

# WOMEN AND ARMED CONFLICT: NEW CHALLENGES



## BEIJING AT 10 : PUTTING POLICY INTO PRACTICE



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UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING INSTITUTE FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

## The Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action



### Critical Area E. Women and Armed Conflict

An environment that maintains world peace and promotes and protects human rights, democracy and the peaceful settlement of disputes... is an important factor for the advancement of women. Peace is inextricably linked with equality between women and men and development.

-Beijing Platform for Action E.131

Reality check: Across the globe, women are struggling to survive the horrors of armed conflict. Some women have grown-up knowing nothing other than war, some have lived through every form of violence imaginable, some are kidnapped and forced into sexual slavery, and some have joined armed struggles as combatants. Women's voices are still insufficiently heard at the tables of peace negotiations, their needs and interests are not reflected in peace treaties and cease-fire agreements, and they are rarely among those making the decision to go to war. The actions mandated by the Beijing Platform for Action in order to address women and armed conflict remain all-too relevant ten years after they were first called for.

As in 1995, armed conflicts remain largely intrastate and continue to irrevocably affect the lives of women, men, girls and boys. Long-standing conflicts, such as those in Colombia, Israel and Kashmir continue to wreak havoc on the day-to-day lives of individuals as well as influencing national, regional and global politics. The recent unilateral war in Iraq established a new precedent of invasion in defiance of international, for in the words of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan: "from the [UN] charter point of view, it was illegal."<sup>1</sup> The disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process in Liberia, the armed conflicts the Darfur region of the Sudan, and the continuing violence in Haiti and Aché, Indonesia, serve as a daily reminder of the global realities of armed conflict.

Despite these sombre realities, the past ten years have also seen certain positive developments regarding the de-escalation of wars and new policies and actions on women and armed conflict. According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Project, the world is now experiencing the lowest level of armed conflict since the early 1970s, down from thirty-eight (1995) to twenty-nine (2003) armed conflicts.<sup>2</sup> Fourteen new

<sup>1</sup> "Iraq War Illegal, Says Annan" *BBC News* (16 Sept. 2004)  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/3661134.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3661134.stm)

<sup>2</sup> Mikael Eriksson and Peter Wallensteen, "Armed Conflict, 1989-2003" *Journal of Peace Research* 41.5 (2004): 625.

multilateral peace missions were launched in 2003; the highest number launched in one year since the end of the cold war.

On the policy front, new international legislation regarding women and armed conflict has served as a powerful lobbying tool for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) all over the world. Resolution 1325 of the United Nations Security Council on "Women, Peace and Security" (2000), has played a groundbreaking role by calling for the equal participation and full involvement of women in all efforts for the maintenance of peace and security and the integration of a gender perspective into peacekeeping, peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction.<sup>3</sup> Additional key legislation includes: the Windhoek Declaration and the Namibia Plan of Action on 'Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multidimensional Peace Support Operations' (2000); UN General Assembly Resolution of the twenty-third special session "Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action" (2000); the European Parliament Resolution on "Participation of women in peaceful conflict resolution" (2000); the G8 Roma Initiative on "Strengthening the role of Women in Conflict Prevention" (2001); and the Commission on the Status of Women Agreed Conclusions on "Women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and post-conflict peace-building" (2004).<sup>4</sup>

Globally these policies have been used by women's NGOs and women's movements to substantiate calls for the increased participation of women and the inclusion of gender issues in all efforts to maintain and promote peace and security. Two key studies have emerged in response to these policy developments: the UN Secretary-General's study on "Women, Peace and Security" (2002)<sup>5</sup> and the United Nations Development Fund for Women's 2002 publication "Women, War, Peace: The Independent Expert's Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women's Role in Peace-building."<sup>6</sup> Additionally, the availability and dissemination of information regarding women and armed conflict have dramatically increased.<sup>7</sup> Manuals and institutional guidelines on gender and peacekeeping, and gender and mine action, have recently been developed within the UN-system. On the ground, innumerable actions have been launched by United Nations and non-governmental organizations to increase the participation and protection of women as well as mainstreaming gender issues in the context of armed conflict.

