

The Role of Women in the RtoP Framework

The United Nations (UN), as well as regional bodies and governments have begun to recognize that conflict and post-conflict reconciliation affects men and women differently. This acknowledgement of the varied roles is a first step in developing gendered responses to conflict. The international community must address the need to protect women from mass atrocity crimes as well as identify and incorporate the contribution of women in the prevention and resolution of crises. Developing a gendered response to conflict will enable the UN, regional organization and governments to guarantee the rights of women and further integrate their role in peace and security. The Responsibility to Protect (RtoP) framework complements existing commitments to protect women's human rights and can also act as a tool for incorporating women's leadership in preventing and stopping mass atrocity crimes.

*"In the Democratic Republic of Congo, 8,300 women were reportedly raped in 2009 while many more were estimated to have suffered unreported sexual violence and abuse."
Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2009 Report*

Protection of Women Against Mass Atrocity Crimes



Escorted by peacekeepers, Sudanese women IDPs collect firewood.
UN Photo / Albert Gonzalez Farran

Protection of women's rights has been codified in international law through the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), UN Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1325 (2000), SCR Resolution 1820 (2008) on Women, Peace and Security, and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC). These key documents outline the rights and duties of the international community, governments, and civil society in regards to women and conflict. Despite the obligations placed on them by international law, parties engaged in conflict often use violence against women as a tactic of war, leading to devastating consequences.ⁱ

Women are vulnerable to the crime of rape and to sexual violence as they account for the majority of civilian deathsⁱⁱ resulting from conflict, and encompass 70-80% of the global internally displaced persons (IDPs) populationⁱⁱⁱ. Also, women are targeted by state and non-state actors and used as pawns to inflict injury on or to terrorize their opponents. Violence against women in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is an example of how sexual violence is used as a weapon of war. Despite an official end to the war in 2003, conflict in DRC continues and it is estimated that tens of thousands of women have been systematically raped by combatants^{iv}. The effects of conflict do not end once a nation reaches a peace agreement as women frequently do not receive the medical or psychological support necessary to cope with trauma^v. As already made explicit in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the passage of UNSC Resolution 1820 the UN reiterated that "rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute a war crime, a crime against humanity, or a constitutive act with respect to genocide" and demanded that "all parties to armed conflict immediately take appropriate measures to protect civilians, including women and girls, from all forms of sexual violence." International legal measures are available for women to obtain justice as the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court extends the coverage of gender related crimes to rape, sexual slavery, enforced sterilization or any other form of

sexual violence of comparable gravity. The inclusion of these crimes is a landmark in terms of the codification of gender specific crimes under international law.

"In the past we were silent, but after being killed, raped, dehumanized, and infected with diseases, and watching our children and families destroyed, war has taught us that the future lies in saying NO to violence and YES to peace! We will not relent until peace prevails."

Leymah Gbowee & Comfort Freeman, Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET)

Women' Leadership Role in Preventing and Resolving Conflict and Mass Atrocity Crimes



Women in Senegal attend classes.
UN Photo / Evan Schneider

Women have participated in the prevention and resolution of conflict and, as the effects of war can lead to mass atrocity crimes, have a role in the prevention of mass atrocities. The UN is increasingly recognizing the position of women's leadership in the prevention and resolution of conflict and crises. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action acknowledged the crucial role of women "during times of armed conflict and the collapse of communities" and called for the establishment of "an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective" when addressing armed and other conflict.^{vi} On 31 October 2000 the UN took the first step in identifying the important position women hold with the

passage of SCR 1325. This resolution stressed the "importance of their (women's) equal participation and full involvement in all efforts of the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution."^{vii} The impact of SCR 1325 was further solidified by the establishment of national action plans by 24 nations, confirming government support at the national level for the inclusion of women.

"My Administration shall thus endeavour to give Liberian women prominence in all affairs of our country. My Administration shall empower Liberian women in all areas of our national life. We will support and increase the writ of laws that restore their dignity and deal drastically with crimes that dehumanize them."

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Liberia

Women engaged in the peace process have used the international framework in their actions at the national level as evidenced by the Liberian organizations, Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) and the Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET). WIPNET^{viii}, which spans across Nigeria, Liberia, Cote D'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Benin, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, and Ghana, mobilized women during the Liberian civil wars with the goal of advocating peace and security within the nation. The Network was involved in the peace process through its project, Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace Campaign. WIPNET members directly engaged with rebels in disarmament camps to convince them to



UNMIL officers participate in medal parade; UN Photo / Christopher Herwig

“lay down their arms, speeding up the disarmament process.”^{xix} WIPNET was involved in the 2005 elections and was instrumental in advocating for the inclusion of women in the electoral process.^x The Mano River Women’s Peace Network (MARWOPNET)^{xi} was also engaged in the peace process in Liberia through the presence of its delegation during peace talks and has continued to remain a vital part of Liberian reconstruction. MARWOPNET has focused on empowering women in post-conflict Liberia through working with the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL) to develop and provide legal support to victims of rape. To continue its work, AFELL met with the UN all women Indian police force in 2007 to “discuss prosecuting rapists and seeking redress against other crimes against women.”^{xii}

Recognition of the Role of Women in Regional Human Rights Instruments



Secretary-General addresses the Security Council on Women, Peace, and Security.
UN Photo / Jenny Rockett

International and regional measures have been taken to promote the recognition and integration of women in the area of peace and security. The UN has taken additional steps to reaffirm its commitment to the rights of women and their role in the peace and reconstruction processes through the passage of Security Council Resolutions 1820 (2008)^{xiii}, 1888 (2009)^{xiv}, and 1889 (2009)^{xv}. Furthermore, in 2010 Secretary-General Ban-Ki Moon appointed Margot Wallstrom to the post of Special Representative to the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, with the goal of intensifying efforts to end sexual violence against women and children in conflict areas.^{xvi}

