

REPORT: COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

UN Headquarters | March 2009

The 53rd Session of the [Commission on the Status of Women](#) (March 2-13) explored as its priority theme: “The Equal Sharing of Responsibilities between Women and Men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS.” The Commission further examined the Equal Participation of Women and Men in Decision-Making Processes, Women in Peacekeeping and Women in Disarmament. We cover these themes below; first providing key recommendations, followed by a full report of panel presentations.

Women in Decision-Making

The Council of Europe organized an event on the theme of “Equal Participation of Women and Men in Decision-Making Processes at all Levels.” Additionally, the Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations hosted a panel on women’s decision-making in the context of decentralization, and the International Federation of University Women assessed both the normative and expediency arguments in favor of including women in all decision-making processes.

Global Action had previously sponsored a workshop on women in leadership and decision-making at the UN. Please [click here](#) for the full report.

Key Recommendations:

- It is necessary to make a clear distinction between progress at the parliamentary and local levels, for while some progress has been made on the national scene, equality in decision-making more rarely reaches local governing bodies.
- Women’s organizations should have a higher profile, as they are important catalysts for progress at the local and community levels.
- Ensuring women’s participation is not only a matter of legislation; awareness raising campaigns will also be needed to combat the stereotype that women are not qualified to participate in the political arena.
- Decentralization has the potential to strengthen democracy and to ensure equitable access to water, land, health services and education; yet it is important to recognize that decentralization does not inherently guarantee gender equality.
- National frameworks for gender equality (such a quota systems) ought to be encouraged; however, bottom-up strategies must also be employed to compensate for the limitations of such frameworks.

Women in Peacekeeping

The United Nations University hosted a panel session to highlight the role of women in peacekeeping operations and to assess progress toward the full implementation of SCR 1325. Panelists included a former female peacekeeper, representatives from the United Nations Police Division and Ms. Theresa Kambobe, a Gender Trainer in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO).

Global Action recently engaged in workshops with peacekeepers in Liberia to document developments in women's participation in peacekeeping. Please [click here](#) for the full report.

Key Recommendations:

- Recruitment efforts within Troop and Police Contributing States will need to address the traditional, cultural impediments to women's participation in armed and police forces.
- Training programs need to be developed for women in the armed forces, such that they gain the competencies and experience to assume leadership roles, both within their national force and in peacekeeping operations.
- Develop a Gender Training strategy, one which considers the various levels of training and which standardizes the training materials used at the mission level.
- Enhance the capacity for gender mainstreaming both at Headquarters and at the field level.
- Engage in research, virtual discussions, and partnerships with civil society to identify and address the obstacles to women's participation and advancement in peacekeeping.

Women and Disarmament

The NGO Working Group on Disarmament, Peace and Security and the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security hosted a panel to discuss the local-level implementation of SCR 1325 and the connections between women and disarmament. Global Action also participated in a brown bag seminar, coordinated by the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, on the same theme.

Key Recommendations:

- Women's organizations should stress the linkages between disarmament and women's issues to capitalize on media attention on armed violence and to ensure that National Action Plans on small arms make explicit reference to violence against women.
- The Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process should be informed by SCR 1325 and a gender component should be expressly included in the DDR mandate. Civil society and women's organization ought to be consulted, to ensure that the DDR process is inclusive of and accountable to women.
- Due to the stigma associated with sexual exploitation and the consequent difficulty of returning to one's community, a parallel yet distinct process to DDR should be developed.
- Even in post-conflict societies, there is a need to control access to guns and to assess how guns licenses are issued.

EQUAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AND MEN IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES AT ALL LEVELS

New York | March 3rd, 2009

The Council of Europe, along with the Ministry for Equality of Spain and the Permanent Representation of Spain to the UN, organized an event on the theme of “Equal Participation of Women and Men in Decision-Making Processes at all Levels.” Spanish Ambassador Juan Antonio Yáñez-Barnuevo opened the panel by observing that in order to achieve democratic systems which are genuinely participatory, it is mandatory that women are included in decision-making in both political and public life. This sentiment was reiterated by panelist Maud de Boer Buquicchio, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, who eloquently argued that “equality is not a privilege or concession; rather, a human right and precondition for genuine democracy.” Other panelists spoke from an expediency standpoint, arguing that the quality of political and economic decisions is enhanced when women are included as decision-makers.