<sup>3</sup> S/Res/1325 (31 October 2000). [http://www.un.org/events/res\\_1325e.pdf](http://www.un.org/events/res_1325e.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> "Windhoek Declaration and the Namibia Plan of Action" (31 May 2000). [http://www.reliefweb.int/library/GHARKit/FilesFeb2001/windhoek\\_declaration.htm](http://www.reliefweb.int/library/GHARKit/FilesFeb2001/windhoek_declaration.htm)  
A/Res/S-23/3 (16 November 2000).

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/ress233e.pdf>  
European Parliament Resolution (2000/2025(INI)), (30 November 2000).

<http://www.womenwagingpeace.net/content/articles/EUResolution.pdf>  
G8 Roma Initiative (19 July 2001).

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/g7\\_g8/genoa/att\\_2.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/g7_g8/genoa/att_2.htm)  
Commission on the Status of Women, "Agreed Conclusions" (14 March 2004).

<http://ods-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N04/335/28/PDF/N0433528.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>5</sup> UN Secretary General's Report "Women, Peace and Security" (2002). <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/eWPS.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Elisabeth Rehn and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, *Women, War, Peace: The Independent Expert's Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women's Role in Peace-building* Progress of the World's Women 2002 Vol 1 (New York: UNIFEM, 2002). [http://www.unifem.org/index.php?f\\_page\\_pid=149](http://www.unifem.org/index.php?f_page_pid=149)

<sup>7</sup> For example see UNIFEM's <http://www.womenwarpeace.org> or Women's International League for Peace and Freedom's <http://www.peacewomen.org>

While these developments constitute a good beginning, as discussed in the following pages, much remains to be done in order to achieve the strategic objectives set out by the Beijing Platform for Action regarding women and armed conflict. Additionally, during the past few years, new areas of concern have been articulated that are not specifically addressed in the Platform for Action, yet must be included in any current discussion on women and armed conflict.

## Strategic Objective E.1.

**“Increase the participation of women in conflict resolution at decision-making levels and protect women living in situations of armed and other conflicts or under foreign occupation”**

Actions to be taken by Governments, International and Regional Intergovernmental Institutions include: to promote equal participation of women in all forums and peace activities, particularly at the decision-making level, and including the UN Secretariat; to integrate a gender perspective in resolving conflicts; to aim for a gender balance in appointing members to international bodies such as the International Court of Justice; and to provide gender training to prosecutors, judges and others.

While preliminary and often merely symbolic gestures have been made, women remain significantly underrepresented in conflict resolution processes. For example: not a single woman participated in the regional delegations of the Dayton Peace Accords on Bosnia and Herzegovina; at the negotiations of the Rambouillet Interim Agreement for Peace and Self-Government in Kosovo, there was only one Kosovar woman, and at the first Arusha peace talks on Burundi, only two of the one-hundred and twenty-six delegates were women.<sup>8</sup> The under-representation of women applies to the international judiciary as well as the negotiation tables, as evidenced by the fact that, in its eighty-plus year history, only one woman has ever served on the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Additionally, the International Law Commission (ILC) elected its first two women in fifty-five years during 2001. These inequalities were reproduced in the recently formed International Criminal Tribunals (ICT) for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and Rwanda (ICTR), where only three of the fourteen permanent judges were women.<sup>9</sup>

However, in recent years there has been increased mobilization and attention paid to the participation of women in conflict resolution. A UN Inter-Agency Taskforce on Women, Peace and Security has been established and has carried out various actions including the creation of gender checklists for needs-assessment missions, briefing notes for Security Council missions, and the drafting of a roster of women's organizations in conflict zones. National governments have also taken specific actions: the Netherlands has introduced a programme entitled "Engendering the Peace Process" that encourages Israel and Palestine to appoint more women to negotiating teams and political decision-making posts;<sup>10</sup> Belgium has supported the use of women mediators in conflict situations;<sup>11</sup> and the Organization of African Unity

<sup>8</sup> Sanam N. Anderlini, *Women at the Peace Table – Making a Difference* (New York: UNIFEM, 2000). [http://www.unifem.org/filesconfirmed/8/226\\_peacebk.pdf](http://www.unifem.org/filesconfirmed/8/226_peacebk.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Women's Caucus for Gender Justice, "Action Alert" (July 2002). <http://www.iccwomen.org/news/lobbyalert.htm>

