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Show me the Progress: Women in Diplomacy and International Affairs Resolution 1325 and Beyond

By Angela Kane

History has been dominated by powerful men. Power and the male gender were one and the same, and the occasional strong woman was memorable because she was so unusual in a world where women were considered the lesser sex.

Yet history has also shown us great and influential – and long-reigning - women

monarchs: in the UK, Queen Elizabeth I, Queen Victoria, now Queen Elizabeth II. Austria celebrated the 300th birth anniversary of Queen Maria Theresia, and the commemoration of her birth sparked many events with the title: “Powerful Women in History”. And think of powerful heads of State like Indira Gandhi, Golda Meir, Margaret Thatcher, Helen Clark, Mary

Robinson, now Angela Merkel and Jacinda Ardern in New Zealand.

Yet, women in power are still not the norm – women are under-represented in many walks of life: as leaders, as negotiators, as politicians, as CEOs, as parliamentarians – just to mention a few of the occupations where we have far less than our share of 50% of the population. Few women occupy the prestigious “corner office” from where power emanates. Few women are at the table when decisions are being taken.

It is really a matter of catching up: men had the vote long before women, and even in Europe, women mostly obtained the vote in the 20th century – the “suffragettes” of those days had to fight for their rights; they were belittled and harassed, yet they persisted – and won the right to vote. Even in enlightened Switzerland, women gained the vote only in 1971. In Saudi Arabia, women were first allowed to vote in the municipal elections four years ago. Getting the vote for women was never easy, and I am reminded of this history when I see today’s struggle for women to get elected to public office.

International Women’s Day is being observed every year in many countries. Let us not forget that it was first held over 100 years ago, in 1914. In Germany, my own country, women did not win the right to vote until 1918.

Let us also not forget that the UN Charter was the first international document to inscribe the equal rights of men and women as part of fundamental human rights. Recent research showed that three women delegates participated in the San Francisco Conference that adopted the UN Charter in 1945. They were all from Latin American countries: Brazil, the Dominican Republic and Uruguay. Their leader was Bertha Lutz from Brazil and she, together with the other two women delegates and the few women

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delegates who participated, demanded an explicit reference to women’s rights in the Charter¹.

It is not surprising when we look at the figures: delegates to the San Francisco conference were primarily men: out of 850 delegates, only four women signed the Charter. And of the 50 countries represented, women had voting rights in only 30 of them. Can you imagine the difficulties of promoting the principle of gender equality in such a group?

I found it fascinating to learn that gender equality was not an idea at San Francisco that came from the West; in fact, not only was the West opposed to have gender equality in the agenda, but they also tried to remove it from Article 8 of the Charter, which says that women and men can participate equally in all UN bodies. In her memoir, Lutz wrote that delegates from the US and UK told her “not to ask for anything for women in the Charter since that would be a very vulgar thing to do”. Yet Lutz and the other women delegates persisted, and we now have several references to the equality of women and men in the Charter, as well as a reference to non-discrimination

¹ “Women and the UN Charter”, Centre for International Studies and Diplomacy, SOAS University of London, see online at: <https://www.soas.c.uk/cisd/research/women-in-diplomacy/women-in-the-un-charter/>

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on the basis of sex. This is a strong legacy, as is Bertha Lutz's advocacy for an autonomous Commission on women's rights – which would become the Commission on the Status of Women that was created in 1946, though it was initially established as a Sub-Commission under the Human Rights Commission).

Let me recall that until that year – 1946 - women were excluded from the British Foreign Service on the grounds that they would not be taken seriously by foreign governments and that they would create “insurmountable administrative difficulties”. I often wondered what men meant by “administrative difficulties”. In the UN, for example, as our numbers increased, women had to fight for additional washrooms in the proximity to the General Assembly and other august meeting halls, as only men participated in large numbers in conferences and the women's lavatories were tucked away in some remote corner, often resulting in long walks to the location and considerable waiting time due to the lines that formed.

Other constraints on women persisted far too long: in many countries, even if women were admitted to the Foreign Service, they had to resign when getting married – a practice that was considered normal, as no married woman was supposed to work, particularly if she had children.

