

## Foreword

As Executive Director of UNIFEM I have witnessed the impact of conflict on women in many countries. In the "Valley of Widows" in Colombia, I met women who had lost their husbands and their land – everyone and everything important to them had been destroyed by civil war and drug lords. I have been to Bosnia where women described abduction, rape camps and forced impregnation, and to Rwanda where women had been gang raped and purposely infected with HIV/AIDS. Stories like these were repeated again and again, in different languages, in different surroundings: East Timor, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guatemala. Only the horror and the pain were the same. Clearly the nature of war has changed. It is being fought in homes and communities – and on women's bodies in a battle for resources and in the name of religion and ethnicity. Violence against women is used to break and humiliate women, men, families, communities, no matter which side they are on. Women have become the worst victims of war – and the biggest stakeholders of peace.

I was prepared to find bitterness and hatred among the women who had experienced such horrific violence and loss, and pervasive trauma, but in many places I found strength. I met women who had transcended their sorrow and discovered in themselves the courage and will to rebuild their lives and communities. Many believed the only way to stop the cycle of violence was to make security and justice key issues on the agenda for a new, more equitable society. A few years ago in South Africa I lit UNIFEM's peace torch with African women; it was sent to other conflict areas and then to Beijing to open the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. The women wanted peace, but they also wanted to be shapers of the peace process in their countries, to use their own suffering and transform it into a force that would build a more secure future for humanity.

That is the deeper story I want the world to know: that despite what they have experienced, many of the women I met have been able to rise to the challenge of building a sustainable peace, recognizing that the security and satisfaction of one side can never be based on the frustration or humiliation of the other. They were women like those in East Timor who created collectives to provide each other with emotional support as well as employment schemes to keep their families and villages going. They have instituted literacy classes – at the end of the war, 90 per cent of rural women were illiterate – and demanded a role in political elections. In Sudan women from the North and the South took the initiative to come together across ethnic and religious divides to talk about building peace. In Ghana women refugees from Liberia learned construction skills through a UNIFEM-supported programme and built a safer camp for themselves and their families. In Afghanistan women met in secret to organize while the Taliban was in power. They developed maps of streets and neighbourhoods where underground homeschools for girls or medical help or jobs could be found, and shared them at weddings and birthdays.

We cannot expect women to do all this alone. Their efforts must be recognized, valued and supported. To build peace and contribute to the rebuilding of their countries, women need resources, skills, authority. Despite the work they have done on the ground, they are not at the peace table when warring factions sit down to negotiate. No one is held accountable for the enormous crimes committed against women.

Although women are feeding their families and have taken in orphans, there are countries where they cannot inherit property or own land to farm. Their needs and their work are not systematically supported in the programmes developed by international agencies. Their rights are not enshrined in constitutions or protected by legislation. All this must change.

Women's peace-building and reconstruction efforts must be supported, not only because it is the right thing to do, but also because most nations consumed by conflict need the strength of their women. The women are the ones who held their families and communities together during the worst of the fighting, even while on the run from armies. They keep a measure of stability during times of chaos and during displacement. Now, as peace accords are negotiated and countries are rebuilt, those contributions must be recognized.

I appointed Elisabeth Rehn and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to conduct an independent assessment of women, war and peace so that people throughout the world will know and understand not only what women have suffered but what they have contributed. Many who read this report will already know what has happened to women in Bosnia, East Timor or Afghanistan, but I believe we have not recognized how pervasive violence against women is during conflict and how great the need for protection and assistance. We know a little about women building peace, but we have not yet recognized women as a force for reconstruction. New responses are vital if we want this century to banish the worst brutalities of the previous one. We must invest in the progress of women from war-affected countries.

This assessment could only take place because of the support of several people: Louise Fréchette, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations; Mark Malloch Brown, Administrator of the UN Development Programme (UNDP); Jean-Marie Guéhenno, Under-Secretary-General, Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO); Kieran Prendergast, Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Political Affairs (DPA); Kenzo Oshima, Emergency Relief Coordinator of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA); Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, Executive Director of the UN Population Fund (UNFPA); and Carolyn McAskie, Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator of OCHA. Throughout this project the UN system cooperated as one to support the visits of the independent experts and to ensure that the voices of women would be heard. I firmly believe that the authoritative analysis presented here will help create the political will to move forward, to promote the skills, strengths and leadership of women as they work for peace.

