



### Women as the key to peace

**Women make up close to 50% of the world's population and have been key, if hidden, players in many of history's political and social movements.** The 100th anniversary of International Women's Day provides a chance to celebrate the unique stories of some inspiring women peacemakers and consider how the International Peacemakers Fund can help support tomorrows peacemakers today.

International Women's Day was first celebrated in 1911, when over a million women marched in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland. Their call was for an end to discrimination, the right to work and the need for vocational training. Since then the movement has spread around the globe and has gone from strength to strength. It is now endorsed by the United Nations and celebrated through a mixture of demonstration, national holidays and story-sharing.

But why consider this from a peace perspective? Because gender and conflict are often bound together. The 'hidden' place of women in societies around the globe means

norms of acceptable violence in the private sphere of home are not challenged and women bear the pain with little opportunity to change their situation.

This invisibility can be exacerbated in times of wider conflict. Women fill roles traditionally filled by men (such as fighting on the front-line) while having to raise children without the help of the child's absent father, or raise children resulting from rape by a passing army or militia group. Some military forces allow women to fight on the front-line, yet activists claim this 'equality' is paper-thin, levelling charges of intimidation and physical and sexual violence towards women within the military ranks.

While women are caught up in all levels of conflict, they are central to conflict resolution and peace building. By looking to inspiring women peacemakers from the past, and then considering how to shape a more peaceful future, this positive celebration is an opportunity to share their stories on this special anniversary of International Women's Day.

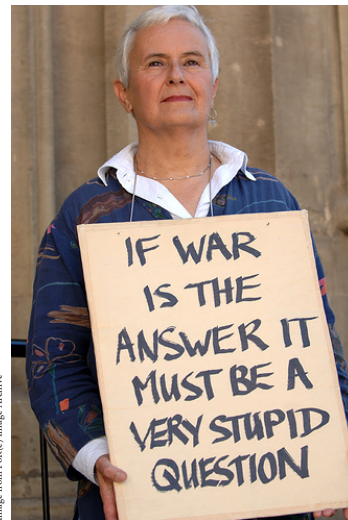
#### Muriel Lester



**Muriel Lester's story weaves through many of the peace movements of the first half of the twentieth century.** From helping to found Fellowship of Reconciliation England (FoRE), to lifelong friendship with Gandhi, she spent a large portion of her life exploring a practical Baptist faith in the City of London before travelling the world to spread the message of peace through the establishment of FoR around the globe.

Muriel worked with residents in Bow, East London, to create Kingsley Hall, a space where all could gather to tackle the underlying problems of poverty and discover what the Christian religion had to say about inequality and injustice. When war broke out in 1914 she was part of the founding meeting of Fellowship of Reconciliation, one of over a hundred people who gathered in Cambridge to explore the idea that 'a nation cannot wage war to the glory of God'. During the war she challenged religious norms by refusing to pray for

#### Diana Francis



**Diana Francis has spent her life working for nonviolent conflict resolution throughout the world.** She has supported activists in Europe, Asia, Africa and the Middle East. She also serves as Patron to the International Peacemakers Fund.

When President of International Fellowship of Reconciliation she played a vital role in supporting the growing Women Peacemakers Programme, which united women from across Europe. Reflecting back on the project, Diana said “

The idea had been to get together women who had substantial experience, both of conflict and of working with it; women who would have a great deal to teach each other and to learn from each other; women who would value support; women who would also be able to pass on the benefits of this opportunity to a wider network of women”. Since Diana's time the project

*These two stories continue over the page...*

#### Listen Out!

**What would you do if, when out wandering one day, you met someone who challenged your whole understanding of the world?** Download our radio play (from our website) to find out what happened when someone encountered Muriel Lester and began to question if their little actions could really make a difference.



As you listen, you may wish to consider the following:

- Where do you look for inspiration?
- Where do you take action to promote peace?
- How do you learn from the struggles and successes of others?

Muriel Lester ctnd...

a British victory and considered the Treaty of Versailles a 'victor's peace'.

It was during this time that she first heard about Gandhi, and his leadership of a nonviolent independence movement for India. As a result of subsequent travels to India they became friends and her London base became his place of residence during his visit to the 1931 round table conference on Indian Independence. Soon after, she passed management duties of the hall to her sister and became a travelling "evangelist for nonviolence and pacifism," researching and speaking out against injustice in India, China, Korea and beyond.

The principles behind Muriel's global work are today supported by the work of the International Peacemakers Fund. This enables supporters to fund positive, practical schemes that promote peace, and enable people to tackle the root cause of conflict.

Diana Francis ctnd.....

has gone on to provide training and support for women peacemakers across Africa.

Her recent book, 'Rethinking War and Peace', tackles head-on the idea that 'Just War' (a religious concept that a war may be justified due to certain criteria) is acceptable. Martin Bell, former MP and former BBC War Correspondent, praised the way it 'explodes the myth of war's inevitability'.

Diana works to share her experiences through extensive writing and speaking tours. She continues to challenge many to see a world where war isn't inevitable and to consider what role faith may bring in promoting peace. The International Peacemakers Fund regularly supports community projects that link faith to the creation of peace in community conflict.

