# WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY:

## ARE WE THERE YET?

**Melissa Labonte and Gaynel Curry**

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# Women, Peace, and Security: Are We There Yet?

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## *Melissa Labonte and Gaynel Curry*

"THROUGHOUT HUMAN HISTORY, IN ANY GREAT ENDEAVOR REQUIRING THE common effort of many nations and men and women everywhere, we have learned—it is only through seriousness of purpose and persistence that we ultimately carry the day. We might liken it to riding a bicycle. You stay upright and move forward so long as you keep up the momentum."[1] This statement by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon resonates with the great endeavor to move forward the global agenda on women, peace, and security. While there has been movement on that agenda, the journey has been slow. Occasional dips in the road have propelled the agenda forward resulting in new resolutions, summits, agreements, and other initiatives designed to raise awareness in response to media-driven sympathy for the issue. However, this rapid gain in momentum would invariably be followed by a slow uphill climb of inadequate fund raising, institution building, and sustainable programming toward the ever-distant moving goalposts of gender equality and women's rights.

The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, designed to address and resolve the disproportionate and unique impact on women of conflict and violence, emerged from the adoption in 2000 of Security Council Resolution 1325. Complemented by seven additional resolutions—Resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), and 2242 (2015)—these documents collectively constitute a broad framework for monitoring, assessing, and implementing the WPS agenda and have over time sharpened the focus of WPS implementation. Additionally and most importantly, many of the resolutions comprising the WPS agenda call for enhanced coordination across the peacekeeping, human rights, political, humanitarian, and security sectors to implement Resolution 1325 and, by extension, the WPS agenda. Alongside coordination, analysis, and information sharing among stakeholders, the resolutions recommend the development of reliable and comprehensive indicators to gauge its effectiveness, improving and regularizing information and evidence gathering on all aspects of conflict-related sexual violence, and strengthening the

leadership role of women in peacemaking and peacebuilding and the gender dimensions of peace processes and conflict resolution.

Conceptually, the WPS agenda is rooted firmly within international legal human rights norms, particularly the principles of gender equality and nondiscrimination which themselves are embedded within numerous international legal conventions, foremost among them the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Operationally, the WPS agenda is a means to an end and an end in itself. It has intrinsic value and it should serve as a catalyst of political will to ensure effective implementation across five mutually reinforcing goals as outlined in the 500-page review of implementation of the WPS agenda, otherwise now known as the *Global Study*. These goals include: (1) putting women's leadership and participation at the core of peace and security efforts; (2) protecting the human rights of girls and women, both during and after conflict—and in recognition of new and emerging security threats; (3) ensuring gender-responsive planning and accountability; (4) strengthening the UN's gender architecture and expertise; and (5) ensuring sufficient and reliable financing for the WPS agenda.

How has the WPS agenda fared, 15 years on? What does its implementation thus far tell us about whether and to what degree its goals are being met? Perhaps unsurprisingly, the picture is mixed. The normative framework that the WPS agenda has generated and reinforced is as visionary and promising as any that have been born of multilateral processes. It marks significant progress, in harmony with broader universal human rights obligations adopted by member states that apply both during and beyond conflict. The diffusion of WPS agenda norms has also contributed to reshaping the formerly indelible perception held by many women (and girls) as victims—to one that casts them as agents of partners in change, as effective peacemakers.

The realization of the WPS agenda, however, has been uneven. Based on the evidence gathered in the *Global Study* and elsewhere, its implementation has been constrained by a business-as-usual approach on the part of some member states, nonstate actors, and others. In part, this stems from deeply entrenched resistance to pay more than just lip service to the necessary, substantive, and, in some cases, costly reforms that cannot be avoided to deliver on effective implementation. This behavior flies in the face of what the data tell us about the consequences of failing to address the effects of conflict and violence on women, the profoundly positive impact that women have on peacemaking, and the value women bring to decisionmaking and negotiation forums in conflict resolution and postconflict peacebuilding.

