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# Sudanese Women and the Peace Process

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# Sudanese Women and the Peace Process

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Priorities and recommendations for women's  
inclusion and empowerment  
Conference in Oslo 13-15 January 2005

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# Contents

<i>5</i>	<b>Preface</b>
<i>9</i>	<b>Executive summary</b>
<i>15</i>	<b>Development of priority key areas</b>
<i>33</i>	<b>Support from the international community</b>
<i>37</i>	<b>Abbreviations</b>
<i>38</i>	<b>Participants</b>



# Preface

*«They cannot bring about this new Sudan without the involvement of you, the women of Sudan.»<sup>1</sup>*

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Based on the spirit of the SC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and the two ensuing reports, which call for the equal participation and full involvement of women in peace-building processes, and stress that any peace process should be locally owned, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs called on the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) to organise and facilitate a conference on Sudanese women and the peace process. The purpose of the conference, which should be seen as a first step, was to gather women from South Sudan, representing various women's organisations and districts, in order for them to voice their priorities for a sustainable peace in their country and how they envisage that the international community can support them to this end.

As the conference took place less than a week after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in Nairobi on 9 January, the atmosphere was marked by optimism, but also awareness of the fact that winning the peace is highly dependent on the implementation of the agreement.

Twelve women from South Sudan made the journey to Oslo (see list of participants). Only the Southern Blue Nile district was not represented. Holding the conference at the current time was of primary importance, given the desire to present a conference report prior to the Donors' Conference to be held in April in Norway.

Also present were the regional director of UNIFEM and a specialist from UNIFEM/HQ, as well as the main Norwegian NGOs

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1 Hilde F. Johnson, Norwegian Minister of International Development in her opening speech.

and institutions working in South Sudan, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, and the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs. Finally, two representatives from the *Sudan People's Liberation Movement* (SPLM) Norway attended the meeting.

On Thursday 13, the afternoon and evening were spent on informal deliberations and discussions, in preparation for the main sessions to take place on Friday, and Saturday morning.

The Norwegian Minister of International Development, Hilde F. Johnson, who had personally taken part in the Sudanese peace negotiations, opened the conference and later also availed herself for questions and comments. In her opening speech, the Minister shared with the audience the experience of having been among the signatories to the CPA. She declared that the celebrations in Nairobi signalled the end of a long and difficult negotiation process, and the beginning of another, maybe even more challenging one: the process of creating peace and prosperity on the ground. She went on to say that even if they had been excluded from the negotiations, the successful implementation of the agreement demands the active participation of women. Because a new Sudan cannot be built without the active participation of those we all know to be the backbone of local communities.

Kari Karamé, researcher at NUPI and main organiser of the conference, gave an address on 'Women in peace processes'. After this address, the floor mainly belonged to the delegates from South Sudan, with contributions in the form of questions, comments and recommendations from the rest of the audience. Members of the South Sudanese community in Norway took the opportunity to meet with their sisters, and also to ask about the conditions for the return of people from the Diaspora. The delegates had been asked to prepare a 10-minute presentation of their own and their organisation's main priorities for the peace process. The morning session on Saturday 15 January, focused on how the international community could support them in the critical phase of implementing the CPA.

The Sudanese participants expressed clear priorities in terms of what action needs to be taken in order to improve women's prospects and empowerment, and to ensure their inclusion in the peace process. They described the new Sudan as an «emerging country», and saw peace as an opportunity to improve the situation of women, acknowledging that their problems do not all stem from war, but also from local culture and traditions. Amendments necessitate multi-level approaches, as well as short-term and more long-term initia-

tives. They expressed great solidarity with the women of Darfur, as well as a desire to meet with women of North Sudan.

The present conference report is based on tape recordings from the sessions, notes and manuscripts from some of the participants. Kari Karamé has edited the report, with the assistance of Lillian Prestegard. It is based on the various experiences and views expressed at the conference, reflecting the different priorities and recommendations presented by the participants regarding women's inclusion and empowerment in the Sudanese peace process.

The organisers would especially like to thank the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for initiating as well as funding the conference. Special thanks go to the Minister of International Development, Ms Hilde F. Johnson, for her active participation. We also extend our gratitude to the representatives of the different NGOs for their contributions to the deliberations. Last, but not least our warmest thanks go to the delegates from South Sudan and the representatives of UNIFEM who made the long journey and braved the cold Norwegian winter. Without them, the conference – and the present report – would not have been possible. We wish you all the best for a peaceful future in the new Sudan.

Kari Karamé  
Researcher  
NUPI





# Executive Summary

*«It is normally said that one hand cannot clap alone. That means that we need both sexes to reconstruct this very vast land.»*

## **War and peace are gendered experiences**

Men and women usually experience war in different ways. They hold different roles in the community, and may therefore have different priorities and expectations in a peace process. Sustainable peace can be obtained only if both men and women are listened to. But experience shows that women are all too often excluded from the negotiations table, and that their needs and interests are not seen as an integral part of the peace agreement. Acknowledging that peace processes should be locally owned, the organisers asked the delegates from Sudan to prepare a presentation where they expressed the priorities – their own and those of their organisations – for a sustainable peace in their country. They were also asked how, in their opinion, the international community can support them to this end.

## **Cultural norms and customary laws limit women's agencies**

Not all the challenges to empowering the women of Sudan are the effects of war. Cultural norms and customary laws represent major barriers to women's participation outside the family sphere. Women cannot own land, and widows are «inherited» – remarried to a relative of the late husband. Generally, girls have had limited access to education. Changes in these fields are necessary to enable women to participate fully in the peace-building process. In addition, it should be borne in mind that the «situation of women» varies with regard to age, level of education, social status, and whether one is an internally displaced person or a refugee.

## Impact of the war on women's situation

Delegates underlined that the war between the North and the South in Sudan was the longest lasting of all the armed conflicts on the African continent, and that it has had especially devastating effects on the population of the South. More than 2.5 million people have been killed; 4 million are now living as internally displaced persons (IDPs) – 3 million of them in the north; and nearly 1 million Sudanese are refugees in neighbouring countries or elsewhere in the world. With most of the physical and administrative infrastructure in the South damaged, the population has lacked access to essential goods and services. The lives of women have been affected in various ways. Some chose to join the armed opposition groups as combatants, others were abducted. In the absence of men, many women had to support their extended families: up to 60% of the households of the displaced population are headed by women. But there have also been some positive effects: women's awareness of their own capacities and capabilities has grown, and many of the refugee women have had access to higher education.

## Future challenges

The reconstruction process will present a host of new challenges to the war-traumatised population. One of these is the return of the IDPs, abducted women and girls, and refugees, which has already started – before the necessary infrastructure is in place. Another challenge is to integrate women into the Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DD&R) process. Women combatants may not be recognised as such, and the return of war-affected male combatants may result in violence against female family members.

Reconciliation needs peacemakers at community level, and then a reconciliation stage where the peace building has already started – including dialogue and meetings. The long-term peace process needs to take women into account. The SPLM Peace Desk and national women's peace organisations will have a pro-active role to play in this connection.

## Priority key areas

The presentation of the priority key areas is based on the presentations given by the Sudanese delegates, and the debates during the conference. The main focus was on the following issues: *educa-*

*tion, women's empowerment, and capacity building.* Delegates further expressed the wish to establish dialogue with women from the North, from Darfur, from the South, and with men. The fact that the conference took place only a few days after the signature of the CPA may explain why delegates focused on the future, and that security problems were hardly mentioned, except for the situation in Darfur. Other recurrent issues were health, including HIV/AIDS, and women's resource centres.

### Education:

*«Without education you will not develop.»*

All delegates expressed a high concern for the general lack or low level of education in South Sudan, for both women and men. For the women, the situation is particularly dramatic, as the majority at the grassroots level are without any formal education, and very few women have access to higher education.

- ▼ **Child and adult education** should be given priority. Special attention should be paid to the education of the young generation, as they represent the future. Both boys and girls should be included in educational programmes.
- ▼ **Prevent girls from dropping out:** Special attention should be paid to young girls who leave school early, mostly between class 4 and class 8. Forced marriages and early marriages were cited as the main causes for dropping out.
- ▼ **Special adult classes** should be organised to help women combine family care and education. Such classes should address the need for education of both married women and widows.
- ▼ **Scholarships:** Selection criteria should be revised to make scholarships more accessible for girls and for students from all social levels.
- ▼ **Education should also include civic education:** In the transition phase, it is crucial for women of the South to understand how the political system functions, in order for them to understand their civic rights and responsibilities.

### Empowerment of women:

*«The real change will happen when they (the women) are included, when they are empowered in all aspects.»*

- ▼ **Capacity building** is needed for women to acquire necessary skills to enter the decision-making process. Existing women's organisations need support and funding. Women should be trained in accountability and transparency.
- ▼ **Political empowerment of women:** It is important to ensure the implementation of a 25% quota of women within the Government of Sudan (GOS) structures, and to raise the number of women in the Leadership Council of the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement (SPLM) – today only 10 % are women.
- ▼ **Economic empowerment of women:** Jobs need to be created for women, based on the demographic situation with a majority of women, and of female-headed households. Legal amendments are necessary, as women cannot own property. Micro-credit loans should be made available, where appropriate.
- ▼ **Legal empowerment of women:** There must be a gendered revision of the legal system based on cultural norms, particularly family law; and ratification of international conventions. The new constitution could be instrumental, as this is the document that is going to spell out the rights of women.
- ▼ **Cultural empowerment of women:** Women's stories should be written down and documented, as well as included in the writing of history, in order to help improve the status of women in the communities.
- ▼ **Translation into local languages and dissemination of documents**, e.g. by radio, of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), of SC Resolution 1325 on Women, War, Security, and of information on international standards of Human Rights.

### Health:

- ▼ Special attention should be paid to women's reproductive health issues.
- ▼ Early marriages and female genital mutilation (FGM) are major areas of concern.
- ▼ Violence against women (also in the domestic sphere) has to be addressed.

- ▼ HIV/AIDS was presented as a «great silenced problem that needs to be addressed».

#### The way forward:

- ▼ **The peace agreement:** Gender needs to be mainstreamed into the CPA implementation and monitoring mechanism. A core group of women experts and disseminators should be trained, as the content of the agreement is known to only a few. Further, the protocols should be developed in simple language, and information disseminated about their implications for women.
- ▼ **Peacekeeping forces:** Women should be included in the peacekeeping forces. Training in gender issues should be provided to peacekeepers. Strategies need to be established to avoid violence against women and sexual exploitation from the peacekeepers and humanitarian workers.
- ▼ **The DD&R process:** The future situation of women should be an integral issue in the DD&R process, with attention given to women combatants, abducted young girls and women, and the wives and mothers of returning male combatants.

#### Women's resource centres:

- ▼ Centres should be established where women can meet and act together, to provide free space for women: for education, training, dialogue, and health care.

#### Forums for dialogue:

- ▼ between women from different districts in South Sudan;
- ▼ between women from the North and the South;
- ▼ between men and women;
- ▼ between local governments and women's organisations.

## Support from the international community:

Delegates mentioned the following ways in which the international community can sustain Sudanese women's integration in the peace-building process. Support should be both of political, organisational, and economic nature.

- ▼ In preparation for the Donor's Conference: promoting women's participation; supporting the identification of women delegates; consolidating the agenda on women's and gender issues.
- ▼ The Joint Assessment Mission for Sudan: support gender analysis of the eight clusters, and ensure that gender-related action plans are included (UNIFEM has developed «Guidelines for Mainstreaming Gender in Joint Assessment for Sudan», November 2004).
- ▼ Support the participation of South Sudanese women in Beijing +10.
- ▼ Advocate the inclusion of constitutional gender experts to aid in the formulation/development of the new constitution.
- ▼ Support the organisation of a Women's National Conference – with North and South Sudanese women: fund-raising committee.
- ▼ Support educational projects for women.
- ▼ Give earmarked funding to women-related projects and activities. Donors should follow up closely, as funding is most often given to men. Local people should be involved in the allocation of funding.
- ▼ Support research projects and statistical surveys on women's condition and issues, as such studies hardly exist.
- ▼ Support the establishment of Women Resource Centres.
- ▼ Support training of selected women in specific areas of concern, like the CPA protocols and UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

# Development of Priority Key Areas

## Education

Education was one of the major concerns raised at the conference, as all the delegates brought this up as one of their priorities. Delegates paid particular attention to adult education for women, as well as to children's education, especially for girls. Education was generally seen as a prerequisite to the realisation of women's rights, women's economic and political empowerment, as well as the development of the country at large.

## Children's education

All delegates drew attention to the importance of education for children of both sexes. However, it was felt that girls' education should receive more focus, because the enrolment rate is lower for girls than for boys,<sup>2</sup> and the dropout rate is so much higher.

Education is seen as instrumental in securing increased opportunities for girls for the future. Some delegates also linked the importance of education to women's rights, citing education as a means to raise awareness of human rights in general, as well as of women's rights in particular, while the girls are still young.

## Preventing girls' discontinuation

One main cause of the high dropout rate among girl pupils is the practice of early marriages. According to delegates, this is rooted in a cultural notion that sees girls and women as economic re-

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2 An estimated 20% of pupils enrolled at primary level are girls. See Mary Anne Fitzgerald (2002) *Throwing the Stick Forward: The impact of war on southern Sudanese women*. Nairobi, UNIFEM & UNICEF, p. 35.



sources for their families. The bride price can often be substantial, so daughters are a source of income for the family. Thus, many do not see the value in educating a girl, and the community does not encourage it. Some delegates, however, pointed to the role of women themselves in upholding these attitudes and practices. They appealed to the women to make room for their daughters' education, for example by freeing time enough from household chores that girls could attend school, as well as do their homework.

One participant urged that concentrated efforts be made to raise awareness of the value of educating girls, in order to encourage parents to send their daughters to school. She proposed the setting up of forums in the local communities, to sensitise parents and local authorities alike. The forums would contribute to raising awareness of the right to education, but also of how educating girls and women contributes to the family and to the whole community. This might help to increase enrolment, as well as reducing the dropout rate among girls.

Another means suggested was to increase the number of female teachers, and provide training so that they can be qualified to teach at higher levels as well. One delegate proposed affirmative action as a means to ensure the continuance of girls' and women's education at secondary and higher levels. Providing special scholarships for higher education could also be an instrument to get more women into higher institutions of learning.

### Adult education for women

*«If you educate a man, you educate a person.  
If you educate a woman, you educate the whole nation.»*

All delegates spoke of the need for education or training for women. Girls' and women's educational opportunities in South Sudan have been constrained both by the effects of the war and by custom and tradition. Displacement resulting from war, as well as the practice of early marriage, has left an estimated 90%<sup>3</sup> of the women of South Sudan illiterate.

There are today a great many women in Southern Sudan who wish to continue their education. As these are mostly married women or widows, it is important that classes be designed to be compatible with their daily lives. One problem is the lack of such classes.

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3 Mary Anne Fitzgerald (2002) *Throwing the Stick Forward*, p. 35.

In the Nuba Mountains, there are only two classes of adult education for women, one delegate reported. As a result of this, women are organising classes under trees in the villages, another delegate told the conference. Thus, a major concern expressed by delegates was that more adult education classes should be established for women.

On the other hand, it was emphasised that the women of South Sudan are highly skilled and knowledgeable in many fields other than formal book learning. Notably they are greatly skilled in their own vernacular, which is vital for upholding local culture and identity, as well as keeping communities together. This, in turn, may prove essential to sustaining the peace. Delegates stressed the importance of appreciating the knowledge and experience of these «uneducated» women, while acknowledging that their ability to exercise their rights and freedoms will depend upon some form of training or education.

### **Scholarships**

Many delegates raised the matter of access to scholarships. It was widely held that scholarships, though available in theory, do not reach those groups who need them most: orphans, and the children of widows. Several delegates reported that scholarships tend to be given to the children of leaders or commanders, and not the children of poor parents. Moreover, when scholarships are allocated, boys are generally preferred to girls. Consequently, there is need for a new allocation mechanism to determine who gets the available scholarships. Some suggested that the women themselves should be the ones to identify the beneficiaries. Another proposal was that funds should be earmarked for the education of girls and women.

### **Civic education**

After decades of war, most people know little about the workings of state institutions or the principles of democratic governance. Many delegates expressed concern that women lacked the knowledge needed for exercising their rights as citizens, much less participating in political processes. There were calls for education on topics like the functions of the various institutions of the state, central and local government; the role of a political party; and also the duties and responsibilities of one's MP. Such knowledge is vital for women to be able to demand their rights as citizens and as women.

## Empowerment of women

*«There are real opportunities now for enforcing Sudanese women's roles and mechanisms.»*

Several delegates declared that there is a general lack of recognition of women's capacities and of how these could be used for the good of the community. They saw a close relation between the situation of women and girls within the family, where they have little influence on decision-making, and the fact that they are not expected to take part in public affairs on the community level. They worried that, because of women's lack of education and of experience in participating in public affairs, there would not be enough women with necessary skills and capacities to fill the posts that might be offered to them in the peace and reconstruction process. But they also reacted against such attitudes: *«Who asks about the skills of men?»* In South Sudan both women and men have had limited access to education and therefore need training, but they feel that only women's skills are put into question. One of the delegates put it this way: *«I can go to parliament even if I don't speak English or I don't speak Arabic, because I know the issues, I can articulate the issues and I can learn whilst I am in parliament.»* Women as well as men should be given the opportunity to run for office, but this should be accompanied with capacity building for all.

The delegates viewed the different aspects of empowerment – political, economic and legal – as closely related. Without economic empowerment it was seen as impossible to participate in political and social affairs. The barriers imposed on women's empowerment by customary laws and local traditions will have to be lifted.

## Capacity building

*«We, as Sudanese women, we need to have self-confidence. That is number one. That is lacking in most of us. Even if you are educated, there are men who don't write and read, they go to parliament and they talk and we respect them.»*

A common point of concern for many delegates was that lack of knowledge as to the workings of the political system and on democratic processes would make women unable to participate in the decision-making processes. Thus, delegates spoke of the need for capacity building in order to raise women's competence concern-

ing decision-making procedures, as well as to build confidence in their ability to participate in public affairs.

Capacity building for women running for office was thus considered as a central instrument for achieving the goal of 25% women in the government structures of Southern Sudan. Equally, delegates emphasised the need to provide capacity building for women currently in political office, and involved in running women's associations.

Capacity building is important to enable women to use political institutions, as well as to work through democratic channels. However, it is also imperative that women learn the rules and principles of political behaviour, so that they can abide by democratic norms of openness. Therefore, one delegate underlined the importance of providing training in accountability and transparency for women who hold honorary offices.

Based on this comprehension that most women lack knowledge about the functioning of political systems and democratic processes, various views were offered as to how to bring women into the political arenas.

Some said that women would not be able to participate in political life until trained in the workings of relevant institutions and procedures. Many delegates expressed a certain lack of confidence on behalf of fellow women. Others were concerned that there were not enough able women to fill the 25% share of the seats planned by the SPLM, much less to be able to compete with the men over the remaining 75% of the seats. Thus, some felt that women should settle for less in terms of representation until it became possible to find enough women with the necessary qualifications. Some even saw it as potentially damaging if unqualified women were put forward as candidates, as they feared that this could backfire on them: that it would give the men grounds for saying that women cannot be involved in politics because they are not qualified. Several delegates seemed to think that at least some form of education or capacity building would be necessary before women could enter politics.

Others, however, claimed that lack of such knowledge should not be used as an argument to prevent women from seeking political positions. On the contrary, they said, the starting point must be the current situation: the lack of formal education is a general problem throughout the Southern Sudan – for both men and women. Thus, the mere lack of formal education should not disqualify a person from running for office in parliament. As one delegate put it, «no-

body checks whether Mr. Gubono is qualified, nobody asks for his CV». Given that men do not question their own capability to hold a political position, women should not question theirs. In a situation where illiteracy among women in South Sudan is estimated at 90%,<sup>4</sup> literacy as such should not be a condition for holding a political position, the argument went. Instead, it was suggested that assistants could be employed to do the reading and writing for them. The same argument was used with regard to knowledge of English and Arabic: If a person does not speak English, then someone should be taken in to do the translation. This was said on the premise that that the most important skill needed to sit in parliament and represent a constituency, was the ability to talk to people and listen to their concerns, and in turn present these in parliament. Importantly however, the delegates proposed that this should be accompanied with capacity building once in office. The appeal was for women to stand up for themselves and demand the right to represent their communities, and also to demand training for capacity building in order to function well, once elected.

### Political empowerment

*«Look, we are not victims only, we are survivors, and we are part of the resolution.»*

Delegates agreed that it was vital for women to become part of the decision-making process, regardless of political affiliation. In the immediate future, the most pressing concern was to achieve the planned 25% quota of women within the GOSS structures. Further, delegates underlined the importance of coordinating and organising women's efforts in this domain. A planned Southern Sudanese Women's Conference, with elected women representatives from all levels in all regions of the New Sudan, was seen as an instrument for achieving the goal of mobilising women at all levels, to fill the 25% quota.

However, as noted by some participants, it is not sufficient to get women into the governmental structures at lower levels only. Thus, some delegates emphasised the importance of raising the number of women in the Leadership Council of the SPLM, where there until recently has been only one woman commissioner, heading the Commission for Women, Gender and Child Welfare. Short-

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<sup>4</sup> Mary Anne Fitzgerald (2002) *Throwing the Stick Forward*, p.35.

ly before the conference, a second woman was appointed, to lead the newly established Commission of Peace and Reconciliation. She will have a central position in the future reconciliation process.<sup>5</sup>

There was also an expressed demand to include women in the dialogues on power sharing which will take place between the North and the South.

Some delegates paid more attention to the question of the participation of women at lower levels of government, because this would involve a greater number of women. They focused on the need for dialogue between women and the local authorities, as a means of improving the understanding of the concerns of women in the local setting, since women's situation and concerns vary from one district to another.

Questions were also raised relating to the political process ahead, like attitudes towards possible political structures outside the SPLM: *«As women or as women's groups, where do we start? Because the SPLM is a party – are all of us joining the SPLM? Or do we need to come up with our own parties, maybe?»* A government of national unity is to be established, with representation from the various parties, and where the SPLM will have just a certain number of seats. Women should therefore agree on their demands to the SPLM – and there should also be some contacts with women from other parts of the country, in order to assure that there will be women ministers in the government of national unity. Gender mainstreaming the monitoring of the JAM is of high importance in this context.<sup>6</sup>

### Economic empowerment

*«Without economic empowerment we cannot participate politically, we cannot participate socially, we cannot even move forward, we cannot even forward our agenda because our hands are tied.»*

With regard to the economic empowerment of women, four points in particular were raised: job creation for women; the right to own land and assets; micro-credit provision for the establishment of businesses; and economic support for women leaders. The call for the economic empowerment of women must be seen in light of the

5 In relation with the formation of the government, the commissions of the SPLM will be dissolved, and replaced by new regional ministries for the South.

6 See also Grace Okonji and Ruth Kibiti: *Guidelines for mainstreaming gender in joint assessment for Sudan*, UNIFEM (November 2004).

current demographic situation in South Sudan where an estimated 60% of the population are women,<sup>7</sup> and there are very many female-headed households.<sup>8</sup> These households depend on the possibility for women to earn an income.

One concern raised in relation to women's economic empowerment was the need to improve job opportunities for women. There was a heavy focus on the impact of the legal regime that restricts women's rights to own land and assets. There were calls for revision of the laws in order to facilitate women's right to own land, and thereby give them the possibility to be financially independent of husbands or relatives. This was seen as critical for ensuring food security at the household level, as this has traditionally been the domain of women. There was also a call for the right for women to inherit from their husband and/or the right to a share of possible resources accumulated during marriage.

A third concern taken up by several delegates was the opening up of possibilities for women to venture into business. The provision of credit would be instrumental, so there was a call for some type of micro-credit scheme.

Lastly, in the field of economic empowerment, there was an appeal to the donor community to acknowledge the need for economic support for women leaders working voluntarily for their organisations. One participant held that the practice of relying on voluntary efforts was contrary to the furtherance of women. She reminded the donors that also these women have children to send to school, and families to feed.

## Legal empowerment

*«If two people have committed the same offence, then they should be treated equally.»*

The need for empowerment of women in the legal sphere was addressed by most delegates. Their major concerns were the unequal treatment of women and men under the law, the need for a review of customary law, and legal protection from harmful cultural practices.

7 There is a general lack of gendered statistics for Sudan, but this figure was given by several of the delegates.

8 25% on a general Sudanese level, 55%–60% among the displaced population. Source: *Sudan Gender Profile*. Compiled by Wafaa Elfadil – WFP Sudan Gender National Officer, March 2004.

Family law in South Sudan is based on customary law, and the delegates agreed that this does not promote women's development. Issues noted included widow inheritance, forced marriages and early marriages, and the fact that women can neither inherit nor own land. Many participants spoke of the biased treatment accorded to women in courts of law, and called for equality of women and men before the law. Their focus was on the revision of customary law.

There was particular emphasis on women's lack of right to own property, land, or to inherit from father and husband. The right to own land was raised by many participants, and was seen as basic to family food security, as well as to the social and economic empowerment of women. As in much of Africa, women in Sudan are the main persons responsible for household food security, and they represent as much as 79.2% of the labour force in agriculture.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, women lack ownership rights: they have to grow food on the land belonging to their husbands or fathers. One participant noted that, if a man is facing economic hardship, he can sell off land without consulting his spouse, thereby threatening the long-term food security of the whole family. The importance of women's right to own land was underlined by many participants.

Regarding the right to own assets, and the right to inherit from one's husband, or the right to property accumulated during marriage after the death of the husband or after divorce, there were equally strong calls for legal change. The absence of such rights obviously hinders women's economic empowerment. For example, the lack of the right to own property makes women dependent on relatives or others for their survival. The lack of the right to own assets and inherit from the husband is also instrumental in maintaining the practice of widow inheritance. After the death of her husband, a woman and her daughters are left completely without resources, unless there is a son. Finding and marrying a male heir among the relatives of her late husband becomes imperative for the survival of her family. There was thus a strong call among conference participants for the right of women to own property and to inherit.

Most pressing concerns centred on providing protection from oppressive cultural practices that have historically marginalized women in Sudan. There was a call for legislation to halt the effects of these practices on women's lives. Although at least one delegate acknowledged the positive role of custom in identity formation

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<sup>9</sup> See Sudan Gender Profile.



and as part of daily life, there was broad agreement that customs that are inconsistent with the development and furtherance of women should be discarded. Some delegates raised the point that women are not only victims of these practices, they also contribute to upholding them. As mothers, women contribute for example to the continuation of the practice of early marriages, some would say. Thus, it was felt that women need to recognise their part in this in order to find ways to curb these negative practices. Other delegates disagreed, saying that, given the status of women within the family, with men having the exclusive right to decision-making, women are not in a position to change such things. Another participant noted that men are also victims of the system. They too are somehow trapped in the system, and this needs to be taken into consideration in trying to change it.

The new constitution was seen as a major opportunity for improving the legal position of women, as this is the document in which women's rights will be defined. Thus, there were many calls for women's participation in the process of drafting the constitution. There was an appeal from UNIFEM that the international community, and Norway in particular, could play an important role in assisting the women to contribute to the making of the constitution. It was suggested that a team of constitutional experts be attached to the process, with a gender expert help the women in particular.

One delegate noted that the constitution must be sensitive to women as the reproductive sex. A specific measure suggested was to protect pregnant women under the labour laws.

Additionally, there was recognition that the various commissions under the implementation of the CPA would be central points of input concerning the rights of women. The human rights commission was identified as particularly relevant with regard to improving the legal status of women.

There were also appeals for Sudan to ratify international conventions, especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

One concern raised by several delegates was the lack of legal knowledge amongst women. Providing training in legal issues was one specific intervention suggested.

### **Cultural empowerment**

A concern repeatedly raised by delegates was the low standing of women within the community as a result of repressive cultural practices, and related attitudes.

One approach suggested, was to facilitate increased recognition of women's roles during the war, and as a resource in the peace-building process. One of the UNIFEM representatives suggested that women be allowed space to tell their stories, which would then be documented in written form. This process was also seen as an important part of a very necessary healing process for women. Women's resource centres were suggested as possible forums for this. Then, in the next round, room should be made for these stories in the writing of history. It was suggested that women's perspectives and women's contributions during the war be included in the school curriculum.

### **Translation and dissemination of documents on human and women's rights**

Many delegates stressed that the knowledge on women's rights and the international conventions protecting them (primarily CEDAW and SC Resolution 1325), is very limited among the women of South Sudan. Consequently, the dissemination of information on women's rights received considerable attention from the delegates. Many emphasised the importance of reaching the grassroots level in particular: empowerment should also be for women who have not gone to school, and who lack basic knowledge on their rights as women. However, also some delegates indicated that their own knowledge of Security Council Resolution 1325 was limited. Delegates underlined the need to make the international conventions and resolutions on women's rights known among South Sudanese women, at the grassroots level as well as among women leaders.

Dissemination could be in part by radio, but this medium has its limitations. There is the problem of which language to use; moreover, radio still has limited coverage in South Sudan. Consequently, delegates saw a need for a team of disseminators who could go around to the local communities and spread information on these issues. This obviously demands time, resources, and qualified disseminators. However, delegates had relatively specific suggestions as to how such dissemination could be carried out; they asked the international community to support this process financially, but possibly also logistically.

Several delegates suggested that women's associations and groups be involved. Their wide reach and local foundations could be instrumental in reaching all communities. Even so, this would entail a process of several components: there is the need to train the disseminators, possibly in several steps, starting at a centralised level and then spreading downwards through a 'training of trainers'-mechanism. Then teams of trained women can go from place to place, spreading information on human rights, and women's rights in particular, as well as on the documents and arrangements to ensure them. There was also a suggestion that in order to save time and resources, information dissemination on the CPA, CEDAW and SC Resolution 1325 should be taken together.

Some delegates expressed concern that translating these documents and their principles would not be easy, and some called for assistance from external experts. At the same time there was a realisation that there is not necessarily a need for a direct or literal translation of the documents. Dissemination among the grassroots population would more likely be successful if traditional media like singing and dancing were employed. So the question becomes: «How will the women sing this?»

It was further pointed out that dissemination of information on human rights and women's rights should also target men and local authorities, as their application depends on them as well.

## Health

Delegates spoke of the consequences of culture and tradition, as well as the consequences of war on women's health. Most importantly, there was a focus on women's reproductive health: in particular, a call for the abolition of female genital mutilation practices. The practice of early marriages also received considerable attention.

Another central aspect relating to women's health was violence against women, whether in the domestic sphere, or as acts of war. Getting this issue on the agenda for the peace process was a high priority for the group.

Finally, as to HIV/AIDS, the most persistent calls for focus on this came from the UNIFEM delegate. She warned against the dangers of overlooking this issue, and leaving it to be dealt with at a later stage. The Sudanese delegates explained that there was a culture of silence surrounding HIV/AIDS. Those affected are stigmatised, and so they «suffer in silence»; «people hide it, they don't

talk about it». This culture of silence also contributes to spreading the virus, for instance via the practice of widow inheritance.

## The way forward

### The peace agreement

The process of negotiating the protocols of the peace agreement did not involve women to any substantial degree. Consequently, conference participants considered it of great importance that gender be mainstreamed into the implementation mechanism as well as the monitoring of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).

Another major concern was that most people, let alone most women, do not know what is in the CPA protocols – even some delegates at the meeting said that they were not familiar with the exact contents. Thus, an important concern was dissemination of the CPA. Seen as equally important was the translation and simplification of the CPA, making sure to clarify the implications of the CPA with regard to the situation of women.

### *Implementation*

Regarding implementation of the CPA, delegates saw the need to act strategically and quickly make plans for women to be included in the various commissions now being established for the implementation of the agreement. The delegate from UNIFEM made relatively specific proposals for the inclusion of women in the various commissions, noting the value that would be added by including women in, for example, the Financial Allocation and Monitoring Commission, considering their wide experience in managing household budgets. She also underlined the possibility this provided for the women to influence the priorities of the national budget. Another commission, which could clearly benefit from the inclusion of women, was the Joint Defence Board. Here, she held, women could positively influence the conceptualisation of security often found among men. While men tend to define security from a political and military perspective, women, she held, generally define security in terms of socio-economic factors – human security. Including this perspective, she argued, would be essential for sustaining peace in Sudan.

### *Translation and dissemination*

Delegates stressed the importance of consolidating the peace agreement at the grassroots level, so one important priority was to spread information on the agreement in the local communities. The UNIFEM delegate proposed that a core group of experts be set up, composed of Sudanese women specialists in each aspect of the CPA. These should analyse the document and internalise it in terms of its implications for women, simplify it, and subsequently train women's groups and associations in spreading this information to the communities. Many other delegates also suggested that women's associations be involved in disseminating the CPA protocols to the communities. Some delegates also proposed that the churches could be drawn into this effort.

Some delegates expressed fears that important nuances could get lost unless the translation was done properly. Thus, it was suggested that the women be given some training in how to translate such things. However, delegates said, this might be less important, as the point is not to translate word for word, but rather to simplify and explain. There was a general understanding that translation would entail making clear what the protocols will mean for women in a very concrete way. Several delegates expressed the need to be creative in the choice of medium for putting these things across in the communities, for example through use of traditional media such as dancing, singing, using physical items, poems, and drawings.

### **Peacekeeping forces**

An important priority for the delegates was women's participation in the peacekeeping forces, and in the monitoring of the peace agreement. This, it was felt, would contribute to preventing violence against women, as well as possible exploitation from the peacekeepers and humanitarian workers.

Few concrete strategies emerged as to how to go about ensuring the active participation of women in peacekeeping. However, there were appeals to the international community, the Norwegian government in particular, to work through the UN to ensure that women are involved at various levels of the peace mission; that women's concerns are included in the mandate of the mission; that peacekeepers receive adequate training in gender issues; that efforts are made to ensure that UN personnel abide by the guidelines; and that, as part of the peace monitoring, there be a specific focus on avoiding violence against women.

Delegates also called for the participation of women in monitoring the peace agreement. In this way, it was felt, aspects that concern women would be included more easily. As an example, it was suggested that rape be reported as a breach of the peace, like any other act of war. One delegate also said that women from civil society would want to be engaged in monitoring violence against women during peacekeeping.

### The DD&R process

*«Women have been a source of life in the face of poverty, HIV/AIDS, and the violence of the patriarchy, and therein lies the hope for reconstruction.»*

The integration of women and consideration for women's conditions in the DD&R process was a concern voiced by many delegates. DD&R affects women in a very immediate way: it affects women as victims of violence; it involves women as returning female combatants and abducted women and girls; and it involves them in their capacities as wives and mothers of returning combatants. Two general concerns were particularly important for the delegates. They strongly felt that the role of women as having upheld the communities during the war should be recognised in the DD&R process, and should guide their inclusion in the reintegration process. They also emphasised the need for making violence against women a major concern in the DD&R process.

### *Small firearms and mines control*

The problem of small arms was taken up by many delegates. It was felt that without adequate control of the distribution and manufacturing of small arms and light weapons, peace could not be sustained at the local level. This has been shown by experiences from other contexts, where there has been a tendency for latent conflicts to flare up if weapons are available. Thus, firearms control was seen as imperative in order to avoid aggravation of the ethnic tensions in the South.

Suggestions centred on how to work vis-à-vis the government, including the Northern government, to make it take action to reduce the proliferation of arms. The need for the government to work together with neighbouring countries on this issue was also stressed, as the problem of small arms is particularly acute in the border areas.

Another important concern mentioned was the need for working together with ex-combatants in the clearing of mines.

#### *Reintegration of abducted women and female combatants*

In some regions, Bahr al Ghazal in particular, the abduction of women and girls into sexual slavery has been a major problem. Reintegration strategies need to pay special attention to the trauma of these girls and women. Not only are these women traumatised as a result of the abuse they have suffered, they are also faced with the possibility of being rejected by their communities. Delegates expressed concern that also these issues should be part of the reintegration effort, alongside the reintegration of combatants.

However, there was also the concern that «combatants» must not be taken to be exclusively male. There will also be female combatants to be reintegrated, and the process must take this into account. The delegates also underlined the value of the role of women in these processes. In particular, the role of women commanders of the SPLM was seen as instrumental in securing the inclusion of women's rights in the DD&R process.

#### *Reintegration of male combatants*

Many delegates stressed the role of women in upholding the communities and the families throughout the many years of warfare. They expressed great concern that this effort should be recognised. Accepting that the reintegration process begins and ends with the communities, women's role in the DD&R process must be acknowledged, and incorporated into DD&R planning. Drawing on experience from other reintegration processes, delegates emphasised the importance of bearing in mind the increased incidence of violence against women after the return of male combatants.

Dialogue, as well as consultation meetings, was seen as very important in this regard. There were also calls for support for women, in order to prepare them on how to receive their combatant sons and husbands. The importance of improving the flow of information was underlined. There were no specific suggestions as to how to carry out this effort, but delegates requested the assistance of the international community in accomplishing this. This was also true with regard to the reintegration of IDPs and refugees.

One delegate underlined the need for education and attitudinal change among the young women and men who have participated in the fighting. It was seen as very important to focus on providing

jobs or further education for them, to successfully replace guns with constructive activity.

*Reintegration of IDPs, refugees, and Diaspora*

The issue of the return and reintegration of IDPs, refugees, and Diaspora caused a lengthy exchange of views among delegates. After all, most delegates were themselves refugees or members of the Diaspora. There was also much focus on the women in the communities who will be receiving these returning groups. As already noted, many delegates underlined the strength of these women and their proven ability to uphold the communities during the war. However, they also emphasised the need for assistance to these women, in preparing them to receive and reintegrate IDPs and refugees, as well as members of the Diaspora who will be returning. The importance of providing information on the current situation to the communities was highlighted.

One of the participants, a Sudanese living in Norway, put the question of how those living in Diaspora, especially in the Western countries, would be received upon their return to Sudan. Her fear was that they would be seen as not having participated in the struggle, and thus would not be allowed into the process of reconciliation and implementation of the peace agreement. This sparked off an exchange of experiences from many participants currently living outside Southern Sudan. There were common experiences of being treated as someone who has not contributed. Thus, there was acknowledgement that the process would not necessarily be easy. However, there were suggestions that the differences could be lessened through the use of dialogue forums, especially through women's resource centres. The importance of creating a space for women to tell their stories was also noted in this regard.

Women's groups and associations were mentioned by several delegates as central to the reintegration process, as was the Gender Desk of the SPLM, with its regional offices.

*Healing, normalisation of communities, and sustaining the peace at grassroots level*

Together with the integration of women and women's concerns in the DD&R process, the role of women in the process of maintaining peace through normalisation of the communities was seen as extremely important. In view of women's efforts to maintain their local communities during the war, their part in maintaining the peace



was seen as vital for the process to succeed. The establishment of forums for dialogue was seen to be an important part of this.

### **Women's resource centres**

The need to establish resource centres for women was brought up by many delegates. The idea was to establish such resource centres in each region. Regarding the primary purpose of the centres, the delegates had different ideas. While some would see the centres as a place for training and education, others would see them as a meeting place for women, and they emphasised the centres' potential in terms of peace building and reconciliation. Such resource centres were seen as being potentially very valuable for securing the peace at grassroots level. Further, the centres could provide a place for dialogue and sharing of experiences – including the documentation of women's lives and the efforts of women during the war, as well as in the peace process. They could also be places where women could work with one another to develop strategies. The centres were also envisioned as simply providing a physical space for women to spend time for themselves, considering the general lack of privacy in their daily lives: thus the centres could be a place for healing, especially for traumatised women who have been victims of sexual violence.

The centres were thus envisaged as filling many functions. One of the representatives from UNIFEM, drawing on experiences from Afghanistan and Somalia, emphasised the importance of creating multi-purpose centres in order to avoid stigma for the women using them. If the centres fulfil a variety of functions, such as education, dialogue, peace building, training, health care, in addition to providing a space for healing, there is no one label that can be applied to the women who go there.

### **Forums for dialogue**

The establishment of forums for dialogue was seen as essential for the process of healing and normalisation of communities. Delegates emphasised the need for dialogue between many different groups: dialogue amongst women of South Sudan; dialogue between women from the North and women from the South; between women and men; cross-border dialogue in the borderline regions; between local authorities and women. Such dialoguing can be expected to improve the understanding between parties on different sides of the various conflicts, and thus is instrumental in sustaining the peace.

# Support from the International Community

Part of the aim of the conference was to identify key areas where support from the international community could contribute to the active participation of women in shaping the future of Sudan, as well as contributing effectively to improving the conditions of women in a long-term perspective.

## **Donors' conference**

The delegates called on the Norwegian government, as host of the Donors' Conference, to make gender issues an explicit part of the agenda. Women's concerns should be specifically addressed as part of the conference programme. There was a fear that a general mainstreaming of gender into the conference could result in the perspective being forgotten altogether. The delegates also called on Norway as the host to encourage the inclusion of women in delegations to the conference.

The UNIFEM representative also urged the Norwegian government to put pressure on its cooperating partners to actively support the implementation of SC Resolution 1325 in Sudan.

There were also calls for gender experts who could support the women delegates during the conference. To help achieve this, UNIFEM suggested that the Norwegian government hold a gender symposium prior to the conference, bringing together international gender experts and the Sudanese delegates. The delegates welcomed this initiative, but suggested that also some men be included among the participants.

## Gender analysis of the clusters of the JAM

As part of ensuring a gender perspective in the plans for reconstruction and development of Sudan, the UNIFEM delegate stressed the importance of doing a gender analysis of the JAM reports. This is already part of the process of finalising the JAM process.

## Support participation of South Sudanese women for Beijing +10

Delegates asked for support – financial as well as logistical – to enable a group of women from South Sudan to participate in Beijing +10. It was agreed in the course of the conference that such support would be provided by the Norwegian government and UNIFEM jointly. Again, the inclusion of men in the delegation was mentioned as an important priority.

## International gender experts to aid in work on the new constitution

In addition to a team of international experts who will assist Sudan in formulating its new constitution, the UNIFEM delegate proposed the addition of a gender expert to this team. This, she argued, is necessary in order to ensure that Sudanese women can make inputs to the process. Following up on that, a Sudanese delegate insisted that someone from South Sudan should also be involved, perhaps together with a UN expert.

## Women's national conference

Delegates strongly expressed the need for dialogue among the women of Sudan, both a South–South dialogue, but also a dialogue involving women from the whole country. They informed the meeting that preparations for a Women's Conference for the South were already well underway. Meetings had been held at village (*boma*) level, at *payam* level, at county level, as well as at regional level, and representatives had been elected at each level to attend the all South Sudanese Women's Conference.

The idea was for similar women's conferences to be held for the women of the North, as well as for the women of Darfur. Preparations for a conference in the North were ongoing, according to some delegates, but they called on the Norwegian government and UNIFEM to help fund and facilitate a women's conference for

Darfur. After the three conferences have been held, the idea is that representatives from the three areas – the South, the North, and Darfur – should meet at the Women’s National Conference.

Delegates noted the need for funding for these conferences, including final preparations and implementation of the South Sudanese Women’s conference, and suggested that a fund-raising committee be set up. UNIFEM offered to help facilitate the conferences.

## **Support educational projects for women**

As education was among the top priorities for the delegates, there were also calls for financial support in this field. Specifically, there were calls for support to start up more adult education classes for women, and for improved education for children of both sexes. There were also calls for scholarships to promote secondary and higher education for girls.

## **Earmark funding to women**

One issue taken up by some delegates was the problem that funding often fails to reach its intended beneficiaries – the women in many cases. Delegates thus appealed to donors to follow up on funding more closely, in order to ensure that it reaches the women. They proposed that this could be done through setting up a fund to target women especially; through an improved monitoring system; and/or through delegating the allocation of funding to local people, possibly the women’s branch of the SPLM.

## **Research and statistics**

Many delegates emphasised the need for research and statistics in the present situation. After decades of war, there exists hardly any statistical material on the situation of women in South Sudan, and the little that does exist, is likely to be unreliable. Thus, there were many calls for assistance and resources from the international community in order to make it possible to document the conditions of women in Sudan. Delegates called for statistics on the situation of women and children, as well as studies on the effects of customary law on women’s situation. Such material can facilitate advocacy work on behalf of the women, using research-based information to support the argumentation, as well as make it possible to state what the problems are.

## Women's resource centres

A major priority for the delegates was the establishment of women's resource centres, at least one in each region. These can provide a space for women to meet; to dialogue; to share experiences; to receive training and education; to get information; to receive health care; or to simply have some time alone. This is considered essential for the very necessary healing process of the women of South Sudan. Such centres will require financial resources, both for establishing them and in order to cover running costs. Delegates called upon the international community to contribute funding.

## Support training and dissemination on the CPA and SC Resolution 1325

Dissemination of information concerning the protocols of the CPA, as well as of SC Resolution 1325, and on women's rights in general, was a high priority for the delegates. They also emphasised the need for training those who would undertake this work. One delegate informed the conference that the identification of disseminators had already begun. Other delegates wished also to involve the women's groups and associations, as well as the churches, in this effort. Logistical as well as financial resources were lacking, so delegates called upon the international community for funding.

There was also a suggestion from one of the UNIFEM delegates to provide a team of Sudanese women experts on the major fields of the CPA, to back up the women. These could be involved in simplifying, translating, and internalising the CPA, as well as in training the disseminators. They could also provide a link with the SPLM, which could clear up any ambiguities in the protocols. Finally, these experts could also act as advocates for the women in the implementation and monitoring of the CPA.

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## Abbreviations

<b>CEDAW</b>	<i>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women</i>
<b>CPA</b>	<i>Comprehensive Peace Agreement</i>
<b>DD&amp;R</b>	<i>Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration</i>
<b>FGM</b>	<i>Female Genital Mutilation</i>
<b>GOS</b>	<i>Government of Sudan</i>
<b>GOSS</b>	<i>Government of Southern Sudan</i>
<b>IDP</b>	<i>Internally Displaced Person</i>
<b>JAM</b>	<i>Joint Assessment Mission</i>
<b>NMFA</b>	<i>Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs</i>
<b>NUPI</b>	<i>Norwegian Institute of International Affairs</i>
<b>SC Resolution 1325</b>	<i>Security Council Resolution 1325</i>
<b>SPLM/A</b>	<i>Sudanese Peoples Liberation Movement/Army</i>
<b>UNICEF</b>	<i>United Nations Children's Fund</i>
<b>UNIFEM</b>	<i>United Nations Development Fund for Women</i>

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In recognition of women's right to equal participation and full involvement in peace-building processes, and the principle that any peace process should be locally owned, a conference entitled 'Sudanese Women and the Peace Process' was held in Oslo, 13–15 January 2005. That is; just a few days after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in Nairobi 9 January.

The conference hosted twelve delegates from South Sudan, and drew participation from UNIFEM, Norwegian authorities and non-governmental organisations, and members of the South Sudan community in Norway, who had asked for the possibility to be present. The initiative came from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who had called on the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) to organise and facilitate the event. The purpose of the conference, which should be seen as the first in a series, was to offer the delegates from South Sudan a platform to voice their priorities for a sustainable peace in their country and how they envisage that the international community can support them to this end.

Responding to this invitation, the delegates also expressed broad solidarity with the women of Darfur, and a desire to meet with the women of North Sudan. This report is based on the various experiences, views, and recommendations expressed by Sudanese delegates, as well as other participants at the conference, regarding women's inclusion and empowerment in the Sudanese peace process. It will be presented in connection with the Donors' Conference planned to take place in Oslo, Norway, 11-12 April 2005.