

Conference Report „Implementation of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in the Countries of North Africa and the Middle East“, 28th March 2012

In the light of the revolutionary movements in many North African countries which started in early 2011 important transformation processes have been set in motion in the region. NATO in cooperation with the Multinational Dialogue on Development Policy of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung decided to initiate a conference on the transitions in North Africa and implementation of UNSCR 1325 on women, peace and security in order to raise the awareness of both the special needs of women as well as their potential. The aim of the conference was to discuss the added value and effectiveness of an increased participation of women both during armed conflicts and in the political side of transformation processes. The event in the context of the 1st anniversary of the Arab Spring connected active women's rights activists from Tunisia, Libya, Jordan and Morocco with stakeholders which deal with different aspects of Security Sector Reform processes. Role models in the region such as Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Tawakkol Karman from Yemen and peace activist, Hibaaq Osman from Somalia, who both participated actively in the conference and briefed NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen on the situation in the region, advocated for an increased inclusion of women in the decision-making processes.

In her key note address the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate not only drew attention to the fact that UNSCR 1325 starts with the protection of women and children and the responsibility of the international community to protect - citing the example of Syria, but also aired her concern that the current transition processes in the region sideline the initial triggering actors - Women and the Youth - in the set-up of new decision-making structures. While in some cases Islamist forces gain ground in others elite-recycling takes place to the detriments of democratisation.

The conference although focusing on the MENA-region highlighted the on-going challenges for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 on national or supra-national level. 12 Years after Resolution 1325 has been passed in the UN-Security Council, it remains necessary for all stakeholders be they multilateral, national, from government or civil society to join hands in the endeavour to strengthen the implication of women in peace processes and security related matters.



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The first panel looked into the status quo in international operations conducted by NATO, the European Union and the AU. What role do and have women played, what kind of progress has been made in their involvement in peace-missions? In addition, the respect for women's rights and the main challenges from an operative but also political/civil-military perspective guided the discussion of General Ivan Beneta, CIMIC Director and Chair of the Allied Command Operations Gender perspective Working Group, NATO; Jeanne Flora Kayitesi, Programme Director, Women's Rights Directorate of Women, Gender, and Development, African Union Commission; Timothy Clarke, Head of Division A4, Partnerships and Military Capabilities, Crisis Management and Planning (CMPD), European External Action Service. Whereas NATO already has enshrined UNSCR 1325 in policy documents, planning documents for joint operations and establishes a related reporting system, the European Union only a few days before the conference approved the implementation of UNSCR in its civil-military missions (Council Meeting, 23.03.2012). For both organizations it is pertinent to train mission staff on all levels on UNSCR 1325 in order to overcome the perception that UNSCR 1325 is "just a women's" issue and to realize, as NATO's Deputy Assistant Secretary General PDD, Dr. Stefanie Babst, expressed it in her introductory remarks, "UNSCR 1325 is about a democratic and human right that we all need to help implement". The example of the African Union certainly showed that the right legal framework needs to be in place but the difference can only be made when declarations and Chartas are filled with life on the ground through continuous and comprehensive trainings (on national level as well as in the regional peacekeeping centres), institutional structures such as gender focal points in missions and an overall change in attitude. Despite its engagement for women rights since the creation of the African Union, severe challenges still remain in the context of conflict and post-conflict situations. Violations of women as an instrument of war continue, women remain marginalized in peace processes but also in post-conflict reconstruction initiatives. Although most African States have ratified UNSCR 1325 and the relevant AU protocols, domestication of its obligations into national law has not been taken place, so far.

The second panel directed its focus to the MENA-region where the unfolding transition processes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen have clearly demonstrated that it is one thing to overthrow a dictator but another to replace the authoritarian regime with a functioning democratic society and state. Although the Arab Spring has received copious attention in the European Media, one crucial element has been rather neglected: the striking role of women in the protests sweeping the Arab world. In panel II women's rights



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and political activists from Morocco, Jordan, Libya, Tunisia discussed about the question, whether the democratic value of equality and women's rights are slowly getting dispersed from the transitional agenda when particularly islamist parties are gaining ground.

In Libya where the challenges are not only in managing a transition but in re-building a collapsed state structure, women played a prominent role which was underlined by panellist, Maysoon Tughar, a women's rights activist and independent consultant for private sector investment. In the overthrow of the Gaddafi-regime women provided moral, medical and psychological but also logistical support by smuggling weapons. However, the decision-making process and later set-up of the National Transitional Council remained in the hands of men. The panellist feared that in the name of Islam, culture and tradition, women's rights might become further reduced as already nowadays women enjoy less civil liberty than the previous generation and particularly those of the 60s did. In the fight for women's rights and democratic values, Maysoon Tughar called on the international community and particularly NATO to remain engaged in Libya and to accompany the transition process further.

