

Inclusive Peace: Women, Peace and Security post 2015

Welcoming remarks by

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to begin by thanking the organizers for giving the Ministry for Foreign Affairs the opportunity to co-host this important event on “Inclusive peace: Women, peace and security post 2015.”

Having been appointed as a foreign minister less than a week ago, I am particularly happy that my first public address in my new capacity regards an issue that is close to my heart: an issue that focuses on how we can ensure women are active participants in all corners of life, but certainly not least in politics, in prevention of conflicts, and in working towards a sustainable peace in today’s complex world.

Having studied the agenda, which you have set for yourself for the next two days, I can see it is ambitious and timely. It poses the challenge to explore ways and means to make the goals of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, and subsequent resolutions, a reality and not mere words on paper.

Last year we celebrated the 15 years anniversary of Resolution 1325. Sadly, the High Level Review of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda underscored the continued lack of women’s full and meaningful participation in peace operations, peace processes, peace-building and

decision-making processes as a major gap in the implementation of UNSCR 1325. Clearly there is still much work to be done.

Iceland has been lucky enough to be free of conflicts. That, however, does not mean we do not have a role to play in advancing peace and common prosperity. We do that, in part, by remaining a voice for gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. The challenge is not only to maintain the strong emphasis that Iceland, often in tandem with our Nordic friends, places on gender, but rather to push for new and innovative ways to support and further advance the work that is already under way.

It was in this light that Iceland, under the leadership of my predecessor and in good cooperation with Suriname, pushed to develop the so-called Barbershop concept - aiming to draw men and boys to the table in discussing gender equality and gender mainstreaming in the international arena.

It is my firm belief that actively engaging men and boys in this effort is important for advancing the goals of UNSCR 1325 and, thereby, adding to the chorus of voices calling for concrete change. As a matter of fact, women and men simply must join hands in this effort to create a better future for all of us. Teamwork is the key concept in this respect – and teamwork takes team effort.

Barbershop events have already taken place at the UN headquarters in New York and in Geneva as well as at NATO Headquarters in Brussels with high-level participation. Further events are in the planning for OSCE, Council of Baltic Sea States and again in New York. It is my hope

that this initiative will help advance the discussion and the necessary mindset to reach the equal rights of men and women and, hence, the goals of UNSCR 1325.

Iceland has also contributed to the "HeforShe" initiative by UN Women and is actively engaged in spreading information to Icelandic men – urging them to sign up. To date, over thirteen thousand men have signed up, including our national basketball team, and the number is growing by the day.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Iceland remains committed to the implementation and promotion of resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions. The goals of these resolutions are strongly reflected in Iceland's foreign policy.

We take the message seriously, both internationally and domestically. It resonates in the training of our civilian peacekeepers, whom we dispatch to the various corners of the world, and in our development policy and projects. In addition, every single employee of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs is due to receive training in the coming weeks that makes him and her attentive to the message that the resolution brings to their daily work.

Equality is an essential part of sustainable development, clean economic growth, social justice, sustainable peace and security. Only through equality can a society, in general, be deemed successful.

What is the obstacle then, one might ask, in reaching the goals of UNSCR 1325? Well, as we have seen, from the High Level Review of the Women Peace and Security Agenda, current structures are not working and the evidence supports the argument that proponents of resolution 1325 have long made – namely, for peace to be sustainable, women need to be at the center.

Nowhere is this more obvious than in data on maintenance of peace. One third of all countries that signed a peace agreement between 1990 and 2012 had returned to violence within five years. A study by UN Women on 31 peace processes for roughly the same period found out that only 2% of mediators and 9% of negotiators in official peace talks worldwide were women.

It is clear that we can do better and I look forward to the meaningful contribution that the newly established Nordic Women's Mediators network can make, given the opportunity to strengthen the role of women mediators in conflict ridden countries, both at a country level and in regional organizations.

Another study shows the correlations between women's representation in parliament and the likelihood of the use of violence. A 5% increase in women parliamentarians makes the likelihood of a breakout of violence five times less likely. If women reach one third of parliamentarians, the risk of relapse into armed conflict all but disappears. This is a recipe for success if ever I saw one.

This is a message that we must keep repeating – we know the drop eventually hollows the stone. However, according to a study by UN

Women, gender equality will not be reached until the year 2095, given the current speed of change. That is unacceptable. We cannot afford to wait for so long. In fact, we cannot afford to wait at all – we must work for the watershed to take place now. Today.

Without a true commitment from the international community to address barriers to women's meaningful participation and representation, efforts towards sustainable peace will remain ineffective. Political leaders must lead the way on this front.

Dear friends,

Iceland adopted its first National Action Plan on UNCR resolution 1325 in 2008 and we are currently working on our third Action Plan for the period 2017-2020. Each National Action Plan builds on the previous one and every time we take on the task of drafting a new plan, we must set our sights further than in previous plans.

Every new foreign minister is given an opportunity, and the responsibility, to push important issues forward and my position is no different – although my time may be limited! I need to build on the work that has been done before me.

It is in that light that I have given ministry officials a clear signal that I want the new plan, one that I want to see finalized on my watch, to be more ambitious and bolder than previous plans. We must dare to take the steps to cement the message of 1325 into all our work, both home and abroad. I intend to be engaged in this work and I look forward to the completion of a new plan that we can all be proud of.

I hope that when it comes to commemorating the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 in 2020 we can look back and take pride in what has been achieved.

I wish you every success.