

Women, Peace and Security: What Does It Mean in the Contemporary World?

By Christine Chinkin¹

First I would like to say what an honour it is to be invited to give the keynote at this launch event of the PRIO Centre for Gender, Peace and Security; and second to congratulate you on the creation of this Centre within an already well established – very highly regarded – research centre on peace and conflict studies. It is great news and I look forward to collaboration and – more importantly – friendship between our Centres.

It is also a daunting task to speak here this afternoon before such a distinguished and expert audience on the topic of Women, Peace and Security. What does it mean in the Contemporary World? So first I will take this literally and give a brief overview of what is women, peace and security – and then venture a few thoughts about what this might mean in a practical sense.

At its core WPS is the agenda set out by the United Nations Security Council since Resolution 1325 in 2000, now some 15 years ago; followed by a further seven resolutions in 2008, 2009; 2010, 2013 and 2015. It is the agenda through which the Security Council has brought the situation of women in armed conflict into the framework of its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. This recognises that, harms experienced by women in armed conflict, especially understood as sexual violence, constitutes a threat to international peace and security through its high incidence in conflict, through its contribution to the displacement of peoples and refugee flows, and unless steps are taken to address it post-conflict, through its continuing divisiveness on communities and society. Its four pillars – prevention, participation, protection, and peacebuilding and relief and recovery have in the words of the Global Study commissioned by the Secretary-General at the behest of the Security Council for the High Level Review in 2015 ‘become the focal point for galvanising worldwide efforts to deal with the many challenges that women face in situations of conflict. Member States, UN entities and civil society at the international, regional and national levels have formed partnerships that have moved forward this agenda and created awareness of the normative framework that governs these issues.’

In the UK there is an additional dimension as this agenda has become combined with another contemporary foreign policy agenda, the Prevention of Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict Initiative (PSVI) championed by former UK Foreign Minister William Hague and the Special Envoy for UNHCR Angelina Jolie Pitt. Women Peace and Security is both wider and narrower than the PSVI Initiative. It is wider in that it has a broader reach, in particular through its security agenda, while PSVI is narrower in its particular emphasis on prevention of and accountability for sexual violence in armed conflict. But PSVI is also wider in that it is a gender neutral initiative – its focus on prevention of and tackling impunity for sexual violence is with respect to all victims, not just women. PSVI and WPS both assume that sexual violence in conflict is gender-based and that it occurs disproportionately against women in its incidence and effect, although there is lack of clarity about its level of incidence against both women and men. There must be caution about statistics relating to sexual violence against

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women and girls; on the one hand this is under-reported for often reiterated reasons – stigma, shame, fear - and on the other hand it may become inflated to the detriment both of recognising other harms committed against women and of the incidence of sexual violence and rape committed against men, which is also significantly under-reported. The concept of PSVI is broad enough to breakdown the binary of women and men and thus not just to encompass sexual violence against women/girls and men/boys but also to include those targeted for their sexuality and those whose gender identity is perceived as deviant. This is an area of growing recognition within the UN; in the words of a recent report of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights violence is ‘driven by a desire to punish individuals whose appearance or behaviour appears to challenge gender stereotypes.’ The report goes on to describe incidents recounted from the Syrian Arab Republic of rape and torture of men assumed to be gay perpetrated both by the State security agents and by non-State armed groups. It also describes the targeting of LGBT persons for punishment, including killings. It describes photos that appear to show men, allegedly accused of homosexual acts, being pushed off a tower to their deaths by militants of the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

