



THE SWEDISH FOUNDATION  
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

## **20 years of women, peace and security**

Lessons learned from working with UNSCR 1325  
by Swedish civil society organisations and their partners  
around the world

## **Introduction**

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on women, peace and security was adopted in 2000 to increase women's influence in peace processes and strengthen women's security. At the time, this was the first time that Member States acted to bring a comprehensive gender perspective into the UN's peace processes. UNSCR 1325 emphasises the urgent need to incorporate a gender perspective in all peacekeeping operations, and recognises that a greater understanding of the impact of armed conflict on women and girls greatly serves to maintain and promote international peace and security. Today, 20 years after the adoption of the resolution, it has become a significant starting point for Member States in their work with women, peace, and security around the world, as well as an important tool for civil society working in conflict areas.

However, UNSCR 1325 has been criticised for using a very ambiguous language, which leaves it open to multiple interpretations. Furthermore, some believe the eighteen-point resolution to cover too many potential interventions and changes that cannot be realistically implemented. The inability of the Member States to prioritise certain recommendations over others also weakens the resolution. For countries to take it on board and attempt to implement it, the resolution would benefit by giving some kind of indication as to which points are more important<sup>1</sup>.

Funded through a grant from the Swedish agency for peace, security and development - Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA), the Swedish Foundation for Human Rights has had the opportunity to implement a project with a specific focus on women, peace and security and civil society's lessons working with UNSCR 1325. The project comprised of a workshop organised to discuss civil society's success stories, challenges, needs and lessons learned with Swedish civil society organizations drawing on experiences of their partner organisations, in order to generate new insights and strengthen the work related to women, peace and security. The project also produced this concluding report where the findings and lessons learned from the workshop is summarised. These findings were furthermore presented in a seminar with decision makers, donors, and researchers, for additional dissemination of knowledge in the subject.

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<sup>1</sup> UN Resolution 1325: Significant but lacking. Peace Women – Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. 2021. <http://peacewomen.org/resource/un-resolution-1325-significant-lacking> (Accessed 2021-03-29).

Swedish civil society and their partner organisations all have unique experiences in working with UNSCR 1325. This was evident in the concluding data that was generated from the workshop. This short report will present this data and thus lift up voices from participating Swedish civil society organisations: such as Diakonia, Plan International Sweden, the Swedish Fellowship of Reconciliation, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, *Kvinna till Kvinna* (English: Woman to Woman), Operation 1325, The Swedish Red Cross, MyRight, the Swedish Foundation for Human Rights. Each drew on their respective international partner organisations in different countries working with human rights issues regarding women, peace and security in one way or another. In the next section a conclusion of the needs, successes, challenges and lessons learned that was expressed during the workshop will be discussed in regards to the four pillars of the resolution; Participation, Prevention, Protection, and Relief & Recovery<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, UN Security Council, 2014, 'Report of the Secretary General on women, peace and security', S/2014/693.

## **20 years with UNSCR 1325 – Best and worst practices**

### **Participation**

Under the first pillar of the resolution – **participation** – UNSCR 1325 recognises the contribution of women in the peace building and conflict resolution processes. Thus, it calls for the increased participation of women and the appointment of more women, including negotiators, mediators, peacekeepers, police and humanitarian personnel, as well as support for local women’s peace initiatives in decision-making processes at national, regional, and international levels.

Civil society organisations express that cooperation between the state and civil society organisations has improved in issues regarding women, peace and security, and the gender perspective has strengthened in capacity building during the last 20 years. This has in some instances led to improvements for women and girls in peace building and conflict resolution processes, for example in Colombia where women’s rights organisations improved conditions for women and girls in the Colombian peace agreement with FARC.

Although there has been progress in the increased participation of women, there is still not a norm that women and girls should be active participants in democratic processes today. Many Member States do not have a national action plan (NAP) for implementing UNSCR 1325 which is aggravating for women’s democratic participation in all forms. The economic structure is still visibly inequitable for women which makes it difficult for women to participate in society on the same conditions as men. Civil society would like to see UNSCR 1325 to be used not only as a tool but rather as a transformative agenda, for instance by taking testimonies from women affected by war and conflict. The inevitable linkage between economic inequality and unequal participation in peace building and conflict resolution processes, as well as in society in general needs to be made visible to a higher degree. Women and girls need to be acknowledged as actors with individual agencies. In this sense, civil society urges all actors to take on an intersectional perspective when working with UNSCR 1325. This is critical in order to include all women irrespective of their age, sexuality or possible disability, therefore recognising women as a non-homogenous group, but equal as actors of change.

### **Lessons learned**

Simple means can create increased participation. Civil society affirms that having a gender perspective from the beginning is a success factor. But, although civil society affirms that having a gender perspective from the beginning is a success factor, women's increased participation in decision making is needed in order to empower women in peace building and conflict resolution processes. By taking testimonies from women affected by war and conflict, UNSCR 1325 can be used as a transformative agenda to improve the implementation of policies focusing on women, peace and security. Women's participation also needs to be acknowledged from an intersectional perspective in order to recognise women as a non-homogenous group and ensure that all women are represented. Furthermore, since the young generation will have to implement conflict resolution policies and reforms in the future, young girls must be included early on and throughout the processes.

