

Women, Peace and Security: Our Unfinished Agenda
Presentation by Ambassador Donald Steinberg to the
International Visitors Leadership Program on Women in Peace and Security
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Honored guests:

It's a great pleasure to address the participants in the International Visitors Leadership Program on Women in Peace and Security. I want to first thank the State Department for organizing this impressive group of 100 women peacemakers from 60 countries. You represent a whole of society approach to gender equality and women's empowerment, with government officials, journalists, civil society activists and academics. Thank you for taking time from your busy schedules to share your experiences and insights with your counterparts in this country.

I also want to salute your courage. In the world's most dangerous regions, you are the eyes, the ears, and the conscience of the global community and your own societies. As if we needed another reminder that being a woman peacemaker is the world's most dangerous profession, it came last week with the brutal murder of Hevrin Khalaf in Rojava in northeast Syria. Ms. Khalaf was a courageous Kurdish-Syrian women's rights activist. Just 34 years old at the time of her death, she had already taken part in negotiations with the United States, France, and other delegations. She was known for her diplomatic skills and her work to increase tolerance and unity among Arabs, Christians, and Kurds.

I want to add my voice to those calling for the investigation and prosecution of the perpetrators of this heinous war crime, as well as those who facilitated or enabled it.

A Cautionary Tale from Angola

For those committed to the leadership of women in issues of peace, justice and security, there is usually a moment or experience where you first "get it." For me, this came 25 years ago. In 1994, I served as President Clinton's special assistant for African Affairs, and I supported negotiations to end two decades of civil war in Angola that had killed a half million people and left four million homeless. When the Lusaka Protocol was signed in November 1994, I asked President Clinton to name me ambassador to Angola to implement the agreement. At a departure press conference, I was asked by a journalist how the agreement addressed the needs of war-affected women. "Not a single provision in the agreement discriminates against women," I said, a little too proudly. "The agreement is gender-neutral."

It took me only a few weeks after my arrival in Luanda to realize how foolish that response had been: a peace agreement that calls itself “gender-neutral” is, by definition, discriminatory against women and likely to fail.

First, the agreement did not require the participation of women in the Joint Commission, the peace implementation body. As a result, a typical meeting of the commission saw 40 men and no women sitting around the table. This silenced women’s voices, wasted the talents and ground truth they could have brought to our deliberations, and meant that issues such as sexual violence, human trafficking, abuses by government and rebel security forces, reproductive health care, and girls’ education were given short shrift, if addressed at all.

The peace accord was based on thirteen separate amnesties that forgave the parties for atrocities committed during the conflict. One amnesty went so far as to forgive the parties for any action they might take in the coming months – the equivalent of a “Get Out of Jail Free” card. Given the prominence of sexual abuse during the conflict, this meant that men with guns forgave other men with guns for crimes against women and children. It also introduced a cancer at the heart of our efforts to rebuild the justice and security sectors and restore rule of law. In effect, it showed Angolan women, as well as other key civil society actors, that the peace process was intended for the benefit of the fighters and not them.

Similarly, demobilization programs for ex-combatants depended on lists provided by the warring parties. As a rule, they defined a combatant as anyone who carried a gun in combat. Thousands of women who had been kidnapped or coerced into the armed forces and served as cooks, bearers, messengers and sex slaves were excluded. Further, camps for demobilized soldiers and refugees were rarely constructed with women in mind, such that women risked rape or death each time they left the camp to collect firewood or used latrines in isolated and dimly lit settings.

Male ex-combatants received demobilization assistance but were sent back without skills or education to communities that had learned to live without them during decades of conflict. As in all such situations, the frustration of these men exploded into an epidemic of alcoholism, drug abuse, divorce, rape, suicide and domestic violence. In effect, the end of civil war simply unleashed a new and more pernicious era of violence against women and girls.

Even such well-intentioned efforts as clearing major roads of landmines to allow four million displaced persons to return to their homes backfired against women. Road clearance sometimes preceded the demining of fields, wells and forests, something that wouldn’t have occurred if women were at the peace table. When men sent their wives and daughters out to plant the fields, fetch water and collect firewood, they suffered a new rash of landmine accidents.

I recall visiting a rural clinic where a young woman on an operating table was giving birth and having her leg amputated at the same time. The doctor later told us that the woman was living in a refugee camp and she knew that the thin gruel provided by relief agencies did not provide enough nourishment for her unborn child. She left the camp in search of food, walked into a mango grove and stepped on a landmine. The loss of blood stimulated premature labor, and the doctor said it was uncertain whether she or her child would survive.

