

# UNSC Resolution 1325: A Building Block for Gender Equity?

Written by Andreas Fabian

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## UNSC Resolution 1325: A Building Block for Gender Equity?

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**To what extent have global policy frameworks such as UNSC Resolution 1325 achieved a transformation in the gender inequities that characterised pre-war and armed conflict settings in Africa? Discuss with reference to at least one case study.**

In her speech at the Second National Encounter of Women Legislators of the Commissions for Gender Equality, United Nations (UN) Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka stated that “we cannot afford to lose the potential of another generation of women.”[1] The potential of women as politicians, decision and policy makers, local and international civil servants, state representatives, peace negotiators or even soldiers and combatants has historically been neglected across the globe. Marginalization of women is not a new phenomenon and international undertakings to bridge the gender gap date back to the 1990s when discrimination of women got the attention of the international community.[2] In the period that followed after the Cold War, new sources of insecurity – namely internal conflicts and struggles against failed/weak/fragile/unstable/collapsed states –emerged predominantly in Africa and were marked with gender inequalities and discrimination of women in conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction.[3] With women’s presence in peace negotiations, it has been argued that chances for successful conflict resolutions are higher, and some authors such as Hudson go as far to argue that female peace-builders are necessary for effective conflict cessation.[4] The UN affirmed this by adoption of Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) in which for the first time the UN endorsed that women’s contributions to peace processes are significant and their role as active supporters of sustainable peace and security should be expanded.[5] Summarized by Mazurana et al., Resolution 1325 stresses the significance of “bringing gender perspectives to the center of attention in conflict prevention and resolution, peace-building, peacekeeping, rehabilitation, and reconstruction efforts.”[6]

The main aim of this essay is to investigate whether, after more than 14 years since Resolution 1325 has been unanimously adopted by the UN member states, the issue of gender inequity has been adequately addressed, or not. By employing Liberia as a case study, the central thesis of this paper is that Resolution 1325 has positively influenced the way women are treated as capable decision-makers and active actors in peace settlement. However, in examining the extent to which it has tackled the issue of gender inequity, it appears that more work is needed to achieve a discrimination-free world. First and foremost, road to the Resolution 1325 is presented, which is subsequently followed by the case study of Liberia revealing that progress has been made and Resolution 1325 has significantly contributed to it. In the section that follows, obstacles that impede the full implementation of Resolution 1325 and achievement of global progress are presented and analysed. Rather than being sceptical and pessimistic about Resolution 1325, this essay argues that we should look at other aspects such as lack of political willingness, inadequate funding devoted to fighting against gender inequalities, and absence of enforcement and sanction mechanisms. The final section concludes and gives recommendations.

### *Road to Resolution 1325*

Resolution 1325 is considered a milestone in engaging with gender problematics. When dealing with equivalence of gender in decision-making and peace processes, the Resolution is one that analysts refer to and criticize the most.

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Resolution 1325 did not come all of a sudden. It was a gradual process with series of conferences, resolutions, speeches and other attempts for gender mainstreaming.[7] The process of putting gender into the UN agenda traces back to the mid-1970s when the First World Conference on Women took place in Mexico City, followed by three more such conferences in Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995).[8] From these four conferences, women's marginalisation in pre- and post-conflict situations and their absence in decision-making were debated in Nairobi and more intensively in Beijing conference, result of which was adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action calling for protection and empowerment of women in peace and development actions.[9] Five years after the conference in Beijing, tracing the progress of the implementation of the Platform took place at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Special Session of the General Assembly, known as *Beijing +5*, revealing that very minimal progress was made.[10] Together with the *Windhoek Declaration* (May 2000) and the *Namibia Plan of Action on Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multidimensional Peace Support Operations* (June 2000) that reaffirmed women's continuous underrepresentation in peace operations and reiterated the need for their increased inclusion, they paved the way for Resolution 1325.[11] Moreover, as Väyrynen emphasized, gender inequity has also been legally framed by adoption of *The Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* in 1979 and the *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women* in 1993.[12]

As highlighted in the introduction, post-Cold War period was marked with new type of warfare – internal violence and civil unrest – and the notion of security shifted from state to human centric. Since then, a number of UN peacekeeping operations (UNPKO) have extensively expanded. Although the UNPKO's statistics of the 1990s and early 2000s do not show up, from available data, an increase in number of female peacekeepers has been observed. From 2006 to 2013, total military female personnel (including observers, officers and troops) in the UN's missions in both Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia more than doubled.[13] At the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Resolution 1325, the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) in cooperation with the Office of Military Affairs (OMA) came up with statistical data showing that number of female military and police personnel increased by 1.83% from 2005 to 2010.[14] Since Resolution 1325 was passed, progress has also been made at the national level and the Resolution has served well for spreading the awareness of gender inequity. It has helped to bring women from margin to the centre of attention by giving them more decision-making power, however, the extent to which a transformation has occurred is still insufficient. Even though female staff doubled in Côte d'Ivoire, in 2013, women still constituted less than 6% of overall personnel.[15] Despite all of these international attempts on gender mainstreaming, only little progress has occurred on global scale. In the section that follows, however, the case of Liberia indicates that it is possible to make a change. Particular highlights from the successful case of Liberia give us a hope that progress is feasible and that other states should take an advantage of Liberia's way forward.

