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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1325

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WHY IS IT IMPORTANT THAT WOMEN TAKE PART IN PEACE NEGOTIATIONS?

Women make up more than half the world's population of the world. From a democratic perspective, it should be self evident that women should take part in peace negotiations in war-torn countries. Today, because society is ruled mostly by men, women are not invited to take part. Peace negotiations are, however, the first step towards a post-conflict society and women need to be part of the process to shape the future.

During war, men are typically involved in the fighting while women take care of the survival of the family. Women know what is needed to sustain society. The leaders who bring a country into conflict need to be involved in cease-fire agreements, but they are not well equipped to negotiate long-term peaceful solutions for their society.

WHY ARE WOMEN BETTER SUITED FOR PEACE NEGOTIATIONS THAN MEN?

By having the responsibility to keep everyday life going during the war, women develop unique experiences and know what is needed to build a functioning society. During conflict, women typically try to keep up contacts with women on the other side of ethnic divides. Also, they are often the first to reach out to meet with women from the other side when the cease-fire agreement is signed. They see alternatives and ways to solve the conflict. They have a vision of a society at peace. The leaders who started the war are not the ones best suited for peace building, as is more than an end to the fighting; it is a totally new and different project. Women are a great asset in this respect, which ought to be utilized, as they have a different perspective on conflicts than the men in power have.

WHY ARE WOMEN PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE IN WAR?

In today's wars, the civilian population is a central target. Soldiers often have protection against sophisticated weaponry; people say that the best way to survive a war is to be a soldier. Today, many wars are civil strives with ethnic cleansing and the removal of the civil population as their goal. The fighting takes place in cities and in villages where people live. Women, children, and the elderly are deeply affected and often targeted by the ethnic cleansing while the men are off fighting at the front.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO OBSERVE THE SPECIAL NEEDS OF WOMEN DURING AND AFTER A WAR?

In refugee camps, women are very vulnerable and abuse against them is common. It is important that women and children are protected. Women have special needs relating to their personal hygiene. They need a separate but well lit place to wash themselves and their children to prevent infections. When aid is sent to refugee camps it is also important to include sanitary pads, for example.

During ethnic cleansing, rape is sometimes used as a war tactic either to produce children particular of an ethnic origin or to prove to the enemy men that they cannot protect their women. Rape is a serious crime against humanity and it is now prohibited by international law. But it is still occurring. Women who are the victims of rape or other kinds of trauma during war need help to process their traumas to avoid long-lasting psychological problems. In many cultures, rape is seen as shameful and the victims are ostracised.

After war, many women are left as widows and single parents. Often their houses have been destroyed. They need help to continue their lives, special support to rebuild their house and job training to support their families. Women are often not offered the scarce jobs in war-torn

societies because employment opportunities are reserved for de-mobilized soldiers. Widows should also be allotted priority as they need income to provide for their children.

WHY DO WE NEED SPECIAL CONVENTIONS AND RESOLUTIONS FOR WOMEN?

The UN Declaration of Human Rights from 1948 is the basis for international agreements about human rights. As time passes, it has become evident that this instrument does not treat women and men in an equal fashion and that it lacks provisions needed to protect women from discrimination. In the Declaration, there is no guarantee for women to vote or to own property, and there is no protection against discrimination in the work-place. Nor is there protection against abuses such as rape, genital mutilation, or the burning of widows. In the old fashioned language of the Declaration, it says that people shall live together "in a spirit of brotherhood," which explicitly excludes women. Due to these shortcomings, the Declaration needs to be strengthened with respect to gender equality.

WHAT IS THE WOMEN'S CONVENTION?

In 1946, the UN appointed a commission to assert that human rights are also women's rights. In 1979, the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to abolish all forms of discrimination against women. One hundred and seventy countries have ratified the convention to date, which means that they are legally bound to the text. A separate committee has been established to oversee compliance with CEDAW and every signatory state must make a yearly report on their progress in fulfilling CEDAW requirements.

WHAT IS A SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION?

A resolution is an agreement among UN member states on how to act on a particular issue. When a resolution has been adopted it means that the issue will be added to the UN agenda and that the states are bound to comply with it. Citizens have a right to demand that their governments, or other state's governments, comply with the resolution. A Security Council resolution is legally binding for all member states and all states have an obligation to report on how they are fulfilling the requirements of the resolution.

HOW DO YOU PUNISH A COUNTRY THAT VIOLATES A SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION?

A country that violates a resolution will lose respect within the UN and perhaps not be allowed to take part in important cooperative endeavours within the UN system. There are also possibilities that various sanctions will be enacted in case of violations against Security Council resolutions. In certain cases there can also be a military response. If the option of using sanctions is employed or not depends on the political will of the UN members, specifically the countries represented in the Security Council.

This document can also be found online at:

http://www.iktk.se/english/thematic_info/resolution_1325/1325faq.html

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PROJECTS

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