

# Building Bridges for Women

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Exclusive Interview between PRAVDA.Ru and UNIFEM Chief of Governance for Peace and Security Ms. Anne-Marie Goetz, who states that the way we think about gender and war has changed in the last decade, although a lot more needs to be done. What is the situation regarding women's rights in conflict zones, what can Governments do, and fundamentally, what can you do?

## **1. Resolution 1325 was passed ten years ago. What, in concrete terms, has been done?**

The most significant achievement over the decade has been a change in the way we think about gender and war. People used to think of war as soldiers facing other soldiers, fighting on a defined battlefield. Few people think that way any more. Most people recognize that modern warfare has changed in character. In many conflicts it is more dangerous to be a civilian than a soldier. Women and children are often deliberately targeted.

They may be abducted to perform services for fighting forces, or they are victims of extreme forms of sexual violence, designed to demoralize and degrade the enemy in a way that lasts much longer than damage to property or other war damage. Women and children also make up the majority of refugee populations. When peace deals are negotiated, the leaders of delegations leave women out, not concerned about how conflict has affected them or about how they can contribute to long-term conflict resolution. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 passed in October 2000 recognizes all of this and calls for the international security community to respond.

In international responses to conflict, there is increasing recognition of the need to improve protection of women and the need to engage women in peace processes. Some countries that contribute troops and police to peacekeeping missions have increased the numbers of women that they send: India and Bangladesh have sent all-female formed police units to Liberia and Haiti. Women's presence amongst international peacekeepers signals the intention to prevent violence against women and encourages local women to join the police and army as part of national security sector reform.

In some peace processes, efforts have been made to include women as negotiators, observers, and experts. The talks for northern Uganda in Juba in 2007 – 9 included women as observers and there was a gender expert in the team of the facilitator to the talks. Various phases of peace talks for Darfur have included extended and committed consultations with women, who have drawn stronger attention to gender issues in peace deals.



It is widely recognized that much more needs to be done to establish a viable protection environment for women during and after conflict. In spite of increased recognition to involve women in peacebuilding, the reality remains that less than 10 % of those negotiating peace deals are women. Much more decisive efforts are needed to ensure that women's interests and concerns are raised in peace negotiations— research shows that less than 5% of post-conflict spending directly targets women's empowerment. Women who have been displaced by conflict are often the most greatly disadvantaged on their return – they may have lost their land, or relatives of their husband may have seized it. Their family members may have been dispersed or women may have lost custody of their children. They have lost livelihoods, yet post conflict employment programmes tend to target young men for job opportunities in order to keep them out of trouble. This leaves very few resources for women to use to rebuild their lives. Finally, women suffer from the legacy of conflict-related sexual violence – they may bear severe physical and psychological injuries or they may continue to be targets of sexual violence after other forms of fighting stop.

### **3. What are your recommendations?**

Uniformed international peacekeepers should have clear instructions – standard operating procedures and rules of engagement – to protect women and children and to prevent all attacks on them including sexual violence.

Humanitarian organizations should be aware of the extent of sexual violence in conflicts and of the fact that it is often under-reported. Priority relief efforts should include services to victims of sexual violence as well as documentation of cases in an ethical and psychologically sensitive way for use in future prosecutions.

Peace talks should include women. If women are not put forward by negotiators, mediators should ensure they have a voice as observers and should create opportunities for them to brief negotiators.

Post conflict planning for priority recovery processes should include gender experts, should consult with women, and should ensure that women have the capacity to participate in donor conferences and monitor public expenditure allocations.

Legal systems should be brought in conformity with international legal standards if they do not already criminalize abuses of women's rights or endow them with full property and citizenship rights.

Employment programmes and livelihood recovery efforts should equally target women producers so that they can help rebuild local and national economies.

Women's participation in post-conflict elections may need particular support to ensure that women register to vote in numbers at least equal to men and that they put themselves forward as candidates. Quota systems should be considered as these are the swiftest means of overcoming party and voter hostility to women in public decision-making.

The Security Council needs better information on women and conflict and the UN needs to use an agreed set of indicators to show whether and how resolution 1325 is being implemented.

#### **4. What can Governments do?**

National governments are key to implementing 1325. Governments of conflict-affected countries have a crucial role to play in bringing women into public decision-making at all levels, and in particular, engaging women in national security decisions, security sector reform, post conflict economic planning, and in the public administration.

Governments of troop and police-contributing countries can support the effort to implement 1325 through including women soldiers and police in the contingents sent to peacekeeping missions. They can also ensure their peacekeepers are trained in practical means of protecting civilians and in particular, preventing sexual violence.

Governments of donor countries can ensure that their financial contributions to fragile states and recovering countries supports women's civil society groups and supports investment in programmes that build women's capacity to engage in economic, social, and governance recovery.

#### **5. ...and ordinary citizens?**

Governments – whether in conflict countries, troop contributing countries, or donor countries, need to feel that their own taxpayers approve of these investments in women's rights and empowerment. The ordinary citizen, wherever you live, can encourage your own government to support women's rights in conflict situations. Citizens can also ensure that all government foreign policy decisions do not damage women's rights or foster any form of violence against women.

Citizens can do these things through lobbying Ministers of foreign Affairs and Defense. You can work with the media to ask for better reporting on what happens to women in conflict, or how your own country's foreign aid or defense spending affects women in conflict countries. Even something as simple as signing the UNIFEM petition to [Make Women Count for Peace](#) is a way of having your voice counted. This petition will be presented to the Security Council and to the UN Secretary-General in October, which is the month in which resolution 1325 was passed 10 years ago. When these policy-makers see how many people care about these issues, it can help them understand that there is a broad global constituency eager to see an end to abuse of women's rights in conflict and post-conflict countries.

You can make a difference just by standing up to be counted as one of hundreds of thousands of people who want to make women count for peace and put an end to violence against women.