Ms. Buquicchio deemed women’s exclusion a “missed opportunity” for failing to capitalize on the distinctive knowledge and experience that women have to offer. In the long term, a failure to incorporate women into decision-making processes poses an obstacle to social and economic development. As evidence of that argument, Ms. Buquicchio noted that companies with more women in decision-making positions are faring better in the current economic crisis. This difference in performance has been attributed to the behavior of female managers, who are reportedly less likely to make risky decisions.

Ms. Buquicchio was careful in her definition of gender equality: it is not sufficient that women are taken into consideration if the decisions are still carried out exclusively or predominantly by men; rather, gender equality is about women making the decisions themselves. She further noted that ensuring women’s participation is not only a matter of legislation; rather, awareness raising campaigns will be needed to combat the stereotype that women are not qualified to participate in the political arena.

Ms. Buquicchio offered four examples of positive developments for women’s participation:

- Spain has recently achieved a majority of women (54%) in government;
- Norway has imposed regulations on the private sector to ensure women’s participation;
- Members of the Council of Europe are denied a vote if no women are included in their delegation;
- Indian law stipulates that rural councils must be composed of one third women and that women should head one third of these councils.

Ms. Bibiana Aído Almagro, the Spanish Minister for Equality, called for a new model of governance, in which transparency, participation and inclusion are guaranteed; the talents and capacities of both women and men are employed to achieve economic, social and political efficacy; and in which all share in the decision-making opportunities and responsibilities. Importantly, Ms. Almagro observed that the increased presence of women in decision-making positions in Spain has resulted in a record number of agencies addressing issues that affect women.

Ms. Almagro suggested that more attention be given to the length of women’s posts in decision-making roles, as she has noted that women tend to be regarded as interchangeable, whereas men in leadership roles are revered as irreplaceable.

Ms. Lotte Grepp Knutsen of Norway's Ministry of Children and Equality noted that her country is often regarded as a model for gender equality in politics; and indeed, by 1986, Norway boasted a female Prime Minister and women constituting 40% of the ministry. Still, Ms. Lotte maintains that Norway faces certain challenges to gender equality, as evidenced by the fact that in the 20 intervening years Norway has yet to achieve a 50-50 gender balance in government.

Ms. Lotte also clarified the misconception that Norway is a country of quotas. Though it is the case that Norway imposes a quota system on the private sector (company boards are required to have a minimum of 40% representation of each gender), no quota for parliament members currently exists. Ultimately, Ms. Lotte maintains that the culture of politics must be transformed to allow both men and women to pursue a career in politics, while maintaining a family life.

WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING, INCLUDING DECENTRALIZATION

New York | March 5th, 2009

The Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations organized an event to explore how decentralization impacts the role of women in local decision-making. The panel served as a follow-up to a conference held in Mexico City, in which parliamentarians, researchers and activists discussed local power and women's rights.

In reporting on the outcomes of that conference, Rocío García Gaytán, the President of Mexico's National Institute for Women, identified benefits to decentralization while also acknowledging its limitations. Decentralization has the potential to strengthen democracy and to ensure equitable access to water, land, health services and education. It ought not, however, to be considered a panacea, particularly with respect to women. Ms. Gaytán maintains that decentralization does not necessarily improve or increase women's access to or participation in local power.

Ms. Seema Kulkarni, of the Society for Promoting Participative Eco-System Management in India, reported on a study which asked whether decentralized water governance improves women's access to water. The study determined that, though access did expand and women's presence in the public sphere improved, significant inequities due to class, caste, age, and marital status persist. Women are tasked with keeping the water infrastructure clean and with collecting water tariffs; thus, women's responsibilities reinforce traditional gender dichotomies.

In assessing decentralization of health services program in Paraguay, Dr. Edgar Gimenez Caballero cautioned that decentralization is to be viewed as a means and not an end, particularly as it does not inherently guarantee gender equality. The Paraguayan public health program sought to strengthen the capacity of local medical and dental services and identified sexual and reproductive health as a priority. The program reflects the principles of universality, completeness, equality and participation, which Paraguay strives to incorporate in its new health policies.

