

WOMEN, WEAPONS, PEACE AND SECURITY

Jody Williams

- *The Nobel Peace Prize winner argues why it is about time for women to get full inclusion in debates on peace and security* •

ABSTRACT

Women have for too long been excluded from the disarmament and arms control debate, despite being disproportionately affected by weapons. In order for women to partake as equals, the author emphasises how it is crucial for women to be portrayed as positive agents of change rather than weak and powerless victims. Williams sets out how civil society is responding to this imbalance while highlighting that there is still a long way to go until full gender equality is reached in the debate at the national and international levels.

KEYWORDS

Arms control | Disarmament | Gender | Women | Security | Peace

1 • Introduction

“It is now more dangerous to be a woman than to be a soldier in modern wars.” When Major General Patrick Cammaert said these words in 2008,¹ he was the Deputy Force Commander of the United Nations Mission² to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). For decades that country has been seen as an epicentre of violations against women’s human rights during war. Rape as a tactic of war has increased dramatically in the DRC over the past twenty years, leading to the country becoming known as the “rape capital of the world.”³ But violations of women’s rights are not specific to the DRC, nor to war, they are a global problem which former US President Jimmy Carter has called “the number one human rights abuse.”⁴

Whether the weapons are small arms or explosive weapons used in populated areas, anywhere where there is conflict women, and children, are especially vulnerable. And while rape has always been recognised as part of the horror of war, it is only recently that it has been recognised as a war crime and crime against humanity. That classification was a monumental legal breakthrough but impunity for the perpetrators while the victims bear the burden of shame and ostracism their communities remains the norm.

Even if women manage to escape the direct impact of the weapons of war, they continue to be plagued with violations of their rights. Whether in refugee camps or on the move to refuge, they are vulnerable to rape and other forms of gender violence as well as becoming victims of human trafficking.

UN peacekeepers themselves, instead of protecting people, often are the perpetrators of violence against women and children. Yet despite ongoing revelations about abuse by peacekeepers, more often than not impunity remains the norm.

In recognition of the impact of war on women, 15 years ago, in October 2000, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1325⁵ which, coupled with several resolutions that followed in its wake, make up the framework for the UN’s “women, peace and security agenda”. The Women’s International League for Peace & Freedom’s (WILPF) “peacewomen” website summarises the rhetorical, at least, importance of that resolution:

*SCR1325 marked the first time the Security Council addressed the disproportionate and unique impact of armed conflict on women; recognized the under-valued and under-utilized contributions women make to conflict prevention, peacekeeping, conflict resolution and peace-building. It also stressed the importance of women’s equal and full participation as active agents in peace and security.*⁶

Despite the challenges facing women and the defence of their rights, many women refuse to be identified as victims but choose to see themselves as survivors who are willing to stand up and take action to defend and promote their rights, even during conflict and its aftermath.

Women also refuse to continue to be ignored in disarmament, arms control and security issues and often play a lead role in global disarmament and arms control efforts by civil society.

2 • Women & Weapons

While it is more dangerous to be a woman than a soldier during today's conflicts, as Cammaert said, it is not women who are generally involved in the design, production, sale and use of the weapons that disproportionately affect them. And until recently, women's voices have not been listened to with regard to disarmament and arms control. Women have always been seen as advocates for "peace" in the general sense of the word but when it comes to the "complexities" of dealing with weapons, we had largely been ignored. That is changing but it still is a challenge that has been best met by civil society efforts on disarmament and arms control as the below examples demonstrate.

In 1981, women from a Welsh group, "Women for Life on Earth," established the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp outside the British air force base at Greenham Common to protest the placement of US nuclear missiles there. As *The Guardian* newspaper wrote in 2013 – thirteen years after the peace camp closed, "Greenham was one of the west's most intoxicating theatres of political protest in the 1980s."⁷ Margaret Thatcher was staunchly opposed to the women's camp and called it an "eccentricity" in her efforts to mute the voices of the women demonstrating against the weapons. But as *The Guardian* pointed out the legacy of the women of Greenham Common continues to inspire women to be involved in efforts to get rid of weapons despite Thatcher's efforts to delegitimise them.

All four of the coordinators of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines have been women. Women from that civil society campaign as well as women diplomats involved in the ban movement played significant roles in achieving the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty prohibiting the use, production, trade and stockpiling of antipersonnel landmines. The head of the vibrant International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons is also a woman. Also, a precedent was set in the negotiations of the Arms Trade Treaty, adopted in 2013 by the UN General Assembly, in that for the first time an international arms control treaty included language on the impact of weapons on women and required states parties to take that impact into account in their decisions about where they would trade weapons.

