

Statement

By

Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

President of the Republic of Liberia

On

UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1325:
WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

Tuesday May 30, 2006

Wilton Park, London

Distinguished Chair and Members of the Wilton Park Academic Council;

Mr. Under Secretary General of the United Nations;

Distinguished Participants;

Elizabeth Rehn, my esteemed partner on review of 1325;

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a pleasure to join you as you celebrate your Diamond Jubilee at Wilton Park where you have a remarkable record of bringing some of the brightest minds together in the cross-fertilization of ideas.

I understand that you intend to mark your Diamond Jubilee this year by hosting and organising sixty policy conferences. I join in applauding you as you endeavor to gain better understanding of global issues in order to make the world a safer and better place for us all. Were he alive, I am sure that Sir Winston Churchill would duff his traditional hat off to you during your celebrations throughout the year.

In this regard, we recognize and commend your pride in the pursuit of academic independence as you support policy formulation and analysis by the Foreign and Commonwealth office. This has helped to shape the image of Wilton Park as an institution well grounded in foreign policy on most of the global issues of

our time. I believe, as Francis Bacon said many years ago, “Conference maketh a ready man”, that Wilton Park has been able to help the UK Government and the Commonwealth of Nations to come up with sound policy-making approaches, no matter how sensitive or controversial the issues may be.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Participants, my task today is to examine some of the challenges relative to the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 which was adopted five and a half years ago. This resolution, which sought principally to address the impact of war on women and women’s contribution to conflict resolution and sustainable peace marked what we all believed to be a major turning point in meeting the commitments of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the document of the twenty-third Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly entitled, ‘Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century in particular those concerning Women and Armed Conflict’.

Elizabeth Rehn of Finland, a distinguished participant in this dialogue, and I were privileged to have been selected by UNIFEM to carry out the study mandated by Resolution 1325 – the study entitled, ‘Women, War and Peace’, representing UNIFEM’s Progress of the World’s Woman 2002.

As reported, over the course of one year, we traveled to many of the world's conflicts. We saw how militarization of society breeds new levels of violence and how impunity by these crimes becomes endemic. We saw a continuum of violence that shatters women's lives before, during and after conflict.

We collected first hand data by meeting with women victims and survivors of conflict; women activists, women leaders and women groups, international and national non-governmental organizations; the media; religious organizations; eminent leaders from civil society; women and girls directly involved in armed conflicts and peace processes; women in their offices and homes; in the refugee camps and on the streets; representatives of host governments and the United Nations, opposition groups and peacekeeping and humanitarian personnel.

We came face to face, little prepared for the enormity of it all, with the staggering numbers of women who survived the humiliation of rape, sexual exploitation, mutilation, torture and displacement; the unconscionable act of depravity; and the wholesale exclusion of women from peace processes.

That experience, persistent today, shows that the extremely high vulnerability of women during situations of armed conflict results from society's diminishing access to the basic means of survival. As conflict escalates, the patterns of

discrimination against women tend to become exacerbated. Consequently, women become more susceptible to the marginalization and sufferings that are engendered by armed conflict. This leads to a corresponding reduction in access to income, resources, markets, information, health and education opportunities; and social ties – a condition aptly described as the feminization of poverty.

Poverty represents the major challenge to the implementation of Resolution 1325. The statistics on poverty is startling. Half of the world's population, nearly 3 billion people, lives on less than a \$2 a day. The top fifth of the world's people in the neediest countries enjoy 82% of the expanding trade and 68% of foreign direct investment; the bottom fifth barely more than one percent. A few hundred millionaires own as much wealth as the world's poorest 2.5 billion people (Poverty Facts and Stats by Anup Shah).

To a large extent, poverty has been at the core of the root causes of the majority of the wars and internecine conflicts in Africa. According to the World Bank, in 2004, 314 million Africans lived on less than \$1 a day, nearly twice as many as in 1981. Africa is home to 34 of the world's 48 poorest countries and 24 of the 32 countries ranked lowest in human development.

The record is also clear that poverty is more pronounced in women than men. To quote relevant UNDP statistics (Women World 2000), '70 percent of people in poverty, living on less than \$1 a day, are women; 66 percent of the world illiterate are women; some 60 percent of the world's 140 million illiterate young people are young women; women own one percent of land in the world; women provide 70 percent of the unpaid work valued at one third of global GDP; women receive only 70 percent of the wages of men. Women in poverty is thus a way of life and a continuing source of their vulnerability.

In their recent book, 'Women in an Insecure World' (edited by Marie Vlachova and Lea BIASON), the situation is described thus: "Over the years, the international development community has developed various approaches to address the socio-economic inequities between genders or, in other words, 'feminization of poverty'. These approaches are embedded in and cannot be de-linked from the broader international discourse on development. However, while it is acknowledged that women's economic vulnerability contributes to overall powerlessness, analysis would indicate that it is far from clear that simply improving women's economic situation automatically and necessarily empowers them in other dimensions, including the physical dimension or the capability to protect themselves from violence. Some direct attempts to increase women's income levels, for instance through microfinance, have in fact attracted additional physical violence from men.

