



GROUNDING 2015 GLOBAL COMMITMENTS FOR A TRANSFORMATIVE AGENDA ON PEACE AND SECURITY IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

October 2015

The Moment: Transformative Aspirations in an Increasingly Militarized World

2015 will be marked as the year of collective reflection, consensus building and a forging of new commitments by governments at a global scale. During this auspicious year, a set of new development agendas for the next 15 years was agreed upon, and renewed commitments were made to re-energize the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on women, peace and security, as a result of their 20-year and 15-year reviews, respectively. This convergence has provided a unique opportunity for women's rights advocates to push for a more systematic interlinking of government commitments on development and peace with that on gender equality and the empowerment of women. It has also raised expectations by women on the ground of benefiting more meaningfully from the new global policy commitments affecting their lives.

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The moment of global reflection and review has allowed for an up-to-date articulation of the immense challenges of our time. These challenges are spelled out comprehensively in the report of the Global Study on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325, which was done at the request of the UN Security Council and assigned by the UN Secretary General to Radhika Coomaraswamy as lead author. This report raises concerns about keeping the peace in an increasingly militarized world, which is reflected in the steady growth of military budgets and the rise in use of military force to settle disputes, as demonstrated by unilateral military operations and the tripling of the UN's peacekeeping budget over the past 15 years.¹ Indeed, the UN Secretary-General's related report to the Security Council shows that national spending on military defence surpasses investments for sustainable peace and development. In 2014, the global military spending of USD 1.7 trillion was thirteen times higher than development aid allocations that amount to approximately USD 130 billion.² The Secretary-General further defines the increasingly militarized world as one that is "shaped by global counter-terrorism campaigns and sophisticated weapons technology that redefine the scope of the battlefield and blur lines between soldiers and weapons"³.

¹ Radhika Coomaraswamy, "Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice and Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325," October 2015, pg. 104.

² Report of the UN Secretary General on women and peace and security, S/2015/716, 17 September 2015, para. 138.

³ Ibid., para. 76.

As the world became more and more militarized, it also lapsed in achieving gender equality and protecting women's human rights. The UN Secretary-General's synthesis report on the occasion of the 20-year review on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action concludes that overall progress has been "unacceptably slow, with stagnation and even regression in some contexts". He explains,

Change towards gender equality has not been deep enough, nor has it been irreversible. Discrimination in legislation persists in many countries, particularly in the area of family law. Increasing educational attainment by women and their rising participation in the labour market have not been matched by better conditions of employment, prospects for advancement and equal pay. At the current rate of progress, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO), it would take more than 75 years to reach equal remuneration for work of equal value.⁴

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In this light, it is not surprising that the record for implementation of the UNSCR 1325 has been less than inspiring. In the Secretary-General's report to the Security Council on this matter, he shows that while 53 countries have adopted a National Action Plan (NAP) on UNSCR 1325, only 11 NAPs have been complemented by a specified budget for implementation. The UN itself, he admits, falls short of its set target to allocate a minimum of 15 per cent of peacebuilding funds to projects whose principal objective is to address women's specific needs and advance gender equality.⁵ Only 2.1 per cent of the Peacebuilding Fund's interventions met this criteria in 2011.⁶

Despite, and presumably in light of, all these recognized challenges, Governments around the world have made political commitments with transformative aspirations for the next 15 years.

Governments of 194 UN Member States describe the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in September 2015, as universal and transformative. All the 17 goals, including that on gender equality and women's empowerment (Goal 5), are

⁴ Report of the UN Secretary-General, E/CN.6/2015/3, 15 December 2014, para. 14.

⁵ Report of the UN Secretary-General on women and peace and security, *ibid.*, para. 168.

⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 134.

to be treated as integrated and indivisible. They further affirm that inherent in these goals is a vision of the universal respect for human rights. 2030 is also the year that Governments expected to have fully and effectively achieved the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. This is in line with their commitment to accelerate implementation, which was made in March 2015 in a Political Declaration during the 59th Session of the Committee on the Status of Women (CSW). Concurrently, the Security Council has now decided, through the most recent adoption of Resolution 2242, to integrate women's concerns in its review of country situations, including by inviting civil society to provide briefings.