Alison Todes reported on “Women, Decentralization and Integrated Development Planning in South Africa” A strong and vocal women’s movement in the 1990s successfully lobbied for national guidelines which ensure the inclusion of women in politics. While South Africa’s constitution is to be commended for its explicit commitment to gender equality, this professed priority has not been adequately incorporated into the structures of local government. Ms. Todes offered two explanations for this disparity: first, women’s organizations have focused their efforts primarily on the national level and second, it is indicative of a mentality that gender is a “luxury” issue, which can be postponed until after more pressing problems have been addressed. A further concern in South Africa is that women depend on political parties to be elected and are therefore beholden to party interests once in office. Ms. Todes concluded that national frameworks for gender equality ought to be encouraged, but that bottom-up strategies must also be employed to compensate for the limitations of such frameworks.

EQUALITY IN DECISION-MAKING, ATTAINABLE AT LAST?

New York | March 4th, 2009

The International Federation of University Women sponsored an event, entitled “Equality in Decision-Making, Attainable at Last,” that brought together panelists from a variety of backgrounds to discuss what progress has been made and what steps must still be taken.

Ms. Jane Hodges, Directors of the ILO Bureau for Gender Equality, began by highlighting that the quality of decision-making is enhanced if both men and women are involved. Norway has recently undertaken a “Female Futures” project to plot levels of productivity and the quality of decisions that are made when women are involved.

Nordic countries are often praised for their progress toward gender equality, in both the public and private sectors; but Ms. Hodges pointed out that important progress is also being made in Latin America where women were appointed first as ministers for women’s affairs and are then able to transition to other ministries, even to the presidency. Ms. Hodges noted that it is important to distinguish between the parliamentary and local levels, for while progress has been made on the national scene, equality in decision-making rarely reaches local governing bodies.

Ms. Hodges spoke of the need to strictly enforce measures for protecting women and girls against trafficking and forced labor. Recent trends in forced labor include: exploitation of younger girls, for more indecent work; crueler treatment; and the use of more deceiving recruitment tactics. In combating trafficking of persons and forced labor, it is important to link it to the broader issue of migration and to keep in mind the female dimension of the economic downturn.

Dan Seymour, Chief of UNICEF Gender and Rights Unit, noted that greater representation of women in positions of public office serves to change attitudes more generally regarding the role and potential of women in decision-making. A study of women in legislatures established that women representatives are more likely to give priority to issues that affect women and children. Greater involvement of women in the brokering of

peace agreements is directly correlated to the sustainability and durability of the agreement itself, in part because women embrace a more inclusive approach to security.

Mr. Seymour identified several steps that will serve to promote women's participation in decision-making: we must ensure that women have a greater voice in household and community decisions; regard education as vital and as opening the door to other opportunities; recognize that young girls face a double exclusion, being both women and children; empower women's ngos as important catalysts for progress at the local and community level; put in place enabling factors such as quotas; and identify the key levers for change and for empowering women, such as increasing job opportunities.

Mr. Seymour concluded by stating that ultimately women's participation is a matter of fundamental, not instrumental, importance. Women must be included in decision-making not only because doing so results in better outcomes, but because it is their right. He nevertheless acknowledged that the expediency argument can help to "sell" the idea of women's participation to reluctant audiences.

A young woman from Indonesia, now attending high school in New York, spoke of the need to empower women and girls at every level and identified equal access to education as the first critical step. She expressed particular concern for domestic servants, who are denied opportunities and freedoms and are some of the most negatively affected in times of economic crisis.

Dr. Mary Purcell, a former president of IFUW, observed that women are oftentimes more reluctant than men to fundraise for themselves and are less likely to consider themselves properly prepared for political office. She emphasized the importance of mentoring young women and of cultivating a support system to allow women to balance family life with a career in politics.

BLUE HELMETTES: THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN UN PEACEKEEPING

New York | March 9th, 2009

The United Nations University hosted a panel session to highlight the role of women in peacekeeping operations and to assess progress toward the full implementation of SCR 1325.

