



PREPARED REMARKS BY MS. HEIDI KÜHN – CEO & FOUNDER OF ROOTS OF PEACE
AT THE HIGH-LEVEL EVENT “WOMEN INVESTING IN PEACE” DURING THE
SIXTY-THIRD SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN
FRIDAY, MARCH 15, 2019 – UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS - NEW YORK, NY

Your Excellencies, Honored Guests, Delegates, colleagues and friends -

Before I begin - I would like to thank our sponsors of today’s panel - the Permanent Missions of Sri Lanka and Kenya to the United Nations and the NGO Committee on Sustainable Development - New York

I would also like to acknowledge and thank the distinguished panelists that I am honored to join in this session - along with Margo LaZaro - our moderator and my friend - it is truly an honor to join you today.

As I begin my remarks this morning, my thoughts are with the 157 victims of Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 and their families.

Representing 30 nations – many of them were our colleagues in the international development community - headed to the United Nations Environment Assembly in Nairobi.

As David Beasley, Executive Director of World Food Program stated, “these aid workers were average people giving everything they’ve got to make the world a better place, and that makes them superheroes.”

As head of an NGO that works in Afghanistan, I am also thinking this morning of the 49 victims of the terror attack in Christchurch, New Zealand – our investment of peace has never been more needed, and may we go forward today to honor their life’s work and sacrifices.

The remnants of war – landmines and unexploded ordnance - do not discriminate on the basis of gender – or any other classification.

These brutal weapons of war have and continue to plague our earth, denying access to livelihoods through agriculture and sadly in many cases, maim and kill innocent men, women, children and livestock.

I started Roots of Peace in 1997 with one goal in mind – to eradicate this scourge and replace it with bountiful harvests that can grow and sustain local communities with new sources of income and food.

Since our founding, my bottom line has always been to improve the lives of smallholder farmers through market driven agribusiness approaches that result in a “harvest a hope” for smallholder farmers.

Roots of Peace focuses on all smallholder farmers, especially women.

ROP doesn't have separate programs for women and men farmers in the countries in which we work. It is our priority to ensure women are integrated into our programs across the entire agricultural value chain – including production, processing, marketing and distribution.

While we are honored to do our part in leading some of these programs, we don't do it alone. It is only with the support and coordination of our partners that results in positive change.

In fact, all of our programs, but particularly in Afghanistan, are built on partnerships with governments, non-governmental organizations, farmers and businesses.

We could not achieve these accomplishments without these valued relationships - particularly with the support we have received from the United States Government – many of whom are here with us today. Roots of Peace gratefully acknowledges their trust and support as we work to effect change on behalf of the American people.

At Roots of Peace, our bottom line is to improve the lives of smallholder farmers through market-driven approaches that result in a “harvest of hope.”

So why are we focusing on agriculture important to our investment in sustainable peace?

The FAO data states that 60% of the world's population is dependent upon agriculture, and Women, on average, comprise 45% of the agricultural labor force. In Afghanistan – it's even more critical to the future of the country – where over 80% of the population is dependent on agriculture for their livelihood.

This is why Roots of Peace has worked in Afghanistan since 2003, focused on improving tree crops and spices that earn higher returns for smallholder farmers.

In 2010, USAID entrusted Roots of Peace with additional funding of the Commercial Horticultural and Agricultural Marketing Program, commonly known as CHAMP, to expand the program into remote villages across the country.

Exports had remained relatively flat until Roots of Peace began training exporters and introducing proper chilling and processing facilities. We are proud that due to our efforts, and those of our partners, exports are forecasted to exceed \$1 billion USD by the end of this year.

While we are here today to talk about women investing in peace, I also want to share with you the story of the women of Afghanistan - who are invested in their future as well.

To date, our programs in Afghanistan have benefitted more than 4,000 women.

Women are being trained in basic food quality and post-harvest handling.

They are also being trained in the business skills and management required to run a business and are encouraged to launch their own agri-business initiatives.

Women are now participating in regional trade shows and deal making across all sectors. In 2018 alone, 5 women-owned businesses signed deals worth more than \$3.6 million USD.

This is just a small snippet of the work Roots of Peace has and continues to undertake in investing in sustainable development – where the real product is peace around the world.

We continue to work in other countries as well, including Vietnam, which has been plagued by the scourge of landmines since the end of the Vietnam War.

In Vietnam, Roots of Peace actively engages in training programs for farmers, and 49% of participants in the training courses are women.

Additionally, Roots of Peace is currently providing capacity training for 14 women in the Vietnamese Government, including rising leaders and extension agents.

Our main focus in Vietnam is on increasing black pepper production that meets and exceeds the high-quality standards required for import into US markets.

Roots of Peace believes it our collective responsibility as a community of nations and as a common humanity to eradicate the scourge of landmines from the face of the earth.

To this end, I am proud to share with you all that Roots of Peace will be launching a campaign later this year to eradicate all landmines from the Quang Tri Province in Vietnam – the province which during the war was known as the DMZ – the most heavily mined region of the country.

This is but a first step to full country eradication of landmines that will restore peace and prosperity to all of Vietnam.

Eleanor Roosevelt once said – “The Future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.” For 22 years, eradicating the remnants of war and replacing them with bountiful harvests of peace has been my life’s work - and my dream.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to join you here today. I invite you, the women investing in peace, to join with Roots of Peace – as we work together to build a more peaceful world.

Thank you.



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