

Gender and Peace

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This issue features:

Acts of protest by Turkish and Kurdish women multiply against the serious escalation of violence in Turkey

The war in Syria threatens to leave thousands of children stateless

The Sustainable Development Goals are approved, including the goal of gender equality

Impact of conflicts

UNITED NATIONS

Despite the United Nations' efforts to investigate cases of rape and sexual exploitation by members of the organisation and especially by soldiers on peacekeeping missions and its calls for member states to prosecute and punish those responsible, sexual abuse and rape continued to be one of the worst scourges facing the organisation. The United Nations has been unable to correct the issue, in the spotlight since the first cases were reported over two decades ago in Sarajevo during the Bosnian War (1992-1995), according to many critics. In September, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called on the member states whose troops are responsible for rape and sexual exploitation in UN peacekeeping missions to stop protecting them for their crimes and bring them to trial. UN sources and the Secretary-General himself have indicated that the organisation's response has been limited because the states are reluctant to cede authority and take measures beyond ordering those responsible for sexual abuse to return to their countries. Ban Ki-moon got in contact with leaders of the countries involved in the most recent cases to ensure that those responsible will be tried for crimes under the corresponding states' laws. The UN Secretary-General did not disclose the names of the countries individually, but whereas France, Morocco and South Africa have announced the prosecution of the soldiers involved,

other countries like Pakistan and the DRC have not taken any initiative. Moreover, according to UN officials, some countries use the organisation to protect their militaries, exposing the UN to bear the brunt of public criticism. The organisation decided to begin suspending payments to the troop-contributing countries that refuse to act when faced with credible accusations of sexual abuse, but declined to reveal the names of the countries in question.

In this regard, in August the UN Secretary-General appointed Gabonese national Parfait Onanga-Anyanga to be his new special representative and head of MINUSCA (CAR), replacing Senegalese citizen Babacar Gaye, whose resignation he had demanded for failing to deal with the many serious accusations of sexual abuse committed by UN peacekeepers in the Central African Republic. Ban Ki-moon reported his unprecedented decision to the UN Security Council behind closed doors after Amnesty International published a report of new cases of rape by UN peacekeepers in the Central African Republic as part of the policy of zero tolerance and responsibility that Ban Ki-moon is trying to ingrain. Gaye's dismissal came after accusations of sex crimes committed against children by troops of the UN peacekeeping mission in the country. In 11 out of 57 accusations of sexual abuse, the victims were children.

- Amnesty International, "[CAR: UN troops implicated in rape of girl and indiscriminate killings must be investigated](#)", 11 August 2015
- RFI, "[RCA: l'ONU nomme un nouveau chef à la tête de la Minusca](#)", 14 August 2015
- Amnesty International, "[UN peacekeeper reform plan falls short on sex abuse](#)", 11 September 2015
- The Guardian, "[Stop protecting peacekeepers who rape, Ban Ki-moon tells UN member states](#)", 17 September 2015

SOUTH SUDAN

Agence France-Presse (AFP) has revealed that hundreds or even thousands of women may have been systematically abducted in South Sudan to be turned into sex slaves in secret “rape camps” in Unity State. The difficulties of humanitarian access to the area made the civilian population even more vulnerable. One of the most affected areas is Mayom County.

AFP’s investigation indicated that SPLA government soldiers and the allied militia led by General Puljang are responsible for the existence of these camps, but all the parties to the conflict have committed serious violations of human rights, including sexual violence. This sexual violence may have taken place as part of a large-scale offensive.

- Tristan McConnell, [Women held as sex slaves in South Sudan ‘rape camps’](#), AFP, 28 September 2015

