

Introduction

Peace – For Whom and When?

As we write this, in the summer of 2002, it is hard to imagine a world without war. Every day, we hear reports of new conflicts and old grievances, of escalating tension and violence. During our missions to conflict situations, we met generations of women and girls who have known nothing other than war. Many were gripped by fear and anger; others had learned to dull their feelings with a quality of silence that often follows catastrophe. Having lost so many pieces of their lives to war, women shared their experiences with us hoping that we would make the difference that would bring them some stability, some safety, some shelter, or even some food. They hoped that their voices would be heard and their triumphs celebrated; that we would showcase, through their lives, every reason that women must be considered full citizens and must have a stake in deciding their own future – and that finally, the world would listen.

We are humbled by our experience over the past year. We spent long hours with women who refused to give up hope for peace, and who turned to us to make their claims. How could we possibly improve their lives? In part, the answer will depend on the seriousness with which the testimony, analysis, hopes and vision of these ordinary but extraordinary women – survivors, leaders and heroines – are both received and acted upon.

Women are victims of unbelievably horrific atrocities and injustices in conflict situations; this is indisputable. As refugees, internally displaced persons, combatants, heads of household and community leaders, as activists and peace-builders, women and men experience conflict differently. Women rarely have the same resources, political rights, authority or control over their environment and needs that men do. In addition, their caretaking responsibilities limit their mobility and ability to protect themselves.

While an estimated one hundred million people died in war over the last century,¹ men and women often died different deaths and were tortured and abused in different ways – sometimes for biological reasons, sometimes psychological or social. While more men are killed in war, women often experience violence, forced pregnancy, abduction and sexual abuse and slavery. Their bodies, deliberately infected with HIV/AIDS or carrying a child conceived in rape, have been used as envelopes to send messages to the perceived ‘enemy’. The harm, silence and shame women experience in war is pervasive; their redress, almost non-existent. The situation of women in armed conflict has been systematically neglected.

Contemporary conflicts have caused economic upheaval – and they have been created by it. The exploitation of natural resources has created ‘economies of war’ where armed groups and other power brokers thrive on the instability of conflict in order to gain control of valuable resources and land. Along with the deepening violence women experience during war, the long-term effects of conflict and militarization create a culture of violence that renders women especially vulnerable after war. Institutions of governance and law are weakened and social fragmentation is pronounced. Until the state's security and legal infrastructure are rebuilt, women's security is threatened inside and outside of the home, where they are subject to the rule of aggression rather than the rule of law. Under constant threat of attack by family members, rogue elements, ex-

combatants, criminals, women spend their days searching for water, food and firewood and caring for children, the sick, the elderly and their extended families. Even though women provide these unpaid services in times of peace, their burden is intensified during conflict since the peacetime infrastructure is often destroyed: Wells may have been poisoned, trees for firewood destroyed, fields burnt and clinics vandalized.

This report does not claim the universal innocence of women, nor does it argue that women are inherently more peaceful, or that men are more warlike. Grappling with the concept of *gender* avoids these stereotypes, and leads to an examination of the different *roles* assigned to men and women in making war and peace. Conflict can change traditional gender roles; women may acquire more mobility, resources, and opportunities for leadership. But the additional responsibility comes without any diminution in the demands of their traditional roles. Thus, the momentary space in which women take on non-traditional roles and typically assume much greater responsibilities – within the household and public arenas – does not necessarily advance gender equality.²

We have grappled with the dilemma of describing the atrocities experienced by women in war in a way that will not ascribe to women the characteristics of passivity and helplessness. Women are everything but that. But as with all groups facing discrimination, violence and marginalization, the causes and consequences of their victimization must be addressed. If not, how will preventive measures ever focus on women? How will the resources and means to protect women be put in place? How will the UN system, governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) be mobilized to support women? We dwell on this point because, so far, not enough has been done.