## Rosa Parks



**One woman's refusal to move helped spark a nation-wide revolt against the segregation laws in the United States of America.** Buses in Montgomery in 1955 had special sections. The front few rows were reserved for white people, with African Americans expected to fit in seats noted by a movable marker. On 1st December Rosa got on the bus and sat in an empty seat in the section marked 'coloreds'. As the bus continued its route it filled up with people and the bus driver moved the marker and ordered four black people to move (including Rosa) so that some more white people could take their seats. Rosa refused. It wasn't, as some claim, because she was tired, but because she was "tired of giving in". Her refusal led to arrest and from this a boycott of the buses was called. While others had challenged segregation through the courts before, Rosa was viewed as a most 'respectable' person to act as a figurehead for the boycott movement. Rev Martin Luther King, a key advocate of nonviolent resistance, (an idea he developed because of information from FoR USA) explained the reason this refusal to move sparked a boycott and similar nonviolent responses: "No one can understand the action of Mrs Parks unless (they) realise that eventually the cup of endurance runs over, and the human personality cries out "I can take it no longer".

Reflecting on her life, Rosa said "I would like to be remembered as a person who wanted to be free...so other people would also be free". The International Peacemakers Fund has supported training in nonviolence for young people living in Palestine, a modern day example of segregation where the cup of endurance is so readily challenged by continual acts of violence.

## Sabah Abu M'dgam

**Sabah Abu M'dgam, from the village of Al Arakib, became a true leader.** With great courage, Sabah stood in front of the bulldozers arriving to demolish Al Arakib, a Bedouin village in southern Israel. This cruel demolition of the village is part of the Israeli government's wider discriminatory policies and its intentions to confiscate lands from Bedouin communities.

At first, the women were excluded due to the wide-spread belief that a woman's place is at home. Day after day, Sabah persistently reached out to women who fear active participation in public life, encouraging them to attend public actions and make their voices heard. The determination of Sabah and a group of outstanding women in Al Arakib enabled them to secure their space in the struggle for justice and equality. On one demonstration, Sabah was injured by a rubber bullet, requiring medical care. However, military violence could not overpower her determination, nor could the patriarchal culture. Today, Sabah takes part in demonstrations in Jerusalem. She speaks in front of audiences and the media – amplifying her own voice, and the voices of hundreds of Bedouin women, demanding justice and life in dignity for their communities and all the people of the Middle East.



The International Peacemakers Fund can only support women who want to create peace if we have your support. Fellowship of Reconciliation provides funds to cover fundraising and administration costs. It is individuals, community groups and trusts that provide the money we distribute to courageous grassroots peacemakers.

## Bible Thoughts

**There are stories of inspiring women throughout the bible.** The book of Esther may be short, but it contains a challenging example of nonviolent direct action.

Central to the story of Esther is the story of Mordechai. He was a devout Jew and refused to bow and show respect to the arrogant counsellor Haman, advisor to King Ahasuerus of Persia. This act of nonviolent civil disobedience angered Haman and led to Haman advising the King to kill all the Jews in response to this perceived snub.

Mordechai approached Esther, the Queen, to see if she could change this ruling. He encouraged her to use her power and influence to take nonviolent direct action. As the Queen, she was able to draw attention to the issue.

The moment of challenge came when Esther was asked to take action and protect her kin-folk. She challenged Mordechai to fast for her, and if he did she would take action. She had to approach the King unannounced. By doing this she was breaking a law of the land. If the King didn't show mercy she would be killed, if the King showed mercy she would live and be able to put her case.

She approached the King and he gave the sign that she could speak. From presenting this challenge, and being accepted, she was able to persuade the King to overturn his ruling and lift the threat to the life of the Jews.

Read the 2nd to 8th chapters of the book of Esther. Throughout the stories there is a strong vein of violence, yet one of the most challenging aspects is the nonviolent action of Esther.

- Where do you think you are standing by and letting injustice happen?
- How can you stand up and take action to prevent war and promote peace?

## Prayer

Lord, stand with us as we consider the role of women. Women who suffer in silence, trapped in a world they cannot control, women who make the break and create a new life, women who glimpse hope, yet are crushed by the reality they see. In the following silence help us consider women who face a daily life of violence.

Lord, be with us as we celebrate the role of women in the world today. women from history, who have taken simple actions that change history, women whose story is never shared, yet who change the world they live in. In this following moment we call to mind women who have changed our lives.

Lord, come alive through me as we each find a way to tackle the causes of conflict. Open our eyes to daily acts of oppression, open our heart to stories of distress from around the globe, open our hands and prepare them to work to bring hope. In the following silence prepare us for the challenges we face.

Lord, celebrate with us the work of women Peacemakers in the world today. Through them communities are changed, through them a silence is broken, through them hope is brought and violence is overturned. In this final silence refresh us, ready to create a culture of peace. **Amen**

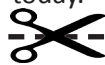
## Pancakes for Peace!

**International Women's Day 2011 falls on Shrove Tuesday, so why not use that as an opportunity to hold a Pancake Party for Peace?** Simply invite your friends round to eat some pancakes and while you're all busy munching away load-up the radio play and consider how each of you can support women peacemakers around the globe today.



## Weblinks

- Official Homepage**  
<http://www.internationalwomensday.com/>
- International Peacemakers Fund**  
[www.for.org.uk/ipf](http://www.for.org.uk/ipf)
- FOR (England)**  
[www.for.org.uk](http://www.for.org.uk)
- Diana Francis article on Gender and Conflict**  
<http://tinyurl.com/6aqaywf>



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Please send this form, and your donation, to  
**International Peacemakers Fund**  
**Fellowship of Reconciliation**  
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**19 Paradise Street,**  
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Fellowship of Reconciliation covers the cost of administration and fundraising. Every penny you donate goes directly to support courageous practical peacemakers around the globe.