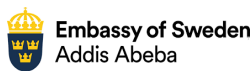


Inter-Religious Council of Ethiopia

The Role of Women in Peacebuilding

From a religious perspective

2021, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia



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Preface

Preventing conflict and building peace is an activity that requires the active participation of all members of society. Peace benefits everyone. Therefore, all members of society must participate in the process of building peace. This does not mean that everyone has to do the same thing, but everyone can contribute to what promotes peacebuilding.

Women account for half of Ethiopia's population. Women have their own potential to build peace in their homes, neighborhood, community, workplace, and \society at large. Hence, their active participation in the peacebuilding process is essential to ensure sustainable peace. Religious organizations should take necessary steps to engage in peacebuilding formally and informally.

From a religious perspective, women and men are created by the Creator and deserve the same dignity. The Creator has given women the potential to participate in the affairs of the society. It is a wise measure to use women's potential for peacebuilding. In religious books and the history of various religions, women who have played a significant role in peacebuilding.

Stakeholders need to work together to address the challenges that hinder women from participating in peacebuilding. Sustainable peace can be achieved in our society when women and men work together for peace. Our society needs the active participation of both women and men in building peace. Women and men must work together for lasting peace in the family, in the community, at school, in the workplace, in the marketplace, in places of worship, and other contexts.

The Interreligious Council of Ethiopia (IRCE), in collaboration with member religious organizations and stakeholders, is contributing its share to enhance the participation of women in peacebuilding. This book, *The Role of Women in Peacebuilding*, is one of the examples of our efforts. We hope that member religious organizations will use this book to increase their understanding of the participation of women in peacebuilding. Finally, we would like to thank all those who contributed their resources to prepare this book.

Introduction

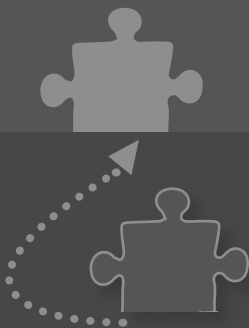
For women to play a positive role in peacebuilding, it is important to first create awareness on the role of women in peacebuilding. In a largely male-dominated and gender-biased society, men are less aware of the need for women's participation.

To address this issue, the Interreligious Council of Ethiopia has prepared this material from a religious perspective. Most of the ideas reflected in this book came from the seven IRCE member religious organizations. Each of the denominations prepared draft articles and submitted them to IRCE for consideration. IRCE hired a consultant to compile, organize and edit the articles. In addition to the articles contributed by IRCE member denominations, the consultant reviewed various relevant literature and added relevant data.

The book entitled *The Role of Women in Peacebuilding* has seven chapters. It contains both religious and relevant research-based information on the role of women in peacebuilding.

A brief introduction and the purpose are mentioned at the beginning of each chapter. At the end of each chapter is a list of questions that can be used for group reflection. Footnotes are stated where appropriate.

This book helps to raise awareness about the role of women in peacebuilding in religious organizations. This is the first edition and your comments are essential to improve the contents; therefore, we kindly request your feedback.



Chapter 1

Understanding Peacebuilding

This chapter tries to explain the basic idea of peacebuilding. It describes the meaning of peace from religious and social science perspectives. Then, it explains what peacebuilding is, the nature of religious peacebuilding, and the uniqueness of religious peacebuilding. At the end of the chapter, it discusses the basic religious principles for peacebuilding.

Chapter Objectives

- Explain the meaning of peace from religious and social science perspectives
- Describe the uniqueness of religious peacebuilding
- Explain the basic principles of religious peacebuilding

1.1. The Definition of Peace

Different fields of studies define peace differently. Although peace is interpreted in different ways, its basic content is similar. The Amharic term for peace, *selam*, implies perfection, wellness, rest, reconciliation, love, unity, security, happiness, and good wishes. In that sense, peace is a state of well-being, tranquility, health, stability, harmony, and coexistence.

John Paul Lederach describes peace as a process rather than something to be achieved after accomplishing certain activities. Peace grows within a relationship when people come together and communicate with each other.¹

¹ (Lederach, *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation*, 2003)

Definition of peace from a religious perspective

Religions have their own view of peace. Religious institutions usually define peace in connection with the Scriptures. Therefore, it is important to understand what each of the IRCE member religious institutions says about peace by exploring the teachings of their scriptures on peace. In the following pages, the teachings of Christian and Islamic beliefs about peace are described briefly.

Definition of peace in the Christian faith

Religious organizations that accept the Bible as the basis for their beliefs seek the meaning of peace by searching for terms that were used in the original languages of the Bible.

Accordingly, the Hebrew word used to describe “peace” in the Old Testament of the Bible is Shalom. Shalom refers to the holistic wellbeing, completeness, and security of people. Shalom includes human wellbeing as well as care for and protection of the natural environment.

In the New Testament, the Greek word for peace is *erene*, which is similar to the Hebrew Shalom in meaning.² The term refers to a time when communication between peoples or nations would be marked by an end to hostilities. The greetings people exchange every day as they meet and say goodbye—wishing for the overall wellbeing of their fellow people—are derived from the concepts of the Greek *erene* and the Hebrew Shalom (John 20:19-19; Luke 7:50).

It is clear from both terms that God is the one who gives complete peace for people in both the Old and New Testaments. Peace is a gift from God to humankind. Receiving and caring for this gift is a human responsibility. Peace is primarily God's character (Judges 6:24). El-Shalom is the God who blesses all with peace. God wants that all humankind should have a full and satisfying life.³

In general, according to the teaching of Christianity, the concept of peace refers to not only the absence of war, but also creating a system where people are free from exploitation and misery and live in justice; equitable share of resources, gender equality, and religious freedom.

² Alexander, T. Desmond, *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Intervarsity Press, USA, P. 682-683

³ Unpublished work presented by Rev Dr. Wakshum on the 5th Women's Forum

Christianity teaches that Lord Jesus Christ is the source of genuine peace. Jesus tells His followers, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you" (John 14:27). Christ is called the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6).

In Christianity, Lord and Savior Jesus Christ taught about peace. He lived in peace with the diverse people in society. Although He had been persecuted since childhood, Jesus did not retaliate against His persecutors. When those who wanted to crucify Him came, the disciples set out to attack the people. However, Jesus commanded His disciples to stop attacking others, saying, "Those who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matthew 26: 52).

- Jesus taught that peacebuilding is a blessed endeavor
- "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." (Matthew 5:9).
- Jesus taught His disciples that they should respond to those who do bad things to them by avoiding the hatred that is the cause of many conflicts.

"But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:44-45)

The disciples of Jesus Christ also taught living in harmony with all people.

"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone" (Romans 12:18)

Definition of peace from the Islamic perspective

According to the teachings of the religion, Islam is a religion of peace. The name Islam implies peace. The literal meaning of Islam is peace. Islam does not teach or support violence.

In the Qur'an Allah (SWT) promotes peace.

By which Allah guides those who pursue His pleasure to the ways of peace and brings them out from darknesses into the light, by His permission, and guides them to a straight path. (Surat Al-Ma'idah 5:16)

Islamic religion teaches the followers of Islam to have good conduct, to be kind to others, to love and respect other people. Hadith teaches the importance of peace for humanity.

Peace in Islam refers to creating a peaceful environment, having peace, experiencing wellness, avoiding bad or harmful things, assuring goodness, creating stability and comfort, and protecting oneself from harm. Islam encourages its followers to seek and follow the way of peace. Islam wishes peace for its followers and all human beings.

Islam also teaches Muslims to do things that safeguard other people.

Muslims must respect others and keep the peace and follow the straight path. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was sent for the mercy of all humankind. The Holy Qur'an stated that the mission of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was global, not limited by race, nation, or continent. This shows that Islam is a religion of mercy, understanding, truth, and peace. His followers should follow in the footsteps of their prophet and strive not only for national peace but also for global peace.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said that religion is consultation. The Prophet (PBUH) also said, "All creatures belong to the family of Allah. The greatest among you is one who has shown great kindness to the family of Allah." The fourth caliphate, Ali bin Abu Talib, said, "people are divided into two; they are either your brother in religion or similar to you in their body."

A Muslim should relate well with the creatures of Allah as he does with his family members. A Muslim should cooperate with others in doing good. Justice is for all people without discrimination based on religion and race. Hate should not pervert justice, even when Muslims are at war with other people. Islam teaches that even the enemy deserves justice.

The greatest blessing of Allah (SWT) in the teachings of Islam is peace. Without peace, one cannot properly fulfill one's religious, social, and economic roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, one may not fully experience the blessings of Allah.

