

Action Plans in EU Countries: Norway

Mari Holmboe-Ruge

IKFF/WILPF Norway

Thank you for inviting me into the EU community. This is a very important political issue in my country: "Yes or no to membership in the EU" is the European debate in a nutshell in Norway. But for this subject of this conference I am very pleased to be joining forces as it were.

As we have been given this short time and have been sent some questions beforehand, I have tried to organise my intervention according to the following questions.

The first question: What have been the activities of Norway with regards to the implementation of resolution 1325? Now I have been asked to speak on the action plan so I will restrict it to that.

The Norwegian action plan - you can see the cover - was presented exactly as in the UK on Women's Day, March 8, 2006. Our plan has been signed by five Government Ministers from our left /centre Government which at the time was quite new. And they really made it an issue to create such a plan in a hurry to have it ready. It was signed by the Foreign Affairs Minister, the Development Minister, the Defence Minister, the Police Minister and the Ministry of Equality. The aim of the plan was to strengthen, coordinate and systemize Norwegian efforts to promote international peace, security and democracy; work for increased participation and representation of women; increase the recruitment of women to peace operations; intensify our effort to safeguard women's rights to protection in conflict. This is the basis for the plan.

What state is the action plan now?

It has been in force for one year. We hoped to have a revision or a report on March 8 of this year. It didn't come. Instead, the Government provided an action plan for equality of women in development on that day. But this is not the theme for my intervention. Unfortunately, the people in the Ministry were not able to meet me in order to update me before this conference. Instead I have looked at some interventions made by politicians on this where they have raised some points which I

want to underline. This is interesting, I think, because this was the State Secretary of Foreign Affairs - he is a man - and he said, "The Government has raised gender issues in areas that have traditionally been gender-free zones." We have to look into what areas they are. But they are all carrying it over from traditional women's issues into other issues.

The Government is developing training courses on 1325 issues for personnel in the ministries and the personnel of the embassies. They have commissioned researchers to study the gender aspect of Norwegian peace negotiation efforts in some of the countries in which Norway has been active. This has been an activity of the Norwegian Government for some years, to try to be a mediator and to facilitate peace efforts in conflict zones. Now there have been some studies done. What they are saying is that in general things are improving but that much more should be done, but they have started to do it.

The Government has also put emphasis on increasing the recruitment of women into peace operations. Internationally, that is the UN in this case. In 2005, Norway offered to finance a study for the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of lessons learned. It was a joint mission by the Netherlands, the UK and Norway which went to Congo, Kosovo, Sierra Leone and Liberia. Their reports states that significant progress had been made; gender advisors are doing an excellent job; however, they say in a very diplomatic language, commitment and accountability is still limited. Norway is also a member of the United Nations' new Peacebuilding Commission. They have been given the special responsibility for Burundi. I know that they are working on establishing contact with the civil society there.

How has this been taken on by the Government?

They really have increased the budget for women and development substantially for 2007, which was the first budget that this Government presented. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs increased the amount of money for women and equality and they also made a political commitment, especially in the area of development cooperation. We may be able to give you some figures later; but I have not put it in here. They also said that the implementation of 1325 will be prioritized and gender and equality will be a general theme through focused initiatives. And they promise us that Norway shall be proactive internationally in strengthening the participation of women and the integration of gender perspective in all efforts of conflict resolution.

The Ministry of development is financing and promoting a number of 1325-related development projects. And the Minister regularly underlines the importance of this - internationally and nationally. The Minister and Ministry of defence in my country - as in others – have really been putting 1325 to use. They use it actively as a basis for recruitment of women into the military forces. This partly reflects the wish of the military to broaden their basis of recruitment, but of course also reflects the fact that international military operations are increasing. Right now in Afghanistan, 12 percent of the Norwegian military personnel are women.

The Minister of police did the same thing recruiting women into the police force. They are also preparing for international tasks to take part in. However, in the Ministry of equality – although the Minister who signed the plan - we have not been able to find any visible activity. The Ministry of education, responsible for educating the regional public, has not been involved at all and we have asked for more involvement. And we get these letters saying, "This is a good idea but we have not yet developed any plans for including 1325-matters into the curriculum. Maybe WILPG can help us?"

How much action has there been behind the plan?

My impression as an NGO person is that this was done quite rapidly, involving persons within the Ministry and researchers who were commissioned to develop the plan. However, they did not involve the NGO community in the development of the plan.

Where are we?

Again, from my point of view, the Government is working very closely with the major humanitarian organisations on international issues, including peace and security. The action plan obligates NGOs - this is new and it is very concrete - to integrate gender perspectives into the international project applications and to report on whether they succeeded or not. NGOs are also encouraged to develop 1325 relevant codes of conduct. You know what that means for the employees. But this is an encouragement. However, the women's and peace organisations have much weaker links with the Ministry. However, it was a women's organisation - not related to WILPF – that first contacted the Ministry in 2001, asking them how Norway planned to use 1325 in their ongoing work in Sri Lanka? It took a year and half before they responded to it. In 2003, a group of women's organisations – including WILPF

Norway - organised the first official meeting on 1325 in Norway. We had Elisabeth Rehn as a major speaker and because she said yes one of the politicians from the Ministry of Foreign affairs came also. And that was the first public statement in Norway about the importance of 1325. Later this group formed a network, which we call Forum Norway 1325, which is an interesting logo to us because FN is the abbreviation in Norwegian for the United Nations. So we are the 'United Nations 1325'. We like that. Although not officially invited, we contributed many proposals and new points to the Ministry during the preparation of the action plan.

What strategies, what mechanisms do we have in place?

There is a contact forum between the Ministry and the NGOs that's supposed to meet twice a year. The last meeting was held last year. They have not been able to expand on it. So it is a reporting meeting that now perhaps only happens once a year - we are not happy with that. We have tried to get funding from the NGOs to do public information, travelling road shows. Somebody said, "lovely idea." The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has said no. We are now trying to get funding from the Ministry of Equality. We have not been successful. We do maintain a website: www.fn1325.no but have problems with its updating for lack of resources.

My wish for the future is: Five sentences:

- 1) A stronger infrastructure in the Ministries. As with other women's issues, there are few persons working on 1325, they are working really hard but have capacity problems.
- 2) We want closer cooperation between the NGOs and the Ministries.
- 3) We need increased awareness on 1325 perspectives in work relating to anti-trafficking and violence against women.
- 4) We need to put much more emphasis to enable women in my country and other places to become peace activists, peace-makers in addition to being the conflict solvers and activists in post-conflict reconciliation.

5) And we need active equipment and training programs for young women who want to do international peace work but do not wish to join the military or the police. This is our main priority.

The Norwegian Action Plan for 1325 may be found at:

<http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/ud/Documents/Reports-programmes-of-action-and-plans/Reports/2006/resolution1325.html?id=420436>

A progress report for the first year was issued in June 2007, but only in Norwegian. In this report they promise to include the NGOs more closely in the work. Unfortunately we have seen few signs of this so far.