



General Assembly Third Committee Topic Background Guide
Topic 2: Examining the Role of Women in Military Conflict¹

11 October 2011

The preamble to the UN Charter (1945) affirms member states' "faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of Nations large and small." In addition, Article 55 of the Charter states that one of the goals of the UN is to promote "universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion."²

More than 50 years after these rights were proclaimed, much work remains to uphold the rights, dignity, and freedom of women. Although this is true in all areas of life, the challenges are especially acute in the area of military conflict. Women rarely participate in national and international organizations that make and implement decisions about war. Yet women are profoundly affected by war. The vast majority of civilians hurt in and displaced by war are women and children. Moreover, during war, women are often victims of sexual violence.

History and Current Events

Historically, military service has been a male occupation, but there are many examples of female participation in war. In 1200 B.C., Lady Fu Hao became China's first female strategist and led women into battle.³ Also in 1200 B.C., an Israeli woman named Deborah led a military campaign in Qadesh. History also tells the stories of Amazons, Joan of Arc, Cleopatra VII of Egypt, Gwenllian Verch Gruffydd of Wales and Emilia Plater of Poland.⁴ During the American Revolutionary War, women posed as men in order to participate. The role of women in military service tends to expand in times of war to cover a wide variety of duties. For example, women's involvement in the war effort greatly increased during the World Wars. Yet women primarily served as nurses, cleaners, and cooks.⁵

When the UN Charter was signed in 1945, just four of the 160 signatories were women. Moreover, only 25 of the original 51 member states gave women the same voting rights as men.⁶ Nevertheless, when the General Assembly (GA) began to meet, women played an important role in its deliberations. Their presence was especially felt in the formation of organizations and treaties to articulate and advance the rights of women.

From the beginning, women's rights were discussed in the context of both peace and war. For example, during the inaugural session of the GA, former first lady Eleanor Roosevelt (who was one of the US delegates to the

¹ This background guide was written by Karen Ruth Adams, faculty advisor, and Kedra Hildebrand, teaching assistant with contributions from Jessica McCutcheon (2011). Copyright 2011 by Karen Ruth Adams.

² Charter of the United Nations, 1945, available at <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/>

³ Wang Qingshu, "The History and Current Status of Chinese Women Participation in Politics," in Jie Tao, Bijun Zheng, and Shirley Mow, *Holding up Half the Sky*, (Feminist Press, 2004), p. 96.

⁴ David Jones, *Women Warriors: A History*, (Brassey's; 2005), p. 113.

⁵ David R. Segal and Mady Wechsler Segal, "America's Military Population," *Population Bulletin*, 59:4 (December 2004), pp. 26-29, available at <http://www.maaf.info/resources/PopRefBureau2004.pdf>

⁶ UN Commission on the Status of Women, "Short History of the Commission on the Status of Women," not dated, pp. 1, 5, available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/CSW60YRS/CSWbriefhistory.pdf>; accessed 24 October 2009.

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GA) invited the 17 women delegates and advisors to a meeting.⁷ At the meeting, they drafted an “open letter addressed to the women of the world.” Roosevelt read the letter to the GA in February 1946. The letter argued that “this new chance for peace was won through the joint efforts of men and women working for the common ideals of human freedom.” The female delegates called on “the Governments of the world to encourage women everywhere to take a more active part in national and international affairs, and on women who are conscious of their opportunities to come forward and share in the work of peace and reconstruction as they did in war and resistance.”⁸

Over the years, the GA has drafted a number of treaties and declarations related to women. In fact, the female delegates to the first session of the GA were instrumental in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948), which asserts that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights,” that every person has the right to “life, liberty, and security of person,” and that no person “should be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.” In addition, the UDHR states that all persons “have equal right of access to public service in his country.” According to UDHR, these rights apply at all times and in all places.⁹

Women’s Rights in War

In the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, states clarified the rights of persons during war. In the Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, states agreed to follow procedures to reduce the likelihood of rape of female prisoners by providing separate facilities for male and female prisoners and by using female guards for female prisoners. States also agreed to transfer female prisoners of war who are pregnant or mothers of small children to neutral countries.¹⁰ Similarly, the Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War established the category of “protected persons” to distinguish non-combatants (civilians) from soldiers and gave protected persons certain rights. Article 27 applies to women in particular. It states, “women shall be especially protected against any attack on their honour, in particular against rape, enforced prostitution, or any form of indecent assault.” According to Article 38, pregnant women and mothers of children under 7 years cannot be targeted by military forces, regardless of their nationality or location. Moreover, female refugees and detainees have the same rights as female prisoners of war.¹¹

