

Who's making policy? What difference does it make?
Friday, October 19, 2006

Women's roles in religion, business, and civil society—and the impact of these sectors on peacebuilding—were the subjects of discussion for the final day of the conference *Who's making policy? What difference does it make?* In addition to plenary presentations by experts in these fields, delegates worked together in small groups to discuss issues ranging from nonviolence and the mobilization of religious women for change to enacting legislation for women to combating their sexual abuse and exploitation.

Despite the fact that religion can be used as justification for violence—often against women—faith and spirituality can also be powerful instruments in the quest for peace and gender equality, as discussed by the expert panel ***Gender-Inclusive, Faith-Based Strategies to Create Human Security and Peace***. Worldwide, women peacebuilders frequently build bridges across their faiths during times of war and draw upon the tenets and values of religion to work for good in their countries and communities. This mobilization of women through religious and inter-faith structures has the potential to propel them into the public sphere and political leadership, enabling them to continue their work on an official level.

Although women are more frequently found in leadership positions in business and civil society than in formal governance roles, we are still far from gender equality even in these sectors. ***Policy Frontiers for Reconstruction and Sustainable Peace*** outlined the gaps that continue to exist on corporate boards, in organizational policies, and in the coverage of issues of concern to women in mainstream media. Yet a vibrant, active civil society with the full participation of both men and women is necessary to hold governments accountable to the needs of the entire population and to ultimately realize sustainable peace and development.

The Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) will publish a conference report that includes context and analysis of the role of women in policymaking for peace and security, highlights from panel presentations and working groups, and recommendations for next steps to advance this agenda. For more information on the outcome document from *Who's making policy? What difference does it make?* email the conference rapporteur: Camille Conaway (cpcconaway@sbcglobal.net).