



INTRODUCTION TO RESOLUTION 1325

Researchers and organisations have for a long time stressed the importance of an increased understanding on how modern day warfare affects civilian populations in general, and women in particular. Today, it is a well known fact that an increasing rate of casualties during conflict are civilians.¹ Among these, women often belong to the segments of the population that suffer the most as a result of e.g. campaigns of ethnic cleansing and during increments of internally displaced people. Rape and sexual slavery of women are, during these incidents, often used as a weapon of war to humiliate and debilitate the enemy.

Female agency

However, studies also show that women in a number of ways are active agents during conflicts.² The term female agency refers to the different roles that women often play in these situations. This include not only the increased responsibilities that women take on during conflicts as heads of households and communities as well as women's roles as organisers of humanitarian assistance, but also as combatants and unarmed participants of armed forces. Women have served as peace educators for generations in their families and societies. Their role as active peace agents before, during and after conflicts is today widely recognised.³



Photo: Nicole Farnsworth for the Kosova Women's Network

Women often marginalised

Despite the fact that women are disproportionately affected by conflicts and neglected in their capacity as peace builders, they are often marginalised in preventive interventions, peace negotiations as well as in post-conflict phases of state reconstruction on all levels. Women's knowledge and experiences are not taken into account during these efforts which hinders reconstruction processes. It limits women's possibilities to claim their rights as these seldom are protected in the following peace agreements.

The exclusion of women from the negotiating table is reflected in reconstruction efforts which often produce a backlash on gender equality. As post conflict societies stabilise, women are increasingly marginalised. This means that they risk facing less decision making power in the post conflict period than they had before the conflict erupted.

As a result, unjust and unstable societies are established, which in turn creates a breeding ground for unresolved conflicts and continued high levels of violence. In order to avoid a situation of prolonged instability it is crucial that women are fully included in all measures taken to prevent and solve conflicts. ⁴

Severale measures have been taken

As the awareness of the negative consequences of neglecting women when trying to prevent and solve conflicts has increased in the international community during recent years, several important measures have been taken to increase women's involvement in these processes. The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979, provides together with UN women conferences, a crucial foundation for this work which have resulted in a number of important achievements.⁵

The Beijing Declaration

The fourth women conference in Beijing, 1995, led to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Women's central role as peace agents was stressed in both these documents, and one of the prioritised focal areas of the action plan, to stop the discrimination against women, focused on the discrimination that takes place against women during armed conflict.

Resolution 1265 and 1296

The UN Security Council Resolutions 1265 (1999) and 1296 (2000), both stress the importance of applying a gender perspective when trying to protect civilians during armed conflict. This can be seen as a further recognition of the importance of a gender perspective in peace and security related issues. Finally the Windhoek Declaration and Namibia Plan of Action on Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multi-Dimensional Peace Support Operations (2000) cleared the way for the Security Council's adoption of UNSCR 1325 on the 31st of October in the same year during the fifth women's conference in New York.⁶



Photo: Malin Arnesson

Resolution 1820

Another important document to mention is the UNSCR 1820 that was adopted by the UN Security Council in June 2008. The purpose of UNSCR 1820 is to stop sexual violence against civilians during armed conflict. It condemns rape and other forms of sexual violence committed during conflicts and states that rape can constitute a war crime, a crime against humanity or a constitutive act with respect to genocide ⁷

While some believe that there is a risk that UNSCR 1820 changes focus from women's active participation as stipulated in UNSCR 1325 to women's vulnerability, others believe that UNSCR 1820 actually strengthens UNSCR 1325 and that violence against women and women's lack of influence must be seen as integral to one another.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF RESOLUTION 1325

The introductory preamble paragraphs of UNSCR 1325 recalls earlier resolutions, documents and statements made on the issue of gender and conflict in order to remind member states and other organisations about earlier efforts and previous commitments. The paragraphs following the preamble can roughly be divided into five categories:

§ 1-4

Women's representation

Paragraph 1-4 are concerned with the issue of increased representation and influence of women and urges member states to ensure increased representation of women at all decision making levels and in all mechanisms that deals with conflict prevention, peace building and post-conflict reconstruction. The Secretary General has the chief responsibility to make sure that the representation and influence of women is enhanced within the UN system.

§ 5-8

Integrating a gender perspective

Paragraph 5-8 emphasise the need for gender mainstreaming within peacekeeping and peace building operations, as well as in negotiation and reconstruction processes. The Secretary General is requested to offer training and guidelines for gender mainstreaming and the member states are asked to allocate the necessary funding for this task. All actors involved in peace negotiations and implementation of peace agreements are additionally requested to apply a gender perspective in these processes.

§ 9-12

Women's rights in conflicts

Paragraph 9-12 are concerned with the protection of women's rights during conflicts. Parties of armed conflicts are requested to uphold international law and are obliged to ensure that women and girls are protected from gender-based violence during conflicts. They are further expected to attend to women's and girls' special needs in refugee camps and settlements. Paragraph 11 particularly stresses that all warring parties and the international community ought to end impunity for crimes against humanity, including all forms of violence and sexual exploitation of women.

