'Filling the Gaps: A Virtual Discussion on Gender, Peace and Security Research'

10 Key Recommendations

In October 2008 UN-INSTRAW brought together over 90 academics and research professionals from universities, research institutes, NGOs and international organizations from around the world in a three week virtual dialogue. The purpose of the dialogue was to exchange information and stimulate discussion on gender, peace and security research with the goal of identifying gaps in current research and tools and methods to fill them.

Though the dialogue participants come from varying academic backgrounds and research focuses, there was much consensus about gaps in gender, peace and security research and ways to fill them. The assortment of suggestions all point, in different ways,

In order to assess current research, scholars, and institutes UN-INSTRAW developed the **Global Gender, Peace and Security Research Directory** which was launched in June 2006. The directory currently includes over 130 different research institutions from around the world that are addressing and actively engaging in gender, peace and security issues. Members of the directory as well as other researchers and academics participated in the 'Filling the Gaps' virtual dialogue.

to collaboration, theoretical engagement and elaboration as ways to improve gender and security research and strengthen peace building processes overall. Participants' suggestions included strengthening ties between academia, policy-makers and activists, encouraging more participatory approaches to peace building, incorporating more extensive gender analysis and perspective in all aspects of security work, and developing more extensive networks for collaboration between academics, researchers and practitioners.

The results of the virtual dialogue include the following recommendations:

1. **Continue the dialogue:** The virtual dialogue participants recommended continuing the collaboration and information sharing begun in the dialogue. It was proposed to:
   o *Develop a Community of Practice* to continue the collaboration among virtual dialogue participants and other interested individuals;
   o For those planning to attend, *meet at the International Studies Association Convention* in New York in February 2009;
   o Per Marian Douglas-Ungaro, *develop a coalition in support of Afro-descendent women and communities*; the group would further information sharing and collaboration with a goal of establishing an international human rights law framework to assess the needs of Afro-descendent women and communities;

2. **Increase collaboration:** More collaboration between academia and practitioners is needed to make peace and security research more inclusive and its impact more visible. Academia is producing students who will go on to work in peace and security practice so this connection must be exploited in order to create and foster more links

between research and practice. Also, there needs to be a stronger connection between the work being done at a grassroots and local level and the work being done by academia. Such approach needs the involvement of all actors including researchers, policy makers, community members and government.

3. **Make research participatory:** Research on gender, peace and security should be participatory in nature and include the perspectives of those involved in all levels of peace processes. Bottom-up rather than top-down approaches seem more successful in addressing the needs of specific communities, with top-down approaches the specific, contextual needs of communities can be overlooked.

4. **Shift to 'human security':** There has been a theoretical shift of focus from state security to human security, however, as this new term is embraced researchers must carefully consider whom is being kept secure and what this means for women and gender roles.

5. **Maintain a gender perspective:** There continues to be a struggle to incorporate gender sensitive approaches in security research and practice. Simply including women in decision making processes is not sufficient and gender as a tool for research and analysis needs to be fully incorporated and utilized in traditional academic disciplines.

6. **Consider marginalized groups:** The voices of marginalized groups and populations is not fully incorporated or recognized in existing research. Gender analysis in peace and security research should consider intersectionality theory which argues that gender identity intersects with and is constructed by other social divisions such as ethnicity, race and class, and thus multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination are possible.

7. **Develop gender empowerment indicators:** While many researchers and groups support gender sensitive approaches it remains difficult to develop comprehensive and standardized indicators and data collection processes to assess the impact of gender empowerment measures.

8. **Increase gender sensitive data:** Obstacles in obtaining information and data such a language and cultural barriers and lack of sex-disaggregated data make it difficult to include all voices and experiences in research. These issues of basic access for researchers must be addressed if gender and security research is to be made more inclusive.

9. **Challenge discourse:** It is important to analyze and critique the discourse used in gender, peace and security research. Discourse refers to written and spoken communication about a topic which comes to normalize or define its acceptable reality or truth.

10. **Create more academic programs**: More academic programs should be created, in particular PhD programs, on gender, peace and security issues which focus on bridging academia and civil society research.