Even today, women taking leadership roles in diplomacy remains an unpopular concept among diplomats in many parts of the world. Out of 193 countries, 21 have female

heads of state. Eleven of these countries are here in Europe. Many countries have never had a woman head of State. Only four countries in the world have at least 50 percent women in the national legislature. Worldwide, the proportion of women in national parliaments is 24%. Clearly, there is still a long way to go.

I should note that in 2015, the overall percentage in national parliaments stood at 22.6%, and that means that in the last five years, the increase was just one percent. Impediments to women running for office are not only gender bias, but also the lack of adequate campaign financing and the lack of commitment from the political parties in changing the status quo, more role models for girls and young women to emulate and aspire to.

Let me give you some more sobering statistics: according to Catalyst.org, of the Fortune 500 companies, only 6% of CEOs were women (a one-point increase in five years!), and 26% were senior corporate managers, an increase of 2% since 2015.

It is clear that we need more women who are powerful and who are visible. More heads of State, more legislators, more women in the boardroom. That is what societies need today.

Women, Peace and Security in the United Nations: the 1325 Agenda at 20

Let me now turn to Resolution 1325 which had a long history of gestation. When it was adopted in 2000, twenty-five years had passed after the First World Conference on Women was held in Mexico, three more World Conferences had followed (in Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985, Beijing 1995), The first conference on

women took place in Mexico City in 1975 and a decade for women was proclaimed, yet the aims of the conference – and the decade – were more oriented towards development cooperation and the economic assistance for women. One important step was the declaration of 8 March as International Women’s Day that allowed women to use this occasion for advocacy and campaigning for equal rights and an increase in senior-level appointments for women.

In the ensuing years, the General Assembly repeatedly called for higher percentage of women in UN management and senior positions, yet at the end of the 1990s only 7.1% of positions at the D-1 level and higher were held by women. In 2000, no woman was seated at the Security Council table, and the number of women ambassadors to the UN was in the single digits.

Resolution 1325 had three goals:

- (i) To increase representation and participation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional, and international institutions and mechanisms for conflict prevention, conflict management, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding (op. paras. 1-5);
- (ii) To bring a gender perspective to the planning and implementation of peace operations and peace negotiations (gender-sensitive training of personnel, an expanded role of women as peacekeepers etc), (op. paras. 6-9); and
- (iii) To increase attention to the protection and respect of women’s rights, including protection against gender-based violence in situations of armed conflict (op. paras. 10-14).

Resolution 1325 marked the formalization of the Security Council’s recognition that women were crucial to peace processes and international security, though the initial focus was more on women as victims of under-development.

Since the adoption, the Security Council has regularly monitored the implementation

of the resolution, culminating in 2013 in the request to the Secretary-General to conduct a review with regard to the implementation². This review was to

- (i) identify the gaps and challenges; and to
- (ii) identify emerging trends and priorities for action.

The global study was completed in 2015 and presented to the Security Council for consideration.

Looking back twenty years, one has to underline how much the world has changed and become increasingly militarized. It has become more violent, more conflict-ridden, more prone to greater readiness to use force – and in many cases less respect has been shown for protection of civilians, especially women and children.

Yet I would like to focus on the positive: the adoption of resolution 1325 was clearly a watershed for the international community. It placed women and the question of gender firmly on the agenda and made it part of the formal UN discourse on security. The Outcome Document of the World Summit³ in 2005 included a paragraph which recognized “the important role of

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²S/RES/2122 of 18 October 2013

³A/RES/60/1 of 24 October 2

women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and peacebuilding” and stressed “the need to increase their role in decision-making at all levels”.

This commitment was also reinforced when the Peacebuilding Commission was established in late 2005, followed in 2008 by Security Council resolution 1820 which focused specifically on sexual violence in armed conflict, a topic that has since been addressed regularly in the Council discussions on resolution 1325 and peacekeeping mandates.

It is thus clear rather that women in peace and security (WPS) has become a central part of the agenda, both on the political front as well as in humanitarian and social development contexts. It is a topic that cannot be shunned. I should also like to note that resolution 1325 was the first of the so-called “thematic resolutions”; the “thematic issues” on the Security Council’s agenda now number ten⁴ and go far beyond the country-specific resolutions and their narrow focus that used to be the staple of Security Council considerations.

