and communicate women's experiences and agendas to the public and the media in a way that inspires new thinking and critical reform? During the third and final day, participants will hear from pioneering journalists and communications experts and explore how to both democratize media institutions and use the media as a tool to support women's democratizing efforts. In addition, to draw on the experiences presented in previous days, the conference will conclude with learning from the visions and actions of young feminists, ecofeminism, and indigenous women, in order to chart possible directions for redefining democracy for peace, justice and equality.