

**Symposium in Commemoration of the Centenary of the Birth of
The late Yukika SOHMA (1912-2008),
a Founder of Association for Aid and Relief, Japan**

“Democracy and the Power of Women”

Presentation by Ms. Jody Williams

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I want to start by thanking AAR for inviting me to come again to Japan. I've had the privilege of knowing AAR for many years now and Yukie OSA (President of AARJapan) is a personal friend. It is wonderful to be able to be back here. I'm not quite sure anymore how many times I've been to Japan; I love this country.

It is a particular honor for me to be here now. I had the deep honor of meeting Ms. SOHMA; she is an amazing inspiration. At sixty-seven years of age she decided to create an organization to help others. It shows what people can do at any age. I agree with the concept that we should be trying to improve ourselves until the day we die. I think she did a good job of improving herself throughout her life and I was happy to know her at least a little bit.

I want to also thank the panel for what they had to say. I found it extremely interesting with the different perspectives of the women on the panel: they came from government and the corporate world, and from the UN and NGOs. They were slightly different, but not really in some ways.

It seems to me, at the center of it all is the invisible prejudice that women still suffer when they are trying to work in what is still a man's world—as was pointed out by one of the speakers. This isn't an insult to you guys; you can't help it, that's the way it's been. And we are going to help you to change it.

That's the job of women now—to help change perspectives. But in this world—where societies, cultures, and governments are controlled by men—when a woman wants to be part of that, it is very difficult. Unless she is willing to accept the framework of the male dominated structure, whether it is a government structure or a corporate structure or even in the

NGO world, if it is a predominantly male-run NGO, the same thing can happen there.

When I have talked about women generally having a different sense of power, there is always the response: “What about Margaret Thatcher?” Margaret Thatcher was hardly a woman’s woman. Margaret Thatcher was more like a man in a woman’s suit, more or less. But my response is that Margaret Thatcher chose to accept the male system. And she chose to act in that system which requires taking decisions and acting in that fashion. I don’t believe it is inevitable and I certainly do not believe it is healthy.

A friend who has been very important in finance and I were talking about trying to have better communication between women in corporations and women in the NGO world. It is not easy. A lot of that is because when women go into the corporate world they have to put aside their perspectives as women or they will be seen as too weak or not able to compete in the men’s domain. So we were trying to strategize about what we could do to make corporate women feel comfortable talking to civil society women—NGO women—because at our core we’re all women.

I think part of the challenge both as women and as human beings is to get people to take off their uniforms and talk to each other as human beings. Whether it’s their “uniform” as a government official, whether it’s their “uniform” of a corporate official, whether it’s their military uniform, or the “uniform” of the NGO world.

I think it is fundamental and I think it is one of the reasons we were so successful in the campaign to ban landmines, which AAR was a critical part of. We refused to let the general be a general, we refused to let the diplomat to speak only like a diplomat; we made them be human.

And when I was talking to my friend, she's Swedish and works in the corporate financial world, she was saying that there are many studies that have been done in which almost every one indicated that until there are 30% women in the management section of a company, it will not change. If there are only two women, the male domination is too strong for the other perspective to have space. To me that says that women have to take responsibility to accept being part of the world even though it is still a little too male dominated, in order to change it. But if we keep sitting back and not working to change things, nothing will change.

I was in Hiroshima a few years ago. It was me and Shirin Ebadi and other women on a small delegation. Dr. Ebadi, from Iran, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003 for fighting for women and children's human rights in her country. We were in Hiroshima and there was a gentleman from the United Nations talking to our delegation. He was an ambassador in New York. I can't remember why he was talking to us, but he was.

When it got to the question and answer time, I said to him, "I know that quite a few years ago, the United Nations set a goal for itself of having 10% women in management positions." (10%—remember that we are more than 50% of this planet and they thought it was excellent that they were going for 10%.) So I asked him how they were doing. And his answer was, "We're doing terribly. We're not even at 3%."

So, I asked him the most logical question, which was, "Why?" His answer was shocking in its stupidity. He said to us—we were delegation women, including two women who received the Nobel Peace Prize—and he says, "The reason we don't have more women in management in the United Nations is because we *cannot find any qualified women.*"

I thought, even if you think that, Mr. Ambassador, it isn't very wise to say it to a delegation of women, including women who had received the Nobel Peace Prize. We have our problems, we're not perfect, but we have our accomplishments just like men do.

