

Security in Safe Hands: Women Make the Difference!

Second Global SAVE Conference Sisters Against Violent Extremism

February 26th-28th, 2010
SAS Radisson Hotel, Vienna

SAVE
SISTERS AGAINST VIOLENT EXTREMISM

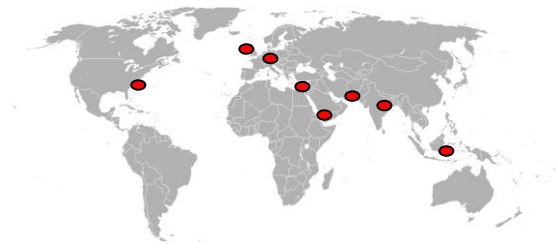


“We used our frustration and grief as motivation to rise above the hatred the terrorists forced on us.”

*Christie Coombs, USA
Lost her husband Jeff in the 9/11 attacks*

Conference Purpose

From February 26th-February 28th, 2010, 15 courageous SAVE activists gathered at the SAS Radisson Blu Hotel in Vienna, Austria, to participate in the second global SAVE working conference: *Security in Safe Hands: Women Make the Difference!* These civil society leaders, experts, researchers, activists, and family members of victims of terrorist attacks came from Indonesia, Yemen, India, Pakistan, Israel, Palestine, the US, the UK, and Northern Ireland to discuss practical strategies for combating violent extremism.



The conference participants focused on increasing the strength and numbers of *SAVE* groups and on improving the efficacy of local operations. Each *SAVE* Sister was invited on the basis of being able to act as both a teacher and a student as it was critical that all sisters learn and share as much information as possible to be able to continue to fight violent extremism globally.

Over the course of conference, participants:

- ◇ **Addressed** both the **challenges** and **successes** that we face locally and internationally.
- ◇ **Strategized** how to **utilize New Media** to spread our message and to improve our communication with each other.
- ◇ **Learned** how **storytelling** can help **reconcile** seemingly intractable divisions between groups.
- ◇ **Discussed** ways of **empowering victims** and **breaking taboos**, and developed a series of initiatives to guide our operations in the coming year.

Participants



Anita Pratap is a documentary filmmaker, author, and journalist from India. Anita was the South Asia Bureau Chief of CNN until January 1999, during which time she covered all the major stories in the region including the nuclear tests, the ethnic war in Sri Lanka, the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, conflicts in India's Kashmir and North East, women, poverty and terrorism-related issues. Anita worked as an independent documentary filmmaker, scripting and directing films on topics ranging from war to traditional culture. She is also the author of *Island of Blood* (2003) and *Unsung* (2007). She is currently working on a new book on conflict resolution.



Anne Carr is a dialogue practitioner from Northern Ireland who has been working to reconcile and reintegrate divided communities in Northern Ireland for more than 25 years. She recently facilitated a pilot project on Women in Conflict, which encourages women across Northern Ireland to share their experiences of the conflict as well as their hopes and fears regarding the peace process. Anne has developed a range of storytelling techniques and dialogue processes, and she was involved in both the development of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition and the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. Anne was a founding parent of the first integrated primary school established outside Belfast and chaired the Board of Governors there for fourteen years. Anne received the 2008 Community Relations Council Award for exceptional achievement in the field of community relations in Northern Ireland and the 1999 award from the Northern Ireland Baha'i Community for her work in peace building.



Archana Kapoor is from India and is the proprietor of Archana Kapoor Productions, the publisher of *Hardnews* magazine, and an independent filmmaker. Archana is also the founder of Seeking Modern Applications for Real Transformation (SMART), an NGO that is working with marginalized communities in India. SMART has mobilized thousands of women to participate in empowerment and economic sustainability programs, and she is now setting up a Community Radio to inform, educate, and empower the community. Archana has made a film on the Mumbai terror attacks, and she is now working with SAVE/Women without Borders to fight violent extremism and discrimination in schools and colleges.



Arshi Saleem Hashmi is a Senior Research Analyst at the Institute of Regional Studies and an Adjunct Assistant Professor at the National Defense University in Pakistan. Prior to her work at Institute of Regional Studies, Arshi has worked as a researcher in Washington DC with the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, and the Middle East Institute. Arshi has published widely, including the book *Conflict Transformation from Ethnic Movement to Terrorist Movement: Case Studies of Tamils in Sri Lanka and Mohajirs in Pakistan*. Arshi Hashmi is a member of Women in International Security (WIIS) and the United States Institute of Peace Alumni Association.