Although the Geneva Conventions laid the legal basis for prosecuting rape as a war crime, until the 1990s, there were no efforts to do so. Only after the civil wars in Rwanda and Yugoslavia, which involved mass rapes, did international criminal tribunals begin to hear and rule on cases of sexual violence.¹²

In 1998, the rights of women during war were further articulated in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), which clarifies the meaning of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes and provides for enforcement against individuals who perpetrate them. In 2002, these crimes became illegal and subject to prosecution by the ICC in states that had ratified the Statute. As of September 2011, 108 countries had ratified

⁷ The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project, “Eleanor Roosevelt: 1946-1952,” George Washington University, <http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/abouteleanor/timeline/tl5.cfm>

⁸ “General Assembly,” *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1946-1947*, pp. 77-78, available at <http://unyearbook.un.org/unyearbook.html?name=194647index.html>

⁹ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, available at <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>

¹⁰ Geneva Convention (III) Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, 12 August 1949, available at <http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/7c4d08d9b287a42141256739003e636b/6fef854a3517b75ac125641e004a9e68>

¹¹ Geneva Convention (IV) Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, 12 August 1949, available at <http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/7c4d08d9b287a42141256739003e636b/6756482d86146898c125641e004aa3c5>

¹² Center on Law and Globalization, “Consensus Increases on Rape in International Law,” http://clg.portalxm.com/library/keytext.cfm?keytext_id=200

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the Rome Statute.¹³ According to the ICC, depending on the reason rape and other forms of sexual violence occur in conflict situations, they can be war crimes, crimes against humanity, or part of a campaign of genocide.¹⁴

The third Millennium Development Goal (MDG) adopted by UN member states in 2000 is “to promote gender equality and empower women.”¹⁵ Reducing violence against women, both in the family and in society, is an important aspect of achieving this goal. In a recent report on progress toward MDG #3, the UN Millennium Project Task Force on Gender Equality noted the following about sexual violence during war:

An International Rescue Committee study suggests that sexual violence has been a strategy of armed conflict in virtually all recent armed conflicts... Documentary evidence of this phenomenon comes from Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Bangladesh, El Salvador, Guatemala, Indonesia, Kuwait, South Africa, and Sudan... While wartime rape may be an end in itself, it can also be used as a means of subverting community bonds, both as “war booty” and “asset stripping” as in Mozambique... or as a tool of ethnic cleansing as in Bosnia and Herzegovina, ... Rwanda ... and Sudan... In postconflict contexts women are also extremely vulnerable to rape in refugee camps. One study found that 26 percent of Burundi women in a Tanzanian camp had experienced sexual violence since becoming a refugee... In the Rwandan camps in 1994 it was reported that virtually every woman and girl past puberty had been sexually assaulted.¹⁶

Violence against women has many costs. When women and girls suffer illness, death, depression, and social isolation, countries face health care problems such as drug abuse and the spread of HIV-AIDs, as well as economic problems such as absenteeism and reduced productivity.¹⁷

To reduce sexual violence against women, states can use international treaties such as the Geneva Conventions and the Rome Statute to hold violators accountable in national courts and at the ICC. Over time, this may deter possible offenders from carrying out sexual violence.

In addition, health care providers, schools, and refugee camps can provide counseling and other services to help victims of sexual violence recover and lead healthy lives. Because violence against women often continues when war is over, it is necessary to educate all members of society about women’s rights and the high costs individuals and societies bear when they are violated. As *New York Times* columnist Nicholas D. Kristof explains, “the evidence is overwhelming that the best way to deal with rape is to demystify it, dismantle the taboos, and address it directly.”¹⁸

¹³ International Criminal Court, “The States Parties to the Rome Statute,” <http://www.icc-cpi.int/Menus/ASP/states+parties/>

¹⁴ According to the Rome Statute, genocide consists of acts intended “to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group” (Article 6). Crimes against humanity involve “a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population” (Article 7). War crimes are “grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions” (Article 8). International Criminal Court, “Rome Statute,” 1998, available at <http://www.icc-cpi.int/Menus/ICC/Legal+Texts+and+Tools/Official+Journal/Rome+Statute.htm>

¹⁵ UN Development Programme, “Millennium Development Goals: Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women,” <http://www.undp.org/mdg/goal3.shtml>

¹⁶ UN Millennium Project Task Force on Gender Equality, *Taking Action: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women*, 2005, Chapter 9, p. 114, available at http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/reports/tf_gender.htm

¹⁷ UN Millennium Project Task Force on Gender Equality, *Taking Action*, pp. 114-115.

