

NTS Insight, No. IN16-01, April 2016

Moving Beyond UNSCR 1325?

Women in Conflict Affected Countries and Peace Building

This NTS Insight explores the changing nature of conflict since the late 1990s where women and children were increasingly used as weapons of war. Since its passage in October 2000, the UNSCR 1325 has significantly advanced women's rights in conflict situations and brought to light the absence of women in negotiations and peace-building efforts. The number of peace agreements incorporating women's rights have increased over the years. Despite this progress, a lot remains to be done. More female negotiators and mediators are needed, and demobilisation and reintegration processes have to take into account the role of female fighters in conflicts, moving beyond recognising women as victims. In order to ensure that gender inclusivity remains at the top of the agenda, courageous women's leadership in public spaces is essential.

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An all-woman Formed Police Unit from Bangladesh, serving with the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti, arrives in Port-au-Prince to assist with post-earthquake reconstruction. Credit: UN Photo/Marco Dormino

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Recommended citation: Noeleen Heyzer, 'Moving beyond UNSCR 1325? Women in Conflict Affected Countries and Peace Building', NTS Insight, No. IN16-01 (Singapore: RSIS Centre for Non-Traditional Security (NTS) Studies, 2016).

Why UNSCR 1325?

United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 marked the beginning of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the Security Council. Adopted in October 2000, the Resolution addresses the changing nature of conflicts, highlights serious problems of justice and exclusion, and offers a practical solution to deal with fragile peace and fragile recovery. In the 1990s, many conflicts instead of targeting soldiers, targeted civilians. They targeted women and children. Sexual violence was used as a weapon of war to destroy communities and traumatize them beyond recovery. We witnessed this in Bosnia, in Rwanda, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and in Timor-Leste. Yet the types of violence women experience were not treated as war crimes.

When it came to peace making and recovery, warlords were invited to the peace talks. Mediators frequently perceive the peace process as ceasefires and the silencing of guns, often at the expense of long-term peace building. Women were therefore completely excluded from the peace table, and from post-conflict decision-making. Today it is recognized that peace is more than the absence of violence. Peace has increasingly meant an inclusive political process, a commitment to human rights in the post war period, and attempts to deal with issues of justice and reconciliation.

The exclusion of a gender perspective from peace building and recovery processes weakened the foundations for sustainable peace and security. Having no female representation during peace negotiations rendered women's grievances unheard and unaddressed. This made it particularly difficult for women to re-establish their lives and to weave back the social fabric of the community after conflicts ended, leading to the recurrence of conflict and fragility. Also disarmament, demobilization and reintegration focused on male combatants, forgetting that there were women and girls in the fighting forces and faced a different set of challenges from their male counterparts.

Approximately half of the conflict-specific items currently on the Security Council's agenda can be considered cases of conflict relapse. If the goal is to build sustainable peace, it requires more diverse inputs from the rest of society, and women have a critical role to play in shaping a fairer and more inclusive future. There is a need to move from a male and elite-dominated approach to more inclusive governance and decision making by engaging women in all aspects of conflict resolution, peace building and recovery. UNSCR 1325 provides four pillars for advancing this: prevention, protection, participation, peace building and recovery. It promotes the human rights of women in conflict - affected countries, emphasizing that women's rights to inheritance, property and land; health, education and employment, are critical for the recovery and rebuilding process. It asks how are you going to have recovery in agrarian societies if you don't address women's economic rights post-conflict, and specifically their rights to productive property, namely land? In fact, post - conflict recovery is the period to transform societies and work towards gender equality.

What difference has UNSCR 1325 made?

UNSCR 1325 is regarded as a landmark resolution and has made a difference in several ways:

i. There is better understanding of the importance of protecting women during and after armed conflict. One of the most significant achievements of the last 15 years has been the recognition of sexual violence as a tactic of war, deliberately deployed for terror and even used in genocidal campaigns. Two additional Security Council resolutions have been passed on this. That means sexual violence in war now demands a security-military and political responses. It must be addressed in troop deployments and peacekeeping tactics, peace processes and war crimes tribunals. Sexual violence has been one of the most neglected areas of international law and almost completely invisible in peace agreements, when it needs to be in all peace and security discussions. This is a big difference but it is not enough. Despite these gains and a comprehensive normative framework, there are very few actual prosecutions, particularly at the national level. Though some argue that the normative frameworks have deterred future crimes, others claim that there is still no significant difference for women on the ground in many conflict-affected countries.

ii. Between 1990 and 2000, when the Security Council adopted 1325, just eleven per cent of peace agreements signed included a reference to women; since the adoption of resolution 1325, 72 per cent of peace agreements have referenced women. The number of senior women leaders within the UN has been on the rise - from special envoys of the Secretary-General, to the first female commander of a peacekeeping mission. In fact the current Foreign Minister of Sweden was the first SRSG on Sexual Violence in Conflict when the post was established in 2009.