### **Prevention**

The second pillar – **prevention** – focuses on 'prevention of conflict and all forms of violence against women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations' and is the one pillar that have got the least attention. This pillar urges organisations and Member States to consider gender issues at the policymaking level. It includes integrating gender considerations into early warning systems and involving women and their specific needs in prevention and disarmament activities. It also includes measures to prevent gender based violence (GBV) by fighting impunity and increasing prosecutions for perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence.

Civil society finds that effective early warning systems have been critical for women and girls in conflict situations, especially on a local level. One example is women and girls in Nigeria affected by Boko Haram. It has been shown favourable to grant financial aid and cash transfers to women before conflict situations. In elections cycles, Women's Situation Rooms (WSR), a peace building project that empowers women to be the leading force for democratic and peaceful elections, have been shown to reduce election related violence against women and girls prior to elections. WSR has been used successfully in several African countries, such as Liberia, Senegal, Kenya, and Sierra Leone<sup>3</sup>. Accordingly, viewing women as actors of change

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<sup>3</sup> Godia, Jane. Women's Situation Room: Africa's unique approach to reducing electoral violence. *Africa Renewal*. April 2015. <https://www.un-ilibrary.org/content/journals/25179829/29/1/10/read> (Accessed 2021-03-09).

in elections cycles has been a successful component in the prevention of conflict and violence against women and girls.

However, civil society considers it to be difficult to get financial support for projects related to preventing violence against women and girls in conflict and post-conflict areas. There is a general conception of a lack of political will to establish and implement laws concerning prevention, especially laws of conflict and violence prevention that incorporate a gender perspective. Consequently, the risk of armed conflicts increases and the protection of women and girls in conflict situations decreases.

Members of local communities that have been exposed to violence in conflict situations, particularly women and girls, have first-hand knowledge of how the act of conflict-related violence can be prevented. By providing them with resources and including them in decision-making, such actors would be acknowledged as important and legitimate agents in prevention processes.

Despite the fact that many Member States highlighted the risk of increased violence against women and girls during lockdown, and alarming figures on GBV<sup>4</sup>, there has been a great lack of gender focused prevention methods during the pandemic of Covid-19. In this situation and in many others, civil society sees the need for state actors, civil society actors, and actors in the private sector to receive better education in gender aspects of preventing conflicts and violence against women and girls.

Many improvements have to be done in the implementation of projects focusing on women, peace and security as well as continued evaluation and monitoring of results. Civil society therefore urges the Swedish government to prioritise UNSCR 1325 more in the feminist foreign policy, and to put pressure on the Swedish private sector to do the same.

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<sup>4</sup> UNHCR. Gender-based violence on the rise during lockdowns: Data shows that displaced women and girls worldwide are experiencing increased gender-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. *UNHCR*. 2020. <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2020/11/5fbd2e774/gender-based-violence-rise-during-lockdowns.html> (Accessed 2021-03-09).

### **Lessons learned**

Economic rights, gender equality as well as equal distribution of power and resources are fundamental in the prevention of conflict and all forms of violence against women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations. Women and girls with experience of GBV and/or conflict related violence are vital agents of change in the prevention phase, and therefore need to be included in the decision-making processes as well as provided with right resources in order to do so.

### **Protection**

The third pillar – **protection** – acknowledges that wars and armed conflicts have gendered aspects. All genders experience security differently and focus should be on determining what women and girls need in order to safely participate in society. Furthermore this pillar urges warring parties to protect women's rights, including guarding women and girls from gender-based violence.

Civil society expresses that it has been favourable combining prevention methods with working hands on with protecting women and girls in conflict situations. Another success has been the 2008 UNSCR 1820 which states that rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity or a constitutive act with respect to genocide.

However, there are still great difficulties in writing reports and collecting data of from victims of rape, sexual violence, and GBV from many countries where the stigma of sexual assault still lives on. This highlights women's vulnerability prior to, during, and after conflict. Social leaders, journalists, and human rights defenders advocating women's rights keep on being exposed to violence, threats, and imprisonments. Therefore, civil society urges state actors to condemn impunity of perpetrators and take stronger action in the protection of women's and girl's rights in both armed conflict and post-conflict situations.

The shrinking space for NGO's and human rights defenders has been even more intensified during the Covid-19 pandemic. With increased anti-gender rhetoric and nationalism which reinforces the traditional role of women and other stereotypical gender norms, this has been detrimental to the protection of women's rights. Furthermore, the division of UNSCR 1325 into different pillars instead of one integrated approach can pose as challenge for consistent

implementation since it leads to different interpretations and focus points in different Member States.