In the Qur'an, Allah (SWT) says, "They will be told: 'Enter it in peace and security'" (15:46). This implies that Allah wants Muslims to seek peace and become promoters of peace. People can accumulate wealth when there is peace. Without peace, even the richest people cannot enjoy their wealth. Life is meaningless without peace. Peace is the basis for the development of social life and civilization. Therefore, it is essential for all people to do their best to sustain peace in society.

Peace is the call of nature. The absence of peace is the cause of failure for any society. Islam teaches that no matter how sacred a party maybe, its approach must be holy, and its implementation strategies must be peaceful, healthy, and legitimate. Islam has contributed to peacebuilding by reminding people to make peaceful conversations, establish good neighborhoods, and host strangers.

Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated in the hadith that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should speak good or remain silent, whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should respect his neighbor, and whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should respect his guest" (61:36).

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said in another hadith, "You will not enter Paradise until you believe and you will not believe until you love each other. Shall I show you something that, if you did, you would love each other? Spread peace between yourselves" ⁴

Ensuring peace was the main mission of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This was essential to convey the commands of Allah (SWT) to others, to take care of society, and to establish peace among people. Muslims look to the Prophet as an example. During the first thirteen years of his prophethood, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) faced opposition but he used peaceful means to persuade them. Despite facing serious persecution, he taught his followers to persevere in their efforts to lead people to the right way peacefully.

When the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was entrusted with the responsibility of governing the city of Madinah by the followers of various religions and ethnic groups, he approved the document known as the Constitution of Madinah and became a source of hope for the Medina community. Muslims, Jews, Christians, and pagans were guaranteed assurance for their lives and property under the just and peaceful leadership of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). They agreed to support each other if one community was threatened by war. Medina served as a holy city for all. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) remained loyal to the signatories until the treaty was violated.

In conclusion, peace is a universal concept that touches on people's personal, psychological, intellectual, economic, social, and natural relationships. Peace has a universal impact. Various religious institutions teach that peace is a good gift from the Creator to humankind and that human beings should care for this gift as stewards. Peace involves having a good relationship with the Creator and having a good relationship with fellow human beings who are living with us.

⁴ *Sahih Muslim 54*

Reflection Questions

1. How do you understand the idea that peace is holistic? Explain the holistic nature of peace by giving examples.
2. What similarities and differences do you see between the perception of peace in society and the perception of peace in religious institutions? What differences or similarities have you observed on what the scriptures of various religions speak about peace?
3. What do you think is the significance of describing peace from a religious perspective to peacebuilding?

1.2. What is peacebuilding?

Peacebuilding is a relatively new term. But many different ideas and practices involved in peacebuilding do exist in many cultures. All cultures and communities have their ways of restoring peace when peace is lost. Peacebuilding is the process of creating a lasting peace by using the potential, practices, and skills that already exist in a given culture.

The purpose of peacebuilding is to restore peace. John Galtung, a peacebuilding expert, pointed out the existence of two different concepts of peace. They are called negative peace and positive peace. Negative peace refers to a situation in which there is no obvious violent conflict or direct war between people. However, in negative peace, there may be hidden conflicts. Negative peace is not always achieved by peaceful means.

Negative peace does not guarantee complete peace. People can be silenced by force, cultural pressure, and tradition. The government can also use the law to prevent people from protesting or getting into direct conflict. In a collective culture, individuals or groups may not be allowed to do what they want unless they get an endorsement from community gatekeepers. In general, in negative peace, we may not see direct physical or observable violence in the community, but there may be ideological war between people.

Positive peace, on the other hand, refers to a stable social life in which there is no escalation of conflict and war. Positive peace is true peace. It is a context in which economic justice, religious equality, gender equality, and human and democratic rights are respected. Positive peace also means building a system in which a community is protected from conflict.

Positive peace is achieved when appropriate action is taken to eliminate direct violence, cultural and structural violence. Peacebuilding works to bring about positive peace in society.⁵

Peacebuilding focuses on resolving the 'root causes' of conflict. Conflicts are complex and may take a long time to resolve. Peacebuilding, then, is a journey into a positive peace.

The central function of peacebuilding is to create positive peace. Peacebuilding is about sustaining stability in the community, creating a new system that prevents escalation of conflicts, eliminating physical and structural violence, eliminating discriminatory practices, and building trust among people.

The peacebuilding initiatives seek to address the root causes of conflict and to change the relationship style of parties. Peacebuilding works to help victims of conflict move from vulnerability and dependence to self-reliance and security.

Peacekeeping

Peace making

Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding is different from peacekeeping. Peacekeeping is largely done at the level of the United Nations and other regional institutions. These organizations are staffed by peacekeepers and security personnel. During peace keeping, military and intelligence officers are assigned to keep peace in targeted areas.

Peacebuilding is different from peace making. To make peace is to work for peace between two warring factions. It is an attempt to make peace by giving up conflict or war. It works for the parties to a ceasefire agreement.

Peacebuilding is often a post-conflict activity. It provides comprehensive reconstruction work in conflict zones. It focuses on making the necessary changes so that conflict does not recur. Peacebuilding tries to bring lasting peace to the community.

⁵ http://www.activeforpeace.org/no/fred/Positive_Negative_peace.pdf

Peacebuilding has objectives. There are four overall objectives for peacebuilding. They are

Objectives of peacebuilding

Controlling conflict

Mitigating conflict

Resolving conflict

Transforming conflict

The peace process can be short or long, depending on the nature of the conflict and other factors. In general, peacebuilding takes a long time. There are several tasks involved in this process. The order in which these activities take place may also vary according to the situation on the ground.

Peacebuilding is a general concept that describes the many processes and activities that take place to resolve conflict and establish sustainable peace. While there are many activities in these processes, they may include discussions, reconciliation, justice, helping victims of conflict, policy reform, or peacebuilding training. Peacebuilding refers to activities that are designed to bring peace to people and to address the underlying structural causes of conflict, regardless of the degree of conflict. The term peacebuilding often focuses on the root causes of conflict.

Peacebuilding is a multi-stakeholder process involving governments, religious organizations, civil society, traditional leaders and structures, the media, and the business community. Peacebuilding is an ongoing process. Peacebuilding takes place at all levels of society, in educational institutions, in government and business, and community centers in every village and town. Peacebuilding is not a one-size-fits-all event. Peacebuilding is an inclusive and participatory process.

Religious Peacebuilding

Religious peacebuilding is an effort by religious organizations to resolve conflicts and build peace by using the beliefs, values, teachings, and practices of religion. Religious peacebuilding occurs when people try to bring peace through religious motivations. Religious peacebuilding is often done by religious leaders or religious individuals who are dedicated to religious values.

Religious peacebuilding has its characteristics. Here are some of them.⁶

- Religious peacebuilding is built on religious or spiritual ideas. The influence of religion on people varies across various religions due to differences in a set of beliefs and traditions. The common denominator of all religious peacebuilding is belief in the spiritual realm.
- Understanding the causes of conflict may involve spiritual things in addition to the structural and economic factors that are commonly emphasized by secular analysts. Religious leaders' motivation for action and attitude toward success is more spiritual than professional. Their approach to conflict resolution is expected to be directed by Scriptures, symbols, worship, and prayer or meditation.
- From a religious point of view, peacebuilding is more than just preventing conflicts between different parties. The absence of conflict shows only one aspect of peace. One can say that peace exists in a community when there are no conflicts as well as when people in the community relate well. Therefore, those involved in peacebuilding are expected to undergo an individual transformation before facilitating peacebuilding. They are expected to embrace peace with one another and to take positive steps to live peaceably with others. They need to experience positive peace.
- Sometimes there is a hidden conflict between people. True peace, however, is achieved when there is a satisfying, just relationship between people. Peacebuilding begins with making peace with oneself. When religious leaders experience inner peace, they can bring peace to our communities.
- The followers of various religions are more likely to accept the peacebuilding messages communicated by faith leaders. Because they fear the Creator and respect their religion, they accept the ideas of religious leaders. This is a unique opportunity for faith leaders to lead their followers to peaceful co-existence.

⁶ (Garred & Abu-Nimer, 2018)

“Allah can make love between you and those who are at war with you. And Allah can do all things. And Allah is Most Merciful” (Qur'an 60:7).

“Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it” (Psalms 34:14)

In conclusion, peacebuilding is an all-encompassing process that tries to restore and sustain peace. It can be done using secular or religious approaches. Religious beliefs, values, and systems can help in restoring peace. The two approaches are not necessarily exclusive; we can use them in ways that complete each other to sustain peace in society.