Noeleen Heyzer  
Executive Director  
UNIFEM

## Preface

We were not strangers to war when UNIFEM asked us to carry out this independent assessment on the impact of armed conflict on women and women's role in peace-building. Elisabeth remembers the sound of World War II planes overhead. She witnessed the long rows of corpses and body parts as the mass graves of Srebrenica were exhumed. Ellen was one of only four government ministers who escaped assassination after the Liberian coup of 1980. As former Defence and Finance Ministers, and as Presidential candidates, we understand the world of politics, and we have a keen sense for ripe political moments. This is such a moment. This is an opportunity to improve protection for women in armed conflict and to strengthen women's contribution to peace processes and to rebuilding their communities.

Over the course of one year, during 2001 and 2002, we travelled to many of the world's conflicts. Focusing on the impact of armed conflict on women and women's role in peace building, we visited 14 areas affected by conflict: Bosnia and Herzegovina; Cambodia; Colombia; the Democratic Republic of the Congo; East Timor; the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, including Kosovo; Guinea; Israel; Liberia; the occupied Palestinian territories; Rwanda; Sierra Leone and Somalia. In all of these areas, we saw how the militarization of society breeds new levels of violence and how impunity for these crimes becomes endemic. We saw a continuum of violence that shatters women's lives before, during and after conflict.

In retrospect, we realize how little prepared we were for the enormity of it all: the staggering numbers of women in war who survived the brutality of rape, sexual exploitation, mutilation, torture and displacement. The unconscionable acts of depravity. And the wholesale exclusion of women from peace processes.

We prepared for each visit by researching the background of the conflict and developing a set of questions to guide interactions, although we often found that a less rigid approach elicited better answers to our questions and provided more information. We have decided not to reveal the identities of those we met in order to protect them from reprisals. Due to fear of this kind we did not film or record our meetings with women's organizations and individuals, but instead took extensive notes. Our meetings were informal and off the record in an effort to make women as comfortable as possible discussing what were extremely distressing events and issues.

We collected first-hand data and testimonies by meeting with women victims and survivors of conflict, including refugee and internally displaced women; activists; women leaders and women's groups; international and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs); the media; religious organizations; eminent leaders from civil society; and women and girls directly involved in armed conflicts and peace processes. We met women in their offices and homes, at health clinics, in refugee camps, on the street, in bars and restaurants. We also met with representatives of United Nations agencies, both at headquarters and in the field, as well as with host governments, opposition groups and peacekeeping and humanitarian personnel to find out what they are doing for women and how they were approaching gender issues.

In addition to field-based interviews and information collection, we relied on research and analysis from human rights groups and civil society, independent reports and UN documents. These provided useful analyses and raised policy issues that

underscored what women themselves identified as priorities. While our goal was to focus on the testimonies of women we met during our visits, we wanted to demonstrate that their experiences are not country-specific, but global. Many of the trends we saw are universal phenomena, which is why we included a number of examples from places we could not visit.

In our report, we introduce you to many of the women we met: Chantal from a UNHCR transit camp in Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo; Lam, a 15-year-old Vietnamese girl in a woman's shelter in Phnom Penh, Cambodia; and a prize-winning journalist from Colombia who fled her country after receiving death threats. We share their stories to show the reality of war for women and to give a human face to the struggle for security. We have concluded that the standards of protection for women affected by conflict are glaring in their inadequacy, as is the international response. Only by ending impunity for crimes against women in war can nations be rebuilt. Gender equality in this context means enabling women as full citizens, as voters, as candidates, as decision-makers. It means supporting women's centrality to reconstruction – to reforming the constitution, the electoral system, and the policies and resources that support development. Without women's representation – without half the population – no country can truly claim to be engaged in democratic development and participatory governance.

This glimpse of bitter reality is shadowed by the deadly nexus of HIV/AIDS and armed conflict for women. It is fueled by the economies of war, relief and reconstruction. Women do not receive what they need in emergencies, for development, peace-building, or reconstruction. Their entreaties for education and health care go largely unanswered. In short, women and their organizations need more resources. At all levels – from the grass roots to the international – women's organizations continue to be insufficiently recognized and supported.

But our report also shows many ways in which women in conflict situations are being supported. A large number of United Nations agencies and many international and local non-governmental organizations are protecting women and supporting their role in peace-building. We maintain, however, that this excellent work needs to be amplified exponentially.

We are proud to pay tribute, in this report, to the courageous peacekeepers and humanitarian workers on the front lines and to showcase new models of protection for women in a peacekeeping environment. We are encouraged that civilian police are working to protect women from domestic violence and, in some cases, to prevent it. We are gratified to see peace operations support HIV/AIDS awareness. But we were also appalled by reports of flagrant violations committed against women by those with the duty to protect them. We support fully Secretary-General Kofi Annan's position that there must be zero tolerance and full accountability for these crimes. We take note of the recent report of the UN Office for Internal Oversight (OIOS) on sexual exploitation and efforts underway across the humanitarian community to strengthen measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in humanitarian crises.

