

The UN Security Council addresses women's role in peace

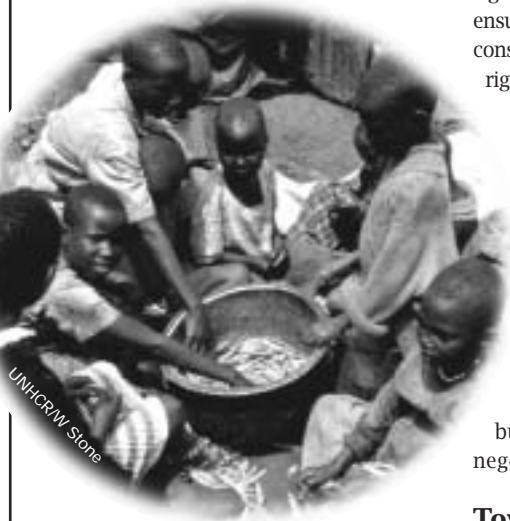
by Maha Muna and Rachel Watson

Perpetué Kankindi longs for an end to the seven-year civil war that has devastated her native Burundi.

She runs a successful animal husbandry project for women of all ethnicities at a time when divisions between the majority Hutu and minority Tutsi are bloodier than ever. She hopes that this project will offer a building block for security in the villages where she works.

the negotiations agreed to include three women politicians in their negotiating teams. Though the women participants served as observers, their presence indicated official recognition of their capacity for establishing and maintaining peace. They presented a unified platform on the Arusha Peace Agreement, including proposals to ensure a women's charter in the new constitution and recognition of women's rights to land and property.

IDPs in Gashi Kanwa area, Burundi



UNHCR/W. Stone

Each woman in Perpetué's project is given a goat to rear, on condition that when the goat has a kid, the owner hands over the kid to a woman of a different ethnic group. The women — Hutu and Tutsi — also share seeds and harvests. "The women had to say hello to each other and manage the project together," explained Perpetué. "The Hutu women who were doing the harvest came to visit the Tutsi women in the village. Little by little the fear began to diminish."

Last year activist women's groups across Burundi successfully lobbied for and secured the right to participate in the ongoing peace talks. Some of the 19 political parties involved in

Meanwhile, on the international stage, in October 2000 the UN Security Council (SC) passed an historic resolution (SCR 1325) which finally recognises and encourages the efforts of women like Perpetué and her Burundian colleagues. It calls on UN member states not only to protect women in times of war but also to include them in peace negotiations.

Towards SCR 1325

The resolution represented the effort of a broad coalition of civil society, UN and state actors: an NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security (whose members are Amnesty International, Hague Appeal for Peace, International Alert, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children), UNIFEM, the UN Division for the Advancement of Women and the UN Mission for Namibia. Together they built on gains made in preceding years and took the issue all the way to a SC resolution.

The NGO Working Group was concerned that while the SC had

previously made references to women's experience of war under the general umbrella of civilian victims of conflict, it had ignored the particular ways in which women are affected by war. The group stressed that women experience war differently. Women organise their families and communities to cope during war and displacement; women's networks are essential for solidifying peace and women have valid concerns that may not be discussed if only men come to the peace table.

2000 also saw the five-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action on gender equality, development and peace. The Platform's chapter on women and armed conflict clearly stated that lasting peace depended on the participation of women in all aspects of peace initiatives. It reiterated that humanitarian and human rights law demands the protection of women and their rights during armed conflict. This was an important reaffirmation that women's rights are human rights, as understood in various international human rights instruments.

During preparations for the Beijing review process, the SC marked International Women's Day in March 2000 with a statement noting that peace is inextricably linked to equality between women and men. The SC had already held several 'thematic debates' on such topics as civilians in armed conflict, children and the

ideally positioned to take this initiative since it had spearheaded the Windhoek Declaration and Namibia Plan of Action on Mainstreaming Gender in Peace Support Operations, both of which recognised the important role of women in conflict prevention and resolution and called for gender equality in peace support operations.

Getting female voices heard

Prior to the debate, women peace activists from war-affected regions around the world related their own experiences to members of the SC. Invoking the 'Arria Formula' which allows non-governmental representatives to share their opinions with the SC, women from Zambia, Somalia, Guatemala and Sierra Leone told Council members that while women were at the forefront of grassroots efforts to promote peace and reconciliation, they were rarely offered opportunities to participate in peace negotiations.

Faiza Jama Mohamed, a Somali activist, spoke of how Somali society is organised into clans and sub-clans of which women are not considered full members. They are thus excluded from fora where decisions to make war are taken and denied a role in peace negotiations. However, despite their exclusion, women in Somalia have gone to imaginative lengths to restore peace and security in their communities. One women's organisa-



The language of the resolution moves beyond portraying women as vulnerable victims of war to acknowledge their role in supporting families and surviving armed struggle and their ongoing protection needs. It calls on all those involved in implementing peace agreements to protect the rights of women and girls under international law and to consider their special needs during repatriation, resettlement and post-conflict rehabilitation. All peace actors are urged to support women's initiatives for conflict resolution and to facilitate their involvement at all levels of peace negotiations.

