Zainab Salbi

Building Bridges, Rebuilding Societies
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Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies
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Zainab Salbi

Building Bridges, Rebuilding Societies

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The mission of the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice (IPJ) is to foster peace, cultivate justice and create a safer world. Since 2000, the IPJ has worked to build peace with justice by strengthening women peacemakers, youth leaders and human rights defenders, and developing innovative approaches to peacebuilding. In 2007, the IPJ became part of the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies, made possible by a gift from Joan Kroc’s estate.

The Institute strives, in Joan B. Kroc’s words, to “not only talk about peace, but to make peace.” In its peacebuilding initiatives, the IPJ works with local partners to help strengthen their efforts to consolidate peace with justice in the communities in which they live. The Institute currently has projects with local partners in Nepal, West Africa, Guatemala and Kenya.

The Women PeaceMakers Program documents the stories and best practices of international women leaders who are involved in human rights and peacemaking efforts in their home countries. WorldLink, a year-round educational program for high school students from San Diego and Baja California, connects youth to global affairs.

Community outreach includes speakers, films, art and opportunities for discussion between community members, academics and practitioners on issues of peace and social justice, as well as dialogue with national and international leaders in government, nongovernmental organizations and the military.

In addition to the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice, the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies includes a master’s program in Peace and Justice Studies to train future leaders in the field, and the Trans-Border Institute, which promotes border-related scholarship and an active role for the university in the cross-border community. The School also partners with USD’s School of Business Administration on the Center for Peace and Commerce and with USD’s School of Leadership and Education Sciences on a Peace and Global Education Certificate.
## JOAN B. KROC DISTINGUISHED LECTURE SERIES

Endowed in 2003 by a generous gift to the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice from the late Joan Kroc, the Distinguished Lecture Series is a forum for high-level national and international leaders and policymakers to share their knowledge and perspectives on issues related to peace and justice. The goal of the series is to deepen understanding of how to prevent and resolve conflict and promote peace with justice.

The Distinguished Lecture Series offers the community at large an opportunity to engage with leaders who are working to forge new dialogues with parties in conflict and who seek to answer the question of how to create an enduring peace for tomorrow. The series examines new developments in the search for effective tools to prevent and resolve conflict while protecting human rights and ensuring social justice.

## DISTINGUISHED LECTURERS

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October 27, 2005  His Excellency Ketumile Masire  
Former President of the Republic of Botswana  
Perspectives into the Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Contemporary Peacebuilding Efforts

January 27, 2006  Ambassador Christopher R. Hill  
U.S. Department of State  
U.S. Policy in East Asia and the Pacific

March 9, 2006  William F. Schulz  
Executive Director — Amnesty International USA  
Tainted Legacy: 9/11 and the Ruin of Human Rights

September 7, 2006  Shirin Ebadi  
2005 Nobel Peace Laureate  
Iran Awakening: Human Rights, Women and Islam

October 18, 2006  Miria Matembe, Alma Viviana Pérez, Irene Santiago  
Women, War and Peace: The Politics of Peacebuilding

April 12, 2007  The Honorable Gareth Evans  
President — International Crisis Group  
Preventing Mass Atrocities: Making “Never Again” a Reality

September 20, 2007  Kenneth Roth  
Executive Director — Human Rights Watch  
The Dynamics of Human Rights and the Environment

March 4, 2008  Jan Egeland  
Former Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator for the United Nations  
War, Peace and Climate Change: A Billion Lives in the Balance

April 17, 2008  Jane Goodall  
Founder — Jane Goodall Institute and United Nations  
Messenger of Peace  
Reason for Hope

September 24, 2008  The Honorable Louise Arbour  
Former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights  
Integrating Security, Development and Human Rights

March 25, 2009  Ambassador Jan Eliasson  
Former United Nations Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Darfur and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs  
Armed Conflict: The Cost to Civilians

October 8, 2009  Paul Farmer  
Co-founder — Partners In Health and United Nations  
Deputy Special Envoy to Haiti  
Development: Creating Sustainable Justice

November 18, 2009  William Ury  
Co-founder and Senior Fellow — Harvard Negotiation Project  
From the Boardroom to the Border: Negotiating for Sustainable Agreements

February 25, 2010  Raymond Offenheiser  
President — Oxfam America  

September 29, 2010  Monica McWilliams  
Chief Commissioner — Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission  
From Peace Talks to Gender Justice

December 9, 2010  Johan Galtung  
Founder — International Peace Research Institute  
Breaking the Cycle of Violent Conflict

February 17, 2011  Stephen J. Rapp  
U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes Issues  
Achieving Justice for Victims of Genocide, War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity

May 9, 2011  Radhika Coomaraswamy  
U.N. Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict  
Children and Armed Conflict: The International Response

October 6, 2011  Zainab Salbi  
Founder — Women for Women International  
Building Bridges, Rebuilding Societies
Zainab Salbi is founder and, until recently, CEO of Women for Women International, a grassroots humanitarian and development organization helping women survivors of wars rebuild their lives. Since 1993, the organization has helped 250,000 women survivors of wars access social and economic opportunities through a program of rights awareness training, vocational skills education and access to income-generating opportunities, thereby ultimately contributing to the political and economic health of their communities.

In its 17-year history, the organization has distributed $95 million in direct aid, microcredit loans and other programs, and has impacted more than 800,000 family members. For its work “alleviating human suffering,” Women for Women International was awarded the 2006 Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize, the first women’s organization to receive this honor.
STUDENT MEETING AND INTERVIEW

The following is a combined edited transcript of a private meeting with graduate students from the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies (KSPS), and an interview between Salbi and KSPS Professor of Practice Necla Tschirgi and Elena McCollim, program officer at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice (IPJ).

Both meetings were held on Oct. 6, 2011.

Q: Please explain more about your organization Women for Women International, which won the Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize in 2006, and about your recent decision to step down as CEO.

A: It was a very exciting moment when we won the Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize. It is a $1.5 million award — at that time bigger than the Nobel Peace Prize in terms of size — and the most prestigious in the nonprofit sector. When we got it, Women for Women was the only women's organization and the youngest organization to have won it, so it was a major turning point in the organization's life.

I founded Women for Women International 18 years ago. I just stepped down as the CEO because I want to focus on Arab women, and particularly on Arab Muslim women. I think it is a very exciting phase of our lives. I think of the larger Muslim world as going through its dark ages. Recently with the Arab Spring a window has opened, and it's a very exciting window in spite of the chaos that it came with. So I feel like this is my time. I have lived in America 21 years and I lived in Iraq for 20 years, and I feel it's time for me to go and give back home.

My work will be focused on women in the media. I will share with you the anchoring philosophy. When it comes to women's rights, it is seen as a Western woman's issue, not a Muslim woman's issue. The question is, how do we revive in our own cultural context the concept of women's rights? We don't have a context for them. We need to be practical. We need to ask, “What do women want?”

Islam, in the Middle East, is the prevailing identity. There is no changing that, you just have to accept it. Islam is the prevailing identity. But the question is, how do you work within that? How do you revive local narratives of change?

Of course, I'm still very much involved with Women for Women, but I'm handing over the leadership of the organization to a new generation, which is a very exciting thing for me to see. I was at a board meeting two days ago and there were people very into it and discussing things. I thought, wow, this is very exciting to see others coming in and owning it. It's also a very painful process, like letting go of a child.

I am in a way starting where maybe many of you are, in a new journey. It's very exciting. I'm taking the opportunity to learn new things in my life. I traveled, in my exit, to almost all the countries we work in and interviewed as many women as possible. There's a campaign I'm working on called “If You Knew Me You'd Care.”

I got to have a conversation with the staff and colleagues and the team and the women about what it is that we have done that succeeded so much, because it is a successful model. I've been asking the question for many, many years now, and every day it's something different: it's the sponsorship program, it is this program, it is that program. And finally, I'm going back to where I started: I wanted to document all the stories. My parting gift is to give it to the team to say, “This is how we tell the story.”

I did a lot of interviews and videos, and I really came to the realization — as one colleague in Bosnia told me — that what we do is simply inspire women. It's not this program or that program; all programs are good. She said, if you really want to know the magic about us, it's that we inspire women. That was an “aha” moment. It's simple because we can all inspire each other, and it's the process of inspiration that triggers a lot of actions. I have accumulated a lot of stories of how one woman heard another woman or visited another woman and showed what she had done, and then she changed her life as a result. It's just so beautiful.
I’ll stop here, because I can talk a lot. But this is where I am: in a moment of transition, in a moment of saying, how do we learn from the past? How can I take my learning and go home and give it to my people? I don’t mean it as “my people,” not “your people” — there’s a desire to go home and serve the very environment that I left, beyond Iraq, to the larger Arab and Muslim world. I’m very excited about it.

“If you really want to know the magic about us, it’s that we inspire women. … it’s the process of inspiration that triggers a lot of actions.”

Q: Who do you see as your natural allies?

A: Everyone is a potential ally: the progressive forces, youth, men, everyone. There was a woman in Sadr City in Iraq who started out by trying to get women to take off the abaya. That was her starting point. Can you imagine? I told her “Why do you want to do this? You will get yourself killed.” She was an absolute radical; she was convinced that we had to get women to take off the abaya. I tried to convince her not to. But do you know what she said to me? “It’s women like me who make women like you look more moderate and acceptable.” And so, everyone is my ally — from the extreme radicals like her to everyone else along the spectrum. With my upcoming media work, Turkey is the starting point because it provides the hybrid.

