

Testimony for U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee

“Beyond Victimhood: Protection and Participation of Women
in the Pursuit of Peace”

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October 1, 2009

Mr. Chairman. I would like to begin by thanking you and ranking member Senator Lugar for your initiative in bringing us together to address the issue of global violence against women, and for your continuing leadership on these issues. My testimony will focus on eliminating such violence by promoting protection and participation of women in the pursuit of peace.

For those of us who have spent decades working on issues of women’s empowerment and protection in conflict situations, these are exciting times. There is a growing awareness not only of the personal costs of violence against women, but of the tremendous collective costs such violence imposes on the global community in failing to achieve our goals of building peace, pursuing development, and reconstructing post-conflict societies.

Signs of Progress

It is tragic that it has taken graphic images of women raped in the Eastern Congo, and young girls with acid thrown in their faces in Afghanistan for daring to return to school to shame our collective conscience, but the world is responding. At the United Nations, UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict is bringing together the enhanced work of a dozen separate agencies to stop rape now. Security Council Resolution 1820, spearheaded by former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, and a new resolution passed under the stewardship of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton yesterday have created a special representative for eliminating violence against women, mandated new measures of accountability for action, created structures to name and shame parties not protecting women against sexual violence, authorized the use of UN sanctions in such cases, and defined sexual violence itself as a threat to international peace and security. The creation of a new UN Under-Secretary-General for women’s affairs has the potential to end the disarray that has bedeviled the efforts of UNIFEM and its sister agencies, if key steps are taken to ensure its effectiveness and relevance.

Within the U.S. government, the formation of the State Department’s Office for Global Women’s Affairs under the formidable Ambassador Verveer; enhanced programs within USAID and the State Department’s Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration; and the leadership provided by this Committee, President Obama, Secretary Clinton and Ambassador Rice are encouraging. And hopefully, we will soon be able to celebrate the re-introduction and quick passage of the International Violence Against Women Act. Now is the time for this landmark legislation.

Our challenge now is to translate these developments into enhanced protection for women facing violence in the context of armed conflict.

A Cautionary Tale

For me, these steps are both long-overdue and deeply personal. In 1994, while serving as President Clinton's advisor for Africa, I supported negotiations to end two decades of civil war in Angola that had killed a half million people and left four million homeless. When the Lusaka Protocol was signed, I boasted that not a single provision in the agreement discriminated against women. "The agreement is gender-neutral," I said in a speech.

President Clinton then named me ambassador to Angola. It took me only a few weeks after my arrival in Luanda to realize that a peace agreement that calls itself "gender-neutral" is, by definition, discriminatory against women.

First, the agreement did not require the participation of women in the implementation body. As a result, 40 men and no women sat around the peace table. This imbalance silenced women's voices and meant that issues such as sexual violence, human trafficking, abuses by government and rebel security forces, reproductive health care, and girls' education were generally ignored.

The peace accord was based on 13 separate amnesties that forgave the parties for atrocities committed during the conflict. Given the prominence of sexual abuse during the conflict, including rape as a weapon of war, amnesty meant that men with guns forgave other men with guns for crimes committed against women. The amnesties introduced a cynicism at the heart of our efforts to rebuild the justice and security sectors.

Similarly, demobilization programs for ex-combatants defined a combatant as anyone who turned in a gun. Thousands of women who had been kidnapped or coerced into the armed forces were largely excluded, including so-called bush wives and sex slaves. And demobilization camps were rarely constructed with women in mind, such that women risked rape each time they left the camp to get firewood or used latrines in isolated and dimly-lit settings.

Male ex-combatants received demobilization assistance, but were sent back to communities that had learned to live without them during decades of conflict. The frustration of these men exploded into an epidemic of alcoholism, drug abuse, divorce, rape, and domestic violence. This was especially true for young boys, who had never learned how to interact on an equal basis with girls their own ages. In effect, the end of civil war unleashed a new era of violence against women and girls.

Even such well-intentioned efforts as clearing major roads of landmines to allow four million displaced persons to return to their homes backfired against women. Road clearance sometimes preceded the demining of fields, wells, and forests. As newly resettled women went out to plant the fields, fetch water, and collect firewood, they faced a new rash of landmine accidents.

We recognized these problems, and brought out gender advisers and human rights officers; launched programs in reproductive health care, girls' education, micro-enterprise, and support for women's NGOs; and involved women in planning and implementing all our programs. But by then, civil society – and particularly women – had come to view the peace process as serving

only the interests of the warring parties. When the process faltered in 1998, there was little public pressure on the leaders to prevent a return to conflict, and war soon re-emerged.

Making Peace Matter for Women

We all recognize that when social order breaks down it is women and girls who suffer most, especially when rape is used as a weapon of war. But how we make peace is equally important in determining whether the end of armed conflict means a safer world for women or simply a different and in some cases more pernicious era of violence against them.

