

Women's security is ignored



Kvinna till Kvinna

Discrimination and violence against women in war and conflict is not viewed as a security issue within international security policy. And when violence against women continues even after a conflict has officially ended, the result is that peace does not reach all – and is not sustainable.

Threats to human security take different forms depending on where in the world people live and their socio-economic status. In addition, security threats for men and women differ, in particular in war and conflict. Many women in Israel for example are more afraid of sexual violence than of bombings (Women's Security Index Israel, 2012). The security needs of women and girls tend to be neglected. Often they are not even seen as an issue in security policy, which is dominated by men.

The gender perspective is missing

Women's organisations in conflict zones are often told that the time is not yet ripe for women's rights: first the violence must cease and a peace agreement be concluded. This was the refrain in the peace negotiations in the Balkans, the Caucasus, Iraq and Liberia, for example. But if peace and security are to reach all, it is vital that the gender perspective permeates the debate.

When the safety of women is discussed, the focus is often on how women should be protected. But protection is not the same thing as security. The question should be what women need to safely participate in society.

It is problematic when politicians and those in power identify threats to women without having listened to what women themselves experience as problems. Security threats must be defined by both sexes. Similarly, the measures implemented in response to these threats must be formulated by both women and men.



In Hebron on the West Bank, women are hit hard by the poor security situation. Photo: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation



The security needs of women and girls are rarely an issue for international security policy – which is dominated by men.



Only if women play a full and equal part can we build the foundations for enduring peace, development, good governance, human rights and justice”, says Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary-General, 1997–2007.





In Iraq, it is difficult for girls and women to move about freely.
Photo: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation/Anna Lithander

UNSC Resolution 1325

Women's rights and opportunities to participate in peace processes are an issue of international peace and security. That is the primary message of UNSC Resolution 1325, adopted in 2000. 1325 emphasises the importance of women participating at all levels of conflict management, negotiations and reconstruction in war zones.

Peace is not just the absence of armed conflict. For peace to be sustainable, democracy is important. And a cornerstone of democracy is respect for the equal value and rights of all people irrespective of gender, race or religion. Women's rights are an important part of democratisation processes, and should therefore be included in global and national security policy.

New threats

The world is changing, and so are the threats to international stability. Previously, security was primarily about defending territory and borders, and threats came from enemy states. But threats today are becoming more complex. In addition to armed conflict, the climate is changing and there is a worldwide risk of natural disasters, famine and epidemics. These events in turn provide a breeding ground for new conflicts.

While we need new solutions to tackle the security problems we are facing globally, the focus continues to be mainly on military solutions. According to the Stockholm Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) military expenditure began to level off in 2011 after having risen steadily since 1998. But even today, enormous sums of money are spent on the armed forces. SIPRI's view is

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This is how many billions of US dollars that were spent on the military in 2011 according to the Stockholm Peace Research Institute.



What does human security mean?

Human security is an approach to security that focuses on the individual – not the state. It's about all people being valued equally and having the opportunity to participate in the development of security policy that serves all in the community.

that military solutions can not create sustainable peace. Instead, greater emphasis should be placed on developing solutions that are better able to respond to future security challenges and the threats identified.

Worldwide military expenditure totalled USD 1738 billions in 2011. The Swedish section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom has identified what one year's (2008) military expenditure could provide:

- 43 years of the costs for women all over the world to gain access to sexual and reproductive health care.
- 24 years of the additional aid required to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. The Millennium Development Goals are eight measurable goals to improve the life of the world's poor.

Human security

The concept of human security was introduced to the international community by the UN in 1994. Human security is an approach to security that focuses on the security of the individual – not the state. However, work to gain sympathy for this new direction suffered a setback in connection with the terrorist attacks in the US in 2001. The war against terrorism and military methods took over the entire security agenda and the concept of human security was relegated to the background.

Human security is about all people being valued equally and having the opportunity to participate in the development of security policy. Everyone will benefit from the concept of human security being put higher on the security policy agenda.

