

## CONCLUSION

# CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE IN GENDER LANGUAGE

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If the findings on gender language used in relation to small arms and light weapons in the various UN meetings and fora are compared, it is noticeable that common phrases are often repeated by most bodies, usually as some formulation of “women and children are the most vulnerable victims of the pervasive use of SALW”. Yet, as this monograph has demonstrated, there seems to be little consistency, within different debates, meetings and bodies, on when such language is used in member states’ statements or in other contexts related to SALW. On the other hand, the language used in the thematic debates of the Security Council specifically on women, peace, and security give salience to various important norms regarding gender and armed conflict. These include changing the misconception that women are merely victims of SALW violence, and replacing it with more holistic perspectives that instead present women as active agents in disarmament and peace processes, and even sometimes perpetrators of SALW violence.

It has been observed that UN debates on SALW do not yet address gender in the SALW context in a fashion that encompasses the differing social, economic and political effects that SALW have on men and women. However, it is important to remember that these issues are fairly new on the international agenda, even if the gender implications of SALW have existed since the invention of guns. Therefore patience and persistence are required to develop a working language, with operational implications, for the UN. The following observations and suggestions are intended to indicate how an environment conducive to the development of norms on gender and SALW may be fostered. Clearly, the evolution of norms requires many supportive conditions, including a ripe political environment and a measure of political will, a network of dedicated individuals and organizations pursuing that particular issue, and adequate resources to back up the effort. This study does not focus on those aspects, but rather makes particular observations arising from the analysis of gender references at the UN.

## Observations

*Observation One: Norm evolution at the UN is a lengthy process.* Haphazard as it may seem, a pattern of inclusion of certain kinds of language can be noted within the bodies of the UN. First, the delegates from member states make statements on an issue at meetings or debates, in which common themes can be identified. Second, negotiations take place, often behind closed doors, to find a common language for resolutions, presidential statements or meeting reports on which member states can agree. Often the language that finds its way into such documents represents the lowest common denominator among different terms. This language is then repeated by member states in subsequent debates or meetings, and additions are suggested or refinements made. The process continues in cycles, further solidifying, clarifying and focusing norms. Therefore norm-setting documents such as Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security are of great value to efforts toward improving the inclusion of gender perspectives within UN decisions on SALW governance.

*Observation Two: Member states are aware that their role as regards gender mainstreaming is greater than formulating appropriate language.* The issue of implementing Security Council Resolution 1325 was mentioned by 33% of states in July 2002, 24% in October 2002, and 49% (a significant increase) in 2003. Many states recognize that “we need to say that gender is important enough times for it to become second nature”.<sup>71</sup> In other words, states recognize that gender mainstreaming is more than a theory, but also involves the development of applied implementation procedures that will guide the activities of the UN.

It is important to remember that gender mainstreaming, as a process, is not an end in itself. Rather, it is a means through which justice and equality can be achieved. It is not enough to commit oneself in principle to this endeavour; concrete actions are needed to make the concept a determinant of action. This includes the conscious incorporation of accurate and contextually diverse gender language in UN meetings. The more gender mainstreaming pervades the discussions of the UN, the more it will become natural and acceptable to include this mindset in all its activities. For example, the UN Department for Disarmament Affairs plans to consider ways to develop training programmes on the SALW Programme of Action and its gender implications. In addition, UN peacekeeping missions assisting disarmament should be obliged to “pay special attention in carrying out [their] mandate to all aspects relating to gender perspective, in accordance with Resolution 1325 (2000)”.<sup>72</sup>

*Observation Three: Member states and NGOs use gender language differently.* This paper has noted that NGOs tended to use a wider selection of gender language indicators than member states at both the 2001 SALW Conference and the 2003 BMS. There are several explanations for the more nuanced references to gender by NGOs. First, they have more focused expertise on the issue, whether from first-hand experience of armed conflict, extensive research, or from preparing advocacy positions. NGOs therefore tend to tailor their statements in public fora to articulate policy goals that they see as appropriate for the member states (as representing both the law and the policy-makers) to consider. On the other hand, representatives of member states are often more constrained than NGOs from pronouncing publicly on politically difficult issues before widespread consensus has been reached. In addition, the scope of representatives of member states is often limited, as diplomats must obey their superiors or are so much occupied with other pressing items on the international agenda that they are unable to consider one issue in detail. It follows that NGOs and member states serve particular functions that are separate but interdependent in influencing policy-making at the UN.

