

DIPLOMACY AND THE FEMINIST VOICE

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I will start with the concept of gender – gender as we use it in daily speech, in the grammar of daily life: men, women, each holding up their section of the sky. In India, we have less women than men, which could get one started on a wholly different story, but, we refer to the country, as Mother India, in the feminine: as our first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru said long ago, he saw India’s soul as feminine. We have had a powerful woman Prime Minister at one stage of our current history. She was Indira Gandhi, referred to at the height of her fame, as the woman goddess who was a slayer of demons – the image being current during the birth of Bangladesh and the defeat of the Pakistani General, known as the butcher of Dhaka, Yahya Khan.

We are here to talk of diplomacy and the feminist voice. I notice that “feminism” was the most looked-up word in the Meriam-Webster Dictionary last year. Feminism as defined thus: “the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes” and “organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests.” In real life, we are a little reluctant to use the word feminist as it implies being against men. Some suggest we use the word gender equality instead. In any case, equality is what we aspire to, and what we

want. We need not be encased by definitions.

Now, you may say, diplomacy is basically gender-neutral; it does not occupy itself with she's and he's. It is the art of getting peace to triumph over war and conflict, the skilful and quiet negotiation, the mastery of facts and consolidation of knowledge, the alert and observant mind, and adeptness of communication. Where does the feminist voice fit in in all this? That is what we are set to explore in modest measure, this evening.

A little more than a year ago, I wrote a piece for a major Indian newspaper called "Have the Women Spoken?" Speaking as a South Asian, I said the following:

"I often wonder what a feminist foreign policy for South Asia would look like. (In Europe, the Swedes have it; we do not.) Can we not consider a discourse that speaks of matters beyond war and peace (peace in the South Asian subcontinent seems to be associated with white flags, surrender, submission, weakness)? Do we think of a South Asian Commons? Not an arena for mutual jousting where we bait each other in blood sport, but a space for maturity of peaceful purpose, robust civility, and mutual accommodation? We have built towering babels around ourselves, but we have not cleared a way for the Commons."

I took the view that not much distinguishes Indian and Pakistani women from each other. We share similar genealogies, and labour under the same masculine patriarchies. We care similarly about our children, our homes,

our environments. We are programmed to be peacemakers, each in our own small way and we weep similarly for lives lost. We want literacy, empowerment, liberation from hierarchies that keep us confined in spaces and prevent the full flowering of our talents as capable, gifted, human beings. So why, then, do we women subscribe to the popularly expressed shibboleths about India and Pakistan, the endless litany of retributive give-and-take?

This cannot just be a relationship that has nuclear weapons at its core. Neither can it just be about victimhood: Indians as victims of cross-border terror or Pakistanis as victims of perceived Indian arrogance or inflexibility. It is about our future, and whether we wish to sentence ourselves to the nightmare we have made our own because win-win is not a concept we understand. Through it all, there is the festering problem of Kashmir — Kashmir, the incomparable, the Valley that embodies the crucible of our opacity and rigidity (in both India and Pakistan), of sorrow, of alienation.

I said that a feminist foreign policy would embrace the idea of a South Asian Commons; it would speak and act in favour not of ravishing disunities, but of rationalising unities, of merging capacities to build, to develop, to link. It would exercise vetoes to block war, not peace; it would emphasise the right to food, the right to health, the right to knowledge and learning, the right to reject the disconnects, the worn clichés and mental barriers that divide us. It would weigh the interests of humanitarianism against the

interests of power with far greater precision and wisdom. It would say no to violence, against all, but particularly crimes against women and children. It would reject the voices of the far right and the far left. It would feel the true pulse of the unknown, the marginalised, the excluded. It would have a people-centred approach (on both sides of the divide across the LoC) to healing the wounds in Kashmir. It would promote business-to-business engagement, building the infrastructure for trade, removing non-tariff barriers, facilitating commerce, understanding the economics of proximity rather than promoting proximity as a peril. Why sacrifice these benefits at the altar of history? Rather, promote these possibilities as assets that can alter the narrative of the past, and realise the prospects of peace that have hitherto been so elusive.

