

Peace and Security: Implementing Women's Diverse and Full Involvement

In 2000, resolution 1325 was adopted by the UN Security Council. It declared that women's equal participation and full involvement in maintaining and promoting peace and security is vital in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and that the role of women in decision-making must be increased.

After a comprehensive review of gender issues in peacekeeping in May 2000, in Windhoek, Namibia, and with the analysis and recommendations contained in the [Windhoek Declaration](#) and [Namibia Plan of Action](#) taken into consideration, the Security Council elevated the need to include a gender perspective in peacekeeping operations to **'urgent'**. This led to the creation of [res. 1325](#), which is an important milestone as it was [the first time](#) the Security Council addressed the impact of armed conflict on women. Every year since, the Council has met to discuss the implementation of the resolution. These sessions are informed by the UN Secretary General's annual report on women, peace and security, with the most [recent report](#) having been distributed in June 2020. Since the adoption of res. 1325, the Security Council has adopted [nine more resolutions](#) related to the women, peace and security agenda. The uniqueness of res. 1325 can be seen in the fact that it not only creates a legal framework but also structures the work of civil society organisations that are crucial for the inclusion of provisions that [address social inequalities](#).

Women and Armed Conflict

A significant area of concern pinpointed in res. 1325 is the impact of armed conflict on women and girls, which is also a key area of concern in the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#). Although women usually do not start wars, they are greatly affected by them. There are [264 million](#) women currently living in fragile conflict-affected countries across the globe and millions more who have been forcibly displaced due to conflict. According to the [Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security](#), women are "more likely than men to experience displacement, have their education interrupted, and have less access to employment and income

opportunities. They also face cross-cutting challenges of poverty, gender-based violence, and discriminatory norms”.

Women’s Roles in the Prevention and Resolution of Conflicts

According to [UN Women](#), studies have been undertaken that show that “women’s direct participation in peace negotiations increases the sustainability and the quality of peace”; when women are involved in peace negotiations the agreements signed [are](#) more likely to include a higher number of provisions aimed at political reform and a higher implementation rate of these provisions. That means that women’s participation can also ensure longer-lasting agreements that address social inequalities, such as gender inequalities, and the incorporation of provisions that men have failed to include that benefit all genders.

To achieve women’s equal participation and full involvement in maintaining and promoting peace, res. 1325 declares that member states must increase the representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions; that more women must be appointed as special representatives and envoys on behalf of the Secretary General; and that the role and contribution of women in UN field-based operations must be expanded, particularly among military observers, civilian police and human rights and humanitarian personnel.

The representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions remains unacceptably low. Although it is indeed increasing on many levels, it is doing so at a painfully slow rate. On a [national and regional level](#), for example, as of February 2019, only 24.3% of all national parliamentarians were women and 20.7% of government ministers were women. In regard to the representation of [women in peace and security in the UN](#), as of December 2018, 35% of heads and 48% of deputy heads of UN peacekeeping and special political missions were women, compared with 26% and 35% respectively in 2017. Also, since December 2018, the representation of women police personnel in UN Peacekeeping Operations increased to 12.8%. In June 2019, approximately 25% of permanent representatives of member states to the UN in New York were women,

and out of 15 Security Council seats, only three seats were filled by women ambassadors.

In April 2019, Germany and the United Kingdom invited member states, UN entities and regional organisations to commit to actions included in res. 1325. Out of 193 member states, only 64 made commitments, with eight UN entities and three regional organisations also pledging commitments. In regard to the role and contribution of women in UN field-based operations, [several countries](#), including Germany, made a commitment to promote participation of uniformed women in peacekeeping missions. Germany stated that it would do this through a financial contribution of EUR 2 million to the [Elsie Trust Fund](#) (a fund for uniformed women in peace operations). This pledge was completed in December 2019. Canada declared that it would strive to meet the annual targets set by the Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy in its deployment of military and police peacekeepers to UN Missions – a [strategy](#) that includes co-locating at least two women uniformed officers in mission team sites where possible. And Albania stated that it would seek to increase women’s participation in armed forces, police and in peacekeeping operations. So far, it has managed to send two women peacekeepers to South Sudan. With numerous cases of [abuses of power](#) in terms of sexual abuse by UN Peacekeepers having now come to light, revealing that the impact of armed conflict on [women and children](#) can also include suffering abuse at the hands of those who have been deployed to help them, the increased participation of uniformed women in peacekeeping missions may help stamp out this abuse.

The Importance of Diversity

There is much focus by the UN on diversity between men and women. This is framed in terms of gender equality. However, diversity is not only important regarding gender equality, it is also essential to incorporate diversity into our understanding of the category of “women”. It is not enough to simply pass gender quotas and consider the women/gender equality box ticked. An increased representation of women [must include a diversity](#) of voices, actions and experiences that contribute to the implementation and progression of already existing provisions in regard to conflict and rights and that can aid with the creation and implementation of new and improved ones – provisions that acknowledge diversity in people and in

their needs. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, gender non-conforming and transgender individuals (LGBTQ) and women with disabilities are at a [heightened risk of violence](#) in situations of armed conflict, but they are, nonetheless, typically left out of policy and decision-making processes. All groups and all genders must be represented at every decision-making level in national, regional and international institutions. With human rights abuses rife across the globe, a focus on both diversity and accountability is a necessary step towards lessening the negative impact conflict has on women's lives. Not only does a diverse representation of women need to be increased in leadership roles and decision-making roles, systems must be put in place to hold those who enter positions of power accountable for their actions; be it leaders of countries or NGOs or peacekeepers working for organisations such as the UN; be it men, women or any other gender.

Teri Shardlow