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WOMEN EMANCIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT THE WAY TO IMPROVE THE WORLD GOVERNANCE

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WOMEN EMANCIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT: THE WAY TO IMPROVE THE WORLD GOVERNANCE

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FOREWORD

At a time when Pope Francis affirms on 12th October 2013 , at the closure of the seminar “On the Dignity and Vocation of Women” (1), that the church must continue to work for a more profound understanding of women and their roles, the issue of women emancipation and empowerment hits once more the headlines. In particular, the Pope envisages two dangers: the first is “To set apart woman with her potential, not fully valuing her in the construction of the community”, the second is “Promoting a type of emancipation that, in order to occupy the space stolen by the masculine, abandons the feminine with its priceless elements”.

The goal of equality between women and men and the promotion of women' rights are enshrined in international conventions and commitments. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, envisions “the equal rights of men and women”; in 1979 the United Nations General Assembly approved the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); in the UN World Conference (Beijing 1995) empowerment of woman and gender equality were considered prerequisites for achieving political, social, economic, cultural, and environmental security among all peoples. In September 2000 189 countries signed the Millennium Declaration to build a better world. To this end they set out eight concrete, measurable targets, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), to be achieved by 2015. The third goal, promoting gender equality and empowering women, is key to the achievement of the remaining goals.

On 31 October 2000, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted UNSCR 1325, the first formal and legal document requiring all states respect fully international humanitarian law and international human rights law applicable to the rights and protection of women and girls during and after the armed conflicts.

The adoption of Resolution 1325 represented the worldwide tangible recognition that state security had ceded its primacy to human security, namely the security of individuals within states, and that coping with the post Cold-War instability needed innovative modalities.

Resolution 1325 formally acknowledges the changing nature of warfare where civilians are increasingly targeted, and women continue to be excluded from participation in peace processes instead of playing a key role in conflict prevention, conflict management, conflict resolution and sustainable peace.

UNSCR 1325

Resolution 1325 has four pillars: Participation, Protection, Prevention, and Relief and Recovery. As for participation, more participation of women is required at all levels of decision making (in national, regional and international institutions) as civilians, soldiers, police, and UN Secretary General Special Representatives.

As for protection, it is necessary to protect women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence, including in emergency and humanitarian situations. Prevention of violence against women is achieved by prosecuting those responsible for violations of international law, strengthening women national rights and supporting local women peace initiatives and conflict resolution processes.

Relief and recovery measures address international crises through the gendered lens, taking into account the particular needs of women and girls in the design of refugees camps and settlements. In 2005 the UNSC called upon Member States to implement Resolution 1325 through the development of National Action Plans (NAPs) while assisting them in identifying priorities, resources, and responsibilities.

Five follow-up resolutions providing support for 1325 were successively approved: Resolution 1820 (2008), Resolution 1888 (2009), Resolution 1889 (2009), Resolution 1960 (2010) and Resolution 2106 (2013). Resolution 1820 recognizes that conflict-related sexual violence is a tactic of warfare, and calls for: the training of troops on preventing and responding to sexual violence, the deployment of more women to peace operations, and the enforcement of zero tolerance policies for peacekeepers with regards to acts of sexual exploitation or abuse.

Resolution 1888 calls for leadership to address conflict-related sexual violence, deployment of military and gender experts to critical conflict areas. Resolution 1889 addresses obstacles to women participation in peace processes. Resolution 1960 calls for an end to sexual violence in armed conflicts, providing measures to end impunity for perpetrators of sexual violence.

The key message of Resolution 2106 is gender equality. Only if men and women are equal in rights and a woman is the sole decision-maker regarding her own body and her choices, sexual violence will cease to occur. The six Resolutions taken together constitute the “Women, Peace and Security” (WPS) thematic agenda of the Security Council and the international security policy framework: as a consequence they call for greater participation of women in conflict resolution, improved respect

for women rights in conflicts and more women perspectives in peacekeeping.

