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## 2018 PSR/Sacramento Essay Contest Finalist

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“The connection between women’s human rights, gender equality, socioeconomic development, and peace is increasingly apparent.” *Mahnaz Afkhami*

The quote from Ms. Afkhami recognizes the delicate ecosystem-like balance and interdependence of women’s human rights and equality with the ability to have fair and just socioeconomic development as well as peace. As further stated and supported by Kofi Annan, gender equality is more than a goal, rather it is a precondition for reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and good governance. Although historically women have not been treated as equal to men, a present-day perspective may prove helpful in understanding the important connection between women’s rights, development, peace, and the change that is still needed.

Although women comprise approximately 50% of the world’s population, current statistics and headlines continue to highlight the need for greater education and involvement of women in positions of politics and government. In 2018, 106 women held seats in the United States Congress, including 19.8% of the 535 members; 22 women (22%) serve in the United States Senate, and 84 women (19.3%) serve in the United States House of Representatives(1). In order to provide the leadership that is necessary to have the foundation for sound public policy and decision making, it is critical that both genders have adequate representation and that differing perspectives be considered, especially when debating and crafting policy and legislation that directly affect women such as reproductive rights, child care, wage equality, business practices, and sexual harassment or that which affects us all including peace negotiations, housing, welfare, etc. Without a balanced perspective, one cannot expect effective socioeconomic development or peace at a locally, nationally, or worldwide.

Although there are additional necessary improvements, women worldwide, especially younger women are seen as agents of change(2). More and more, women are educating themselves and exercising their ability to have their voices heard to affect the change that is desired. The Women’s Marches in 2017 and 2018 have united women in numbers

never before seen to tackle a range of issues. The marches have allowed women to advocate for legislation and policies that ultimately support positive socioeconomic development and peace such as immigration reform, healthcare reform, reproductive rights, the environment, lesbian gay bisexual transgender questioning (LGBTQ) rights, racial equality, freedom of religion, and more. The Women's march also took advantage of their time and set up numerous booths where women could register to vote and further the chance and opportunity for women to take their political voice seriously.

As a young woman in today's political climate, I feel energized and empowered to affect the change I desire because I understand the role that it plays in a healthy, democratic, and peaceful society that provides opportunities for all of its citizens. The 2018 mid-term elections will be the first election that I will be able to participate in. I plan on being educated about the issues and candidates so that I can vote for those who support the ideals and will provide the leadership that I think is necessary to achieve the change we desire.

#### References

- 1) <http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/women-us-congress-2018>
- 2) <https://www.un.org/press/en/2011/gashc4009.doc.htm>