SRI LANKA

In accordance with the mandate of a Human Rights Council resolution issued in 2014, the United Nations presented a report on human rights violations during the armed conflict in Sri Lanka that established the need to conduct an investigation in order to promote reconciliation, accountability and human rights in the country. The report states that during the period under investigation (from the breakdown of the ceasefire agreement between the government and the LTTE on 21 February 2002 to the end of the armed conflict on 19 May 2009), serious violations of human rights were committed that could constitute international crimes. With regard to gender violence specifically, the report notes that the security forces committed sexual violence systematically, essentially against detained men and women and especially after the armed conflict had ended. The sexual violence was a specific form of torture to extract information and to punish and humiliate people accused of having links to

the armed opposition group LTTE. The report highlights the enormous difficulties in investigating this kind of violence and establishing its scale, but states that everything indicates that it could constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. In a significant amount of cases, sexual violence was perpetrated against people who were detained after returning to the country after the armed conflict had ended. It also cites some violations of human rights and international humanitarian law with major impacts in terms of gender, like deliberate attacks against civilians by the security forces in the final stage of the armed conflict, attacks on humanitarian facilities and especially hospitals and the recruitment of children by the LTTE and the militia of Colonel Karuna. Finally, it states that there are 60,000 female-headed households in the northern province who are very seriously affected by food insecurity and a lack of livelihood, making them especially vulnerable to sexual harassment, exploitation and violence.

- [Promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka - Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights \(A/HRC/30/61\)](#)

TURQUÍA

Acts of protest by Turkish and Kurdish women multiplied against the serious escalation of sexual violence in Turkey, with demonstrations and rallies, participation as human shields, calls for the peace process to resume and meetings with international government representatives, among other events. On 10 September, Leyla Zana, a prestigious Kurdish MP and winner of the Sakharov Prize, announced that she would begin a hunger strike if all the acts of daily violence did not

end, a message addressed to all armed actors. She also urged for a resumption of negotiations. Since the end of July, Turkey has witnessed a return to war between the government and the PKK, mainly after the launch of a vast military, police and judicial offensive against the PKK and the Kurdish movement, with repeated air strikes in northern Iraq and parts of southeast Turkey; the declaration of safety zones, curfews and military and police deployment; and arrests, including of journalists,

co-mayors and activists, among other actions. In this context, battles between the Turkish security forces and PKK guerrillas multiplied, including attacks by the PKK, which announced the end of its ceasefire in July following an attack on a Kurdish cultural centre in Suruç. The resumption of the war is having a serious impact on the civilian population and female Kurdish movement activists and lawyers denounced cases of the use of sexual torture by the security forces against Kurdish women. They also condemned the serious impact that the security forces' siege of the city of Cizre (population 120,000) had on men and women. Presented as a counter-terrorist operation, the siege involved sealing off external access and a curfew in the city starting on 4 September that was extended for nine days, along with power, water and telephone outages. The curfew was

reintroduced for a few days in mid-September. Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Nils Muiznieks expressed his serious concern about the escalation of violence in the country and about the "alarming" information that he was receiving about the situation in Cizre, including serious allegations of a disproportionate use of force by the security forces against civilians, serious disruptions of public life, including essential services like healthcare and a situation approximating a total information blackout. Around 20 civilians may have been killed during this period, including five women, according to the Kurdish movement (one civilian, according to the government). A delegation of women that visited Cizre after the blockade was lifted reported specific impacts on women, including various miscarriages caused by stress about the violence.

- Melanie Gingell, Margaret Owen and Shatha Beserani, "[Delegation Report: Women's delegation condemns the arbitrary killing of 21 civilians in Cizre](#)", September 2015
- Today's Zaman, "[HDP's Zana threatens hunger strike if killings don't stop](#)", 10 September 2015
- Today's Zaman, "[Rights activist Kaya: Gross human rights violations committed in Cizre](#)", 13 September 2015
- ANF, "[Women call for the recommencement of negotiations](#)", 24 August 2015
- Council of Europe, "[Statement: Turkey should ensure immediate access to Cizre by independent observers](#)", 11 September 2015
- JINHA, "[Turkey's sexual torture is a war crime](#)", 28 August 2015