References to the women, peace and security agenda have been included in other thematic resolutions⁵ as well as in the mandates of peace operations. It has even found its way onto the agenda of the 1533 DRC Sanctions Committee when it listed new entities and individuals, including for sexual violence – a trend that was replicated when the Council responded to the deteriorating situation in the Central African Republic.

Let me now highlight a few of the results of the High-Level Review on Women, Peace and Security: 15 Years of Security Council Resolution 1325⁶, a 420-page assessment of developments since 2000 and its

implementation. Let me also add that at the time, in 2015, women made up only 2% of mediators, 5% of signatories and 8% of negotiators – indicating the exclusive male nature of formal peace processes.

Its executive summary sets out ten specific recommendations and concludes with a set of general recommendations for policy guidance and advocacy. The ten recommendations are:

1. prevention of conflict must be the priority, not the use of force;
2. resolution 1325 is a human rights mandate;
3. women’s participation is key to sustainable peace;
4. perpetrators must be held accountable and justice must be transformative;
5. localization of approaches and inclusive and participatory processes are crucial to the success of national and international peace efforts;
6. supporting women peacebuilders and respecting their autonomy is one important way to counter extremism;
7. all key actors must play their role;
8. a gender lens must be introduced into all aspects of the work of the Security Council;
9. the persistent failure to adequately finance the women, peace and security agenda must be addressed; and
10. a strong gender architecture at the United Nations is essential.

In response to the Global Study, the Secretary-General’s issued his own report⁷, in which he linked the Study to the three other review processes, namely the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations⁸, the Advisory Group of Experts on the 2015 Review of the United

⁴ Protection of Civilians; Women, Peace and Security; Children and Armed Conflict; Counter-Terrorism; Arms Control and Disarmament; Justice and Criminal Accountability; Peacebuilding; Peacekeeping; Peacemaking; UN Institutional Issues.

⁵ See S/RES/2117 on small arms; S/RES/2129 on counter-terrorism; and S/RES/2086 on peacekeeping. 005

⁶ <http://wps.unwomen.org/en/highlights>

⁷ S/2015/716 of 16 September 2015

⁸ S/2015/446

Nations Peacebuilding Architecture⁹, and the consultations for the 2016 Humanitarian Summit. It is a useful overview of developments from the UN's perspective, with much of the focus on gender as a human rights and development issue rather than an emphasis on the political participation of women which I would have liked to see more highlighted.

And here is really the issue that in my opinion needs to be addressed: the “development lens” – even at times the “women-as-victims lens” - has been the traditional approach to gender and this has also been manifest in the focus of the assessment of the implementation of resolution 1325. The language in the study and the SG's report is often aspirational, urging action, suggesting steps to be taken, rather than reporting on the practical successes of implementation. The level of consciousness of gender is high, yet there is a wide gap between exhortation and concrete outcomes.

Following the 2015 study, the Security Council established an Informal Experts Group (IEG) on Women, Peace and Security¹⁰ to facilitate a more systematic approach and to enable greater oversight and coordination of implementation efforts. Yet the IEG's status as an expert group downgrades its visibility: the IEG co-chairs are not included in the list of Security Council subsidiary bodies, and meetings are not reflected on the Council's program of work. Neither is there an obligation for Member States to attend. While most do, China and Russia are mostly absent¹¹.

While the normative framework of 1325 has been firmly established, there is pushback by Member States and extensive negotiations take place on inclusion of language in

resolutions. Sweden, as Security Council member for 2017-2018, had declared a “feminist foreign policy” under Foreign Minister Wallstrom and was very active on 1325 issues. But even States which are generally supportive of gender issues are not always in agreement on wording.

In April 2019, for example, the US threatened to veto a draft resolution on conflict-related violence over language on sexual and reproductive health – even though the same language had already been included in past Security Council decisions. Though the resolution was ultimately adopted¹², the negotiations proved extremely difficult and China and Russia abstained in the voting.

Similarly, contentious negotiations took place in October 2019 ahead of the adoption of resolution 2493¹³ on the WPS. While the resolution was finally adopted by consensus, it has become clear that further expansion of the WPS agenda is not conducive to progress at this time. Even the suggestion to have the IEG submit annual updates on progress towards implementation of the recommendations had to be taken out of the draft.

