



# Inter Pares

BULLETIN

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## Women at the Heart of Change

*In the late 1970s, one of the problems identified in Bangladesh was that the needs and interests of women were being largely overlooked in development programs. While women play a major role in agricultural production, for example, rural development programs at the time focused exclusively on men. Inter Pares was asked to help address this problem and became involved in research and in the development of training materials for local development workers.*

During this period Inter Pares developed relationships with some talented Bangladeshi women who were determined to place women's needs on the development agenda. We met Khushi Kabir, for example, a young activist who was committed to organizing women and supporting them in identifying and meeting their needs. Khushi and her colleagues were also engaged in broader issues affecting women such as land rights, inheritance laws, domestic violence, and economic rights. Today Khushi is a leading feminist in Bangladesh and the coordinator of Nijera Kori, a social mobilization organization with which Inter Pares continues to collaborate.

Over the years, Inter Pares developed relationships with feminists in other countries who were also determined to ensure that women's needs became central in development efforts. This was a vibrant period at home as well. Women across Canada were organizing to promote women's equality rights, legal access to abortion, greater rights for indigenous women, stronger laws against rape and violence against women, and the creation of services from shelters to rape crisis centres. Inter Pares brought Canadian and overseas women together to learn from each other and share strategies about working for change.

All of these activities had a profound influence on Inter Pares. By learning with our counterparts, Inter Pares prioritized issues that directly affected women and their ability to exercise their rights, and supported women's leadership and organizing on a variety of issues. By listening to women's stories and taking leadership from them, Inter Pares developed innovative programs on women's health, pharmaceuticals, and women's political and social rights. And we also took a feminist approach to issues not traditionally considered women's issues – food sovereignty, trade, migration, and conflict among them.



Inter Pares Board Member, Sari Tudiver with Nijera Kori Coordinator, Khushi Kabir.

In addition to promoting the leadership of women in our programming activities, staff reflected on the organizational structure of Inter Pares, and how we could embody the values of equality, consensus and personal accountability that are so central to feminist thinking and organizing. In the mid-1980s Inter Pares underwent a transition to a non-hierarchical management structure in which all staff were paid the same and made decisions by consensus. We still manage the organization on the basis of these principles today.

Inter Pares has been frequently asked to document and share the important methodological and organizational practices that have led to the results we have achieved over the years. In 2008, we set out to document the role of feminist analysis and practice in our work over the last three decades. This research clearly shows that feminist values of equality, collaboration and coalition-building, of learning with our counterparts, and the principles underlying our organizational structure, are key factors in achieving successful outcomes.

Decades of feminist organizing have profoundly changed the landscape of societies around the world, although the struggle is far from over. What we have learned along the way continues to inspire our social justice work, here and abroad. This *Bulletin* presents a few of the people and activities inspired by this history. ✕

## Board of Directors Profile: Dr. Shree Mulay



Shree Mulay first became aware of Inter Pares in the mid-1980s when she attended “Side Effects” in Montreal, a play on women’s health co-sponsored by Inter Pares and the Great Canadian Theatre Company. Some months later during a visit to Ottawa, Shree dropped into the Inter Pares office, a visit that launched many years of cooperative work.

Shree’s passion for women’s health led to collaboration with Inter Pares staff on the development of an alternative Canadian women’s report for the 1994 Cairo Conference on Population and Development. She worked with Inter Pares counterparts in Bangladesh to analyze and document women’s access to health services. In Montreal, Shree was deeply involved with the South Asian Women’s Community Centre, an organization supporting immigrant and refugee women. During the 1990s, Shree was a leader in the international campaign against the use of quinacrine as a chemical sterilization agent for women, and documented unethical trials of this toxic drug in Southern population control programs. She brought her expertise on women’s health issues into the National Action Committee on the Status of Women.

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Shree expanded her commitment to Inter Pares by joining our Board of Directors in 1996.

“What I like about Inter Pares,” Shree said recently, “is the way it incorporates a broad social justice analysis that includes race, class, gender, religion and culture into its work. This is very complex. It’s very difficult to navigate the lines between what is possible and what is just. Inter Pares has been able to do this with sincerity.”

Today Shree is the Associate Dean and Professor in the Faculty of Medicine, Memorial University of Newfoundland. As a respected researcher and feminist, Shree continues to contribute to knowledge on the health of immigrant and refugee women in Canada, the human rights of women, and access to health services and medicines in India. She is the co-editor of the book “Women Building Peace between India and Pakistan.”

Inter Pares looks forward to many more years of collaboration with Shree, as a Board member, researcher and women’s rights activist. ☞

## Take Back the Day – Mother’s Day, that is



The modern Mother’s Day was born from the dream of American writer and women’s suffrage and anti-slavery activist, Julia Ward Howe, who, horrified at the carnage of the US Civil War, wrote in the Mother’s Day Proclamation of 1870 that “*we, the women of one country, will be too tender of those of another country to allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs...*” and called for an international congress of women,

**To promote the alliance of the different nationalities,  
The amicable settlement of international questions,  
The great and general interests of peace.**

Her idea was taken up by Ann Reeves Jarvis, who founded “Mothers Friendship Day” to reconcile communities torn apart by the U.S. Civil War. A few years later, a new “Mother’s Day for Peace” began with a call for women to unite across

# Building Coalitions: Feminism in Practice

In mid-2008, Inter Pares received funding from the International Development Research Centre to document the role that feminism has played in our history and methodology. The research revealed that coalitions have been a highly effective strategy for advancing our Canadian social justice efforts because through them, we have been able to achieve more than by working in isolation. Inter Pares has always brought a strong feminist analysis to coalition work on a variety of issues – from food sovereignty to solidarity work with Burma – that not only raises the profile of women’s concerns and women’s activism, but values cooperation, consensus-based decision-making, and collective achievements over individual protagonism.