### **Lessons learned**

CEDAW should be used even more as a complement to UNSCR 1325 in order to strengthen the protection of women's rights in conflict and post-conflict situations. This can better ensure that women and girls can safely participate in society. Women also need to be included in decision making processes in order to be recognised as equal agents, not only as victims. Furthermore, in order to ensure long term protection of women's rights local organisations need increased support and acknowledgement.

### **Relief and recovery**

The fourth and final pillar – **relief and recovery** – urges local actors, Member States, and the UN agencies to adopt a gender perspective in peace operations, negotiations and agreements, and to include women in the relief and recovery phase. It also aims to ensure that women and girl's specific relief needs are met, for example in repatriation and resettlement, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes (DDR), the design of refugee camps, support to internally displaced persons (IDPs), and in the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

In Colombia, implementing the Peace Agreement with women as active participants requires gender sensitive security conditions. Although Colombia is yet to adopt a NAP for UNSCR 1325<sup>5</sup>, civil society considers reintegrating women and girls from the FARC-guerrilla as successful in many areas.

Although cease-fire can bring windows of opportunities, equality and gendered issues are often overlooked and considered insignificant during these short periods of time. Furthermore, civil society expresses failures to meet the most primary needs in the relief and recovery phase, such

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<sup>5</sup>1325 National Action Plans (NAPs) WILPF Monitoring and Analysis of National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security. *Women's International League of Peace and Security*. 2021. <http://1325naps.peacewomen.org> / (Accessed 2021-03-22).

as education, health care etc., for women and girls with disabilities. These failures are due to a lack of resources. Social and economic aspects, such as housing-, land-, and property rights are overlooked in conflict situations, and women often continue to be excluded from these rights even post conflict in the relief and recovery phase. Therefore, civil society would like to identify how actors can meet the needs of different groups of women, as well as applying an intersectional perspective to UNSCR 1325.

### **Lessons learned**

The first step in women and girls receiving equal distribution of power and resources is to achieve equal economic rights. From an equality standpoint, this is needed in order to close the gendered gap in the relief and recovery phase. Furthermore, specific relief needs to be gender, age, and disability sensitive to a greater degree in order to meet the needs of all women and girls. This can be accomplished by taking testimonies and including the concerned parties in relief and recovery processes.

### **Conclusion**

UNSCR 1325 represents a milestone in the fight for women's fundamental human rights, and is vital for women's human rights for three main reasons. First, UNSCR 1325 has brought gender issues into the mainstream and provided the international community with a viable framework that can be adapted and used. The existence of a document at an international level that recommends that gender-issues are respected and incorporated into peace building and reconciliation policies has pushed states and civil society organisations to incorporate UNSCR 1325 into both old and new practices. Second, UNSCR 1325 has identified women as active agents rather than passive recipients or victims. This is the most vital part of the resolution, since it identifies women's participation as their right, not something that men are giving them out of goodwill. Third, despite UNSCR 1325 not being legally binding, the fact that it is a Security Council Resolution that passed unanimously holds states, at least to some extent, liable to its recommendations, and gives civil society organisations specific instruments to engage with in their work with women, peace and security.

However, the level of its significance, considering that it lacks enforcement measures, has repeatedly been called into question by civil society, academics and practitioners. The findings in this short report show how civil society specifically urges other actors to use UNSCR 1325 as a transformative agenda, especially by integrating CEDAW even further and adopting an intersectional perspective. They also state that women and girls with experience of GBV or conflict related violence are vital agents of change that need to be recognised and included in decision making to a greater extent than what has been done in the past. Most importantly, achieving equal economic rights is needed in order to close the gendered gap in peace building and conflict resolution processes.

### **General recommendations from civil society organisations taking part in this project**

- Increased participation in decision making is needed in order to empower women in peace building and conflict resolution processes.
- Women's participation needs to be acknowledged from an intersectional perspective in order to recognise women as a non-homogenous group and ensure that all women are represented.
- Specific relief needs to be gender, age, and disability sensitive to a greater degree in order to meet the needs of all women and girls.
- Young women and girls must be included early on and throughout peace keeping and conflict resolution processes.
- Economic rights are fundamental in the prevention of conflict and all forms of violence against women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations.
- Women and girls with experience of GBV and/or conflict related violence are vital agents of change in the prevention phase. They need to be included in decision-making processes as well as provided with right resources in order to do so.
- CEDAW should be used even more as a complement to UNSCR 1325 in order to strengthen the protection of women's rights in conflict and post-conflict situations.

**This report was produced by Felicia Njie Sjögren from the Swedish Foundation for Human Rights, based on discussions and presentations at a workshop in February 2021 with the generous participation of the following organisations:**

**Diakonia**

***Kvinna till Kvinna* (English: Woman to Woman)**

**MyRight**

**Operation 1325**

**Plan International Sweden**

**The Swedish Fellowship of Reconciliation**

**The Swedish Red Cross (GLOW Red)**

**Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.**

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