The Global Study on Implementation of UNSCR 1325 emphasizes that the women, peace and security agenda must be respected as a human rights mandate – rather than as part of a military strategy – and that the work of peacebuilding must be localized. It underscores the reality that the root causes of conflicts have become more complex, from systemic discrimination to climate change and the prevalence of identity politics, which in their extreme form are deeply conservative and reactionary towards women and their rights. Importantly, it advocates for an end to the cycle of militarization, for the prioritization of the prevention of conflict, and for support of national transformative justice agendas. The report ends with the following call to action:

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In all previous generations, when the world was at war, where there was increased militarization and terrible violence, women have come forward as peacemakers and peacebuilders. Today is no exception. It still happens at the local level, whether in Syria or the Congo. The international world, by embracing “celebrity culture” has forgotten these women, and allows them to remain invisible. It is important to turn the spotlight again onto these women peace builders, to support and fund their efforts. Networks must be voices and activities can reach a climax and stem the current tide of recurrent militarization and mindless violence.⁷

⁷ Radhika Coomaraswamy, *ibid.*, page 312.

Implications for Women Affected by Conflict in Asia and the Pacific

Asia-Pacific women affected by conflict have been engaging actively in the range of spaces made available for input into the inter-governmental processes of global reflection and consensus building. Particularly given the nature of conflicts in the region, Government commitments made for the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the 15-year review of UNSCR 1325 must be treated together as a coherent and interconnected whole.

As described in APWAPS' previous publication⁸, conflicts in this region are considered the longest running in the world and mostly occur within rather than across borders, often in the peripheries of nations, at the subnational level. They are highly asymmetrical in terms of the balance of power between government forces on the one side and minority groups on the other; and, that such conflicts occur only rarely in relation to weak states, mostly emerging in the context of strong states and ambitious development agendas. The very existence of these subnational conflicts is, most often, officially denied by national governments, let alone addressed by the international system for peace and security.

During the consultation process convened for the Global Study by Radhika Coomaraswamy in Nepal, which was organized in collaboration with APWAPS, women from conflict-affected communities in the region raised a wide range of issues along six common areas of concern. These six areas of concern include: (1) accountability and combating impunity; (2) militarization, small arms and the continuum of violence in everyday life; (3) structural inequalities, climate injustice and their links to development policies and practices; (4) rising cultural and religious fundamentalisms; (5) victim/survivor recovery; and, (6) women's full and meaningful participation in building peace and security.

Critical issues raised in the Global Study on developments in the 15-year period after the adoption of the UNSCR 1325 resonate with women in conflict-affected communities in the Asia-Pacific region and need to be addressed comprehensively

⁸ "Charting Our Pathways: Women's Leadership for Lasting, Inclusive and Grounded Peace and Security in Asia and the Pacific", APWAPS, February 2015.

by States. While national action plans (NAPs) have brought together ideas of how governments can address the women, peace and security agenda, these plans have had limited impact on improving real opportunities and outcomes on women's lives on the ground. They are also few and far between in this region: as of March 2015, out of the 53 countries that have adopted NAPs, only 8 are from Asia-Pacific region.⁹ Furthermore the majority of countries with ongoing or protracted conflict have not shown any political will to develop national action plans or implement UNSCR 1325.

The Global Study and the UN Secretary-General's report on the women, peace and security agenda as well as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognize the critical role of regional and subregional institutions. According to the Secretary-General's report, as of May 2015, five such organizations – ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States), the EU, the Inter- Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) - had adopted dedicated regional action plans on women, peace and security. The League of Arab States has also developed a strategy on “Protection of Arab Women: Peace and Security” which will be complemented by a regional action plan in 2015, while the African Union just launched a new five-year plan on Gender, Peace and Security.¹⁰ The glaring gap lies in regional and subregional institutions in the Asia. Meanwhile, the Pacific region's action plan on this issue ends this year.

In reality, most women in the conflict-affected communities of Asia and the Pacific do not have access to the systems and mechanisms put in place by the UN Security Council in relation to its Resolution 1325. Very few countries in the region reach the point of review by the Council. Women in the region must make use of a wider range of mechanisms on development and human rights, including the application of CEDAW General Recommendation 30, to ensure women's meaningful participation in and benefit from all forms of initiatives and measures to build peace and establish security.

Given that the causes of conflicts in the Asia-Pacific region are rooted in multiple forms of entrenched inequality, Government commitments on a transformative agenda for sustainable development are particularly relevant. The 2030 Agenda

⁹ See UN Secretary-General report on women and peace and security, *ibid.*, para. 97.

¹⁰ Report of the UN Secretary-General on women and peace and security, *ibid.*, para. 107.

outlines follow-up and review processes that will be voluntary and country-led, while being open, inclusive, participatory and transparent for all people and stakeholders. In this, the Nation's Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) will play a particularly significant role for women in the region.

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development also signifies the commitment of Governments to a review mechanisms that are “people-centred, gender-sensitive, respect human rights and have a particular focus on the poorest, most vulnerable and those furthest behind”.¹¹ For this to occur, these periodic reviews must fully integrate commitments made to accelerate implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda across all the 17 goals, not just exclusively for Goal 5.