Q: In the past 10 days, we have seen the passing away of the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize, Wangari Maathai, and the awarding of the prize to three more women, two from Africa and one from the Middle East. There is almost a sense of a passing of the torch. Do you think the world is finally starting to recognize in a significant way the agency and contributions of women leaders from the global South?

A: I would say not just women. But yes, with this Nobel Prize particularly, it is. This one is the flip side of the Nobel awarded to Arafat and Rabin [and Peres] in 1994. That prize was awarded to the old way of making peace: two men signing an agreement to formally end the fighting. The award announced today was to women who are outside the system (except for Ellen Johnson Sirleaf). These are women who spoke truth to power. They are dealing with practical issues. These are women who recognize that everyone is hungry for the truth.

This award is an acknowledgement that the old ways are not working, that the old ways are bullshit. You can put that in the official record: They are bullshit. These three women are very gutsy. And the award is for everyone — it goes beyond just women. It is women who are taking the lead though.

Women are rising. A woman’s definition of peace is a very inclusive one. Women recognize that peace is not just about the end of fighting. They look for a mix of strategies and recognize that there are other ways.

Q: You have identified remarkable reserves of resilience and tenacity in women working to rebuild their lives, homes and communities after violent conflict. This points to leadership capabilities in places and in people that established leaders often neglect to see. How do you define leadership?

A: There are many ways. A good leader is one who has the courage to show vulnerability. Being a good leader means being comfortable with your strengths and weaknesses. There is a delicate balance, because showing vulnerability is not the same as being so vulnerable that you allow yourself to be victimized. It’s as nuanced as “forgiving does not mean forgetting.” But it’s one of the things that helps others connect. A good leader has the courage to go and address real issues. It does not necessarily lead to being popular. Also, good leadership does not have to be charismatic. People often confuse charisma with leadership.
Q: Oftentimes in conflicts, the suffering of women is perpetuated by other women. What work needs to be done in the women’s movement as a whole?

A: There is a lot of work we women need to do, in my opinion. While before our work was external — we demand this and this from the external world — I believe that our work right now is internal. Not to say that the external world is not unjust to us, and there is a lot of work to do, but equally we need to do the work internally. We have to take responsibility.

“A good leader is one who has the courage to show vulnerability. Being a good leader means being comfortable with your strengths and weaknesses.”

I usually talk about that in our inner circles, not in public. That work is deep, deep inside. We need to look at the issue of respect, utter and absolute self-respect. When I talk of these things, these are my narratives as well as the general narrative, so I don’t feel separate from this. I think it’s almost in our historical DNA to be stuck in the victim story. We repeat it. We are stuck. We reinvent it over and over again with our personal relationships, with the men in our lives, with whatever we encounter.

It’s just only recently that it dawned on me that I do that. I think of myself as the strong, independent woman, but oh my God, I do it as well. It’s almost in our DNA — I don’t really mean to suggest that because it’s not biological, but we sort of thrive on the victim story. We need to change that narrative. That narrative is not going to change because a man is going to change. We need to change, irrelevant of men, in my opinion. We need to own completely that utter self-respect and utter self-love, and not in a selfish way. When I say “self-love,” it is respect. As my friend says, it’s the ultimate love. We can slip into that victim story and sometimes, as a friend told me, when men notice we go to that story, they disrespect us.

I feel that we should snap out of it and do our internal work, and our internal work starts with the individual. We can’t build a sisterhood in a solid way if we don’t have that self-content with who we are: our bodies, our spirit, our soul, our looks, our behavior — not doubting ourselves and our intuition, not doubting our femininity, not wanting to be manlike so we can succeed in the corporate world or the government world. That has nothing to do with men. It’s our journey. And we have a long way to go.

As much as I have dedicated my life to serve women, with no doubt, without even a hesitation, it’s also been women who have hurt me the most, unfortunately. And that doesn’t impact my love and dedication to serving women. But that’s because it’s our work. I don’t know how much of that dialogue, the narrative of feminism or women’s rights, we have delved into.

If we go into the mothers of modern-day recent feminism, like Gloria Steinem or Alice Walker, their narrative, whom they are individually — as someone who has the extreme privilege to know them — is not the image of them the outside world sees. In other words, they are incredibly spiritual, beautiful, loving, joyful, sexy women, and the outside world still thinks, of Gloria at least, as the hardcore feminist. The narrative has not caught up with where she is as a beautiful human being. She wrote her narrative, but the general stereotypical narrative has not caught up. And we need to catch up to that.

We need to say that our work on ourselves is so essential in order to build that sisterhood. But if that sisterhood — changing the world and building our unity and echoing each other — is on a foundation of lack of self-respect to ourselves as women, then it has limits in my opinion to where it can go. The Dalai Lama said, “If you can’t respect the people you serve, then don’t serve them.” That’s the connection between the self-respect and the serving of others, and the serving of other women particularly. It’s interconnected for me.

Q: I recently completed an internship in Nepal and spent a lot of time in the rural areas. There is a lack of connection between the large NGOs [nongovernmental
organizations] in the capital and women in the rural areas. How can that connection be made?

A: Five years into Women for Women someone asked me, “Are you going to keep it small or are you going to make it big?” When I started Women for Women, besides wanting really to serve, I had no ambition about how big or small it should be. A lot of women leaders of NGOs ask me about success. The number one reason, in my opinion, for the success of Women for Women or the role I played in it was that I had no attachment to outcome. Believe me, I didn't go in saying, “I'm going to meet this person and I'm going to raise $1 million from them.” It doesn't work like that. You go and you just work and hope that the blessings will come — and the blessings always come when they are sincere.

“I had no attachment to outcome. Believe me, I didn't go in saying, 'I'm going to meet this person and I'm going to raise $1 million from them.' It doesn't work like that. You go and you just work and hope that the blessings will come — and the blessings always come when they are sincere.”

As much as I'm in that stage of equally believing that we must invest in the smaller mom-and-pop NGOs, there is no answer. I remember our staff in Bosnia. In the middle of the snow we would drive up the mountain to find these 40 women, and did that religiously every two weeks. Now they can't afford it because we must be efficient. The bigger we become, we must be as efficient as possible. You have to widen your circle so you can invest your money in different ways, and it becomes a business. You start thinking about it differently.

I'm sure there are the smaller NGOs, and you should find them and encourage them. And if there aren't, help create them. But the message I have is that we need to invest in them. They have the least amount of money, and in essence they do the hardest work.

Q: How do we make sure that dialogue is happening between large and small organizations so that some money gets to small, grassroots groups doing that hard work?

A: The dialogue is a different dialogue country to country, and it takes leadership always. In my opinion, such dialogue takes individual leadership to make it happen, not organizational leadership. It doesn't matter which organization, it's the individual in that group. If they take the leadership and bring women together, it happens usually.

But besides the Global Fund for Women, which does give small grants, I don't know of any group that really focuses on smaller NGOs. Perhaps one should promote a Kiva model1 or some model to promote very small grants to these smaller NGOs. You're absolutely right. They so desperately need the money and they do so much with it.

I was going about it without strategizing whether it was going to be big or small. Eventually it became bigger than me and took over my life. But having experienced the start of something like a mom-and-pop and going to middle and going to large, the larger you become the more you can't afford going to the rural and isolated areas. To give you my experience: The smaller we were, the more isolated areas we served. Our staff could go and drive two hours just to find the 40 women on top of a mountain to provide them the services. The bigger we became, the more we gravitated to the larger areas where there were a lot of people, so you can serve more women at the same time.

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1 The Global Fund for Women is a publicly supported, nonprofit grantmaking foundation that advances women's human rights by funding women-led organizations worldwide. It provides general operating support grants to organizations working at the local, regional and national levels to enable women and girls to reach their potential and live free of discrimination and violence. Kiva is a nonprofit organization that leverages the internet and a worldwide network of microfinance institutions to allow individuals to lend as little as $25 to help create opportunity around the world.
One should explore how to create a forum for individuals or foundations to give money to small NGOs. Generally, my bet on the future is the smaller grants, the smaller dollars. It’s the grassroots people who are going to save the day. I definitely believe that. It’s not the bigger entities that are going to save the day.

Q: As you and others have pointed out, women do two-thirds of the world’s work for 10 percent of the world’s income. Part of this is due to their simply not being in the monetized economy, but instead engaged in producing crops for household consumption. Part is due to their lack of ownership of assets that would provide an income stream. How does Women for Women International respond to these issues — for example, does it take positions on trade and employment policies, or does it seek to promote land rights for women as a way for them to acquire secure assets?

A: First, it’s important to clarify that we are not an advocacy organization. We do not do policy advocacy. We do not advocate to change laws. We do provide research and information for others who do.

We focus on land rights for women in their own countries. Here’s what we’re noticing: Sometimes the laws that exist are quite good, but women do not know them. So, instead of changing legislation, we’re doing a hybrid stage between women’s full ownership of land and their renting it.

We have land under a 90-year lease in Sudan, a 30-year lease in the Congo and a 25-year lease in Rwanda. It’s long-term. We acquire a massive amount of land on behalf of the women. Then we bring them commercial buyers. We train them and hand the whole thing over in five years. Also, the first thing we tell women entrepreneurs is, “With your profits, go buy land.” Of course, we can’t make them do so, but we advise them.

Q: Do you work with women across religious, ethnic and political divides? How do you get them to work together, or how do they get themselves to work together?

A: It all goes back to the practical. In Bosnia, for example, loads of money were spent on peace. People said to us, “Do they really think that if we spend two weeks talking together in a nice hotel, at the end of it we’re going to forgive each other and love each other?” So we decided not to approach it that way. Instead we said, “Look, we all need jobs and food,” and we worked on that. As it turned out, their practical need just to survive was greater than their need to forgive and reconcile, or their need to keep hating for that matter.

