

## CHAPTER TWO

# THE EVOLUTION OF GENDER LANGUAGE ON SALW IN THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND THE SECURITY COUNCIL BETWEEN 2001–2003

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Under the United Nations (UN) Charter,<sup>22</sup> the UN Security Council has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. Unlike the General Assembly (GA), the Council has 15 members—five permanent members and ten elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms. While other organs of the UN make recommendations to governments, the Council alone has the power to take decisions that member states are obliged under the Charter to carry out.<sup>23</sup> By examining the deliberations, resolutions and related documents of each body, one can ‘take the temperature’ of the international mood on various issues of concern. This can give a sense of where an issue stands in the realm of norm emergence, development, agreement or disagreement among member states, as well as that issue’s level of priority.

### **The General Assembly**

#### ***Prior to the 2001 SALW Conference***

The UN General Assembly as the organisation’s main deliberative organ, includes representatives of all UN member states. Through its politically binding resolutions, the General Assembly makes recommendations on the principles of co-operation in the maintenance of international peace and security. These include the governance of disarmament and arms regulations. It adopted its first resolution on the issue of illicit trade in SALW in 1994, when it welcomed an initiative from Mali raising the question of the illicit circulation and stockpiling of small arms in various states of the Saharo-Sahelian subregion. In 1995, the GA adopted another resolution requesting that the Secretary-General convene a panel of qualified government experts to explore the types, nature and causes of the excessive accumulation and transfer of SALW, and ways and means to prevent such activities. It was in the report of this panel that gender references arose in the context of SALW for the first time. Women were twice mentioned (probably inaccurately) as the primary victims of SALW, “with women and children accounting for nearly 80% of the casualties”.<sup>24</sup> The frequent reference to this number by UN member states is not useful,

in that it may or may not be true: little data related to small arms has been disaggregated by gender. As noted by a study on small arms undertaken by the International Committee of the Red Cross:

“These estimates [of 80% of civilian casualties of SALW] are almost always provided with no indication of how they have been arrived at. Most commonly, a reference is given which merely refers to an earlier report quoting the same figure. Thus, in recent years, a large number of documents by NGOs, international organizations, and even articles in the peer-reviewed medical literature have cited figures which are increasingly being used as ‘evidence’ by those concerned with weapons availability and misuse, but which are difficult, if not impossible, to substantiate.”<sup>25</sup>

In 1999, when the Secretary-General submitted his report to the General Assembly on the subject of small arms, he mentioned women twice in the context of their being victims. His statement, “...We would welcome the inclusion of the following items in conference agenda: (b) the political, economic and social consequences...[of] the role played by small arms and light weapons in...exposing women and children to violence”, brought to the forefront the importance of understanding the differentiated impacts of SALW violence on women, although it remained in the ‘women as victims’ pigeonhole.<sup>26</sup>

In another report made by the Secretary-General a month later, entitled “The Illicit Traffic in Small Arms”, three references were made to women. He called on the UN to include “women’s organizations” to participate in civil society’s efforts to combat the illicit trade in small arms.<sup>27</sup> It was the first time in which a Secretary-General’s report had referred to women as actors rather than victims. Although mentioned in passing, these references introduced to the GA the idea of including the informal sector in which women operate into ways of addressing SALW. The report also included one reference to the importance of collecting information on the effects of illicit trafficking of SALW on women and children.<sup>28</sup>

Of all nine resolutions and decisions adopted by the GA between 1995–2000, however, none included gender language indicators.<sup>29</sup> Evidently the gender mainstreaming goals of the ECOSOC resolution of 1997<sup>30</sup> had not yet penetrated the GA’s walls. In 2000, the report submitted by the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on “Illicit Traffic in Small Arms” contained no reference to gender, indicating a regression in the prioritization of gender as a consideration in SALW issues.<sup>31</sup>

While examining the GA documents concerning small arms to find evidence of gender mainstreaming, the authors found it useful to extend their analysis to thematic meetings focused on women's issues, to see if the problem of language used in discussing small arms issues has been raised in those fora. In 2000, the GA held a Special Session, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the 21st century".<sup>32</sup> This meeting considered three thematic areas: how armed conflict affected women; how women responded to conflict, peace processes and post-conflict reconstruction; and how the UN incorporated gender equality into the strategy of peace operations. The key recommendations that ensued were:

