

Dignity of Women

**Frauenföderation
für Frieden e.V.**

(Women's Federation for Peace,
Germany)

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Introduction to the Project “Dignity of Women”

Women all over the world awaken to their responsibility. Many women are active in the NGOs and politics.

In a declaration from UNESCO on the contribution of women to a Culture of Peace it is said: ***“Only as women and men together in equality and partnership can we overcome the difficulties, silence and desperation and secure the understanding, political will, creative thinking and concrete activities which are necessary for global transition from a culture of violence to a Culture of Peace.”***

One of the eight main goals of the Millennium Declaration in 2000 is to promote gender equality and empower women.
(Goal Number 3)

Empowering women needs different approaches according to the society, religious, cultural and racial background and the development of the country where they are living. Therefore we need to meet their needs accordingly. In some developing countries first of all women need to receive the basic nutrition, education, financial support and health care.

The Women’s Movement has experienced many successes in Europe and the USA. Just think about the right to vote, the right to an

education, equality and right to gainful employment. We can see that there are women today in responsible positions, even as heads of state, as in Germany.

However, are you aware of the fact that violence towards women up to today constitutes by far the most frequent violation of human rights? An issue many times being ignored – yet, since decades homes exist for battered women and children, taking refuge from the dangers of violence, sexual intimidation and bodily and psychological abuse.

Even on a private level these are criminal acts, oftentimes not recorded due to the economic dependence of women from their partners. This sex-oriented, domestic violence is closely connected with lack of respect towards and equality of women in the awareness of society.

Through sexualized language and advertisements, through misuse of the female body as advert-gag for the greatest variety of products, this lacking equality is being reinforced and encouraged very subtly and, with it, not only the domestic violence against women but also the abuse of children.

Several European countries, over the last few years, have elevated the status of prostitution to a recognized profession by making it legal. Thus prostitution is categorised as service provision – this means that women’s sexuality is a service provided for men and as such, women’s bodies are merchandise available for purchase.

Faced with the continuous degradation of women in many areas, such as prostitution, pornography, advertisement, FGM, widow burning, honour killing, rape as part of war strategy, one requirement has to be met – that of discovering, nourishing and valuing this dignity within ourselves. This means that we find ourselves at a point where our inner development stands in direct connection with our influence on society. In other words, as soon as we have discovered the dignity within us, we have to live it; we have to carry it out to the world and begin to invest ourselves in

society with our individual and different capabilities and interests.

Therefore we need to support women to rediscover the value of their original femininity, to connect to their original mind and to gain the strength to live their dignity and to reject whatever misuses them as women.

What does "Dignity" mean?

I would like to reflect on the meaning of dignity. From the old German language, 'wirdi', or from medieval German language 'wirde' we recognize a linguistic connection with the German word for 'value'. Surely similar clues can be found in different languages and provide insight into contents and significance.



The first to have formulated the term 'dignity of the human being' was the Renaissance-philosopher Pico della Mirandola. In his speech 'De hominis dignitate' (Latin translation: "About the dignity of the human being") (1486/87),

he shows that man is free to determine his nature in accordance with his own will. Pico della Mirandola emphasised man's freedom and God given ability to rise to the vision of the deepest secrets of the universe. Literally, he says: 'what an enormous and admirable happiness of the human being, to whom it is given to have what he desires and to be what he wishes to be'.

Richard Bach lets his seagull Jonathan say the same with the words: 'we are free; we can fly, wherever we want, and be what we are.....'

Dignity therefore is within us from the very beginning of life.

The philosopher Immanuel Kant spoke of the

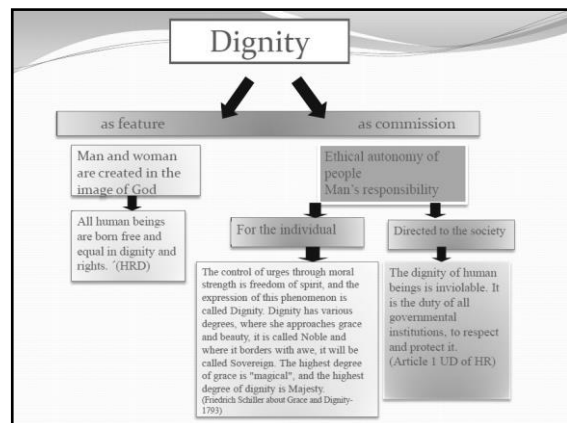


universal dignity within each human being. He said: 'Each person honours the human dignity through his/her own person,, has the right to receive respect

from others, for the said human dignity ; and is in turn, obliged to respect the human dignity in those nearest to him...'

This means that it is important to grant dignity first to myself and to be free of any doubt concerning it. Dignity is an immanent nature, an innate character of humans, independent from any other characteristics such as age, intelligence, abilities and sex.

There are two definitions of dignity which complement each other: Dignity as a feature and dignity as commission.



Dignity as a feature we find in the Christian teaching of man being created in the image of God and in the Declaration of Human Rights: - "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."

The very first Declaration of Human Rights is found in the Old Testament,

„So God created man in His own image, in the image of God he created him,

male and female He created them." Genesis 1:26, 27

That means that every human being has been created in the image of the creator, without any restrictions of gender, race, intelligence or faith.

This Bible passage has been nominated by Michael Horowitz, a leading US Human Rights Lawyer, as the greatest revolutionary statement ever made.

Dignity as commission is the idea of ethical autonomy of people as we find in the Enlightenment and also in the philosophy of Kant. Dignity as commission can be directed to the individual as well as to society.

In his discourse on "Grace and Dignity" (1793) Friedrich Schiller defines dignity as commission directed to the individual.

Dignity as commission directed to the society is defined in the Human rights declaration: "The dignity of human being is inviolable. It is the duty of all governmental institutions, to respect and protect it. "

I want to briefly remind us of the importance given to human dignity in the Human Rights Charter.

In the Preamble we read:

- Whereas ***recognition of the inherent dignity*** and of the equal inalienable rights of all members of the human family ***is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world ...***,
- Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.

In the Resolution 217A (III) of Dec. 10th, 1948, General Assembly of the United Nations we read:

- **Article 1 All human beings are born free and equal in dignity** and rights. They are

endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

- **Article 2 Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms** set forth in this Declaration, ***without distinction of any kind, such as*** race, colour, ***sex***, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.
- **Article 3 Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person**
- **Article 7 All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law.** All are entitled to equal ***protection against any discrimination*** in violation of the Declaration and ***against any incitement to such discrimination.***

The Women's Federation in Germany started a "Campaign for the Dignity of Women", organized several street campaigns, distributing the position papers, leaflets and gathering signatures.

June 8th to 10th 2007 WFWP representatives from 10 countries met to launch the European campaign "Dignity of Women".

2008 60 international participants representing 11 European countries, as well as Japan, Gabon, Nigeria, Mongolia, China and India met in Vienna. The title of the conference was: *Promoting human dignity to prevent trafficking and addiction*.attended this

2009 WFWP annual conference took place in Paris. The title was: *Concluding the UNESCO Decade of a Culture of Peace: New Alliances to fulfill MDG 3*

This conference was a step forward especially in creating alliances between the participating NGOs. Awareness creating and educational aspects in preventing violence against women and children were the main focus.