Reflection Questions

1. How do you define peacebuilding?
2. Why do we choose to use the concept of peacebuilding rather than conflict resolution?
3. Explain the similarities and differences between secular peacebuilding and religious peacebuilding. Do you think the two can go together? How?

1.3. Principles of Religious Peacebuilding

Peace is something to be built. To build a house, there are basic inputs we need. Similarly, to restore and sustain peace, we need fundamental principles. In this section, we will look at basic religious principles that can help in restoring and sustaining peace in our communities.

Seek and pursue peace

Human beings must seek peace to live in peace. People can find peace by seeking it. There are factors that bring peace and those that impede peace. Everyone must choose and follow the things that bring peace. Choosing and pursuing peace is one of the principles to achieve lasting peace.

Religions teach their followers to live in peace. In their scriptures, they teach that a person who believes in the Creator and obeys the Creator's commands should follow the path of peace.

In the Bible, Christians are commanded to seek and pursue peace.

“Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.” (Psalms 34:12-14)

In the Holy Quran, Muslims are advised to avoid disputes.

“Obey Allah and His Messenger, and do not dispute and [thus] lose courage and [then] your strength would depart; and be patient. Indeed, Allah is with the patient.” (Quran 8:46)

The Holy Quran also commands people to respond peacefully to people’s evil speech.

“The ‘true’ servants of the Most Compassionate are those who walk on the earth humbly, and when the foolish address them ‘improperly’, they only respond with peace” (Quran 25:63)

Scriptures tell us that those who seek peace should refrain from speaking evil words and doing evil things, and do things that are good for humanity.

Obey the Golden Rule

The Golden Rule refers to the notion of not doing to others what we do not want to be done to us or to do to others what we want them to do to us. This law is a principle that allows people to avoid evil and to support one another and do what is good to humanity.

The Golden Rule is stated in the Bible in this form:

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12)

Islam teaches people not to harm others, and to treat others as ourselves.

“You do not really believe unless you desire what you desire for yourselves and others” (Prophet Muhammad’s (PBUH) actions and speeches)

Establish fair use of resources

The root causes of conflicts in society are directly or indirectly related to an unjust system of resource utilization. Sadly, the system of the world lets few people control the wealth of the world. This is contrary to the law of nature that has provided resources for all without discrimination.

The Bible encourages people to share resources they have with the needy so that everyone meets his/her basic needs.

“ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.... The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’” (Matthew 25:35-37)

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (James 1:27)

In addition to religious-based generosity, the Bible also teaches that every believer should support the needy in one’s family circle.

“Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1Timothy 5:8)

Zakah is one of the pillars of Islam and is a religious virtue that eases the suffering of many. The Qur'an also teaches the importance of zakah.

“And establish prayer and give zakah, and whatever good you put forward for yourselves - you will find it with Allah. Indeed, Allah of what you do, is Seeing” (Al-Baqarah 2:110)

Zakah expenditures are only for the poor and for the needy and for those employed to collect [zakah] and for bringing hearts together [for Islam] and for freeing captives [or slaves] and for those in debt and for the cause of Allah and for the [stranded] traveler - an obligation [imposed] by Allah. And Allah is Knowing and Wise (Surat Al-Tawbah 9:60).

The Qur'an also teaches to help one's relatives in times of need. Helping one's relatives is said to be a noble act.

“Worship Allah and associate nothing with Him, and to parents do good, and to relatives, orphans, the needy, the near neighbor, the neighbor farther away, the companion at your side, the traveler, and those whom your right hands possess. Indeed, Allah does not like those who are self-deluding and boastful” (Surat An-Nisa 4:36)

Build good personal life

Peace and security can only be achieved if everyone has a peaceful disposition. If everyone is peaceful, society will be peaceful. To that end, religious institutions must teach everyone to live in peace, to live for peace, and to keep the peace.

In the teachings of Christianity, God knows people personally; He calls them personally.

Islam gives attention to individual people. In principle, the call for prayers starts with the individual. Individual reform plays an important role in promoting peace and development.

Build a peaceful family

A family is the foundation of a society. When a family is healthy, society becomes healthy. The family influences the behavior of its members, especially the children. Family is the first school for children. Everyone lives with what they have learned at this school. A peaceful society can be created if every family teaches its members and children the importance of peace, the skills to relate well with people, and non-violent ways of resolving conflicts.

The Bible teaches the need to have a peaceful family and how it contributes to the peace of the community.

“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12)

“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4)

In Islam, peace is believed to be built starting from a family. The family is the foundation of the community. Looking for something good in the community that is not sown in the family may be searching for dung where there was no cow. Islam values the role of the family.

In Islam, establishing a family is a blessing and getting a place of rest.

“And Allah has made for you from your homes a place of rest and made for you from the hides of the animals' tents which you find light on your day of travel and your day of encampment; and from their wool, fur and hair is furnishing and enjoyment for a time” (Surat An-Nahl 16:80)

“O you who have believed, protect yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones, over which are [appointed] angels, harsh and severe; they do not disobey Allah in what He commands them but do what they are commanded.” (Surat At-Tahrim 66:6)

Relate well with the Creator

When people fear the Creator, they obey the Creator's commands. They refrain from doing the evils that the Creator does not like. The Creator loves peace. Those who follow the Creator are lovers of peace. Therefore, it is important to teach good faith values so that people fear the Creator and live peacefully with others.

According to Islamic teachings, prophets are sent to strengthen the community's relationship with their Creator. If a person follows the prophets, he/she will have the victories of both worlds. If he/she refuses, he/she will miss the chances of this world and the next.

Respect diversity and tolerate differences

Humankind was created by the Creator, but they are different. Diversity and differences are natural and cannot be eliminated. Peace seekers appreciate diversity and are willing to live in harmony with one another. Differences in views exist within the same family, community, religion, and country.

Diversity means not being the same. Diversity reflects the uniqueness of people. As human beings, we have similarities and differences.

Not everything created by the Creator is the same. There is diversity among plants and animals of the earth. There is diversity among the stars and planets of space. We have diverse creatures in the water. The universe is full of diversity.

The concept of coexistence implies a certain degree of acceptance of the fundamental differences between individuals, groups, and nations. The principle of coexistence encourages opposite groups to avoid confrontation to promote peaceful co-existence. It suggests the determination to solve conflicts peacefully by tolerating differences. The principle of peaceful co-existence advocates for talks around the table to break hostility and pave the way for negotiations.

When the principle of coexistence is applied, the conflicting parties cooperate to build trust and work towards reconciliation. Even when reconciliation is not possible, the principle encourages avoiding violence and respecting each other's right to live. When people act according to this principle, they begin to respect the right of the enemy to live.⁷

The Bible promotes tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

“From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands” (Acts 17:26)

“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love” (Ephesians 4:2)

The Qur'an teaches that all human beings have a common origin and that all human beings, regardless of religion, ethnicity or tribe, should be recognized and respected for their human dignity.

⁷ (Porter, 2007, p. 81)

“O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted” (Surat Al-Hujarat 49:13)

“And if your Lord had willed, He could have made mankind one community; but they will not cease to differ” (Surat Hud 11:118)

Practice mercy and forgiveness

Humans can do bad things to one another for various reasons. To make peace, it is important not to return evil for evil. Conflict does not escalate when one does wrong and the other does not retaliate. Forgiveness in the face of conflict helps to build peace.

Some of the thoughts the Bible speaks about forgiveness include:

“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8)

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32)

The Qur’an also speaks about forgiveness and mercy.

“And the retribution for an evil act is an evil one like it, but whoever pardons and makes reconciliation - his reward is [due] from Allah. Indeed, He does not like wrongdoers” (Surat Al-Shuraa 42:40)

“Repel, by [means of] what is best, [their] evil. We are most knowing of what they describe” (Surat Al-Mu’minum 23:96)

Follow non-violent ways of resolving conflict

When there is a conflict between people, people react differently. Some responses exacerbate conflict, while others contribute to calming the conflict. It is best to resolve conflicts in a non-violent way. Violence has serious negative consequences. People can resolve conflicts in non-violent ways.

Religious teachings encourage nonviolent ways of resolving conflicts. They call on people to resolve conflicts through dialogue, to avoid retaliation for the sake of the Creator, and to pay the price for peace.

In the Bible, believers are advised to settle disputes peacefully.

“Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Romans 12;17-18)

“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over” (Matthew 18:15)

In the Holy Qur'an, it is mentioned that a non-violent way of resolving conflicts is necessary. It is essential to be patient and resolve issues calmly and to supplicate to Allah (SWT) in the face of even more severe issues.

“And not equal are the good deed and the bad. Repel [evil] by that [deed] which is better, and thereupon the one whom between you and him is enmity [will become] as though he was a devoted friend.

But none is granted it except those who are patient, and none is granted it except one having a great portion [of good].

And if there comes to you from Satan an evil suggestion, then seek refuge in Allah. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Knowing. ” (Surat Fussilat 41:34-36)

In conclusion, there are fundamental principles that are essential to peacebuilding in religious teachings. The above-mentioned religious principles enhance to restore and sustain peace in the society.

Reflection Questions

- 1) What do you realize when you look at these religious-based principles?
- 2) Could we build sustainable peace in our communities by applying these religious principles in our day-to-day life? Explain.
- 3) What do you think should be done to ensure that different religious groups understand and practice these principles?



Chapter 2

Religion, Women and Peace-building

This chapter discusses the role of women in religion and peacebuilding. First, it highlights what religion can play in peacebuilding. The chapter also mentions experiences from scripture that enhance peace.

Furthermore, it stresses the role of women in religious ding based on studies conducted on the issue.

Chapter Objectives

- Explain the role of religion in peacebuilding.
- Explain the role of women in religious peacebuilding.

2.1. Religion and Peacebuilding

Religious peacebuilding is not a new phenomenon. Religious people have long been involved in promoting peaceful and fair relations between communities based on religious principles. However, in the field of international conflict resolution, modern religious peacebuilding theory and practice began to emerge in the 1990s.⁸

In various places, religious people promote emotional, spiritual support for war-torn communities, bring their communities and others together for peace, mediate between warring parties, restore peace, dialogue, disarmament, and reconciliation.

⁸ (Marshall & Hayward, 2011)

In a society where people have high regard for their religion, it is imperative to use religious values for peace. If the role of religion in the work of peace is neglected, those related to faith may be excluded or their ideas and contributions may not be utilized for peace. To mobilize more people for peace, it is important to work in a way that includes various religions.⁹

Religion contributes to peacebuilding. Religion can bring peace when employed appropriately. All three of Abraham's religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) have many commands that can help to bring peace. Interfaith dialogue has been used to resolve violent conflicts. Religious peacebuilding focuses on forgiveness and encourages peace. Peacebuilding activities based on religious values do more than making the participants feel good. It addresses issues of social justice based on religious values.¹⁰

Douglas Johnston, president of the World Center for Religion and Diplomacy, cited the need to use religious peacebuilding as an alternative to address various conflicts. He mentioned that religion could be meaningful to one or both parties in the conflict, the ability of religious leaders to work for peace between the two parties, the transcendence of religion, and the existence of religious values can promote peacebuilding.¹¹

Religious leaders and institutions also have their unique qualities for peace and reconciliation.

- Most people trust religious institutions.
- There are religious values that can be tapped for peacebuilding.
- Religious leaders may protest when they see injustice in society, based on their moral values and the sacred purpose for which they stand.
- Faith leaders reconcile the conflicting groups through mediation, restore the broken relationships.
- Religious leaders have the opportunity to seek the cooperation and support of other stakeholders for peace and reconciliation.
- Encourage people to persevere in the face of adversity.

⁹ (Pettman, 2005)

¹⁰ (Smock, 2006)

¹¹ (Johnston, 2003)

In religious institutions, various resources can be used to build peace. Some of the include:

Religious thoughts - religious contents

Religious experiences - worship activities

Social structures - faith community

Spiritual practices

In the process of peacebuilding, there are many good inputs obtained from religious institutions and their followers. The key to peacebuilding is understanding, empathy, and compassion for those who suffer for a variety of reasons. Understanding others and being compassionate are essential qualities in peacebuilding. People with these qualities have a better chance of building peace.

At times, it is said that the world's religions have become increasingly divisive. Indeed, if left unchecked, religion can be a catalyst for conflict.

Timothy D. Sisk, a professor of international and comparative politics at the Joseph Corbel School of International Studies at the University of Denver and director of the Center for Sustainable Development and International Peace, says religious leaders can be conflict activists or messengers of peace. Religious elites provide ideological justification, provide logical reasoning, and call for violence to escalate tensions between individuals or groups. On the other hand, in societies that are divided along ethnic, racial, or sectarian lines, religious leaders play a variety of positive roles. Religious leaders can play a vital role in preventing inter-ethnic violence or reduce tensions.¹²

The role that religions have played and are contributing to peace must be noted. Religious institutions and leaders are working hard to promote peace. Many are using their religious teachings and traditions to try to prevent and resolve conflicts. Therefore, social scientists should take seriously the role that religion plays in building social cohesion and building peace.

¹² (Sisk, 2011)

Thus, religious institutions and leaders contribute to the building of peace by using good religious values. They cannot do everything alone. Since they can work effectively with other stakeholders on peacebuilding, those who work on peacebuilding can partner with them and use their potential resources.

While religion may at times be a source of conflict, good religious values and doctrines contribute to peace. Religious leaders are more likely to promote peace and harmony in society. Since religious institutions have structures and connections that extend to families and individuals, they can easily inspire people to peace and mobilize resources. Religious leaders and followers can take advantage of these opportunities to contribute to the building of lasting peace in their communities.

Reflection Questions

- 1) Explain the similarities and differences between secular and religious peacebuilding by giving concrete examples.
- 2) Discuss how religious peacebuilding is being implemented in your community, citing examples.
- 3) What do you think religious institutions should do to actively participate in religious peacebuilding?

2.2. Women in religious peacebuilding

Religious peacebuilding requires common ground, brings people into unity and cooperation, and works to create an awareness that all people are equal before the Creator.

If properly used, religious leaders can use religion to build peace and influence society positively. In addition to the religious community, they have the opportunity to serve many non-believers in the community. Religious peacebuilding can only make a difference if it is inclusive. Inclusive means to include all sections of the faith community and to allow everyone member of the faith to participate in peacebuilding. The inclusion of women of faith in peacebuilding is one of the ways to ensure inclusion.

Women of faith constitute two groups: first, it refers to women who have received inspiration, understanding, and support for their work from their religious knowledge and personal experience. Second, it refers to women who are active members of religious institutions, religious associations, and groups.¹³

For many women, the motivation for their role in peacebuilding is rooted in their faith. When these women are confronted with various challenges in the peace process, they do not give up because they believe that when they are working for peace, it is an expression of their faith.¹⁴

According to Howard and Marshall, certain values enable religious women to contribute to peacebuilding. These include inclusiveness, justice, respect, and democratic processes. Women might have developed these values because they have lived in a male-dominated system and are influenced by it.¹⁵

Religious women can communicate with others by overcoming divisions. They can cross boundaries and form relationships and partnerships. The women usually do not think about the differences with other parties, but focus on the common problems they have faced individually and as a group.

Women who work for peace based on religious values pay special attention not only to external problems but also to psychological and spiritual issues. They focus on providing psychological and spiritual support for those who are victims of conflict.

¹³ (Qurtuby, 2018, p. 27)

¹⁴ (Marshall & Hayward, 2011)

¹⁵ (Hayward & Marshall, 2015)

Religious women often work well as mediators of conflict because they have relationships with many groups in society. In the process of reconciliation, people usually consider women as friends, not as a threat.

Women have strong ties to various groups in society and can mobilize people to defend the rights of victims.

In general, there are women of faith who have taken steps to resolve conflicts and build lasting peace, based on the good education they received from their religion and the religious values they practiced. Women of faith may play a role in peacebuilding, either in private or in religious institutions.

Reflection Questions

- 1) How do you think religion is affecting women's rights and their participation in society? Discuss positive and negative impacts with examples.
- 2) In your context, what is the role of religious women in peacebuilding? Share your good practices.

Chapter 3

Rationale for Women's Participation in Peacebuilding

It will be important to raise awareness on the importance of women's participation in peacebuilding based on empirical evidence. Given the negative perception of people about women in a male-dominated society, it is important to point out the rationale for women's role in peacebuilding. In this chapter, we will look at why women's participation is important in peacebuilding and what its benefits are.



Chapter Objectives

- Explain why women need to be involved in peacebuilding.
- Explain the benefits of women's participation in peacebuilding, as well as the negative impact of women's lack of participation in peacebuilding.