Women and female kids are the first victims of any war, and are often used as an element of the war strategy. Women are at the bottom in both conflicts and in other critical situations. Resolution 1325 is a milestone in terms of fighting against sexual violence against women: but from a power perspective, from a capital perspective, this requires changing attitudes and changing the game of power.

As a matter of fact, too often women are considered only as victims: they must be seen as leaders and their role and participation in leadership is not a favor to women, but is essential to peace and security. Women can offer a vital perspective in the analysis of conflict and provide strategies toward peace by building on common interests and prioritizing inclusiveness, transparency, and sustainability of any peace process.

In terms of global security, women soldiers serving abroad in operational theaters have demonstrated tremendous resilience, adaptability and capacity for innovation, giving a competitive advantage and showing that courage and leadership recognize no gender.

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGS)

The eight MDGs (2) - which range from halving extreme poverty rates to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education, all by the target date of 2015 – form a blueprint agreed to by all the world's countries and all the world leading development institutions. They have galvanized unprecedented efforts to meet the needs of the world poorest.

The target of reducing extreme poverty by half has been reached 5 years ahead of the 2015 headline, as has the target of halving the proportion of people who lack access to drinking water. Conditions for more than 200 million people living in slums have been ameliorated. Primary school enrollment of girls equaled that of boys, and child and maternal mortality has been reduced. But the remaining targets, in particular that of gender equality remain unfulfilled, with serious negative consequences, given that achieving the MDGs depends so much on women empowerment and equal access by women to education, work, healthcare and decision-making.

According to the UN annual assessments (3), in many countries current efforts will not be enough to achieve the MDGs, although the situation differs between countries and sometimes even within countries. Saharan Africa is lagging behind, especially in areas of armed conflict. Extra efforts by governments as well as civil society will be essential in reducing the shortfall. It is important for Western countries to achieve results in development cooperation by periodically measuring and reporting on the outcome of their aid to achieve the MDGs.

All countries are required to make a contribution. Rich countries must help developing countries to achieve MDGs while poor countries need to improve their institutions, combat corruption and ensure that everybody can participate in development.

UN OFFICE ON WOMEN

The UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women is the “UN Office on Women”, which became operational in Jan 2011 under the lead of the Under Secretary General and

Executive Director Michelle Bachelet (4), current President of Chile and former President of Chile from 2006 to 2010.

To institutionalize the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda a systematic approach is needed in developing targets, monitoring implementation, measuring results and reporting back to decision-makers. A close cooperation of the UN with other actors, in particular OSCE, EU and NATO is also required, keeping in mind that in many countries respect for women rights and inclusion of women requires societal developments and a broad set of reforms.

The greatest challenge is to change mindsets: changing the way people think will also change the way they act and perform their job. History will be made only when mindsets have changed through the combination of theory and practice. According to Kant: “Theory without experience is empty, but experience without theory is blind.” (5).

When discussing Women, Peace and Security it is also important to keep in mind the main responsibility to implement 1325 and related resolutions rests with the national states. It is the governments that are responsible for ensuring that the whole of their population is protected and included: it is the governments that need to ensure that women are included in decision making and security institutions.

While states have the primary responsibility ensuring implementation, the International Community has a responsibility developing norms and policies, provide assistance when necessary and keeping states accountable. 1325 was the first resolution recognizing that the major security, economic and governance challenges of our time cannot be solved without the protection and participation of women at all levels of the society.

Reality makes this imperative, in particular because armed conflicts and post-conflict lawlessness hit women and children hardest. They lose access to healthcare, education and economic opportunities. They are the biggest proportion of Refugees and Internally Displaced People (IDP). And they are increasingly subject to sexual violence by combatants and armed elements, sometimes as a direct weapon of war.

Additionally and sadly, women remain under-represented at all political levels and are excluded from the negotiating table where conflicts are to be resolved, although their experiences and actions are critical for building and sustaining peace. Afghanistan is a case in point. As a result of decades of war, millions of women and children have lost their families, their home and their future. But women must not only be seen as victims but also as part of the answer (6).

