

While women alone cannot
carry the burden of finding a solution,
their participation is vital
to forging the consensus necessary
to a lasting peace



BY NOELEEN HEYZER

the Executive Director of UNIFEM

foreword

This year has once more brought the issues of peace and security to the forefront of Africa's – and the world's – conscience. Whether in Liberia or the Democratic Republic of Congo, in Burundi or Sudan, the resurgence of fighting marks a set-back to efforts aimed at a peaceful settlement of conflicts and causes new suffering, mainly among the civilian population. More than 70 per cent of the victims in modern wars are civilians, and most of them are women; women and children also make up 80 per cent of all refugees and displaced persons.

It is in this context that the role of the UN Security Council, including its historic Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, is reaffirmed. Experience shows that one sure way to achieve the compromise needed to create and sustain peace is to involve women throughout the peace-building process. Women can more readily embrace the collaborative perspective needed to cut through ethnic, religious, tribal and political barriers. They also embrace a more sustainable concept of security.

If we imagine a secure world, what would it look like through women's eyes and how can we help to bring it about? First and foremost, we must redefine global security, focusing on the human dimensions. Recently in particular, the concept of local, national and global security has been almost exclusively defined in military terms, so that human security has become virtually synonymous with weapons-based security. Women, however, insist on a broader vision, one that puts human life and human rights at the forefront and that includes lives free of all forms of violence, including HIV/AIDS. It is this vision that has inspired women peace activists to go before the Security Council each year, briefing members on the impact of conflict on women and the need for women's leadership in peace-building and reconstruction.

Some months ago I visited the Democratic Republic of Congo, where I talked to many of the women whose lives have been devastated by the years of war in that country. They are asking the international community to demand an end to



will her vote count?

impunity for the crimes against women by all sides of the conflict. Rape has become a weapon of war, a way to humiliate male relatives or implicate entire communities. The women also want a role in the disarmament process, to ensure that demobilisation camps are equipped to address the needs of female ex-combatants, wives or companions of soldiers, and war widows. By developing mechanisms to end impunity, and protect women from a new round of sexual violence, we must acknowledge the deep pain of these women, punish the perpetrators and support women's roles in rebuilding their society.

While women alone cannot carry the burden of finding a solution, their participation is vital to forging the consensus necessary to a lasting peace. They need support, however, to translate their expertise into participation in formal peace negotiations, in peace-building and reconstruction and eventually their participation in national governments. Wherever security issues are discussed, the needs of women must be a regular item on the political agenda, along with their vital role in contributing to peace. Decisions that exclude half the population from political processes offer little hope for achieving a secure future. New responses are vital if we want this century to banish the worst brutalities of the previous one. We must invest in the progress and solutions of women from war-affected countries. 🗳️

ACCORD has trained over 16,000 people from numerous African countries over the past decade. This includes some 4,000 South African election monitors trained in 1994 and over 2000 Nigerian election monitors trained in 1999

TRAINING
www.accord.org.za





Historically, gender-based exclusion, including women's absence from peace negotiating forums, has resulted in damaging setbacks in reconciliation and post-conflict recovery efforts. Our work at ACCORD with women in the Somali, Burundi and DRC conflicts bore testimony to the crucial role that women play in peace negotiations. The women of Somalia played a critical role in brokering peace in Mogadishu in 1998. When the city was besieged by opposing militia groups, the women negotiated a ceasefire to allow men, women and children to go about their daily lives. In a similar display of iron will in 2002, the women of the DRC barricaded their men-folk inside the Inter-Congolese Dialogue venue and demanded that they do not leave the venue until they sign the peace agreement!

As steps are taken on the continent to address the difficulties that women face in conflict situations, and to achieve the objective of increasing women's participation in peace processes, awareness needs to be raised on, firstly, why women are particularly at risk and the challenges they face on the continent, and secondly, what achievements have been made to mainstream gender at decision-making levels of sub-regional organisations. This special edition of *Conflict Trends*, on Women, Peace and Security, seeks to illustrate and analyse these issues and stimulate debate on the continent regarding the positive contribution that women make on peace and security issues.

Conflict results in significant transformation and disruptions in the structures and culture of society, including gender relations that determine

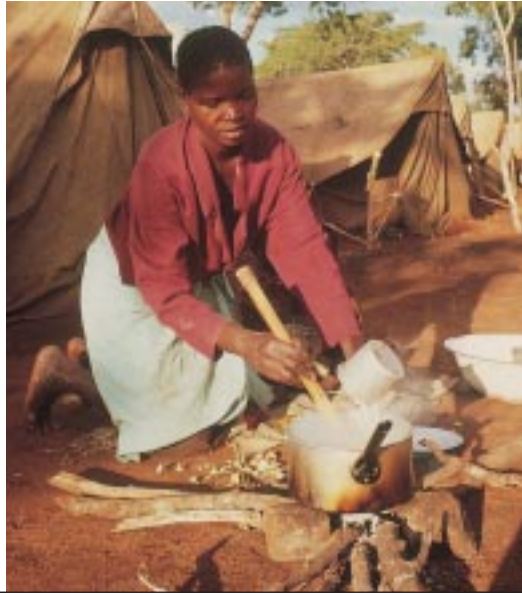
access to resources and control. These disruptions tend to continue after a peace agreement has been signed, and they negatively affect the long-term resolution of the conflict. Women have generally been viewed as vulnerable and in need of protection during these destabilising times. Although women often do need special consideration for protection, they are also powerful forces for change and play an important role in regaining a balance in gender relations and bringing long-term peace and stability to their war-torn communities.

This edition comes at a historical moment in Africa with the recent adoption of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa by African Union Heads of State and Government. This recent development is indicative of the African Union's commitment to the advancement of gender equality and the recognition of the role that women play in conflict resolution.

At ACCORD we applaud the adoption of the Protocol and other achievements gained by women's groups in placing women's issues squarely on the African and international peace and security agenda. We also continue to support women's lobbying efforts to mainstream gender in the African Union and NEPAD, through our various networks and affiliations. We are thus pleased to partner with UNIFEM on this special edition of *Conflict Trends* and trust that it will further the debate and raise awareness of the links between women, peace and security.

Vasu Gounden is Executive Director of ACCORD

Unpacking the nexus
between theory and practice



BY DR LOUISE VINCENT

CONFLICT PREVENTION

current discourse on the

role of women in conflict prevention

and conflict transformation: a critique

Much of the recent discourse surrounding the role of women in conflict prevention and conflict transformation is shot through with contradictory assumptions used as the basis for the argument that women should play a greater role, that women's voices should be heard more, and so on, in these processes. While the desire for a more humane politics, for the insertion of the legitimacy of emotions and an ethic of care into our deliberations about the causes of conflict and its possible resolution, is to be welcomed, we need to theorise with greater care why we associate these positive social goods with women and what we mean when we talk about 'women'. We need also to look at the implications of doing so and to ask ourselves why these values have been marginalised in the first instance. Calls for conflict prevention strategies to take into account a 'gendered perspec-

tive' (and what is usually meant here is a 'women's perspective' rather than a gender perspective) lack a clear theoretical grounding and have become a somewhat hollow talisman whose real meaning is unclear. Constantly repeating the refrain of the absence of a 'woman's perspective' tells us little about what such a perspective might be and is falsely universalising in its premise. These calls draw from a variety of conflicting theoretical trends ranging from liberal pluralism through to standpoint feminism. What they fail to do is to take into account the post-structuralist critique of such perspectives which denies the unitary subject of both liberal and feminist accounts.

The Liberal Pluralist Impulse

At the heart of the liberal account of politics is the autonomous individual, freely choosing and moti-

vated in those choices by self-interest. Key to this account is the distinction between a private sphere of personal, subjective interests which is mediated by the competition of the market and a public sphere where the aim is to try to rule according to the supposedly apolitical idea of a common good. In the liberal pluralist version of this account different groups ought to have differential influence in public life according to the degree to which they are impacted upon by a particular issue: "Within the liberal logic of self-interest, people are more likely to exercise their agency as citizens over matters that affect them most directly."¹ Embedded in the rhetorical claims made in many of the calls for a greater involvement of women in conflict resolution, for a 'gendered perspective', is the idea that women have a particular interest in peace. In a variety of forums where the need to mainstream a

"... the state and formal political process, it is implied, are the domain of men... Men are already empowered. What is needed are other voices, in particular, the voices of women."

gender perspective in conflict resolution is reiterated again and again, the fact that women and children are the most vulnerable group when conflict erupts and are frequently the main victims of armed conflict is cited as the preface to a call for the greater involvement of women in conflict resolution structures.² Women are said to be the mothers, wives, grandmothers, lovers of the soldiers who are sent to die in conflict;

women are said to suffer the most from war and therefore to have the greatest interest in ending it. This then is the liberal pluralist idea of the right to a greater representation in the processes governing conflict resolution deriving from a particular interest in the resolution of conflict.

A further version of liberalism is the associationalist idea which requires a strengthening of the voluntary associations that make up civil society as a counterpoint to state power. "The civil society argument departs from conventional liberal democracy by according voluntary bodies a primary role in organising social life, rather than an ancillary function to government. These smaller private entities, which may or may not be governed by democratic principles, are viewed as more flexible and responsive to community needs."³

In current discourse on the role of women in conflict resolution both liberal pluralist and associationalist perspectives are common. Much of this discourse arises from the non-state sector: from aid organisations, conflict resolution bodies, United Nations subsidiaries, and other civil society formations. Much of the discourse implies that, left to states alone, conflict resolution and transformation is unlikely to succeed, that what is needed is to base these efforts in the lives of 'real people' from which the state is seen to be relatively removed. In particular, the state and formal political processes, it is implied, are the domain of men and the already empowered. What is needed are other voices, in particular, the voices of women.

The Critique of Liberal Pluralism

Yet inherent in the call for a 'gendered approach' to conflict resolution and for the 'perspective of women' to be included in conflict transformation, is also fundamentally a critique of liberal individualism. Opponents have argued that far from the ideal of the neutral state which referees between conflicting interests as expressed by freely choosing autonomous subjects, the state has become the instrument of the already empowered, that the separation between public and private which lies at liberalism's heart is illegitimate and that not all interests in society are in an equal position to assert themselves.

Each of these critiques is suggested but seldom explicitly stated in elements of the current discourse on the role of women in conflict resolution. If the call is to look to formations of civil society for an energy, a richness, a new perspective to be brought to bear on conflict resolution processes, then implicit in this is the idea that while women are often absent from formal state structures they are often to be found in organisations of civil society. More than this, it is implied that the state, male arena that it is, is often incapable of taking into account women's perspectives and interests.

But in another form, the discourse on the role of women in conflict resolution offers a more fundamental critique of liberal pluralism than this. As seen above, one form of critique is simply to say that it is all very well to propose many different groups in society with different perspectives and the ideal is that each perspective is fully expressed. This



leaves out notions of power, race and gender. Implied in this critique is the rationale that if one could cancel out these inequalities of expression, the notion may well be valid. But is this really what the proponents of a greater role for women's voices in conflict resolution wish to say? In some versions it appears that what is being said is something more fundamental. Rather than simply postulating that women's voices should be included because they are an interest in society that is important and has unjustifiably been excluded with unfortunate consequences, there appears to be implied in many versions of this discourse something more far-reaching. Rather than one valid perspective among many, there is the idea underlying much of what is said that women's perspective is *the* perspective that is needed. Women, it is often implied, are peaceable, caring, loving, and kind and we need a world in which these values are paramount. Conflict resolution requires a reinsertion of these values onto the top of our political agendas and we do so by including women.

While pluralism, as Mouffe has pointed out, means the "absence of a single substantive idea of the good life", many arguments for the inclusion of women's voices in conflict resolution seem to hold implicit in them a very particular substantive idea of the good life.⁴ Women's perspectives are not just held as one among many valid ideas but rather are implic-

itly viewed as offering a better, more peaceful way of ordering social life, a better way of seeing conflict, its roots and causes and thus a better way of solving it, along with a better way of living after conflict. This brings us to the next set of implicit assumptions in this discourse, namely its essentialising assumptions regarding who and what women are.

Standpoint Feminism

Current discourse on the role of women in conflict resolution and conflict transformation owes many of its fundamental assumptions to what has been termed "standpoint feminism". This perspective includes the following assumptions:⁵

- ▲ the claim that philosophical as well as social-scientific theories of the past have been cognitively inadequate because they have failed to take into account the standpoint, activities and experiences of women;
- ▲ to correct gender blindness it is necessary to identify a set of experiences, activities, as well as patterns of thinking, feeling and acting which can be characterised as 'female';
- ▲ such experiences, activities, etc. are a consequence of women's social position or of their position within the sexual division of labour; whereas men have been active in the public sphere of production, politics, war and science,

women's activities have been confined to the domestic/reproductive and private spheres;

- ▲ the task of feminist theory is to make this sphere of activity and its consequences for human life visible, audible and present at the level of theory; feminist theory articulates the implicit, tacit, everyday and non-theorised experiences and activities of women and allows these to come to the level of consciousness;
- ▲ by aiding the articulation of female experience, feminist theory not only engages in a critique of science and theory but also contributes to the process of transforming women's consciousness by giving female activities and experiences public presence and legitimacy.

These points correlate very well with what is being said in the political discourse on women in conflict resolution:

- ▲ it is claimed that conflict resolution practice and theory have failed to take into account the standpoint, activities and experiences of women;
- ▲ it is argued that the dominant discourse of conflict resolution and prevention has been guilty of gender blindness thus excluding women's experiences, activities, and patterns of thinking, feeling and acting;
- ▲ women are seen to hold these different perspectives because of their different social position; women have a perspective drawn from their lives as mothers, carers, wives and they have been relatively absent from the realm of production, politics, war and science;
- ▲ the task of a gendered perspective in conflict

resolution practice and theory is to make the lived experiences, activities and perspectives of women part of the agenda of conflict resolution.

"...women have a perspective drawn from their lives as mothers, carers, wives, and they have been relatively absent from the realm of production, politics, war and science."

The Post-Structuralist Critique

Post-structuralist theorists such as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have argued that each person belongs to numerous overlapping groups and holds multiple intersecting identities.⁶ In contrast to the fundamentals of standpoint feminism this is a non-essentialist

view of politics. In contrast to the unitary agent both of liberalism and of standpoint feminism, the social agent is conceived of as constituted by a multiplicity of subject positions whose articulation is always precarious and temporary. In this view, then, identities (including both gender and sex) are socially constructed with no basis of 'givenness' in nature, anatomy or some other anthropological site.

Post-structuralist ideas of the radically decentred, multiple-layered subject have thus led to a very fundamental critique of the assumptions of standpoint feminism. Yet the discourse on the role of women in conflict resolution appears entirely to be situated in the paradigms of liberalism, pluralism and standpoint feminism and to have taken little cognisance of this critique. Yet whether or not women can be said to be the bearers of a different and distinctive set of values is the central debate in contemporary feminist theory. As Benhabib points out, "there is not a single organisation with the agenda of which a majority of women would agree...Relishing in diversity, basking in fragmentation, enjoying the play of differences, and celebrating opacity, fracturing, and heteronomy is a dominant mood of contemporary feminist theory and practice."⁷

Poor and working class women, lesbians, black women, and rural women have argued that the standpoint feminist starting point fails to illuminate their lives or address their problems. This is a vital critique for the discourse on conflict resolution to take into account, addressing itself as it does chiefly to poor women in poor countries. The assumption of a universal female dependence and confinement to the domestic sphere is seen as a false extrapolation from the experience of white, middle-class, heterosexual women situated primarily in the North.⁸ This "contemporary mood" of feminist theory and practice poses an enormous challenge to those who would wish to see various forms of political activity based on the idea that women have something in common, in this instance, a common perspective on peace and society which has hitherto been absent from the conflict resolution discourse and needs to be inserted.

Meeting the Post-structuralist Challenge

While it seems empirically difficult to argue with the critique of standpoint feminism as privileging a narrow section of women's interests and experiences

and generalising these to incorporate all women when we use terms like 'women's perspective', this is a politically enfeebling position to arrive at, entailing as it does the loss of the female subject. In response to the post-structuralist challenge, various attempts have been made to shore up the idea of a common women's perspective. One attempted answer has been from the literature which casts women as mothers. Much of this literature comes from the peace movement where it is/was supposed that women were somehow more predisposed to peace as a result of their ability to, or actual experience of, giving life. Yet it has been a characteristic of this literature that it ends up talking not about 'women' at all but about certain kinds of roles or practices. Thus it is not women who are more peaceable or kindly or nurturing, but mothers. And it is not only women who can be mothers but the role of mothering itself which renders certain attitudes available to one – and in principle such roles could be performed either by men or women.⁹ It is the values and experiences that are affirmed, then, not a particular type of person.