iii. Though the participation of women in formal peace processes has been inching up, a study of 31 major peace processes between 1992 and 2011 revealed that only nine per cent of negotiators were women - a negligible figure given the issues that are involved.

iv. Some of the biggest successes in implementing Resolution 1325 have involved the adoption of quotas for post-conflict elections. In Nepal, for example, a 33 percent quota revolutionized the National Assembly - women are now 33 percent of the representatives, up from 2 percent earlier. Rwanda has the highest percentage of women in parliament in the world and Timor-Leste has the highest percentage of women in parliament in Asia.

v. The comprehensive framework of 1325 has also deepened with subsequent resolutions: 1820 (in 2008), 1888 (in 2009), 1960 (in 2010) and 2106 (in 2013) have all focused on obligations to prevention and protection especially in the area of sexual violence. UNSCR 1889 (in 2009) and 2122 (in 2013) in particular focus on women's role as leaders in peace building and conflict prevention. This deepening has taken place in terms of rights and obligations, identification of institutions (global, regional, national and local) to implement the agenda and those to be held accountable.

Much has been achieved but there is still a long way to go in terms of delivering for women, peace and security especially with new threats and challenges.

Can democracy and human rights deliver women's security?

The answer is no, unless transformed by women's experience and leadership. Frequently, both human rights (HRs) and democracy fail to capture and address women's rights and struggles. A good example is the exclusion of violence against women (VAW) from HRs frameworks till 1993. At the 1993 United Nations HRs conference women fought for "Women's Rights as Human Rights". Even CEDAW did not include VAW until after the United Nations Population Conference in Cairo, 1994 and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, 1995. The HRs rapporteur dealing with VAW was only established in 1994. Torture and war crimes did not include rape and sexual violence until SCR 1325 came into being.

As an ideal our democracies promise political rights and freedoms. But in reality we are struggling with how social justice and women's human rights movement can still bring positive change in a period of history where economic, social and political inequality has reached unprecedented levels and power elites have become unaccountable and socially irresponsible. Institutions of democracy have been captured and corrupted. These systems cannot deliver women's security nor human rights. Even at their best, democracies do not automatically address structured gender inequality and discrimination, nor engage with social, economic or political transformation necessary to bring about greater fairness and equitable development. This usually comes about through voice and leadership, and people's movement and struggles for change.

In short both HRs and democracy need reforms but it is much easier to bring about transformation for gender equality and women's security through them than through other frameworks and political regimes. For all their limitations, human rights instruments have enabled women's movements to access a normative and analytic framework for fighting against discrimination, while they reframe taken-for-granted socio-economic injustices against women as human rights issues. The efforts to change family and property laws, reduce the age of marriage to protect girl children, make domestic violence a legal offence, establish quotas for women's political participation, make rape in conflict zones a crime against humanity - all show how rights discourses can be deployed to legitimize women's demands for the improvement of their legal status, social and economic rights, political representation and well-being. That is why we work within the framework of human rights and democracy. We need also to be aware that there is the growing influence of national and transnational forces working to close down democratic spaces and becoming effective in mobilizing against human rights, especially women's human rights. In many parts of the world the gains we have made are now under attack or have been lost. Today, women's rights and social justice advocates, men and women in different locations and power positions need to come together as champions to defend and build on our gains on equality, development and peace.

What is required to deepen the impact of UNSCR1325 on women's lives?

Political leadership and champions matter

A very good example is President Nelson Mandela when he was the facilitator of the Burundi process. At his invitation UNIFEM succeeded in bringing Burundi's 19 negotiating parties to accept the need for women involvement in the peace process. Twenty-three of the women's recommendations, including provisions for education, health, employment, and inheritance rights, were included in the final peace accord and became critical components of the country's reconstruction efforts. We brought

Women from similar conflict-affected countries to share their stories with the Security Council of how they have the most to gain from new opportunities and also the most to lose if fragile communities break down. Their stories helped to convince some members of the Security Council to become champions of the women, peace and security agenda.

Having courageous women leaders in public office matters

Many important changes for women – legislative changes, justice changes, policy changes – have occurred as a result of courageous women being in public office. Let me give you just two examples. There was no prosecution in an international war crimes tribunal for systematic widespread sexual violence until Navanethem Pillay introduced a prosecution in the tribunal for Rwanda, and similarly, Carla del Ponte pioneered prosecution on gender-related atrocities. No male judge ever took that initiative. So, it does make a difference having women in public office, but it doesn't happen automatically. I would say it's about their ideas and their courage to implement them.

Sharing evidence of success matters

There are successes with the implementation of UNSCR 1325 which need to be shared and integrated as good practices. Let me share some examples from my time at UNIFEM.

Our work on rebuilding conflict-affected countries through the empowerment of women, using the legitimacy of UNSCR 1325, delivered some results. By educating women voters and supporting peer networking, women elected Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as the first women President of Liberia and of Africa. By supporting women to become elected leaders, Rwanda has the highest percentage of women in parliament in the whole world, with women playing a bigger role to shape the new direction of their conflict affected country. These experiences are testimony to the fact that people are the most powerful agents of change and when supported and empowered in the direction envisioned by the UN Charter can shape their destiny towards a future of greater freedom and dignity.