The situation of Morocco, where reforms have been gradually introduced by the king and a new family law promoted the rights of women, was presented by Prof. Omama El Kettani, academic and communication expert and Adv. Fadela Sebti, lawyer and human rights activist since the early 80s. Prof. El Kettani reminded the audience that the driving force for the protests and the subsequent revolutions was rather the demand of citizens for a life in dignity than for democracy. The transition processes in the MENA-region take place in a context which differs in its adherence to democratic values and which makes the strife for gender equality extremely challenging. Adv. Sebti also expressed her concern that the Arab Spring might provide opportunities for islamist parties to further narrow the space for women participation. Particularly, in Morocco where the constitution highlights the religious character of the state and religious parties showcase women in ministerial ranks but with weak portfolios and no power, women empowerment becomes a farce in itself.

Nermeen Murad, the Managing Director of the Information and Research Centre of the King Hussein Foundation in Jordan and a staunch advocate for women and child rights informed the public about the nature of Jordan's top-down reforms initiated by King Hussein and driven by its established elites. A reform process, where neither Women nor the Youth are part and parcel of the reform dialogue and where regressive tendencies can



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be observed. The most prominent and sad example has been the rejection of the article on gender equality by the committee for constitutional reform. Although Jordan tries to keep up its image of a modern, Western Style monarchy, the complex mix of nationalism and tradition create a socio-political culture which reveals a substantially different image behind the scenes. Ministers promoting the head-scarf for women, lack of empowerment of the latter and on-going impunity for acts of sexual harassments and domestic violence are spots on the white image the government tries to keep up.

The most positive assessment of the situation women are facing in the current transitions came from Tunisia. Adv. Salma Slama, professor of private law at the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences in Tunis and advocate for women's and children's rights reported on the prominent role women played in the uprising against Ben-Ali's regime irrespective of the fact that he had tried to establish the image of a modernist in favour of women empowerment. In Tunisia the fact that for the first free multiparty elections held in October 2011, 7% of candidates on party lists had to be women has been lauded. However, despite the sweet icing on top, the base and large majority of women outside of the urban elite remain marginalised due to high rates of analphabetism due to low levels of school enrolments for girls.

After the evaluation of the current situation in the MENA-region and its consequences for women's rights, panel III explored the concrete question of what further needs to be done to integrate women's rights in military and civilian-military structures - A question particularly pertinent when most countries do not even have National Action Plans drafted. The initial idea of the conference to provide the opinion from the respective ministries in the MENA-region and thus to engage them into a closer interaction with civil society could not be fully realised given that besides of the case of Tunisia, where the Ministry of Defence seconded Major Colonel, Fawzia Behia, no other Ministry from the MENA-countries followed the invitation. Tunisia already started under the Ben-Ali regime to integrate women into its defence forces although not in combat positions. Medicine, information technologies, justice are areas where women can engage. In addition Tunisia prepares its peace-keeping mission staff with special seminars on women rights.

Dr Wafa Al-Khadra, women's rights activist and professor for American and Comparative literature at Al-Ahliyya Amman University, Jordan, saw a point of weakness in Jordan's reform process which already started a couple of decades ago, in the emulation of reform

and the imposition of paradigms ignorant of cultural specificities. This created a certain dependency on international architects and lacks reciprocity within large segments of society. In turn, the recent waves of nationalisation created systemic clashes and led to derogatory attitudes towards modernisation. In the security sector Jordan still follows an outdated very traditional paradigm and although the country is recipient of thousands of migrants and refugees from the region and UNSCR 1325 bears particular importance, so far no necessary steps for further implementation have been undertaken. However, this weakness also has to be seen in the broader picture where women are not or under-represented in the respective ministries and are not sufficiently able to lobby for UNSCR 1325 as a democratic and human right. Khaled Hayet, gender violence specialist and Director Assistant in the Centre de Recherche, d'Etudes, de Documentation et d'Information sur la femme, Tunisia, draw attention to the widespread sexual violence that occurred during the Arab Spring and affected women. A phenomenon which also relates to the high levels of domestic and sexual violence within societies in the region and which until now constitutes an anathema in public discussions. Besides of creating the necessary legal frameworks for women rights in the Arab world, more awareness raising campaigns both for women and the broader public Khaled Hayet also underlined the need for all stakeholders to join hands in order to advance the implementation of UNSCR 1325. Hibaaq Osman, Founder and CEO of Karama, Egypt confirmed the lack of adequate legal frameworks in Arab countries be it for domestic violence or in order to strengthen women representation in parliament (citing the example of 1.6% of women represented in the Egyptian parliament). From her own experience as a women's rights advocate she alluded the audience that even one decade after its creation UNSCR 1325 still does not feature prominently on the agenda of most women's organisations. They might work towards the values but with a kind of unconscious adherence. Hibaaq Osman equally underlined that an exclusive rights-based approach as such is not sufficient and that the role of women in Arab societies largely depends on and is linked to their socio-economic development.

In his final remarks, Ambassador Alexander Vershbouw, Deputy Secretary General of NATO, confirmed NATO's dedication to support the development of democratically accountable security institutions in its partnership activities. This implies the challenge to improve the role of women in the security sector as well as the adherence to and promotion of women's rights. If women were not active participants in peace-building, reconciliation and development, so says Ambassador Vershbouw, "then the views, needs and interest of half of the world's population are not represented."