

WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY: UN RESOLUTION 1325 PUT TO THE TEST

At the normative level, international demands that women be better protected from sexual violence in conflicts and be more strongly involved in peace support have left their mark. However, UN Resolution 1325, which was passed over ten years ago, has only seen limited implementation so far. Traditional societal structures in conflict-ridden states and disparate levels of interest among UN member states prevent a stronger emphasis on the gender-specific implications of violent conflicts. In the case of Switzerland's peace support activities, gender mainstreaming is a well-established feature.



Swiss diplomat Heidi Tagliavini has held important leadership positions in conflict resolution efforts, particularly in the Caucasus. *Reuters*

Gender-specific aspects of violent conflicts have become an increasingly important topic of international security policy in recent years. Historically, there have always been differences in the way men and women experience armed conflicts and are affected by them. Men traditionally are mainly victims of direct combat operations, while women predominantly take on noncombatant roles and are, for example, subjected to various forms of sexual and gender-based violence. However, two factors have prompted the international community to increasingly view violent conflicts from a gender perspective and to pay special attention to the specific needs and roles of women today:

First, the nature of warfare has changed significantly since the end of the Cold War. The vast majority of violent conflicts today take place at the intra-state level. In such civil wars, the civilian population is always strongly affected by violence and is often consciously targeted by the combatant parties. According to UN statistics, in today's conflicts, 90 per cent of the victims are civilians. Therefore, proportionally more women, children, and infirm persons are becoming victims of armed conflict than ever before. Secondly, the so-called "sexualisation of the theatre of war" has increased. In addition to growing conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, this phenomenon also includes human

trafficking and forced prostitution in war zones and post-war societies. For instance, the then UN commander in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) stated some years ago: "It is now more dangerous to be a woman than to be a soldier in modern conflict."

Gender-specific aspects of violent conflicts became an issue of international law in the aftermath of the wars in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Rwanda during the 1990s. In both conflicts, systematic rape was used as an instrument of warfare. An estimated 20,000 to 50,000 women and girls were raped in Bosnia-Herzegovina; in Rwanda, their number was between 250,000 and 500,000. At the same time, the Srebrenica massacre made clear that men, too, can be victims of gender-based violence. The two UN International Criminal Tribunals for Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda finally facilitated the establishment and codification of rape and other forms of sexual violence as crimes against humanity, as war crimes, and as acts of genocide under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

It was against this background that the UN Security Council also took up the matter. Resolution 1325 on "Women, Peace, and Security" was unanimously adopted in October 2000. It is the first Security Council resolution to deal with gender-specific aspects of violent conflict, though it is limited to the female sex. The resolution notes that women suffer disproportion-

ately from violent conflicts and demands that women have an active role in all phases of conflict prevention and resolution. It also calls for effective protection of women from sexual and gender-based violence and the inclusion of the gender perspective in all aspects of peace support. Resolution 1325 gave rise to four follow-up resolutions: 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), and 1960 (2010). In the following, the substance and implementation of this body of norms will be critically assessed.

Resolution 1325

In Resolution 1325, the Security Council acknowledges that “an understanding of the impact of armed conflict on women and girls, effective institutional arrangements to guarantee their protection and full participation in the peace process can significantly contribute to the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security”. This is the first internationally binding legal text that links specific female experiences of violent conflict with international security. In this regard, the follow-up Resolution 1820 is even more specific, as it makes reference to conflict-related sexual violence as a tactic of warfare that can threaten international peace. Other follow-up resolutions, in turn, constitute important complements to Resolution 1325 by dealing with questions of implementation. For instance, in Resolution 1888, the Security Council requests that the UN secretary-general appoint a special representative to fight conflict-related sexual violence. Resolution 1889 requires the UN secretary-general to submit a set of indicators for use at the global level to track implementation of Resolution 1325 (2000). Finally, Resolution 1960 establishes an accountability system for the implementation of Resolutions 1820 and 1888.

The body of norms linked to Resolution 1325 implies an obligation for the UN and its member states to act. The resolutions encompass an unusually broad spectrum of demands and are directed both at the parties to violent conflicts and at peace support actors. The question of their legal force remains controversial, however, since they are not based on Chapter VII of the UN Charter. More than ten years after the adoption of Resolution 1325, an interim assessment of the acceptance and implementation of these provisions must come to an ambiguous conclusion.

