

Pathways to Peace Report
UN Conference on the Status of Women
March 1-15, 2002
Millionth Circle Participation
Submitted by Joan Kenley

Twenty-five women representing The Millionth Circle were NGO delegates to the UN on the Commission on the Status of Women March 1-15, 2002, representing Pathways to Peace, Global Education Associates, and MiraMed. The Millionth Circle organized consciousness of Circle programs for worldwide consideration as actions for peace, health, consciousness, and community in addition to the UN Conference themes of poverty and natural disasters. Although peace was not the primary UN focus, it was always in our thoughts and conversation. I had an inspiring meeting with Monica Willard, Pathways to Peace New York UN representative.

Ann Smith is Executive Director of Global Education Associates, and The Millionth Circle exists as a non-profit program as part of that organization. She summarizes the experiences as follows, beginning with the MILLIONTH CIRCLE Statement to the United Nations:

Mr. Chairman,

We thank you for this opportunity to introduce the Millionth Circle. We represent the NGOs of Global Education Associates, Women's World Summit Foundation, Pathways to Peace, and Miramed. Ancient circles have been recalled and remembered, empowering women's groups to become sacred space for the feminine spirit. From the four UN World Conferences on Women, millions of circles have formed. Some are for security and peace, some for economic empowerment, some for stopping environmental destruction, some for parenting, some for health, for AIDS prevention and treatment, for disaster relief and rehabilitation, and the list goes on and on, unlimited in their scope and depth of issues.

The Millionth Circle supports, stands behind, and links women's circles of economic and personal empowerment. It is a grassroots women's movement that believes that the circle process is key to addressing the root causes of poverty and gender discrimination so that our global efforts to eradicate poverty, eliminate gender bias and foster peace and security amongst all peoples is effective and sustainable. Circles support each member to find their own voice and live more courageously. No woman is left behind as we move together to create sustainable development for the creation of a world community.

The Millionth Circle seeds, nurtures and connects circles around the world. Through modern technology the Millionth Circle can organize hundreds of thousands of individuals through the internet and electronic mail. It combines ancient wisdom with modern technology: a web site that connects all other circle movements, and a database that organizes for social action.

Mr. Chair, we thank you for allowing us to offer the circle process in the United Nations forum, as we believe it has the potential to contribute to the largest shift of consciousness in the world and actions that bring lasting peace and security.

Ann Smith, Executive Director,
Global Education Associates

In our efforts at the UN to invite women's circles to register with us, the first circle to sign on was a peace circle the Sisters of St. Joseph of NW PA. They have been working for peace for ten years. Now if all circles, especially peace circles, would

register with us & we can connect them. GEA also has a new peace initiative that we will put on our website soon that is trying to coordinate as many peace groups as possible. GEA has an important meeting April 24-26th at our headquarters that is the annual meeting for the Catholic religious orders in partnership with us and is open to all people on a first-come, first-served basis, up to 400. Catholic sisters have been leaders for peace and the peace movement; they are connecting to the Millionth Circle through GEA, now to connect them beyond the Catholic circles.

What next: it is about joining forces, getting out of our national, regional, religious, and political boxes and coming together. It is about consciousness raising with circles that will also help in saving Mother Earth.

We need to put our energy in the role of connecting circles for social action, working with as many peace and environmental organizations as possible, creating partnerships, coalitions.

After the UN experience, we met at the Deer Hill Conference Center. We were given the sacred water by Natasha Wardle and Lynne Orchard from the Chalice Well, Glastonbury, England, for a wonderful ritual and for future gatherings. We had two representatives from Canada, Marion Pape from the West Coast and Janice Alto from the East Coast. They brought the good news about Granny Circles that are infused with consciousness raising and social action along with zippy songs, skits and laughter. The two Japanese interns from GEA, and the GEA volunteer, from Slovenia, added the voices and energies of twenty-year-olds. We became an international gathering learning new music, dances, rituals, and perspectives.

The working circles are incorporating the dreams and ideas. Outreach is now in two circles, one for the UN and one for grassroots seeding, nurturing and connecting. You will hear more from these circles and how you can participate. We learned much and gained more insights and wisdom and it will take a while to ponder and discern what it all means.

Tea, our young volunteer from Slovenia, said her Deer Hill experience was the best time she has had since she coming to New York five months ago. She said that it was so wonderful to meet so many American women who are so open-minded and had their hearts open. Each story, each life was so moving, all of them, every woman was so special. She loved the rituals, they fed her with energy, and everything came into place, from her past, her present and what she hopes for in the future. Everything came together in that one day and made sense.

