

From the Charter to Security Council resolution 1325

The United Nations Charter not only committed its members to save succeeding generations of the scourge of war, it also unequivocally reaffirmed fundamental human rights and the equal rights of men and women. Despite this strong commitment, the understanding of the impact of armed conflict on women and girls and the role of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding developed slowly within the United Nations. It took several decades to develop a strong normative framework and strengthened operational policies and procedures and make the UN system increasingly responsive to the needs and priorities of women and girls in countries in conflict.

Early efforts to address the situation of women in armed conflict include the consideration by the Commission on the Status of Women in 1969 whether special protection should be accorded to women and children during armed conflict and emergency situations. In 1974, the General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict.

World Conferences on Women: Linking gender equality, development and peace

Building on this early work on women in conflict, the four United Nations World Conferences on Women focused on the linkages between gender equality, development and peace: Mexico in 1975; Copenhagen in 1980; Nairobi in 1985; and Beijing in 1995. Over the years, the focus of the discussions on women and peace shifted from overall political issues to the impact of war on women and girls and their role in peacebuilding.

At the 1975 World Conference on the International Year of Women in Mexico City, governments and non-governmental organizations identified international cooperation, the strengthening of international peace, and women's political participation as specific areas for national and international action. The Conference addressed women's participation in the struggles against colonialism, racism, racial discrimination and foreign domination.

The World Conference gave also impetus to the drafting of an international treaty to eliminate discrimination against women. In time for the Copenhagen Conference, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), often referred to as women's bill of rights, was adopted by the General Assembly in 1979 and entered into force in 1981.

At the 1980 World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women in Copenhagen, member states and participants saw women as agents of change at the national and international levels, and in political, social and economic areas. Women were also seen as key in building more just, rational societies and in the struggle for fundamental national rights and self-determination of peoples against wars of aggression. The Conference was concerned with the situation of women living under apartheid in South Africa and Namibia, as well as with the situation of the Palestinian people.

At the 1985 Nairobi World Conference, participants considered women's participation in the efforts for peace in decision-making positions, and in education for peace as vital to peace building. Delegates discussed strategies for women's participation in safeguarding world peace, averting nuclear catastrophe, halting the arms race, and in complete disarmament. For the first time, the various forms of violence against women in everyday life and in all societies were highlighted as a major obstacle to the achievement of peace.

The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, identified women and armed conflict as one of 12 critical areas of concern. Delegates discussed the increased participation of women in conflict resolution at decision-making levels; the protection of women living in the situation of armed conflict; reduction of excessive military expenditure; and the promotion of women's contribution to fostering the culture of peace. The section on action in connection with armed conflict was further reinforced by the critical areas of concern on violence against women and the human rights of women. The Platform for Action recognized that civilian casualties outnumber military casualties, with women and children comprising a significant number of the victims, and proposed a number of strategic objectives and actions to be taken by relevant actors. It also called for the upholding and reinforcement of the norms of international humanitarian and human rights law in relation to the offences against women, and the prosecution of all those responsible for such offences.

In 2000, the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" reaffirmed the commitments made in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The outcome document called for the full participation of women at all levels of decision-making in peace processes, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. It also addressed the need to increase the protection of girls in armed conflict, especially the prohibition of their forced recruitment.

In 2005, the Commission on the Status of Women conducted a ten-year review and appraisal of the Beijing Platform and issued a declaration reaffirming the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome document.

Creating new mechanisms to address gender-based violence

The conflicts in the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s contributed to a growing understanding of violence against women in armed conflict. In 1993, the Security Council established the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and in 1994 the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). The Statutes and jurisprudence of the two ad hoc Tribunals, and the more recent Statutes of the International Criminal Court (ICC), which entered into force in 2002, and the Special Court for Sierra Leone in 2002, include provisions which reflect an understanding of the gender implications of armed conflict and are of great significance in the context of redress for women and girls through the international criminal law process.

In 1993, the General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, which recognized that women in situations of armed conflict are especially vulnerable to violence.

In 1994, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights appointed a Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences. From the beginning of her work, the Special Rapporteur indicated that all violations of the human rights of women in situations of armed conflict, and in particular, murder, systematic rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy would be covered by her mandate. The work of other Special Rapporteurs or Representatives has contributed to the growing understanding of the situation of women and girls during armed conflict. The Special Rapporteurs on the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as the Special Rapporteur on torture, have all highlighted gender-based and sexual violence against women and girls committed during armed conflicts.