Angola is sadly not an isolated case. Around the world, talented women peace builders face discrimination in legal, cultural and traditional practices, and threats of violence make even the most courageous women think twice before stepping forward. Groundbreaking research under Anne Marie Goetz at UNIFEM shows that only one in 14 participants in recent peace negotiations since 1992 have been women. In recent accords on Indonesia, Nepal, Somalia, Cote d'Ivoire, Philippines and Central African Republic, there was not a single woman signatory, mediator, or negotiator. Of 300 ceasefire accords, power-sharing arrangements and other peace agreements negotiated since 1989, just 18 of them – just 6 percent – contain even a passing reference to sexual violence. For conflicts in Bosnia, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Somalia – where such violence was a dominant feature of the fighting – the peace accords are silent.

Similarly, in emergency funding to support 23 post-conflict situations since 2006, only 3 percent of the projects included specific funding for women and girls – this despite our knowledge that girls' education, for example, is the single best investment in promoting stable societies and improving socio-economic standards in these countries.

To cite one example of great national interest now, it is deeply disturbing, given the Taliban's abhorrent record in Afghanistan on women's rights and access for women and girls to education and health services during their tenure in power, that the insurgents have made in-roads by arguing that women in Afghanistan today suffer broadly from the lack of security, corruption, rights abuses and civilian casualties. Sporadic and regional advances in political participation by women and school attendance by girls have been offset by a failure to insist on accountability for warlords whose forces committed sexual violence during the years of conflict, and continue such abuse today. Instead, a number of these criminals have been given positions of power.

The murder of women leaders and human rights defenders in Afghanistan and the failure of the government to identify and prosecute attackers underlines the impression of a lack of national commitment to women's rights. Not only has the Karzai administration failed to publicly articulate a vision of women's rights that is both home-grown and consistent with traditional Afghan Islamic society, it has demonstrated a willingness to treat women's rights as a bargaining chip to win support from traditional leaders. Thus, it has ceded the debate to those who erroneously argue that such efforts are an alien concept imposed on Afghanistan by foreigners and their Afghan "puppets."

We can no longer afford to exclude the talents and insights of half the population in the pursuit of peace or to treat them as mere victims, because the stakes of game have risen dramatically.

Failure to consolidate peace and stability no longer impacts just the people of that country, but opens the door to training camps for global terrorists; new routes for trafficking of persons, arms and illegal drugs; flood of refugees across borders and even oceans; incubation of pandemic disease; and even piracy.

Collective Action: Imperatives for the United Nations

Given the importance of collective action in addressing these challenges, I wanted to discuss as well what the United States can do in collaboration with the United Nations to pursue these objectives.

Despite the positive steps cited earlier, the United Nations has thus far failed to lead by example, in part because of a gender architecture that identifies no lead agency, mandates no clear division of responsibilities, and holds no one accountable. This situation thwarts the efforts of many dedicated and talented professionals working in such entities as the UNIFEM, the Office of the Special Adviser for Gender Issues, the Division for the Advancement of Women, the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, the Commission on the Status of Women, the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, the Peacebuilding Commission, and others. Their work is currently under-funded and poorly coordinated.

Given that the ideal solution – a single agency with at least \$1 billion in dedicated funding, a so-called "UNICEF for Women" – seemed beyond reach, the UN General Assembly last month approved the creation of a single office, headed by an Under-Secretary General, to ensure greater coordination and synergies, and raise the profile of women's issues at the UN Secretariat in New York and in UN missions abroad. The details of this office were put aside to be worked out later under the direction of the new Under-Secretary-General. But the potential impact of this change on women in the real world is all about the details. As the NGO coalition Gender Equality Architecture Reform points out, the following commitments must be secured:

- O Women in civil society around the world – and especially from conflict-related countries – must have a real voice in the new entity, not just on an ad hoc consultative basis, but through a formal decision-making role on issues that impact their lives. The principle must be, "Nothing about us without us."
- O The office must be mandated to develop and promote time-bound goals backed by monitoring, accountability and enforcement mechanisms for achieving reductions in violence against women, participation of women in peace processes, allocation of reconstruction resources to projects of interest to women, and the like. There must be rewards for achieving these objectives and sanctions for failing to do so.
- O There must be a quantum jump in the resources dedicated to these issues, especially for projects in conflict impacted countries – up to \$1 billion per year, or just about 30 cents per woman. If increased resources are to depend on voluntary contributions, pledges must be made now and the Secretary-General must make obtaining those resources among his highest priorities. This will ensure a presence for the entity in all impacted countries.

- O The new Under-Secretary-General must be a world-class figure, with the capacity to generate public attention, mobilize political will among governments, and “work” the UN system. The Secretary-General must give this leader the respect and resources needed to do her job, and access to the UN General Assembly and Security Council. .

The United States should provide additional financial support for this office with voluntary contributions that permit it to achieve broad presence in conflict countries and effective mainstreaming of gender issues within the entire UN community. U.S. assistance can help ensure the upgrading of the role of gender advisers in UN missions, and to promote their success through training and mentorship.