The glaring gaps in women's protection expose the systematic failures of the humanitarian community to reach women. Although women have benefited from humanitarian assistance more generally, their specific needs are largely neglected, particularly in relation to physical and psychosocial care, economic security, HIV/AIDS and displacement. Women continue to have the least access to protection and assistance provided by the state or international organizations.³

In Afghanistan women have not entered a new era yet, despite the many symbolic photographs in the media of women removing their burqas. Afghan women are neither secure nor safe. In fact, they have not removed their burqas in significant numbers and, for many women, this is less important than the violence and exclusion they experience in Afghanistan's political, economic and social reconstruction. The status of Afghan women is as precarious as the stability of their country's transition to peace. But in one essential way, the media did get it right: When women are safe, so are nations. When women feel secure, peace is possible. The power of this message undoubtedly lends new significance to the contributions of Afghan women – past, present and future – to their nation's development. And it reminds us of the risks they face as they try to rebuild their nation and their lives.

Women were taking risks in every place we visited. They were putting communities and families back together, providing healing and recovery services and organizing solidarity networks across ethnic, class and cultural chasms. Through women, we saw alternative ways of organizing security and of building peace. We saw women's resistance to war – expressed through theatre, public demonstrations and civil disobedience. We watched women educate each other, write, publish news, lobby for ceasefires and outline the contours of peace agreements. Women often spoke to us about

the challenges of working with men to build peace and resolve conflicts and of overcoming male identification with militarism and war.

Why an Independent Expert Assessment?

As the nature of warfare has changed, the Security Council recognizes that international peace and security are advanced when women are included in decision-making and when they contribute to peace-building. In October 2000 the first UN Security Council Resolution on Women and peace and security was passed unanimously.⁴ Resolution 1325 emerged from the leadership of supportive governments, the advocacy of a coalition of NGOs and technical assistance from the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and other gender advocates in the UN system. The Resolution set a new threshold of action for the Security Council, the UN system and for all governments.

Resolution 1325 is a watershed political framework that makes women – and a gender perspective – relevant to negotiating peace agreements, planning refugee camps and peacekeeping operations and reconstructing war-torn societies. It makes the pursuit of gender equality relevant to every single Council action, ranging from mine clearance to elections to security sector reform.

This Independent Expert Assessment was designed in response to Resolution 1325, as one effort to continue to document and analyse the specific impact of war on women and the potential of bringing women into peace processes. This Assessment is also a direct response to the call from Graça Machel, the United Nations Secretary-General's Expert on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children, for a report on the gender dimensions of conflict and its relevance to international peace and security.⁵

We were commissioned to undertake this independent study by UNIFEM and we undertook it in the belief that what is presented here will provide the United Nations and the international community with the information they need to implement Resolution 1325.

The women's movement has already seized the opportunity provided by this Resolution with vigour. It is evident that even in the most unlikely places women are organizing on the basis of Resolution 1325, including refugee camps and clinics. The Resolution has trickled down to the grass roots because it has given political legitimacy to a long history of women's peace activity. The Security Council has heard testimony from women who described their efforts to overcome the deadly hold warlords had on their countries by providing education, housing and alternative income to war-affected women. In turn women's organizations and networks at all levels are paying more attention to Security Council actions and have invested resources and time in publicizing Resolution 1325. They, and we, are genuinely hopeful that this expression of political commitment will translate into concrete resources, political access, and protection and assistance for women.

