

Protection of Women and Girls: How the EU can contribute

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Abstract

This presentation will introduce the ad-hoc working group on violence against women in conflict, a group of NGOs and UN agencies working in Brussels to help shape the EU's response to violence against women. It will introduce the working group's comprehensive approach to protection of women against violence, provide for a commentary to the previous presentations by EU staff and the EU's efforts to implement 1325, and finally provide recommendations for the ministerial meeting on 1325 in New York in October 2010.

The Ad Hoc Working Group on Violence against Women in Conflict

The Brussels Working Group on Violence Against Women in Conflict was established in 2008 and includes representatives from over 35 NGOs and NGO networks. UN agencies and other organizations, including Human Rights Watch, act as observers to the group.¹

The working group focuses on the need to address sexual and gender-based violence in EU external relations and policies. It believes that lack of consistent political action and reliable funding to address the needs of women in conflict is hindering efforts to protect and effectively respond to the needs of women. The group provides European Institutions, groups, agencies, donors, and think tanks with information, expertise, advice, and recommendations.

Its main aim is to provide constructive feedback and useful information to the EU institutions and member states in order to further and improve the implementation of promises made to combat violence against women in conflict.

The group has a holistic approach and emphasizes the necessity of a multi-sector response and a human rights-based approach to violence against women in conflict. Reflecting the experience and expertise of the members of the Working Group, we focus on four key areas for intervention: the need for access to justice, education, comprehensive health services, and economic possibilities and livelihoods.

¹ **Member of the group:** CARE International, Cordaid, International Rescue Committee - IRC, Justitia et Pax, Marie Stopes International, Médecins Sans Frontières Belgium, Pax Christi International, EurAc Network, Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme, the World Organisation Against Torture—OMCT, and PLAN International. **Observers:** the Brussels offices of UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF and UNIFEM; Amnesty International-EU office, Human Rights Watch, ISIS Europe and the Norwegian Refugee Council.

The EU and Resolution 1325

As described by EU Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response Kristalina Georgieva: “[Resolution 1325] is not just about Rwanda, where half a million women were raped, or the 60.000 rapes in Bosnia...Women’s bodies have become part of the battleground for those who use terror as a tactic of war.”² Many of these women are girls. Resolution 1325 is not only about the actual physical protection of women in conflict, but about empowerment of women by ensuring their role in the peace process and the post-conflict rebuilding of a country.

Europe is a frontrunner when it comes to efforts to implement UNSC Resolution 1325. Many EU states have adopted national action plans. Member states as well as the EU have played an important role at creating new UN institutions and posts on the topic of sexual violence as well as women’s rights in general. At EU-level, as discussed in detail by my fellow panelists, several important policy documents have been adopted over the years, such as the Comprehensive Approach to the EU Implementation of the UNSCRs 1325 and 1820 on women, peace and security, as well as most recently indicators to measure how the EU is implementing this comprehensive policy.³ There are also references to 1325 in Council conclusions and parliamentary resolutions.

Making all these pledges, policies, ideas and guidelines a reality has proven to be more difficult. Implementation requires ambitious, concrete, measurable, responsive programs with deadlines. It requires self-reflection and a shift in resources and staff. Within the EU institutions, and Common Security and Defense (CSDP) missions, gender equality remains sorely missing, and there is a lack of senior level staff with expertise in this field.

This is of course not just the EU’s responsibility- EU member states play a key role in furthering implementation of SCR 1325. The member states propose candidates for EU top jobs, the member states develop mandates for CSDP missions and organize pre-deployment training, and the member states execute their own development, humanitarian and military missions. The EU institutions however, play an important monitoring, stimulating and implementing role and there are several opportunities this year for the EU to show they are serious about 1325 and women’s right in the world.

Recommendations:

- The new European External Action Service should be sufficiently equipped to play the leading role on women, peace and security the EU envisages for itself. This means:

² Speech by EU Commissioner Georgieva, “Women, Peace and Security”, 14 April 2010, European Parliament Brussels, http://www.eu-un.europa.eu/articles/fr/article_9671_fr.htm.

³ Adopted 14 July 2010, <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/10/st11/st11948.en10.pdf>.

- A Special Representative on Gender issues with a particular mandate for women, peace and security;
- A women's rights unit, which will provide the necessary support;
- A fulltime senior gender advisor in every EU Delegation;
- A strong emphasis on women, peace and security in the training program for all EAS personnel;
- The six-monthly evaluation of CSDP missions should include detailed reporting on women, peace and security.
- The EU should actively encourage and support all its partners to include women and women's organizations at any peace negotiations;
- Continue and strengthen the EU Task Force on women, peace and security by having its meetings chaired by the new Special Representative, or when appropriate by the High Representative;
- Improve the transparency of the decision making process around new CSDP missions and political dialogues with third countries through meaningful consultations with relevant civil society groups.

The 10th Anniversary: How to make it count

It has been almost 10 years since the adoption of Security Council resolution 1325. Since then, few of the provisions in this resolution have been complied with. Sexual violence against women in conflict has continued unabated and most peace processes or negotiations continue without the participation of even one woman. In most recent peace negotiations in Nepal, Somalia, Darfur, Cote d'Ivoire, the Philippines and Central African Republic, no woman was involved officially in the peace process.

For Human Rights Watch, the 10th anniversary of 1325 offers a unique opportunity to take stock, look ahead, and move towards better accountability of the implementation of the resolution. We feel that these three objectives are best fulfilled by a step-approach with separate activities that each address a targeted part of this agenda. We applaud the efforts by the Belgian Presidency of the EU to organize these three focused and strategic meetings in the run up to the ministerial conference in October.

For the actually gathering in October to be fruitful, we believe it has to be a commitment meeting where countries and the EU make pledges that are measurable, concrete, time-bound and meaningful.

Recommendations:

- Ensure High Level ministerial participation in the October meeting from each of the 27 member states and participation of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs;

- Use the meeting to showcase the 1325 National Action Plans of those member states who have adopted them, and speed up the process of adopting the action plans in those countries that haven't;
- Present the newly adopted Indicators for the Comprehensive approach to the EU implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 on women, peace and security⁴ and add actual targets to these indicators;
- Present the first report on said indicators with concrete figures at the meeting, as pledged in the adopted document with the indicators;
- Play a leading role in galvanizing support for commitments with the EU's partners in Africa, Asia and Latin America, to ensure a global push for actual realization, such as "will include at least 30% women in peace negotiations."

⁴ Adopted 14 July 2010, <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/10/st11/st11948.en10.pdf>