2010: This year's conference took place in Dresden, Germany under the title *Empowering women to form alliances to create a culture of peace, focusing on dignity as a cornerstone for building a culture of peace*.

As a result of the European conferences, the Dignity of women Campaign was presented in other European countries:

In Strasbourg, December 2007 during a French German Friendship meeting, the project was presented to the participants.

WFWP Europe presented the „Dignity of Women“ in Slovenia at several events in Maribor, Celje and Ljubljana. In Cyprus, the first event on Women's Dignity was held on the 6th of May 2009 in Nicosia where the presentations were translated into Greek.

Meanwhile the project also has been introduced and carried out not only in many European countries but also in other continents, as in the States, Canada, New Zealand and Russia. The Dignity project also was presented on the Women's World Conference Madrid, Spain, 2008 and the WORLD CIVIC FORUM May 7, 2009 as well as during the 54th CSW in New York.

This campaign has different aspects:

The external aspect:

Campaigning against sexualised advertisement in the media, creating awareness in society regarding the consequences and the existence of forced prostitution and trafficking. This campaign includes distribution of information through seminars and presentations and through leaflets, signature campaigns, appealing to the different committees of the UN offices in Vienna, Geneva and other European countries, cooperating with other NGOs and politicians on this subject.

This refers also to government actions and decisions as there are:

- ❖ The paramount challenge for the EU in the next years will be to improve the economic situation in the acceding countries

- ❖ Especially for Germany it is important to stop pseudo marriages because the 'so called' husbands take the money and the women go empty handed.
- ❖ Working permission for female dancers should only be granted after having scrutinised the working place.
- ❖ Effective protection of witnesses and victims, residence permission for victims
- ❖ Therefore education of the woman in the poorer parts of the EU is important inclusive establishing Hotlines. As article 1 of the German Constitution says: "The dignity of the individual is inviolable. To respect and protect this, is the duty of governmental authority"
- ❖ Waking the sensitivity of the punters (suitors, Johns), so that they become aware of their responsibility toward the fate of the victims. Sweden could drastically minimize trafficking and prostitution in not allowing the purchase of sexual services. Internationally, this was the start. "Customers" are charged with sentences up to 6 years and traffickers who bring in prostitutes up to 10 years.

With this, the market shall be contained, instead of putting endangered women into prison. This legislature is backed by 80% of the population. The result is respectable. In 2010 Stockholm had only between 105 and 130 prostitutes compared to Oslo with 5000. Another benefit is that compared to other European countries very few women are brought into Sweden by trafficking. The neighbouring countries are trying to find a similar solution to prevent trafficking.

Because of increased competition and higher risk of violence the Swedish government tries to take better care of the women working in prostitution. There are more social institutions that actively help the prostitutes to get out of their dilemma. They receive drug rehabilitation and other necessary treatments. Most of them have been misused at an early age by relatives and suffer from psychological and emotional problems. It is an important insight that there are no, nor can there be happy prostitutes.

First and foremost, prohibition, as seen by Sweden's example, brings about a change in

society. When school children already learn that purchased sex is illegal then this will no longer be regarded as a norm. This is already part of the inner aspect, raising the consciousness and creating awareness in society.

The internal aspect:

- Education on the global situation of women
- Education on the influence of the misuse of woman's body as advert gag on the family.
- Education on the history of the dignity of women
- Education on how to live our dignity as a woman
- Inspire women to feel the value of femininity

Practical aspects of the campaign:

Call to action: The Women's Federation for World Peace Europe issued an appeal to both women and men who want to prevent, that under the disguise of increased turnovers through advertisement, not only a product is being advertised but, much more, the dignity of women is being undermined and violated. Leaflets and information materials are distributed in many European countries.

Seminars: The Women's Federation Europe organizes ongoing educational seminars -

Topics are the understanding of dignity and womanhood, the history of women in Europe, the feminine power, the historical chance of contributing to a culture of peace, reconciliation, women and leadership and feminine values as cornerstone for a peaceful world.

Signature campaigns were organized and brought to the corresponding UN agencies.

Against the rapes in Bosnia
Against sex and violence in TV
For the Dignity of Women

Book tables with information material on prevention of trafficking, forced labor and prostitution through understanding and living dignity are always well received

Special materials, brochures and leaflets for UN days calling on ending violence against women and children, for the conferences and special seminars are available in different languages

Websites dedicated to this subject and for this campaign help to create awareness

Networking: Working together with other NGOs which dedicate their efforts to similar purposes.

The main presentations given at seminars on the topic are: "Living our dignity", "The dignity of Women through the Ages" and "Is Peace possible?" Further presentations are dealing with the essence of femininity and the role of women in society and her contribution to the Decade of the Culture of Peace. Materials are available for everybody who wants to engage in this campaign. Please contact us or visit our website www.diewuerdederfrau.de

A call to action

by the Women's Federation for Peace



Women's dignity is sacrosanct.

"The dignity of the individual is inviolable. To respect and protect it is the obligation of all governmental authority."

(Article 1 of the German Constitution)

Let us bring back to full, human awareness the original value and the original beauty of the woman!

'Violence towards women' might at times be ignored as a relatively irrelevant issue. Despite that, mistreatment of women is not rare by any means. When, more than 30 years ago, the first homes for battered women were founded in Germany, many doubted their necessity. Today's criminal statistics prove that domestic violence is on the rise. The majority of those who suffer from it, not only need help in an acute crisis but consistent support. Their children, too, require changes in order to be able to live as free from violence as possible. In particular the representation of the woman as portrayed through advertisement and the media brings about a controversial human image which tends to degrade the value of the feminine.

The Women's Federation for Peace issues an appeal, via this leaflet, to both those women and men who want to prevent that under the disguise of increase in turnovers through advertisement not only a product is being advertised but, much more, the dignity of women is being undermined and violated. It is through these means that, so far, the unobstructed exploitation of human beings has been encouraged, who, as unique creations, possess universal value and deserve to be respected accordingly.

Violence towards women on the worldwide level is the most frequent violation of human rights

Everywhere in Europe many refugee homes exist for the protection of women and children, who, in their home, are exposed to violence of marriage partner or father. Every fourth woman experiences in her life violence through a partner at least once. This is shown through studies done for authorities for family, senior citizens, women and youth, safety and health of women. Even when committed privately, humiliation, sexual intimidation, and psychological abuse are criminal acts! These criminal acts are, many times, not being recorded because many women want the violence to stop, but not the relationship. The reasons for their staying are varied: Love, hope, shame, mutual children, economic dependence.

How often do we hear about the abduction of both young girls and boys and about their abuse and murder. Which mother wouldn't think about her own children when hearing such news? Many organizations deal with this issue.

A real flood of violence is being poured over the population through literature and film with realistic acting-out of sexual relations, rapes, and murder of women.

There is no precedent in history to the wild growth of pornography in books, magazines, video films, films, television and the internet. Wherever there is advertisement, in TV, the internet, in magazines or on posters, there is the practice of misuse and marketing of the female body. This type of advertisement has become the norm that it is being used for any type of product, from cars to groceries to cigarettes and magazines of any type. So, the image of the woman is being distorted and she is being degraded to an object of sexual gratification. This has nothing whatsoever to do with equal status of the women within society. If we continue to tolerate this kind of misuse of the female body, we open to the violence towards women all doors and violate the dignity of the woman herself.

