

# Imagining a post-Solution Cyprus: The Gender Dimension

By the Women's NGO: 'Hands Across the Divide'

## Introduction

The Annan Plan for a future Cyprus uses the words 'a new state of affairs'. A careful reading of the Plan shows that what is intended for Cyprus is a transformed relationship between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, one which is: *equal, respectful, communicative and non-violent*. In this paper we put forward a thought never expressed by the entirely male teams of politicians negotiating peace: may we not at this self-same moment, when change is in the air for ethnic relations, call for 'a new state of affairs' in gender relations? Could we not expect that relations between women and men in the future might also differ from the past, using these very same terms? Have we not a right to expect that our relations as women and men are every bit as *equal, respectful, communicative and non-violent* as relations between Turkish and Greek Cypriots (hopefully) will be?

## Thinking of a 'post-Solution' Cyprus

This paper derives from a series of three workshops we held within our small NGO, Hands Across the Divide. So much of our time had been given to struggling for a 'solution to the Cyprus problem'. For the two and a half years of our existence a peace agreement had seemed always on the horizon, always just in reach, but never finally attainable. Now we thought: whether or not we get an agreement by the magic moment of EU accession, May 2004, perhaps we should set free our minds to leap over that moment, and imagine a future when peace is here at last. And to ask ourselves: what changes would we, as women, want it to bring?

Hands Across the Divide is a group of women who share certain values, including: democracy, equality, inclusion and non-violence. We have come together to form a unitary organization, disregarding, so far as is possible, differences of ethnic or national identity, and even geographical location. That said, however, we know that to co-operate effectively we must take account of the inequalities between us and inevitable differences in the needs we prioritize, deriving from our different past experiences and different realities today.

One of the values we share is that, as many of us put it, 'we are hungry for a solution to the Cyprus problem'. The first question we discussed in our workshops was 'What do we want a peace agreement *for*?' Each of us has in mind particular gains we personally hunger for and believe that peace could bring. But overall, our hopes are shared. First and foremost, we long for an *identity*, that we define as 'Cypriot'. Each of us wants this as a person – and as a woman. Some changes are most urgently needed by those of us living in the particular conditions of north Cyprus. But those of us living in the south also want those things - not just out of empathy but because we do not want to live in an island where some of us are disadvantaged. Each of us wants the others' needs to be satisfied, as part of the satisfaction of our own.

## Imagining 'gender change'

Hands Across the Divide is a women's organization by choice. The reason for this choice is that we share a perspective that we find generally lacking in Cyprus: a 'gender perspective'

that takes account of the realities both of women and men, the masculine and the feminine, and the relations between them. We feel this perspective has something fresh to show us about the conflict, about Cypriot societies today, about the long-drawn-out peace process, and about the Cyprus that might follow from the signing of an agreement.

This does not mean we want to increase the distance between women and men. On the contrary, we deplore the line that is too often arbitrarily drawn between us. We think of both men and women as human beings, and want to emphasize the many things we share. Our wish would be that the damaging differences and divisions of gender diminish, and that genuine partnership be enabled to grow.

The many things we said to each other in the course of our series of three workshops showed us that we agree on certain basic perceptions of the world we live in. It is clear to all of us that society, in the shape of our various Cypriot cultures, has marked a sharp contrast in the roles and expectations of women and men. Certain good qualities are expected, encouraged and valued in men, and other good qualities in women. The two sets of qualities, when found in the 'opposite' sex, are seen as wrong. For instance, tenderness, seen as a natural quality of women, is often seen as weakness in men. This has narrowed the scope for both women and men, brought about characteristic strengths and failings in each of them, hindering communication between us. And in particular it has generated many inequalities and disadvantages for women.

