

THE UN, WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY: 15 YEARS ON, WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PEACE AND SECURITY IS MORE URGENT THAN EVER

By Associate Professor Sara E. Davies and Professor Jacqui True

This week saw an historic High-Level Open Debate in New York at the UN Security Council to review the progress over the 15 years since the adoption of UNSCR 1325 on women, peace and security.

The overwhelming consensus of the high-level debate is that failure to deliver on achieving women's equal participation, protection, and contribution to the prevention of conflict is severely undermining the prospects for sustainable peace around the world. As UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon said: "At a time when armed extremist groups place the subordination of women at the top of their agenda, we must place women's leadership and the protection of women's rights at the top of ours." Ban highlighted that the "one common theme" across the reviews of the UN Peace Operations, Peacebuilding Architecture, and Women, Peace and Security in 2015 is that "any reforms must include gender equality and women's leadership as central ingredients, and must be strongly grounded in human rights".

UNSCR 1325 was the product of a transnational advocacy network that has continued to be remarkably successful in prying open the powerful Security Council to challenge who's international peace and security the Council should protect. The debate this week provides further evidence of that innovation. A record 110 speakers made official statements including governments, regional organisations and three civil society representatives. There was a spontaneous round of applause when the Security Council adopted Resolution 2242 and clapping after many statements. Also unheralded, the debate was allowed to run over to a second day, continuing for more than 11 hours by the SC Chair, the President of Spain, Mariano Rajoy Brey. The actual date of the Open Debate was brought forward more than 10 days, because Spain's President wanted to chair it and be present together with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

As the scale and egregiousness of violent conflicts and their disproportionate effects on the human rights of women and girls intensifies, the Security Council and UN member states have renewed their commitments to implementing the landmark resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.

The proof is in how many states participated, and in the unanimous adoption of SC Resolution 2242 put forward by the United Kingdom, the penholder for the women, peace and security cross-cutting agenda; Australia was among the 71 countries that co-sponsored the resolution. UNSCR 2242 calls for the United Nations to bolster its gender architecture (in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Political Affairs in particular), to prioritise women's rights and access to justice in conflict situations, to ensure that women's civil society organisations are supported in humanitarian action and to ensure that women are able to participate in peacemaking.

Key actions introduced to address the implementation gaps in the WPS agenda include requiring the integration of WPS mandates in country-specific situations (this means funding for women protection officers and advisors in UN Missions), permitting women's civil society groups to contribute to Council

country-specific briefings, the integration of gender as a cross-cutting issue in the Counter-Terrorism Committee mandates (which may allow for the introduction of sanctions against actors that commit gender atrocity crimes), Council consultations on WPS implementation in country missions, and the convening of an informal expert group to advise the Council on WPS issues. Even Russia, which opposed the language around these actions in particular, the relevance of WPS to the Counter-Terrorism Committee and the creation of the informal expert group, did not in the end veto the Resolution.

The High-Level debate and UNSCR 2242 takes up the recommendations of the Global Study (“Preventing Conflict, Securing Peace”) commissioned by the UN Secretary-General to thoroughly examine 15 years of implementation of Resolution 1325. Above all, the most challenging implementation gap highlighted in the study is the gaping absence of women’s participation in peace and transitional decision-making processes.

The Global Study provides powerful evidence of the negative impact of women’s exclusion and absence from peace processes on the resolution of conflicts and sustainability of peace. It draws on research from the Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative (IPTI) at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva that found the presence of women in peace processes as witnesses, signatories, mediators and/or negotiators makes it 20 percent more likely that a peace agreement will last at least two years and 35 percent more likely it will last 15 years.

More must be done to address the appalling record of women’s representation in peace processes: between 1990 and 2011 across 31 peace processes that the UN was involved in, women were just 2 percent chief mediators, 4 percent witnesses and signatories, 9 percent negotiators. UNSCR 2242 in its first operative paragraph reiterates the call to member states to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels for the prevention and resolution of conflict, and “encourages those supporting peace processes to facilitate women’s meaningful inclusion in negotiating parties’ delegations to peace talks, and calls upon donor countries to provide financial and technical assistance to women involved in peace processes.” As stated in the Open Debate concept note provided by Spain “investing in participation has a strong impact on prevention.” This is true not because women are more peaceful or less bound by ethnic, political, and religious allegiances than men, but simply because they represent at least half of the population, and their participation and progress is essential to achieve peace and security from the community to the international level.

