



WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

INVOLVING MORE WOMEN IN
PEACE PROCESSES AND
THE SECURITY SECTOR
WILL YIELD LASTING
BENEFITS

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Women across the world face challenges to their status every day, but their underrepresentation is especially obvious in the security sector. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, an international organization of parliaments, women made up 22 percent of parliaments worldwide in 2015, just 6.6 percent of the heads of state were women and only 7.3 percent were the heads of government. In ministerial positions, which are often sent to participate in peace negotiations,

women represent just 17 percent of the total, with the vast majority representing social affairs ministries focusing on education and family affairs. As a result, women are rarely present in state affairs, delegations, peace negotiations or post-conflict reconstruction efforts. This phenomenon is rooted in centuries of gender inequality and in an uneven progression of women's rights under patriarchal societies that has greatly restricted opportunities for women to lead independent and proactive social,

economic and political lives.

Few women can be found in state delegations, international negotiations or conference settings because women seldom reach governmental positions worthy of such appointments. Therefore, the likelihood of female representation at such events is marginal from the beginning. At peace conferences, this becomes problematic when considering that the fate of all women within the conflict area is determined without a balanced female representation.

RESOLUTION 1325

This is not a new debate, and past efforts to promote women's participation in the security sector are worth considering. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted in 2000, seemed like a groundbreaking antidote. Also referred to as the first resolution on "Women, Peace, and Security," it was seen as officially recognizing the need "to address the disproportionate and unique impact of armed conflict on women." Resolution 1325 and its seven successors brought light to the challenges women face in armed conflict and the different security needs they have.

It commits U.N. member nations to four basic principles: prevention of conflict and violence against women and girls; equal participation and gender equality in decision-making processes on state and international levels; the need to protect women and girls in conflict areas; and the recognition and fulfilment of the relief and recovery needs of women and girls during and after a conflict. The participation of women is especially lacking, but much needed, in these four areas. To accomplish that, it is imperative to look at the roles women play in conflicts and the roles they should play in conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction.

GENDER ROLES IN CONFLICT

Throughout history, armed conflict has traditionally been primarily a male occupation, while women have filled more passive and victimized roles. This resonates in literature, with women and children being the only groups referred to exclusively as civilians. Men are more likely to die as a result of violent conflict than women, while women are more likely to die from post-conflict consequences, such as starvation and disease. Women are especially vulnerable to sexual exploitation because pre-existing institutional and social barriers of protection break down during conflict.

In reality, however, women have the same capacity as men for violence and evil and can play diverse roles in conflict. They can be actively involved in the war apparatus through planning, execution and organization, as well as supporting their male counterparts. They can be soldiers, instigators, murderers or torturers. Sanam N. Anderlini, a U.N. consultant and Georgetown professor, wrote in her book, *Women Building Peace*, that "from Kashmir to Colombia, El Salvador to Sri Lanka, particularly where identity, freedom, or self-determination fuels warfare, women have been involved in prewar propaganda, inciting violence, encouraging revenge, and taking up arms themselves." Women can perform the traditional role of combatant that in most cases is occupied by men, a fact often overlooked post-conflict when justice is sought for perpetrators, or combatants need to be incorporated into disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs. Studies show women who participate in conflict, especially in countries with more traditional views of gender roles, are less likely to enroll in rehabilitation programs because it lessens their chances to be accepted in their community.

It is difficult to determine the extent of direct female participation in conflict because of the immense difficulty of data collection during armed conflict and the diversity of



Refugee women protest for better living conditions in the Greek city of Thessaloniki in November 2016. Women are underrepresented in peace negotiations that affect their lives.

case examples. Therefore, attention is usually drawn to flashy examples, such as female suicide bombers or the female fighting units of the Kurdish peshmerga. But these are highly contextual examples that do not establish a norm by which to judge the female combatant phenomenon. In return, we can also argue that men are falsely stigmatized as being primarily combatants, not taking into consideration that they can be victims or that they are sometimes forced into the combatant role at gunpoint.

WOMEN AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

We must recognize that the participation and involvement of women in the security sector, and particularly in peace processes, is not a panacea in the fight to end all conflict on Earth. Women are also not the only interest group wrongly excluded from peace processes, with participants mostly limited to belligerents and mediators. Yet, there is ample evidence suggesting that women, especially when organized in civil society groups, can have an immensely positive effect on implementing peace in conflict settings. Women are the other half of the equation. Simply put, it is not logical to leave their potential unused. The effective influence of women's groups contributes to reaching peace agreements, implementing them more often and having them last longer, according to "Broadening Participation in Political Negotiations and Implementation," an examination of 40 case studies at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, Switzerland.

Women also improve access to conflict's most vulnerable populations and an understanding of their needs. Precisely because men are the predominant participants at the peace conference table, they determine the outcome of peace processes and post-conflict reconstruction, while the needs of



Afghan Air Force Capt. Safia Ferozi sits in a C-208 turboprop plane at an air base in Kabul. Ferozi flies transport missions and is the country's second female military pilot, part of Afghanistan's effort to bring more women into the Armed Forces.

women, youth, elderly and minorities are often neglected. Resolution 1325 was implemented because women, in particular, along with children and the elderly, have different needs from the combatants typically represented in security and peace operations.

The insecurity of women, children and the elderly is magnified by conflict, because institutions break down and any structures that previously protected these groups are no longer in effect. Women who are widowed must provide for entire families without their husbands, often with scarce resources. It is particularly relevant that health services for women and children are among those most neglected, according to the United Nations Population Fund, and that can lead to increased deaths, especially for pregnant women and infants.

In short, women bring light to important issues that otherwise are pushed under the table. Many argue, including a U.N. assessment on the implementation of Resolution 1325, that “when women are placed at the center of security, justice, economic recovery, and good governance, they will be more direct recipients of a range of peace dividends including job creation and public services. This means that the payoffs of peace will be delivered more rapidly to communities.” Women tend to focus more on investing in food security, education and especially the welfare of their families. Additionally, enabling women as mediators, peacekeepers or state builders can ensure that in societies where contact between women and men is unusual outside familial ties, the female population can be reached and taken care of.

As Anderlini wrote in her book, “it is not that women are necessarily more selfless than men, yet the anecdotal evidence suggests that women are, at the very least, perceived to be more trustworthy, sometimes because women are less often

implicated in war. Other times, it is a result of the tactics women themselves use. They come forward as representatives of the people, with no agenda of personal gain.” For instance, in Somalia where tribal warfare was the primary catalyst for conflict, women who were not allowed at the negotiation table. They decided to create the “Sixth Clan” in 2002 to gain access to a peace process dominated by male clan elders. The Sixth Clan was created across tribal structures, ignoring the different tribal backgrounds of the women and banding them together as one. They didn’t necessarily advocate for the end of the conflict or a better cut for their own clans — they simply wanted to create safe conditions to cover basic human needs, like being able to buy food at the market.

CONCLUSION

Changing attitudes, systems and practices has never been a one-day process. Accelerating the participation of women in the security sector will require institutional changes in governments and political parties. Emancipated states and international organizations must be role models for others and, most important, practice what they preach. In addition, there need to be cultural changes in countries restricting the rights of women, changes in how gender roles are perceived, and behavioral changes in men in positions of power. In particular, there needs to be passionate engagement from women for women. A good example is that of Christine Lagarde, managing director of the International Monetary Fund, who, as finance minister in France, carried a list of 20 women to give to the male leaders of companies who complained they could not find capable women to hire. As both the qualitative and quantitative evidence suggests, giving more women a seat at the table seems to be a no-brainer. □