Most recently, the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, launched in early 2013, is coordinated by a woman. Despite the role of women in all aspects of the campaign, sexism remains an issue. When, just one year after the launch of the campaign, the first multilateral meeting on the development of lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS), as governments prefer to call them, was convened at the U.N. in Geneva in May 2014, not one woman was called to speak on the expert panels that informed the discussions.

It seems that governments could not manage to find any “qualified” women for the 18 purported expert presentations that the French president of the session on killer robots invited to give their views on the implications these weapons have for ethics, laws of war, and technical and operational issues. Behind the scenes, several men from the campaign were quietly told that the reason that all of the “expert presenters” were men was because “there were no *suitable* women to fill the slots.” What is a suitable woman?

The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots refused to sit quietly in the face of the exclusion of women experts and pressured governments to include women on any such future expert panels.⁸ The efforts bore fruit with women being included on the panels at the diplomatic discussions on killer robots in 2015. In contrast, in both the 2014 and 2015 Geneva sessions, all of the side events held by civil society were gender balanced.

Finally, another example of women’s leadership in tackling head on the impact of war on women and girls, is the International Campaign to Stop Rape & Gender Violence in Conflict, launched in early 2012 under the leadership of the Nobel Women’s Initiative. When women in conflict are continuously viewed and portrayed as victims, the response consciously or not so consciously evoked is that they – and it goes without saying, their children – need protection and it is expected that it will be “their” men who protect them.

As long as women are portrayed as weak and powerless, how can they possibly be taken seriously as individuals capable of contributing to conflict resolution, peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction of society? As long as the spotlight continues to be shined on the victims of conflict violence and not the depravities of the perpetrators, women will be seen as easy targets in war and impunity for the crimes against them will reign.

The Campaign to Stop Rape and Gender Violence in Conflict works to address all of these issues. Following the organising model of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, the Stop Rape Campaign brings together women’s organisations around the world working to stop rape as a weapon of war. This campaign also works with governments that actively share the same goal.

3 • Women, Peace & Security: Rhetoric vs. Reality

UN Resolution 1325, as noted previously, is seen as landmark resolution recognising the disparate impact of war on women, their under-recognised contributions to peace, and the need for women’s full inclusion in actions on peace and security. Just two months ago, in October, the 15th anniversary of the resolution was recognised amid much fanfare. But the question remains about how much serious work needs to be done to finally see its full and meaningful implementation to empower women and recognise as the norm their role in peacemaking, peacekeeping and security.

The gaps between rhetoric and reality abound and continue to overshadow progress and challenge the UN and governments to act on the promise of the words they put to paper. The UN itself, which should lead by example, has a rather dismal record for including women in positions of influence throughout its bureaucracy and its various agencies.

The UN's Secretary General himself, not that long ago, gave a glaring – and ultimately embarrassing – example of the fundamental disconnect between words and action. In October of 2014 Secretary General Ban was singing the praises of Resolution 1325 and the impact it was having in women's lives, their political empowerment and inclusion in all aspects of peace and security. But about one week later on 31 October, when he officially announced the members of a new expert panel on peacekeeping operations, 12 of the 14 people he named to the panel were men. So much for empowerment and inclusion.

People were stunned and called for the dissolution of that panel and its reconstitution based on gender parity. After digging in his heels against the cries of blatant sexism, Mr. Ban ultimately responded, weakly, to the pressure. Ban did not name a new panel, he merely added two more women to the male-dominated group, also naming one of the women vice-chair of the panel. When UN leadership itself will not implement 1325 by empowering and including women, the message it continues to send to the world is very clear.

While governments and international bodies continue to resist gender balance, nongovernmental organisations and activists continue to press for change. In fact, as a result of the blatant sexism in the first round of Geneva talks on killer robots, members of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots have taken an even more active stance to end gender discrimination in global policymaking.

One of the founding members of that campaign, a British organisation known as Article 36 — referring to a Geneva Convention protocol regarding new weapons and methods of warfare — began compiling a list of men working in the field of peace and security who have made a commitment not to speak on panels concerned with peace, disarmament and security issues that include only men.

Within days of opening the list, more than three-dozen men had already signed on and it was being shared beyond members of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. Other campaign members have begun compiling lists of women working in these areas to facilitate the ability of governments to find “suitable” women experts.