Is this an idea for our time? Cynical, public trials conducted in the Indian or Pakistani media do not provide the answer. We need sense and sensibility, not pride and prejudice, in relations between India and Pakistan. Yet another feminine voice of our region, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, once said to a global audience: “Let us sweat in peace, not bleed in war”. I asked, could we, as South Asians, particularly as Indians and Pakistanis, have the courage, the boldness, the foresight to think differently? Learning the art of mutual accommodation in solving the problems that have kept us in this state of hostility and mutual enmity is not a loss of manhood. It may, I concluded, just signal the dawn of a truly feminist region.

Typically, as it often happens in our times today, I was greeted with a tsunami of mansplaining, machismo comment. One of the more civilized comments, trying to strike a note of patriarchal condescension, said, “the author's pipe dream of feminist foreign policy will die before it is even conceived. Very disappointing and a waste of time.” Clearly, given the politics of the subcontinent, very few vest their hopes in crafting a future where the women of the region, lead with their voices and actions to build the peace that overrides conflict. Peace is clearly, only a dream. Years after the passage of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1325 regarding women in peace and security, many major countries have yet to come up with National Action Plans that spell out their strategy. I know that India does not have one taking the line that the Security Council cannot be the source of international law of a general nature! All the same, what prevents the enactment of an ab initio national strategy that is inclusive on the participation of women in peace negotiations and conflict prevention. One answer I was given was that the gender – male – that cannot work out issues for itself is not going to deliver on others.

I said at the outset that diplomacy as we see it today, is gender-neutral. But that does not imply that diplomacy cannot be populated more than it is, with issues that concern the wellbeing of humankind as a whole, of whom women are an indivisible component. Women have been present at those moments of history that have crafted the shape of the world today – beginning with the San

Francisco Conference and the setting up of the United Nations, the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (replacing the Rights of Man with Human Rights encompassing men and women) and, have lent powerful voices to the finalization of international statutes that govern the welfare of women and children in conflict. When women are victims of war and social, political and economic upheaval, when they are anchorless migrants cast upon a river of no return, left to fend for their hapless children, when they are exploited in conflict and agency-less, when enslavement is alive and well in the 21st century – where then are the women’s voices to shape agendas and outcomes so that more sense and sensibility prevails, countries are not summarily wiped off the map in acts of masculine hubris and the whirlwind reaped under the perceived Responsibility to Protect? The question I ask, drawing reference to the definition of feminism is: can diplomacy organize itself more effectively so that outcomes take into account the interests of these largely silent multitudes that comprise women? Can women make themselves more effectively heard? Very often, those women who make it to the top echelons of diplomatic life seem to have no option but to adopt approaches that differ little from their male colleagues. Is diplomacy, then, a straitjacket? Restrictive, offering little scope for the articulation of the female voice?

Yes, the female voice. How often is it heard across the climate-controlled portals of international affairs? It seems to me that too few women are seen in that world and even

those that are there are an exotic species, hot-house flowers as it were, to be celebrated no doubt, but not wrestlers in the amphitheatre. They say the strongest indicator of a state's progressiveness is not its democracy, or wealth, but the way it treats its women and how much the latter issue impinges on the national consciousness.

Obviously, strength lies in numbers. Where I come from, in India, the numbers of women in international studies or relations are to be counted – they are mostly conspicuous by their absence in panel – or I just learnt a new word, 'manel' - discussions and often overlooked when it comes to such participation since the male "experts" are the default choice. The contributions of women are mostly forgotten. I have myself been a victim.

There is all this talk of a feminist foreign policy these days. The Swedes, the Canadians have all climbed the bandwagon. These countries have a well-established profile of being identified as flag bearers for peace-building, peace-making, upholders of human rights, working against sexual violence and discrimination, anti-proliferation etc. These are issues that in a general sense, have been very much a part of their foreign policy playbooks for some time. Did they really need a definition in terms of gender – as tools to be deployed by feminist foreign ministers? Do they place the world on a new trajectory? I think the jury is out. In the real locus of power, the U.N. Security Council, the responsibility to protect becomes a tool driven more by the raw

calculus of strategic interest, the commandeering of resources, and even beyond the Security Council, the cases of Libya and Syria (and Iraq) show the complete insensitivity to the facet of human dislocation, the destruction of societies and human heritage, the erasing of history, and the effects on the welfare of women and children. The arbiters of destiny are the men- politicians and statesmen, playing god, and seemingly guiltless about induced suffering. And very often, women foreign ministers go along. We are yet to find a way in which we combine feminine soft power with masculine hard power to create that ideal yin and yang in diplomacy.

