

Cyprus

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Introduction

Cyprus does not have a National Action Plan (NAP) on United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 but it has adopted a National Strategic Plan on Equality for 2014-2017.¹ Unfortunately, this plan does not address the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda and does not even include any references to UNSCR 1325 in its objectives. The prevalent narrative of the government is that in the frozen conflict, known to the international community as the 'Cyprus Problem'², the issue of equality is only included in terms of ethnicity.

The National Machinery for Women's Rights (NMWR) under the Ministry of Justice and Public Order is the main coordinating body for the promotion of gender equality in the Republic of Cyprus. Headed by the Gender Equality Commissioner, it:

- advises the Council of Ministers on policies, programmes and laws promoting women's rights;
- monitors, coordinates and evaluates the implementation and effectiveness of these programmes and laws;
- provides information, education and training programmes on relevant issues;
- contributes to the mobilisation and sensitisation of the public sector on equality issues;
- serves as a channel for co-operation between the Government and women's organisations and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working on gender equality and women's rights.

The National Strategic Plan on Equality is significant in that it incorporates a holistic approach to gender equality addressing six priority areas: employment, education, decision-making, social rights, violence against women (VAW) and gender stereotypes. The Plan was developed in close collaboration with all government departments and local authorities as well as women's organisations and other NGOs.

The UN's Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) noted several gaps and weaknesses and has made a series of recommendations for UN member states and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) concerning:

- 1) Upgrading / strengthening of national mechanisms for the promotion of women's rights and improved coordination of equality bodies;
- 2) Eliminating legal discrimination and monitoring the implementation of equality legislation;
- 3) Informing citizens, particularly women, about their rights to recourse to judicial and legal mechanisms.

Despite the overall approach to addressing gender equality, the National Strategic Plan fails in implementing UNSCR 1325, as it makes no references to women's participation in peacebuilding. In fact what is disconcerting about the document is that it reads as if the frozen conflict does not exist.

¹ The Strategic Action Plan for Equality 2014-2017 replaces the Strategic Action Plan for Equality 2007-2013.

² The island of Cyprus is divided into the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), which is only recognised by the Republic of Turkey, and the Republic of Cyprus, which is a EU Member State. Since the Government of the Republic of Cyprus is internationally recognised as the government of the whole of the island of Cyprus, the entire territory is considered to be part of the European Union (EU). However, the *acquis communautaire* is suspended in the TRNC pending a political settlement to the Cyprus Problem.

Where are the women in the peace process?

Women are still missing from the official negotiation table and the closed-door policy discussions around a negotiated agreement. Both negotiating teams from the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot sides have failed to see the necessity of including UNSCR 1325 as part of the pathway towards a sustainable solution to the Cyprus Problem. While the term “gender” includes women, girls, men and boys, an adequate understanding of its impact in formal discussions and possible solutions to the Cyprus Problem amongst the members of the negotiating team is not fully understood.

Civil society initiatives to include UNSCR 1325 in the peace process

CSOs, specifically those focused on women’s issues continue to advocate for the inclusion of a gender perspective in the peace negotiations. Women’s organisations have taken on the responsibility of educating and advocating for a change in the status quo.

In October 2009, a Gender Advisory Team (GAT) was formed by a group of representatives of CSOs, including members of Hands Across the Divide (HAD)³ with the aim of ensuring that gender equality would be integrated into the peace negotiations. GAT worked with the UN Secretary-General’s (SG) Mission of Good Offices in Cyprus on issues related to gender and citizenship, property, governance and the economy. It has also worked with HAD, the Cyprus Women’s Lobby and the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies to lobby for change in the public discourse regarding the inequalities women experience in Cyprus. Together, these organisations advocated for women’s inclusion in the official peace negotiations, women’s representation in the House of Representatives, amendments to the legislation on violence against women and girls (VAWG) and the adoption of a gender lens in the education system.

In May 2015, the Cyprus Women’s Lobby raised the issue of the lack of women’s participation in the peace negotiations in Cyprus during the European Women’s Lobby’s (EWL) General Assembly. As a result, EWL’s plenary committee passed an emergency motion in which it called for the leaders of both communities to implement UNSCR 1325 and to ensure that women accounted for 50% of both negotiating teams. EWL also repeated these requests in letters which it sent to the leaders of the two communities, the two lead negotiators, the Special Adviser to the UNSG on Cyprus and the Head of the UN’s Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP).

In late May 2015, the two leaders announced that a Gender Equality Technical Committee (GETC) made up of men and women from CSOs and academia from both the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot communities would be appointed as part of the ongoing confidence building measures (CBMs). The GETC was set up in August 2015 as part of the fifth CBM but the process for selecting members lacked transparency. Given the closed-doors nature of the peace negotiations it remains very unclear if gender issues are now addressed in the discussions. Media coverage of the issue of gender in the peace talks is minimal at best and there remains limited dialogue with local women’s organisations and other CSOs as GETC meetings are not public. Although the setting-up of the GETC has the potential to promote the inclusion of a gender perspective in the official peace talks its members have not reached out to other CSOs because they are bound by a confidentiality clause.

The need for support from international actors (especially the UN’s Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and the European External Action Service’s Principal Advisor on Gender and on the implementation of UNSCR 1325) for the promotion of gender into the peace talks has never been greater. Simply calling upon warring parties to adopt a ‘gender perspective’ in peace talks is hollow and meaningless unless the international community also provides real opportunities and support for women to participate in peace negotiations and to be equally represented at all levels of decision-making in the peace talks.

Conclusion

³ HAD is the first women’s only bi-communal NGO on the island made of Turkish and Greek Cypriot members.

There are several issues we suggest to the EU and the Principal Gender Advisor could address:

- 1) Provide political support and gender expertise to peace negotiation teams on both sides;
- 2) Bring together government officials, women's organisations and the UNFICYP to develop a NAP on UNSCR 1325;
- 3) Illustrate the leadership roles women can play to bring peace to their communities and the nation through awareness raising and advocacy training;
- 4) At the local and community levels, better and more creative outreach strategies are needed to highlight cases where women have played roles as leaders, entrepreneurs and role models, especially when Cyprus will not recognise them. EU's funding at local and community level could make a difference in that matter.
- 5) Facilitate the identification and appointment of qualified women as mediators and provide adequate training to CSOs, policy makers, politicians and peace negotiation teams on gender issues across the range of subjects addressed in the peace negotiations.

Women's participation in the Cyprus peace process remains one of the most unfulfilled aspects of the women, peace and security agenda in Cyprus. Cyprus remains stagnant in its implementation of UNSCR 1325 because there has been a lack of integration of women into the formal peace processes.