

1325 And Beyond – Essay Contest

THIRD PRIZE

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

Paula Drumond and Tamya Rebelo

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda has evolved tremendously over the past two decades. Since the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, pledges to mainstream gender into peace and security initiatives have proliferated. Nine subsequent resolutions raised collective expectations that these commitments would translate into effective policies. Implementation, however, largely relies on activities carried out by states, international organizations and civil society. As a result, the WPS agenda has diffused unevenly across the globe. Of the 83 countries that have developed national action plans (NAPs), about 70 percent are in Europe and Africa.¹

Until 2015, Chile was the only Latin American country to adopt a NAP. The 15th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 marked a tipping point in the region, with the approval of the second Chilean NAP and the adoption of national plans in Argentina (2015), Paraguay (2015), Brazil (2017), El Salvador (2017) and Guatemala (2017). Perhaps not surprisingly, WPS debates tend to mirror the existing geographical imbalance of the worldwide NAP uptake. Many of the challenges and touted achievements reflect analyses developed in Europe and Africa. The result has been a major disconnect between WPS policies and the violent realities facing Latin American women.

This essay reflects on how best to move the objectives of the WPS agenda forward in one of the most dangerous regions in the world for women and girls.² We argue that

the transformative potential of the WPS agenda in Latin America requires new ideas, languages and practices that move beyond the war/peace dichotomy entrenched in traditional WPS formulations. The first part of this essay overviews the regional landscape of gendered violence and insecurity, which has been persistently neglected in traditional WPS debates. The second part considers what is needed to move beyond the shortcomings of the agenda in the region, concluding with specific and practical recommendations for action.

Gender and Insecurity in Latin America

The WPS agenda has ambiguous contours in Latin America. Often portrayed as a “zone of peace,” the region continues to grapple with the consequences of unconventional armed violence.³ With only 8 percent of the world’s population, Latin America hosts one-quarter of all global homicides.⁴ These alarming statistics are due in large part to the presence of organized criminal groups, including drug cartels, street gangs and paramilitary militias, which often engage in violent disputes for territorial and market control.

Latin American women and girls are disproportionately affected by the increasing levels of violence that ravage both urban and rural areas. Latin America is “home to 14 of the 25 countries with the highest rates of femicide in the world”⁵ and to the highest global rate of sexual violence against women.⁶

In Brazil, the largest and most populated country in the region, a woman is raped every 11 minutes.⁷ These patterns of violence historically intersect with a range of postcolonial exclusions based on class, gender, race and ethnicity. Existing data on femicide in Brazil shows that between 2005 and 2015 the annual number of violent deaths of black women increased by 22 percent while the murder rate for white women fell by 7 percent.⁸ Indigenous and rural populations also face disproportionate levels of violence, with one in every three indigenous women experiencing sexual violence in their lifetime.⁹ Their exposure to sexual and physical violence is often exacerbated by the militarization of indigenous areas and the presence of mining and other extractive activities on lands they depend on for sustenance.

Latin America is also a major source, transit and destination of human trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation, forced labor and domestic servitude. The UN Office on Drugs and Crimes indicates that women and girls account for the vast majority of detected victims of human trafficking in the region, mostly for sexual exploitation.¹⁰ Recently, the political crisis in Venezuela has led to an increase in human trafficking within regional borders after the displacement of millions of Venezuelans to neighboring states.¹¹

These violent situations often fall off the radar of the Security Council since they are not explicitly related to conventional armed conflicts. Indeed, the detaching of the WPS agenda from internal dimensions of violence is a longstanding global trend, which arguably draws on the traditional divide maintained within the United Nations between the human rights and security agendas. In Latin America, the disconnect between these agendas must also be understood against the backdrop of recurrent episodes of colonial and postcolonial interventionist policies by great powers. Perhaps not surprisingly, the very few countries in the region that have developed NAPs focus on defense and foreign policy initiatives, avoiding as much external scrutiny as possible over their domestic and regional security challenges. In these documents, efforts to combat sexual and gender-based violence, for example, only apply to foreign subjects located in traditional conflict situations, perpetuating conventional WPS rationales that project insecurity externally.

As a result, WPS frameworks have failed to address a regional dimension. Despite Chilean and Argentine efforts to include WPS issues in the negotiation agenda of the Conference of Defense Ministers of the Americas and other regional fora, debates on how to advance the agenda in the region remain scarce. Regional security debates undertaken at the Organization of American States, for instance, have often adopted a “bifurcated approach” that disconnects the WPS commitments from issues of public security.¹² Instead

of pursuing a broad understanding of women’s insecurity, this approach continues to discourage attention from the continuum of violence against women, thus failing to capture how the agenda can be interpreted and made relevant to the national and regional contexts.