Investing in participation also addresses protection issues by tackling the cultures of impunity linked to women’s and other marginalised groups’ disempowerment.

A second focus of the Global Study and Open Debate was conflict-prevention. Conflict-prevention requires taking seriously the fragility and instability caused by failure to address gender inequality. In an environment where political, ethnic and religious persecution is widespread, women’s inequality on account of their sex compounds their risk of human rights violations. In these situations women are more likely to be subject to sexual and gender-based violence, but all forms of violence in general. States and non-states actors are likely to permit, even condone, impunity for widespread violations, which perpetuates the cycle of violence. In the Security Council, we have only just begun to see

sustained attention on the relationship between gender inequality and situations of sexual and gender based violence. At the High-Level Debate, Ms. Mohammed of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security and cofounder and President of Women's Freedom in Iraq noted that ISIL arose from ongoing conflicts in Syria and Iraq, where the "rights of women, girls and LGBT [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender] persons and other marginalised groups were already degraded, leaving them open to abuse from ISIL," adding that the situation in Iraq was now one that included the subjugation of women and the disenfranchisement of minority groups.

The proposal to create the Informal Experts Group on Women, Peace and Security will assist in prioritising but also normalising the inclusion of gender considerations and the rights of women to be taken into account on all situations on the Council's agenda.

What about Australia's commitments to Women, Peace and Security?

With respect to the renewed national and international commitments to women, peace and security, Australia has made four significant pledges to further progress this agenda. Australia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations H.E. Gillian Bird announced at the open debate a further AUD \$4million would be provided over three years to the new Global Acceleration Instrument on women's engagement in peace and security and humanitarian affairs. A total of AUD \$5.5million will support "the critical role of women's organisations in preventing and resolving conflict, building peace and ensuring relief and recovery". Compared with the UK's additional US\$1 million and Spain's 1 million Euro, this financing represents significant backing by Australia. The Australian government stated its commitment to deploy more women in the Defence Force and to increase their number in senior decision-making roles. It also pledged an additional \$7 million in specific funding to address sexual and gender-based violence in response to the Syria crisis (as part of \$59 million in humanitarian support to Syria over the past 12 months) and funding to support new research by Monash University on 'Women's empowerment and civil society mobilization in preventing conflict and countering extremism' which will contribute evidence on the participation and leadership of women and women's organisations and strategies to counter terrorism and violent extremism.

Where to now with UNSCR 1325 implementation?

In his opening statement, Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon said 'Implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) must be aligned with the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals.'. We suggest this alignment, and other models of 1325 alignment, is vital for two reasons. First, the Security Council has experienced failure in the last four years concerning the Syrian crisis. The UN has been accused of widespread failure in halting atrocities in Central African Republic, and faces questions about its own conduct concerning an investigation into sexual crimes by peacekeepers against civilians. These failures have to be owned by the responsible country, donor states, troop contributing countries, the UN Secretariat, and the Permanent 5 Member States on the Security Council. However, Ban's point could be that the Security Council is not the only place to realise the 1325 agenda. Indeed, it would be a mistake to do so.

This leads to our second point. 1325 advocates need to promote wide and deep implementation. What are other national, regional and international institutions doing to realise 1325? The Sustainable Development Goals will play a vital, complimentary role to long-term conflict prevention and equal participation. When we look around, we see many tools and institutions that could be more utilised and integrated. The World Bank is making funding commitments to the prevention of gender based and sexual violence in low income and middle income countries, as well as calling for an investment fund to support women's health after the humanitarian crisis caused by the Ebola outbreak in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. The UN Human Rights Council (HRC), where Australia hopes to secure a seat from 2018-2020, hears reports of human rights violations across 41 themes, conduct Universal Periodic Review of member states, and conduct Fact-Finding Missions and Investigations. The HRC has a vital task of prevention – these reports and investigations serve as early warning signs of situations where women's and minority groups' human rights are being continually violated. We also have regional organisations which must play a vital role in realising 1325. In our region, the Viet Nam delegate spoke on behalf the Association for South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and highlighted the role of regional organisations and regional mechanisms in implementing 1325. Other regional organisations made similar statements, including the African Union, European Union, North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. We must demand as much from these institutions as we do from the Security Council. Equally we must be as disappointed in the performance of these institutions in progressing 1325 as we have been overall with the Security Council.

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