Another (related) attempted answer has come from the literature on care. Carol Gilligan argues that an "ethic of care and responsibility" characterises women's moral voices. She claims that women are more likely to display empathy than men: the values of care, responsiveness to the needs of others, the ability for empathy and for taking the standpoint of the concrete other.¹⁰ Again this literature ends up eschewing essentialist notions which make women uniquely caring to talk about the ethic of care itself as a good ethic rather than about which people have this ethic and what the gender of such people might be.¹¹

While the idea of women all collectively possessing and articulating certain fundamental interests and perspectives is impossible to sustain in the face of the post-structuralist challenge posed to standpoint feminism, it may be possible to reactivate the notion of a common good, a shared human vision (as opposed to a woman's vision). It may be that we are able, for example, to claim that whatever our cultural, sexual, class, race, regional, gender or other (intersecting) identity components, it is self-evident that human relationships characterised by mutuality, caring, empathy and compassion are more desirable than relationships based on competition, mistrust, antagonism, violence and aggression.

This is the move that Benhabib makes when she

talks of a vision of feminism "which accepts that the furthering of one's capacity for autonomous agency is only possible within the confines of a solidaristic community that sustains one's identity through mutual recognition...Distinct from the language of eternal contestation, conflict and haggling over scarce resources, the primary virtue in politics is the creation of an enlarged mentality."¹² So rather than the goal of a good politics being the creation of a neutral state which presides over perpetual conflict, the aim is unashamedly to give a particular content and meaning to the good life that is being proposed, unashamedly to avow a politics of mutual compassion rather than narrow self-interest. It is true that the virtues in question have at some points been associated with the 'feminine', while competition, aggression and violence have historically been associated with the 'masculine', but the idea here is to recognise that these are human virtues and human ills; they do not adhere timelessly, biologically or necessarily to any particular gender or to any particular type of man or woman. Rather, these are virtues which are always precarious, vulnerable to corruption and in need of our ongoing and dutiful attention so that they may be privileged in public life. The point here is that it is more helpful straightforwardly to attest to the sorts of ways we want people to be rather than essentialising a notion of 'women' who are then postulated as the guardians of these virtues which have hitherto been absent from public life. Unless we believe that men are as capable of these virtues as women (and contrariwise that women are as capable as men of the vices of greed, aggression and violence), then both our hopes for more peaceable human relations and the probability of our hopes succeeding must likely be dashed.

This response to the post-modernist critique moves in the opposite direction from the latter critics, taking as it does an avowedly non-relativist stance and returning to the unpopular notion of a common good as being the goal of public life. Rather than accepting a notion of human society as consisting in ever more particularised individual interests, it entails, as Hannah Arendt has suggested, a recognition of at least the potential for agreement with others, whatever our gender, class, race, regional

"Simply to 'include' women or women's voices in a politics that is flawed ...will have little transformative effect."

or other identity; it suggests that the capacity for imagination with which human beings are uniquely endowed provides us with the potential for “an enlarged way of thinking which...knows how to transcend its individual limitations”.¹³ This is an idea taken up by amongst others the philosopher Thomas Nagel who argues that the appropriate form that moral reasoning must necessarily take is for the individual to view a particular matter partly from her own standpoint but partly also by imaginatively placing herself in the shoes of the other persons affected by a particular course of action.¹⁴

Conclusion

Simply to ‘include’ women or women’s voices (and these, it must be remembered, will not be representative in any way of a general category of ‘women’ since no such thing exists) in a politics that is flawed and based on unsatisfactory ethical and moral bases will have little transformative effect. As Dhaliwal has pointed out, such inclusionary attempts do little more than reaffirm a “hegemonic core to which the margins are added without any significant destabilisation of that core”. The add women and stir project serves to “valorise the very centre that is problematic to begin with”.¹⁵ Formal legal rights to equality of men and women are likely to have little impact in the absence of new and deep-rooted forms of political culture. It is moreover impossible to create the latter in the absence of a positive vision which affirms certain values and disavows others. Yet the positive affirming of particular values and rejection of others, say in public education, is precisely what is unpopular among many of the very proponents of conflict resolution who would wish to see a greater role for women. Current dominant perspectives on ‘multiculturalism’ lead some to the conclusion that *any* positive moral vision is necessarily flawed and that it is never justifiable to affirm certain values and deny others. Because of this shyness about what is viewed as the relativity of value standpoints, these proponents have to introduce a substantive and positive value affirmation through the back door as it were – by suggesting that if we include women, then we shall include the kinds of values and points of view that have thus far been missing. Why not simply talk about these values for their own sake, as human values which are to be affirmed and positively fostered through education and the formation of a

new political culture?

This is in stark contrast to some recent theorists of radical democracy who, in focusing on the need to include various people in the decision-making of a democracy, end up in what appears to this writer to be an absurd position where truth matters less than participation: “the right to decide takes precedence over making the right decisions, which is why who participates in a decision is as important as what is decided”.¹⁶ This seems patently ridiculous. While there are certainly legitimate issues of justice and equality in relation to the unequal numbers of men and women in structures of political power, including conflict resolution and transformation processes, an exclusive focus on who is present and who is absent risks confusing the presence of certain types of people with the presence of certain types of substantive values and ideas. The inclusion of women is no panacea and can easily become a readily achievable substitute for the much more difficult process of negotiating and inculcating a positive peace agenda which includes gender sensitivity. 🗨️

Louise Vincent is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Political Studies and International Studies Unit, Rhodes University.

Endnotes

- 1 D Trend, ed. *Radical Democracy: Identity, Citizenship and the State*, New York: Routledge, 1996, p 11.
- 2 See for example various statements at the UN Security Council Open Meeting on Women, Peace and Security, New York, 25 July 2002.
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 Cited in S Benhabib, *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, pp 20-21.
- 5 As summarised in *Ibid.*, pp 30-31.
- 6 Trend, 1996, p 15.
- 7 Benhabib, 1996, p 29.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p 31.
- 9 See for example S Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1995.
- 10 Cited in Benhabib, 1996, p 28.
- 11 See for example S Sevenhuisjen, *Citizenship and the Ethics of Care: Feminist Considerations on Justice, Morality and Politics*, London: Routledge, 1998.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p 38.
- 13 Arendt, 1961 cited in Benhabib, 1996, p 38.
- 14 See for example, T Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- 15 Cited in Benhabib, 1996, p 44.
- 16 Cited in Trend, 1996, p 67.

Engendering early
warning mechanisms for
effective conflict prevention



BY FELICITY HILL

CONFLICT PREVENTION

the elusive role of women in

early warning

and conflict prevention

By providing time to prepare, analyse and plan a response, early warning is an essential precursor and prerequisite for effective conflict prevention. Not always about predicting a conflict or episode of violence before any such incidents have broken out, early warning information is also used to predict a resurgence or escalation of conflict and violence. The OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities describes early warning as “any information from any source about escalatory developments, be they slow and gradual or quick and sudden, far enough in advance in order for a national government, or an international or regional organisation to react timely and effectively, if possible still leaving them time to employ preventive diplomacy and other non-coercive and non-military preventive measures”.¹

The importance of gender to conflict prevention and early warning has been recognised. However, concrete measures to improve the flow of early warning information from and about women have

not been put in place. If preventive visits and fact-finding missions to areas of potential conflict were to routinely include gender expertise and consultations with women’s organisations, systematic and useable information about women could be collected and analysed. Only then could ‘gender perspectives’ be turned into concrete early warning indicators, and only then will the basis laid down by the Security Council be built upon in a meaningful way.

This article will examine developments as they relate to the role of women in preventing conflict, particularly focusing on the need for enhanced information about the impact of conflict on women and women’s role in peace-building, as well as mainstreaming gender into the early warning indicators used to predict and prevent conflict.

Recent Developments in Conflict Prevention

Over the last five years, the debate about conflict prevention has been stimulated by a number of

reports and resolutions. The report of the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict published in 1999 brought together eminent persons with a wide range of expertise.² Their final document, and the numerous papers and events that contributed toward it, created the foundation for the renewed contemporary focus on conflict prevention. The concepts of operational (immediate) and structural (root causes) prevention elaborated in this document have informed subsequent debates and it remains a key text in this field. The Commission qualified the post-Cold War optimism for a 'peace dividend' while not abandoning hope that the end of bi-polar hostilities could produce a new framework for preventing conflict. The Commission calculated that at least US \$200 billion was spent on the seven major interventions in the 1990s – in Bosnia Herzegovina, Somalia, Rwanda, Haiti, the Persian Gulf, Cambodia and El Salvador. A preventative approach would have cost the international community US \$130 billion, a savings of \$70 billion. Jane Holl Lute, Executive Director of the Carnegie Commission, compared the preoccupation and engagement with the science of preventing conflict at both international and national levels with the relative cynicism when their effort first commenced: "In 1994, when we began our work, people laughed at us, they thought the notion of preventing violent conflict was ludicrous in the extreme, and that you couldn't make a difference in people's thinking."³

The change of attitude witnessed since the publication of the Carnegie Commission report proves the cynics wrong, as the Security Council, the General Assembly, the G8, the OECD, the European Union, and the African Union have returned the notion of conflict prevention to the realm of realism. Serious debates, resolutions and small concrete steps towards establishing mechanisms for early warning and response have demonstrated that preventing conflict is a legitimate and achievable goal. NGOs have advanced this agenda considerably through predicting conflicts, refining early warning instruments and documenting that, in fact, prevention works.⁴ The debate about women, peace and security has also achieved prominence and coherence in these institutions over the same period, and linkages have been made through noting the *potential* role of women in preventing war.

When the Security Council first debated its role in the prevention of armed conflict in November 1999, Secretary General Kofi Annan urged the international community to move "from a culture of reaction to a culture of prevention".⁵ In June 2001 the Secretary General issued a very comprehensive report on conflict prevention that underscored the importance of gender equality, the costs of failing to prevent war and the need for non-governmental organisations to clarify their role in conflict prevention and their relationship to the United Nations. The report stressed the need to protect women's human rights and called on the Security Council to include a gender perspective in its work and to integrate the protection of women's human rights in conflict prevention and peace-building.⁶ In response, the Security Council passed Resolution 1366 on conflict prevention which reiterated its recognition of the role of women in conflict prevention and its request to the Secretary-General "to give greater attention to gender perspectives in the implementation of peace-keeping and peace-building mandates as well as in conflict prevention efforts". Many other regional security organisations have made similar statements about the crucial role of women in conflict prevention, and have made commitments to incorporating gender issues, especially after the passage of Security Council resolution 1325, including, *inter alia*, the G8,⁷ the African Union,⁸ the Non-Aligned Movement, and the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD).⁹

Enhancing Women's Role in Peace and Security Decision-Making

On 31 October 2000, the Security Council adopted its first resolution (1325) on women and peace and security. This resolution provides a comprehensive political framework within which women's protection and their role in peace processes can be addressed. For the first time, the Council called for a comprehensive assessment of the impact of armed conflict on women and girls, the role of women in peace-building and the gender dimensions of peace processes and conflict resolution. The resolution specifically mentions women's role in conflict prevention, but does not go on to elaborate on what that might mean.

The 2000 Brahimi Report provided a compre-

hensive review of UN Peacekeeping and emphasised the need for enhanced conflict prevention strategies, echoing the advocates of the women, peace and security agenda that verbal postures without political or financial support are not sufficient for preventive action to work.¹⁰ The report recommended improving information and analysis capacities within the UN and urged the Secretary General to conduct more fact-finding missions, despite the “impediment” posed by some states that fear for the integrity of their sovereignty.¹¹

The 2001 report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, an independent panel of experts brought together by the Canadian government, responded to Secretary General Kofi Annan’s request that the international community negotiate how to protect the sensitivities of sovereign states while also preventing genocides and massacres.¹² Affirming the primary responsibility of sovereign states to prevent conflict and protect their citizens, the panel proposed that the responsibility shift to the shoulders of the international community if a state cannot or will not protect its citizens, or if it is the perpetrator of “conscience shocking events crying out for action” such as “large scale loss of life or large scale ethnic cleansing, whether carried out by forced expulsion, acts of terror or rape”.¹³ This report highlights the need for “constant campaigning” for preventive action, and has deepened the debate about how and when to intervene, emphasising non-military actions, and reconfirming that UN Security Council authorisation “should in all cases be sought prior to any military action being carried out”.¹⁴ The report also emphasises that crimes against women constitute “conscience shocking events” and the need for a renewed commitment to prevention, early warning and analysis as well as effective disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) and security sector reform in post-conflict countries to prevent the resurgence of violence.

The United Nations Department of Political Affairs is the UN focal point for prevention, and works in close collaboration with other UN Agencies through the Inter-Agency/Interdepartmental Framework Team for Coordination, made up of 14 UN agencies and departments. The Framework Team meets regu-



larly to evaluate areas of risk and identifies preventive measures for countries at risk of conflict. At present there is no dedicated staff to assist this information sharing and coordination mechanism. In addition, the early warning indicator framework used by the team is lacking gender components. The framework team has just invited UNIFEM to participate in the group as the organisation that is undertaking efforts to develop and test gender-based early warning indicators in order to integrate gender in its efforts to coordinate the UN system preventive response to potential conflict.

Early Warning, Information and Analysis

Effective preventive strategies must consider information and early warning from and about the primary targets of war: civilians. The threat to civilians, and especially women in conflict situations, has underscored the need to incorporate gender analysis into early warning activities and the opportunity for preventive measures to strengthen women's protection. Such steps must be based upon timely and accurate knowledge of facts, an understanding of developments and global trends, and the economic, social and political causes of the conflicts. If higher quality information and analysis existed, and if governments at the UN were prepared to share that quality information and analysis of the long list of quantifiable emerging early warning signs, war would be much easier to prevent.

In their Preliminary Framework on Gender and Conflict Early Warning, Eugenia Piza-Lopes and Susanne Schmeidl suggest that incorporating gender-sensitive indicators will fine-tune existing information collection and analysis mechanisms, allowing for previously overlooked signs of instability at a grassroots level that can anticipate conflict before it spreads to formal politics.¹⁵ In addition, incorporating gender analysis and perspectives into formulating response options ensures that discriminatory policies are not perpetuated in post-conflict situations, nor that newfound freedoms reversed once fighting has subsided. According to Lopes and Schmeidl, "...gender analysis elicits different questions about the causes and effects of conflict on different sectors within society and their particular relationships and roles with each other. It also provides a better understanding of unequal social hierarchies (including gender hierarchies), inequality and oppression, which are often characteristics of societies that are prone to, or embroiled in conflict."¹⁶ The peaceful all-woman protests at ChevronTexaco oil pipeline facilities in Nigeria represented a departure from previous protests in the oil-rich Niger Delta, where armed men frequently use kidnapping and sabotage to pressure oil multinationals into giving them jobs, protection money or compensation for environmental damage. The women occupied offices and oil fields, creating a space for nego-

tiation between workers and the company. The women demanded more jobs, business loans, schools and hospitals for their communities, and by taking up measures to reduce the pressures posed by poverty, poor health and lack of services, may have prevented violent conflict and certainly improved their situation.

When documenting the root or systemic causes of war, focusing on gender analyses of power and structures will provide insights into violent societies. For instance, preliminary research suggests that countries with very low percentages of women in parliament and the formal labour sector, or cultures that restrict women, condone violence against them or treat women as property, are more likely to resort to armed conflict to settle disputes.¹⁷ Other data that may be relevant include the female literacy rate, average level of female education, number of children per household, which influence women's ability to participate in structures that may prevent war by engaging in other forms of conflict resolution.

The Preliminary Framework asserts that gender is a relevant category when examining medium term conditions that reflect rising tension in the society. The prevalence of the following occurrences, which may only be evident to those on the ground, indicate social discord that may result in armed conflict: gender-specific human rights violations such as rape, abductions, trafficking, domestic violence, sexual harassment, abuse by security forces, killings and disappearances of women, elections-related violence, lack of institutional prosecution of perpetrators, increased rates of prostitution and commercial sex work due to military presence, abrupt changes in gender roles, such as the imposition of restrictive laws, rewards for aggressive behaviour and propaganda emphasising hyper-masculinity, number of single female-headed households, sex-specific refugee migrations, sex-specific unemployment, sale of jewellery or other precious materials, and the hoarding of goods.