The difficulty in moving beyond the war/peace dichotomy entrenched in more conventional WPS formulations helps explain why the agenda has so easily evaporated at the regional level and failed to take root in Latin American states. Although UNSCR 1325 may not explicitly address situations other than war, WPS norms are “expected to [...] transform gender power relations” through a human security paradigm that acknowledges the economic, social and political gendered dimensions of peace.¹³ UNSCR 1325 (2000), 1889 (2009) and 2122 (2013), for example, advanced more comprehensive perspectives connecting security concerns with the eradication of inequalities and the strengthening of human rights norms. The transformative potential of the WPS agenda in Latin America should build on these entry points through new ideas and practices that further expand on these developments. This ambitious goal will require long-term as well as short-term strategies, which will be further explored below.

Accelerating WPS Implementation in Latin America

This section fleshes out common actionable strategies that can be explored across the region to accelerate WPS implementation. These recommendations require sustained political will, sufficient resources and broad civil society participation.

The WPS agenda has so far privileged global norms diffused through standardized policies that have left structural inequalities unaddressed and their gendered security implications unexplored. This gap calls for the creation of multi-stakeholder fora to spur critical debates on the relevance of the agenda at the national and regional levels. These fora should stimulate debates on how WPS frameworks can advance gender-sensitive policies on key security challenges, including urban violence, human trafficking, mass displacement and natural disasters. Such initiatives can provide platforms for sharing knowledge and experiences and developing capacity on WPS-related frameworks through workshops, trainings and awareness-raising activities. The fact that Canada and Uruguay are co-chairing the WPS Focal Points Network in 2020 provides a unique opportunity both for increased regional cooperation and for building an Americas perspective on WPS. This is also a key opportunity to build on good practices, such as expanding existing networks of women mediators and women human rights defenders to the regional level.

Achieving WPS transformative goals requires more than just the expansion of thematic debates and the addition of new areas of concern. In the next decade, WPS policies should attend to the development of intersectional methodologies, which take seriously how women's insecurities are shaped by class, race, ethnicity, dis/ability, creed and sexuality. Measures to build more effective policies in this direction should take into account bottom-up initiatives that help civil society actors take ownership of the agenda. When developing and implementing NAPs, governments often focus on national-level policies and machineries, neglecting the need for more local-level initiatives. A key strategy is thus to invest in localization programs involving local governments, traditional leaders and women's grassroots organizations. Local action plans have been developed in Colombian municipalities and can serve as models for other countries in the region.

Considering that lack of resources weakens the operationalization of WPS commitments and makes them more vulnerable to political changes, the development of mechanisms to fund WPS programs and to monitor budget allocation is vital to ensure the fulfillment of and continued support to the agenda. These mechanisms can be funded by national, regional and international agencies and donors. Financial and capacity-building support from the latter, however, is going to be particularly relevant in the next decade considering the economic and political crisis affecting countries in the region, which will be aggravated by the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Finally, at the national level, the creation of interinstitutional coordination structures can also play a critical role in the harmonization of WPS initiatives with gender policies already in place. These mechanisms are critical for forging constant interaction among key stakeholders involved in WPS implementation processes, allowing them to share experiences and information while avoiding the "departmentalization" of their tasks and duplication of efforts.

Conclusion

The 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 is a major opportunity to accelerate the implementation of the WPS in Latin America over the next decade. This essay has identified key opportunities and challenges in this regard. By putting forward specific recommendations, our purpose is to support a more active, effective regional engagement with WPS principles and consequently to reduce the gap between the rhetorical commitments and the operationalization of the agenda at the national and regional levels. Our recommendations highlight the need for supporting the development of new commitments and priorities through strategies that can be undertaken at the regional, national and subnational levels. They include, for example, the creation and support of regional networks and fora that can spur innovative, grounded interpretations of the agenda. The expansion of the agenda toward nontraditional WPS areas of concern, which acknowledge the diversity of women's lived insecurities in the region, is also crucial to spawn more fundamental change. These recommendations are achievable with sustained political will, sufficient resources and meaningful civil society participation. While ambitious, they offer essential milestones on the path to a more equitable vision of peace.

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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.

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