Asha Castleberry, a First Lieutenant in the U.S. Armed Forces, spoke from her personal experience as a peacekeeper in the joint mission in Managua, Nicaragua. Of the 400 peacekeepers deployed, Lieutenant Castleberry was one of only 10 women and not one of those women served in a leadership role; rather, they were assigned to posts in public affairs or military intelligence. As a consequence, Lieutenant Castleberry perceived a lack of gender perspective in policy decisions and an inability to underscore the importance of gender equality when working with the civilian population.

Lieutenant Castleberry offered several recommendations, aimed particularly at Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs). Recruitment efforts within the TCCs themselves will need to address the traditional and cultural impediments to women's participation in armed forces. Training programs ought to be developed for those women in the armed forces, such that they gain the competencies and experience to assume leadership roles, both within their national force and in peacekeeping operations. Lieutenant Castleberry also highlighted the need to incorporate and improve gender-sensitivity training programs for UN peacekeepers.

Olabisi Kolawole and Andrew Carpenter, both of the Police Division of DPKO, identified the challenges their department faces in increasing women's participation and proposed strategies for effectively implementing SRC 1325. Ms. Kolawole noted that the gender imbalance in the UN Police Force is largely a product of the low representation of women in domestic police forces (approximately 30%). Similarly, the lack of women in UN Police leadership roles reflects certain national barriers to women's advancement.

Echoing the recommendations of Lieutenant Castleberry, Ms. Kolawole emphasized the need identify obstacles which prevent Police Contributing Countries (PCCs) from deploying female officers and encouraged specialized training programs which would qualify female police officers for international deployment. Ms. Kolawole suggested that women may lack the necessary skills, such as driving, shooting or even education, to serve as police officer. Furthermore, cultural conceptions of gender roles may discourage or prohibit women from pursuing career in the police force.

Mr. Carpenter, the Chief of the Strategic Policy and Development Section, noted that for policing to be successful, it must be reflective of society it serves and thus the underrepresentation of women in UN policing undermines the effectiveness of the missions. The presence of female police officers also serves to improve the sensitivity and response to sexual violence and offers a positive illustration of gender equality for the host country.

In order to achieve a gender balance, the Police Division will strive to improve networking and trainings with women's police associations; will identify the obstacles to women's participation as police officers, through research and virtual discussions; and will intensify advocacy efforts to PCCs, for if they do not nominate women, DPKO cannot deploy women.

In assessing the Department of Peacekeeping Operation's (DPKO) progress in promoting women's participation and leadership, Ms. Theresa Kambobe reported that although a gender balance is very nearly achieved at the P2 and P3 levels, the parity greatly decreases in the more senior levels of P4 and P5. At the moment only two SRSGs are women (Liberia and Nepal) and six Deputy SRSGs are women. In an effort to better incorporate a gender perspective in peacekeeping, 10 of the 18 missions currently deployed have a dedicated gender capacity and 7 have gender focal points.

DPKO has instituted a Senior Leadership Appointment Section, charged with identifying qualified women candidates and ensuring they are placed on 'short lists' for leadership positions. DPKO is also working to encourage women to apply for non-traditional roles, in logistics for example.

Ms. Kambobe identified certain challenges to retention of women, including the number of posts designated as non-family and/or hardship, noting that women are affected differently and disproportionately in these circumstances. Women continue to face challenges to advancement, including the perception that the UN is an "Old Boys" network, which discourages women from promoting themselves, and the cultural and technical barriers which prohibit women from assuming non-traditional roles.

The panelists see cause for optimism, noting that as mission mandates improve and evolve, to include proactive responsibilities such as restructuring and reforming post-conflict societies, a more specialized staff will be needed and new job opportunities will become available. This will hopefully assist in combating the "Old Boys Club" and in promoting women to leadership roles.

Steps forward ought to include: improving mobility, at least through the middle-management level, to ensure that women are retained; expanding outreach efforts to recruit qualified women; encouraging Member States to nominate more women; and training national staff so that sufficiently educated and qualified women are available. Ms. Kambobe concluded by reiterating that increasing the number of women alone is an insufficient goal; rather, the number of women in senior-level positions must be improved.

WOMEN AND DISARMAMENT

New York | March 6th, 2009

The NGO Working Group on Disarmament, Peace and Security and the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security hosted a panel to discuss the theme of “Women and Disarmament.”

