

Eight Recommendations For the II National Action Plan On Women, Peace And Security of Spain – Analysis

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The II National Action Plan for the implementation of Resolution 1325, currently being prepared by the Spanish Government, should build on lessons learnt and include specific measures and best practices if it aims to achieve any advancement in the women, peace and security agenda.

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Nine years after the approval of the I National Action Plan for the implementation of Resolution 1325 –and mainly driven by its participation, as a non-permanent member, in the United Nations Security Council during the 2015-16 biennium–, the Spanish Government has marked the women, peace and security agenda as a priority, undertaking to draft a II National Action Plan. The number of challenges outstanding, almost 16 years after the approval of Resolution 1325, calls for a global commitment that is sustained over time and for actions and measures in field operations supported by sufficient funding (the most serious and persistent impediment for implementation of Resolution 1325). The alliance with local organisations and agents, mainly women's organisations, has proved to be the most efficient way to promote and ensure a significant participation by women in the prevention of conflicts and in peace-building. Only a Plan based on such premises will effectively contribute towards the implementation of Resolution 1325.

Analysis

An essential political agenda, the agenda of international peace and security

Resolution 1325 (and the seven subsequent resolutions which complement it) on women, peace and security constitutes a solid regulatory framework for the United Nations organisation addressing the main responsibility of the Security Council: to keep international peace and security. In order to achieve this goal, gender equality is an essential condition which has also proven to be indispensable for the consolidation and sustainability of peace.

This is a political agenda –and not only and intrinsically a technical agenda based on expertise– sustained on the rights/efficiency binomial: on the one hand, the right of women to participate, with an equal footing to men, in the achievement and consolidation of peace; and, on the other, the close link between women's leadership and participation in building sustainable peace.¹ Its direct interdependence with the agenda of gender equality and empowerment of women –and, therefore, with one of the essential goals to achieve the Sustainable Development Objectives for 2030– underlines its priority nature and its need to occupy a position of preference in the political agenda.

The agenda in terms of women, peace and security mainly affects the area of foreign action and policy, but also requires policies regarding gender equality, as well as justice, home affairs, defence, healthcare, cooperation and education, among others.

It is a good example of the synergy that exists between the domestic and foreign dimensions of policies, but can also reveal, as the case may be, any inconsistencies that exist between ambitious objectives abroad which are not matched by domestic policies.² The complexity of the challenges it addresses renders a multidimensional agenda which requires a political will that is permanent and sustained over time, the provision of human and financial resources in the short and medium term, measurable goals and objectives and continuous monitoring and assessment. The political nature of the agenda lends relevance to the participation of Parliament in the follow-up of its achievements, as well as of civil society, a key player in the observance and implementation of the objectives of Resolution 1325.

The I National Action Plan: good intentions but few results

Spain was among the first 10 countries in the world that drew up national action plans for the implementation of Resolution 1325.³ Approved on 30 November 2007 by Agreement of the Cabinet of Ministers, this first Plan continues to be in force. At that time, only Denmark, the UK, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Ivory Coast, Austria and the Netherlands,⁴ as well as Spain, had approved national plans.

The main purpose of the National Action Plans is none other than to include the objectives of Resolution 1325 in the national planning, thus ensuring that the gender perspective and the significant participation of women becomes an objective of all national agencies involved in the prevention of conflicts and in the achievement and consolidation of peace. National plans are therefore of an instrumental nature (they do not constitute objectives in and of themselves) designed to achieve the objectives of Resolution 1325 in field operations. A number of the 60 countries worldwide which have approved national action plans to date⁵ are either currently preparing a II Plan or –as is the case of Denmark, the Netherlands and the UK– are currently implementing their III National Action Plan.

The commitments undertaken in the 2007 Spanish plan,⁶ despite reflecting Spain's political intention to promote and commit to this agenda, lacked specific measures to achieve the objectives set; they did not have sufficient human and financial means; there was an evident imbalance between the greater involvement of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation and Defence and those of Equality, Justice, Education, Health, Employment or the Interior; and they failed to include outcome indicators or rigorous assessment and accountability mechanisms. Among the more positive aspects are the coordination role of the female Ambassador on Special Mission for the Promotion of Gender Equality (a post eliminated in 2011) responsible for chairing the monitoring group formed by the Ministers involved; and the commitment to establish coordination mechanisms with civil society with a view to exchanging information on actions carried out in connection with Resolution 1325 and presenting an annual follow-up report.

