INDEPENDENT COMMISSION ON MULTILATERALISM

Women, Peace, and Security

Executive Summary

Over the past two decades, an abundance of legal and policy frameworks in the multilateral system have focused on women's security and empowerment. The international community has sought to address violence against women and women's full and equal participation since the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing. At the United Nations, the Security Council connected women's security with peace more broadly in the year 2000 when it placed "women and peace and security" on the international agenda with Resolution 1325. It is has passed six more resolutions on the topic in the intervening years. The creation of UN Women in 2011 showed that gender equality is now recognized as a cross-cutting challenge in international affairs.

However, women continue to be poorly represented in formal peacemaking activities, and they suffer disproportionately from the indirect effects of conflict. International laws on conflict-related sexual violence are advancing, but patterns of behavior on the ground appear slow to change. While change undoubtedly requires concerted action at individual and societal levels, there are also gaps, challenges, and tensions in the multilateral approach that are creating obstacles to progress.

This paper outlines key debates in the field of women, peace, and security (section I) before exploring institutional challenges and opportunities (section II). Finally, the paper offers conclusions and observations that can serve as strategic entry points for action (section III) and recommendations for the multilateral system on operationalizing its policy commitments on women, peace, and security (section IV).

Progress in this area is something on which the credibility of the multilateral system itself depends. Even as the multilateral system—in particular the UN Security Council, which serves as the home of the women, peace and security agenda—continues to prioritize state security over human security, there is now compelling evidence that women's physical security and gender equality in society are associated with broader peace and stability in states. There is growing recognition that inclusive societies, which provide equal opportunity for all, are more likely to be peaceful and stable. Inclusion and inclusive development are increasingly seen as core elements of conflict prevention.

Today, many states are under stress to a great extent because of their exclusive nature and lack of legitimacy, both of which are in turn reflected in the state-based multilateral system. A multilateral system built on exclusive states and exclusive structures is not sustainable. Amid widespread calls for a return to the foundational principle of "we the people," states and the organizations that they create cannot ignore the priorities of half their populations.

The women, peace, and security agenda raises significant questions about the way that the multilateral system conceives of peace and security, and whose interests the system is prioritizing. These fundamental debates in turn influence the institutional gaps and challenges in implementing the agenda and accelerating progress for women and for peace.

These interrelated dilemmas offer **three general tasks ahead** for those looking to improve multilateral engagement on women, peace, and security:

1. **Reimagine traditional approaches to peace and security.** Advancing the women, peace, and security agenda may require a fundamental rethinking of the traditional approach to peace and security in the multilateral system—from conceptions of peace and security to the identification of key actors and the goals of peace processes.

2. **Achieve a unified, holistic, and coherent approach.** Improving women's security and increasing women's participation in managing and resolving conflict depends on multiple, related elements—from shifts in social norms to improvements in education and increased women's representation in politics and policymaking.

3. **Build an inclusive and legitimate multilateral system.** The empowerment of women as equal citizens—and global citizens—could help to make the state-based multilateral system itself more legitimate, credible, and effective while also advancing the women, peace and security agenda.

Fifteen years after the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, the agenda is undergoing a global review of progress to date. The following six recommendations, described in detail in the paper, can provide strategic entry points for action:

1. **Promote leadership beyond multilateral norm-setting.**
2. **Concentrate on operationalizing the agenda in a coherent way.**
3. **Increase accountability for added efficiency and effectiveness.**
4. **Translate normative frameworks literally and culturally.**
5. **Engage and encourage male champions of equality.**
6. **Partner to develop applied tools.**

The potential of women can only be unlocked by addressing their fundamental needs—ensuring freedom from security threats and linking this agenda to their social and economic advancement. International actors can no longer separate peace and security from development, if participation and gender equality are to advance. This has been recognized in the Sustainable Development Goals, which include critical links to women's empowerment.

As outlined above, the women, peace, and security agenda raises significant questions about the way the multilateral system conceives of peace and security. Such fundamental change in this realm requires high-level strategic engagement with key decision makers across the UN system, regional organizations, and member states. It also calls for increased representation of women at decision-making levels in politics and foreign policy in general.