It is important that we stand up against this sexist advertisement

The more we speak out against it, the more we protest against his misuse of our body, the more we will be listened to and prevent the 'normality' of this type of advertisement. Surely it is many times difficult to get up and express our feeling in words when looking at such scenes, and to address the firms or advert-agencies concerned. To facilitate this, we have written a sample letter in addition to this leaflet. Please feel free to use it and make your voices be heard. It is generally recognized that one letter represents the voice of one thousand customers.

For those women who suffer in silence, who don't have the strength to oppose the misuse, we want to ensure that the respect and regard of the female body becomes the norm again. The female body must not continue to be degraded as object of sexual lust and thus as an advert-gag in advertisement.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On....., I have noticed
at/in.....your advertisement
for.....

As woman, I am writing to express my indignation about this advert.

Are you aware of the fact that violence towards women constitutes by far the most frequent violation of human rights? An issue many times being ignored – yet, since decades homes exist for battered women and children, taking refuge from the dangers of violence, sexual intimidation and bodily and psychological abuse.

Even on a private level these are criminal acts, oftentimes not recorded due to the economic independence of many women from their partners. This sex-oriented, domestic violence is closely connected with lack of respect towards and equality of women in the awareness of society.

Through sexualized language and advertisements, through misuse of the female body as advert-gag for the greatest variety of products, this lacking equality is being reinforced and encouraged very subtly and, with it, not only the domestic violence against women but also the abuse of children.

I, therefore request that you take responsibility by paying close attention in your choice of adverts.

Therefore, it is of paramount importance to withdraw, with immediate effect, the advert mentioned above.

A reply to this letter would be greatly appreciated.

Name:

Addr:

This leaflet is part of the awareness creating campaign by the Women's Federation for Peace Germany and Women's Federation for World Peace Europe.

Dignity of women throughout the ages

Christine Sato und Ingrid Lindemann

Maria Fernanda, Trafficking-Victim from Colombia, reports: „I started living on the streets when I was 11 years old – my father threw my brother and me out of the house. He never worried about us – he was always taking alcohol combined with drugs. On the streets, I met prostitution and crime. One always dreams about being somebody, and that having material things makes you somebody. I never imagined that, wanting to improve my living conditions, I was going to end up losing my dignity.

I want to have a brief look into history how the awareness of women's dignity was lost and regained.

The awareness of women's dignity has been lost over a period of time in history.

History taught at schools begins with the civilization of the Sumerians, Egyptians and Greek. Only little knowledge is conveyed about the previous cultures.

There have been hundred thousands of years of **Palaeolithic culture** centring on women and 8000 years of city cultures based on partnership of men and women with a high developed standard. All signs suggest that this have been peaceful cultures because no weapons and demonstrations of repression, slavery and/or wars were found at archaeological excavations. These societies had goddesses at the centre of their worship.

These cultures came to an end 2000 BC. The decline of the gynocentric society began with the wave of invasions of Indo-European pastoral tribes who brought with them their gods of war. The core of their system was that the power to take life was considered to be higher than the power to give life. Power was considered to be synonymous with conquer and destroy. The original meaning of power as the live-giving and nourishing force was forgotten. Women had their decision-making power and spiritual authority taken away from them.

The writing of history by the patriarchal cultures begins. This history is viewed from a clearly andocentric perspective¹. If one leafs through commonly available history books one finds that they are strangely almost exclusively referring to the exploits of men. Women are generally depicted as intriguers, troublemakers and power hungry rulers.²

In the antique world, the beauty of a woman was demonised as dangerous and seductive for men. Some Greek philosophers claimed that only men were human beings in the fullest sense and women some deficient being, the result of spoilt sperm. For Aristotle women only served as the medium through which to produce children.

Around the beginning of the Common Era a movement began, inspired by the teachings of Jesus Christ, which brought with it the beginnings of equal rights for women. He shocked the religious authorities with his announcement that Jews and Greeks, menials and free persons, men and women are all spiritually equal. In early Christianity women held high management positions. Gatherings often took place in the houses of its female followers. However, Jesus' insight that our spiritual evolution would lead to fundamental change through a new values system which includes female values, could not be accepted in our society by the authorities of the day and still cannot be accepted today.

After Christ, the great church father Augustine adopted the inheritance of Neo-Platonism whereby for him man stands over woman like the soul over the body, the higher over the lower.

Thomas of Aquinas adopted the views of Aristotle and many of the church fathers followed this same way of thinking. There was even discussion that woman must resurrect as

¹ Androcentrism is the practice, conscious or otherwise, of placing male human beings or the masculine point of view at the center of one's view of the world and its culture and history. The related adjective is androcentric

² Recently though society has become aware of the merit of women in history. We are very happy about this development.

a man to be saved. They imagined a Heaven without women or at least that women would be below men in the hierarchy.

Tertullian (200 years after Christ) accused women of being responsible for sin and temptation and that mankind was destined to die because of them. In this age woman was even made responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus.

During the dark centuries of the inquisition the Hammer of Witches or “Malleus maleficarum”, from 1487 degraded women into imperfect animals. Sexual lustfulness was only identified with women.

Even as late as 1910 Max Funke, a German philosopher, wrote a book in which he wished to prove that women are not human beings.

Fortunately there were in history also many men who defended the dignity and rights of women. In the Middle Ages an outstanding champion of the rights of women was Friedrich von Spee. He fought against the eradication of witches at the risk of his life.

So what have women themselves done to protect their value and their dignity?

In the Bible we read in book Esther:

- And on the 7th day, as the king was in a good mood of the wine he drank, he asked his servants to bring Queen Vasthi, so that he could show her to his people and his Lords, because she was beautiful.
- But Queen Vasthi did not want to listen to this request from the King. This made the King very angry and rage inflamed in him.

Queen Vasthi defended herself. She did not want to be exhibited. As her there have been many women risking their lives in defence of their dignity in all religions all over the world. I now will only refer to the European history.

In the Christian field there is very clearly a history of feminine theology traditions from the female disciples of Jesus over deaconesses and woman preachers in the original Christian

congregations through to the female mystics of the Middle Ages.

The Venetian theologian and author Christine de Pizan (1405) wrote in “Book from the City of Women” about this female history of theology which has been so persistently hushed up. She said the works of women are ladders which lead to Heaven.

This applies to Margarete Porete, who at the end of the 13th Century called men in the church to have more humility before God. She was stoned to death in 1310 as a heretic and is not yet rehabilitated to this day. One woman who has been highly regarded to this day is the mystic, Hildegard von Bingen.

The nun Roswitha von Gandersheim in the Middle Ages proved to be a playwright; Wilhelmine von Böhmen became a religious leader.

In the Renaissance period there were equally powerful women such as Diana from Potiers, Margarete from Navarra, Katharina from Medici and Elisabeth I of England.

In the 17th Century some women like the Swedish Queen Christina and poets such as Countess La Fayette and Aphra Behn showed themselves to be scholars and authors.

In the 18th century, 1789, in France a declaration of human rights and rights of the citizens was formulated. However women were not included. Only 1791 through a declaration of the rights of women and female citizens women received equal rights. (formulated by Olympe de Gouges)

However soon through the „Code Napoleon“ those achievements were annulled. Women were subordinated to men in all aspects.