Here in the West, you’re very fortunate that you have met the basic needs for food, shelter and so on, and so you can focus on needs for dignity and respect and so forth. But when people’s basic needs are not being met, that’s where you have to start. So we started with the practical and the rest came later of its own accord. We never pushed it.

To give you an example, one day we were all going to a picnic, and one of the Bosnian women said, “Where is the Serb woman? Why hasn’t she come?” And of her own accord she went back to the woman’s house to invite her to come.

“**When people’s basic needs are not being met, that’s where you have to start. So we started with the practical and the rest came later of its own accord.”**

Q: Child sponsorship is a time-honored development aid activity that came under criticism in the early 1990s and subsequently underwent reforms. How do you differentiate woman-to-woman sponsorship, your organization’s model?

A: That’s exactly it: You’re dealing with two adults. I agree with the reforms that were instituted in child sponsorship. But with the woman-for-woman
sponsorship you’re dealing with two adults. Moreover, it’s not ongoing, but instead is for one year only. We only work with active-age women. The minimum age might differ from country to country. For example, in a given country, if a 16-year-old woman is married and has children, we will work with her. How do we get her the right interventions?

The other thing is that, for the woman doing the sponsorship, the sponsorship itself is the entire experience — is all of what she experiences from her end. But for the woman in the country, that sponsorship is only one element. What’s more important is getting together with other women. Our survey data consistently show that that is what women rate as the most important part of the experience: the getting together with other women. And the jobs, of course.

Now, it is true that the letters are important. I don’t mean to say that they’re not important; they are. In fact, 95 percent of the women say that they have never received a letter before. And getting a letter from America — that is a very big deal. This is so even among well-off families, at least in the Middle East. When I was a child and a letter arrived with an American stamp on it, the postman would notice, everyone would gather as it was read.

**Q: What happens after one year?**

**A:** The women graduate and we hold a big graduation ceremony. For the previous six months or so, they would have been talking with their counselor about what they are going to do after the year is up, about what track they’re going to take. They take one or another of these actions: The most common thing that they do is to start a cooperative with the other women [graduates of the program]. The next most common thing is to take out a microloan and start a business. We place them in existing jobs. And, finally, we create jobs and bring the jobs to them: We set up an enterprise to create jobs for the women. This is by far the most effective way. But it is the least common, because it’s also the most expensive.

How do we then keep the energy from dissipating? How do we have a sustainable financial model? That’s why the sponsorship is so important: It brings in the funds that help us stay sustainable.

**Q: What is the best way to promote local awareness of global women’s issues?**

**A:** In this year’s travels, the sets of interviews I did were very different than the interviews I used to do. Before when I went to a country, I would zoom right into the story of that woman — in such and such country, this is what happened to her, and this is what she did to change her life. They are stories where you zoom into the victim and the strong woman all in the same very fast piece.

In this recent travel I decided to slow down. In all the interviews I took more time to explore a woman’s love story or childhood or about her hopes and happy moments. In my experience all the women giggled. All of us giggle and blush when we talk about our own love story. If an interview was an hour, I used to spend 40 minutes on her victim story. I switched it and decided to do 40 minutes on everything that was before anything changed in her life: her childhood, her love, whatever it is. But there are also divorces, and domestic violence is a normal story most women face. And then there is the war, and there’s the big issue of culture. But it comes at the third quarter of the story. And then you finish the story of what happened.

The reason I’m telling you this is that in the process I learned — and it surprised me — that it was the normal things that created the connection, not the poverty or the rape or the violence that created the connection. To give you an example, I was in Iraq a year ago exactly. I wanted to take my colleagues out for lunch to celebrate, to thank them for their work. Just before we go out to lunch, a bomb explodes nearby. We were saying, “Oh my God, it’s near our office. Where could it be? The traffic is going to be horrible. Should we go out or should we order lunch?”
I looked at the office cleaner and thought, if we bring lunch that means that she's going to have to serve and clean, and it's not an outing for her. So we discussed — and really, this was a 40-minute discussion about whether we should go out or order lunch. And then we finally decide we're going to go out.

We go out to the restaurant and I sit next to a woman I don't recognize. Lo and behold, it's the office cleaner. She had changed and put on her nice clothes. She said, "Thank you so much, thank you, thank you. It's the happiest day of my life."

And I said, "First, it can't be the happiest day of your life. Second, let's eat first and see if this is a good restaurant."

She said, "Oh no, no. Honestly, it's the happiest day of my life." And I was thinking, how is it the happiest day? She was in her 50s and she said, "Well, I've never been out to a restaurant. And it was my life dream to go in a restaurant. So this is the happiest day of my life — even if I don't eat anything — because I got inside a restaurant."

It's that moment in my experience that has triggered more responses, more cries and tears and shock from people, because all of us go to a restaurant and take it for granted. You never think about someone who has just never been to a restaurant, right? And that's the moment that triggered it.

Continuing, I said, "Let's go back into your memory. Let's go into happy moments. Your marriage?"

"No, no." She was honest.

"Your second child?"

"Really, no."

"Your third child? Your fourth child?" (It's a son.)

"Well, I have to tell you I was a bit happy it was a son."

"Then let's go back into childhood." Honestly, whatever I asked her she said no.

And then she goes back and she remembers, "Well, OK, if you insist. The happiest moment was when my father came with food, because we were hungry a lot of times and a lot of days we did not eat food. The neighbor would smuggle us some rice and it was embarrassing. So the days my father came with rice and bread and all of that were the happiest days of my childhood."

If I start the story from this point, you won't associate with her because you haven't faced that, hopefully. But I start the story with her going to a restaurant. It's a long story to tell you. I really believe that when we zoom in to how horrible the world is — such as the wars in Congo and Afghanistan — there is a dissociation with it: These people are so different and we cannot understand them.

It's a long way to tell you that we need to switch the way we tell the story or share the story, from that of the differences to that of the similarities. All of us, believe it or not, have the same emotions. I met my Dalai Lama in Congo, a Congolese woman who was raped and imprisoned for three months. Her rapist ended up being the one who saved her. When I asked her, "What does peace mean to you?" she said, "Peace is inside our hearts. No one can give it to us, no one can take it from us."
Three months locked in a room, and she said, “That child that I had as a result of rape is my prophet. She teaches me about love.” I call her my lama. What if you start the story on these emotions as opposed to on the differences? I think that may help.

Q: As a media professional with little experience in peace and justice, what is the best way for me to serve women?

A: I’m switching to the media role because I believe it’s actually more effective. I believe you can really penetrate into the household faster, given you are conscious and not giving garbage material. Then, given that, there can be coordination where you take care of the change that happens.

Let me tell you a story. In Karbala, a southern province that is very religious, you cannot enter the borders without covering your hair, without wearing the abaya, even as a child. When Iraq was very secular, in that province you still had to cover. When I first met this lawyer, a friend of mine now, she was wearing the black chador to her chin, which means she’s very religious, and gloves, which means she’s ultra-religious. I was thinking, oh no, this is a scary woman — honestly, because the stereotypical image is that this is a fanatic.

Then I got to talk with her. I asked her for a ride and the story came. She has a four-wheel drive, the only woman with a four-wheel drive in that city, and she’s driving and talking on her cell phone. She’s a women’s rights lawyer. She said, “Honey, I just do these things so they can leave me alone and I can just do the work. But I’ll be happy to take it off the minute I leave the city.” For her it was just a strategy, and for me I went into my stereotype and judgment. It was a humbling moment.

As a lawyer — her name is Zainab — she was representing a woman who was divorcing her husband of 20 years. Zainab asked her, “Why are you divorcing him? Do you know you have all these rights?”

“I don’t want anything from him.”

“But you have the furniture and …”

“Nothing. I want nothing from him.”

“Why are you divorcing him?”

“He is a very abusive man. I want to leave.”

So the lawyer asked her, “But why now? He’s been cruel and abusive to you all this time. Why now?”

And she said, “I saw it on a Turkish soap opera. I don’t have to tolerate it. I learned from that Turkish soap opera that I don’t have to tolerate it.”

Here I am busting my neck working and going to war zones and all these things, I’m exhausted all the time, and you mean to tell me a Turkish soap opera did it faster? Could penetrate that household?

I ended up meeting the producers of that soap opera and went to Turkey to talk to them: “Do you know what you’re doing?” And they said, “We actually did it commercially — it’s a classic story in Turkey — but we didn’t realize it.” As a result they created a hotline for abused women. So I think that media is crucially important.

So this woman, who did not even go through Women for Women — or any organization in this case — just saw it, learned and knew she had to get out. She got herself a job, rented a room and that’s when she decided to leave. I do believe that there needs to be coordination; you can’t just raise awareness and then leave them — that’s the most horrible thing to do. There needs to be a parallel approach, making sure that in this sector or community there are actually services being provided, very practical services. It’s crucially important.
I learned from Oprah that you have to mix between doing the fluffy stuff and the serious stuff. You have to have that consciousness on the mission. When the structure or commercial aspect takes over, you lose. I believe success comes when there is authenticity and truth, and when you don’t have authenticity and truth it doesn’t resonate with people. So how can you be authentic and truthful in whatever you are doing? I believe it will bring success. Inshallah. That has been my way.

“I believe success comes when there is authenticity and truth, and when you don’t have authenticity and truth it doesn’t resonate with people.”

Q: As an American male, I wake up feeling guilty every day in a world of the haves and the have-nots. A lot of the guilt I feel is for colonialism. Where do men who are committed to change sit at the table? What can committed men do?

