

Genesis of 1325 – What next after ten years?

Keynote Address

by

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A little more than 10 years ago, on the International Women's Day in 2000, on behalf of the UN Security Council as its President, I had the honor of issuing a statement that formally brought to global attention the unrecognized, under-utilized and under-valued contribution women have been making to preventing war, to building peace and to engaging individuals and societies live in harmony. The members of the Security Council recognized that peace is inextricably linked with equality between women and men and affirmed the equal access and full participation of women in power structures and their full involvement in all efforts for peace and security.

It was unfortunate that the intrinsic role of women in peace and security had remained unrecognized since the creation of the United Nations. For a long time, there has been an impression of women as helpless victims of wars and conflicts. The role of women in fostering peace in their communities and beyond has often been overlooked. That inexplicable silence of 55 long years was broken, for the first time, on the 8th of March 2000. Thereby, the seed for the Security Council resolution 1325 was sown.

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If one looks into the relevance of contents, potential for change and expected impact of any global declaration for women, two stand out head and shoulder above all others. The Beijing Platform for Action and 1325 are unparalleled in terms of what they can do to empower women, not only to give 50% of world's population their due but also to make the world a better place to live. Adoption of 1325 opened a much-awaited door of opportunity for women who have shown time and again that they bring a qualitative improvement in structuring peace and in post-conflict architecture.

The main question is not to make war safe for women but to structure the peace in a way that there is no recurrence of war and conflict. That is why women need to be at the peace tables, women need to be involved in the decision-making and in the peace-keeping teams, particularly as civilians to make a real difference in transitioning from the cult of war to the culture of peace.

I am often asked how the concept behind 1325 came on to the Security Council agenda for the first time during Bangladesh's Presidency of the Council. My conviction and determination to steer that initiative grew, if I may say so, out of my close and long-standing engagement with the international women's agenda. This agenda came up forcefully in my interaction of years with the NGOs and this was something I felt needed a boost in the work of the Security Council, asserting the undeniable link between women's equality and peace. The dynamics of global war and security strategy as it was evolving in a post cold war world situation and the UN General assembly's action to adopt a Programme of Action on Culture of Peace, that I also had the privilege of shepherding, prepared the ground for raising the issue.

At the beginning of March, when the Council's monthly work plan is submitted by its President, I had indicated my intention to proceed with this agenda. When I first brought women and peace and security as an issue into the Security Council, wide-ranging disinterest, even indifference, was expressed by my colleagues saying that the President was diluting the Council's mandate by trying to bring in a "soft issue" on its agenda. The Permanent Five of the Council resisted stubbornly through procedural and substantive maneuvers, expecting that this new-comer in the Council (Bangladesh joined in January) will

not be able to sustain its enthusiasm against this long-standing bastion of power. Conceptually it seemed they decided not to connect women and peace and security. Also, I found that in general, Ambassadors to the UN do not feel that women's issues are a top priority for them - also many of them do not get clear instructions in this from their respective governments. Though the NGOs were drumming up support for some years for the linkage between women and peace and security, no country or its Ambassador in the Security Council - even with changing composition every year - was ready to take leadership to initiate this issue in the Council. After I took that up, of course, it was a pleasure to get the collaborative support of some of my colleagues in the Council, in particular Ambassadors of Jamaica and Namibia.

I had originally hoped that the outcome would be a Security Council Resolution but it turned out not to be possible in the time available due to objections by some high-profile member-states. In that situation, we settled for a Presidential Statement which also remained elusive. Finally, I could coax all 15 to issue an agreed upon Press Statement by the Security Council. Considerable resistance by some members till the last moment to such a move could not be sustained when those countries found that I was very determined to push this through even threatening to issue a Council President's own press statement without the other members of the Council. It is only this move that made them join in reconciling with the situation.

To me and many others, the key element of 1325 is participation in which women can contribute to decision-making and ultimately help shape societies where violence against women is not the norm.1325 marked the first time that such a proposition was recognized as an objective of the Council.

Analysts are of the view that the passage of 1325 is an impressive step forward for women's equality agendas in contemporary security politics. However, they also believe, that the historic and operational value of the resolution as the first international policy mechanism that explicitly recognized the gendered nature of war and peace processes has been undercut by the disappointing record of its implementation.