§ 13-15

Gender perspective during disarmament

Paragraph 13-15 deal with the areas where special attention should be given to the needs of women and girls during disarmament; for example female combatants. The Security Council is urged to ensure that women's groups are consulted when planning and conducting peace keeping missions and to take gender as a legitimate humanitarian exemption from sanctions affecting civilians during armed conflicts.

§ 16-18

Reporting mechanisms

In the final paragraphs, 16-18, recommendations are given on what kind of studies that are needed on the topic of women, peace and security and how to promote gender mainstreaming in UN implementation mechanisms and reporting systems.



ACCOMPLISHMENTS SO FAR

UNSCR 1325 has brought the issue of women, peace and security on the agenda of the international community including the UN system, and the Security Council. It has further proved to be an efficient tool for civil society organisations working with issues relating to women's rights, peace and conflict. In the following text, some concrete examples will be given on what actions have been taken by women's groups in conflict and post conflict countries to implement UNSCR 1325. A more general description of some of the important accomplishments made on the international, regional and national level will then follow.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN CONFLICT STRICKEN COUNTRIES

Rwanda

The peace process that followed the genocide in Rwanda was largely influenced by the active involvement of women's groups in reconciliation and reconstruction efforts. In the immediate aftermath of the genocide, 70 percent of the population was female. Given the demographic imbalance and women's active agency, women took on multiple roles as heads of households, community leaders and financial providers to meet the needs of their families and communities. Women were the ones who buried the dead, who built shelters and found homes for approximately 500 000 orphans. ⁸ Women were also actively involved in the genocide.



Photo: Malin Arnesson

MADRE's sister organisation in Rwanda; BENIPUHWÉ, is a concrete example of how Rwandese women who survived the genocide, together with female perpetrators, managed to reconcile and come together to find joint solutions on how to deal with the problems that confronted them in their war-torn society. Women's active involvement in the peace process and the promotion of women as peace agents in UNSCR 1325 has most certainly had effects on the new constitution adopted by the government in 2003. According to the new constitution, at least a third of the representation in the parliament must be female. Women currently constitute 55 percent. Today, this figure represents the highest female parliamentary representation in the world.¹⁰

Women's organisations in the Democratic Republic of Congo have arranged a number of activities to increase the Congolese's awareness of UNSCR 1325 and its importance for the peace negotiations. Several workshops and conferences have been held on the topic and women have participated in a national TV debate and on the radio to spread information and promote UNSCR 1325 and to help promote it. In 2002, a workshop was organised to build the capacity of Congolese women, preparing them to join the peace negotiations during the Inter-Congolese Dialogue in Sun City.

Women's groups later managed to distribute copies of UNSCR 1325 to all the delegates and experts that participated in the Dialogue.¹¹ In 2008, a meeting was arranged between the Permanent Framework of Dialogue for Congolese Women (CAFCO) and the UN mission in DRC (MONUC) to discuss security questions and how the Congolese women can participate in the prevention and settlement of the conflict.¹²

Liberia

Since peace was officially sealed in Liberia in 2003, the occurrence of sex crimes have continued to be persistent after fourteen years of civil war. With the support of UNSCR 1325, a law was passed in 2005 that prohibit rape. Despite the adoption of the rape law, the number of reported rape cases has continued to increase according to civil society organisations. During the last two years, Liberian women's group have thus been advocating for setting up a special court that is able to enforce the law and deal with other forms of violence against women. A campaign backed by the United Nations supported their efforts and in March 2008, their demands were listened to and the Liberian government decided to establish a special court for this purpose.¹³



Photo: Nicole Farnsworth for the Kosova Women's Network

Serbia and Kosova

The Serbian Women in Black Network have together with the Kosova Women's Network created the Women's Peace Coalition. The primary basis for the work of Women's Peace Coalition is UNSCR 1325 and the goal is to achieve just and sustainable peace by striving to include women in all peace building processes as equal partners. The Coalition stresses the importance of solidarity between women across divisions of ethnicity, religion, as well as state borders and support the idea of women as dynamic actors in peace movements, not only as survivors of war.

During the monitoring negotiations on Kosova's final political status, the Coalition advocated for the inclusion of women in the negotiations and sought to inform the negotiators, as well as the citizens in Kosova and Serbia, about the Coalition's stance on the protection and preservation of cultural heritage. The Coalition has also, among other things, actively supported witnesses and victims that testified in court proceedings against suspected war criminals.¹⁴

South Caucasus

Women's organisations in Georgia are making extensive efforts to achieve peace in South Caucasus. In collaboration with women's organisations from Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Armenia, Azerbaijani and Russia, they have educated women in negotiation technique, conflict resolution in the region and analysed peace plans. The aim has been to prepare women in joining the ongoing negotiations between Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. With the support of UNSCR 1325 these women have urged the UN, EU and the Georgian President to get permission to join the talks. However, so far, there are still no positive responses to their requests. The Caucasian women's movement still constitutes one of very few communication channels for political cooperation in the region.¹⁵



Photo: Ann-Sofie Hellgren