

## *1325 And Beyond – Essay Contest*

### HONORABLE MENTION

## *Dismantling Structural Prejudices That Promote Gender Inequality: Overturning a Culture of Violence against Women in Nigeria*

**Itodo Samuel Anthony**

***“It is more dangerous to be a woman than to be a soldier in modern conflicts.”***

*Major General Patrick Cammaert, former UN Commander in the DRC*

Recently a video went viral in Nigerian social media: Two soldiers had recorded themselves threatening to rape the “wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters” of the men of the city of Warri and infect them with HIV/AIDS in retaliation for the alleged murder of a soldier by some community youths. The brazenness of their threats while in state-assigned uniforms was shocking. This is Warri in peacetime. One does not need to stretch the imagination far to visualize what these soldiers would be capable of during armed conflicts.

Violence against women during or after armed conflict has been reported in every war zone, with rape and other sexual violence often used to humiliate the enemy. For perspective, “during the Rwandan genocides of the Hutus and Tutsis, an estimated 50 percent of women were raped.”<sup>1</sup> Women in Nigeria are hit hardest in the conflicts that have ravaged the country in recent times, many of them subjected to horrific sexual violence, related HIV infection, involuntary pregnancies, increased food insecurity and internal displacement. With the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast and the herdsmen crisis in the north central region, Nigeria has seen the abduction of girls, murder,

rape, internal displacement, and recruitment of women as suicide bombers, sex slaves and forced laborers.<sup>2</sup>

UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and other instruments have been developed at the international, regional and national levels to protect women and girls from violence in times of peace and war. However, many of these instruments have not been very effective on the ground because they focus on implementation at a high level of governance, with legislation and policy formulation largely ignoring a fundamental root of violence against women—patriarchal and social constructs that diminish women’s place in society.

Despite achievements in the implementation of UNSCR 1325 through UN initiatives and national action plans, there are limited changes at the macrosocial level, as these resolutions sidestep structural issues that undermine gender mainstreaming. The institutionalized prejudices in many patriarchal societies like Nigeria manifest in the form of violence against women, in peace and in wartime, as well as in systemic marginalization, which limits women from participating fully and equally in peace and

security decisions, particularly in formal negotiations and peacemaking processes.<sup>3</sup>

While UNSCR 1325 and other similar policy documents can be potent tools for women, it is time to shift focus to combating, at the grassroots level, the religious, cultural and social values that promote gender inequality and violence against women. I propose a model of action that focuses on young people, who are still amenable to changing socially ingrained values that catalyze violence against women and doing revolution from the ground up.

### ***Nigeria's Position on Women, Peace and Security***

Nigeria is signatory to several instruments on the protection of the rights of women and girls, including the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol of 2003), UNSCR 1325, and the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Domestically, Nigeria has instituted the National Gender Policy of 2006, the Violence against Persons Prohibition Act (VAPP, of 2015), Gender-Based Violence (Prohibition) Law of 2007, the National Action Plan for the Implementation of the UNSCR 1325 and related resolutions. The NAP was first launched in 2013, with an updated one in 2017 to cover 2017–20. Implementation remains a challenge.<sup>4</sup>

The overall goal of Nigeria's national action plan is anchored on the following priorities: increased political empowerment for women and engagement at all levels of decision making, a more effective and credible justice and security environment for women during and after conflict and allocation of greater and more sustainable financial resources to support women in recovery processes.<sup>5</sup> The plan's areas of focus, termed the 5 Pillars, are: prevention, participation, protection, prosecution and promotion.

### ***Addressing Patriarchy and Social Constructs***

The patriarchal nature of several societies, including Nigeria's, promotes violence against women and girls and constricts their roles. In such a culture, a senator can threaten a woman colleague with rape on the floor of the Senate during a policy debate, even though the woman is a colleague of "equal standing." The son of the governor of a state in Nigeria, while arguing with someone on Twitter, threatened to arrange for his antagonist's mother and sister to be gang-raped. Recently, I heard that certain teenagers on finishing high school planned to rape female classmates as a "parting gift."

Women and girls suffer the greatest violence during conflicts, yet wars do not suddenly turn men into rapists. There was already a tendency toward violence against women in such men, and conflicts merely present a fertile arena to express that tendency. This mind-set should be dismantled. To change the narrative on the roles of women in society, advocates for women should focus on the young, with the following strategies:

- **Introduce gender and peace studies into the curriculum.** Such study can be a powerful tool for promoting appropriate gender education and unlearning harmful socialization. To deepen learning, young people working in teams should come up with interventions within their communities to mitigate violence against women and girls.
- **Form gender and peace clubs across secondary schools.** These groups could help raise awareness of instruments like UNSCR 1325. Most people, but especially the women and girls these tools are designed to protect, are not aware of its provisions. Young people in these groups would have regular conversations on peace, security and violence against women to create a much-needed consciousness of women's rights and roles in society.
- **Set up school parliaments and courts for conflict resolution.** These parliaments should have adequate representation from boys and girls, and they can both deliberate issues around peace and security and resolve school-based conflicts. Implementing partners can use these youth parliaments, with their gender balance, to normalize having women's voices alongside men's from a young age. Essay competitions and debates on the theme of violence against women across secondary schools would also help to popularize the resolutions and actively engage young people.
- **Form peace and security focus groups at the community level.** Civil society organizations and nongovernmental organizations, working with local government authorities, can set up peace and security focus groups of young boys and girls at the community level. These groups would raise awareness of UN resolutions protecting women and girls against violence, foster advocacy against violence toward women and girls and act as a reporting and feedback channel, linking victims of gender-based violence to the appropriate authorities for actions to be taken, especially in rural areas. Periodic debates at the community level on issues of peace and security can be organized through this platform to help evaluate structures that promote violence against women and move to dismantle them.

