

# WOMEN'S PIECE OF SECURITY

*The UNSCR 1325 aims to create a foundation to anchor women's participation in all social, political, and economic activities. It has presaged a new global thinking about peace and security, and situated women's rights at the center of international security dialogue for the first time. Security Council resolution 1325 was born out of conflict, and thus, its relevance and message remains essential to the ongoing global conflict. It has represented a significant political shift for NATO, as it addressed women's experiences and roles in conflict and peacemaking as a matter of international peace and security. This article aims to holistically explain the concept of human security and why it is essential to include and acknowledge women's potential in contributing to a secure and risk-free world.*

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**T**he adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in 2000 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) presaged a new global thinking about peace and security, and situated women's rights at the center of international security dialogue for the first time. The standard normative practice in addressing armed conflict and its aftermath only remained as a framework of the late 90s but is considered a revolutionary approach to the conceptualization of peace and security.

*“Resolution 1325 was one of the crowning achievements of the global women’s movement and one of the most inspired decisions of the United Nations Security Council.”<sup>1</sup>*

At its essence, UNSCR 1325 is about making the invisible, visible: it is about opening spaces and dislodging obstacles to women's participation in decisions around conflict and peace. The exclusion and invisibility of women only endorse society's pre-determined gender-based roles for men and women, and prevent women's societal and political engagement.

The foundation of WPS builds on the integrated and interconnected themes of empowerment and protection—a pillared approach to the fundamentals of gender equality that is separate yet equal—giving clarity and credence to the mutually reinforcing themes of protection and participation. These core concepts were adopted in part as a way of addressing the inadequacies of conflict resolution by acknowledging that gender norms and its imposed values are perpetuated in responses to conflict.

Since the adoption of UNSCR 1325, a number of changes have taken place, including the widening of the WPS mandate to encompass the broader scope of peace and security pertaining to women. Together with the more extensive scope of UNSCR 1325, eight additional resolutions on WPS were adopted as well.<sup>2</sup> However, the additional resolutions were narrowed and targeted, allowing further refinement of specific issues that need the attention of the Security Council and the international community. The result is a package of resolutions on WPS intended to structure the overlooked and undervalued elements of women, peace, and security in a comprehensive and holistic manner.

The adoption of the WPS resolutions has been anchored to previous commitments that promote, advance, and uphold women's rights and gender equality in conflict

<sup>1</sup> UN Women, “Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325,” *United Nations*, 2015, [https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/UNW-GLOBAL-STUDY-1325-2015%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/UNW-GLOBAL-STUDY-1325-2015%20(1).pdf)

<sup>2</sup> UNSCR, 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015), 2467 (2019).

and post-conflict situations. Building on the Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform, the landmark resolution of 1325 did not stand alone but was a piece in a labyrinth of frameworks that collectively addressed women rights. It was however unique in that it was the first international recognition of the importance of women within a discourse of peace and security.

### *NATO and the Roadmap to Equality*

The adoption of the UNSCR 1325 represented a significant political shift for NATO, as it addressed women's experiences and roles in conflict and peacemaking as a matter of international peace and security. The Alliance has long held the principles of WPS as an innate element of NATO's core tasks. Since the adoption of the first NATO policy on Women, Peace and Security in 2007, the Alliance has anchored its gender and security framework in efforts on collective defense, cooperative security, and crisis management. Over the years, NATO has introduced an architecture of policy and guidance on WPS, including the endorsement of the NATO/Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) Policy on WPS. This consolidation included the development of training initiatives, the systematic deployment of Gender Advisers in NATO-led operations and missions, and the establishment of a Civil Society Advisory Panel on WPS to provide a platform for women's civil society to be heard.

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Within the WPS Agenda, the three pillars of prevention, protection, and participation remain the bedrock of UNSCR 1325. NATO has further adapted these pillars to tailor them to the Alliance's reality. This was evident at the Brussels Summit in 2018, where NATO Heads of State and Government endorsed a revised NATO/EAPC Policy and Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, introducing new principles.