I give that as another example of the overt prejudice against women. Men don't even think about seeing us as equals. I don't think it's necessarily evil, although sometimes it can be. But you see what you're used to seeing. If all you see working in governments around the world and all you see running corporations is men, that is what you're going to think about it when you think about finding *qualified people*.

And that is why it is, in my opinion, extremely important that women recognize the need to be part of the system. And not just for ourselves. I think if women's rights are elevated, everybody benefits.

I think too often men believe that when women want to be part of a democratic process or want to be in corporate leadership positions, somehow we want to be men.

With all due respect to all of you men here today, I've never in all of my life, not even for one minute, wanted to be a man. None of the women I've worked with ever wanted to be a man. What we want is equality; recognition before the law, whether in governments or corporations. And I'm not saying that women are perfect. I think there are some differences in how women and men cooperate and work together, though not all.

I'll give you the example of our Nobel Women's Initiative. It was in 2004, and I was in Nairobi, Kenya. Shirin Ebadi happened to be there. And it was also right after it was announced that Wangari Maathai, from Kenya, had received the Peace Prize in 2004 for her work on democracy and the environment. It was before she left to go to Oslo to receive the prize.

So Shirin was very clever and she said to me, “Jody, have you thought about the fact that today there are seven women alive who’ve received the Nobel Peace Prize?” I just have to point out that in the one hundred and ten years of the Nobel Prize, there have only been fifteen women—and three of them from last year. All of the others were men, or organizations. So Shirin said “We have enough women that we could come together and form a project to help women.”

I thought that was a fabulous idea. So the next day we saw Wangari to congratulate her on her prize and we talked to her about the idea of bringing the women together so that we could use whatever power and influence we have because of the Nobel Peace Prize to support women around the world working for sustainable peace, with justice and equality.

We have the vision of sharing our prize, which really isn’t about us. It’s about all of the people with us that helped to bring change. But we wanted to share the Nobel Peace Prize with women working in Africa, in Asia, in Latin America. We wanted to stand with women human rights defenders who are being threatened and oppressed because they defend human rights around the world.

We wanted to use, whatever the power we have to share with women everywhere so that their voices can be heard. Because we know if we stand behind them or with them or beside them, people pay attention.

So we started the Nobel Women’s Initiative in January 2006. So far, it’s been fun but difficult. We’re very hard, fighting women. I bring it up because when I was saying that there is a difference between how men and women cooperate, I think men compete and women are more willing to cooperate.

I think about all of the men in the history of the Nobel Prize, and never has there been a Nobel Men's Initiative. Never. The men have never come together to share what they have with other people. Yet as soon as we, the women, recognized that there were enough of us, we knew we could work together to support women working for sustainable peace with justice and equality.

I think it is a curious but very common distinction between how men look at their place in the world and how we women tend to look at ours. Not always, but I think it's pretty fair to say that the tendency is for women to try to work together while men come at things on their own.

I was in the university; it was 1968-1972 in the United States. It was a very volatile time in my country. It was the civil rights movement and Dr. Martin Luther King. It was the reemergence of the feminist movement and also, of course, the war in Vietnam. And it was at that time that I discovered that because I was a woman, I was supposed to be discriminated against.

I didn't know it because in my family that's not how we were raised. The boys and the girls were raised the same so I didn't even understand we were supposed to be oppressed, until I read a book about female oppression. Then I got so angry that every time I was near any male friend of mine, I would start ranting about oppression, I'd always ask them, "What are you doing to make it different?"

So when I would come near a group of my male friends, they would run. I realized then that I was not effective talking about women's issues. What I felt was too personal, it was too much in my soul and it made me so angry I couldn't speak effectively. It was "easier" in many ways protesting the war in Vietnam. And that was the experience that shaped my activism.

I spent eleven years trying to stop US military intervention in Nicaragua and El Salvador in the 1980s during Ronald Reagan's wars in Central America. Then I was invited to start the campaign to ban landmines. It was an amazing effort.