It also stems in part from the fact that the UN Security Council is struggling mightily to manage and adjust to the changing nature of the

world's crises of late, which have at times relegated the WPS agenda to the back burner. A case in point is the Syria conflict, where women have been disproportionately impacted by the direct violence but are completely absent from global and regional peacemaking efforts, including attempts to devise a workable strategy to manage the implications of the massive forced migration crisis now facing other parts of the Middle East and Europe.

Relatedly, it is clear from their own rhetoric and behavior that member states view the WPS agenda from very different perspectives, creating a Rashomon effect that impedes its coherent implementation. Close study of the evolution of the WPS agenda confirms this. Western member states, for example, have tended to see in the WPS agenda a vehicle for highlighting and redressing the impact of war on women but also a tool to promote women's civil and political rights, political participation, and, most recently, women's roles in countering violent extremism and counterterrorism initiatives. Non-Western member states, for their part, have viewed the WPS agenda as an opportunity to address how their populations encounter and are impacted by immediate life-threatening insecurity and how quickly their communities can return to sustainable livelihoods and economic empowerment.

Collectively, this points up the fact that the WPS agenda has evolved and grown considerably in the past 15 years—but it also signals that the nature of that growth is more divergent than convergent, reflecting particular or individual interests rather than global interests. And while it is a truism that national interests always inform multilateral politics, the degree to which this has affected the implementation of the WPS agenda cannot be underemphasized, even if it may not be possible to overcome. No matter where the emphasis lies, however, the WPS agenda has not been championed in the manner in which it can and should be, leaving many skeptical and cautious about its future.

In the remainder of this essay, we assess briefly a range of themes embedded within and across the *Global Study*'s goals and offer some insights on the way forward for those issue areas that pose the greatest challenge to the WPS agenda should they remain unaddressed by member states and other stakeholders.

## Keeping Human Rights at the Forefront

Considerable progress has been made in achieving the goal of developing effective international-level institutional arrangements to guarantee the protection of women's and children's rights during and after conflict. Since 2000, every UN peace operation has included civilian protection as part of its mandate and, despite recent allegations of sexual misconduct perpetrated

by peacekeepers against civilians, predeployment training for troops and civilian police as well as mission staff on the special protection needs of women (and children) is now established practice. The creation of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General on sexual violence in conflict and the advocacy role inherent in this position help ensure that protection issues are identified and raised at headquarters and in the field. The systematic inclusion of Women's Protection Advisors within peacekeeping and political mission strategic planning processes; the national justice reform and capacity-building work of the UN Team of Experts on Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict; the monitoring, analysis, and reporting work of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; and the mediation/women in peacebuilding work of the UN Department of Political Affairs and others all contribute to the goals of preventing rights transgressions and protecting women's rights.

While only a few years ago the UN lacked the necessary technical expertise to ensure protection from sexual violence during and after conflict, member states invested initial resources to improve capacity in this area. However, more was needed to ensure that women have the right to a life free from violence, which would in turn help fulfill member states' enduring obligations under international human rights law. A similar, perhaps greater, challenge now faces the UN in terms of generating levels of technical expertise to implement parts of the WPS agenda that focus on gender, counterterrorism, and countering violent extremism. It is not yet readily apparent how this will be done and whether member states will commit the necessary resources to achieve this newly adopted goal articulated in Resolution 2242.

## Aligning Commitments with Adequate Resources

While the UN has made important strides in strengthening its gender architecture and expertise, and in mainstreaming a gender perspective into various aspects of its work on peace and security, the evidence suggests that this has been achieved more in word than in deed. In the area of gender-responsive peacebuilding, UN member states have repeatedly committed themselves, in word, to tackling root causes of conflict, particularly where persistent structural asymmetries and inequalities further disempower women and make them more rather than less vulnerable. As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon made clear in his 2010 report on women's participation in peacebuilding, gender-responsive peacebuilding must not be an afterthought or an add-on. His Seven-Point Action Plan spells out clearly that women are key peacebuilding partners whose talents, skills, and knowledge are critical in advancing durable peace built on political legitimacy, social unity, and economic recovery. Moreover, the report emphasizes that when

women are economically empowered, it yields positive effects well beyond the household and helps consolidate postconflict social recovery locally and nationally. As a result, the UN set itself a target of 30 percent funding to economic recovery initiatives that target gender equality in such settings.

