



The Gender Security Project 🏠 · Dec 25, 2019 · 7 min read



What next for the Women peace and Security Agenda?

Dr Anu Mundkur, Head of Gender Equality, CARE Australia, reflects on the two decades that have passed since the adoption of the Women Peace and Security Agenda by the United Nations, commencing with Resolution 1325 at the Security Council. (Views expressed are my own and do not reflect the views of CARE Australia)



2020 marks 20 years since the adoption of the Women Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda by the United Nations. The agenda itself is over a hundred years old, dating back to 1915 when the International Congress of Women convened in The Hague to “to protest against war and suggest steps which may lead to warfare becoming an impossibility.”^[1] It would take another 85 years of tireless advocacy by diverse women before the UN Security Council passed UNSCR 1325 finally acknowledging that war and conflicts disproportionately impact



The most recent report of the UN Secretary General on WPS ([S/2019/800](#)) highlights the achievements to date and the challenges that lie ahead. It makes a damning assessment of the slow progress to date:

We still live in a world where women face exclusion from peace and political processes; where the number of attacks against women human rights defenders, humanitarians and peacebuilders continues to rise; where the attempted erosion of international human rights standards persists; and where xenophobia, racism, intolerance, homophobia, transphobia and violent misogyny continue to spread.

Equally discouraging is the [NGOWG on WPS annual analytical report](#) on the work of the Security Council on WPS (2018):

Our analysis of the Security Council's performance over 2018 shows that its approach to WPS remains superficial, ad-hoc and inconsistent; subject to the individual efforts of Security Council members rather than being systematically integrated into Council action; and reflects a lack of willingness to tackle the harder and more complex issues under the WPS agenda. Its approach is defined by a lack of accountability for failure to fully implement all provisions of the ten resolutions that constitute the WPS agenda.

The achievements are slim pickings. Some progress has been made in better integrating gender perspectives into work on counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism. There is a greater focus and recognition to address conflict related sexual and gender based violence, sexual exploitation and abuse. There have been advancements in adopting survivor centred approaches to women's access to transitional justice mechanisms. Improvements have been made in developing gender-sensitive early warning signs and analysis to inform conflict prevention. As of December 2019, 83 UN Member States (43% of all UN Member States) have UNSCR 1325 National Action Plans (NAPs) but only 22% of all plans included a budget for the implementation, at the time of adoption.^[2] The NGOWG acknowledges the efforts made to institutionalize and root the WPS agenda within the UN peace and security architecture, adopting robust language on gender-sensitive conflict prevention for the missions in Central Africa and West Africa and the Sahel, the strengthening of sanctions regimes by explicitly paying attention to conflict related sexual and gender-based violence.

Yet, according to the UNSG's report, we are seeing record levels of political violence targeting women, over 50 parties to conflict are credibly suspected of having committed or instigated patterns of rape and other forms of sexual violence, at least 1 in 5 refugee or displaced women experience sexual violence, an estimated 35 million women, young women and girls require lifesaving sexual and reproductive health services, and interventions to prevent gender based violence and response to their needs as survivors. Fewer than 20%



of all Security Council resolutions in 2018 contained references to the importance of and the need to guarantee the fundamental rights and freedoms of women's groups and women human rights defenders.

In the midst of all this we have seen two additional UN Security Council Resolutions on Women Peace and Security – [UNSCR 2493](#) (October 2019) and [UNSCR 2467](#) (April 2019) bringing the total count of WPS resolutions to ten. UNSCR 2467 emphasizes the need for a survivor-centred approach to addressing gender-based violence (especially sexual violence) and the need for holistic understanding of justice and accountability which includes the provision of reparations for survivors as well as livelihood support to enable them to rebuild their lives and support their families. However, UNSCR 2467 also brought to light a deeply divided UN Security Council when it comes to sexual violence. The United States threatened to veto, unless previously agreed-upon language on the provision of sexual and reproductive health services to survivors of sexual violence was deleted from the final draft of the resolution. This is also the first WPS resolution that was not adopted by consensus (Russia and China abstained).