- to address the different impact of armed conflict on men and women;
- to devote specific attention to forms of rehabilitation and reintegration that take into account the needs of women and girls;
- to improve women's capacity by encouraging their involvement in humanitarian activities during times of armed conflict;
- to promote the participation of women in peace processes;
- to support women serving as stabilizers in conflict situations; and
- to release resources for social and economic programmes geared towards the advancement of women.<sup>33</sup>

Another recommendation concerning disarmament attempted to create a link between reduced military spending and developmental benefits, in that the former would allow for increased spending on improving the situation of women. Although it did not reappear again in subsequent statements or documents, and does not clearly spell out the connection between gender and small arms, the use of language specifically linking the cost of small arms to gender concerns is interesting at such an early stage of norm development on small arms.

### ***The General Assembly general debate, 2001***

At the beginning of each regular session, the GA holds a general debate, often addressed by heads of state and government, in which member states have the opportunity to express their views on pressing international issues. The 2001

debate was important for two reasons: it was the first to take place following the SALW Conference, and it was also the first meeting after the 11 September 2001 attacks on the US.

In 2001, approximately 17% of the statements in this general debate made a reference to gender, a measurement arrived at based on key words. (See Appendix I.) However, only three (1.6%) of all statements referred to small arms and light weapons specifically in combination with gender language, and all mentioned women only.<sup>34</sup> Those three statements referring both to SALW and gender touched on four gender language indicators, characterizing women as “the most vulnerable in society” and as the “primary victims” of SALW violence. One statement included references to the importance of “empowering women as partners in socio-economic development”.<sup>35</sup>

Out of 17% of all statements addressing the issue of gender in the context of armed conflict, 28% of the references were made in the context of women as victims of armed conflict. With the war in Afghanistan just beginning, ten references were made to protecting women’s rights in that country, including various suggestions for the empowerment of Afghani women, so that they could “once again become the makers of their own fate and future”.<sup>36</sup> Thirteen references were made to the importance of the role of women in peacebuilding, nine to gender equality, eight to women’s rights as human rights, three to Security Council resolution 1325, one to gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping operations, and one to the activism of women in civil society.

The two Secretary-General’s Reports to the GA, “Illicit Traffic of Small Arms and Light Weapons” (A/56/182) and “Assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and collecting them” (A/56/296), did not contain any language referring to specific groups (women, men, children or the elderly).

### ***The General Assembly general debate, 2002***

In 2002, the number of gender references decreased. By then, only 14% of the 187 reports made some gender reference in the context of armed conflict, while 1.1% (two statements) included language on both small arms and gender. Considering that the 2001 Conference on SALW had taken place the previous year, this number is surprisingly low. In the context of small arms, one reference was to women as a “vulnerable group” in society, while the other was to the “exploitation of women” as a pressing global issue that needed to be addressed along with SALW. This language, indicating the belief that women

are more vulnerable to SALW violence than anyone else, merely serves to reinforce the misuse of a stereotype that women (and children) make up the greater proportion of victims of SALW.

In the broader context of gender and armed conflict, there were 49 instances of gender language, although all focused exclusively on women. Eighteen of these references were to women as victims of war; nine to women's participation in peace building, with the main emphasis on equal political participation. Eight references were made to women's rights as human rights. Six illustrative examples were used in relation to gender issues (all references to women, none to men). Five references were to gender equality; one to the role of women in civil society; one to gender mainstreaming in the UN generally; and one to Security Council Resolution 1325.