Accountability Systems matter

UNSCR 1325 is being enriched by efforts to build on its different pillars. Resolution 1820 says that sexual violence is a tactic of warfare in certain circumstances and therefore requires a security response. My colleague in UNIFEM, Dr. Anne-Marie Goetz, has worked extensively on this. The SC is now mandated to send some cases to the Sanctions Committee if governments are found to be not only failing to protect women from widespread systematic sexual violence but in fact using it as a means of promoting political or military objectives. So, this is potentially a strong accountability provision, and it has subsequently been reinforced in resolution 1857 that renews the mandate of the Sanctions Committee and now mentions sexual violence as one of the triggers for the Sanctions Committee's attention. Peacekeeping commanders, police leaders and civilian operators have to come up with guidelines on what they're going to be doing to prevent and protect women from widespread and systematic sexual violence. But there are other pieces of 1325 that need to be strengthened. Something has to be done about the failure to include women in peace negotiations as mediators, negotiators, observers and experts, and in the implementation of peace deals.

The UN, in particular, but also other security institutions, is a hierarchical, command-driven institution. So, if something is to happen, it has to be in the set of commands and the command structure. In addition, the UN and troop contributing countries have to seriously address the abuses and failures in peace-keeping operations. Sexual violence is a serious problem as we have seen in the DRC and the Central African Republic. We must have data and information on what the system and our governments are doing to prevent it from ever happening again.

Women as perpetrators

We have to stop portraying women as one monolithic group of helpless victims or resistance fighters. In any conflict, you will find women combatants, women fighters, women leaders of fighting forces and also women who have incited ethnic violence and women who have an interest in pursuing violence. At the same time, in many conflicts, women are leaders of peace building groups, reconciliation and conflict resolution groups.

Clearly, women are not only victims but people with both grievances and agency. Some are engaged in violence and extremism. Some are on the front lines of countering extremism and violence. Many have a very strong interest in peace and recovery. The point of 1325 is not necessarily to say that women are better at building peace than other social groups, but simply that they must be included and given a chance. But if we disregard not just women's roles as leaders and peace-builders, but also women's roles in early recovery, we will be undermining long-term stability.

Beyond UNSCR 1325: What Next?

The fundamental issues in SCR1325, the importance of understanding the impact of conflict on women and girls, supporting women peacebuilders, empowering women, advancing their rights and ensuring that women are part of the solution to these conflicts, remain as urgent as ever. It is clear that military responses alone are insufficient in addressing peace and security concerns. From 2003 to 2010, every civil war that erupted, was a resumption of a previous civil war. As reaffirmed by the recent review of the UN's peacebuilding architecture, women's participation is crucial for economic recovery, political legitimacy and social cohesion: "without women's engagement from the earlier moments of attempting to end the violence to the latter stages of consolidating the peace, the dangers of relapse are greatly heightened."

Given the importance of women's participation in preventing relapse to conflict, their exclusion therefore impacts not just the lives of women and girls, and their families and communities, but impedes societies' efforts for stability as a whole. Networks of women peace builders, humanitarian workers and community leaders must therefore be expanded and supported to come to the fore. At the same time, the empowerment of women cannot be done without also supporting men in these communities to understand the importance of protecting the rights and dignity of women and girls. Protecting these rights must be seen to be in the interest of the community as a whole and understood as the best guarantee for advancement of the entire community. We must work in ways that bring universal principles, norms and standards and local values, practices and traditions together. This is the approach that I took in advancing UNSCR 1325 in places like Afghanistan where some gains have been lost, and in Liberia and Timor-Leste with better success.

These experiences taught me that transformational leadership can only be realized through empowerment on the ground. That, to me, is the role of leadership in the UN, supporting local people on the ground who will lead change in their own communities in line with the values and vision of the UN Charter, where "We the Peoples" can live in greater freedom...freedom from want, freedom from fear.



* **Dr. Noeleen Heyzer** was the former United Nations Under-Secretary General (2007-2015) and the first woman Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission of Asia and the Pacific since its founding in 1949. She was the first woman from outside North America to head the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) becoming its longest serving Executive Director for 13 years (October 1994–August 2007).

Dr. Heyzer played a critical role in the Security Council's adoption and implementation of the landmark Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security, formally presenting the issues to the Security Council. She and her team organized the "Arria Formula" meeting for women from conflict - affected

countries to engage with the Security Council for the first time on peace and security. She was appointed technical advisor to the President of the Security Council during the drafting of SCR1325 and undertook extensive missions to conflict-affected countries worldwide to help with its implementation. She was awarded the Dag Hammarskjold Medal in 2004, for her work on Women, Peace and Security.

She and her team were instrumental in the establishment of UN Women (the successor of UNIFEM) to ensure that the United Nations will always have a strong institutional voice for women at its highest decision-making table.

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