We direct our findings and conclusions to those with the power and resources to make a difference. Indifference is not an option. In representing women's experience of war we have paid attention to causes and consequences. But for each woman, the challenges, obstacles and opportunities are different. We accept full responsibility for our

conclusions – their merits and their shortcomings. They do not represent the position of UNIFEM whose courage we salute in commissioning this long overdue assessment. We pay special thanks to Noeleen Heyzer, UNIFEM Executive Director, for financing and creating the political space for this report and for shepherding it through difficult challenges to completion. We also owe thanks to Jennifer Klot, the Senior Adviser of the Governance, Peace and Security section at UNIFEM for identifying the need for this report and her inspired leadership of the secretariat.

We are indebted to the experts who provided research specifically commissioned for this assessment. Radhika Coomaraswamy, the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, helped us understand the nature of sexual violence and exploitation in armed conflict. Angela M. Wakhweya, Catherine A. Rielly, Monica Onyango and Gail Helmer at the Center for International Health at Boston University conducted valuable research on the intersection of gender, HIV/AIDS and conflict, and Professor Donna Sullivan of New York University School of Law provided much needed guidance on the pursuit of justice and accountability for gender-based war crimes in post-conflict reconstruction. We also owe thanks to Victoria Brittain for her touching and insightful contributions.

We have relied enormously on the guidance of our Advisory Group, composed of eminent women and men from all regions of the globe whose expertise includes peace support operations, humanitarian assistance, human rights and peace building. Their encouragement, support, knowledge and sheer intelligence have been invaluable to our work. In this regard, our thanks go to Rafeeuddin Ahmed, Winnie Byanyima, Isha Dyfan, Asma Jahangir, Stephen Lewis, Jane Holl Lute, Luz Mendez, Faiza Jama Mohamed, Maha Muna, Milena Pires, Maj Britt Theorin and Stasa Zajovic.

We would also like to thank the many experts we consulted – too numerous to mention by name – who offered advice, information and encouragement. We are grateful for the support of the secretariat staff from UNIFEM, Aina Iiyambo, Sumie Nakaya, Felicity Hill, Gaella Mortel, Liliana Potenza and Karen Judd. We are thankful to Maarit Kohonen who was seconded from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; she helped get this initiative off the ground and continued to provide substantive input. Saudimini Siegrist of UNICEF generously provided insight and expertise. Pam DeLargy from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) joined us in our field mission to West Africa and worked closely with the secretariat. We owe her and her staff an enormous debt for their invaluable advice and contributions to our analysis of the links across gender, HIV/AIDS, conflict and health and for UNFPA's financial contribution to our work. Our security adviser, Heljo Laukkala, was a great help during our visits. We would also like to thank the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) for their direct support of our work. We express our deepest respect and appreciation to the courageous humanitarians in the field who went far beyond the call of duty to help us in so many ways.

Finally, we thank the women who inspired this report, who have committed their lives to peace and justice, for which they have waited too long.

Elisabeth Rehn and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf  
October 2002

## **Toward the full implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325, the Independent Experts call for:**

- 1. An international Truth and Reconciliation Commission on violence against women in armed conflict as a step towards ending impunity.** This Commission, to be convened by civil society with support from the international community, will fill the historical gap that has left these crimes unrecorded and unaddressed.
- 2. Targeted sanctions against trafficking of women and girls.** Those complicit must be held accountable for trafficking women and girls in or through conflict areas. Existing international laws on trafficking must be applied in conflict situations and national legislation should criminalize trafficking with strong punitive measures, including such actions as freezing the assets of trafficking rings. Victims of trafficking should be protected from prosecution.
- 3. Strengthening of United Nations field operations for internally displaced women, and those bodies that support a field-based presence.** Protection officers from all relevant bodies, including the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), should be deployed immediately if a State cannot or will not protect displaced populations or is indeed responsible for their displacement.
- 4. Psychosocial support and reproductive health services for women affected by conflict to be an integral part of emergency assistance and post-conflict reconstruction.** Special attention should be provided to those who have experienced physical trauma, torture and sexual violence. All agencies providing health support and social services should include psychosocial counselling and referrals. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) should take the lead in providing these services, working in close cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO), UNHCR, and UNICEF.
- 5. All HIV/AIDS programmes and funding in conflict situations to address the disproportionate disease burden carried by women.** Mandatory gender analysis and specific strategies for meeting the needs of women and girls should seek to prevent infection and increase access to treatment, care and support.
- 6. Gender experts and expertise to be included in all levels and aspects of peace operations, including in technical surveys, the design of concepts of operation, training, staffing and programmes.** To this end, a Memorandum of Understanding should set out the roles and responsibilities among DPKO, Department of Political Affairs (DPA), UNIFEM and the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW).
- 7. A review of training programmes on and approaches to the gender dimensions of conflict resolution and peace-building for humanitarian, military and civilian personnel.** United Nations entities active in this area should lead this process with support provided by the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and the Task Force on Women, Peace and Security with a view to developing guidance on training policy and standards.
- 8. The Secretary-General, in keeping with his personal commitment, to increase the number of women in senior positions in peace-related functions.** Priority should be given to achieving gender parity in his appointment of women as Special Representatives and Envoys, beginning with the minimum of 30 per cent in the next three years, with a view to gender parity by 2015.