UNIFEM's Response

UNIFEM's mandate is to generate and support innovative and catalytic strategies towards gender equality. Because it has long-standing relationships with women's organising efforts in every region of the world, including conflict areas, UNIFEM is well

placed to test information collection models and provide support to other entities collecting and analysing information on the impact of armed conflict on women and women's role in peace-building. However, the emphasis on being catalytic and innovative in UNIFEM's mandate has hindered the ability to remain operational in many countries on a continuous or long-term basis.

Complying with a call from the General Assembly to enhance efforts undertaken in conflict areas, and responding to Security Council Resolution 1325, UNIFEM has intensified its work in 25 conflict affected countries through a four-pronged framework for action that increases the availability of targeted information on the impact of conflict on women and their role in peace building, strengthens approaches to protection and assistance for women affected by conflict, strengthens the contribution of women to conflict prevention, resolution and post-conflict peace-building at national, regional and international levels, and mainstreams a gender focus in inter-governmental peace and security initiatives.

In order to analyse the full potential of Security Council Resolution 1325 and to survey women affected by conflict, UNIFEM appointed two independent experts to travel the world's war zones. Elisabeth Rehn of Finland and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia generated a ten-chapter book reviewing existing knowledge and offering 64 recommendations which was launched on 31 October 2002, the second anniversary of the passage of Resolution 1325. The experts summarised the gender components of early warning as including:

- ▲ Propaganda emphasising hyper-masculinity;
- ▲ Media scapegoating of women, accusing them of political or cultural betrayal;
- ▲ Sex-specific refugee migrations;
- ▲ Engagement of women in a shadow war economy;
- ▲ Sex-specific unemployment;
- ▲ Resistance to women's participation in peace processes and negotiations;
- ▲ Lack of presence of women in civil society organisations;
- ▲ Growth of fundamentalism;
- ▲ Increase in single female-headed households.

Citing stories they were told by women about

weapons accumulation, and foreknowledge of actual attacks, the independent experts concur with Piza-Lopes and Schmeidl's finding that assessing the affects of conflict on women provides new information that may lead to fresh analysis and response options. While practitioners in the field emphasise the need for accurate and timely information, influential authorities have claimed that more analysis and response is needed, rather than more information. The experts asserted that this perspective overlooks a rich source of information that is not being tapped. They discovered in their meetings with conflict-affected women that they spontaneously describe and refer to early warning indicators, which differ from country to country. Listening to women in these zones would be of enormous advantage to those collecting and analysing information, according to the experts, who recommended that UNIFEM develop and test gender-based early warning indicators in field based pilots.

Pursuing a collaborative approach to developing common indicators for early warning, taking into account women and gender issues, UNIFEM has started implementing this recommendation in partnership with the UN system, especially UN Funds and Programmes, and with NGOs, regional and sub-regional organisations. The first step, developing a set of gender-based early warning indicators for testing in three field-based pilots, has required adapting conflict analysis tools – including situation profiles, analysis of the causes, actors and potential scenarios of the conflict – that have been traditionally gender blind. The organisation has generated lists of gender-specific characteristics of conflict including signs forthcoming in the latent-formation of conflict, as well as the stage of escalating tension, or low or high intensity violence. The obvious indicators relate to the feminisation of poverty and the increased economic burden placed on women during conflict, increases in forced or voluntary prostitution, the decline in women's access to health, education, employment, credit and land.

“Listening to women in conflict zones would be of enormous advantage to those collecting and analysing information.”

While manifestations of the cultural impact of war and psychosocial trauma are less easy to document, it is certainly not invisible, and can be seen by those living in close proximity to the society. For example, it is recognised that restricting public debate on increasing political tensions is a sign of impending conflict. Politically active and visible women are silenced in gender-specific ways, through threats of rape and threats of injury or death to children. As women's organisations turn to UNIFEM for support in providing security for their members, alarm systems for their offices, or international visibility to protect women leaders, the organisation is able to document the impact of the conflict on women. Inflammatory public rhetoric very often manipulates gender roles and symbols to arouse hatred of 'the enemy'. Concrete examples gleaned from UNIFEM's presence in conflict countries of press materials, graffiti or social codes enforced by armed groups are relevant and useful in predicting the patterns violence may take, therefore prompting appropriate protection initiatives.

Experience in this field has proven that the process may be as important as the results. As analysts and practitioners become familiar with the information offered by using gender-based early warning indicators, not only will they learn more about the impact of armed conflict on women, they will also appreciate the critical role women can play in preventing it. During the field-based testing of the indicators listed above, UNIFEM will be working closely with UN country teams, governments and NGOs to enhance the security literacy of women, and the gender literacy of security institutions and decision-makers.


Decision-makers on the Security Council obtain analysis and recommendations for action from a variety of sources including their national intelligence mechanisms, and through the

thematic and country-focused reports of the Secretary-General. Security Council resolution 1325 acknowledges the lack of data about the impact of armed conflict on women and women's role in peace-building informing their deliberations. Resolution 1325 asks the Secretary-General, where appropriate, to include in his reporting to the Security Council progress on gender mainstreaming throughout peacekeeping missions and all other aspects relating to women. Despite this request for a more complete picture of the situation on the ground in war torn societies, the information provided to the Council has been patchy.

In order for ongoing detailed and up to date information on the impact of conflict on women and their activities in peace building, UNIFEM is developing a web portal on women, war and peace. The portal will be launched on 31 October 2003, the third anniversary of the passage of Security Council Resolution 1325, and will provide gender profiles of countries in conflict, as well as thematic resources on issues such as displacement, violence, health, HIV/AIDS, justice, reconstruction, prevention, small arms and human security, among others. Rather than providing *ad hoc* information prior to a Security Council mission or to a UN department writing a report, UNIFEM will be facilitating ongoing and routine inclusion of information by and about women enduring war through this mechanism.

While the founders of the UN emphasised the need for equality between men and women as well as nations large and small and provided a series of mechanisms to prevent war, they understood that the prevention of war was inextricably tied to the reduction and control of armaments. In Article 26 of the Charter, the Security Council, together with the Military Staff Committee, is asked to generate a plan to divert as little of the world's human and economic resources to armaments as possible. The independent experts appointed by UNIFEM reaffirmed this role for the Security Council in preventing conflict, echoing the observation of the women's peace movement, and every Secretary-General of the United Nations regarding the asymmetrical investment in war rather than peace. If we invest in war, we will get war. If the world's governments invested as many human and economic resources into peace and conflict prevention as they invest in war, the ultimate goal of the United

"The obvious indicators relate to the feminisation of poverty and the increased economic burden placed on women during conflict, increases in forced or voluntary prostitution, the decline in women's access to health, education, employment, credit and land. "

Nations to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war would be realised. It is high time for women's voices, recommendations and actions to be better utilised by the international community towards that goal. 

Felicity Hill works as a governance, peace and security specialist with UNIFEM.

Endnotes

- 1 Dr Max Van Der Stoel, High Commissioner On National Minorities, Keynote Speech to the Seminar on Early Warning and Preventive Diplomacy, Warsaw, 19-21 January 1994, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/documents/periodicals/bulle2-2.pdf>.
- 2 <http://www.ccpdc.org/>.
- 3 Jane Holl Lute, Paper presented at UNIFEM Advisory Group meeting to the Independent Experts on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women's Role in Peace-building, Helsinki, Finland, 6-8 March 2002.
- 4 The European Platform for Conflict Prevention and Transformation is an open network of some 150 key European non-governmental organisations involved in the prevention and/or resolution of violent conflicts in the international arena. Its mission is to facilitate the exchange of information and experience among participating organisations, which includes women's organisations. See <http://www.euconflict.org>. Founded in 1991, the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) is one of many African NGOs focused on conflict prevention and has devoted considerable energies to exploring gender and women's role in prevention and peace-building in Africa. See <http://www.accord.org.za/web.nsf>. A large coalition of international and national groups launched the Global Action Plan to Prevent War in 1999. The Plan is a blueprint for a war prevention regime to be established in four phases over the first three to four decades. See <http://www.globalactionpw.org/>. A collection of 50 prevention success stories recently published by the Oxford Research Group reveals the detailed analysis of strategies for prevention, conflict management and resolution that is now readily available from the NGO community, including women's organisations. See Dylan Mathews, *War Prevention Works: 50 Stories of People Resolving Conflict*, Oxford Research Group, September 2001, www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk.
- 5 UN Press Release, SC/6759, 29 November 1999.
- 6 Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on Conflict Prevention, A/55/895 – S/2001/574, 7 July 2001, <http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/reports/2001/574e.pdf>.
- 7 Conclusion of the meeting of the G8 Foreign Ministers' Meeting, Attachment 2, G8 Roma Initiatives on Conflict Prevention, 'Strengthening the Role of Women in Conflict Prevention', 18-19 July 2001, Rome, Italy, http://www.g7.toronto.ca/g7/foreign/fm091901_con_att2.html.
- 8 The 1993 Declaration of the Assembly of African Heads of State established the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. The objective of the Mechanism, overseen by a 16 member Central Organ, is the anticipation and prevention of situations of potential conflict from developing into full-blown conflicts. The Organisation of African Unity (now called the African Union) has begun to take practical steps to include African women and utilise their skills in resolving conflicts in Africa. For example, in 1997 the AU dispatched an African Women's Solidarity Mission to Burundi with the goal of encouraging the participation of women in the peace-building process. In 1998, in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the AU created an advisory body called the African Women's Committee on Peace and Development to foster the full participation of women in continental efforts to manage conflicts, although the Committee is criticised for being weak and not integrated into the Mechanism.
- 9 IGAD Member States have established a Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism and held a workshop entitled 'Engendering the Early Warning and Response Mechanism for IGAD Member States', 25-26 November 2002, Addis Ababa. This was attended by 34 participants from seven IGAD member states.
- 10 Comprehensive Review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects A/55/305 – S/2000/809, 21 August 2000, para 32.
- 11 *Ibid.*, para 33.
- 12 'The Responsibility to Protect: Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty', Ottawa: International Development Research Center, December 2001.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p xii.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 Eugenia Piza-Lopez and Susanne Schmeidl, *Gender and Conflict Early Warning: A Preliminary Framework*, Geneva: Swiss Peace Foundation with International Alert, July 2002.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p 8, citing Anne J Tickner, 'Why Women Can't Run the World: International Politics According to Francis Fukuyama', *International Studies Review*, vol 1, no 3, 1999.
- 17 Mary Caprioli, 'Gendered Conflict', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol 37, no 1, 2000, cited in Piza-Lopez and Schmeidl, 2002.

The politics of compromise and negotiations is a collective effort



BY SANAM NARAGHI ANDERLINI

PEACEMAKING

the untapped resource

women in peace negotiations

In October 2000 the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. It explicitly calls on member states and all parties to include women and civil society groups in peace processes and conflict resolution. Yet in the past few years, progress towards the full inclusion of women in peace processes has at best been slow, and at worst, non-existent.

This marginalisation of women is symptomatic of most peace processes. It is indicative of the catch-22 situation in which women are caught with regard to participation in peace negotiations and the longer-term process of building peace. On the one hand, to ensure that their concerns are addressed, it is necessary to have strong women's representation at the table. On the other hand, to ensure strong representation, it is necessary for other stakeholders to acknowledge that women's contributions are an essential component of the

process. But in the majority of cases neither the local protagonists nor the international mediators acknowledge this.

The prevailing belief is that participants at the peace table must be those who have the power to implement agreements, or those who have the power to threaten a veto and spoil the process. Women, it is argued, rarely have such power. Moreover, gender inequality is embedded in the local culture and traditions of many countries suffering from civil war, so women have always been powerless and excluded from the public arena. The peace table, the argument continues, is not the right context in which such deep-rooted cultural norms can be addressed. Those who have doubts also argue that often women delegates at negotiations are not representative of women in society as a whole, that they are of the elite, do not share the concerns of the poorer sectors of society, and as a result are no different to the men present.



ASP

Interestingly, the same argument, while equally true for men, is never used as a rationale for their exclusion. Even when there is recognition of the rights of women and the need for a more inclusive process, it is often cast aside in the process of bargaining. In effect women, and civil society in general, who may have important contributions to make, remain marginalised and their concerns excluded.

Finally there is still a prevailing belief that peace accords are gender-neutral. There is an implicit notion that references to 'human rights' and justice encompass everyone, including women. Yet time and again, when 'gender issues' or 'women's rights' are not overtly addressed, they are consistently ignored when it comes to implementation.

Not surprisingly, the women in war zones who are struggling to get their voices heard offer a different perspective on the purpose of the peace negotiations and the rationale for their participation.

On one level, they argue that women as victims have a right to voice their concerns at the peace

table. They are the deliberate targets of physical and sexual abuse. They are forced out of their homes and villages. The peace-table provides the chance to address the needs of all concerned and an opportunity to foster confidence and initiate the long process of reconciliation and healing. Without the presence and the voices of the victims on all sides, argue many women activists, this process can never be complete.

Demography and democracy also come into play. From South Africa to Burundi women comprise over 50 per cent of the population. Despite international commitments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) calling for women's increased participation in decision-making processes, they are still vastly under-represented. Excluding the majority population from decision-making, argue the women, counters the basic principles of democracy.

It is also important to recognise women's right to self-determination. This is particularly salient in the context of conflicts in which self-determina-

tion, freedom, equality and human rights were the principles for which people took up arms. As Cheryl Carolus, a member of the ANC's Women's League and CEO of South African Tourism has argued, if the right to self-determination is an acceptable cause for 'a people' or a nation, why should it be denied to women? "The parallels between racism and sexism in South Africa are very important for us," she says. "It was a very important approach to say, we're talking about equality here. So for the same reasons that you can't exclude me from the full benefits of my society, purely on the basis of one biological fact, like the colour of my skin. You can't use another one, like the sex in which I was born."¹

Finally, in the aftermath of conflict, often over 50 per cent of households are headed by women.

"In the aftermath of conflict, often over 50 percent of households are headed by women."

Apart from coping with their own trauma, these women are left with the sole responsibility of raising and educating children, earning a living, and caring for the wounded and maimed returning from war. By definition, they are not only committed to building peace and stability, but are also the most active on a daily basis.

Unlike political elites or international actors, women in communities never plan their work with an 'exit strategy' in mind.

When Women Have Influenced the Peace Agreement

Despite the fact that women are mostly excluded from formal peace talks, there are exceptions to the rule. In Liberia, Northern Ireland, Guatemala, South Africa and elsewhere women succeeded in getting to the negotiations and making a difference, by:

- ▲ Changing the dynamics of the talks and fostering greater inclusiveness and trust during talks;²
- ▲ Introducing a more holistic approach to peace and security and infusing the concerns of the wider society into the talks;
- ▲ Integrating issues of women's rights into the agreement and demands for the inclusion of women in long-term decision-making processes.³

Women in Civil Society

From 1994-1996, the Liberian Women's Initiative (LWI) was entirely based on civil society members. The group mobilised support amongst women across the country and lobbied on a platform of 'disarmament before elections'. They gained widespread public support. LWI organised workshops and seminars for the warlords, always advocating for peaceful negotiations and mutual approaches to problem solving. Although they never gained official status at the talks, the women played an immensely important advisory and counselling role. Their credibility was manifested when Ruth Perry (a founding member) was elected as the transitional head of government in 1996. Her task was to lead Liberia out of 17 years of political conflict and seven of civil war into a democratic election. Warring factions curtailed Perry's political power, and although her authority was at times undermined, she nevertheless succeeded in mitigating violence and creating a calmer and more moderate atmosphere in which the elections could be held.⁴

Did They Make a Difference?

The LWI was somewhat successful in its lobbying for disarmament prior to elections. In 1996 a partial disarmament process was undertaken prior to elections. LWI members were present at arms collection points throughout the country. For the elections, they trained, registered and encouraged women to vote. Due to their influential role in the peace negotiations, the LWI were able to call for and get a Women's Ministry. Seven years on, there are many variables that have contributed to the situation in Liberia, resulting in renewed violence. The LWI continues to work closely with groups such as the Mano River Women's Union in the sub-region in a coordinated campaign to end violence. Clearly they alone cannot withstand the tides of war but they symbolise the power that ordinary citizens can have in society, if they choose to engage and mobilise around issues of peace and security.

