Peace and security for whom?

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The Euromed Feminist Initiative (IFE-EFI) is a network that brings together women’s rights organisations from Europe, Maghreb, and Middle East. All of them have the same belief that feminism is a driving force behind the transformations that our societies urgently need, all over the world. I would like to highlight here some of IFE-EFI’s analyses on peace and security. Let me first remind everyone that one of the objectives of this conference is to continue supporting the advocacy work of the Syrian women’s rights activists and to provide them expanded space to discuss and advocate for their demands. IFE-EFI has been working with them for several years, contributing to the efforts of preparing a democratic future for Syria inclusive of women’s rights and gender equality. The University of Padova has been associated to this work by welcoming two young lawyers for a five-month internship and for both sides, this experience was a very fruitful one!

Peace and security are among the major issues that frame the action of our network, and United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 is one of the major tools we use to preserve women’s rights rights and security, together with other international and regional statements and resolutions, above all the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The gender gap in both peace and transitional phases is a persistent and universal challenge. Thus, women’s struggle for political and social change needs strong international solidarity to expose both the prevalence of militaristic
values, and male-dominated cultures and norms that lead to limited space and access for women’s political and social role and influence.

Today, we are globally confronted with an unprecedented wave of reactionary political movements and religious fundamentalisms that threaten people’s lives and deny their rights to freedom, social justice, and peace. We are facing the rise of bloody conflicts, the pursuit of repressive regimes, and occupying forces that kill and imprison people to stifle all voices defending human rights. Women’s rights, as universal human rights, are particularly targeted. That’s why there are urgent steps to lay the foundation for political solutions to the conflicts in which women play an equal and significant leading role.

As feminists, we are pacifists and used to questioning the traditional approach of peace and security, and we strive to uncover the emptiness of dominant discourses based on domination, control over the other, military action, and destruction. We strive to unveil the continuum of violence against women during peace and war and to get from the States the integration of this structural violence as part of their security policies. We stress that human security truly merits its name only if it includes the two components of Humanity. In times of crises and conflicts, the issue of gender equality is more than ever pushed at the background of the public debate, while it should be the opposite.

Why is there such a persistent gender gap in the planning of both peace and transitional processes that take societies out of conflicts and dictatorships in spite of the role played by women? Peace processes are built upon a combination of different factors.

The first obstacle is related to the specific patriarchal legacy of societies and universal traditional patriarchal values. This combination results in different forms of discrimination against women after conflicts are over and during the political transitions that follow. Therefore, women’s active participation for social change and for keeping the community going during violent conflicts does not translate into their proportional participation in formal peace processes and decision making under the following transitional period.
The debate on women’s participation in decision-making processes often leads to the same questions about ‘the difference that women would make’. For us, this participation is not a matter of ‘plus’ or efficiency, on which difference women would make, but a basic matter of social justice. In other words, the presence of women is not measurable in terms of impact, but it is a measure of democracy. This means that all decision-making processes, peace processes among them, should include equal representation and participation of women.

The second is related to the power structures that maintain women in a subordinated position all over the world. As we know, one of their bases is militarism that sustains and strengthens the supremacy of military values on culture, identity, and norms of society on public institutions and policies. Militarist culture is a major barrier to the presence of women in decision making in the field of security.

The third is the strength of stereotypes about the myth of a feminine identity characterized by a so-called women’s lack of taste and incapacity to deal with power or to manage difficult negotiations. This ‘femininity’ has always been used to exclude women from history. Our network, IFE-EFI, acts with all the components of the democratic movement for the development, in the whole Euromed region, of political tools to eradicate these stereotypes – as early as at school – and to denounce the increasing intrusion of religions in the public sphere that contribute to consolidating them.

The last obstacle is linked to the nature of peace negotiations: as political processes, they are male-shaped in their composition, functioning, language, and history. Women are welcomed to intervene on ‘women’s issues’, supposed to be ‘their’ specific issues, and not issues related to half of humanity.

How to face all these obstacles? The first necessity is the implementation by the States of actions counteracting dominant discourses on militarism that penalize fundamental women’s rights in the name of national security. Besides, together with all components of the feminist movement, we have to convince
the democratic political and associative movement of the urgency to take into account feminist analyses as it is the only way to build a democratic world.

Last and not least, it is crucial to promote the UNSC Resolution 1325 and work for its implementation. This resolution, adopted in 2000, reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace building, peace keeping, and in post-conflict reconstruction. It stresses the importance of equal participation and full involvement of women in the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. It urges all actors to increase this participation and incorporates gender perspectives in all United Nations (UN) peace and security strategies. It also calls on all parties of the conflicts to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and sexual abuse in situations of armed conflict. This resolution provides a number of important operational mandates, with implications for Member States and entities of the UN system.

