



# Increasing the Role of Women in Conflict Resolution and Peace Building Processes

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## Introduction

The exclusion of women from conflict resolution and peacebuilding is a major issue the international community is only beginning to resolve. Women and girls are greatly affected by armed violence, but they usually play no role in solving the problem. All too often, only female celebrities or isolated female officials are allowed to contribute. Instead, women, are left to deal with the hard work of implementing peace programs they had little or no voice shaping, which may or may not solve the issues that concern them most, and which they may or may not accept.



Poor omen: Completing the 2016 peace agreement between Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). The agreement was later rejected in a national vote. Photo: *New York Times*, 26 September 2016.

The 193 Member States of the United Nations have agreed that women play an essential role in solving armed conflict, and that better conflict resolution requires greater participation from women. Without recognizing how women are affected by armed violence, conflicts cannot be resolved in a lasting way. And the only way to ensure women are heard is ensure women participate in conflict resolution and peacemaking processes.

Member States pledged to reduce all forms of

violence. Under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the coordination framework guiding all international humanitarian assistance for the years 2016-2030, women are recognized as an essential part of the problem.

According to *Inclusive Security*, a non-governmental organization (NGO) specializing on this issues, only 9 per cent of negotiators and 4 per cent of signatories at official peace talks are women. When critical decisions are made—about security, governance, justice, and more—half the population is left out.<sup>1</sup>

The widespread failure to include women in peacemaking and conflict resolution processes makes women’s suffering less visible and less likely to be addressed. Reducing violence against women requires bring women into the political process, assuring them permanent roles and a clear voice. Otherwise, the problems are unlikely to be heard, seen or dealt with.

A basis for action is UN Security Council resolution 1325, *Women, Peace and Security*, passed in October 2000.<sup>2</sup> This calls for increased participation of women in peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peace negotiations. UNSCR 1325 was the result of several past statements, charters, and declarations involving the basic principle of equal rights and liberties for women, such as the right to self-determination, to participating in politics, and to nondiscrimination.

<sup>1</sup> *Inclusive Security; Why Women?*

<https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/why-women/>

<sup>2</sup> Security Council resolution 1325, <https://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/7458081.84146881.html>



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Paul H. Woodruff, *Earth's population*, 2006

The right to contribute to peacemaking and peace negotiations is also a concern for women's rights simply as individuals affected by the emergence of war and armed conflict. Women are not found at the borders of conflict. In conflicts of the modern era, civilians, who are mainly women and children, are usually the major victims. Women are the majority regarding the number of refugees and displaced individuals, and there are increasingly victimized

In all of World War I, only 5 percent of casualties were civilians. During World War II, the percentage of civilian victims rose to 48 percent; today, the percentage has risen to 90 percent. With the absence of weapons and training in warfare, women tend to become physically, emotionally, and mentally vulnerable during times of war and conflict.

While all UN Member States agree the role of women must be improved, there is sharp disagreement over how to present their perspectives, the exact roles they must play, and the ability of other actors—especially men—to represent women's needs. There also is disagreement about the role of the international

community shaping regional peacemaking efforts. Can the parties to a conflict craft their own solutions, justifying excluding or limiting the role of women because of their immediate priorities? Or can the international community demand specific terms, like including diverse women's voices, leaders and groups throughout the conflict resolution process?

### Current Situation

A landmark study by *The Small Arms Survey*, the Geneva-based research institute, found that women make up a minority of fatalities from armed violence, but they still suffer serious and poorly recognized effects:<sup>3</sup>

- Globally, men and boys account for 84 per cent of violent deaths in 2010–15. On average 64,000 women and girls—the remaining 16 per cent—died violently every year.
- The regions with the highest known violent death rates for women are Central America, the Caribbean, and South America.
- In the Afghan and Syrian conflicts, the proportion of women killed has been steadily increasing.
- In industrialized countries, the general decrease in homicide also saw a decline in killing of women, but rates of domestic and intimate partner violence have proven particularly difficult to reduce, and appear to be falling more

<sup>3</sup> A Gendered Analysis of Violent Deaths (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2016), <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/about-us/highlights/2016/highlight-rn63.html>



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slowly, if at all.