In contrast, Women, Peace and Security is on its face narrower in that it is gender-specific, it is about the situation of women particularly during and post armed conflict; there are strikingly few references to men in most of the SC resolutions except as perpetrators and in the context of the different needs of women and men combatants in disarmament. It appeared that this might be changing in that SC Resolution 2106 (2013) emphasised for the first time that ‘we must recognise that men and boys are victims of this crime, as are those who are forced to witness or perpetrate this violence against their family or community members.’ However this resolution references the commitments made in the Declaration on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict adopted by G8 foreign ministers in London on 11 April 2013, one of the major landmarks of PSVI and reflects PSVI’s broader approach in this regard. The latest SC Resolution 2242 again is silent as to crimes of sexual violence committed against men and boys and refers to them only ‘as partners in promoting women’s participation in the prevention and resolution of armed conflict, peacebuilding and post-conflict situations.’ The role of men and boys in the Security Council’s Women, Peace and Security agenda is thus circumscribed; but of course a broader understanding assumes that the WPS agenda cannot be progressed without taking account of the gendered nature of conflict, that conflict is a social enterprise and like all social interactions is constructed by and constructs and perpetuates social understandings of masculinity and femininity and of the relations between women and men; even though the nature of conflict is changing this remains true. The question is whether the social roles that are constructed are also changing and how unpacking gender inclusivity can help us to understand this and the implications for policy and practice. Perhaps by calling the PRIO Centre Gender Peace and Security you have it easier in ensuring the engagement of men and boys, in ensuring the central role of gender, and in not reducing gender to a synonym for women.

I would like to make one other general point about WPS/PSVI. They are political agendas – WPS emanates from the Security Council - the paradigmatic political body; PSVI is championed by a politician – the foreign secretary and now by the Prime Minister’s special representative on PSVI. It is entrenched into three Government Departments: the FCO; MoD and DfID. One of the major successes claimed for PSVI, especially the Global Summit held in London in June 2014, is that it raised political awareness of the prevalence and extreme violence of sexual violence in armed conflict, but the corresponding critique is that is all it has done. It has not led to more effective implementation or enforcement. But it is important that neither agendas is solely political. Both are founded upon the normative framework of international law, in particular human rights law, international humanitarian law and international criminal law. In the words of the Global Study: ‘It must not be forgotten that resolution 1325 was conceived of and lobbied for as a human rights resolution that would promote the rights of women in conflict situations’

Further the CEDAW Committee – the monitoring Committee for the UN Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women - has supplemented the WPS Agenda with its General

recommendation No 30 on Women in Conflict Prevention, Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations, thereby underlining the continued applicability of the Women's Convention in conflict, that gender inequality is at the root of all violence against women and girls and that human rights considerations must inform all policy. I think this is important: political agendas create priorities and consequentially accepts the marginalisation of other policies, for instance focus on sexual violence in armed conflict allows violence against women in non-conflict situations – ordinary so-called peacetime rape and domestic violence – to be given less attention, for these crimes to be regarded as committed over there, committed by others, not by us and thus as not engaging state responsibility for the failures at home. If, however, all such crimes are recognised as existing along a continuum and giving rise to legal obligations under human rights law, then the lens cannot be so easily shifted and the concept of state responsibility for failure to investigate, prosecute, punish and make reparation for such crimes is sustained. There are of course other critiques of the role of law, but I think the WPS agenda should not be too readily labeled as political, not legal.

I have very briefly outlined some aspects of the WPS agenda – what it means. But I would now like to add a few words to the title of this talk: WPS what would it mean if taken seriously in the contemporary world. Taking as stakeholders those referenced in the quote from the Global Study at the outset – what does it mean for Governments, for the UN and for us as academics as a component of civil society. In many ways the Global Study has answered this for us, so I will just highlight a few aspects.

For the UN: what it should mean is a fulfillment of its own commitments, something that despite the rhetoric remains sadly lacking. Indeed, Resolution 2122 adopted in 2013 reads almost as an apologia from the Security Council about its own failures to implement the promises of Resolution 1325 and as a renewal of its own vows. These shortcomings include failures to ensure meaningful participation of women not only in conflict prevention, management and resolution but also in key roles within the UN – as special envoys, as special representatives of the Secretary-General in conflict-affected areas, as members of Commissions of Inquiry, as heads of peace operations in the field (In 2014 a woman was appointed head of a peacekeeping force for the first time – in Cyprus) as senior personnel in UN Headquarters and throughout key departments such as the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Peace-Building Support Office. This is an oft repeated commitment, is supported by evidence of its efficacy as set out in the Global Study, but progress remains glacial. Further it must mean giving effect to the greater openness and transparency promised in 2242, for instance with respect to an Informal Experts Group on WPS, to ensuring that WPS is included in country specific mandates, that Security Council missions take into account gender considerations and the rights of women, including through consultation with local and international women's groups, and that civil society be invited to brief the Security Council on country specific issues – but looking for instance at the latest Security Council resolution on the Central African Republic it is disheartening to see little reference to the WPS agenda.