For the first time, women are not only approached as ‘victims’ or as a ‘vulnerable group’ by the UN Security Council. Resolution 1325 focuses on women as agents in their own right in situations of conflict and post-conflict. It recognizes the unbalanced and gender-specific impact of conflicts on women, but also highlights the very limited role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction. In Article 1, it calls for the “increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in […] prevention, management, and resolution of conflicts”. In Article 8, it requires all participants to the negotiation and implementation of peace agreements to “adopt a gender perspective”.

Even if three other Resolutions have also been adopted after 1325 to preserve women’s rights in conflict situations – UNSCR 1820, 1888 and 1890 – UNSCR 1325 is important because it is mandatory for all member states. As such, it is a precious tool in the hands of civil society to make governments accountable.

In this year of the 16th anniversary of the Resolution, what has been achieved? The reports about sexual violence in conflict zones and the persistent under-
representation of women in peace negotiations and post-conflict governance highlight the huge gap between the adoption of the resolution and its implementation. As early as 2004, the UN called on Member States to develop National Action Plans as the most effective way to fill this gap. As the Resolution was written in general terms concerning women’s needs in all conflict and post-conflict areas, its implementation needs national plans with specific, measurable, and time-limited objectives. Furthermore, the change of women’s situation “requires specific actions and policies, accountability mechanisms for the different ministries and respective authorities, a concrete allocated budget, transparency, and [therefore] evaluation and monitoring reporting mechanisms”\(^4\).

With the support of the Norwegian Embassy, IFE-EFI initiated, supported, and facilitated the development of the National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of the UNSCR 1325 in Iraq 2012-2014. The plan was adopted in 2014.

The main objectives\(^5\) of this project were through the plan to:

- increase the effective and proportional participation of women in decision-making positions on local and national levels in all reconciliation committees and peace-building negotiations;

- increase quotas as an affirmative action on all levels: executive, legislative, and judiciary and in the local communities to allow women to play their role in decision making;

- harmonize national legislation with international standards and mechanisms for women’s human rights, including UNSCR 1325, annul laws which violate women rights, and promulgate/enact legislations that protect and promote them;

\(^4\) http://www.equalpowerlastingpeace.org/tag/national-action-plan/

\(^5\) http://www.peacewomen.org/assets/image/iraq_nap.pdf?
• strengthen women’s agency through right-based approaches;

• integrate and mainstream gender in in all policies and processes related to conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and peace-building in Iraq.

Via this project, Iraq has become the first country in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to have such a plan. It was adopted in 2014. Its development was carried out by a Cross Sector Task Force (CSTF) composed of State actors, representatives from relevant ministries, members of parliament, judiciary courts, and the ‘INAP 1325 Initiative’ – an informal network of women’s rights organizations and networks in the civil society – from Iraq and Kurdistan.

IFE- EFI is now supporting the phase of implementation that can also have an impact on regional peace and stability. Exchanges have already taken place with Syrian activists on the Iraqi experience and the lessons learned from this process. The last report provides an overview of the collective and individual efforts of Iraqi ministries, security institutions, and civil society in implementing the plan in a very challenging context. Analysing the achievements, as well as the challenges and the gaps in the implementation will help the CSTF in addressing them during the development of the second national plan.

The key provisions of the resolution, captured by three P’s (protection of human rights of women and girls during times of conflict, prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, and equal participation of women in peace building and reconstruction), are addressed by the Iraqi National Action Plan. A fourth pillar related to economic empowerment was also integrated, responding to the actual needs of women. Legal actions have also been elaborated in order to enable the implementation of the resolution. Approaching these issues in a comprehensive manner, the national plan has thus become an important tool to enhance the implementation of measures guaranteeing an increased level of security and participation of women in rebuilding society.

The added value of this national plan is its collaborative and consultative process which ensured broad ownership. Furthermore, the common work on its
development and implementation provided space for all involved to responsibly enhance skills and increase capacities in the field of women’s rights as well as for understanding the interconnected nature of women’s meaningful participation in decision making and building peace and security.

Most of all, we hope that this work has contributed to an improved situation for women on the ground, who are the real actors for change.

As stated above, to face the immensity of the present challenges, feminist perspectives must be shared and adopted by the democratic movement. In parallel, immediate steps must be taken by all States to stop the bloodshed, to act for global demilitarization, and the end of occupation. Without this, no advancement of any rights can be achieved, as militarism and sacrifice of rights, in particular women’s rights, in the name of national security, will prevail. It is our common responsibility, researchers and women’s rights activists together, to intensify our efforts in order to reach our common goal: a peaceful and secure world, where security will equally benefit women and men and not only half of humanity.