When Civil Society Groups Transform into Political Parties

Throughout the 1980s in Northern Ireland, Catholic and Protestant women were forging strong bonds around issues of childcare, education,

health, economic well-being and equality for women. They built trust and understanding between their communities.

In 1996, it was decided that admission to the all-party talks would be via elections (with a maximum of ten parties) and the women's peace movement found itself at risk of being marginalised. They held an open meeting, and women's groups from various religious, geographical and social sectors across the region agreed to form their own political party. With 70 candidates across the region, the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC) campaigned on a platform of justice, equity and inclusive dialogue. They garnered sufficient votes to come ninth, thereby gaining two seats at the all-party talks. They were the only women at the peace table.

Did They Make a Difference?

The 1998 Good Friday Agreement became the foundation of the current (albeit slow) peace process in Northern Ireland. The NIWC contributed to the substance of the agreement, to the implementation processes and towards mobilising popular support for the agreement. Throughout the talks the NIWC played a critical role in:⁵

- ▲ opening spaces for women's participation;
- ▲ fostering external consultation with a wider number of groups representing the community, women, trade unions, business interests, churches and ensuring that their views were fed into the process of the talks;
- ▲ paying attention to the process and dynamic of the talks and often 'interpreting' differing positions between parties (who had little communication with each other) to clear confusion and ensuring that conflict was not exacerbated due to miscommunication or use of language.

Other political parties were suspicious of the NIWC but in time they had built sufficient trust to be called on as confidants and intermediaries. This is a role they continue to play.

Women Political Leaders, the Lone Voice

While in most instances a single voice is drowned out, the presence of Luz Mendez as a member of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity

(URNG) made a significant difference in the Guatemalan peace process. By her own admission, Mendez was not fully aware of the women's concerns.⁶ However, through the Assembly of Civilian Society (ACS), women's groups focused on Mendez and established close ties with her. They highlighted the critical areas of concern for the women and indigenous groups. Mendez successfully conveyed the message to her own colleagues and the opposition.

Did They Make a Difference?

Mendez as an advocate for women's and indigenous rights at the negotiations was critical in ensuring that the peace accords address a broad range of issues, notably:

- ▲ Access to the distribution of land, credits and other productive resources;
- ▲ Integral health programmes;
- ▲ Equal opportunities for training and education;
- ▲ The right to a paid job;
- ▲ Elimination of legal discrimination;
- ▲ Penalties for sexual harassment;
- ▲ Creation of spaces and institutions for the defence of women's rights;
- ▲ Mechanisms to promote the political participation of women.

"...an advocate for women's and indigenous rights at the negotiations was critical..."

Seven years on, some sections of the accords have been barely considered, and many groups, including women, feel marginalised. Nevertheless the Guatemala accords are a benchmark of success for Guatemalan women and civil society participation in general, and they remain a stark record of promises made but then broken.

Women as Equal Members of a Political Party

In South Africa, the women's league of the African National Congress (ANC) played a critical role in ensuring women's full and equal participation in the negotiations and transformation process. Having secured their own 50 per cent participation within the ANC's negotiating team, the women reached out across the political spectrum to form a

coalition with other women from across the political and racial spectrum. In the midst of a tense and highly polarised political situation, they sought out the middle ground and created spaces for dialogue. In 1992, at the first meeting of the Women's National Coalition, women from different political, social, economic and racial groups came together to define a common agenda. It not only unified the voices of women but also enhanced their sense of dignity and empowerment.⁷

Did They Make a Difference?

The women of South Africa make up some 53 per cent of the population. Their mobilisation for peace within their communities, and their mass participation in the elections that led to Nelson Mandela's victory, was critical to the success of the South African transformation.


Women's 50 per cent representation in the negotiations altered the dynamics of the talks in terms of process and substance. There was greater empathy amongst participants, greater emphasis on building trust and dispelling fears. More specifically, the participation of women in the drafting of the South African Constitution was particularly significant. For example, the Bill of Rights is extremely comprehensive and reflects the nation's diversity. In addition there is specific recognition of women's economic, political, and reproductive rights. South African women broke new grounds in a number of areas:

Equality, human rights and the freedom to choose are key principles embedded in the constitution. In effect, the constitution ensures that people from different cultural, ethnic, tribal or social backgrounds have the right to live according to their own beliefs.

Women attained a 25 per cent quota in parliament. The presence of this critical mass of women parliamentarians has helped to transform the structures and systems of work. In particular, women in parliament have encouraged more inclusive and participatory approaches to discussions.

Traditionally male-dominated ministries, such as the defence ministry, have senior women staff. Their presence has shaped the country's approach to military and defence issues. As Thandi Modise, a notable female figure, states, women's contributions were crucial to the debate on the role and

functions of the military.⁸ In a country where security forces were feared, there was demand for their abolition. Yet by opening the debate to the wider public it was agreed that the military should be trained in peacekeeping and emergency disaster relief services.

In South Africa, like other places, the struggle for gender equality has not ended and new issues such as the spread of HIV/AIDS create new challenges. But no one doubts that the exclusion of 50 per cent of the population, their talent, their energy and commitment when tackling such complex problems would be a mistake. As Cheryl Carolus says, "Today in South Africa...when any important body or activity is considered it is an obvious thing that people say: 'How does this impact women? Why are there no women?'"⁹ 

Sanam Naraghi Anderlini is a consultant researcher and author of the UNIFEM publication, Women at the Peacetable, 2000. She is currently Director of the Policy Commission, Women Waging Peace.

Endnotes

- 1 In interview with the author, October 1999 for *Women at the Peacetable, Making a Difference*, New York: UNIFEM 2000.
- 2 J Darby and R MacGinty, eds. *The Management of Peace Processes*, New York: Palgrave, 2000, p 93.
- 3 The Guatemalan peace process, the South African process and Northern Ireland offer examples in this regard.
- 4 See Perry's speech at the UN, available at www.the_perspective.org/ruthun.html, 1996, and interviews in *Women at the Peacetable: Making a Difference*, New York: UNIFEM, 2000.
- 5 See www.niwc.org for information on the Coalition's activities and policy positions.
- 6 Mendez discussed her role in the Guatemala talks at the Kennedy School of Government, Women Waging Peace Research Symposium, Cambridge, November 2001, <http://www.womenwagingpeace.net/content/researchcenter/symposium/2001/>.
- 7 Susan Collin Marks, *Watching the Wind, Conflict Resolution During South Africa's Transition to Democracy*, Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2000, pp 136-139.
- 8 As quoted in S Naraghi-Anderlini and R Manchanda, eds. *Women and Violent Conflict, Global Perspective*, London: International Alert, 2000.
- 9 As quoted in S Naraghi-Anderlini, *Women at the Peace Table Making a Difference*, New York: UNIFEM, 2000.

An inclusive approach to
peacekeeping in the DRC



BY NADINE PUECHGUIRBAL

PEACEKEEPING

women and peacekeeping

in Democratic Republic of Congo: towards a common goal

The Office of Gender Affairs (OGA) in the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) started to operate in March 2002. As part of its core functions, the OGA is working to “ensure that gender is mainstreamed within design, implementation, promotion and monitoring of the mission’s policies and programmes” and “advise the mission on strategies to facilitate the involvement of local women, groups and networks in the peace process including reconstruction, reconciliation and rehabilitation and other processes leading to sustainable peace”.¹

Within the framework of its mandate, the OGA has worked to integrate a gender perspective into the peacekeeping mission, based on a twofold strategy. Drawing on Security Council Resolution

1325 (2000) and MONUC Resolution 1445 (2002)², the OGA adopted an internal strategy to monitor gender mainstreaming in MONUC’s programmes and activities, as well as an external strategy to act as an interface with civil society, including women’s groups, as well as UN agencies, international NGOs and the government.³

Working closely with the MONUC Political Affairs Division and the Military Observers, the OGA has aimed to ensure that they interact with different groups of civil society in their daily work. Gender-sensitive check-lists were introduced to assist political affairs officers and military observers in interviewing both men and women about security, political or military events, the local situation, and so on. This is due to the fact that women remain a largely untapped resource,



ASP

invisible because they are not recognised as a reliable source of information.⁴ This observation led the OGA to improve the gender training package that is delivered to peacekeepers by inviting representatives of civil society, mainly women's groups, to participate in the training sessions, thus facilitating exchanges between the mission and the population of its host country.

In addition to the work of the MONUC Political Affairs Division and Military Observers, it has also been critical to ensure a gender-sensitive approach to providing humanitarian assistance

and protecting women's human rights. Congolese women and girls have been sexually abused by different armed groups throughout the country. Several reports have emphasised the gravity of the situation, particularly in the East.⁵ The Olame Centre in Bukavu, a local NGO and member of the Coalition on Violence Against Women, is one place where rape victims can

find help and support. The centre provides counselling services, trauma healing as well as health and humanitarian assistance – provided resources are available. Many of the victims arrive at the centre almost naked, with serious psychosocial and health problems. Some had been used as sex slaves by the fighting forces and went into hiding in the

forest after running away. Often, the victims' children had been sexually abused too. OGA has highlighted the need to support and strengthen local initiatives such as the Olame Centre in order to help women victims of sexual violence. But beyond this immediate support, it is also of the highest importance to fight impunity and hold those responsible for the forced recruitment and gender-based violence accountable for these crimes, as recommended in the Report of the Secretary-General on women, peace and security.⁶

Women have also largely been ignored in the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programmes in several countries trying to come to terms with war. An area of concern for the OGA is the situation of the Congolese 'wives' who used to live with foreign soldiers and were left behind when the troops withdrew. MONUC human rights, humanitarian and child protection officers have reported that some 150 Congolese women and children were abandoned in the northern town of Gbadolite by Ugandan soldiers, and have been refused entry to Uganda. A local NGO, Action pour la Protection et l'Encadrement de l'Enfant, is providing some food for children, but in most cases, the women and their children are without means.


Women are not only victims: they are also agents of change in the post-conflict phase leading to the rehabilitation of the country. Congolese women have been involved in the different steps of the peace and political process, receiving support from UNIFEM, UNDP and international women's groups such as Femmes Afrique Solidarité. Following the signature of the Global and Inclusive Peace Agreement in Pretoria on 16 December 2002, different women's networks active at the grassroots level decided to join forces and advocate for the implementation of the agreement and the full participation of women in the political institutions. In January 2003, Congolese women from all political parties and affiliations organised a peaceful demonstration in Kinshasa to advocate for the peace process in the context of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue. Around 10 000 demonstrators took to the streets chanting slogans such as, "Women request 30% of seats in all transitional institutions in line with Resolution 1325". As part of its outreach activities, the OGA provided

"Women are not only victims:
they are also agents of
change in the post-conflict
phase leading to the
rehabilitation of the country."

support to these women's groups to build their capacity and foster leadership that goes beyond their different political affiliations.⁷

Women have to lead an uphill battle to gain access to decision-making positions in the transitional government and be part of the country's reconstruction and the preparation of future elections. It is important that they remain vigilant with respect to the full implementation of the Sun City resolutions that were adopted as part of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue. For instance, as stated in the Sun City resolutions, the Humanitarian, Social and Cultural Commission puts special emphasis on emergency programmes in different social sectors, calling for special efforts with regard to the school enrolment of girls, the abrogation of laws and customs that are discriminatory towards women and the participation of 30% women in all decision-making bodies at the national level.⁸ One of the resolutions recommended by the Humanitarian, Social and Cultural Commission is to create an independent Observatoire National des Droits de l'Homme (National Human Rights Observatory) with the aim of strengthening the protection of women and children and fighting against all forms of gender-based violence.

In addition to those mechanisms, article 51 of the transitional constitution requests the government to attend to the elimination of all forms of discriminations against women and ensure that their rights are respected and promoted. The article further requests the government to take appropriate measures to ensure that women become involved in the economic, social and cultural fields and are represented within national, provincial and local institutions. Finally, article 51 calls on the government to take all necessary measures to fight against all forms of violence targeting women in both the public and private spheres. Drawing on elements contained in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), article 51 provides Congolese women with a constitutional tool for the protection and promotion of their rights during the transitional period, thus paving the way for the preparation of the coming elections and the post-transitional phase. It remains to be seen whether these tools and mechanisms will be effectively applied and will assist the women in asserting their basic rights.

As renewed efforts for sustainable peace in the DRC are under way, the OGA will continue to assist the different groups of Congolese women in finding mechanisms to channel their concerns, and press for the implementation of the provisions agreed to in the peace negotiations. Congolese women must sustain their efforts, and pull their strengths together for a unified goal so that their expertise can benefit in the reconstruction of their country. As UNIFEM Executive Director Noleen Heyzer said during her visit in the DRC in May 2003, "Women have extensive experience in reconciliation within their communities, in the provision of basic services after war, and in rebuilding their families. But rarely are their perspectives and insights utilised in negotiation and peace building. Societies pay a huge price for ignoring the proven abilities of women to forge agreements."⁹ 

Nadine Puechguirbal was a Gender Affairs Officer at the OGA in MONUC until 1 May 2003. The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations.

Endnotes

- 1 MONUC, Office of Gender Affairs, 'Activities report from the Office of Gender Affairs (OGA) in the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC)', Kinshasa, 10 January 2003.
- 2 In Resolution 1445 (2002), point 12, the Security Council calls on MONUC to "pay special attention in carrying out its mandate to all aspects relating to gender perspective, in accordance with resolution 1325".
- 3 OGA activities report, 2003.
- 4 See UNIFEM Independent Experts' Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women's Role in Peace-Building, 2002, p 9.
- 5 See for example, Human Rights Watch, 'The War within the War: Sexual Violence against Women and Girls in Eastern Congo', June 2000; MONUC Bukavu, Human Rights Section, 'Status Report: Sexual Violence in South Kivu', October 2002.
- 6 Report of the Secretary-General on Women, Peace and Security (16 October 2002), p III. International legal framework, recommendations, p 4.
- 7 The OGA disseminated Resolution 1325 (2000) and the Nairobi Declaration in the four official languages of the DRC.
- 8 The Sun City resolutions were adopted following the recommendations from five different commissions: Political and Legal Commission; Defence and Security Commission; Peace and Reconciliation Commission; Economic and Financial Commission; Humanitarian, Social and Cultural Commission.
- 9 UNIFEM Press Release, 'UNIFEM Director to meet with Government leaders in the Democratic Republic of Congo to urge for immediate protection of women and girls in the DRC', 19 May 2003.



ASP

Measuring the impacts of small arms on war zone and post-conflict societies

PEACEBUILDING

BY VANESSA FARR

women, men and the **struggle to disarm**

Over the past few decades, Africa has seen a growth in the number of internal conflicts, involving members of different ethnic, religious or political groupings within one country, which sometimes spill over into cross-national clashes across borders. In these wars, increasing numbers of civilians are caught up in the fighting, internally displaced into unsafe areas, or forced to flee their country altogether.

The gendered effects of these wars are significant. Not only do levels of gender-based violence increase in public spaces, but those who are traumatised by war and then demobilised frequently carry on the fight inside their own homes, turning the violence they have witnessed or perpetrated inwards and expressing their rage and pain in

attacks on those who are nearest to them. As Thandi Modise, Deputy President of the African National Congress in South Africa has stated, the “clichéd definition of not being at war” has little relevance for women and children in many conflict and post-conflict zones. “In South Africa today,” she observes, “there is increasing domestic violence, an increase in child abuse. So we cannot say South Africa is at peace.”²

Small arms and light weapons (SALW), because of their widespread availability, mobility and ease of use, play a central role in wartime and then maintain social dislocation, destabilisation, insecurity and crime in the aftermath. One means to counter their effect is to increase understanding of the role played by prolific small weapons in rein-

forcing and maintaining gender-specific expressions of violence before, during and after conflict.

How Small Arms Disrupt Traditional Gender Roles

The chaos and instability brought about by the large-scale forced movement of civilians has caused unprecedented levels of social disruption. Modern wars take place everywhere, and increasingly, the civilian sphere in which women, children and the elderly live has been expressly targeted for violation. Even if people use traditional methods of indicating their neutrality or vulnerability such as waving a white flag or taking refuge in a church, they are not immune from attack. What people used to think of as safe spaces are violated: girls and boys are routinely kidnapped from schools to join irregular forces, and women are robbed, raped, or abducted as they try to do their work in the fields or marketplaces.