- Accurate data on female suffering from armed violence is scarce. In eight countries with good data, high income and low violence levels, women were victims of more violent death than men in Austria, Germany, Hong Kong, Japan, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Slovenia, and Switzerland.

Not included in these statistics are the more widespread effects for women and girls. Although they are less likely to die from armed violence, far greater numbers feel other effects. These range from non-lethal injury to chronic intimidation, displacement as millions are made international refugees or lose their homes and become displaced (domestically). When male relatives die or are injured, women and girls often fall into severe poverty, condemning them to lives of everyday suffering and crippling their chances for a better life.



*Violence Against Girls and Women:* The level of violence against women has been a tremendous problem within many conflict zones (Cambodia, Somalia, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Israel, Palestinian Territories, Colombia, etc.). Within many of these conflict zones, both women and girls were often raped, either by individuals or

by gangs, with combatants alternating in front of children and the victims' spouses.

The abduction of women and girls by combatants to be sold into sexual slavery has also been a common occurrence. Victims would also be forced to accompany combatants as they traveled around the country. Infants and young children born out of rape and abduction, especially when rape is used as a weapon against the woman or girl, are often unwanted and abandoned. Due to displacement, and destruction of the economy and the resulting poverty, parents in every conflict zone would be forced to use their children, usually their daughters, to earn income for the family. Girls would typically exchange sexual acts for food, shelter, safe passage, identification papers, and other items or favors for the safety of themselves and their families. Many of these girls sell their bodies on the streets or in the refugee camps or are sold by their families to brothels where they are virtual prisoners. Conflict also provides a breeding ground for other forms of sexual exploitation such as trafficking, and it is indistinguishably linked to an increase in violence after the conflict, particularly in the form of domestic violence.

Girls in their adolescence are particularly vulnerable. They are targeted for abduction and coerced into recruitment into armed forces and armed groups and are regular victims of rape as well as other forms of sexual abuse. Their risk of contracting HIV/AIDS increases in proportion to the level of violence they may encounter.<sup>4</sup> Many are forced to head households and may not have legal access to land, property, housing and essential services. Young teenage girls have also been neglected in the delivery of health services and education, vocational training and

<sup>4</sup> "Women, Peace and Security Progress on UN Security Council Resolution 1325." *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, vol. 21, no. 1



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life skills. Their active participation in community-based relief, recovery and reconstruction programs would increase their sense of purpose, self-esteem and identity while strengthening and sustaining initiatives.

*Displacement:* Displacement, internally or across borders, is both disruptive and dangerous. It deprives women of the security of their community and exposes them to hunger, disease, violence, and sexual assault. Within conflict areas, vast numbers of people have been forced out of their homes by fighting, and by the destruction of their means of livelihood. Approximately 80 per cent of people displaced by conflict or human rights violations are women and children. Husbands and partners are either deceased, in hiding, or fighting. Because of this, women and young girls are heading households, but in many cases struggle to do so without income, basic resources, or control over decision-making. Various experts visiting conflict areas have been assessing the gender implications of this disintegration and collapse of local and national economies and the displacement that both violence and economic collapse cause-implications that in the past have repeatedly been overlooked.

There are times when many women find themselves in strange surroundings, without a home, often without extended families, faced with the need to earn money. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, economic and physical insecurity has led to vast movements of people and family separations, with the burden of family support now lying almost entirely on the DRC's women. Due to tremendous poverty, rural mothers in the DRC would sell girls as young as 10-years old for payment as minimal as \$3 to serve as maids. In comparison to another conflict area, such as Georgia, most Georgian women who fled Abkhazia and South Ossetia left relatively prosperous lives behind. Many of these women were trained

professionals who had worked as teachers, as economists, and in manufacturing and healthcare, among other trades. These skilled allowed them to find ways to provide basic income and food for their families through selling crafts or garden crops.

Women's needs are also ignored in the post-conflict era because most disarmament and demobilization aid are offered to men. Many women tend to be hesitant to return home even after a conflict had dissolved because they considered the security risks too high. Women were concerned about the flow of arms to their regions and felt that disarmament needed to take a regional approach. Those who have been kidnapped by rebel or government combatants are frequently hesitant to return home, fearing traditional discrimination. Those who do are often rejected or treated with suspicion and disdain when reunited with their families. Consequently, women may be forced to stay with men who raped them. Their abductors become the only family these women know and have. Those who do not stay with combatants and cannot return home often roam the countryside or city streets, forced into prostitution to survive.

