Women and Peace and Security Agenda – Progress and remaining challenges after 20 years of implementation

2015 marks an important year for the women and peace and security agenda. In 2015 the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action will celebrate its 20th anniversary and the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on “women and peace and security” will observe its 15th anniversary. These documents recognized for the first time the disproportionate and unique impact of armed conflict on women as well as, in particular, their important role as active agents of change in the promotion and maintenance of peace and security.

Over the last two decades essential progress has been made in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action and UNSCR 1325 (2000) on various levels. UN Member States, the UN system, international, regional and sub-regional organizations and civil society groups have invested in the development of policies, action plans, guidelines, programmes and trainings with a view to ensuring women’s active participation as well as the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in peacekeeping and the prevention and resolution of conflict.

However, in spite of these efforts numerous challenges remain. Grave abuses and violence against women, including sexual violence and rape, continue to be a common occurrence in conflict and post-conflict settings all around the world, and current cycles of violence in different parts of the world even stand out for their disproportionate impact on women and girls. The “increased representation of women at all decision-making levels” as affirmed in UNSCR 1325 and inclusion of women in the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict has not become the norm, but remains marginal. Additionally, the media coverage of conflicts is still dominated by stereotypical portrayal of women and men, creating an overall image of women as helpless victims of rape, sexual violence, or displacement, while neglecting to document and present their diverse roles as combatants and supporters of conflict, mediators, peace-builders, decision-makers and agents of change.
**Symposium ‘Enhancing Women’s Share in Peace and Security’**

Against this background and as a contribution to the Beijing +20 campaign of UN Women and the Global Study on the implementation of UNSCR 1325, Austria hosted a symposium on ‘Enhancing Women’s Share in Peace and Security’ on 3–4 November 2014 in Vienna. The symposium brought together international experts from politics, government, military, academia, media and civil society with the aim to discuss major achievements, remaining challenges and emerging priorities in the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda in the 21st century and provide recommendations for the way ahead.

Following a high level public opening, experts engaged in a closed event in interactive discussions on progress, challenges and necessary future action focusing on the following four areas: 1) Mainstreaming a gender perspective in conflict prevention and crisis management, 2) Gender-sensitive conflict assessment and analysis, 3) Women as active agents of change in peace talks, and 4) Role of the media in implementing UNSCR 1325. During the closing session key findings and recommendations on how to achieve better results in the above-mentioned areas were presented, in order to ensure that women’s potential to make crucial contributions to the resolution, management and prevention of conflicts becomes more visible, recognized and effectively used.

**Recommendations for the way ahead**

The participants of the Vienna Symposium on “Enhancing Women’s Share in Peace and Security” stressed that the women and peace and security agenda represents a strategic and holistic approach to foreign and security policy, which recognizes that it is indispensable to involve both men and women on an equal footing in matters of peace and security in order to render efforts for conflict resolution more effective and increase the chances for achieving sustainable peace. Not only women, but humanity as a whole will benefit from women’s increased involvement and participation.

Participants also urged for a comprehensive understanding of the gender dimensions of armed conflict as well as peace processes and for the integration of gender issues in all parts of foreign and security policy. They stressed that gender inclusivity is fundamental to deconfliction and post-conflict state building. They also highlighted the importance of differentiating between “gender” and “women” and of engaging more men and boys as champions for gender equality.

Participants acknowledged the lead that Africa has taken in the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and welcomed the appointment of a Special Envoy for Women, Peace and Security of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission.

With a view to ensuring that women’s needs and rights are recognized, their voices heard and their contributions for the establishment of long-lasting peace and security more effectively used participants of the conference made the following recommendations:
Recommendations addressed to national Governments and international, regional and sub-regional organizations

- For national Governments that have not yet done so to develop National Action Plans on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 by 2017 as a collaborative effort with civil society, including women’s rights movements and organizations.

- For national Governments to introduce and implement quota for women’s participation in relevant positions in foreign and security policy.

- For national Governments to include strategies for working with and doing outreach to the media in National Action Plans on UNSCR 1325 and to contribute to awareness raising efforts for journalists to improve reporting on UNSCR 1325 and its core topics of prevention, protection and participation as well as the women and peace and security agenda overall.

- For national Governments to incorporate women and peace and security issues in Member States’ periodic reports to relevant human rights treaty bodies and in particular to the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in view of the Committee’s general recommendation No. 30, and to implement the CEDAW Committee’s recommendations in this regard.

- For national Governments to support the proposals of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals, including in particular the proposed Sustainable Development Goal on gender equality and empowerment of women and girls and the proposed Sustainable Development Goal on peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice for all, and effective and capable institutions and to ensure coherence of the women and peace and security agenda and the post-2015 development framework.

- For national Governments and international, regional and sub-regional organizations to prioritise development of “localization” strategies for UNSCR 1325, to ensure that political commitment at higher levels is translated into meaningful implementation at very local levels.

- For national Governments and international, regional and sub-regional organizations to work together with civil society in developing regional Action Plans on UNSCR 1325, in particular where necessary to address current conflict- or post-conflict situations.

- For national Governments and international, regional and sub-regional organizations to facilitate women’s participation in peace talks, including by providing flexible funding mechanisms, in particular concerning logistical aspects, such as access to visa and travel funds and by providing follow-up support to safeguard women’s security.

