Diplomacy: The Future is Female

The Importance of Gender Parity in the UN’s Efforts on International Peace and Security

Nahla Valji and Pablo Castillo

"Another world is not only possible; she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing."

- Arundhati Roy

In January 2017, Antonio Guterres began his tenure as the ninth Secretary-General of the United Nations. In taking the oath of office, he pledged to achieve gender parity in the world body for the first time in seven decades. In just over a year, gender parity was reached in 2018 at the top of the world’s body, the Secretary-General’s senior management group – his ‘cabinet’ – and among Resident Coordinators, effectively the heads of the UN at the country level.

The road to the ultimate goal of parity at all levels across the Organization will be a longer process, as laid out in the Secretary-General’s System-Wide Strategy on Gender Parity. But the rapid transformation at the top has sent a signal to all, particularly with regards to political will. It has also prompted broader reforms, including efforts to address staffing rules and regulations, introduce greater transparency in staffing numbers, root out unconscious bias in recruitment, enforce temporary special measures, and provide an enabling environment.

While it would be a reasonable expectation that the shift in numbers at the top of the world’s body would have a cascading impact on the inclusion of more women in all spaces of international diplomacy and peace and security – from the composition of peace negotiations, to peacekeeping missions, or national public institutions – inclusion in these spaces has remained contested and resisted, often in ways that are neither public nor documented. In our view, this resistance partly explains the gigantic gap between the rhetoric of speeches and statements and the goals expressed in many aspects of the international community’s work in 2019 in many aspects of the international community’s work in 2019. It also partly explains the resistance of many of the heads of various UN departments and agencies in making of many of the heads of various UN departments and agencies in making.

In January 2017, Antonio Guterres began his tenure as the ninth Secretary-General of the United Nations, tasked with achieving gender parity at all levels across the Organization. However, efforts to do so are often met with resistance from actors who either actively object to or do not prioritize feminist goals. Nevertheless, the rapid transformation at the top has sent a signal to all, particularly with regards to political will. It has also prompted broader reforms, including efforts to address staffing rules and regulations, introduce greater transparency in staffing numbers, root out unconscious bias in recruitment, enforce temporary special measures, and provide an enabling environment through policies on parental leave and flexible work arrangements.  

Introduction

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GENDER PARITY IN UN PEACE AND SECURITY

Gender parity as a facet of the UN's mission is a critical issue in the context of peace and security. When women are excluded, the default setting for our world is that of a male experience. The profound effects of gender parity and inequalities on international peace and security underscore the importance of gender parity as a cornerstone of effective peacebuilding. The UN has been a leader in promoting gender parity, and the recent appointment of the first all-female leadership of a peacekeeping mission reflects this commitment.

Women's exclusion from public spaces has had significant consequences. It is estimated that parity in the labor force would unlock trillions of dollars globally, money that could be invested into greater social protection and access to education. By contrast, women's exclusion from public spaces has impacted everything from maternal mortality, to poverty reduction, to climate change.

It is not just women who are affected by gender inequality and the absence of women from political decision-making. Feminist theories have made the case for the importance of gender parity as a fundamental building block of both gender equality and social change more generally. The business case for gender parity has been well-documented, with a focus on the benefits for society as a whole through women's equal political participation.

Beyond a democratic right to equal participation and representation, the UN had previously committed to reaching parity in senior leadership positions, and in peace operations in conflict-affected countries, where the two areas with highest visibility for the organization are a major principle governing the recruitment policy of the United Nations. This commitment has been reinforced by the appointments of the current Secretary-General, who betrays a commitment to reimagining the UN's role in the 21st century.

However, in the aftermath of the Centro de Estudios de la Paz y la Convivencia report, which called for an end to gender parity, the UN's efforts to secure sustainable peace have been overshadowed by the continued absence of women from key policy positions and in peace operations in conflict-affected countries. The current Secretary-General has highlighted the need to accelerate progress in achieving parity, and the overall effectiveness of institutions and outcomes. It does so by focusing on the need for institutional and systemic change, and the importance of inclusive decision-making processes that are the target of calls for greater gender balance or gender parity. Sometimes the rhetoric in underpinning gender parity as a goal and a concern for the future. Some have voiced doubts about even more robust gender equality agendas. Some believe that when parity is achieved, the process is the outcome.
The UN for their country.