<sup>10</sup> E/CN.6/2000/PC/2 (January 2000). <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/ecn6-2000-pc2.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

and the Economic Commission for Africa launched the Women's Committee on Peace and Development in 1999.<sup>12</sup>

Even with international legislation mandating the inclusion of women, and specific actions by the United Nations, governments and NGOs, there has been little systematic progress. The issue of women's participation or the inclusion of gender issues in conflict-resolution processes is consistently considered less "urgent" and therefore less important than other priorities. Among the obstacles to women's participation are the lack of political motivation to press for the inclusion of women, the scarcity of funds for women's organizations involved in conflict resolution and an institutionalized sexism that prevents women from reaching decision-making positions. Moreover, the international and national discourse on women's status and human rights is increasingly being used as a validation of armed conflict. As many experts have argued, the oppression of Afghani women was commandeered as a partial justification for the war in Afghanistan, forcing women into the role of victim and re-enforcing a persistent stereotype of the discourse on women and armed conflict: that women are nothing more than passive victims of conflict rather than active agents of conflict, resolution, and peace.

Women's grassroots organizations are at the forefront of the struggle to be included in conflict resolution and peace activities. Impressive examples of women organizing to have their voices heard exist in conflict-torn countries around the world. One such organization is the Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET). Awarded the 2003 UN Human Rights Prize, MARWOPNET is a joint peace initiative by the women of the Mano River Region (Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea). Among other peace-building activities, MARWOPNET prevented the outbreak of hostilities between the three countries by bringing the leaders back to the negotiating table on the issue of refugees.<sup>13</sup>

#### Areas for Future Action:

- § The United Nations and other international bodies must set an example by appointing women to decision-making positions within conflict resolution processes, including inter alia UN Special Representatives and Envoys.
- § Based on best practices, such as the example of MARWOPNET, re-examine the funding and international support provided to grassroots women's organizations working with conflict resolution and peace processes.
- § Actors engaged in peace negotiations, peace processes and the construction of civil governance structures, including the international community, must implement measures to ensure the inclusion of women in these processes, for example through the establishment of minimum quotas of thirty-percent of each sex.
- § Judicial reform and reconstruction programmes should include a mandatory gender training component for prosecutors, judges and other law enforcement officials.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Femmes Africa Solidarité, "MARWOPNET Awarded 2003 United Nations Prize in the field of Human Rights" (3 December 2003). <http://www.peacewomen.org/news/Liberia/Nov03/prize.html>

## Strategic Objective E.2.

### “Reduce excessive military expenditures and control the availability of armaments”

Actions to be taken by Governments include: increasing and hastening the conversion of military resources to peaceful purposes; appropriate reduction in military expenditures and the arms trade; taking action to investigate and punish police, security and armed forces for violations against the human rights of women; combating the illicit trade in arms and the trafficking of women and children; supporting the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT); working actively towards general and complete disarmament; and halting the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel landmines.

On many fronts, with the exception of anti-personnel landmines, we are now further away from implementing this strategic objective than we were ten years ago. The steady post-cold war downward trend in major arms transfers and world military spending has drastically reversed since 2001. In two years, world military spending has increased by eighteen percent in real terms, reaching \$956 billion.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, the downsizing in arms production ended in the mid 1990s, and with increased concentration, internationalisation and privatisation, the global level of arms production has started to increase. The field of biotechnology is rapidly evolving, and over the last five years, politicians and the media have given increased coverage and import to the potential threat posed by biological weapons and bio-terrorism. As stated in the 2004 SIPRI yearbook, the United States and North Korea have taken actions unprecedented in the modern history of international arms control, through their respective withdrawal from the 1972 Treaty on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems (in 2002) and the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (in 2003).<sup>15</sup> The Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), though ratified by one hundred and eleven countries, still only has thirty-two of the forty-four necessary ratifications in order to enter into force.<sup>16</sup> Contrary to the media exposure devoted to the threats of “weapons of mass destruction” and international terrorism, these developments have received little to no media coverage.

