

## Women among paper tigers

**Maj Britt Theorin**

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*How to finish what we started - Maj Britt Theorin, formerly of the European Parliament's Committee of Women's Rights and Equality, on retrieving the year 2000's resolutions on women in peace-building, from dusty office drawers.*

Five years ago, two important events occurred. The UN Security Council adopted resolution 1325, demanding that member states increase the representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict.

And the European Parliament (EP) adopted a resolution on the participation of women in peaceful conflict resolution, demanding that member states include at least 40% women in all reconciliation, peace-keeping, peace-enforcement, peace-building and conflict preventive posts – including fact-finding and observer missions.

The EP resolution not only calls for the participation of women but it also demonstrates what has to be done to prevent and solve armed conflicts. It shows that analyses and policies regarding conflicts have long been gender-blind, and that women as civilians are more likely than soldiers to be killed during armed conflict, and raped and sexually assaulted. Women are generally absent from official initiatives to end conflicts and more or less totally absent from all peace negotiations.

So, since 2000, what has happened? How far have we come in implementing these resolutions?

Even when a resolution achieves an overwhelming majority in the European Parliament, nothing happens if the European Commission does not bring it back to the European Parliament and the European Council with concrete proposals for their decision. So far, no proposal has come from the European Commission, where the adopted EP resolution seems to stay stuffed in a drawer.

EU governments must demand that the Commission present a proposal on how to guarantee that women partake in all areas of peace-building. All European governments should develop Action Plans for the participation of women in conflict resolution. These should be public and drawn up in consultation with civil society, particularly with women's groups. They should be evaluated on a yearly basis. They can include gender education for all soldiers and police forces in order to avoid rape, prostitution and sexual abuse. Civilian observers – including women – should follow in the footsteps of military troops to monitor them, ensuring that international law is observed. The plans should also include the education of women in

negotiation and reconciliation in order to recruit women as UN special envoys to peace commissions.

UN SCR 1325 risks being no more than a paper tiger if nothing more concrete happens in the UN. Here, it is up to the Security Council to see that 1325 is fully implemented in all member states. The Security Council must therefore demand yearly National Action Plans for the management and implementation of resolution 1325. And the new UN Peace Mission must secure the full participation and influence of women.

“Operation 1325” in Sweden includes six women’s organisations: International Women’s League for Peace and freedom (IKFF), Women for Peace, Nation League for International Organisations of Immigrant Women (Riffi), Swedish UNIFEM, Swedish

Ecumenical Women’s League and Swedish Women’s Lobby. With economic support of the Foreign Ministry we inform and engage women about the implementation of 1325, create public opinion and force government and parliament to act in line with 1325, educating women and women’s organisations to create an invaluable resource base for women on peace missions to conflict areas.

It is now up to all of us to organise and put pressure on governments and parliaments in order to prevent a recurrence of the attitude I met when I introduced my resolution on women and conflict to the European Parliament five years ago. The chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee said to me: “You women should not involve yourselves in such matters. Don’t you understand that we men fight – for you”.

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*Maj Britt Theorin, a Swedish MEP in the Party of European Socialists from 1995 onwards, was chairperson of the Committee of Women’s Rights and Equality in the European Parliament from 1999-2002. She is also well known as a former ambassador for disarmament.*

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