## **Recommendations**

*Recommendation One: Experts on gender perspectives of SALW should engage in education and awareness-raising exercises with representatives of member states well in advance of UN meetings on SALW.* Better dissemination of information outlining the gendered impact of SALW to representatives of member states could help to foster a higher level of government expertise on this issue. This information could be communicated by raising talking points or suggesting recommendations for practical tools and strategies. This would help to demystify gender mainstreaming goals by providing clearly mapped-out reasoning and policy suggestions regarding SALW and gender considerations. This information could also be presented so as to include particular recommended gender language use that diplomats can incorporate in their statements at relevant meetings. This will promote the automatic consideration of gender perspectives in decision-making. Examples of existing materials include a checklist developed by UNIFEM on practical ways for UN peacekeeping missions to incorporate gender mainstreaming in disarmament processes,<sup>73</sup> and the IANSA Women's Network's fact sheets on gender perspectives of small arms.<sup>74</sup> The Department for Disarmament Affairs's "Gender Mainstreaming Action Plan" is a concrete tool for the inclusion of gender perspectives in the work of any UN entity.<sup>75</sup>

*Recommendation Two: Bridge the gap between gender expertise and policy-making.* Gender information needs to reach those that do not already have a background in gender issues, to foster the growth of gender knowledge among those making decisions. Awareness-raising can be brought about by various methods, including expert meetings, round tables and workshops, to educate UN agencies, NGOs and national delegations dealing with SALW issues and encourage an exchange of views on gender. These information sessions and dialogues could take place between one country's representatives or between those of a number of member states. They should take place well in advance of official UN meetings concerning small arms, so that by the time such meetings take place, the appropriate delegates will be well versed in the issue.

Discussing gender and SALW in a focused manner will assist the development of common understandings. Experts on the topic can encourage and influence the consensus-building process among member states, as noted earlier. This would also facilitate greater communication, co-ordination and the development of a common language for gender and SALW. These interactive meetings would provide an opportunity for diplomats to delve into the issue in greater detail, and may help to increase the prioritization of gender in UN activities. This in turn will cause the relevant parties to think about gender automatically when considering the SALW issue.

*Recommendation Three: Focused messages.* When providing recommendations to national delegations on gender and small arms, NGOs might find it useful to consolidate the message to make their points easier to digest. With the plethora of NGOs focusing on this issue, an umbrella organization such as the IANSA is a useful vehicle for streamlining messages. In addition, specialized UN agencies such as UNIFEM and the Department for Disarmament Affairs could co-ordinate recommendations on gender and small arms with relevant NGOs and interested member states. If fewer recommendations are repeated more frequently, they may have more of a chance of sinking in.

*Recommendation Four: Connecting agenda-setting to practical implementation.* The statements made by member countries and the outcome documents of UN meetings are useful to the assessment of where issues such as gender mainstreaming stand on the agenda-setting priorities of member states. The focus on official UN proceedings may not, however, be particularly useful for measuring actual change in behaviour. Therefore the monitoring and evaluation of how gender mainstreaming is being implemented in activities related to small arms must be done concurrently with the analysis of gender language used in the UN. The UNIFEM Independent Assessment on Women and Armed Conflict is a step in this direction. Collecting, compiling and

assessing both anecdotal and numerical data on the inclusion of gender considerations in UN activities on small arms would provide a foundation for persuading member states that this issue is not one to be marginalized.<sup>76</sup>

*Recommendation Five: Looking towards a convergence of norms in 2006.* While the next BMS on SALW will take place in 2005, the next opportunity for member states to negotiate language in SALW norm documents, and therefore to bring about change, will occur only at the 2006 Review Conference. The preparatory stages and proceedings of the 2005 meeting therefore present a golden opportunity for NGOs, UN agencies and departments to advocate that member states use gender language in their statements and outcome documents. Considering the patterns of norm-emergence observed in the thematic debates in the Security Council on women, peace and security, the use of gender language in 2005 could increase the likelihood that such language would reappear in 2006. For example, the PoA could be analyzed for opportunities to include relevant gender references. Gender advocates should begin now to build relationships with delegates that foster the productive exchange of information and views, with future negotiations in mind.

## **Concluding remarks**

A participant at the 2003 BMS made an insightful comment that seemed to encompass the concept of gender mainstreaming directly: "Gender should be pervasive, but highlighting the issue also compartmentalizes it, limiting the mainstreaming goal".<sup>77</sup> This point has been the subject of a long-standing and inconclusive debate among public policy-makers. However, in defence of gender mainstreaming, women currently enjoy less participation, representation and consideration in decision-making than men in the public policy world. This justifies the drive to bring women's issues to international attention. Unfortunately, in order to achieve the ultimate gender-mainstreaming goal of having gender perspectives so pervasive that they no longer have to be defined specifically as 'gender' perspectives, activists have had to emphasize gender issues as exclusive, in order to gain the attention they need to make systemic changes. This approach also runs the risk of allowing the terms "gender" and "women" to be used interchangeably, when the actual goal is to focus equally on both men and women, while respecting different perspectives and outcomes. Therefore, it is important to ask: When we talk about gender mainstreaming in the context of small arms, how much closer have we come to that so-called pervasiveness of gender perspectives? Are we getting closer? And how will we know when we have reached it?