The Economies of War

Over the course of the 20th century civilian fatalities in war climbed dramatically from 5 per cent at the turn of the century, to 15 per cent during World War I, to 65 per cent by the end of World War II, to more than 75 per cent in the wars of the 1990s.⁶ This shift

was accompanied by a changing demographic landscape of war-torn societies seen mostly in terms of a declining male population, changing household size and composition, and increased migration. Conflict causes an overall increase in female-headed or child-headed households; women and children are among the majority of displaced in refugee camps and conflict zones. Often displaced men set up new households in the cities, abandoning their wives and families who remain in rural areas. In these situations, women search not just for a minimal level of economic security but for an acceptable social status in a society where lone women are far more at risk than their male counterparts.⁷

Violence will not abate while weapons are easier to acquire than a bag of maize. Weapons in the community translate into violence against women in the home and on the street. For women, more guns do not mean more security. Through women's eyes, we found a broader notion of security – one that is defined in human, rather than in military terms. Yet those with the power to define security see the equation differently. Current global military spending has returned to Cold War levels. The United Nations and all its Funds and Programmes spend about \$10 billion each year, or about \$1.70 for each of the world's inhabitants,⁸ compared with military expenditures of approximately \$139 per person worldwide – roughly eighty times more.⁹ In the 1990s, at least \$200 billion was spent by the international community on seven major interventions: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, El Salvador, Haiti, the Persian Gulf, Rwanda and Somalia. The Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict estimates that a preventive approach would have saved the world \$130 billion.¹⁰

Women in war zones throughout the world talked to us about the weapons flowing into their communities. They told us how militarization affected their sons, their husbands, their brothers – that it turned them into different people. They complained that their men were cold, cut off and then explosive and often violent, relying heavily on alcohol to block out the pain and trauma of what they had seen and done. Cynthia Enloe, a professor at Clark University, USA, asks these questions, “When a community's politicized sense of its own identity becomes threaded through with pressures for its men to take up arms, for its women to loyally support brothers, husbands, sons and lovers to become soldiers, it needs explaining. How were the pressures mounted? What does militarization mean for women's and men's relationship to each other? What happens when some women resist those pressures?”¹¹ And what about the men who resist the social pressures and name-calling if they do not choose to align their identity or masculinity with war fever? Militarization often forces men into committing acts of violence, or into imprisonment if they do not wish to fight. Militaries rely not on men per se but on men who behave in certain ways.

UN Agencies, Women and War

Women do not receive the humanitarian assistance they need. We saw over and over again that need is not, in fact, what determines a woman's access to assistance, protection and support. Her nationality, ethnicity, age, marital status, family situation and even her place of residence are far more likely determinants. Overall levels of assistance to women in conflict, and especially humanitarian aid, are related strongly to the media interest in her country's trauma, the conflict's duration, its natural and mineral resource

base, and its geopolitical relevance. Described by Oxfam as “one of the most brutal inequalities in the world today”, the disparity in resources mobilized across conflict situations is becoming ever more pronounced.

The agencies and staff of the United Nations have both the opportunity and the challenge to address the impact of war on women and women’s roles in building peace. As we travelled to different countries, we saw courageous and dedicated UN staff working to prevent conflict, deal with its aftermath, and assist countries to re-build. Yet it is indisputable that, despite numerous UN resolutions passed by consensus by governments from around the world, the UN system still needs to improve staff capacity, organizational practices and systems, and high-level commitment to more effectively address the gender dimensions of war and peace.

This Independent Expert Assessment compliments the study undertaken by the UN Secretary-General as called for in Resolution 1325. The study will provide far greater detail about the work of the UN system. Nevertheless, during our visits, we saw the challenges that the UN system confronts when it tries to honour the commitments made by governments to gender equality and women’s rights; and we saw the lost opportunities from having inadequate resources, coordination and focus on protecting women and promoting their role in peace-building.

A number of agencies are well positioned to strengthen their work in the area of women, peace and security. The General Assembly has encouraged UNIFEM to expand its work in the area of peace and security.¹² In the early 1990s, UNIFEM developed the African Women in Crisis (AFWIC) programme, which called attention to women’s psychosocial and trauma needs in the aftermath of war and supported African women leaders to build activist peace networks. It has since expanded this programme to almost every region in the world, now supporting women’s efforts to advocate for peace in Colombia, Southern Africa and South Asia, as well as women’s leadership in re-building war-torn countries from Afghanistan to Sierra Leone. But, despite its best efforts, UNIFEM needs additional strengthening to be able to play a more effective advocacy role and to pilot innovative ways of addressing women’s protection and assistance issues.

