

On 14 October 2015, WILPF and MADRE, with support from the Sorensen Centre at CUNY Law School, facilitated a civil society launch of the global study on UNSCR 1325 (2000) and discussion with global study lead author Radhika Coomaraswamy. WILPF Secretary General Madeleine Rees moderated discussion with lead author and key feminist peace leaders including Charlotte Bunch (CWGL), Leymah Gbowee (Gbowee Peace Foundation), Pramila Patten (CEDAW), Bandana Rana (Saathi), and Yifat Susskind (MADRE). The event provided an alternative civil society space to explore how to implement study recommendations and strengthen feminist movement mobilisation for action moving forward.

Radhika Coomaraswamy began the discussion by reflecting her key take-away from the global study process and recommendations. “No to militarization, yes to prevention - that is what women claim,” she stated. Coomaraswamy highlighted the need for demilitarisation and a decrease in military spending as key take-away of the global study’s roadmap for sustainable conflict prevention and peace. She recognised the importance of the study being an independent report (rather than a UN consensus document) and emphasised how it built on global consultations on UNSCR 1325 (2000) around the world. Coomaraswamy also noted the importance of listening to grassroots women, noting that different regions had different priority areas (e.g., a focus on military spending and advancement of UNSCR 1325 (2000) National Action Plans in Western Europe and a focus on empowerment, safety and funding for women’s organisations in Nepal and other developing countries).

Given the focus of the new resolution (UNSCR 2242) and debate on violent extremism, Coomaraswamy noted with concern a blurring of lines between military and civilian agendas in connecting Women, Peace and Security with counterterrorism discussions. Participants explored how the blurring of these lines risks reducing funding to women’s human rights defenders and peace activists due to redirection of funds to military “protectors,” and actively undermining a holistic agenda including by further reducing civil society space through militarised anti-terrorism and anti-extremism measures.

Following Coomaraswamy’s introduction the panel explored strategies for addressing obstacles to key gap areas on the Women, Peace and Security agenda as addressed by the global study. In the area of peacebuilding, the consensus on the panel was that there is not enough mapping of what is already being done at the local level. Participants affirmed that the feminist peace movement must continue to raise the bar in our vision and action for change.

Nobel Peace Laureate Leymah Gbowee emphasised the interrelationship between justice and women’s participation. “Wars are fought today on the bodies of women - they can no longer be excluded from participating,” she held. “When women are left out of the first stage of peace and rebuilding, it becomes impossible for them to have access to justice.” Panellists stressed that prosecutions are still very few; there is still a need for systems that will punish perpetrators, provide reparations to survivors, and address systemic challenges to lack of justice at the national level.

The remainder of the discussion focused on how to better implement UNSCR 1325 (2000) moving forward. Bandana Rana from Saathi spoke on the need to keep hope despite challenges, and raise awareness of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. She used the example of Nepal, where the government has implemented a National Action Plan and stipulated in the new constitution that 33% of women must be included in government. However, despite policy, the situation on the ground remains “business as usual.” Many other attendees were concerned with funding issues, in particular the lack of funding commitments made at the Security Council Open

Debate on Women, Peace, and Security, and their embarrassingly low level of ambition, especially in comparison to military expenditures.

Liesl Grentholtz from Human Rights Watch expressed concern that the Women, Peace and Security agenda is undermined by the closing of Civil Society space and attacks on human rights defenders. While civil society is clearly becoming a critical resource for implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, rather than merely the “creators,” civilian groups in peace processes remain dominantly male. Furthermore, accountability is still far from reality and all voices are not being heard. One issue is that UN entities can blockade input from groups critical of governments. This highlights a lack of accountability that is essential to effective implementation.

Fifteen years ago the emphasis was on building women’s institutions, then the focus shifted to measuring legislation, now the emphasis is on tracking the number of women at high level meetings or the number of references to women in Resolutions. Panellists voiced concern that Women, Peace and Security activists have moved too far away from the actual desired impacts (e.g. safety, economic empowerment) and that there is a need to shift attention back to grassroots efforts. According to Yifat Susskind of MADRE, “we have to shift the gaze back to the experiences and demands of women on the ground if we are to advance this agenda.” Charlotte Bunch of the Centre for Women’s Global Leadership brought attention to the fact that, while the Women, Peace and Security agenda has been successful in changing discourse and raising awareness, strategies are still needed to bring change from the UN to the ground.

Participants recognised that current challenges have developed from the successes of developing a strong normative framework on Women, Peace, and Security over the last fifteen years. They explored how to broaden and deepen discussions and action on Women, Peace and Security to move from norms to action. Together they recognised the global study as a clear body of evidence and tool, and committed to continuing to work together for action moving forward. As Coomaraswamy reiterated, “The most important message on the Global Study is the call for action.”