Therefore, meeting women's basic needs is not enough. More crucially, there is a need for concurrent strategies that aim to challenge and transform the institutions and structures that systemically perpetuate asymmetries.”

A second major challenge to the implementation of Resolution 1325 is justice – justice in the form of punishment for those who in war commit in war heinous crimes against women; justice in the form of punishment of those who abduct, rape, torture and enslave women in war time. In many instances, those crimes against women are neither spontaneous nor random; they are planned and deliberate, a stark revelation of the complicity of male dominated institutions and the weakness and ineffectiveness of judicial systems, even in post conflict situations. As pointed out in our report, ‘accountability on the part of states and societies for crimes against women means more than just punishing perpetrators. It means establishing the rule of law and a just social and political order. Without this, there can be no lasting peace. Impunity weakens the foundation of societies emerging from conflict by legitimizing violence and inequality. It prolongs instability and injustice and exposes women to the threats of renewed conflict.

A third major obstacle to the implementation of Resolution 1325 is what I call the Structural Hangover of the past – the difficult task of reversing conditions imposed by centuries of male domination. This is manifested in long standing inequities in

women's access to a range of productive resources including land, work, education, and health care. It is reflected in the fact that women's participation in managerial and administrative posts is around 33 percent in the developed world, 15 percent in Africa. It is reflected in the fact that there are only five women Chief Executives among the Fortune 500 corporations; only an average (2004) 15.6 percent in the percentage of women members of Parliament, a representation less than 2 percentage points since 1990; in the fact that only 7 percent of women are Cabinet Ministers. In the United Nations System, women hold 9 percent of the top management jobs and 21 percent of senior management positions. In December 2003, out of over 180 countries only 12 were headed by women (if we did not lose any this would have changed significantly in 2006). In short, no region of the world, developed or developing, are women equal to men in socio-economic rights. This is a result of the long standing imbalances in relationships between men and women which can be changed only through concerted and sometimes radical action.

I recently read an excerpt from a speech by Stephen Lewis, UN Special Envoy for HIV AIDS in Africa in which he quoted from an open letter sent to the Secretary General of the United Nations and member governments of a coalition of international women groups. He quoted the women in saying, "We are disappointed and frankly outraged that gender equality and strengthening the women's machineries within the UN system are barely noted, and not addressed as a central

part of the reform agenda. Again we must ask how it can be that more than ten years after the commitment to gender parity at the Beijing Conference, the UN is still offering only token representation of women on critical committees, high level expert panels and in senior positions within the organization?"

Stephen went on in his words, "I do not believe that simply factoring women into the consideration of development, humanitarian assistance and environment will lead to fundamental change. The demand to incorporate women's concerns into priorities set by men has been made, met, and invariably abandoned countless times before." These words from the Women Coalition and from Ambassador Lewis serve only to remind us that the structural imbalances of the past are not easily overcome.

In spite of all that women continue to endure, Elisabeth and I met brave and tireless women who continued to work steadfastly in the midst of deadly conflict, undeterred by threats to their safety, limited resources or their marginalization by decision makers. They sacrificed their lives for peace. They challenged militarism and urged reconciliation over retribution. They have contributed to peace building as activists, as community leaders, as survivors of the most cataclysmic horrors of war. They have transformed peace processes on every continent by organizing across political, religious and ethnic affiliation.

In post-conflict in my country, Liberia, the glaring indicators of the adverse effects of war on women and girls speak volumes of truth about the torturous experiences that women undergo during situations of armed conflicts. For nearly fifteen years the women of Liberia—and indeed the civilian population—were subjected to the most banal forms of social injustices. They were murdered, gang-raped, subjected to all forms of sexual and gender-based violence, disconnected from their families, and conscripted into militias in which many of them served as sex slaves for male combatants and their commanders. The civil war was a dehumanizing experience for women as it subdued them to the most sub-human state.

Nevertheless, their contributions to the search for durable peace, in most instances overlooked, were remarkable and unparalleled. For example, through the efforts of the Liberia Chapter of Women in Peace Building Network (WIPNET), a group of church going women, associated with the St Peter's Lutheran Church began organizing and mobilizing for peace in 2002. This church, for those with knowledge about the war, was the scene of the first major massacre of people in 1990 at the start of the war. By the end of the war, it was these women, joined by others in WIPNET who defied the heat of the scorching sun, or the cold of the rain to organize sit-in for peace. As will be published in a forthcoming UN report, they chanted that "sun and rain are better than the bullets of war. Our vision is for the

unity of families and the elimination of hunger and disease. We believe God's hands are under us in the effort now. God had tuned his ears toward us".

