

CHAPTER ONE

GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND SMALL AND LIGHT WEAPONS: NORM EMERGENCE AT THE UN

Most of the deaths, injury and destruction caused during conflicts since the end of the Cold War have resulted from the use of small arms,⁴ but the response of the global community to this growing crisis has been slow. In January 1995, the UN Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali was the first major figure to alert the world to the spread and misuse of SALW.⁵ In 1997, a UN Panel on SALW made a recommendation that a UN conference be held on the illicit trafficking of small arms,⁶ and in July 2001 the Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects took place. This conference adopted a Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in SALW in All Its Aspects by consensus. The General Assembly also decided to convene a Meeting of States on a biennial basis, commencing in 2003, to consider the national, regional and global implementation of the Programme of Action (PoA).

The first Biennial Meeting was convened in July 2003. In addition to these two meetings, the UN General Assembly First Committee on Disarmament and International Security and the UN Security Council have each held annual discussions on SALW, and further reports have been submitted by the Secretary-General each year on the same issue. The next Biennial Meeting of States (BMS on the Implementation of the PoA) will take place in 2005, while the first SALW review conference is scheduled to occur in 2006.

Gender mainstreaming norm evolution at the UN

The first UN statement that linked gender equality, development and peace was made at the UN Conference on Women, held in Mexico City in 1975, which brought together nearly 6,000 women and men, thousands of NGOs and 133 government delegations. The discussion and activism initiated in Mexico, and the subsequent conference held in Stockholm (1980), were to develop into a coherent plan of action. This was put forward during the Third World Women's Conference in Nairobi, Kenya and the parallel NGO forum. It provided gender mainstreaming advocates with the first foundations of a

policy platform from which to put pressure on government agencies and states.⁷ In 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted by the UN General Assembly, defined what constituted discrimination against women. It also set up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. Another key document approved in 1995 at the UN Fourth International Conference on Women was the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which identified many effects of armed conflict specific to women and girls. In a general sense, the language used to link violence and women evolved from mere passing mentions in earlier years, to more contextually specific accounts in more recent years that referred to the impact that violence had had on women.

While these elements were crucial to the broader role of gender mainstreaming within the UN, in 2000 more specific norms were developed that applied to programmes geared toward helping women who were facing armed conflict. On 31 May 2000, the Windhoek Declaration and Namibia Plan of Action on “Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multidimensional Peace Support Operations” proposed that “the principles of gender equality must permeate the entire [peace] mission, at all levels, thus ensuring the participation of women and men as equal partners and beneficiaries in all aspects of the peace process”.⁸ In practice this could include a range of different elements, including ensuring gender balance in peacekeeping personnel; training peacekeepers in the different ways in which conflict affects men and women; and planning disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes so that they benefit men and women equally.

This was followed by the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in October 2000. This ground-breaking resolution recognized the concept of women making a direct contribution to disarmament, and emphasized the need to incorporate gender perspectives in all areas of peacekeeping operations. Resolution 1325 was a significant achievement in that it provided a conceptual shift. It was first time that the Security Council had recognized women as active agents in peace building and development, rather than merely as victims of war. In the three years since the adoption of the resolution, the Security Council has held four debates on Women, Peace and Security. In addition, two presidential statements and a Secretary-General’s Report have been devoted to the subject.

The goal of gender mainstreaming is to promote and provoke a “revolutionary change” in the international and domestic policy process. This would make

gender issues a core concern, not only for specific departments or bodies dealing with women's issues, but for all actors across various subject areas, and at all stages in the policy process, "from conception and legislation to implementation and evaluation".⁹ Just as discussions of the specific requirements of women and the likely effects on them of policies have been missing from the discourse between policy makers, so any discussion of the implications of policy for men has been missing from planning for mainstream development. In addition, men are largely ignored in institutional efforts to operationalize and promote gender mainstreaming, perpetuating the inscription of 'gender' as the domain and the concern of women.¹⁰ Therefore, gender stereotypes (such as the perceptions that ex-combatants are all men, and that women are the only victims of conflict) pervade the assumptions on which policies, projects and programmes continue to be based.¹¹ The issue of small arms and light weapons is no exception.

Convergence of norms?

In examining the major UN documents on SALW to assess their response to women's specific experiences of the misuse of SALW, Vanessa Farr, a gender specialist, observes: "Although weapons proliferation is often culturally sanctioned and upheld by the manipulation of gender ideologies, gender goes entirely unremarked in all documents which were not explicitly conceived to focus on gender mainstreaming".¹² When women have been mentioned, UN statements and documents systematically characterize them as the primary victims of gun violence. Not only is this characterization false (as men are, in fact, most commonly the victims of gun-related deaths), but it fails to acknowledge the various manifestations of victimization that women often endure as a result of gun violence. These include psychological trauma, economic hardship and sexual assault.