On the one hand, it should be noted that much has been done in the past decade

1325: Important Resources

Relevant UN Security Council resolutions [↗](#)

National action plans [↗](#)

Comparison of European action plans [↗](#)

Swiss foreign policy: Women and conflicts [↗](#)

to develop norms and implementation mechanisms. These efforts were made under the aegis of the UN, which has defined an action plan for its own implementation of the norms, advocates on behalf of analogous national action plans, and has defined 26 indicators for monitoring the areas of prevention, participation, protection and aid, and reconstruction. The EU too plays an important role. For instance, the Council of the European Union adopted two documents for the implementation of Resolution 1325 in 2008 and defined indicators in July 2010. On their basis, an initial implementation report was published in May 2011.

On the other hand, the following sections of this analysis will show that not much has changed for women in practice. The norms of Resolution 1325 are today far from being acknowledged by all relevant actors. Tellingly, 22 of the current 36 national action plans were authored by European and North American states. Of the states that are in principle supportive of Resolution 1325 norms, a few have shown only limited interest in the gender-specific aspects of violent conflict. Moreover, those states that are actively advocating for the implementation of Resolution 1325 can make according provisions in their own peace support activities, but have only indirect means of influencing the actions of the parties to a conflict.

Women in peace processes

An initial focus of Resolution 1325 is on the stronger involvement of women in conflict resolution and peace processes. In particular, women should increasingly hold key positions in peace negotiations and mediation processes. The underlying argument here is that the views of the female population, which is differently and often more grievously affected by conflicts, should not be discounted and that taking into account women’s experiences in the negotiation of peace agreements brings a sustainable peace dividend.

However, reality today lags far behind the 1325 norm in this respect. While women have always, even in male-dominated

societies, been engaged not only in advocacy for their own rights, but also for peace, they mainly do so in grassroots movements, as illustrated, for example, by the initiative “1000 PeaceWomen Across the Globe”. Their involvement in peace negotiations and reconstruction processes remains marginal, apart from a few exceptions such as Liberia or Kosovo. A study of 24 peace processes from 1992 to 2008 shows that only 2.5 per cent of the signers, 3.2 per cent of the mediators, 5.5 per cent of the observers, and 7.6 per cent of the negotiators were female. Accordingly, the UN rightly concludes that women’s participation in peace processes remains largely ad-hoc and unsystematic today.

The example of Iraq shows how difficult it is to embed the principle of involving women more strongly in peace and reconstruction processes if such norms are not established in the local context. Despite US proclamations of equality that manifest themselves in a 25 per cent quota for female MPs in the Iraqi parliament, only one woman was given a place in Nouri al-Maliki’s 40-member cabinet. Another example is Nepal, where Switzerland has been engaged for many years in strengthening the role of women in the peace process. While Nepalese peace activists succeeded in establishing a female quota in the constitutional assembly, they remained excluded from the peace negotiations despite being schooled in the theoretical and practical aspects of negotiating.

According to expert assessments, a critical mass of 30 to 40 per cent female participation in peace processes is required for gender-sensitive characteristics to take hold. However, experience shows that Resolution 1325 can only be implemented in small steps in countries with traditional social structures and that such a development is sometimes only possible after a far-reaching transformation of values.

Protection from sexual violence

Protecting women and children from sexual violence in armed conflicts and post-conflict situations also remains difficult. The legitimacy and relevance of this aspect of Resolution 1325 is patent. The resolution refers to numerous conventions under international law for the protection of the civilian population, refugees, and children in armed conflict as well as to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Rome Statute of the International

Criminal Court. In addition to pointing to the undisputed right to physical and mental inviolability, the resolution also argues that sexual and gender-based violence has a highly destabilising influence on societies and their cohesiveness. As the UN has found in pilot studies, it is precisely because of such socially destabilising effects that gender-specific violence (primarily directed against women) can even be a key indicator in the run-up to conflicts.

Nevertheless, mass rapes and other forms of systematic sexual violence continue to be part of many conflicts. In the South Kivu province of the eastern DRC alone, 40 women and girls are raped on average every day, according to Médecins sans Frontières. The overwhelming majority of the perpetrators of sexual violence go unpunished. To be sure, a whole range of measures can be identified, especially at the level of the UN, that take into account this aspect of Resolution 1325. For example, in addition to the new position of a UN special representative on sexual violence, a rapidly deployable expert team against sexual violence was formed that has since become active in the DRC and has conducted initial investigations in Liberia, South Sudan, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Cote d'Ivoire. Furthermore, all states have been requested to end impunity for violent sexual crimes, to exclude such crimes from amnesties, and to prosecute culprits to the full extent of the law. However, such measures have not had much of a deterrent effect so far.