The women's movement

Since 19th century especially the women's movement, the different waves of feminism have contributed regaining the awareness of women's dignity.

Important contributions to the restoration of the dignity of woman, her value and place in

society were achieved by the Women's Movement.

One of its masterminds was the English author Mary Wollstonecraft. In her book "Defence of Women's Rights" (1792) she assured us: "Woman was not just created to comfort man.... Based on this misunderstanding concerning the differences between the genders a fully false system was created which robbed our gender of our dignity." She therefore demanded comprehensive education of all women in equal rights so that they could free themselves from sexual suppression. It is true that Mary Wollstonecraft was famous, or perhaps one should say infamous during her life, because of her book, but was forgotten at once after her early death. Following generations involved themselves above all with the great feminist manifesto of John Stuart Mill "The Bondage of Woman" (1869). This sharp-witted essay by one of the most prominent English thinkers had immense influence on the Women's Movement. Mill wrote it after the death of his wife who gave him the impulse to write it and should therefore actually be considered to be his co-author.

The first wave of the modern Women's Movement

The first wave of the modern Women's Movement or Women's Rights Movement (middle of the 19th Century until the beginning of the 20th Century) fought for the basic political and civil rights of women such as the right for women to vote.

The second wave of the Women's Movement

The second wave of the Women's Movement (since the 1960s), which created a theoretical concept about feminism, went beyond the goal of achieving 'equality' of man and women on the political, social levels and both occupational and private levels. In an appeal to the West German Women's Freedom Movement in December 1956, it was stated that peace is a special task for women. "We are conscious of the fact that woman, who is destined by her nature to care for, guard and

protect, has a duty to perform in public life which no-one can take from her".

The third wave of the Women's Movement

A third wave of the Women's Movement began to appear in the 90's, especially in the USA. The young feminists of the third wave are less spectacular, but they are target-oriented in projects and networks with a feminine orientation, e.g. in the Third Wave Foundation (USA).

Power feminism

Feminism has developed since its inception in many different directions. Depending on their environment, culture and economic situation women have developed various concepts, and set different emphases.

There were also many misunderstandings about the basic ideas behind feminism. Feminism is in no way to be seen, as meaning the devaluation of men; even if there have been individual representatives of it who have expressed such ideas.

There are basically two opposing forms of feminism, the strait-laced, moral, and self denying feminism and the freethinking, buoyant and self-aware feminism.

Naomi Wolf wrote in her book "The Strength of Women", that she does not consider it to be so meaningful to place the powerlessness and victim-hood of woman in the foreground, thus accusing the male sex at the same time of imperiousness and aggressiveness. "No-one is served well by such thinking. I would like to set this direction of feminism against power feminism. Its basis is tolerance and respect for feminine individuality and sees itself as feminism of optimism and strength. "

Spiritual freedom and the same right to an education are passionately advocated goals in power feminism.

Great women in history

There have always been great women in history who were a source of hope for others, who pointed out the way to a dignified life and lived it as an example. I wish to thank all of them. It would take too long here to mention them all.

However, looking at the present situation here in Europe and worldwide still a long road is ahead of us to bring back the awareness of the original value, the original beauty of the woman to the home of the human family. We are fortunate to live here in a culture where we can be conscious of this, very easily, and we can be thankful for that. There are still many women throughout the world who have no chance to recognise their value and to find their own identity. What is needed there is good education of both genders in order to come to recognise the joy of an equal relationship/ partnership and to learn to live it.

This is the background of the campaign “Dignity of Women”. The main focus is educational and trying to raise the awareness in society for everything which is violating women’s dignity.

Later on we will set milestones on our way to living our dignity. As women, we cannot longer stand by and witness the degradation of our dignity. We only can achieve changes if we are aware of our dignity and pass on this awareness to others.

Milestones on the way to dignity

(Session of Seminars on “Living our Dignity”)

In the course of history, especially throughout the last century, women have fought for equality and recognition and experienced that no one would roll out a red carpet for them.

If, indeed, we wish our men partners to recognize our dignity, one requirement has to

be met – that of discovering, nourishing and valuing this dignity within ourselves.

This means that it is important to grant dignity first to myself and to be free of any doubt concerning it. Dignity is an immanent nature, an innate character of humans, independent from any other characteristics such as age, intelligence, abilities and sex.

How does this dignity manifest itself within us? How can we find a way of relating to our dignity?

Exercise: Finding our inner ‘Queen dignity’

May I ask all of you to stand, please?

Place your right hand on your chest and breathe in deeply. Whilst doing this, you can feel how you grow. Make yourself big, look straight ahead, upright. Then, calmly, breathe out again but remain as big. Repeat this exercise three times and listen to your inner being. Feel how, within you, your inner queen, your dignity, is awakening and continuing to grow. Please sit down.

This inner Queen dignity I discovered after a back-operation. All I was allowed to do for two months was to stand and walk. My corset forced me to go straight. I was only allowed to take small steps in order not to strain my back. At the same time, I had to ensure that the muscles around the lumbar region were kept tense at all times.

1.) Recognize our mask



It took a lot of willpower to do this. I was forced to remove my mask. Ordinarily, I would have made myself smaller, would rather have walked hunched-over with rounded shoulders.

Our masks in daily life have become a protective mechanism which we use to avoid being hurt. Are you aware of this mask? Are you making yourselves bigger or smaller? Are you always nice and friendly and ready to help or, rather distant? Do you pretend to have competence and self-

confidence or do you pretend to be more helpless than you actually are? Do we wish to satisfy and please everybody around us? Everyone is different; however, many of our different types of behaviour are only masks and not the real me. Sometimes, our real 'me' is hidden so deeply beneath the mask that we ourselves are not able to recognize it any more.

Today I invite you to start and to move towards the discovery of the true 'me' and thus to the encounter with your inner Queen dignity.

Why do I call the dignity within us 'Queen'? After an operation of my spine, a friend visited me and was enthusiastic about my new style of walking. She called it 'striding', like a queen.

We can accompany each other on this journey to discover our inner Queen Dignity, the "true me", and set some milestones as orientation for the continuation of the journey ahead.

2.) Becoming aware of our specific feminine qualities

Feminism has freed us in the fields of education and career. However, we have all simultaneously been thrown into an identity crisis involving tensions between holding down a job, having a career and being a woman. Women have often seen the difference between themselves and men as a hindrance. However, this new way of living also leads to a reduction of the value of the very qualities which are special to women, both in the biological and the mental/spiritual field. These qualities must be rediscovered and consciously implemented in our lives.

Now is the time to learn to cherish ourselves, to realise that we possess special values, capabilities and talents which our society so desperately needs. The world today is seeking for feminine values and this is shown even in politics, where more and more women are elected or appointed to represent their people.

Becoming aware of our specific feminine qualities will strengthen our self-respect and

understanding, that without us women, respectively feminine qualities also in men, there can be no peace and no further development in the society and the world.

In this respect I would like to cite Chris Griscom, an American author and healer:

"The feminine tries to find and unite the common factor in all ideas, in the creative force, through discovering opportunities in resistance and finding solutions through combining various ideologies and philosophies. Which point of view provides the better way to research, create and realize the possibilities of peace? Who would be better to achieve peace and to educate the next generation to live in peace?"

