Engendering early
warning mechanisms for
effective conflict prevention

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the elusive role of women in
early warning
and conflict prevention

By providing time to prepare, analyse and plan a response, early warning is an essential precursor and prerequisite for effective conflict prevention. Not always about predicting a conflict or episode of violence before any such incidents have broken out, early warning information is also used to predict a resurgence or escalation of conflict and violence. The OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities describes early warning as "any information from any source about escalatory developments, be they slow and gradual or quick and sudden, far enough in advance in order for a national government, or an international or regional organisation to react timely and effectively, if possible still leaving them time to employ preventive diplomacy and other non-coercive and non-military preventive measures".[1]

The importance of gender to conflict prevention and early warning has been recognised. However, concrete measures to improve the flow of early warning information from and about women have not been put in place. If preventive visits and fact-finding missions to areas of potential conflict were to routinely include gender expertise and consultations with women's organisations, systematic and useable information about women could be collected and analysed. Only then could 'gender perspectives' be turned into concrete early warning indicators, and only then will the basis laid down by the Security Council be built upon in a meaningful way.

This article will examine developments as they relate to the role of women in preventing conflict, particularly focusing on the need for enhanced information about the impact of conflict on women and women's role in peace-building, as well as mainstreaming gender into the early warning indicators used to predict and prevent conflict.

Recent Developments in Conflict Prevention

Over the last five years, the debate about conflict prevention has been stimulated by a number of

reports and resolutions. The report of the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict published in 1999 brought together eminent persons with a wide range of expertise.[2] Their final document, and the numerous papers and events that contributed toward it, created the foundation for the renewed contemporary focus on conflict prevention. The concepts of operational (immediate) and structural (root causes) prevention elaborated in this document have informed subsequent debates and it remains a key text in this field. The Commission qualified the post-Cold War optimism for a 'peace dividend' while not abandoning hope that the end of bi-polar hostilities could produce a new framework for preventing conflict. The Commission calculated that at least US $200 billion was spent on the seven major interventions in the 1990s – in Bosnia Herzegovina, Somalia, Rwanda, Haiti, the Persian Gulf, Cambodia and El Salvador. A preventative approach would have cost the international community US $130 billion, a savings of $70 billion. Jane Holl Lute, Executive Director of the Carnegie Commission, compared the preoccupation and engagement with the science of preventing conflict at both international and national levels with the relative cynicism when their effort first commenced: "In 1994, when we began our work, people laughed at us, they thought the notion of preventing violent conflict was ludicrous in the extreme, and that you couldn't make a difference in people's thinking."[3]

The change of attitude witnessed since the publication of the Carnegie Commission report proves the cynics wrong, as the Security Council, the General Assembly, the G8, the OECD, the European Union, and the African Union have returned the notion of conflict prevention to the realm of realism. Serious debates, resolutions and small concrete steps towards establishing mechanisms for early warning and response have demonstrated that preventing conflict is a legitimate and achievable goal. NGOs have advanced this agenda considerably through predicting conflicts, refining early warning instruments and documenting that, in fact, prevention works.[4] The debate about women, peace and security has also achieved prominence and coherence in these institutions over the same period, and linkages have been made through noting the *potential* role of women in preventing war.

When the Security Council first debated its role in the prevention of armed conflict in November 1999, Secretary General Kofi Annan urged the international community to move "from a culture of reaction to a culture of prevention".[5] In June 2001 the Secretary General issued a very comprehensive report on conflict prevention that underscored the importance of gender equality, the costs of failing to prevent war and the need for nongovernmental organisations to clarify their role in conflict prevention and their relationship to the United Nations. The report stressed the need to protect women's human rights and called on the Security Council to include a gender perspective in its work and to integrate the protection of women's human rights in conflict prevention and peacebuilding.[6] In response, the Security Council passed Resolution 1366 on conflict prevention which reiterated its recognition of the role of women in conflict prevention and its request to the Secretary-General "to give greater attention to gender perspectives in the implementation of peacekeeping and peace-building mandates as well as in conflict prevention efforts". Many other regional security organisations have made similar statements about the crucial role of women in conflict prevention, and have made commitments to incorporating gender issues, especially after the passage of Security Council resolution 1325, including, *inter alia*, the G8,[7] the African Union,[8] the Non-Aligned Movement, and the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD).[9]