### *Liberia – a Successful Example*

Liberia had gone through a 14 years long civil strife that resulted in about half of the population displaced and approximately 200,000 people killed.[16] In 2003, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) was deployed by unanimous adoption of the resolution 1509 to protect the rule of law and to maintain peace and security in war-shattered Liberia.[17] Being implemented shortly after passing of Resolution 1325, an analysis of peacekeeping operations by Hudson shows that “the mandate for the operation in Liberia has been the most progressive when it comes to gender mainstreaming strategies.”[18] Gender mainstreaming strategy was incorporated to the mission from the beginning and it has positively influenced the way Liberian women are treated today, and their agency of being capable decision and policy makers has been strengthened ever since.[19] With increased presence of women, the security situation in Liberia has considerably improved since 2003. In order to get desired outcomes, the UN established the Office of the Gender Advisor (OGA) and it has been an integral part of UNMIL to provide expertise and support for effective gender mainstreaming.[20] Compared to women's inclusion in other peace operations, Liberian mission has been standing out in number of women involved in peace settlement process. Even though the situation is not ideal, women's participation in UNMIL accounts for quite high numbers – “6% of the military observer, 2% of the troops, and 18% of the police, as well as 34% of the international civilian staff.”[21] With a still-growing attention devoted to gender mainstreaming, the situation is likely to be improved in the future.

An international discourse has been created around the security sector which is male-dominated. For instance, Detraz describes peacekeeping operations as being predominated by masculine features, with the roles being

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created to fit perfectly for men.[22] The case of Liberia and still-increasing number of women recruited to security sector, however, refutes this debate. Based on the recommendations of Resolution 1325, not only the UN, but also the Liberian government itself has paid particular attention on enlisting female personnel into security sector.[23] As the OGA's 2010 Best Practices Report on gender mainstreaming in Liberia shows, the number of women recruited to the Liberia National Police (LNP) has increased from 2% in 2006 to 12% in 2009.[24] Thanks to the creation of the Committee for National Recruitment of Women and launching of the Educational Support Programme to support women's police education and training, it is likely to expect higher quotas in the future generation.[25] The UN reaffirmed its commitment to gender equality by deploying the first police contingent exclusively composed of women.[26] This impacted the situation of Liberian women in a very positive way. Competences of women other than mothers and caregivers, but also as police officers and peacekeepers have been more recognized since then – a very significant step for effective and successful gender mainstreaming efforts. In her contribution to SIPRI Yearbook 2008, Deputy Head of the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces Megan Bastic brought an interesting observation to her research – “the LNP received three times the usual number of female applicants in the month following the deployment of all-female peacekeeping contingent in Liberia.”[27] Gender-oriented mandate the UN incorporated into UNMIL has not only lowered the number of sexual assaults, but female workers in security sector have become to be perceived as role models, giving impetus for other women to speak up and to be more active.[28] As it appears, the security sector is not necessarily a domain of men. Women have also taken part in rebuilding of war-torn state and have helped to re-construct a more peaceful society where women are becoming equal to men.

A possible explanation for relatively high success in Liberia that has been shared by many analysts is the 2006 presidential elections that resulted in the first female president in Africa – Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.[29] Despite unfavourable conditions for a female candidate to win the elections, the unexpected became the reality and the UN, having implemented recommendations of Resolution 1325 to its mandate, played a very significant role in it.[30] Johnson Sirleaf's efforts to achieve gender parity and to bring women to the centre of attention are great, for instance, she has filled many high-level positions with female personnel, including ministerial posts and state representatives serving abroad.[31] Among those 48 states that have been actively working on the adoption of a National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of Resolution 1325, Johnson Sirleaf's initiatives and her strong commitment to gender equality owes to what has been characterized as “one of the most specific NAP.”[32] Liberia adopted its comprehensive NAP in 2009 and already in 2008, Svensson predicted that “once adopted, Liberia could be the first country in Africa, and the first post-conflict country in the world, to have made a real commitment to the resolution.”[33] Whether this prediction will be fulfilled is still a matter of the future. But as it appears, Liberia is on a right way to fully recover from war and to achieve gender equality. Following the Resolution, incorporating right tactics and launching of gender-sensitive programmes, both by the UN and the Liberian government, gender inequity has been adequately addressed and the situation of women has considerably improved. Despite a successful shift in gender mainstreaming built on the case of Liberia, globally, the gender gap is still wide. In order to discern where the problem is, the following part investigates what prevents states from the successful implementation of Resolution 1325 and taking gender equality into a serious consideration.