In contrast to 2001, the general debate of the GA in 2002 was considerably less politically charged. In response to the events of 11 September 2001, most states taking part in the earlier debate deplored terrorism. There was also a general focus on empowering and upholding the rights of the victimized and oppressed, especially Afghan women. There were no equivalent focal points to which states could direct their rhetoric at the 2002 debate. It also appeared that gender mainstreaming was still not an important feature of GA discourse. Only one country, Chile, mentioned gender mainstreaming as a goal. However, one improvement on 2001 was that the Secretary-General's report to the GA on small arms made six references to gender, in the context of women as both the majority of victims and as peace-builders. Again, no attention was drawn to men. In particular, the report highlighted two United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM) projects related to SALW in Albania and Somalia.<sup>37</sup>

### ***The General Assembly general debate, 2003***

While the number of statements alluding to gender, or at least to women, increased in 2003, the number of measurable gender language indicators fell to 56 references.

One report out of 196 identified the threat of SALW to women as a top priority.<sup>38</sup> In the context of gender and armed conflict, 16 references were made to women as victims, while 13 were made to the role of women in peace building. This almost equal balance of reference contexts is one encouraging sign indicating the possible development of a conceptual shift towards viewing

women in situations of armed conflict as active agents rather than simply as victims. This is in contrast to the debates in 2001 and 2002, in which more than twice as many references occurred that emphasized the victimization of women rather than acknowledging the variety of important roles, such as peace building, that women play in times of conflict.

In 2003, both of the reports submitted to the GA by the Secretary-General made seven references to gender. This time only one of these was to women as victims. The other references were to gender equality, women's rights as human rights, mainstreaming gender in peacekeeping and in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, Security Council Resolution 1325, and one reference to the negative impact the violation of women's rights had on development. This increased frequency of gender language references in the Secretary-General's reports on small arms is encouraging.

### ***The disconnection between the First Committee and the general debate of the General Assembly***

The discourse in the GA First Committee on Disarmament and International Peace<sup>39</sup> between 2001–2003 seemed to be completely disconnected from that of its counterpart, the debate in the GA, in that language used when talking about gender and SALW by the two bodies did not correspond. References in the First Committee to the gendered implications of small arms proliferation appeared only nine times in the course of meetings from 2001–2003. Every single mention of gender occurred in the context of women being the primary victims of SALW. The observation that unless the discussion is specifically focused on women, gender issues will go virtually unremarked, is very clearly demonstrated within the GA.<sup>40</sup> The same phenomenon manifests itself in the Security Council.

### **The Security Council's thematic debates on SALW**

The Security Council has held an annual one- or two-day debate on the item "small arms" since 2001. Given their exclusive focus on this issue, the debates when examined in terms of this study's gender language indicators proved revealing of the extent to which gender mainstreaming featured in the SALW discussions.<sup>41</sup>

### ***Security Council thematic debate on small arms, 2001***

In 2001, 22% of the statements in the annual debate on small arms made reference to gender, each of them to women as the victims of SALW proliferation. Various different words were used to describe this victimization, including mention of the “increasing suffering of women and children in armed conflict” and the “defenseless[ness of] women and children”, as the preliminaries to a call for the “protection of civilians, women, and children in armed conflict”. Yet mechanisms of protection, or the role of women as active agents in early-warning<sup>42</sup> and peace-building, were left out of the discussion.

The Security Council Presidential Statement on Small Arms of 2001 made one gender reference, which included the following: “The Security Council expressed grave concern at the harmful impact of small arms and light weapons on civilians in situations of armed conflict, particularly on vulnerable groups such as women and children...”.<sup>43</sup> Again, this emphasis on the stereotype of women and children as the only vulnerable groups does not serve to advance the quality or the empirical accuracy of the discourse on gender and small arms.

### ***Security Council thematic debate on small arms, 2002***

In 2002 the frequency of references to gender in the small arms debate increased significantly, to 34%. While the rise in gender references indicated relatively greater attention to gender perspectives, all of them described women as the primary victims of SALW proliferation. Country representatives stated, “80% of civilians killed are women and children”. As already noted, this statistic is often cited by NGOs, UN agencies and governmental officials, although its origin is unclear, and it excludes the huge numbers of combatants, both male and female, who are killed by small arms. This statistic, seemingly more urban legend than factual, is often challenged. However, actual data on those affected by small arms (such as civilians, combatants or war refugees) that is disaggregated by gender have yet to be collected.<sup>44</sup>

### ***Security Council thematic debate, “Small Arms in West Africa”, 2003***

In 2003, the debate on small arms focused on the West Africa region. The frequency of references to gender dropped to 31%. However, not every gender reference concerned women as victims. Instead, mention was made of the role of the “grassroots movement taking their fate in[to] their own hands and

trying to come to terms with the problems of the reckless and irresponsible use of small arms and light weapons".<sup>45</sup> In this context, the activism of the women of the Mano River Union was particularly commended.

