

Women are important in peace processes



Kvinna till Kvinna

Giving representatives from the entire community a voice in the peace and reconciliation process is essential to achieve long-term peace. In most cases however, half of the population are excluded from this process.

War is no longer simply about soldiers in trenches. War also kills, cripples and destroys the lives of a large proportion of the civilian population – both men and women. Generally it is the men who go into battle while the women are left to ensure that society and its functions continue to operate. But traditional gender roles during war also become obvious when it's time for peace negotiations: men go to the negotiating table while women stay home. The statistics from peace processes give a clear picture: 92,4 percent of participants in peace negotiations and 97,5 percent of signatories to peace agreements are men, according to Unifem (2010).

Peace agreements not only mean the end of the war but they also lay the foundation for reconstruction and the future. When women are excluded from peace processes, the new society is constructed without the benefit of half of the population's knowledge. And since the peace agreement often forms the basis of the new Constitution, women's rights might not be taken into account.

Patriarchal values

Whether affected by conflict or not, many societies are marked by traditional and patriarchal values, which protest that women are not capable of sharing in power and decision-making. Women are excluded from politics in a variety of different ways: they are threatened, slandered, ridiculed and ignored. On the other side, men often do not perceive their own oppression or they choose to ignore the power structures that have been established over many generations.



Recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize 2011: Tawakkul Karman, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Leymah Gbowee. Photo: Martin von Krogh

Although conflicts adversely affect both sexes in equal measure, women are excluded when it is time to negotiate the peace. Often with the argument that it is the warring parties who need to agree.

“Human rights abuses and inequality between different social groups are two powerful factors that fuel armed conflict.” One key message of the World Bank's World Development Report 2011.





In Montenegro it is difficult for women to make their voices heard. But women's organisations are challenging the prevailing norms through different manifestations. Photo: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation

97,5

97,5 percent of all signatories to peace agreements are men, and 92,4 percent of all participants in peace negotiations are men. (Unifem, 2010)



What is UNSC Resolution 1325?

In 2000, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325. It deals with women's rights and participation as actors in peace processes. Women's participation in peace negotiations are now on the Security Council's policy agenda.

Men sign agreements

Of the 585 peace agreements signed between 1990 and 2010, only 16 percent contained any reference to women according to a report entitled "Peace Agreements or Pieces of Paper? The Impact of UNSC Resolution 1325 on Peace Processes and their Agreements".

A community that does not respect the human rights of all its citizens creates inequality that in itself jeopardises the peace – or as the World Bank's World Development Report 2011 concluded: Human rights abuses and inequality between different social groups are two of the most powerful factors that fuel the start of armed conflict.

UNSC Resolution 1325

The international community has acknowledged the disastrous consequences of women being excluded from peace processes and has begun to act for the full participation of women in all peace and security processes. At the UN's World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, a Platform for Action against the discrimination of women was adopted. The Platform for Action makes it incumbent upon UN Member States to take action and adapt legislation and legal decisions to remove all barriers to gender equality. As a consequence, in 2000 the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. It deals more specifically with women's rights and participation as actors in peace processes.

UNSCR 1325 was subsequently followed by Resolutions 1820, 1888 and 1960, which further reinforced the Articles in 1325 (1888), and specifically took aim at efforts

to combat sexual violence in conflicts (1820, 1960).

When a resolution is adopted in the UN Security Council, it means that the issue is on the Security Council's agenda. That in turn means that the UN Member States are obliged to take responsibility for the issue and act in accordance with the Resolution.

UNSC Resolutions are binding on all UN Member States, but as the statistics show, there is still a long way to go before they are fully implemented.

Progress in Liberia

One of the countries where women have had a decisive role for peace is Liberia, which for 14 years was shaken by a bloody civil war. Since 2003, peace reigns and the Liberian women's movement has become world-renowned for its importance in the peace agreement that was formulated. To achieve an end to the war, women throughout Liberia worked together and forced negotiations through non-violent strategies. Close to 2000 women in matching white T-shirts sat tirelessly for days outside then President Charles Taylor's offices and demanded a ceasefire. This action was successful and Charles Taylor agreed to begin peace talks.

In the subsequent deliberations in Ghana, the women barricaded the doors and refused to move before the negotiating parties inside had settled on the terms of the peace agreement.

In 2011, one of the leaders of the Liberian women's movement, Leymah Gbowee, received the Nobel Peace Prize for her efforts. She shared the prize with Liberia's president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.