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COMMITTEE: Commission on the Status of Women

TOPIC: The question of Enhancing the Role of Women in post-war Societies

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INTRODUCTION

During wartime, women are widely considered the primary victims of armed conflicts because they are often subject to violence and sexual abuse, become widows and suffer from the disintegration of their social communities.

During conflict, existing inequalities exacerbate. For example, only 9% of women own legal titles to land in conflict and post-conflict countries, compared to a global rate of 19% (which is still very low). Girls in conflict are also 13% less likely to be in school, compared to the global rate, and child marriage rates are among the world's highest in many conflict countries. During war, women and girls are often faced with the role of preserving order and normality among chaos and destruction, when undertaking new roles in society as heads of households and when struggling to promote peace in order to protect the health, safety and well-being of their families.

In post-conflict situations, though, despite their active role in war, women are too often neglected. Research showed that peace agreements are more likely to last in time when women are included at the negotiating table. Most of the time however, this continues not to be the case. Even worse, as of 2014, more than half of peace agreements continued to make no mention of women and data gathered by OECD showed that only 2% of aid to peace and security targeted gender equality as a principal objective. From a socio-economic point of view, women are also disregarded. Legal limitations to women's right to lands for instance, mean that many widows, who administered the land of their husbands, often find themselves in the situation where they have no rights over that land anymore. Girls on the other hand, who had to leave school are unlikely to be able to go back, having long lasting consequences in the future.

EXPLANATION OF THE TOPIC

During wartime, women are often the primary victims of numerous atrocities. Nevertheless, women also show great resilience as they always cover many roles in the absence of their husbands and relatives fighting in the battlefields, but their influence in society is likely to stop immediately after the end of the war when women go back to their previous jobs, housework and duties and are consulted much less in the country's political, economic and social decisions for the reconstruction of the society.

Yet, studies recognize that a very important step forward in establishing a new, safe and peaceful way of living in a post-war country could be made by ensuring an active participation of women in all formal and informal peace-keeping and rebuilding activities.

Post-conflict settings are often unstable ones. As most conflicts nowadays are intra-state conflicts, peace does not necessarily occur once the peace agreement has been signed. It takes time and effort for violence to cease. For a more lasting peace, both political and socio-economic grievances have to be addressed. Additionally, actions on all Sustainable Development Goals have to be undertaken.

Achieving gender equality and women's empowerment is integral to each of the 17 goals. Only by ensuring the rights of women and girls across all the goals will we get to justice and inclusion, economies that work for all, and sustaining our shared environment now and for future generations.

In the political sector, even though women can be very active in civil society with pro-peace movements and networks, they are very often excluded from formal peace negotiations and democratization because such high-level negotiations are either considered as male domain or elite prerogatives. In 2008, UNIFEM estimated that less than 10% of women are involved in peace negotiations and less than 2% are signatories of peace agreements. This has to change, as it was proven that when women are at the negotiating table, peace is 35% more likely to last at least 15 years. The perspective of women who have lived the struggle of war from home and have often become part of informal pro-peace organizations is fundamental to identify the female needs and priorities in peace and reconciliation agreements. Higher levels of gender equality are associated with a lower propensity for conflict, both between and within states. Including women in peace agreements and post-conflict reconstruction programmes is therefore the first step to guarantee a more developed and peaceful society in the future. It's therefore crucial to encourage women's participation in rewriting laws and constitutions and access to political positions at all levels of society.

Transitional justice also plays an important role in post-conflict settings, as re-establishing justice and the rule of law is a basis for a stable society. As victims, observers or participants to the conflict, women have to be involved in these processes. It is critical that truth-seeking, reparations programs, criminal prosecutions acknowledge the violations of women's human rights during the conflict and punish their perpetrators. Additionally, women should be included in the investigations, as they can speak more easily to particular parts of the population. Men victims of sexual violence, who often feel "emasculated," for example, will find it easier to share their testimony to a woman investigator, than to a man.