As a result of her experience at the UN Conference and what's currently happening in the world, Dr. Jean Bolen has written:

**Women's Circles and Peace in the Middle East
A Proposal from Jean Shinoda Bolen**

**Untapped Source of Peace,
The Only real hope
Is to Draw upon the Collective Wisdom of Women.**

**Bring an equal number of Israeli and Palestinian women together in a Peace Camp.
Each an equal among equals.
With qualities that can serve the process
Some with expertise, political connections, the likelihood of being heard by men.**

**Most with direct experience of the cost of war:
The life of child, grandchild, sibling, spouse,
The loss of limb or mind of someone near and dear,
The loss of laughter, the pervasiveness of fear,
The loss of hope for the future.**

**Women who see loved ones filled with vengeance and hate,
Bearing no resemblance to who they could have been
In a peaceful world.
Women who know that they, too
Could fall into this darkness.**

**I see a women's peace camp.
Organized in circles.
An equal number of women from each side of the conflict
Each an equal in the circle.
The process begins with the personal story
Which is what women naturally do.
These are the mothers and grandmothers and daughters
The emotion-carriers of their people,
Whose men are warriors,
Who project evil,
And thus deny a common humanity to their enemies.
Women in circles
Listen.
Does it matter why a child is dead?
Keening knows no boundaries.**

**When women meet in circles and speak the truth of their situation,
What is felt in common and hoped in common
Is stronger than differences.
When women sit together in a sweet silence
For reflection, contemplation, prayer, guidance,
Wisdom comes into the circle.**

**But for common ground and common hope to be real,
The worst that has happened also has to be heard.
There are reasons for mistrust, hate, revenge or fear
And stories that justify such feelings.
Hopelessness is hard to overcome
Unless the truth can be borne.
Given the circumstances.**

**For peace to come to the region,
The only hope is through women meeting in circles.
Smaller circles for healing,
Larger circles for community,
Working circles to bring forth concrete proposals.
And the means and time to go forth from this peace camp
To seed more circles everywhere,
In urban Israel, in Palestinian refugee camps.
(and in Bosnia, Afghanistan, Somalia, wherever they are also needed).
First the women, then circles of women and men.**

**There are men who proposed putting Ariel Sharon and Yasser Arafat
In the same room together,
Locking them in until they came to an agreement.
(Or killed each other?)
Heightened stress in male leaders
Increases the amount of testosterone and adrenaline
A physiological reaction.
Add male ego to this "flight or fight" reaction,
And aggression will win out.**

**Gender differences favor women as peace negotiators,
Physiologically.
Women "tend and befriend" under stress.
They talk, share stories, commiserate, suggest solutions.
The amount of oxytocin (a maternal bonding hormone),
Enhanced by estrogen increases.**

**Circles that can transform the peace process
Are more than an arrangement of chairs.
There is a technology and expertise to doing circles.**

**Are more than women coming together,
And coming up with workable solutions.
For workable solutions from women
Need the support of men
And governments.
And is a principle adopted by the United Nations.**

**United Nations Resolution 1325, on Women, Peace and Security
Passed by the Security Council on October 31, 2000.
Calls for the involvement of women in peace negotiations and more.
 When the Grandmothers speak,
 And women's wisdom is heard,
 The human family will be healed.
 And there will be peace.**

**Jean Shinoda Bolen, M. D.
April 2, 2002 Å see www.millionthcircle.org for information Å**

Peggy Sebera writes that she is transformed again by the power of the intentional circle. She believes the circle to be such a powerful tool for peace and significant leadership development. It is a place to feel oneself in the laboratory of Grace: a Spiritual Path in which the ego subsides and takes a back seat while the Being with the Whole comes to the forefront. The circle continues to be the place where refinement occurs and everyone has a potential for growing in leadership and humility. Nothing is invisible in the circle. We must stretch to hold the whole, with so many needs and perceptions simultaneously.

At the UN: It was very difficult to hear again and again how drastic and painful the experiences of women are all over the world—the violence that is common, the trafficking of young women, the lack of power of women to speak and influence their worlds. Many speakers spoke more about the theory of their approaches—development, education, partnerships, etc. Beverly (apology circle) and Joan (peace & healing fostered by women's circles) and Jean (goddesses in older women) each did a circle teaching in a space near the UN.

What is the power of love and prayer from where we sit and what is the need to get up and go somewhere else? Is seeding and nurturing circles enough or do we need to adopt circles, communities, to support and raise funds for ongoing projects? Is nurturing the lives of a very large family and local community enough or do we need to go where the pain is greater? These are the questions that arose by being at the UN.

