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## 5. Peace and Conflict in the Commonwealth

The first part of this chapter uses paragraphs from UNSCR 1325 to chart the progress made by selected Commonwealth countries in attaining the goals outlined by the resolution. The extracts are in italics while the accompanying text provides examples of how the actions called for have been implemented in the various country contexts. The second part of the chapter offers some possible future scenarios regarding women, peace and conflict in the selected countries.

### Implementation of UNSCR 1325 in selected countries (2000–2011)

#### India

*Urges the Secretary-General to seek to expand the role and contribution of women in United Nations field-based operations, and especially among military observers, civilian police, human rights and humanitarian personnel*

**2010:** Female Indian peacekeepers on the streets of Liberia have contributed to the involvement of women in Liberian society, particularly the police force. 'The numbers speak for themselves. Five years ago, one in 20 police personnel was a woman. Now, nearly one in five is female. According to UNMIL [the UN Mission in Liberia], applications from women to join the police force tripled the year after the female Indian peacekeepers arrived' (Ford & Morris 2010). This speaks interestingly to the role of women peacekeepers as members of states that are helping to implement UNSCR 1325 abroad while their own country sometimes struggles to meet its demands.

#### Nigeria

*Urges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict*

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**2001:** ‘Women in all walks of life are realising that to be an integral part of the democracy, they need to organise and be more radical. Nigeria has 36 states and 747 local government chapters yet ... it has only four female senators, five Ministers in the Federal government and one female Deputy-Governor of a state (Lagos). President Obasanjo, when he came to power in May 1999, echoing the Beijing Platform for Action, promised that 30 per cent of the decision-making positions in his government would be reserved for women, sadly this is not yet a reality’ (International Alert n.d.).

**2007:** The National Gender Policy called for 35 per cent representation of women at all levels of decision-making. Although more women have been appointed to cabinet positions, however, the electoral model of first past the post still limits the participation of women in senatorial, parliamentary and local government elections. Women have to work very hard to gain political acceptance in a patriarchal society. ‘Nigerian women feel especially aggrieved at their lack of political empowerment and their voices are among the loudest calling for a referendum on the Constitution’ (International Alert n.d.).

*Further urges the Secretary-General to seek to expand the role and contribution of women in United Nations field-based operations, and especially among military observers, civilian police, human rights and humanitarian personnel*

**2006:** Nigeria took the lead among UN member states by providing about 49 women police officers to peacekeeping missions by the end of 2006. It pledged a similar police contingent to support the African Union mission in Darfur, Sudan in 2007 (Deen 2007).

### **Papua New Guinea (Bougainville)**

*Urges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict*

**2001:** ‘In two agreements in Bougainville-Papua New Guinea... the only mention of women was as signatories of the peace agreement itself’ (Bell & O’Rourke 2010: 941–80).

**2005:** ‘Bougainvillean women have not attained the public power that they would like. For example, women argued for 12 reserved seats in the new Constitution of an Autonomous Bougainville, but achieved only three’ (Saovana-Spriggs 2007: 106). ‘It is striking that since the 2005 election, there are only three women members of the government, out of a total of 40’ (Charlesworth 2008: 347–361).

### **Rwanda**

*Urges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict*

**2001:** Rwanda employed a three-ballot system in the March 2001 sectoral and district elections that effectively increased women’s political participation (as well as youth participation). Voters were provided with three ballots: a general one, a woman ballot and a youth ballot. This effectively guaranteed that women would be able to get

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into office, thus fulfilling President Kagame's notion of 'partnership' (Powley 2003; Mzvondiwa 2007).

**2003:** 'The role of women was formalised in the constitution, which set aside 20 of the 80 seats in the Chamber of Deputies for women. Throughout all levels of government in Rwanda, positions have been created to address women's issues and gender concerns. At national level, the Ministry of Gender and Women in Development co-ordinates with the government in gender-mainstreaming policies, creating gender focal points in other key ministries and conducting gender awareness training. At provincial level, there are civil servants with gender and women portfolios. At district level, the post of vice-mayor for gender has been created and local women's councils are active at cell levels' (Mzvondiwa 2007: 103).