A: It’s more that I want to hear your ideas. You make me think of a recent experience I had when the revolution happened in Libya. An Italian friend of mine said, “What’s going on in Libya?”

And I said, “You don’t know what Italians have done in Libya?”

“What? I just want to know about the history of Libya!”

I invited him over, cooked dinner and rented “Lion of the Desert,” with Anthony Quinn, a very old movie. And I said, “Now you’re going to learn what Italians did in Libya.” It was supposed to be a fun evening. We put the movie on and I was crying through the whole movie. I turned to him, “This is what your people did to my people!” In the process, poor thing, he kept saying, “But no one told us that!” Now, this situation is a comedy, but there was guilt and I was imposing it.

I want to connect the two points here. For the colonized, our present is your past. The story of Italian colonialism, as an example, in Libya, is very much present in our awareness, in our consciousness — we live with it as a matter of fact. I spent my summer in an indigenous community and it’s the same. The present in our consciousness is the past of the Western world — it’s moved on. But we’re still living in it. We’re still asking for apologies and funds and all of these things, and people here think, “Get over it. We’ve moved on.”

There are two works here. Our work is the self-respect part, taking ownership of it and not waiting, because we wait and then we’re bitter and we get into a cycle. That’s when corruption starts. You believe that this person did so much to you, so what if you are corrupt? And the “donor” thinks, well, we just keep giving them money and they don’t do anything with it. So the work of the colonized people is to have absolute and utter self-respect, and that means taking responsibility of our goodness and our badness. That’s when we can have the conversation, because we are stuck in the victim story. So that’s one.

“For the colonized, our present is your past. … we live with it as a matter of fact.”

Your work is to acknowledge, because there is nothing more that drives people crazy than when there is no acknowledgment. But it should be acknowledgment without guilt. Guilt is passé, I feel. If you really want to impact other fellow white men or European men, you shouldn’t do it from a guilt point of view. It won’t go anywhere. You should do it from a different point of view. It just doesn’t work. It gives you the victim points also. It’s more of an acknowledgment: Have you done anything wrong in your life? I know I have. Let’s go back into childhood when your parents reprimand you and you cry, and then you become the victim even though you were the one who did it.
I remember one time I was playing with my brother and I hit him by mistake. He cried and my parents came to see what was going on, so I started crying to take attention from him. So I was the oppressor. They paid attention to me instead of him, the victim. And every time he tells a story about our childhood, he tells that story.

The point is, that’s not the way to go about it. The way to go is to take responsibility. As adults we make mistakes, we take responsibility and say, “This is what I’ve done. This is what I’ve learned. This is how I’m moving forward in the future.” That by itself goes, for me, a long way. In your case it’s not you, it’s your ancestors, but so what? You think Iraqis are all victims? We spread chemical weapons on Iranians. We massacred Iranians. We raped Kuwaitis. We are a horrible people as well. We are both the aggressors and the victims.

But it doesn’t mean I just completely live in victimhood. It’s taking acknowledgment of it and addressing the lessons and trying to incorporate these lessons in your life so you can lead it in a different way, whether in your company or NGO or in your country when you lead a government. That’s how it works in my opinion.

Especially for men, I don’t think you’ll resonate if you go about it from a victim story. You need to go about it from a different story, a story with integrity, a story with mind and with heart. No one would want you to be a victim, nor should you be a victim. Believe me, as a woman of color: Please, go save yourself first. Don’t save us, we’re OK. Just acknowledge and move forward.

Q: Traveling to all of the places that you do and witnessing the horrors of war, how do you maintain your well-being?

A: I wish I could tell you that it’s an easy ride. It’s not an easy ride. I hope what I’m sharing shimmers through, but I’m not sure it can unless you go through the experience. But I am going to share it.

I went through the first few stages of my work where I had what is called secondary trauma or post-traumatic stress disorder. I came back and I didn’t want my husband to touch me, because everything was about rape at that time. I felt guilty about everything — forget the material things, the fact that I had access to water even. I deprived myself of everything and gave away everything. It’s easy for me to give, I’m a very giving person by nature so it’s hard for me to resist. I had to learn, like the Dalai Lama says, “Give as much as you can, but keep some for yourself. It’s good.” I had to learn to keep some for myself.

I remember — you probably read about it in the book2 — where I just crashed. There was a moment that was a turning moment in my life: I was just crying. There was a day where I woke up and just cried. For those of you who haven’t read the book, basically my husband at the time panicked. Poor thing, he just didn’t know what to do, so he called the ambulance. Sometimes men try to help but not always in the right way. But he had good intentions. So the ambulance came and thought that he was abusing me, so they asked, “Is it him?” And I said, “No, he’s a wonderful man and I love him.” “Is it school?” “No, I just got straight A’s, I’m OK.” “Is it work?” “No, I just got honored by President Clinton” — this was in the ‘90s. “So what is it?” “I don’t know.” I was just exhausted.

The first lesson out of this was: I can’t continue to do the work if I am exhausted in the process. I will not enjoy it. I will not even be able to help. It’s been a series of attempts to change my life, and every time I slip I quickly get reminded by the very women I serve. Because what they’re looking for, in my opinion, are a few things. When you’re tired, when you’re in a victim stage for example — and we all go through this stage — you don’t want the person who is serving you also to be a victim. You say, “Go fix yourself and then come to help me.” Or if you have a cold, you don’t want the person serving you to have a horrible cold worse than yours. Lesson number one, that’s not what people want. It’s pathetic almost that I go and put my own victimhood on them by trying to serve them.

2 Salbi recalls the experience in her memoir, Between Two Worlds: Escape from Tyranny: Growing Up in the Shadow of Saddam.
The second lesson was — and it’s really amazing for me because it’s not tangible, it’s not provable — what they thank me for the most is my smile. The first time I was like, “No, no, no. I didn’t do anything.” And they say, “No, really. We try to tell you, thank you for your smile because it brings us hope.” This has nothing to do with Women for Women, has nothing to do with service, nothing has been provided in these cases. It was just someone who came and what they felt was joy. And that was beautiful. It wasn’t someone who was melodramatic and saying, “Oh, poor victim.” It was someone who was coming with joy. Honestly, I can’t tell you how much I have been thanked.

“*What is needed to serve is to be a healthy individual, not a melodramatic victim. And to be a healthy individual, it’s part of the job that I go and become healthy.*”

Most recently I was in Bosnia in the airport lining up for passport control, and a woman came to me and said, “I’m not sure it’s you, but I recognize you from your smile.” She was one of the first 33 women who I delivered support to at Women for Women International 18 years ago.

So what I’m trying to say is that what is needed to serve is to be a healthy individual, not a melodramatic victim. And to be a healthy individual, it’s part of the job that I go and become healthy. I slip, but I try to keep the patterns of exercise and not feeling guilty about getting a massage now and then, about shopping for clothes and doing the normal things. We shouldn’t go to extremes, and I was an extremist in the past. The extreme means that you’re either a women’s rights activist and thus you have to look ugly and sad and all of that, or you are an airhead — I’m obviously stereotyping both sides. But it doesn’t have to be like this. I really believe it’s a joyful life and we have to enjoy it.

Now it’s also very painful. I would lie if I didn’t tell you I cry. And usually after these trips I cry. It’s hard to witness many stories and not cry. And what personally kept me sane is my spirituality. I move from being pissed off at injustice to really believing that unfortunately the world is all of it: It’s darkness and it’s light, it’s beauty and it’s ugliness. It’s all of it. And what we need to do is to keep serving to make whatever difference that is possible. And that’s OK and that’s worth it. But the world is all of it. I can’t continue to just be pissed off. I need to love it. I hope this helps, but you have to go through your journey.

And just to add one more thing: I came from privilege and then deprived myself, and then go to unprivileged areas with women, and what do I learn from them? They love beauty. I’m the privileged woman, the hardcore one going to war, and what do women ask me for in war all the time: lipstick. It’s the simplest act of resistance, to put that lipstick on.

Also, they love dancing. I learned dancing back in Congo and Rwanda, and fierce, fierce dancing with women who have just recently gone through hell. What do I learn from war? Women like fashion. The first investment they make is that new dress. So the very women in whose name I justified my deprivation, they are the ones who taught me to enjoy all the things we all do.
Good evening and welcome. I'm Stephen Ferruolo, dean of USD School of Law. The School of Law is pleased to partner with the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies in presenting tonight’s speaker, Zainab Salbi, founder of Women for Women International, who will be speaking on the topic “Building Bridges, Rebuilding Societies.” This lecture is presented as part of the Joan B. Kroc Distinguished Lecture Series and the Jane Ellen Bergman Lecture on Women, Children and Human Rights.

The Joan B. Kroc Distinguished Lecture Series is a forum for high-level national and international leaders to share their knowledge and perspectives on issues related to peace and justice. The Jane Ellen Bergman Lecture on Women, Children and Human Rights is the result of a gift from Barbara Yates, a former professor at the University of Illinois, and was established in honor of Jane Ellen Bergman. We’re privileged to have Professor Yates with us here this evening, and we thank her for her generous support.

The Bergman lecture was established to raise awareness on key human rights issues and through this awareness to make life better for those who cannot defend themselves. We’re deeply appreciative of the generous support we’ve received, both from Mrs. Kroc and Professor Yates, to make tonight’s event possible.

I would now like to invite Milburn Line, executive director of the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice, who will introduce our speaker.
Thank you, Dean Ferruolo. On behalf of the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice, I want to thank all of you and welcome you to our first Distinguished Lecture of the season, which takes place during an ongoing forum, “Women, Media, Revolution.” It is part of our Women PeaceMakers Program which, thanks to generous funding from the Fred J. Hansen Foundation, brings four women peacebuilders from all around the globe to the University of San Diego each fall.