### *Impediments for Gender Equity*

Having observed the progress that has been achieved, it is of great significance to emphasize why there has been just so little of it on a global scale. A large and growing body of literature has investigated what is actually hindering the full implementation of Resolution 1325 and effective gender mainstreaming. Drawing on an extensive range of studies, the authors set out the different ways in which to look at the lack of action to tackle gender inequities. The majority of these studies have come to a conclusion that the way women are represented merely as victims and not as active participants in peace processes and decision-making are problematic, and it basically denies different roles women have played in conflicts and conflict resolutions. In her book, Shepherd problematizes Resolution 1325 and finds that women are represented as ones that need to be protected, what she also calls a submission.[34] According to her research, Resolution 1325 and other UN documents “permit the violent reproduction of gender.”[35] In a similar vein, Puechguirbal argues that representation of women in the UN is based on “an essentialist definition that allows male decision-makers to keep them in the subordinated position of victims, thus removing their agency.”[36] In addition to describing women merely as victims, El-Bushra finds that “essentializing women as wives, mothers and

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nurses exclude them from the world of active players and decision-makers.”[37] Taken together, without addressing power structures and with describing women solely as victims, it has been argued that international attempts to tackle gender inequities actually contribute to vicious circles where women are continuously deprived the roles of decision-makers and effective contributors to peace and security, suggesting that the language the UN uses should be changed.

However, approaches of this kind carry with them some limitations. As Moser and Clark highlight in the introduction of the book they edited, “there is clear evidence to show that women suffer severe forms of victimization during armed conflict, and that men overwhelmingly are the perpetrators.”[38] According to the UN data, women and children are those who are influenced by armed conflict the most and on average, they constitute more than 70% of refugees and displaced persons.[39] Sexual violence perpetrated on women has become a popular tactic of wartime strategy, affecting women’s everyday life. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a ‘leader’ in number of cases of sexual exploitation, as Cannon points out, approximately 50 women and children are sexually abused per hour.[40] Despite of being well aware of the fact that the number of female combatants and active war participants is increasing, women still constitute a vast majority of those that are victimized and are in a need of protection.[41] Therefore, this essay argues that placing women as victims is appropriate, it is not an impediment for effective gender mainstreaming and the way women are represented in any documents of the UN is correct. It makes little sense to criticize characterization of women as victims of armed conflict and attribute it to gender discrimination, because apparently they are victims and such a portrayal of women does not necessarily need to mean removing of their agency. Thanks to reiterating of women’s negative experiences of war, the overall issue of gender inequality has been brought to the centre of attention and recognition, significantly contributing to effective resolution of the problem. Rather than criticizing Resolution 1325, this essay suggests that in order to effectively address gender inequities, it is necessary to confront with three obstacles that truly impede prevention of gender discrimination and successful implementation of Resolution 1325, namely lack of political will, inadequate funding and ineffective sanction and enforcement mechanisms. In the section that follows, each of the impediments is presented and analysed.

### *Obstacle One: Lack of Political Will*

Gender inequity is a widely spoken problem and states agree that gender gap must be bridged. Despite states’ acknowledgement of this problem, the ‘gender crisis’ persists and women continue to be discriminated vis-à-vis men. In examining realism, Mearsheimer argues that “institutions have minimal influence on state behaviour,”[42] confirming that states are single most important actors in the international system. In order to survive, (selfish) states care about their national strategic interests, leaving little space and political will for dealing with gender inequalities that characterize the international system we live in.[43] In her article for the International Feminist Journal of Politics, Harrington puts an interesting argument, claiming that the increased attention on women and gradual progress in preventing their discrimination in the 1990s is attributed to the change from bipolar to unipolar world that marked the end of the Cold War.[44] According to her, “the USA as the unrivalled global hegemon adopted the pose of democratic defender of women and children.”[45] The USA as a sole superpower showed its commitment to cope with gender inequities and strengthened women’s agency, however, only until 9/11 when all the attention was shifted to fighting against terrorism and failed states. With decreasing of political willingness, gender mainstreaming stagnated and continuous lack of will of other great powers to take the lead in addressing this problem impedes the full implementation of Resolution 1325. Being preoccupied with other national interests, for instance Russia with securing of its sphere of influence and China with securing its strategic interests in East Asia, political will to adequately address women’s underrepresentation is lacking. Argued by Alston, “gender mainstreaming requires international collaboration by gender specialists”[46] which is, however, in a world of selfish and gender-uninterested states difficult to achieve.