### **Gains both for women and men**

The second question we discussed in some depth in the workshops therefore concerned our relationships with men. We asked ourselves 'What do I appreciate about the men in my life? What would I like to change *in* them? And how would I like things to change *for* them?' We found each of us could name certain desirable characteristics in women and femininity – for instance, that we are communicative, in touch with our feelings etc; and certain undesirable characteristics - for instance that women shy away from public roles and from power, that women sometimes do not support each other. Likewise, each of us has experienced good qualities in the men in our lives. Each of us can name and appreciate particular strengths, particular ways of thinking, the way men are often supportive to each other, they often show great generosity and responsibility to their families, have much to teach, and, as our fathers, have often encouraged our education.

But other experiences have made us want to see change in gender relations, in the way men and women relate to each other. The masculine cultures that prevail today discourage respect for women and the feminine. They do not foster good communication and empathy between men and women, or between men. They do not generate a close link between mind and feelings. They do not make of men good listeners, with sensitivity to the other's feelings. Indeed men are not encouraged to feel love and need, or to give full expression to such feelings. They are not imbued with respect for domestic life, housework and care, or respect for men who share fully in those things. Men and boys are seldom taught that to share power and responsibility with women can be a win-win game, it need not be at the expense of their own agency and power. A particular grievance of women is that men operate a double standard as regards emotional and sexual fidelity, with one set of norms for themselves and another for women.

We do not see the problematic things in gender relations as being the fault only of men as men. Rather, we see them as stemming from the way society shapes masculinity and femininity. We recognize that women, especially mothers, have some responsibility for the shaping. But we feel that men would gain, along with women, from change. Men would gain by redefining, refusing or sharing some of their perceived responsibilities, for there are

burdens as well as privileges in being the more powerful sex. At present, men give a hard time to those among them who step out of line, who share both power and domestic life fully with women, and value 'feminine' values in themselves. Men might be happier if not continually called on to prove themselves, to compete and keep up their defensive mask. We believe they would gain much from a reduction in militarism and violence in society.

With these things in mind we went on, in our workshops, to 'brainstorm' the kind of transformations we would like, as women, to see in a 'post-Solution Cyprus'. We then separated into five small groups to develop the ideas further. We present them below as a five-part 'manifesto for gender democracy'.

### **A. Political and Legislative Structures** (drafted by Fatma, Myrka, Selma and Rita)

A peace agreement for Cyprus will involve changes to the constitution and related structures, in the interests of co-operation between its people. That innovatory moment could be an opportunity for creative changes, also, on the gender dimension.

*1 As women we want to have a Constitution that explicitly identifies women and men, and stresses equality between them.*

At present, there is only a general provision in Article 28 of the Constitution, under Part II: Fundamental Rights and Liberties, which states that:

- All persons are equal before the law, the administration and justice and are entitled to equal protection thereof and treatment thereby.
- Every person shall enjoy all the rights and liberties provided for in this Constitution without any direct or indirect discrimination against any person on the grounds of his<sup>1</sup> community, race, religion, language, sex, political or other convictions, national or social descent, birth, colour, wealth, social class, or any ground whatsoever, unless there is express provision to the contrary in this Constitution.

*2 We want the laws that govern society to flow from such a 'gender-acknowledging' Constitution and all new policies to be screened and evaluated for their gender implications before they are introduced. This in practice will mean that gender is 'mainstreamed' into all legal instruments and policies and into the departments of state that administer their implementation.*

By mainstreaming we mean the reorganization, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making. This presupposes *training of all policy actors in gender awareness and on gender issues in their field, and developing tools and instruments such as gender-sensitive data and statistics*. It also presupposes the involvement of suitably prepared people, i.e. with a combination of expertise in *both* the subject matter of the policy field in question *and* gender analysis

---

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that in the English translation of the Constitution the word "his" is used when referring to any person. Since the Constitution is dated 1960, this is not surprising. Because of the structure of Greek grammar, the Greek version uses a neutral word.

processes. In this respect, we propose the establishment of an *Administrative Co-ordination Committee on Gender Mainstreaming in each Ministry*, which would ensure that the gender perspective is reflected in all areas of the Ministry's responsibilities. This Committee would consist of representatives of both the governmental and non-governmental sectors (social partners, NGOs and in particular women's organizations).