RESOLUTION 1325 AND THE EU

The EU has put in place a robust policy on WPS covering the security, humanitarian and development aspects, from crisis management to long-term reconstruction, taking concrete steps to enhance protection mechanisms for vulnerable groups (women and children).

The EU supports the inclusion of gender experts in its mediation efforts, alongside the equal and full participation of women throughout processes of prevention and resolution of: conflicts, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and post-conflict reconstruction. The EU adopted a joint Commission and Council document on a “Comprehensive Approach to Resolution 1325” in 2008, an action plan on “Gender Equality and Women Empowerment

(GEWE)” in 2010 as well as a revised operational document on Resolution 1325 implementation within the EU Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) in 2012. There is an ever increasing recognition within CSDP on the importance of the added strategic and operational value of incorporating gender issues in all phases of planning, conduct and review of civilian and military Crisis Management missions and operations as well as in pre-deployment and in-mission training. Where possible the EU aims to include a dedicated Human Rights and/or gender adviser or focal point for each CSDP mission and operation.

As for Gender Equality and Women Empowerment, the EU considers GEWE as prerequisites essential to the achievement of the MDGs. Economic and political empowerment of women is not only a driving force for gender equality but it is also fundamental to achieve overall economic growth in developing countries and reduce poverty. Furthermore, in all societies women are often powerful actors in the promotion of sustainable development and social justice, as well as agents for peace and democracy in conflict or post-conflict situations.

The EU is convinced that 1325 needs to be implemented in a holistic and comprehensive manner: as a regional security organization the OSCE has a major role to play. As a matter of fact, the EU provided its support for the development of the 2004 “OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality” based on Resolution 1325 and is effectively cooperating with OSCE which is, on its side, continuously pushing its 56 Member States to stick to the commitments envisaged in such Action Plan (7).

RESOLUTION 1325 AND NATO

NATO is convinced that while it is important to understand women needs and situations during conflicts, ensure their security and in particular be able to prevent sexual violence, it is also very important to understand that women can and must be key contributors to the resolution of conflicts and establishment of enduring security. If women intellect, abilities, competences and experiences are not included in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, opportunities are missed to resolve the problems. NATO cannot afford not to include women: this is not simply a question of what benefits woman, but of what benefits the whole society – men and women, boys and girls.

NATO is therefore seriously committed to prevent armed conflict from having a disproportionate impact on women and children, to protect women and children and to increase the participation of women in NATO operations and decision making at all levels.

ISAF, the UN-mandated NATO-led mission has acted as a catalyst for NATO approach to implementing 1325. NATO, stressing that no country can waste 50% of intelligence and knowledge, recognizes women' great capacity in peace building and their skills in the capacity of dialogue and consensus. When training soldiers having women on board is a force multiplier, is giving a better climate, is providing more opportunities. Women are deemed essential in the field, in the theater of operations, especially in Afghanistan where the main goal is to win the heart and mind of population through a link between women in the field and female Afghan population, thus implementing the programs instrumental to the success of the mission. In Afghanistan female soldiers are actually able to discuss with the population on the ground where local women are allowed to talk only with NATO female soldiers. This is a unique opportunity to reach out for the population without harming culture or religion.

NATO is therefore conducting gender awareness training to its civilian and military teams before their deployment on operations, providing them with an understanding why it matters to take a different approach in dealing/interacting with Afghan women.

Now gender experts working in NATO operations advise commanders of what women in local communities need besides aid and basic services like health and education. Female Engagement Teams (FET) provide many opportunities to open up dialogue with local women that previously would not have taken place. Female soldiers conduct searches on Afghan women at checkpoints, without causing offense. Female military doctors and nurses can run clinics where women will more easily go for treatment.

