

UN Security Council Resolution 1325

by Jackie Kirk and Suzanne Taylor

UN Security Council Resolution 1325¹ on women, peace and security, passed on 31 October 2000, was the first UNSCR to specifically acknowledge the impacts of conflict, particularly sexual violence, on women and girls. What has it achieved – and what are its limitations?

UNSCR 1325 provides a useful framework from which to develop and improve policy and programming on gender, peace, security and development issues. Most importantly, UNSCR 1325 provides a platform for civil society to demand accountability from their governments and to raise public and political awareness on the issue of sexual violence in conflict and beyond.

UNSCR 1325 is an 18-point document focusing on four inter-related thematic areas:

- participation of women at all decision-making levels and in peace processes
- inclusion of gender training in peacekeeping operations
- protection of the rights of girls and women
- gender mainstreaming in the UN's reporting and implementation systems.

Within each of these thematic areas, UNSCR 1325 encourages action by UN agencies, the Security Council, the Secretary General, governments and all parties to armed conflict. Importantly, a Security Council resolution brings international attention to a particular issue and also provides a political framework that recommends action to be taken by governments and international institutions.²

In calling for the protection of the rights of girls and women, UNSCR 1325 acknowledges gender dimensions and differences in the protection of human rights in conflict and post-conflict situations and calls on "all parties to armed

conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence." These measures include ensuring respect for international law with regard to women's human rights, protecting women and girls from sexual abuse and gender-based violence and ending impunity for perpetrators of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes including sexual and gender-based violence crimes. UNSCR 1325 highlights the need to end impunity for sexual violence and rape, particularly in holding governments accountable for the actions of their members of armed forces and civilian police. It also stresses the need to recognise that women's and girls' protection needs change in the transition from conflict to post conflict: protection of witnesses at international tribunals is just as important as protection while in refugee and IDP camps.

Gaps and challenges

UNSCR 1325 is in no way a magic formula to ensure security and protection for all women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations; international norms and their implementation are by nature limited in scope and influence but especially so if there are no inbuilt monitoring mechanisms. It is hard to measure the impacts of international policy instruments such as UNSCR 1325 on the lives of women and girls living in conflict and post-conflict contexts. Many governments have made broad commitments and several have established ad hoc initiatives but, without any monitoring and reporting mechanisms, actual impacts are hard to assess. There is a need to support both quantitative and qualitative research that identifies measurable indicators.

Even when intra-government coordination mechanisms are in place, there are often gaps in programming and policy between different state agencies. At an international level, improvements in donor coordination on the prevention, protection and response to sexual abuse and exploitation of girls and women are essential. In addition, coordination is vital in contexts where interventions are usually short-term and involve a variety of actors in different locations.

In retrospect, UNSCR 1325 could have been better framed. In particular it does not draw attention to the differentiated effects of armed conflict on women and girls of different ages and situations. It refers to 'women and girls' as a homogeneous entity with supposedly similar experiences, views, vulnerabilities, protection needs, survival strategies and degrees of resilience and agency.

Recent research has helped to articulate some of the specific issues relating to the vulnerabilities of adolescent girls, and the gender-age dimensions of power imbalances in conflict and post-conflict contexts. Girls may be particularly targeted for sexual abuse by fighting forces and in refugee/IDP camps and may be subject to sexual exploitation by the very people there to care for them, including peacekeepers, humanitarian workers and even teachers.³ There is also increased awareness of the particular experiences of girls and young women in fighting forces and their multiple roles within such groups. Recommendations for protecting girls and young women from sexual violence include ensuring appropriate and empowering educational opportunities, as well as increasing opportunities for girls' participation in decision making regarding their own safety.⁴

Agency and empowerment

Although they are often at risk from sexual and gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict contexts, girls and women – young and old

– are not only victims. They have multiple identities and through their roles as mothers, heads of households, combatants and peace activists they often demonstrate incredible resiliency, coping and survival skills. It is imperative that all efforts to protect women and girls from sexual violence recognise this and do not simply depict them as helpless victims. Protection initiatives need to recognise these multiple identities. Rather than reinforce perceptions of women and girls as inherently vulnerable, we need to empower and support them to act to assert their rights within their families, organisations and communities.

UNSCR 1325 is a very positive initiative but there is a lot left to do. Rape and other forms of sexual violence continue unimpeded on a daily basis. Policy makers, practitioners and researchers need to pay more attention to the root causes of this type of violence and

its connection to wider determinants of conflict and power relations. There is a risk that programmes exclusively addressing sexual violence will be isolated from larger policy prescriptions for conflict prevention, conflict resolution and reconstruction. Sexual and gender-based violence and exploitation should be included in broader analysis of peace, conflict, security, reconstruction and development. Sexual and gender-based violence violates the rights of women and girls and is a major barrier to their effective participation in peacebuilding and development within their families, communities and societies.

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Resolution 1325 has been translated into some 77 languages. Other translations are in progress. For details, see www.peacewomen.org/1325inTranslation/index.html

1. www.un.org/events/res_1325e.pdf
2. For information about who is responsible for 1325 implementation see www.peacewomen.org/un/UN1325/1325whoswho.html
3. UNHCR and Save the Children UK (2002) *Note for Implementing and Operational Partners on Sexual Violence and Exploitation: The Experience of Refugee Children in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone*. www.savethechildren.org.uk/scuk_cache/scuk/cache/cmsattach/1550_unhcrscuk_wafrica_report.pdf
4. Gender and Peacebuilding Working Group and Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (2005) *Adolescent Girls affected by Violent Conflict: Why Should we Care?* www.peacebuild.ca/upload/AdolescentGirls_eng.pdf