The No-Nonsense *guide to* Communicating Women and Peace and Security

How can women's participation at decision-making levels in peace processes be strengthened? How can the number of women at decision-making levels in national, regional and global institutions involved in preventing, managing, and resolving conflicts be increased? These questions frame United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on women, peace and security. What is missing is an articulation of the role communication can play in giving a more prominent place to women's voices, needs, and achievements.

Media, language, and representation are three key aspects of communication that have long reinforced negative stereotypes about women's roles in conflict situations and peace processes. When criti-

sented in formal peace processes. According to UNIFEM, no UN-sponsored peace negotiation has ever been led by a woman. Likewise, women represent less than 8% of participants and less than 3% of signatories in recent UN peace negotiations. Women do, however, contribute significantly to informal peace processes, and are able to lend a unique perspective on peace and conflict that will strengthen prospects for sustainable peace.[1]

UNSCR 1325 (see blue box overleaf) acknowledges this, recognizing that exclusion from peace processes is an infringement of women's rights. The Resolution affirms women as agents of critical change in conflict prevention, conflict management, and peace building.

Since the adoption of UNSCR 1325, three supporting resolutions have been adopted by the Security Council: UNSCR 1820, 1888, and 1889 (see second blue box overleaf). Taken together, these four resolutions emphasize the significant harm incurred

Banner displayed outside the United Nations in New York during a week-long 'Peace Fair', October 2010.

cally approached, these aspects of communication can become powerful tools for the promotion of women's increased participation in peace processes.

Evidence shows that women are poorly repre-

by women as a result of armed conflict and the impact this has on durable peace and reconciliation.

In response, the resolutions call for women's equal participation and full involvement in the promo-

tion and maintenance of peace and security, and also for increased opportunities for women to be involved in decision-making processes related to conflict prevention and resolution.

UNSCR 1325 specifically recognizes women's unique capacity for conflict prevention, conflict management and peace building. However, it fails to articulate the important communication dimensions of this issue. In what ways do certain methods of communication obscure the potential for women's involvement in peace processes? How will women be able to participate in peace processes unless they are informed about what is happening in the world around them? And how will they participate in peace processes unless they are visible and their voices are heard?

If women are to become more involved in formal peace processes, they must be empowered by and for communication. Deborah Tannen has put forward a theory suggesting that women use communication that establishes connections and maintains similarity, while men communicate in a way that negotiates status and hierarchy.[2] This suggests that one of the barriers to women's increased involvement in formal peace processes is not their inability to communicate, but a lack of empowerment to use their natural peace-promoting communication skills.

What follows is a discussion of some of these aspects, the ways in which they have impacted women's active participation in bringing peace to the public sphere, and examples of how communication has been used by women's groups to promote their involvement in peace processes.

WOMEN, PEACE AND MEDIA

News media typically overlook the participation of women in peace processes. More often, they give an impression of women as helpless victims in situations of war and conflict. The World Association for Christian Communication's 2010 Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) found that only 21% of subjects in news stories about 'peace, negotiation, treaties,' were female. Likewise, only 5% of these stories challenged gender stereotypes in comparison to 64% which reinforced gender stereotypes.[3]

Gender stereotypes include powerful and pervasive images of male and female roles during conflict. One is that of the powerful and heroic male warrior, in contrast to the beautiful and helpless female citizen. Such simplistic and sexist images are created and sustained by entertainment media. Films and video games that deal with conflict situations often feature male, lead characters responsible for resolving the conflict. Female characters tend to be sidelined, and their value is derived solely from their dependency relationship to

the heroic male.

When women create their own communication networks, media can become a powerful tool for promoting their increased involvement in peace processes. We see this demonstrated by femLINKpacific (www.femlinkpacific.org), a non-governmental organization in Fiji that promotes 'women speaking to women for peace'. By developing and implementing a range of women's media initiatives, such as a radio station, a regional magazine and e-news bulletins, femLINKpacific offers a safe space for women to articulate and exchange viewpoints.

femLINKpacific has found that many Fijian women are already involved in informal peace processes at the community level, but are held back from becoming full participants in formal peace processes because they do not have access to sufficient information. femLINKpacific empowers women by providing education and the tools necessary to become involved in peace processes on a broader scale. It aims to bring the voices of marginalized and oppressed women into

the political arena through strengthening of women's media networks.

