

Gender and Nuclear Weapons

NPTRC, New York 5 May 2015

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Dear delegates, NGO representatives, fellow panelists, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to be here today with you to discuss a topic which is not only extremely important, but also innovative, and even groundbreaking. It is a topic that will most probably – unfortunately one must say – stay with us for some time, even though we hope to one day be able to call it a problem of the past.

For more than 150 years, the international community has been in agreement that warfare should be made less inhumane, through the rules and principles of international humanitarian law. Civilians should be protected in armed conflict. But these rules and principles are challenged or even ignored. Civilians are particularly hard hit in today's complex and protracted conflicts. This trend has to be reversed. And the ultimate threat against civilians is, of course, that of use of nuclear weapons.

Women, men, girls and boys face different threats and difficulties during and after conflict. International humanitarian law doesn't always assist in addressing these threats. The laws of war were written during a time when only men were defined as combatants and

responsibilities of women were seen as distant from the battlefield. Today, the situation regarding gender inequality when it comes to war, conflict, arms control and disarmament is complex and, I would say, multilayered.

One can easily identify a number of expressions of this inequality, ranging from for example the fact that women are often worse hit by violence in armed conflicts than men and soldiers, even after a conflict has ended, by mines, explosive remnants of war, and small and light arms; and that women are strongly underrepresented in forums and venues where disarmament and non-proliferation is discussed, both on diplomatic and technical levels; and that gender-based violence relates not only to the ultra-violence of nuclear weapons, but to all other categories of weapons and armaments.

But for today's discussion, it may be more practical to just identify two layers of issues: one is in fact of a positive character, namely that the full and active participation of women in all types of security, defence and governmental forums contributes to more including formulations of problems and thereby a larger number of possible solutions. The other, of course, the headline for our gathering here, is the disproportionate effects on women and girls of nuclear weapons.

What has struck me the most is the clarity of Mary Olson's findings, in combination with the realisation that I have never before even thought about, or read, that girls would be more at risk than boys from radiation exposure. I have studied and read about nuclear weapons for at least half of my life, but I have never once met these facts before.

This to me means two things particularly:

- 1) that the invisibility problem mentioned by Mary is a reality – that the predicaments of girls and women are to some extent hidden behind calculations and measurements pertaining to the normal person, the Reference Man, or to the normal soldier, who happens to be a man; and
- 2) that the impossibility and absurdity of use of nuclear weapons stands up clearer to me than ever before. Not that it needed any more clarity, but the additional strength that these findings give us, when we deem the use of nuclear weapons unethical, is quite striking, since they take into account half of humanity, and not only half of the presently living members of mankind, but also, because of the impact on reproductive health, all of humankind in future.

These findings and the studies behind them are of a truly revolutionary nature. They give a whole new dimension to the 70-year old problem of nuclear weapons.

Sweden of course has no direct decision-making on first-hand nuclear weapons issues. In the broader peace and security area, Swedish women are being increasingly represented, but the increase is fairly slow and more will be done. This is a stated priority of the Swedish government elected in September last year. Several units and departments within the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs have started this work within their own areas of responsibility, which definitely will make an impact in the security and defence field.

While women for the most part are equally represented as decision-makers in the Swedish Parliament and the Government offices, defence and security policy stand out as areas where women are still

underrepresented. Moreover, there is not much data on efforts to appoint women and promote a more equal gender distribution in international peace and security forums of which Sweden is a member, such as the UN, EU, the OSCE, CTBTO, OPCW or the IAEA, for example.

Since I dare say that Sweden has a reputation of being at the forefront of gender equality, this commits Sweden to be frank also about national shortcomings. It also puts pressure on Sweden to include women equally at all levels of decision-making, also in expert positions and in international delegations and meetings, as well as working for a gender perspective to influence all efforts.

Despite wide recognition of the need for more women in international peacekeeping missions, there is also in Sweden a certain lack of systematic efforts. Further, an increase of the proportion of women in the security sector does not necessarily address the need to dissolve the strong gender stereotypical attitudes that still prevail throughout the sector. For example, implementation of UNSCR 1325 does not stop at recruiting more women, but requires dismantling ideas of masculinity and challenging militarist ideas, in order to rethink what peace and security means for women and men equally.

One measure to promote women's equal participation could be to systematically investigate the motives and obstacles to women's participation in international missions, and design recruitment processes, terms of employment, and benefits accordingly.

At the same time I must add, on a positive note, that a number of important measures are being taken both on the governmental level and by NGOs, so the situation is improving nationally. And internationally, Sweden is for example active as a NATO partner state with NATO's directives to implement resolution 1325 in the organisation's work. Sweden has also seconded a gender advisor to the SHAPE headquarters, and has built up a Nordic military center for gender-related issues.

Internationally, the resolutions 1325 and 1820 were most definitely steps forward, even though the implementation of both of them leaves quite much to be desired.

Let me now briefly widen our perspective somewhat. There is a growing body of research which shows that women's security is directly related to both national and international security – and the other way around! Data indicate that the more violent a state and its citizens are towards women, the more violent that state is likely to be over all, both internally and in its dealings with the outside world. For example, Valerie Hudson wrote in *Foreign Policy* three years ago that "the very best predictor of a state's peacefulness is not its level of wealth, its level of democracy, or its ethno-religious identity. The best predictor is how well its women are treated."

This thinking has profound implications. Most politicians rarely see women's rights as having a direct impact on international security issues. But based on this way of thinking, a foreign policy which tries to improve gender equality might also improve the acting state's own security and that of its neighbours.

This is the direction in which Swedish foreign policy will go. In its center will be efforts to ensure women's rights and gender equality. This is not just because it is the right thing to do, but also because it's conditional to progress with regard to Sweden's wider peace and security agenda.

Internationally, it's often the case that women's and girls' rights tend to remain somewhat isolated, mainly addressed through development cooperation and contexts exclusively concerned with women. These issues should be brought to the core of strategic discussions on peace and security. Failure to do so will inevitably hamper efforts by the international community to achieve peace, development, and stability. And it goes without saying that the ultimate proof of such a failure would be if the ultra-violence of nuclear weapons would once again hit women and girls somewhere on Earth.

Thank you.