An increasing demand for armaments, largely fuelled by the recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, is one of the major obstacles to conversion of military equipment for peaceful purposes and the reduction of military expenditure and the arms trade. A general lack of political will and international advocacy has hindered the entry into force of the CTBT and universality of the Mine Ban Convention.

On a brighter note, the entry-into-force of the Mine Ban Convention<sup>17</sup> in March of 1999 serves as a shining example of the potential influence of civil society movements on international issues such as disarmament. The International

<sup>14</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, “Highlights from the SIPRI YEARBOOK 2004,” [SIPRI Yearbook 2004: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security](http://editors.sipri.se/pubs/yb04/highlights.html#) (Stockholm: SIPRI, 2004). <http://editors.sipri.se/pubs/yb04/highlights.html#>

<sup>15</sup> Christer Ahlström, “Chapter 19. Withdrawal from arms control treaties” SIPRI Yearbook 2004: Armaments, Disarmament and International security (Stockholm: SIPRI, 2004). <http://editors.sipri.se/pubs/yb04/ch19.html>

<sup>16</sup> Ben Mines, [The Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty: virtually verifiable now](http://www.vertic.org/assets/BP3_Mines.pdf) (Vertic Brief, 3 April 2004). [http://www.vertic.org/assets/BP3\\_Mines.pdf](http://www.vertic.org/assets/BP3_Mines.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> [Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction](http://www.mineaction.org/misc/dynamic_overview.cfm?did=134) (March 1999). [http://www.mineaction.org/misc/dynamic\\_overview.cfm?did=134](http://www.mineaction.org/misc/dynamic_overview.cfm?did=134)

Campaign to Ban Landmines, a coalition of more than fourteen-hundred non-governmental organizations in ninety countries, including a strong presence of women's organizations, instigated and facilitated the international Convention that prohibits the use, stockpiling, production or transfer of anti-personnel landmines.<sup>18</sup> The United Nations also took action, as outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action, and formed the UN Mine Action Service in 1997, as well as establishing the UN Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action. This inter-agency group is currently in the process of developing guidelines for the integration of gender into mine action programmes.

#### Areas for Future Action:

- § Support, advocate for and realize a global Arms Trade Treaty to create universal legal standards for arms transfers.
- § Increase funding for Mine Action – and use this successful experience as basis for building advocacy efforts around other issues such as small arms.
- § Exert international pressure in order to achieve universal signing and ratification of the CTBT and the Mine Ban Convention.
- § Carry out systematic and in-depth gender trainings for UN personnel involved in disarmament work.

### Strategic objective E.3.

**“Promote non-violent forms of conflict resolution and reduce the incidence of human rights abuse in conflict situations”**

Actions to be taken by Governments, International and Regional Organizations include: ratifying international instruments related to the protection of women during armed conflict; respecting international humanitarian law in armed conflicts; strengthening the role of women in decision-making; reaffirming the right of self-determination; encouraging diplomacy and peaceful settlement of disputes; considering rape during times of armed conflict as a war crime and crime against humanity; condemning and acting against all forms of terrorism; gender-sensitising trainings on international humanitarian law, human rights, peacekeeping and humanitarian aid; and alleviating the negative consequences of sanctions.

On the policy-level, clear progress has been made toward addressing certain aspects of this strategic objective. In the statutes of the Ad Hoc Tribunals created by the UN Security Council to address crimes committed in the Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, rape is explicitly labelled a crime against humanity. Additionally, both Tribunals have issued several indictments relating to sexual violence, and the Rwanda Tribunal has convicted one defendant of genocide, including as a result of sexual violence.<sup>19</sup> At the regional level, inter-American and European human rights bodies have established that sexual violence and rape in conflict situations constitute a violation of human rights treaties. Finally, the July 2002 entry into force of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court has marked a new era for women's justice.

<sup>18</sup> Stefan Brem and Ken Rutherford, “Walking Together or Divided Agenda? Comparing Landmines and Small-Arms Campaigns,” *Security Dialogue* 32.2 (2001): 169-186.

<sup>19</sup> E/CN.6/2000/PC/2.