'Another mechanism used by the government is a parallel system of women's councils and women-only elections. These are grassroots structures, elected at cell level by women only (and then through indirect election at each successive administrative level), which operate in parallel with the general local councils, and represent women's concerns (Izabiliza 2005). The role of the women's council is one of advocacy rather than policy implementation. Women are involved in skills training and awareness campaigns. They articulate women's views and concerns on education, health, and security to local authorities. This system has been effective in that it brought some women into the national parliament. It breaks the traditional bonds that have characterised male dominance and women's subordination in Rwanda. ... However, ... the participation of women is still in its infancy; a lot needs to be done to fulfil these initiatives. For example, the women who participate at grassroots level and in the councils are doing great work, but their involvement is often disparaged as "volunteer", charitable or social' (Mzvondiwa 2007: 104).

**2005:** 'As of 2005, Rwanda held the world's highest representation of women in parliament with 48.8 per cent' (Binder et al. 2008: 22-41).

**2007:** 'In Rwanda today, women hold nearly 49 per cent of the seats in the Lower House of Parliament. This is the greatest representation worldwide, according to a tally by the Geneva-based Inter-Parliamentary Union. In 2003 the union reported that Rwanda "had come the closest to reaching parity between men and women of any national parliament", replacing long-time champion Sweden (Enda 2003). This set-up has seen women's contributions to good governance. Women began serving in the executive, legislative and judiciary arms of government. This kind of high-level involvement is likely to have a great impact on how girl children perceive their role in Rwandan society' (Mzvondiwa 2007: 104).

**2011:** As already noted, women now hold 56.3 per cent of the seats.

## Solomon Islands

*Urges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict*

**2000:** 'From the early days of the conflict, women sought to capitalise on cultural images of women as peacemakers, forming a Women for Peace group to bring the

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warring parties together (Leslie 2002). Despite this, no women were included in peace talks held in Townsville in 2000. RAMSI [the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands] has done little to draw on women's experience in conflict resolution in the Solomons. Although women welcomed RAMSI's arrival and the immediate effect it had on curbing lawlessness in the capital, women leaders feel marginalised in the peace-building process' (Charlesworth 2008: 347–361).

'During the conflict, women's groups joined together to call for peace and democracy. They also played a more active role, crossing boundaries to talk and pray with the warring groups (Kabutaulaka 2002: 23). In May 2000, women, especially those in Honiara, formed women's peace groups and were later contacted by women around Guadalcanal who joined them in their peace work to resolve the crisis (ibid.). The conflict exposed introduced systems, intended to uphold the rule of law, as weak and irrelevant. International lobby groups, aid donors and foreign governments, desperate for legitimate, neutral groups to act as local entry points, paid increased attention to civil society and non-government organisations, including women's groups. For women in Solomon Islands, their role in peace-making assisted in dissolving some of the barriers to their involvement in public life. Given that societal values, particularly in rural areas, are essentially conservative and patriarchal, this is a quantum leap from the previous position' (Corrin 2008: 169–194).

**2002:** 'Solomon Islands finally became a State Party to the Convention [United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women 1979] on 6 May 2002, nearly 24 years after the pledge of equality was made in the Constitution. Since ratification of the Convention, no plan of action for strategies to implement it has been developed, as required by the Beijing Platform of Action. Nor has Solomon Islands submitted a report to the CEDAW Committee' (Corrin 2008: 169–194).

**2004:** The final draft of the new constitution provided more rights for women than the previous one, with women's equality constitutionally guaranteed as a 'fundamental right and freedom'. The constitution also provided women with rights to equal opportunities in political, economic and social activities, employment, education and health care as well as the right to represent the Solomons in international organisations (Corrin 2008).

**2006:** Despite constitutionally guaranteed equality and the contestation of 26 women for one of the 50 seats in parliament, no women were elected in the 2006 elections (Charlesworth 2008). Women are underrepresented in other high-ranking positions as well. Of nine magistracy appointments, only two have been women, and of 940 local court bench appointments, just one has been female. On the other hand, there has been an increase in the number of women lawyers, with women forming the Women in Law Association of Solomon Islands in 2006 (ibid.).

**2007:** The draft constitution from 2004 had still not become law and was being reviewed by a Constitutional Review Congress. The change of government in late 2007 meant its fate was uncertain (Corrin 2007). Despite the constitutional guarantee of equality, the law and politics in Solomon Islands have often accorded markedly different treatment to women and men in practice (Pulea 1985 cited in

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Corrin 2008:169–194). Although there are areas of law where legal barriers have been removed, sex-based inequalities continue to persist in other parts of the decision-making process (ibid.).

