Seminar on

“Women, Peace and Security: from resolution to action”

Ten Years of Security Council Resolution 1325

Statement by

Ms. Navanethem Pillay
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

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Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to thank you for inviting me to this seminar on: “Women, peace and security: from resolution to action. Ten years of Security Council Resolution 1325.” Delivering concluding remarks at the end of such a comprehensive discussion is a bit like carrying coal to Newcastle. I will, nonetheless, try to contribute to this debate by outlining the trajectory of Resolution 1325, summarize common denominators in advocates’ analyses and, in so doing, also offer my Office’s own perspective.

Let me recall that with Resolution 1325, the Security Council embraced for the first time a truly human security perspective overcoming the strictly “hard security” focus that had been its historic domain.

This new approach did not emerge in a vacuum. Rather, it resulted from years of effort on the part of the global women’s human rights movement, as well as on the determination of the United Nations and other intergovernmental organizations to provide a long overdue space for women’s growing grid of solidarity and rights-awareness. I take this opportunity to pay
tribute to all these activists and richly diverse movers and shakers who made such progress possible. In particular, I wish to mention the contributions of the late Angela EV King, the first special adviser to the Secretary-General on gender issues and advancement of women.

Resolution 1325 recognized that there is a fundamental difference in the way in which women and men experience conflict. Further, it reminded the international community of its obligations and responsibilities under international human rights treaties and international humanitarian law, including the Geneva conventions. It reaffirmed the need for all States to uphold human rights, including the principles of non-discrimination and gender equality, during situations of conflict, peace-making and peace-building. Crucially, the resolution asserted the vital role that women can and must play in putting an end to conflict, including in peace negotiations, as well as in post conflict reconstruction.

Subsequent Security Council Resolutions 1820, 1888, and 1889 built on resolution 1325 and strengthened the view that women and girls are not only victims, but also rights-holders and indispensable agents of change.
Both on their own individual merit or taken together, these four resolutions provide important bases for a substantive dialogue among OHCHR, the UN system partners and national stakeholders, including governments. If properly implemented and enforced, these resolutions will ensure that the human rights dimension in the causes and impact of armed conflicts are understood and addressed. Given the priority they deserve, their provisions will contribute to solidifying peace, help justice take root, enhance equality, and ensure protection to those most at risk.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

During delicate transition periods, when new foundations for national institutions and citizen interaction are laid, realization of women’s rights is often put on the backburner and their quest for justice is either neglected entirely or postponed. Women’s contributions in the reconstruction effort and the obligation to embed women’s rights in law and practice are indispensable preconditions for peace to take firm hold. Non gender-sensitive peace agreements are seldom gender-neutral. Often they reinforce pre-existing inequalities and discrimination against women. This approach must be reversed.
Albeit with tardiness, a more coherent vision for the implementation of the four Security Council resolutions on Women, Peace and Security is now evolving. The implications of this body of documents and the responses they require are also becoming clearer.

I wish to commend, in particular, efforts made to formulate national action plans as well as the contributions of civil society.

For its part, the United Nations has engaged in the elaboration of a variety of monitoring mechanisms, including indicators developed by an ad hoc inter-agency task force aiming at tracking progress in the implementation of Resolution 1325.

Indeed, what is emerging with stark clarity is the imperative to develop a better system for data collection to identify women’s specific requirements in transition periods. The need to provide adequate resources, vehicles and mechanisms to stimulate women’s inclusion and influence in peace and security activities is also apparent.

A good starting point is ensuring the safety of women involved in peace negotiations and empowering them to participate
in such processes. Institutional reform, as well as reform of the security sector, including the military and the police, must include training in gender issues and must ensure that these institutions and forces promote women’s access. Ultimately, the UN must keep track of progress and gaps in order to refine the targets of the organization’s advocacy and capacity building.

