

## **Listening to Loss: The methods used by the Women's Action Group for Peace and Development in promoting peace dialogue in Khartoum between northern and southern, Muslim and Christian, urban and displaced women.**

Listening has a powerful role to play in healing hostility and correcting misunderstanding between individuals, groups, tribes, societies and nations. The Women's Action Group uses mutual sympathetic listening -- in which both sides have a turn to speak -- as an aid to dialogue between Sudanese women from different backgrounds.

Simply put, dialogue is not debate or argument or negotiation. Dialogue is simply listening and trying to understand the other person's position and then being given the same courtesy in return. We don't have to agree with the views expressed, but we do need to give the opportunity to speak while we listen carefully. If we can do that, we find that we can put ourselves in the other person's place and begin to recognize that although our experiences are different, our pain and our loss are much the same. Through careful listening, dialogue between different groups leads to personal healing and group reconciliation.

The WAG motto is "the differences which unite us". The differences we refer to are our personal experiences of loss. All Sudanese women have lost a great deal whether it be family members, friends, property, education, employment, opportunity, faith or courage. For each person the loss is personal and different from the loss of any other person. But when we recognize that the very loss itself is a common factor of life, a bridge opens between women from different regions, different cultures, different religions, and different economic and educational spheres.

Because discussion of loss often involves very painful emotions, we must take care to support one another. When a group feels mutual support for its individual members, that group is said to be "bonded". But bonding should also occur between speaker and listener. Careful listening to another person affirms a bond of common humanity between speaker and listener. And when another person feels accepted by you as a human being, she becomes a sister rather than simply "a Muslim", "a Christian", "a Dinka", "an illiterate", "a graduate", "a secretary" or even "an enemy".

Listening to one another is an important step towards peace. It is, in fact, the first and most important step for it leads to peace in our hearts.