From an economic point of view, it's in the post-conflict economic reconstruction that women struggle the most. Although during war women often had to become breadwinners in the family, undergoing heavy and continuous stress to provide for the family maintenance, both economically and morally, as men return from the conflict, women and girls are often neglected. Economic policies usually place great emphasis on reforms, economic stabilisation and rehabilitation of men and former combatants in the labour market, often forgetting gender issues. Employment and training courses, access to land, venture capital for enterprises and microcredit are largely directed in favour of men, while women are forced to go back to their pre-conflict jobs and roles. In Eritrea, for example, women who during conflict had been doctors, dentists, teachers, administrators, land workers had to leave these roles after the war ended. Even though opportunities and situations vary from country to country, to make a useful contribution to women's economic empowerment, gender-sensitive strategies and actions are of vital importance not only on a large sphere, but also and especially starting from family and local level. Below is a closer look to some challenges women face:

- Recognition of unpaid care work and access to the labor market: From a social point of view, post conflict social reconstruction aims at rehabilitating the social infrastructure of communities by providing the population with adequate healthcare, education and other services. It's important to remember that women have always played an important role in trying to keep the existing social facilities functioning also during wartime by providing psychological support for traumatised family members, teaching children at home and offering first aid and turning into nurses and doctors in emergency situations. However, in

post-war situations these tasks have been considered as an extension of their domestic work rather than a qualified social job. It's therefore important to recognize the role of women in this field as a professional status subject to training and remuneration in order to have a profound impact on development.

- Women's access to land: As mentioned in the introduction, land access is one of the major challenges for women in post-conflict situations. Half of the world resides in rural areas, and one third of the population depends on agriculture. Landlessness is one of the best predictors of poverty, for women in post-conflict, it can be a determinant factor for falling into extreme poverty. Without such, they might not ever be able to sustain their families economically after a conflict. Land is also a social asset that is crucial for cultural identity, political power and participation in decision making. Women's access to land is therefore essential in ensuring their right to equality, non-discrimination and to an adequate standard of living.
- Women as business owners: Microcredit and other financing mechanisms for small businesses have been recognized as crucial development tools. In Bangladesh for instance, 40% of poverty reduction in rural areas has been attributed to the role of microcredits. Even though the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) put women's access to credit on the international agenda and allowed more women to have access to such tools, this remains limited for women in post conflict settings. In fact, women empowerment is not often taken into account in the design and evaluation of microcredit programmes, leaving them gender blind. This, coupled with discriminatory laws that do not entitle women to request loans or own a bank account, leaves women in a vulnerable situation. In fact, even where they have access to land, they might not be able to request funding they would need to re-start their business after the conflict. Additionally, the need for awareness raising is important, as women are often not even aware of microfinancing opportunities.
- Girls' education and trainings: conflicts drive children, and especially girls out of schools. After the conflict, girls often have to bear responsibilities to care for family members, including sometimes their own children conceived out of sexual violence. Such circumstances, besides leaving girls vulnerable for increased discrimination, are an obstacle to education. Many students, and particularly girls, are unable to cope with the formal system which ultimately leads to an increase in illiteracy rates, which can have a long lasting effect on a country's development. Measures thus have to be taken to ensure girls' return to education. This is very hard to achieve, as they often cannot avoid their new responsibilities at home. We suggest delegates to look into Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) that can have a tremendous impact for girls in post.conflict societies.

MAJOR INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS

The international community has recognized that in post-conflict societies women can play a fundamental role in peace-building and reconstruction, so various measures have been taken in this sense by the UN and NGOs.

In 2000 the UN Security Council passed the Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security which demands for women to participate in the peace building process in order to gain more voice in human rights, have access to justice and services in order to reduce and remove discrimination.

Since then many other resolution have been passed: Resolutions 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122, 2242 which stress and claim the importance of protection and security of women, especially

in war and post-war areas and strongly reiterate a call for all Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflicts. Security Council Resolution 1889 in particular emphasises the need to develop effective financial and institutional arrangement in order to guarantee women's full and equal participation in peace-building processes. Lastly the Beijing platform for action, adopted in 1995 includes strategic objectives on Women and Armed Conflict. Strategic objective E.1 for instance is to “Increase the participation of women in conflict resolution at decision-making levels [...]” while strategic objective E.4 outlines actions to be taken to promote women’s contribution to fostering a culture of peace.