Similarly, the International Women's Tribune Center (IWTC) (www.iwtc.org) seeks to make knowledge about UNSCR 1325 available to women at national and community levels. It uses media, especially community-based radio and local-language print materials, to communicate about women's rights. A specific IWTC initiative is a series of radio productions called 'Women Talk Peace', broadcast throughout Africa, to raise awareness of UNSCR 1325 and other international conventions relevant to women in conflict situations (see http://iwtc.org/2983/index.html).

The Women Talk Peace radio productions use various formats including features, dramas and short plugs to communicate information about UNSCR 1325, as well as other international conventions and legal mechanisms relevant to women in conflict situations.

The first radio productions focused on women, peace and security issues in Africa and Asia and the Pacific region and specific issues in certain countries in those regions. The productions in Africa addressed issues of reconstruction in Liberia as well as the complexities of the armed conflict in Northern Uganda. The African productions were made available in Luganda, Swahili, Kpelle, Bassa, French, and English.

The productions in Asia and the Pacific spoke about the armed conflict in the southern Philippines but also reflected the nature and extent of conflict in Aceh, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Papua New Guinea. The Asia and Pacific productions were made available in Filipino and English. The radio productions were aired by a number of community and public radio stations in all the regions.

In addition, and in partnership with the Uganda Media Women's Association, Radio Apac, and other local women's groups and community radio stations in Uganda, IWTC produced a radio soap opera focusing on issues of sexual and gender-based violence. Called 'The Open Cage', it was broadcast in Luo, Luganda, and English, and was launched on International Women's Day 2008. The production process involved a 'writeshop' and focus group discussions during which local women's groups and people from Atana Village in Apac district in Northern Uganda participated in the development of the script and in the field-testing of messages.

A similar initiative took place in Sierra Leone, again in partnership with a number of local women's organisations and NGOs. The programmes in Sierra Leone addressed issues confronted by women and men in rebuilding the country, including post-conflict violence.

The 'Women Talk Peace' series is part of the

IWTC's effort to develop a core group of broadcasters, print journalists and other media practitioners who are informed about UNSCR 1325 in order to ensure a sustained flow of information about the Resolution, other legal mechanisms and how they can be used to protect and promote women's rights.

IWTC is widely recognized for its pioneering work and innovative approaches in the information and communications arena. It was one of the first to develop skill-sharing opportunities for women in the

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Since resolution 1325 was adopted, three subsequent resolutions have been endorsed by the UN to address women's involvement in conflict and peace building.

Resolution 1820 (2008) recognizes conflict-related sexual violence as a matter of international peace and security. It calls for the UN and peace operations to develop mechanisms to prevent and respond to sexual violence.

Resolution 1888 (2009) appoints leadership to coordinate UN efforts to address conflict-related sexual violence, and calls for the inclusion of the issue of sexual violence in peace negotiations.

Resolution 1889 (2009) ensures that obstacles to women's participation in peace processes are being addressed by requiring the UN Secretary General to track the implementation of resolution 1325.

At the Security Council debate on 'Women, peace and security' and 10 years of progress in implementing SCR 1325, held in New York on October 26, 2010, UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon called on the Security Council to take leadership on 1325, specifically asking it to endorse the indicators on 'Women and peace and security' developed earlier in the year and hold peacekeepers in the UN system accountable when they are the perpetrators of violence.

See: http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/WPS%20S2010%20173.pdf

Global South with new information technologies; one of the first to develop systems to support the growth of networks and networking; and one of the first to demonstrate the possibilities of translating research findings and policy mandates into highly visual, participatory materials for use at the community level.

IWTC's materials and graphics are available for reproduction, adaptation, translation and sharing by women's and community organizations and development agencies worldwide.

Transforming public discourse

Language that is used to speak about conflict is not gender neutral. In Carol Cohn's analysis of language used by nuclear defence specialists, she identifies a myriad examples where weapons are spoken about in masculine terms, and the land and people which are destroyed by those weapons in feminine terms.[4] This discourse normalizes a concept of male dominance and female helplessness in war, which influences the way women are expected to respond in conflict situations.

Conflict language tends to emphasize women as victims, thereby obscuring the possibility of women being seen as active workers for peace. It can also conceals women's involvement in peace processes when, for example, the word 'actors' is used, and never 'actress'. Although a simple linguistic distinction, the act of referring to individuals in male terms marginalizes and veils the participation of women.