- For national Governments and international, regional and sub-regional organizations to boost women’s capacities to participate in and contribute to formal and informal peace talks and dialogue processes by investing in skill development of women leaders, including women from
marginalized populations, including through the establishment of rapid, intensive training units.

- For national Governments and international, regional and sub-regional organizations to promote gender-responsive budgeting and policies in the broader peace, security, governance and development strategies they support, to define priorities for maximising the utility of existing resources and to ensure integration of UNSCR 1325 into national and local planning processes.

- For national Governments and international, regional and sub-regional organizations to promote participatory approaches to identify women and peace and security priorities, fund and implement those priorities and monitor progress at local and national levels. Best practices in multi-stakeholder and partnership-based approaches to UNSCR 1325 implementation, monitoring and accountability should be documented and options for scale-up outlined.

- For national Governments and international, regional and sub-regional organizations to hold perpetrators of grave violations against women accountable with no impunity whatsoever and to make clear that the human rights of women are not negotiable under any circumstances.

- For national Governments and international, regional and sub-regional organizations to develop a comprehensive understanding of the gender dimensions of armed conflicts and peace processes through context-specific gender and power analyses (social mapping) to be integrated into all conflict management, peacebuilding and programming efforts from the start-up phase.

- For national Governments and international, regional and sub-regional organizations to use and report on gender-sensitive early warning indicators for conflict prevention as developed by the UN, the OSCE and civil society organizations and to increasingly incorporate women in early warning and crisis management mechanisms, supported by latest information and communication technologies.

- For national Governments and international, regional and sub-regional organizations to generate dedicated funding earmarked for activities aimed at improving the security situation of women in conflict zones.

- For the UN to appoint a High-level personality as Goodwill Ambassador for women and peace and security issues.

- For the UN to ensure that senior management throughout the UN system is fully alert, knowledgeable and sensitized about the importance of the effective implementation of UNSCR 1325.

- For the UN to form a pool of experts composed of experts from civil society, governments and the UN to offer assistance to States in the development of National Action Plans and to ensure
that UN Resident Coordinators will provide needed support including technical assistance to the poorest countries in their preparation.


- For the UN, international, regional and sub-regional organizations, including the EU, to appoint more women as Special Representatives or Envoys for conflict-affected countries.

- For the UN, international, regional and sub-regional organizations, to ensure that the terms of reference and mandates of all mediators and peace building actors are gender sensitive and incorporate a gender perspective, thus ensuring that there is, from their part, accountability towards the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda.

- For the EU and other regional and sub-regional organizations that have not yet done so to appoint a Special Envoy on Women and Peace and Security, following the good practice of the African Union.

- For international, regional and sub-regional organizations to coordinate and for national Governments to participate in periodic formal peer reviews at the regional level to monitor Member State progress and performance in the implementation of UNSCR 1325. This could be modelled on the OECD Development Assistance Committee’s peer review mechanism on development cooperation.

**Recommendations addressed to civil society and to the media**

- For civil society to undertake a global review on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 complementing the Global Study on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 commissioned by the UN Secretary-General.

- For the media to sensitize and alert journalists and media workers to gender issues in order to further gender-sensitive reporting.

- For the media to avoid stereotyping the roles of women and men and to provide coverage of the diverse roles women play in conflict and in building, securing and maintaining peace and to report in-depth on the impact of gender issues, including women’s and men’s representation, on the success of conflict resolution and peace talks.

- For media and civil society to increase media monitoring in order to ensure that women as well as gender related issues, including sexual atrocities against women and men, girls, and boys, are adequately represented and addressed in the media.

- For civil society to intensify its advocacy on national, regional and international levels for accountability for effective implementation of UNSCR 1325.
Recommendations addressed to all actors

- To identify, nominate and lobby for more female candidates for senior positions in the UN for appointments as well as elections, in particular for the election of the next Secretary-General in 2016.

- To actively engage men and boys to support the women and peace and security agenda, including in the context of women and peace and security projects and programs, and to embrace the HeforShe campaign of UN Women.

- To engage religious leaders on the issue of the human rights of women and the women and peace and security agenda.

- To identify resilience actors and peace activists in all stages of the conflict cycle and develop alternatives for non-violent conflict resolution.

- To integrate media in policies, campaigns and communication strategies on UNSCR 1325.

- To customize information about UNSCR 1325 to local and regional contexts so that men and women can engage locally around successes and gaps in implementation.

- To put the content of UNSCR 1325 in local languages and in wording that non-experts can understand and to conduct public outreach and education activities, in particular through interactive programs, and by using modern communication technologies and forms of media, including film and social media, as well as by engaging the young generation.

- To establish a dedicated multi-stakeholder financing mechanism in support of the women and peace and security agenda, dedicated to accelerating the implementation of UNSCR 1325.

A cooperation of:

Federal Ministry of Defence and Sports

Parlament

EUROPE INTEGRATION FOREIGN AFFAIRS FEDERAL MINISTRY REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA

Bundesministerium für Bildung und Frauen

Austrian Development Cooperation

KREISKY FORUM

UN WOMEN

BUNDESKANZLERAMT ÖSTERREICH