### **Sri Lanka**

*Encourages all those involved in the planning for disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration to consider the different needs of female and male ex-combatants and to take into account the needs of their dependants*

**2007:** Women were recruited into the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and regarded as fighters on par with men, while still expected to maintain certain traditional moral standards. However, after the conflict these women's agency did not lead to political power or respect, and in fact they have been expected to revert to traditional roles as wives and mothers within society.

'The expanded space for females attained in the context of armed conflict may therefore not automatically translate into tremendous post-conflict social changes ultimately beneficial to women. In fact, Alison (2004) notes that civil society is uncertain how to respond to female ex-combatants in times of peace. Some of the most negative aspects of women's reintegration into society post conflict entail a need to hide their past participation in war from the Sri Lankan governmental authorities' (Jordan & Denov 2007: 59).

### **Uganda**

*Urges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict*

Although women played instrumental roles in fighting for the end of conflict, in general their work has been marginalised in formal peace-building structures. 'Thus the peace-building involvement of Ugandan women tends to reflect their traditional roles as "background workers" and actors off the scene. They are rarely involved in officially recognised – or "forefront" – formal peace negotiations; rather, they participate in the informal processes around the official meetings' (Binder et al. 2008: 22–41).

**2005:** 'The principal peace negotiator in the major conflict between the government and the LRA is a woman, Betty Bigombe. She has been a key actor in the conflict-resolution process since 1994. As a northern Ugandan, a former government minister, and therefore a recognised and prominent political figure, Bigombe has been well prepared to mediate between the LRA and the Ugandan government. Under very difficult conditions, Bigombe has been encouraging the LRA and the Ugandan government to sign a ceasefire agreement. Her efforts have resulted in the resignation of a number of high-ranking LRA commanders who laid down their arms to support efforts for peace. In September 2005 Bigombe prepared a draft peace agreement that Museveni accepted as the start for substantive negotiations. Bigombe's efforts are supported by a growing number of women activists' (ibid.: 22–41).

**2008:** While women have been very active in NGOs and in peace-building activities, they lack support from the government or the international community.

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Yet, 'they need both political and financial support from key national actors and donors to have sustainable impact. This is where the problems start. Unfortunately, Ugandan women are in this respect in no better position than women in other African countries. Support is sparse, if it is given at all – despite Resolution 1325, which has the support of local women engaged in peace efforts on the ground' (ibid.: 22–41).

### **Afghanistan (a non-Commonwealth example)**

*Urges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict*

**2003:** 'The American government was initially discouraged by some experts from focusing on women in Afghanistan as it was feared this would alienate anti-Taliban forces whose support was required in the war against terrorism. But eventually women's issues were placed at the top of the agenda and the United States pressed for full participation of women at Bonn, the reconstruction conferences in Washington and Tokyo, and the Loya Jirga in Afghanistan. Media also played an extremely effective role in highlighting the Taliban's repression of women' (Council on Foreign Relations 2003). In this respect it should be noted that UNIFEM (2002) has indicated that overall levels of assistance to women in conflict are related strongly to media interest in the country's trauma.

'Currently, work is underway to ensure the mainstreaming of gender in various ministries and projects, and ensuring that the new constitution guarantees equal rights for women and men. Finally, the economic and physical security of Afghan women is inextricably linked to peace and security in the country as well as to its economic growth (Council on Foreign Relations 2003).

**2005:** 'Since the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan, every government has included a minister of women's affairs; in Afghanistan's 2005 parliamentary elections 25 per cent of the seats were reserved for women' (Binder et al. 2008: 22–41).

Calls on all actors involved, when negotiating and implementing peace agreements, to adopt a gender perspective, including ... measures that ensure the protection of and respect for human rights of women and girls, particularly as they relate to the constitution, the electoral system, the police and the judiciary

While the Security Council's record in incorporating women's concerns has been inconsistent, its resolution on Afghanistan was one of only a few to contain specific mandates for the protection of women and children. Other countries include Burundi, Darfur, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Timor Leste (Binder et al. 2008: 22–41).

