Training the UN to Have a Gender Perspective
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07.16.2009 | Culture and Society  The United Nations has tapped a University of Dayton professor to develop a training program for government officials on how to consider the impact their peace and security operations at the national and international level have on women and gender equality.

"It's a recognition that none of the work the U.N. does is gender-neutral," said Natalie Florea Hudson, an assistant professor of political science at the University of Dayton. Conflict, peacemaking, peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction affect men and women in different and critically important ways, she said.

"It's important to understand how armed conflict impacts a society beyond causalities, if the rebuilding process is going to be successful. For example, if a community loses much of its male population, what does that mean for women who have no rights, such as the right to own land? How the constitution is written, how the laws are established and enforced, how 'security' is defined — all of these have a gender component."

Hudson's training manual could influence how the international community interacts with nations like Iraq and Afghanistan as they rebuild their societies and reconstruct the roles and rights of men and women.

"When a war has ended and you're reconstructing the judicial branch or the national police — institutions that constitute the security sector — all of that has gender implications, not just for women's security, but for the gendered roles that women and men play in society," Hudson said.

In cultures where it is acceptable for women to have no voice, power or recourse in the face of violence and injustice, she said, those in power must be sensitive to the way women suffer during and after armed conflict as well as the important roles women can play in rebuilding a war-torn society. This means not only addressing peace and security issues, but also the unique cultural attitudes within that population of people.

The course, which Hudson is developing for the United Nations Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women (OSAGI), will be available online for government officials, civil servants and others. Primarily, it addresses the U.N. Security Council Resolution 1325, passed in 2000, which acknowledges the importance of gender issues in peace and security work by calling for special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence. It also calls for increased participation of women in all phases of conflict resolution and conflict management.

"The participation element is crucial here because it goes beyond seeing women as 'victims-only' by recognizing women's agency and basic rights, such as the right to participate in government," Hudson said. "Such participation is a critical component of any reconstruction effort, whether that's in East Timor or Afghanistan."

The course will take a best-practices approach to gender incorporation in conflict, highlighting successes in countries such as Liberia and Uganda, which now have national action plans in place to implement Security Council Resolution 1325.


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