Unfortunately, many of these actions are reactive as opposed to preventive. Violence continues to be directed towards women during armed conflict. War-related sexual violence, including rape, torture and sexual slavery, has affected seventeen percent of displaced households surveyed in Sierra Leone.<sup>20</sup> Post-conflict, there is a documented rise in cases of domestic violence; in Timor-Leste in 2001, forty percent of the reported crimes were cases of domestic violence or violence against women.<sup>21</sup> In a majority of cases where actions have been taken to curtail human rights abuses, gender perspectives are left out of the debates and women themselves are often excluded from the process of negotiating these statutes. Even with increased international attention on the issue of trafficking of women and girls, the lack of clear policy and resources to support female survivors of human rights abuses hinders the investigation and punishment of crimes against women. Lack of political will, the “culture of silence” surrounding sexual violence and the low prioritisation of gender training all contribute to the continuing prevalence of human rights abuses against women (for more information see the upcoming INSTRAW Beijing Reports on Violence Against Women and the Human Rights of Women).

One of the most positive examples of the fulfillment of this strategic objective has been the creation of the International Criminal Court (ICC). Women’s rights activists mobilized and participated at every step of this process, from designing the initial statutes to ensuring the representation of women among the judges that will serve on the ICC, thus making sure that women’s human rights are recognized as an essential part of humanitarian law. The end result of the ICC negotiations was the Rome Statute, which outlines the establishment and structure of the ICC, and which is responsive to gender-specific crimes and has jurisdiction over the range of abuses that happen to women. Specifically, the Rome Statute of the ICC criminalizes sexual and gender violence as war crimes and crimes against humanity; ensures staff expertise on gender and sexual violence; and guarantees protection and participation for victims and witnesses.<sup>22</sup>

#### Areas for Future Action:

- § Governments, international bodies and non-governmental organizations need to implement strategies focusing on the prevention of armed conflict and human rights abuses against women.
- § A minimum of thirty-percent of each sex should be included in all national and international judicial bodies.
- § Continue to support and advocate for the right of self-determination as stated in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (1993).
- § Based on a review of successful experiences; devote increased attention and funding to specific bodies and institutions that are engaged in the peaceful settlement of armed conflicts and international disputes in order to increase their capacity to influence policy and decision-making.
- § Create and enforce codes of conduct for police, security and armed forces in order to stop the violation of women’s human rights
- § Review and modify existing economic sanctions in order to ensure the least possible negative effects upon the well-being of women and girls.

<sup>20</sup> Rehn and Sirleaf, 11.

<sup>21</sup> UNIFEM, “Violence Against Women.” <http://www.womenwarpeace.org/issues/violence/violence.htm>

<sup>22</sup> Human Rights Watch Backgrounder. “International Justice for Women: The ICC Marks a New Era” (1 July 2002). <http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/icc/icc-women.htm>



§ Systematically incorporate gender-sensitive concerns into development training programmes.

## Strategic objective E.4.

### “Promote women's contribution to fostering a culture of peace”

Actions to be taken by Governments, International and Regional Intergovernmental Institutions and Non-Governmental Institutions include: promoting peaceful conflict resolution, peace, reconciliation and tolerance through education and training, in particular for young women; encouraging the development of peace research that involves and addresses women; developing and disseminating research on the effects of armed conflict on women and girls; establishing educational programmes that foster a culture of peace.

The “Culture of Peace” is defined by the UN as a set of values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by solving problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations.<sup>23</sup> We need only look at the current state of the world; from the crisis in Sudan, to the rates of gun-violence in Brazil and South Africa to the global increase in military expenditures in order to conclude that we are far from achieving the heralded “culture of peace”. The creation of a culture of peace includes not only the prevention and resolution of military and armed conflicts, but the prevention of other forms of violence such as the domestic abuse of women and children. A culture of peace begins with education and training programmes that target violent attitudes and norms of behaviour. The difficulty with the concept of a “culture of peace” is on one hand challenging entrenched norms of violent behavior and on the other hand the fact that initiatives within this field are often poorly funded and remain hard to monitor and evaluate.

Actions taken over the last few years by the United Nations include passing several resolutions encouraging activities that contribute to a culture of peace, and declaring 2001-2010 the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) is engaged in a range of activities in the field of the culture of peace, many of which include a gender perspective. In terms of promoting peaceful conflict resolution through training and education, once again NGO's have contributed to the most forward thinking and effective actions within this field.