**2009:** 'In response to widespread concerns about harmful traditional practices and endemic violence against women throughout Afghanistan, the Government enacted the EVAW law [Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women] in August 2009, which represents a significant legislative step towards ending harmful traditional practices. Civil society groups and the Ministry of Women's Affairs steered the law's development. Among its objectives, the law lists "fighting against customs, traditions and practices that cause violence against women contrary to

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the religion of Islam,” and preventing and prosecuting violence against women’ (UNAMA & OHCHR 2010: 3).

‘Article 5 of the law lists 22 acts, the commission of which constitutes violence against women: rape; forced prostitution; publicising the identity of a victim in a damaging way; forcing a woman to commit self-immolation; causing injury or disability; beating; selling and buying women for the purpose of or under pretext of marriage; *baad* (retribution of a woman to settle a dispute); forced marriage; prohibiting the choice of a husband; marriage before the legal age; abuse, humiliation or intimidation; harassment or persecution; forced isolation; forced drug addiction; denial of inheritance rights; denying the right to education, work and access to health services; forced labour and marrying more than one wife without observing Article 86 of the Civil Code’ (ibid.).

## **Possible scenarios for women, peace and conflict in these countries, 2011–2015**

### **India**

It is difficult to generalise with such a large country, particularly given the diversity of the conflicts in various areas. Overall, however, India appears to be moving toward greater inclusion of women in peace talks, creating initiatives for local women leaders and trying to address the concerns of each people as a whole, rather than simply dealing with the male leaders. There is a possibility that the next five years will bring some positive changes along the lines advocated by various aspects of UNSCR 1325. With the positive strides being made economically, India has the potential to improve rather than regress in the area of women’s rights as more of the country becomes part of the global economy.

### **Nigeria**

Women in Nigeria have made some progress over the past decade, but the majority of them have yet to be economically or politically empowered in any significant way. The major efforts at the moment centre around changing ingrained ideas regarding women in politics and capacity building on the ground to produce qualified women candidates for office. Progress in this area is possible but, barring some significant alteration in Nigerian policy, this will most likely take the form of incremental changes that will only add up to significant advances in the next decade or two (Muhammad 2010).

### **Papua New Guinea (Bougainville)**

The push for women’s involvement in government has stagnated since peace was achieved. Currently the only women elected are those mandated by the quota, so one possible way to bring about positive change would be to increase the quota.

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## **Rwanda**

Conditions for women will continue to improve in the country, largely due to the parity achieved in the Government and the emphasis on maintaining and growing the role of women in politics. The girls who are currently going to school will see the gender parity at high levels of government and, barring strong cultural influences to the contrary, this should perpetuate the acceptance of women in positions of authority.

## **Solomon Islands**

Improvement for women will continue to be slow moving in this country. There has been much rhetoric about women's rights in the past 10 years but very little actual change. Unless measures are put in place to require a quota, women will very likely continue to be excluded from government and thus the decision-making processes in the country. There needs to be a commitment to the laws of equality already on the books and a push to implement further changes both in law and in actuality.

## **Sri Lanka**

While women (at least on the Tamil side) were allowed and even encouraged to participate fully in the struggle, in the aftermath of the conflict their voices are being silenced and the role of women is barely acknowledged. Women have been told to return to their traditional roles in the home and few provisions have been made to include them in the peace process. Unless the leaders of the peace talks or the UN decide otherwise, there is a strong possibility that the lobbying of women's groups in Sri Lanka will go largely unheard and their needs unaddressed.

## **Uganda**

Contingent on the existing grassroots and civil society organisations of women gaining traction in more official channels, the conditions for women will improve in Uganda. The fact that Uganda has a NAP on the books bodes well for the implementation of measures to include women in the peace process and other official government channels going forward.

## **Afghanistan (a non-Commonwealth example)**

The next few years for women in Afghanistan will depend largely on whether the coalition forces currently in control of the country choose to focus solely on stabilisation or continue fledgling efforts to empower women under the ideals espoused by UNSCR 1325. Pure stabilisation (driven by a desire to get out as soon as possible) would likely sideline the rights of women in favour of putting a strong government in power and instituting a set of laws on the books that most of the (male portion of the) country will support. On the other hand, US Secretary of State Clinton has repeatedly committed the United States to improving the rights of women around the globe, so it appears likely that efforts to provide access to education and carve out a role in government for women will continue, as well as the creation of laws to protect women from harmful 'traditional' practices.