

**Presence, Promotion, and Protection:  
Three Pillars for Advancing Women in Peace and Security**

6th AWP Global Youth Essay and Art Contest – First Prize (Essay)

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea

Heewon Seo

Word Count: 997 words

## **Presence, Promotion, and Protection: Three Pillars for Advancing Women in Peace and Security**

Since adopting the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (Resolution) in 2000, 108 member states -56% of the total- have implemented National Action Plans (NAPs) on the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda.<sup>1</sup> Yet, as recently as last year, the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General expressed concern over the “still woefully lacking” representation of women in critical roles.<sup>2</sup> This essay highlights the ongoing issues affecting women related to the WPS agenda. It aims to suggest actionable solutions to promote women’s role in peace and security, which will contribute to a more inclusive peace process. Women’s role in peace and security can be advanced in three ways: 1) their increased ‘presence’ by mandating gender quota in the peace negotiations; 2) their active ‘promotion’ by supporting grassroots initiatives as the medium between the UN or government and local community for WPS agenda monitoring and evaluation; and 3) their secured ‘protection’ from gender-based violence (GBV) arising from conflicts and displacement.

### **I. Presence: Gender Quotas in Peace Negotiations**

Increasing women’s presence through mandated gender quotas in the peace negotiations will address the persistent women’s underrepresentation in peace and security. The resolution explicitly mentions “the importance of [women’s] equal participation and full involvement.”<sup>3</sup> In 2023, however, only 9.6 per cent of peace negotiation participants were women, and none of the peace agreements reached included women representative groups as signatories. This low number signifies the need for and potential benefit from systemic improvement via gender quotas. Research shows that women’s participation increases the probability of a peace agreement lasting fifteen years by 35 per cent.<sup>4</sup> Each actor has a designated responsibility for successfully implementing the gender quota. The UN should provide standard guidelines by setting minimum thresholds and establishing monitoring by conducting regular assessments and reports on gender presentation. Financial and logistical incentives or penalties for non-compliance can encourage adherence. Each member state should work to develop a legal framework for their NAPs that requires a minimum percentage of women in peace negotiation terms. Overall, mandating the gender quota allows women to be present and acts as a platform for women to contribute to gender-inclusive and sustainable peace solutions actively.

---

<sup>1</sup> “1325 National Action Plans – an Initiative of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom.” n.d. <http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/>.

<sup>2</sup> “More Action Needed to Advance Women’s Role in Global Peace and Security | UN News.” 2023. News.un.org. October 25, 2023. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/10/1142797>.

<sup>3</sup> “Resolution 1325 (2000).” 2000. United Nations . United Nations. October 31, 2000. [https://www.un.org/shestandsforpeace/sites/www.un.org/shestandsforpeace/files/wps\\_sres1325.pdf](https://www.un.org/shestandsforpeace/sites/www.un.org/shestandsforpeace/files/wps_sres1325.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Caparini, Marina, and José Cobar. 2021. “Overcoming Barriers to Grassroots Inclusion in Peace Processes | SIPRI.” Ww.sipri.org. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. February 18, 2021. <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/blog/2021/overcoming-barriers-grassroots-inclusion-peace-processes>.