There is also the problem of stereotyping. The fact is that in the exceptional cases where women have risen to top diplomatic positions, the stereotyping is difficult to throw off especially by a world media mostly dominated by the men. When Vijayalakshmi Pandit became the first woman president of the U.N. General Assembly in September 1953, this was how the event was reported by The Hindu, a newspaper from Chennai in Southern India: “The President's job is neither a sinecure, nor that of a figure-head. It carries no financial remuneration, only an overload of responsibility out of all proportion to the frail feminine shoulders which are going to bear it during the year ahead. Mrs. Pandit's will be the sole task of interpreting complex, ambiguous rules of procedure of the Assembly — on the able performance of which depends not merely the expedition of business, but amicable handling of all the many problems

before the House.” Please note the reference to the “overload of responsibility out of all proportion to the frail feminine shoulders which are going to bear it during the year ahead.” Frailty, thy name is woman, is the sub-text. Sixty years down the line, the problem has not gone away. Leadership positions held by women are few and far between. Seen and not heard, the old dictum applies. And the field of diplomacy is no exception. An American friend of mine who travelled to India for a policy dialogue was greeted by one of the male organizers of the conference with the words that he was so glad that she had as a woman, been able to make the long journey across seven seas as it were, to the Conference. Talk of caring condescension!

The Swedish Foreign Minister, Margot Wallstrom is absolutely justified when she says that striving toward gender equality is.. not only a goal in itself, but also a precondition for achieving our wider foreign, development and security policy objectives. Her strategy focuses on the three Rs: promoting the *rights* of women and girls, supporting women’s *representation* in decision making and ensuring financial *resources* for promoting gender equality. Rights, representation and resources – I do not believe any government worth its name should have any quarrel with any of these concepts when they apply to women. They are so politically correct so why dispute them. But the devil is in the implementation. The sincerity with which these goals are pursued. The zeal with which they are applied to society at large. Because therein lies the hope and the prospect for

more mainstreaming of women and gender-related issues into the societal commons. And, each country has to develop its own dynamic in this regard. There is no one playbook that we can automatically relate to or apply.

Allow me to digress a little. A few years ago, the British author, Helen McCarthy authored an interesting study, called "Women of the World" which was essentially about women diplomats and their struggle to be accepted in male-ordered diplomatic universe. Reading through McCarthy's study, I drew some conclusions. Firstly, for those who assume the female diplomat has been around for a long time, a study of history will reveal otherwise. The only women in the world of diplomacy until the early 20th century were the "ambassadors" or wives of ambassadors. A New York Times report in 1902 spoke of how in drawing rooms, courts, or at any royal function which ladies attend, "it is the 'Ambassador', not the Ambassador who has to be considered. Sometimes she is a touchy personage indeed."

The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography said of Lady Harriot Dufferin, whose husband went on to become the viceroy of India, that she was regarded as "the most effective diplomatic wife of her generation". These were not career diplomats but wives of powerful men who left a mark on history with their charm, wit, charisma and ambition. In 1933, it was stated in a debate in the British House of Commons, "The special virtues of women are singularly ill-adapted to diplomatic

life". Counted among womanly virtues were intuition and sympathy –regarded as "absolutely fatal" to diplomacy, tempting "people to jump to conclusions", and the latter "equally fatal" since it caused people to "identify with causes or personalities with which or whom they feel sympathy". Together, it was concluded, these "virtues" would be fatal "to that very balanced attitude which it is the business of the Diplomatic Service to preserve".

In Britain, one reason advanced to establish that a career in embassies and consulates abroad was not for a woman was that they would be at an automatic disadvantage dealing with such categories as "drunken sailors". This is reminiscent of an argument often heard in similar contexts that women in embassies would be misfits since they "could not go to the airport" to receive dignitaries at night. A 1934 press report spoke of a main objection to women in the diplomatic service being that "a large proportion of the 400 odd posts are in unhealthy parts of the world". McCarthy's account speaks of the first women entrants to the British Foreign Service, post- World War II. (India seems to have led, rather than followed, in this regard since our first women diplomats entered the scene in 1948/49 whereas Mary Galbraith, the first woman foreign service appointee for Britain, began her Foreign Office career in October 1951. Our first career diplomat woman ambassador was C.B. Muthamma who became ambassador to Hungary in 1970. The first British woman career ambassador was Dame Anne Warburton who became ambassador to