One idea that bubbled up as a result of being in the UN and which we spoke about together in the circle was the idea of an International Day of Circling 2003. There could be simultaneous circling everywhere. We might mentor young women to participate, where some might spread their circling to nearby communities of women, and some might travel to other countries to share in circle somewhere else, and where we could have as a theme for such a day of circling regarding the Status of Women. This day would be a day of circling for both men and women; perhaps networking with existing circles everywhere to strengthen the participation.

This way we would ignite awareness and participation in the Millionth Circle prior to focusing on some event in 2005 which might also be local, regional events simultaneously. There was some interest in seeing if Costa Rica would be a location for the Millionth Circle event that would be connected to the NGO organizations in 2005. It is not likely that the UN gathering would be held for women in 2005, but perhaps an NGO event would be held. Or maybe a regional Millionth Circle event.

Penny McManigal reports on her experiences with The Millionth Circle, the UN, and the Commission on the Status of Women Conference:

One part of my mission was to place a co-creative sculpture called The New York City Phoenix Bird Dream Catcher within the city as a Love Offering from those of us coming to New York from the Millionth Circle. I spent considerable time within the 25 floors of offices of the UN and met many kind and loving people.

At one point the basic structure (6 feet x 6 feet with a 4 1/2-foot Dream Catcher in the center) was set up in the UN Church Center conference room. It was not ever finished because the objective was to set it up in the lobby so that visitors from around the world could add their love, memories, names or good wishes on the hundreds of small tags waiting to be placed on the Dream Catcher. By the end of the day others had met in the same spot and there were tags added from East Timor, Sierra Leone, Denmark, the UK, Canada and many other distant places. Our Millionth Circle and GEA brochures lay on the red cloth at its base.

We all left Deer Hill Sunday morning and I still had 2 days in the city! As it turned out, the answer to my Quest was still unfolding. Monday, March 11 would be the 6-month marker of the devastating tragedies of September 11th.

On Sunday, March 10th, I was invited to place the NYC Dream Catcher at St. Paul's Church at Ground Zero. This is the site that is directly next to the former World Trade Towers and has served, ever since that day, as the location for the firemen, policemen and many others to come for comfort and rest. The site is restricted. Meals have been donated by restaurants in NY and are served 24 hours around the clock. There are beds for sleep, music for the soul, piles and piles of supplies (sweaters, gloves, chapstick, face masks, etc.) The entire interior of this church, built in the 1700s (and still holding the pew of George Washington) is filled with the heartfelt outreaching of people from all over America and beyond who have sent their love and good wishes. The visual effect is almost indescribable.

To this rich mixture and outreach, the NYC Dream Catcher was added and many firemen, policemen and women and others shared their stories as they added names and prayers to the net. The Millionth Circle Button was right there near the top of the net! After helping serve meals and help in other capacities for several hours, I said a prayer and left the NYC Dream Catcher to its future life.

So, dear Circle Sisters, know that the spirit of the Millionth Circle and all that we represent resides now at Ground Zero.

Margaret Fulton, in her commitment to peace, adds these words: Thanks for a great summary of activities. The circle concept is a powerful tool, but circles alone will not change the suffering on our planet. We have to continue to raise consciousness and we must learn to challenge the leaders who believe in militarization of both our planet and the universe.

The personal must become political. We must do more than save ourselves, we must save others. That means we have to change the structures of hierarchy which prevent the UN from being an effective World Organization.

War, we know, is the ultimate form of violence against innocent civilians, particularly women and children. War is the ultimate act of terrorism, and nuclear war is an attack on the very Earth that supports us all.

Women have no weapons to fight against militarized power except with words. The pen can be mightier than the sword! Letters to politicians do get read and they do help raise the consciousness of everyone to alternative ways of living together on this planet. World Peace is not too large a goal for women to embrace.

The Women's Peace Movement knows no boundaries. Women, like the wind, circulate in nooks and crannies and interact whenever possible, but we must take action. Praying in silence in our own secure corners of the Globe is good, but it is not enough. We must make our voices for peace heard at all levels of National Governments. The task is enormous, but the World Women's Peace Movement is a start. Be of good heart. We are all part of the same movement. "We shall overcome."

Pathways to Peace information was placed at all the tables so designated. The women representing Pathways to Peace attended numerous sessions on the many subjects presented. The NGO Pathways delegates were Joan Kenley, Justine Toms, Charlotte Kelly, India Supera, Clare Campbell, Dian Harrison, Charlotte Kelly, Lexis Rewcastle Delgado, and Linda Merryman.