

## PEACEKEEPING AND PEACEMAKING MINUTES

An Interview with Carolyn McAskie, January 2011

*Excerpts from "Being at the Table" in peacewomen.org*



*Carolyn McAskie, former UN Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support*

*PHOTO: unac.org*

Peace talks are nearly always among those who fought the war, whereas they should be among those who will build the peace, the peacebuilders; and women are an important component of that. Women also need to be represented in post-conflict planning and governance to make sure that women's issues are

addressed. The basic concept here is that if women aren't at the table, the chances of their issues being addressed are very low. I think it's an important point not to assume that there is a women's view—like any other group there are a whole variety of views, and it's not a case of "OK, here's the gender aspect, let's make sure we include it." No. You just have to make sure that women are at the table; then you get the whole variety of views and information. Women are often excluded because they haven't had the background or the training. But get the women to the table and you'll discover they can do just as well.

There was an interesting incident on my mission, where my gender adviser came to me and said, "I've got a problem here. There are lots of women coming in with the rebels, who have been attached to the rebels, and our guys are not including them in the disarmament program because they are not in uniform or carrying a gun." She said there is a very clear policy that has been developed for women who have been associated with armed groups and may not necessarily be fighters. But she said she couldn't get our disarmament team to give them the same benefits of reinte-

gration into society that the male rebels received. So I called in my chief of the disarmament unit, my gender adviser and my political deputy and said, "Listen to my gender adviser," and she explained it. I turned to the disarmament chief and I said, "We're going to do this, right?" and he said, "Yes, ma'am!"

So when you have a woman in a leadership position who is prepared to call the managers to account, the men have no difficulty in implementing your instructions. My gender adviser said that she was the envy of all the gender advisers, because she had a female boss who wasn't afraid to make sure the men understood why they had to look at issues from a gender point of view. I'm not saying I'm doing anything wonderful. What I'm trying to say is I was doing it differently. And that's why having women at the table matters. I think the important thing is not to look for anything amazingly different or scientific, but when people say, "Why is it important to have women at the table?" the answer is, "How can you do it without women and men at the table? Would you do it without men at the table?"