



*In this issue*

An analysis of the impact of ongoing conflicts and law and order disturbances on Pakistani women; their systematic exclusion from peace building and policy recommendations for a more gender sensitive and gender equitable approach to conflict resolution in Pakistan.

by

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**Gender Sensitization for Conflict Management and Resolution**

"If women are half of every community, are they therefore not half of every solution?"

- Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Director of the UN Development Fund for Women

**Impact of Recent Conflicts on Pakistani Women**

As the world marks International Women's day, thousands of Pakistani women across the nation, suffering due to ongoing conflicts in the region remain largely ignored by the world. Domestic violence, harassment and discrimination continue to form the pillars of the women's rights agenda for most activists and rights based organizations. Responding to the needs of women in conflict zones, their rehabilitation and their inclusion in peace negotiations or post conflict reconstruction are causes that have not received adequate attention.

More than 30,000 Pakistanis have been killed or injured in the War on Terror since 2001. According to Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) sources, this includes over 21,000 civilian deaths and injuries. UNOCHA reports that over 2.5 million people have been displaced as a result of military operations conducted in the north-west of Pakistan. The war has taken a heavy toll on life, livelihoods and infrastructure but gender disaggregated data is currently available. Therefore, quantifying the impact of the war on women remains difficult. Subsequently, policies focused on alleviating the plight of women and increasing their participation in negotiating peace or rebuilding their cities remains woefully inadequate. Women continue to suffer on the margins of society, not only victimized and targeted during conflict, but also excluded from post conflict reconstruction and peace building processes.

Women suffer the indignity of rape, torture and captivity. Girls' schools are primary targets for extremist organizations and education for women and girls has come to a virtual halt in areas where the militancy continues to rage. Working women are targeted by extremists while threats to personal safety leaves women deprived of livelihoods and increases their financial dependence on patriarchal and tribal structures. Whereas many women have suffered at the hands of the conflict, some have also actively aided and abetted insurgents. Therefore, despite being neglected by the state, women continue to be involved actively in

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conflicts, as victims and aggressors, but their potential as peacemakers and peacekeepers remain untapped.

Hotbeds of militant activity in Pakistan coincide with highly patriarchal and exclusionary societies where women have historically been marginalized and excluded from public life and decision making processes. The rise of guerilla groups in these regions, the military’s subsequent action against them and the state’s longstanding failure to empower women has resulted in increased oppression of women, their exclusion from society and further exacerbated the culture of violence towards women.

The state needs to play a more active role in sensitizing security forces operating in these areas to women’s needs and work towards ending the cycles of violence, oppression and exclusion. The State must also encourage women to act as agents of change in their communities. Women should be empowered to play a positive role in ending militancy and violence in their communities. Supporters and sponsors of the War on Terror, in the pursuit of their strategic goals in the region also neglected the plight of women in the area.

International actors, operating in the region, fail to consider the impact of the war on terror on women. In the construction of their military strategies they did not prioritize strategies that mitigate the impact of the conflict on women and children. The structure of aid programs also failed to build in substantial incentives for increasing female participation in conflict resolution, post-conflict reconstruction or rehabilitation.

### **SCR 1325 and Pakistan: An Unused Framework for Inclusion**

On 31 October, 2000, the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 1325 on women, peace and security during its 4231st meeting. The resolution deals with the special impact war has on women and children. It stresses the necessity to involve women in conflict prevention, peace building and post-conflict reconstruction. The resolution calls for increasing the number of women working at all levels of decision-making and incorporating a gender sensitive perspective in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post conflict reconstruction. The training of security and peacekeeping personnel in accordance with these priorities to ensure their implementation in the field is also mentioned.

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Progress remains limited to gender sensitization of peacekeepers sent abroad on UN peacekeeping missions. There is currently no state-wide program or initiative in place for the sensitization of civil and military personnel deployed in conflict zones in the country. Some initiatives, led by local NGOs and funded by a variety of donors have worked on gender sensitizing police personnel but no

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such program exists for military and paramilitary forces operating in the north western regions of Pakistan.

