

1888: STEPPING BEYOND RHETORIC

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On September 30, 2009 the United Nations Security Council adopted a resolution on sexual violence in situations of armed conflict. Sam Cook, Project Director of [PeaceWomen](#), a project of the [Women's International League for Peace and Freedom](#), spoke with AWID about Resolution 1888 and its implications.

By Kathambi Kinoti

AWID: Why is resolution 1888 so important?

SAM COOK: Security Council Resolution 1888, [SCR 1888] is the third resolution adopted by the Council under its women, peace and security agenda item. It is important in advancing this agenda in that it does seem to indicate the Council's commitment to progress and to making its previous commitments more specific and focused. More particularly, it is important in strengthening the response to the issue of sexual violence in conflict on which it is focused. Sexual violence is once again recognized as being an important security issue that must be addressed by the Security Council and peacekeeping missions and for which a comprehensive response is required.

It is, however, vital that this response goes beyond condemning the use of sexual violence and that it goes beyond broad calls to end impunity. While these are important, they do not themselves do anything to prevent or respond to this violence. For that matter, a resolution alone is also not going to do anything to further a response. But SCR 1888 does strengthen and add to the tools at our disposal and it sets the stage for concrete and practical measures to be taken at the field level. There are important provisions for leadership and coordination and tools to build a real system of accountability – including advances in reporting systems and in the consideration of the perpetration of sexual violence as a criterion for the imposition of sanctions by the Council.

The PeaceWomen Project's coverage of the Open Debate in which the resolution was adopted and our analysis of the resolution can be found in our [September e-newsletter](#) but in brief, SCR 1888 :

- * Calls for the appointment of a Special Representative of the Secretary General [SRSG] to drive forward response efforts and in particular to provide leadership and coordination of UN efforts to address sexual violence;
- * Requests the deployment of expert rapid response teams to situations of concern - this team will assist national governments in justice and prevention efforts;
 - * Calls for the identification of "women protection advisors" within peacekeeping missions and their gender advisory or human rights protection units. It is thought that these advisors will provide support for the reporting of sexual violence and for the implementation of the Resolution's protection mandate;
 - * Urges the consideration of issues of sexual violence within peace processes – this is important to provide access to justice and reparations but also to build the foundations for sustainable peace;
- * Requests more systematic monitoring and reporting on conflict-related sexual violence and requests a report within three months on ways of improving this monitoring and reporting;

- * Requests an annual report on implementation of **SCR 1820** – including information on parties to armed conflict credibly suspected of perpetrating patterns of rape;
- * Identifies the link between the new UN Gender entity established in a recent General Assembly resolution and the coordination of UN efforts to address sexual violence and end impunity;

AWID: What was the journey up to the passing of resolution 1888, and what was the involvement of civil society organizations ?

SC: The journey to the passing of 1888 can of course be traced back through efforts over many, many years to get the international community to respond to the use of sexual violence in conflict. Within the context of the UN and the Security Council, SCR 1888's roots are firmly within the Council's women, peace and security agenda as first reflected in **SCR 1325**. SCR 1888 focuses on sexual violence in conflict – and in that sense is a follow up to which also had such a focus. However, I think it is vital that we look at and work with SCR 1888 within the broader women, peace and security framework and as one of many resolution tools that can advance that agenda. In thinking of the passage to 1888, we should not fall into the trap of isolating SCR 1820 and 1888 as separate agenda items. Of course many governments and UN entities are more comfortable in such a protection framework, but separating 1820 and 1888 from 1325 and now **1889** is dangerous in many respects. Each of these resolutions are tools with which to work in driving progress on the broader women, peace and security agenda.

Furthermore, and in relation to addressing sexual violence, it is important that we not reinstitute the now unhelpful dichotomy that places women either as victims or as agents of change. Whether or not one of these roles is prioritized or highlighted is itself not the only point. Rather it is not helpful to see women as being “either / or” and it is important to understand that powerful agents of change are at risk of sexual violence and those victimized by this violence do not lose their agency in the process. In addition – and most advocates inside and outside the system do seem to appreciate this and we look forward to the SRSG taking this approach – efforts to address sexual violence will likely be most effective if they take a holistic approach and one that addresses issues of participation and empowerment and peacebuilding. Separating out the “sexual violence resolutions” from the “other women, peace and security resolutions” will only exacerbate this problem and does not accurately reflect that all 4 current women, peace and security resolutions contain language linking issues of participation, protection and conflict prevention.

That then is the “big-picture” background to SCR 1888. In the more immediate past and more narrowly, it is the case that this resolution came about as a follow-up to SCR 1820 and the **report** that the SG submitted on this resolution in July and it takes up many of the report's recommendations, as well as civil society **monitoring and recommendations** of the Open debate on SCR 1820 and the SG's report.

There was some civil society engagement in the SG's 1820 report. Certainly groups in New York advocated for the UN to consult civil society at the field level and from New York many groups engaged with their own networks to develop recommendations to those developing the report. While not all of our recommendations were taken up, the report was satisfactory in many respects and SCR 1888 takes up many important issues and recommendations – including the appointment of an SRSG for which we have long advocated.

As regards engagement in the actual drafting of SCR 1888, as with so many Security Council processes, civil society access was very limited. The US, which led the resolution's adoption, did consult with New York groups on our recommendations and efforts were made to ensure we put forward the views of local and national civil society. However the limited time for consultation and the very nature of the negotiations made this process very challenging and not nearly as open as the civil society led efforts of SCR 1325. It is, however, vital that civil society remain engaged through the implementation stages and that at all levels – that is local, national and global – we continue to let the UN and our governments know that we are watching and pushing for results.

AWID: What is the track record on the implementation of resolutions 1325 and 1820, and how does this relate to expectations that 1888 will be effective in curbing sexual violence during conflict?

SC: This question is in many ways impossible to answer with any degree of confidence. The reason for this lies within the resolutions – or rather within what they do not contain. SCR 1325 and 1820 do not themselves contain mechanisms or indicators to measure and track progress. News reports and human rights groups' reports indicate that progress is limited. While lack of indicators and monitoring mechanisms is of course not itself a reason for the lack of progress in addressing the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war (which was already prohibited in international law) the lack of mechanisms for monitoring does hinder efforts to bring accountability for action. It is hoped that the recently adopted SCR 1889, which calls for the provision of global indicators to measure the progress in implementing SCR 1325, will be of assistance in this regard. Also, SCR 1888 does contain provision for annual reporting on 1820 and for reporting on perpetrators credibly thought to be perpetrating these patterns of sexual violence.

AWID: What are the next steps in ensuring that resolution 1888 serves as a powerful tool?

SC: There are of course steps that need to be taken within the UN system – a Special Representative needs to be appointed who has the credibility and skills to get the job done effectively, and we look forward to seeing progress on the various reports and indicators requested. But perhaps most important for civil society advocates is to continue to push for meaningful systems of monitoring and accountability, and to continue to advocate for the dedication of resources to these efforts. All the resolutions in the world add up to nothing if real resources are not committed to making the commitments real.

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