According to them, the poor record of the implementation of 1325 has fuelled rather well-founded suspicions about the complicity of the Security Council in international practices that make women insecure, basically as a result of its support of the existing militarized inter-state security arrangements. While some scholars point out that the language of 1325 is inherently flawed, others have highlighted its 'cost-free' acceptance by UN member states wherein few have taken concrete steps to implement the provisions of the resolution.

Analysts are of the opinion, and I agree with them, that "1325 is not an end, but the beginning of the processes that will gradually help reduce the gap in inequalities." Also, we should keep in mind that this does not necessarily indicate that the Security Council itself has internalized gender considerations into operational behavior. A major concern emerging from various studies is that the themes most frequently referenced in country-specific resolutions tend to refer to women as victims rather than as active agents in the peacebuilding process, such as in governance, peace negotiations, and post-conflict peacebuilding. It should be realized that women are not just a vulnerable group, they are empowering as well. Those studies consider, and here again I agree strongly, that this point is crucial, given its reactive versus proactive nature, and because it suggests a critical weakness in the Security Council's commitment to key aspects of 1325. This weakness should serve as a lobbying point by women's organizations, other NGOs, state actors and civil society to maintain pressure on the Security Council to fully implement its stated commitments.

Such hard-nosed analysis apart, my experience has shown that the participation of women in peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding assures that their experiences, priorities, and solutions contribute to stability and inclusive governance.

When women have been included in national peace negotiations, they often have brought the views of women to the discussions by ensuring that peace accords address demands for gender equality in new constitutional, judicial and electoral structures.

Such encouraging developments are to be seen in the work of - to name a few - the Mano River Women's Peace Network, a

regional body based in West Africa, FemLINK Pacific, another regional set up based in Fiji, in the courageous efforts for women's and girl's education in Afghanistan and in the organizations like Swanee Hunt's Inclusive Security.

While we get encouraged by such efforts on the part of civil society, the role of the UN Secretariat, the Secretary-General in particular remains much to be desired to say the least. Not to speak of the need for his genuinely active, dedicated engagement in using the moral authority of the United Nations and the high office he occupies for the effective implementation of 1325, even his pronouncements have referred to this landmark resolution in a cursory and non-substantive manner.

On this year's International Women's Day, which his office curiously observed on the 3rd of March instead of the globally observed 8th, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon devoted one lonely sentence to 1325 in his rather long oration claiming that he has "made women's empowerment a priority". On the 2008 and 2009 International Women's Day, he used his good judgment not to say anything at all on 1325.

So far only about 19 countries have submitted their national actions plans for 1325 implementation. Why does not the Secretary-General write to member-states suggesting a date for submission of these plans in respect of their countries?

Another area that deserves special attention is the need for the awareness, sensitivity and training of the senior officials within the United Nations system as a whole with regard to 1325.

A matter of urgent attention is that in the name of peacekeeping, the sexual abuses which have been ignored, tolerated and left unpunished for years by the U.N. cannot be acceptable in a civilized international community. Out of 450 cases of abuse, only 29 have been acted upon during 2007-2009. Latest information for this year available this week mentions that out of 45 cases, only 13 have been acted upon. The U.N. leadership hides behind the position that it is the sovereign right of member-states to try their peacekeepers. If the U.N. through its tribunals, and through the International Criminal Court (ICC) can put former or sitting heads of state on trial, then why not peacekeepers? The SRSG in charge of each of the 18 peacekeeping missions should be held accountable

for sexual violence and abuse committed by any peacekeeper in his/her jurisdiction.

Also, critical here is the role and contribution of civil society. At the global level, the UN secretariat should not only make it a point to consult it, but at the same time, such consultations should be open and transparent. During the 1325 tenth anniversary ministerial meeting of the Security Council in October, civil society should have a seat at the Council table. These days one rarely hears about the Arria formula meetings of the Council with NGOs.

As I conclude my presentation, I have the honour of launching at this meeting my personal contribution to the effective implementation of 1325. It is the proposal entitled " Doable First-Track Indicators for Realizing the 1325 Promise into Reality" outlining measures that could be initiated without delaying anymore and without prolonging our agony and frustration after ten years of wait in expectation. Copies of the proposal are available for all of you.

I thank you again for your commitment to advocate and work for the full and effective implementation of 1325 .

When we raise our voice, only then things would happen !!!
