

## FOUR PILLARS OF THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA

The United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women and Peace and Security (WPS) on October 31, 2000. UNSCR 1325 recognizes the crucial connection between global security and the lives of women and girls. It is the result of the vision and commitment of civil society and United Nations Member States to address and prioritize the role of women in peacebuilding and the impact of conflict on their lives. UNSCR 1325 reaffirms women's crucial role in conflict prevention and resolution, peacebuilding, humanitarian response, and post-conflict reconstruction. It stresses that women's full engagement and equal participation is essential to ensuring lasting peace and post-conflict recovery.

UNSCR 1325 and subsequent UNSC resolutions call for the protection of women and girls from gender-based violence in conflict, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse. One of the ways through which UNSCR 1325 is made real in practical action is through the development and implementation of national-level policies, often by way of National Action Plans (NAPs). Strong collaboration between Member States and civil society, and particularly women-led organizations and networks, has proven successful in actualizing the NAPs on Women, Peace, and Security across the world.

UNSCR 1325 is organized around four pillars: 1) Participation, 2) Prevention, 3) Protection, and 4) Relief and Recovery. Since 2000, additional UNSC resolutions

and advocacy by activists have broadened and deepened the WPS agenda, raising issues relating to more intersectional analysis (ex. bringing in youth, LGBTQ issues, etc.) and the scope of discussion (for example, the climate/security/gender nexus and a stronger emphasis on disarmament.)

While the initial 'four pillars' represent a good starting point for thinking on WPS, many civil society, academic, and policy stakeholders have commented that this segmentation creates challenges. The real world security issues facing women and girls do not fit neatly under one pillar but rather are cross-cutting and more expansive than the definitions provided for each pillar. As the WPS agenda evolves, it increasingly encompassing a range of human security issues including those not related to armed conflict; such as climate change, cyber security, disinformation, protection of civilians, countering violent extremism, Indigenous rights, migration, and economic development.

### **A synopsis of the four pillars of UNSCR 1325:**

#### **Participation**

*Full and equal participation and representation of women at all levels of decision-making, including peace processes, electoral processes, UN positions, and the broader social political sphere.*

While it is well documented that women's participation results in better outcomes in peace processes and peacebuilding efforts, women's participation continues to be contested and generally only achieved through concerted pressure and advocacy by women's organizations. Women have the skills and capacity to participate in peace negotiations, conflict mediation, disarmament, reconciliation and other peacebuilding and conflict reduction efforts, but face political, social, and logistical barriers that make this largely impossible. Political will and skill are key to integrating and amplifying women's voices and participation. Inclusive and transformative peacebuilding is not simply a series of activities or checked boxes for women's participation. Rather, it is also an approach which requires addressing systemic gender inequality, which is among the root causes of conflict. The barriers to women's participation must be addressed with context-appropriate strategies, which require a deep understanding of the barriers, as well as possible solutions. Countries like Canada can support and fund women's organizations, as they are best suited to provide the analysis and solutions that will enable these organizations to push for their right to participate and make their voices heard. While this area of the agenda has seen some concrete lessons learned and a few successes, more dedicated and coordinated actions are needed.

### **Conflict Prevention**

*Incorporation of a gender perspective and the participation of women in preventing the emergence, spread, and re-emergence of violent conflict as well as addressing root causes including the need for disarmament.*

The prevention of armed conflict and the reduction of ever escalating levels of militarization is the underlying objective of the women, peace and security agenda. Over the past decades, military responses to conflict have dominated international interventions. Little progress has been made to put in place effective early warning and prevention measures, including addressing the root causes of conflict. An attitudinal shift away from military responses and towards peaceful conflict prevention strategies is needed. Prevention strategies include early warning and response, preventive diplomacy, peacekeeping, promotion of social cohesion and trust-building, and the use of information and communication technology. These strategies must integrate an intersectional gender analysis and must be locally-owned and community-driven. Women-led or informed strategies to early warning and conflict resolution are proven tools to strengthen effectiveness of conflict prevention measures, but have rarely been incorporated. For example, evidence shows that rising levels of gendered violence is a predictor of insecurity in a society. Inversely, states that have higher levels of gender equality are less likely to use force and instead prioritize non-military options.

### **Protection**

*Specific protection rights and needs of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict settings, including reporting and prosecution of sexual and genderbased violence.*

The Women, Peace, and Security Agenda recognizes that the impacts of war on women and girls are

compounded by pre-existing gender inequalities and discrimination. All forms of violence against women increase during war and leave women with a lack of access to the most fundamental rights; including healthcare, food, shelter, education or even nationality. These rights are closely linked to women's security and must be addressed in interventions holistically, by recognizing the need for support for survivors, security sector reform, ending impunity, and building capacity of women's groups. Likewise, it is important that humanitarian work includes an intersectional gender analysis to ensure women's needs, rights and security are fully addressed. Women's leadership and gender equality is of highest importance in making humanitarian action effective and successful. Therefore, any programming in humanitarian settings must have women's leadership and the promotion of gender equality at its core.

### **Relief and recovery**

*Promoting and working to ensure women's equal access to humanitarian and development assistance and international assistance that supports the specific needs and capacities of women and girls is crucial in all relief and recovery efforts.*

Despite the leadership roles that women often play during conflict, they find themselves largely locked out of decision-making forums post conflict. Women's needs are often swept aside and their concerns excluded from the statebuilding enterprise. For example,

a key issue in post-conflict settings is that sexual violence is seldom addressed as a security concern and continues unabated post-conflict. As a result, women's security continues to be undermined and peace remains elusive. Due to gender norms that largely position women as victims, women's role as combatants and in other roles in active conflict are often not acknowledged or understood, leading to reintegration and recovery efforts that do not respond to their specific needs and experiences. Women are also rarely involved in guiding reconciliation efforts between and within groups involved in conflict. The Women, Peace, and Security Agenda reimagines peacebuilding in a way that leverages the capacity and contributions of women, and develops strategies for the inclusion of their roles and experiences. It is the women on the ground who are instrumental in stitching the fabric of society back together. Reconciliation and reconstruction must empower women and girls economically, politically, and socially and include long-term strategies that benefit women of all ages and across a range of intersecting identities from the grassroots, building their capacity for individual and collective action to ensure their participation in elections, constitution writing, and economic recovery.

### **Global Progress**

Although UNSCR 1325 was adopted more than two decades ago, global progress on the WPS agenda remains slow and uneven. Only 98 or 51% of United Nations Member States have

adopted NAPs to date, and Canada did not have its first NAP until 2011. There remains a disconnect between the political-level WPS agenda and the principles and priorities of local civil society actors. There has been significantly greater emphasis on the implementation of the “Protection” pillar, with the others receiving less investment and attention. The UN Secretary-General is required to report to the Security Council on an annual basis on the implementation of WPS across the world. These reports serve as an accountability mechanism for Member States and advocacy opportunities for civil society.

*Prepared by Laura Sewell for WPS-Dialogue-FPS (April 2022). This note is based on a previous version written by Diana Sarosi for the CNAP2 Consultations in 2017.*