UNIFEM is an innovative and catalytic fund with a budget of just over \$30 million a year, so its efforts on behalf of women have necessarily been limited. The larger UN agencies must get on board and, here too, we have seen great potential and great need. In some areas, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is filling this gap by providing essential services to women, such as reproductive health care, psychosocial support, HIV/AIDS awareness and other crucial forms of assistance. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme (WFP) and a wide range of NGOs and faith-based organizations are on the front lines responding to women’s needs. But even when these needs are understood by the humanitarian community, the gap between ideology and practice is often very large. Full-scale delivery for women is simply not possible in the absence of appropriate programme and policy guidance, expertise and resources.

It goes without saying that the first step in removing obstacles to women’s protection is identifying what they are. UNHCR has noted that women are likely to suffer from a range of discriminatory practices in conflict situations, from receiving smaller food rations to legal wrangles over custody, inheritance and property. Not only do women carry the emotional and physical burden of caring for the whole family under

difficult conditions but, in the process, they are more exposed to violence and often become victims of inadequate diets and infectious disease. Ironically, women's role as caregivers may affect their ability to receive assistance. By standing in a queue to collect food or water, a woman may forfeit the chance to receive medical attention. Girls may be kept out of school to help with domestic chores – a practice that helps to explain the three-to-one ratio of school attendance between refugee boys and girls.

Given the present institutional arrangements for women's protection, we have concluded that a system-wide recommitment and implementation plan must address the situation of women in conflict. Overhauling humanitarianism costs money. It requires expertise. And it means, according to Charlotte Bunch, Executive Director of the Center for Women's Global Leadership, "not just looking at what have been called 'women's issues' – a ghetto, or a separate sphere that remains on the margins of society – but rather moving women from the margins to the center by questioning the most fundamental concepts of social, [legal and political] order so that they take better account of women's lives."¹³

Themes addressed in this report

It is crucial that women's voices are heard and their work on the ground is recognized, valued and supported. Decisions should be made with them, not for them. To move this agenda forward, both operational and political action are needed. This nexus goes to the heart of the debate. Humanitarian and human rights concerns do not compromise military and political decision-making; they are intrinsic to it. This is the human security equation. In setting out this equation, our report addresses ten central themes:

1. Violence against women: The magnitude of violence suffered by women before, during and after conflict is overwhelming. The glaring gaps in women's protection must be addressed. Without dedicating resources specifically for women's protection, and without mobilizing the requisite technical and operational capacity, the neglect of women will continue.

2. Displacement: The gender dimensions of displacement are overwhelmingly neglected. The international community has a responsibility to protect women who are forced to flee their homes. It must help women to rebuild their lives, protect them and their children, and prevent the violence and exploitation often associated with displacement.

3. Health: Sometimes even basic health care is lacking for women in conflict situations. Attention to reproductive health in emergencies has to be institutionalized as part of the response. The knowledge and skills already exist, and experience shows what can be achieved with sufficient resources and political will, and with the participation of women in planning.

4. HIV/AIDS: Wherever a woman lives with conflict and upheaval, the threat of HIV/AIDS and its effects are multiplied. Women are more susceptible to infection than men, yet often have little control over their sexuality, and at the same time are forced by conflict conditions to trade sex for money, food, shelter and any other number of necessities. Education, protection and access to treatment are essential for people in conflict zones if the rates of infection are to be reduced.

5. Organizing for peace: Women organize for peace in their communities and at the national and regional level, but they are rarely a part of the official peace process. Formal negotiations that exclude half the population from the political process have little hope of popular support. Women's activism must be supported and their political demands acknowledged at every step, from peace negotiations to post conflict elections and the restructuring of society.

