

Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security
27 October 2005

*Securing a Just and Sustainable Peace:
Strengthening Women's Effective Participation in
Peace Processes*

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Check Against Delivery



Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, Members of the Security Council and Distinguished colleagues,

Thank you for the honour of addressing the Security Council on the important issue of women's participation in peace processes on the fifth anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325. The participation of women in all aspects of peace processes, and systematic attention to the needs and priorities of women, are not simply gender equality goals. They are crucial to a just and sustainable peace. Women know the costs of war -- what it means to be displaced, to be excluded from public life, and to be regarded as less than full citizens. They know the realities on the ground, and what needs to be done to address the injustices of war and to prevent relapse into conflict. They can be, and must be, part of the solution for lasting peace.

With the support of both programme and donor countries, UNIFEM has worked in over 20 conflict-affected countries to help bring women to the peace table and strengthen their role in peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction. Our work has focused on supporting women's rights and inclusion in constitutional and legal reform and institution-building processes, as well as strengthening women's leadership and participation in decision-making. We have seen that women can foster ties among opposing factions, across political, ethnic and religious lines, to generate genuine dialogue. They can bring a different perspective to peace negotiations, raising critical issues -- from land rights to rape babies --- that might otherwise be overlooked. And they can build a foundation for reconciliation and greater social inclusion, and work to sustain peace within their communities. Our work has generated some important lessons and practices that I would like to share with you today.

Creating a more equitable and inclusive society

The transition from war to peace presents unique opportunities to address the causes of conflict and transform institutions to create a more equitable and inclusive society. Peace processes, to be most effective, must build on the widest base of experience and capabilities, while addressing the needs and priorities of all. That means that they also need to take into account women's experiences and capabilities. Failure to do so leads to a justice deficit for women and girls, and a framework for peace and security that fails to address their socio-economic and human rights situation. The range of issues covered in peace agreements and the process of implementation is then limited and based primarily on men's experiences of conflict, men's expectations for conflict resolution and peacebuilding, and men forgiving men for crimes against women.

Peace agreements provide the framework for the reconstruction of the political, legal, economic and social fabric of a conflict-affected society and its institutions. They thus have a direct impact on the extent of women's involvement in post-conflict peacebuilding and reconstruction and achieving gender justice. The silence of peace agreements on critical issues affecting the lives of women and girls ignores the human rights of half the population, and undermines the foundations of societies emerging from conflict that are aspiring to establish democracy and the rule of law. Such states then lack the legitimacy and inclusiveness to generate a sense of ownership among the population, men and women alike.

In its resolution 1325, the Security Council spoke with one voice in emphasizing the need to mainstream gender justice and gender equality in peace-making, peacekeeping, peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction, and called upon all actors concerned to adopt measures to ensure the protection of and respect for the human rights of women and girls. This resolution has

been a major bedrock to support the efforts of women to participate in peace processes and the building of institutions, and to insist that the injustices they have suffered in conflict are addressed. As we saw in the film from Burundi, participation in peace processes enables women to call attention to gender and sexual-based crimes that must be halted and redressed. Equally important, it also lays the foundations for women's engagement in political and public life in post-conflict societies. The overriding goal for women must be social transformation, not reintegration into a system in which they are marginalized. They seek full citizenship, social justice and empowerment based on respect for international standards of human rights and security that, too often, did not previously exist. To make real progress, they need our commitment and support, as required by resolution 1325.

Developing a common women's agenda

Our experience in supporting women in peace processes -- from the Mano River countries to the Great Lakes, Sudan, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Timor Leste -- has shown the importance of building constituencies in a country to develop and implement a common women's agenda for promoting peace and security that transcends political, ethnic and religious lines and advances gender equality. This entails a long-term commitment of support, and requires an investment of time, effort and resources to enable women from different parties to a conflict to come together to identify common priorities and goals.

For example, in countries such as Afghanistan, Liberia and Colombia, UNIFEM and partners have supported national women's consultations to help build common agendas and links across ethnic and political divides. These national consultations have highlighted priorities for advancing gender equality that newly-formed national women's machineries can use as a basis for constituency building for their work in the early days of post-conflict reconstruction.

In Sudan, building on a long-term partnership with Sudanese women, UNIFEM, together with the Government of Norway, convened, in April 2005, women from the North and the South of Sudan to develop a common agenda to be presented to the Oslo donors' conference. In Kosovo, where we assisted women to develop a common national action plan following the conflict, women are now asking UNIFEM to assist them to be at the table where future status issues are being discussed.

The process of uniting around common priorities for peace is a vital first step to increased women's involvement in the political and peace-building processes. We have learned that international support for such processes must be provided in such a way that women can take full ownership of priorities established, recommendations put forth and decisions taken. Our role is to be a trusted partner and honest broker to assist women in identifying strategic entry points to the peace and transitional processes so that they may impact on critical issues on the agenda to promote opportunities and justice for women.

An example of this role was seen in July this year, when UNIFEM was asked by Israeli and Palestinian women leaders to organize a dialogue between them to be able to identify their common priorities for peace. The result of this meeting was the formation of an International Women's Commission to support a just and sustainable Israeli-Palestinian peace, which was recently endorsed by a decree from the President of the Palestinian National Authority. At the same time, the Israeli Knesset has endorsed resolution 1325 and the participation of women in the peace process.