Denmark in 1976.) World War II had opened the space for women to prove their worth in many quasi-diplomatic areas of functioning, as also in intelligence work and communications. In the early 20th century, pioneers like explorer and archaeologist, Gertrude Bell, an Arabist, left a huge imprint with their stellar work in the Middle East, despite the fact that there were men like the British MP, Mark Sykes, who described her (Bell) as "a flat-chested, man-woman, globe-trotting, rump-wagging, blathering ass". Such diatribes apart, Bell was widely regarded as a combination of 'masculine vigour, hard common sense and practical efficiency – all tempered by feminine charm and a most romantic spirit'. The Soviet Union had, during this period, led the way with the appointment of Alexandra Kollontai as Ambassador to Norway in 1922. Kollontai's egalitarian instincts and sympathetic manner endeared her to many. Outnumbered by their male colleagues, a tiny minority of four women also affixed their signatures to the Charter of the United Nations in 1945.

The "marriage bar" restricted the rise of women in the foreign services of countries like Britain and India for years. It bore the stain of sex discrimination. India's diplomatic service lost many women stalwarts like Rama Mehta, Mira Sinha Bhattacharjea and Surjit Mansingh who quit their careers post marriage. It was only in the early seventies that this iniquitous requirement which prevented married women from applying for foreign service was dropped. In Britain, and in India.

The advance of women to posts of a

sensitive nature and responsibility in diplomacy has been slow the world over. It is only in the last two decades that women secretaries of state in the US were seen. In India, we now have a woman external affairs minister, Sushma Swaraj, who is our leading diplomat today. It was only in 2001, 54 years after Independence that our first woman foreign secretary, Chokila Iyer, was appointed.

McCarthy observes that the presence of women at leadership level in global summits is limited and exceptional and there is a tendency to hold women to a higher standard. She notes, "Even in the 21st century, woman wielding serious power in the global political arena is an oddity, a phenomenon to be explained rather than taken for granted. Not only is her performance subject to closer scrutiny than her male peers, but it often comes to stand as a test of the ability of all women and to reflect, for good or ill, the wisdom of allowing a woman to do a 'man's job'." These are truths that must be acknowledged.

What do women need most regardless of what their field of professional choice is? I believe it is voice – that which enables them to articulate their cause, their interests, and their aspirations. And voice needs amplification, the amplification that comes from numbers, from adequate representation. If women constitute fifty percent of the population, it is obvious that their representation in professions, and in leadership positions should be equal to or at least close to equal that of men who are

similarly placed. How is it that this aspect is never in serious focus? In the Indian Foreign Service, the numbers of women are going up steadily but nowhere even near half of the numbers of male diplomatic officers.

The third aspect after voice and amplification relates to service conditions. In my own lifetime, I was witness to the long march we women have undertaken from what one legal luminary called the “stain of sex determination” where married women diplomats could not continue to work, where you could not apply to join the Foreign Service if you were married, and where you could scarcely aspire to the top positions of responsibility in the Service. These were all egregious, grossly discriminatory requirements, an apartheid policy practiced against a particular gender. The third barrier was the last to fall and it took a famous case launched by C.B. Muthamma, one of our pioneer women diplomats, where she took the senior leadership of the Ministry of External Affairs to the Supreme Court to protest against their unwillingness to appoint her to the post of Vice-Minister – a post that was unquestioningly offered to male officers – despite the fact that she was equally qualified in terms of meritorious service and experience. It was another matter that the Ministry blinked first. They promoted Muthamma to the post of Vice-Minister before the case came up for judgement although while closing the case, the concerned judge said he was dismissing the petition “but not the problem” – the problem being that relating

to sex discrimination in service conditions.

But let us return to Vijayalakshmi Pandit: and to 1949 when she was appointed the first woman ambassador, world-wide, to the United States. If this was breaking news, it was truly deserving of being labelled thus. When asked by a woman journalist on arrival: “Tell me, Mrs. Pandit, how does it feel to be World Feminist Number One?”, she said, “I am not a ‘feminist’. As far as I can see, the question of being male or female has nothing to do with the duty of both sexes to take their part in world affairs.” Then (as it happens often now, too), much to her concern, the media took an inordinate interest in her coiffure (a type...most women dream of, but seldom achieve”), her pastel sarees, her Great Lady elegance, as if, as she said, “I were a visitor from Hollywood”.