MAIN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

The United Nations for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, also known as UN Women: As part of its broader mandate, UN Women acts to build women’s participation and influence in decision-making to prevent and resolve conflicts, supporting women’s engagement in all aspects of peace building, towards more inclusive, egalitarian societies that can end gender discrimination and resolve conflicts without violence. Their programmes encourage women’s peace coalitions and prepare them to be involved in peace processes, reaching out to peacekeepers to detect and stop conflict-related sexual violence.

UNDP: In October 2010 the United Nations Development Program issued a synthesis report concerning the importance of planning, budgeting and financing in post-conflict reconstruction and the involvement of women in the funding process. Four case-studies were discussed (South Sudan, Sierra Leone, Kosovo, Timor Leste) which showed different approaches to financing with six recommendations that are crucial to advancing women's empowerment and gender equality.

WILPF: The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom's mission is to achieve feminist peace for equality, justice and demilitarised security. Since 2000 they have developed a programme called “Peace women programme” with the purpose to promote the role of women in conflict and post-conflict situations and to promote an integrated approach that connects Women, Peace and Security to disarmament, human rights and other current issues.

WEDO: The Women’s Environment and Developing Organization promotes a programme for the empowerment of women in six post-war and rural areas with the purpose to increase women’s participation and leadership role in policy and in the economy and strengthen policies and legal frameworks for gender equality and women’s access to resources through experience sharing and policy advocacy nationally and internationally.

WOMEN IN POST-CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION: CASE STUDIES

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Until 1992, Bosnia and Herzegovina was part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. After cessation, a violent war followed, lasting from April 1992 to December 1995. The war destroyed almost completely all the infrastructure, the economy, the social system of the country as well as ethnic relations between the three main groups: Muslim Bosniaks; Orthodox Serbs and Catholic

Croats. The reconstruction process therefore entailed rebuilding the cities and reconciling the three groups.

Before the conflict, women were participating in political life, accounting for 24.1% of the political representatives for the republic. Economically, women enjoyed a decent employment rate and were entitled to social benefits, as socialist countries valued gender equality. Nevertheless, there existed in Bosnia the underlying notion that women's power remained inside the house and illiteracy rates among women were very high.

During the conflict, women were victims, since rape was used as a war-tool for ethnic cleansing, but also combatants and activists. Economically, Bosnian women were more affected by poverty than men and black market activities was a norm.

After the conflict, despite their important roles, the Dayton peace accord gave no attention to women or gender. Politically, grassroots work was sponsored by International Organizations and other donors to enhance women's influence on the peace-building and reform process. Donors were especially targeting women for projects of ethnic reconciliation and the re-establishment of cross-ethnic communication. Women Civil Society Organizations lobbied hard to create the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) to provide justice to victims. Sadly, women participation in the ICTY after its creation became more rare. Economically, much emphasis was given to microcredit programmes directed towards women, the UNDP programme for instance, incorporated a gender dimension. The main post-war micro-credit and income generating funder, the Bosnian Women's Initiative (BWI) was established thanks to the UN. Lastly, in the social sphere, women organized themselves and undertook a variety of humanitarian and community activities. They supported training provided for humanitarian relief, social service provision and civil society building.

Liberia

Liberia was subject to two, closely followed Civil Wars. The first one lasted from 1989 until 1997, killing 250,000. Already then, women's organizations worked tirelessly to bring warring parties to the negotiating table. The Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) mobilized women since the earliest days of the civil war. Sadly, as in numerous conflicts, peace was fragile and the first peace agreement was short lived, as the conflict resumed in 2000. During this second conflict, WIPNET spearheaded the "Women in Liberia Mass Action for Peace" campaign, which confronted the rebels directly and encouraged them to negotiate. This eventually led to the 2003 Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Nevertheless, it should be underlined that women were also participating as combatants to the conflict. In fact, thirty to forty percent of all fighting forces in Liberia were women.