We started from one NGO in the United States and one in Germany—and with one staff person, me. But with a group in the U.S. and another in Germany we could call the campaign international. And we grew to one thousand three hundred organizations in ninety countries, working together to change the world on this one issue and we succeeded.

But then, what? You get the Nobel Peace Prize and all of a sudden you're supposed to go around the world and everybody thinks that everything you say should be brilliant and you should be able to solve every problem, and the pressure is horrible.

I had a big fear that the only thing I would ever do would be the landmine ban campaign and then I would sort of disappear like a ghost. Nobody would ever hear from me again and everybody would think that I was a mistake, that they never should have given me the peace prize—it's a horrible pressure.

So I spent some time wondering what I should do next. And that was when I had the pleasure of sitting down with Shirin Ebadi and talking about the Nobel Women's Initiative. I had been an activist for so many years I think I had matured enough so that I could handle working on women's issues in a different way. Not like when I was twenty. Now I don't yell quite so much, now I could try to be rational when I talk about it. But that took a long time.

I do believe that when we women activists—and I'm just using the Nobel Women's Initiative as an example—come together, it sends a

powerful message to women around the world that when we work together, we can really make a big difference in the world.

I'm now going to give an example of a woman who is pretty amazing and how she brought women together to make a big change in her country. Her name is Leymah Gbowee. Leymah is from the country of Liberia in Africa and she received the Nobel Peace Prize last year.

If you ever have the opportunity to see the movie *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*, it documents the story of the women of Liberia—with Leymah as one of the most important leaders—who came together to force the men to the peace table after years of hideous war.

The war in Liberia, and in that region, was very evil and ugly. Charles Taylor was the most important warlord and a man with no morality at all. Finally the warring sides were starting to talk to each other but there were continuous roadblocks and delays and it seemed that war would never end.

So Leymah and others organized women who carried out relentless activities to end the war. Finally, in total frustration, they surrounded the building where the men were negotiating. When they heard the news that the men were going to break negotiations and go back to war, the women chained themselves to the doors of the negotiating room and would not let the men out. They forced the men to finally negotiate the end of the war.

I would have to say, it would have been nicer if the women were inside the negotiating room. As our UN colleague on this panel mentioned, the big push is supposed to include women in peacemaking and to include women at the negotiating table of peace. But it is still a dream and not very close to the reality in today's wars and the negotiations to end them.

The United Nations, during a meeting of all of the states, passed a resolution. Its number is 1325. That resolution calls upon states to include women in peace negotiations but so far, that remains mostly a dream.

A woman friend of mine, who was a US ambassador, said something that I find amusing in a sad way even though it is true. She said, “In today’s world, it is totally insane that the same men who fought the wars are then the ones who are allowed to sit at the table to decide the terms of peace.”

Really those men who having been fighting each other are sitting at the negotiating table to find a way to separate their soldiers, while at the same time trying to maintain the most power they can maintain in the process. And is the meaningless statements they make then is, “Oh, but once we get through that, we’ll deal with ‘women’s issues.’”

Women’s issues? What are women’s issues? Education, health, sanitation – that and all of the other things of normal life are called ‘women’s issues.’ Which to me is a little crazy. Men go to school, men need healthcare, men need decent housing, and men need sanitation. So why are those things considered a women’s issues?

I think this is part of the reason why there’s more emphasis on trying to push for women’s involvement because that would make for a stronger peace. That’s the recognition that when you make peace if you do not consider the needs of all of society after the war, you are setting up the possibility of the war again. That is the conception behind trying to get more women involved in the peace process.

Women think beyond just trying to somehow keep soldiers and guns and aspects of power, as men do, while they try to maintain as much power as they can in “peace” negotiations. Women have a different and perhaps longer-term vision of what peace might need to look like.

There is a saying in English, and I don't know if it makes sense in Japanese but I will try. There is a little saying that goes: if you give a man a cow, he will call up all his male friends and invite them over for dinner. While drinking beer or wine or sake, the men would butcher the cow, party, and have a barbecue.