Others are also refusing to just keep politely asking that women be recognised as equals and are taking action to press governments and international bodies to do what they should be doing anyway – protecting and promoting women's human rights by actions and not simply words. In September of this year, a new campaign, spearheaded by the Center for Justice and International Law, was launched: Campaign for gender parity in international representation (GQUAL). In its own words:

The under-representation of women affects virtually all international tribunals and monitoring or adjudicating bodies that play key roles in developing international law, human rights, international relations, and cooperation [...] International bodies make important decisions for societies, including issues of security and peace, international boundaries, environmental protection, and the scope of human rights [...] The under-representation of women, who make up more than half of humanity, and a lack of diversity diminishes the legitimacy of international human rights tribunals and monitoring bodies and limits their potential and impact. We also believe that a critical mass of women can add different perspectives and experiences to make visible and help address issues that may otherwise be absent or overlooked. Above all, GQUAL promotes parity in these spaces as a measure of equality.⁹

Government and UN bodies need to recognise the critical role women play in helping shape disarmament, peace, and security discussions, and to recognise, solicit, and promote women's expertise in contributing to our own security in an insecure world. That time is well past due — and the reaction to the UN's failure to enforce its own rhetorical standards shows that women, and men, are not willing to wait any longer.

Women don't need to be protected/made secure. Women need to be empowered and listened to regarding their own sense of what makes them secure and given their rightful place in all aspects of creating sustainable peace with justice and equality.

4 • Conclusion

While Cammaert's words about it being more dangerous to be a woman than a soldier in modern wars remains true, women – and men who truly share their goals – are increasingly refusing to sit back and be talked about instead of included in all aspects of building sustainable peace, international security, and deliberations about disarmament and arms control.

Sitting back and waiting for change is not an effective strategy for making change happen. While governments and international bodies continue to resist the full recognition of women's human rights, nongovernmental organisations and activists have increased efforts to ensure that such change occurs in years not decades.

“Nothing about us without us” rings as true for the achievement of the full recognition of women's human rights as it did during the global efforts to achieve the international treaty on the rights of persons with disabilities. Women make up more than half of the world. It is way beyond time that “women” and “women's issues” no longer be treated as but one element of broader discussions – by men - about sustainable peace and global security.

NOTES

- 1 • Soraya Chemaly, "Worldwide, It's 'More Dangerous to Be a Woman Than a Soldier in Modern Wars,'" *The World Post*, October 5, 2012, accessed November 10, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/soraya-chemaly/rape-in-conflict_b_1501458.html.
- 2 • United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo.
- 3 • Michele Lent Hirsch and Lauren Wolfe, "Country Profile: Democratic Republic of Congo," *Women Under Siege*, February 8, 2012, accessed November 10, 2015, <http://www.womenundersiegeproject.org/conflicts/profile/democratic-republic-of-congo>.
- 4 • "President Carter Champions Women's Human Rights at TEDWomen 2015," *The Carter Center*, July 8, 2015, accessed November, 2015, <http://blog.cartercenter.org/2015/07/08/president-carter-champions-womens-human-rights-at-tedwomen-2015/>.
- 5 • [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325\(2000\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325(2000)).
- 6 • "Security Council Resolution 1325," *Peace Women, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom*, accessed November, 2015, <http://www.peacewomen.org/security-council/WPS-in-SC-Council>.
- 7 • Beatrix Campbell, "The legacy of Greenham Common has outlived Margaret Thatcher." *The Guardian*, April 17, 2013, accessed November 10, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/shortcuts/2013/apr/17/greenham-common-outlived-margaret-thatcher>.
- 8 • These efforts included speaking out against the gender imbalance from the floor during the meetings; direct discussions with the French delegation in charge of that session; direct discussions with the delegation that would chair the subsequent session; meetings with the Director of UN's Office on Disarmament Affairs.
- 9 • "Campaign for gender parity in international representation," *GQUAL*, accessed November 10, 2015, <http://www.gqualcampaign.org/about-gqual/>.



JODY WILLIAMS – US

Jody Williams received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997 for her work to ban landmines through the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. She is co-founder and chair of the Nobel Women's Initiative which increases the power and visibility of women's groups working globally for peace, justice and equality.

email: jwilliams@nobelwomensinitiative.org

Received in October 2015.
Original in English.



"This paper is published under the Creative Commons Noncommercial Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License"