First annual UNESCO Chair in Gender Research lecture by Clare Short

Do women think differently about foreign policy?7

The title of my lecture is both a question and challenge.

I am greatly honoured by this invitation to give the first annual lecture organised by the UNESCO Chair in Gender Research. I want to use the opportunity to remind us of the founding purpose of the United Nation's Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation and to suggest that there is a potential power in Gender Research to challenge the culture of violence that dominates foreign policy thinking.

UNESCO was founded in London in November 1945 and its Constitution spells out the belief of its founding members, that the encouragement of educational, scientific and cultural cooperation would help to remove the ignorance and mistrust which so often in the past has led to war. Despite the many achievements of UNESCO since its foundation 65 years ago, it has clearly failed in the central aim formulated following the horrors of the second world war, which was to establish a Culture of Peace. It would of course be wrong to blame the advent of the Cold War on the work of a United Nations agency, but for the purpose of my lecture today, I wish to emphasise the fact that UNESCO's constitution sets out its purpose as encouraging the sharing of educational, scientific and cultural values **in order** to prevent warfare. The intriguing question which the existence of the UNESCO Chair of Gender Research provokes, is whether gender research might challenge the culture of militarism and violence that dominates foreign policy thinking thus pre-empting resources and distorting the response of the foreign policy elite to the great dangers currently facing the future of humanity.

UNESCO was established in the aftermath of a war that destroyed 61 million lives, half civilian and half military, which broke out only 20 years after the butchery of the First World War was brought to an end. And, despite the fact that nearly half of the lives lost the war against Hitler was sacrificed by the people of the Soviet Union, it was only a few short

years before the 'iron curtain' descended and the world divided once again into two armed camps. Thus the 20th century was dominated by the First World War, and after twenty one years of troubled peace, the Second World War and following that, the Cold War. Massive resources were spent building up military forces and then investing nuclear weaponry. The world was lucky that a nuclear exchange was avoided. And those of us who lived in Western Europe enjoyed a long period of progress and peace. But war was not avoiding for all people, 10 million people died in surrogate wars fought between the two sites in Korea, Vietnam, the horn of Africa, Afghanistan, Angola, Nicaragua and other places.

However despite the Cold War, major advances were made across the world through the struggle that ended colonial domination and through an expansion of educational opportunities, access to health care, reduced infant mortality and enhanced life expectancy. Much remains to be done to deliver to all the access to justice, human rights and fundamental freedoms that the United nation's Charter promises. But the possibilities are tantalising because we now have access to the knowledge, technology and capital capable of delivering these basic social and political rights to all people and creating a more secure, equitable and stable world order.

However the progress made might be halted and reversed, as we face a new challenge which is, in the view of Martin Rees, the retiring head of the Royal Society and a world renowned mathematician and cosmologist " that this century may easily turn out to be humanity's last, if we don't make the right kind of political decisions that will save us from environmental destruction, climate change and an ever expanding human population" (Independent 27th September 2010). He describes himself as a technological optimist but a political pessimist

Lester R Brown, in the latest edition of his book Plan B 3.0 Mobilising to Save Civilisation, spells out the dangers. He points out that, if we assume that China's growth rate slows to 8% per annum, then in 2013, income per head in China will reach the level of the US today. If Chinese consumption patterns are then the same as the US today, China will have 1.1 billion cars. The world currently has 860 million. By 2030 China would need 98 million barrels of oil a day. The world currently produces 85 million barrels per day. Thus he argues it is clear that the fast-growing emerging economies of India and China, and the other 3 billion people who also aspire to live like the people of the OECD countries, simply cannot do so. And in a closely integrated world economy, it is impossible for the OECD

countries to continue with the way of life that cannot be extended the rest of humanity. There's a real danger of growing conflict over access to natural resources, and it is notable that the Chinese navy is doubling in size every seven years . Lester Brown concludes that the overriding challenge is to build a new economy, powered largely by renewable energy and systems that reuse and recycle everything. He concludes "we have the technology to build this new economy, an economy that will allow us to sustain economic progress" but asks whether we can build it fast enough to avoid a breakdown in social system. He suggests that the breakdown will come as more and more states fail to deliver basic services, order begins to disintegrate a civil war provides training for criminal and violent forces.

