

# Women spring for peace and justice

By Patty Bates-Ballard

On May 7, 2008, a Lebanese woman named Nadine Labaki learned that she was pregnant. The same day, after two decades of peace, Beirut began erupting into violence. Labaki (pictured right) gave birth to a child and subsequently [to a film](#) that examined how far women might go and how creative they can be to protect their children from war. The top-grossing Arabic-language film in Lebanon, "[Where Do We Go Now?](#)" is a bold, satirical, and fantastic story about Christians and Muslims who have managed to live peacefully together for a time. When the townsmen begin to thirst for war, the townswomen creatively scheme to keep the peace, ultimately going so far as to convert to each other's religions.

The role of women in promoting peace is as old as war itself. Surely [many men](#) have been and are peace-wagers. Yet from teaching their [children to solve problems cooperatively](#) to [leading anti-war movements](#), many women bring focus, commitment, and passion to championing a just peace. In the spring of 2012, the visibility of women taking leadership in creative ways to promote peace and justice has been astounding.



This publication is rich with examples of local women as well as men creatively calling for peace and justice. On the heels of national outrage over the [defunding of Planned Parenthood](#) and in the face of what many consider now to be a [War on Women](#), well-known and unknown women across the world



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are responding to all manner of aggression with creativity, courage, and intelligence. In a pre-spring example of this phenomenon, Sandra Fluke, disallowed to speak before Congress on contraception and disparaged by Rush Limbaugh, [responded with grace and strength](#).

Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson is one who believes that women are more open to peace and more likely to reject combat. Her annual *A World of Women for World Peace* conference happens each spring around Mother's Day because the first Mother's Day was organized just after the Civil War by mothers grieving their war-dead.

"We have not been able to solve very much from war," said Congresswoman Johnson (pictured left with a constituent). This year's conference recognized the role of technology in helping women participate in Arab Spring movements.

In April, [Sheila Lyall Grant and Huberta von Voss-Wittig](#), the wives of the British and German ambassadors to the United Nations, released a [video targeting Asma Assad](#) with an online petition urging the wife of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad to stand up against the violence in her country. In the video, a woman's voice asks, "One day, our children will ask us what we have done to stop this bloodshed. What will your answer be, Asma?" (continued next page)

(Continued from page 30) The same month, Nobel Peace Prize recipient Aung San Suu Kyi won election to parliament in Burma. She traveled to Norway in June to receive the award and [give her long overdue acceptance speech](#). She said that when she learned of the honor in 1991, it was a sign to her that “the oppressed and the isolated in Burma were also a part of the world,” and that the Nobel Committee was “recognizing the oneness of humanity.”

Also in April, a young, thin Iranian woman [fended off security guards to climb](#) onto Iranian President Ahmadinejad’s car and boldly scold him about the hunger and poverty the Iranian people are suffering.



Hilary Clinton (pictured above), during a visit to China, [confronted the emerging world power on human rights](#), pushing for stronger actions against violence in Syria and Sudan, and pressure for nuclear disarmament in North Korea and nuclear transparency in Iran, while simultaneously [finessing a request by a Chinese dissident](#) for refuge at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing.

Vital Voices, an organization Clinton started in 1997 with then-Secretary of State Madeleine Albright works to identify and empower emerging female leaders. In May, the group’s president and chief executive, Alyse Neson, released the book *Vital Voices: The Power of Women Leading Change Around the World*.

The book, said to read like a global management guide, draws from the stories of Kenyan [Rebecca Lolosoli](#) (pictured above right), who runs Umoja, a



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women-only village for those fleeing abuse; [Somaly Mam](#), a former sex worker in Cambodia who now helps women in a similar situation; Marina Pisklakova, who started Russia’s first domestic violence hotline, and other women who have led social change in male-dominated societies. One woman who could soon make the list is Anna Grodzka, the [first transgender woman elected to parliament](#) in Poland, and the second ever in Europe.

Rachel Maddow’s [Drift: The Unmooring of American Military Power](#) and Lisa Bloom’s [Swagger](#) are among books published by women this spring that take on systemic issues of war-making and the imprisonment of young men in outrageous numbers.

Says Bloom, powerful forces like failing schools, a punitive culture, and a stagnant economy may be aligned against young boys, but there is much that parents and caregivers can do. “Step up to the plate for him. Give your boy a hug, don your superhero cape, and let’s begin.”

Michelle Obama’s new book [American Grown](#) promotes local gardening as a strategy not only for healthier bodies, but for healthier, [more connected communities](#).

A group of Saudi women and their allies have courageously created Facebook and Twitter campaigns, [Women2Drive](#), to [achieve the right to drive](#) in their country.



A Disney cartoon new this spring carries a serious message for children who struggle with chronic illness and/or who are at risk of buying into limiting stereotypes. Created and produced by the prolific children's TV writer [Chris Nee](#), [Doc McStuffins](#) features a six-year-old African American girl who runs her own make-believe clinic where she heals stuffed animals and other toys using humor, song, and self-confidence.

In Florida this spring, Volusia County Republican supervisor of elections [Ann McFall](#), Democrat [Susan Bucher](#), and eventually the entire Florida State Association of Supervisors of Elections (headed by Republican [Vicki Davis](#)) spoke out against and refused to cooperate with the voter purge initiated by Governor Rick Scott. The purge is now the subject of lawsuits by the [Justice Department](#), [two female Florida voters](#), and several non-profit organizations.

Rep. Lisa Brown, silenced on the Michigan House floor for saying "vagina," joined others to [perform The Vagina Monologues](#) outside the Michigan capitol. No doubt there are thousands more examples of creative stands for peace and justice taken by women and men this year.

The spring flood of creative feminine responses to violence, dysfunction, and injustice shows no signs of slowing. Calling themselves [Nuns on the Bus](#), a group of Catholic sisters are traveling by bus this summer to states like Iowa, Wisconsin, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia to call attention to how federal budget cuts in Rep. Paul Ryan's (R-WI) budget, passed by the House of Representatives, will hurt struggling families in these states.

The [Nuns on the Bus website](#) documents specific cuts to jobs, Head Start, special education, Medicaid, Food Stamps, and other services outlined in the Ryan budget that will be more than devastating to those living in poverty.

While most of the systemic problems tackled this spring by women continue to fester, it is only through continued creative, imaginative action that change happens.

When today's wars and other injustices finally are resolved, no doubt we will be able to look back to the spring of 2012 to identify when and where many of the seeds of change were planted by creative, brave, imaginative women and men.