The Commission on the Status of Women

In addition to its role in preparing the World Conferences on Women and drafting CEDAW, the Commission on the Status of Women adopted agreed conclusions on women and armed conflict in 1998, which addressed gender-sensitive justice; the specific needs of women affected by armed conflict; the need to increase women's participation in all stages of peace processes, including conflict prevention, post-conflict resolution and reconstruction; and disarmament issues.

In 2004, the Commission revisited this theme and adopted agreed conclusions on women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peacebuilding. It was recognized that peace agreements provide a vehicle for the promotion of gender equality and that a gender-sensitive constitutional and legal framework was necessary to ensure that women fully participate in such processes. Finally, the allocation of necessary human, financial and material resources was seen as critical for specific and targeted activities to ensure gender equality at the local, national, regional and international levels, as well as for enhanced and increased international cooperation.

Other thematic debates

The work on the situation of children in armed conflict also contributed to a deeper understanding and greater urgency on these issues. In 1996, the Secretary-General's study on the impact of armed conflict on children emphasized the roles and experiences of girls and highlighted the ways in which they are placed at high risk during armed conflict.

In 1997, the Secretary-General appointed a Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict with a mandate to protect and promote the rights of war-affected children and ensure that those rights are comprehensively addressed by the main actors at all levels. The efforts of the Special Representative have resulted in the inclusion of child protection officers in the mandates of the United Nations peacekeeping missions and,

more recently, the development of a monitoring and reporting mechanism (Security Council resolution 1612 (2005)).

In 1998, the Special Representative on internally displaced persons formulated Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, which contain a number of provisions addressing the specific needs of women.

The humanitarian community started to address the needs of women and girls during and after conflict by developing programmes targeted at women and producing guidelines such as the first UNHCR Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women in 1991. In 1998, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee issued a policy statement for the integration of a gender perspective in humanitarian assistance, and in 2005, issued guidelines for gender-based violence interventions in humanitarian emergencies with a focus on prevention and response to sexual violence.

The lead up to resolution 1325

In March 2000, the Security Council issued a Presidential Statement on International Women's Day in March 2000. It recognized the link between peace and gender equality, and the fact that women's full participation in peace operations was essential to sustainable peace. It was an important precursor to resolution 1325.

A thorough review of the United Nations peace and security activities was undertaken by a high-level panel convened by the Secretary-General in 2000, which resulted in the Report of the Panel on the United Nations Peace Operations. The report recognized the need for equitable gender representation in the leadership of peacekeeping missions. The seminar on the gender perspectives of multidimensional peacekeeping missions led to the development of the Windhoek Declaration and the Namibia Plan of Action on Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multidimensional Peace Operations in June 2000. The Windhoek Declaration was another critical step leading to the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000).

On 31 October 2000, the Security Council adopted resolution 1325 under the presidency of Namibia. This resolution was the culmination of several decades of growing realization of the diverse roles that women play both in conflict and building peace and the result of active involvement and advocacy by women's organizations. The resolution has galvanized the UN system, Member States and civil society organizations and has become one of the best known and the most translated resolution of the Security Council. Within the United Nations system, the Inter-Agency Taskforce on Women, Peace and Security of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality has been coordinating efforts for the implementation of the resolution.

In 2002, the Secretary-General study *Women, peace and security* documented the collective experience of the UN system and analyzed the impact of armed conflict on women and girls and the relevant international legal framework. It also reviewed gender perspectives in peace processes, peace operations, humanitarian operations and reconstruction and rehabilitation. The Independent Experts' Assessment, supported by UNIFEM, contributed to

the discussion by providing examples of women in conflict regions and their struggles to contribute to the safety and well-being of their communities.

In recent years, the Security Council has sought to meet with women's groups and other civil society organizations in order to access information on the situation of women and girls during so-called Arria Formula meetings and during missions to conflict regions, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kosovo and Sierra Leone. The Council has requested a number of individuals to testify before it on the role of women in peace processes and peacebuilding, including the Minister of Women's Affairs of Afghanistan and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women in March 2002 and the senior gender adviser from a peacekeeping mission (MONUC) in 2003.

Resolution 1325 has led to the deployment of gender advisers in peacekeeping operations and at headquarters, the development of a gender resource package and training materials. DPKO and DPA are in the process of creating departmental action plans on gender mainstreaming. Since its adoption, resolution 1325 has also led to the inclusion of more comprehensive information and data on women and gender issues in both thematic and mission-specific reports presented to the Security Council for its review.

In October 2005, the Security Council, in its annual open debate on women, peace and security, will review a system-wide action plan on the implementation of resolution 1325. The action plan is based on input from 37 UN entities and maps strategies and actions by the UN system for the period 2005 to 2007.