

Bringing 1325 Home

Remarks

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UNSCR 1325: Moving Beyond Theory to Maximize Security in the OSCE

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Thank you very much for inviting me to be here with all of you today. I would like to say a special word of thanks to the Gender Section of OSCE Secretariat and the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina for planning and hosting this conference, as well as to the Governments of Norway and Lithuania for supporting it. Thank you as well to all those who conceptualized, organized, and interpreted. Your hard work has made this conference happen, creating the space for us to come together to advance implementation of UNSCR 1325 in countries across the OSCE region.

Why does UNSCR 1325 matter?

Last month, I attended a screening in Washington, DC of a riveting film entitled “Pray the Devil Back to Hell,” featuring a group of courageous women from Liberia who banded together to form a peace group during Liberia’s civil war. These women transcended gender stereotypes, religious divides between Christians and Muslims in their country, and barriers to women’s involvement in public affairs, becoming a political force that helped drive the warring parties to a peace agreement in 2003. Motivated by the suffering around them, including horrific rapes of women and girls, they took action to make their voices heard. In a particularly compelling scene, they traveled to Accra, Ghana for the peace talks, as the rebel forces were approaching Liberia’s capital city, Monrovia. Although they were not allowed into the negotiations, the women demonstrated peacefully outside the conference hall day after day. The Nigerian leader of the peace talks quickly recognized the political power these women wielded, and he began to engage them to help make the government and the rebels lay down their arms.

As the talks wore on without progress, the women finally decided to take matters into their own hands. Exasperated by what they saw as male leaders enjoying a comfortable vacation in Accra while the Liberian people continued to suffer, the women encircled the conference hall, preventing the two sides from leaving until they had reached a deal. The women told them, if you are hungry or tired, then you will know the suffering of your people. Before long, a peace deal was reached.

The courage, tenacity, and determination of these Liberian women to bring about peace are not only inspiring, but also a powerful example of the crucial role women can play in conflict resolution, peace negotiations, effective disarmament processes, and post-conflict reconciliation. As these women showed, women’s full participation is essential to peace and security. This is not just a theoretical construct, but a profound reality – and an imperative recognized by the Nobel Committee just three

weeks ago when it awarded this year's Nobel Peace Prize to Leymah Gbowee of the Liberian women's peace group.

The importance of this conference

The awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize this year to women activists for peace and women's rights sends a strong signal that the work we are here to do at this conference is critically important. States and the international community must address the needs and include the perspectives of *all* people affected by conflict, the majority of whom are women and children. That is the promise of UNSCR 1325.

I would like to share a few reflections on 1325, its origins, its core meaning, and where we stand today, 11 years after its adoption.

When women from around the world gathered in Beijing for the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, armed conflict was very much on their minds. They understood that if they were to develop a comprehensive platform for the advancement of women, a key component would be the creation of "an environment that maintains world peace and promotes and protects human rights, democracy and the peaceful settlement of disputes." The resulting Beijing Platform for Action contains a robust section on women and armed conflict. It affirms that "violations of the human rights of women in situations of armed conflict are violations of the fundamental principles of international human rights and humanitarian law." The Beijing Platform condemns violations such as rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy, emphasizing the need for an effective response to these abuses as well as accountability, stating that the perpetrators of such crimes must be punished. Further, it underscores that these violations of women's human rights help create an exodus of refugees and displaced persons.

In many ways, the Beijing Platform was a vehicle for acknowledging at the international level the impact of armed conflict on women, both immediate and enduring. The Platform recognized that civilian victims, most of whom are women and children, often outnumber casualties among combatants. Women of all ages suffer displacement, loss of their homes and property, loss of close relatives, family separation and disintegration, and poverty. Women and girls in conflict situations are also victims of murder, rape, sexual slavery, sexual abuse, forced pregnancy, torture, and enforced disappearance. Women often become sole household managers, single parents, and sole caregivers of the elderly and the injured. All of these impacts are "compounded by the life-long social, economic, and psychologically traumatic consequences of armed conflict."

From this recognition of the impact of armed conflict on women and girls came a call to action, first in the Beijing Platform itself and then, five years later in 2000, in UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

UNSCR 1325 and its four related successor resolutions (1820 (adopted in 2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), and 1960 (2010)) call on states to take a number of actions related to women, peace and security. These actions can be grouped into two principal categories. First, UNSCR 1325 emphasizes the vital role that women can and must play in security sector institutions and as decision makers in conflict prevention, crisis management, peace negotiations, and post-conflict reconciliation. All too often, however, women are denied a seat at the table, thereby hampering peace-building efforts and leaving

women vulnerable to harm during and after conflict. Women's full and equal participation in peace and security matters is a central component of UNSCR 1325.

Those who experience the reality on the ground often understand the crucial role that women can play. I saw this firsthand this summer in Kyrgyzstan. The OSCE Field Office in Osh and UN Women are supporting the active participation of local women's peace and mediation groups in the south in the reconciliation process, so that issues of concern to women can be raised and addressed. As Kyrgyzstan embarks on the development of a national action plan on UNSCR 1325, the process can hopefully build on women's contributions to reconciliation at the local level to produce a strong plan of action that both responds to women's needs and benefits from their insights and creative ideas.

Second, UNSCR 1325 requires states to take action to prevent and respond to the ways in which women and girls are adversely affected by conflict. While the consequences of armed conflict for women are far ranging, sexual violence is a persistent abuse that violates the fundamental human rights of women and girls. Despite its repeated condemnation, sexual violence in armed conflict continues. In 2009, the UN called for the establishment of a Special Representative of the Secretary General to focus exclusively on this issue. Successor resolutions to 1325 have emphasized that, when used as a tactic of war or as part of widespread or systematic attacks against civilians, sexual violence can significantly exacerbate conflict and can impede the restoration of peace.