Women the world over became foot soldiers and champions of peace as they risked their survival by shuttling between belligerent armed groups. In most instances, they resorted to non-violent direct action, embarking on sit-ins and even undertaking risky peace advocacy campaigns in the wake of growing hostilities. Their relentless and positive endeavors, although flagrantly ignored during negotiations aimed at resolving the prolonged and ineffably devastating civil war, were remarkable and have therefore left a lasting legacy that has greatly helped to accentuate the need to re-think conflict resolution and reconstruction approaches.

In the sub region of West Africa, women's roles have been acknowledged through the effective grassroots and community mobilization activities such as the 50/50 Women's Movement in Sierra Leone; the Liberia Women's Initiative in Liberia, and the Mano River Women's Network for Peace. The challenges they faced are enormous and well documented.

Today as we reflect on the past half a decade since the Security Council adopted Resolution 1325, we are reminded that greater efforts are still needed to ensure compliance with its provisions. As stated by the World Bank, the challenge

to achieving gender equality have evolved and become more intense as a result of the forces of increased globalization and the spread of the HIV AIDS pandemic. The world can no longer afford the risk involved in downplaying the enormous contributions that women are making in order to help transform their societies and the world. For the past half a decade, women were instrumental in working to promote peace at the national, sub-national and global levels. Women's vision is to help their nations recover from the shackles of armed conflicts. However, this vision cannot be realized if the world fails to recognize the significance of more tangible and concrete efforts that promote equal participation.

As Elizabeth and I concluded, "the standards of protection for women affected by conflict are glaring in their inadequacy, as is the international response. Only by ending impunity for crimes against women in war can nations be rebuilt. Gender equality in this context means enabling women as full citizens: as voters, as candidates, as decisions-makers. It means supporting women centrally to reconstruction – to reforming the constitution, the electoral system, and the policies and resources that support development. Without women's representation – without half the population – no country can truly to be engaged in democratic development and participatory governance."

Resolution 1325 thus needs a rekindling. Steps to do so include improvements in girls education, improvements in women's labour market position, programs in women's life expectancy, improved property rights and political representation, and tackling HIV AIDS. The world needs to recognize the immense and invaluable contributions that women make even in the midst of growing hostilities. Both women and men need to be encouraged so that together they can both support the reconstruction of their war-torn societies. The goals of peace and reconstruction are most likely to be missed if holistic participation in decision-making processes is not encouraged and promoted on a large scale. For us in Africa, where large numbers of our population are still embroiled in armed conflicts of varying proportions, Resolution 1325 evinces the greatest emphasis: that both men and women, whatever the circumstances, have an equal responsibility to remove the shackles of armed conflict.

Our own difficult country experience over the past fifteen years has shown that although exposed to discrimination and victimization during situations of armed conflict, women built within themselves a mighty fortress, undertaking to challenge the status quo to make it become gender sensitive and to press for increased participation at all levels of decision-making process. In short, although the anticipated support did not come, the women of Liberia were relentless in the struggle to secure their own survival and that of their families. Today the women of

Liberia are once again proud torch bearers of leadership in the field of political participation and decision-making.

Our democratic election which has resulted in the first female led elected government in Africa will be a test case. We want to prove to the world and indeed to our own domestic constituents that an investment in women leadership at the highest level should and will yield high and a long-lasting peace dividend. In this context we are trying to make a difference by ensuring not only that the President and head of government is a woman, but that women can simultaneously head other strategic positions – the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Commerce and the Director of the National Police, all vital areas for addressing poverty and preserving a post conflict fragile peace.

We hope that our new political architecture can serve to minimize the scale of the effects of poverty, help in meeting the challenges of implementation of Resolution 1325.

We hope that leadership, as a test case, will lead to the establishment of political benchmarks for women in post conflict societies, a trail blazer for the empowerment of women, an investment in peace and conflict resolutions, and the

formulation of bold steps to meet the challenges of implementation of Resolution 1325.

Let me conclude Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen by emphasizing that in my view there is hope. Indeed, there remains every reason to see the challenges that we have confronted over the past five years of implementing Resolution 1325, as opportunities for women to rise up and assume a more active role in the decision-making contours of the political terrain in Africa.

Let me also suggest that once we begin to address the subject matter of poverty collectively and globally as partners for change, we will be embarking on a fundamental path to redirection and reform in the conduct of our lives and ways of doing business. We urge us all, partners in the global struggle for gender equity and equality to rekindle the spirit of Resolution 1325, to simplify and adjust every aspect of their lives in investing and acknowledging women's roles and leadership in post conflict situations. We urge zero tolerance for war and a positive affirmation for peace. We direct this appeal to those with the power and resources to make a difference. We point once again to the several recommendations in Women, War and Peace. Indifference is not an option. We must achieve the critical mass of 30 percent of women in decision making in all aspects of national endeavor. This represents the overarching challenge to Resolution 1325. I thank you.