UN Resolution 1325

UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which concerns the impact of armed conflict on women as well as their role in the different stages of conflict, is unique in its focus on women in ways that have not previously been observed. As a consequence of the resolution all UN member states are to pass National Action Plans, a crucial but complicated task in many countries, not least in post-conflict contexts, such as Libya.

UN Resolution 1325

Challenging issues with progress and obstacles

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On 31 October, 2000, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325). The resolution was historic as it was the first time the Security Council focused on the unique impact of armed conflict on women specifically. To reach an adoption was no easy task, however, but became a reality only after persistent advocacy from civil society organisations in general, and women's rights organisations in particular. To this date, four additional resolutions following and strengthening 1325 have been adopted.[1] Together, these comprise the Women, Peace and Security thematic agenda of the Security Council, and the international security policy framework in this area.

The resolution can be seen as a landmark, as it was the first time the impact of conflict on women, and women's partaking in both conflict and conflict resolution during all stages of conflict, was addressed by the Security Council. Under the UN Charter, all Member States are obligated to comply with Security Council decisions. This gives UNSCR 1325 the potential to impact and influence high level policy work and diplomacy, to a degree previously unheard of at the international level.

It is also a landmark resolution in that it focuses on women not only as victims of conflict but on their power as agents of influence in ending conflicts and building peace. 1325 and its following sister resolutions encompass all of these aspects but are often summed up by the three P's: Prevention, Protection and Participation. Sometimes a fourth P is added: Promotion, as in promotion of a gender perspective. The obligations of the resolutions stretch from the international to the local level, from intergovernmental bodies, such as the United Nations, to national level governments. UNSCR 1325 calls on all member states to pass National Action Plans (NAP) on the resolution, and up until today, 40 states have adopted NAPs. In addition, several regional action plans have been adopted, by the European Union, NATO etc.[2]

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Implementing the resolution

While many countries are working on drafting NAPs, most of the countries which already have their NAPs are instead struggling to implement the resolution, and working on monitoring and evaluation. Although states carry the responsibility of implementation under the UN Charter, NGOs worldwide work on all levels for the realisation of UNSCR 1325. For example, in Colombia, where the state has not recognised the resolution, NGOs have created a national network for its implementation, and are about to create a draft for a National Action Plan. But, just because there is no NAP in Colombia does not mean nothing is being done on the state level. Several authorities, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence, work on issues of gender perspectives in conflicts, although they refer not to the resolution but to national documents with similar focus. In the Democratic Republic of Congo there is a National Action Plan, but not all relevant actors, state and non-state, are aware of the content of the NAP. In South Sudan work is in progress towards drafting a NAP. Here, both government and civil society have been and continue to be involved with the help of the donor community. The challenge for South Sudan is a continued militarisation of society due to the conflict with neighbouring Sudan that affects smaller local ethnic and cattle-related conflicts.

Wherever we shift our gaze in the world, the work on UNSCR 1325 seems to be characterised by a few common denominators. First, common for many NGOs in the field is that they are actually implementing the resolution – without knowing it. They are working towards greater participation of women in decision making processes, they are working towards ending impunity for

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About 200 activists attended the second One Voice – New Horizons Women's Conference in Tripoli, Libya, to discuss how to uphold and promote women's rights in the new Libyan Constitution. The conference was co-organized by five women's organizations. The participants came from all over Libya and some international guests were also present.

violence against women, and they are working to raise awareness in order to prevent more violence from occurring. What they are often not aware of in these sometimes Herculean efforts is that they have the UN Security Council behind them. They lack knowledge of how the UN and its Security Council function, and they lack knowledge about the resolution itself, as well as how they can claim responsibility from their states. It is often knowledge that is missing – not the work on the ground. On the state level, the relationship seems to be the opposite; state ministries have knowledge about the resolution, but show real limitations in the amount of real work that is done.

Challenges in post-conflict Libya

"I have to admit that it hurts a lot to see that what we are fighting for in my country are simple rights in other countries. You don't know how much a walk in the street and knowing that there are no dangers ahead of you in any way, what it means to us, the freedom we feel. Sometimes what I learn from a walk in the street [here in Sweden] is more powerful than what I learn in the lectures, because it brings to me the question: why we don't have our simple rights in our country? But also, I get the answer that we should not give up, no matter what obstacles face us, as we know it's a long battle ahead, but yet, it gives me the hope that if others were able to get their rights then me and all Libyans can too."