We are not in favour of creating a separate Ministry for Women. This is not only because the word 'women' and issues relating only to women unfortunately 'trigger' adverse responses in our culture and society - it is also because *a separate Ministry for Women is likely to compartmentalize women's issues and inhibit gender mainstreaming in all policies*. Other Ministries might be tempted to neglect gender implications, since gender equality policy would be seen as a responsibility of the Ministry for Women. They might only "add on" policies concerning women when these are closely connected to their own policies, or when a relevant piece of EU legislation falls under their responsibility. In this way, gender mainstreaming in *all* policies might be inhibited.

*3 We believe that gender mainstreaming cannot replace specific policies that aim to redress situations resulting from gender inequality. Gender equality policies and gender mainstreaming are complementary strategies which must go hand in hand to reach the goal of gender equality. We, therefore support positive measures to overcome women's disadvantage and achieve parity of numbers and effective equality.*

We note in particular the very small numbers of women ministers. Women are also under-represented in other high-level positions in the Government, in public offices and in parliament. Positive measures could include the introduction of *quota systems* that enable women's increased participation in all decision-making bodies, state institutions, public offices and parliament, with the ultimate aim of achieving numerical parity with men. Another measure could be the *revision of the criteria currently used to calculate government funding to political parties*, in order to *encourage the participation of more women in parliament*. At present, political parties receive:

- an equal amount as a grant to cover their contributions towards the respective political parties of the EU,
- an equal amount as a basic grant,
- an amount, which is distributed proportionally according to the results of the previous parliamentary elections.
- *We suggest that an additional criterion should be the proportional distribution of an extra amount according to the number of women elected in the previous elections.*

*4 We anticipate that, after a peace agreement and accession to the European Union, EU directives, resolutions and recommendations, relevant international court rulings, etc. will be applicable throughout the island, and observed not only to the letter but also in spirit. We want particular attention to be given to the practical implementation of legislative provisions on gender so that equality does not remain a mere principle, but is achieved in effect.*

Although EU equality directives have already been transposed into Cyprus legislation, we stress the importance of *developing implementation mechanisms and structures*. We are pleased to note that several of the new laws include provisions for the development of effective implementation mechanisms. The law on equal pay (N. 177[I]/2002), for example, provides for the appointment of inspectors who monitor the implementation of the law and deal with complaints that have not been submitted to the labour dispute court. Similarly, the

law on equal treatment of men and women as regards employment and vocational training (N. 205[1]/2002), which among other things includes provisions for protection against sexual harassment, also provides for the establishment of an equality committee responsible for monitoring the implementation of the law, advising on policy formulation and the revision of legislation, proposing measures and programmes for the promotion of equality in the area of employment and vocational training and carrying out relevant research.

*5 We believe that women suffering discrimination on grounds of gender should be able to have recourse to an equality ombudsperson for redress.*

Two new posts of *equality ombudsperson* should be created (one in each community), with responsibilities for gender issues and more general discrimination issues such as discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin, religion, belief, age, sexual orientation and disability.

We believe that the role of the existing ombudsperson for administration should *not* be expanded to include equality and discrimination issues, for a number of reasons:

- The existing ombudsperson for administration is responsible for examining citizens' complaints against services or persons with executive or administrative duties. By expanding her or his role, s/he may at a given time receive complaints from both a victim of discrimination *and* the person, body or organization accused of the discrimination, thereby leading to situations in which there is a conflict of interest. This could be damaging to the sense of security of women and other people suffering discrimination.
- The existing ombudsperson for administration does not have executive powers to enforce decisions, whereas the equality ombudsman should be able to see his/her rulings implemented.
- Gender equality and anti-discrimination issues call for specialized knowledge and sensitive handling, which may be overshadowed by the generic workload of the existing ombudsperson for administration.