Current UN estimates are that world population will grow from the existing 6.7 billion to 9,billion by the year 2040/50. And 90% of the new people will be born into the poorest countries, where natural support systems are already deteriorating. Water tables are falling, forests are being cleared, fish stocks are declining and food security is threatened. The danger from climate change is well understood and scientists are now forecasting that following a dip due to global recession, carbon dioxide emissions from burning coal, oil and gas will reach their highest levels in history this year.

Lester Brown argues that to save civilisation we must take action urgently to eradicate extreme poverty, stabilise population, restore the Earth's natural systems and cut carbon dioxide emissions by 80% by 2020. He cites examples of countries that have made progress on all these challenges and concludes that we need the kind of urgency that mobilises resources for war, to rise to this challenge. Clearly there is no prospect of a response of this scale and urgency at the present time. Instead we are mired in a war in Afghanistan that long ago met its objective of preventing Al Qaeda organising. The war in Iraq has left a destabilised country in which Al Qaeda has gained access to organise, and has created deep and bitter divisions between the Sunni, Shia and Kurdish people of Iraq. Israel is armed and supported by the US and the EU in its military aggression and constant breaches of international law.The oppression of the Palestinian people is causing mounting international concern and enraging the Arab and Muslim people of the world. Senior figures in the US and the former British Prime Minister Tony Blair are even calling for military action against Iran.

Western policy thus recruits more angry young Arabs and Muslims to the belief that violent resistance is the only way to avoid constant humiliation. Islamaphobia is growing as is military expenditure. Far from attending to Lester Brown's urgent priorities, resources and attention focused elsewhere and are irrationally deployed exacerbating the problems they claim to be resolving.

The tragedy of these developments is that history provided us with a second major opportunity to challenge this culture of violence and militarism in 1989/90 when the Communist system crumbled, the Berlin Wall came down and Nelson Mandela was released from prison. The Cold War was over, military expenditure was slashed and it was realistic to hope for a new era of co-operation and progress. For a shot period, there was considerable progress.The Kyoto protocol was adopted in December 1997 when the world agreed to act together to restrain climate change. In 2000 the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Millennium Development Goals and agreed that the systematic reduction of poverty should be the central focus of a united international effort to mark the new millennium. The Doha Development trade round was launched in 2001 with a promise to make global trade rules fairer for developing countries. However, at the same time, there was a complete failure to take preventative action to hold the outbreak of a new kind of civil war in the Balkans and the Great Lakes region of Africa, as the withdrawal of cold war controls allowed underlying tensions to break out into vicious wars within rather than between states. This led to the displacement of large numbers of women and children and the massive use of rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war. The destabilisation of the East of the DRC continues with 5 million people having lost their lives over the last 10 years and the continuing use of rape by contending forces, despite the deployment of the UN's largest peacekeeping force. It could be argued that the failure of this force to halt the widespread use of rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war can be compared to the failure of state power to protect women and children from rape, sexual abuse and domestic violence.

Following the attack on the world trade centre in September 2001 there was unprecedented agreement, supported unanimously in the Security Council and General Assembly that all countries should cooperate to bring the perpetrators of this terrible crime to justice. But after a short pause came the declaration of the War on Terror, a massive increase in US military expenditure and the excuse was used to launch an illegal and ill-prepared invasion of Iraq. This response made no sense. Al Qaeda was not in Iraq and

the massive rise in military expenditure and aggression was not an appropriate response to the nature of the Al Qaeda threat. Thus the historical window for a massive advance in international cooperation for peace and development closed, and a new era of militaries and opened up. But this time the enemy were non-state actors and the greatest military power in the world displayed its weakness in the face of determined resistance by informal forces. The prospect of a growing number of failed states, feared by Lester Brown, became increasingly likely.

My conclusion, shared with many others, is that this commitment to massive military expenditure and reliance on military action to solve foreign policy challenges is counter-productive and pre-empts the resources and international attention required to attend to the real threat to humanity's future. There is a particular responsibility on the UK to rethink its desperate search to "punch above its weight" in international affairs by acting as the unconditional supporter of US foreign policy errors. The UK could do more to prevent the coming dangers, if it were capable of rethinking its foreign policy objectives and seeking to work with others to bring a just peace to the Middle East and to focus on poverty reduction and sustainability. And it is more likely that US isolation might lead to a reconsideration of policy if the UK was not always at hand is a willing ally.