After almost nine years since its approval, and in view of the follow-up reports presented by both the administration⁷ and civil society,⁸ and the limited real impact achieved by the plan, the need to consider the preparation of a new National Action Plan –and not just an update of the existing one–⁹ has become evident. The participation of Spain as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council during the biennium 2015-16, and the fact that it was Spain's turn to preside the UNSC during the month of October 2015, coinciding with the XV anniversary of Resolution 1325, has undoubtedly contributed to this realisation. These international

obligations have acted as an incentive to revitalise an agenda which had lost some momentum at a national level over the last few years.

Learning from lessons and incorporating best practices

The implementation of Resolution 1325 has been –and continues to be– a long road fraught with obstacles (beginning with the marked inequality of gender, of a structural nature, and particularly in the realms of political participation and empowerment of women).¹⁰ It has also been a course filled with trial and error, of lessons learnt, both in the United Nations, the EU and other regional organisations, and in countries that have undertaken to promote its objectives. Translating the resolutions into actual solutions continues to be an outstanding challenge in most cases. However, there are some specific examples of success, such as the Colombia peace process,¹¹ where effective policies can be identified and efforts are focused in the right direction.

A new Plan is, without a doubt, a valuable opportunity. But it can also become a lost opportunity if the experience accumulated so far cannot be exploited, posing feasible initiatives and specific proposals to be applied in the field, well beyond the theory, the rhetoric and the good intentions that have plagued many of the national plans. First, it should take into account, with a critical and pragmatic approach, the recommendations contained in the Spanish follow-up reports, as well as lessons learnt in other national experiences, and incorporate, by way of a guideline, the specific proposals of the assessment report of the Global Study.¹² The examples set by the three countries which have already implemented their III National Action Plan –the UK¹³ (2014-17), Sweden¹⁴ (2016-20) and the Netherlands¹⁵ (2016-19)–, whose best practices to an extent have been contained in this work, may also prove useful.

1. Inclusive participation in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and assessment of the Plan. The joint preparation of the Plan (in close cooperation with civil society) has been considered one of the best practices to achieve effective plans that can be implemented in the field, in a concrete and realistic manner. In most cases, it is the civilian organisations of countries in conflict and post-conflict which are best placed to implement the objectives of Resolution 1325. Their significant participation in the design of the Plan ensures expertise on the context, as well as on the needs and desires of women. Both the Dutch III Plan¹⁶ and the Swedish one have been drawn up by reference groups comprised of representatives from the government and of civil society organisations, who will also contribute to their implementation and follow-up.
2. Impact indicators, annual assessment and accountability. As mentioned above, the absence of outcome indicators renders practically impossible the measurement of the progress achieved by the plan, as well as a rigorous and useful assessment of the adequacy of the measures implemented. Impact indicators must include baselines (as in the case of the British III NAP, for instance) as benchmarks to indicate the starting point and therefore allow the effort and the real measurable impact of the plan to be evaluated. Both the United Nations and the EU have designed quantitative (number of women, but also percentages) and qualitative impact indicators which can be added to the Plan, making any necessary adjustments for the case of Spain. An annual assessment, as has been undertaken by the British, Dutch and Swedish plans, seems to be an optimal solution, as it enables precise monitoring to be carried out and the suggestion of appropriate rectification or necessary reinforcement, as the case may be, of some measures. The national Parliament must be involved in the follow-up of the Plan and as an accountability mechanism. The presentation

in Parliament and the debate on the follow-up reports are some of the best practices to guarantee efficacy and accountability.