Women have long been excluded from arms control, the military, as well as diplomacy. A recent Security Council resolution focused on women in peacekeeping¹⁴, and while not a WPS resolution in the strictest sense, I see it as furthering a nuanced discussion of women as actors. Previously, calls to increase women's participation in peacekeeping relied on gendered stereotypes, on their empathy, on other “soft skills” and their role as protectors of women, girls and children. Such stereotypical language is missing from resolution 2538 and instead stresses their operational effectiveness, a subtle yet

⁹ S/2015/490

¹⁰ S/RES/2242 of 13 October 2015 and IEG guidelines S/2016/1106

¹¹ “Women, Peace and Security: The Agenda at 20”; Security Council Report, Research Report, June 2020, online at www.securitycouncilreport.org

¹² S/RES/2467 of 23 April 2019

¹³ S/RES/2493 of 29 October 2019

¹⁴ S/RES/2538 of 28 August 2020

meaningful change. Equally meaningful is the fact that 97 countries co-sponsored the resolution, including all fifteen Security Council members.

In October 2020, Russia chaired the Security Council and thus had the responsibility to coordinate the drafting of a resolution commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. While the focus of the open debate was on “better implementation”, the consultations on a draft resolution continued the divisive debates of 2019 among Council members.

A general point of criticism by some Council members – the Dominican Republic, the EU members and the UK – was that the draft consisted almost exclusively of previously agreed language, thus not adding any value. Their proposal to issue a presidential statement instead was rejected by Russia. The difficult dynamics resulted to the failure to adopt the draft resolution tabled by Russia; it only received five affirmative votes, and ten abstentions.

Looking to the future

Despite the recent developments in the Security Council, the last 20 years have accomplished much in the 1325 agenda. It is easy to be critical: what is important is to look ahead and take concrete steps to further the goals.

The UN now has tools in the Council’s toolbox to address the issue of gender in peace and security (appoint more gender advisers in peace operations, impose targeted measures for sexual violence, interact more consistently with the Special Representative on Sexual Violence, stress gender during visiting missions, etc.), though these tools have not been applied consistently. One aspect that stands out

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is the increased involvement of civil society groups, whose representatives have been regularly invited to Council sessions and briefed the members, even if it was in an Arria Formula setting.

Gender is firmly rooted in the international security agenda, even if some states only grudgingly tolerate it. The establishment of UN Women in 2010, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, reinforced the gender agenda, and the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) further rooted the WPS development aims.

Ahead of the 20th anniversary, the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, an umbrella organization of 18 international NGOs advocating for equal and meaningful participation of women in international peace and security, published a “road map” with recommendation for the implementation of the WPS agenda¹⁵. It is ambitious and far-reaching and while it was not possible for the Security Council support the program at its annual consideration of the 1325 resolution (which traditionally takes place in October each year), it is further proof that the gains made over twenty years, the progress made in the normative framework and the expectations of

¹⁵ 2020 Civil Society Roadmap on Women, Peace and Security, online at www.womenpeacesecurity.org

the WPS agenda are a fact – which could also be seen in the strong statements that were made by Council members during the October open debate on this issue.

In the light of divisions among Council members, what could be the most effective way forward? Steps could include: using the established tool box, specific briefings on WPS issues by civil society, monitoring of the implementation of resolutions, country-specific reporting on WPS issues, expansion of listing criteria for sanctions regimes to include sexual and gender-based violence, and the regular raising of WPS issues in political briefings.

It is imperative, however, not to lose sight of the divisions that exist among Member States, in the Security Council and the

membership at large. While resolution 1325 was adopted in the Security Council, questions have been raised, particularly by China and Russia, whether the mandate, especially relating to sexual violence in conflict, properly belongs in the Security Council. The states supporting the WPS agenda therefore may have to weigh carefully how best to proceed. Using the individual peace operations mandates seem to be the most promising effort. Rather than anchoring resolutions in the WPS framework, placing the discussion in specific country or peacekeeping context allows for a deeper discussion during negotiations of the text and would hopefully lessen gender stereotyping in the final outcome.



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