SYRIA

One of the least visible aspects of the refugee crisis caused by the war in Syria is the problem of stateless people, a phenomenon that especially affects thousands and thousands of children. The Syrian law that regulates nationality issues is discriminatory against women and establishes that only men can pass it on to their children. For children born outside Syria during these years of war, the situation is complex because many fathers have died or disappeared, although there are also many cases of families that have lost their documents while fleeing the violence while others never managed to register their children before leaving the country. There are also cases of unaccompanied boys and girls. Without documentation attesting that their father is Syrian, these children risk being unable to prove their nationality and remain stateless, which will affect their access to education, healthcare and social services and can lead to a significant restriction of their rights and freedom of movement. The difficulties in obtaining identification that proves their nationality and details about their

birth also makes children more vulnerable to situations of labour and sexual exploitation, forced marriage, recruitment by armed groups, human trafficking and irregular adoption. On top of all these possible impacts are the difficulties in potentially returning to Syria after the armed conflict ends. According to a UNHCR study published in 2013, 77% of the children of Syrian origin born in Lebanon had not been registered and according to experts, similar percentages were estimated in neighbouring countries. In this context, Syrian female refugees have identified legal assistance and access to information about the registration of newborns as one of their priority needs. In recent years, UNHCR has launched information campaigns aimed at refugees and intended to raise awareness in host countries neighbouring Syria to attempt to facilitate registration processes. Even when the father is present, in most of these countries the registration of newborns requires the presentation of a marriage certificate, which Syrian refugee families do not possess in many

cases because it was lost or destroyed. Some of the host countries neighbouring Syria have tried to adopt more flexible policies allowing children to register, but problems persisted nonetheless. In Turkey, for example, the civil servants in charge of the process were sometimes not aware that it is possible to accredit these relationships based only on information provided

by the mother or there were problems of translation. Specialists, NGOs and activists have stressed that long-term resolution of the problem will require a change in Syrian law to reverse discrimination against women in regard to the transmission of nationality, a subject that was raised widely by Syrian women's organisations in the years before the war broke out.

- Emma Batha, “War may make hundreds of thousands of young Syrians stateless”, *Reuters*, 17 September 2014
- Lisa Davis, “Why are so many Syrian children being left stateless?”, *Open Democracy*, 1 July 2015
- Sarnata Reynolds and Daryl Grisgraber, *Birth Registration in Turkey: Protecting the Future for the Syrian Children*, Field Report, Refugees International, 30 April 2015
- UNHCR, *The Future of Syria: Refugee Children in Crisis*, ACNUR, 28 November 2013
- “Born in exile, Syrian children face threat of statelessness”, *News Stories*, ACNUR, 4 November 2014

Peacebuilding

COLOMBIA

In September, the government of Colombia and the FARC guerrillas signed an agreement to create a Special Jurisdiction for Peace, which represents the most significant progress in achieving a final accord to end the armed conflict in the country. The agreement stipulates that the Colombian government will grant the broadest possible amnesty for crimes committed as part of the armed conflict, but excluding crimes against humanity, genocide and war crimes and specifically sexual violence, which will be investigated and prosecuted by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace also established in the agreement. This was one of the main demands raised by women's organisations, which on various occasions had submitted input on how this violence should be addressed as part of agreements on transitional justice. The women's organisations had called for the eradication of sexual violence, the establishment of a truth commission for sexual violence and the exclusion of amnesties and pardons. They also emphasised the importance of recognising that sexual violence is not a strategy for achieving the parties' objectives and therefore cannot be connected to political offences. The organisations had also demanded the creation of a special programme for women and girls who are victims and survivors of sexual violence that establishes means of reparation, as well as a plan with specific and structural measures to move towards inclusion and the equality of women and girls as a guarantee of non-repetition of such violence. They

also stressed the importance of pledging to eradicate sexual violence immediately, of applying the principle of distinction to suspend the involvement of civilians, of establishing a verification commission, of providing immediate care to the victims of sexual violence and of attaining parity in structures of verification.

In August, a delegation of women representing different women's organisations and research centres (Corporación Humanas, IMP, DEJUSTICIA, the national university's gender school, Sisma Mujer, Taller Abierto, Corporación Mujer Sigue Mis Pasos, Ruta Pacífica, Casa de la Mujer and PROFAMILIA) participated in a new session of the subcommittee on gender in Havana and met with Colombian government and FARC representatives to tackle the issue of gender violence and sexual violence. The participating organisations called on the parties to commit to eradicating all forms of gender violence, including sexual violence, and to promote measures to clarify and acknowledge what happened, providing reparations, access to justice and participation in designing the agreed mechanisms of justice and ensuring non-repetition. The fourth delegation of women to travel to Havana to participate in this mechanism, it stressed the need to frame sexual violence within a broader context of gender inequalities and discrimination, which is necessary for achieving a sustainable and lasting peace.