By contrast, effective steps to prevent and respond to sexual violence in conflict situations can make a significant contribution to building a just and sustainable peace. Indeed, Resolution 1888 from 2009 emphasizes that ending impunity for sexual violence in armed conflict is necessary both for reconciliation and prevention of future crimes of sexual violence. Action must be taken to investigate these crimes and hold the perpetrators accountable. Survivors must be given access to justice and provided with protection, legal and social assistance, health services, and adequate redress. Where justice for sexual violence in armed conflict has been achieved, a crucial factor was the extraordinary courage of the women who testified.

Another major impact of armed conflict on women is displacement. This issue bears special mention this year, as we mark the 60th anniversary of the UN Refugee Convention. Women and children comprise 80 percent of the world's refugees and internally displaced persons. It is important to deepen our understanding of the intersection of conflict, displacement, and gender, and to use the anniversary of the Refugee Convention to highlight the issues confronting refugee and displaced women, with the goal of increasing efforts to address them effectively.

UNSCR 1325 and its successor resolutions do not allow us to take a one-dimensional view of women in situations of armed conflict, seeing them only as victims without agency or as peacemakers in limited roles defined by gender stereotypes. Instead, UNSCR 1325 requires us to take women seriously – their experiences, their needs, their skills, their knowledge, their perspectives, and their leadership. With its dual focus on women's participation and on the adverse impact of conflict on women, UNSCR 1325 is a clarion call to prevent and respond to the harms that women suffer during armed conflict and to take

seriously women's roles as full and equal participants in all phases of conflict prevention and peace building.

So how do we bring the promise of 1325 home?

The challenge we face here was aptly described by the first UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Radhika Coomaraswamy, as she reflected on nearly a decade of efforts at the end of her tenure in 2003. The words she used to frame the challenge on violence against women could well be said of where we are today on women, peace and security issues. While we have made substantial progress in raising awareness of the problem and in standard setting at the international level, little has changed in the lives of most women. What is urgently needed is to translate UNSCR 1325 into a tangible reality in the lives of women and girls, both in the OSCE region and around the world.

At the OSCE level, we have OSCE commitments on women, peace and security that reflect core aspects of the UN resolutions. The 2004 OSCE Action Plan on the Promotion of Gender Equality addresses these issues, as do two Ministerial Council Decisions: 14/05 from 2005 addresses women's participation in conflict prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation, and 15/05 from 2005 on violence against women includes language on gender-based violence in armed conflict. When we speak about implementation in our region, we can look to UN resolutions as well as OSCE commitments to guide our work in this area.

Our biggest challenge is not conceptual; it is a need for greater action in support of commitments made at the UN and OSCE levels. An important action step that states can take on the path to realizing the promise of 1325 is the development and implementation of a national action plan (NAP) on UNSCR 1325.

First, some numbers: There are now 31 NAPs around the world, 19 of which have been developed here in the OSCE region. The numbers change fairly frequently as more and more states continue to create NAPs. States with plans under development in our region include Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and the United States. Tajikistan is also considering the issue not as a stand-alone NAP, but as part of a larger national strategy to promote gender equality. I am pleased to see representatives of all of these countries at this conference. Since we are gathered here in Sarajevo, we also should note that Bosnia-Herzegovina launched its NAP in 2010.

Because NAPs will be discussed in great detail during the conference, I will offer a few overarching points. First, implementation of NAPs is critical. NAPs cannot remain words on a page. Implementation requires commitment and resources to carry out the actions identified in the NAP. Even in a resource-constrained environment, creative strategies can be devised to maximize impact. Second, in developing and implementing a NAP, process can be as important as the substance of the plan itself. A solid NAP process requires the active engagement of civil society, especially women's groups, as well as consultations at the community level. The process should also involve coordination among all relevant agencies or state institutions, including those in the security sector and those that may not have strong knowledge of gender issues or experience interacting with women's NGOs. Third, high-level government support is often needed to drive the process to a successful result. For example, in Nepal,

the drafting process did not begin in earnest until the Deputy Prime Minister began chairing a high-level inter-agency steering committee. Fourth, a well-run process can allow creative ideas to emerge and become part of NAPs. Again from Nepal comes another example. The action plan includes ideas such as educational scholarships for girls affected by conflict, and a proactive media and communications strategy to increase public awareness of the NAP and of women, peace and security issues more broadly.

Another important issue area for NAPs concerns states operating as contributors to peacekeeping and other field missions. Under UNSCR 1325, states need to bring a gender perspective to their peacekeeping efforts. They should improve the practices by which they contribute personnel to peacekeeping missions to reflect a commitment to involving more women military and police personnel in such missions, as well as to deploying more peacekeepers and other field staff with a deep understanding of the gender dimension of conflict in all its phases.

The way forward

In conclusion, I very much hope that this conference will spur action both at the national level and at the OSCE level to make the promise of UNSCR 1325 a reality in the lives of women and men throughout the OSCE region. Over the next two days, we will exchange information on the development of NAPs, share ideas and lessons learned, and devise strategies that lead to effective implementation of UNSCR 1325 and related commitments.

Can we succeed? We know the devastating realities of armed conflict and its impact on women and girls. We know the statistics, the stories, and the challenges. Eleven years ago, the international community issued a call to action when the UN adopted SCR 1325. The question is -- do we have the capacity and the will to address security issues in ways that are fully inclusive of women as well as men? Do we have the capacity and the will to prevent and respond to the harms inflicted upon women and girls during armed conflict? I hope that this conference will inspire action that answers these questions with a resounding yes.

I wish you all great success in your work here over the next two days and in the work you are doing to advance peace and security in our region and beyond.

Thank you.