Regional measures have been taken to promote the protection of women as well as to develop a gendered approach to conflict prevention and resolution. The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) issued the Declaration on the Advancement of Women in ASEAN in 1988^{xvii} and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in the ASEAN Region in 2008^{xviii} as measures to identify the need to protect women’s rights and incorporate women’s groups to strengthen regional action.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, an entity under the Organization of American States (OAS), established the Rapporteurship on the Rights of Women in 1994 with the goal of ensuring that Member States protect women’s human rights. The Rapporteur has placed special emphasis on the need to combat violence against women, calling on States to fulfill their obligations to protect women’s rights and security as outlined in the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women.^{xix} The OAS further strengthened its commitment to guaranteeing the rights of women and integrating their leadership role through its Plan of Action established at the Third Summit of 2001. The Plan of Action calls on Member States to fully incorporate women’s human rights in all institutions, to facilitate the development of gender perspectives in all bodies and agencies, and to develop policies and practices to combat violence against women.^{xx}

The African Union (AU) has declared 2010-2020 the “African Women Decade” with the overarching theme of “gender equality and women’s empowerment.”^{xxi} The African Women’s Decade focuses on ten areas of concern including peace and security and violence against women, with the goal of providing a gendered perspective to issues and empowering women on the continent. To enhance the protection of women’s rights, the AU seeks to

promote international and regional commitments on peace and security, including UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820, as well as to strengthen responses to violence within the AU Peace and Security Department, Peace and Security Council and Panel of the Wise. The AU is also working to meet the goal of promoting a stronger role for women within resolution and peace processes.^{xxii}

Engendering the Responsibility to Protect: Challenges and Recommendations

The RtoP framework can serve to protect women from mass atrocity crimes as well as integrate women's perspectives into the processes for prevention and halting. RtoP, as outlined in the 2005 World Summit, clearly lays out the four crimes in focus, three of which (genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity) are defined in the Rome Statute with provisions for acts of violence that specifically target women.^{xxiii} The notion of sovereignty as responsibility put forth in RtoP reinforces the idea that states and the international community have individual and mutual responsibility to prevent mass atrocity crimes, thus shifting focus from a state-centric to a human-centric approach to security. As RtoP focuses on prevention, it provides an opportunity for state-actors and the UN to integrate women's leadership into this field as promoted in the women, peace, and security agenda. Despite the added value of RtoP, numerous opportunities have been missed to incorporate a gender approach to the norm.



Sudanese woman displaced by war seeks shelter.
UN Photo / Tim McKulka



Liberian women in community peace hut. UN Photo / Andi

The International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) report^{xxiv}, published in 2001, outlined the principles of RtoP (prevention, reaction, rebuilding), however this document failed to acknowledge the effects of mass atrocity crimes on women and the leadership role they can play in resolution and reconstruction measures. ICISS did not include a gendered approach despite the approval of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), and primarily viewed women as victims, thus overlooking the contribution women can make. The Secretary-General's report, *Implementing the Responsibility to Protect* (2009), worked to overcome the missed opportunities of ICISS by identifying the need to protect women's rights under the RtoP framework. Secretary-General Ban-Ki Moon's report reiterates that sexual violence against women can specifically constitute war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity and calls on Member States to take action to implement preventative measures.^{xxv} The report is an important step as it enhances the discussion on the relationship of sexual violence in conflict; however, it overlooks other forms of violence that are used to target women such as forced pregnancy and forced slavery and fails to acknowledge women's role as providers of protection in peace operations.

There are numerous challenges affecting the integration of women and women's rights into the RtoP framework, thus hindering the development of a gendered approach to RtoP. The obstacles faced include:

- The focus on women as victims can undermine their role in protection, peace and resolution;
- The resources available to international, regional, and national bodies to provide protection for women is limited or not available;
- Women continue to be a minority in formal peace processes including in mediation;
- There are currently no gender specific indicators within early warning systems;

- Widespread and systematic violence against women continues to occur and the information and resources necessary to understand why this continues are unavailable;
- Although the Rome Statute identifies rape as a war crime, other forms of violence against women remain unrecognized (i.e. sexual slavery).

To enhance the development of a gender approach to RtoP and to overcome the challenges that presently exist, the following recommendations should be taken into consideration:

Recommendations

- The UN and state actors need to increase their recognition of the synergy between the RtoP and women, peace, and security agendas;
- Measures must be taken in the area of capacity building specifically to increase the participation of women in political life and as mediators in peace processes, as well as to include the views of women in peace and security initiatives;
- Resources, such as training for military and police forces, the creation of safe spaces for women and girls, and the increase in medical and psychological support available to victims, need to be made available;
- Gender sensitive indicators need to be established to broaden the collective knowledge on how violence against women contributes to wider instability and insecurity;
- Early actions must be taken through diplomatic and other non-violent means when states fail to protect women;
- Action-oriented-research needs to be conducted to investigate why measures taken to combat violence against women continue to be unsuccessful, as evidenced by the current conflict in the DRC;
- A working group on women and RtoP should be established to better integrate a gendered approach to the norm.

"In country after country, as we discussed with the implementation of Resolution 1325, we have seen that the underlying issues that cause conflicts are more likely to recur and less likely to be resolved if women are not involved at the peace table. "

[U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton before the UN Security Council, 16 November 2010.](#)

Join the International Coalition!

To see more information and the work of ICRtoP members at the national, regional and international levels, see www.responsibilitytoprotect.org.

Endnotes

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