Distinguished Participants,

Last year we commemorated the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption by the General Assembly of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the international bill of rights for women. The Convention and the Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security are inspired by a shared vision of gender-equality; they all call for women’s participation in decision-making processes, and for the establishment and respect of the rule of law.

Throughout its work, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which oversees implementation of CEDAW, has emphasized that violence against women is frequently a precursor of conflict and often a weapon of war. Moreover, the Committee’s General Comment on Temporary
Special Measures, which include positive action, preferential treatment or quota systems to advance women's participation, offers a solid basis for proposals aimed at promoting women’s involvement in the full spectrum of a society’s activities and institutions.

In short, taken together, CEDAW and the Security Council resolutions provide a comprehensive legal and policy framework to protect women and girls in conflict, ensure that they are present at the peace table and that they participate in the decision-making process.

For its part, my Office is developing a holistic approach to help bolster the implementation of all resolutions in the area of women, peace and security. We are doing so by drawing from the expertise of our field presences and an array of partners. OHCHR actively participated in the UN inter-agency efforts to develop indicators to monitor the progress on the implementation of the resolution. It has committed to take the lead in tracking some of these indicators related to trends of violations against women which are reported to the United Nations human rights mechanisms, including the treaty bodies, and the special
procedures of the Human Rights Council. My Office also heads efforts to monitor the level of women’s participation in national governance institutions.

Moreover, the recent deployment by OHCHR of women’s rights and gender advisors to selected regional offices, in Beirut, Suva, Dakar and Panama, is meant to boost momentum and strategies for the implementation of Resolution 1325 both at the regional and the national levels. To this effect, we have also co-organized, a Regional Forum which is currently taking place in Dakar and which has attracted more than 100 participants.

Dear Colleagues,

The international community has invested a considerable effort to shore up the capacity of national authorities to combat impunity for sexual violence. Yet, serious problems persist, including the inability of victims to exercise their right to remedy and reparations, especially in cases where the perpetrators have not been identified.
This situation occurs in many countries emerging from conflict, but it has reached almost unimaginable proportions in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In order to strengthen assistance and support to victims of sexual violence, OHCHR has assembled a high-level panel of experts that will convene on September 27. The panel, led by my Deputy, will hold a series of hearings in various parts of the DRC with survivors of sexual violence as well as other actors. It will examine how victims perceive and evaluate institutional responses to the crimes committed against them. Ultimately, this project will provide a much needed advocacy tool not only for developing a reparations mechanism for all victims of sexual violence, but also for addressing the many weaknesses in the judicial system that affect prosecution of this crime in the DRC.

This initiative dovetails with a major OHCHR report which maps out major violations of human rights and humanitarian law, including gender violence, committed in the DRC from 1993 to 2003. The report will be released on October 1. Its overarching objective is to enable the Government of the DRC to identify appropriate transitional justice mechanisms to deal with the legacy of these violations, in terms of truth, justice, reparation and reform.
Indeed, one of the key elements of OHCHR work pertains to the area of transitional justice, where we lead the UN efforts. In recent years, our activities to build national capacity have included the formulation of strategies, as well as training initiatives, spanning from Kathmandu to Bujumbura, from Lomé to Nairobi and elsewhere.

Experience shows that in most transitional justice scenarios there is a chronic problem of gender inequality and systemic discrimination against women. It is crucial that women fully participate in transitional justice initiatives in order to set out and follow up with decisions that affect them. Let’s remember that, ultimately, the aim of transitional justice processes is to protect and restore the dignity of the large numbers of individuals whose rights have been seriously violated. The outcome must reflect the broadest spectrum of the stakeholders’ views. The inclusion of a gender perspective and paying heed to the views of women widen the scope of transitional justice and offer the possibility of addressing potential imbalances at the very beginning of a reconciliation process.
Let us always be aware that women may have been battered and abused, but they were still able to produce human rights jurisprudence and social change. They will continue to do so and we must stand by them.

I am eager to work with all of you to enhance women’s participation and clout regarding peace and security issues.

Thank you.