Enhancing Women's Role in Peace and Security Decision-Making

On 31 October 2000, the Security Council adopted its first resolution (1325) on women and peace and security. This resolution provides a comprehensive political framework within which women's protection and their role in peace processes can be addressed. For the first time, the Council called for a comprehensive assessment of the impact of armed conflict on women and girls, the role of women in peace-building and the gender dimensions of peace processes and conflict resolution. The resolution specifically mentions women's role in conflict prevention, but does not go on to elaborate on what that might mean.

The 2000 Brahimi Report provided a compre-

hensive review of UN Peacekeeping and emphasised the need for enhanced conflict prevention strategies, echoing the advocates of the women, peace and security agenda that verbal postures without political or financial support are not sufficient for preventive action to work.[10] The report recommended improving information and analysis capacities within the UN and urged the Secretary General to conduct more fact-finding missions, despite the "impediment" posed by some states that fear for the integrity of their sovereignty.[11]

The 2001 report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, an independent panel of experts brought together by the Canadian government, responded to Secretary General Kofi Annan's request that the international community negotiate how to protect the sensitivities of sovereign states while also preventing genocides and massacres.[12] Affirming the primary responsibility of sovereign states to prevent conflict and protect their citizens, the panel proposed that the responsibility shift to the shoulders of the international community if a state cannot or will not protect its citizens, or if it is the perpetrator of "conscience shocking events crying out for action" such as "large scale loss of life or large scale ethnic cleansing, whether carried out by forced expulsion, acts of terror or rape".[13] This report highlights the need for "constant campaigning" for preventive action, and has deepened the debate about how and when to intervene, emphasising non-military actions, and reconfirming that UN Security Council authorisation "should in all cases be sought prior to any military action being carried out".[14] The report also emphasises that crimes against women constitute "conscience shocking events" and the need for a renewed commitment to prevention, early warning and analysis as well as effective disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) and security sector reform in post-conflict countries to prevent the resurgence of violence.

The United Nations Department of Political Affairs is the UN focal point for prevention, and works in close collaboration with other UN Agencies through the Inter-Agency/ Interdepartmental Framework Team for Coordination, made up of 14 UN agencies and departments. The Framework Team meets regu-

larly to evaluate areas of risk and identifies preventive measures for countries at risk of conflict. At present there is no dedicated staff to assist this information sharing and coordination mechanism. In addition, the early warning indicator framework used by the team is lacking gender components. The framework team has just invited UNIFEM to participate in the group as the organisation that is undertaking efforts to develop and test gender-based early warning indicators in order to integrate gender in its efforts to coordinate the UN system preventive response to potential conflict.

Early Warning, Information and Analysis

Effective preventive strategies must consider information and early warning from and about the primary targets of war: civilians. The threat to civilians, and especially women in conflict situations, has underscored the need to incorporate gender analysis into early warning activities and the opportunity for preventive measures to strengthen women's protection. Such steps must be based upon timely and accurate knowledge of facts, an understanding of developments and global trends, and the economic, social and political causes of the conflicts. If higher quality information and analysis existed, and if governments at the UN were prepared to share that quality information and analysis of the long list of quantifiable emerging early warning signs, war would be much easier to prevent.

In their Preliminary Framework on Gender and Conflict Early Warning, Eugenia Piza-Lopes and Susanne Schmeidl suggest that incorporating gender-sensitive indicators will fine-tune existing information collection and analysis mechanisms, allowing for previously overlooked signs of instability at a grassroots level that can anticipate conflict before it spreads to formal politics.[15] In addition, incorporating gender analysis and perspectives into formulating response options ensures that discriminatory policies are not perpetuated in post-conflict situations, nor that newfound freedoms reversed once fighting has subsided. According to Lopes and Schmeidl, "...gender analysis elicits different questions about the causes and effects of conflict on different sectors within society and their particular relationships and roles with each other. It also provides a better understanding of unequal social hierarchies (including gender hierarchies), inequality and oppression, which are often characteristics of societies that are prone to, or embroiled in conflict."[16] The peaceful all-woman protests at ChevronTexaco oil pipeline facilities in Nigeria represented a departure from previous protests in the oil-rich Niger Delta, where armed men frequently use kidnapping and sabotage to pressure oil multinationals into giving them jobs, protection money or compensation for environmental damage. The women occupied offices and oil fields, creating a space for nego-