### United Nations Role

The UN is the only international organization where Member States deliberate and agree to set standards for international peacekeeping operations, women's participation in negotiations, and to ensure their perspectives are effectively integrated into conflict resolution processes.

The basis for action remains UN Security Council Resolution 1325, *Women, Peace and*





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*Security.*<sup>5</sup> This was the first time that the UN Security Council agreed on women and gender in relation to peace and security. UNSCR 1325 had its roots in the adoption of the UN Charter in 1945 and the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDoHR), which clearly emphasize the importance of gender rights for both men and women.

In 1995 women's rights activists found themselves at a table with staff members from the United Nations Development Fund for Women (now UN Women) in New York discussing how to move the agenda around the issue of gender and conflict outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action, approved that year. The Beijing Platform is a 21 year old program to eliminate any obstacle to women's active participation in public and private life through a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural, and political decision-making<sup>6</sup> forward into mainstream political consciousness.

A staffer from UNIFEM brought the topic of the Permanent Representative of Namibia into the conversation, a politically practical decision given that Namibia had hosted the deliberations that led to the Windhoek Declaration and Namibia Plan of Action for mainstreaming gender in peace and security operations. The Namibian mission was able to provide support in drafting the text that would eventually become Security Council Resolution 1325.

When the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1325, it stressed the need to integrate a gender perspective into the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security, including through peacekeeping operations. However, including

female uniformed personnel in national contributions to UN peace operations has fallen short of expectations. By March 2013, women made up less than 4 per cent of UN peacekeepers globally, accounting for about 3 per cent of UN military personnel, and about 9.7 per cent of UN police.<sup>7</sup>

The UN is unlikely to reach its goals for gender equality in peacekeeping missions because it is not fully implementing its two-pronged approach:

- (1) increase the number of women in peacekeeping operations and
- (2) integrate a gender perspective within these missions.

Both goals have gone unmet due to three core issues:

- (1) the lack of understanding among member states about Resolution 1325 and UN policy on gender equality in peace operations;
- (2) a gap in data and analysis about women's participation in national security institutions globally and in UN peacekeeping in particular; and, most importantly,
- (3) the prevalence of social norms and biases that perpetuate gender inequality within the security sector.

Further, the UN and member states' focus on increasing the numbers of female uniformed personnel has obscured the equally important goal of integrating a gender perspective into the work of peace operations.

<sup>5</sup> Security Council resolution 1325, <https://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/7458081.84146881.html>

<sup>6</sup> "Beijing Platform for Action," *The United Nations Conference on Women*, September 1995

<sup>7</sup> Sahana Dharmapuri, "Not Just a Numbers Game: Increasing Women's Participation in UN Peacekeeping," *Providing for Peacekeeping*, No. 4, New York: International Peace Institute, July 2013



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The likelihood of achieving the UN's goals for gender equality in the composition of peacekeeping operations would significantly improve if there were a clear strategy to effectively operationalize the UN's existing policy and generate greater political support for it among governments of key member states. Specifically, increasing female participation and integrating a gender perspective into peace operations requires a strategic vision and coherent efforts in the field, at UN headquarters, and within key member states.

Despite the lack of comprehensive data, it is clear that women's participation in peacekeeping operations has been low since the UN's inception. From 1957 to 1989, only twenty women served in peacekeeping missions, mainly as nurses in medical units.<sup>8</sup> From 1957 to 1993, no female military officers were assigned to peacekeeping offices at UN headquarters.<sup>9</sup> However, by 1993, eleven out of nineteen UN peacekeeping missions had significant civilian components, and almost one-third of civilian staff serving in them were women.

