

Women and Armed Conflict

I. Global commitments

The Beijing *Platform for Action* recognized that peace was inextricably linked to equality between women and men and development, and emphasized that women's full involvement in all efforts for the prevention and resolution of armed conflicts was essential for the promotion and maintenance of peace and security. The *Platform for Action* set out six strategic objectives.

Increase the participation of women in conflict resolution at decision-making levels

advise and propose integrated strategies for post-conflict recovery with a special focus on reconstruction, institution-building and sustainable development in countries emerging from conflict. The founding resolutions of the Peacebuilding Commission provide a mandate to mainstream a gender perspective in all aspects of its work.⁸ Gender equality issues were identified as cross-cutting peace consolidation strategies in Burundi and Sierra Leone – the first two countries on the Commission’s agenda – and in relation to new countries under consideration, Guinea-Bissau and the Central African Republic.

In June 2008, the Security Council held an open thematic debate on “Women, peace and security: sexual violence in situations of armed conflict” which culminated in the adoption of resolution 1820 (2008). In this resolution, the Security Council reaffirmed its resolve to eliminate all forms of violence against women, including by ending impunity. The Council recognized sexual violence as a security problem requiring a systematic security response. The resolution calls for a number of concrete actions and measures aimed at eliminating sexual violence and addressing its impacts by the Secretary-General, United Nations entities, Member States (including troop and police contributing countries), all parties to armed conflict, regional and sub-regional bodies, and financial institutions. It also calls

sexual violence and violence against children. In May 2004, for the first time in the history of international law, the Special Court decided that forced marriage would be prosecuted as an “inhumane act”, that is, a crime against humanity. In 2009, the Court convicted three former leaders of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) on the charge of forced marriage, thereby recognizing the deep and long lasting suffering inflicted upon women through conscription as

Women, Peace and Security Coordination in Fiji

In 2003, the *Women, Peace and Security Fiji Coordinating Committee on 1325* (WPS Fiji) was established, following a consultation by the Ministry of Women with a range of women's groups and NGOs. WPS Fiji is a working partnership between the national machinery for the advancement of women and women's peace-centred NGOs, which has been facilitated by UNIFEM Pacific in Melanesia. To accelerate the implementation of resolution 1325, WPS Fiji collectively works to:

- 1) Improve the availability of data and analysis on the root causes of conflicts, the impact of conflict on women and their role in conflict prevention, resolution and post-conflict peace-building in four project countries;
- 2) Strengthen the capacity of women and women's groups to play a role in conflict prevention, resolution and post-conflict peace-building at the national and regional levels;
- 3) Promote a gender perspective in conflict resolution and peace-building initiatives of governments, regional organizations and mainstream agencies; and
- 4) Promote peace, tolerance and reconciliation, linked to economic security, through advocacy in the community and with the general public.

Source: NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security (2005)
*From Local to Global: Making Peace Work for Women*¹²

Increasing attention to gender perspectives and increasing women's participation at all stages of peace processes and post-conflict reconstruction

Governments, including donors, troop and police contributing countries, and international organization play important roles in facilitating women's participation in peace processes, peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction, including by removing legislative and other barriers for women's participation and by providing technical and financial support to women's organizations and leaders. In post-conflict societies this support is critical as institutions are redefined, restructured or newly created and new laws and regulations are developed.

Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) has galvanized efforts of countries to address the gender dimensions of armed conflict and enhance women's participation in peace processes. A growing number of countries have developed national action plans to implement resolution 1325, including: Austria, Côte d'Ivoire, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Belgium, Ghana, Jordan, Liberia, the Philippines and Sierra Leone are in the process of developing national action plans.¹³ Other countries, such as Croatia and Fiji have included the implementation of resolution 1325 into their national plans of action on gender equality.¹⁴ Countries have used national action plans as a tool to identify priority areas for action. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, the following areas have been identified: protection of women and girls from sexual violence; inclusion of gender perspectives in policies and development programmes; reinforcement of women's access to basic social

infrastructures and participation in reconstruction and reintegration processes; and strengthening the participation of women in political decision-making.¹⁵

