

## **Every Woman locked outside peace talks is another opportunity lost.**

**By Shaheen Chughtai and Caroline Green**

Friday 16 October 2015

This week the UN security council met to mark the [15th anniversary of resolution 1325](#). Adopted in October 2000, it was the first security council resolution to establish the [women, peace and security agenda](#) worldwide. It called for new policies and standards to protect women and girls more effectively and promote their participation in political efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts.

On Tuesday, [Julienne Lusenge](#), a veteran campaigner for women's rights in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), addressed the security council. She began by saying she had spoken to the body before and had thought long and hard about whether to do so again.

Seven years earlier, Lusenge had described to the council the rapes, murders and massacres ravaging her country. She had asked for action to enable peacekeeping operations in the DRC to better protect women from sexual violence.

The focus of this week's UN security council meeting was to review progress and challenges in the implementation of [resolution 1325](#). Lusenge told them bluntly: for women caught up in conflict in the DRC, almost nothing had changed. The [trafficking, rapes and murders continued](#). Local organisations trying to support survivors of sexual violence struggled to find the necessary resources. And attempts to achieve peace and stability were largely ineffective and unsustainable.

Around the world, the past 15 years have not been without progress. UN peacekeeping missions and mediation teams now include more female staff and gender experts. More than 50 countries now have formal national action plans to implement women, peace and security aims. From Rwanda to Afghanistan, women have entered parliaments in record numbers. Some progressive donors have earmarked commendable sums of aid for the cause.

But Lusenge's account from the DRC rings true globally. The actual impact on the lives of women and girls has been minimal. Collectively, international aid still falls far short of what is needed, and the amount that finds its way to women's organisations on the frontline of conflicts is woefully small. The majority of national action plans have no budget or effective means to track progress. Female participation in the prevention or resolution of conflicts is still seen largely as a luxury or a complication.

As the security council lead for women, peace and security and convener of the [ending sexual violence in conflict summit in 2014](#), the UK government has an important role to play in raising the bar on this agenda. The UK announced a number of commitments at the debate on a range of areas across the 1325 agenda. These included supporting female participation in all UK-hosted peace-building events and in wider peace processes, through lobbying and funding; further training for British troops on women, peace and security; and calling for results for women and girls at next year's [world humanitarian summit](#).

Clearly, these measures are very positive. But without clear guarantees that women will never be locked outside when peace, security and development discussions are held on UK soil, or a dedicated budget to ensure effective implementation of its own [national action plan on 1325](#), the UK leadership remains far too limited.

Two years ago in DRC, when talks began between the government and the M23 armed group, women in North Kivu province demanded participation in the peace process. Lusenge recalled the response they received. "There are only two parties in the conflict," the women were told. "Either you are part of the government or part of the M23 group." The women were denied access to the negotiations.

The message this mindset sends – that only men, particularly armed men, should take part in peace processes – defies both logic and evidence. A [study by the Graduate Institute in Geneva](#) (pdf) of 40 peace processes between 1990 and 2013 found that, far from weakening or complicating efforts, female involvement made it much likelier that a peace agreement – benefiting both women and men – would be reached.

Yet resistance persists. From 1992 to 2011, less than 4% of participants in peace agreements and less than 10% of negotiators at peace talks were women, [according to UN data](#). With conflicts on the rise this decade, triggering record numbers of displaced people, the continued exclusion of women seems increasingly anachronistic. We are missing opportunities to promote peace.

With the world having failed to implement effectively the [seven existing resolutions](#) on women, peace and security, the security council has adopted an eighth. UNSCR 2242 reiterated familiar concerns and promises, with a few welcome new measures – such as a planned doubling of female staff in peacekeeping missions.

From Chile to China, various countries and multilateral organisations indicated their support for the agenda, recalling their contributions and achievements. Some announced new commitments.

Argentina plans a 33% female quota in its armed forces. Brazil will develop a national action plan.

The commitments are welcome, and indicate that the women, peace and security agenda has gained real global recognition over the past 15 years. But now we need a radical shift in mindsets and policies, and the adoption of a feminist approach to domestic and foreign policy. This means more than just pay lipservice to the importance of women's participation. We need to live in a world where peace processes that exclude women are not supported or tolerated in any form. And we need budgets to turn plans and strategies into tangible support for women on the ground in places like DRC, Afghanistan and Syria.

Anything less is not only at the cost of equality. It comes at the cost of peace too.

- *Shaheen Chughtai is [Oxfam's](#) lead on women, peace and security, and has been in New York attending the security council discussions. Caroline Green is interim director of the UK [Gender Action for Peace and Security Network](#)*