UNSC Resolution 1325: A Dream Deferred

The fight against sexual violence against women can only be won in conjunction with efforts to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325, a groundbreaking resolution passed in October 2000. Resolution 1325 is a road map to promoting women's full engagement in peace negotiations, gender balance in post-conflict governments, properly trained peacekeepers and local security forces, protection for displaced women and accountability for sexual violence. It urges the Secretary-General to bring a gender perspective to all peacekeeping operations and other UN programs, and calls for greater funding for measures to protect women during armed conflict and rebuild institutions that matter to women.

Plans are already underway to “celebrate” the tenth anniversary of Resolution 1325 in October 2010, but as noted earlier, the current situation hardly warrants celebration. Instead, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Deputy Secretary-General Asha Rose Mirogiri must act now to identify and implement specific reforms and practical steps in the UN system, member states and the broader international community to better protect women in conflict situations and ensure their participation in building peace.

A first step might be to appoint an advisory panel on Resolution 1325 of prominent international figures from developing and developed countries with past engagement on gender and armed conflict and knowledge of the UN system. More than a shop-talk or report-writing exercise, the advisory panel would develop and help implement accountability mechanisms by identifying time-bound goals, proposing measurement criteria, assigning responsibility for implementation, and defining rewards and sanctions to ensure compliance by individuals and agencies within the UN system. It would seek to reverse the shameful situation in which women fill only three of the Secretary-General's 40 or so posts for country-specific special representatives.

The panel might also consider charging a single entity, perhaps the new office of the Under-Secretary-General, with overseeing the Resolution 1325 agenda; promoting the creation of a permanent Security Council working group; establishing a watch-list of countries and non-state actors of concern to be named and shamed into improving their records; ensuring periodic reports by the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the status of Resolution 1325 implementation; and enshrining the principle that sanctions can be adopted on governments and non-state actors that abuse or fail to protect for women.

If these steps seem like a stretch, it is important to remember that each of these measures now applies to the protection of children in armed conflict under UNSC Resolutions 1612 and 1882

American Leadership

Mr. Chairman. The United States must provide leadership on these issues, first by ensuring that all its diplomatic and military personnel are familiar with and committed to the provisions of UNSC Resolutions 1325 and 1820, and have the resources needed to ensure its implementation.

UN Ambassador Susan Rice and her team have stepped forward impressively on these issues, building on a good work by former Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad. In their future efforts, they should be guided by several principles. The United States should insist that the mandate for every UN peacekeeping mission includes as a priority the protection of women and the safeguarding of women peace builders, including through the provision of personal security, training, and stipends. The United States should demand that negotiations led by the United Nations include a critical mass of qualified women on all sides – beginning at 20 percent – even if it takes quotas to do so.

Similarly, the United States should prioritize in post-conflict reconstruction and donors conferences the rebuilding of social structures of particular importance to women, such as reproductive health care and girls' education, as well as significant provisions for women to attain livelihood security, such as access to and ownership of productive assets such as land. All post conflict recovery plans should be subjected to gender-impact analysis, and specify the funds dedicated to women's needs.

U.S. support for the rebuilding and reform of armies, police, and other security forces should insist on training in gender issues for all personnel and require the incorporation of women into those forces, in particular so that local women who have been abused will come forward with their accusations. The United States could commit to providing teams of women military observers to peacekeeping mission and ceasefire monitoring teams. The presence of women in these missions and teams has been proven to encourage reporting of sexual violence and much greater attention to monitoring the problem.

I would also like to encourage the United States to expand its leadership in preventing violence against displaced women, both refugees and internally-displaced persons. One simple step would have a dramatic impact. In order to put a stop once and for all to the rape of women and girls during the collection of firewood, the global body for humanitarian agencies, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, recently adopted guidance on the provision of cooking fuel in humanitarian settings, based in large part on recommendations from the Women's Refugee Commission,. The United States should mobilize donors to ensure that the resources are there to implement these provisions fully, starting with the high-risk regions of Sudan, Chad, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, and the huge Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya.

Keeping Our Eyes on the Prize

As we consider these and other funding, institutional and administrative changes, we must never lose sight of our real goal. The success of our efforts will not be measured by the reports we issue, the publicity we generate, or even the money we spend. It will come in changing the lives of women on the ground, empowering women to play their rightful and vital role in post-conflict governments and economies, securing seats for women in peace negotiations, preventing armed thugs from abusing women in conditions of displacement, holding government security forces and warlords alike accountable for sexual violence against women, preventing traffickers from turning women and girls into commodities, building strong civil society networks for women and ending the stigma of victimization that bedevils women leaders.

No challenge we face as an international community is more important than this to creating a safe, secure and prosperous world for women and for men. Thank you.

Grants from the U.S. Government

International Crisis Group was approved September 30, 2007 for a USAID grant to support a program of Conflict Prevention and Containment (USAID grant #DFD-G-00-07-00252). For the current fiscal year, we have so far received \$78,624.94 on November 17, 2008; \$84,681.48 on February 13, 2009; \$219,617.35 on May 15, 2009; and \$118,087.79 on August 14, 2009.