These are – or should be - relatively simple things to fix, and could be a significant step towards addressing one of the critiques of WPS – its heavily top down and privileged nature. The Security Council holds the highest place in the UN hierarchy; its decisions with respect to international peace and security are made by diplomats in New York, far removed from the women whose lives will be affected by them. In seeking to implement such 'top down decisions' there is a danger of losing sight of local institutions and actors especially at the peacebuilding stage, and thus of making erroneous assumptions, failing to benefit from the local knowledge and expertise or worse disrupting local efforts. Further, interactions on the ground in furtherance of the resolutions are mediated through peacekeepers, international experts and officials. On the one hand such international personnel may lack understanding of or be unsympathetic to the women, peace and security agenda, regarding it as a further complicating task in what is already a difficult mandate – conflict zones are by definition dangerous and unstable – and thus one that can be ignored. In a worst case scenario international personnel – peacekeepers - are themselves responsible for sexual exploitation and abuse, which are still largely committed with impunity to the severe detriment of the credibility and effectiveness of the

mission. Taking WPS seriously requires implementing fully the reforms proposed in the Zaid report as long ago as 2005, and also those recently put forward, for instance in the Global Study on the feasibility of setting up an International Tribunal for Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by UN peacekeepers and UN staff in the field.

On the other hand, where peacekeepers are committed to addressing gender equality and women's rights post-conflict they may find these goals antithetical to or obstructed by local policies and positions in these matters. Attempts to give them effect may only result in friction and tension – something those engaged in peace operations seek to avoid; or other internationals may urge compromise and seek to suspend this agenda until a time of greater stability. The CEDAW Committee was unequivocal in not allowing this, rejecting 'all forms of rollbacks in women's rights protections in order to appease non-State actors such as terrorists, private individuals or armed groups;' but this view may be displaced by other imperatives for international mediators and politicians.

Of course the UN comprises Governments and it is their responses that are key and omissions from SC Resolution 2242 from recommendations in the Global Study are indicative of their ambivalence with respect to giving it practical effect. For instance, despite the setting up of the Global Acceleration Fund, actual long term and adequate financial commitment has been disappointing. Similarly the take up of national action plans is limited, but even where they have been adopted it is important that this is seen as the beginning of the process, not as an end of itself. WPS is too easily seen institutionally (at the international and national levels) and substantively as a separate compartmentalised agenda – for instance apart from human rights, gender equality or the sustainable development goals instead of as integral to the success of those other goals and vice versa. This also loses the opportunities for coherent and integrated monitoring, for instance through the human rights mechanisms. Prevention is given a lower priority – at least in the North - than protection or participation, thereby continuing the gendered roles of women as victims to be rescued by 'good' men from harms perpetrated by 'bad' men; the chronological association of WPS with the Responsibility to Protect – both articulated as aspirations at the turn of the Millennium - also compounds this imagery with those of racism and imperialism.

This leads into more structural issues. Governments' responses to WPS have been too comfortable: it is easy to condemn sexual violence in armed conflict, even to accept the need for wider participation of women in conflict management and resolution. The former allows for technical, legal expert assistance such as involved in the Protocol on the Collection of Evidence, a significant outcome of PSVI. I do not mean to doubt its importance – used widely and properly with proper training it could over time enhance considerably the chances of successful prosecution and reduce impunity. But such innovations do not require structural change or tackling the difficult questions: neither PSVI or WPS challenge structural bases of harms such as the impact of militarisation, of the continuing arms trade, and the inequalities fostered by neo-liberal economic globalisation which are enhanced when these structures are repeated post-conflict; and the continuum of violence against women that moves from the home through to armed conflict. Taking WPS seriously includes coordination of domestic and foreign policy with respect to sexual violence, for instance in the context of migration and immigration policies.