Over time, we recognized these problems and brought out gender advisers and human rights officers; launched reproductive health care, girls' education, micro-enterprise and support for women's NGOs; and engaged women in planning and implementing all our programs. But by then, civil society – and particularly women – had been disempowered and had come to view the peace process as serving only the interests of the warring parties. When the process faltered in 1998, there was little public pressure on the leaders to prevent a return to conflict and war soon re-emerged. Permanent peace only came when the rebel leader was killed in February 2002.

Sadly, the Angolan case was – and to a great extent, is – not the exception, but the standard practice. Only one in thirteen participants in peace negotiations since 1992 has been a woman. Recent accords in Indonesia, Nepal, Somalia, Cote d'Ivoire, the Philippines and the Central African Republic have not had a single woman signatory, mediator, or negotiator. Of 300 peace agreements negotiated since 1989, just eighteen contain even a passing reference to sexual violence.

In emergency funding projects to support post-conflict situations, less than 3 per cent included specific funding for women and girls– this despite our knowledge that girls' education, for example, is one of the best investments in promoting stable societies, reducing unwanted pregnancies, improving agricultural methods, and eliminating sexual violence.

UN Resolution 1325: A Turning Point

A turning point came in the year 2000, as global civil society came together in Namibia to adopt the Plan of Action on Mainstreaming Gender in Peace Operations. Governments were driven to respond, and later that year -- prompted by the Bangladesh UN Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury – the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325. The groundbreaking resolution called for:

- Full representation of women in national decision making, especially in conflict prevention and resolution;
- Adoption of a gender perspective in all aspects of peacekeeping operations;
- New financial and logistical support for gender dimensions of peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction;

- Focus on women and girls in resettlement, rehabilitation, and demobilization programs;
- Respect for women’s rights and an end to impunity for crimes against women; and
- New efforts to combat sexual violence in armed conflict.

Later, the Security Council called for countries to adopt National Action Plans to carry this vision out. I was so inspired that I added the numbers 1-3-2-5 to my email address.

But Resolution 1325 was a product of its times. It reflected a clear cautiousness among the Security Council members in 2000 about wading into thematic issues and declaring that gender discrimination itself constituted a threat to international peace and security. Thus, its language “urges,” “encourages,” “requests” and “invites” rather than “demands” or “instructs.” The resolution lacks time-bound targets for achieving its goals; accountability or measurement provisions to secure its implementation; new funding or personnel dedicated to the issue. Further, it does not have provisions for naming, shaming and sanctioning governments and non-state actors failing to meet its objectives.

Some observers believe that these gaps doomed Resolution 1325 from the outset. This is unfair. There has been notable progress within institutional structures, especially in terms of awareness, expansion of the number and roles for gender advisors, gender training for peacekeepers and senior officials, adoption of outstanding guidelines for field action, development of small-scale and in-situ programs, and more.

Implementing the WPS Agenda: The Pace Accelerates

At the United Nations, UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict has been formed to coordinate enhanced work by thirteen dozen separate agencies under the tagline, “Stop Rape Now.” Security Council resolutions – 1820, 1888, and 1889 in particular – have created an office of a special representative for eliminating violence against women, mandated new measures of accountability, called for structures to name and shame offending parties, authorized the use of UN sanctions in such cases, and defined widespread sexual violence itself as a threat to international peace and security

We have also seen the creation of UN Women, the Civil Society Advisory Group on which I was proud to serve; and the High-Level Steering Committee for Women, Peace and Security, chaired by Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed. Other international and regional organizations – notably the European Union, the African Union, the Organization of American States, NATO, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe – are taking similar steps. Among governments, the Nordic countries have long shown the way in this agenda, but now they are joined by other governments.

In United States, we responded slowly at first, but the pace accelerated after Secretary of State Hillary Clinton declared in 2010 that the United State would prepare its own 1325 National Action Plan. As the U.S. Agency for International Development, we took a number of other steps for women’s empowerment. We brought in a talented Senior Coordinator, Carla Koppell, and gave her broad authorities. She was surrounded by a “dream team” of human rights advocates, including Caren Grown, Charlotte McLain-Nhlapo and Sarah Mendelson. As Deputy Administrator, I helped to ensure that this agenda was mainstreamed throughout the agency. I also had the privilege to with this team, Secretary Clinton, Ambassador for Global Women’s Issues Melanne Verveer, Counselor Cheryl Mills, my Defense Department colleagues and others to prepare and adopt the U.S. National Action Plan in 2011.