Asma Asfour is a Council Member of the Sinjel Municipality in Palestine. Her candidacy was prompted by the establishment of a new quota system that required female representatives in local councils. Asma strongly believes that the increased participation of women in decision-making processes—both in politics and in civil society—helps Palestinians in reaching a resolution regarding both internal and regional issues. As she said in a recent op-ed piece for the Common Ground News Service, “It stands to reason that a Palestinian society with a greater degree of social equality will be in a better position to reach a sustainable resolution with Israel and to build a strong independent state.” Asma, like many other Palestinian women, dreams of an independent state that has peaceful relations with its neighbors and gender equality among its citizens.



Christie Coombs, from the United States, is the founder of the Jeffrey Coombs Foundation and a co-founder of the Massachusetts Military Heroes Fund. After her husband, Jeffrey Coombs, was killed in the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City, Christie has become a voice for families and individuals affected by terrorism in Massachusetts. She established the Jeffrey Coombs Foundation in honor of her husband and has raised more than \$250,000 since 2001 to assist Massachusetts families struggling emotionally or financially due to death or illness within their family, to provide assistance to local schools, and to host special programs for Massachusetts military families.



Fahmia al-Fotih' is the SAVE Coordinator in Yemen and is currently very involved in building a vibrant chapter there. She has taken the initiative to partner with Women Journalists Without Chains, an organization that acts as an advocate for freedom of speech and freedom of the press, especially for women journalists, and is developing a community of women to combat violent extremism on the ground. In the past, Fahmia has worked as a consultant for USAID as well as with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as a Research &

Knowledge Management Associate. She also worked at the Yemen Times, Yemen's first English-language newspaper, as a reporter, editor, and translator.



Hanan Ibrahim founded the Somali Family Support Group (SFSG), a community organization serving Somali families, East Africans, Horn of Africa asylum seekers and refugees as well as all other families who live in deprived areas (of London?). SFSG provides a range of services including a family advice center, promotion of health awareness and basic literacy, (career?) skills development, and job-search advice. Hanan also runs a women's group, Shaah iyo Sheeko (tea and chat), which promotes women's rights by supporting educational and professional achievement, mentoring, and community empowerment. Hanan has further developed the Taaleen Dialogues to educate people on the culture, values, and contributions of migrant communities.



Hilde Rapp is the Co-Director of the Centre for International Peace-Building in the UK. She is the Director of the Nepalese Health Network, Co-Director of the Centre for International Peace-Building, for which she acts as a representative to the United Nations, and she has been a director of the UK Ministry for Peace initiative. At the Centre for International Peace-Building, Hilde focuses on issues of security, preventing and ending violent conflict by tackling its root causes, and creating the conditions for rebuilding society, which must include overcoming trauma through improving health and education and forming bonds of solidarity.



Lily Munir is the director of the Center for Pesantren and Democracy Studies (CePDeS) in Indonesia, an NGO which she co-founded in 2003. CePDeS envisions the birth of progressive Muslim leaders through democracy and human rights education in Muslim society. Lily has worked independently as a researcher, activist and consultant specifically on the issues of gender, women's and human rights, and political Islam. She has written numerous articles for publication and presented in various conferences internationally. Lily is also a national board member of Muslimat Nahdlatul Ulama (MNU), the women's wing of NU, one of the largest independent Islamic organizations in the world. She served as the only woman and only Muslim on the International Commission of the Joint Elections Management Body (JEMB) for the Afghan Elections and as a member of the UN Election Experts Monitoring Team (EEMT) in Nepal. Through CePDeS, Lily recently initiated the birth of SAVE Indonesia, which has mobilized over 100 students against violence and terrorism to date.



May De Silva is the Director of Women into Politics, a cross-community organization in Northern Ireland that practices and encourages the principles of democracy, feminism, and community development. Women Into Politics works in partnership with grassroots organizations to raise awareness of the principles of community relations, strategies for peace building, and promoting reconciliation within communities. May has more than 20 years experience working in charitable and statutory sectors in the UK, and her main goal is to increase the number of women in decision-making at all levels in our society and a mission to promote equality for all. May is the Chairperson of the Northern Ireland Policing Board's Women's Strategic Group, a member of the Belfast City Council's Good Relations Partnership and a Board Member of Women's News.



Nadia al Sakkaf is the Editor-in-Chief of the Yemen Times, the only woman in Yemen currently to hold such a position. Nadia has been working in the media since July 2000 when she joined the Yemen Times as a translator and reporter. She then steadily advanced through the ranks until she became the Editor-in-Chief in 2005. The Yemen Times is the first and largest English-language newspaper in Yemen. Her accomplishments in journalism were recognized by the international media community when she received the inaugural Gebran Tueni Award in 2006, which honored her courage in defending the ideals of freedom of the press, demonstrated excellence in leadership, and high managerial and professional standards. Her areas of expertise are development issues, gender, and media in the Middle East (especially Yemen).