3. A proper institutional framework in each unit of the administration involved, as well as a coordinating body.¹⁷ The existence of a focal point in each of the Ministries and units involved (Defence, Interior, Education, Culture and Sports, Health, Social Affairs and Equality, Institute for Women and Equal Opportunities, and the Spanish International Cooperation and Development Agency, as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation) is essential to drive the Plan in sustained and permanent manner and to monitor and, as the case may be, correct any measures that need to be changed or reinforced. In addition, the existence of a figure to coordinate all of the administration agencies involved, to provide coherence to all of the actions implemented and to help maintain the political momentum of this agenda, also acting as the interlocutor with civil society organisations, is also essential. A good example of this is the Embassy for gender equality (in existence in Sweden since 2015, and which also coordinates the government's feminist policies; as the Swedish Plan rightly points out, this role serves to strengthen Sweden's profile in the Women, Peace and Security dossier).
4. Local action, in the field, is absolutely essential. The consideration of local players and women's organisations in the field as partners is critical to achieve the objectives of Resolution 1325. The support of women's organisations in the field is the most positive lesson learnt, the most reiterated recommendation and the measure that has proved to be the most efficient of all those evaluated over the past 16 years. Permanent contact with women's organisations is essential in the prevention of conflict, as it enables the outlook and views of women to be taken into consideration when designing early warning systems and mechanisms in conflictive areas, and the gender perspective to be included in their analysis. As the II Dutch Plan underlines, local women's organisations are 'well placed to act in the field, are able to interact and exchange information, lobby and exercise political influence; they document human rights violations and sexual violence incidents and pressure governments and the United Nations to improve policies and frameworks for the efficient implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda'. Acting locally has proved efficient even at the preparation stage of the Plan. Consultations in the field (as were carried out by the Swedish government both to embassies and local civilian peace-building organisations and national authorities at ground level) are essential when seeking to design the most efficient specific measures.
5. Funding, indispensable to achieve the objectives. Identified by the Global Study as the 'most serious and constant obstacle' to meet the commitments, the allocation of resources is one of the keys to ensure the influence and significant participation of women in peace process and prevention of conflicts. The Global Study stresses that 'accessible, flexible and foreseeable funding for civilian women's organisations is indispensable to achieve specific results', and proposes that member states, regional organisations and the United Nations system should undertake to allocate at least 15% of the funds assigned to the peace and security agenda to programmes whose main objective is to respond to the specific needs of women and to promote gender equality. Resolution 2242, approved in October 2015 under the Spanish Presidency of the UNSC, highlights the critical nature of the financing gap of women's organisations, identifying the Global Acceleration Instrument on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action as a channel to attract funding, coordinate responses and accelerate implementation.

Thinking globally, but acting locally: eight specific measures for the II National Action Plan

Direct contact with reality and the local players in countries which are fragile, in conflict or post-conflict, has proved indispensable for the prevention and the implementation of peace process leading to sustainable agreements. In this regard, permanent contact in the field –via national diplomatic representations– with local women’s organisations and other civilian organisations and NGOs is essential to enhance the leadership and visibility of women and their significant participation in peace-building process. By way of recommendation of specific measures which will help to boost the objectives of Resolution 1325, below are some which, based on best practices, could be included in the II National Action Plan:

1. Promotion of leadership of more women at decision-making levels, both domestically and in international organisations. The British II Plan has undertaken to encourage the appointment of more women in senior decision-making positions in areas addressing conflict, stability and security abroad (United Nations and other regional organisations), but also to increase women’s participation in the domestic sphere in senior positions so that, by the end of the term of the Plan (2017), 50% of new appointments are women.
2. Support to civilian organisations in the field in countries at risk, in conflict and post-conflict involved in peace-building process, particularly to women’s rights organisations, through dialogue, enhanced visibility, dialogue and regular interchange with Embassies and other national agencies in the field, as well as technical support and mediation training.
3. Financial support, sustained over time, to women’s organisations promoting equality, women’s empowerment, conflict prevention and peace process, with a specific budgetary allocation and establishment of a minimum amount of the overall peace and security budget. This priority would likewise go hand in hand with the reinforcement of feminist and women’s organisation in civil society as reflected in the Spanish Cooperation Master Plan.¹⁸ In addition to public funding, which is essential, public-private alliances might be an option worth considering. The international peace and security and gender equality cause might arouse the interest and support of the private sector, shoring up the effort of the administration and boosted by it.
4. Support to women mediators in peace process, creating a women mediation network similar to that established in Sweden in cooperation with the Folke Bernadotte Academy,¹⁹ or the network of Nordic Women Mediators (NOREF),²⁰ to help identify women mediators, enhancing their visibility and training.
5. Priority implementation of the National Action Plan in those countries which can benefit from added value and which provide the best circumstances for the promotion of the Resolution 1325 objectives. Following the model proposed by the Dutch III NAP, these would be the countries in the foreign policy spotlight and where there is room for manoeuvre, local partners, national non-governmental organisations working in field operations and participation in civilian and/or military multilateral missions, among others. In Spain’s case, the combination of diplomatic efforts, ODA and other development contribution mechanisms, the presence of Spanish NGOs in the field and the necessary support to women’s organisations could be provided, for instance, in Mali, Colombia and the Palestinian territories, all countries in conflict or post-conflict situations where Spain could implement specific measures to support women’s participation, in the medium and long term, in peace-building process.
6. Annual evaluation carried out by civilian organisations, providing the public administration with an independent assessment which enables the least effective measures to be corrected and those yielding better results to be strengthened.