## **II. Promotion: Women-led Grassroots Initiative**

Beyond representation at the peace negotiations, promoting women-led grassroots initiatives will foster local community engagement as the advocate of the WPS agenda, which is essential to sustainable peace. The resolution emphasises the importance of protecting “the rights of women and girls during and after the conflict.”<sup>5</sup> Effective response networks at the community level could provide timely and essential support. Although women’s participation rate in formal peace negotiations is somewhat disappointing, women play critical roles at the grass-roots level of peacebuilding; for instance, 71 per cent of the informal peace process involved women’s groups in 2020.<sup>6</sup> They are deeply embedded within communities and well-equipped to address local norms. Therefore, grassroots organisations’ involvement in peace and security should be recognised, formalised, and institutionalised by giving them three primary roles. First, they become the agents to monitor the implementation of the peace agreement, hold the government accountable, and track compliance. Second, they evaluate the impact of NAPs in their communities by collecting data and reporting. To establish long-lasting mechanisms, UN agencies could train grassroots leaders, while national governments can allocate peace-building funds to women-led community organisations to ensure sustained local involvement. Lastly, linking to the previous point, grassroots representatives are involved in a formal peace process. It allows them to input women’s priorities and needs at the community level at the negotiation table. Overall, promoting women-led grassroots initiatives helps to provide evidence to assess the progress of UNSC Resolution 1325 and NAPs in the local context and, more importantly, provide them with equal opportunities to participate and be heard.

## **III. Protection: Gender-based Violence Arising From Conflict and Displacement**

Protecting women from GBV is essential for empowering them during conflicts and displacement. To promote women’s role in peace and security, supporting all women, especially those marginalised by cultural taboos and stereotypes, is crucial. The resolution concerns vulnerable women, with expanded consideration, including “refugees and internally displaced persons.”<sup>7</sup> Conflict-induced displacement exacerbates security risks for women, impacting their long-term stability even after conflicts end. For instance, in 2023, 58 million girls and women were forcibly displaced from security conflict and violence which involved 3,688 cases of sexual violence such as rape, child marriage, intimate partner violence, abduction, and forced marriages.<sup>8</sup> Protecting GBV survivors should be done in two main ways: by providing the necessary recovery assistance and opportunities for advocacy and support networks. As the

---

<sup>5</sup> “Resolution 1325 (2000).” 2000. United Nations . United Nations. October 31, 2000.

[https://www.un.org/shestandsforspeace/sites/www.un.org.shestandsforspeace/files/wps\\_sres1325.pdf](https://www.un.org/shestandsforspeace/sites/www.un.org.shestandsforspeace/files/wps_sres1325.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Dayal, Anjali, and Agathe Christien. 2020. “Reframing Women’s Roles in Peace Processes: Beyond the Negotiating Table.” <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Beyond-the-Negotiating-Table.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> “Resolution 1325 (2000).” 2000. United Nations . United Nations. October 31, 2000.

[https://www.un.org/shestandsforspeace/sites/www.un.org.shestandsforspeace/files/wps\\_sres1325.pdf](https://www.un.org/shestandsforspeace/sites/www.un.org.shestandsforspeace/files/wps_sres1325.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> UN Women. 2023. “Facts and Figures: Peace and Security.” UN Women. 2023.

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/facts-and-figures>.

initial step, it is critical to help women recover from reproductive health risks from access to comprehensive healthcare such as contraception, maternal care, and mental health support. They should have access to economic and social empowerment resources through skill-building and education, reducing dependence that often leads to vulnerability. Potentially, the GBV survivors provide invaluable insight into the peacekeeping process through survivor-led awareness advocacy and by creating peer support networks. Conclusively, the protection of women in GBV through recovery assistance and advocacy fosters their lasting resilience against the threats in the peace and security context.

In conclusion, the resolution acknowledges engaging women's perspectives in peace and security, but many areas remain to be improved. The underrepresentation of women at the peace negotiation table, the lack of connection between governmental bodies and conflict-affected communities, and the prevalent gender-based security risks undermine the agenda's objectives. By implementing gender quotas in peace negotiations, actively supporting grassroots initiatives as intermediaries for WPS agenda monitoring and evaluation, and strengthening protections against gender-based violence, the role of women is promoted to contribute to a more inclusive and resilient peacebuilding process. Empowering women through their increased presence, active promotion, and secured protection will ensure their essential contributions to peace and security and that they are effectively integrated into the global WPS agenda. It is not just a moral imperative but a practical solution. By committing to these changes, we can create a more peaceful, resilient, and equitable international community where women are recognised as essential agents of peace.