

Women, Peace and Security: A Review of the High Level Review

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September 2015 marks the 15th Anniversary of the landmark UN Security Council Resolution (SCR) [1325](#) on Women, Peace and Security. UNSCR 1325 prompted significant and important attention to the experience of women during armed conflict. The Resolution set out a range of measures intended to include women in the prevention, management and resolution of conflict. It also addressed a wide range of conflict related challenges for women including HIV/ AIDS programming; repatriation, resettlement and reintegration of former combatants; post-conflict reconstruction programming; constitutional and electoral reform processes; access to justice; gender- based violence; and displacement.

After the passage of 1325 further resolutions followed. Despite the broad promise of 1325, all subsequent resolutions demonstrated a fastidious preoccupation with sexual violence over all other aspects of the agenda for action. For example, resolution [1820\(2008\)](#) explicitly recognized sexual violence as a tactic of war, and confirmed the legal status of sexual crimes as capable of meeting the legal thresholds for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. The Security Council expanded its preoccupation with sexual violence in 2009 by passing resolution [1888](#), mandating that peacekeeping missions protect women and girls from the harms of sexual violence. In that same year, resolution [1889](#) addressed the obstacles to women's participation in peace processes and peacebuilding. 1888 called for the UN Secretary-General to submit to the Security Council a set of indicators for use at the global level to track the implementation of UNSCR 1325. Resolution [1960](#) (2010) focused on data collection, affirming the value of gender-disaggregated data on sexual violence in conflict. Anti-impunity measures for sexual violence also figured in this resolution, setting out the kinds of processes that would address the impunity gap. These included listing violators in the Secretary-General's Annual Reports, referral to UN Sanctions Committee and ultimately referral to the International Criminal Court. Resolution [2106](#) (2013) tackled the value of greater criminal prosecutions for sexual violence. Perhaps as a result of criticism on the failure to address a broader range of issues that affect women in conflict, resolution [2122](#) (2013), defined a series of measures designed to enable women's participation in conflict prevention and peace processes broadly defined. Fifteen years after the passage of 1325 the Security Council has made women, peace and security (WPS) a highly visible part of its peace and security agenda.

WPS has been invoked in numerous Chapter VII resolutions, and the mantra of protecting women in conflict is a powerful one.

Yet, many [observers](#), including myself are cynical and underwhelmed by the scope of the Security Council resolutions and their implementation. In particular, there is significant disquiet about the lack of any vision of gender equality and autonomy for women in the places and spaces where their protection is invoked. There is little evidence of a willingness to address the root causes conducive to the production of systematic violence for women. Rather, sustained attention to rape above all other harms has deflected attention from the poverty, economic inequality, and structural discrimination that defines women's lives in conflict and post-conflict settings making them vulnerable to sexual and other violence in a myriad of ways.

Despite this cynicism, 2015 has been a high profile year for these resolutions and for the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. A [High-Level Review and Global Study](#) of the resolutions was initiated last year, and is led by [Radhika Coomaraswamy](#), former UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children in Armed Conflict, with a subsequent report due to be published in the early autumn. Coomaraswamy's recommendations and examples of best practice are to be included in the Secretary-General's annual report in October to the Security Council and Member States. In parallel to the Global Study a [high-level advisory group](#) was also convened this year, and a set of regional consultations have taken place infusing some grassroots level participation in the study. As we are in countdown to the Study's publication and the Secretary General's Report, advocacy and lobbying on the shape of the WPS agenda post 2015 is intense.

Addressing women's human rights in conflict is an imperative, but the days of platitudes are over. If gratitude for recognition of women's rights and needs in the peace and security arena was one defining element of the initial response to the WPS agenda, demanding the acceleration of implementation of the agenda is today's mantra. This means saying No to more Security Council Resolutions, and demanding that those agreed are, in fact, implemented. Hence, a nascent proposal to generate yet another UNSCR in the autumn 2015, giving the Security Council another photo opportunity on the passage of yet another resolution, has met with deep cynicism.

Implementing the resolutions in all conflict spaces requires states, the United Nations and civil society to prioritize women's participation and protection in equal measure. It demands engaging a gender perspective across all the aspects of conflict prevention, peacemaking and

reconstruction. It means that past the ceremonial, ritual and opportunistic elements of the Study's publication and the Secretary-General's Report there is potential to demand and advance effective implementation. Operationalization of WPS is not only good for advancing women's rights in conflict settings, but arguably offers one of the few ways in which conflict management and conflict ending can be sequenced and transformed in ways that undo the fiascoes of recent conflict endings and patterns of peace negotiation disappointment that define contemporary international engagement in numerous conflict and transitional sites around the globe.