*6 The equality ombudsperson should be assisted by an equality commission, which would promote equal opportunities for everyone, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, nationality, colour, religion, belief or disability, and act as a watchdog or guardian of standards in the field.*

The equality commission would:

- Provide information and advice to people who have suffered discrimination or harassment.
- Monitor social policies and work in both the public and private sectors to encourage social inclusion and fair treatment for everyone.
- Run campaigns to raise awareness on gender and discrimination issues and to enhance social cohesion by encouraging civil society to play their part in creating a just and inclusive society.

*7 We wish to have, in each of our parliaments, a standing committee on equality in terms of gender and other forms of discrimination.*

As in the case of the equality commission, the standing parliamentary committee would work in the area of equal opportunities for everyone, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, nationality, colour, religion, belief or disability. The standing committee would ensure that a gender and anti-discriminatory perspective would be taken into account before the enactment of new laws.

## **B Economy, Employment and Training**

(drafted by Marina, Nana and Pembe)

Although recent decades have seen a greatly increased participation of women in the labour market in Cyprus, with a consequent gain in women's economic autonomy, the importance of a 'gender perspective' in the development of macro-economic policy is still not widely recognized. Meanwhile, globalization is having effects on our economy and our everyday lives. Its benefits have been unevenly distributed, leading to wider economic disparities, the feminization of poverty, and increased gender inequality. While it has brought greater economic opportunity and independence to some women, many more, far from gaining, have been further marginalized, and inequalities between men and women driven deeper. For example, many women continue to be employed in low-paid, part-time and sub-contract jobs, marked by insecurity. And women, especially new entrants into the labour market, continue to be among the first to lose jobs during cut-backs, and are the last to be rehired when labour is again in demand.

An important tool for addressing women's economic insecurity and inequalities between the sexes in employment and training is the strategy known as 'gender mainstreaming', mentioned above, by which the principles embodied in the European Union directives on sex equality should be implemented in all public policies and services of member states. In this spirit we call for the following developments, whether mandatory or voluntary, in the economy and employment, throughout Cyprus.

- Take action to increase *women's participation* in economic activity and to bring about a balanced representation of women and men *in all sectors, levels and occupations of the labour market* (i.e. breaking down horizontal and vertical sex-segregation), by encouraging the creation or expansion of institutional networks to support the career development and promotion of women.
- Support the policy for '*equal pay for work of equal value*' in order to diminish the stubbornly persistent differential in incomes between women and men.
- Develop programmes and policies to ensure that *maternity, motherhood and parenting*, and the role of women in procreation, are not used as a basis for discrimination nor to restrict the full participation of women in society.
- Promote the *reconciliation of work and family life* by developing flexible working practices, e.g. fairly-paid home-based work, tele-work, job sharing, expanding family support and care services for children and other dependants (e.g. elderly or disabled family members), and improving leave arrangements for workers with families.
- We welcome the *parental leave* legislation, which has recently been enacted, but we are concerned that take-up by men might be limited. In this respect, we stress the need to change social practices and perceptions which still presuppose that women are chiefly responsible for unpaid work related to looking after a family while men are chiefly responsible for paid work derived from an economic activity. The principle of equality between men and women in relation to employment and labour also implies *equal sharing in the home sphere*.

