

WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

MYTHBUSTERS

The UN Security Council has drawn up a large number of resolutions addressing women's participation in peace and security issues, but the member states have not done enough to make good on their promises. In practice, women's participation in peace processes has not been realised, despite the fact that there is a well-established link between the participation of women in peace talks and the stability of the eventual peace agreement. The international community has unequivocally committed to upholding UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and other resolutions on women's leadership and participation that supplementary UNSCR 1325. Nevertheless, women's experience and know-how are often called belittled as "women's matters", and are not taken into account in considering matters of peace-building and security. This exercise focuses on the myths associated with social and political participation by women.

ABOUT THE EXERCISE

- Duration: 45–60 minutes. The background material (attached) can be given to the students in advance.
- With guidance from the teacher, the class discusses women's participation in peace-building.
- In small groups, students either argue for or against the claims presented to them.
- The exercise is aimed at secondary-school students

AIMS OF THE EXERCISE

Research has shown that women's participation in conflict resolution, peace processes and the implementation of peace agreements leads to more sustainable peace. Despite this fact, however, the proportion of women in recent peacekeeping missions has fallen to less than eight percent of negotiators, and less than 3 percent of the signatories of peace agreements are women. What explains this?

This exercise focuses on misconceptions related to women's participation in peace mediation and conflict prevention. Similar myths related to Finland and to UNSCR 1325 are also discussed

HOW THE EXERCISE PROCEEDS

Below is a list of claims and questions related to women's participation in peace mediation, as well as suggested responses. The teacher can go through the background material in

the class, or give it to the students in advance to read before the class. As homework, the students can also be assigned the following topics to read about:

- UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (in Finnish) <http://www.1325.fi/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/NaisetRauhaJaTurvallisuus-paatoslauselmat.pdf>
- Finnish action plan (in Finnish) http://www.1325.fi/tiedostot/kansallinen_toimintaohjelma_2012.pdf
- Shadow report – UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (in Finnish)
- “Naiset, rauha ja turvallisuus” – Arvio Suomen toisen toimintaohjelman (2012-2016):
- <http://www.1325.fi/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/1325-varjoraportti-2017-FINAL.pdf>

There are two options for the exercise.

Option 1:

45 minutes (20 minutes of group conversation and about five minutes per group for their summary) The class is divided into small groups of four, with two students defending the claim and two opposing it. The arguments in support of the claim and the counterclaims can be found in the explanatory sections below. After the group discussion, each group chooses one representative to briefly tell the class what the group has discussed. After that, the entire class discusses the reports.

Option 2:

40 minutes (about 5 minutes per debate, and 20 minutes for full class discussion and feedback)

Choose one student to represent one party to the conflict, and another to represent the mediating outside party (such as the State of Finnish or the United Nations), which will initiate the negotiations. The mediator’s goal is to ensure the participation of women and to maintain the inclusive nature of the negotiations. The representative of the conflicting party presents the myth / false belief misperception in question, and the mediator presents the counter-claim. They make their arguments, and the rest of the class can participate by asking questions and making statements of their own. The teacher (or a student) acts as the chairperson.

CLAIMS AND RESPONSES

1. WE REPRESENT THE ENTIRE SOCIETY

The parties do not easily admit women into the negotiation. According to one study, however, armed factions are often open to interaction with civil society, especially with groups and individuals that exert social influence, such as religious leaders. The prospect of women’s participation in peace-building often raises considerable opposition. The excuses for keeping women away from the negotiating table are typically along the lines of “they are not qualified” or “it is not safe for them to travel” (even when the women in question live within the conflict zone).

Counter-claim: War affects women and men differently. Inclusion of women can bring new content to talks, and helps the other parties to the negotiations to understand the concerns of ordinary people.

2. WOMEN ARE NOT IMPORTANT IN THE EARLY PHASES OF THE NEGOTIATIONS (AND THE MEDIATOR CAN'T DO EVERYTHING)

Some parties to peace negotiations suspect that the involvement of women would make it a sensitive process more difficult, which could, they claim, prolong the hostilities or even cause the whole peace process to fail. Others argue that the mediator would not be able to persuade the parties to include women in their delegations.

Counter-claim: Research shows that women's participation in peace negotiations has increases the likelihood of a successful outcome. Women have often created a favourable atmosphere for negotiations, and have often been a positive influence on bringing about a ceasefire.

3. WHO ARE THE WOMEN PEACE-BUILDERS?

Women's participation in peace processes has often been opposed either on the grounds that they represent the grassroots level of society, or are too elitist and therefore lacking credibility or qualifications. The qualifications of other groups are not put in doubt in the same way. This double standard becomes clearly evident when armed groups are admitted to peace negotiations in the hope that this would prevent them from derailing the process through violence. So because of this unequal treatment, those who have been or still are involved in perpetrating the violence are actually rewarded.

Counter-claim: Women have a long history of peace-building and dispute settlement at all levels of society, from the grassroots level upwards.