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### **The Way Forward**

- **Implementation of SCR 1325:** The government of Pakistan, despite not being a conflict state, must realize that SCR 1325 is a comprehensive framework for ensuring that women’s needs are addressed and their voices are included in the process of post-conflict reconstruction. Therefore, various arms of the state involved in managing the law and order situation, should ensure that their operations are aligned with the international covenants enshrined in 1325.
- **Review of gender policies of law enforcement agencies:** Policies outlining conduct of law enforcers towards women, particularly during crises and conflicts have in many cases not been formulated and in most cases not implemented. Lack of implementation of these policies needs to be investigated. Policies, where lacking, must be crafted and implemented. Unimplemented policies should be reviewed by MoWD with the help of relevant expertise from civil society to ensure that they are in accordance with our international commitments to protecting and promoting women’s rights. A report on the status of implementation of gender sensitive policies of law enforcement agencies should be commissioned and made public by MOWD
- **Setup an inter-ministerial task force for an interagency effort to sensitize law enforcement agencies:** MoWD should coordinate with all related organizations including NGOs, police departments and the military to translate national and international commitments to women’s rights and inclusion into performance on the ground. The taskforce should review the status of policy implementation in each organization, recommend actions for improvement and monitor the progress of agencies to ensure implementation. The report of the taskforce should be made public.
- **Develop accountability mechanisms for trying and punishing perpetrators of crimes against women:** Law enforcement agencies have internal mechanisms for holding personnel accountable for violating official policy. These mechanisms, particularly in the military are not transparent or impartial. Greater transparency around the trial and prosecution of perpetrators of crimes against women and children should be instituted in all law enforcement agencies. A mechanism for grievance redress, which allows members of the public to file complaints against law enforcement agencies and follow up on progress, must be instituted.

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- **Establish a platform for greater coordination and interaction between the NGOs and law enforcement agencies, particularly the military:** While a number of civil society initiatives are in place to sensitize the police to issues of gender, no such large scale civil society initiative exists for military personnel. This is largely due to the lack of access to military personnel and sustained interaction between members of civil society and the military. Such interaction could facilitate an understanding of operational challenges and constraints experienced by the other groups. This can provide a platform for devising solutions to Pakistan’s unique situation that will allow, not only the protection of women and children during conflicts, but their inclusion in negotiating peace.
- **Knowledge-sharing between the Pakistani and Argentinean Ministries of Defense:** Under the leadership of its Ministry of Defense, Argentina has taken steps to make law enforcement more inclusive, democratic and sensitive to the needs of women. The ministry of Defense drafted a progressive and comprehensive gender policy and set up a training institute dedicated to the sensitization of peacekeepers and law enforcement agents to gender issues. The ministry of Defense in Pakistan should establish a platform for knowledge sharing with their Argentinean counterparts in order to formulate similar policies that ensure gender equity in deciding matters of national security.
- **Encourage greater participation of women in civil and military law enforcement agencies:** Pakistan has already taken steps to actively recruit women into the police and armed forces. Such efforts should continue and all female groups should be deployed in areas experiencing law and order disturbances along with their male colleagues. Female troops will have greater access to the women in the area, thereby allowing law enforcement agencies to become aware of the needs of women.

Deployment of women in areas experiencing conflict is not standard practice in Pakistan as it is believed that the protection of female troops will become an additional burden on security forces. However, women battalions and groups have been deployed in various conflict zones across the world and the Pakistani military and law enforcement agencies must review their policies to allow women troops in the field.
- **Use the pre-deployment training of peacekeepers as a template for sensitizing all military personnel:** MoWD and the military have developed a training for UN peacekeepers that is used to sensitize them to gender issues before being deployed abroad as part of a UN mission. This short training is only provided to troops going abroad. The scope of this training must be expanded to include all civil and military personnel. This training should also be instituted as a core part of the initial training and curriculum of security forces instead of being provided prior to a tour of duty overseas.