



UN-INSTRAW Interview

On the National Action Planning Process on Women, Peace and Security in Spain

With Aurora Mejía, Ambassador on Special Mission for the Promotion of Gender Equality Policies

I. Preparing the Action Planning Process

1. UN-INSTRAW: “Where did the idea of drafting an action plan come from? Did civil society organizations advocate for a plan? Or the UN Mission in NY?”

AM: “Spain had assumed the commitment of drafting a National Action Plan on the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. In April of this year [2007], when I was appointed Ambassador on Special Mission for the Promotion of Gender Equality Policies, within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, we believed that the moment had arrived for carrying out such a commitment and that it was within the framework of the responsibilities inherent to this new post. Therefore, it has been one of my main activities during the last months.

The Permanent Representative of Spain to the United Nations recalled this year, amongst the activities to commemorate the approval of the Resolution, Spain’s commitment to formulate the Action Plan.”

2. UN-INSTRAW: “What was the goal/objective of writing an action plan on women, peace and security issues?”

AM: “One of the main objectives was to create awareness on the situation of women and girls who live in conflict zones, as well as to give proof of the commitments assumed by the Government of Spain to mitigate as much as possible the effects of these conflicts on the mentioned population. However, being aware about the possibility that women could be presented as victims and passive subjects, we have at all times wanted to highlight the active role of women, underlining the importance of their work in conflict prevention and resolution, as in general terms, in everything that refers to the strengthening of peace. In this sense, we wanted to highlight the need to increase women’s participation in peace missions and in decision-making posts within the entities responsible for carrying out such missions; as well as having women in conflict zones participating on equal terms as men, in missions for peacekeeping and the promotion of peace and security.”

3. UN-INSTRAW: "Why should countries develop action plans on women, peace and security issues? What are the advantages? Disadvantages?"

AM: "Although Resolution 1325 originates at the Security Council and relies on its own specific mandate, I believe to have two options to implement the Resolution in a specific country; either the Government in power adopts sporadic measures to apply it or you count on an Action Plan. I believe that complying with the Resolution will be much more systematic in the second case. The fact that many different people from different departments and administration will be involved in the process of formulating the Action Plan will be later of help in the development of other much more ambitious tasks related to the NAP. Drafting a NAP also means reflecting on ongoing activities and responsibilities of the ministries involved and the impact on possible consequences of women in our peacekeeping missions.

I believe that the formulation of an action plan is advantageous since it contributes to greater effectiveness of ongoing peacekeeping missions and the different tasks carried out by different ministries around these issues. One of our lessons learned has been the long work process, although it can be very beneficiary especially when the result is as satisfactory as in the case of Spain."

II. Drafting the Action Plan

4. UN-INSTRAW: "How long did it take to draft the plan, from when official approval was granted until it was publicly launched?"

AM: "We started to work on the Plan, as I said before, in April 2007 when I was appointed. At that time I started to establish contacts with other ministries and governmental departments, and we started to hold meetings in which we formulated and worked on first drafts. The final draft was approved by the Board of Ministries last November 30th, after a rich interministerial debate."

5. UN-INSTRAW: "Which bodies of government participated in drafting the plan?"

AM: "The Foreign Relations and Cooperation Ministry (with the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation as executing agency in the field of cooperation for development), the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (including the Women's Institute), Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education and Science and Ministry of Health and Consumption participated in the drafting of the Plan."

6. UN-INSTRAW: "Was a special taskforce or committee set up? What was its structure? Who was on the taskforce/committee? How did it function?"

AM: "Yes, from the beginning, a working Group was established with representatives from the ministries mentioned before. I chaired the meetings and I must say that the teamwork was very gratifying and satisfactory. The different meetings enriched and strengthened the first draft, and it has been very important to count on the different opinions and viewpoints of the other ministries. On the other hand, this collaboration has allowed us to learn about the different initiatives that each ministry was carrying out in fields related to Resolution 1325, as well as being aware of to what point we could advance with our proposals and the new challenges that would be set forth the moment when this Plan of Action would be put into effect.

Finally, this interministerial Group is the heart of the working Group that will be in charge of further follow-up and evaluation of the implementation of the Plan."

7. UN-INSTRAW: "How was civil society involved in the drafting of the plan? Were meetings or workshops held? When? What were the results? Was there sufficient involvement on the part of civil society?"