Working groups have also been set up to review and monitor implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) at regional and national levels. At the eighth Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers meeting held in Kampala, Uganda in 2007, Ministers agreed to the establishment of a Commonwealth Working Group on Gender, Peace and Security to address gender equality issues in peace and post-conflict processes. The same year, the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office in Brussels initiated the European Union 1325 partnership, which brings together regional and national institutions, agencies, military, academia and NGOs in an effort to augment gender awareness, understanding and mainstreaming in peace and security related policies, strategies and programmes and coordinate implementation efforts regionally.¹⁶

While there is growing support for women's equal participation in peace processes, progress in women's access to such processes, in particular formal peace negotiations, has been limited. In 2003, in preparation for the 48th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, an expert group meeting was organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women in Ottawa, Canada to discuss obstacles, lessons learned and good practices in the negotiation, content and implementation of peace agreements. Only incremental progress in the level of attention to gender perspectives as a cross-cutting concern in peace processes had been achieved. The absence of women from formal processes and peace negotiations continue to result in insufficient attention to and reflection of the concerns of women in peace agreements. Key issues, such as protection and promotion of women's human rights, especially women's economic and social rights, may be omitted. The expert group meeting adopted recommendations for a comprehensive framework of model provisions for inclusion in future peace agreements.¹⁷ Some governments have taken important initiatives to address the absence of women in formal peace processes. The Israeli Women's Equal Rights Law, for example, was amended in the spirit of resolution 1325, mandating that the Israeli government include women in any group appointed to peace-building negotiations and conflict resolution.¹⁸

Measures to ensure attention to women's rights and gender equality issues in truth and reconciliation commissions have also been taken. The International Centre for Transitional Justice and other organizations have produced useful materials along with specific strategies to address gender equality issues across all operations of truth commissions.¹⁹

Gender perspectives in Truth and Reconciliation Commissions

In **South Africa's** Truth and Reconciliation Commission, several steps were taken to facilitate women's participation: gender training was provided for all the commissioners; preparatory workshops were held, particularly for rural women; and gender-sensitive reparations policies were developed (for example, providing compensation for work in the home).

In **Sierra Leone**, women's participation in the design of the truth commission ensured the existence of a special unit to investigate war crimes from a gender equality perspective. A

Women's Task Force, made up of members from women's associations, United Nations agencies, the police force, the media and the legal profession, worked to create an atmosphere in which women could participate in these institutions. The Task Force is credited with addressing the need for gender balance and sensitivity within the truth commission.

In **Timor Leste's** Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation, women's groups were involved in public dialogues regarding the various options for transitional justice, the decision to establish a truth commission and as members of the steering committee. In particular, the two female commissioners (out of seven) were at the forefront in ensuring that women's issues are included throughout the process.

Source: The Initiative for Inclusive Security and International Alert Joint Publication (2004).
*Inclusive Security, Sustainable Peace: A Toolkit for Advocacy and Action.*²⁰

Post-conflict situations can provide unique opportunities to introduce a more inclusive political framework to advance women's political participation. The international community has worked with women's organizations and national governments to support post-conflict constitutional, electoral and legislative reform processes and to build the institutional capacity of national institutions, including national machineries for gender equality, in post-conflict areas. In Afghanistan, thousands of women from around the country participated in meetings and workshops focused on women's issues and democracy in the run-up to the Bonn process of December 2001, the June 2002 Emergency Loya Jirga, and the December 2003 Constitutional Loya Jirga. Two of the nine members of the drafting committee were women, as were seven of the 35 members of the review commission. In addition, women comprised more than 20 per cent of voting delegates in the Constitutional Loya Jirga. As a result, the new constitution included language on gender equality and a quota for women in the lower house of parliament.