¹⁸ Nicholas D. Kristof, “After Wars, Mass Rapes Persist,” *New York Times*, 20 May 2009, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/21/opinion/21kristof.html>

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In 1979, the GA adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This treaty came into force in 1981, when 20 states had ratified it. State that are party to CEDAW promise to:

Take all appropriate measures... to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women.¹⁹

In addition, states pledge to report every four years on the measures they have taken to improve women's rights. These reports are reviewed by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). In the reporting guidelines CEDAW specifically request information on violence against women and women and armed conflict.²⁰

In 2000, the GA negotiated an optional protocol (additional agreement) to CEDAW. States that ratify this protocol agree to allow individuals and groups to submit complaints against them to CEDAW and allow CEDAW to investigate reports of rights violations within their borders.²¹ As of 2010, 187 states have ratified CEDAW and 99 have ratified the optional protocol. Among the states that have not ratified either CEDAW or the optional protocol are Iran Sudan, and the US.²²

Women's Rights to Participate in Public Policy, Including Military and Peacekeeping Operations

States that ratify CEDAW also promise to "take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country" including "the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof ... at all levels of government" (Article 7). These states also agree "to ensure to women, on equal terms with men and without any discrimination, the opportunity to represent their Governments at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations" (Article 8).²³

Despite this treaty, in 2011, just 19% of national legislators were women.²⁴ Moreover, in 2006, just 11 of the 192 UN member states had female heads of state. Thus, less than 6 percent of the people who made the final decision about whether to fight wars and negotiate peace were women.²⁵

Occupational segregation by sex also continues at the UN. According to political scientist Francine J. D'Amico, in 2005, just 47 women were accredited as ambassadors to the UN. None served on the Security Council,

¹⁹ "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women," New York, 18 December 1979, Article 5, available at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cedaw.htm>

²⁰ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), "Compilation of Guidelines on the Form and Content of Reports to be Submitted by States Parties to the International Human Rights Treaties," HRI/GEN/2/Rev.1/Add.2, 5 May 2003, Item G1, available at <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G03/417/51/PDF/G0341751.pdf?OpenElement>

²¹ CEDAW, "Text of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women," <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/protocol/text.htm>

²² United Nations, "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women," http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en

²³ "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women."

²⁴ Inter-Parliamentary Union, "Women in National Parliaments," 31 August 2011, available at <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>

²⁵ Kofi Annan, "Message of the Secretary-General: International Women's Day," 8 March 2006, available at <http://www.un.org/events/women/iwd/2006/message.html>

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and few were head of mission. From 1976 to 2006, the number of women working in professional capacities for the UN Secretariat (in the various divisions and departments) rose from 18 percent to 38 percent. But “women employees at the United Nations are still predominantly concentrated at the lower echelons of professional staff ... and still in gendered feminine tasks of social welfare vs. security work.”²⁶ Thus, the UN workers responsible for implementing policies to reduce conflict and mitigate its effects on women are overwhelmingly men.

National military forces are also predominantly male. For example, in 2006, of the 28 members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) military alliance, Hungary had the largest percentage of women serving in the military (18 percent).²⁷ Israel (which is not a NATO member) is the only country in which military service is compulsory for both men and women. Even there, men are required to serve two years, while women are required to serve just one; thus women make up just 33 percent of the Israeli armed forces.²⁸

Even when military service is open to women, they are generally excluded from combat positions. What counts as combat varies by country. In recent years, American women have served as tank gunners and in other battlefield roles in Iraq and Afghanistan.²⁹ But the US Army excludes women from units “assigned a routine mission to engage in direct combat, or which collocate routinely with units assigned to a direct combat mission.” In 2007, 70 percent of US Army positions were open to women.³⁰ In Israel, “all face-to-face combat positions and the armored corps, including tank operators, remain closed.”³¹

The situation is much the same in UN peacekeeping forces. Peacekeeping forces are military and police forces authorized by the Security Council or General Assembly to provide security in countries emerging from armed conflict. As of July 2011, 122,000 peacekeepers were serving in 16 peace operations on four continents. These forces were contributed by 114 UN member states. According to the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), the percentage of women serving in civilian aspects of peacekeeping is 30 percent. However, only 3.3% of UN peacekeepers with military roles are women.^{32 33}