A good example of this is our work in Canada on issues concerning the Americas. In the mid-1980s, El Salvadoran refugees who had fled the conflict into neighbouring Honduras began organizing themselves to return home, a dangerous political act in which they requested accompaniment from the international community. Inter Pares, along with other Canadian organizations, responded to this call and began to coordinate efforts to leverage support from the Canadian government for the refugees. In the early 1990s, this coalition became similarly involved in the return process of Guatemalan refugees – supporting refugee women’s organizations and their leadership in negotiating the conditions of their return. This process was historic – for its impact on Guatemalan peace building

efforts, and for successfully pressuring the Canadian government to support grassroots human rights work.

Today this coalition, known as the Americas Policy Group, is a working group of the Canadian Council for International Cooperation. It coordinates the efforts of over 40 Canadian civil society organizations working in the Americas, to collectively respond to the needs of local counterparts and by engaging the Canadian government in

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defense of human rights. Over the decades, Inter Pares has played a central role in coalitions like these, advocating for collective efforts, maintaining a focus on women’s needs and leadership, and building Canadian solidarity efforts that respond to local needs and hold the Canadian government accountable for its actions. This history of Inter Pares’ belief in working together for genuine solidarity lives on today. ☞

*Inter Pares gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the International Development Research Centre for their financial contribution to this initiative.*

national boundaries to end war. For over fifty years, Mother’s Day was about women working together for a better world.

You can reclaim the original meaning of Mother’s Day. Make a gift to Inter Pares in honour of the women who have made a difference in your life – and support the efforts of women in communities around the world who are promoting peace and justice. With each donation, you can send your own customized greeting card that tells your sisters, your friends and family that you want to “pay forward” to others the love and care you’ve received from them – a wonderful way to honour your mother, pay homage to your grandmother, give courage to your daughter, and recognize all the important women who enrich your life and our world.



**TAKE BACK THE DAY** celebrates the real roots of Mother’s Day by raising funds for women and organizations working towards social transformation, and offers a gift-giving alternative to people who care about peace and justice. ☞

*Visit [www.takebacktheday.ca](http://www.takebacktheday.ca) to give a gift, send a card, and watch the video of the history of Mother’s Day. Celebrate Mother’s Day the way the founders intended – with a little peace and justice.*

# Trusting in Each Other

“I hope there will be a day when we will be singing just one song.” These were the words of Gertrude Mongella, a member of Sudanese Women Empowerment for Peace (SuWEP), at one of the group’s first meetings. She had noticed that a number of songs about women and peace were sung by various political parties, and she dreamed of a unified women’s movement for peace in Sudan.

Many others shared Gertrude’s dream, and finally, fifteen years later, women from the North and South of Sudan came together to overcome divisions and build trust and peace.

SuWEP is a movement working to increase women’s equality in Sudan, committed to the political, social and economic empowerment of women. Its roots lie in the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing. Women of North and South Sudan crossed paths in Beijing, and recognized that the hostility they felt towards each other was the result of decades of civil war. These women made the conscious decision to reach out beyond the fear bred by division. When they spoke about their experiences of the conflict, they found they shared many common concerns as women, and a common dream of ending the war.

*No matter the outcome of the 2011 referendum on Southern Sudanese independence, women from the North and the South are committed to a shared struggle for freedom and equality.*

It took years to build the deep trust necessary among the women of SuWEP that would in turn enable them to negotiate with their various political leaders to find ways to end the war. SuWEP members explain how their discussions and actions laid the ground for peace negotiations, and the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005. “Men are taking the credit for signing the peace agreement, but the contributions of women were critical. We know this because we were there.”

SuWEP members from the North and South have more recently developed a common agenda for the women of Sudan, inviting their sisters from Darfur into the discussion. No matter the outcome of the 2011 referendum on Southern Sudanese independence, women from the North and the South are committed to a shared struggle for freedom and equality.

Inter Pares has supported women’s organizations in Sudan for more than five years, and contributed to their efforts by generating support and awareness in Canada. We recently invited Zaynab Elswawi, the coordinator of SuWEP, to travel to Canada to share the story of the women’s peace movement in Sudan. Zaynab met with representatives from all political parties, telling them that authentic peace in Sudan must



Staff members Rachel and Eric, meeting with northern SuWEP members in Khartoum, Sudan.

include women’s rights, access to health services, and education. Inter Pares also arranged for her to speak with staff members of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the inter-departmental Sudan Task Force so that Canadian foreign policy towards Sudan reflects women’s concerns.

Inter Pares also coordinated a critical hearing before the parliamentary Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, where Zaynab shared how women in the North and South had overcome fear and mistrust to work collaboratively for peace. As a follow up, the Standing Committee agreed to hold further meetings to examine the ramifications of the referendum in Sudan, and make recommendations on how Canada could best support peace. Inter Pares staff members were recently in Sudan to meet with SuWEP to find lasting ways of supporting women’s leadership, promoting their rights and equality.

Overcoming the divisions of war, women in Sudan have been able to identify their common struggle, and give the best they have to offer in the interest of peace. Fifteen years after the first SuWEP meeting, women from the North and South are singing a common song, and preparing to support peace together. ✂

To hear SuWEP members’ song, visit [www.suwepmovement.org](http://www.suwepmovement.org).

Proceedings of Zaynab’s testimony before the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development are available at [www.interpares.ca/en/publications/reportsandpresentations.php](http://www.interpares.ca/en/publications/reportsandpresentations.php) under Peace and Democracy.

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With the support of thousands of Canadians, Inter Pares works in Canada and around the world with social change organizations who share the analysis that poverty and injustice are caused by inequities within and among nations, and who are working to promote peace, and social and economic justice in their communities and societies.

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