Women should be involved in all peacebuilding efforts in society. There are basic reasons for women's participation in peacebuilding. Some of the key points that necessitate women's participation in peacebuilding include:

Women account for half of the population

Women make up about half of the total population in many countries including Ethiopia. A society cannot achieve the desired development goals without the proper participation of half of its population. Women have their potential to contribute to society's development.

Although it is not possible to obtain accurate statistics on the number of women in each of our religious institutions, it is possible to assume that the number of women in the faith community is equal to or greater than men. However, women do not have an equal voice as men in religious organizations. Hence, it is fair to demand for women's voices to be heard.

The desired peace cannot be achieved if men and women in the communities do not work together for sustainable peace. Peacebuilding is a process that unites people of all cultures, languages, races, ethnicities, religions, ages, and gender. There is no peace in the context of division, exploitation, and resentment between men and women. Thus, for lasting peace, women and men need to work together as partners.

Communities that use both men's and women's talents, experiences, and wisdom are more likely to meet the needs of their members. If women are excluded from community decision-making and leadership or are too busy with family responsibilities and do not have time to attend community meetings, half of the population will lose their talents, experience, and skills to build the community.

Women care for their families

As a mother, a woman is naturally caring. She has unconditional love for her children and that contributes to peace. Motherhood is a special gift given to women by nature. She carries a baby in her womb for nine months, gives birth to the baby in pain, and then she forgets the pain and provides the utmost care for the newborn baby. A mother shares her life with others. In our context, a mother feeds her children while being hungry herself. A mother pays a price for the well-being of her children.

If a mother does not have enough money, she works hard until her children can support themselves. A mother sacrifices her rights to provide basic needs to her children. She nurtures children who have different personalities. This practice helps women to manage diversities better than others in society.

- Women work hard to fulfill the responsibilities of motherhood by raising their children and working for peace for generations to come.
- Women are peace coaches who teach generations the value of life and pass it on to future generations
- Women are committed to building a good family life and pass characters such as tolerance, patience, and respect for each other to those who establish families in the future

Women's upbringing and social responsibility enable them to develop relationships and prevent conflict. In many societies, women are raised by being encouraged to develop good relationships, to be caregivers, and supportive. As girls grow older, they learn these behaviors from their mothers and older sisters. Therefore, their upbringing encourages women to stay away from violence and build harmony with other people.¹⁶

While there are personal and political barriers to the unity of the various parties to the conflict, women can work as peacebuilders to bring warring parties together. In doing so, they recognize the differences between the conflicting groups, but form collaborations through cross-border efforts, thinking that all can be resolved through dialogue. In the peacebuilding process, women recognize differences and collaborations. They can understand how to create cooperation and collaboration in the face of differences.¹⁷

Women are the most vulnerable in conflicts

When there is a conflict in a community, all sections of the community are harmed. Above all, women are the most vulnerable to conflict. Women and men have different experiences in violent conflicts. Women are often affected by violence more than men.

During the conflict, women are vulnerable to sexual assault, rape, sexually transmitted diseases, and unplanned pregnancies. When local service facilities are destroyed due to conflict, women have difficulty accessing medical care, water, and electricity. In a war zone, men go to war, and women take care of children and the elderly near their homes. They work hard to support their families.¹⁸

When women are hurt, their families are affected. As women are the primary caregivers of their families, their harm, oppression, and exclusion from conflict prevention and peacebuilding will be detrimental to all segments of society.

¹⁶ (Schirch & Sewak, 2005, pp. 99-100)

¹⁷ (Porter, 2007, p. 69)

¹⁸ (Unicef, 2005)

Ensuring gender equality is crucial to sustainable peace

Many formal peacebuilding activities are carried out without the knowledge of different sections of the community. There is a need to assess how gender plays out in peacebuilding in the community. In a context where there is no gender equality, it is unlikely to build sustainable peace. Therefore, it is important to conduct a gender analysis at the beginning of the peace process and to study and analyze the impact of the conflict on gender relations and the needs of men and women, as well as the role of men and women in peacebuilding.¹⁹

If the peacebuilding process is dominated by men only, it will reflect the dominance of men in the community and strengthen existing power structures. Therefore, the peacebuilding process needs to be gender-sensitive.

In a context where gender equality is not guaranteed, gender-based violence may continue in the community, despite regular peacebuilding activities. Sometimes in the community where there is no violent conflict, women are vulnerable to gender-based violence in the family. In such a case, people claim that there is peace in the community, but women are being abused and their rights violated due to the prevalence of domestic violence.

In a context where domestic violence persists, lasting peace in the community is unthinkable. Therefore, to bring lasting peace to society, it is necessary to assess the basic problems of women and create a context in which their rights are respected. For this to happen, women need to be actively involved in the affairs of society, solve their problems, and take control of decision making that affect their lives.

There is a link between women's participation and sustainable peace

Various studies have been conducted on the positive effects of women's participation in peacebuilding. There were armed conflicts in various parts of the world. Negotiations were held to resolve these conflicts. Negotiations, where women were negotiators, showed good results. Since then, peace has been restored in those places. As a result, studies have shown that when women participate in peacebuilding as mediators, negotiators, and observers, sustainable peace is possible.²⁰

¹⁹ (Peacebuilding Initiative, 2009)

²⁰ (Krause, Krause, & Bränfors, 2018)

Lasting peace can only be achieved if the needs of the various groups in that community are identified and are properly addressed. No lasting peace can be achieved if the interests of some groups are met and others are ignored. The groups of which their needs are not addressed continue provoking conflicts directly and indirectly.

John Paul Lederach, an internationally recognized leader in conflict transformation and peacebuilding, says that lasting peace cannot be achieved without the proper response to the needs of different individuals and groups within a community.²¹ In this regard, peacebuilding efforts that do not take into account the views of many women in the community will not produce the desired results. Because peace that begins without their needs does not meet the needs of each group and will not last.

Restricting women's participation in peacebuilding processes excludes the voice of poor and marginalized women. It deprives women of the opportunity to identify and respond to their concerns and needs. It also prohibits women's experience and knowledge of conflict from being made public.

Since the victims of violent conflicts are mostly women, they need to be actively involved in matters that affect their lives. To achieve lasting peace, women must play an equal role to men in bringing sustainable peace to their communities.

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 calls for women to play a key role in bringing lasting peace to the post-conflict period, as women are more affected by conflict than men.²²

Women may come up with different alternatives about conflict, its causes, and solutions. Therefore, gaining their perspective is essential to peacebuilding. Women as survivors of conflict have been able to mediate between conflicting parties as they have witnessed conflict. As they serve their families in times of violent conflict, women play a vital role in breaking the cycle of conflict.

²¹ (Lederach, 1999)

²² (UNSC, 2015)

Government and religious institutions usually talk about the importance of women's active participation in peacebuilding. In practice, however, the issue does not seem to be making much progress. It should be noted that women's participation in peacebuilding benefits not only women but also society as a whole. Lasting peace can only be achieved if women are actively involved in peacebuilding at all levels. Therefore, it is important to overcome obstacles that exclude women from actively participating in peace processes

Reflection Questions

- (1) In your opinion, what are the main reasons for the low participation of women in peacebuilding?
- (2) Discuss the benefits of engaging women in community peacebuilding and the negative effects of not engaging women in peacebuilding. Give examples.
- (3) What is the level of understanding of religious institutions on the importance of engaging women in peacebuilding? Share your experiences.

Chapter 4

Involvement of Women in Peacebuilding in the Scriptures

This chapter describes religious views about women and stories of women who played important role in peacebuilding processes in the Scriptures.

The chapter focuses on drawing lessons from women's stories so that we can apply them in our lives.

Chapter Objectives

- Explain the major views of the Scriptures about women.
- Describe stories of women who participated in peacebuilding in the Scriptures.

4.1. Women who have worked for peace in the Scriptures

It is not the purpose of this article to describe in detail what the Scriptures teach about women. However, to raise the issue of women's participation in peacebuilding, it is appropriate to briefly address the views of the Scriptures of various religions on women.

Various religions teach about the origin of women, their relationship with men, their role in the family and society, and how they should guide their lives. There are also commandments in the Scriptures to guide women's behaviors.

Because religious teachers are humans, they are conditioned by the culture in which they live in. Sometimes these religious teachers interpret and teach doctrines about women from a cultural perspective rather than in the view of the Creator. If read and interpreted in a balanced way, the Scriptures say many positive messages about women.

Christianity's view of women

The Bible tells us that God created man and woman. Both have equal human dignity because they were created by God. Therefore, it is important to have respect for both.

“So God created mankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27)

God created man and woman and gave them commands. His command was to multiply and to rule over the creatures.