As soon as we deeply engraft these and other wonderful feminine abilities in our consciousness, we will find our dignity.

3.) Be authentic

From our birth, our Queen dignity is within us, our authentic self. As a child, and as a girl, we still had relatively free access to it, until we were faced with more and more demands from our environment, pressurizing us into adjusting. We adopted any attitude that would make us appear more kind from the viewpoint of society around us. Through this, we have given up at least a part of our self.

There lies the difference between self-denial, and full dedication of our self. With self-denial, which means giving up our own personality, abandoning ourselves, we lose our own self, our inner Queen, our dignity.

With full dedication of the self, we offer from ourselves, from the inner wealth of our queen; we remain who we are and thus, the self-dedication becomes the foundation of true love. Look at Mother Teresa, whom we all know. She has fully dedicated herself to the task she wanted to accomplish and has always been a woman with a shining dignity.

To be ourselves is what makes us more amiable and endearing to others, because it is authentic. Only then will we be recognized as a fully fledged person in her own right, respected, loved and trustworthy and what can one lose by living in a genuine way? Maybe someone will reject us because we

don't correspond to their concept of womanhood. However, we have ourselves, we are honest and our life becomes valuable and dignified.

4.) Let go of our fear and sally forth

I invited you to sally forth to discover your true self, to meet your Queen Dignity, to let go of your mask and be authentic. That needs courage. Sometimes we don't have this courage. Sometimes we are afraid to discover new aspects in us.

Fear is an inner alarm, a mechanism to protect us from possible injuries, dangers and the unknown. Often we are trapped in an environment that seems safe but puts a limit to our development.

To be brave is not the same as not to be afraid. We are only really courageous, when we feel our fear and despite this dare to start off (sally forth) to the unknown, the new. When we leave the safe shore, we can let go of our fear and open up to our longing for life and fulfilment.

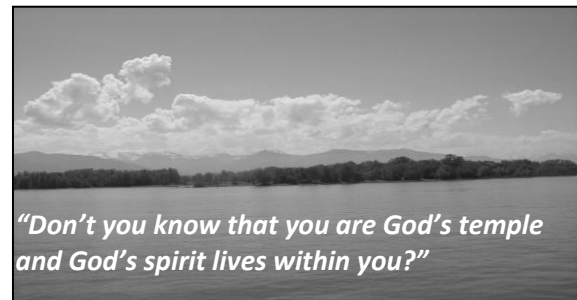
We can try to understand and clarify which fears we have to let go. Perhaps it is the fear not to live up to others liking, to disappoint them, the fear to be judged, the fear to fail, not to be loved anymore or the fear to lose control. Instead we can open ourselves to the decision to be authentic, to the awareness of our beauty, our competence for clear decisions, to the courage to face life and to self-confidence.

5.) Keep our sense of dignity

No matter, how others treat us, we should never feel we are a victim. Our universal, God-given dignity is much stronger than any evaluation that anyone else may give us. In general, women have the tendency to be dependent on the compliment from others. Often we observe that women or girls let themselves be misused by men, hoping to get love in return. They forgive their drunken husbands again and again, being smitten and humiliated, hoping for the situation to change for the best! Men will also be helped, when we strongly insist in our dignity and seek

assistance from the family advisory service. Endurance alone is not the answer. We do not need to be ashamed; it is our right to be appreciated as a woman. We can learn to become independent of the judgement of others, by constantly affirming ourselves that we are created as God's image with eternal value. To lose control of our emotions, accusing or judging others bereaves us of our sense of dignity.

6.) Always remind yourself of your divinity



Most of us know the words of the Apostle Paul, Corinthians 3:16: "Don't you know that you are God's temple and God's spirit lives within you?"

Dignity as feature is, what in the anthropology of the Holy Scriptures of the Abrahamic religions is stated as the image of God, thus differentiating mankind from the rest of creation.

This means nothing else but that man is godly in his original being. Erich Fromm calls this divinity in man "primal blessing". However often we do not recognize our divine image. It seems to be buried under the rubble of our imperfection, our lack of self control and faultiness.

The great German poet Friedrich Schiller explains: "Dignity is an expression of resistance which the independent spirit puts up against the natural drive." To live a dignified life means therefore not to let our emotions and drives of any kind freely dominate us. That means also to contain mentally my Ego, which always likes to dominate others. Thus dignified action will bring forth our godly identity. Then our temple will be well cared for and we and others feel comfortable in our temple.

We will be free and steadfast people when the condition of our soul will be independent from all external influences.

Especially for us woman it is of great importance to remind ourselves again and again of our original godly identity and thereof gain strength and trust in our interpersonal relationships, our being and our doing in this world.

7.) Our life is a work of art

Have you experienced situations when you reach the limit? Exhaustion, stress, sleeplessness and illness pile up on top of you. Yet, how often do we go beyond these? From my own experience I can say: Too often! Again and again, we just continue, a small break, maybe a painkiller, and off we go again. The show must go on. What has to happen before we will finally listen to our body and say 'no' for once? We women all pay too high a price. Don't we know the feeling that all will collapse if we don't do 'it'? Often, we also feel that we haven't done enough – yes that we have never given enough, no matter how much we gave. However, there will come a moment at which we will only 'do' without any sense of joy. Something essential is missing despite it all – and, more precisely, - exactly because of all the 'self-sacrifice'. Through our activism we shy away, in the end, from our spiritual creativity and our self-development.

The women's inborn gift of absolute dedication is important for the time when our children are young. The temporary symbiotic relationship demands our undivided attention. But we mustn't forget to bring this period to a conclusion when the kids grow older. They will begin to go forward themselves. Only in this way, will they shape their own personality. It is exactly the same with our marriage partners. They too, have their individual courses with which we cannot and must not interfere with

After this period we can dedicate ourselves in a new way. The "motherly" aspect within us then can turn to the necessities of the bigger family, the world, in whatever aspect we decide to invest ourselves in. At the same time we can attend to our own spiritual needs.

We ourselves are the ones to shape our lives, thus be co-creators of our own 'me'. Pico della Mirandola saw the dignity of people in self-determination and free development of their character. All other creations grow according to laws and only human beings have the option, in other words, the divine commission, to share in creating themselves.

Discovery of our qualities, development of our talents requires our total concentration, our investment and every new day is exciting and stimulating. Our life is our uniquely personal artwork.

8.) Accept ourselves and our life

In Buddhism, the deep sympathy for our own humanity is a high aim which entails redemption at the same time. Jesus said: Love your neighbour as you love yourself. Therein dwells the greatest difficulty – to accept oneself, on a daily basis, with unconditional love: - without placing conditions on oneself, the fulfilment of which only, 'supposedly', would render us amiable. However, to accept myself is the most important prerequisite when aiming for success in treating others with more love.

Accepting ourselves means especially not to compare oneself with others. Have a look at the beautiful countryside. Discover the great variety of flowers and the special character of each and every one of them. We are like that, each and every one in our own unique way beautiful and special, endowed with value and dignity.

Once we accept ourselves in this way, with all our particularities, we then can begin to accept other people around us with their specialities, without forming images of each other, which only leads to our personal deceptiveness and disappointment.