Zainab Salbi is a peacebuilder, activist and social entrepreneur. She’s the founder and up until recently was the chief executive officer of Women for Women International, which has worked since the Bosnian war in the early 1990s with over 300,000 women survivors of conflict to rebuild their lives and communities. Women for Women International has been recognized with the Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize, arguably the world’s most important prize for humanitarian action. She’s been recognized by the Clinton Global Initiative, Forbes magazine, the World Economic Forum and others for her leadership. Ms. Salbi is also the author of two books, Between Two Worlds: Escape from Tyranny: Growing Up in the Shadow of Saddam and The Other Side of War: Women’s Stories of Survival and Hope.

Without further interference, please join me in welcoming Ms. Zainab Salbi for this Distinguished Lecture Series.
Building Bridges,
Rebuilding Societies

Zainab Salbi

in conversation with
Diana Kutlow

DK: Good evening, everyone. I’m Diana Kutlow, senior program officer for the Distinguished Lecture Series here at the Institute. I’m really honored tonight to speak with Zainab Salbi, founder of Women for Women International, which has gone from being a very small, personal cause for Zainab to a $35 million organization that is helping women in eight countries. I’d like to begin with the story of the founding, Zainab, and how the organization has managed to grow the way that it has.

ZS: The organization started in 1993, directly as a response to the war in Bosnia. I had recently arrived in America. I came from Iraq in 1990. It was the same month that I learned about the Holocaust, and I learned about people saying “never again.” I honestly never learned that before. That same month the covers of *Time* magazine and *Newsweek* were of concentration camps and rape camps in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and images very similar to that of the Holocaust. As I was learning “never again,” it was happening again. So I just happened to be someone who learned the two issues or the two facts all in the same month and connected them very fast.

I was 23, I was an immigrant, I didn’t have much, and I was a newlywed at the time. But I knew that we needed to do something. We said “never again” and it was happening again, and it was the same images, so we had to act. At that time there were Yellow Pages, there was no internet. So I turned in the Yellow Pages and I called women’s organizations and said, “I want to volunteer to help Bosnian women.” They were in rape camps. They were given numbers, and when their number was called they had to go into another room and get gang raped, any time from a month to nine months or a year period. Girls as young as 9 years old and women as old as 80 years old were raped in these camps. So there was no question.

Long story short, I was connected to the Unitarian Church as a result, who said, “Come and present to us what you have in mind.” When I heard the other groups say to come after six months, I came up with the idea that we need to sponsor women. We would match women in the United States with women survivors of the war in Bosnia and facilitate an exchange of letters.
and pictures between the two of them, and facilitate money. At that time it was $20, $30 a month. So that was a very simple idea.

I went to the church. I borrowed my father-in-law’s suit and a briefcase to pretend I’m a professional woman, because I was 23 years old and didn’t have any work experience, or a very limited one. I presented to the board of directors of the church. They called me after and said, “We’ll support you for a year.” And that was the best gift anyone has given me. It was a group of people that I did not know trusting a 23-year-old kid. They said, “In that year, you are to go and register yourself as an organization and get the tax exempt status.” And that’s how it started.

Up until then I was going about my life. Two things changed. One was the first meeting I had with the first woman I met in Croatia. Her name was Aisha. It was my 9 a.m. meeting the first day I was there. Aisha just talked about the devastation. She was in one of the camps and was released only in a prisoner exchange. She did not know the whereabouts of her husband and two children. And someone asked her to come to the U.S. and testify in front of the Senate and the Congress. But the same group that invited her to come did not ask her if she wanted to go to the doctor while she was here, or go shopping for new shoes while she was here.

She was crying, and I remember the new shoes part. It wasn’t the material aspect as much as her saying, “I had no shoes. I came with slippers. There was a lack of sensitivity of my reality, to just come and testify and go back.” I remember going to the hotel at night with my former husband and the co-founder of Women for Women, and we cried the whole day. I realized I was dedicating my life to that.

So that’s how it started. It started with friends folding brochures with me, and women from all over the United States calling and saying, “We want to join,” realizing very fast that I wasn’t the only one interested. But it really started with no agenda other than to help.

**DK:** There’s a sense of solidarity in that approach: the letter writing, what’s established between women on both sides of that relationship. Can you tell us more about how that solidarity grew into other kinds of programs and to skills training?

**ZS:** I want to take a moment to talk about the solidarity because it’s easy for us to talk about it, but I don’t know how to explain the impact of it (because I know we’re talking about media and the impact of media at this conference). The first major coverage we had was through the AP wire service from a reporter who followed the exchange of letters between two women, one in Michigan who was writing about her garden and about her flowers and about the smell of the roses, and the other one was in Bosnia. The one in Bosnia at the time was writing about lining up in the water supply line and the snipers shooting at the line. And she would stay along with everyone. She would talk about people dying in front of her, and she would stay because she had no choice but to get water. They were very different letters.

So the solidarity part is beyond solidarity. It wasn’t actually the solidarity that was being provided as much. In the letters, what the American woman was providing was that window of hope. It was just that window of hope that let Samia, the Bosnian woman, live through her garden. What Samia provided to the American woman was the I in me — at least that’s what she provided to me because I got to read the letters when we did the article.

In one of the pieces she said, “I lost the I in me.” I think she provided, at least for me, the I in me, and how different that is when we are in peaceful situations. To a great extent we are in control of it, and that control is lost in war. You lose the I in me and you become someone who just survives. I think it was solidarity not to say “we are here for you,” but to have perspectives over both our lives and help us be more grateful for what we have.

In terms of the other programs, first I said, “This is only for raped women.” And the raped women said, “We’re not going to line up in an organization that says this is only for raped women. You’re just going to stigmatize us
more. So, no.” So I said, “OK, that’s a good lesson.” And of course in the
process I learned that victimhood comes in all shapes. It doesn’t come with
only raped women. It doesn’t come with only widows. I learned victimhood
comes as simple as a woman who saw her house burned down in front of
her, and when she talks about it the pain of that loss is as painful as anything
else. I couldn’t compare which one is more of a victim.

Then I said, “Well, we’ll sponsor and give you financial support, limitless.”
And I remember a Bosnian woman stormed into our office and said, “It’s not
fair. It’s not fair that you help one woman for three years and you could have
helped three women for three years.” And I thought, “She’s right. Absolutely.”
So we changed the program so we could rotate.

For the longest time I was so rigid about a no-smoking policy in our office
and in the women’s centers. And then I realized the women were fidgeting
and could not be patient for half an hour talking about women’s rights, and
I was like, “Fine, just smoke a cigarette.” Honestly, people in war, don’t talk
to them about cigarettes.

It was a humbling process. But then I learned a few things that I want
to share. One is, we see people in war as only victims, and in a way we
perpetuate their victimhood by the way we send aid and charity. It’s more
like, “Oh, poor thing. If you just stay in the tent, I will feed you and send you
my secondhand clothes.” It doesn’t work like this. People want their integrity
and dignity, and it’s no different than any other person.

“We see people in war as only victims,
and in a way we perpetuate their victimhood
by the way we send aid and charity.”

My first awareness of that was in Sarajevo and the office next to ours was a
psychologist’s office. I noticed the women, when they got out of his office
they were talking and engaged. And when they entered our office, they acted
physically like the victims. I thought, Oh my God. They think that’s the image
they have to carry in order to get aid. And we’re giving exactly the opposite
message in here.

Right now if you go to any of Women for Women’s offices, you see beautiful,
gorgeous women dressed up. I always ask myself, because we’re all prejudice
and so am I, “Are you sure she’s poor?” They always take me to their homes
and they show me their poverty, just to make sure. But the organization
shifted in its image. Instead of being a victim when you come here, come as
a survivor, as a beautiful, strong woman who has survived so far and we’re
going to help you stand on your feet.

The last and most important is the ability to earn money and get a job.
Yes, war destroys everything. War snaps the rug from underneath your feet,
without regard for anyone and we don’t know why and how. So what people
are eager for the most is to get that job so they can feed their children and
have the integrity of having the roof and the bicycle and the food — just to live with dignity. And rather than charity, I really, really believe in treatment with respect, that this is not going to be charity. This is going to be breathing room for only a year. You're going to know all about your rights so you know what access you have.

We also teach them vocational and business skills, so they can get a job: tangible vocational and business skills. Most women, particularly poor women unfortunately in many parts of the world, when you ask them what they want to learn, they say tailoring and hairdressing. We've been conditioned that we can only know tailoring and hairdressing. How many tailors can you have in the world? And the best of them are men actually — it's true.

So we shift the strategy: Where are the jobs? We'll go and teach the vocational skills where the jobs are. I just came from Rwanda, where we teach women brick-making, carpentry, shoe repair, food processing. We give something practical so they can actually get a job. Sometimes tailoring and hairdressing are practical, sometimes they're not. But do what's practical so she can earn a living.

"In every way the organization's expansion has been related directly to our media coverage. I would say it makes a big difference."

DK: We've been talking a lot in the last day or so about the exclusion of women from media. You've already touched on two instances where media has had a tremendous impact on what you do, both what motivated you — the story in Time, being informed — and also the building of your organization through the exchange of letters and the way it was publicized. How have you been able to use media effectively to communicate about these issues, to build awareness of the challenges and the solutions?

ZS: We have been blessed by getting a lot of media. Particularly we've been very blessed by appearing on the Oprah Winfrey Show 10 times. At the organization we say, “God bless Oprah.” My dream is to have a statue of her in the middle of the organization, because every time we appeared on the show — almost every time — we raised between $2.5 and $5 million within the first couple of days of responses. And that means tens of thousands of women joining by donating $30 a month.