### *UN Policy*

In 2006, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) adopted the UN Policy Directive on Gender Equality in Peacekeeping Operations. The directive elaborated the principles and requirements for implementing UN mandates on women, peace, and security in

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<sup>8</sup> "The Role of Women in United Nations Peacekeeping," Women 2000, No. 1 (December 1995): 1; Francesco Bertolazzi, "Women with a Blue Helmet: The Integration of Women and Gender Issues in UN Peacekeeping Missions," UN-INSTRAW Working Paper Series, 2010, p.8

<sup>9</sup> UNDAW, "The Role of Women in United Nations Peacekeeping," p.4

the work of all missions. It also examined the gaps in recruitment and retention of women and gave DPKO a mandate to "advance gender balance among DPKO Headquarters and mission staff, including at senior management levels."<sup>10</sup>

In 2010, DPKO and the UN Department of Field Support (DFS) published "Guidelines for Integrating a Gender Perspective into the Work of the United Nations Military in Peacekeeping Operations." These underlined the importance of female uniformed personnel and the operational necessity of employing a gender perspective in missions. The document was intended to provide a practical translation of the mandates on women, peace, and security, such as Resolution 1325 and Resolution 1888, and "to inform the force-generation goals in line with specific operational requirements for the selection and deployment of male and female military personnel, pre-deployment preparations and training of military personnel."<sup>11</sup>

### *Implementing UN Policy*

Since 2009, the UN has set goals for increasing the numbers of female uniformed personnel in missions and encouraged member states to contribute more of them. UN Police set a goal of increasing female police by 20 percent in UN peacekeeping, and Anne-Marie Orler, the former UN Police Division chief, repeatedly called on member states to meet this objective. The UN Office of Military Affairs (OMA), on the other hand, did not set a specific target, but its leadership encourages member states to contribute more female troops via correspondence and meetings with member states. There is no overarching strategy that merges and guides both approaches to

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<sup>10</sup> DPKO, "DPKO Policy Directive: Gender Equality in UN Peacekeeping Operations," November 3, 2006

<sup>11</sup> DPKO and DFS, "UN Gender Advisory Team Annual Progress Report 2010." 2010.



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addressing the low participation of women in UN peacekeeping operations and methods for effectively integrating a gender perspective into field missions. What follows is an overview of the efforts of some of the offices of DPKO and DFS.

### Conclusion

Gender-specific threats to women and young girls offer a cluster of challenges of ensuring their protection. Thus, women's protection in armed conflict and their centrality to conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding must be a primary concern of the international community. Currently, the deliberate killing, rape, mutilation, forced displacement, abduction, trafficking and torture of women and girls continue unrelieved. These issues will continue to be constant as long as women have neither voice nor authority in the institutions and processes that mediate the conditions under which they live. Women must be represented at every level in these processes, from the distribution of food to patrolling the camps to planning and participating in educational and vocational training programs. As it should be recognized, when women share authority with men, there is not only less violence against women but less violence overall.

But how should these goals be achieved? Are special mandates for the UN the best way to achieve that? What can the UN General Assembly ask the 193 Member States to do? Since the Member States are sovereign, the UN can only request their cooperation. Programs the states do not support or respect are unlikely to win funding of action. The Global Forum, as an extension of the UN General Assembly, must carefully balance international expectations with sovereign realities.

Some basic questions to consider:

- Should the UN act to establish separate programs to ensure women are fully integrated into peace processes, or is it enough to insist that peace processes reflect the needs of all human beings?
- Are peace processes that exclude or fail to sufficiently include women's participation sustainable over the longer term, or preferable even if incomplete over the short term?
- Should the UN target the needs of women and girls in specific conflicts, addressing situations as they emerge, tailoring its responses to each one, should it establish basic threshold levels of action to guide international responses to all armed conflicts?
- How can the UN further contribute to an increase in female actors working in conflict resolution and peacekeeping situations? Should the UN require or expect women to be involved in peace negotiations? Does the UN have that authority? What if governments or armed groups resist UN pressure?
- Would it be worthwhile to have a female battalion or regiment of specifically female UN peacekeepers? Or is it better to establish a threshold for minimal levels of female participation in all UN peacekeeping? Targets will require clear goals, as well as commitment from Member States to finance the changes and supply personnel, something many governments refuse to do.
- Can other UN agencies, such as the UN Development Fund or the High Commissioner for Refugees, be given



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the responsibility and resources to help women reintegrate after armed conflict?

Where will the funding for such programs be found?





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