According to Rachel Mayanja, UN Assistant Secretary General and Special Advisor to the UN Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, it is imperative to increase the number of female

²⁶ Francine J. D’Amico, “Promises to Keep: Women Workers at the United Nations,” paper presented at the 2008 annual meeting of the International Studies Association, 26 March 2008, pp. 3, 5-6 available at http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/2/5/1/3/0/pages251300/p251300-1.php

²⁷ Office on Women in the NATO Forces, “Percentages of Female Soldiers in NATO Countries’ Armed Forces, 2001-2006” available at http://www.nato.int/issues/women_nato/perc_fem_soldiers_2001_2006.pdf

²⁸ Brenda Gazzar, “Israel’s Female Soldiers Face Military Inspection,” WeNews, September 12, 2008, available at <http://www.womensenews.org/story/the-world/080912/israels-female-soldiers-face-military-inspection>

²⁹ Steven Lee Myers, “Living and Fighting Alongside Men, and Fitting In,” *New York Times*, 16 August 2009, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/17/us/17women.html?_r=1&fta=y&pagewanted=all

³⁰ RAND, “RAND Study Says U.S. Army Following Defense Department Policy Barring Women from Ground Combat Units,” press release, 7 August 2007, available at <http://www.rand.org/news/press/2007/08/07/index.html#>

³¹ Gazzar, “Israel’s Female Soldiers Face Military Inspection.”

³² UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, “DPKO/OMA Statistical Report on Female Military and Police Personnel,” http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/documents/gender_sces1325_chart.pdf

³³ UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), “Fact Sheet: United Nations Peacekeeping,” June 2009, available at <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/factsheet.pdf> See also UN DPKO, “Gender Statistics,” available at <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/resources/statistics/gender.shtml>

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peacekeepers. Female peacekeepers provide good role models for young women and are often the only peacekeepers women will trust when they have been victims of sexual violence.³⁴ According to DPKO:

Women are better-placed to carry out a number of crucial peacekeeping tasks, including interviewing victims of sexual and gender-based violence, working in women's prisons, assisting female ex-combatants during the process of demobilizing and reintegration into civilian life and mentoring female cadets at police academies.³⁵

In addition, the DPKO Lessons Learned Unit has concluded that:

Women's presence improves access and support for local women; it makes men peacekeepers more reflective and responsible; and it broadens the repertoire of skills and styles available within the mission, often with the effect of reducing conflict and confrontation. Gender mainstreaming, then, is not just fair, it is beneficial.³⁶

The finding that male peacekeepers are more "reflective and responsible" when they serve with women is important. The presence of UN peacekeepers in a country has been associated with an increase in rape and prostitution.³⁷

Increasing the percentage of women in peacekeeping missions has been difficult because peacekeeping forces are loaned to the UN by member states. Therefore the percentage of women in UN peacekeeping forces depends on national military, cultural, and social factors. According to sociologist Mady Wechler Segal, among the military factors are a country's security situation, its level of military technology, the structure of its military forces, and its recruitment policies. Social factors include the state of a country's economy, the rate of female participation in the labor force, and the structure of the family. Finally, cultural factors include national ideas about gender roles and gender equality.³⁸

Whether countries are willing to have women serve in combat positions also depends on these factors. In particular, attitudes about gender traits such as aggressiveness and strength affect the roles that are open to women. It is sometimes argued that women cannot attain the same standards as men, even when they have the same training. But empirical evidence suggests otherwise.³⁹ According to the Israeli Defense Forces, "the majority of women 'perform satisfactorily in combat position trainings and carry out the tasks they are assigned very well according to their commanders.'" ⁴⁰

³⁴ Rachel Mayanja, "Statement made at the DPKO Strategy Workshop with Women's Constituencies from Troop and Police Contributing Countries," United Nations, February 7-9, 2007, 1, available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/statements/Pretoria%20statement%20Feb2007.pdf>

³⁵ DPKO, "Fact Sheet: United Nations Peacekeeping."

³⁶ DPKO Lessons Learned Unit, "Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multidimensional Peace Operations," DPKO, July 2000, p. iii, available at <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/lessons/Gender%20Mainstreaming.pdf>

³⁷ Marc Lacey, "In Congo War, Even Peacekeepers Add to Horror," *New York Times*, 18 December 2004, available at <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9D0DE1D81530F93BA25751C1A9629C8B63&sec=&spon=> See also Elisabeth Rehn and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, *Women, War, Peace: The Independent Experts' Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women's Role in Peace-Building* (Progress of the World's Women 2002, Vol. 1), Chapter 5, available at http://www.unifem.org/materials/item_detail.php?ProductID=17

³⁸ Mady Wechler Segal, "Women's Military Roles Cross-Nationally: Past, Present and Future," *Gender and Society*, 9:6 (December 1995), pp. 757-75.