tiation between workers and the company. The women demanded more jobs, business loans, schools and hospitals for their communities, and by taking up measures to reduce the pressures posed by poverty, poor health and lack of services, may have prevented violent conflict and certainly improved their situation.

When documenting the root or systemic causes of war, focusing on gender analyses of power and structures will provide insights into violent societies. For instance, preliminary research suggests that countries with very low percentages of women in parliament and the formal labour sector, or cultures that restrict women, condone violence against them or treat women as property, are more likely to resort to armed conflict to settle disputes.[17] Other data that may be relevant include the female literacy rate, average level of female education, number of children per household, which influence women's ability to participate in structures that may prevent war by engaging in other forms of conflict resolution.

The Preliminary Framework asserts that gender is a relevant category when examining medium term conditions that reflect rising tension in the society. The prevalence of the following occurrences, which may only be evident to those on the ground, indicate social discord that may result in armed conflict: gender-specific human rights violations such as rape, abductions, trafficking, domestic violence, sexual harassment, abuse by security forces, killings and disappearances of women, elections-related violence, lack of institutional prosecution of perpetrators, increased rates of prostitution and commercial sex work due to military presence, abrupt changes in gender roles, such as the imposition of restrictive laws, rewards for aggressive behaviour and propaganda emphasising hyper-masculinity, number of single female-headed households, sex-specific refugee migrations, sex-specific unemployment, sale of jewellery or other precious materials, and the hoarding of goods.

UNIFEM's Response

UNIFEM's mandate is to generate and support innovative and catalytic strategies towards gender equality. Because it has long-standing relationships with women's organising efforts in every region of the world, including conflict areas, UNIFEM is well

placed to test information collection models and provide support to other entities collecting and analysing information on the impact of armed conflict on women and women's role in peace-building. However, the emphasis on being catalytic and innovative in UNIFEM's mandate has hindered the ability to remain operational in many countries on a continuous or long-term basis.

Complying with a call from the General Assembly to enhance efforts undertaken in conflict areas, and responding to Security Council Resolution 1325, UNIFEM has intensified its work in 25 conflict affected countries through a four-pronged framework for action that increases the availability of targeted information on the impact of conflict on women and their role in peace building, strengthens approaches to protection and assistance for women affected by conflict, strengthens the contribution of women to conflict prevention, resolution and post-conflict peace-building at national, regional and international levels, and mainstreams a gender focus in inter-governmental peace and security initiatives.

In order to analyse the full potential of Security Council Resolution 1325 and to survey women affected by conflict, UNIFEM appointed two independent experts to travel the world's war zones. Elisabeth Rehn of Finland and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia generated a ten-chapter book reviewing existing knowledge and offering 64 recommendations which was launched on 31 October 2002, the second anniversary of the passage of Resolution 1325. The experts summarised the gender components of early warning as including:

▲ Propaganda emphasising hyper-masculinity;
▲ Media scapegoating of women, accusing them of political or cultural betrayal;
▲ Sex-specific refugee migrations;
▲ Engagement of women in a shadow war economy;
▲ Sex-specific unemployment;
▲ Resistance to women's participation in peace processes and negotiations;
▲ Lack of presence of women in civil society organisations;
▲ Growth of fundamentalism;
▲ Increase in single female-headed households.

Citing stories they were told by women about weapons accumulation, and foreknowledge of actual attacks, the independent experts concur with Piza-Lopes and Schmeidl's finding that assessing the affects of conflict on women provides new information that may lead to fresh analysis and response options. While practitioners in the field emphasise the need for accurate and timely information, influential authorities have claimed that more analysis and response is needed, rather than more information. The experts asserted that this perspective overlooks a rich source of information that is not being tapped. They discovered in their meetings with conflict-affected women that they spontaneously describe and refer to early warning indicators, which differ from country to country. Listening to women in these zones would be of enormous advantage to those collecting and analysing information, according to the experts, who recommended that UNIFEM develop and test gender-based early warning indicators in field based pilots.

