

These international efforts altered the military definition of "security", linking it with poverty, militarization and violence, some nine years before the 1994 UN Human Development Report proposed replacing the narrow concept of national security by an "all-encompassing concept of human security". Still this report did not address the harm of the "war system", a feminist understanding of the true meaning of "security" which was by then circulating in the women's peace movement.

United Nations links

Access to UN disarmament discussions is difficult for women's peace groups, though there have been small, tentative gains. In 1989, a small VOW team including Ms Alton and Ann Crosby, was invited by the NGO Committee on Disarmament to prepare a five-minute oral presentation to the Third Special Session on Disarmament (UNSSOD 3). Most of the official delegates left as soon as it was time for the NGOs to speak, without hearing our request "to increase the participation of women in its peace and disarmament processes". In 1990 in Vienna we combined continued lobbying for our recommendation at the Commission on the Status of Women (arousing little interest in our views, though access had improved) with representations to diplomats engaged in the continuing discussion between NATO and the Warsaw Pact on mutual force reductions, where we had some interesting exchanges.

Still things had improved since 1975, when a proposal by some women's peace groups to put peace issues on the agenda of an intergovernmental conference in Mexico City was rejected, with the exception of the inclusion of a panel on disarmament at the urging of Nobel laureate Sean McBride. Two women were included on the panel, a major breakthrough at the time.

In the 90s, the surge of conferences on international policies increasingly included such issues as environmental and economic security, women's rights as human rights, decent habitats, the abolition of land mines, and the establishment of a permanent court for the prosecution of war crimes, including gender-based crimes. These events led to a greater effort to document women's contribution to peace building. They have also increased the number of partnership processes between civil society organizations and governments.

A highlight of the "new diplomacy" was the overflowing International Hague Conference to Abolish War in May, 1999, led by civil society organizations. In contrast to its solely governmental forerunner in 1899, this conference had 10,000 NGO and government delegates mingling freely. The agenda stressed the interdependent components of human security and led to the launch of the "Women Building Peace" global campaign. In July 1999, the 50-point action plan "The Hague Agenda for Peace and Justice for the 21st Century" was accepted as an official UN document.