Rebecca Peters, the Director of International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), explained that her organization works to understand the problem of gun violence from the perspective of women and children, opting to prioritize human security rather than national security. Though more men than women are killed in armed conflict, women make up a majority of those affected by armed conflict. Ms. Peters identified the characteristics that make women more successful at affecting change: women are more practical, less egotistical, and are accustomed to working without pay and with very limited resources. Ms. Peters noted that in order to effectively address domestic violence, the link between guns and masculinity must first be broken.

Layla Alkhafaji, of the Al-Hakim Foundation in Iraq, began by sharing a bit of her personal history as a former political prisoner under Saddam Hussein’s regime. Now a member of Iraq’s parliament, Ms. Alkhafaji works to compensate the victims of terrorist action; to ensure young adults are given the education they were deprived due to years of violence; and advocate for more women in the police force. Iraq has adopted a quota system, which requires that provincial councils set aside 25% of seats for women, to ensure their participation in politics. These women are leading the efforts toward good governance, accountability, and transparency.

Ms. Alkhafaji noted that men and women experience conflict differently, precisely because the resources available to them and the responsibilities required of them differ. Whereas men are the primary combatants, women work to ensure the survival of family members and are invested in the post-conflict process of reconstruction. Iraqi women have not only endured the violence of war, but have also suffered under terrorism, an execution campaign, an economic crisis, and an intellectual embargo. Women are victimized by explosives, both physically and psychologically. Women assume an economic burden if their husband or brother is lost and must fulfill the roles of both woman and man. Women have been the victims of kidnapping, which may be politically, economically or ethnically motivated. Women have also inflicted violence on others as suicide bombers. Ms. Alkhafaji hypothesizes that these women are motivated by revenge for loss of loved ones or may be used unwittingly.

Ms. Alkhafaji encouraged training for women as part of the post-conflict reconstruction phase, to equip them with the skills and experience necessary to qualify for grant loans. Ms. Alkhafaji stressed that in the post-conflict environment, it is essential that the burden of poverty is alleviated, that women are guaranteed access to decision-making and political participation, and that legislation is enacted which ensures rights, while taking customs and traditions into consideration.

Annie Matundu-Mbabmi, a partner of WILPF in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, spoke about the UN-led Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration (DDR) process in the DRC. Ms. Mbabmi explained that very little DDR actually occurred, due to renewed violence, political problems, and a lack of needed infrastructure. In total, over 3,000 women demobilized. Of these, the majority (60%) had been exploited as sex slaves and the remaining 40% were wives of combatants. Most women, however, remained unaware of the DDR process or unclear on the rules for participation. Additionally, the new approach of offering \$100 per gun collected does not benefit women, as it was intended to do.

Ms. Mbabmi suggests that, due to the stigma associated with sexual exploitation and the consequent difficulty of returning to one's community, women ought to be involved in a process that parallels DDR but is distinct from it. Though counseling and medical services are made available, more must be done to prevent sexual violence. Ms. Mbambi also stressed that the DDR process should be informed by SCR 1325 and that civil society and women's organization ought to be consulted.

Maria Pia Devoto, working with the Asociación para las Políticas Públicas in Argentina, offered the perspective of one who is living in a society at "peace," but still plagued by gun violence. Ms. Devoto perceives a lack of commitment to control access to guns and to reassess how gun licenses are issued. The problem of gun violence is exacerbated by the machismo culture, which promotes the use of guns to dominate, intimidate and threaten women.

Brazil recently implemented a successful disarmament campaign, in which they simultaneously implemented stricter regulations for acquiring a gun and engaged in a gun collection program. The collection program included a destruction component as a confidence-building measure. Partnership with evangelical churches proved particularly useful; the churches ran a campaign with the slogan: "Put your trust in God, not in a gun."

In the question and answer portion, one attendee advocated involving religious organizations and media outlets in campaign to condemn gun violence and, in particular, violence against women. Other participants stressed the need to provide support, both financial and psychological, to the victims of gun violence. In responding to a question about how to best address the source of guns, panelists pointed to the problem of porous borders and faulted developed countries for producing and distributing weapons without proper regard for the consequences.