At USAID, we adopted for the first time the provision that all major project proposals had to prepare “gender impact statements” to ensure they improved the status of women. I also had the privilege to announce a new \$14 million project to support women peacemakers around the world. Launched at the remarkable Afhad University for Women in Omdurman, Sudan, the project provided resources for stipends, travel, training and physical security for women prepared to take the risks of standing up for peace.

Combatting the Legacy of Domestic Violence

Another USAID program focused on domestic violence in Central America. Regrettably, the end of the civil wars in that region had not reduced the suffering of women and domestic violence was rising. In Guatemala, the Congress passed a new law declaring domestic violence to be a crime – until that point, it had been considered “a cultural practice” – but the law required any case be brought before a judge within eight hours of its occurrence. To address this challenge, then-Attorney General Claudia Paz y Paz sought our help to create a “24 Hour Court” in the capital of Guatemala City.

No matter what time it is, if a survivor of domestic violence comes to the court, she first sees a doctor who will attend to her medical needs and document the abuse. The next stop is a public advocate, who will advise the survivor of her rights and offer to enter a civil charge. If the survivor chooses to file a charge, she next goes before a judge. Then she sees a psycho-social counselor, and finally a community assistance worker, who will work out a plan of action to support the survivor. When I visited the facility in 2013, I could see the clear difference between the mental/physical condition of survivors when they entered and as they later departed. The healing had already begun.

Attorney General Paz y Paz then took me to a rural community in Nebaj, where we were supporting a project that brought together women survivors of domestic violence to advocate

for their rights. These courageous women were petitioning the local authorities and business community to enforce the new legislation and provide assistance to survivors. Toward the end of a meeting with the group, one man stood up to tell his story. He said,

When I was a young boy, my father would frequently get drunk and beat my mother I was powerless to stop him and I thought that this was how a man was supposed to act. And so, when I grew up and got married, I did the same thing. Two years ago, I started coming to these meetings and I realized the pain and torture I was inflicting on my wife. Last year, she gave birth to a son, and when I first held him, I said: "Enough is enough! This stops with me." I will never again bring violence into my home.

The Women, Peace and Security Act of 2017

More programs of this nature are in the offing with the passage of the Women, Peace and Security Act of 2017 and the release of the White House national strategy last June. The 2017 law instructed the Administration to prepare a plan to promote the meaningful roles for women around the world in peace operations and political, civic, economic and security systems. It was broadly sponsored by House and Senate Republicans, Democrats and Independents and passed unanimously.

Even as a frequent critic of some of this Administration's position on gender, I am pleased to say that the White House strategy has much to offer. First, it appropriately aligns the women, peace and security agenda with American national security interests, including countering violent extremism, and linking it explicitly to the President's National Security Strategy. The WPS imperative is not presented as a "soft" issue.

The three key prongs of the strategy are reasonable and well-chosen. They are: (a) preparing women to promote stable and lasting peace; (b) ensuring that women are safer and better protected and have equal access to assistance and resources; and (c) institutionalizing WPS within a whole-of-government approach. The strategy rightfully calls for partnerships with civil society, including faith-based organizations, to "increase women's meaningful leadership in political and civic life."

There is welcome language promoting psycho-social support for the survivors of violence, exploitation and abuse, but regrettably no reference to addressing sexual and reproductive health needs in conflict and humanitarian settings, which is a priority for most world governments and civil society organizations.

Finally, the strategy tasked State, Defense, Homeland Security and USAID to identify resource requirements, articulate roles and responsibilities, propose new policies, adopt cross-cutting training programs, and indicate what measures of effectiveness and accountability provisions are

to be used. These implementation plans are due shortly. From my dialogue with policymakers in these agencies, I'm encouraged that they are taking this assignment seriously and devoting their best talent to producing meaningful implementation plans.

Civil Society Continues to Lead

Even more activity is taking place in the civil society sectors. A number of impressive coalitions are drawing together international actors, including the Women's Refugee Commission, which I am pleased to co-chair; the Institute for Inclusive Security under Ambassador Swanee Hunt; the International Civil Society Action Network under Sanam Anderlini; the Joan Kroc Institutes for Peace and Justice, and the Civil Society Working Group for Women, Peace and Security.

