

Women and Armed Conflict

Open Debate of the Security Council, 29 October 2008 on Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) – Women, Peace and Security

Introduction

The unanimous adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on 31 October 2000 was a watershed in the evolution of international women's rights and peace and security issues. Resolution 1325 was the first Security Council Resolution specifically addressing the disproportionate and unique impact of war on women, as well as women's contributions to conflict resolution and sustainable peace. As such, it urges member states to take specific actions to ensure women's equal and full participation as active agents in peace and security. The resolution is historic not only in that it constituted the first time the Council systematically addressed the manner in which conflict affects women and girls differently from men and boys, but also because it acknowledges the crucial link between peace, women's participation in decision-making, and the recognition of women's life experiences in conflict situations.

The resolution reaffirmed that women have an important role to play in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, and stressed that their equal participation and full involvement in such efforts, including decision-making, "can significantly contribute to the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security." It therefore calls on the United Nations and member states to ensure the full participation of women in conflict prevention, management and resolution and in all peace processes. It calls for the integration of a gender perspective in peacekeeping operations

With the adoption of resolution 1325 by the UN Security Council in October 2000, women and issues affecting them have been placed firmly on the international agenda. Building on this momentum generated by the resolution, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1820 in June 2008 which focuses specifically on sexual violence in situations of armed conflict. Resolution 1820 "demands the immediate and complete cessation by all parties to armed conflict of all acts of sexual violence against civilians," urges Member States and the UN system to strengthen their efforts in providing protection and facilitating equal and full participation of women at decision-making levels, and requests the Secretary-General to submit a report to the Council in June 2009 on the implementation of the resolution.

Since the adoption of resolution 1325, the Security Council has held seven open debates on the implementation of the resolution and has adopted seven presidential statements and one press-release. These presidential statements have called on Member States, the United Nations system and civil society to commit to broad action, ranging from increasing the number of women at the highest levels of decision-making to ending impunity for those committing sexual and gender-based violence.

Based on information from the civil society organizations, UN entities and the Member States, important progress has been realized in the implementation of the resolution in areas ranging from gender mainstreaming in the area of peace and security, response to violence against women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations, work on security sector reform, including the issue of impunity to support for greater participation of women in all peace and reconstruction processes. In recent years there has been an increase on the proportion of female soldiers and police officers in peace missions. Female police officers are indispensable for taking care of women victims of rape and assisting them in reporting such crimes.

However, while women increasingly play an important role as partners in mediating and negotiating peace, in searching for justice, in fostering reconciliation, in supporting disarmament and demobilization, and in rebuilding national institutions, at the national level, they are still vastly underrepresented in the majority of security, peace and governance processes worldwide.

Women often organize at the grass roots level in order to promote peace but their access to formal peacemaking and peace building processes continues to be limited, including in terms of peace agreements and their implementation, constitution drafting, security sector, democratic governance and legal reform measures. Very few women are included in peace negotiations or in politics of governance in general in countries affected by conflict and war. Very few peace agreements have taken a gender and human rights perspective into account. Women's voices and concerns have often been excluded in decisions that affect the economic and power structures of post-conflict reconstruction, from land and property rights to legislation issues. Despite a plethora of conferences, advocacy from NGOs, from politicians, world leaders, and diplomats, not enough has happened. Women continue to be excluded from negotiations, treaty-making, interim and transition-appointed governments, in planning and implementing humanitarian aid, post-conflict reconstruction planning and policy-making. On the whole, peace processes remain a male exclusive endeavour where men negotiate power, and largely set the post-conflict agenda. For the principles of democracy and good governance to take root in countries coming out conflict, it is vital that both women and men have equal opportunities to participate in the ongoing processes.

Objectives

On the eighth anniversary of Resolution 1325, the Security Council is holding an open debate on the theme "Women and Armed Conflict".

Effective and appropriate interventions to support women affected by war and violent conflict are hampered by a general lack of reliable information and analysis regarding the situation of women in many post-conflict countries, although some inroads are being made into this information gap. Concerted efforts at the international and national level are needed to stimulate research and knowledge sharing in the field of women, peace and security to inform effective policy and program interventions.

Experience around the world suggests that women's contribution during conflict emergencies can make a critical difference to community survival and reconstruction. Women's contributions to post-war reconstruction expand the scope of 'peacemaking' itself, since their activism addresses the psychosocial, relational and spiritual as well as the political and economic, dimensions of conflict transformation. In many countries, women's potential contribution to peace negotiations and to reconstruction has not been recognized at the national level. However, at the local and community level, women have held families together during crises, and have been critical in maintaining household economies through their involvement in agriculture and informal sector, even when men's employment and trade options were closed off. Women have often demonstrated their ability to set up networks with other women and transcend the dividing lines of conflicts.

Women's advocacy groups and the national women's machineries have been active in translating the resolution into action. They have been active in advocating for greater participation of women in decision-making, and in particular in preparing women for participation in post conflict elections. Together with the UN, civil society groups have trained women in leadership, and carrying out civic and electoral education programmes, with the intention of increasing the number of women in public office.

Evidence from many countries suggests that an overarching goal of crisis recovery and reconstruction efforts must be the reform of political institutions so that women (and other previously excluded groups) can participate actively in democratic structures at all levels. It is critical to recovery that women should live free from violence and unjust treatment; critical to this goal is the establishment of political, economic and juridical systems, which protect women's rights. Legislative reform processes and development and/or strengthening of the judicial system should aim at eliminating gender specific inequalities and discriminations. Further efforts are needed to also address cultural and institutional barriers to women's participation in decision-making.

Sadly, even though many member states have actively supported Resolution 1325, the practical implementation of its goals remains a huge challenge. Many countries still often lack the political will

to effectively implement the resolution. In addition to lack of political will, many countries coming out of conflict lack serious capacities on the ground to improve women's position.

Very few instruments are available to assess the impact that conflict and reconstruction have on women and women's rights. Common standards are needed to assist member states and civil society organizations to establish monitoring systems that track the progress on the resolution. Currently arbitrary reporting on the resolution does not provide an effective direction on the real progress made nor the serious gaps in implementation.

The adoption of the goals of the resolution requires a sustained advocacy effort, technical expertise and understanding of gender equality at international, national and local levels. Furthermore, international attention and funding for women's issues have decreased in recent years. Members of the Security Council and other Member States are thus encouraged to exert political pressure to keep the issue of women's rights on the agenda of the peace and security discourse by providing concrete recommendations to assist the Council, providing political support, financial resources and strengthening cooperation in order to accelerate the implementation of Resolution 1325 (2000).

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