Other organizations that have focused on peace and non-violent education include the Hague Appeal for Peace, which has as its mission a Global Campaign for Peace Education. This NGO aims to understand the root causes of violence and transform cycles of violence and human rights violations through integrating peace education into school curricula, community and family education. They have created a global network to support the implementation of peace education programmes, published and translated a primary teaching text, created an international youth programme

<sup>23</sup> A/RES/52/13 (20 November 1997). <http://www.un.org/ga/documents/gares52/res5213.htm>  
A/RES/53/243 (6 October 1999). [http://www3.unesco.org/iycp/kits/uk\\_res\\_243.pdf](http://www3.unesco.org/iycp/kits/uk_res_243.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> A/RES/58/11 (20 November 2003). [http://www3.unesco.org/iycp/uk/uk\\_sum\\_decade.htm](http://www3.unesco.org/iycp/uk/uk_sum_decade.htm)

and partnered with the UN Department for Disarmament Affairs to introduce peace and disarmament education intended to reduce armed violence.<sup>25</sup>

#### Areas for Future Action:

- § Based on a review of best practices, increase funding and support for grassroots conflict resolution and non-violence training and education.
- § Develop mechanisms to monitor and evaluate culture of peace, peaceful conflict resolution, and non-violence initiatives.
- § Prioritize the implementation of conflict prevention and resolution measures and educational programmes that target youth, young women and young men.

### Strategic objective E.5.

**“Provide protection, assistance and training to refugee women, other displaced women in need of international protection and internally displaced women”**

Actions to be taken by Governments, Intergovernmental and Non-Governmental Organisations include: fully include women in planning, design, implementation and monitoring of programmes; adequately protect and provide assistance to women and children; find solutions to the root causes of displacement; protect the safety, physical integrity and human rights of refugee women and internationally displaced women; ensure the right to return; ensure that the needs of refugee women are being met; provide educational material; equal access and treatment for women; and promote self-reliance capacities and training programmes.

Approximately half of the world’s seventeen million asylum seekers, refugees and others of concern to the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) are women and children. Though this figure may sound high, it is the lowest total in at least a decade; in 1995 the total was circa twenty-six million. This encouraging decline is largely the result of a reduction in armed conflict, an increasing number of returnees, and international efforts to find solutions for millions of uprooted people.<sup>26</sup> The UNHCR recently developed a code of conduct that ensures that the human rights of women and girl refugees are respected. A ten-year review of the implementation of the “Guidelines on the protection of refugee women” noted improved capacities for gender-sensitive refugee status determinations, increased enrolment of girls in schools, enhanced methods of organizing women refugees and including them in camp management, direct involvement of women in food distribution, incentives to employ more female staff in health and education programmes, wider availability of reproductive health services and increasing access to safe houses and counselling services.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Hague Appeal for Peace, “About Us.” <http://www.haguepeace.org/aboutus/aboutus.php>

<sup>26</sup> United Nations High Commission for Refugees, “Basic Facts” (7 October 2004).  
<http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/basics>

<sup>27</sup> Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, UNHCR Policy on Refugee Women and Guidelines on Their Protection: An Assessment of Ten Years of Implementation (New York: Women’s

However, these measures have often been ad hoc and sporadic. Displaced women continue to suffer from a lack of clothing, blankets and sanitary items; they remain excluded from decision-making; are often forced to exchange sex for scarce food and non-food items; and are the constant targets of sexual violence.<sup>28</sup> A number of obstacles impede the full implementation of this particular strategic objective, among them a lack of resources for training programmes and actions that specifically address women's issues such as sexual violence prevention, lack of political will, inadequate reporting and monitoring systems for sexual and other types of violence, an ad hoc approach to implementation, and a lack of gender-sensitivity training among staff that work with refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and asylum-seekers.