This leads to the role of academia which I think should be aimed at both resistance and transformation. On the one hand we must seek to keep the WPS agenda alive and to move it forward in accordance with its origins – enhancing women's human rights and seeking transformation in women's lives; on the other we must resist co-option to other political imperatives. The most evident concern here is the asserted linkage in SC Resolution 2242 between WPS and the counter-terrorism and counter-extremism policy frameworks. As recognised in the Global Study – and I think accepted by us all - extremism in all its forms has serious impacts on the rights of women and girls. There are numerous ways this plays out – forced marriage, restrictions on and targeting of girls' educational establishments, harassment and violence in public spaces, or denial of access to public spaces, systematic and targeted sexual and gender-based violence. But this linkage has both opportunities and dangers: opportunities for ensuring

the continued policy attention to PSVI/WPS – keeping it on the agenda – but the danger of instrumentalisation and securitisation of the agenda, risking a backlash against women’s rights defenders, and heightening women’s insecurity. Promotion of women’s human rights – the bedrock of women’s peace and security – are issues of equality and inclusion; ends in and of themselves which require decoupling from counter-terrorism policy and security concerns. But instead of recognising this government responses to counter-terrorism are rooted in military and security solutions, including surveillance that collapses trust and engenders suspicion of researchers, compromises the role of women’s organisations and women leaders within their own communities. This might be a good area for cooperation between our various academic institutions taking up the Global Study’s appeal for research and data collection, for instance on women’s roles in terrorism, the impacts of military and surveillance counterterrorism strategies on their lives, including within their own communities, their access to resources to undertake activities relating to countering violent extremism.

But there are also many other areas open to research: PSVI and the Global Study identified gaps in our knowledge and the need to ask such questions as what works and what doesn’t with respect to ending accountability, or with respect to participation in decision and policy-making; how patterns of sexual and gender-based violence relate to different forms of warfare and how these patterns shift with differing forms of conflict and even during conflict as it ebbs and flows; how gender-based violence intersects with other identities – class, ethnicity, race, religion, disability, sexuality, indigeneity etc; how these patterns of conflict impact on the aftermath of conflict related violence; what measures of relief and recovery would provide reparation – in the fullest sense of the word – to the range of harms experienced in armed conflict, not limited to sexual violence, and how these shift according to the identity of the survivor. Why does sexual violence in conflict work and what are the integrated strategies that the international community, governments in conjunction with civil society need to follow to address it? What are the connections between the political economy, war and gender-based violence? What does protection of civilians really mean – noting it has different emphases under international humanitarian law, human rights law and within protective mandates of UN peace operations? How does immediate protection fit with longer term protection requiring attention to justice reform, delivery of and access to economic and social rights as a core element of transitional (transformative) justice? How do we change the attitudes that allow perpetrators to continue their lives with impunity while survivors live with stigma, isolation and poverty throughout their lives? What needs to be prioritised, how do we determine adequate and appropriate budgetary allocations and how do we measure results? Academia has a commitment to teaching, research and public engagement and all three functions are relevant in addressing these issues.

But we must also remember that academia is of course another site of privilege, another top down institution that in our cases are far removed from the local in conflict-affected areas; another responsibility is to ensure working with civil society – including most importantly local people in conflict affected areas and government - combining scholarship, activism and policy discussion seeking to harness the transformative potential of WPS within local contexts. Georgetown and PRIO already have outstanding records in this, which we too need to follow.

It is apparent that taking WPS seriously is time consuming, long term and messy. To conclude I would like to refer to the work of Laura Shepherd who sees in a feminist approach to peacekeeping and peacebuilding – thus WPS - a message of hope, a belief in the possibility of positive change in society resulting from specific actions. WPS provides a plethora of positive actions, but they must be tailored to the particular context, without top down instruction centering local – women’s voices in the process. The Global Study showed us that a feminist, transformative agenda is possible; our role is surely to keep that message to the forefront.