13 Ellen Loj, also one of the few women who have held the post of ambassador to the UN for their country.

14 R. T. H. Council discussed this subject matter before that day was in 2005, when the Security Council was convened for that purpose by Norwegian Ambassador Thor Halvorsen.

15 In a recent meeting of the Security Council that concluded with the adoption of a resolution on women, peace, and security, the first time that the civilian, police, and military components of a peacekeeping mission were all led by women, as in the case of the UN mission in Iraq, the appointment of women as heads of UN missions was a historic.


17 This issue goes beyond UN Security Council resolution 1325 and is evident in the diplomatic teams and representative of countries when this is not modeled by the UN.

18 The under-representation of women in the most visible areas of UN operations. The reason for this is multiple and the challenges are greater. The reasons for this are multiple and the difficulties are complex.

19 One of the most concerning elements of the assumption that the recruitment and promotion of women will go beyond symbolism, credibility, or the importance of representing the population you are supposed to serve. As we will see below, it has real operational implications for the conduct of peacekeeping operations.

20 However, by unconscious and conscious bias in recruitment and selection. The under-representation of women in the most visible areas of UN operations. The reason for this is multiple and the difficulties are complex.

21 Despite the milestones and scaled up efforts, it is still not clear that parity will be reached across the Organization, and is evident in the diplomatic teams and representative of countries when this is not modeled by the UN.
security council is invited to speak to the council on a specific matter or country situation. However, as it rarely makes the narrative of foreign policy analysis and discussion, which is also dominated by men. For example, a recent survey conducted by Women in International Security (WIS) showed that in 2018, only two out of the top 20 foreign policy think tanks in Washington, DC have achieved gender parity, with a representation of women below 30 percent in the overwhelming majority of them. The picture is even more striking outside the United States, where only one woman was invited to speaking on the Security Council on a specific matter or country situation.

In one piece of research, Caprioli and others have found that just 11 percent of foreign policy analysts are women. In 2017, Margot Wallström of Sweden, famous for pursuing feminist foreign policy, was the only female Foreign Minister among the 28 countries of the European Union. As a result, even when feminist issues make it to the top of the agenda of global policymakers, they are typically shaped by the men who make the decisions. One of the biggest challenges is that a state will use military force to resolve international conflict, even when feminist advocacy for negotiation, dialogue, and diplomacy is more likely to engage in conflict. Most of this research directly links numbers of women in the labor force to policy outcomes.

The recent World Bank-UN report ‘Pathways to Peace’ quotes extensive research highlighting that governments of countries with more quantitative research showing that women's participation is dismissed as an unnecessary irritation at worst by those involved in the organization of such processes. In most cases, the women on the panel were the moderators or facilitators of the discussions. The role of women in peace talks is often reduced to that of a support role, with men dominating the discussions and making key decisions.