It is urgent for public discourses in relation to conflict and peace processes to be changed. Mary Yoder Holsopple recommends that this can be done through peace education, teaching skills to women and men to help them conceptualize conflict and peace in a more inclusive way.[5]

ISIS International, an organization located in the Philippines, educates women to promote peace through community radio. In a project supported by WACC, ISIS facilitated a five-day seminar for female community radio practitioners from South and Central Asia living in conflict situations. The seminar taught radio production skills and empowered them to begin dialogue in their local communities focused on wom-

en's involvement in peace processes. This initiative created opportunities for women to speak about conflict using language that did not obscure their active role in making peace.[6]

The International Women's Tribune Centre (IWTC) provides similar opportunities through its 'Speak for Peace', Cyber-Dialogue programme. Cyber-dialogues allow women to be involved in global peace processes and to network with other female peace activists through internet voice chat and tele-conferencing.

Many grassroots women's organizations are also working to empower others to create their own public images about conflict and peace in an attempt to promote women's involvement in building a culture of peace. WACC sponsored a grassroots group called UWAFI working in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to train local female activists in communication rights and to tackle the problem of violence against women. UWAFI facilitated an exchange visit with leading human rights organizations in Uvira on approaches to peace advocacy and women's rights.

In addition, UWAFI carried out educational work in schools, workplaces and communities, supported local women's groups to distribute Education and Action kits and to speak out on issues of public policy, women's human rights, and on violence against women. It organized three Peace Days in local communities and the painting of twelve public peace murals by women in their communities.

> **'The historic and operational value of the resolution as the first international policy mechanism that explicitly recognized the gendered nature of war and peace processes has been undercut by the frustrating record of its implementation... We should never forget that when women are marginalized, there is little chance for our world to get peace in the real sense!'**
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> From a speech given on 4 November 2010 in Washington DC at the United States Institute of Peace conference on 'Women at the Centre of Peace: UNSCR 1325' by Ambassador Anwarul K. Chowdhury, UN Security Council President (March 2000 & June 2001) and Under-Secretary-General and High Representative of the United Nations (2002-07).

Religion, peace and gender[7]

Religion has a bad reputation in relation to war and peace, but the gathering entitled 'Interfaith Peace Building consultation: the need for a gender perspective' held in Nicosia, Cyprus, in September 2010 and organized by the Women Peacemakers Program of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, was designed to allow participants to focus not only on the negative side of religion but on the positive potential of faith-based peacebuilding.

The consultation's interactive process began with intensive conversations about the current exclusion of women from power, within their own experi-

ence of religion. One key theme that emerged was the lack of space and opportunity for women's voices to be heard, especially higher up the ladder of religious hierarchies where decisions are made. Discussion focused on the relative advantages of on the one hand creating spaces and gaining power for women within existing structures, and on the other hand creating new, parallel structures designed for cooperation and inclusion.

The point was strongly and repeatedly made that many of the exclusionary or violent norms and practices in use against women that are thought by many to be religiously based, come in fact from cultural norms and constructs which are then imputed to scriptures and embedded in religious teaching. Furthermore the texts adduced to support discrimination are almost always selected and interpreted by men. Relatively few women have the education and hence the confidence to challenge these scriptural interpretations.

It was clear that for many women their religious faith was a strong motivating force for peace making and their accounts of their work were moving. Aesha Aqtam and Piera Edelman both belong to Parents Circle Families Forum, an organisation working for peace, whose members have all lost relatives in the Israel-Palestine conflict. They addressed one workshop together, describing the impact of the violence on their personal lives and outlining their common hopes and values. Speaking of the cost of violence, Aesha said, 'There is nothing more expensive than the person'.

Awanah Flee, of the Women in Peacebuilding Network in Liberia She described the role Liberian women had played in helping to broker an end to the Liberian civil war when Christian and Muslim women activists came together during the civil war to demonstrate against the war and expose its horrors, and how they managed to pressure male leaders into signing the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

The final day of the gathering focussed on strategies to bring a gender perspective to inter-faith and faith based peacebuilding, agreeing that to do so meant recognising the equal validity and importance of women's and men's dignity, needs, well being and contributions, and seeing gender justice as essential to peace. Building solidarity between women and finding allies among men were confirmed at this consultation as twin approaches to overcoming the current inequities in power and participation.

It was clear also that some of the peacebuilding work undertaken by the women was by nature 'interfaith', in the sense that it concerned bridge-building between people of different faiths, and that the belief in and commitment to peace that many of the women brought to their peacebuilding work was firmly based in their religious belief.