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (Genesis 1:28)

Apostle Paul said that all who believe in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ are equal before God. When God gives salvation to humankind, He does not discriminate based on gender, race, social status, or ethnicity. All are equal before Him.

“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28)

Islamic view of women

Women make up half of the population in the Muslim community. Social issues and activities carried out without the participation of women are minimal or slow. Women are considered the most important partners of men.

In the Holy Qur'an, Surat al-Hujurat says,

“O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted” (49:13)

In another section of the Holy Qur'an, it also says,

“The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and establish prayer and give zakah and obey Allah and His Messenger. Those - Allah will have mercy upon them. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise” (Surat At-Tawbah 9:47)

In the Holy Qur'an, a woman is different from a man, and she has moral and spiritual obligations given to her by Allah (SWT). Both men and women will be rewarded by Allah (SWT) for their good deeds.

And their Lord responded to them, "Never will I allow to be lost the work of [any] worker among you, whether male or female; you are of one another. So those who emigrated or were evicted from their homes or were harmed in My cause or fought or were killed - I will surely remove from them their misdeeds, and I will surely admit them to gardens beneath which rivers flow as reward from Allah, and Allah has with Him the best reward." (Surat Ali-Imran 3:195)

The Scriptures teach that women are created by the Creator and that men and women should live together. In the eyes of the Creator, men and women are equal. Both men and women can have a spiritual relationship with the Creator. They can worship and follow their Creator. They can also do things that please the Creator.

In the scriptures, we read the stories of men and women. Some of the women mentioned in the Scriptures participated in peacebuilding, reconciliation, and paid a price for the sake of peace.



Abigail

Stories of women peacebuilders in the Bible

A woman named Abigail was recorded in the Bible in 1 Samuel chapter 25. The Bible tells us that after the death of the prophet Samuel and the moving of David to Faran, there was a man named Nabal who lived in Maon. Nabal's wife was Abigail. Although her husband was immoral and naughty, his wife was very intelligent and beautiful (1Samuel 25:3). Abigail had good manners, not just physical beauty.

David sent a message of peace to her husband, Nabal. The message was that David and his men should be given food to eat. Nabal answered David's servants, "Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days. Why should I take my bread and water, and the meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows where?" (1Samuel 25:110-11). His response was rough.

Hearing Nabal's scornful response, David drew his sword and prepared his men to attack Nabal's family. A servant who saw this situation told Abigail what had happened. Realizing the seriousness of the situation, Abigail went to her own house, prepared the food, and gave David and his servants all the food they needed. She did not tell her husband what she planned to do.

She fed the 600 men who were prepared to attack her family. In addition, with her seasoned and humble speech, she calmed down the angry David who was prepared to kill all that belonged to Nabal.

When she came to David, she begged him to forgive her, so that he would not shed blood. Abigail changed David's mind. He turned around. His fighting mood was changed into a forgiving spirit.

Then David accepted from her hand what she had brought him and said, “Go home in peace. I have heard your words and granted your request.” (1 Samuel 25:35)

Abigail was like those women who calm down husbands who incite conflicts in the family. Abigail is like those women who support their husbands by dealing with challenges that come through their husbands' work, relations, and social interactions with wisdom.

- She brought praise to God with her wise and humble actions,²³
- She saved her husband and her family from impending doom,
- She believed that every action has consequences,²⁴
- She was well organized, and meticulous which enabled her to respond to the problem promptly
- It was a peaceful time, people were enjoying the party, and it seemed that there was nothing that threatened the lives of the family. When conflict erupted suddenly, she acted promptly.

Abigail did not tell her husband what her response plan was. When she returned after meeting David, she did not talk to him because he was drunk. She was a woman who knew when and what to say.

As we can see from Abigail's story, we see that women have a great role to play in preventing conflict and building peace. We recognize that women have the potential for peace. Abigail was able to meet and talk to a rebel leader and brought peace.

²³ 1 Samuel 25:32

²⁴ 1 Samuel 25:19



Midwives

By the time Moses was born, Pharaoh was worried about the increase in Israelites in Egypt and had declared to kill male Israelite babies at birth. This was a time of distress, sadness, and anxiety for many mothers.

During this difficult time, midwives rescued the Israelite children without fear of the Egyptian government. A government decree was that all Israelite males should be put to death at birth. This was especially carried out by midwives. These midwives knew the cost of disobeying a government order.

Midwives decided to do justice. They did not allow innocent children to die. They wisely opposed the proclamation of the state. In so doing, they saved the lives of many children including Moses who later became a leader, who led the Israelites out of Egypt (Ex. 1:15-20; 2:1-10).

Midwives have played a key role in preventing genocide. They have been able to prevent the massacre of children by disobeying an unjust government order.



Esther

The other woman in the Bible who was known for thwarting the genocide plan was Queen Esther (Esther 3:13; 9 ■1). Esther came from a poor Jewish family, but because of her external and internal beauty, she was attracted to King Artaxerxes. The first of her heroic deeds was to save the lives of her people by wisely fighting the decree of the king to destroy all the Jews in one day.

According to the Book of Esther, Artaxerxes ruled from India to Ethiopia. Jews were living in the land of the king who were exiled by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Among them was Mordecai, a Benjaminite from Jerusalem who lived near the citadel of Susa. This man brought up Esther, his cousin, in the Jewish tradition. Esther was beautiful. The king was captivated by her beauty and took her to the palace.

Haman, the king's servant, proclaimed a decree to destroy all the Jews who had been taken captive because of their quarrel with Mordecai. The Jews were very worried about the execution. Mordecai approached the king's gate, tearing off his garments, wearing sackcloth, and ashes. He could not get in. However; he was able to send a message to Esther to intervene and prevent the genocide of the Jews from happening.

When she realized that the Jews were in danger, she became determined to save her people.

“Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.” (Esther 4:16)

She presented her case to King Artaxerxes. She appeared before the king violating the tradition of the palace but acted discreetly.

There are two things that Esther was able to do for peace and reconciliation. The first was her faith in God. As soon as Esther received the message from Mordecai, she proclaimed fasting and prayers for three days (Esther 4:15). We must keep in mind that peace and reconciliation can be achieved not only by discussing with kings or two opposing forces but also by asking God for His guidance and wisdom.

Secondly, Esther was determined to make peace. We can learn a strong commitment to bringing peace from the example of Esther. This commitment led her to prepare for sacrificing her life. Women are willing to pay any price to save their children, their families, and their communities from violent conflicts.



The noble woman

Some churches say that the wise woman mentioned in the book of Proverbs contributed to peacebuilding. The virtues and actions of a wise woman are mentioned in (Proverbs 31:10-31).

A wise woman is a good and diligent woman. She has family, housekeeping, and business responsibilities. She also plays an important role in the community. She is a woman who uses her time wisely and works hard in all areas of life.

The noble woman has three major responsibilities in her life. First, she takes care of herself. Next, she has built a good relationship with her husband. Third, she is responsible for her household. By prioritizing these three things, she does the right thing in business and social responsibility.

In her personal life, she is at peace with her husband, her family, her servants, and the community. Through good communication, she promotes peace. She can do this because she is leading a balanced life. She is a diligent and successful woman in her responsibilities. She is not anxious and stressed. She is not worried and does not make others anxious. By providing proper leadership for her family and staff, she avoids conflict.

Stories of women peacebuilders in the Holy Qur'an

Among the women mentioned in the Islamic scriptures were many Muslim women who worked for peace. To illustrate this, let us consider a few of them.



Khadija

Khadija was the daughter of Khuwaylid (may Allah be pleased with her), the first wife of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and a role model for Muslim women. Khadija's father was a businessman. After her father died, she took over her father's business and continued the business. She hired loyal and talented men and started her business from Mecca to Syria and Yemen. Her business was better than other rich merchants in the Quraysh community. She was very popular because she faithfully traded goods.

Khadija was a wise woman with a positive attitude, treating the religious leaders, the nobles of the Quraysh, and the poor fairly. She also knew that she had to do her job wisely. She helped people with integrity. She only hires staff who could meet her criteria.

Khadija (may Allah be pleased with her) was involved in peacebuilding. She provided financial assistance to help those who were unable to marry due to poverty. Most of these were poor, orphans, and the marginalized. She gave her income to the poor and needy children, the widow, and the sick. She helped poor girls get married.

To illustrate the excellence of Khadija, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) once said that there were four strong wives: Khadija (wife of the Prophet Muhammad), Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the daughter of Imran (the Virgin Mary) and Asiya, the daughter of Muzahim (Pharaoh's wife). She helped those in need. made them feel equal to others and encouraged them to live in peace and to avoid going to extremes.