- Develop policies and programmes to enhance the *employability of women* and their access to quality jobs, through improving access to formal, non- formal and vocational training, lifelong learning and retraining, long-distance education including in information and communications technology and entrepreneurial skills, to empower women in the different stages of their lives.
- Promote gender-sensitivity and social responsibility of the *private sector* of the economy through the management of work time and dissemination of gender-sensitive information and an advocacy campaign.
- Develop and / or strengthen programmes and policies to *support women entrepreneurs*, including those engaged in new enterprises through access to information, training including vocational training, new technologies, networks, credit and financial services. We welcome the fact that in the last two years the Ministry of Commerce and Industry of the Republic of Cyprus have developed programmes for women from 25-55 years, providing them substantial financial aid to start up and establish their own businesses.
- Although, there has been growing acceptance of the importance to society of full participation of women in decision-making and in the structures of power at all levels and in all forums, we still observe a wide gap between men and women in these positions. We suggest that our government apply affirmative action policies, including quota systems or voluntary agreements, and develop training programmes for women's leadership, not only in the government offices but also within political parties and electoral processes, and in semi government organizations (see also section A above).
- Encourage and support education of girls in science, mathematics, new technologies, including information technology, and technical subjects; and encourage women, for instance through career advice, to seek employment in high-growth and high-wage sectors and jobs with career prospects.
- Take all appropriate measures to *eliminate harassment and violence* against women and girls by any person, organization or enterprise.
- Design and implement policies and programmes to fully address the specific *needs of women and girls with disabilities*, to ensure their equal access to education at all levels, including technical and vocational training. Provide adequate rehabilitation programmes in health services. And protect and promote the human rights of people with disabilities, equalize their job opportunities, and wherever possible eliminate existing inequalities between women and men with disabilities.
- Analyze and respond as necessary to the major causes of men and women being differentially affected by the process of *job creation and retrenchment* associated with economic transition and structural transformation of the economy, including globalization.
- Mainstream a *gender perspective into national immigration and asylum policies*, regulations and practices so to promote and protect the rights of migrant women. Take into account gender-related persecution and violence when assessing grounds for granting refugee status and asylum.

- We affirm the value of an umbrella organization for women's rights within the framework of which women's non-governmental organizations would be enabled to promote, monitor and implement programmes in the economy and other sectors.

### **C Security, Militarism and Violence** (drafted by Katie, Lesley, Maria and Sevgul)

The people of Cyprus, and particularly women, have lived with the effects of inter-communal and intra-communal violence and insecurity for decades. This experience of violence and fear of violence has taken a severe toll, not only in public life but also between individuals at a personal level, including the relations of home and family. This is one of the ways in which the armed conflict has been, though not recognized as such, not only a political issue *but also* a 'women's issue'.

It is our perspective in HAD to detect a connection between the ideas inherent in militarism, patriarchy, nationalism and capitalism. Many studies have shown that nationalists and their militaries need men to act 'as men', proving their manhood by being willing to kill and die on behalf of the state. But also, nationalism and chauvinism are a source of militarism and ethnic enmity. Nationalists ideologues and military commanders need women to behave in ways required by patriarchal ideals: they must be ready to offer up their sons and husbands to fight against the enemy in defence of the 'national interest' - as defined by a small powerful group of men. As women, we want an end to these harmful tendencies.

A significant contribution of feminist thought has been to reveal the relationship between all forms of violence, whether domestic, social, institutional or international. All violence stems from the imbalance of power and resources that prevails in a male-dominated world in which women's participation and perspectives on the vital issues of war making, peace making and reconstruction are either absent or markedly under-represented.

It is noteworthy that in countries where there is a critical mass of women in political decision-making, the political agenda tends to be broader and a higher proportion of state funds to be allocated to education, health, the environment and programmes for women's empowerment. Women in positions of power tend to promote a different view of politics and to define security to include human security as well as military defence, perhaps because women are socialized toward a culture of inclusion and care, towards a more holistic understanding of the 'other's' perspective, and towards structures that connect rather than divide people.

#### *Seeking change: real security*

Our women's organization, Hands Across the Divide, would like to see change of the following kinds.

- First, we want to see a world free of all forms of violence. As women we want ourselves and our children to be free from the threat of war. We hope for demilitarization of Cyprus and the creation of conditions that will lead to a future culture of non-violence and peace.
- We hope the experience of living under a peace agreement will finally bring an end to the threat of external attack, which generates the psychological insecurity that in turn makes a high defence budget and a heavily armed society seem legitimate.