So talking about the power of media, the first appearance on Oprah was in September of 2000 and our budget was $600,000 and we were supporting 700 women — or the reverse, $700,000 and supporting 600 women, I can't remember. Eleven years later, 300,000 women, $35 million. And it's correlated to Oprah appearances and all the wave that she creates with it: you get on other shows and you get on other media.

In terms of this very practical impact, it has made a huge difference. For a nonprofit that is trying to raise awareness about the issues, you try to raise donations for the issue, and the most efficient, best way for your cause is the media. It made a huge difference. You can't buy that. Even an ad would not do it.

Then we added the social media component. We brought a team from AOL. We needed to know how to utilize the social media component. For the longest time our chief marketing officer was an AOL person and a lot of our current team is from AOL. How do we, in other words, take the for-profit sector experience and apply it to the nonprofit sector, in particular social media?

In every way the organization's expansion has been related directly to our media coverage. I would say it makes a big difference.

DK: This media also takes you from the grassroots to the government level. You can not only influence a woman in her home, but also you can influence policy, what is happening at the highest levels of government, through stories,
through media. How have you moved your organization from only dealing with direct assistance to women, to getting them more involved in leadership in post-conflict situations?

ZS: When it comes to women’s issues — we know from “Women, War & Peace”³ — that we see war from only a frontline perspective. We see war as fighting and army and troops and politics. We rarely, I would say really rarely, see war from a backline perspective, which is what women encounter. So if the frontline is led by men, the backline is led by women — and they are both real and they are both true. And they both make the full story. Life doesn’t stop in war; life continues in war. I feel that every time I say that, people go, “Really?” And I say, “Well, yes, we fall in love, get divorced, go to school and have parties — and actually a lot of fun parties.” You keep life going in the midst of war, and even go to jobs and go to school and keep the factory open — and that is something that is led by women. So we miss on that.

³ PBS’ “Women, War & Peace” is a five-part series challenging the conventional wisdom that war and peace are men’s domains. All five films can be viewed online at www.pbs.org/wnet/women-war-and-peace.

It’s the same thing when there are negotiations for peace. Less than 3 percent of all peace agreements include a woman’s signature. There is a complete exclusion of women’s perspectives in peace processes. Peace becomes about the ending of fighting, rather than the building of peace. Women’s voices are dismissed.

One of the ways that I noticed that it could shift a little bit is when you take the women’s stories from only the emotional story and only the victim story. Women, we are strong in our emotions, and also the victim story exists: 80 percent of refugees worldwide are women and children, most women do face all kinds of atrocities in war, women predominantly face rape in war — these are all facts. But those aren’t the only facts about us. We are as cornered in our image as victims as men are cornered in their image as oppressor. And neither is the full story. There are wonderful men out there, and women are not only victims.

How do we shift this? How do we transfer the women’s voices, especially at the grassroots, to the political level? The way we did it was by surveying them on political issues. We started with a survey in Iraq, then went to Afghanistan and Congo — and there’s a long way to go to improve — but
basically we asked women not about children's issues only, though we do, or women's issues only. But we really asked them about their prime ministers and presidents and the constitution and the military and the economy — the “men's” topics. Women are not asked these questions. Women are only asked what we think about children, health and education. We’re not asked about the other things, at least in part of the world when it comes to war.

As leader of a group called Women for Women, you can imagine the jokes I have encountered from politicians, particularly in the countries where we work: “Oh, Women for Women. Why not Women for Men? Men for Women?” I know the jokes, and they get really bad. You can imagine.

But then when I say, “OK, Mr. Prime Minister, I have a survey. And let me tell you what women in your country are saying about you.” Honestly, almost all the time it’s, “OK, um, I want to see.” So you shift the debate. You shift the language. And that’s what I’m interested in, that we don’t have to present the emotional, victim issue. Imagine if you present it as political leadership issues. These women’s voices are very important. They have very particular demands of you. And by the way, we did that at the prime minister level, but we also did that in countries like Congo with the military commanders and the chiefs and the mayors. When you present women’s issues as “these are constituents who can actually get you out of office if you don’t pay attention to them,” then you change the dynamics of how they treat women: with respect. The respect we simply deserve.

DK: Are you seeing those changes showing up in legislation, at policy levels, or simply in how well those laws that do exist are enforced?

ZS: I personally think that in the last few decades women have focused a lot on legislative changes all over the world. I think the work is not legislative changes, though there is room for plenty. Where I put my attention and interest in is really their implementation. And even before their implementation, for the people to actually know about them.

Let’s take Congo, for example. Rape is prosecuted as a crime in Congo, but on average not many perpetrators go to prison in Congo. There are lots of changes happening on the political, elite level, but it doesn’t happen at the grassroots.

Now, there are a few good experiences. One is Rwanda. As you may know, 55 percent of its parliament is women; it’s one of the best countries in terms of representation of women. They had a lot of changes in their constitution. They simplified the language of the constitution in a booklet with cartoonish images and very simple language, and they made that booklet available to every single person. They summarized it for women particularly on all the issues that apply to them — usually family law impacts them the most: inheritance, custody, marriage, divorce, ownership. These are where women get restricted or given rights. So they translated that and simplified it and made it accessible to everyone. Then the work becomes about how you actually help activate it. And that’s, for me, where the work needs to be done. When it happens it’s fantastic.

“We are as cornered in our image as victims as men are cornered in their image as oppressor. And neither is the full story.”

There’s a woman in our program in Congo who learned in the process of this program that she has inheritance rights. But her husband died about 20 years ago and her in-laws took everything. She saved up some of the money she got through the program, hired a lawyer, sued the in-laws and got her home back. She opened a store out of one of the rooms, so now she earns a living. It wasn’t that the law cheated her; she did not know. I really believe that knowledge is as important as access to resources, and in the case of women, what we need to have much more work on is the knowledge.
DK: Now in the case of the Congo, you see that as a really pivotal country for focusing on these issues. Tell us about what you’re doing along with the Clinton Global Initiative about the Congo.

ZS: I see Congo as the most pivotal issue. Hans Rosling, a Swedish scientist, talks about how the world is shifting in our economy, that the Western world is the founding father of the modern capitalist economy that is prospering, and then there is the emerging market that is coming and joining it in the future. He basically divides the world and says that those who have cars are going to have planes. Those who have bicycles are going to have cars.

He’s worried, and I share his worry, about those who don’t have bicycles but are still cooking with firewood. He said that others are doing well, they are moving along the line. If you want to save the world, save Congo, because it’s one of the worst places on earth — and Afghanistan, I would add. Women still go to the forest and collect charcoal and cook with it.

I was in Congo a couple of months ago with Ashley Judd and a group of Clinton Global Initiative leaders — leaders selected by President Clinton from different sectors. We decided together to come and work on Congo. It was Ashley Judd, Jeff Gordon, Myron Rolle and others. I’ve been going there so long, but for the first time — thanks to Ashley — we saw women carrying loads, about 50 pounds of charcoal, on their backs. This is still happening today. I’ve always seen these women, but this time we carried it to see how heavy it is. It’s so heavy, and some of these are children, 8 or 9 years old, carrying it. You can’t actually stand up. You have to be parallel to the ground in order to be able to carry this load.

It is a place that is still the wretched of the earth. It’s a place where hundreds of thousands of women are still getting raped. It is a place that is rich and should not suffer through what it is suffering. It is about our political will to stop the war there. It is about proper investment in the country so we can bring prosperity. To quote Hans Rosling again, “If you want to save the world, save Congo” — and I would add Afghanistan. These are the two worst places on earth. I can’t see us progressing with those who have bicycles and cars and buses and planes if we forget about those who are still going to the forest and cutting the wood and making it into charcoal to cook.

“I believe that women are the bellwether to the directions of a society. Violence often starts with women, and progress often starts with women. And political compromises often start with women.”

DK: You have had programs in Afghanistan for a while. There’s a particular situation arising now in the discussion of peace negotiations. Who is going to be included in those peace negotiations and what compromises might be made, particularly on women’s rights, in order to achieve peace — meaning an end to the fighting, not necessarily meaning the beginning of a normal life? What do you see happening in Afghanistan with women’s rights?

ZS: I am very scared. It’s more than scared. I’m very sad because I think we are betraying Afghan women. I believe that women are the bellwether to the directions of a society. Violence often starts with women, and progress often starts with women. And political compromises often start with women — “It’s just women.” That goes back; I know it as far back as British history in India. One of the worst laws in India and Bangladesh and Pakistan was brought by the British. It’s historical, it’s consistent, including most recently in the American invasion of Iraq. It’s very consistent.

Religious leaders want control of the private sphere, and the private sphere is usually defined with women. It is women who carry honor and heritage and the family. And religious leaders want to regulate family law, and that has to do with mobility, access to resources, choices. Again, marriage, divorce, inheritance,
custody, right to study — these are all family law issues. Usually it is the secular who abandons more, who says, “I want free market, I want free trade, I want all of these things,” and that’s the trading card always. We give you the private sphere, we get the free market. What we miss on this trade is that it simply starts with women. We are like the kitchen door. Back home in Iraq there is the kitchen door and the formal guest door, and when people enter through the kitchen door it’s informal so it’s not paid attention to, as opposed to when people enter through the main door. We’re like the kitchen door.