To support implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in countries emerging from conflict, the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) undertook consultation missions to Afghanistan, Haiti, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Timor Leste to raise awareness on the Convention among national machineries, personnel in line ministries and other relevant bodies, such as human rights commissions and NGOs. DAW conducted workshops to support the preparation of national reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and undertook follow-up missions to support implementation of the concluding observations after the reports were presented to the Committee.²¹

Countries, such as Rwanda, Burundi, Mozambique, South Africa and Timor Leste, have taken important steps to increase the number of women legislators in post-conflict elections, including revisions of constitutional and legal frameworks to remove discriminatory provisions; reform of electoral systems; specific targeting of women in voter registration; provision of security during elections; training of women candidates, and introduction of temporary special measures such as quotas.²²

Historic election results in Rwanda

Participation of women in post-conflict security services is crucial to creating structures that are representative, trusted and legitimate, and are able to meet the security needs of both men and women. Training of military, civilian police and civilian peacekeeping personnel on the protection, rights and particular needs of women, as well as the importance of involving women in all

Guinea, can contribute to developing operational procedures to ensure that women and girls are not excluded.³⁰ The United Nations Integrated DDR Standards and the checklist on *Gender-aware Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration* developed by the United Nations Development Fund for Women provide guidelines on addressing the particular needs of women and girls during DDR processes.³¹

In his report on Small Arms to the Security Council in April 2008, the Secretary-General stressed that gender approaches are particularly relevant for targeted policy interventions, as are prevention and response

Enlisting political, military and religious leaders to collaborate in community mobilization and sensitization;

Strengthening medical infrastructure, including through provision of drugs, equipment and training for health workers;

Building the technical and logistical capabilities of rehabilitation centres for survivors of rape;

Strengthening outreach networks in 150 communities;

Providing support in the drafting of laws and ensuring legal assistance; and

Facilitating the reintegration of survivors into communities through literacy and skills training.

Source: UNFPA (2006) *Report on the International Symposium on Sexual Violence and Beyond*.³⁵

Training and other initiatives aimed to enhance the capacity of legal practitioners

Improvements in protecting displaced and refugee women and addressing their needs have been achieved. These include improved international legal instruments, mandates of peacekeeping operations and responses by humanitarian actors. Regional organizations, such as the African Union and the Organization of American States, have established protocols and policies on the rights of the displaced. States have enacted or amended laws concerning refugees and asylum seekers. Canada and Finland, for example, consider gender-related persecution as a possible criterion for granting asylum. United Nations entities, such as the UNHCR, have developed special programmes to ensure women have equal access to protection, basic goods and services, and a Policy on Refugee Women and an Accountability Framework for Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming.

Increasing women's representation in camp management in Nepal

During the run-up to the 2006 elections for the Camp Management Committees in seven Bhutanese refugee camps in Nepal, UNHCR worked to get more women involved. Core groups of men and women worked to increase the representation of women and support them in taking up leadership roles. These efforts resulted in women's equal representation as candidates for the Camp Management Committees. After several years, a woman candidate was elected as camp secretary in one camp. Cumulatively, women held 61 per cent of the executive posts in all seven camps. The results also showed increased representation of women in food and non-food distribution committees.

Source: UNHCR (2008) *Handbook for the Protection of Women and Girls*⁴¹

humanitarian response as a means to standardize the work across agencies.⁴³ In addition, initiatives such as policy directives, departmental action plans, deployment of full-time gender advisers and regular training on gender equality and protection issues have enhanced capacity of entities and staff involved in peace support operations, peacebuilding and humanitarian assistance to more effectively respond to the needs and priorities of women, men, girls and boys.

To promote implementation of resolution 1325 and improve coordination a United Nations system-wide action plan for the im

maintaining peace, in rebuilding communities and in working to overcome the physical and psychological trauma of conflict” have not been given adequate attention.⁴⁷ A study of women’s peacebuilding in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan and Uganda concluded that recognizing and supporting the role and capacities of women in preventing and mitigating conflict remains an afterthought.⁴⁸

The challenges of establishing mechanisms and channels for bringing the priorities and recommendations of informal women’s groups and networks into more formal processes and removing barriers for women’s representation at all levels of decision-making, remain. Women’s participation in formal negotiation and decision-making processes has been directly opposed in some situations. In addition, women face many more general challenges to their participation in public life and decision-making. These include: intimidation, harassment and violence, time and mobility constraints, responsibilities in the home, including care obligations, illiteracy and limited access to education and training, limited access to information, economic dependency and lack of adequate financial resources, customs and traditions. Stereotypes continue to limit or narrowly define women’s role in public life and decision-making.

Preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence

There is a pressing need for strengthened and coordinated efforts at national and international levels to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence. In situations of armed conflict, women are exposed to exacerbated violence, including the use of sexual violence as a strategic weapon of war to terrorize populations. Women and girls are abducted into sexual slavery or forced marriage and forced to exchange sex for survival. Horrific accounts of the brutality and scope of violence against women in situations of conflict all over the world have been recorded. In North Kivu, eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, three out of four women have been raped, some with extreme violence.⁴⁹ In Haiti, 2008 estimates revealed an increase in the number of documented cases of physical and sexual violence, compared with the period from 2004 to 2006.⁵⁰ Country examples from, for example, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Guatemala, Liberia and Sierra Leone, also show that women often continue to be affected by high-levels of gender-based violence and sexual crimes in the aftermath of war. Sexual violence during and after conflict continues to

survivors, including medical care, legal support and economic security required to rebuild their lives. Furthermore, stigma and fear continue to prevent women from seeking assistance and redress.

Strengthening accountability and monitoring

Even though governments and international organizations have developed guidelines and other support materials, discussion of gender equality issues is often absent from mainstream work on conflict prevention, peace negotiations and reconstruction.⁵² A challenge often raised is the lack of effective accountability and monitoring mechanisms to follow-up and drive more determined action on implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 and other global commitments linked to the situation of women in armed conflict at international, regional and national levels. The inadequate availability of information and limited capacity to collect data and information at national level, including statistics disaggregated by sex and age, to inform reporting and to guide policy making and programmes, remains a challenge. Without such data, the analysis of security situations, including violations of women's human rights, will be incomplete and women's contributions to peace processes and their participation will continue to be challenged.

At the Security Council level, these challenges are reflected, for example, in lack of or inconsistent attention to gender perspectives in reporting and in the definition of mandates for peacekeeping operations. Similarly, the integration of gender perspectives in country and thematic resolutions by the Council has been sporadic. Since the adoption of resolution 1325, 102 out of 309, or 33 per cent, of country-specific Security Council resolutions contain specific language on women or gender equality (as of 6 August 2008).⁵³ There is also a lack of clear routines and directives for consultations with women's organizations and leaders during assessment and fact-finding missions of the Security Council; such consultation take place mainly on ad-hoc basis. The Secretary-General has called repeatedly on the Security Council to establish a mechanism dedicated to monitoring implementation under the women, peace and security framework.⁵⁴

Securing resources for initiatives to promote gender equality

In his 2004 report to the Security Council, the Secretary-Ge

negotiations and peacebuilding; to reduce excessive military expenditures in order permit the possible allocation of additional funds for social and economic development, including for gender equality and the advancement of women; and to ensure that adequate resources are allocated for activities targeting persistent serious obstacles to the advancement of women.

IV. Resources

Selected websites

- (Department for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). The website contains information on UN peacekeeping with links to reports and resource materials in including on gender equality and peacekeeping. www.un.org/Depts/dpko/lessons (accessed 7 April 2009)
- (This site provides a brief overview of the work of DPKO on gender equality issues. www.un.org/Depts/dpko/gender/index.htm (accessed 7 April 2009)
- (OCHA (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs). The gender equality section of the OCHA website provides information on gender issues in humanitarian action. ochaonline.un.org/AboutOCHA/GenderEquality/tabid/1188/Default.aspx (accessed 7 April 2009)
- (Inter-Agency Standing Committee Sub-Working Group on Gender and Humanitarian Action. The Sub-working Group brings together representatives of United Nations organisations and NGOs and supports the integration to gender issues into all elements of humanitarian action: www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/content/subsidi/tf_gender/default.asp?bodyID=1&publish=7 (accessed 7 April 2009)
- (UNIFEM Internet Portal. This web portal contains country-specific information and analysis as well as information on specific issues (including displacement, elections, peacekeeping, landmines, etc.). www.womenwarpeace.org/ (accessed 7 April 2009)
- (www.un.org/Depts/dpko/gender/infocentre/infocentre.htm (accessed 7 April 2009)