Small arms, which are both lightweight and easy to use, facilitate this encroachment on civilian space. Easily accessed lethal weapons mean that women and children are more vulnerable to attack, but also, that they are being drawn into conflicts in new ways. With easy-to-use weapons in their hands, they are becoming skilled members of militarised forces and participate actively in the violence of war. These 'non-traditional' fighters are a threat to deeply entrenched traditions about how, and by whom, wars are waged. When women and children are involved as fighters, the reactions are shock and horror. And for the people in humanitarian and relief agencies who plan and manage disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) processes at the end of a war, working with these unconventional combatants can present a logistical nightmare.

Contemporary wars, then, have given rise to a large-scale destabilisation of social and cultural constructs about warfare itself. In particular, the ways in which modern armed conflict is waged, particularly because of ready access to small weapons, have affected traditions that maintain power relations between the sexes and contribute to the formation of male and female identity.

Gendered Differences in Attitudes to SALW

Traditionally, women are thought of as hating guns

and men as being fascinated by them. In some African cultures, it is taboo for women to know anything about arms or to touch weapons of any kind, while men have to know about and bear arms to prove that they are adults in that community. This is changing, however. In wars that are being waged in Africa today, many of the guns in circulation are easy-to-use, lightweight and durable, so that armed women and children can kill with as much ease and proficiency as men. Sometimes, warlords will deliberately use women and children to fight because they want to take advantage of the shock of being attacked by someone people think of as 'vulnerable'. Using women and children as fighters breaks down cultures and traditions of care and protection and destabilises communities in terrifying ways: it is a kind of psychological warfare that leaves very deep scars.

One of the challenges facing researchers and aid workers who try to clean up the mess of war is that there is not enough knowledge about the ways in which the use of accessible SALW rely on, as well as transform, the gender ideologies of a society under attack. The humanitarian impacts of small arms are being studied, but until recently, there has been too little awareness of the need to consider, identify and articulate how men and women are differently affected by their misuse.

Even though few formal studies have been presented on this problem, stories from the field suggest that women, men and children do not have equal access to SALW and are differently impacted by their misuse both during and after conflict; and there are many debates about whether women, men and children have different attitudes to the widespread presence of guns. Since the effects of small arms misuse are so widespread, special care has to be taken to document different perspectives on the problem. Otherwise it will be difficult to develop better means to improve human security by curtailing the effects of the millions of small arms currently in circulation.

SALW and the 'Continuum of Violence'

One place to start this work is to acknowledge that a

"..warlords will deliberately use women and children to fight because they want to take advantage of the shock of being attacked by someone people think of as 'vulnerable.'"



ASP

characteristic of war, which frequently continues in the aftermath, is to violently disrupt political, social and cultural traditions. This destruction of values always has particular implications for gender relations. Small arms play a significant part in the process of social destruction, and their continued presence has a profound impact on how a society reshapes itself after conflict. Yet, to date, international attention has focused quite narrowly on where weapons are coming from and whether they are legally owned rather than the political dimensions of the small arms trade. There has also been a tendency to characterise the problem of small arms as one which results from 'illicit' or 'criminal' activity. Such thinking does not help develop meaningful actions to tackle the effects of

these weapons and the structural violence in which they are embedded.

From a gender perspective, a shift in attitude to the impact of small arms and light weapons, whether they are legitimately owned and subject to gun laws or not, is long overdue. For many years, gender researchers have refused to understand violence in a fragmented way. They are not interested in arguing that there is a difference between violence that occurs in the domestic sphere in 'peace time' and violence that happens in times of war. They also do not think it matters whether women are abused at the point of a weapon that is legally owned or one that is not. Instead, they want to highlight the fact that violence is not private and individualised, but socially and structurally produced by political

systems that put men in positions of dominance over women and maintain the status quo through aggression. From the researchers' perspective, an exclusive focus on the high levels of political violence which occur in and after a war, or on the technical problems posed by weapons proliferation, can hide the effects of other violence such as domestic abuse that is often socially sanctioned, predating war and continuing in peacetime.

Most wars do not aim for social transformation; so after a war ends, there is little sense in hoping people will suddenly change. Those who think violence is an appropriate response to conflict or stress are more likely to carry that attitude forward, especially when the society they live in does not make an effort to change its traditions to embrace peace. As a result, women's bodies may become the 'shock absorbers' of the social breakdown that results from war. South Africa is a prime example of how, long after a war has officially come to an end, women suffer terrible abuse. Easily available guns, and social attitudes that tolerate gun ownership and use, are also contributors to women's insecurity in a post-war situation.

This is one reason why gender-aware research on the impacts of small arms proliferation is so important: through it, it should be possible to trace the links between 'everyday' violence and the 'unspeakable' extremes of violence seen in conflict situations. These links are supported, to a large extent, by gender ideologies which promote and glorify male superiority and condone male aggression towards women and children. Gender-aware peace researchers are challenging ideologies which preserve and support the continuation of violence in all societies – those which are caught up in violent conflict as well as those that are supposedly 'at peace'.

An approach to human security which is interested in investigating the meaning of gender-based violence in different social contexts is helpful for research on the effects of prolific small arms and light weapons. In recent years, a small number of gender-disaggregated studies of firearm-related violence, produced mostly in high-income countries in the North, have shown that women and children are far more likely to be harmed by firearms in countries where guns are seen as necessary commodities than in places where they are

strictly controlled. Showing that guns are particularly dangerous if they are kept at home, these studies prove that many popular ideas about what guns can do are really myths. In violent societies, large numbers of guns support expressions of violent masculinity.

In a study in South Africa, researchers found that men who kill their female partners are not seen as having committed an unthinkable act. Instead, other men were able to understand, if not actually forgive, the idea that a man should feel provoked to murder his female intimate. In some instances, the fact that he had become uncontrollably angry with a woman even gained him sympathy. Frighteningly, legal officers were among those who believed it was appropriate for a man to be driven to murder if he thought this wife had been unfaithful. They saw a violent response as understandable in such circumstances, and gave lenient sentences in support of this belief.³

Attitudes such as this condone violence against women, and can only be overcome by activism that is based on carefully documented evidence about how firearms impact on women's lives. In particular, accurate statistics need to be gathered to develop new, far-reaching legislation. This is particularly significant in Africa, because many countries still do not have effective domestic gun control laws. That they need to be upgraded within terms that are gender-aware and responsive to the particular needs of women is essential for the peaceful development of the region.

"South Africa is a prime example of how, long after a war has officially come to an end, women suffer terrible abuse."

What Women Think of Small Arms and Light Weapons

Globally, while far more men than women die at the point of a gun, the easy availability of SALW plays a powerful role in maintaining male dominance and facilitates the perpetration of violence against women in conflict zones. It is not useful, however, to consider the impact of weapons proliferation on women in terms which portray women as victims and men as perpetrators. Instead, the

complex ways in which the widespread presence of guns and other light weapons support ideologies of masculinity and femininity have to be analysed.

In many societies, bearing arms carries a significant cultural meaning. It is seen as a right and is interwoven with social rituals such as a young man's coming of age. Women's 'proper' role, in such societies, is to support men's right to carry a weapon; but very few observers have commented on how important it is that women play a cultural role in normalising gun ownership. In some societies, such as the cattle-raiding Karamojong of Uganda, women actively encourage men to use arms in raids as their increased success improves the economic position of the family unit.⁴ In countries like South Africa, even though "research shows that the gun women, and by association children, most need to fear, is the one owned by their husband, boyfriend, or father," some women are helping normalise the increase in privately-owned weapons by upholding the belief that their male partner needs a gun to protect them.⁵

"...women cannot always be characterised as innately peace-loving and fundamentally opposed to the presence and use of arms."

Such attitudes show us that women cannot always be characterised as innately peace-loving and fundamentally opposed to the presence and use of arms. Women's responses to weapons, like those of men, are complex: this is why it is important to improve the knowledge of how women are drawn into the proliferation and normalisation of firearms and gun-related violence, and how they internalise and carry out their supportive role in gun-dominated societies.

By insisting on initiatives to understand the complexity of women's relationships to small arms, peace activists can pay more attention to what women are doing to reduce the impact of such weapons. While some women will choose to support arms proliferation, others may play key roles in resistance. This is especially true since it is women who bear the brunt of domestic violence, and women who understand that the presence of firearms increases the likelihood that they might die at the hands of their husbands, lovers, fathers, brothers or sons. Women activists often play leading

roles in civil society initiatives to build peace. They support efforts to control firearms, work as volunteer counsellors to assist victims of gun violence, create grassroots community initiatives to help protect children in gang-infested areas, or even run informal witness protection programmes in places where official police support is limited. In most countries, it is women who bear the major burden of caring for those who are injured or disabled by gunfire. Recognising that children are often involved in gun violence, either intentionally or by accident, women are often at the forefront of firearm education initiatives aimed at youth.

The Need for Practical Strategies

The rhetoric of 'gender mainstreaming' has permeated international agreements in recent years, but practical strategies for ensuring that the needs of women and men receive equal attention have been more difficult to implement. The pervasiveness of small arms and light weapons, their ease of use, and their lethal impact on everyone from combatants to innocent passers-by makes this problem, however, an ideal platform from which to institute gender-aware policy, research and activism.

The Beijing Platform of Action, the Windhoek Declaration and Resolution 1325 offer formal avenues through which to hold governments and international agencies responsible for tackling gender-based violence perpetrated with small arms.⁶ These resources support policy and legal reform as well as providing strong platforms for consciousness-raising and other forms of social and political activism. The documents are not powerful, however, if there is no political will to insist that gender differences must be taken into account in any work that is done to contain SALW.

The Challenges Ahead

A greater commitment to gathering sex-disaggregated data on the effects of small arms is essential: without it, there is little chance of overcoming the silence about who bears the real costs of light weapons proliferation. However, it is not easy to do this work in recent war zones because data collection on firearm-related violence is frequently haphazard, hand-collated for the purposes of regional but not national statistics, and otherwise unsystematic.⁷

Often, officials do not want to answer questions about firearms-related violence and resist talking about attacks on women. As a result of social taboos and unsympathetic security and legal systems, both women and men refuse to speak about sexual violence so it is difficult to collect accurate statistics on how bad things really are.

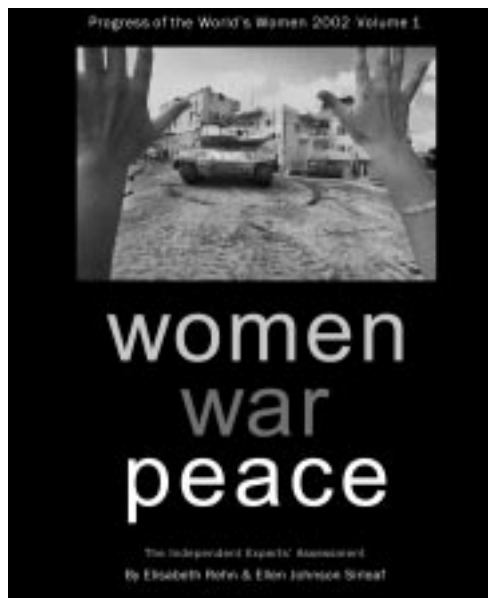
What this lack of information suggests is that civil society organisations involved in gun control should make a particular effort to develop awareness-raising and training models through which to institute a new culture of data collection. They must emphasise that information on the sex of both the victims and the perpetrators of firearm violence must be gathered. Governments and local authorities must be lobbied to standardise data-collection, because recording and analysing these figures is arguably the most important first step in challenging the indifference and denial which currently attend cases of gender-based violence that are facilitated by the use of a gun.

There is a need to provide a clear picture of the difficulties that women face when guns are pervasive, when people believe a man without a weapon is not a man, and when most crimes are reported, judged and punished by men. Only with proper information about the effects of pervasive small arms will it be possible to convince opinion leaders, policy makers and the general public that easily available guns are especially dangerous to women, decrease their options and freedom of choice, and deny them the right to lead a safe and full life. Such information will also contribute to the understanding of the ways in which dangerous images of masculinity are upheld in violent societies, and play an important part in reinforcing on-going activism to encourage positive expressions of male identity. 🗿

Vanessa Farr is a researcher and activist working on the gendered implications of SALW and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR)

Endnotes

- 1 A longer version of this paper has been published as 'Men, women and guns: Understanding how gender ideologies support small arms and light weapons proliferation', *BICC Conversion Survey 2003: Global Disarmament, Demilitarization and Demobilization*, Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2003, pp 120-133.
- 2 Vanessa Farr, 'How do we know we are at peace? Reflections on the Aftermath Conference', *Agenda*, vol 43, 2000; Robert Muggah and Martin Griffiths, *Reconsidering the Tools of War: Small Arms and Humanitarian Action*, Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2002.
- 3 Lisa Vetten, 'Man Shoots Wife': Intimate Femicide in Gauteng South Africa', *Crime and Conflict*, vol 6, 1996.
- 4 See Vanessa Farr and Kiflemeriam Gebre-Wold, eds. *Gender Perspectives on Small Arms and Light Weapons: Regional and International Concerns*. BICC Brief 24. Bonn: Bonn International Center for Conversion, 2002.
- 5 Adele Kirsten, Press Release, Gun Free South Africa, 2002 p 35.
- 6 <http://www.undp.org/fwcw/plat.htm>;
http://www.reliefweb.int/library/GHARkit/FilesFeb2001/windhoek_declaration.htm;
http://www.un.org/events/res_1325e.pdf.
- 7 Katharine McKenzie, *Domestic Gun Control Policy in Ten SADC Countries*, Johannesburg: Gun Free South Africa, 1999.



Recognising women's role...
from war to peace

PEACEBUILDING

UNIFEM REPORT

women, war, peace



UNIFEM report describes the impact of war on women and their role in peacebuilding

Chantal, a Rwandan woman now living in a United Nations centre for refugees in the Democratic Republic of Congo, spent five years of her life as a sex slave to mass murderers who also used her as a porter and human shield. Maria, a community organiser from northern Colombia, received a videotape of a colleague being tortured and killed. "The message was clear: If I continued with my activities, I'd be next."

Asha Hagi Elmi, an activist in Somalia and a delegate to the National Peace Conference in 2000, understood that peace could only come from cross-clan reconciliation, not official negotiations among warlords and faction leaders. "We lobbied for a quota for women in the future legislature, the Transitional National Assembly. But we faced opposition from the male delegates. 'No man,' they told us, 'would agree to be represented by women.'"

"Epidemic of Violence"

These women's stories are but a few of the testimonies presented in a report on women and armed

conflict, *Women, War, Peace*. The report concludes that while women have always been among wars' victims, they have been systematically singled out in recent conflicts for sexual violence and other atrocities. Where this has occurred, the violence has largely been undocumented and perpetrators have frequently gone unpunished. Moreover, despite the fact that women have fostered numerous initiatives to prevent, stop and recover from war, they rarely have access to political power structures or are included in official peace negotiations as mandated in 2000 by the landmark UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.

The Independent Experts' Assessment was commissioned by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in close collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in response to Resolution 1325. The assessment was conducted by Elisabeth Rehn, a former Finnish defence minister, presidential candidate and United Nations human rights investigator, and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a banking execu-

tive and a former finance minister and presidential candidate in Liberia.

During visits to 14 war zones in Africa, the Middle East, South America, Asia and Eastern Europe, the experts found shocking evidence of an “epidemic of violence” against women and girls during recent conflicts. They also found that while women were rarely part of official peace talks or reconstruction efforts, they have played a pivotal role by campaigning and working for peace at the grassroots level, often working across traditional dividing lines and borders.

Working for Peace and Justice

During armed conflicts, women often experience violence, forced pregnancy, abduction, sexual abuse and slavery. Their bodies have been used as ‘envelopes’ to send messages to the perceived enemy. “The harm, silence and shame women experience in war is pervasive, but their redress is almost non-existent,” the report states.

Women do not enjoy equal status with men in any society and during armed conflict, a pre-existing culture of discrimination is often exacerbated. Even after hostilities end, changes are rarely made to ensure that women and women’s rights are protected. “We saw the scars, the pain and the humiliation. We heard accounts of rape camps, gang rapes and mutilation, of murder and sexual slavery,” the experts say in the report. “Yet, time and again, we met women who had survived trauma and found the courage and the will to recommit to life. They were struggling to rebuild their community and remake their lives.”