Also neglected in the discourse are women's more complex roles in conflict areas as peace-builders, care-givers and combatants. Gender stereotyping and the refusal to discuss the impact of gender ideologies within the context of SALW violence holistically diverts attention from human rights violations made possible by guns, such as gender-based violence. It also ignores various forms of community-building in which women can be significant and productive actors. As long as gender and SALW remain exclusive to one another in policy making discussions, strategies to tackle the problem of gun violence will continue to ignore crucial pointers that help to identify both the root of the problem and suggest comprehensive solutions.

In recognition of the need to explore the context of gender mainstreaming in disarmament issues at the UN, the UN Department for Disarmament Affairs (UNDDA), along with the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, issued a special collection of Briefing Notes in 2001, entitled “Gender Perspectives on Disarmament”.¹³ This resource packet was one of the first tools developed to explore the relationship between gender and disarmament.¹⁴

Although fairly general in nature, the Briefing Notes provided the groundwork for the incorporation of gender considerations into the SALW issue. They also emphasized the importance of implementing Security Council Resolution 1325. These efforts, under the leadership of the former Under-Secretary General for Disarmament, Jayantha Dhanapala, resulted in the development of the DDA Gender Action Plan, which was released in 2002.¹⁵ This document aimed to provide “a concrete working tool” for mainstreaming gender perspectives within DDA mandates. It was the first gender action plan produced by a UN Secretariat unit, setting an example upon which other departments and agencies within the UN could build. However, while this advance is important, such building blocks have not so far modified UN discourse, as this analysis will demonstrate.¹⁶

Methodology

The overwhelming quantity of relevant UN bodies, meetings, documents and reports that contribute to the formation of norms on gender and armed conflict or gender and SALW makes covering every relevant forum and document impossible.¹⁷ Considering these limitations, the authors have selected the Security Council, General Assembly, 2001 SALW Conference and 2003 Meeting of States on SALW for examination, on the grounds of their visible and weighty roles in norm-building on peace and security issues.

This study scans the Security Council and General Assembly statements, documents, Secretary-General reports and resolutions for key words that reference gender disaggregations.¹⁸ The key words are ‘gender’, ‘women’, ‘men’, ‘female’, ‘male’, ‘girl’ and ‘boy’. The contexts within which the key words arise determine the ‘gender reference indicators’¹⁹ that this study utilizes to form a framework through which to compare gender reference frequency and contextual diversity within and between UN SALW fora.²⁰ As the Security Council debates on women, peace and security primarily address gender issues, it is not necessarily as useful to evaluate gender reference indicators

based on the same values as it is to examine meetings that have a 'difference' focus. Therefore, these documents are first scanned for language referring to small arms. Only then are they examined according to the gender reference indicators utilized for the other meetings.

The other key events held under the auspices of the UN that the authors assess are the 2001 Conference and 2003 Biennial Meeting of States on SALW. These meetings are analyzed in Section III, using the same methodology as that applied for the General Assembly and the Security Council. This section also looks at other factors that may have played a role, such as civil society meeting schedules during these larger events, to observe the thematic priorities of participant civil society actors. Whether gender is a low, medium or high priority among these organisations might affect the policy of advocacy for gender mainstreaming among state delegations, either positively or negatively.

The data collected on these UN bodies and their events offer tools with which to compare the efforts of member states, UN agencies and NGOs toward incorporating gender perspectives into SALW global governance structures and processes. Although this analysis aims to determine the extent to which the UN focuses on gender in SALW discussions, it remains sympathetic to the varying levels of expertise on gender matters in different member states, UN agencies and NGOs. It also bears in mind that different levels of expertise in gender analysis may cause some actors to refrain from commenting on gender, and others to devote more vigorous and directed attention to it. While sympathetic to the limitations imposed by any lack of expertise, this analysis identifies such deficiencies as an issue that indicates the need for better collaboration between those actors with expertise in matters relating to gender and those without it.

Further studies beyond the scope of this monograph could look at the consequences, in terms of gender, of the policies implemented by the UN, and the extent to which the language used at the UN has encouraged the achievement of certain agreed-upon criteria for good practice in gender mainstreaming.²¹ The next step would be to link the language used in UN official documents and mandates to the degree of gender awareness demonstrated on the ground in UN policy implementation.

The comparison of various official UN documents and statements, therefore, offers clues as to where gaps in expertise may lie, and also exposes potential entry points for further investigation. It paints a picture of the ways in which

systematic gender mainstreaming in UN SALW conferences and meetings has evolved, by mapping out the gender language that is used within the discourse. Although it does not provide direct information regarding the effect of such language on actual gender awareness amongst actors, it does allow inferences to be drawn as to how gender has been prioritized in the thematic hierarchy of UN meetings and conferences on SALW.