Aisha Bint Abubakr

Aisha Bint Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with her) is another role model for women of this age. She was a daughter of Abu Bakr Sadik (may Allah be pleased with him), a friend and supporter of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), and was a very popular woman. There are many verses of the Qur'an associated with her. She was one of the most admired of the faithful mothers. She had a great mind and a wonderful memory. There are many hadiths reported from her. This is possible because of her strong connection with the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

Aisha excelled in various fields of religious knowledge. Her ability to interpret, her ability to teach, her loyalty to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) were among the most remarkable personalities. She was a very good woman and was exceptionally outstanding. She was an outstanding teacher of Hadith. No other woman has transmitted a hadith to her level. She reported 2210 hadiths. Her recollections and wisdom enabled her to increase her knowledge of the religion that benefited her to teach the Muslim community from century to century. She contributed to dispel ignorance, and illuminate the path to knowledge.

Imam al-Zahabi (may Allah be pleased with him) wrote: "Aisha is superior to all other women in her knowledge and wisdom. She was a great theologian. Her verdict was upheld during the caliphate. She has extensive knowledge of inheritance and Shari's laws. People who were close friends of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) used to come to Aisha for the verdict at different times. Her religious commentary has greatly contributed to the peace of the community."

Women are instrumental in Islam. Without their participation, complete peace in the community would be unthinkable. As the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) taught, it is obligatory to teach girls. This teaching can be religious or secular.

When girls are educated, they can teach their families especially their children. An educated girl can play an important role in educating the community. Because women are more tolerant than men, women have a tremendous responsibility to raise their children by teaching them moral education. An educated mother has a major responsibility to teach Qur'an to her children and to help them with their education after school. Educated women contribute more to the peace of the community than uneducated ones.

During the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), women contributed to the expansion of Islam by teaching people about the religion. The women who followed the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) at that time were well known in history and contributed to the establishment of Islam. As a result of their hard work and encouragement for men, a peaceful community was built in Medina and other Muslim provinces. Today, Muslim women, along with men, are playing an important role in building peace around the world.

It has been suggested that Muslim women have the potential to contribute to peacebuilding in society. Therefore, it is essential to encourage Muslim women's participation in peacebuilding.

There are stories in the scriptures of women who have contributed to peace at home, in the community, and at the national level. These women wisely dealt with the challenges of peace in their day and avoided conflict. Most of these women focused on preventing conflicts than waiting until the conflict occurred. Women in the 21st century can learn a lot of lessons from the stories of these women.

Reflection Questions

- 1) How much do you think people of different religions in your community understand what the Scriptures teach about women?
- 2) What are the differences between what the Scriptures teach about women and what people think about women in society?
- 3) What do you think is the relationship between what religions teach about women and women's participation in peacebuilding? Explain by giving examples.
- 4) Discuss if other women are not listed in this section but who are mentioned in the scriptures as role models in peacebuilding.
- 5) Discuss what can be learned from women of faith who participated in peacebuilding in the Scriptures.
- 6) What is the significance of the mention of these women in the scriptures in terms of women's participation in peace processes?



Chapter 5

The Participation of Women in Peacebuilding in the History of Religions

Each religion has its own history. There are prominent figures in religious history. In this chapter, we will look at the case of a few women who set a precedent for peacebuilding in religious institutions in the past.

Chapter Objectives

- To tell the stories of women who have worked hard for peacebuilding in the history of Christianity and Islam.
- To point out the lessons that should be learned from the role of women in religious peacebuilding in the past.

5.1. In Islam

Many Muslim women in the history of Islam have worked for peace in various countries. In this section, we will tell stories of few Muslim women role models who contributed significantly to the peace of their communities.

Dekha Ibrahim Abdi

Dekha Ibrahim was born in 1964 in Wajir, Kenya to a Somali Muslim tribe. With her father's support, she received a good education and became a teacher. In the early 1990s, ethnic clashes over water and livestock in Wajir claimed the lives of 1,500 people. At that time, Dekha, a local school teacher, began working with women from other ethnic groups. Despite opposition from traditional leaders, they began to mediate between rival factions.

The first step of Dekha's approach was to listen carefully to all those involved in the conflict. She showed respect for people by recognizing that disrespect was one of the causes of conflict. She knew that treating people who experienced disdain with respect was a way of healing. She learned that when people who were involved in a conflict expressed their feelings and when they felt that they were understood, they were willing for reconciliation.

Dekha had the opportunity to work on peacebuilding at various levels. She has won numerous international awards for her exemplary work in mobilizing women for community peacebuilding.

She used traditional methods to resolve religious-based and other conflicts.

Dekha was a devout Muslim who loved Islam. She said that what she learned about her faith gave her much motivation for her peacebuilding work. She explained that reading the Qur'an helped her to achieve lasting peace. She was working as a peace activist and a peace consultant on conflicts in Kenya before she died in 2011 in a car accident at the age of 46.²⁵

5.2. In Christianity

In the history of the various Christian denominations, many women were exemplary in peacebuilding. Some of the women were not recognized for their work during their lifetime but later gained recognition for their work.

²⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dekha_Ibrahim_Abdi ; *in addition see* <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2011/aug/09/dekha-ibrahim-abdi-obituary>; *also see* <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/feast-with-your-enemies-dekha-ibrahim-abdi/>

Sister Marie-Bernard Alima

A Catholic Sister Marie-Bernard Alima has worked for more than two decades to promote peace and empower women in peacebuilding. Sister Marie-Bernad is known for her work on peacebuilding in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In 2001, she founded the Civil Society for Women's Democracy and Peace Coordination to train and support women peace leaders. This network currently has thousands of women members in the Democratic Republic of Congo. These women play a leading role in human rights, transitional justice, women's participation in politics, and the fight against sexual violence and gender-based violence.

Sister Alima is the first woman to serve as Secretary-General of the Episcopal Justice and Peace Commission of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Justice and Peace program she runs serves half of the population in a Catholic country. Under her leadership, the Commission is actively involved in preventing sexual and gender-based violence and encouraging rehabilitation support for victims.

In general, women who have been involved in peacebuilding around the world are often motivated by their religious beliefs. The efforts of religious women in peacebuilding have gone unnoticed. In many religions, women often have little formal religious leadership. Most religious leaders are men. On the one hand, this stigma has alienated women from formal religious activities, but it has allowed them to build peace behind the scenes. It is important to remember these women who have paid the price for peace in the history of religions, to learn from their lives, and inspire women today to build peace.

Reflection Questions

- (1) Discuss the role women played in religious peacebuilding in our country.
- (2) Describe the challenges faced by women who over the centuries have worked to build lasting peace through religious peacebuilding.
- (3) What can religious women today learn from women of faith who practiced peacebuilding in their time, using the teachings and values of their faith?

Chapter 6



Challenges of Women's Participation in Peacebuilding

While women's participation in peacebuilding is believed to be important, many challenges prevent women from actively participating in peacebuilding. Although the nature and extent of the challenges vary from place to place, there are traditional, systematic, and structural challenges that hinder women's participation in peacebuilding. In this chapter, we will look at these challenges in more detail.

Chapter Objectives

- Identify basic challenges that prevent women from participating in peacebuilding.
- Explain the causes of the challenges that prevent women from actively participating in peacebuilding

Traditional Challenges

In some areas, women are seen as violent, provocative, and conflict escalators rather than as messengers of peace. Some proverbs illustrate this point. Here are some of them:

- A man sent by a woman is not afraid of death

These expressions portray women as contributors to conflict and thus affect their participation in peacebuilding.

In generic terms, women, as human beings, can provoke conflict. Just as men can provoke conflict, they too can become involved in a conflict. In Ethiopia, women participated in the protection of national sovereignty and civil wars. Women engaged in direct combat.

They were also involved in conflicts in many other ways for instance, in spying, providing food for the warriors, encouraging men to take revenge on their victims, concealing and smuggling weapons, providing cover for their families, and protecting their children and youth.²⁶

This does not mean that women should not be involved in peacebuilding. There are also many opportunities for women to be connectors among various groups in their community. Therefore, it is necessary to avoid such gross generalization. This is one of the distorted thoughts that need to be changed by educating the community.

In some societies, men make decisions without the active participation of women. Women are less likely to participate in the public decision-making process. As with any other issue, women are also excluded from peacebuilding. Traditionally, women are not given the opportunity to engage in the public affairs of their communities.