This again, entails that we love ourselves unconditionally - the way we are, with our anxieties, weaknesses, rage, boredom, sorrow and stress, with the liveliness, the wildness, the strength and the pain. Once we love ourselves as unconditionally as to embrace all of these, then we can love others around us in the same way. For, what I don't need to reject

in my own self, I don't need to reject, let alone fight in the other.

Our evaluation of 'myself' and our inability to recognise our uniqueness is the biggest drawback or handicap to letting our Queen Dignity shine.

9.) Let go of feelings of guilt

For centuries, feelings of guilt have accompanied us as women. Our search in the religious interpretations of the Holy Scriptures, about the origin of all difficulties of human life, will lead us to the woman being the initiator of the separation from God, the first sinner.

In the Greek Philosophy, too, we find a strong degradation of the woman. Patriarchal education has only reinforced this notion. Therefore, it is obvious that we are always very aware of our mistakes, our guilt and allow this awareness to paralyze us.

Feelings of guilt leave no room for reflection and new cognitions. They restrict us, strangle us, depress and put a burden on us. Guilt is connected with accusations by whoever may be our judge. I like the statement of the American psychologist and Author Dr. Wayne Dyer: "The universe needs nothing to forgive, it accuses nobody."

When we feel guilt we have allowed someone, often only ourselves, to accuse us. Therefore it is important that we let go of this inner accusation and forgive ourselves and do not remain trapped in feelings of guilt. It is healthier to take these supposed mistakes as lessons to learn from.

10.) Recognize our years of activity

A further step is to recognize what we have achieved. All of us are looking back on many years of activity. Furthermore, based on what we have already achieved, can only built on, when we give ourselves the legitimate recognition. This means to leave fake modesty behind us and to stop comparing ourselves with others or to orientate ourselves looking at them. Whatever we 'achieved' or 'didn't achieve' – we didn't fail.

From a universal perspective, we are all on the path of growing and learning and the sum of our experiences constitutes the fruits of our life. Whatever we built up, learned and achieved internally is only known to each one of us. For this, no one apart from me can take account and give recognition.

11.) Time, a gift of creation

Changes take time as does all growth. Time is a part of the creative process. So we are permitted to utilize this time as a gift offered by creation and banish all impatience with ourselves. Rhythms of nature show us that the actual growth often occurs during times of apparent inactivity, at times beginning in darkness only to become visible when the seeds push through the soil. This is preceded by the time of maturing hidden from and invisible to the eye. 'The creator gives from his being, from his femininity he offers the time' says Weinreb who studied the sources of the old Jewish knowledge in his book 'The mother God – the feminine side of God'. Activity at all cost, as demanded by society and business even today is not as important as the patient waiting for the developments to naturally unfold, as a process that is inherent to everything that is living.

12.) Articulate the Aim of our soul



Once we have found the way to our inner Queen dignity, all that remains is to discover which strengths, dreams, abilities and desires are within us. I call this the exploration of the aim of our soul. That means to

give a deeper meaning to our life, quite apart from the external responsibilities. When embarking on this, it is absolutely essential to take time. We will come to a more intimate acquaintance with our inner Queen.

The difference between what helps us and what, on the other hand, hinders us, can only be found out by each and every one of us

individually. In this process, it is important to recognize that even difficult situations can be of help. Something that we might possibly identify as being 'bad' for us might be an important indication towards the need for a change in our concepts, or way of thinking not to impede our growth. Many happenings in our life serve our internal purpose, correspond to it and further it, often without our being aware of it.

13.) Desires and visions

Right at the earliest stages of growth, we women often suffocate our desires and visions with thoughts such as: 'I cannot do this anyway, I don't have time for this, this is not realistic, I am not strong enough for this, nobody would understand this, and nobody would accept this!' Throughout history, women have experienced so many dismissals, have been hurt so frequently that, unconsciously, this became a part of us. How many women are of the opinion that they haven't deserved any better?

This is why we often don't realize the internal aim of our soul. Thus, let us learn to desire. The greatest, internal strength arises out of the strength of a personal vision. Vision, articulate clear ideas and wishes give us courage and help us to overcome any external control. Wish whatever you really desire for yourself.

When you make your first step, you will feel the support of the universe and from a small beginning undreamed results can develop as even changes in our town, protection of the environment, fight against hunger in the world and many more. We can often not even imagine what wonderful surprises life has in store for us. There is so much within you that urges to develop. Your inner Queen Dignity wants to become visible.

Visions and desires are like a fire within us. Let us keep it alight and let it burn brightly.

14.) Feminine Power

Sometimes, we are afraid of this brightly burning, internal fire because we feel how much power it gives to us. We have known

power only in negative terms from the masculine side. Until now, power brought us fear, oppressed us and dominated our lives. The power of femininity has been life spending, conserving, nourishing and protecting from time immemorial.

Since power has become alienated from its original meaning, we women have also lost the connection to it.

Mobilizing our feminine qualities for the sake of all legitimises us to use all our power. That includes striving for integration and association, and also appreciation of all the diversity and variety of characters, opinions and possibilities. The concept of feminine power can, contrary to the controlling power, be defined as the power of realization.

Many women are finding, quite independently of their financial situation or relationships, access to a commodity which is becoming ever more valuable: to information. Do you know the saying "Knowledge is power"? We should not forget to continue to educate ourselves and to specialise in our areas of interest if we wish to participate on creating peace and global balance.

The female characters of girls and woman by Astrid Lindgren often show courage, self-reliance and assertion. Astrid Lindgren describes woman, freed of fixed social functions, no matter what task they take on. The value and significance is always their capability to love and the importance of the feminine self-esteem.

A study by Sally Helgesen, journalist and author, with woman in management positions of big companies' shows, that woman usually represent values which are fixed in the female soul and that they incorporate these principles in their function and leadership. The authority in the hierarchic, more masculine structures is based on the position at the top of the organisation. Women prefer to work in teams and networks. They represent more the heart than the head of the whole. It doesn't need a subordinate position to emphasize their status. They achieve authority by contact with people in their surroundings not by distance. This encourages the team spirit.

Being successful women point out to the co-responsibility of others.

It is therefore important that we as women declare our power, implementing it with wisdom, exerting positive influence on the world around us.

15.) The position of the woman in the universe

As far as the occupation of our position in the family, society and the universe is concerned, we as women have been given a special, historic burden to carry. In many religions, the sentence: 'the woman reaches God only through the man' has been upheld for centuries. Only the feminist theology has pointed out that already Jesus especially valued women and elevated feminine values and virtues to a central position. He preached based on the realization that a spiritual evolution through such a new value-system would lead to fundamental changes in society.

In Buddhism, too, it was upheld for a long time that women first had to be embodied as men before being able to attain the state of enlightenment, as women. Whereupon a disciple of Buddha, who today is worshipped as a goddess, Tara, swore that she would be reborn as a woman for as many times as necessary until reaching enlightenment as a woman. She did succeed, of course.