- **Use a social credit model to promote peace and security.** To get young people—male and female—actively involved in promoting peace and security at the community level, a social credit model can be implemented to reward and motivate their participation. I have successfully used this model to get students actively involved in environmental protection and community volunteering. Students are allocated points for carrying out activities such as raising awareness of climate change and planting trees. These credits are accumulated on a ledger board, and students convert them into tangible rewards: a place on an excursion, textbooks, or tuition fee discounts, for example. This program generated a frenzy of student activity that ultimately helped instill the desired values. A similar community program would allow boys and girls to accumulate credits for active involvement in gender equality, peace and security promotion, provision of reporting and feedback to appropriate authorities, and setting up initiatives that tackle violence against women and girls. This program will create a more pragmatic local awareness of the resolutions than adding several more documents and policies at the national and international levels.
- **Set up local gender and peace courts and train security personnel.** Violations against the rights of women and girls need special courts for rapid dispensation of justice, as delayed penalties typically erode their severity in the eyes of parties involved and risk too easily have offenses swept under the rug. Without perpetrators being seen to receive punishment, the culture of violence against women will only be perpetuated. Security personnel typically treat issues of rape and violence against women with levity, many times terming them “family matters” to be resolved at home. This attitude emboldens violators and furthers the culture of violence against women, which we now see mirrored in a Nigerian senator’s brazen public threat to rape a woman.

It has been two decades since member states unanimously adopted the UNSCR 1325 as a seminal tool in addressing the violence women and girls face in armed conflict. While Nigeria developed a national action plan, the situation of many Nigerian women is not much changed. Women’s participation in the peace and security process is still mostly rhetoric. More often than not, women are allowed to participate in formal peace processes infrequently and usually for cosmetic purposes, to present an image of inclusiveness. Fundamental values, anchored in patriarchal structural injustices that relegate women to second-class citizenship, need organic change from the grassroots. By helping young people unlearn these negative values and involving them actively in the gender equality and peace and security process, Nigeria can raise a generation that will not need UN instruments to instruct them to treat women with fairness.

## References

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- 3 ACCORD and SIDA, *Resolution 1325 in 2020: Looking Forward, Looking Back* (Umlangha Rocks, South Africa: Fishwicks, 2011), p. 28.
- 4 WILPF, *Women, Peace and Security in Nigeria*, p. 2.
- 5 Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, *National Action Plan for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 and Related Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security in Nigeria* (Lagos, Nigeria: Nigerian Federal Government, 2014), p. 9.

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## 1325AndBeyond – Essay Contest

In the run up to the 20th anniversary of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325 (2000)) Women In International Security (WIIS) and the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung Washington, DC launched an international essay competition *1325AndBeyond*.

WIIS and the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung Washington, DC are proud to announce and publish the winning essays. The essays highlight innovative and imaginative ideas and strategies to achieve the objectives of UNSCR 1325 in the 2020s.

### FIRST PRIZE

ANA LAURA VELASCO UGALDE (MEXICO)

*UNSCR 1325 and the WPS agenda: A Feminist Response to Authoritarianism*

### SECOND PRIZE

AGATHE CHRISTIEN (FRANCE)

*Enhancing WPS in the 2020s: Lessons Learned and Strategies for Transformative Change*

ANNINA CLAESSION (SWEDEN)

*Mobilizing a Forgotten Sector: A Case for a New Media Code of Ethics on Gender and Conflict*

### THIRD PRIZE

PAULA DRUMMOND & TAMYA REBELO (BRAZIL)

*1325 and Beyond: Moving Forward the WPS Agenda in Latin America*

MUHAMMAD AMMAR HIDAYAHTULLOH (INDONESIA)

*WPS in Asean: Progress, Gaps and Way Forward*

### FOURTH PRIZE

ESTHER LUIGI (FRANCE)

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WIIS and the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung Washington, DC would like to thank the members of the jury: Fauziya Abdi Ali; Joanna Barelkowska; Chantel Cole; Jessie Evans; Chantal de Jonge Oudraat; Karma Ekmekji; Jessica Grün; Layla Hashemi; Karin L. Johnston; Miriam Laux; Maxinne Rhea Leighton; Kayla McGill; Hannah Neumann; Chiedo Nwankor; Hannah Proctor; Liane Schalatek; Donald Steinberg; Dominik Tolksdorf; Anna Von Gall; Rokšana Verahrami; Karin Warner; Ursula Knudsen Latta. Special thanks to Kayla McGill and the members of the WIIS team for organizing the competition and to the Mobilizing Men as Partners for WPS (Our Secure Future) for contributing to the Honorable Mention awards.

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