The discussions about women in peacebuilding, tended to focus rather generally on women as peacemakers and to overlook interfaith or faith-based work. The debate highlighted the malign aspects of religious teaching and hierarchies and how to change them, and because religious and cultural belief systems and practices are often inseparable, the conversation often strayed into general discussions about gender-based discrimination and violence.

The fluid shape the consultation took reflected the concerns and experiences that the participants brought with them. And it provided an important opportunity for developing practical strategies and networks.

In their closing reflections, one after another, women described how the sense of isolation they had felt when they arrived had been replaced by an overwhelming feeling of solidarity and an awareness that, although there was a very long way to go, they were in good company for the journey. This was an important and ground-breaking meeting, which was hopefully just a beginning.

Role of mass and community media

According to a UNIFEM survey of peace processes in the global South undertaken in 2005, six factors were identified as necessary to ensure gender equality throughout a peace process:

(1) Women's involvement in peace negotiations should reflect the diversity of active women and women's groups.

(2) Women are more likely to make an impact in the negotiations when they have developed a common agenda and have identified strategic entry points through which that agenda can be introduced.

(3) Facilitators/mediators can play a critical role in peace negotiations by ensuring that issues directly related to the needs and concerns of women and girls are included and that women will be empowered in all stages of the negotiation process.

(4) Women and their organizations need continued support and strengthening of their capacity to enhance their effective participation in peace negotiations and build skills that will last beyond the talks.

(5) After a peace agreement has been signed, women must be part of monitoring mechanisms and transitional bodies that foster implementation of the peace agreement. The tenets upon which the peace agreement is built must inform constitutional, electoral and legislative reform.

(6) Women's political and economic empowerment in the post-conflict period is vital to successful development and sustainable peace.

However, as femLINKpacific executive director Sharon Bhagwan Rolls pointed out in a round-table discussion on 'Securing the Peace',[8] it is not merely a question of strengthening women's capacity to speak out on their own issues. There is an equivalent and pressing need to ensure that women's concerns are transformed into language that influences policy makers and national leaders.

It is also important to create women's peace networks through which to contribute to the prevention of further conflict. Community communications (especially radio) offer a locally-driven, locally-owned and inclusive process where women can assert their right to participate in the decisions being taken about their future.

Those responsible for the mass media – as public service media – have a duty to represent women's concerns fairly and adequately. Balanced and objective inclusion of women's perspectives in news coverage, holding governments and official bodies up to public scrutiny, and promoting an ethos of responsibility and accountability are three guiding principles.

As Cora Weiss, President of the Hague Appeal for Peace, said in her speech 'Vision for Women in the 21st Century': 'I dream of peace and justice. I dream women will make it happen.'[9] Communication by women can help make it happen. ∎

Notes

1. 'Women, War and Peace', UNIFEM Online. Accessed on November 17, 2010. http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/women_war_peace/
2. 'Women and Men in Conversation', by Deborah Tannen (1991) in You Just Don't Understand, p. 12. Random House.
3. Who Makes the News? Global Media Monitoring Project 2010. Toronto: WACC. http://www.who-makesthenews.org/
4. 'Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals', by Carol Cohn (1987) in Signs, Vol. 12, No. 4, Within and Without: Women, Gender, and Theory, p. 637. The University of Chicago Press. Accessed Online at http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174209
5. 'Education: Teaching a Culture of Peace', by Mary Yoder Holsopple (2004) in Building Peace: Overcoming Violence in Communities, p. 29. WCC Publications, Geneva.
6. See: http://www.waccglobal.org/en/programmes/communication-for-peace/2113-women-in-south-and-central-asia-promote-peace-via-community-radio.html
7. Excerpted from 'Religion, peace and gender' by Diana Francis published online by openDemocracy, 18 October 2010, http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050
8. 'Securing the Peace' (March 2005) Guiding the International Community towards Women's Effective Participation throughout Peace Processes. http://amarcwiki.amarc.org/upload/documents/Use_of_CR_to_encourage_women.pdf
9. http://www.haguepeace.org/showCoraSpeech.php?url=speeches/speeches8.inc

The World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) promotes communication for social change. It believes that communication is a basic human right that defines people's common humanity, strengthens cultures, enables participation, and creates community.

WACC's key concerns are media diversity, equal and affordable access to communication and knowledge, media and gender justice, and the relationship between communication and power. *www.waccglobal.org*

WACC runs the Centre for Communication Rights portal – a source of documents and materials about all aspects of communication rights. *www.centreforcommunicationrights.org*

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