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## [Women Peace Prize Winners Band Together to Help Others](#)

The Tea Party Movement has been brewing for awhile in our country, resulting in front page headlines, strong political rhetoric and emotional reactions -- both pro and con -- from many Americans. But I want to tell you about a very different tea party, with a far more satisfying outcome.

It started on a hot November day in Nairobi, Kenya. This potentially world-changing movement began when the composed, well tailored Iranian lawyer and former judge [Shirin Ebadi](#) took tea with [Jody Williams](#), the brash American activist who peppers her polemics with salty unprintables. It was an unlikely tea party. Yet it led directly to another tea party the very next day, with a third guest, [Wangari Maathai](#) of Kenya, who had just joined Ebadi and Williams in a very small, elite club--women winners of the Nobel Peace Prize.

"In the 108 year history of the Nobel Peace Prize, only 12 women have received it," Williams told me on the phone when I interviewed her for my book, *INFLUENCE: How Women's Soaring Economic Power Will Transform Our World for the Better*. Seven of those women are alive today. Williams and Ebadi had received their awards for very different kinds of work: Williams, in 1997, for bringing dozens of NGOs and governments together to oppose the use of landmines in war; Ebadi, in 2003, for campaigning fearlessly (despite death threats, harassment and imprisonment) for the rights of women and children in Iran. Their backgrounds and personal causes were worlds apart. But as they talked over tea about their mutual desire for a more peaceful world, they came up with a novel idea for a shared vision.

What if all the living women Nobel Peace Prize winners banded together to promote the role of women in creating a more peaceful world? Their combined fundraising power and connections could do so much to support the peacemaking efforts of other women around the world. They could bring women from every continent together to share their ideas, to connect the dots

between seemingly disparate projects advancing the good of the planet, economic security of families, fairness of government and peace itself.

It was a simple idea, but none of the Nobel men had ever launched a joint project like this. Williams loved the idea. It made perfect sense, she told me a few years after that tea. "It's the women who suffer the most during war, and have the least say about peace, and who struggle to keep things together during war. They don't get recognized. The men who make the war get recognized."

The next day, Ebadi and Williams broached the idea with Maathai, the country's first professor of veterinary medicine, who had led a massive effort of poor Kenyan women to reforest the countryside known as the [Green Belt Movement](#). Innocuous as tree-planting may sound, Maathai's efforts have had far reaching effects on government, the economy and the status of women. The brilliant and colorful Maathai immediately signed on to the plan that Ebadi and Williams proposed.

Soon, the three enlisted the help of three more women who had received the Nobel Peace Prize: Guatemala's [Rigoberta Menchu Tum](#), who worked to improve the rights of indigenous people like herself in Guatemala, and Ireland's [Betty Williams](#) and [Mairead Corrigan Maguire](#), who shared the 1976 prize for their crusade against sectarian violence in Northern Ireland. (The seventh living woman laureate, [Aung San Suu Kyi](#), remains under house arrest in Burma/Myanmar.)

These six Nobel Peace Prize Winners, from very different backgrounds, with very different personal causes came together to form "[The Nobel Women's Initiative](#)" to work together for a cause they all considered the most important one of all. "It's about promoting peace with justice and equality," Williams told me. "Peace is not just the absence of armed conflict. That's only the baseline." This international group discovered that their wide diversity of experience led them to a whole new definition of "peace"-- a definition that connected the dots between economic empowerment for women, financial security for families, the rise of women in parliamentary bodies, the integrity of the environment and natural resources, and the basic human rights of men and women around the world.

The Nobel Women's Initiative started as a simple tea party but has become so much more. (You can join them on [Facebook](#).) The group's mission is to promote, spotlight, and grow the work of women's rights advocates and organizations worldwide that address the root causes of violence. "We are in search of democracy that transforms not just our lives, but all society--and we will not be silenced until it is achieved in every part of the world." Now this is the kind of tea party movement that we can all get behind.

This blog has been adapted from *INFLUENCE: How Women's Soaring Economic Power will Transform Our World for the Better* by Maddy Dychtwald and Christine Larson.

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