Pursuing a collaborative approach to developing common indicators for early warning, taking into account women and gender issues, UNIFEM has started implementing this recommendation in partnership with the UN system, especially UN Funds and Programmes, and with NGOs, regional and sub-regional organisations. The first step, developing a set of gender-based early warning indicators for testing in three field-based pilots, has required adapting conflict analysis tools – including situation profiles, analysis of the causes, actors and potential scenarios of the conflict – that have been traditionally gender blind. The organisation has generated lists of gender-specific characteristics of conflict including signs forthcoming in the latent-formation of conflict, as well as the stage of escalating tension, or low or high intensity violence. The obvious indicators relate to the feminisation of poverty and the increased economic burden placed on women during conflict, increases in forced or voluntary prostitution, the decline in women's access to health, education, employment, credit and land.

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While manifestations of the cultural impact of war and psychosocial trauma are less easy to document, it is certainly not invisible, and can be seen by those living in close proximity to the society. For example, it is recognised that restricting public debate on increasing political tensions is a sign of impending conflict. Politically active and visible women are silenced in gender-specific ways, through threats of rape and threats of injury or death to children. As women's organisations turn to UNIFEM for support in providing security for their members, alarm systems for their offices, or international visibility to protect women leaders, the organisation is able to document the impact of the conflict on women. Inflammatory public rhetoric very often manipulates gender roles and symbols to arouse hated of 'the enemy'. Concrete examples gleaned from UNIFEM's presence in conflict countries of press materials, graffiti or social codes enforced by armed groups are relevant and useful in predicting the patterns violence may take, therefore prompting appropriate protection initiatives.

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Experience in this field has proven that the process may be as important as the results. As analysts and practitioners become familiar with the information offered by using gender-based early warning indicators, not only will they learn more about the impact of armed conflict on women, they will also appreciate the critical role women can play in preventing it. During the field-based testing of the indicators listed above, UNIFEM will be working closely with UN country teams, governments and NGOs to enhance the security literacy of women, and the gender literacy of security institutions and decision-makers.

Decision-makers on the Security Council obtain analysis and recommendations for action from a variety of sources including their national intelligence mechanisms, and through the thematic and country-focused reports of the Secretary-General. Security Council resolution 1325 acknowledges the lack of data about the impact of armed conflict on women and women's role in peace-building informing their deliberations. Resolution 1325 asks the Secretary-General, where appropriate, to include in his reporting to the Security Council progress on gender mainstreaming throughout peacekeeping missions and all other aspects relating to women. Despite this request for a more complete picture of the situation on the ground in war torn societies, the information provided to the Council has been patchy.

In order for ongoing detailed and up to date information on the impact of conflict on women and their activities in peace building, UNIFEM is developing a web portal on women, war and peace. The portal will be launched on 31 October 2003, the third anniversary of the passage of Security Council Resolution 1325, and will provide gender profiles of countries in conflict, as well as thematic resources on issues such as displacement, violence, health, HIV/AIDS, justice, reconstruction, prevention, small arms and human security, among others. Rather than providing *ad hoc* information prior to a Security Council mission or to a UN department writing a report, UNIFEM will be facilitating ongoing and routine inclusion of information by and about women enduring war through this mechanism.

While the founders of the UN emphasised the need for equality between men and women as well as nations large and small and provided a series of mechanisms to prevent war, they understood that the prevention of war was inextricably tied to the reduction and control of armaments. In Article 26 of the Charter, the Security Council, together with the Military Staff Committee, is asked to generate a plan to divert as little of the world's human and economic resources to armaments as possible. The independent experts appointed by UNIFEM reaffirmed this role for the Security Council in preventing conflict, echoing the observation of the women's peace movement, and every Secretary-General of the United Nations regarding the asymmetrical investment in war rather than peace. If we invest in war, we will get war. If the world's governments invested as many human and economic resources into peace and conflict prevention as they invest in war, the ultimate goal of the United

Nations to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war would be realised. It is high time for women's voices, recommendations and actions to be better utilised by the international community towards that goal. 🔔

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Endnotes

1. Dr Max Van Der Stoel, High Commissioner On National Minorities, Keynote Speech to the Seminar on Early Warning and Preventive Diplomacy, Warsaw, 19-21 January 1994, http://www.osce.org/odihr/documents/periodicals/bulle2-2.pdf.