There's not necessarily anything wrong with that. But if you give the same cow to the man's wife, she will take care of the cow, she will milk the cow and give some of the milk to her children. If there is any left over, she will sell it. She will also start learning how to make cheese and sell the cheese so that she can earn enough to buy another cow. In this way, the entire family benefits. I think that is unfortunately pretty true.

If you look at education around the world, especially in developing countries, for women it isn't available and most believe it doesn't matter for girls and women. The most important child to get education is the son. And then maybe if they are enlightened parents, the girl child might get education, or if it is parents who have money.

On a slight aside, I think that is part of what feeds into the problem of trafficking of women. If women aren't of any value, if women aren't worth educating and the family is poor, you sell your daughter and at least she brought some money to the family. I think until there's a much stronger emphasis on educating women and girl children, it will be harder to have equality and democracy throughout the whole world.

I also have a little issue with the idea of bringing democracy to other countries. But that might be because I am from the United States and my country has a very bad history of invading other countries and saying that we are doing them a good thing and we are bringing them democracy. I don't think you can bring anybody democracy, I believe that it has to grow

from the needs and desires of the people themselves and that won't happen if you have an uneducated population. That won't happen if women and girl children are not part of society. So I think that education is really a fundamental part of changing this world. I think it's fundamental for women then to feel they have the power to be involved in business, government or the NGO world.

I was talking to some students in the US a few weeks ago and I was talking about how brave it was they were in university and they were going to have a career. Some were going to go into business; some were going to go to law school. They had their trajectory all laid out. I asked them what their moral trajectory was. I asked them if they had as much clarity about their personal ethics and morality as they moved along their path at work, having a family, or whatever they decide to do. Did they know what their moral path was? Did they even know there was one?

I think many people once they start their career, their life path, ethics and morals kind of become amorphous. They're not something we generally think about. We are not educated to think about those things. But I think if you really want a democracy, in any country, including my own because I don't think we have one you have to think about those things.

I think that corporations own my government. If you really want democracy, you have to educate students who have a moral compass as well; to critically think. For me, the model becomes, "Do no harm".

If you think about what you're doing and recognize that you are doing harm, then you shouldn't be doing it. I think that's one of the things that is very lost in the United States today. In my country, it is not "let's all raise everybody up, and let's educate all of the immigrants and their children, and make it a better America." It's "let me get what I want and

pretend we're a democracy, go kill people in other countries and try to impose 'democracy' on them."

I think that if we really want to change this, and I do in my country, as women we have to accept the responsibility to not give up our power. We talk a lot about our human rights, and I'm a defender of human rights, I believe in that. But I also believe that I have responsibility to act in the world in a way that benefits everybody, including myself.

I'm not selfless; I'm not an angel. I want a nice world for myself as well. But that requires that I accept that I do have power. I think women are very nervous about power. What is power? When people introduce me as a powerful woman, I don't know what that means because I've not sought power. Especially the kind of power that is important in my country.

But I do believe we all have power. I think that in a real democracy, everybody should use their power: women, girl children, men.

I want to end with quoting Ms. SOHMA. I'll read it in English because it really moved me, "I believe that not only the relationships between individuals but also the relationships between countries are becoming more and more complex. Progress will cease one day if we continue to perceive issues through the eyes of men, as we have done. That is what I would like for all women around the world to exert the inner strength of womanhood." This is the woman who started AAR at sixty-seven and had that kind of vision. I think we owe it to her to do that.

I just have to say that she has the support of his holiness the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, two other people who received the Nobel Prize who are now saying, "Men have confused our world for too long, it's time for the women to clean up the mess." I would prefer that men and women work together to clean up the mess. I don't want to see

men oppressed and women oppressing men any more than I'd like men to continue oppressing women. I think we should all work together.

And I will end by saying that I'm going to go tomorrow to Soma city and Iitate to see the results of the nuclear disaster. There is a personal element for me to go—that same reactor is in my backyard, in my state.

We have a very small state and Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Plant is exactly the same as Fukushima and I wanted to see what might happen if we don't stop that plant in my town. My state voted to shut it down, and Washington said, "No, you have to run it." Is that democracy?

I end that I'm very sad that Japan is starting to open nuclear power plants again. I think it is very short-sighted but I'm not the ruler of the world. If I were, it would be very different. I can assure you. Thank you.