Robi Damelin is an Israeli member of the Parents Circle-Bereaved Families Forum. In 2002, Robi Damelin's son David was killed by a Palestinian sniper along with seven soldiers and three civilians. David was doing his reserve duty and was serving in occupied territories. After her son was killed, Robi joined the Bereaved Families Forum, eventually closing her PR firm to focus full-time on working with them. Rather than channeling their losses into revenge, the Israeli and Palestinian families in the group work together for reconciliation and to find a just solution to the conflict. Today, Robi Damelin speaks out in support of Israeli/Palestinian reconciliation both locally (throughout Israel and the occupied Palestinian Territories) and globally. She is featured in Just Vision's award-winning documentary film Encounter Point, and she says that all of her work is aimed at finding a solution and understanding between the Israeli and Palestinians.



Seham Ikhlayel is a Palestinian member of the Parents Circle-Bereaved Families Forum. Seham grew up in Palestine, during which time her mother was frequently arrested and imprisoned by Israeli authorities, and her three brothers were arrested soon after Seham was married at age 17. In 2000, one of Seham’s brothers was critically wounded, another was shot and killed at a checkpoint by an Israeli soldier, and the third was in an Israeli jail. Following her mother’s example, Seham joined the Parents’ Circle in 2006. Although she had formerly felt incapable of promoting non-violence given her family’s history, Seham changed her mind when Israeli members of the Parents’ Circle came to pay their respects to her mother. Today, Seham coordinates the women’s committee of the Parents Circle.



Vinita Kamte is an Indian author whose husband, Police Commissioner Ashok Kamte, was killed during the 26/11 attack in Mumbai. Many questions remained about the circumstances of his death, which Vinita set out to answer. Those questions turned into a best-selling book, *To The Last Bullet*, co-authored with journalist Vinita Deshmukh. In the book, Vinita writes about her personal quest to find out the truth about how her husband died and why the police were hiding the circumstances of his death from her. She found out that negligence on the part of the police force was in part responsible for his death, and that her husband’s final actions as a police officer—wounding the only terrorist that would be captured alive—helped unravel the story behind 26/11.

Conference Summary

Dr. Edit Schlaffer opened the conference with a welcome dinner on February 26th, 2010, at the Radisson Blu Palais Hotel. Over the course of the dinner, the participants and the SAVE staff members introduced themselves, speaking of their personal experiences with violent extremism, their commitment to making the world a safer and more stable place, and their gratitude for being given access to a platform to speak and act out against violent extremism. The women's statements provided a poignant look into the range of challenges faced by women around the world, and simultaneously helped to create a 'safe space' that would be critical for the work over the course of the weekend.



The first day of the working conference was dedicated to learning about the use of storytelling as a tool, the SAVE campaigns being carried out by chapter groups, and the incredible work the SAVE activists have been doing on the ground. Anne Carr, a dialogue practitioner from Northern Ireland who has extensive experience in using storytelling to break down tensions between members of opposing groups (specifically, Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland), led a series of exercises in which the participants were gently encouraged to share their stories with the other members of the group. Anne used touching images, physical movement, and emotional support to depict the effectiveness of storytelling in understanding 'the other.'



The conference participants who have already implemented SAVE campaigns in their home countries next described their work. Archana Kapoor spoke of her successes and struggles in implementing "Schools Against Violent Extremism!" in India, while Lily Munir described the launch of SAVE Indonesia and the students' commitment to spreading the SAVE message among their classmates. May de Silva and Hanan Ibrahim discussed how they were introducing SAVE concepts through their work on the ground and highlighted the potential of the "Mothers for Change!" program in their respective communities. Edit Schlaffer also gave a short overview of the "This is Me, Who are You?" campaign, which aims to bring communities together on a personal level, to reduce tensions and challenge assumptions about 'the other.'

Vinita Kamte and Christie Coombs both spoke of their experiences after losing their husbands to terrorist attacks. In contrast to the array of organized support networks that were created in the US in the wake of 9/11—organizations like the Massachusetts Military Heroes Fund, for which Christie is in part responsible—Vinita found that family members and victims of the 26/11 attacks were isolated and marginalized by political machinations. Vinita

will now serve as a face for the victims and bring together the victims as a unified voice against terrorism while Christie will spread the SAVE message in the US.

