

## Feminist Peacemaking

By Carol Cohn

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<sup>1</sup> "Women are not just victims of violence. They are often the driving force for peace."

<sup>2</sup> "In our view, only the full participation of women in global affairs can open up greater opportunities for achieving global peace."

<sup>3</sup> "Yet, when it comes to negotiating peace, post-war reconstruction and reconciliation, women are still grossly under-represented."

<sup>4</sup> "No approach to peace can succeed if it does not view men and women as equally important components of the solution."

<sup>5</sup> "Peace is inextricably linked to equality between women and men."

Inspiring quotes, aren't they? Okay, now take a minute and try to guess—who is saying these things, and where?

Did you think it might be a meeting of American feminists discussing Iraq or Afghanistan? Or a group of women activists from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, talking about the role they can and should play in bringing an end to violence in their country? Or an international meeting of women peace activists? Whatever you guessed, if you are an American, you are unlikely to have known that these comments are actually the public statements of United Nations Security Council ambassadors—all of whom are men. The occasion for their remarks was a day-long Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security in the Context of Peacekeeping Operations, held this past October 29<sup>th</sup>.

The Open Debate marked the third anniversary of the UN Security Council's passage of Resolution 1325. If the terms "UN" "Security Council" and "resolution number" all immediately set off your "irrelevant and uninteresting" alarm, you might want to pause and reconsider. For women in many war-torn regions, in many local, national, and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and in many multilateral institutions, what happens at the UN matters a lot, and they follow it with close attention. For those women, just saying "1325" evokes a host of new possibilities and the promise of a radical change from politics-as-usual. Whether that promise is realized or not hinges, in large part, on women's international mobilization.

Resolution 1325 is often called a landmark resolution because it represents the first time the Security Council has ever turned its full attention to the subject of women and armed conflict. Previously, on those rare occasions when women showed up in Security Council resolutions at all, it has been in passing reference to women as victims, or women as a "vulnerable group," (along with children, and elderly and disabled people); it was never in reference to women as active agents.

Resolution 1325 breaks new ground because it not only recognizes that women have been active in peace-building and conflict prevention; it also recognizes women's *right* to participate—as decision-makers at all levels—in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and peace-building processes. Further, it calls for *all* participants in peacekeeping operations and peace negotiations "to adopt a gender perspective." Gender perspectives, in this context, are taken to include attention to the special needs of women and girls during disarmament,

demobilization, repatriation, resettlement, rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction, as well as measures supporting local women's peace initiatives. Resolution 1325 recognizes that women are disproportionately victimized in wars and calls upon all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to respect women's rights, to protect women from gender-based violence, and to end impunity for crimes of violence against women and girls. It calls for gender training for peace-keepers and others involved in peace operations. And it calls for better representation of women throughout the UN system itself. In other words, if Resolution 1325 were fully implemented, the world would look like a very different place.

Granted, that is a big "if," as a glance at many other Security Council resolutions quickly affirms. Even when the Council members unanimously approve a resolution, as they did 1325, the Council structurally lacks adequate ways to implement or enforce its commitments. And the scope of 1325 is especially far-reaching, so the impediments to implementation are particularly daunting. It calls for changes in the behavior of member states, international agencies and institutions, and the Security Council, the Secretary-General, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, and many other parts of the UN itself. Those changes would fundamentally shift the gendered distribution of power—and we are all too familiar with the many institutional, bureaucratic, and individual barriers that stand in the way of such transformations.

These challenges, however, are not reason to write off Resolution 1325 as "just another resolution," or as "no more than rhetoric." What makes 1325 unique is not only that it (finally) addresses women, war, and security, or that its scope is expansive and its implications radical; what makes 1325 unique is that it is both the product of and the armature for a massive mobilization of women's political energies.