³⁹ Marina Nuciari, "Women in the Military: Contributions and Problems," paper presented at the Geneva Center for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, November 2002, available at http://www.dcaf.ch/milsoc/ev_prague_02_nuciari.pdf pp. 17-19.

⁴⁰ Gazzar, "Israel's Female Soldiers Face Military Inspection."

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Ideas about the ability of women to serve in military roles can change over time with new the influence of new norms or even advancements in military technology. When it was demonstrated that US Air Force cockpits could be inexpensively redesigned to accommodate women and that this would benefit short men as well as women and increase foreign sales, the changes were quickly accepted.⁴¹ Similarly, although US military commanders have long voiced concern about the effects of women on unit cohesion, women have served in large numbers in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan with little or no detrimental effect on unit performance.⁴²

Some revolutionary groups actively recruit women for combat missions. In the 1980s, thousands of women joined the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN). These women defied the patriarchal traditions of El Salvador and left their homes and families to become members of a militant insurgency. Similarly, women made up 30 percent of the guerilla armies in Nicaragua and Peru that fought against highly trained, all-male government forces. According to sociologist Jocelyn S. Viterna, the Salvadoran women who participated in guerrilla combat fell into three groups. First were the “politicized guerrillas” who believed in the cause of the FMLN and wanted to become involved at all levels. Second were the “reluctant guerrillas,” women who fought because the conflict left them no other option. Finally, there were “recruited guerillas,” women who lived in refugee camps or repopulated areas and were recruited because they sought adventure or revenge.⁴³

Women also participate in terrorist attacks. In January 2002, Sheik Ahmed Yassin, the spiritual leader of Hamas, said Hamas would never use a female for suicide missions. But on January 14, 2004, Hamas deployed its first female suicide bomber. When questioned about the reversal, Yassin said it signified a “significant evolution in our fight. The male fighters face many obstacles...Women are like a reserve army—when there is a necessity, we use them.” Female suicide bombers provide a tactical advantage in countries where women are veiled. Also female attacks gain more publicity, which helps recruit new members.⁴⁴

Many states are trying to improve gender equality in the military. In Burkina Faso, the Ministry of Women’s Affairs has been working with the Ministry of Defense to admit equal percentages of men and women to military schools. Similarly, Jordan has implemented a 10-year strategy to enhance the role of women in the military. In France, national legislation provides equal opportunities for service in the armed forces and training.⁴⁵

Previous Committee Work on This Topic

In 1946, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) established the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) to “prepare recommendations and reports ... on promoting women's rights in political, economic, civil, social and educational fields” and make recommendations “on urgent problems requiring immediate attention in the field of women’s rights.”⁴⁶ The CSW reports to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and through ECOSOC, to the GA.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Nina Richman-Loo and Rachel Weber, “Gender and Weapons Design,” in Judith Stiehm, ed., *It’s Our Military Too: Women and the US Military* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), pp. 136-155.

⁴² Steven Lee Myers, “Living and Fighting Alongside Men, and Fitting In.” See also Nuciari, “Women in the Military: Contributions and Problems,” pp. 19-23.

⁴³ Jocelyn S. Viterna, “Pulled, Pushed, and Persuaded: Explaining Women’s Mobilization into the Salvadoran Guerrilla Army,” *The American Journal of Sociology*, 112:1 (July 2006), p. 3, available at http://www.yale.edu/macmillan/ocvprogram/OCV_Viterna.pdf

⁴⁴ Debra Zedalis, “Female Suicide Bombers,” *Strategic Studies Institute*, June 2004: 7, available at <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB408.pdf>

⁴⁵ Mayanja, “Statement made at the DPKO Strategy Workshop,” pp. 5-6.

