

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security: High Hopes, Unmet Expectations

Reflections on the 10th Anniversary of the Resolution

1325: A Landmark Resolution

When the United Nations Security Council unanimously passed [Resolution 1325](#) ten years ago, the Women's Refugee Commission hailed it as a landmark development for conflict-affected women, and an essential step forward in securing sustainable peace agreements and long-term stability in post-conflict states.

The core elements of the resolution focused on addressing the participation, protection needs of women and girls in armed conflict and mainstreaming a gender perspective in humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping operations, peace negotiations and post-conflict reintegration and reconstruction. As the Women's Refugee Commission has argued since its founding in 1989, ensuring women's equal participation in decision-making processes and equal access to assistance programs is not only the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do. If women and girls are not fully included and protected, assistance programs and peace processes are not fully effective. Stability remains elusive and donor investment is not maximized.

The track record on 1325 implementation is mixed at best. It is a record characterized by high hopes and inspiring rhetoric, but largely unmet expectations. The 10th anniversary of 1325 represents an important opportunity for the international community to recommit to meeting the goals of this groundbreaking resolution. To have any meaning, the anniversary must be marked by the development of concrete action plans that bring tangible gains for conflict-affected women and girls, and establish accountability systems for governments, UN agencies and other organizations providing assistance.

A Decade of Policy Improvements, but Weak Implementation

Some progress has been made in moving women, peace and security issues forward since 2000. In terms of humanitarian response, there is greater awareness of the importance of women's participation and better understanding of the protection and assistance needs of conflict-affected women and girls. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee's (IASC) 2005 [Guidelines on Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings](#) and 2006 [Handbook on Gender in Humanitarian Action](#) provide an excellent roadmap for effective programming in humanitarian and early recovery settings. Other welcome developments include the U.N. Secretary General's 2003 [Bulletin on Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#), the release in 2008 of UNHCR's [Handbook for the Protection of Women and Girls](#) and IASC's [global guidance on safe access to cooking fuel for refugees](#), also in 2008.

Unfortunately, policy improvements have not yet produced sustained, significant gains on the ground. Sexual violence remains rampant in many war-torn areas, committed by perpetrators operating in an environment of impunity. The simple task of collecting firewood to cook family meals puts many women and girls at risk of assault. Women and girls just trying to survive find themselves forced to trade sex for food and other essentials for themselves and their families. Services for survivors of sexual violence remain grossly inadequate in a number of humanitarian settings.

Women's needs go unmet in large part because they are marginalized from decision-making at all levels. The meaningful engagement of women in every phase of program planning and implementa-

tion remains an aspirational goal. Their substantive participation in peace processes is even more so. These patterns are unlikely to change until the international community moves from seeing women principally as victims of conflict to understanding that they are essential agents of effective programming and peace building.

Added Challenges for Women During Displacement

Refugee and internally displaced women and girls face the same challenges, which are further compounded by their displacement. They, too, struggle to be recognized as equal partners in program planning and implementation. The dissolution of their communities and support structures and the changing roles of men and women during displacement often put them at heightened risk of all forms of violence, including domestic violence. In addition, the vast majority of displaced girls have no access to secondary school and often have access to only a few years of primary education. Most refugee women cannot legally work. Many labor in the informal economy under conditions that increase their vulnerability. At a time in their lives when displaced women's needs for reproductive health services are often escalating, access to these services can be particularly problematic. These participation, protection and assistance challenges can be even more complex in non-camp and urban settings where the majority of displaced people now live.

The average length of displacement is 17 years. It is therefore all the more critical to ensure that during the long period of displacement women and girls have the opportunity under safe conditions to develop their leadership skills, participate on an equal basis in program design and implementation, benefit equally from basic humanitarian assistance programs and have full access to programs that address their particular vulnerabilities to violence and exploitation.

The Tough Realities for Displaced Women Upon Return

When conflicts end, displaced women face additional hurdles in re-establishing their lives and rebuilding communities in their home countries. The first hurdle is the peace negotiations process itself. Women, including displaced women, are rarely included in deliberations on the fundamental outlines of post-conflict governance. This greatly increases the likelihood that important gender considerations will be overlooked and women's concerns will not receive due attention in post-conflict reconstruction and institution building.

Conditions in areas of return and resettlement can also pose considerable risks for returning refugees and internally displaced people. Funding that may have been available for humanitarian programs during displacement often dries up when conflict ends. The result is that refugees return to areas with weak security, no health services or schools and limited opportunities to earn a living. Women and girls find themselves facing the same risks they encountered during displacement, but without the assistance that may have been available previously from humanitarian organizations.

Recommendations

If displaced women and girls are to benefit from the promise of Security Council Resolution 1325, the international community must recognize that how they fare during displacement directly impacts their ability to participate in the political, economic and social life of their communities and country as envisaged under the resolution. With this in mind, the Women's Refugee Commission makes the following recommendations to all parties responsible for humanitarian response operations:

To promote the meaningful participation of women and girls:

- Involve women on an equal basis with men in the design and implementation of humanitarian assistance programs.
- Provide leadership training to women and girls during displacement so they can fully participate in decision-making at the community level. Ensure displaced women are also trained during displacement to participate in peace negotiations and in post-conflict nation building.

To improve protection and better prevent and respond to violence against women and girls:

- Support the development and implementation of comprehensive protection strategies that capture the roles and responsibilities of community groups, host or national governments and their security forces, and international organizations, including peacekeeping forces.
- Ensure that humanitarian programs are consistent with relevant IASC guidance, including the *Guidelines on Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings* and the global guidance on safe access to cooking fuel for refugees, from the start of a crisis.
- Require organizations implementing humanitarian programs to demonstrate how they will ensure that women and girls have equal access

to services as outlined in the IASC's *Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action*.

- Increase funding for programs, including community-based programs, that address the needs of survivors of gender-based violence, including reproductive health services and medical, psychosocial, legal and economic programs for survivors.
- Provide increased funding for programs targeted at women and girls that help mitigate their risks to violence, including effective livelihoods programs, vocational training and safe access to cooking fuel. Support increased access to education and school retention rates for girls. Provide dedicated funding to improve the capacity of local organizations, national governments and the broader humanitarian community to prevent and respond to gender-based violence

To address the particular challenges that displaced women and girls face when conflict ends:

- Ensure that women from displaced communities are regularly included in substantive ways in conflict resolution and peace processes.
- Provide sustained and adequate funding during the post-conflict period for essential health and education services, effective livelihoods programs and skills training, and gender-sensitive training for security forces at every level.