All over the world, the report found, women have challenged militarism and urged reconciliation over retribution. They have opposed the development, testing and proliferation of nuclear weapons, other weapons of mass destruction and the small arms trade. They have transformed peace processes on every continent by organising across political, religious, and ethnic affiliations.


An Equitable Role for Women

In their recommendations, the experts convey women’s call to governments and the international community to help stop violence. The women also demand an equitable presence at peace negotia-



tions as well as in legislatures and in the planning and operation of humanitarian interventions and peacekeeping missions.

The experts also call on governments and the international community to adopt and vigorously enforce laws aimed at protecting women and ensuring their human rights. They recommend that an international Truth and Reconciliation Commission be set up in order to highlight the plight of female war victims.

Moreover, the Experts also call for more female candidates in post-conflict elections, the appointment of more women to United Nations peacekeeping and diplomatic posts, and a greater role for women in peacemaking and post-conflict reconstruction activities. Procedures and mechanisms to investigate, report, prosecute and remedy violence against women in war must be strengthened, the Experts say: “Otherwise the historic refusal to acknowledge and punish crimes against women will continue.” 

Women, War and Peace: The Independent Experts' Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women's Role in Peace-building - By Elisabeth Rehn & Ellen Johnson Sirleaf can be found at http://www.unifem.org/index.php?f_page_pid=149.



Acknowledging the
relevance of resolution 1325

PEACEBUILDING

BY DR THENJIWE MAGWAZA

counting the cost & listing the gains:

is the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 responsive to Africa's challenges?

In this article I make direct reference to and analysis of the UNSC 1325 as a tool that is earmarked for women and girl children. The instrument advocates strongly for social justice for women who find themselves in precarious situations due to conflict in their countries of birth. The instrument offers a framework for realising and practising peace and working towards security in a manner that is gender sensitive and cognisant of the international human rights law. It is intended to engender respect for women and girls in the face and aftermath of war. For instance, in the aftermath of terrible attacks against refugees, the instruments urge global citizens to treat each other with respect and sensitivity, especially to fellow human beings who suffer the effects of war and conflict.

Though an academic by profession I place my

work and this article within the tradition of radical, political and feminist engaged scholarship. Therefore, the reflection and analysis presented is in accordance with data and women's views gathered over a period of almost three years of researching communities plagued by conflict and violence. Feminist research insists on placing experiences and the actual bodies of the marginalised other at the centre of our analysis and data presentation.

In this article I briefly examine where the world has been in terms of positioning women in society with special reference to conflict management and respect for women's rights, the significance of the UNSC 1325, and how Africa and in particular South Africa is responding to the resolution.

Looking at the Position of Women: we Have Come a Long Way

Since 1948, the world community has continuously debated varying interpretations of human rights in response to global developments but little of this discussion has addressed questions of gender, and only recently have significant challenges been made to a vision of human rights, which excludes much of women's experiences.¹ Rebecca Cook discusses the inefficiencies of international human rights law in addressing the redress.² In conflict situations female victims are often invisible as the dominant image of the political actors in our world is male.³ The United Nations (UN) decade for women made great strides to help bring attention to the critical importance of women's activities to economic and social development, but the women of Africa did not benefit much from the decade, as suggested developments were not translated into meaningful and relevant gains for them.

Traditional thinking about war, conflict and peace has ignored women's potential to bring about peace. Often it has been held that the responsibility is that of other people than women, who are mere 'victims'. Swanee Hunt and Cristina Posa question this traditional assertion and refer to the disregard as an "oversight that has cost the world dearly".⁴ Recently, there has been growing attention on the role of women in conflict and post-conflict situations. Today, the goal is not simply the absence of war, but the creation of sustainable peace by fostering fundamental societal changes.

South Africa, though considered a significant player in bringing about change and facilitating peace processes in Africa across borders, has failed to do so equally at home. What has let South Africa down in this regard has been its foreign policies. Elsewhere, I vigorously criticise South African foreign policies and practices, in particular against non-South African women citizens – African victims who have been through difficult times and exposed to cruel experiences due to conflict in their home countries.⁵ Such a failure can be attributed to the country's inability to put into practice human rights stipulations. Having worked with Durban-based refugees since November 2000, I have had an opportunity to engage with refugee communities and individuals on a personal level.



AP

Studies conducted have shown that many families are suffering at the hands of Home Affairs officials and fellow refugees. Women and children as identified by UNSC 1325 are hit the hardest.⁶ Women are raped during times of conflict while in their home countries, and are coaxed into either offering sexual favours or marrying strangers in order to survive in the host country. A number of children join the labour market illegally, after losing their parents and relatives in conflict-related situations while they are at home or on their way to the new country. It is women relatives who take it up as their responsibility to address the internal (personal) and interpersonal emotional and needs for peace of most destitute children and other victims. This kind of peace, which is vital and is often nurtured by the female folk, is not acknowledged in UNSC 1325.

It is common for African peoples, due to their communal culture, to 'adopt' people who are non-biological relatives and make them their family members due to the fact that they have been victims of conflict. Victims of wars are not only those who are killed on the field, but also those who die of grief, trauma and other related consequences. Victims of wars are also those who are affected by mines, radiation from depleted uranium, and chemical and biological weapons. The effects of these atrocities last for generations to

come, causing children yet unborn to suffer. UNSC 1325 does take this into account, expecting national states to accommodate all kinds of victims, in particular the women affected by landmine clearances.⁷

A Feminist Reading of UNSC 1325

As outlined above, women fleeing violence are too often not given adequate protection. Unlike men, women asylum seekers often have claims based on personal violations occurring in the 'private' sphere. It is however a sad fact that many governments do not recognise violations that are based on gender, such as domestic violence, sexual trafficking and rape, as a basis for refugee protection. Such experiences that are often peculiar to women are not only

highlighted and emphasised in the resolution but member states are called upon to acknowledge them. An important theme that resonates in the resolution is "women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management of conflict resolution and post-conflict, and peace-building". The resolution is significant in that it calls for and emphasises the need to recognise women's role in peace processes, but also goes beyond this factor when it

realises that we need to have uppermost in our minds, in our deliberations and in our decisions, to reflect on gender-based violence, affecting women as a result of armed conflict. This recognition makes the resolution a vital tool for transforming the human rights concept from a feminist perspective, so that greater account of women lives is considered a serious affair.

The resolution is essentially aimed at strengthening the capacities of women and thereby empowering them, by ensuring that they are afforded a significant role in resolving conflict and participating actively in post-conflict reconstruction. It is designed to recognise women's efforts in bringing about peace and to give them an opportunity to participate in planning and decision-making processes. An important feature of the resolution is

that it views women's empowerment not as an isolated phenomenon but as part of a wider process of social change. Essays in a book edited by Rajani Murthy entitled "Building Women's Capacities: Interventions in Gender Transformation" give accounts of successes achieved when women are actively involved in peace and other social processes.⁸ What the resolution advocates is reported in the essays, wherein women's contribution in bringing about social change is actively solicited.

The resolution not only highlights the importance of women in peace-building processes, it is also aimed at raising awareness in states that are plagued with conflict and those helping in resolving conflict, like South Africa, around the need to resolve conflicts amicably and to uphold respect for women's human rights. The analysis on mainstreaming gender that is provided purports to influence policy makers to design appropriate mechanisms for redress – mechanisms that are consciously inclusive of women. The question of 'including' women has been a concern for feminists for a long time. Hunt and Posa argue for what they term "inclusive security", an approach that emphasizes women's agency, not their vulnerability. "Rather than [being] motivated by gender fairness the concept is driven by efficiency: Women are crucial to inclusive security since they are often at the centre of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), popular protests, electoral referendums, and other citizen-empowering movements whose influence has grown with the global spread of democracy."⁹

There have been various responses to the resolution. With UNSC 1325 passed unanimously on 31 October 2001, international organisations are beginning to recognise the indispensable role of women in conflict resolution and peace-building. In particular, a decision at the 2002 summit of the African Union (AU) in Durban, South Africa, was that five of the ten commissioners to make up the leadership of the new secretariat would be women. This was a historic announcement for Africa, as not a single African state has a woman as its head of state. However, such a crucial decision, which was in no doubt related to and responding to UNSC 1325, has received little publicity.

It is unfortunate that such strides forward by international organisations have not shown much significance on the ground. Ordinary women are still relegated to roles and responsibilities that do not have a direct bearing on bringing about peace.

"The instrument offers a framework for realising and practicing peace and working towards security in a manner that is gender sensitive and cogniscant of the international human rights law."

There is a need to address this shortcoming as well and other gaps identified in the resolution.

Shortcomings of the Resolution

One of the gross forms of human rights violations reported by refugee women is sexual violence, often perpetrated by wartime combatants, and sexual favours demanded by individuals when women want to be registered. In populations not affected by armed conflict, other forms of gender-based violence, such as domestic violence and sexual exploitation, are rampant but are often not reported because of a lack of mechanisms and structures where these can be reported. On this matter Beth Vann notes, "Although few hard numbers are available, news of the toll wrought is increasingly surfacing not only in anecdotal evidence –reports from victims, health-care professionals, and compatriots – but from the studies now being conducted by WHO, RHRC, CDC, and others to identify the magnitude and depth of the problem in some settings."¹⁰ It is unfortunate that the resolution fails to give guidance or a directive on this crucial matter. The resolution should expect states to take on a responsibility to protect women from human rights abuses both at the hands of their own officials and in the community and home.

Demands and expectations on ratifying states need to be accompanied by clear guidelines as to what will happen if they fail to carry out the expected duties. Unless such a clear commitment is outlined, a better future for both women and children will be difficult to realise. Member states should not be allowed to eschew their mandate by allowing foreign officials and individuals to blatantly disrespect such obligations and the international law. Often victims are left on their own to cope with the aftermath of war. Host governments and all those responsible for armed conflict ought to be made accountable for the suffering and loss suffered by their citizens.

Recommendations and Conclusion

One of the aims of organisations looking after the well-being of people who have been through war is to get them to organise, mobilise and challenge structures that violate their human rights. Precise and planned movements against the new 'war' need

to be formed and existing ones strengthened to intensify the 'fight'. Such movements are necessary, for as long as silence and non-activism prevails, war and suffering will continue. A system-wide plan for implementing all aspects of the resolution (humanitarian protection, training for peace-keepers, gender units, etc.) needs to be prepared by such organisations. These organisations and movements need to call for women's active participation in decision-making on conflict resolution and peace negotiations and the implementation of UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. It is essential that organisations speak out and document instances of violations of international law and the rights of women, children and in particular girl children. It is the responsibility of all African states and civil society to make the resolution go beyond being a theoretical wish and hope for Africa but turn the rhetoric into practicality. It should be employed as a tool for realising women's rights in the fundamental issues of women's lives.

Funds must be redirected from current militarisation to peaceful conflict resolution, to victims of war, and towards the fight to eradicate the root causes of war, such as poverty and unsustainable development – based on increasing inequality between nations and within nations. Furthermore, the funds should be used for the empowerment of women and for humanitarian actions. An article by Moser and Clark attempts to shed some light on this subject by examining women's experiences in Latin America. They point out that it is necessary that humanitarian and post-conflict programmes be designed in accordance with their peculiarities.¹¹ Their argument is based on the assertion that women often have very diverse experiences of conflict and violence, different from those of men and even among women themselves. Helen Leslie has concrete lessons for how gender-sensitive programming could be framed in order to benefit women.¹² She outlines successes that have been achieved in El Salvador by incorporating women's needs and experiences. She makes specific reference to instances wherein women who are victims of violence recollect and relate their suffer-

"The resolution should expect states to take on a responsibility to protect women from human rights abuses both at the hands of their own officials and in the community and home".



“Are you having a hard time dealing with conflict?”

Come and be trained by the experts in conflict management training on the continent of Africa. Over 7000 people since 1992 would recommend it!



<http://www.accord.org.za>



ings, a process believed to be helpful and a means of validating, recognising and addressing painful past experiences.

Dr. Thenjiwe Magwaza is the Director, Centre for Gender Studies, University of Natal, Durban

Endnotes

- 1 Charlotte Bunch in C Bunch and R Carrillo, *Gender Violence: A Development and Human Rights Issue*, New Jersey: Rutgers Centre for Women's Global Leadership, 1991, p 4.
- 2 "International human rights law has not yet been applied effectively to redress the disadvantages and injustices experienced by women by reason only of their being women. In this sense, respect for human rights fails to be 'universal'. The reasons for this general failure to enforce women's human rights are complex and vary from country to country. They include lack of understanding of the systemic nature of the subordination of women, failure to recognize the need to characterize the subordination of women as a human rights violation, and lack of state practice to condemn discrimination against women." Rebecca J Cook, 'Women's International Human Rights Law: The Way Forward', in RJ Cook, ed. *Human Rights of Women: National and International Perspectives*, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994, p 3.
- 3 It is to this end that Charlotte Bunch (1991) advocates for policy that consciously recognises and aims to respect women's rights as human rights.
- 4 S Hunt and C Posa, 'Women Waging Peace', *Foreign Policy*, 2001.
- 5 See T Magwaza and F Khumalo, 'A Struggle for Survival: The Lives of Mozambican Women in a Stanger Village', *Agenda*, no 55, 2003; T Magwaza, 'Evolutionary South African Policies', Paper presented at the Policy and Politics International Conference, *Policy and Politics in a Globalised World*, Bristol, UK, July 2003.
- 6 See Security Council Resolution 1325, *Women's International League for Peace and Freedom*, <http://www.peacewomen.org/un/sc/1325> (visited 13 July 2002).
- 7 "Emphasizing the need for all parties to ensure that mine clearance and mine awareness programmes take into account of women and girls during and after conflicts." See *Ibid*.
- 8 RK Murthy, ed. *Building Women's Capacities: Interventions in Gender Transformation*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2001.
- 9 Hunt and Posa, 2001.
- 10 B Vann, 'Gender-Based Violence: Emerging Issues in Programs Serving Displaced Populations', New York: Reproductive Health for Refugees Consortium, 2002, http://www.rhrc.org/pdf/gbv_vann.pdf (visited 13 March 2003).
- 11 C Moser and F Clark, 'Gender, Conflict, and Building Sustainable Peace: Recent Lessons from Latin America', *Oxfam journal, Gender and Development*, vol 9, no 3, 2001.
- 12 H Leslie, 'Healing the Psychological Wounds of Gender-Related Violence in Latin America: A Model for Gender-sensitive Work in Post-conflict Contexts', *Oxfam journal, Gender and Development*, vol 9, no 3, 2001.



Women have the capability to effect change, pave the way for peace, work across conflict divides, and act as agents in conflict prevention, resolution, and reconstruction

PEACEBUILDING

BY AMB. SWANEE HUNT & KEMI OGUNSANYA

women waging peace

– making women visible

Introduction

War has terrible consequences. Violent conflict results in an increase in female-headed households with limited social, economic, and educational resources, leading to increased poverty and diminished educational opportunities – especially for young girls. War's violence often leads to sexual assault, such as rape and genital mutilation. In the midst of fighting, and even post-conflict, populations are vulnerable to other inhumane and criminal acts such as incest, slavery, and domestic abuse.

Although men instigate most violent conflicts, not all women are innocent bystanders. Women may occupy combat positions in the military, and may torture men and women alike. On the other hand, some women warriors have used their leadership

skills to stabilise post-conflict societies.¹

Women's interests have been neglected in peace-making processes. Although women were recognised as 'observers' in the Burundi peace process and as 'advisors' to the Inter-Congolese Dialogue in South Africa, they are all but invisible in most peace negotiations. This poses a challenge for women determined to be active decision makers. In response, they have launched multiple awareness campaigns, conferences, seminars, and advocacy efforts to gain international recognition of their effectiveness. Although their successes are often pushed to the background, women are highly invested in preventing and stopping conflict and have the capability to effect change, pave the way for peace, work across conflict divides, and act as agents in conflict prevention, resolution, and reconstruction.²



Making Women Visible

Women Waging Peace was launched in 1999 to advocate for the full inclusion of women in formal and informal peace processes, and to connect women in conflict areas to one another and to policy shapers worldwide. The inclusion of all sectors of society furthers the development of fresh, workable solutions to seemingly intractable conflicts. Sustainable peace, and therefore international security, depends on such innovations.