Many examples exist of exceptional and creative programming to include displaced women. The Saharawi refugee camps in southwest Algeria are a clear example of how women, through their own volition, have organized a largely egalitarian society. Women hold up to one fourth of the seats in the Saharawi parliament and make up most of the civil service including teachers, nurses and doctors. "Women built these camps," states Menana Mohammed, the Deputy Secretary-General of the Union of Saharawi Women.<sup>29</sup> UNHCR has supported these developments through vocational training and income-generating projects for women; the establishment of Women's Centers in all camps; training in women's rights; and entrusting women with the reception, handling and distribution of all basic humanitarian assistance.<sup>30</sup>

#### Areas for Future Action:

- § Increase the number of female staff working with refugees, IDPs, asylum-seekers and others.
- § Implement mandatory gender training for all staff.
- § Based on a review of successful programmes, increase funding and support to programmes that focus on women and girls.
- § Strengthen local, national and international reporting, monitoring and data collection systems for sexual violence and other human rights abuses against refugees, IDPs and others.
- § Create mechanisms for preventing sexual violence and sexual-bartering.
- § Reform asylum and refugee policies to take into account both gender-based persecution and the trafficking of women and children.
- § Fully involve women in planning, management, food distribution and all other decision-making with respect to camps for displaced persons.

Commission, May 2002). <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/+wwwBmegjv68wwwwwwqwwwwwwwhFqo2010E2gltFqoGn5nwGqrAFqo2010E2glicFqhidMnDDzmxwwwwww1FqmRbZ/.opendoc.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> John Thorne, "Sahara refugees form a progressive society" *The Christian Science Monitor* (26 March 2004). <http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0326/p04s01-wome.html>

<sup>30</sup> UNHCR, *A Practical Guide to Empowerment: UNHCR Good Practices on Gender Equality Mainstreaming* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2001). <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/+QwwBmeBGqUwwwwwwqwwwwwwFqA72ZR0gRfZNhfqA72ZR0gRfZntFqrpGdBnqBzFqmRbZAFqA72ZR0gRfZNDzmxwwwwww5Fqw1FqmRbZ/.opendoc.pdf>

## Strategic Objective E.6.

### “Provide assistance to the women of the colonies and non-self-governing territories”

Actions to be taken by Governments, Intergovernmental and Non-Governmental Organizations include: support and promote the implementation of the right of self-determination; and raise public awareness to create a better understanding of the situation of women of the colonies and non-self-governing territories.

The issues of self-determination and colonization continue to be highly contentious and politicised. Due to the absence of information and the lack of consensus regarding the right to self-determination; it is difficult to measure progress on this strategic objective during the last ten years, aside from the case of Timor-Leste. According to the United Nations General Assembly, there remain sixteen non-self-governing territories, a majority of which are Caribbean and Atlantic islands. However, this list does not include Palestine, Northern Ireland, Kurdistan and other regions that have long struggled for their right to self-determination. The UN has declared 2001-2010 the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, and is calling for self-determination and independence for the sixteen non-self-governing territories. However, the Plan of Action for the next decade excludes any reference to women or gender.<sup>31</sup> The UN Secretary-General’s report on the dissemination of information on decolonisation from June 2003 to May 2004 mentions women only in passing by listing a briefing on indigenous women held by the UN Department of Public Information NGO Section.<sup>32</sup> Non-governmental organizations have taken action on this topic to a much larger degree than governmental or intergovernmental organizations.

There is an apparent lack of effort to mainstream gender and women’s issues into information and actions on self-determination and independence. Additionally, as the issue of self-determination is officially limited to sixteen territories, and the discourse is increasingly technical, an understanding of the situation of women in colonies and non-self-governing territories is often excluded.

The clearest example of positive change during the last ten years has been the establishment of a sovereign Timor-Leste on the 20 May 2002. Women were violently targeted during the more than twenty-five years of Indonesian occupation, and struggled side-by-side with men for independence. After the 1999 UN sponsored-referendum where the East Timorese voted overwhelmingly for independence, women have been a vital force in the reconstruction of the country. After the first elections, women made up twenty-seven percent of the Constituent Assembly. Numerous women’s NGOs have been working with women across the country to increase political participation; address the issue of domestic violence and rape; and promote education and training for women.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> A/56/61 (22 March 2001). <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/docs/56/a5661.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> A/AC.109/2004/18 (24 March 2004). <http://ods-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N04/285/52/PDF/N0428552.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>33</sup> UNIFEM, “Timor-Leste.” [http://www.womenwarpeace.org/timor\\_leste/timor\\_leste.htm](http://www.womenwarpeace.org/timor_leste/timor_leste.htm)

#### Areas for Future Action:

- § Increase efforts to raise public awareness regarding the situation of women in colonies and non-self-governing territories, including in the United Nations Department for Public Information and the Decolonization Unit of the United Nations Department for Public Affairs.
- § Increase international attention and pressure to implement the right to self-determination in the sixteen non-self-governing territories as well as other contested territories.

