



Gender Institute and Department of International Development public lecture

Empowering Women to Meet New Challenges, from National Development to Conflict Prevention and Post-Conflict Recovery

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Check against delivery

Thank you for inviting me to speak about UN Women's priorities as well as the challenges that we are facing. It is a great pleasure to be back at the London School of Economics and in such distinguished company. Last time, I spoke here as the president of my country. This time it is as the head of the United Nations Entity on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment—'UN Women' for short.

Tonight I am here to present what UN Women sees as priority issues in advancing women's empowerment—economic, political and personal. I will first lay out our five programmatic priorities. I will then present in some detail our work in one of these areas, conflict and post-conflict recovery, as it is in this context that we face some of the greatest challenges, as well as opportunities. It is in conflict affected states that the threats to women's rights are often the most acute, and where women's empowerment can make the biggest difference for peace and development.

In describing what we are doing to bring women's empowerment to the center of the peace and security agenda, I will argue that an approach to peacemaking and peacebuilding that is grounded in gender equality must inescapably be linked to economic and political development strategies that seek to build women's power through economic security and the strength of association.

This approach brings us into close engagement with the UN's Peacebuilding Commission and its Peacebuilding Support Office. Both of these entities were, like UN Women, established fairly recently as part of the UN Reform process, and both these make the connection between the security and the development work of the United Nations.

In outlining our five thematic priorities, it is important to note that these have been affirmed through comprehensive consultations with member states, civil society and UN partners. We have held consultations in more than 100 countries to learn from our partners how UN Women can accelerate progress on gender equality. I have personally met with government leaders, women's rights and other civil society organizations. Their feedback informs and supports the selection of our five priorities, specifically:

Women's economic empowerment; women's political voice, participation and leadership; ending violence against women and girls; and engaging women and women's rights fully in national development planning and budgeting and in peace and post-conflict processes.

In all of these areas, we will prioritize the provision of high-quality support for UN inter-governmental processes, ensuring that norms, standards and policies on gender equality, the empowerment of women and gender mainstreaming are more comprehensive and dynamic.

Our approach to peace and security begins with Security Council resolution 1325. The resolution not only recognized the impact of war on women, it also highlighted the positive contributions that women make to

peace making, conflict resolution, and long-term peace-building. As such, the focus was on resources for peace, not the perpetrators of violence. It acknowledged that the differential impact of conflict on women and men requires a gender specific set of responses to their needs during and after conflict.

Resolution 1325 was driven by a recognition that the nature of warfare was changing – a fact that has been highlighted by distinguished researchers here at the LSE, such as Mary Kaldor and others. The majority of wars since 1945 have been internal, civil wars. Many of them are ethnic conflicts, where the fight is not necessarily about expanding national territory, but instead over controlling who counts as a national.

Weapons of mass destruction are still a major threat but new localized versions have developed. Mass population flight and complete decimation of communities can be accomplished with systematic sexual violence. Civilians, not combatants, are the targets –indeed, a former UN force commander, Major General Patrick Cammaert, remarked that ‘it is possibly more dangerous to be a woman than a soldier in conflicts today’.

In the past three years, however, the Council has adopted several new resolutions concerning sexual violence in conflict. Resolutions 1820, 1888, and 1960, each stronger than the last, show an unprecedented degree of Council concern with the phenomenon of sexual violence used as a tactic of warfare. Thanks to these resolutions there is now a Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms Margot Wallstrom, with whom UN Women collaborates closely.

A variety of different truth and reconciliation processes are attempting to heal past wounds to prevent future recurrence. The International Criminal Court is gradually asserting that there is no place for war criminals and mass human rights abusers to hide, not even in their own countries. But for the majority of victims and survivors of conflict, particularly women, there is still little immediate redress, little direct engagement in national and local decisions about making peace and building the future.

For the most part, the Council has concentrated primarily on the ‘protection’ elements of the women peace and security agenda; driven by the horrific incidents of sexual violence in conflict and the threat it presents to national recovery. The risk is, however, that if we focus exclusively on women as victims, not as agents of the peace, we will fail to invest in a major driver of recovery, which is women’s leadership for peacebuilding.

This ‘participation’ component of 1325 is neglected partly because it requires the Security Council to engage in an unfamiliar challenge – that of women’s empowerment. The exception is resolution 1889 on women’s participation in peacebuilding. This resolution has enabled important advances within the UN’s peacebuilding architecture to ensure better attention to women’s needs in recovery. It has also triggered some of the approaches that I will cover tonight.

The one critical, foundational, element of peacebuilding that lacks women’s contribution is the crucial process of peace-making itself. Our own research into 24 peace processes since the mid-1990s show that women average less than 8 per cent of negotiating delegations - a proportion, ironically, that seems to have gone down since the adoption of resolution 1325.

While opinions differ as to whether women bring a particular quality of consensus-building to peace talks, the one thing women indisputably bring to peace processes, given the chance, is an insistence that their own priorities should be addressed in the governance, justice, security, and recovery aspects of a peace agreement. And these priorities--including quotas for women in post-conflict elections, equal land and property rights, or an end to impunity for perpetrators of sexual violence –can help build a more sustainable peace.

There are four reasons why women's participation builds a better peace:

First, because women's participation broadens the peace process to larger constituencies beyond the fighting parties. This engages not just the people with guns – the 'spoilers'. It engages the people who can ensure broad social acceptance of and commitment to the peace deal. In other words, the 'survivors', those who invest in peace.