- Red Nacional de Mujeres, Sisma Mujer, No es hora de callar, Corporación Humanas, *Cinco claves para un tratamiento diferencial de la violencia sexual en los acuerdos sobre la justicia transicional en el proceso de paz*
- Red Nacional de Mujeres, Sisma Mujer, No es hora de callar, Corporación Humanas, *Cinco subclaves para un tratamiento diferencial de la violencia sexual en los contextos de desescalamiento, cese de hostilidades y de cese al fuego*
- *Comunicado Público de las organizaciones de mujeres en la Mesa de Conversaciones de La Habana*

The Sustainable Development Goals: sufficient for gender equality?

In September, the United Nations adopted the new development agenda to replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which expire in 2015. Known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the new agenda consists of 17 targets to reach within the next 15 years. The agenda includes a topic specifically focused on gender, “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”, an important addition since one of the main weaknesses of the MDGs was the fact that they lacked a specific goal of equality. Other goals contain explicit references to equality or set out targets that are crucial to achieving full equality. Women’s organisations performed intense work in the years prior to approval of the agenda to ensure that the gender dimension would have a significant presence in the final document, based on the argument that that it is impossible to achieve genuinely sustainable development without attaining full equality between men and women. Some of the most important equality-related targets established in the final document include the eradication of all forms of discrimination, the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls and harmful practices such as forced marriage and genital mutilation, recognition of unpaid work and the full participation of women and equal opportunities in leadership and universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services, among other issues. After the SDGs were adopted, the United Nations held a conference called Global Leaders’ Meeting on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: A Commitment to Action, which brought different governments together for the purpose of demonstrating specific commitments to equality.

Despite acknowledgment that the approved document represents significant progress with respect to the MDGs, different women’s platforms that performed close monitoring and advocacy work throughout the process stressed that the text of the SDGs is still not ambitious enough. The agenda is not forceful enough in addressing the issues of deep equality in the distribution of wealth worldwide or the international trade and finance system, which are at the root of the inequalities in the world and have significant consequences for inequality between men and women. It also grants an important role to the private sector without addressing its responsibility for generating poverty, exclusion and inequality worldwide. On more specific issues, the SDG agenda does not explicitly address the rights of LGBTI people and neglects some forms of discrimination, like those resulting from migration. Meanwhile, some authors have stressed the fact that various countries had reservations about meeting the targets related to sexual and reproductive health (targets 3.7 and 5.6), which led to a softening of the language in those sections. For instance, goal 16, on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, makes no reference to gender equality or to the international women, peace and security agenda, despite the specific demands made by women’s organisations. Therefore, the final assessment is mixed: though progress has been made in giving visibility to the crucial and indispensable role of gender equality in full sustainable development, the mechanisms adopted are not powerful enough to achieve it.

- Post-2015 Women’s Coalition, *Response to the outcome document “Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”*
- Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, “The Canary in the Coal Mine: Women and Reservations to Post-2015 Development Agenda”, *Just Security*, 30 September 2015
- Women’s Major Group, *Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 Presents a Bold Vision for Women and Girls Advocates Gear Up for Work to Come*

AFGHANISTAN

The issue of women's participation in peace negotiations with the Taliban insurgency (currently suspended since the death of Taliban leader Mullah Omar two years ago was made public) re-emerged after the human rights organisation Human Rights Watch urged the government to take advantage of the impasse to promote a more important role for women and after different organisations asked donors to make aid for the country more conditional on the promotion of gender equality. Despite the promises of the Afghan president to include women more in negotiations, no women participated in the talks in Murree, Pakistan in July. In June, the Afghan government presented its National Action Plan (NAP) on Resolution 1325, one of whose objectives is to guarantee the effective participation of women in the peace process. The NAP does not include any concrete implementation

plan as of yet, although during their meeting in September, the country's donors demanded that the plan be carried out. Nevertheless, HRW has stated that currently the only space for women to participate is the High Peace Council, where 9 of 70 members are women. However, the institution does not play a central role in the negotiations. Thus, the human rights organisation urged the Afghan government to include women among its top-level advisors to the peace negotiations, give the women on the High Peace Council a more important role, effectively implement the NAP on Resolution 1325 and ensure a greater presence of Afghan women in different international forums in which the country participates. Meanwhile, women's organisations asked donors not to support processes that exclude women and called for more demands for the government to make effective change.