The resolution validates and endorses the work of women like Mary Balikungeri, a Rwandan woman who established the Polyclinic of Hope, a hospital and training centre which promotes peace and reconciliation in a country torn apart by ethnic hatred. Mary recognised that long-term recovery for female genocide survivors would entail physical and psychosocial support and her project has gained international attention. Her Rwandan Women's Network has reached out to other women's organisations in neighbouring Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo and found common ground at a time when conflict still engulfs the region. She believes the challenge is how to translate the resolution into action on the ground. "I see the implementation at two levels. Locally we need to be better organised so that we can better understand, implement and monitor

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spread of HIV/AIDS. The UN itself had appointed and received regular reports from a Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and had developed a wealth of understanding relating to women's status and women's protection. At the same time, the Brahimi Report on UN Peace Operations and Graca Machel's review of the impact of armed conflict on children and women were under discussion.

The NGO Working Group worked closely with UNIFEM, the UN Mission for Namibia (a non-permanent member of the SC) and the Division for the Advancement of Women to table an open debate on women, peace and security in October 2000. Namibia was

tion collected funds to provide uniforms, food and salaries for the local police force and then rebuilt the police station. By their actions, the women ensured some protection against armed militia and robbers who had previously attacked villages with impunity.

Adoption of the resolution

The Arria session was followed by a two-day debate in the SC which led to the unanimous adoption of SCR 1325. The resolution calls for the inclusion of women in peace building, expresses concern at the adverse effect of conflict on women and urges specialised gender-sensitive training for all UN peacekeepers.



such resolutions, and regionally and internationally we need to lobby strategically so that governments and the UN can implement this resolution. My dream is that our women politicians can encourage such strategies.”

Implementation challenges

This may be the major sticking point of SCR 1325. The challenge rests with the UN and its member states — its peacekeeping operations, its assistance organisations and SC missions — to follow through on promises and to translate good intentions into tangible improvements for women affected by war. Much remains to be done in such key areas as training for peace-keeping missions and moving towards gender-sensitive humanitarian programming.

There is no timeframe for the UN Secretary General to take the necessary steps to implement the recommendations in the resolution. As with many resolutions of this nature, the language used is woolly and tentative (using words like encourage, request and invite), indicating that the SC still has much to do to ensure that this resolution really is integrated into all the operational culture of the UN.

Currently women make up only 4% of military and civilian police personnel. None of the current cadre of 62 Special Representatives of the Secretary General are women. SCR 1325 requires the Secretary General to

report to the SC on ‘gender mainstreaming’ in UN peace operations. This will include the recruitment of qualified women for high-level posts at the UN and in UN peace keeping and peace support operations. It will also review support by member states for gender-sensitive training for peace keeping troops and civilian police units.

Refugee women have reported that civilian police forces overseen by the UN are poorly trained and inadequately supervised. In Kosovo and Bosnia, women have complained that some UN-supported civilian police officers use prostitutes and are sexually abusive towards the female members of the public they are supposed to be protecting. Training for police officers on gender issues such as sexual violence is vital. Codes of conduct need to be strictly enforced, and not just with the dismissal of the officers concerned. Immunity for UN staff accused of sexual violence needs to be addressed. UN staff who are responsible for protection must be held accountable for their transgressions.

On a more positive note, a month after the passing of the resolution, the UN’s annual appeal, the Consolidated Appeal Process, was launched under the theme of ‘Women and War’. All humanitarian assistance programmes receiving funding from this appeal should consider this theme, and ensure the participation and protection of women during and after conflict. When implementing programmes for demobilised combatants, UN agencies must consider the specific concerns and needs of women and children who had been abducted and enslaved by military forces.

Improved protection and increased participation have been proved to reduce the vulnerability of refugee women and enable them to contribute effectively to post-war reconstruction. Yet despite a proliferation of policies, guidelines and targeted programming, there remains a wide gap between what we know about improved protection and the realities that women face in refugee situations. SCR 1325 reinforces the guidelines and policies that oblige UN staffers to include women in refugee camp decision-making bodies, where they can ensure the improved protection, equal distribution of food and support critical reproductive health services.

The NGO Working Group is ensuring that the voices of refugee women feed directly into the monitoring process of the implementation of SCR 1325. The Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children is currently undertaking field research as part of a review of UNHCR’s Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women. The Women’s Commission also participated in a series of regional dialogues with refugee women which culminated in a Refugee Women’s Consultation whose findings and recommendations will be taken to the UNHCR Excom meeting in October 2001.

The NGO Working Group is pushing for another Arria meeting to again allow women activists to consult with SC members. A shadow report by NGOs on the implementation of Resolution 1325 will be released at the same time. Meanwhile the Working Group continues to work with local partners to monitor UN peacekeeping operations and to equip local organisations with better advocacy skills. Other NGO monitoring initiatives include a website tracking all UN documents relating to women, peace and security¹ and a gender audit of UN protectorates in East Timor and Kosovo.

Conclusion

While governments contend with international law and UN protocol, women around the world are continuing the struggle to maintain a safe environment for their communities and their children in the face of war. In Latin America, mothers, wives and sisters dared to question military juntas about their ‘disappeared’ relatives. In Mali and Liberia, women rallied together to call for disarmament. In the Philippines, women run peace zones around villages protecting their children. It is for these women — and all women in conflict zones — that we must ensure that SCR 1325 is not just filed away in UN offices but is actively implemented, with the encouragement and monitoring of all those who work to promote peace.

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The text of SCR 1325 can be seen at: www.un.org/Docs/scres/2000/res1325e.pdf