Hajer, 21 years old

In October 2012, we met a young woman from Libya, Hajer. She had come to Sweden to participate in a Sida funded training programme focusing on UNSCR 1325, on human rights, women's rights and on how to work for social change. Hajer belongs to a whole new generation of Libyan activists from the youth and women's movements that has emerged since the revolution. Two years have now passed since the Gaddafi regime fell and the country began its arduous journey to democracy. The challenges facing Libya are in many ways no different from other post-conflict countries: unemployment, human rights violations, high costs of living, an increased tension between different religious/ethnic groups, and an increase in post-conflict (militia) violence. The government lacks the capacity to act, and to build or rebuild state institutions remains a big challenge. Some of the same militia groups that helped overthrow Gaddafi are now also threatening the democratic process that they fought for. This has a lot to do with trust, or in this case, the lack of trust. The militia groups do not trust the present government and are unwilling to disarm and demobilise under present conditions.

In the beginning of 2012, the National Transitional Council handed over power to the democratically elected General National Congress (GNC). Its first and most important mission was to decide on the formation of the entity that would draft the new constitution. This has also been the main focus of most civil society organisations that have developed in Libya since the revolution. Unfortunately, there has been

little progress. The flawed and hurried Egyptian process of passing a new constitution has often been mentioned as a deterrent, but whatever the reason, the new constitution has engaged the whole of Libyan society. For example, the second women's conference in Libya, held in January 2013 and organised by the civil society organisation Voice of Libyan Women focused mainly on the new constitution – the process of writing it as well as its content.

Although work on the constitution has been slow and fraught with conflicts, the very existence of a women's rights NGO is remarkable. Prior to the revolution, independent women's rights groups did not exist. The state had to sanction any activities promoting women or protecting their rights. Today, women are organising, participating in and influencing community life and social development on the local as well as the national level. For the first time in Libyan history women have 17 per cent of the seats in the temporary parliament, the GNC. Some women have been appointed ministers and many women are either active members or even co-founders of new political parties. The level of education in Libya is quite high, also for women. In 2010, over 51 per cent of Libyan women had a third level education.

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This would leave one to presume that progress is underway and that the status of women in Libya is improving. However, the setbacks are many. First of all, recently Libya's High Court of Justice removed all restrictions imposed by the previous law that limited polygamy. Although this was met with demonstrations from women's organisations, the court carried on. The second issue sailing up on the agenda is Libya's stance on CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women). Libya has previously ratified CEDAW with two reservations[3], and now women's groups fear that there are more reservations to come, due to recent discussions regarding the fact that CEDAW is not compatible with Islam or sharia law. Thirdly, rumours have started to circulate regarding women's rights to travel outside of Libya unaccompanied by a man. Women activists in Libya are alarmed by the recent developments, especially considering that the process of drafting the constitution is about to start.

Fragile security situation

Another challenge for all citizens in Libya, but with particular consequences for women, is the security situation. Since the revolution, security is upheld by the police and by the different militia groups. For example, the international airport in Tripoli is guarded by one of the armed groups. Due to failed demilitarisation and demobilisation ini-

PHOTO: KATE THOMAS/IRIN

Women waiting for Friday prayers to begin in Benghazi. Even if the status of women has improved in Libya after the revolution, there is still a lot more to be desired. Meanwhile, women's meeting places and solidarity are of great importance.

tiatives there are still many weapons in the hands of civilians, militias and other armed groups. Reports have shown that there is a link between the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and violence against women[4], and this is something that concerns many women's groups for which the collection and destruction of arms and ammunition constitutes an important step towards peace and security.[5]

Demilitarisation, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programmes are often contested and conflictual exercises, wherever they take place in the world, and Libya is no exception. Here, there is also the added problem of legitimacy. This can be illustrated by a recent trip to Libya, where one of us, Emma Johansson, met a former rebel who admitted he still had weapons in his house. The reason for hanging on to them, he said, was that he and several others distrust both the police and security staff in charge of the demobilisation process.[6]

> ***There is a fine line between maintaining security and controlling cities, which makes the situation unstable.***

In addition, in contrast to many other post-conflict countries going through a DDR process, the high level of education and financial well-being of the former fighters in Libya mean that it has been difficult to identify proper incentives for fighters to demobilise. In this context, it is futile to bargain with offers of education or a couple of hundred dollars in exchange for a weapon. As mentioned above, there is a lack of trust in the process, and there is also a real security need. The national police cannot uphold security in this transitional phase, and citizens to some degree depend on militia groups to maintain security in parts of cities. However, there is a fine line between maintaining security and controlling cities, which makes the situation unstable. This is but one instance where general security concerns become specific women's concerns as well.