2. http://www.ccpdc.org/.

3. Jane Holl Lute, Paper presented at UNIFEM Advisory Group meeting to the Independent Experts on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women's Role in Peace-building, Helsinki, Finland, 6-8 March 2002.

4. The European Platform for Conflict Prevention and Transformation is an open network of some 150 key European non-governmental organisations involved in the prevention and/or resolution of violent conflicts in the international arena. Its mission is to facilitate the exchange of information and experience among participating organisations, which includes women's organisations. See http://www.euconflict.org. Founded in 1991, the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) is one of many African NGOs focused on conflict prevention and has devoted considerable energies to exploring gender and women's role in prevention and peace-building in Africa. See http://www.accord.org.za/web.nsf. A large coalition of international and national groups launched the Global Action Plan to Prevent War in 1999. The Plan is a blueprint for a war prevention regime to be established in four phases over the first three to four decades. See http://www.globalactionpw.org/. A collection of 50 prevention success stories recently published by the Oxford Research Group reveals the detailed analysis of strategies for prevention, conflict management and resolution that is now readily available from the NGO community, including women's organisations. See Dylan Mathews, *War Prevention Works: 50 Stories of People Resolving Conflict*, Oxford Research Group, September 2001, www.oxfordreasearchgroup.org.uk.

5. UN Press Release, SC/6759, 29 November 1999.

6. Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on Conflict Prevention, A/55/895 – S/2001/574, 7 July 2001, http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/reports/2001/574e.pdf.

7. Conclusion of the meeting of the G8 Foreign Ministers' Meeting, Attachment 2, G8 Roma Initiatives on Conflict Prevention, 'Strengthening the Role of Women in Conflict Prevention', 18-19 July 2001, Rome, Italy, http://www.g7.utoronto.ca/g7/foreign/fm091901_con_att2.html.

8. The 1993 Declaration of the Assembly of African Heads of State established the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. The objective of the Mechanism, overseen by a 16 member Central Organ, is the anticipation and prevention of situations of potential conflict from developing into full-blown conflicts. The Organisation of African Unity (now called the African Union) has begun to take practical steps to include African women and utilise their skills in resolving conflicts in Africa. For example, in 1997 the AU dispatched an African Women's Solidarity Mission to Burundi with the goal of encouraging the participation of women in the peace-building process. In 1998, in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the AU created an advisory body called the African Women's Committee on Peace and Development to foster the full participation of women in continental efforts to manage conflicts, although the Committee is criticised for being weak and not integrated into the Mechanism.

9. IGAD Member States have established a Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism and held a workshop entitled 'Engendering the Early Warning and Response Mechanism for IGAD Member States', 25-26 November 2002, Addis Ababa. This was attended by 34 participants from seven IGAD member states.

10. Comprehensive Review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects A/55/305 – S/2000/809, 21 August 2000, para 32.

11. *Ibid.*, para 33.

12. 'The Responsibility to Protect: Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty', Ottawa: International Development Research Center, December 2001.

13. *Ibid.*, p xii.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Eugenia Piza-Lopez and Susanne Schmeidl, *Gender and Conflict Early Warning: A Preliminary Framework*, Geneva: Swiss Peace Foundation with International Alert, July 2002.

16. Ibid., p 8, citing Anne J Tickner, 'Why Women Can't Run the World: International Politics According to Francis Fukuyama', *International Studies Review*, vol 1, no 3, 1999.

17. Mary Caprioli, 'Gendered Conflict', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol 37, no 1, 2000, cited in Piza-Lopez and Schmeidl, 2002.