Second, women's specific concerns, if answered, can help speed a more rapid return to the rule of law. Often the impunity enjoyed by perpetrators during war has a contagion effect, triggering high levels of sexual violence after conflict. Failure to signal zero tolerance through immediate prosecutions of commanders who either organized or condoned sexual violence can encourage others to commit these crimes. A 'free for all' when it comes to crimes against women will make a complete mockery of efforts to assert the return to the rule of law. As the journalist Ann Jones says: 'for women, the war is not over when it is over'. However, only 6 ceasefires for 45 conflicts situations since 1989 have mentioned sexual violence as a prohibited act. That means that sexual violence continues after the guns fall silent. And if the war is not over for women, the peace cannot start for them or their children.

Third, women's participation in all aspects of peacebuilding, including disarmament processes, transitional justice, constitutional reform commissions and the like, will ensure that a greater diversity of views is reflected in decision-making. This is good for the quality of decision-making, and it is good for democratization.

Fourth, attention to women's needs in recovery resources – such as access to a departed spouse's land and property, can help to speed economic recovery. Conflict, like any crisis, produces a surge of female-headed households. If these women have no livelihoods, they are pushed into low-reward, high-risk work, deepening their poverty. With some degree of economic security, they are faster to invest in child welfare and education, faster to build food security, and faster to rebuild rural economies.

Given the benefits of women's participation to the quality of governance, rule of law, and recovery, it is unacceptable that they remain marginalized from peace talks and recovery. This has to change.

This year's World Bank World Development Report on 'Conflict, Security and Development' argues that the keys to successful peacebuilding lie in citizen security, addressing injustice, and creating employment—all of which are also fundamental to economic development, good governance and political legitimacy.

We argue that if women could be fully engaged in peacebuilding there would be a much lower rate of relapse into conflict.

Why is this? To re-state what I mentioned earlier: if security institutions address women's security during and after conflict, they would help prevent the impunity that undermines efforts to re-establish the rule of law. This is what peacebuilding is, after all, all about.

In the realm of justice, if sexual violence in conflict is not tried as a war crime, and if its victims do not receive reparations, then the rule of law is weakened and women's citizenship rights are profoundly undermined.

In the realm of economic recovery, if women are not given land rights and support for recovering livelihoods, rural recovery and in particular food crop recovery will be delayed.

Finally, in governance, if women are engaged in public decision-making, and employed in the public administration, we would see more diversity expressed in policy-making, and more attention to community and family needs.

If we put women at the centre of security, justice, economic recovery and good governance, peace dividends would be delivered more rapidly to communities, and the massive challenges of what is often called 'building back better' would be addressed.

Now, if this is so evident to policy-makers, why is it not translated into adequate investments in women? Our research shows that only slightly over 5 per cent of so-called Multi Donor Trust Funds in post conflict countries is dedicated to supporting women's empowerment or advancing gender equality. Post conflict needs assessments often recognize women and men's different needs for resources in recovery processes. Yet when the analysis converts to budgets, again we see less than 5 percent of proposed funding targets women's specific needs.

UN Women is partnering with the Department of Political Affairs and other UN entities to increase the numbers of women at the table – and to ensure their issues are addressed -- including through more women mediators and more gender experts on mediation teams.

What if just a fraction of what we currently spend on disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration were spent on providing women with access to land, credit, and training? We know that there are important differences between how men and women spend money. Would we see a more rapid rate of recovery in rural communities?

What if there were significant investments in community security so that women can resume farming and market activities without fear of attack? Would we see more families prospering, and more women running for local council? Women, it is well known, invest the majority of their income in their families, leading to more kids in school, houses repaired, healthier families.

We know that women can make a massive difference to sustaining peace. For this to happen, women cannot be added to conflict resolution as an afterthought at the last minute. The same is true of current transitions to democracy in North Africa. Leaving women's participation to the end is disastrous not just for women but for the sustainability of peace and democracy. Women cannot be credible participants if they are brought in to a process where the rules have already been agreed without them. It can create thousands of communities harboring deep resentments, plotting revenge.

Just as women need temporary special measures in political competition to compensate for histories of social and political exclusion, so too in economic recovery special provisions are needed to ensure women's access to recovery resources.

Last year we worked with the UN's Peacebuilding Support Office to develop a 7-point Action Plan on Gender-responsive Peacebuilding. The commitments include:

- a requirement that at least 15 percent of UN expenditure in conflict and post-conflict situations be devoted to investments in women's empowerment and gender equality;
- mechanisms for providing appropriate gender expertise to peace talks and post-conflict state building initiatives, including technical assistance on the use of temporary special measures such as quotas to increase women's representation;

- *and...* institutional changes to advance women's empowerment through economic recovery and rule of law interventions. The measures specify that at least 40 per cent of the jobs offered through temporary employment programmes should go to women.

Modest goals, to be sure. But if they were met, we estimate that current levels of investment in women's empowerment post conflict would triple. The numbers of jobs available to women post conflict would go up exponentially.

Let me finish by quoting the words of a survivor of multiple gang rapes by armed groups in eastern Congo – a woman who currently runs a shelter for rape survivors. At a public hearing about reparations, conducted by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Congo last year, she told an audience of her fellow citizens:

“What reparation do I want? I do not want money. The only reparation I want is that you all see rape not as MY problem, but YOUR problem.”

Gender discrimination and violence against women is everyone's problem. Gender equality is in everyone's interests. It will serve our mutual interests in development, respect for the environment, and peace. I welcome all of you to joining us in this effort to advance women's rights, and I look forward to your questions.

Thank you

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