In Afghanistan the Taliban have a list of all the compromises they want on women’s issues. A lot of the international community as well as Afghans are saying, “It’s just women.” I talked to an Afghan adviser to President Karzai who said, “Look, women are going to have to compromise. But don’t worry, it’s not so much. It’s just their mobility and their appearances.” And I wanted to shoot myself because I wanted to say, “How do you know? You’ve never worn a burqa, have you? You haven’t been told that you can’t go to school or you cannot go to work. So how do you know ‘it’s not so much?’” But I equally heard this from American senators, who said, “Maybe it’s irreconcilable, the rights of women in Islam. It’s just too much. We don’t have hope that it can be reconciled in Afghanistan.” Different statement to the same end.

I hear this and I see it on the political sphere. I was in Afghanistan last March and I met this woman who was promised to be married at the age of 6 and got married at the age of 15. She was now a widow and a single mother at the age of 16. She was beaten with a whip during the Taliban time for wearing open shoes, and in the middle of that beating she grabbed the whip from the Talib and threw it.

I said, “What gave you the courage?” And she said, “It wasn’t the pain of the beating, but it was the humiliation that someone was beating me, a human being was beating another human being. That was what got me to stop him.”

But this woman comes to our program with nothing. She’s completely and utterly poor. She learns about her rights. Her vocational skills happen to be embroidering and tailoring, and she was so good that we hired her because we have a partnership with Kate Spade, so she embroidered things for Kate Spade. She got out, we hired her, she took a loan, she started a business. Long story short, this woman has $30,000 in her bank account. She just bought a machine for $18,000. She’s employing 150 people.

Five years ago she entered our program. She said, “I just want stability in Afghanistan so I can continue to grow my business.” It makes sense, right? She’s hiring 150 people, her daughter is going to college. And I see her and I feel we are betraying her. She and many other women did their part. They stood up. They went to school. They ran for parliament. They did their part, and I feel if we’re not going to make sure to protect their rights, that if we compromise on their rights, we are going to compromise on the larger peace in Afghanistan — and it will hit us back here again. I feel very sad.

“They did their part, and I feel if we’re not going to make sure to protect their rights, that if we compromise on their rights, we are going to compromise on the larger peace in Afghanistan — and it will hit us back here again.”

DK: There’s another country where that’s a real risk, and that’s Iraq. It’s a country that’s very personal to you. You lived there for 19 years before coming to the states. What do you see different about work in your own country than in the other places where you’ve worked?
ZS: I love my country. It’s been the hardest country to work in and the most dangerous to work in because it’s unpredictable. You don’t know when the bomb is going to explode. In the other countries you can actually know, sort of. You avoid this street or that street. But in Iraq you just don’t know.

It breaks my heart what happened to Iraq. Everything is destroyed. It’s destroyed. Everything about my life has been destroyed. The house I grew up in that was built the year I was born — my parents said that I brought the blessing by building the house. Six years ago or five years ago it became an execution center, and then a brothel. My dad called me saying, “It’s a brothel!” And I said, “Dad, at least they’re having sex instead of killing each other.” But of course it’s horrible because trafficked women and prostituted women go through horror. Then it became a military base.

When they released it a year ago I went to see it. It’s stripped of everything. I only tell this story because that’s how I feel about Iraq. It’s been stripped of everything. The house had a garden surrounding it and the garden is absolutely dead — nothing in it. Even the electric wires were taken from the house. And I feel that’s Iraq. It’s destroyed and there’s the sense of the unfairness that happened. As my aunt said, “America destroyed and we destroyed. We have our own part to share and America has its own part to share.” I agree with her.

I think that I’ve reached that stage where the only hope I have in Iraq is through Iraqis. I went from a time of lobbying and talking with American politicians that we cannot leave Iraq, not in terms of military but in terms of development and infrastructure. We helped destroy the country and we need to help rebuild. It’s like someone going to your home and destroying it and leaving. We chose to go to Iraq, we weren’t invited. And the country is destroyed and we need to help rebuild it.

At this point I have no faith, honestly. I think America abandoned its responsibility toward Iraq. But I’m not willing to wait for America to claim its responsibilities toward Iraq. I have more hope in Iraq than in Afghanistan, to be very honest. The country has more resources. It’s just about Iraqis shaping up and waking up and getting our own job done. But I have more hope in Iraq because it has resources, because we still have educated people in it, because we still have things going for us. And shame on us if we stand still and don’t do anything.

DK: Where are women being successful there?

ZS: Well, you have a wonderful warrior here who keeps it going, Rashad Zaydan.4 I think women are successful in all these countries including Iraq. Honestly, they keep life going. I’m not exaggerating. It’s a very personal story, but it’s a story I hear nonetheless all over, all the time. My mom, during the war, would say that my dad would cry and say, “My country is destroyed.” And it was my mom who would go and run and get the vegetables and the fruit.

A couple of years ago I was in Gaza and I stayed with a family. The husband is an artist, a painter. They were telling me that in the two hours of ceasefire they had during the war, he would go to his studio and paint beautiful, intense paintings. And she would go and collect the flour from all the neighbors and bake as much bread as possible, so every neighbor had a stack of bread to survive in case there was no ceasefire tomorrow. I’m not comparing, this is not bad or good, worse or better. But it is women whose strength is in keeping life going.

Unfortunately it’s not credited or respected. But it’s no different than how women’s work is not credited or respected in this country: our household work, our cleaning, our cooking, all of these things. Now, in this country more men are doing it, which is really good. But this is recent. Most societies don’t credit women’s work.

4 Dr. Rashad Zaydan, a pharmacist and the founder of Knowledge for Iraqi Women Society, a development organization, was a Woman PeaceMaker at the IPJ in 2011. For more information on Zaydan’s work, see www.sandiego.edu/peacestudies/ipj/programs/women_peace_makers/women_peacemakers/middle_east/Iraq.php
It's the same in war. What is war? War is a microcosm of what happens in peace. It's just a more intense experience. That's all that it is. It shows us life and death in the same day. You meet it every day. It's raw. But the same feelings and the same experiences that happen in peace happen in war.

DK: In Iraq you're dealing with this particular situation with religious differences, and you write in your book about feeling those differences for the first time when the Iran-Iraq War began. How do you build bridges between religious groups through the work you've done?

ZS: There are many ways to answer this question. In Iraq we have Sunni-Shia issues, but I would extend that to any two groups of people who are fighting, whether it's in India with Hindus and Muslims, or anywhere else. It's no different than the essence of my answer to Iraq. I really believe we need to forgive even when not asked for forgiveness. I think it's a very hard thing to do. But unless we do that, I don't see how we can move forward.

“War is a microcosm of what happens in peace. It's just a more intense experience. That's all that it is. It shows us life and death in the same day.”

In other words, I can wait as an Iraqi for America to be aware and ask for forgiveness, or I just forgive because I can't be captured in that story anymore and I need to move on. Or the Sunni-Shia conflict, we repeat a story that is 1,400 years old. Literally, we repeat it every single year. Or Hindu-Muslims. Or Muslims-Jews. Or whatever it is, you name it. We all fight each other. We like it for some reason. Unless we, whatever the group of people who are impacted, learn to forgive even when not asked for forgiveness, it's very hard to shape it. Otherwise we are stuck in the story. And that applies to women as well by the way. We will be stuck in the story and we need to change the narrative. So that's first.

In my experience particularly as a women's rights person, when I work with religious folks — and you have to work with religious leaders — I'm a big advocate of changing the narrative from that of culture to that of practical solutions. And that is the economy. When you go to meet a person and you go about attacking their culture or religious values, then there is a defensiveness — and I'm telling you this as a Muslim woman who is from the other part of the world. (I hate calling it the Third World, it's just different — the good, the bad and the ugly exist, it's just different.) You just think, “Oh my God, I can't stand another attack on Islam and women.” Not that there isn't an issue, but there are issues with all religions.

Amartya Sen, the Nobel Prize-winning economist who wrote about identity, said that when you narrow a people into one identity and you dismiss all their other identities, and you tell them, “You are horrible, horrible, horrible,” they become horrible, because you narrow them down to that one single identity and you leave them no room to say, “I'm also a doctor. I'm also a painter.”

So when it comes to issues of women and religion particularly, my attitude about it is we don't start with women and religion and culture, but we start with practical solutions. I'll give you an example of the strategy and my attitude at large. I was in Iraq in that same province, Karbala — very religious. I had to cover head to toe. I had my Iraqi colleagues with me. We wanted permission to work in the province. The mayor accepted and the governor and all the government officials accepted. At the end they said, “But you must get the approval of the tribal sheikh.”

So I go to the tribal sheikh and he senses that I'm the leader, even though my Iraqi colleagues are there, and he picks on me. He starts picking on my identity: “Who are you? Who is your father? What tribe are you from?” It's impolite for him to ask, “Are you Sunni or Shia?” But he asks, “Who is your family? Which part of Baghdad are you from? Where are you living? I can sense from your accent you are living abroad right now. You live in America.” And every answer I give him is wrong in his dictionary.
I was thinking, *I'm not going to get the deal to work in this province to help the women because of my own identity.* But the point is, I said, “OK, look. I know I’m failing. So let me tell you what I do, why I’m here. If you don’t agree with that then I might as well go because I know I’m not fitting the picture here. All I want to do is work with widows” — and in this case Iraq has about 1 million widows — “and vulnerable women too. I have a program that is one year, teaching them vocational skills to get them jobs.” I didn’t highlight too much that we also do rights awareness and educational training, but I said that it comes with an educational program. But the most important thing in this case was jobs.

This man, this sheikh, this traditional guy who did not like who I am, the Westernized person, after two minutes of that said, “Bless you. Women are like a broken wing to a bird. A bird can never fly if one of its wings is broken. So God bless you. Go work with them.” And all of a sudden my identity and who I am and my background were irrelevant because it was about practical solutions.