⁴⁶ “Economic and Social Council,” *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1946-1947*, p. 529, available at <http://unyearbook.un.org/unyearbook.html?name=194647index.html>

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Since 1946, the GA has sponsored four world conferences on women. At the first, which was held in Mexico in 1975, two additional organizations were created to advance women's rights: the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).⁴⁸ The UN Division for the Advancement of Women provides these organizations with administrative support.⁴⁹

The most recent world conference on women was held in Beijing, China in 1995. The Beijing Plan of Action includes six goals for increasing female participation in conflict resolution and protecting women in conflict situations. It is the most comprehensive UN statement to date on these issues. Every four years, states that have ratified CEDAW must report on their progress in achieving these goals.⁵⁰

In May 2000, the GA adopted the Windhoek Declaration and the Namibia plan of Action on Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multidimensional Peace Support Operations (A/55/138). The declaration calls for including women in all stages of the peace process, including peacekeeping forces.⁵¹

In October 2000 the Security Council passed Resolution 1325, which urged "increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict." In Resolution 1820 (2008), the Security Council addressed sexual violence as a security issue.⁵² In 2009 the Security Council passed resolution 1888 mandating peacekeeping missions to protect women and girls from sexual violence in armed conflict, and resolution 1889 reaffirming the 2000 resolution 1325 on women and peace and security.

Conclusion

Although human rights treaties affirm that women and men have equal rights, women's rights are often violated during war, and few women participate in national and international policy making and implementation. What can and should the GA do to reduce violence against women and increase occupational equity? Are these problems related? Would women's rights be more respected if more women made policy decisions about peace and war and participated in combat and peacekeeping operations?

In researching and writing your country's position on this issue, consider the following questions:

- What percentage of your country's legislators are women? Has your country ever had a female head of state? What is the cultural and social situation in your country that results in this role for women?
- What percentage of women serve in your country's military, and in what roles? Is your country trying to increase this number? If so, why and how? If not, why not?

⁴⁷ Charter of the United Nations, Articles 62 and 68.

⁴⁸ "Key Conference Outcomes on Women and Gender Equality," United Nations, available at <http://www.un.org/esa/devagenda/gender.html>

⁴⁹ UN Division for the Advancement of Women, "About Us," available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/daw/index.html>

⁵⁰ UN Division for the Advancement of Women, "The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women: Platform for Action: Women and Armed Conflict," September 1995, available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/armed.htm>

⁵¹ "Women, Peace and Security: Women Managing Conflict," United Nations, March 8, 2001, available at <http://www.un.org/events/women/2001/background.htm>

⁵² "Women, Peace and Security: Women Managing Conflict." These resolutions are available on the Security Council website, <http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/>

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- What was the last war that was fought in or by your country? How did this war affect the rights of women and girls?
- Does your country contribute UN peacekeeping forces? If not, why not? If so, where do they serve and with what effects on women and girls?
- Has your country ratified the Geneva Conventions, the Rome Statute of the ICC, CEDAW, and/or the CEDAW optional protocol? Why or why not?
- How can the GA encourage member states to reduce violence against women and improve their participation in public policy, the military, and peacekeeping? Of these, which should be the GA's priority, and how can it best be achieved?

Recommended Reading

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). "CEDAW Country Reports."
Available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/reports.htm>

This site provides access to the most recent country report of each CEDAW member. If your country has ratified CEDAW, it is a good place to find out about the situation of women and girls in your country.

Human Rights Watch. "Women's Rights." Available at <http://www.hrw.org/category/topic/women>

HRW is a non-governmental organization that specializes in monitoring human rights worldwide. This is a good place to find out about women's rights in your country, as well as efforts by your country to improve women's rights around the world.

Myers, Steven Lee (August 16, 2009). "Living and Fighting Alongside Men, and Fitting In." *New York Times*.
Available at
http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/17/us/17women.html?_r=1&pagewanted=1&ref=todayspaper

This article discussed the role of women in US military forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. It illustrates some of the pros and cons of female military participation.

Rehn, Elisabeth and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (2002). *Women, War, Peace: The Independent Experts' Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women's Role in Peace-Building*. Progress of the World's Women, Vol. 1. Available at http://www.unifem.org/materials/item_detail.php?ProductID=17

This study by two independent experts provides a detailed and interesting account of the challenges of reducing violence against women and creating an international culture of peace.

United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women. "About Us." Available at
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/daw/index.html>

This site provides access to all of the UN agencies and agreements focused on women, including CSW, UNIFEM, and the Beijing Plan of Action. It is a good source for information about women's rights, the status of women worldwide, and UN efforts to improve women's rights.

United Nations. United Nations Treaty Collection. Available at <http://treaties.un.org/Pages/Home.aspx?lang=en>

This site provides access to the text of all treaties entered into by member states. It also lists the states that have ratified each treaty and provides their ratification statements and reservations, which provide insight into how they interpret each treaty. Use this site to find out your country's position on the Geneva Conventions, the Rome Statute of the ICC, CEDAW, and the CEDAW optional protocol.