

AUSTRALIA, THE UNITED NATIONS AND WOMEN

Measures to advance gender equality are central to the success of any United Nations effort to safeguard international peace and security. Australia was a founding member of the UN and has actively engaged with the UN since that time. As a good international citizen, it must support the ongoing work of the UN to improve the status of women.

WomenSpeak, a national alliance of women's advocates, has participated in a variety of UN mechanisms and processes which aim to advance the status of women, including the UN Commission on the Status of Women and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women. In recent years, WomenSpeak has joined with women's and other organisations around the world in supporting the establishment of a new composite UN entity for gender equality and women's empowerment. WomenSpeak has also supported efforts to see full implementation by Australia of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, on Women, Peace and Security.

Support for Establishment of a New Composite Entity for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment:

In September 2009, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution that strongly supports the establishment of a new 'Composite Entity', which will sharpen the focus and impact of the gender equality activities of the entire UN system. The new entity (name still to be determined), will bring together the mandates and assets of the following existing UN entities: DAW (Division for Advancement of Women); OSAGI (Office of the Special Advisor for Gender Issues); UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women); and INSTRAW (UN International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women).

The new entity will be more strategic, powerful and catalytic than the sum of its parts. It will be led by an Under Secretary General to ensure the necessary authority and leadership.

The new entity will provide:

- A powerful voice for women and girls at the global, regional and local levels.
- Better support for Member States as they enhance the normative and policy environment to accelerate progress towards gender equality.
- Increased assistance for national partners as they address critical gaps and challenges in their efforts to achieve equality for women and girls – this includes leading the UN system in developing and implementing innovative and catalytic initiatives.
- An enhanced and coordinated UN response to country-defined needs and priorities, where the UN system works in a more effective, collaborative and coherent way.
- Strengthened accountability in the UN system for gender mainstreaming including, through oversight, monitoring and reporting on system-wide performance on gender equality.

The new entity requires adequate funding (\$US1 billion) to enable it to be effective. Australia should pledge core, predictable, and multi-year voluntary funds now. Australia must continue to offer strong moral support for the new entity. Further, Australia must advocate in support of recognition of the vital role that civil society, particularly women's organisations, should play in the work of the new entity.

Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325

On 31 October 2000, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. Resolution 1325 marks the first time the Security Council addressed the disproportionate and unique impact of armed conflict on women, recognised the under-valued and under-utilised contributions women make to conflict prevention, peacekeeping, conflict resolution and peace-building, and stressed the importance of their equal and full participation as active agents in peace and security.

The knowledge and experience of women in conflict prevention and in the post conflict reconstruction of their societies is usually excluded, and women are under-represented in decision-making institutions. Gender-related violence is regularly used strategically by warring parties, and violence against women and girls is treated with impunity. Resolution 1325 recognises the relevance of women's experiences of conflict in both peace processes and in conflict resolution; looking at women as active participants – rather than simply as victims.

Resolution 1325 calls for:

- Increased representation of women at all decision making levels in institutions promoting security.
- Attention to the specific protection needs of women in conflict, including refugees.
- Increased support for women peacebuilders.
- Protection from sexual violence, and an end to impunity for war crimes against women.
- Women's perspectives to be considered during conflict and in peacekeeping operations.
- Response by all parties to women's post-conflict needs – throughout disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration.

Australia has been closely involved in promoting Resolution 1325 in the Pacific region through AusAID programs but there is no broad whole of government set of guidelines for gender awareness in peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction. Australia's key role in post-conflict reconstruction and peacekeeping – assisting Pacific nations along with peace and troop commitments in various conflict zones across the globe, including Timor Leste – requires full implementation of Resolution 1325. The role of women in peace and security must be explicitly recognised by the Australian Government and consideration of gender in peace and conflict issues must become a central obligation and active consideration in the Australian community's response to our military and defence commitments.

KEY POINTS FOR ACTION

Women's advocates are urged to raise the following recommendations with Members of Parliament, Senators and candidates for the 2010 federal election, and remind them that the following elements must be essential to the plan:

Recommendations

- Australia should pledge core, predictable, and multi-year voluntary funds now for the new Composite Entity for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment and continue to offer strong moral support for the new entity. Further, Australia should advocate in support of recognition of the vital role that civil society, particularly women's organisations, should play in the work of the new entity.
- Australia should fully implement the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 through a National Action Plan. The Plan must articulate protection as an integrated component and must link to other relevant United Nations Resolutions, including Security Council Resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009) and 1889 (2009).
- Australia to continue to support the role and full participation of civil society in UN meetings, conferences and international human rights forums.

WomenSpeak

T 02 6230 5152
E womenspeak@ywca.org.au
PO Box 1022 Dickson ACT 2602