

CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL WOMEN DAY 2023: WOMEN AND INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY

By

Mahrukh Khan

Research Fellow

Centre for Strategic Perspectives (CSP), ISSI

Edited by

Dr Neelum Nigar

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Source: <https://www.unesco.org/en/days/women>

Women are among the worst sufferers of the impacts of war and conflict during and post conflict and stand as one of the most vulnerable strata in a society. However, women participation lacks on multiple counts during peace and conflict resolution processes--such as peace negotiations, relief and aid management, reconciliation and justice, disarmament, along with economic, political and social transformation. Women's participation in decisions related to international peace and security is essential to peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction. To materialize this realization, efforts were made to institutionalize the role of women in global peace and security matters while integrating gender equality concerns in post-conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325

In 2000, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution 1325; the first time the international community formally recognized both the impact of conflict on women and the need to involve them as active agents in peace-building.¹

UNSCR 1325's framework consists of four pillars:²

¹ Aisling Swaine and Catherine O'Rourke, "Guide Book on CEDAW General Recommendation no. 30 and the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women Peace and Security," New York, 2015, 10

- The role of women in conflict prevention;
- Women’s participation in peacemaking and peace-building;
- Protection of women’s rights during and after conflict; and
- Women’s specific needs during repatriation, resettlement, rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction.

UNSCR 1325 addresses not only the disproportionate impacts of war on women but also the pivotal role women should and do play in conflict prevention, conflict management and sustainable peace efforts.³

Later on, Women, Peace and Security (WPS) framework was developed which primarily evolved from UN Security Council Resolution 1325, further guided by 9 resolutions including 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122, 2242, 2467, and 2493.⁴ This was aimed at bolstering the normative frameworks, which make up the broader women, peace, and security (WPS) agenda. It is a critical framework that guides and encourages women to play vital roles in building sustainable international peace and security. As a policy framework, WPS promotes gender balance in situations such as security, peace process and peace-building internationally.

Pakistan’s commitments to International Peace and Security

Pakistan has voiced its commitment to the framework that views women and youth as the cornerstone of peace-building. More recently, in its first National Security Policy (2022-2026), the Government of Pakistan recognized ‘gender security’ as a key pillar and aimed to “ensure integration of gender equity into national security narratives through full and meaningful participation of women in decision-making, law enforcement, justice sector, and peacekeeping.” Pakistan also remains one of the 6th largest contributors to UN peacekeeping, including female engagement teams and troop contributions.

On March 7, 2023, while addressing the Commission on Status of Women in New York, Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari stressed that peace and security of any nation is incomplete without protection of women and also welcomed the adoption of national action plans that empower women and girls to respond to violence and conflict. Moreover, the Foreign Minister also highlighted the plight of women under foreign occupation.

² Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security, <https://peacemaker.un.org/wps/normative-frameworks/un-security-council-resolutions>

³ Advancing Women, Peace and Security, <https://www.usip.org/programs/advancing-women-peace-and-security>

⁴ Peace and Security, UN Women, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security>

Over the past two decades, Pakistan has proposed several recommendations to further cement the protection of women in conflict situations and to enhance their participation in post-conflict processes. These included:⁵

- Develop a comprehensive strategy for conflict prevention and resolution, with special emphasis on the protection of women and girls.
- Strengthen provisions on full compliance with international humanitarian law; ending impunity, and accountability for the perpetrators of crimes against women, including in transitional justice mechanisms.
- Include gender perspectives in UNSC resolutions relating to peacekeeping operations as well as women protection advisors.
- Develop ways to address the special needs of women and girls affected by armed conflict.
- Ensure fullest participation by women, including all actors of civil society, in peace processes as well as in post-conflict peace-building activities.
- Build the wherewithal of “gender justice” in post-conflict situations, incorporating gender perspectives across the broad spectrum of reconstruction efforts.
- Provide technical assistance to concerned states for reforming and rebuilding judicial, legislative and electoral sectors as well as economic, social and political empowerment of women.
- Demand from all parties to armed conflicts full respect for and compliance with international humanitarian law and other relevant instruments on the protection of women.