However, data tracking of peacebuilding donorship highlights that mainstreaming gender equality is not a focus in deed. Analysis of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) funding across economic and productive sectors in peacebuilding settings from 2012 to 2013 indicates that only 2 percent of the more than $10 billion allocated each year to peacebuilding and postconflict transition settings was earmarked to promote gender equality as a "principle objective."[2] Moreover, only 6 percent of all DAC aid was aimed at promoting gender equality overall and across various sectors in "fragile contexts" between 2012 and 2013. No matter how it is measured, the evidence confirms that donors are not prioritizing gender equality and are falling well short of the UN's 30 percent goal. The banking and business, energy, extractive industry, and construction sectors are those most affected by the dearth of gender-responsive peacebuilding assistance[3]—whereas the majority of funding continues to go to programs that, perhaps ironically, reinforce traditional gender-stereotyped economic roles for women such as hairdressing, craft making, and tailoring.

## Women's Leadership and Participation

Equally worrisome are the implemention gaps in the area of putting women's leadership and participation at the core of peace and security efforts. This goal relies in large part on two related subgoals, namely, facilitating and ensuring women's full participation and involvement in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and postconflict peacebuilding, and affirming the pivotal role women can and should play at all levels of decisionmaking concerning these issues.

Despite the overwhelming evidence that the exclusion of women from matters of peace and security often leads to more and not less instability, fragility, and violence, little progress has been made to implement reforms that potentially would help the Security Council in its work and also fulfill its duty as a guarantor of the WPS agenda. For example, *Global Study* data indicate that "every civil war that erupted between 2003 and 2010 was a resumption of a previous civil war,"[4] yet women are routinely missing from and their views ignored during conflict management, resolution, and transformation processes. Moreover, the evidence also points out what many, particularly civil society organizations, have long known to be true: adopting an inclusive approach to gender and the role of women is crucial to creating environments conducive to both positive and negative peace.

The gender gap that has persisted for decades at the highest levels of multilateral leadership on peace and security now also seems to be widening. One recent report indicates that while women led five of the UN's sixteen peacekeeping operations, in 2015 the women formerly heading many UN agencies and special programs vital to the implementation of the WPS agenda, including the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), the head of management, and the head of legal affairs have all been replaced by men.[5] The dearth of women serving at the undersecretary-general and assistant secretary-general levels is shocking. Men were appointed to 92 percent of seniormost UN staff appointments made in 2015.

Across UN entities whose mandates intersect with the WPS agenda, the proportion of women serving in managerial positions has varied significantly, ranging from those that have achieved or exceeded gender parity to others that hover at 20 percent.[6] On the ground, gender asymmetries have been even more skewed, with the overall percentage of women serving as Secretariat field staff (excluding Department of Peacekeeping Operations, DPKO) remaining far below other agencies and special programs, including the UN Development Programme, the UN Children's Fund, UNHCR, and the World Food Programme. Women accounted for less than 30 percent of the more than 7,000 field- and mission-based international civilian staff, and only one-fifth of senior management posts.[7] In the area of peace negotiations, only a small percentage of women were involved, despite the evidence that approximately 50 percent of all male-dominated peacemaking efforts fail within five years.[8] Data gathered in 2012 by UN Women indicated that women constituted less than 4 percent of signatories of multilateral peace agreements and less than 10 percent of negotiators in peace processes.[9]

Even if progress is made to right these asymmetries across the UN system and in other multilateral forums, how will women be trained and prepared to take on these new roles? It is one thing to simply add more women to the decisionmaking tables where women, peace, and security issues are tackled. But it is quite another to build and sustain the necessary structures and platforms to develop a skilled cadre of women peacemakers across multiple levels and settings.