Creating an environment to facilitate women's effective participation.

While women are capable advocates for their participation in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction, quotas can do much to ensure their greater participation in all policy- and decision-making forums. In addition, women's effectiveness in peace negotiations can be greatly enhanced by the facilitator, who can play a critical role in bringing local women leaders and groups engaged in *informal* peace processes into the *formal* peace and political processes. These facilitators can thus be instrumental, as we saw in Burundi, in helping to get women to the table and ensure that their perspectives are integrated into the peace accords – but we need to ensure that they stay involved throughout the phases of implementation. Another important element is the composition of the facilitation team, which should have equal representation of women and men and a solid understanding of gender issues. The role and leadership of an SRSG is also critical, as seen in the context of the International Conference for the Great Lakes Region, where the SRSG has designated UNIFEM as the focal point for women's issues. In this capacity, we have funded a gender adviser in the SRSG's office; provided technical support to mainstream gender throughout all levels of the process, including in the national and regional consultations, technical thematic task forces and the inter-ministerial meetings; and provided assistance in facilitating the women's regional meeting where over 100 women from the Great Lakes adopted the Kigali declaration setting out a common women's agenda for peace and reconstruction.

In addition, women in conflict-affected countries have called on UNIFEM and other partners for support in building capacity and technical skills needed to participate effectively in peace and transitional processes – in areas ranging from conflict resolution, mediation and negotiation; to political leadership, constituency building and electoral campaigning; to constitutional and legal reform. In Afghanistan, for example, UNIFEM has supported networks of women lawyers and judges involved in drafting a new constitution and has supported women's participation in elections as both voters and candidates. In Iraq, UNIFEM organized face-to-face meetings between women's groups and the Interim Governing Council, where women negotiated a quota for 25 per cent representation in government bodies, and also supported women during elections.

Achieving justice for women

Peace agreements often fall short of providing any strategy or resources to ensure implementation or measures to sanction non-compliance, especially with regard to issues affecting women. It is clear, from last year's UNIFEM/ILAC Conference on Gender Justice in Post-Conflict Situations, where we brought together women in critical legal and judicial positions from over 12 conflict-affected countries, and from the follow-up meeting in August on "Building Partnerships for Promoting Gender Justice" organized by the Government of Sweden with us, that a gender perspective must be implemented in every dimension of justice and the rule of law. It was also clear from these consultations how inextricably linked achieving justice for women is to any sustainable peacebuilding process. Gender justice can no longer be bargained away as a 'soft-chip' for realizing other political and operational gains. It must be central to any rule of law strategy.

Many of the needs of women can be realized relatively easily if the international community is really serious about supporting and resourcing them. For example, training for judges, lawyers, police and military on the handling of sexual-based violence and other crimes against women; witness protection services; legal education and assistance services for women and girls to know

their rights and access justice; and focusing on addressing the most pressing needs of women who are victims of war, who are trafficked or infected with HIV/AIDS, who are widowed, who are ex-combatants, and who are refugees or internally displaced persons.

But, at the heart of any implementation of real justice in countries recovering from conflict, is the demand that human rights violations against women and girls are regarded and treated as crimes by the criminal justice system. Gender justice must not simply be relegated to the realm of customary or traditional legal systems.

Moving forward: Challenges for the UN and the new Peacebuilding Commission

We would all agree that, today, Security Council resolution 1325 has a growing constituency in countries around the world. However, if that constituency is to move beyond women's rights advocates to make a real difference in the lives of women and girls, it must also be embraced by men and boys, newly-emerging governments, multilateral and regional organizations, and donors. In moving forward, I would like to suggest some ways to ensure that existing UN mechanisms and processes, as well as the new UN PeaceBuilding Commission, will work on behalf of women as well as men to meet the calls of resolution 1325.

- The UN needs to adopt a more holistic "one-system approach" to systematically address the needs and capacities of women throughout all phases of the transition from conflict to peace as a seamless continuum. This can be done by bringing together the programmes and activities of different UN entities in the areas of peace-making, peacekeeping, peacebuilding and reconstruction and ensuring that the United Nations Women's Fund (UNIFEM) has a seat at the table.
- There is a need to ensure that women's priorities and capacities are systematically addressed in all stages of the planning and implementation of UN peace operations and peacebuilding initiatives, with the central focus on supporting nationally-owned priorities and strategies. Women and civil society of a conflict-affected country, including those in rural communities, must be consulted and involved very early in the assessment and planning stages of such operations and initiatives.
- In addition to increased support to local women's groups and civil society organizations, there must be increased outreach to the men and boys of a country -- fathers, brothers, husbands, village elders, religious leaders -- including through the use of civic education programmes and the media to change their attitudes and behaviour so that they truly understand that promoting gender equality and gender justice benefits women and men alike. But the focus must not only be on the men and boys of the conflict-affected country. It must also be on UN peacekeepers and staff to put an immediate stop to the outrageous incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse toward the very women to whom they are supposed to protect and assist. Only then will peace, including peace in the home and in the field, be possible for women after war, and only then will women be able to contribute as full citizens to build a better society for all.

Thank you.