Since Pakistan’s inception, women have been actively involved in every aspect of the fabric of society. Mader-i-Millat Fatima Jinnah was one of the most notable female figures of the Freedom Movement. Begum Shaista Ikramullah was a member of the committee that worked on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention against Genocide in 1948. Begum Ra’ana Liaquat Ali Khan became the first Pakistani woman to be appointed Ambassador in 1952 and also served as Representative of Pakistan to the 7th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).

⁵ Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security, November 30th 2012, Security Council Chamber, Statement by Mr. Masood Khan, Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations, https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/pakistan_wps2012_0.pdf

Currently, women diplomats head foreign missions in key regions including the Americas, Africa, Europe, the Middle East and South Asia and almost as many are posted in other important missions. It is not their gender but their ability, talent and commitment that gives them recognition in the world capitals.

The presence of females in every sector has increased significantly whether it is government, armed forces, medicine, education, science, arts, and the media. Thousands of females are breaking stereotypes by serving at high ranking executive positions like Justice Ayesha Malik became Pakistan's first female Supreme Court judge. Similarly, women in the Armed Forces are breaking stereotypes by making valuable contributions to national security. The resilient women of the land have proved time and again that they can excel in any field and stand shoulder-to-shoulder with men. Moreover, Pakistan is the only Muslim country to have female officers in its military, serving in all ranks up to Major General. The women of Pakistan are not only making history in the country but are also breaking stereotypes globally. Ayla Majid made history by becoming the first South Asian woman to be elected as the Vice President of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) in its 118-year history.⁶ Moreover, Saima Saleem became the first visually-impaired Pakistani diplomat to serve as Second Secretary on Human Rights for Pakistan's Permanent Mission to the UN in Geneva. According to statistics, the number of women in the federal and provincial bureaucracy has increased by 20 per cent during the past decade, with scores of female officers holding important positions. The Defence Division is the largest administrative unit in terms of female employees with a share of 36.86 per cent out of total female employees. The second largest unit is the Federal Education & Professional Training Division with 19.74 per cent of the total female employees.

National Health Services Regulations & Coordination, Interior and Communications Divisions remain third, fourth and fifth with a share of 8.32 per cent, 6.56 per cent and 4.79 per cent respectively out of the total female employees. As per security officials the army has also increased the number of women officers and staff taking part in international peace missions to fulfil the UN quota of 15 per cent female representation in peace missions since 2019.

In the past two decades, Pakistan has passed multiple bills and laws to eliminate discrimination against women and to promote and protect their rights. Laws such as the National Commission on the Status of Women Act, 2012; Protection Against Harassment of Women At Workplace Act 2010;

⁶ "Ayla Majid Becomes First South Asian Woman To Be Appointed As VP ACCA," *Tribune*, November 17, 2022. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2386777/ayla-majid-becomes-first-south-asian-woman-to-be-appointed-as-vp-acca>

The National Commission on the Status of Women (Amendment) Act, 2021; and Witness Protection, Security and Benefit Act, 2017, among many others to protect women at every level.

Conclusion

With 49 per cent of its population as women, Pakistan is increasingly progressing in upholding women representation in all walks of life. Women are rapidly becoming an important part of the socio-economic, political and development fabric of the country. Pakistan has taken progressive steps towards protection of human rights by ratifying most international human rights conventions and introducing pro-women legislation, including the National Gender Policy Framework (2022) along with numerous other acts and legislations implemented in all four provinces of Pakistan.⁷ Women in Pakistan today, hold important and pivotal positions across multiple sectors including the Supreme Court, judiciary, diplomacy, armed forces and police, corporate sector, arts, education, and the media.

Although women comprise half of the total population of Pakistan, they still remain underrepresented on multiple forums. If peace and stability are to be sustainable, women must be involved at every stage of decision making processes, during the peace and conflict resolutions and also in post conflict negotiations and management.

⁷ UN Women Pakistan, <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/pakistan>