

A NOBLE GATHERING - IWD Dinner Party 2007

It was International Women's Day 2007. Never have I seen such a powerful group as the 650 women and supporters joined together in celebration at the Oakville Conference Centre in Oakville, Ontario on Wednesday, March 7th, 2007. Thanks to the dedication and hard work of the women of *WHAM*, [*Women Halton Action Movement*], a Dinner Party extraordinaire was created. It was indeed as Nazaneen Majid, teacher and director of schools in and around Jalalabad, Afghanistan and in the refugee camps across the border in Peshawar, Afghanistan, addressed us in her email as - "A Noble Gathering".

The food was excellent and fed our physical beings. We then embarked on food for the spiritual soul. We were treated to the beautiful flute and keyboard music created by two young women students from a local girls' school. Our spirits swelled with the song, *Strong Woman* as we watched and listened to the song presented on DVD by the feminist choir, *WomEnchant*. We heard greetings from both Jacqueline Benn John, director of *SAVIS*, [*The Sexual Assault and Violence Intervention Centre*], and from *WHAM* member, Jan Smith while we learned of their tireless efforts to ensure that there is justice for the women of the world and that violence towards women must end. We heard from Liz Watson of *CSAW*, [*Canadians in Support of Afghan Women*], and their work with the women of Afghanistan. Goods handmade by Afghan women, widows of the ongoing wars in Afghanistan were sold at the event at a beautifully set up table managed by Barb Wood and Ruth Sheridan of *CSAW*.

Especially noted was a message to this *Noble Gathering* - to those attending this IWD Dinner Party from our sister, Nazaneen Majid. Nazaneen is a woman of courage, a warrior woman: one who is strong and fiercely proud and who faces danger daily in Afghanistan. Nazaneen paid great tributes to those who have assisted her in her endeavours in the past. She appealed to us to "JOIN HANDS" for continuing to support the education of women in Afghanistan.

Sally Armstrong. This woman, the keynote speaker for the evening, continued to ignite our passionate desire to see peace and justice for women in this world. One particularly touching moment occurred when Sally spoke of her recent trip to Afghanistan in search of Lima, a young woman who is an orphan who never attended school. When Sally first met her a few years ago, she learned that Lima had great responsibilities for one so young caring for her brothers and sisters, had had no opportunity to attend school, and found solace and comfort visiting the grave of her mother. It was Sally's return visit

to find Lima that was the emotional reunion that we found so profound. Things are changing for the better for Lima.

Both *SAVIS* and *CSAW* would like to thank everyone who contributed financially to the evening. The money collected will benefit *SAVIS* in their endeavours to aid women in the community. *CSAW* will be using their money to better the lives of the women and girls in Afghanistan.

The fight for justice for the women of the world is not over. In history, one courageous woman started the ball rolling, started the search for justice for women, then another and then yet another. They started to speak out and demanded that their human rights be upheld! We continue their journey. We, of this "noble gathering", join hands in solidarity with women around the globe by taking the torch and carrying forth their dreams of freedom and of justice for women internationally.