WWP brokers relationships among an extensive network of women peace builders and policy shapers, resulting in new solutions to long-standing conflicts at local, regional and international levels. The organisation has extended its network to more than 20 conflict areas and is working with ACCORD in South Africa. Over 1 000 government officials, NGO leaders, media professionals, and academics have collaborated with the WWP network. Together they have explored options for building sustainable peace at annual colloquia, held in conjunction with an executive programme of the Women and Public Policy Program at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. They have also sponsored similar meetings around the world.³

Women, Peace, and Security

Recent policy statements from the UN Security Council, the Organization for Security and

Cooperation in Europe, the G8, and the European Union recognise the role women play in peace and security and call for women's inclusion in local and international efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts. WWP advocates for the implementation of these groundbreaking international commitments.

Women's contributions in the field of peace and security are largely unrecognised at institutional and public policy levels. The Women Waging Peace Policy Commission was created in 2001 to focus on research and analysis as underpinnings for policy advocacy. The commission is producing a series of approximately 15 case studies documenting the effectiveness of women in peace efforts around the globe, including South Africa. The studies examine women's activities in conflict prevention, pre-negotiation and negotiation, and post-conflict reconstruction.⁴

In November 2002, the Waging Policy Commission hosted a conference to discuss the G8's recognition of women's roles in peace and security, as well as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Participants included 11 African women leaders from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, and Sudan, as well as government representatives from Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The meeting provided a unique opportunity for in-depth discussion between donors and stakeholders regarding the most effective and concrete means of

fulfilling NEPAD's promise and the G8's commitment to women.⁵

African women are skilled in the art of reconciliation, which involves strong listening and communication skills, intellectual and emotional flexibility, extensive experience in practical problem solving, and the willingness to care for all people despite political differences.⁶ Such attributes pose a threat to warlords, who generally refuse to allow women to participate in peace talks.⁷

Women's participation in peace processes helps break down traditional stereotypes in patriarchal societies. Women have their fingers on the pulse of the community and can gather essential information on the ground to mobilise post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction.⁸ Contrary to some expectations, many women willingly accept the challenges of working in dangerous and isolated situations. Women foster confidence and trust among local populations, since they often care for the maimed, injured, and orphaned. They propose constructive solutions while suggesting innovative approaches for dialogue among polarised groups. They sometimes use unorthodox means such as singing and dancing to diffuse potentially violent situations.

In cases where women have joined organisations or decision-making bodies in sufficient numbers, they have created a more collaborative atmosphere, characterised by mutual respect, and have sought consensus rather than 'winner-take-all'. They tend to focus more on understanding and resolving problems.


Waging Peace in Africa

The African Waging Network includes women from Burundi, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Sudan. Women Waging Peace created the opportunity for African women to network with women from other conflict areas, share strategies, have access to policymakers, and research the role of women in peace processes globally. Local and regional meetings in Africa have allowed academics, civic leaders, corporate executives, and community leaders to discuss a wide range of issues affecting African women: reconciliation, justice and trauma counselling; economic inequity; conflict and HIV/AIDS; capacity building and empowerment; dissemination of information, education, and technology; work with refugees and

displaced persons; and the role of international agencies in humanitarian assistance.

ACCORD has hosted a series of online chats with regional and international members. The organisation also convened the first WWP delegation meeting in South Africa, where issues such as racism and xenophobia were raised. South African delegates also participated in a Waging regional meeting in Kigali, followed by a 'training for trainers' session sponsored by Women as Partners for Peace in Africa, with women from the DRC, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. Participants included His Excellency Olara Otunnu, UN Under Secretary for Children in Armed Conflict.

Conclusion

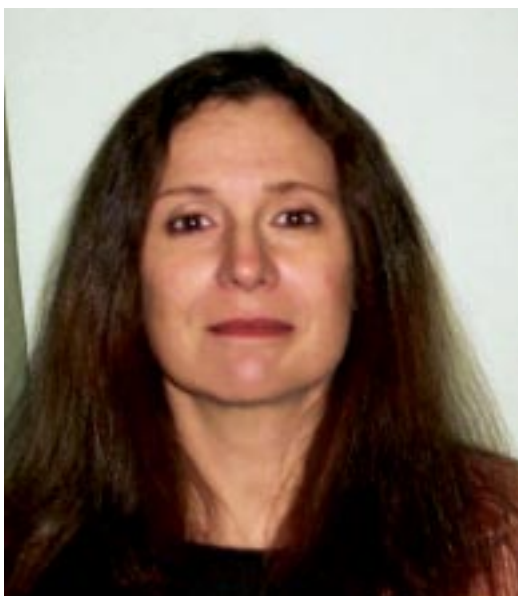
Waging Boston recognises ACCORD as an important and valued partner in the effort to bridge the gap between expert community work and the policy arena. Rhetorical commitment to women's involvement must be translated into action. To that end, we should enhance capacity-building initiatives for women peacemakers at the grassroots and national levels. As women find their voice, progressive and effective government leaders will recognise the pivotal role they can play in all phases of peace processes. 

Amb. Swanee Hunt is the Director, Women and Policy Program, John F Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University; former US Ambassador to Austria; founder of Women Waging Peace Global Network; and President, Hunt Alternatives. Kemi Ogunsanya is a Senior Training Officer with ACCORD and a Core Member of the Network.

Endnotes

- 1 Swanee Hunt (2003), 'The Critical Role of Women Waging Peace'. *Columbia Transnational Law Journal*, 14 April, p 106.
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 Overview of the Women Waging Peace Initiative, www.WomenWagingPeace.net.
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 Summary of Proceedings from the 'G8, NEPAD, Women, Peace, and Security Meeting', 8 November 2002, Cambridge, MA.
- 6 S Anderson (1999), 'Women's Many Roles in Reconciliation' in *People Building Peace, 35 Inspiring Stories from Around the World*, 1999, p 230.
- 7 Hunt 2003, p 108.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p 110.

Accountability is the key to promoting a culture of healing in a post-conflict society



BY ROBERTA MARIA BALDINI

PEACEBUILDING

international criminal justice,

conflict and its response to gender-based violence

Since the commencement of the war in Sierra Leone, women have borne the brunt of the atrocities committed by all factions in the war.¹

Those who commit gender-based war crimes must be punished.² This statement seems obvious until one considers that from the beginning of wars to the present, during each armed conflict, women have suffered violence at increasingly high levels. It is only recently, with the creation of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), that such crimes have been prosecuted. After World War II, there was not one indictment that included rape as a crime against humanity at either the Nuremberg Trials or the Tokyo Military Trials.

The need for accountability is paramount.

Countries, states and societies must be accountable to women who suffered gender-based violence during armed conflict. Accountability and not condoning a culture of impunity may promote healing in a war torn society.

Instituting the rule of law and creating the political space for social order adds to the stability of a post-conflict environment. Without these stabilising factors there can be no real peace. On the other hand, granting licence to and legitimising violence and inequality weakens a post-conflict society. Impunity prolongs instability, injustice and the threat of renewed conflict, all of which expose women to violence.³

Background

An independent assessment conducted by UNIFEM



ASP

states that there has been a vast increase in the number of war-affected civilians since the early part of the last century.⁴ During the 20th century, the number of civilian casualties has increased, from 5% at the turn of the 20th century, to 15% during World War I, 65% during World War II, and 75% during conflicts fought in the 1990s.⁵

During wars, past and present, both male and female civilians are subject to atrocities, including being shot, beaten, burned, bombarded, tortured and forced into slave labour, to name but a few. Women face additional atrocities generally not faced by men. Both women and children are sexually assaulted with alarming regularity. Those who commit these crimes are enemy combatants, but also enemy civilians, government troops and national civilians, and in some cases even humanitarian aid workers and peacekeepers.⁶

Reports by UN agencies further indicate that the change in the demographics of poor and war-affected societies has created increased numbers of families headed by women or children. A family headed by a woman is more vulnerable than is a male-headed household. Attacks against such women during contemporary wars occur on a greater scale and at a higher level of depravity than seen in previous conflicts.

Depraved acts committed against civilians

cause terror, destroy families, and pull communities apart.⁷ Examples include combatants gang raping girls as young as eight, betting on the gender of a pregnant woman's unborn child by slitting her belly open and pulling the child out, or inserting pieces of burning wood into a woman's vagina. The strategy increasingly employed in contemporary conflicts is not only to commit depraved acts, but also to spread word of them, causing a higher level of terror.

Christiana Thorpe, co-founder of the Forum of African Women Educationalists in Sierra Leone, describes what it was like in Freetown, Sierra Leone during the war. Thorpe tells of hearing the gunshots and the breaking of glass followed by the screams of neighbours, who were under their beds, huddled together. Christiana and her colleagues knew that if the combatants knocked on their door, it meant they would be raped, killed or even burned alive in the house. They were terrified.⁸ Many Sierra Leoneans fled the country and were able to find safe haven with friends or relatives, but many more were unable to flee and suffered the effects of the conflict first hand.

Violence against women does not happen randomly or by coincidence. These deliberate plans of terror destroy a society's fabric and devalue what the society holds dear. Child combatants have

raped women who could be their grandmothers, while in Rwanda a mother stands accused of selecting the women her son would rape.⁹ During many of these acts the victim's family were forced to watch, helpless to stop the violence.

The international community learned that gender-based violence does not stop or decrease after a declared truce or peace. Rather, gender-based violence increases during the post-conflict period. The reasons for post-conflict violence are postulated in a 1999 study by Medica Zenica, *To Live Without Violence*, conducted in Bosnia.¹⁰ It describes how men experience post-war trauma by resorting to the same violent behaviour learned during combat and how they find it difficult to control their anger after the war. On the other hand, women suffering post-war trauma from rape or other violence are expected to forget the pain and attend to the needs of their children and husbands. For many women in Bosnia and other parts of the world this expectation is not new.¹¹

In a post-conflict environment where law enforcement, the justice system and civil society are weak or non-existent, criminal conduct abounds. Women are exposed to both physical and sexual violence whether in the streets, at home, or in refugee or internally displaced persons camps. The perpetrators of this violence can be any man: ex-combatants, family members, neighbours, or strangers. There is no authority to whom to report such violence. It is also possible the authorities may be guilty of these crimes, complicit, or simply too weak to prevent or prosecute on a large scale.

Accountability for Gender-Based War Crimes

Since the dawn of history, rapes and other forms of sexual assault have been used as weapons of war.¹² While these crimes have gone on for thousands of years, only in the last decade has the international community been willing to pursue these criminals. The international community is now indicting and prosecuting the perpetrators of gender-related war crimes.

During the Nuremberg and Tokyo Trials convened after World War II, gender-based war crimes perpetrated against civilian women were virtually ignored in the face of overwhelming evidence. The evidence documented examples of calculated sexual assault, including rape, forced

prostitution, and forced sterilisation. Such evidence would have supported not only an indictment, but could have proven the charges beyond a reasonable doubt.

Ad Hoc International Tribunals

The United Nations established *ad hoc* International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda in 1993 and 1994, respectively, to prosecute crimes arising from the conflicts in those countries. Both tribunals have, to some extent, addressed gender-based crimes such as rape, sexual slavery, torture, persecution and other inhumane acts committed against women and girls.

Special Court for Sierra Leone

The United Nations and Sierra Leonean government established the Special Court for Sierra Leone to prosecute persons who bear the greatest responsibility for serious violations of international humanitarian law and Sierra Leonean law committed since 30 November 1996.¹³ This mixed body of legislation explicitly articulates gender-based crimes such as rape, torture and sexual slavery as crimes in violation of international humanitarian law. The Statute of the Special Court specifically provides legislation addressing gender-related violence.¹⁴ There is an additional mandate requiring the Office of the Registrar to create and maintain a Victim and Witness Unit.¹⁵ This unit, in consultation with the Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) shall provide protection, security, counselling and other appropriate assistance for witnesses and victims.

The Special Court offers an opportunity to practise lessons learned and ensure greater protection and promotion of women's human rights. However, the international community must ensure that adequate funding is available to support this initiative. At a recent meeting held in New York, the Registrar for the Special Court, Robin Vincent, reported that funding for the court, which is by voluntary contributions by interested member states, was severely limited and may not be sufficient to ensure its operation beyond September 2003. Due to budget constraints, the court is only 50 per cent staffed. When asked

"The international community is now indicting and prosecuting the perpetrators of gender-related war crimes."

whether the victim support programme was in place, the response was that a very competent gender specialist has been hired.

During the course of Mr Vincent's presentation, he also indicated there may not be funding for security sufficient to protect the court should a high profile defendant such as Foday Sankoh¹⁶ or Charles Taylor¹⁷ be brought to Freetown.

Addressing Gender-Based War Crimes

During a recent visit to the ICTR, a young attorney asked whether the prosecutor should require a traumatised, unwilling victim to testify about her rape in order to develop the law or whether it was better to simply forget the rape and ask her to testify about the genocide she had witnessed. The question describes the dilemma, faced by every prosecutor, of whether to

ask a witness to expose herself to the court, the defendant and the defence attorney's cross-examination, in the interests of proving rape as an element of genocide or crime against humanity and thereby developing case law in the process.

Currently, the international criminal justice system does not provide a safe, supportive environment for women to voluntarily come forward to report or testify about the atrocities they have experi-

enced. Convening an international tribunal does not diminish the cultural, historical or societal prohibitions against revealing a sexual violation.

Preparing the victim or witness to testify before the tribunal requires care and a great deal of time. It is emotionally intense for both the victim and the prosecutor. All of these preparations require skill and training, which in turn require adequate funding.

Prosecutors are generally overworked and under-resourced. Asking a prosecutor to undertake what appears to be an additional responsibility is usually met with resistance. Therefore, it is important to make clear that this approach to prosecuting gender-based violence can lead to more effective prosecutions.

The witness preparation in a case in which rape

or sexual assault is charged as a crime against humanity has many similarities to preparing any witness for trial, but also unique differences. Testifying about gender-based war crimes is qualitatively different from testifying about a destruction of historic sites or bombardment of hospitals, both in the magnitude and intensity of the crimes, as well as with respect to the effect on the victims and their social network. Thus, a prosecutor must be ever mindful that these victims may be unwilling or unable to speak out, due to post-traumatic stress disorder, avoidance, shame, guilt, fear of reprisals or a feeling of the futility of coming forward, given the lack of legal redress for such violations.¹⁸ It is also particularly difficult for the victim or witness to talk repeatedly about intimate body parts, acts of depravity and societal taboos, all of which are rarely the subject of public discourse.¹⁹

There needs to be a shift in approach. The question is how the international criminal justice community can eradicate these barriers.

The international community has the opportunity, in the creation of the International Criminal Court (ICC), and through the ICC's Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) to develop a best practice protocol regarding the handling of cases where gender-based violence has been charged against the defendant. The international community must create a criminal justice response to gender-based violence that allows victims to feel safe and supported in coming forward first to report, then to testify about such crimes. The ICC and the OTP have an opportunity to learn valuable lessons from the *ad hoc* tribunals and the Special Court regarding their successes and failures. The ICC may also wish to look at progressive criminal justice response protocols established in various nations.

It seems obvious to state that establishing a best practice protocol requires a serious commitment on the part of the international community, to adequately fund and implement these practices, provide training and bring women into the decision-making process. Without these components in place the statutes and diplomatic promises are empty.

It must be stated in the strongest possible terms, that an adequate criminal justice response to gender-based violence requires all of the representatives of the international criminal justice system to be held accountable. The judges and the prose-

"The international community must create a criminal justice response to gender-based violence that allows victims to feel safe and supported in coming forward first to report, then to testify about such crimes."

cutors are only two sets of actors in this system. The others are law enforcement, prosecution and defence investigators, court personnel, clerics, registrar staff and virtually anyone who comes into contact with a victim or witness.

Successful prosecution of gender-based war crimes entails supporting the victim or witness prior to, throughout and beyond the trial. Prosecution of gender-based crimes cannot be presented without the cooperation and testimony of the victims or witnesses. It is not surprising they may not be willing: requiring the victim or witness to testify exacts a heavy toll on them when they most likely to want to forget about the events.

The prosecutor's job can be made easier by learning how to build bridges and trust between him or herself and the women who will provide evidence before the tribunal. Building trust and supporting the victim is difficult without a strong Victim Support Unit or Victim/Witness Protection Unit.²⁰ These units must be staffed with social workers and psychologists and other personnel trained and experienced in treating survivors of gender-based violence and other traumatic events, such as genocide, who may suffer from acute stress disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder.