### *Obstacle Two: Inadequate Funding*

Another reasonable approach to tackle gender inequities is to investigate sources of funding devoted to actions undertaking women’s empowerment. Since the UN has no budget of its own, it is composed of member states’ financial contributions and financing of peace-keeping operations often depend on voluntary sponsors.[47] The

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agenda of the UN is very broad, requiring a huge financial backing to cover all of its initiatives. When struggling with lack of finance, the UN member states prioritize what will and what will not receive a decent amount of money. Despite the fact that Resolution 1325 called for raising of voluntary financial assistance, Willet finds in her research that an unsatisfactory proportion of financial resources has been accumulated for strengthening of women's equality.[48] At the tenth anniversary of the Resolution 1325, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) issued five statistical chapters on aiding gender equality by members of the Development Assistance Committee, and the fourth chapter entitled *Aid in Support of Gender Equality in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States* found that "only 20% of aid allocated in the peace and security sector in fragile states integrates a gender equality dimension and that only 38% of aid allocated to the governance sector in fragile states addressed gender equality." [49] Due to lack of progress, the UN created new organization in 2010 – the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) – and its first strategic plan for 2011-2013 stressed that "achievement of the Millennium Development Goals is impeded by inadequate investment in the gender dimension of the Goals." [50] Apparently, lack of funding is fairly considered an important impediment for the effective and full implementation of Resolution 1325 and for not meeting the set targets to end gender inequality.

## *Obstacle Three: No Enforcement and Sanction Mechanisms*

The third obstacle to gender mainstreaming presented in this essay is absence of enforcement and sanction mechanisms. As Tryggstad in his optimistic analysis of Resolution 1325 shows, "resolutions adopted under Chapter VI, including thematic resolutions such as Resolution 1325, are of non-coercive nature," [51] so it is up to member states whether to take an action, or not. As a result of weak enforcement power, Resolution 1325 has only been arbitrarily implemented, the fact that significantly contributes to the gender gap that still persists. [52] Sanctions may function as an effective deterrence strategy to force states to comply with something that has been agreed. However, male-dominated decision-making and negotiation positions neither directly constitute a discrimination nor violence against women, and since Resolution 1325 is non-binding, there is nothing to be sanctioned. Moreover, the Resolution has been neglectful in regards to the internationally accepted principle of the Responsibility to Protect, which deteriorates the overall situation. [53] Altogether, the Resolution is rather a set of recommendations on what should be done and it is a matter of individual states whether these recommendations will be taken into account, or not.

## *Conclusion*

The international community has struggled with producing and implementing of policies aimed at redressing the gender inequities that characterised the post-Cold War period, especially in Africa. Women have long been denied the roles of active actors in security sector and their underrepresentation continues to be a global challenge. The year 2015 marks a deadline for the Millennium Development Goals to be achieved, however, post-2015 strategies are needed for the third goal – promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women – to be met. [54] The main aim of this study was to determine the effectiveness of Resolution 1325 on women's participation in security sector and their inclusion in conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Whilst this study did not confirm that Resolution 1325 and other international attempts have achieved a global transformation, the analysis of Liberia undertaken in this paper shows that there is a way forward. Liberia is one of the few examples where considerable progress has been observed. A relatively high success derives mainly from the gender-sensitive mandate the UN has deployed to its missions in Liberia, as well as from local initiatives and Johnson Sirleaf's high commitment to gender.

Apparently, gender inequality persists for other more serious reasons than just characterization of women merely as victims. Abovementioned impediments clearly indicate why it has been so difficult to achieve a fair treatment of women. When challenges are faced in a right way, achievement of progress is feasible and transformation might be possible. However, the extent to which a transformation has occurred is still minimal. In order to approach more positive results in the future, this essay suggests studying and addressing of lack of political will, inadequate funding, and enforcement and sanction mechanisms when analysing lack of fairness between the two sexes and the roles they play. To sum up, Resolution 1325 should be neither praised nor criticized and totally dismissed. Rather, it should be used as a starting point, as a tool to work with in achieving absence of discrimination and violence-free world.

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[2] Väyrynen, "Gender and UN," 125.

[3] Kaldor, *New & Old Wars*, 1.

[4] Hudson, "Peacebuilding Through a Gender Lens," 288.

[5] Cohn, ed., *Women & Wars*, 183.

[6] Mazurana et al., eds., *Gender, Conflict, and Peacekeeping*, 16.

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- [29] Svensson, "Women Hold Up Half the Sky," 178.
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