- HRW, [Afghanistan: Accept Full Role for Women in Talks. Donors Need to Back Women's Rights, Uphold UN Resolution 1325](#), *HRW*, 27 September 2015
- Mujib Mashal, ["Taliban-Afghan Meeting Ends With Optimism and Plans to Hold More Talks"](#), *New York Times*, 8 July 2015
- Sune Engel Rasmussen, ["Afghan activists urge donors to make aid conditional on women's" rights](#), *The Guardian*, 5 September 2015

GEORGIA

Representatives of civil society women's organisations met with representatives of the government delegations of Georgia and Abkhazia participating in the peace process known as the Geneva peace talks, which involves Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia under the facilitation of the UN, EU and OSCE, as well as the participation of the United States and Russia. Held in July in the Georgian capital, the meeting was organised by UN Women and the Women's Information Centre, a Georgian NGO that promotes the protection of the rights of women and gender equality. The civil society organisations stressed risk prevention and security issues, as well as access to healthcare and

matters involving education for the internally displaced population and people affected by the conflict. The civil society representatives urged the negotiating delegations to conduct meetings to exchange information of this kind more often. The Women's Information Centre forms part of the platform Caucasus Women's Initiative for Peace, which includes various organisations from the Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Georgia) and has promoted several regional conferences with the participation of women from territories in conflict, like the one held in Armenia in June on the role of women in preventing conflict and maintaining peace and security.

- UN Women, [Meeting between women's NGOs and participants of Geneva International Discussions](#), 30 July 2015

1325

EUROPEAN UNION

The European Union has created a high-level position dedicated to the gender dimension and Resolution 1325: EEAS Principal Adviser on Gender and on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and it has nominated Mara Marinaki for that post. A high level post on gender had been demanded by civil society organisations working on gender and peacebuilding. Recent EU documents had included references to that post, including *Council conclusions on CSDP (8971/15 of 18 May 2015)* and the *Council Conclusions on Gender in Development (9242/15 of 26 May 2015)*. Both documents hailed the intention of Vice President of the European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini to create the high-level post. The subsequent joint working paper of the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of Girls and Women through EU External Relations 2016-2020* (SWD [2015] 182 final), of 21 September, did not explicitly create the position, but repeated that the European Commission and the EEAS will implement various measures to enhance their engagement with

gender equality, including to “ensure strong and dedicated leadership on commitments to gender equality and women’s empowerment in external relations”. It also pledged to set up a “gender advisory board with leading experts from partner countries”. Unlike the EU until now, other regional and international organisations had high-level offices on gender equity and the women, peace and security agenda, like the UN special representative of the Secretary-General on sexual violence in conflict, the African Union’s special envoy on women, peace and security and the special representative of the OSCE rotating chairperson-in-office on gender issues. The EU has developed a significant policy framework on women, peace and security that commits its institutions to carry out the agenda and evaluate and report on its implementation. However, independent reports and assessments agree on a lack of implementation, despite the ground gained in recent years. The Swedish NGO Kvinna till Kvinna had described the upcoming creation of the high-level post devoted to Resolution 1325 and the gender perspective as a great success. The establishment of such an office was part of Sweden’s feminist foreign policy and security policy, according to Kvinna till Kvinna.

- European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of Girls and Women through EU External Relations 2016-2020*, Joint Staff Working Document, (SWD (2015)182 final), 21 September 2015
- Council of the European Union, *Council conclusions on CSDP*, 8971/15, 18 de mayo de 2015.
- Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on Gender and Development*, 9242/15, 26 de mayo de 2015.
- Kvinna till Kvinna, “Finally EU has listened to us!”, *Kvinna till Kvinna*, 27 de mayo de 2015.

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