



## **OP-ED FROM SECRETARY KERRY**

**International Women's Day, March 8, 2014**

### **Women Play a Central Role in Peace** **By John Kerry**

International Women's Day is more than a moment marked on a calendar. It is a day not just to renew our determination to make the world a more peaceful and prosperous place – but to recognize that a world where opportunities for women grow, is a world where the possibilities for peace, prosperity, and stability grow even more.

I see it every single day as Secretary of State. Even as the Assad regime's barrel-bombing of Aleppo continues, showing the world a brutal regime's true colors, with every act of courage and perseverance, Syria's women show the world their true colors as well. We heard from some of these remarkable women in Montreux just last month.

Their stories spoke to the bravery of countless other Syrian women. One woman from Idlib worked with the Free Syrian Army to ensure that the people of her village could remain in their homes and till their own land. Another woman from Aleppo got restrictions on humanitarian access lifted by offering food to regime soldiers at the checkpoints. If that isn't courage under fire, I don't know what is.

It's not just in Syria that women offer us hope for resolution to conflict. Women are vital to our shared goals of prosperity, stability and peace. That's as true when it comes to ending our battles as it is jumpstarting our economies. The fact is that women bear the greatest burden in war. But their voices are too rarely heard in negotiating peace.

That has to change.

Countries that value and empower women to participate fully in decision-making are more stable, prosperous, and secure. The opposite is also true. When women are excluded from negotiations, the peace that follows is more tenuous. Trust is eroded, and human rights and accountability are often ignored.

In too many countries, treaties are designed by combatants for combatants. It should come as no surprise, then, that more than half of all peace agreements fail within the first 10 years of signature. The inclusion of women in peace building and conflict prevention can reverse that trend.

So how do we get there?

Evidence from around the world has shown that deadly conflicts are more likely to be prevented, and peace best forged and protected, when women are included as equal partners.

That's why we are working to support women in conflict and post-conflict areas around the world.

In Afghanistan, we are advocating for the inclusion and election of women at all levels of governance. Afghan women today are marching forward in ways unimaginable just 10 years ago. They're starting companies. They're serving as members of parliament. They're teaching in schools and working as doctors and nurses. They are the foundation upon which Afghanistan's future is being built.

As the people of Burma work to resolve the conflict that has plagued their nation for decades, the United States is supporting the meaningful participation of women in the peace process and inter-communal peace initiatives.

We know that the security of women is essential to their participation in peace building. That's why we are working to ensure women get equal access to humanitarian assistance and relief, wherever we work.

The United States is also leading by example. My sister has worked for many years at the United Nations, following in the State Department footsteps of our father many years before I did myself. She's a trailblazer. But she's not alone. It's no coincidence that some of our top diplomats and peace negotiators are women – from National Security Advisor Susan Rice, to U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power, to Deputy Secretary of State Heather Higginbottom, to Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Wendy Sherman. Today, all but one of the State Department's Regional Assistant Secretaries are women.

We celebrate their accomplishments not just because they are women, but because their work around the world will make all people – men and women, boys and girls – more secure.

Peace is not the absence of conflict. It is the presence of every member of society working together to promote stability and prosperity.

No country can succeed unless every citizen is empowered to contribute to its future. And no peace can endure if women are not afforded a central role. So today, we mark the miles women have traveled around the world – but more importantly we commit to the next miles of the journey.



*Secretary of States John Kerry*

###