**9. Gender equality to be recognized in all peace processes, agreements and transitional governance structures.** International, regional organizations and all participating parties involved in peace processes should advocate for gender parity, maintaining a minimum 30 per cent representation of women in peace negotiations, and ensure that women's needs are taken into consideration and specifically addressed in all such agreements.

**10. A United Nations Trust Fund for Women's Peace-building.** This Trust Fund would leverage the political, financial and technical support needed for women's civil society organizations and women leaders to have an impact on peace efforts nationally, regionally and internationally. The Fund should be managed by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), in consultation with other UN bodies, and women's civil society organizations.

**11. UNIFEM to work closely with the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) to ensure that gender issues are incorporated in peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction in order to integrate gender perspectives in peace-building and to support women's full and equal participation in decision-making, and for the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) to strengthen its work in emergency situations in order to build women's capacity in conflict situations.** UNIFEM and UNFPA should be represented in all relevant inter-agency bodies.

**12. The Secretary-General to appoint a panel of experts to assess the gaps in international and national laws and standards pertaining to the protection of women in conflict and post-conflict situations and women's role in peace-building.**

**13. Increased donor resources and access for women to media and communications technology, so that gender perspectives, women's expertise and women's media can influence public discourse and decision-making on peace and security.**

**14. The Secretary-General to systematically include information on the impact of armed conflict on women, and women's role in prevention and peace-building in all of his country and thematic reports to the Security Council.** Towards that end, the Secretary-General should request relevant information from UN operations and all relevant bodies.

**15. The systematic collection and analysis of information and data by all actors, using gender specific indicators to guide policy, programmes and service delivery for women in armed conflict.** This information should be provided on a regular basis to the secretariat, member states, inter-governmental bodies, regional organizations, NGOs and other relevant bodies. A central knowledge base should be established and maintained by UNIFEM together with a network of all relevant bodies, in particular the Department of Political Affairs (DPA).

**16. The Security Council to formulate a plan for the least diversion for armaments of the world's human and economic resources.** Sixty years after being assigned the task, the Security Council should implement Article 26 of the United Nations Charter, taking into account the Women's Peace Petition which calls for the world's nations to redirect at least 5 per cent of national military expenditures to health, education and employment programmes each year over the next five years.

**17. The UN Development Programme (UNDP), as the leading agency in the field of security sector reform, to ensure that women's protection and participation be central to the design and reform of security sector institutions and policies,** especially in police, military and rule of law components. UNDP should integrate a gender perspective into its country programmes.

**18. Operational humanitarian, human rights and development bodies to develop indicators to determine the extent to which gender is mainstreamed throughout their operations in conflict and post-conflict situations** and ensure that ‘gender mainstreaming’ produces measurable results and is not lost in generalities and vague references to gender. Measures should be put in place to address the gaps and obstacles encountered in implementation.

**19. Gender budget analysis of humanitarian assistance and post-conflict reconstruction** to ensure that women benefit directly from resources mobilized through multilateral and bilateral donors, including the Consolidated Appeals Process, the Bretton Woods Institutions and donor conferences.

**20. Establishment of macroeconomic policies in post-conflict reconstruction that prioritize the public provision of food, water, sanitation, health and energy, the key sectors in which women provide unpaid labour.** Special attention should be paid to the consequences for women of decentralization policies.

**21. A lead organization to be designated within the United Nations for women’s education and training in conflict and post-conflict situations.** This lead organization, together with UNESCO, UNHCR and UNICEF, should ensure that all education programmes for displaced persons provide for women as well as girls.

**22. The Security Council, the General Assembly and ECOSOC to give serious consideration to the above recommendations and adopt relevant decisions to operationalize them.** The Secretary-General should thereafter formulate an implementation plan addressing each of the recommendations contained in those decisions and submit an annual report to the Security Council and all relevant bodies on the progress made and obstacles encountered in implementation.