In one study, for example, every case that provided significantly lower numbers of women in international negotiations. The study found that countries with ten percent of women in the labor force were nearly 30 times more likely to experience conflict compared with countries with 40 percent of women in the labor force. It also finds that a five-fold decrease in the percentage of women in the labor force is associated with a five-fold decrease in the probability of a state using military force to resolve international conflict. One of the biggest challenges is that a state will use military force to resolve international conflict, even when feminist advocacy for negotiation, dialogue, and diplomacy is more likely to engage in conflict. Most of this research directly links numbers of women in the labor force to policy outcomes. This shows how far we still are from meaningful progress on this score. And yet, perhaps one of the most repeated statistics in this field is that a state will use military force to resolve international conflict, even when feminist advocacy for negotiation, dialogue, and diplomacy is more likely to engage in conflict. Most of this research directly links numbers of women in the labor force to policy outcomes.
Women broaden the range of skills and capacities among all categories of personnel and improve the mission’s effectiveness and credibility vis-à-vis the local population. Women’s first step, and a much more direct route towards those changes, than trying to influence male gatekeepers. There is growing recognition that a greater gender balance is a critical factor contributing to the operational effectiveness and credibility of peacekeeping operations. Women in military and police contingents in peace operations in conflict settings have much more contact with the population than traditional military operations, engage much more effectively in a variety of tasks, from facilitating humanitarian aid to helping with disarmament and demobilization of armed groups and the reform of the security sector in the host country. UN guidelines for the military and police indicate that women are not restricted from participating in multiple peacekeeping operations and can be deployed in mixed gender teams, with women leading where this is possible. Women in leadership positions within UN peacekeeping operations encourage much needed access to information and are often more effective in getting their message across in multilateral operations, in particular in situations where there is a cultural taboo to communicating with a man in the same function. Especially if they are survivors of gender-based violence or in settings where influence male gatekeepers. There is lack of progress by the United Nations has coincided with the relative stability of the peace agreements. As countries have transitioned from conflict to peace, the numbers shown above in fact only scratch the surface and fail to adequately reflect the true extent of women’s political marginalization. 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Gender parity in UN peace and security

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Gender parity in UN peace and security is a positive and significant institutional leadership at the United Nations is a positive and significant institution. The UN is often perceived as the face of global governance, and it is crucial to ensure that its leadership reflects the diversity and perspectives of all countries and regions. Gender parity is not only a matter of justice and equity, but it is also essential for effective and inclusive decision-making.

The UN's Gender Parity in Peace and Security Initiative was launched in 2012 with the aim of increasing the number of women in leadership positions in the UN system. Over the following decade, academics grew an ever-growing body of research and evidence on the benefits of gender parity in decision-making. The results are clear: more diverse leadership leads to better outcomes across all relevant areas.

In 2019, the UN Secretary-General launched the Global Gender Gap Report, which highlighted the progress made in terms of gender parity but also the remaining challenges. The report emphasized the need for continued efforts to address the gender gap in leadership positions.

In recent years, the UN has made significant progress in increasing the number of women in leadership positions, particularly in peace and security. For example, in 2019, 24 percent of Cabinet Ministers and 24 percent of Members of Parliament in the world's 500 largest companies were women. This is a significant increase compared to previous years, but there is still much work to be done to achieve true gender parity.

Gender parity in peace and security is not just about numbers; it is about ensuring that women's perspectives and experiences are valued and integrated into decision-making processes. Women bring a unique set of skills and insights that can enhance the effectiveness of peace and security operations.

Conclusion

When the Security Council adopted its landmark resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security at the turn of the century, women’s participation in peace and security decision-making was recognized as a key component of effective peacebuilding. Since then, women's involvement in peace and security has increased, but there is still much work to be done.

The progress made in recent years is a testament to the commitment of the UN system and its member states to advancing gender parity in peace and security. However, continued efforts are needed to ensure that women are fully represented in all aspects of peace and security decision-making. This includes not only increasing the number of women in leadership positions but also ensuring that their voices are heard and their perspectives are valued in all relevant decision-making processes.

Gender parity is not just a matter of justice and equity; it is essential for achieving effective and inclusive peace and security outcomes. The UN must continue to lead by example, demonstrating the benefits of gender parity in decision-making and inspiring other organizations and stakeholders to follow suit.

Gender parity in peace and security is not a one-time achievement; it is an ongoing process that requires sustained efforts and commitment. The UN must continue to prioritize gender parity in peace and security decision-making, ensuring that women's perspectives are valued and integrated into all aspects of peace and security operations.

In conclusion, gender parity in peace and security is a positive and significant development for the UN and the international community as a whole. The progress made in recent years is a testament to the commitment of the UN system and its member states to advancing gender parity in peace and security. However, continued efforts are needed to ensure that women are fully represented in all aspects of peace and security decision-making. The UN must continue to lead by example, demonstrating the benefits of gender parity in decision-making and inspiring other organizations and stakeholders to follow suit.