7. Presentation and debate in the Parliament of the Plan and evaluation reports, so that the Parliament participates in the follow-up of action implemented and the accountability of the legislative power is guaranteed.
8. Permanent encouragement and promotion at an international level and in all organisations of which Spain is a member (United Nations, EU, OSCE, NATO, United Nations Human Rights Council in the event its candidacy is successful, etc.) included in the women, peace and security agenda, thus consolidating Spain's leading position in the promotion of gender equality. The active participation in the recently created Network of Focal Points of Women, Peace and Security²¹ –presented in the United Nations on 23 September– must be consolidated, along with the active participation in the EU Women, Peace and Security Task Force. In addition, Spain should actively support and propose the measures promoted by the Principal Adviser on Gender and on the Implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325 on European External Action Service, Mara Marinaki.

What profile should define Spain in the United Nations?

In its candidacy to the UNSC for the 2015-16 biennium, the Spanish government defined gender equality as 'one of the main objectives of Spanish foreign policy and diplomacy' and included, among the 10 reasons underpinning its application, that of 'giving human rights and gender equality and women's participation in peace-building their rightful place in ensuring security and stability'.²² Upon gaining its membership, Spain identified gender equality as one of the priorities during the biennium, having assumed the presidency of the Security Council during the month of October last year, coinciding with the XV anniversary of Resolution 1325. During its presidency Spain promoted the approval of a new Women, Peace and Security Resolution: Resolution 2242.

The biennium in the United Nations has given Spain the chance to assume a leadership role which, following this momentum, should help to consolidate gender equality as a priority objective of foreign policy (and not only as a tool serving foreign policy goals). To remain active in the Women, Peace and Security agenda should be an objective of the whole of the administration, headed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, helping to consolidate a leading position in the long term. The identification and recognition of Spain as one of the leading countries in the promotion of gender equality –which, after several years of setback, the membership of the UNSC has helped to restore– is an asset which must be preserved and consolidated one of the hallmarks of Spain's foreign action in the world. It would also become part of the footprint left by Spain during its time in the Security Council, of the profile which would identify it for future candidacies and an area in which its contribution and added value in a medium term agenda such as that of Sustainable Development Objectives would be widely acknowledged.

Conclusion

The Women, Peace and Security agenda (which entails the promotion of global objectives such as international peace and security and gender equality, and local action in field operations to achieve its objectives) must be viewed as a priority objective of foreign action and policy, involving the whole of the administration, and helping to create synergies between the realms of foreign and domestic policies.

The drafting of a II National Action Plan is a valuable opportunity to make a significant contribution to the implementation of Resolution 1325, incorporating some of the new and more ambitious goals of Resolution 2242, such as that of having more women leaders at decision-making levels or the training of mediators. However, if the necessary human and financial resources in line with the level of its aspirations are not provided, it runs the risk of becoming a lost opportunity.

Therefore it is paramount that the Plan contains a balanced commitment of all units of the administration, establishes institutional coordination mechanisms to enable the agenda to be promoted, involves dialogue with civil society, incorporates impact measurement, assessment and monitoring mechanisms and, particularly, includes specific measures in the field to provide support –mainly financial and political– to women’s organisations, and the leadership and participation of women in the prevention of conflicts and in peace-building and consolidation processes.