- We want to see not only Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot militaries disbanded but the Greek and Turkish armies withdrawn from the island. We want the British bases, their intelligence devices and spying antennae to be dismantled, both because they create health problems for the local population and because they add to our insecurity.
- The land mines laid along parts of the demarcation line must be cleared and the fields turned into places where our children are safe to play.
- We want Cyprus to be demilitarized, defence industries converted to production for peace (with women getting a fair share of the jobs thus created) and the 'defence' budget re-allocated to social issues like health, education, services for the elderly and more kindergartens for our children.
- We want an end to conscription into the military for our sons. The maturity and discipline some believe that boys gain from army service can be acquired in many more socially useful and non-authoritarian ways. Militarized masculinity is not the only form of masculinity, and we hope peace will make possible gentler forms of manhood for men and boys. We want to move towards a less macho and aggressive culture, and demilitarization will be one step in this direction.
- The police should be under a civilian, local, authority instead of under military, and foreign, command as is the case in northern Cyprus today.
- Women should be recruited into the police in equal numbers with men, and should have equal status in the service with men.
- Police officers should have gender training, in particular so as to be more sensitive in the ways they handle domestic violence, cases of rape, and the abuse of migrant women. Women should have the right if they so wish to speak to a woman police officer.
- As women we want to be accorded dignity and respect by men. We want to see an end to harassment, disrespect and degrading treatment both in the workplace and the home. Laws already on the statute book that provide for this purpose must be implemented. As women we want an end to abuse of the vulnerable, whether in the home, in schools, in playgrounds, in sport, in institutions or in the media.
- Incidents of domestic violence are growing in both communities. We need to empower women to come out openly and talk about their experiences. We are concerned at the extreme violence increasingly shown in TV programmes, the press and other media. A public campaign for sensitization on these issues should be undertaken by women's organizations, in cooperation with women in public life.
- Crime, including enforced prostitution, and other forms of exploitation of women by others, must be treated as a serious social problem and offenders be brought to justice. Connected to this is the problem of drugs and drug dealing. Recently, many mothers are voicing serious concern to save their young sons and daughters from drug addiction. There is an urgent need in both communities for de-tox clinics, and centres where professional advice and support is available to drug abusers. A special police unit should be trained for action against perpetrators in the drug trade.
- The notion of 'security' should be given a new meaning in Cyprus, so that it no longer refers merely the build-up of armaments for 'national security' in the context of armed

conflict, but implies true human security – the guarantee of psychological, economic and social wellbeing. Security for women means not only feeling safe from the threat of war, but also feeling safe to walk out in the streets late at night without fear of harassment or danger of attack.

### *Reconciliation – across national and gender divisions*

The resolution of a conflict, that is a mutually accepted, negotiated, agreement at the macro-level, is not of itself adequate to create a culture of peace, that is a 'comprehensive, society-wide system of values, beliefs, attitudes' through which ordinary people in their daily lives will place a premium on peace, truly stand for peace, after the moment of solution. All too often formal agreements fall apart or prove incapable of establishing trusting relationships between former rival peoples. For co-operation to take root, a conscious process of *reconciliation* needs to penetrate deep into the societal fabric and include all the segments of the population.

Since 23 April 2003, many people from both communities have repeatedly crossed to each other's 'side' of the partition line. Many believe that in this way a people-to-people reconciliation process is quietly happening in Cyprus. If so, now may be the time to link the efforts for peace at the macro-level with the micro-level desires. It is time to introduce a feminist, holistic, analysis and understanding of the complex issues of peace and security. The Reconciliation Commission provided for in the Annan Plan could be a significant mechanism for forgiveness and healing. A women's group such as HAD has a responsibility in such processes, as a space in which reconciliation can be fostered, among and between women of all ethnic 'identities' in Cyprus. The other side of the coin is that 'reconciliation' should and could be interpreted by the whole of Cypriot society as a process of bringing to light, speaking honestly about, and finally putting behind us (along with ethnic conflict) the oppression, inequality and violence that sadly, much too often, cast a shadow on relations between men and women.

## **D The Family, Everyday Life and the Community**

(drafted by Neriman, Kyproulla and Elvan)

One of the most difficult sites of gender change is the family. It is difficult because the family is the most cherished and valued institution in society, the place where we find love and affection, security and support – while at the same time it is the place where unfairness, oppression and even in some cases violence, are capable of hurting us most. We believe that while Cypriot society is engaged in the task of renewing democracy at the political level, designing a new system of governmental structures as part of a 'Solution', we should boldly renew our expectations of 'deep democracy', a democracy that penetrates to the grassroots of society and includes democracy in marriage, household and family. Some of the changes we would like to see are as follows.