Gender-based factors

It is important to understand what gender is and how it differs from sex before describing how gender inequality hinders women's participation in peacebuilding.

A dictionary defines sex as "the state of being male or female." Sex refers to the biological differences between men and women. These include chromosomes, hormonal profiles, internal and external sex organs. Everyone is born male or female. Sex is natural, universal, and cannot be changed. Sex does not vary from culture to culture or from time to time. Sex is permanent in all cultures and times.

Gender is a social concept. This term describes the characteristics of a masculine or feminine in a community. Gender is a set of socially constructed roles and responsibilities. Gender is not natural. We are not born with gender roles. We learn from the community. Gender is conditioned by the culture. Therefore, it varies from culture to culture and from time to time.

Sex is a natural identity whereas gender is a socially constructed role of men and women in society.

Gender inequality in a society affects women's participation in peacebuilding in various ways.

²⁶ (Porter, 2007, p. 3)

It is widespread in many societies and has a negative psychological impact on women. It keeps women from participating in peace processes. It instills fear in women, and in the process of conflict and peacebuilding, it prevents them from making their voices heard.

Gender inequality has long been a barrier to women's participation in peacekeeping operations around the world. Women's participation in UN peacekeeping was low. Because people who work in institutions work with the attitudes and behaviors of the community, people at all levels of society reflect the attitudes of society. In most societies, men are thought to be warriors, heroes, and defenders. When it comes to military service, men, not women are considered. This attitude has been cited as one of the barriers to women's participation in international peacekeeping.²⁷

Although the United Nations, NGOs, researchers, and women's advocacy groups have supported women's participation in peacebuilding, community-based movements, peace activists, and faith groups have reportedly failed to address women's participation in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. This low level of women's representation in peacebuilding exacerbates gender inequality in the field. Moreover, it is thought to undermine women's ability to contribute to peacebuilding.²⁸

Refusing to listen to the voices of women and other marginalized groups in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, disregarding their identities and interests is a violation of their dignity. Such an approach would prevent lasting peace in the community.

In some cases, women, especially religious women, are more likely to accept negative attitudes toward women and to exclude themselves from social life. Instead of fighting for their rights and contributing to society, women tend to be reluctant to participate in peacebuilding because they tend to accept the social status they do not deserve in society. This feeling of helplessness or inability to do something is a dangerous inner enemy that keeps away women from participating in peacebuilding.

²⁷ (Karim & Beardsley, 2017)

²⁸ (Porter, 2007, p. 2)

Inadequate Competence

There are many challenges to women's active participation in peacebuilding, especially in decision-making. One of these is related to women's competence. Most women do not have the same level of education as men to participate in peacebuilding. There is a huge gap in terms of educating girls to make them competent in all aspects. Sometimes women want to participate in the peace process, but they do not have the education and training to do so.

Peacebuilding is a profession that requires basic skills, such as communication, cross-cultural communication, conflict analysis, negotiation, gender analysis, mediation, listening, anxiety, and stress management skills.

Women often have practical conflict resolution and peacebuilding skills that do not require special training. In reality, inadequate competence in peacebuilding is an excuse to exclude women from the peacebuilding process. As for the technical skills needed for peacebuilding, women do not have the same technical skills as men because they are not given equal opportunity as men to get the training.²⁹

Economic Challenges

Women need the economic capacity to move freely and participate in the peace process. Women need to have their income to operate independently. Without equal opportunities for employment and income, women will not be able to increase their economic potential.

Thus, many challenges prevent women from actively participating in peacebuilding. These challenges include considering women as conflict instigators, gender inequality, lack of opportunities for women to develop the technical skills needed to build peace more than men, and economic inequality. These challenges are man-made, and if properly addressed, they will be solved and changed.

²⁹ (Erzurum & Eren, 2014, pp. 250-251)

Reflection Questions

- (1) What are the challenges that prevent women from actively participating in peacebuilding in your community? Explain by giving examples.
- (2) What do you think is the relationship between gender equality and women's peacebuilding?
- (3) What are the root causes of these challenges for women to not actively participate in peacebuilding?

Chapter 7

Ways to strengthen Women's participation in peacebuilding

While the active participation of women in peacebuilding has been noted, there are still many obstacles to overcome in many societies. Recognizing that women's participation in peacebuilding plays an important role in bringing lasting peace, we need to gradually address these barriers and create an environment in which women can participate fully in peacebuilding.

This chapter outlines some of the key actions that need to be made to engage women in meaningful peacebuilding efforts at various levels.



Chapter Objectives

- Explain the ongoing efforts to involve women in peacebuilding.
- Outline the steps that need to be taken to enable women to actively participate in peacebuilding

Teach women how to participate in religious peacebuilding

Women are created by the Creator and have their potential. They have the same human dignity as men. Apart from the role that women are naturally given, women can do the workmen do.

According to religious traditions, women were involved in a variety of peacebuilding activities in the Scriptures and religious history. Some of these women were already mentioned in this book.

Peace is of great value and should be shared by all. Peace is not something that can be achieved by the efforts of a few. For lasting peace at all levels, men and women must play their part in peacebuilding.

Since religious institutions have many followers, leaders are influential in their constituencies, and they can influence people's thinking and actions, they need to be taught the importance of women's active participation in peacebuilding. If religious institutions properly teach the importance of women's participation in peacebuilding, positive change can be achieved.

Strengthen women's peace forums in religious institutions

The Women's Peace Forum has been established under the auspices of the Interreligious Council of Ethiopia.

In some areas, men and women may not be able to participate in peacebuilding because of religious beliefs, and there are alternative experiences in which men and women can discuss peacebuilding in separate groups to discuss the same issue simultaneously.³⁰ When government institutions have peace talks with religious leaders, it is possible to include female religious leaders in conversations instead of always doing it with male religious leaders.

Some reports indicate that there are women desks in most of the religious organizations in Ethiopia. These desks usually exist at the head office of the faith-based organizations. If these women's desks are strengthened, they can expand their ministry to include peace issues.

Encourage women to engage in peace activities in their daily lives

Women do not have to perform special miracles to build peace. They can contribute to peacebuilding as they go about their daily activities. Some may be able to contribute to the peace of the community by performing great things. A study conducted in Uganda on the role of women in peacebuilding stated that women contribute to peacebuilding in a variety of ways.

³⁰ (Hussain, 2018)

These women's peacebuilding efforts are reflective of their lives as women within their society, at times working from within socially and culturally defined roles, at others challenging and even defying these same roles. They are influenced by the values, knowledge, and skills acquired through their Western education. They are also reflective of the values embodied in their indigenous African worldview—interconnectedness, relationships, cooperation, and social balance. Of significance is the fact that values necessary for building cultures of peace are intrinsic to the African context; they are in no need of being imported from the West.³¹

Build women's capacity in peacebuilding

Women can be actively involved in peacebuilding when they acquire the knowledge and skill they need to build peace. Appropriate education and training are essential for peacebuilding. Governmental, non-governmental, and religious institutions must act in a planned manner to empower women by building their capacities for peace.

The commitment of stakeholders to engage women in peacebuilding is realized by empowering women for peacebuilding. Institutions need to allocate the necessary resources (human power, materials, and money) to enhance women's peacebuilding skills.

Ensure gender equality

It is well known that one of the main reasons for the low participation of women in peacebuilding is gender inequality in society. Gender inequality is prevalent in religious institutions and all should do their share to address it.

Religious institutions need to create a conducive environment for gender equality based on their teachings. This is possible partly by developing a gender equality policy in religious organization.

³¹ (Jennifer Ball, 2019, p. 211)

Study and strengthen traditional women peacebuilding activities

In some communities in our country, women are more likely than men to resolve conflicts and work for peace. These innovative women's peacebuilding experiences can be widely used if identified by research.

Share experience on women's participation in peacebuilding

It is a good idea for women peace activists to work together in faith-based contexts, to share ideas, experiences, best practices as well as to examine religious teachings from a gender perspective. Women in religious peacebuilding in Ethiopia can learn from the experiences of women in other countries. This would give them a good opportunity to learn from other's good experiences.

For women to take an active part in peacebuilding in society and in religious institutions, all stakeholders need to do their part. If barriers to women's participation in peacebuilding are identified, and all efforts are made, the barriers can be removed. All parties must work together to change this age-old gender inequality.

Reflection Questions

- (1) Discuss positive experiences in your communities or institutions in terms of actively involving women in peacebuilding.
- (2) What do you think should be done to encourage women to be actively involved in religious peacebuilding?

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