Introduction

Gender equality is both one of the eight domains of the United Nations Program of Action on a Culture of Peace, and also an important component of each of the others. It is both an important goal on its own, in terms of justice for women, and an important contribution to the promotion of peace. This chapter looks at gender equality in both of those contexts, as an important human rights goal for women, and as a framework for looking at the whole conceptualization of the Culture of Peace.

Gender Equality and Justice for Women

While the norms of gender equality have developed both in individual states and in the international system, the realization of gender equality remains far behind in most states. The first wave of the women’s movement in the 1800s eventually led to women’s suffrage, but it did not lead to full gender equality, nor did it lead in the short term to increases in other forms of equality and justice, as some had hoped and some had feared. Norms of gender equality were further strengthened when, in 1945, the preamble to the United Nations Charter reaffirmed a faith in “the equal rights of men and women,” with Chap. 1 stating as one of the purposes of the UN “promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion....” Women’s equality, later gender equality, continued to be important as part of the basic human rights approaches within the UN, from the initial 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the proclamation that “women’s rights are human rights” in the context of the UN’s 1993 Vienna Conference on Human Rights and 1995 Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women. The interweaving of women’s social movements for equality and efforts in the United Nations has been an important part of the changing norms of gender equality.

Women’s political participation, in the various forms of voting and standing for election, was not realized until almost the start of the twentieth century. Most
countries recognized women’s rights during the next century, but it often took many years for the actual election of a woman to parliament. By 2003, Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) data showed that only in 37 of 175 countries did the percentage of women in the lower or single house of parliament exceed 20%, with only 11 exceeding 30%. As of 31 December 2007, the IPU reported that the percentage of women in both houses combined was 17.7%. In some countries, women’s right to vote and stand for election has not yet been recognized, and in some, there is not a parliament at all.

Gender inequality also continues in economic structures and activity. Only in the service sector does female employment usually exceed male, with the reverse being the case in agriculture and industry. For countries for which data are available, the highest estimated ratio of female to male earned income is roughly 70%, with only four countries meeting or exceeding that level in 2003, based on data from the International Labor Organization (Human Development Report, 2003). While female work time exceeds male in most countries, much of female work time remains in non-market activities, such as care of children in the home, and thus is not counted. Women’s ability to crack the glass ceiling of entry into upper levels of business management remains low.

Gender equality in the social and cultural spheres has also not been realized. Stereotyping of men as strong and as warriors (with the two being seen as related), and as participants in the public sphere, and women as more suited to the domestic sphere, as guardians of children, the home, and culture, continues despite the numbers of women who enter the political and economic spheres. In education, while the adult literacy rates of women begin to approach those of men in developed countries, this remains less true in the less developed countries. Ratios of women to men in primary education are roughly equal in terms of net primary enrollment only in countries with the highest levels of human development, while ratios in net secondary enrollment and, even more so, in net tertiary enrollment, remain considerably lower in most countries (UNDP, 2003). Only in life expectancy does gender inequality operate in the opposite direction, with men dying earlier than women. As a culture of peace is a necessary part of the development of peaceful societies, so a culture of gender equality is an essential underpinning to the development of gender equality.

The Contribution of Women to Cultures of Peace

While gender equality is essential as a part of the guarantee of basic human rights, it has also been stated, as in the United Nations 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (paragraph 23), that women’s “full participation in decision-making, conflict prevention and resolution and all other peace initiatives is essential to the realization of lasting peace.” Women have been proportionally less involved in war and more involved in peace movements than men. They appear to be consistently more opposed to the use of force and violence than men. Even their conceptualizations