

UN-INSTRAW Interview

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

With Bert Koenders, the Dutch Minister for Development Cooperation¹

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?”

B.K: “The current Dutch government has made gender issues an across-the-board priority. We believe that women’s rights are of concern to everyone. Based on extensive consultations with Dutch civil society, I made a firm decision that gender, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and fragile states would be priority areas for my development policy. As a result, the Pact of Schokland on UN resolution 1325 was signed in the summer of 2007 and a working group was formed to draft a national action plan.



Only six months later, on 4 December 2007, 15 NGOs and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defence and the Interior & Kingdom Relations launched the National Action Plan on resolution 1325 (NAP). We are taking a joint stand against the terrible violence in countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sudan.”

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

B.K: “The NAP’s primary objective was to establish a framework for cooperation among ministries, NGOs, women’s organisations, universities and think-tanks on gender and conflict and post-conflict situations.

During the consultations, the civil society representatives and I recognised that we all agree that gender inequality impedes development and is an obstacle to lasting peace. We also acknowledged that we need one another to implement government policies effectively. The action plan gives us a unique opportunity to build on one another’s strengths. It also gives us a forum for discussion and a place to bring

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people together from grassroots women's organisations, the military and other groups that may not have worked much with one another before. The NAP may thus lead to greater understanding among the Dutch."

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

B.K: "Women play multiple roles in conflict situations, extending well beyond the roles of caregivers and victims. For that reason, it is of crucial importance to build on women's potential in peace processes and ensure that women are included in processes of economic reconstruction, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR), and security sector reform (SSR). More than seven years have passed since resolution 1325 was unanimously adopted, and yet women are still not participating equally in peace and security initiatives. Any agreement is only as good as its implementation. An action plan sets the stage for actually implementing 1325.

The Dutch action plan is unique in the sense that it has been signed by both civil society organisations and the government, and that we have all agreed on a number of action points. This has the advantage of making us jointly accountable for fulfilling our collective commitments."

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?"

B.K: "The drafting process started in August 2007, and on 4 December 2007 the NAP was presented to the public. It is currently being published in Dutch, English and French.

The process that led to the NAP actually began in 2003, however, when the Women, Security and Conflict Task Force was created. This Task Force, comprised of civil society representatives and government officials, made several recommendations for national and international action. It continued its work until 2006 and inspired the process that resulted in the adoption of the NAP."

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

B.K: "As mentioned above, the Dutch government actively supports empowerment of women. The different Ministries complement one other's work in standing up for women's rights, here in the Netherlands and in our foreign policy. For example, as I am not in charge of peace missions, collaboration with the Ministry of Defence was a natural step. And our Minister of Education, Culture and Science was the central figure behind the government's policy document 'More opportunities for women: equal opportunities policy 2008-2011'. In short, building bridges within the government was a smooth process."

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?"

B.K: "The Women and Development Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs took on the task of coordinating the drafting of the action plan, and chaired a small committee consisting of representatives of NGOs, women's organisations, think-

tanks and universities, and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, the Interior, Defence and Education, Culture & Science. This broad spectrum of expertise and experience in the field of women, peace and security, brought together in a single committee, resulted in a thorough analysis, well-thought-out objectives and common commitments."

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?"

B.K: "Civil society organisations were actively involved from the beginning. A large number of organisations organised themselves in three platforms, which took on the task of coordinating input from the different NGOs. Both civil society organisations and government participated in the drafting sessions."

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?"

B.K: "We scrutinised action plans from other countries and took stock of our own programmes on gender in conflict and post-conflict situations. The drafting process itself was analytical and consultative, thanks to its inclusion of a wide variety of actors. The result is a set of quantifiable action points, which will enable us to monitor the implementation of our own commitments and those of all the NAP's signatories."

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

B.K: "The challenge of bringing together and uniting all the different players was in fact an asset in developing the action plan. Bringing together military attachés and women activists gave us a unique opportunity and enriched the process. We found that while different participants may speak a different language (metaphorically speaking) and use different methods, we share the same ultimate goal. The challenge now is to back up our commitments with money. I have committed myself to increasing the budget to support gender equality, protect women's rights and end violence against women."

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

B.K: "Doing a reality check. Knowing what is happening on the ground. Listening to women and girls in conflict areas. Women know better than anyone else what a society truly needs to change for the better. Recently I visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Even though I knew all the statistics, I was horrified by what I saw in the DRC's refugee camps and hospitals. I would urge everyone, governments and civil society together, to translate our consternation into action. So far, several countries have developed national action plans. I would encourage all other UN member states to formulate and implement action plans on resolution 1325."

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

B.K: "I am very proud of the process and of the result. It is too early to judge what we should have done differently. Time will tell."

III: Implementation

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

B.K: "The signatories of the NAP will meet twice a year. The first such meeting, scheduled for March 2008, will survey the current state of affairs and the plans of the organisations involved. This will serve as a baseline. Progress will be discussed at subsequent biannual meetings coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs."

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

B.K: "Gender is one of my four development priorities. I have reserved an additional €75 million for the next three years to contribute to achieving MDG 3. This money will be spent primarily on combating violence against women, ending impunity, striving for gender equality and, of course, implementing the NAP action points. In addition, the government has launched Project 2015 to make up the arrears in achieving the eight MDGs. I have also set up a fund to which I have allocated extra resources for DDR and SSR."

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

B.K: "The overall time frame is four years, from 2008 up to 2011, although the plan explicitly states that our efforts on these action points will not end in 2011. The NAP is primarily a framework for cooperation, which sets out steps to be taken in the short and long term."

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

B.K: "The main challenge will be to achieve lasting change, obtain and sustain commitment from political leaders worldwide, adopt and implement laws that protect women, train and educate people, change attitudes towards traditional gender roles and empower women and girls."