What this means for us is to follow the example of Tara, to, metaphorically, discover the divinity within us. Our real task is to occupy the position intended for us, only for each one of us. Once we occupy our position and place which corresponds to ourselves and which has been reserved for us, the strength required will begin to flow, the universe will cooperate with us. Once we have taken those first steps, we will notice that it is only becoming easier and less arduous, to be ourselves than to fit into our mask. When we really are ourselves, our eyes will open before the wealth of life, joy and beauty. Then, the task will become full of the joys of life and we become creators of our future. Then, we have

discovered within us the dignity as hitherto described by Pico della Mirandola.

Conclusion

These are just a few milestones for orientation along the way. Surely every one of us also has their own, personal indicators.

Once our inner Queen Dignity reigns within us, she will appear shining and can be recognised by others. We will be free of inner, self-imposed restraints, apparent necessities and fake rulers. We will finally discover that we are not just dealing with a question of being free 'from' but also to be free 'for which'. We become free for our own way, free for the inner dignity, free for vision, free for power.

The free woman within us, the inner Queen dignity, is a woman who is decisive. We will discover new spheres within ourselves. Joy in doing things and joy in a time of contemplative rest will be in balance in our daily life.

The raising of our awareness and living our dignity are the first steps, the foundation for any further steps. We may as well start here and now.

Paradigm Shift in society

(Excerpts from a presentation given by Mrs. Christine Sato at 2009 WFPW Europe Conference in Paris)

The term "**paradigm shift**" has been used in many contexts. In humanities paradigm shift represents a major qualitative change in a certain thought-pattern — a radical change in personal beliefs, complex systems or organizations, replacing the former way of thinking with a radically different way of thinking

In humanities and arts paradigm shifts are also described as turns.

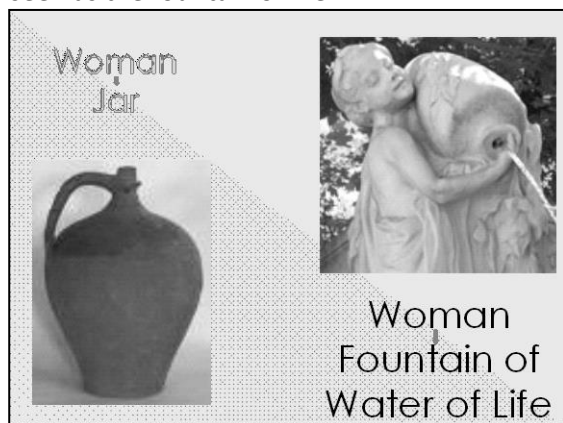
There are many examples of paradigm shifts especially in natural sciences. Darwin's theory of natural selection changed not only the scientific but also the philosophical view of life. Now we see the next paradigm change through neuro biology, showing that man is

made to cooperate. This again will change the view of our world tremendously. Peace is possible!

A marvelous example of paradigm shift which deeply affects us as women has been described by Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel in her book "Man and women, ancient roles, new values"

In the story of the woman of Samaria, who meets Jesus, the Jewish teacher, at the well, Jesus develops a complete unusual image of man and especially of womanhood, unusual for the time of Jesus and usual for us today.

The woman of Samaria comes to the well with a jar to fetch water. Jesus while talking to her refers to the symbolism and tells her that through the word that he is giving her, she can become a well, a fountain of independent, creative life. This is a revolutionary promise, because only God Himself so far had been seen as the fountain of life.



The woman is so excited hearing these words from Jesus that she leaves her jar behind, in those times the symbol of femininity, and runs back to her community to share her experience with her people.

Jesus implements a radical paradigm shift. Before seen as jar to receive water of life, woman becomes the fountain of the water of life.

I am sure there are similar statements of other great teachers, philosophers and founders of religions.

Let's have a look at our situation today.

The external paradigm shift has been carried out throughout the last centuries, more or less complete. Freed for education, studying, work, positions in the different parts of society women here in Europe and other continents now have to face an inner conflict, an internal

disruption between the traditional image of womanhood, still alive in society and the new challenges, they have to meet. Even though we are not living in the beginning stage still we stand in the midst of the balancing act between woman, wife, mother and working world. Who of us didn't experience the physical and mental exhaustion in trying to accomplish all our commitments?

Not much time is left to consummate this paradigm shift, to renew the image of womanhood in ourselves.

But this is exactly what we need to do. Mahatma Gandhi said: "If you want to change the world you have to be the change you want to see in the world."

Only if the paradigm shift is consummated in ourselves, if we change our self-consciousness from "Jar" to "Fountain", then the final internal paradigm shift can happen in society and especially in man. Let us be aware that as well as woman's role also man's role has changed. Also men need to review the traditional image of manhood. Creating this new anthropology of woman-and manhood will be the crucial alliance for the culture of peace.

We have to be aware that we are living in a unique situation and that because of the historical background and living in this century we have a special historical chance and commission.

In order to find ourselves and to bridge the conflict between traditional and modern challenges we need a shift in our consciousness right now more than anything else, because, as Einstein said, "No problem will ever be solved at the level of consciousness in which it was created."

Changing our consciousness will help us to become women capable to create the Culture of peace. This means to change from "fighting against an antiquated image of woman" to "creating an image of women building the culture of peace". As long as we fight we remain trapped in the era of violence.

How can we attain this new level of consciousness?

Paradigm shift in the self image of woman takes place once we discover our dignity within us, once we allow our dignity to spring like an internal fountain. We uncover this fountain once we let go of antiquated

paradigms, traditional concepts and prejudices which devalue woman.

Dignity is an immanent nature, an innate character of humans, independent from any other characteristics such as age, intelligence, abilities and sex.

Being aware of our dignity is equal to the creative aspect in man that is in Jesus words, being the fountain of life.

The first steps are to understand who we are, to feel free to think and to act.

Sometimes this includes saying no, no to whatever we don't really want to do. Then we can come to know where we really want to invest ourselves.

We only can discover our own value when we stop to depend on the appraisal of others.

A further step is becoming aware of our specific feminine qualities.

Women have often seen the difference between themselves and men as a hindrance. However, this also leads to a reduction in the value of the very qualities which are special in women, both in the biological field and the mental/spiritual field. These qualities must be rediscovered and consciously implemented in our lives.

Now is the time to learn to cherish ourselves, to realise that we possess special values, capabilities and talents which our society so desperately needs.

Many milestones have to be set on this new path.

Discovering our own value we find our dignity, vitality, the fountain of love. Everything exists in us in abundance, as in nature everything exists in plentifulness.

The fountain of love, joy and wisdom is deep in our soul. Throughout history the fountain has been buried within us. Therefore we always looked for external fountains and went as a jar to receive the water of life.

Let us take home all the wonderful inspirations of these days together to complete the paradigm change within us and help create the awareness that we are the fountain of life.

This paradigm shift will change society and together with the scientific paradigm shift that peace is natural for both man and woman we will create the culture of peace and heart.

Thank you

Discovering women's value, dignity and role in bringing change within the family and society

Ingrid Lindemann, Madrid, 2011

Dear Mrs. President, dear guests and ladies from all over Europe,

I am delighted to greet you this morning in this wonderful historical city of Rome. We have come here from so many different European countries!