## Moving Forward

So what is to be done? All stakeholders in the implementation of the WPS agenda have the same evidence in hand, thanks to the massive effort undertaken by the authors of the *Global Study* as well as other reports and assessments. This will aid enormously in identifying and prioritizing for the future. There are many ways to move the WPS agenda forward to bring it closer to achieving its goals, but two of them are particularly vital.

First, to truly facilitate the implementation of the WPS agenda, its supporters must continue to link it to other related global initiatives, especially those that seriously tackle root causes of conflict and invest in sustainable outcomes designed to ameliorate the structural violence that leaves women disproportionately vulnerable in societies around the globe. This would include identifying and leveraging synergies between the WPS agenda and Sustainable Development Goals that reinforce the human rights ethos embedded within the WPS agenda, especially Goal 5, achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. Making this link in particular—between development, human rights, and peace and security—is sine qua non in terms of meaningful implementation of the WPS agenda. Addressing poverty reduction; fighting discrimination, including in terms of accessing land and other productive resources; building functioning public health systems; guaranteeing equal access to primary and secondary education; and achieving gender equality are all necessary precursors to promoting and readying women for local, national, regional, and global leadership. In their absence, women will continue to lag behind men in their ability to act as change agents within and across fragile or conflict-affected societies.

Member states must also have the political will necessary to commit to measurable progress on select WPS agenda elements in parallel with other closely related reform efforts such as the 2015 Review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture, the 2015 High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, and the outcomes of the World Humanitarian Summit. Failure to look beyond business-as-usual, stovepipe approaches to reform will only impede the effective implementation of the WPS agenda. One way to build momentum on this would be to enact quotas to ensure that gender equity is realized for senior positions within all parts of the UN system tasked with implementing the WPS agenda at headquarters and in the field. This would show leadership within the UN and represent real, measurable change to ensure women's full participation and involvement in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and postconflict peacebuilding.

Second, meaningful implementation of the WPS agenda cannot be done on the cheap. It requires that member states commit new and additional resources, both human and material. There is no escaping this fact. The Security Council's recent adoption of Resolution 2242 (13 October 2015) represented an important affirmation of the *Global Study*'s findings. It recognized the need to improve the Council's working methods in relation to the WPS agenda and signaled a commitment to adopt the recommendations related to gender that feature in the reviews of the peacebuilding and peacekeeping architectures, but it also expressed the view that Security Council members believe that change is possible at little or no additional cost. For example, the Council welcomed the Secretary-

General's commitment to appoint more women to senior leadership positions, yet only where such action aligns with prevailing relevant rules and regulations pertaining to administrative and budgetary issues. Council members also encouraged the Secretary-General to collaborate with member states to double by 2020 the number of women serving in military and civilian police contingents across UN peace operations, but only within existing resources.

## Conclusion

The international community of states, both alongside and through the UN, can and must do better to fully realize the implementation of the WPS agenda and ensure the norms of gender equality, nondiscrimination, and the rights of women to participate in the development of human security in their own communities. This will require unflappable political will and commitment to new leadership models, structures, modes of operation, and resource allocation. It will also rely on integrative thinking and doing that genuinely embrace the nexus of development, human rights, and peace and security. Given the unprecedented contemporary challenges to global and regional peace, and the destabilizing effects of internal conflict and structural violence, UN member states should treat the WPS agenda as an absolute imperative. With each new crisis that is laid at the UN's doorstep, the world bears witness to what business as usual begets. We can no longer argue that we don't know whether the full participation of women in peace and security makes a positive difference. We do know that it does.

But saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war is not the only rationale for the UN's existence. Its Charter Preamble also emphasizes that "We the Peoples" are determined to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small—and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom. None of this can be accomplished without the full and inclusive participation by women. The world organizations' legitimacy depends in large part on it—and the well-being of half the world's population demands it. ⊕

## Notes

Melissa Labonte is associate dean in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences and Associate Professor of Political Science at Fordham University. Gaynel Curry is Gender and Women's Rights Advisor in the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in New York. The views expressed here are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations.

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