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We finally need to involve women to build lasting peace

It takes more than just UN resolutions to protect women from the violence of war and involve them in peace-making

Read this article in German.

In February 2020, the US signed a peace agreement with the Taliban and a joint declaration with the Afghan government 'for bringing peace to Afghanistan'. That was clearly a big success. But something crucial for the country's future was missing: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had refused to include *women* in the peace talks. In the current negotiations on designing a durable peace, less than 10 per cent of the people at the negotiation table are women.

We really should know better.

Studies show that gender-equal societies are more secure, stable, peaceful and economically successful. When women are included in peace agreements, the likelihood that they will last at least 15 years increases by 35 per cent.

In Colombia, women played a major role in the November 2016 peace agreement ending the war that had raged since the 1960s. When peace talks between the government and the guerrillas collapsed in early 2002, it was women's organisations who insisted on finding political solutions and prepared the ground for future negotiations. They organised peace marches, dialogued with armed groups to free hostages, brought back child soldiers and erected street blockades to secure the passage of food, medicines and people.

There is no good reason for not having women sit at negotiating tables in equal numbers and speaking rights. No justification for not paying women compensation and reparations for their wartime suffering. No defence for not having gender advisors and women making up 25 per cent of the soldiers in all peacekeeping missions.

With our ability to do technical and scientific wonders, can we really not guarantee equal participation to half of humanity?

Empty words

In the wars in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the early 1990s, an estimate 20,000 to 50,000 women and girls were abused, raped, sexually enslaved and killed. Their woeful tales convinced the United Nations Security Council to address the subject of women and armed conflict.

On 31 October 2000, the Security Council passed Resolution 1325 on 'Women, Peace and Security' – acknowledging for the first time that women and children are most affected by armed conflict and are increasingly targeted. The Security Council also acknowledged women's decisive role in peacebuilding and post-war society.

Twenty years have passed. Nine follow-up resolutions have been adopted and 86 of 193 countries have drawn up action plans to implement Resolution 1325.

But little has changed. Just 25 of the 1,500 peace treaties concluded between 2000 and 2016 even mention women. Less than three per cent of peace agreement signatories and under 10 per cent of peace negotiators are women. In 2019, women accounted for just five per cent of military personnel and 11 per cent of the police units in UN peacekeeping missions.

Women are crucial in all areas of peace and security. If their perspectives are left out and their voices are not heard, wars will continue to break out and conflicts that have been resolved will flare up again.

It was no surprise that at the 75th anniversary of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2020 there were *nine* women representatives. That's not even five per cent of UN ambassadors and is the lowest percentage in years. In 2020, men represent 95 per cent of UN member states.

In Germany, the situation for women is not much better. In its headquarters on Werder'scher Markt, 150 years after its founding, the Federal Foreign Office named its first conference hall after a woman: Ellinor von Puttkamer, the Federal Republic's first female diplomat. Currently, not even one in five German diplomatic missions is run by a

woman. Germany has never *ever* named a female ambassador to the UN, not even a deputy.

What's to be done?

We certainly don't need any more UN resolutions! The normative framework for *Women, Peace and Security* is comprehensive. It merely has to be put into practice. This is a glaring problem: All parts of society worldwide need to change their minds. In truth, this is a *huge* project! But it's past time to roll up our sleeves and attack the problem head on because we will only keep wars at bay when women have an equal say in decision-making and equal access to education and resources – that is, to power.

How do we manage that? One way would be to provide the Women, Peace and Security agenda with specific goals – like those in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – and regularly review their compliance (perhaps through peer review, as is customary in the UN Human Rights Council).

At the national level, all UN member states will have to draw up the National Action Plans to implement Resolution 1325 they should have had since 2004. They also have to fund them properly: Money makes the world go round! So far, however, only 86 of 193 states have plans.

Measurable goals include naming women to 40 per cent of all diplomatic posts and delegations to international conferences. The percentage of women in UN peace missions could be increased from five to 20 per cent although that's much easier said than done. Since women only make up 15 per cent of the German Army, a very large number of female soldiers would have to be diverted to the UN peacekeeping missions to fill the quota.

Adjustments are needed in training, family/career compatibility and military culture. More women must be trained as mediators, gender advisors and commanders. More job locations have to provide a reasonably safe environment, and education, housework and care have got to be fairly shared by women and men. Last but not least, it must be clear in conflict areas that deployments do not just provide protection against armed violence, but also supply food and water, health and hygiene, access to education – and safeguard human rights.

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Sweden shows that things can be different: It has been pursuing a feminist foreign and security policy since 2014. In 2018, Sweden even published a handbook of feminist foreign policy. Focusing on ‘the three Rs’ – rights, representation and resources – makes a difference: Women run 40 per cent of Swedish embassies and Sweden has a network of women mediators who are active all over the world.



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