

While women alone cannot  
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to a lasting peace



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# foreword

**T**his year has once more brought the issues of peace and security to the forefront of Africa's – and the world's – conscience. Whether in Liberia or the Democratic Republic of Congo, in Burundi or Sudan, the resurgence of fighting marks a set-back to efforts aimed at a peaceful settlement of conflicts and causes new suffering, mainly among the civilian population. More than 70 per cent of the victims in modern wars are civilians, and most of them are women; women and children also make up 80 per cent of all refugees and displaced persons.


It is in this context that the role of the UN Security Council, including its historic Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, is reaffirmed. Experience shows that one sure way to achieve the compromise needed to create and sustain peace is to involve women throughout the peace-building process. Women can more readily embrace the collaborative perspective needed to cut through ethnic, religious, tribal and political barriers. They also embrace a more sustainable concept of security.

If we imagine a secure world, what would it look like through women's eyes and how can we help to bring it about? First and foremost, we must redefine global security, focusing on the human dimensions. Recently in particular, the concept of local, national and global security has been almost exclusively defined in military terms, so that human security has become virtually synonymous with weapons-based security. Women, however, insist on a broader vision, one that puts human life and human rights at the forefront and that includes lives free of all forms of violence, including HIV/AIDS. It is this vision that has inspired women peace activists to go before the Security Council each year, briefing members on the impact of conflict on women and the need for women's leadership in peace-building and reconstruction.

Some months ago I visited the Democratic Republic of Congo, where I talked to many of the women whose lives have been devastated by the years of war in that country. They are asking the international community to demand an end to



impunity for the crimes against women by all sides of the conflict. Rape has become a weapon of war, a way to humiliate male relatives or implicate entire communities. The women also want a role in the disarmament process, to ensure that demobilisation camps are equipped to address the needs of female ex-combatants, wives or companions of soldiers, and war widows. By developing mechanisms to end impunity, and protect women from a new round of sexual violence, we must acknowledge the deep pain of these women, punish the perpetrators and support women's roles in rebuilding their society.

While women alone cannot carry the burden of finding a solution, their participation is vital to forging the consensus necessary to a lasting peace. They need support, however, to translate their expertise into participation in formal peace negotiations, in peace-building and reconstruction and eventually their participation in national governments. Wherever security issues are discussed, the needs of women must be a regular item on the political agenda, along with their vital role in contributing to peace. Decisions that exclude half the population from political processes offer little hope for achieving a secure future. New responses are vital if we want this century to banish the worst brutalities of the previous one. We must invest in the progress and solutions of women from war-affected countries. 

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