Then there is also the problem with the GNC itself. In the women's rights community there is a mistrust of the women representatives in the GNC. As in many other countries, women often express a lack of faith in their female representatives in congress or other legislative bodies. Although this is not something new or unique for the country, it poses a major problem in a new democratic state such as Libya. Considering the obstacles to women's equal participation in society that have emerged recently, there is a felt need for women to support each other. The women in the GNC, as all other representatives, also have to choose their battles, and in doing so do not and cannot represent all women. The women in the GNC are nevertheless critiqued by women's groups for only looking out for their own vested interests and not for the greater good of Libyan women. Other voices nevertheless emphasise that in order to push for more women in key positions, women need to support other women, to pose a role model for others.

The ongoing debate about the constitutional review process nevertheless shows that there is a strong commitment among women's organisations to make sure that women's rights are included in the new constitution. But organising in civil society is still a relatively new phenomenon in Libya, and women's rights organisations are sometimes grappling in the dark. This became evident during the conference One Voice when the head of the UN mission stated that, "The UN will provide you with the help you need", and the women's organisations answered, "But we don't know what we need. Can you help us identify what we need?" The UN head of mission, slightly confused, answered, "We cannot give you anything unless you tell us what you need". The inevitable Catch 22.

A long way to go

The power of UNSCR 1325 is that it both anticipates and covers all ongoing processes and discussions on women's rights. Due to its statutes, it can be used as a mechanism and a tool to put pressure on key actors and institutions to push for improved representation and participation of women at all levels of decision making in post-conflict states. However, the resolution has no way of working on its own; it is not a deus ex machina. State after state is drafting and passing National Action Plans, and in country after country women's rights groups are spreading awareness of its content and opportunities.

In Sweden, we are just now in the process of reviewing our own National Action Plan, using the recently adopted indicators by which we will measure progress and failure. One example of such progress, we believe, is the creation of the International Training Programme on UNSCR 1325 funded by the Swedish International Cooperation Development Agency (Sida), targeting post-conflict countries such as Colombia, DRC, South Sudan and Libya. This was where we first met Hajer and many more men and women like her, incessantly fighting to increase the participation of women in decision-making, to prevent violence and abuse and to protect those girls and women who suffer from it.

1 SCR 1820 (2009) is focused on sexual violence as a weapon of war. SCR 1888 (2009) builds on SCR 1820 and calls for the appointment of the Special Representative on sexual violence in conflict, as well as establishes Women Protection Advisors within peacekeeping missions, in addition to a Team of Experts, meant to rapidly deploy to situations of sexual violence. SCR 1889 (2010) is focused on post-conflict peacebuilding and in particular calls for the development of indicators to measure the implementation of SCR 1325. SCR 1960 (2011) creates institutional tools to combat impunity and outlines specific steps needed for both the prevention of and protection from sexual violence in conflict.

2 See also Akatsa-Bukachi, M., 'Gender and violence: Small arms – a human security issue', New Routes, 2012:4, pp. 17-19.

3 There are two reservations. The first, Article 2 of the convention shall be implemented with due regard to the peremptory norms of the Islamic sharia relating to determination of the inheritance portions of the estate of a deceased person, whether female or male; and the second, the implementation of paragraph 16 (c) and (d) of the convention shall be without prejudice to any of the rights guaranteed to women by the Islamic sharia.

4 The International Action Network on Small Arms, Amnesty International, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, etc.

5 See also Akatsa-Bukachi, M., 'Gender and violence: Small arms – a human security issue', New Routes, 2012:4, pp. 17-19.

6 http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/about-us/highlights/highlight-rn18.html