The NATO Policy on WPS outlines three I's: *Integration* (gender equality is considered to be an integral part of all NATO policies, programs, and projects), *Inclusiveness* (increasing representation of women across NATO and in national forces to enhance their operational effectiveness), and *Integrity* (upholding the highest standards of professional and personal conduct both within NATO's civilian and military staff).

This new framework of policy principles represents the next step in advancing the WPS agenda within the Alliance and reaffirms the continuous commitment of NATO Allies and partners in integrating gender perspectives and WPS priorities into their policies. Both NATO Allies and partners aim to make the NATO/EAPC Policy and Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security an integral part of their everyday business in both civilian and military structures to improve operational effectiveness and contribute to a more modern and agile Alliance that is ready for the complex challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Though the adoption of a robust policy and progressive action plan is an essential foundation for the implementation of the WPS, the ultimate success of gender equality relies on accountability. Time bound goals and objectives backed by monitoring, accountability provisions, and enforcement mechanisms are necessary to ensure transparency. While support of senior leadership is critical, a sense of responsibility must also be embraced by officers of various ranks and levels with commitment and persistence. It is vital to move beyond words and uphold principles of accountability in order to establish and implement an ambitious but achievable agenda for action.

The success of a mission cannot be measured by well-written action plans or words of commitment. Success is measured by the degree to which we protect the lives and well-being of women and girls faced with the horrors of war, prevent abuse in conditions of displacement, and intercept traffickers from turning women and girls into commodities. Our success is dependent upon the vital and rightful participation of women in peace processes, post-conflict reconstruction, and governance.

The Alliance has not only recognized that women are best placed to speak on the issue of participation and protection, but also that they must be more engaged to make the invisible visible. Without women, any process lacks legitimacy and true prospect. The exclusion of women undermines the chances of achieving sustainable peace. In other words, it is clear that the constituency of women is key in promoting peace and stability. Women can act as catalysts in transforming conflict to peace and restoring the rule of law, governance, and democracy by playing a leading role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts.

For this reason, NATO established a Civil Society Advisory Panel (CSAP) which has promoted more open and inclusive dialogue with women pertaining to matters of security. Civil society organizations remind us all that we do not only pay the cost of failing to protect women in the context of armed conflict but also bear tremendous collective costs as a global community for failing to achieve our goals of building peace, pursuing development, and reconstructing post-conflict societies.

### *Whose Security?*

One of the results of the CSAP's engagement is understanding that women's perception of security greatly differs from men's. Women approach security broader and more varied. Obstacles to women's public participation such as cultural barriers, traditional images of leadership, and women's self-deprecating opinions of their own status are challenges that "correlate with the global perceptions of women vis-à-vis security."<sup>3</sup> Women tend to internalize protection, situating the concept of "security" in relation to their status. By extension, any protection mechanisms that have been designed without the active input of women will fail to achieve their purpose. Reflecting on today's global security challenges, it has become apparent that traditional responses are not always the most appropriate or successful.

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We know that sustainable peace cannot be achieved without women's security and equality. We know that the treatment of women in any society is a barometer with which we can predict other forms of oppression. We also know that countries where women are empowered are vastly more secure. That being said, space for integrating women's perspectives into peace and security continue to be limited as violence further hinders women's rights and their participation in platforms of expression.

To recognize what security is, it is necessary to identify the meaning of risk. Women's exclusion from defining risk, and thus security, will inevitably lead to the marginalization of women in the process of defining peace. For women, peace is not merely the absence of war but equality in social, economic, and political participation. Therefore, the vision of security must be anchored to the inclusion of women in all activities. It is women who serve as the mediators in disputes at community levels, who hold families together in times of conflict, who identify and manage resources when there are few, and often defend and protect at great risk. Their bodies carry the scars of violence and the wounds of loss, but still in the face of all adversity and destruction, women are resilient and yet are still missing from the center of discussions.