AM: "We have always been aware of the importance of involving the civil society in the process, and, for this reason, although they have not participated in the interministerial meetings, we have held conversations about the Plan with the main NGOs that work on the issue of women and armed conflict in Spain; especially with the person responsible of gender issues of the NGO Coordinator for Development. We wanted to count on her special criteria and we asked her to make the draft known amongst the persons that she believed were important. In addition, after having approved the Action Plan we held a meeting with representatives of the Gender Group of the NGO Coordinator for Development, in order to start planning the specific actions of this Action Plan in which they could be involved.

In this sense, our wish is to be open for new suggestions. We don't believe that the Plan will not have any more modifications than those that we have already proposed; on the contrary, we understand that it is a document open to new contributions and changes, and we know that in this field the civil society is always willing to enrich its content."

8. UN-INSTRAW: "Did you conduct any type of assessment or analysis of the existing implementation of SCR 1325 as part of the process of drafting the plan? Or will an assessment be conducted at a later point?"

AM: "Of course we have analyzed and debated different documents, analyzing what has been done to implement Resolution 1325, and it is something that we will keep in mind in the future, at the time that activities are initiated as well as in the follow-up and evaluation process."

9. UN-INSTRAW: "Did you consult with other countries that are developing Action Plans?"

AM: "We did not hold consultations at bilateral level, but we analyzed the different existing plans and as a result of the meeting on the Human Dimension of the OSCE in Varsovia that was held at the beginning of October, the Spanish presidency organized a "side event", that also served to analyze the British and Swiss experiences."

10. UN-INSTRAW: "What obstacles or challenges were there within the development process?"

AM: "We wanted that the process does not extend the given time frame too much because Spain was committed to formulate an Action Plan for the end of 2007 the latest. This implied the inherent difficulty of having to work quickly."

11. UN-INSTRAW: "What worked well? Good practice to recommend to other countries?"

AM: "I have already highlighted it but I want to mention again the excellent way in which the Working Group functioned. The communication was very good and I believe that I would recommend exactly this, to work in groups and to encourage a dynamic debate and the communication amongst all parts in order to prepare a good final document in which different points of view are taken into account. From the beginning we included many

ministerial departments. I believe that more than other countries. In this respect I would recommend a more inclusive group than an exclusive one. The more ministries feel committed, the richer that the Plan will be."

12. UN-INSTRAW: "*In hindsight, what would you have done differently?*"

AM: "If I had had more time, I would have chosen a longer and deeper consultation process with a greater participation by non-governmental organizations."

III. Implementation

13. UN-INSTRAW: "*How will the implementation of the plan be monitored and evaluated? Who will oversee the implementation?*"

AM: "We understand that in the implementation of an Action Plan is completely indispensable from its follow-up and evaluation process, which highlights achievements and things being done, detecting possible problems, suggesting solutions, and foreseeing difficult situations. In this sense, the interministerial group, jointly with representatives from the civil society will prepare a follow-up Report on an annual basis. We also want that the contents of the Resolution will reach the population in general, and we will publish information on the work that has been carried out.

The supervision will lay in the responsibility of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, through the post held by me."

14. UN-INSTRAW: "*Where will the funds to implement the plan come from?*"

Financial contributions come from each participating Ministry. Each one has foreseen many concrete activities and tasks. We understand that a large part of it will correspond to the area of cooperation for development, which at the same time prepares the Action Plan on Women and Peacebuilding of the Spanish Cooperation Agency.

15. UN-INSTRAW: "*Is there a time frame for implementation?*"

AM: "The Action Plan is a plan is a framework rather than a work plan, for which reason no concrete duration has been determined. Once approved, we want to start to work with the annual reports which I mentioned previously. However, we have preferred to keep the Plan with an indefinite duration, since we have not established a definite timeframe for the completion of relevant actions, in four or five, or ten years. Also, as I mentioned before, we understand that on the contrary, the Plan is an open document which can keep on growing."

16. UN-INSTRAW: "*What do you think are the main challenges for the implementation of the plan of action?*"

AM: "As I stated before, we consider the Plan a good framework to start working, but we now must focus on the concrete activities that we will start carrying out year after year, with indicators that allow us to do a good follow-up and evaluation and we expect to count on the support of the NGOs that have great interest in the realisation of the plan. We must keep good coordination and communication. And, of course, the big challenge is to see how the different measures are received by the populations to which the Action Plan is addressed and by the persons who are sent to peacekeeping missions."

UN-INSTRAW: "*Thank you very much!*"