Mrs. Pandit’s reference to the duty of both sexes to take their part in world affairs, was particularly telling. It symbolized a natural grasp of a universal truth – that women have as much the right and the responsibility to influence the course of human destiny and the flow of global events as their male counterparts do. And women like Mrs. Pandit brought a sense of proportion and determination to their job – qualities that embellished their natural gifts of resilience and intelligence. Life had taught her to understand the “politics of revolution, the responsibilities of administration, and the possibilities and impossibilities of modern diplomacy” as one observer put it. There could not have been higher praise for her faculties and better proof of her qualification for the job.

In fact, it is little wonder that the inspiration for women in post-independent India to enter public service was provided by women like Mrs. Pandit and another equally distinguished Indian woman, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay. Here was another rooted cosmopolitan spirit, shaking the world, gently. She had a clear point of view about the contribution of women to the labor market, including the need to valorize the work that women performed in the household and for which they did not receive recognition or remuneration for their contributions, on racial discrimination and also the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Her definition of human rights incorporated autonomy, dignity and creativity. Here she is, speaking of an Indian world view, in the years prior to independence in a voice far ahead of her times and in a tone even more progressive than the male stalwarts leading the freedom struggle: she points to India's "insular peninsular outline" as having "widened into the global, with an increasing awareness that we and the rest of the world are but part of a single sphere, that our destinies are inevitably linked, our paths interlocked...It is not idle curiosity or cheap sentiment which shapes the question that haunts and harasses every diplomat like a family ghost: 'What about India?' We may well say 'Everything'... India is more than a test, it is a symbol. It is the mirror in which the world sees the shape of things to be...It is towards a world which recognizes the right of every nation to determine and rule its own destiny but in a cooperative world order,

that the women of India and of the world have to strive for, if humanity is ever to enjoy decency, peace and happiness.”

Any consideration of the feminist voice in foreign policy, cannot ignore the life and times of Indira Gandhi, India's first woman Prime Minister. Her example is particularly interesting because she led the country at a time of momentous developments concerning not only domestic politics but also India's external interface both regionally and internationally. While she was not a hard realist, or a consistent practitioner of realpolitik, Mrs. Gandhi led the country through a war with Pakistan, the creation of Bangladesh, the deterioration of relations with the United States under the Nixon Administration, the recommencement of normalized ties with China, the first “peaceful nuclear explosion” of 1974 which effectively demonstrated the capability of Indian nuclear scientists to develop nuclear weapons and the passage from food shortages to agricultural self-sufficiency through the Green Revolution secured with U.S. assistance. If her foreign policy reflected feminist qualities, these were difficult to discern, although it is difficult to deny its feminist core. She had little choice but to demonstrate that she could lead like a man in a man's world, intent of establishing that her pragmatism in politics set her apart from the romantic idealism of her father, Jawaharlal Nehru. She was memorialized as Durga, the goddess slaying demons, after the birth of Bangladesh, but also as coming up short on ruthless determination in failing to ensure a settlement of the Kashmir issue in exchange

for the return of 90,000 Pakistani prisoners of war during the Simla Conference of 1972.

One can argue that leading a democracy as complex as India's is a daunting task in the best of times, and that Mrs. Gandhi through the power of her example did prove that women were as capable as their male counterparts in demonstrating charismatic leadership at critical times in a nation's history and making largely, the right choices in exceptionally difficult circumstances. She had proven herself in such domain areas traditionally seen as male preserves as foreign policy, defence, security, and diplomacy. She had established herself as a globally recognized political leader as her successful, international outreach campaign to highlight the national crisis caused by the refugee influx into India from the erstwhile East Pakistan in 1971 showed – combining here feminine soft power with the steel of hard power to come, as subsequent events showed. She was through her actions creating a pathway for women of succeeding generations to follow, despite the fact that she had come to the Prime Ministership of India through being her father's daughter rather than through a self-made trajectory of rising through merit and diligence from obscurity. In many ways, Mrs. Gandhi's success made it possible for middle-class India to suspend disbelief about women entering the arena of politics, national security, and diplomacy and pursuing full-fledged careers in public service. In my own life, it encouraged our parents to actively encourage my sisters and myself to become professional women without a shadow of

doubt being raised about our capacity to out-achieve the sons of their friends and peers.