Under the topic heading of “Breaking Taboos,” Nadia al-Sakkaf gave an overview of the situation of women and extremism in Yemen, while Fahmia al Fotih’, who has been the SAVE Yemen coordinator since October 2009, described the SAVE Yemen group and the research she has conducted with mothers. Both participants stressed that women in Yemen either belong to the privileged elite or to a much larger group of mostly uneducated, disadvantaged women, for whom extremism is a daily reality. Arshi Saleem Hashmi spoke on her views on extremism in Pakistan, which she describes “as the most misunderstood country in the world.” Arshi attributed some of the misperceptions to a cultural identity crisis that started decades ago, when the country’s Islamic leadership decided to reinvent Pakistan as an Arabic country. Pakistan, however, is culturally and historically South Asian, leading to conflict. Asma Asfour, from Palestine, described her role in politics in the Sinjel Municipality and her hopes for a free Palestinian state.



The second day of the working conference began with an introduction to new media techniques. The Parents Circle–Bereaved Families Forum has taken advantage of social media, including the production of full length movies and interactive websites, to spread their message of reconciliation. Robi Damelin and Seham Ikhlayel spoke of their efforts, showed the movie, and described their website as an example of the power of new media.



The majority of the second day was spent developing a strategy for a global campaign as well as in individual countries. The SAVE participants agreed to implement the “Mothers for Change!” campaign on a global level, with country-specific adaptations. Several chapters have further committed to conducting research and/or implementing programs in addition to the “Mothers!” campaign. Please see below for the global SAVE strategy the participants jointly produced.

Over the course of both days, Anita Pratap guided the conversation and kept the participants on topic in her function as moderator, and Hilde Rapp made important connections between the participants and outside groups with whom they could partner.

Conference Outcomes

- Existing chapters were reaffirmed and new chapters were discussed.
- Conference participants exchanged best practice models and challenges.
- Participants agreed on “Mothers for Change!” as the global campaign.
- The “train-the-trainer” camp was planned to take place in May 2010 in Carinthia, Austria, to prepare trainers to implement the “Mothers for Change!” campaign in their respective countries.



Our SAVE Global Campaign: “Mothers for Change!”

SAVE will empower mothers as agents of change in the global environment of violent extremism. Our campaign will be initiated in Yemen, Indonesia, Pakistan, India, Palestine, Israel, the UK and Ireland. Women are strategically positioned to raise consciousness for the threat of violent extremism and to empower women to reduce the attraction of extremist ideologies. They build an ideal early warning system when their sons, daughters or husbands travel down the wrong path.

The “Mothers for Change!” campaign will give mothers the encouragement, support and necessary tools to protect their children from the threat of violent extremism.

SAVE Indonesia has already organized youth peace camps and will now harness the potential of mothers.

SAVE Yemen: Mothers are joining hands to help their sons choose the right path.

Bereaved **Palestinian** and **Israeli** mothers will work together to prevent further killing.

SAVE Pakistan mothers will open new opportunities and horizons for their children.

SAVE India gives mothers a voice to fight violent extremism.

In the **US**, SAVE Sisters will reach out to mothers to reinforce the need to combat violent extremism.

SAVE UK and **Ireland** will empower mothers to safeguard their children from violent extremism. The mothers acknowledge the work they have done and what still needs to be done. They will share their experiences with other SAVE chapters.

Palestine will empower mothers to search for alternatives to break the cycle of violence.

Mothers do not bring children into the world to become violent extremists.

Security is in the Hands of Mothers!

“The grief of a mother who loses a child is the same, whether she is from Indonesia, or Israel, or India, or Pakistan. It's universal. And that is what we have to constantly focus on.”

-Anita, India

“We have to create societies where it's about prevention and care, rather than always looking for the big cures which have big guns or big bombs.”

-Anne, Northern Ireland

“You must decide whether you will allow the situation to affect who you are, or if you will affect the situation.”

-Robi, Israel

“If it wasn't for meetings like this, I would have quit a long time ago.”

-Nadia, Yemen

“I think we are taking a stand that we're against terrorism and we want to do something to make it stop.”

-Christie, USA

SAVE (Sisters Against Violent Extremism) is the world's first female counterterrorism platform. Headquartered at the Women without Borders offices in Vienna, Austria, *SAVE* brings together a broad spectrum of women determined to create a united front against violent extremism.

SAVE provides women with the tools for critical debate to challenge extremist thinking, and to develop alternative strategies for combating the growth of global terrorism. *SAVE*'s approach to counterterrorism is unique in that it focuses on women and their ability to combat violent extremism and radicalization on the front lines - at home and in civil society. *SAVE* believes in empowering women to be sought-after agents of change at all levels of international counterterrorism efforts, from grassroots activists to policy makers.

SAVE
SISTERS AGAINST VIOLENT EXTREMISM

