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The Nobel Women's Initiative's First International Conference: Women Redefining Peace in The Middle East & Beyond

openDemocracy.net covered the conference in a series of podcasts, blogs and articles by participants which are being published now and all next week on *openDemocracy.net*. If you would like to share the spirit and the substance of this unique event and comment on what you find, visit www.opendemocracy.net.

(Dublin, Ireland, 1 June 2007) Press Release

Women Nobel Peace Prize Recipients Pledge to become a Global Voice in Tackling Violence against Women and in Peace Advocacy

The women recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize have said that they intend to use their collective voice to advocate for a more prolific role for women in securing peace and combating violence around the globe.

Speaking at the conclusion of the first international conference of the [Nobel Women's Initiative](#) in Ireland, today (01.06.07), the Nobel Laureates said that heretofore women's work in building peace was marginalised and largely unrecognised. They said it was now their intention to leverage the prestige of the Nobel Prize to focus on violence against women, and advocate for recognition of the many ways in which women prevent, combat and survive violence.

The Nobel Women's Initiative – which was established in 2006 – comprises six out of the seven living women Nobel Laureates. The only Laureate unable to join the initiative is [Aung San Suu Kyi](#), who is still imprisoned in Burma.

This week in Ireland the Initiative held its first conference on the theme of "Women Redefining Peace: The Middle East and Beyond". It was held in closed session and was attended by over 70 women from around the globe, including human rights activists, disarmament experts and ex-political prisoners.

According to Nobel Laureate, [Prof Jody Williams](#) (USA, 1997), "arising from our deliberations in Ireland this week, we feel strongly mandated by some of the most prolific women peace activists to advocate at the highest level for greater roles for women in achieving peace and combating violence.

"Women are often the faceless and voiceless victims of conflict. Gender inequality is the root cause of this. Governments and those in positions of power are reluctant to face this down, and as a result, when women articulate their concerns and try to negotiate resolutions, they are mostly ignored.

"Over the coming weeks and months, the women Nobel Laureates will be making representations to Governments and global institutions to realise the important contribution that women can play in combating violence and securing peace."

During its first year, the Nobel Women's Initiative has been particularly concerned about the mounting challenges that face women in the Middle East, and in particular in Iran and Lebanon. In August, Nobel Laureate, [Dr Shirin Ebadi](#) (Iran, 2003) and her colleagues were threatened with prosecution for carrying out their human rights work. Furthermore, earlier this year, Iran Authorities blocked access to the website of a [landmark campaign](#) – initiated by women – to collect one million signatures demanding an end to legal discrimination against women in Iranian law.

According to Williams, the hostilities and serious threats that are being experienced by women in Iran is just one demonstration of how women's engagement in peace resolution is hampered. "We realise that events such as those in Iran are not isolated. Our ability to confront such actions against women requires us to engage with Governments and work as a strong global force with other women so that we can strengthen our response strategies."

Addressing today's event in Dublin, Ebadi said that she felt that despite the difficulties she and her colleagues faced in Iran, there was some reason to be optimistic. "From our deliberations at our conference this week, we feel that Iran and the wider Middle East can act as an important model for how women's rights, human security and peace issues can be addressed globally. We are a live example of applying different approaches in dealing effectively with fundamentalism and securing rights for women. As our work continues in the Middle East, we can create models of best practice that can hopefully be applied by women in other global settings.

"Apart from creating best-practice approaches to conflict resolution, we are also cognisant of the fact that women are victims of violence, be it through rape, beatings or honour killings. A big part of the work that we now will undertake as Nobel Laureates is to highlight this violence and secure actions by Government to protect women from such abuses."

Today's event was also addressed by Nobel Laureates, [Betty Williams](#) and [Mairead Corrigan Maguire](#) (Ireland, 1976). According to Mairead Corrigan Maguire, "it is by no means insignificant that Ireland was selected as the location of the first international conference of the Nobel Women's Initiative. For three decades, women in Northern Ireland have played a consistent and progressive role in securing a lasting settlement. Our work can hopefully act as an inspiration to other

First-Ever UN Security Council Debate on Burma - 15 Sept 2006

Nobel Women's Initiative in "Civilian Casualties, Civilian Solutions" - 11 Sept 2006

Ms. Magazine Features Nobel Women's Initiative - Sept 2006

Shirin Ebadi's rights group outlawed - 9 August 2006

A collective failure in the Middle East - 31 July 2006

Call for Peace in the Middle East - 21 July 2006

Update on Iranian women's rights activists - 6 July 2006

Support for Iranian Women's Demonstration - 16 June 2006

Global Women's Action Network for Children Conference - 15 June 2006

US and Iranian peace laureates' delegation urges negotiated solution - 12 June 2006

Statement for Peace - 8 June 2006

"We Two Women" Joint Statement - 11 April 2006

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women who are living in conflict situations. The recent achievement of a devolved government in Northern Ireland is a demonstration that efforts can be rewarded. And while significant credit has gone to the main power-brokers in securing this devolution, the role which women in Northern Ireland played at all levels cannot be underestimated."

OpenDemocracy.net covered the conference in a series of podcasts, blogs and articles by participants which are being published on openDemocracy.net. Visit: <http://nobelwomensinitiative.opendemocracy.net/>

ENDS.

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Click [here](#) for more information and links to participating organizations.

Media article: [The Independent](#)

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PRESS NOTE FROM 26 MAY 2007

The conclusions of a major [international conference](#) – which will focus on women's role in progressing peace and tackling violence – will be presented by a group of women Nobel Peace Laureates at 12.30pm on Friday, 1st June in No. 15 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2.

In 2006, six of the seven living female Nobel Peace Laureates established the Nobel Women's Initiative to act as a collective voice on issues of peace and women's rights around the globe. The only Laureate unable to join the initiative is Aung San Suu Kyi, who is still imprisoned.

The first international conference of the Nobel Women's Initiative will take place in the West of Ireland next week. The theme of the conference is Women Redefining Peace in the Middle East and Beyond and it will be attended by a host of international human rights activists, disarmament experts and ex-political prisoners.

The conference takes place in the wake of mounting challenges facing women in the Middle East and in other areas of conflict around the world. It will examine the approaches women take in challenging violence – including gender violence – and conflict, as well as looking at how the international community can play a greater role in strengthening women's approaches to peace, security, rights and access to justice.

The conclusions of this conference will be delivered in Dublin by Nobel Laureates, Betty Williams (Ireland, 1976); Mairead Corrigan Maguire (Ireland, 1976); Professor Jody Williams (USA, 1997) and Dr Shirin Ebadi (Iran, 2003).

As part of the conclusions, the Nobel Women's Initiative hopes to determine how the women Laureates can use their visibility and access to power to advance the recommendations of the conference.

Note to media: The conference proceedings that will take place prior to the event in Dublin are not open to the media. A number of the Laureates will be available for media interviews on Friday, 1st June.

Ends.

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For additional information click [here](#).



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