6. Peace operations: A gender perspective must inform all aspects of mission planning and operation, beginning with the very concept of the operation. Currently, gender concerns are often isolated in the form of a single staff person or small unit lacking sufficient seniority and resources. Women in the local community may have little contact with missions and believe that their needs are not taken into account. Violations committed by peacekeepers, United Nations and other humanitarian personnel are inexcusable. The Secretary-General's call for zero tolerance for those who commit such crimes must be honoured and stronger investigative and disciplinary mechanisms must be put in place.

7. Justice and accountability: The impunity that prevails for widespread crimes against women in war must be redressed. Accountability means being answerable to women for crimes committed against them and punishing those responsible. In addition, from the International Criminal Court to regional, national and traditional justice systems, gender must be taken into account and women must have full access to the rule of law.

8. Media and communications: The media supplies information for good or ill; it presents images of women that resound throughout communities in complex ways, especially during conflict and post-conflict periods, when tensions are high. Post-conflict reconstruction depends on honest and truthful reporting about all parties and communities. In order to achieve this, women must be involved in creating media, and stories about them must go beyond stereotypes of women as victims or sexual objects.

9. Reconstruction: In the aftermath of conflict, when nations begin to rebuild, they must recognize and provide for women's specific needs. Water, food and energy must be provided in a safe environment. Training and education are essential. Access to land, resources and jobs must be guaranteed.

10. Prevention: Information from and about women in conflict situations has not informed preventive actions. This is as much a problem of expertise as one of organizational shortcomings. Information from and about women must be collected, analysed, and made available in a way that is politically meaningful. The beneficiaries of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes must not be limited to male combatants. Female combatants, the wives, widows and other dependents of ex-fighters must be included explicitly so that they are invested in rebuilding a new society and ending the cycle of violence.

Conclusion

What remained unchanged after the events of September 11 is as important as what changed. Across the world, 35,000 children under the age of five died of preventable diseases on September 11, September 12, and every day since,¹⁴ the plague of HIV/AIDS has marched on and decision-making on matters of peace and security remains male dominated.

We hope this report will do more than set an agenda for action; we hope that it will bring new information and new issues to the substantive research, policy and political agendas. We hope that it will bring a new perspective to the issues already on these agendas. But we also hope that it will help strengthen the standards for women's protection. We will measure the success of our work by the commitment it generates, of both resources and political will, from the Security Council to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), from the General Assembly to the Group of 8 industrial nations (G8), from the non-governmental to the governmental. We will measure progress through the strengthened capacity of civil society and of women's organizations working in conflict situations. We are convinced that new modalities are needed and that the present institutional arrangements to protect women in war and to support their leadership are inadequate. Accountability much be established. Without it nothing will change. And there are budgetary implications to this agenda. Denying them amounts to denying the agenda itself.

Women have not given up hope of transformation – that hope drives their determination to throw off the mantle of victimization. That women are surviving horror and rebuilding war-torn societies in ingenious and creative ways is indeed worth celebrating and documenting. That women have no choice but to do so, and that their under-resourced peace-building efforts are not acknowledged or funded, is yet another layer of injustice.

Much of the material that follows will make you uncomfortable; it might even make you weep. But reducing the women we met to mere tragedy is not our goal. We hope the graphic detail of injustices inflicted upon the bodies and lives of women fills every reader with a determination for change. Anger is inevitable after witnessing the needlessness and waste of war, and what it deliberately and inevitably does to women in every region of the world. Our anger multiplied our determination to make these women heard, and to believe that the Security Council would rise to the challenge it set the international community through its October 2000 Resolution on Women and peace and security, by listening, reflecting and taking action. The international community can only gain from what women have to offer, and will only continue to miss opportunities for peace and democracy if it continues to systematically exclude them.

Our purpose is to expose women's invisibility – as victims, as survivors and as peace-makers and leaders. We believe this is the first step in addressing the opportunities for and obstacles to improving progress for women affected by war.