We are here in Europe's native city. In Rome, On November 4th 1950 (November fourth, nineteen fifty) the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms took place and a treaty was drafted. Then, on the twenty fifth of March 1957 (nineteen hundred and fifty seven), six countries assembled on Capitoline Hill in the '*Palazzo dei Conservatori*', and founded the European Economic Community and the European Atomic Energy Community. This was the Treaty of Rome, the precursor to the European Union. Today twenty seven countries belong to the EU, and a further five countries are waiting to be accepted. The founding countries were Italy, France, Germany, Belgium, Luxemburg and the Netherlands. The post-war politicians were very inspired by a spirit of reconciliation and longed to live in a war-free Europe. This free, democratic Europe in which we live today is for me a miracle when one looks at the bloody, war-torn history of Europe.

I am very grateful for this consolidated Europe without borders, where we are able to live in freedom and peace together. I think that 'Lady Europe' deserves a round of applause!

Why did I say "Lady Europe"? In the Greek language "Europe" is a combination of "far, broad" and "view", basically meaning: The woman with the far reaching vision". Having a far reaching vision means envisioning and investing in a future beyond existing political, cultural, religious or financial borders.

To me this is more than merely the translation or definition of a name but is the task that Europe has. As "Europe" is feminine, we as women need to be more aware of the

importance of our participation in the process of creating Europe.

I firmly believe in the necessity of the input of femininity into our society. It is my desire to create awareness of the capabilities we as women have. Also I believe that exactly these capabilities will make the difference in every aspect of our society, be it political, economic or other.

We have come together motivated by a common desire for a peace which encompasses Europe and the whole world. Through the many faceted aspects of their work, women in Europe have pioneered a wonderful path to that peace, but have however often not been recognized or valued by society. Especially after the war women rebuilt their homes and cities. Many men had died, had been wounded or were being kept as prisoners. Women did an incredible job. Who really knows how many NGOs have been inspired and led by women? Who really knows the struggles of the women who represent European women in the European Parliament?

However, even today the input of femininity in all parts of society is not easy or to be taken for granted. Therefore on March 5th 2010 the "Women's charter", a declaration adopted by the European Commission on the occasion of the 2010 International Women's Day, stated in the preamble: *"Economic and social cohesion, sustainable growth and competitiveness, and tackling the demographic challenge depend on real equality between women and men."*

Recognizing that although achievements have been made, they are not yet sufficient to grant real equality, Article 4 stresses the importance of dignity, integrity and the elimination of gender – based violence.

"The full enjoyment of fundamental rights by women and girls is an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights and is essential for the advancement of women and girls, peace, security and development. Gender-based violence, including harmful customary or traditional practices, constitutes a violation of fundamental rights, in particular human dignity."

The philosopher Immanuel Kant spoke of the universal dignity within each human being. He

said: *'Each person honours the dignity of humanity in his or her own person, has the right to receive respect from others, for the same dignity ; and is in turn, obliged to respect the human dignity in those around him...'*

Dignity therefore, is within us from the very beginning of life. Dignity is of inborn nature, an innate characteristic of humans, independent from any other characteristics such as age, intelligence, ability or gender.

It is inspiring to hear and read all these statements and they are of great support. However, what does dignity mean to me, to us as women? How does this dignity manifest within us? How can we find a way of relating to our dignity? What does dignity mean in our daily life? How is our role in bringing change in our families and our society enhanced by dignity?

We need to think about and discover our unique and precious personality. No matter how the various religions or ideologies have considered women up to now, no matter what our teachers have told us, no matter what the life of our mothers and grandmothers has been like, no matter what the role models were, we need to engage in a paradigm shift, to renew the image of womanhood in ourselves. Mahatma Gandhi said: *"If you want to change the world you have to be the change you want to see in the world."*

Let us be aware that as well as woman's role also man's role has changed. Also men need to review the traditional image of manhood. Creating this new anthropology of woman-and manhood will be the crucial alliance for the culture of peace.

Now is the time to learn to cherish ourselves, to realise that we possess special values, capabilities and talents which our society so desperately needs. The world today is seeking for feminine values and this is seen even in politics, where more and more women are elected or appointed to represent their people.

Becoming aware of our specific feminine qualities will strengthen our self-respect and understanding, that without us women, as well as the feminine qualities which men possess, there can be no peace and no further

development in society and the world. As soon as we deeply engraft these wonderful abilities to our consciousness, we will find our dignity.

Dignity also has another aspect, the aspect of living and acting in dignity. We can find this idea of the ethical autonomy of people in the Enlightenment and also in the philosophy of Kant. Envisioning the future of Europe therefore includes respecting and protecting human dignity as well as living our dignity.

However, living our dignity is more than granting dignity to one another, to all mankind.

Living our dignity also includes preventing the nonobservance of human dignity in our society.

During the last few months, articles and comments on Europe have been basically centered on the financial crisis. Countries like Spain, Italy and Greece have been evaluated only according to their financial status, their debts, and their money-saving decisions. I don't want to start a discussion on European finances. I want us to remind ourselves of the need to respect and protect the dignity of our fellow Europeans.

Some of the comments I read were really disrespectful and I wonder how our Italian, Greek and Spanish friends must have felt.

Living dignity is accepting each other and recognizing the differences in culture, tradition, religion and character as enriching.

Living our dignity means overcoming and healing the wounds of past conflicts. We have celebrated Women's Friendship meetings crossing the Bridge of Peace with women from former enemy countries. These "Bridge of Peace ceremonies" are a foundation for more understanding and appreciation of each other beyond all borders by sharing thoughts, feelings, experiences and finding common interests and solutions to problems in our respective communities.

Living our dignity is giving a new role model to our young people and changing the educational emphasis to living dignity. In July 1997 Nobel Prize winners from all over the world signed a declaration. They wrote:

"The future of the world hangs on our willingness to really change. --We must dare to tell young people, even in history classes,

that they will contribute more to the world by living in dignity than by dying heroically, that it is conscience, rather than obedience, which is the basis of human life. The only real challenge remaining today, the real issue which will define the future, is, for the first time, to live together by respecting ourselves, each other and the environment."

The respect of human dignity is a way of life:

Living our dignity is meeting one another at eye-level.

Living our dignity is looking at each other through the eyes of dignity.

Living our dignity is meeting one another in our common origin, meeting as children of the one God, beyond all religious differences.

The eyes of dignity do not judge

When we meet respecting our dignity we do not expect the other to be or act as we want, because we can enjoy the variety of all character types.

Living our dignity is sharing without expecting, giving without asking

Respecting our dignity is trusting each other

Dignity includes empathy

Living our dignity is living love!

In his discourse on "Grace and Dignity" (1793) Friedrich Schiller says: "Dignity has various degrees, approaching grace and beauty, it is called noble and it will be called sovereign.the highest degree of dignity is Majesty."

Only by living dignity can we generate changes in the role model of women and bring changes into families, politics, economics and all aspects of our life. Dignity is the first cornerstone for a united Europe. This is stated in the first Article of the European Charter which says: "Human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected and protected. "

Europe is young and is pioneering an exemplary way for countries to unite based on common values and a resolve to share a peaceful future. This has been recognized by the Nobel Peace Prize 2012 which was awarded to the European Union (EU) which (quote)"for over six decades contributed to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe"..

We, women living in Europe, united in the effort to contribute to the establishment of a

culture of peace, want to continue this path, despite all external difficulties, envisioning a Europe living and giving dignity to all in all aspects of our life.

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Living our dignity is living love!