In the resolution adopted by the Security Council regarding Small Arms and Light Weapons in West Africa (S/RES/1467), no reference was made to gender. In contrast, Security Council Resolution 1509 (S/RES/1509) of 2003, establishing the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), mentions women four times. The provision in operative paragraph (3) point (f), describing UNMIL's mandate, is particularly relevant to this monograph, as it calls for the development of the mission's disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation (DDRR) programme to pay "particular attention to the special needs of child combatants and women". In addition it reaffirms the importance of implementing Security Council Resolution 1325 to integrate a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations and post-conflict peace-building.<sup>46</sup> While the inclusion of gender mainstreaming in the mandate is important, in practice it is not yet clear that consideration of both men and women has been systematically or institutionally included in the DDRR process in Liberia.<sup>47</sup>

## **The Security Council's thematic debates on women, peace and security**

This section conducts a thorough examination of the language of the Security Council debates on women, peace and security. The aim is to trace the emergence of norms on gender and armed conflict during a total of four debates occurring between 2000–2003. All four debates were open, allowing UN member states not currently serving on the Security Council to make statements.

The small arms issue was not mentioned in the 2000 Security Council debate on women, peace and security. There was no debate on the topic in 2001. However, in the debate in July 2002, 22% of the statements referred to SALW. Two of these references fell into the women as victims context: the 'threat' of SALW to women and children and how women were 'harmed' by small arms. One-third of the references concerned the need to mainstream gender in disarmament activities. In this vein, the representative of Colombia stated that his country was "informally examining the feasibility of doing some kind of work on the gender issue" during Colombia's presidency of the Security Council in December.<sup>48</sup> In the end, the Colombian presidency did not convene a special focus meeting on the issue.

The third context employed with reference to women and small arms was the recognized role of women already taking part in disarmament activities. For example, the Secretary-General's Special Advisor on Gender Affairs, Angela King, spoke of two cases, in Albania and Cambodia, in which women's groups had been involved in weapons collection and destruction.

The statements in the 2002 debate generally referred to women as victims, although one statement gave women an expanded role: "One factor that increases the risk of domestic violence and violence against women in post-conflict period is the proliferation of small arms. For this reason, women and girls often participate actively in arms collection programmes",<sup>49</sup> for example in the weapons collection programmes in Albania and Mali, where women have played active roles as mobilizers for disarmament and peace-building.

In the 2003 debate, the number of uses of gender language increased slightly, to 13.5% of the statements made by national representatives. Again, two referred to women as victims of SALW proliferation. One state mentioned NGO support for Security Council Resolution 1325 as a "tool for promoting gender issues".<sup>50</sup> In addition, the representative from the Philippines mentioned the role of women in weapons collection campaigns in Albania.<sup>51</sup>

This analysis has shown that over the four years of Security Council debates on women, peace and security, small arms are a minor focus in the wider context of armed conflict. However, it is interesting to note that the language on gender and small arms that various countries use in one thematic debate held by the Security Council would not recur in the national statements made in different thematic debates within the same body. It would be useful if the other debates held in the Security Council included references to gender in disarmament activities, and recognized that women are already very active in this domain.

These meetings provide a platform to articulate certain principles, norms, and recommendations. At times certain issues become more popular than others, but they may then fade from view, depending on where the attention of the member state is focused at that moment. Therefore, the role of 'norm-setting' documents, such as Security Council Resolution 1325, is instrumental in pushing forward issues like the gender implications of small arms and light weapons on the international agenda. The concluding section of this monograph suggests ways in which this norm cycle can be used to encourage increased awareness and education on the issue of gender and SALW for policy-makers.