## Conclusion

*We are a generation of thorns. Memories of nights in rain and gripping fear creep to our dreams. Sleep should be the only place where there is no worry. It should be dreamland, hopeland. But our sleep knows not the vague images of paradise created from longing; there are images of ghosts of dead friends and relatives. The ones we watched pangas hack. Those we heard from our hiding places flogged to death. Those we see headless, limbless, noseless, lipless when we blink.*  
-Monica Arac de Nyeko, Uganda, [In the Stars](#)<sup>34</sup>

As long as we, as human beings, continue to initiate and perpetuate armed conflicts, women and girls will suffer the human rights abuses, sexual violence, displacement and oppression that are addressed in the Beijing Platform for Action. As we move into the twenty-first century, certain signs of hope can be seen: a reduction in the number of armed conflicts; the Mine Ban Convention; the International Criminal Court; Security Council Resolution 1325 on "Women, peace and security"; and the increasing attention and actions taken in the realm of women, gender, peace and security. However, we are far from being able to claim that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action has been implemented. Certain "Actions to be taken" have been fulfilled, but the global and broad nature of the Beijing strategic objectives inevitably mean that implementing the Declaration and Platform for Action is an on-going process. It is disheartening to note steps backwards including in the struggle to reduce military expenditures and the arms trade.

It is time to turn policy into practice. International legislation largely exists to protect and empower women in the context of armed conflict, and international and national actors have to be held accountable for its implementation. Non-governmental organizations have taken the lead in this field and their crucial work must be supported and replicated at the national, regional and international levels by both national governments and international organizations. The areas of women, gender, early warning and conflict prevention must become a priority in order to address the root causes of armed conflict rather than continuously operating in a reactive mode. It is crucial that the momentum from the Beijing Platform for Action, Security Council Resolution 1325 and other legislation continue to grow as we struggle to guarantee their implementation.

<sup>34</sup> Monica Arac de Nyeko, [In the stars](http://www.world.org/archive/archive.asp?ID=388) (11 June 2003). <http://www.world.org/archive/archive.asp?ID=388>

## Additional Areas of Concern

During the past ten years new issues have surfaced in the realm of women and armed conflict that are not specifically addressed in the Beijing Platform for Action. Overall, the language has shifted from “women” to “women and gender,” not to negate the specific role of women, but to include issues of masculinities and a broader understanding of gender relations in times of armed conflict. When addressing the issue of armed conflict much attention has recently been focused on gender and early warning mechanisms, conflict prevention and post accord reconstruction and peace-building. Though mentioned in passing in Beijing, these areas are vital to take into consideration when addressing women and armed conflict. In addition, the issue of the trafficking of women and girls has newly been placed in the international spotlight, as well as the need for gender training and codes of conduct for UN peacekeepers.

The devastating impact of small arms and light weapons (SALW) upon women, as well as women’s disarmament work, is increasingly being acknowledged. Though an international Programme of Action on SALW was adopted in July 2001, it only mentions grave concern regarding the negative consequences of the illicit small arms proliferation on women and the elderly.<sup>35</sup> The issues of militarization, as well as biological and chemical weapons, are also not specifically addressed in the Platform for Action.

“Human security” has become a much debated alternative to the traditional, militarized approach to security in that it takes into account issues such as health, education and social welfare from a perspective of human well-being. In addressing this critical area, the emerging human security discourse has increasingly emphasized the varied and complex causes of armed conflict, highlighting the need for protection and empowerment of women. The utility of periodic reviews of international commitments such as Cairo, Beijing, and the Millennium Development Goals is that we can re-evaluate and implement these agreements in the light of new and emerging issues.

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<sup>35</sup> A/CONF.192/15 (9-20 July 2001). <http://disarmament.un.org:8080/cab/poa.html>