- As women we want complete autonomy over whether to marry and whom to marry, and over other life choices. There should be no pressure on the individual from any source as to the ethnic, religious or other origin or identity of our chosen partners.
- Provision for civil marriage ceremonies should be firmly established in all our communities.
- There should be no discrimination, for instance in employment, on grounds of marital status.

- Children on maturity should be free to make their own choice concerning whether to adopt a religion and which religion it will be, and they should be taught respect for each others' choices.
- Unpaid domestic work and responsibility should be shared equally between women and men, and both partners likewise should have the opportunity of engaging in paid employment and study.
- Having in mind that the majority of single parents are women, we call for more support for people in this situation, from both state and society. Single parents and their children should have the same legal rights as married couples. The law concerning fathers' obligation to pay alimony for the support of their children should be strengthened and fully implemented.
- The family should be supported by the state with a substantial budget for the provision of infrastructure including day nurseries and after-school facilities to enable parents to work, and high quality community care and residential homes for the elderly, disabled and ill, so as to share the burden of care with the family.
- As women we have a particular concern with the quality of childhood. We hope parents (as also teachers – see section E) will encourage in children the capacity for respect for each other's gender, ethnic background and interpretations of history.
- We want to create communities characterized by a 'culture of peace' in all its dimensions, in which streets and public spaces are free of danger, where there is no intimidation either by military or civilians, with no official or police harassment to produce identification, and where women and children have no cause for fear, inside or outside the home.
- We want our communities to be spaces of holistic education in which sport, culture and home life are all sources of mutual learning and development.
- As women we want to see more smiling people, enjoying recreational facilities! We need much greater public provision of parks, cycle tracks and playgrounds, with generous facilities for disabled and elderly people. In particular, once a Solution is agreed, the opportunity should be taken to convert military territories into such recreational spaces.

## **E Education, Media and Culture**

(drafted by Huran, Maia, Magda, Neshe, Tina and Zehra)

In this section of our paper we are concerned with the process of reconciliation of Cypriot people, living as we do in an island that has been a place of love, and of many cultures, but also an island of conflicts and wars. So many centuries – and now Cyprus is seeking ways of giving birth to herself with a new identity that will meld together all the people of Cyprus, whatever ethnic 'name' they carry, and (we would add) whether they are women or men. We believe the value that should prevail above all others, in a post-peace Cyprus, is that of diversity - embracing diversity is the key to solving our bitter struggles.

However, even though the physical fighting has stopped between Greek and Turkish Cypriots, collective memory continues to play a role in transmitting enemy images from one generation to the next, just as beliefs about contrasted and unequal gender roles are also

transmitted to the young by the older generations. Fixed and intractable images of both kinds have become central to a sense of identity in Cyprus, blocking any possibility of a healthy relationship between the two communities or the two sexes. How can reconciliation processes create the dense network of partnerships and alliances for common goals that could transform destructive relationships between Cypriots into co-operative ones, whether on the dimension of ethnicity or of gender?

Here we consider how education, media and culture may play a part in healing simultaneously the wounds of war and the wounds of gender oppression.

### *1 Education for diversity and equality*

Education for diversity and equality is fundamental to achieving a pluralist, multicultural and democratic society. Education can be a key factor in the healing and reconstruction of social relations in a post-peace Cyprus, 'softening' the ethnic and gender divisions in the younger generation.