The Victim/Witness Unit can assist the prosecution in preparing a witness for trial, provide psychological support and help to explain the justice system and trial process. These are some examples of how such a unit can assist both the victim or witness and the prosecutor. Eliciting facts from the victim of gender-based violence may be difficult. Victims who disclose 'peace time' crimes, other than sexual assaults, are usually eager to give the prosecutor full details of the crime. Occasionally they may feel foolish for having exposed themselves to danger and modify the facts in the retelling. They do not, however, often attempt to sanitise the facts to make themselves more likable or paint the facts in a more favourable light. By contrast, the rape victim who was abducted or coerced into joining an armed faction as a combatant or 'rebel wife', or who may not have resisted to preserve her life or a relative's life, may do precisely that.²¹ In these cases, the prosecutor must, in effect, cross-examine the victim or witness or get to the reality of her experience, all the while trying not to traumatise or alienate her.

When a woman is willing to testify before the

tribunal, it will often be the first time she has appeared before a judicial body. The stress of testifying in this artificial environment, not only before the judges, but also the defendant and defence counsel, may overwhelm her. Here again a support team is critical. At the ICTR, for example, witnesses have collapsed on the witness stand from the stress of testifying. No one had prepared them for what would happen during the proceedings.

Investigators working for the ICTR prosecutor have gone under cover of darkness to the homes of witnesses. They would ask the victim or witness to make a statement on her rape or on how she watched as her family and neighbours were slaughtered. When she was finished giving her statement the investigators would thank her and leave. No one was with the victim or witness to support her after the investigators left her village. Everyone in the neighbourhood recognised the UN trucks and knew why they were there. No one offered protection or anonymity to the witness. This case demonstrates the importance of training the investigators and establishing a support network for the witness. With a strong Victim/Witness Unit and training such challenges can be overcome.

Care must always be given to preserving the quality of the evidence/testimony presented at trial. Prosecutors, in particular, must be careful that the support provided does not have the appearance of buying a witness' testimony. Such an appearance would hurt the case, tainting the evidence as bias and raising ethical questions.

The solution arrived at by the *ad hoc* tribunals and the Special Court is that the Victim/Witness Unit is under the aegis of the Registrar. The Registrar's office is charged with the operation of the tribunal, the OTP and the Office of Defence Counsel and is therefore seen as a neutral party.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The international criminal justice system is moving toward greater awareness that gender-based crimes may be elements of genocide and crimes against

"The international criminal justice system is moving toward greater awareness that gender based-based crimes may be elements of genocide and crimes against humanity."

humanity. The international criminal justice system must now understand that prosecuting these cases is different than prosecuting other crimes which are not layered with social taboo, gender stereotyping and the myth that women could have prevented what happened to them. Prosecuting these cases requires a serious commitment to funding; establishing a best practice protocol; training all representatives of the criminal justice system in best practices; making a genuine commitment to increasing women's representation in policy, legislation and decision-making and in the criminal justice system itself; as well as creating strong Victim/Witness Units.

The question of whether the international community is serious in addressing the climate of impunity regarding gender-based violence can only be answered by what actions it takes. If the international community continues to put pen to paper, drafting legislation that on its face appears to address such impunity, but then does not enable such legislation to be effected, the answer is a loud, No.

The international community, the international criminal justice system and the prosecutors in all of the *ad hoc* tribunals and the ICC must be made aware that the women of the world are watching. 🗨️

Roberta Maria Baldinini is a legal consultant on issues related to gender-based violence and domestic violence. She conducted training on trial and witness preparation for the prosecutors of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Roberta has served as an Assistant District Attorney, Bronx District Attorney's Office and as a Project Attorney funded by the US Department of Justice. This article reflects the views of the author and does not necessarily represent the views of any organisation. Copyright is held by the author.

Endnotes

- 1 Zninab Bangura, *Truth and Reconciliation in Sierra Leone*, VI: Raising Their Voices: Women and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone, www.sierra-leone.org (visited 13 April 2002).
- 2 Gender-based violence is a term used to encompass all forms of sexual violence as well as to make the reader aware of societal roles, attitudes, the interaction of men and women and how these work to the detriment of women.
- 3 E. Rehn and E. Johnson Sirleaf, *Women, War, Peace: The Independent Experts' Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women's Role in Peace-Building*, Geneva: UNIFEM, 2002.
- 4 In October 2000, the UN Security Council's Resolution on Women

and Peace and Security 1325 (Res. 1325) was unanimously passed. This watershed resolution established a new political framework, which makes women's and gender perspectives pertinent to negotiating peace agreements, planning refugee camps and peacekeeping operations, and rebuilding and reshaping the post-conflict environment. Furthermore, Res. 1325 makes achieving gender equality a relevant goal in every Security Council action. The study was conducted in response to Res. 1325 (see footnote 4).

- 5 Secretary-General's report to the Security Council on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. (S/2000/331), 30 March 2001, <http://www.un.org>.
- 6 Madeline Morris, *By Force of Arms: Rape, War and Military Culture*, 45 DUKE L.J. 651, 654 fn5 (1996).
- 7 Rehn and Johnson Sirleaf, 2002; Jeanne Ward, *If Not Now, When? Addressing Gender-based Violence in Refugee, Internally Displaced, and Post-conflict Settings*, New York: Reproductive Health for Refugees Consortium, 2002.
- 8 Told to the author by C. Thorpe, New York, 12 December 2002. Ms Thorpe repeated the story during a UNIFEM Executive Director's Brown Bag Lunch later that same day.
- 9 The *Butare* Trial is underway at the ICTR. Two of the defendants in this case are Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, former national minister of family and women's affairs, and her son Arsène Shalom Ntahobali.
- 10 Medica Zenica, *To Live Without Violence*, Bosnia-Herzegovina: Zenica, 1999.
- 11 Cheywa Spindel *et al.*, *With An End in Sight: Strategies from the UNIFEM Trust Fund to Eliminate Violence Against Women*, Geneva: UNIFEM, 2000, p 90.
- 12 The word 'war' acknowledges that there are international, internal and regional armed conflicts. Therefore, rape and sexual assault committed during any type of armed conflict may be viewed as a crime against humanity and/or genocide.
- 13 Statute of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, Article 1, para. 1.
- 14 Article 2 titled *Crimes Against Humanity*; Article 3 titled *Violations of Article 3 Common to the Geneva Conventions and of Additional Protocol II*; and Article 5 titled *Crimes Under Sierra Leonean Law* all have provisions to deal with rape and other gender-based crimes.
- 15 Article 16, sec. 4.
- 16 An indictment was filed for the former head of the Revolutionary United Front, who has since died.
- 17 An indictment has been filed for the former President of Liberia.
- 18 Bangura, 2002.
- 19 Conciliation Resources, *Gender and Conflict in Sierra Leone*, London: Conciliation Resources, 1997; Human Rights Watch, *Sexual Violence within the Sierra Leone Conflict*, London: HRW, www.hrw.org/background/africa/sl-back0226.htm (visited 11 March 2002); Radio Netherlands, *War, Rape and Sexual Assault*, 6 March 2000, www.mw.nl/humanrights (visited 14 March 2002).
- 20 These units are named differently depending on the tribunal or court. I will refer to them as Victim/Witness Units, as this title includes victims and witnesses without regard to gender.
- 21 Khadija Alia Bah, *Rural Women and Girls in the War in Sierra Leone*, London: Conciliation Resources, 2001; Christiana Thorpe, 'The Safety of Girls In Conflict Situations: The Sierra Leone Experience', *FAWE Newsletter*, vol 7, no 3, www.fawe.org/Contents/newslet73b.html (visited 14 March 2002); Bangura, 2002.

The importance of prioritising women's protection in war zones



BY RAMINA JOHAL & MEGAN MCKENNA

PEACEBUILDING

partnering for the protection of **refugee' women**

War-affected women are often portrayed as victims of human rights and refugee rights violations. But they are also activists who witness, document, report on and develop remedies for improved protection, often at personal risk. Women who have suffered rape and other abuses are much more likely to discuss these abuses with other women, especially those who understand them and their culture. Ultimately, when the international spotlight and the funds have gone, local women and their organisations remain to rebuild their communities.

Through its Protection Partners project, the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children collaborates with local partners in several areas around the world, to reinforce their local monitoring and advocacy capacities for refugee, internally displaced and returnee populations. With Women's Commission support, the protection partners push for change in local and international policies and programmes, and work closely with UN agencies, international organisations and local decision-makers.

Broadening the Scope

Refugee women's protection needs have been gaining attention world-wide particularly since the early 1990s. A few examples include:

- ▲ The UNHCR Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women (1991) and its Commitments to Refugee Women (2001);
- ▲ UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000) and subsequent reports by the UN Secretary-General (2002) and UNIFEM, such as *Women, War and Peace* (2002);
- ▲ The Draft Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (July 2003);
- ▲ The US General Accounting Office's report, 'Humanitarian Assistance: Protecting Refugee Women and Girls Remains a Significant Challenge' (May 2003).

Clearly, a momentum is building towards ensuring that women's protection is in the minds of a wide range of actors, from UN Security Council members to those delivering assistance to refugees



and the internally displaced. What is often overlooked is the key role that partnerships between international and local actors can play in addressing and sustaining the protection needs of at-risk populations. Partnerships must be re-conceived to integrate women's protection at the grassroots level so that real change can be achieved and sustained.

Partnering: From Implementing Agency to Protection Partner

Traditionally, partnerships between local groups and international actors, i.e., UN agencies and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), are too often based on fulfilling what are perceived as the most immediate needs of at-risk populations. Local groups are engaged as 'implementing agencies' for example in food delivery and physical reconstruction. Women's groups are often excluded from partnerships because their focus is on other areas or because they lack capacity.

Effective protection encompasses a range of activities through which refugee and IDP rights are secured, and legal issues, physical security and access to assistance are addressed. An enabling environment must also be created so that at-risk populations can take the lead in their own economic and social development.² For refugee women this means ensuring access to decision-making, freedom of movement, gaining redress for violations, skills training and education, and individual documentation, among many other rights.

One model for implementing agencies to draw from is the Women's Commission's work in Sierra Leone, Pakistan/Afghanistan and Colombia, where its local partners determine the protection agenda. In Sierra Leone, the Women's Commission has worked since 2001 with a local activist who identified several gaps in assistance efforts for women. Among her first discoveries, she found that women and girls involved in the war were being excluded from the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) process because they were not ex-combatants; instead they were sex slaves, porters, cooks, etc. Ensuring that

they received protection and assistance became the rallying point for our joint advocacy – at the local and international levels. The partner's work complemented the mandates of the UN, INGOs and the government of Sierra Leone, all of whom were involved in the DDR programme in different ways. As a local protection monitor, her approach cut across a multitude of actors, and resulted in more opportunities for these women and girls, thus ensuring a better chance for a peaceful future for Sierra Leone.

In a second example, the Women's Commission partner documented the participation of internally displaced women in Sierra Leone's 2002 elections. The report, 'Voting for Peace, Survival and Self-reliance', explored IDP women's access to the polls, identified reasons why they voted, what they voted for and what they expected from the new government. The report was shared with the country's Members of Parliament, together with the assurance that the Women's Commission and its local partner would be monitoring and supporting the government's responses in meeting these commitments. An upcoming Women's Commission report will address women's shelter, housing, inheritance and property rights, which were a major concern of those interviewed. The goal of the report is to advance the voters' concerns, and support the progress of the government.

The above demonstrates that working through local women and women's groups is often one of the best ways to get information on protection gaps and how to address them.


Moreover, an effective partnership gives both the local and international group legitimacy in advancing protection. International actors are more often in a position to act as a liaison connecting the local group with the host government and relevant international entities. They can also help local women's groups build coalitions within the country, for example by bringing together a refugee group and a host country women's rights organisation, or by encouraging the host country group to take on refugee women's issues. This has been achieved in other partner sites.

Conclusion

The abuse allegations made in the West African sexual exploitation crisis³ were a wake-up call for the international community. The good news is that progress is being made in areas such as staff training, and the establishment of codes of conduct and mechanisms for accountability.

Moreover, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Ruud Lubbers, recently identified innovations in partnerships, especially with NGOs, as among the agency's top priorities for this year. In Resolution 1325, the UNSC expresses its willingness to ensure that their missions include consultations with local and international women's groups. The UN Secretary-General's report includes numerous recommendations calling for consultation with women's groups and networks in gathering information and addressing protection issues.

But consultations are only part of the solution. What is not yet clear is whether these institutions

are engaging women's groups in a way that maximises their ability to identify gaps in protection, seek solutions and ensure that interventions are appropriate. A clear road map and more innovative strategies for partnering with women's groups will reinforce recent gains and pave the way for more comprehensive protection for women world-wide. 

Ramina Johal is a Senior Liaison Officer, Participation and Protection Project, and Megan McKenna is Media Liaison. Both work at the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children.

Endnote

- 1 In this article, the term 'refugee' includes refugees, returnees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and resettled populations.
- 2 This definition is adapted from the Protection Unit of the International Rescue Committee. The International Committee of the Red Cross's (ICRC) definition of protection is: "all activities aimed at ensuring full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law, i.e. human rights law, international humanitarian law and refugee law. Human rights and humanitarian organizations must conduct these activities in an impartial manner (not on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, language or gender.)" ICRC, Strengthening Protection, 31 December 2001.
- 3 Identified by a report from UNHCR and Save the Children UK, 'Note for Implementing and Operational Partners on Sexual Violence and Exploitation: The Experience of Refugee Children in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone based on Initial Findings and Recommendations from Assessment Mission 22 October-30 November 2001', February 2002.

Progress of the World's Women 2002: Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals

Despite achievements, pace of women's advancement remains too slow

There has been progress in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment around the world – but the pace is too slow in many regions. Sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest levels of achievement, primarily because of a devastating combination of national poverty, conflict and the effects of HIV/AIDS. These are among the findings of Progress of the World's Women 2002, Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals, the second edition of a biennial publication by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) that was first produced in 2000 to track and measure the world's commitment to gender equality.

Progress 2002 assesses improvements made towards women's empowerment within the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a set of eight goals that arose out of the historic Millennium Summit of world leaders in September 2000 and that aim at achieving gender equality and combating poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy and environmental degradation by 2015. Goal 3 of the MDGs calls on nations to "promote gender equality and empower women." It builds on the work of women's advocates at various UN conferences in the 1990s, in particular the Fourth World Conference on Women, and the five year review of the Conference's Platform for Action. In addition, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has played an important part in shaping international commitment to gender equality.

The far-reaching goals can only be achieved if efforts to improve conditions are carefully tracked and monitored. To allow this to happen, the MDGs are backed by a set of indicators that are used to analyze progress towards each goal. UNIFEM's report focuses mainly on analyzing the indicators for Goal 3, namely secondary school enrollment, literacy, non-agricultural wage employment and women's representation in parliaments.

Women in sub-Saharan Africa suffer from the highest levels of maternal deaths and the highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS. In addition, more than half the population lives on less than \$1 per day, the

highest poverty rate in the world. It is also the region with the lowest per capita gross national product. Girls' and women's school enrolment and literacy are low compared to other regions, and compared to boys and men within the region. Women's share of non-agricultural wage employment is equally low compared to other regions and compared to men.

One other major finding of the report is that the level of women's representation in national governments has improved. The rise in women's share of parliamentary seats is primarily due to special measures such as quotas being introduced and is not tied to a nation's relative wealth or poverty. The Beijing Platform for Action (PFA), developed at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, calls for at least 30 per cent representation by women in national governments. Those countries that have introduced quotas of at least 30 per cent have seen substantial growth in women's representation.

Progress of the World's Women 2002 shows that in general, the countries with the highest levels of progress are developed countries. Still, there are many developed countries that don't top the list, mainly because of women's poor representation in national governments. In fact, despite the enormous difficulties confronting sub-Saharan Africa, at least 13 countries in the region have higher rates of women's parliamentary participation than developed countries such as France, Japan, and the United States.

Given the current conditions, UNIFEM believes it is extremely important that governments expedite actions to fulfill commitments to women and that donor nations increase the support and resources necessary to fulfill Goal 3. Promoting gender equality and empowering women are more than mere phrases – UNIFEM shows in Progress 2002 that achieving these ends improves the lives of everyone, not just women. And it shows how ending women's inequality can have a profound impact on many other national sectors.

Progress of the World's Women 2002, Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals can be found at: http://www.unifem.org/index.php?f_page_pid=10