

Action plans in EU countries

United Kingdom

Amy Barrow

University of Manchester, UK and WILPF UK

What have been the activities of the UK with regards to the implementation of 1325?

The UK Government supported the adoption of 1325 in October 2000 and has raised awareness with other UN delegations of women's roles in conflict resolution by encouraging the involvement of women in peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction. Along with the UN, OSCE, NATO and the European Union, the UK has worked to develop the training of peacekeepers on gender issues and reduce sexual abuse of women by military and civilians in peacekeeping missions. However, the UK's support of 1325 at the International level did not filter down to Parliamentarians at the National level until some time after the adoption of the Resolution. At the National level there was a lack of awareness about 1325 and this is perhaps evidenced in the time-lag between the adoption of the resolution and the development of the UK National Action Plan (UK NAP), some six years later. Although there was perhaps not the impetus to create National Action Plans (NAP) until the Secretary-General's report of 13th October in 2004, prior to this, the UK did not have any specific response to 1325 in terms of legislation.

In what state is the action plan?

The UK NAP was launched on International Women's Day 2006. It is a relatively simple twelve-point action plan which covers: UK support to the United Nations; Training and Policy within HMG; Gender Justice including Gender Based Violence; Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR); and Working

with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). It has been described as a low level action plan, which sets out a detailed response, but there is a sense that this is very much a 'living' document, which focuses on action points which can be achieved realistically and in a short time frame. At present there is no gender budget or benchmarks for implementation. In a sense this reflects that the processes laid out in the UK NAP are ongoing and do not have an endpoint. Without such benchmarks however, it is difficult to monitor the success of these activities and hold policymakers to account. According to the UK Government it will be evaluated regularly, which will provide an opportunity for revisions to be made. It will be important for civil society to act as a check and balance on the government to ensure that any revisions strengthen and improve the UK NAP.

How has it been taken on by the government?

Due to the international nature of their work, the UK Government pinpointed the Ministry of Defence (MOD); the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for International Development (DFID); to be key stakeholders in the implementation of the UK NAP.

How much action has there been behind the action plan?

The Associate Parliamentary Group (APG) chaired by Joan Ruddock MP works on a tri-partite basis bringing together Parliamentarians, Civil Servants and Civil Society. This offers valuable space to table parliamentary questions relating to Women, peace and security. In April 2007, the defence secretary, Des Browne, was invited to an APG meeting to look at the issue of gender training of troops. There has also been movement to form sub-groups on Gender Training, Iraq, Afghanistan and Widowhood. FCO overseas missions have been required to reflect on their activities relating to 1325. However, in DFID's draft conflict policy paper of November 2006, there was no express mention of gender or 1325, missing a gendered understanding of how governments and non-state actors

should respond to conflict. As DFID moves towards more preventative policy goals, WILPF drafted a submission which expressed disappointment that DFID (as a key stakeholder in the UK NAP) had failed to recognize both men and women's contribution to this process and how a gender perspective should shape the overall conflict policy. The official DFID report on Preventing Violent Conflict of March 2007 did include a case study on women and peacemaking and a section on 1325 and other paragraphs on women, peace and security.

What has been the role of civil society – which groups have been involved?

In WILPF UK we have a working group on Women, Peace and Security, which lobbies the UK Government on UNSCR 1325 and works along with other organizations as part of GAPS (Gender Action for Peace and Security) which was established in June 2004. GAPS is an expert group of NGOs, academics and grassroots peacebuilders including amongst others: International Alert; Widows for Peace through Democracy and the Northern Ireland Women's Platform (NIWEP). The role of GAPS has been to monitor the inclusion of a gender perspective in security and peacebuilding policies and commitments made under 1325 and European Parliament resolution 2000/2025 and other related instruments. For further information on GAPS contact Coordinator Charlotte Onslow at gaps.uk@googlemail.com

What strategies have they pursued?

GAPS was a key participant in planning the Wilton Park conference in May 2006, which promoted the launch of the UK NAP and brought together high level policymakers, government representatives and members of GAPS. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, president of Liberia and Africa's first elected Head of State was a keynote speaker on the challenges of UN Security Council Resolution 1325. GAPS is also a key partner in an Associate Parliamentary Group on Women, Peace and Security. A key role of civil society organizations has been

awareness-raising and keeping 1325 on the agenda. WILPF has given workshops and seminars on women, peace and security to the general public and university students and GAPS recently facilitated a high profile seminar with the support of the Canadian High Commission, on how to engage men in the implementation of 1325. As an expert group, GAPS is able to connect with organizations working in conflict regions. An example of this being Widows for Peace through Democracy, founded by Margaret Owen, who are currently looking for funding to work on a mapping and profiling project to identify widows and wives of the missing. Widows for Peace through Democracy have connected with Lily Thapa from the Women's Human Rights Single Women Group in Nepal. These connections can help strengthen work at the international level to raise awareness of the discrimination against widows, whose lower social status is further exaggerated by conflict; affecting their access to land, healthcare and income.

How would you judge these strategies?

GAPS has connected organizations working on women, peace and security and provides support for United Kingdom policymakers. GAPS is currently run on a voluntary basis, with great dedication, energy and enthusiasm from all those involved. As a network, GAPS have been very effective in keeping 1325 and gender on the agenda, but funding support would help to build capacity and strengthen GAPS' ability to influence policymakers.

What are the central features that hinder the establishment of an action plan?

In March, I represented WILPF at the 4th session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva where WILPF UK lobbied Governments to adopt NAP on 1325. A country delegate expressed concern that no conflict country would produce a NAP unless other conflict countries were doing so. NAP could be seen as a tool

of rich countries, and looking at the countries which have created NAP, on the surface it appears so. We have to be careful that this does not create a North/South Divide over 1325 which is relevant in all countries. Conflict can affect us all directly or indirectly, and gender-based violence is present in all societies. A lack of resources may hinder the establishment of a NAP, but it has been suggested that NAP do not have to focus on a complex gender audit. NAP can be simple, based on a few areas where the country knows action is needed, and to which senior actors will commit and champion.

What are the problems, what can be recommended/has been proven as promising for the future?

While short term actions may see faster results, support from Governments needs to be long term and sustained. There needs to be greater accountability at the government level for implementing actions contained in the UK NAP. During a short fact-finding trip to Nepal in January, I engaged with women's organizations and grassroots activists working to implement 1325, who are also trying to push for a Nepalese NAP. Although a culture of impunity may make it difficult to implement 1325 on the ground in conflict countries, it is important that the UK Government in selecting people to work in missions overseas employ people who are supportive of the inclusion of women in peacebuilding and will take active steps to work with local civil society. It may sound like stating the obvious, but from my own experience I met negative attitudes which dismissed women's inclusion as something that was 'never going to happen.' With that type of attitude change never happens. By championing gender and with greater accountability in the future change can and will happen.