After the CPA, and despite their role during the war, women found themselves shut out from the disarmament process. WIPNET and other women travelled to the disarmament camps themselves to meet the fighters and convinced them to lay down their arms. Politically, WIPNET was also instrumental in ensuring women's representation during the 2005 election by raising awareness, as many women expressed indifference to voting given that government structures had never before benefited them as a group before the war. In terms of economic empowerment, another Civil Society Organization: the Mano River Women's Peace Network was instrumental for women. They worked hard with the state and companies to include women professionally. For instance, women who had received training as seamstresses had the opportunity to obtain government contracts to

sew uniforms for school children. The same organization was also involved in justice to ensure protection of rape victims.

Civil Society played a large role but larger organizations such as the World Bank helped women in the post-conflict process. The World Bank had a “Gender Action Plan” which focused on women inclusions in the most productive sectors, pushing for Liberian women’s capacity to compete and providing access to commercial credit.

Main sources: <https://dumas.ccsd.cnrs.fr/dumas-01269661/document>

<https://www.usip.org/publications/2007/05/womens-role-liberias-reconstruction>

KEY WORDS:

Fragile state: most countries in post-conflict settings are also fragile, meaning that they have a weak state capacity and institutions.

Intra-state conflict: a conflict that occurs within a state’s border

Inter-state conflict: a conflict that occurs between two states

Peace-building: process of strengthening a society’s capacity to ensure sustainable peace.

Peace-making: the process of bringing about peace, especially by reconciling adversaries.

Post-war society: the society of a country that just came out of a war or conflict

Post-conflict reconstruction: post-conflict reconstruction aims at the consolidation of peace and security and the attainment of sustainable socio-economic development in a war-shattered country.

Transitional Justice: judicial and non-judicial measures to redress legacies of human rights abuses and ensure their non-repetition. It is crucial for post-conflict societies to go forward and not to fall in conflict again.

Women's economic empowerment: the ability for women to enjoy their right to control and benefit from the resources to improve their economic status and well being.

Women's political empowerment: the process of increasing the capacity for women to participate in the political decision-making process and policies that would best support gender equality and agency for women.

CHAIR’S SUGGESTION

Our personal advice for writing a good resolution is to focus on the advantages that all the Member States in post-conflict situations can be drawn allowing an active participation of women in the reconstruction of society, especially as it can have an impact on all 17 SDGs. The resolution will have to address all dimensions of post-conflict reconstruction. You should try to explain well how the role of women can be empowered not only in society but especially in the post-war political decisions which are fundamental for and strictly related with the economic development of a post-

conflict country. As showcased by the two case studies, the role of Civil Society Organizations should not be underestimated and taken into account in negotiations. Overall, also keep in mind that signing a peace agreement does not always mean that violence has stopped, these countries are not as stable as other countries. Resolution number 1325 is fundamental for understanding the United Nation's position on this topic. However, as post-conflict is intrinsically linked with non-discrimination consideration, it is very important to keep in mind all the different aspects of the CEDAW convention when debating this topic, especially General recommendation No. 30. Don't forget to keep in mind whether your country's own policies when discussing women's access to land or microfinance. The UN's, CEDAW's and UN Women's websites are important resources for you to start.

We wish you good luck.

USEFUL LINKS:

<http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security>

<https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/role-education-women-and-girls-conflict-and-post-conflict-countries>

<http://www.undp.org/content/dam/aplaws/publication/en/publications/womens-empowerment/price-of-peace-financing-for-gender-equality-in-post-conflict-reconstruction/price-of-peace-financing-for-gender-equality-in-post-conflict-reconstruction.pdf>

<https://www.cfr.org/report/post-conflict-reconstruction-importance-womens-participation>

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw52/panels/summaries/Summary%20reviewpanel%205%20MAR.pdf>

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw42/CSW%201998%20Agreed%20Conclusions.pdf>

<https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/720/18/PDF/N0072018.pdf?OpenElement>