In the academic community, I would like to highlight the work of Melanne Vermeer and Carla Koppell at the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security; Anne-Marie Goetz at New York University; and Valerie Hudson at the Texas A&M Bush School of Government and Public Service.

Mobilizing Men as Partners for WPS

Earlier this year, working with the groundbreaking organization, *Our Secure Future: Women Make the Difference*, we have created a new coalition called Mobilizing Men as Partners for Women, Peace and Security. This group bring together 180 individuals and organizations from diplomacy, development, and defense sectors who understand the importance of women's leadership and participation in international security issues and peace processes. The men and women engaged in this exercise are men and women ambassadors, government ministers, generals and civil society leaders.

We have pledged to use our connections to open doors in the corridors of power for grass-roots women from conflict countries, who are fully capable of delivering their own messages. We are also going to provide small grants to women's empowerment groups in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America. Further, we will serve as monitors and watchdogs to ensure the robust implement of Resolution 1325, National Action Plans, peacekeeping mission mandates and, in this country, the Women, Peace and Security Act of 2017. Finally, we are pledged to build the coalition of supporters, funders, researchers, activists and advocates committed to this agenda.

You can find the charter and statement of principles for Mobilizing Men as Partners for Women, Peace and Security at <https://oursecurefuture.org/projects/mobilizing-men-wps>.

Concrete Measures of Progress

During your time here, you have an important opportunity to use personal experiences to educate your counterparts and pursue your objectives. You are far better placed to know what

messages you wish to convey, but may I suggest that you be as concrete as possible. In my own advocacy, I prioritize five points.

- We must require that at least 30 percent of leaders and participants in peace negotiations, peace missions, and post-conflict reconstruction processes be women, rising each year to achieve full gender balance.
- We must insist that post-conflict recovery packages adopt an explicit gender lens and include at least 30 percent funding for issues related to basic human security, such as girls' education, reproductive health care, women's economic empowerment, and support for survivors of violence.
- We must openly address issues of in sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, and workplace gender balance through training, performance expectations and accountability measures.
- We must commit to new funding and technical assistance for UN Women to play a more prominent peace operations and for the Women, Peace and Humanitarian Fund to directly support grassroots women's organizations.
- We must adopt a gender lens for all peace missions, enforced by high-level and empowered gender advisers on all peace missions.

The National Security Imperative

You should remind your interlocutors that the United States has committed to the women, peace and security agenda under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UN peacekeeping resolutions, the Refugee Convention, and other international accords. Equally important, we now have clear data to show that peace agreements and processes that exclude women are between 35 and 60 percent more likely to fail within the first decade than those that include them. Our experience has taught us the tragic cost in human lives and resources that result from the repeating cycle of violence from failed peace processes.

Countries faced with instability due in part to marginalizing women are more likely to traffic in drugs, people and weapons; send-off large numbers of refugees across borders and oceans; incubate and transmit pandemic diseases; harbor criminal networks, pirates, and terrorists; and require foreign military engagement and humanitarian assistance.

Think about Afghanistan. The best way for the world to ensure that Afghanistan does not again become a sanctuary for terrorists is not to negotiate a deal with the Taliban that sacrifices the women's rights and progress on the altar of a false peace. Instead, it depends on strengthening the impressive progress achieved for women since the fall of the Taliban in women's rights and roles in the political, economic, academic and social life to build a more stable, prosperous and just society able to resist the siren song of radicalism.

Our Unfinished Agenda

In conclusion, as we approach the 20th anniversary of Resolution 1325 next October, we must move beyond words, resolutions and stock-taking exercises to implement an ambitious but achievable agenda for action on women and armed conflict. The success of our efforts will not be measured by the reports we issue, the resolutions and legislation we pass, the publicity we generate or even the money we spend.

It will be measured by the extent to which we protect the lives and well-being of women and girls faced with the horrors of war; empower women them to play their rightful and vital role in peace processes and post-conflict reconstruction and governance; prevent armed thugs from abusing women in conditions of displacement; hold government security forces and warlords alike accountable for sexual abuses; prevent traffickers from turning women and girls into commodities; build strong civil society networks for women; and end the stigma of victimization that confronts women leaders.

Future generations of girls and boys deserve nothing less. Thank you.

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