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The grave consequences of the region's protracted conflicts have made it an imperative for Asia-Pacific women to access all existing mechanisms for the protection of human rights. In particular, APWAPS' written submission emphasizes the importance of the CEDAW framework on substantive equality and non discrimination as well as the imperative of a comprehensive human rights approach in implementing the women, peace and security agenda. It refers particularly to the CEDAW Committee's General Recommendation 30 on conflict and post-conflict situations which provides a broad definition of conflict, recognizes women's diversity, addresses extra-territorial obligations of states, and calls for accountability for non-state actors, including armed civilian groups, transnational and national corporations, paramilitaries, mercenaries and others. The submission also underlines the importance of the prevention of conflict.

Given the prevalence of non-state actors in the situations of conflict, as well as of widespread and systemic violence that women face in the region, APWAPS appreciates the outlining of protection standards in the Global Study, including the Velasquez doctrine establishing that states have a due diligence duty to ensure that the actions of non-state actors meet with international standards. It also refers to the direct accountability of non-state actors for war crimes and crimes against humanity under the Geneva Conventions, and now under the Rome Statute, as well as in Security Council resolutions related to monitoring and reporting.

¹¹ Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, A/69/L.85, August 2015, para. 74e.

APWAPS particularly appreciates the call made in the Global Study for turning the world's attention to the local level where the critical diversity of contexts is found and where most women working for the transformation of conflict are based. The UN Secretary-General has also made a call to support and leverage the leadership and engagement of women at community-level and to link these to high-level, national processes.¹² Likewise, for country situations that reach the attention of the UN Security Council, the Council has committed to ensure that its field missions include interactive meetings with local women and women's organizations in the field, as stated in its Resolution 2122 (2013). The UNSCR 1325 itself calls on all actors to support local women's peace initiatives and indigenous processes for conflict resolution.

Despite references to the increasingly militarized world, neither the Global Study nor the report of the Secretary-General deals comprehensively with the phenomena of militarization and militarism, including in terms of their presence in daily life and in a wide range of social, economic and political institutions, not just the security sector. APWAPS appreciates the Secretary-General's recognition of the problems associated with a military-centric approach to peace and security when he says:

Many negotiations have focused solely on the military and political parties of conflict and on high-level processes where women remain underrepresented and too few of them are in positions of authority. This has often resulted in further empowering "men with guns" and incentivizing future cycles of violence and impunity.¹³

However, according to APWAPS affiliates, militarization and militarism in its broadest sense is also one of the root causes of conflict. More needs to be done to fully understand the intricacies of these phenomena, particularly as they relate to development and human rights on the ground.

¹² Ibid., para. 153.

¹³ Ibid., para. 11.

Means of Implementation for Women's Leadership on Peace and Security

The UN Secretary-General's number one recommendation on the women, peace and security agenda is to bring women's participation and leadership to the core of peace and security efforts, including responses to new and emerging threats.¹⁴ This can only be achieved when there is adequate support for spaces and institutions that women trust and where women themselves are have leadership.

The Global Study emphasizes the necessary link between supporting women peacebuilders and respecting their autonomy, particularly in the context of countering various forms of extremism across religions and regions, which have launched violent attacks on the rights of women and girls to education, to public life and to decision making over their own bodies.¹⁵ In this regard, the Global Study has made specific financial recommendations, namely:

1. Provide dedicated core financing for women's organizations in conflict-affected and crisis settings that reflects the priorities and needs of those working at the local level.
2. Provide direct financial support to facilitate women leaders briefing the Security Council on thematic and country-specific deliberations.
3. Support women's organizations to participate in donor conferences and ensure gender-related priorities are reflected in compacts, needs assessments and consolidated appeals.

APWAPS believes that redirecting focus on women's agency on the ground would allow for a more comprehensive understanding and support for the whole spectrum of engagements that women initiate and respond to. In our own effort to document women's agency, APWAPS affiliates have come up with a diagram that demonstrates women's multidimensional efforts to transform conflict for peace and security (right side).

¹⁴ Ibid., para. 152.

¹⁵ Radhika Coomaraswamy, *ibid.*, page 5.



Evidently, participating in peace negotiations is not one of the main lived experiences of most of the affiliates. This has not and does not however, reduce the value of women's agency in building lasting, inclusive, just and grounded peace and security. APWAPS work in the areas of knowledge building, capacity sharing and policy advocacy is designed to enhance women's contributions on the ground in the vast region of Asia and the Pacific.

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