There have of course been extensive analysis and criticism of various aspects of UK foreign policy, with calls for a more effective contribution to halting nuclear proliferation, criticism of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and support for more focus on development and less on arms sales and military expenditure. But it remains the case that all the major political parties place the "special relationship" with the US at the centre of their foreign policy. The challenge that is needed is not to one aspect of current policy but is to question the central focus on military force and the US alliance as the centerpiece of UK foreign policy. For example, asked in an interview in Prospect in July 2010 whether it was worth young officers planning to remain in the Army General David Richards the newly appointed Chief of the Defence Staff said "well don't forget that despite those predictions about "the end of history" in 1989, its been a turbulent two decades since. My US counterpart talks about an era of persistent conflict. There are many troublesome places that will often require some forms of military intervention, so if it's fighting your friends are ready for, I don't think there's going to be any shortage of that…" . He went on to say "one of the reasons I would argue with your pals about staying in the Army is that it is not just about killing people or being killed. It is also a huge opportunity to do good…" I quote

these words, not in order to criticise General Richards who I worked with closely to help bring violence to an end in Sierra Leone but to encapsulate the thinking of those who presume that the use of violence is the major instrument of foreign policy and the way to do good in the world.

I want now to ask whether Gender Analysis might help us to take a fresh look at the use of violence and the threat of military force as the central focus of our foreign policy and help us refocus on the real dangers that we currently face. I do not wish to suggest that women are inherently good or peaceful in a way that men are not. The challenges that we face is too serious for such romantic simplification. But it is the case that, in my adult lifetime, the movement of women, supported by women's scholarship, challenged the neglected evil of violence against women and won major changes in criminal law and practice and tolerance of such violence in large parts of the world. It also won support for women's equal, or at least improved, representation in positions of political power worldwide. Given that women tend to express doubt about the use of military force in greater proportions than men, and women and children tend to be the major victims of modern warfare, I am inspired to ask whether women's scholarship could be mobilised more powerfully to challenge the irrationality of the concentration on military action as the central focus of UK foreign policy. The question is whether a perspective that could challenge the use of violence, from outside the foreign policy establishment, might be a very powerful space from which to challenge the massive foreign policy errors in which we are currently embroiled.

I am aware that I am not the first to suggest that Gender Analysis might open new vistas in foreign policy thinking. Scholars like J Ann Tickner from the US asked in 1992 in a seminal lecture, why there were so few women in in the discipline of International Relations. And in 2001 in her Gendering World Politics, reported on progress in feminist work over the previous decade–though I must admit that progress was greatly disappointing to me. I am also aware of the passage of Security Council resolution 1325 in October 2000 which specifically address the situation of women in armed conflict and called for their participation at all levels of decision-making on conflict resolution and peace building. Since 2003 supporting resolutions have been adopted by the Security Council in 2008, 2009 and 2010. This is no small achievement and is an important challenge to the suffering of women in modern warfare and their exclusion from the peacemaking process. But as yet these resolutions have had little effect on the culture of violence and warfare is

continuing to spread and grow. In addition I was inspired by the new thinking in her analysis of violence in Prof Walby's recent book Globalisation and Inequalities which was published in 2009. The question I am left with is whether Gender Analysis, with its powerful record of challenging the use of violence to oppress women, can be deployed to challenge the central reliance on militarism and violence in UK foreign policy. I do believe that the UK occupies a pivotal position given the consequences its unconditional support for US military aggression. This has not in recent years won the support of a majority of citizens in the UK, but as UK troops are deployed and suffer the loss of life and limb, the country rallies to support the troops,the culture of militarism grows and the neglect of the major threats to future peace and security get ever worse. There is no other academic discipline as well placed to challenge this growing culture of violence. The task is enormous but the urgency is even greater and the existence of a UNESCO Chair for Gender Research inspired me to think that gender analysis could be deployed to reinstate the quest for a Culture of Peace and to challenge the foreign policy establishment to deploy its thinking and resources to avert rather than exacerbate the mounting crisis that threatens the survival of our civilisation within the timescale of the present century.