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- ⁹ More information about the Special Court for Sierra Leone is available at: www.sc-sl.org (accessed 7 April 2009)
- ¹⁰ See www.peacewomen.org (accessed 7 April 2009).
- ¹¹ See www.womenpeacesecurity.org (accessed 7 April 2009).
- ¹² NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security (2005) *From Local to Global: Making Peace Work for Women*. www.womenpeacesecurity.org/media/pdf-fiveyearson.pdf (accessed 7 April 2009).
- ¹³ A number of action plans are available at:
www.un.org/womenwatch/ianwge/taskforces/wps/national_level_impl.html (accessed 7 April 2009)
- ¹⁴ *1325 Peacewomen E-News*. Issue #83, 17 November 2006. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. Extracts from the Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security, 26 October 2006. Available at: www.peacewomen.org (accessed 7 April 2009)
- ¹⁵ Secretary-General's report on women, peace and security, S/2008/622, national action plans and statements of Member States at open debates of Security Council, S/PRST/2004/40, S/PRST/2005/52, S/PRST/2006/42 and S/PRST/2007/5.
- ¹⁶ See inaugural meeting report: <http://www.frauensicherheitsrat.de/data/EU-partnership-01.pdf> (accessed 7 April 2009)
- ¹⁷ Background documents and the report from the Expert Group Meeting are available at:
www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/peace2003
- ¹⁸ Statement of Israel at 52nd session of CSW
- ¹⁹ See Nesiah, Vasuki *et al* (2006). *Truth Commissions and Gender: Principles, Policies and Procedures*. New York: International Centre for Transitional Justice.
www.ictj.org/static/Gender/GendHandbook.eng.pdf (accessed 7 April 2009). Other resources include the ICTJ's website on "gender": www.ictj.org/en/tj/786.html (accessed 7 April 2009) and World Bank (2006). *Gender, Justice and Truth Commissions*. Washington: World Bank.
siteresources.worldbank.org/INTLAWJUSTINST/Resources/GJTClayoutrevised.pdf (accessed 7 April 2009).
- ²⁰ See www.womenwagingpeace.net/toolkit.asp (accessed 7 April 2009).
- ²¹ Reports from State Parties can be found at: www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/reports.htm (accessed 8 October 2008)
- ²² For more information see "Women and Elections: Guide to promoting the participation of women in elections." www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/womenandelections.html (accessed 7 April 2009)
- ²³ Elizabeth Powley (2005). 'Rwanda: Women Hold Up Half the Parliament,' in *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*. Stockholm: IDEA. Available at: www.idea.int/publications/wip2/upload/Rwanda.pdf (accessed 7 April 2009)
- ²⁴ See: www.unifem.org/news_events/story_detail.php?StoryID=736 (accessed 7 April 2009)
- ²⁵ UNIFEM (2005). *Securing the Peace: Guiding the International Community towards Women's Effective Participation throughout Peace Processes*. New York: UNIFEM.
www.unifem.org/resources/item_detail.php?ProductID=53 (accessed 7 April 2009) For the document produced at the symposium, see Sudanese Women's Priorities and Recommendations to the Oslo Donors' Conference on Sudan. April 2005. Available at:
www.unifem.org/attachments/events/SudaneseWomenStatementToOsloDonorsConference.pdf (accessed 7 April 2009).
- ²⁶ Secretary-General's report on women, peace and security, S/2008/622, para 50
- ²⁷ Secretary-General's report on women, peace and security, S/2008/622, para 51
- ²⁸ UNDP-UNIFEM (2007). Policy briefing paper: Gender Sensitive Police Reform in Post Conflict Societies. www.undp.org/cpr/documents/gender/Gender_Sensitive_Police_Reform_Policy_Brief_2007.pdf (accessed 7 April 2009)
- ²⁹ See the *Briefing Notes* at <http://disarmament.un.org/gender.htm> (accessed 7 April 2009)
- ³⁰ UNIFEM (2004). "Getting it Right, Doing it Right: Gender and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration." http://womenwarpeace.org/webfm_send/278