Furthermore, NATO is conducting dedicated training for Afghan women police and security officers. Thanks also to NATO active involvement, now women rights are enshrined in the Afghan constitution. More girls are in school, more women are setting up and running their businesses, and more access to healthcare is granted. Currently, the 68 women elected in the Afghan parliament are doing better than some of their female counterparts in Western nations (8).

STATE OF THE ART ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RESOLUTION 1325

The implementation of the Resolution has achieved so far limited success due mainly to lack of accountability, limited coordination and cooperation, limited support to staff working on “gender”, and the masculine culture both in peacekeeping operations and in the host countries.

The key implementers of the WPS resolutions are in fact state institutions who have retained a militarized vision of gender security: for instance, the prevention agenda has been only interpreted as the prevention of violence against women in armed conflict, rather than also considering how to prevent such violence via the prevention of armed conflict as a result of female participation. Besides, the limited presence of female participation in developing NAPs has enabled member states to prioritize defense sectors while avoiding opportunities for reconceptualising security so as to exploit what happened in Liberia where Christian and Muslim women participated in peace negotiations and achieved in 2006 the democratic election of a female Head of State, thus showing that gender parity can no longer be considered as optional or superfluous. Such a success could be replicated in Israel, where the irreducible desire of self preservation through aggressive strategies is negatively impacting on both Israelis and Palestinians peace talks' attempts: compassion and empathy, women' prerogatives, are instead badly needed to solve the conflict. While evolution has programmed men for violence and aggression, women are better at resolving conflicts with skills such as patience, compromising, talking things out. In general terms, as workers, entrepreneurs and caregivers, women are central to solving today most pressing global challenges (9).

At a time when conventional, orthodox thinking is under attack, women can pioneer a new era by seizing the initiative and leading the global transformation in accordance with Albert Einstein quote: “The woman who follows the crowd will usually go no further than the crowd. The woman who walks alone is likely to find herself in places no one has ever been before.” And western women should set the example in this regard: they do not define anymore themselves by their social relationship as mothers, daughters or wives (once calling themselves by their husband name, such as Mrs John White) but by what they do. They have the inclination, education and capability to change the world into a more peaceful and harmonious community by contributing in a more feminine, intuitive way to improve the educational, political, economic, and healthcare sectors of the society. As changes take root in the West, the rest of the world will have to follow suit.

Nevertheless, while recognizing that Western aid efforts can provide key support, it is important to integrate the outside support with initiatives nurtured at the grassroots level within each community. It is the women at the grassroots level that understand and are sensitive to the needs of their community. That's why it is important that Western women approach with humility and ability to listen, avoiding to impose Western solutions to local problems with the certainty that they will work: instead, they need to support the natural intelligence and leadership that already exists within communities.

CONCLUSIONS

The number of female leaders in power (presidents and prime ministers) has increased in the last decades with twenty-three of them currently serving in Europe (Germany, Iceland, Lithuania, Slovakia, Kosovo, Denmark, Slovenia, San Marino, Norway), in Africa (Liberia, Malawi, Senegal), in Asia (Bangladesh, Thailand, South Korea, Cyprus), in America (Argentina, Costa Rica, Trinidad and Tobago, Brazil, Jamaica and Chile) and in Oceania (Australia).

In the past century females reached the top in Sri Lanka (PM Sirimavo Bandaranaike 1960), India (PM Indira Gandhi 1966), Israel (PM Golda Meir 1969), Central African Republic (PM Elizabeth Domitien 1974), Argentina (President Isabel Peron 1974), Bolivia (PM Lidia Gueiler 1979), Philippines (President Corazon Aquino 1986), Pakistan (PM Benazir Bhutto 1988), Bangladesh (PM Sheikh Khalida Zia 1991), Turkey (PM Tansu Çiller 1993), Burundi (PM Sylvie Kinigi 1993). As for Europe, the first elected woman President was Vigdis Finnbogadóttir of Iceland (serving from 1980 until 1996). Today 43% of Parliamentarians in Iceland are women (thus putting Iceland at the top of OECD tables for women participation in public life).