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<sup>3</sup> UNIFIL, "Women, Peace and Identifying Security: Piloting Military Gender Guidelines in UNIFIL," *United Nations*, 2014, [https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/unfil\\_pilot\\_report\\_web\\_flat.pdf](https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/unfil_pilot_report_web_flat.pdf)

Despite the plethora of empirical research and policy briefs urging the integration of gender equality and women's rights into peace and security frameworks, improvement in women's participation in decision-making surrounding peace and security have been slow to follow these past two decades.<sup>4</sup> Conflict resolution mechanisms and peace negotiations must reflect all of society to achieve a sustainable solution. After all, sustainability is grounded in inclusivity.

While resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions do not couch security in such terms, it is essential that all protection elements are more holistic and participatory. Security must be situated in direct correlation to the threats faced by both men and women in different security contexts. If there is a consensus that war impacts men and women differently, then gender considerations must be equally embraced while establishing security as well.

### *A Human Security Approach*

Women have the potential to change the world and shape the future. Building on the WPS agenda, NATO centers its security agenda on principles of change and transformation. The evolution of human security and its application as part of NATO is essential to the development and stabilization of communities.

As noted in General Assembly resolution 66/290, "human security is an approach to assist Member States in identifying and addressing widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of their people."<sup>5</sup> The resolution calls for "people-centered, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented responses that strengthen the protection and empowerment of all people."<sup>6</sup>

Human security is a holistic yet human-focused approach to security. At its core, human security is about addressing the larger threat in relation to the whole community. It is about all the various elements that make up security, not just about physical protection but political, environmental, societal, and cultural rights. It goes beyond the traditional realm and addresses all areas of security that put people at risk. Intrinsic to this approach is reforming the understanding of security to enable a broader conceptualization of what it constitutes, and what promotes the link between peace, security, and women's rights. Focusing on the human dimension of conflict in this

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<sup>4</sup> Marie O'Reilly, "Why Women? Inclusive Security and Peaceful Societies," October 2015, <https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/publication/why-women-inclusive-security-and-peaceful-societies/>

<sup>5</sup> General Assembly resolution 66/290, *Follow-up to paragraph 143 on human security of the 2005 World Summit Outcome*, 10 September 2012, A/RES/66/290, <https://undocs.org/A/RES/66/290>

<sup>6</sup> General Assembly resolution 66/290, *Follow-up to paragraph 143 on human security of the 2005 World Summit Outcome*, 10 September 2012, A/RES/66/290, <https://undocs.org/A/RES/66/290>

way would allow NATO to adopt appropriate strategies to tackle the complexities of emerging and evolving security challenges. As NATO evolves, it takes account of the changing geo-political dynamics and responds to new security challenges, recognizing that the potential of human security approaches will be key.

*“To build peace requires visioning what constitutes peace and security across cultures, nationalities, ethnicities, and between genders.”<sup>7</sup>*

Achieving human security starts with people and continues with empowering them, especially women, to participate in making choices about how they can be most secure. It also requires norms and institutions that guarantee the basic protection of human progress and safety through good governance, rule of law, and early warning mechanisms.

The Women, Peace and Security agenda can underpin NATO's approach to human security by providing the connective tissue between all the cross-cutting areas that incorporate human security. Security Council resolution 1325 was born out of conflict and thus its relevance and message remains essential to the ongoing global conflict. Therefore, the resolution has more resonance than ever, as conflicts continue to tear communities apart and women's lives and bodies are constantly at risk.

It is the direct and dangerous impact that conflict has on women and girls, their lives, and their futures that makes the WPS agenda so pertinent and increasingly important. For this reason, the WPS needs to be understood and implemented, not just in the framework of military response, gender parity, or traditional security but within the wider context of the human security puzzle as well.

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<sup>7</sup> Dyan Mazurana and Susan McKay, *Women and Peace-building*, (Montreal: International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, 1999).