

## Women stabilising an insecure world

*The role of women in promoting peace and security is increasingly acknowledged, with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women and Peace and Security as a crucial reference point, though much still remains to be done at all levels to implement this resolution. On the eve of the International Women's Day more than 50 international women leaders will meet in Brussels to discuss the role of women in stabilising an insecure world.*

As we write this, in the spring 2008, it is hard to imagine a world without war. Every day, we hear reports of new conflicts, of escalating tension and violence. And in any situation of insecurity, from war to health threats to climate change, women are often disproportionately affected because of their traditionally more vulnerable position in the society.

80 percent of the world's refugees are women and children. Sexual violence and rape are prevalent in regions of war as well as in refugee camps. We cannot talk about the role of women in conflict resolution without acknowledging this terrible reality. At the same time, we need to remember that women are also key actors promoting peace and stability. Security cannot be effectively discussed or achieved without the involvement of women. Women's participation is crucial not only in the more traditional "hard" security spheres like war efforts, peace-building, post-conflict reconstruction and counter-terrorism, but also countering "softer" human security threats such as global epidemics, psychological health during and post-war, and the emerging concerns of climate change and environmental degradation.

On 6 March more than 50 women leaders from all continents **will meet/have met** in Brussels on invitation of Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner to discuss about "Women: stabilising an insecure world". Female heads of states, ministers, and heads of international organisations, business leaders, and civil society activists **will discuss/have discussed** the twin themes of security and women's empowerment. This international conference for women political leaders builds on recent initiatives including the meeting hosted by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice last September in New York and the International Women Leaders Global Security Summit last November, hosted by the Council of Women World leaders where Commission vice-president Margot Wallström is chairing the Council Ministerial Initiative.

We believe the key to a stable world is sustainable development. It is about stabilising an insecure world and finding the right combination of economic growth and social progress, while at the same time caring for our planet.

Without education you cannot have social stability. Yet there are currently around 100 million children not getting any education at all – and more than 70 million are girls. That we have to change.

Another important instrument to stabilise the world is the UN Resolution 1325 on Women's Role in Peace building and security that links gender equality to global security and acknowledges the importance of women's voices in building lasting peace. This resolution is a milestone on the road to more gender-sensitive peace processes and security policies. Though the implementation of the resolution is a long-term political process it must receive more attention throughout the EU and in the various member states, in particular among decision makers in the fields of foreign, defence, security and development policy. Since the adoption of the resolution in 2000 awareness of the importance of including women in peace and reconstruction process has grown. Yet implementation of its mandate remains sporadic and ad hoc.

Women make a difference, in part because they adopt a more inclusive approach toward security and address key social and economic issues that would otherwise be ignored. Women can make peace agreements and post-conflict efforts more viable, effective, and practical by engaging in a wide variety of actions, including but not limited to participating in peace talks; rehabilitating children associated with armed groups; convening people across conflict lines to discuss common concerns such as access to clean water; and advocating budget priorities that emphasize social services rather than military expenditures.

Women also have a great deal to offer to the planning and execution of weapons collection, demobilization and reintegration programs. Women's organisations are very active at the community level in both disarmament and reintegration initiatives. Whether persuading fighters to disarm, collecting weapons or providing psycho-social assistance to former combatants, women's civil society groups such as ProPaz in Mozambique or Dushirehamwe in Burundi are attempting to address the proliferation of small arms as well as the impact and needs of former combatants.

But despite the general consensus to protect and empower women, they remain marginalized in decision-making, peace-building and peacekeeping operations. Under-representation of women in politics still persists worldwide, including in Europe. Only six percent of ministers worldwide and 10 percent of parliamentarians are women. And we all know that the famous "glass ceiling" is still in place, be it in politics or economy.

Barring women from full participation at the decision making levels are significant barriers to achieving Resolution 1325's goals. There is also a widespread problem of simply viewing women as victims and not recognizing their potential as active participants in the process of building a more stable and secure world.

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