Women alone will not rule the future: women with leadership skills and traits and men who also possess them, stand a greater chance of success in an increasingly interconnected global economy by acting in an empathetic, cooperative, humane and ethic way. Anyway, feminine peculiar and important skills still remain expressiveness (communication skills), long-term thinking, loyalty, flexibility, and patience. Women are less defensive, more open to others, more accepting of accountability and can relate better to costumers, communities, teammates and other stakeholders in a business.

Gender parity is good business, and executives must frame equality as a strategic imperative: corporate culture must evolve. A balanced presence in the front office and in the boardroom means conventional wisdom gets questioned more readily, new ideas are introduced more frequently, and in-group negative thinking is more likely to be avoided.

After the exaltation of the post-1968 Paris, conservatism, free trade and capitalism have characterized the Western world, with the young generation mainly preoccupied to make money in a society where Madonna sang "Material Girl". Moving forward from feminism and from barricades, now it is time for women to act as tolerant and smiling revolutionaries, to stop advocating and to start performing as leaders in all walks of life and in politics.

Education together with music, literature and art are key means to empower women: they often address issues of injustice through nonviolent and efficient tools, touching both hearths and minds. Malala Yousafzai was the youngest nominee and front runner for the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize which went, instead, to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) mainly because of the Syria events.

Malala, 16 years old human rights activist who in 2012 survived being shot by the Taliban is the epitome of the freedom of thought and of the global campaign for education. She raised to fame when she was nominated for the International Children Peace Prize in October 2011 for writing diaries for BBC in favor of girls' education in Swat (Pakistan). After being shot to death by the Taliban on her way back from school, when she was still unconscious hundreds of thousands from all over the world stood by her and paid her tributes (among them Madonna, Angelina Jolie, Laura Bush). In 2013 she was awarded on 9 September the International Children' Peace Prize, on 18 September the Amnesty International Ambassador of Conscience Award and on 10 October the Sakharov Prize, the EU Human Rights Award for the Freedom of Thought. Her dream was to become a doctor, so as to assist and help people, but now she believes her best choice is to be a politician able to create a society where a medical student can get a doctoral degree without risking her life, thus demonstrating that women can cultivate their own identity even when raised in such traditional societies as Pakistan, India and China. These women embrace learning, are enthusiastic, peripatetic, optimistic, energetic, opportunistic.

And this is why the woman is the best chance for mankind, opposing the fanatics who want to set the calendar back to zero. And why not envisaging an Afghan woman who can get rid of the burqa, get her MBA in the USA, marry an Italian, settle down in Sidney and still go back to Kandahar to celebrate Eid al-Fitr (10)?

Women are determined to change the world focusing on practical, profitable, sensible initiatives. This time of crisis is a time of opportunities to create revolutionary advances, making it possible to solve humanity's great challenges including energy, education, water, food, and health. Those with experience and education have the edge because they can see the big picture. Women, who are becoming more and more confident and assertive, are destined to lead in this new era.

(1) Two-day Seminar (10-11 October 2013) marking the 25th anniversary of John Paul II's "On the Dignity and Vocation of Women"

(2) MDGs

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal healthcare
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development

(3) MDGs Report 2012 and 2013

(4) The current Under Secretary General and Executive Director is Phumzile Mlambo-Ngulka, from South Africa, who assumed duty on 19 August 2013

(5) Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) "Theory of Judgment"

- (6) Role and experience of International Organizations in the implementation of 1325 in Afghanistan - Nov 2010
- (7) OSCE Forum for Security Cooperation - July 2013 Consolidated Report
- (8) NATO Secretary General's second report on UNSCR 1325 – January 2013
- (9) Global Agenda Council on Women Empowerment – July 2013
- (10) Feast of breaking the fast. It is an important religious holiday celebrated by Muslims and marking the end of Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting.