PRIO Launches New Centre on Gender, Peace and Security

PRIO Gender, Peace and Security Update

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The PRIO Gender Peace and Security Update is an electronic newsletter launched by PRIO’s Gender Research Group in response to growing interest among the public for information about women, peace and security issues. The newsletter will keep readers informed of the latest developments both internationally and in Norway in relation to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security and subsequent resolutions.

PRIO is pleased to announce the launch of a new PRIO Centre on Gender, Peace and Security. Over the last decade, PRIO has positioned itself as the leading scholarly community in Norway for research on gender, peace and conflict. The centre will build on this gender research work to consolidate achievements and strengthen PRIO’s competence in gender, peace and security studies.

Building on existing research and competence

The new centre has its foundations in the work of the PRIO gender team under the Gender, Conflict and Peacebuilding research project, established in 2006. The project has been funded by the MFA on an annual basis. As of 2015 PRIO is entering into a multi-year funding agreement with the MFA, which allows for the establishment of a centre.

Gender team members including Inger Skjelsbæk, Helga Hernes and Jenny K. Lorentzen will continue to form the core staff at the new centre, together with PRIO senior researcher Dr Torunn L. Tryggestad, who will take up the position as centre Director.

Tone Allers, Deputy Director General of the Section for Peace and Reconciliation at the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), explains the decision behind supporting the establishment of the centre:

“Throughout the years, PRIO has produced and disseminated high quality research and promoted the agenda on
women, peace and security through conferences and training. It has already established itself as a highly regarded hub on the issue. Establishing a centre is a way of making this knowledge and capacity more visible and strategic.”

From research project to Centre

When the MFA started to prepare a national action plan to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in the autumn of 2005, it became clear that there was a need for a scholarly environment in Norway on gender, peace and security. As Tryggestad, the incoming Centre Director, explains:

“There was a lot of dialogue back and forth about the need for more scholarly resources on gender issues in relation to peace and security. At the time there was little research being done on this.”

In 2006, the MFA-funded Gender, Conflict and Peacebuilding research project was established at PRIO in order to focus on gender. Up until that point, it had mainly been Inger Skjelsbæk who had been doing research on gender issues at PRIO. Since 2006, there has been a core group of four people working on the research project, producing cutting-edge research on themes including the women, peace and security agenda and conflict-related sexual violence.

Tryggestad reflects on other achievements of the project that have contributed to the decision to develop the project into a Centre:

“Beyond our own activities on issues surrounding the women, peace and security agenda and conflict-related sexual violence, we have encouraged other colleagues at PRIO to also pay attention to gender dimensions – how gender is relevant to their own research projects.

I think it is really encouraging and quite an achievement to see that we now have a Gender Research Group at PRIO with 25 members, so it’s not only the core gender team of four people working on gender issues. A number of colleagues have now integrated a gender dimension or gender as a variable into their more mainstream projects on peace and conflict studies.”

Centre core activities

Building on the work of the gender team under the previous Gender, Conflict and Peacebuilding project, the new centre will focus its activities around four main pillars: research and publishing; teaching and training; conferences, workshops and seminars; and policy advice and public outreach.

Now with a new multi-year funding agreement with the MFA to establish the Centre, gender research at PRIO can develop even further and its competence in this area can be strengthened, explains Tryggestad:

“We can now plan with a much longer horizon and look into recruiting more people to work on topics we think are important but that we haven’t had the capacity or competence to address yet.

And the fact that we are now moving up one step – from a project to a centre – says something about PRIO’s commitment to this research agenda; that it is important for PRIO’s research portfolio and seen as highly relevant also in the years to come.”

In research and publishing, the centre will continue conducting research under the broader gender, peace and security topic. Ongoing research projects deal with issues such as the advancement of the women, peace and security agenda, sexual violence and transitional justice, gender in UN-led conflict mediation, and gender equality in Norway’s peace engagement.

The centre also aims to expand research to new issues such as masculinities and male perspectives. This reflects the decision to name the centre the Centre on Gender, Peace and Security, as Tryggestad explains:

“We want to focus on the term ‘gender’ as it’s supposed to be understood – that it is about both men and women and...
that gender is not about women only. So although most of our gender research projects at PRIO have focused on women, our ambition is also to gradually establish projects that are looking into masculinity issues, the role of men in peacebuilding and peace processes, and the relationship between the two genders.”

In terms of teaching and training, the centre will continue to offer an introductory lecture on gender, peace and security at the University of Oslo during the Oslo Summer School. Teaching at the Centre will also expand to include a Gender, Peace and Conflict course and a course on transitional justice with a focus on sexual violence in conflict at the PRIO Research School.

The centre will continue to offer the training initiative High-Level Seminar on Gender and Inclusive Mediation Processes, together with the Crisis Management Initiative in Finland and the UN Department of Political Affairs. This initiative is regarded by the MFA as an example of the ‘important work PRIO has done when it comes to developing tools for practitioners in mediation,’ according to Tone Allers.

The centre also plans to expand the training of personnel working on gender, peace and security issues in the Norwegian government ministries. Previous training for the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence provided by the PRIO gender team has been valuable in helping ministries understand what the women, peace and security agenda is about and how to translate the normative framework into practice, explains Tryggestad, who believes there is a need to expand this training to more government institutions.

Through conferences, seminars and workshops, the centre will continue to be a platform for exchanging ideas and knowledge. The gender team has been involved in many such activities including the Missing Peace Symposiums in the US (featured in the 2013-1 newsletter issue) and Uganda (see this issue), in addition to a range of mini-seminars and workshops held at PRIO.

Tryggestad says the centre will be a space for disseminating research findings and where dialogue and discussion can take place in order to develop the centre’s research agenda and identify interesting questions to explore. This space will be open to people from all sectors interested in gender, peace and security issues, as Tryggestad says: ‘We want to bring together different kinds of people – not only researchers but also people representing NGOs and policy-makers to discuss burning issues.’

With policy advice and public outreach, Tryggestad says the centre will have a close dialogue with the relevant Norwegian ministries and other official institutions to provide policy input based on the centre’s research. It will continue to share information on work by the centre and others through, for example, social media, op-ed pieces and the PRIO Gender, Peace and Security Update newsletter. Tryggestad also hopes the centre will be a place journalists can turn to when writing about issues dealing with gender, peace and security:

“We aim to be a resource centre that can help in providing interesting information; not only our own research, but also research that we keep track of from all over the world and among our partners.”

Broader contribution and impact

As a centre, the gender research work at PRIO will have greater reach and impact. Tryggestad says the centre can contribute greatly as a resource hub for people in all sectors working on gender, peace and security issues and that the centre will benefit not only the scholarly environment but also the general public, journalists, students, the NGO sector and the government.

In particular, Tone Allers believes the centre can make important contributions to the MFA’s work on gender, peace and security issues by ‘continuing to provide quality research and policy briefs, and by focussing more on the operational level, for example by mapping expertise and experiences, and making them available to actors involved in peace processes.’

The centre also plans to build stronger collaboration with partners in the Global South. As Tryggestad explains, this will help bring more voices and knowledge from the Global South into the academic discourse on gender, peace and security, which has largely been dominated by voices from the Global North.

Conference on Accountability for Sexual Violence

Over 100 practitioners from six African countries met in Kampala, Uganda, on 26-28 August for the ‘Missing Peace Practitioners’ Workshop’ on accountability for sexual violence during and after conflict. The focus was on building local capacity as a way to increase accountability.

The conference was a follow-up event to the Missing Peace Symposium in Washington DC in 2013, which was featured in a previous issue of this newsletter, and was the third event in a series of Missing Peace Initiatives, which are co-organized by PRIO, the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), Women in International Security (WIIS), and The Human Rights Center at University of California Berkeley. The
Participants and organisers at the Missing Peace Practitioners’ Workshop in Kampala, Uganda. Photo: Human Rights Center

conference in Uganda was primarily organized by the Human Rights Center at University of California Berkeley School of Law with the Uganda Fund.

The aim of the conference was to bring together practitioners from law, law enforcement and health to exchange knowledge, tools and techniques in reporting, investigating and prosecuting sexual violence, and supporting survivors based on their experiences working on the ground. PRIO research professor Inger Skjelsbæk, who is a leading scholar on conflict-related sexual violence and a member of the Missing Peace Steering Committee, attended the conference and reflects on the conference’s objective:

“Implementing political goals such as combatting sexual violence crimes in armed conflict is dependent on a series of details, everyday practices and norms. Open discussion and exchanges of learning are therefore essential.”

The conference’s focus on practitioners reflected the important role of local actors in providing accountability for international crimes of sexual violence. Skjelsbæk explains that ‘criminal prosecution of sexual violence perpetrators is essential to combat impunity for these crimes’, and bodies like the International Criminal Court, which deals with sexual violence as an international crime that threatens international peace and security, provide an important opportunity to do so.

But for acts of sexual violence to be considered international crimes, accountability must first be established at the national level by national authorities. Local practitioners therefore play a crucial role in providing that accountability through reporting, investigating and prosecuting cases of sexual violence.

However, the role of local actors in providing accountability is hindered by a range of challenges. These challenges have been identified in a new, four-country study entitled ‘The Long Road: Accountability for Sexual Violence in Conflict and Post-conflict Settings’, conducted by the Human Rights Center.

The Human Rights Center’s study finds a range of barriers to establishing accountability, such as social stigma towards sexual violence that deters survivors from reporting such violence and choosing to be involved in prosecution procedures; a lack of resources and training among nurses and police officers that hinder their work in providing evidence, which affects prosecution; and an unwillingness among some local workers to investigate sexual violence cases.

The study, which was launched at the conference, provided the starting point for discussions, where participants explored strategies to strengthen accountability mechanisms based on study findings. Skjelsbæk recommends that others, including PRIO researchers, adopt this kind of conference format. A conference report reflecting the discussions at the conference will also complement the initial study, according to Skjelsbæk.

One such valuable addition was the discussion by a panel of health workers, police and NGO workers who are first responders to sexual violence survivors. The panel explored ways to provide accountability through survivor-centred approaches, as Skjelsbæk who chaired the panel explains:

“We discussed how important it is to meet various survivor groups – women, men and children – in appropriate ways that both help the survivors to get adequate health and psychosocial assistance, while also attempting to secure evidence for criminal prosecution. This is a complex task for first responders.”

The Human Rights Center announced at the conference that it will create an online repository of resources, such as training manuals, that will make access to resources easier for practitioners working in different countries. Another
important outcome of the conference was that it inspired plans for more future collaboration among practitioners to improve criminal prosecution as well as psychosocial assistance. Reflecting on these outcomes, Skjelsbæk found that ‘the sentiment at the conference was that people found the discussion and exchange very useful, and wished to maintain networks for mutual exchanges of experiences and lessons learned.’

New themes raised at the conference will inform the next event by the Missing Peace Initiative. And according to Skjelsbæk, they will aim to achieve the same outcomes of ‘bringing together academic scholars and practitioners to discuss what the knowledge needs are and how the existing research can be used by practitioners and policy makers.’

Gender Dynamics in US Presidential Elections

Hilde Eliasson Restad, Associate Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies at Bjørknes College, Oslo, gave a talk at the seminar ‘Cracking the Glass Ceiling’ at PRIO on 21 August, chaired by PRIO senior researcher Torunn L. Tryggestad.

Restad discussed gender dynamics in US presidential elections, namely the nomination races of 2008 and 2016 and Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton, and asked whether the 2016 race will be different from 2008 – a race characterized by gender bias.

Restad opened by asking whether the seminar was necessary – ‘maybe there’s no problem at all?’ She quickly answered this by revealing the extent of gender bias in the 2008 race, including the US media’s sexism towards Clinton. Emphasis was given to Clinton’s weight, age and choice of clothes over her position on the issues, illustrating the ‘extra hurdles female candidates have to jump’, as Restad put it. During the discussion, PRIO senior advisor Helga Hernes suggested that in US elections female candidates face a ‘media ceiling’ rather than a ‘glass ceiling’.

In contrast to the media’s fixation on Clinton as a female candidate, Restad pointed out that Clinton centred her 2008 campaign on being the most experienced person, rather than on the historic nature of her candidacy as a woman. In comparison, Restad showed that the 2016 race signals a shift in emphasis; today Clinton appears less concerned about playing down her femininity and focuses on being both an experienced and a woman candidate. She is also paying more attention to gender issues.

Restad has written a piece based on the seminar for PRIO’s Blog, available online. A video of the seminar is also available on PRIO’s website.

Women, Peace and Security in Bosnia Today

In 1995, the signing of the Dayton Accords marked the end of more than three years of war in Bosnia. Women in particular suffered during the war, and many women were victims of systematic rape and sexual enslavement. Twenty years later, what is the situation for women, peace and security in the country?

To answer this question, FOKUS and PRIO invited a panel of experts on women, peace and security in Bosnia to the seminar ‘Bosnia 20 Years after the War’, held on 9 September at PRIO. The panel included Vanja Matic, Gender Officer at OSCE Bosnia and Herzegovina; Ingrid Vik, Head of Unit for Analysis and Research at FOKUS and former director at Nansen Dialogue Centre; and Inger Skjelsbæk, Research Professor at PRIO.

The panellists described a situation of despair in Bosnia today, with the main issues being lack of support and justice for women who were victims of gender-based violence during the war. Matic explained that survivors do not receive the necessary support, and are offered ‘knitting programmes’ rather than psychological support.

It remains to be seen how the 2016 race will differ as regards gender bias and media sexism in particular. Restad questioned, however, whether the sexism in the 2008 race will deter women from running for presidential nomination in the future. As the 2016 race unfolds, Restad also pointed to other emerging gender dynamics. For example, Republican candidate Carly Fiorina is presenting herself as the right woman candidate to take on Clinton. This tactic, as one audience member at the seminar pointed out, may feed into the gender stereotype of women fighting each other.
Matic pointed to the thousands of cases of wartime rape that remain ‘untouched’ and the culture of impunity for gender-based violence, such as rape and domestic violence, that persist in peacetime. From their work in Bosnia, Matic and Skjelsbæk described how the lack of support and justice for survivors has left women frustrated and disillusioned.

The panel also identified a number of the unspoken experiences of war, or ‘lost narratives’ as Matic put it. Silence continues to surround the experiences of women who were raped by members of their own group, male victims of rape, children born as a result of wartime rape, and child soldiers. This has implications for recognizing survivors’ rights to receive psychological, financial and other support.

Another important lost narrative of the war is domestic violence. Skjelsbæk pointed to the link between domestic violence and sexual violence during conflict, whereby domestic violence cases increase when sexual violence is a characteristic of war, as was the case in the Bosnian war. Domestic violence has gone relatively unnoticed and continues to affect women in Bosnia today; according to Matic, around 40 per cent of women have experienced abuse.

Panellists also pointed to the slow progress in increasing women’s political participation in Bosnia. Around 20 per cent of the parliament is made up of women, and this proportion decreases dramatically in the executive branches, according to Matic. Vik argued that the government has failed to internalize commitments to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and lacks a sense of responsibility for implementing the resolution.

The discussion was moderated by Gro Lindstad, Executive Director at FOKUS.

**Women, Peace and Security in Africa**

**Bineta Diop**, Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security of the Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union (AU), visited PRIO on 18 September to talk about women, peace and security in Africa.

Diop, who was appointed special envoy in January 2014, has for many years been an influential figure in promoting women’s rights in Africa, in particular on women, peace and security issues, and in 1996 co-founded the Executive Board of Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS) which promotes women’s rights, initiatives and leadership in relation to peace and security.

At the seminar, entitled ‘Women, Peace and Security – Review and Outlook in Africa’ and moderated by PRIO senior researcher Torunn L. Tryggestad, Diop talked about how Africa has responded to the Resolution.

Given the generally slow implementation of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security since its adoption in 2000, Diop reflected on the major gaps and challenges in implementing the Resolution on the African continent specifically. She also considered prospects to improve protection and participation of women and girls in Africa.

She stressed the role of civil society in countries experiencing conflict and extreme violence, and the importance of women’s mobilization to strengthen their voices. Diop also made reference to the partnership between Norway and the AU, where the women, peace and security agenda and gender equality are among the top priorities.

**Critical Reflection on the ‘Robots-don’t-rape’ Argument**

The emergence of lethal autonomous weapons – or ‘killer robots’ – has been accompanied by the notion that using robots to fight wars will ‘clean up’ armed conflicts. One argument, in particular, that reflects this notion is the ‘robots-don’t-rape’ argument. In a recent blogpost for IntLawGrrls, Kristin B. Sandvik, senior researcher at PRIO, and Kjersti Lohne, PhD candidate at the Department of Criminology and Sociology of Law, University of Oslo, have critically reflected on this argument, which essentially claims that a war fought without humans will be more humane because rape would no longer be found in wars fought with robots.

Sandvik and Lohne point out that the ‘robots-don’t-rape’ argument reflects a problematic idea of progress which assumes that ‘technological innovation is equated with human progress’. It is also increasingly being used by those with vested interests in killer robots. Looking at commercial and governance interests, as well as the legal and ethical considerations of killer robots, Sandvik and Lohne critically analyse how concern about sexual violence in conflict is used by proponents of the ‘robots-don’t-rape’ argument and whether wars fought with robots would indeed put an end to such violence. Sandvik and Lohne’s analysis is also available to read on the PRIO blog.
International News

UN peace operations and peacebuilding architecture review reports were released in June. An analysis of gender issues in the reports is available online.

Photojournalist Diana Zeyneb Alhindawi was awarded ICRC’s Humanitarian Visa d’Or Award at the International Festival of Photodocumentary in Perpignan, France for her depiction of 2014 rape trials in Minova, DRC.


Zainab Bangura, UN Special Representative to the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, briefed the UN Security Council on 25 August about sexual violence in Iraq and Syria. On 28 August, the Security Council condemned the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war in Iraq and Syria.

The UN Security Council held an open briefing for member states on 9 September on the role of women in counter-terrorist terrorism and violent extremism.

The UN Security Council will review the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security on 13 October. A summary of the review process is available online.

News from Norway

Norwegian Church Aid organised a seminar on ‘Gender-based violence: Religion a hinder or an opportunity?’ in Oslo on 1 September to discuss the role of religion in tackling gender-based violence and promoting gender equality. A video of the seminar (in Norwegian) is available online.

FOKUS, the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs and the Norwegian Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion co-hosted the conference ‘Beijing +20: Hva skjedde i Beijing og hvor er vi i dag’ on 17 September in Oslo.

Internasjonal Kvinneliga for Fred og Frihet (IKFF), Norwegian section of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), celebrated its 100-year anniversary with an event themed ‘Feminist Foreign Policy’ on 25 September in Oslo.

Marita Sørheim-Rensvik is the new coordinator for Women, Peace and Security at the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, replacing Bjørg Skotnes.

News from PRIO

PRIO is launching a new Centre on Gender, Peace and Security. PRIO’s senior researcher Torunn L. Tryggestad will take on the role as Director of the new centre (see separate story).

PRIO hosted the seminar ‘Cracking the Glass Ceiling’ on gender and US politics with Hilde Eliasson Restad, Associate Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies at Bjørknes College, Oslo, on 21 August (see separate story).

PRIO co-organised the ‘Missing Peace Practitioners’ Workshop on Accountability for Sexual Violence’ in Kampala, Uganda on 26-28 August. PRIO research professor Inger Skjelsbæk participated in the conference (see separate story).

PRIO and FOKUS co-hosted a panel discussion on women, peace and security in Bosnia at the seminar ‘Bosnia 20 Years After the War’ on 9 September at PRIO. PRIO research professor Inger Skjelsbæk participated on the panel (see separate story).

PRIO held a seminar on ‘Women, Peace and Security – Review and Outlook in Africa’ on 18 September where Bineta Diop, Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security to the African Union, was guest speaker (see separate story).

PRIO doctoral researcher Jenny K. Lorentzen attended the Global South Unit for Mediation winter school at the BRICS Policy Center in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on 13-24 July, where she took part in an academic and training programme on international mediation.

Julie Marie Hansen was welcomed back to PRIO after the summer as research assistant at the new PRIO Centre on Gender, Peace and Security.

PRIO researchers Gudrun Østby, Henrik Urdal, Andreas Forø Tollefsen, Ragnhild Belbo and Christin Ormhaug and Assistant Professor at the University of Oslo Andreas Kotsadam presented their paper ‘Armed conflict and maternal health care Micro-level evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa’ (2015) at the Annual Convention of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, 3–6 September.

Recent Publications


Coming Events

Gender, War and Conflict Reporting, conference at Oslo University College, 6-7 October.

Towards a Feminist Foreign Policy: Talk with Zainab Salbi and Margot Wallström, Centre for Women, Peace and Security, London School of Economics, 9 November.

Promoting Gender and Inclusive Mediation Processes: Side event marking 15-year anniversary of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, by PRIO, CMI, UNDP and the Governments of Norway and Finland, at UN Secretariat, New York, 14 October.

15-year anniversary and review of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security: Calendar of US-based side events in October is available online.