When I was in Afghanistan in March, I met with 20 religious leaders, tribal leaders. I was the only woman sitting with them except for my colleague. We were having serious discussions from rights of women to education to domestic violence to rape to Taliban. They treated me with as much respect as I treated them with respect. But the line of entry, the starting point, is practical; it’s not attacking religion or culture. Culture, as the South African saying goes, is water not stone. It moves, it evolves, it changes. We can’t start from that point. We have to start with the practical.

The least resistance I get is from poor men. Usually they say, “We are so hungry. If you want to help us, help our wives get jobs, please.” I most recently had this discussion in Rwanda. I personally think be practical first and provide practical solutions to people, and then you can go into the more sensitive solutions, but only after you build a foundation of trust with honest and sincere respect — not coming at it as, “You are horrible and I’m going to save your women.”

DK: I’d like to ask a personal question, and that’s about the kind of toll that this work takes on you, that it takes on our Women PeaceMakers, even on the writers who hear their stories and take those in as their own, as you have for hundreds if not thousands of women around the world. What gives you comfort? What gives you respite as you process all that you’ve seen and heard?

ZS: I am just living my truth. I’m not sacrificing. I’m not compromising. For me, the simple answer is, I’m just living my truth. That’s it. It just happened to be this. And I’m grateful that it’s this. So what gives me comfort at the end of the day is that it’s about the cause, not the physical job. That makes it easier. It’s living our truth, because when you live the truth, whether you are a painter and your truth is to paint, or you’re a writer, then it keeps you going. That’s ultimately the answer. I will just go back and back and back because I love doing it.

Other than that, it’s been a journey in which I learned that to serve, you must serve with integrity, and to serve with integrity you must be a healthy individual. When I’m not healthy, I’m not a good person. I need to be healthy in order to serve with integrity, because the last thing you want to do is not be fully healthy.

DK: I know there are a lot of men in our audience here, many of whom are involved in the same kind of work that you’re doing in various ways. In a world where men still hold most of the power — economic power, political power, military power and frequently cultural power, as you’ve discussed — how can we get men to support this movement?

ZS: There are practical and there are ideological reasons. I think a couple of things happened in terms of the women’s movement; this is my simple take on it. The movement is going through a shift right now — the women’s

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5 The Women PeaceMakers Program documents the stories and best practices of international women leaders who are building peace in their communities. Each fall, four Women PeaceMakers are paired with four Peace Writers, who interview them daily and write their stories of living in conflict and building peace.
cause, the women's issue, if you may — is going through a shift. It’s shifting from the policy/activist talk to something that’s changed in the last few years, and these things have to do with media.

“It’s been a journey in which I learned that to serve, you must serve with integrity, and to serve with integrity you must be a healthy individual.”

For example, Nike Foundation and NoVo Foundation brought out the Girl Effect and shifted the energy. The Girl Effect appealed to men as much as to women; it appealed to others about the future of their girls. And that shifted the energy around the issue. Goldman Sachs took it on because their research department showed a correlation between economic growth and women's incorporation fully in the economic sector. They realized there is a direct impact on women's economic activities in the growth of Japan, Cameroon, etc.

So here’s this financial institution saying, “We have nothing to do with women, but we are about the future, and the future is with women.” They created a whole program: 10,000 women to talk about how women are related to economic growth, and that while women are overpopulated in microfinance and a little bit represented in high-end businesses, the medium and the small were empty, and they needed to populate women in medium and small businesses. Then it shifted to the Clinton Global Initiative taking this role, and now more and more companies are interested in how we do things for women.

Now, I think the shift is happening to the grassroots again, and not grassroots activists because they are already there. In my hope, it’s grassroots consumers putting pressure, asking “Where are the women in this?” “How can I be consistent in my values to support women as I am consistent in my values of organic food?” I can’t be consistent right now in my values to support women in everything about my life. Unfortunately, my dress was probably still produced by a woman who was abused in a Chinese factory. So there is this shift right now into the mainstream grassroots.

So this is the practical thing. It’s irrelevant if you’re a man or a woman. As I talked to a couple of companies last week, do you want to get ahead of the game or do you want to catch up with the game? It’s moving. And as Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn say in Half the Sky, this century is going to be the woman century. Really, do you want to be ahead of the game and jump in the wagon right now for economic growth or stability or peace, or do you want to catch up with it? It’s a choice.

There is also the ideological issue. It’s not sustainable what we have. It’s simply not sustainable that the world is missing half of its population in decision making, and every decision-making position in the world is still dominated by men by far. Political representation is the best, and it’s only 18 percent of women. That’s the highest number. It’s not sustainable. We can’t continue on like that, and we can’t solve our health challenges or economic challenges or war or military or you name it — poverty, environment — if we do not address women, both at the decision-making table as well as agents of change. It’s just not going to work anymore.

“It’s simply not sustainable that the world is missing half of its population in decision making.”

DK: There’s a question that always comes up from our audience, and that is, what can people here do to make a difference in Afghanistan and Congo?

ZS: Well, I always encourage everyone to sponsor a woman by sending her $30 a month through Women for Women International — I’ve been saying
that for 18 years. You do get to meet one woman at least and help one woman, and sometimes that's good enough. But honestly, political pressure. Ten years ago, before America went to war with Afghanistan, there was a huge women's movement, an American women's movement, to put pressure on getting attention to what was happening to Afghan women. We don't have to wait for things to get worse in Afghanistan. I'm urging everyone to go and do it now. This is the time to re-energize American women to be proactive before things go bad, to make sure that we actually get Afghan women safe and not compromise in this process. That's a political movement.

“I want to urge young women particularly to go into the corporate, government and media sectors. We need to populate these sectors because a holistic approach is what is going to change the world, not only a one-sector approach.”

DK: Talking about the political movement, what are you seeing in younger women and men you are running into? What are you seeing from them in terms of how they are getting involved in economic support for women internationally, political issues, using media effectively, to address these issues?

ZS: I can tell you what I'm urging young women in particular to do. My observation is that when I talk to young women — now, mind you, I interact a lot more with overseas women — they tend to go to the same sectors I have gravitated to: the social sector, social services, providing services. I want to urge young women particularly to go into the corporate, government and media sectors. We need to populate these sectors because a holistic approach is what is going to change the world, not only a one-sector approach.

We can't continue being overpopulated in civil society and underpopulated in the political or corporate or media sectors. Now, we're in media a lot, but not in decision making. Actually, I believe only 2.5 percent of decision makers in American media are women. We need to go into these sectors and be savvy about how we fulfill our dreams there, and try to get these sectors women-friendly and respectful of women, rather than just keep fighting the fight from the margin. I really believe that.

In terms of young men, a young man today was talking about feeling guilty as a young white American kid. I feel guilt is passé. No one should feel guilty. We should just feel self-love and love for everyone. Guilt doesn't take us anywhere. No guilt. We need to give with love, but not with guilt. I'm talking to myself as well. There is a lot of optimism here.

DK: What do you envision for the organization in the future? As you're stepping away from it a little bit, you have other ideas about what you can be doing, about what the organization can be doing. Let’s start about the future of Women for Women International, and then talk about what you see for your future.

ZS: Well, Women for Women International has a very clear trajectory. I wouldn't have left now, I wouldn't have stepped down as CEO if I didn't think that it's in a very clear trajectory. We have a very clear program, we have a very clear mission, an amazing, wonderful team. What it needs is just to grow and serve more women. It's exciting to see people who are excited about growing it and improving it. But you have the template, and it's just, go and serve more. I feel a great level of comfort for where it is. I'll continue being part of it, of course. It's like having my baby, who is 18 years old.

As for me, when I came to America I was almost 20. This year I'm 21 in America, 20 in Iraq, basically. It's almost half of my life interrupted over here in America. I honestly feel that with the Arab revolutions, there is so much hope. I have so much hope in the Arab world. You see, the fear we had is so hard to explain. For all these people, the young people and the old people, to have gone to the streets and rebelled and screamed, I have chills whenever I hear their chants. The people were demanding with courage. It was about life. It was about dignified life. People want jobs and a dignified life. Women took part in it, and we're in danger of course — women always go out in front and then are pushed back.
I feel there is a huge window of hope. If what I've done in the last 20 years of my life was focus on building this big bridge between the Western world and conflict areas, I'm coming to the realization that the small bridges are equally important. The small bridges between us as individuals, all the small bridges between people from the same region — Egyptians and Iraqis, Jordanians and Palestinians, Yemenis and Moroccans, Indians and Iraqis, and Malaysians and Lebanese. It’s that other part of the world. And Africa, of course: my sisters in Kenya and Congo and Rwanda and Mozambique. The bridges between us.

We have focused so much on the bridge between the Western world and the other part of the world, which is valid and important and to be continued. We need to have small bridges because there is so much more to share between us. Perhaps it's easier to create a shift when it's coming with our own images, so that's what I want to focus on.

DK: We wish you all the best as you move forward. It's an exciting time of transition for you, Women for Women International, and for our Women PeaceMakers as well. I'm very excited you've had a chance to link with them, and I know you'll be marching forward with many of them and their activities in the future. Thank you.

ZS: Thank you. It was a pleasure.
RELATED RESOURCES

**Girl Effect.** [www.girleffect.org](http://www.girleffect.org)

**Global Fund for Women.** [www.globalfundforwomen.org](http://www.globalfundforwomen.org)

**Kiva.** [www.kiva.org](http://www.kiva.org)


**Women for Women International.** [www>womenforwomen.org](http://www.womenforwomen.org)

**Women, War & Peace.** A Five-Part Special Series on PBS. [www.pbs.org/wnet/women-war-and-peace](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/women-war-and-peace)
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