Women's NGOs played a crucial role in the genesis and passage of 1325. While feminists internationally have long been active in trying to shape the UN agenda in areas such as development, human rights, and violence against women, the main focus of their work has been the General Assembly or the Economic and Social Council. The idea of mobilizing to influence the Security Council, and to get a Security Council resolution on women and armed conflict, represents a new and important strategy. The Security Council, as the primary UN decision-making body in the area of international peace and security, is at the center of UN power. And Security Council resolutions, in contrast to General Assembly resolutions, are binding on all member states of the UN.

Since 1325's passage, feminists inside and outside the UN have put tremendously creative thought and energy into making it a living document—an ongoing commitment for the Security Council, rather than a one-time rhetorical gesture. Around the UN, 1325 is known as the only resolution that has such an active constituency—and the only one that has an annual anniversary, when there are multiple panel discussions, Security Council meetings, and other events organized to try to advance the women, peace, and security agenda. The UN Inter-Agency Taskforce on Women, Peace, and Security and a member state group called Friends of 1325 are among the groups working hard to bring gender perspectives into the daily procedures and mechanisms of the Security Council and relevant UN departments. The NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, which came together to create and pass the resolution, now focuses its energy on implementation; for example, the UN office of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) has created the PeaceWomen website, [www.peacewomen.org](http://www.peacewomen.org), to share information among women peace activists from around the world and the UN. The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) has just launched a complementary web portal, [www.womenwarpeace.org](http://www.womenwarpeace.org), to provide national and international actors with timely information on the impact of conflict on women and their role in peace-building and to show how and when gender issues should be addressed in preventive actions and in post-conflict peace-building.

One of the main goals of the UNIFEM web portal is to foster the inclusion of gender perspectives in resolutions, mandated missions, and debates of the Security Council and regional organizations focused on peace and security, and in the reports of the Secretary-General, “where attention to specific gender issues in individual countries is lacking.” In fact, a recent study by the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women revealed that of the 225 Security Council resolutions adopted in the three years since 1325's passage, only 33 of them even mention the words “women” or “gender” at all. Clearly, there is a yawning chasm between the sentiments expressed by the Security Council ambassadors in their Open Debate statements and the actual routine work of the council and the Secretary-General. The challenge, both for the community of NGOs that tries to have an impact at the UN on this issue and for advocates working inside the UN, is to develop a strategy that identifies and targets the critical leverage points that offer the most effective ways to move the organization forward. Although this may sound self-evident, it is not that easy to do. The UN is a rather byzantine institution, with structures, processes, and unspoken rules that are neither quickly learned nor readily transparent, even to people who have been there for some time. And one of the exigencies of working in or alongside the UN is that you are confronted with many short-range deadlines and the need to respond to many developments that are not of your own creation—so the space and time for strategic planning is not as readily available as many advocates wish it were.

Luckily, women “on the ground”—grassroots activists in conflict zones--are not simply waiting for a thorough transformation of the UN. While 1325 is a document profoundly shaped by its institutional context, including the boundaries of the mandate of the Security Council, women in NGOs far from New York and from UN bureaucratic politics are finding ways to use 1325 in their own countries. Word of the resolution has spread through UN and NGO consultations and trainings, and through websites such as [www.peacewomen.org](http://www.peacewomen.org)—which as of this writing has posted translations of 1325 into [30 different languages](#). In November, I had the privilege of organizing a 1325 workshop where women peace activists from countries including Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), El Salvador, Fiji, Iraq, Kosova, Liberia, Rwanda, and Sri Lanka could share their strategies for deploying 1325 as a tool in their own contexts. Among the many ways women are using 1325 on the ground:

- Women from Melanesia have formulated a plan of action to implement 1325 at local, regional, and national levels. They have established women’s community media as a way to spread information, and to make 1325 a reality at the community level, and will be establishing a regional magazine, to be called *FemTalk 1325*, to highlight what 1325 is about and what women are doing.
- After women from the DRC heard about 1325 from UNIFEM, they wrote a memorandum to their government, telling them that as signatories to the resolution, they now needed to implement it! For two years, they lobbied extensively for 1325's implementation in the DRC, both nationally and internationally, including writing to the Security Council. When the UN peace-keeping mission arrived in the DRC in 2000 without a gender component, they lobbied the director of the mission for a gender office and perspective in the mission. Since a Gender Advisor became a part of the mission in March 2002, the women have been working closely with her on projects such as translating 1325 into the four official languages and strategies for inserting a gender perspective into all levels of the government.
- Women in Kosova have not only translated 1325 into local languages, but have also translated it out of “UN language” into more accessible terms. Among their many initiatives, they negotiated with a women’s group in Italy and got some financial support from the UN to sponsor about 20 shows on TV explaining the resolution. They also organized several roundtables, not only in Kosova, but also in Macedonia and Albania, and built a network around the resolution.

- At their July 9<sup>th</sup> conference on democracy in Baghdad, Iraqi women held a workshop in which they explained 1325 to the many participants (including lawyers, university lecturers, and so on) who had never heard of it. At the end of the day, they came up with recommendations, saying that, “We need equality between men and women with regard to rights and responsibilities.” They used 1325 to support their call.

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But resolution 1325 (2000) has very special qualities. It was a landmark. For the first time, we broadened our gaze from the traditional political and military aspects of peace and security and rightly turned our attention to the rights of those most widely and frequently affected by conflict. Crucially in doing so, we recognized that women were not just disproportionately affected by conflict but also in many ways the key to peace.

—Ambassador Sir Emyr Jones Parry, Permanent Representative  
from the United Kingdom to the UN, October 29, 2003

Why are so many women in so many places putting energy into 1325? It is not only a landmark document; it is potentially a revolutionary one. Its broadening of the gaze from the traditional political and military aspects of peace and security can and should do several different things at once: it affirms women’s rights to protection and participation; and should it be widely implemented, women’s experience of conflict and their ability to prevent or end it could be substantially transformed. What could also be transformed by this “broadening of the gaze” is the mainstream belief in the adequacy of restricting one’s vision to the traditional political and military aspects of peace and security. Resolution 1325, as it moves from rhetoric to reality, could potentially transform our ideas about the prevention of war, the bases for sustainable peace, and the pathways to achieve them.

So why aren’t more US feminists and women’s organizations paying attention to 1325? The issues it addresses are literally matters of life and death for women across the globe. And it commits powerful international actors, including our own government, to put gender squarely in the center of its security deliberations, policies, and actions. It was the US’s own ambassador to the United Nations, John Negroponte, who said, “No approach to peace can succeed if it does not view men and women as equally important components of the solution.” Isn’t it time we mobilized to get the US government to live up to those words, both in its foreign policy and in its role as a permanent member of the Security Council?

Resolution 1325 not only requires the UN system and its member states to think anew about the pathways to sustainable peace; it also offers us the opportunity to think anew about what it means to be an American feminist in this age of brutal intra- and inter-state wars—some of which are started by our own government, many of which depend on weapons supplied by the US, and many others of which depend on our failure to take preventive action or intervene.

Many participants came away from the Women’s World Conferences in Nairobi and Beijing thinking that we were part of something global and that we had to strengthen our alliances with women around the world. Many of those women are already mobilizing to get 1325 implemented; many more desperately need the promises of 1325 to be realized. We don’t need to wait for another world conference to create a new opportunity for alliances. All we need to do is broaden *our* gaze and follow the lead of women around the world for whom 1325 is an important part of the struggle to end wars and build sustainable peace.

Key to the quotes:

<sup>1</sup> Ambassador Stephan Tafrov (Bulgaria): original language French

<sup>2</sup> Ambassador Cristian Maquieira, Deputy Representative of Chile to the UN

<sup>3</sup> Ambassador H. E. Vladimir Drobnyak, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Croatia to the UN

<sup>4</sup> Ambassador John D. Negroponte, United States Permanent Representative to the UN

<sup>5</sup> Ambassador Marcello Spatafora, Permanent Representative of Italy to the UN, speaking on behalf of the European Union