4. WOMEN ARE NOT NEEDED IN PEACE NEGOTIATIONS, BECAUSE MILITARY AND SECURITY MATTERS DO NOT CONCERN WOMEN.

One frequent objection to the involvement of women in peace processes is that "women's issues" are not relevant to security. This claim ignores the impact that conflict has on women, for example in the form of sexual violence committed against the civilian population.

Counter-claim: Most of the matters that are raised by women in peace negotiations are related to security, such as land mines, civilian security, and potential physical threats to women and girls are issues that are not always raised by representatives of the military or other armed parties. Because women typically have a strong connection to the local community, they tend to be highly aware violence-related changes in their society. In peace talks, women often expand the range of issues that are dealt with. This helps to create more

comprehensive and more stable agreements. Women are also irreplaceable members of the control groups that ensure that ceasefires are upheld.

5. THE EXCLUSION OF WOMEN FROM PEACE NEGOTIATIONS IS A CULTURAL MATTER – PEACE NEGOTIATIONS ARE NOT THE PLACE TO DISCUSS GENDER EQUALITY.

It is often claimed that exclusion of women from peace processes can be justified by appealing to local customs and religion.

Counter-claim: If the exclusion of women from peace processes were merely a cultural matter, then there would be very large differences between countries in this respect. In reality, however, the exclusion of women is a common feature of all peace processes, despite the fact that war affects both men and women. Female peace-builders often consider the needs of their society, including men, more comprehensively than men.

CLAIMS RELATED TO FINLAND

Divide the class into small groups (e.g. four per group), and give each group one or two arguments for to think about (give about 15 minutes for thinking about the issue). Each group chooses one student to briefly (five minutes) present the main points of the group's discussion to the rest of the class.

1. "In Finland women and men are equal, so there are no concerns about equality".
2. "How do you think UN Security Council Resolution 1325 has affected the debate in Finland on the participation of women in peacekeeping operations?"
3. What about women's possibilities for joining the military?"
4. The "women, peace and security" agenda concerns Finland mostly as a country that an "importer and exporter" of ideas concerning equality for immigrant communities living in Finland".
5. "Do Finland's obligations under the "women, peace and security" agenda including safeguarding the rights of refugees in countries of origin, in refugee camps, on their journey to another country, and as refugees in Europe and Finland?"

APPENDIX: WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY: BACKGROUND

On 31 October 2000, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1325, on women, peace and security. Its main objective is to strengthen women's role and decision-making power in conflict prevention and resolution, and in peace-building. The resolution is also aimed at creating better protection for women and girls, for ensuring that their human rights are respected, and to prevent gender-based violence. With Resolution 1325, the UN Security Council – which is the highest international body for peace and security – recognised for the first time that war affects men and women differently. Another turning point brought about by the resolution was that women and girls were seen not as passive victims but as active actors who have the right to participate in peace-building and conflict prevention. In the global South, for example, international women's organisations and researchers played a significant role in drawing up UNSCR 1325. A key factor for supporters of that resolution is the participation in peace mediation of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) led by women. This was stated in the resolution's message: women build peace and are essential to preventing and resolving conflicts.


Resolution 1325 rests on three pillars:

- Protecting girls and women in conflicts and safeguarding their human rights
- Prevention of gender-based violence
- Equal participation of women in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction

Although Resolution 1325 is often considered to apply only to the rights of women and girls, an essential feature of it is that it calls for and requires the United Nations and states and other international actors to involve non-state actors in conflict resolution. In other words, it provides the international community with a justification for opening up peace negotiations to national non-state actors that want to create change through non-violent means. In other words, Resolution 1325 makes it easier to see that peace-building as more of a social process than a question of security policy.

According to recent UN studies, however, in the years since it came into force the resolution has not had a major impact. Over the past 15 years, women have been signatories to less than two percent of peace agreements, and less than nine percent of peace negotiators have been women. The narrow range of participants that get to participate in peace processes, and the exclusion of women from them, go a long way towards explaining why nearly half of all peace agreements fail within the first ten years.

The United Nations Security Council has repeatedly called on UN member states to draw up national action plans for implementing Resolution 1325 that have been made. Finland announced its first national action programme of this kind in 2008, as well as a follow-up action programme (2012–2016) for further stepping up implementation of Resolution 1325. The purpose of the programmes was to strengthen Finland's know-how and position in



matters related to UNSCR 1325. The aim was that Finland could contribute to global implementation of the resolution, as part of upholding its own international responsibilities.

Finland is now operating a third national action programme, for the 2017–2021 period. When Finland launched its 1325 action programme in 2008, only a few other countries had a national programme of this kind. By 2017, the number of countries with a national action programme for implementing UNSCR 1325 is 66, and is still growing.

In Finland, the national implementation is monitored by a 1325 monitoring group, which is chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The group includes representatives of many bodies that are responsible for the implementation of the action programme: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. In addition to these responsible bodies, the monitoring group also includes representatives of various NGOs, as well as individual researchers. The ministries and bodies responsible report every year to the parliamentary foreign affairs committee on the implementation of the action plan.

In recent years, the UN Security Council has adopted seven new resolutions and statements by the chairperson of the Security Council in support of the UNSCR's agenda on women, peace and security.