We see the Ministry of Education and school administrations as having an important responsibility. They should set up a division with the specific responsibility of promotion education for equal and respectful citizenship and co-existence. We hope it would consider the following changes:

- Model multicultural, multilingual schools should be established.
- Within the education system educational curricula, guidelines, texts and exam content should be overhauled to rid them, on the one hand, of racism and negative ethnic stereotyping, on the other hand of sexism and gender stereotyping.
- The history curriculum, in particular, is currently imbued with nationalist bias, and taught and represented as men's stories told by men in a masculine voice. We wish to see the subject humanized, expressive of diverse view points, and reclaiming women's hidden history.
- Education at all levels, from the nursery school to university, should openly address divisions of nationality, religion, colour, class, gender and sexuality, so that multiple identities are acknowledged, welcomed and represented.
- There should be a conscious element of conflict resolution in the educational process to address conflict in gender relations, family life, local communities and (at a national level) cultural and religious conflict and tensions concerning the environment. Children and young people should be enabled to express their viewpoints on conflictual themes in the confidence of being heard respectfully, so as to foster empathy.

Not only the educational administration but also, importantly, teachers and parents must be involved in the creating this new educational culture of respectful co-existence. There are challenging implications for teacher training.

### *2 The potential of the media for social change*

As a result of their ability to reach and influence large numbers of people, the media carry an immense power whether to deepen division and conflict, or enable a culture of peace. To counter the media's negative potential for escalating tensions, journalists (and through them

their audiences) should be encouraged to be more alert to the realities and sensitivities of 'the other' – whether this means the insufficiently heard voice of the ethnic 'other', or of women.

*In terms of the ethno-national conflict...* Media should air the political and social realities of the 'other' as well as of their own 'side'. They should encourage public discussion about conflictual issues, adopt a responsible in-depth and analytical approach to reporting them, state clearly the underlying and explanatory facts. They should avoid presenting the views or actions of certain individuals as though they spoke for an entire ethnic group, identifying them rather in their specificity, together with the particular interests they represent. Journalists and broadcasters should make a practice of putting forward alternatives, whether of concepts, frameworks, perspectives or interpretations. We might consider the use of responsible historical documentaries on TV and radio, to allow discussion of the past, the admission of suffering and of responsibility, an opportunity for mourning and a chance to move forward.

*In terms of gender relations...* Too many media representations today either lack a presence of women or promote stereotypic roles for men and women, with women often portrayed as passive, or as sex objects. We wish to see more women in positions of influence and authority in both press and broadcasting, whether in decision-making, directing, production, news services or entertainment. Women's viewpoints on political issues should be given equal space with those of men. The media can be influential in changing the use of language to suit new times. We want all our languages to be reformed so as to exclude unnecessarily militaristic, hierarchical, sexist, racist and other divisive terms. We would like to see sex-neutral words replace unnecessarily gendered language (e.g. chairperson for chairman), and an end to innuendo and sexualized terminology.

We believe the following could be useful:

- joint workshops for journalists and broadcasters from north and south;
- internships in the media of 'the other side';
- cross-ethnic journalists'/broadcasters' Internet networks;
- gender awareness workshops for journalists and broadcasters;
- women journalists and broadcasters' associations and networks;
- support for heightening professional standards of journalism;
- a 'watchdog' institution to register complaints against the media under anti-discriminatory laws.

### *3 The important role of culture in fostering multicultural and inclusive citizenship*

Intellectuals and artists can play an important role both in building peace and creating a respectful and gender-equal society. It is their strength that through their work they can question and deconstruct those myths and traditions that exclude, marginalize or put down the ethnic or gender 'other', while through their imaginations creating more pluralist, inclusive myths and traditions for the generations to come. We would like to see the intellectuals and artists of both 'sides', and of both sexes, associating and working co-operatively in such a way as to shift the understanding of the others' life experiences, in exhibitions, poetry readings, dance, cinema festivals, theatre productions and many other cultural forms. These possibilities should be explored at local level in our communities, at national level in Cyprus, and internationally – where the people of Cyprus can make the island known as a centre of inclusion and of equality – in short, of peace.

**Paper presented at the conference on '*Gender in the Mediterranean: Emerging Discourses and Practices*'**  
March 5 – 7, 2004,  
Intercollege, Nicosia, Cyprus.

E-mail Contact : [handsacrossthedivide-owner@yahoogroups.com](mailto:handsacrossthedivide-owner@yahoogroups.com)