The question, however, still remains whether women bring a purely feminine-oriented perspective to the conduct of public policy. While their contributions on the consolidation of the statutes on universal human rights or highlighting issues of racial discrimination and poverty may point to perspectives of gender justice, equality, conciliation, conflict-prevention, there is little to suggest that women in foreign policy leadership have differed from men in handling situations of conflict, threats to national security and foreign aggression. These women are placed in situations where they are often the sole woman among a cabinet of males, and the question of being solely guided by a womanly perspective does not simply arise. They exercise their judgement as the need of the hour dictates, and perhaps they are at pains to demonstrate that they are no less equal to men in taking muscular decisions.

The issue would be different if the numbers of women in public policy decision-making were to substantially increase and if women are no longer in a minority. That becomes the inflection point for greater confidence and assertiveness in speaking out or leaning in, in a manner that is incorporative of concerns about the impact of decisions taken on gender-equity, post-conflict scenarios, violence against women and children, sexual trafficking, conflict and

migration, and human displacement. But until the numbers of women increase, the preponderant behaviour will be to conform to prescribed codes and methods that are seen as best practices in decision-making paradigms long-established in a world led by men. [A decade after the U.N. adopted Security Council Resolution 1325](#), which speaks to the necessity of including women in peace agreements, ninety-seven per cent of military peacekeepers are still men, and less than one in ten participants in peace negotiations are women.

That India today has women holding the portfolios of defence and foreign affairs has not signalled any path-breaking initiatives in independent, inspirational, feminist thinking in either of these sectors. The incumbents are seen as dutiful team-players, steering clear of sensitive or 'big' policy issues in their ministerial domain or in trying to signal a more inclusive approach to issues involving women in peace and security.

Nowhere is male patriarchy more in play than in the universe of social media. The trend is to overwhelm any point of view that does not conform to the stipulated common denominator of what constitutes the "truth". Female opinions are subject to constant mansplaining by twitter handles that are anonymous and ignorant. But social media by way of its expansiveness and universal outreach, requires to be the arena where female views and feminist opinions must be freely propagated so that they take root and refuse to be dismissed by trolls or alt-

newsmakers. It offers the scope of advocacy and the creation of agency. Advocacy because it promotes the accumulation of view-points and awareness about women's issues and female participation in policy-making and legislative matters and enriches the debate. Agency because it promotes women's ownership of issues concerning their welfare and progress, their safety and wellbeing, their health and empowerment and their rights to be agents of peace and security. We, the people must include she, the people. Social media provides that sounding board, that listening platform that increases engagement between civil society activists, who want the empowerment of women, it enables their voices to be heard and to be introduced into the policy debate.

I was struck recently by what an Afghan woman had to say about the future of her country. "We are not responsible for the destruction" she said, "but we should be responsible for the reconstruction." Women must play their leading role in stopping corruption, political cronyism, the promotion of an identity that goes beyond ethnic, communal or political interests. They must be the voice that secures fundamental rights and respect for the country's constitution, in building dialogue, promoting inclusive development especially in responsible infrastructure, digital communication and energy, and fostering meaningful reform of national institutions. They must be heard in national politics, and their representation has to increase in consonance with their proportion of the population. They have to be

partners, not victims. As the former British Foreign Secretary, William Hague said in 2016, “the full social, economic and political empowerment of women is the greatest strategic prize of the 21st century”.

The greatest threats to people-kind, as the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau says should replace mankind, are threats of human peace and security. The role of women in peace negotiations, and conflict-prevention is inadequately recognized. Each country deserves a National Action Plan developed in its own sovereign capacity and recognizing its own unique requirements in this field. In countries like the Philippines women negotiators have finalized peace agreements ending internal conflict. Nepal and Columbia are also countries where the sensitivity index to such issues is very positive. The United States Congress just enacted the Women, Peace and Security Act (WPS)—requiring the U.S. to take on a leading role globally and develop a comprehensive strategy for increasing and strengthening women’s involvement in conflict prevention and peace negotiations.

There is a lot of connecting the dots and mapping the terrain that remains to be done. But the journey has begun. This is not about men versus women. Feminists can come from both genders. The important matter is that we recognize and respect gender equality, the right of women to be heard, and to make decisions that affect the peace and security of our homelands, to promote their participation in public life and to expand their leadership

opportunities. The time just came for us to be, as women, smarter and braver, about what the protection of our interests should be about, and how there is no need to mansplain a feminist foreign policy. We can speak with the greatest authority on what it means.

Thank you all.