UNSCR 2493 was a reset of sorts in getting the Security Council back to a consensus position on ahead of the 20th anniversary. The resolution includes strong language on the full, equal and meaningful participation of women CSOs in peace talks. The call is for the UNSG and UN entities to 'develop context-specific approaches for women's participation in all UN-supported peace talks, including country specific situations'. It urges Member States to 'support peace processes to facilitate women's full, equal and meaningful inclusion and participation in peace talks from the outset, both in negotiating parties' delegations and in the mechanisms set up to implement and monitor agreements.' In doing so, this resolution reiterates other resolutions in particular UNSCR 1325 and 2242. But it fails in progressing the WPS agenda. There is no explicit reference to women rights defenders, for example, but the resolution 'encourages Member States to create safe and enabling environments for civil society, including formal and informal community women leaders, women peacebuilders, political actors, and those who protect and promote human rights to carry out their work independently and without undue interference.' Even this diluted reference to the work of women rights defenders was unacceptable to China who stated that it does not support this paragraph, but it did not break from consensus.

We have made the least progress in preventing conflict – one of the founding pillar of agenda. [WILPF's WPS Scorecard](#), which tracks the gaps between commitments and achievements of the four pillars of the WPS agenda by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, shows that prevention pillar ranks the lowest when compared to the other seven category measures (2017). World military expenditure grew to \$1.8 trillion in 2018, an increase of 2.6 per cent from 2017. According to [SIPRI](#), a reduction of 10% of military spending would be enough to achieve major progress on key Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 16 Peace Justice and Strong Institutions.

The five key messages in the NGOs' [open letter to UN Security Council](#) (Oct 2019) suggests how we might progress the WPS agenda.

1. Take decisive action to prevent conflict, avert crisis and end war by addressing the root causes of conflict:

Preventing conflict and sustaining peace are also not simply matters of ending war and violence – they must address the root causes of conflict, which include gender inequality and discrimination; militarization, arms proliferation and the political economy of war; violations of international



2. Recognise that gender equality and the human rights of all women and girls are central to international peace and security:

The full scope of the rights of all women and girls, including sexual and reproductive rights, must be protected in crisis; denial of sexual and reproductive services undermines all pillars of the WPS agenda. ... It is critical to increase attention to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination faced by women and girls in conflict. It is also vital that the specific challenges facing young women, migrant and refugee women and girls, women and girls with disabilities, indigenous women and girls, people of diverse SOGIESC, and older women are fully integrated into WPS implementation by all actors.

3. Women's right to full, equal and meaningful participation in all aspects of peace and security, including all formal and informal processes, must be safe-guarded and non-negotiable:

The exclusion of women and girls from peace processes is unacceptable and results in peace agreements that do not reflect their rights, experiences, or needs... Women's meaningful participation – enabling women's inclusion so that they can influence the outcome of negotiations and discussions – must be politically and financially supported, and safe-guarded as a right.

4. Defend the legitimacy of the work of all human rights defenders and their role in promoting peace and security, and condemn all attacks against them

Threats to human rights defenders (HRDs) undermine global efforts to prevent conflict and sustain peace. The lack



legislative, judicial and digital, to take place. As long as ordinary women and gender non-conforming persons, HRDs, women activists, peacebuilders and women politicians are the targets of violence and harassment, they cannot freely participate in public or political life. ...must ensure their safety and protection from reprisals... and speak out publicly against such attacks to send an unequivocal message that they will not be tolerated.

5. Meaningful action on women, peace and security requires recognizing the interrelated, inseparable and mutually reinforcing nature of all elements of the WPS agenda, and committing to full implementation

Protection of women from gender-based violence is inseparable from women's meaningful participation, bodily autonomy and rights, and ensuring accountability for violations of fundamental human rights is necessary in order to prevent relapse into conflict....It is vital that the Security Council, as the primary UN body entrusted with peace and security matters, leads by example by fully implementing all resolutions comprising the WPS agenda and integrating a gender perspective into all aspects of peace and security. As the 20th anniversary of Resolution 1325 (2000) approaches, outcomes that damage or fail to advance the core tenets of the WPS agenda, or endorse anything less than full implementation, are unacceptable.

We do not need any more resolutions. We need Member States to implement the commitments that they have already made.

[1] <https://www.peacepalacelibrary.nl/2015/02/international-congress-of-women-of-1915/>

[2] <https://www.peacewomen.org/member-states>

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