The example of Afghanistan shows that local contextual factors can prevent effective implementation of Resolution 1325 even where measures are taken to improve the protection of women. UN Women (formerly UNIFEM), the UN's women's organisation, has been advocating a gender-balanced security sector reform in this country for the past decade, for instance by raising the number of female police officers. It is hoped that this will encourage women traumatised by sexual violence to seek protection and to press charges against their tormentors. However, UN Women was unable to prevent the many cases of women being arrested for so-called moral crimes. Frequently, rapes perpetrated against them are treated as instances of adultery.

In order to be effective, the enforcement of norms to protect women and girls at times also requires a flexible translation

context that takes local cultural factors into account. Conversely, rigorous enforcement independently of context is required in connection with combating sexual violence and exploitation by peacekeepers. The increase of such crimes in the context of peacekeeping missions, as reported for instance in Haiti, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Sudan, Congo, and Kosovo, is a matter of great concern. It shows that heightened sensitivity for gender aspects is necessary not only among parties to the conflict, but also at the level of peace support actors.

Gender mainstreaming

Of the three main themes of Resolution 1325, the demand for integrating gender-sensitive perspectives in all peace promotion projects and programmes offers the most immediate opportunities for action to peace actors. Taking gender-specific differences into account in a practical manner at all stages of a programme is very demanding, however.

For instance, gender-sensitive conflict analysis must not be guided by stereotypical expectations that exclusively ascribe to women the role of victims. At the same time, it should be taken into consideration that the interest in gender mainstreaming varies not only between states, but also within states. It comes as no surprise, then, that the implementation of this aspect of Resolution 1325 is extremely disparate.

In principle, however, there is a major need for action here, too. This need concerns not only the systematic integration of the gender perspective in peace support and the establishment of instruments for gender mainstreaming such as gender trainings. In many states, there is just as much scope for developing a gender-sensitive staff policy in the realm of peace support. Just look at the UN's peacekeeping statistics. In UN Peacekeeping operations in 2010, women accounted for 2.42 per cent of military troops, 4.14 per cent of military experts (including military observers), and 8.7 per cent of police officers. If we add up these three categories, women accounted for a total of about 3.3 per cent of the approximately 100,000 soldiers and police officers deployed by the UN. Currently, they make up about 30 per cent of the international civilian personnel in UN operations. However, in civilian peace promotion, too, key positions continue to be held largely by men.

Switzerland's role

The future significance of the 1325 norms depends largely on the importance that states attach to the obligations they imply. In this respect, it should be noted that Switzerland has played a very active and important role in recent years. As one of the first states, it adopted a national action plan for the implementation of Resolution 1325 in 2007. It has since been one of only six states to revise its action plan. The respective catalogue of measures for the years 2010 to 2012 will be once more revised in the near future. This process is directed by the interdepartmental Working Group 1325, which is staffed by members of the foreign, defence, and justice and police ministries, and chaired by the foreign ministry's Human Security Division.

The Swiss action plan has three main characteristics. First of all, it is an organic document that can be adapted as and when needed. Secondly, this process of adaptation takes place in collaboration with civil society as part of a participative mechanism. Third, the plan defines not only goals, but also the respective measures, responsibilities, and indicators. The latter are intended, in line with the UN's parameters, to make implementation measurable and controllable. However, with these indicators, Switzerland is largely entering unknown territory. Some of them are still defined too generically to be suitable for operationalisation. It is therefore likely that they will be adapted in the coming revision phases.

Today, gender mainstreaming is particularly well established at the foreign ministry, not least thanks to the strong efforts of former foreign minister Micheline Calmy-Rey and some top-level diplomats. For instance, within the Human Security Division, a staff position for a "Gender Advisor" was created to promote gender mainstreaming systematically. There is also a system of budget controlling for gender sensitivity of civil peace promotion activities. Furthermore, an above-average 46 per cent of the members of the Swiss Expert Pool for Civilian Peacebuilding deployed in 2011 were female. While gender mainstreaming is less institutionally entrenched at the defence ministry, gender trainings are an established part of preparations for overseas deployments and are also appreciated by partner states. With a quota of six per cent, participation of

With its indicator-based action plan, Switzerland has entered unknown territory

women in military peace support is also above the average for UN operations – and far higher than the overall percentage of women serving in the Swiss armed forces.

Switzerland continues to struggle to find suitable candidates for high-level political jobs in international peace promotion. After the resignation in April 2012 of the UN special representative on sexual violence, Margot Wallström, it remains to be seen whether a Swiss candidate will be able to make a credible bid for the position. As Switzerland continues to adapt its 1325 activities, it seems worth considering not only a stronger international focus of its personnel policies, but also an increased internationalisation of Swiss best practice efforts, for instance by supporting interested states in the development of an indicator-based national action plan. However, a continued active engagement by Switzerland requires that the Federal Council will continue to extend political support for this issue, even now that Calmy-Rey is no longer in office.

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