



SPECIAL REPORT

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ABOUT THE REPORT

This report examines the implementation of UNSCR 1325, what it has accomplished, and its potential in Egypt, Iraq, Israel, the Palestinian territories, and Tunisia fifteen years after being passed by the United Nations Security Council. To understand the successes and challenges of 1325 in each nation, one-on-one interviews were conducted as a key part of this research. Interviewees included female and male academics, activists, government officials, and nongovernmental leaders.

The report distills lessons and recommendations that are applicable to the Middle East and North Africa region and those relevant to particular nations. The report's findings aim to deepen the recognition and application of the essential linkages between advancing gender equality and creating sustainable national security and peace.

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Paula M. Rayman, Seth Izen, and Emily Parker

UNSCR 1325 in the Middle East and North Africa

Women and Security

Summary

- The United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1325 in October 2000. The resolution is not being utilized consistently across the studied nations in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. This disparity exists not only among the five nations examined by this report but also *within* each nation.
- Internally, there are differences among women and men in their support for the resolution and a Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda due to factors such as rural/urban divides, religious/secular affiliations, and socioeconomic status.
- Resolution 1325 offers a “common language” and approach for unifying efforts toward ending violence against women in the MENA region post-Arab Spring and promoting advancement toward gender equality.
- Women’s organizations have benefitted from 1325 because of international funding for related projects which they have struggled to obtain from local governments.
- Passage and implementation of National Action Plans (NAPs) by governments in the studied nations have proven difficult, largely due to insufficient political will, a dearth of governmental leadership and buy-in, and a lack of necessary and targeted resources. General unawareness is a major obstacle to both launching viable campaigns for 1325 and recruiting actors necessary for its implementation.
- For real change to occur, male and female leaders need to embrace values of gender justice that are recognized to be in the national interest of all.
- As conflicts in the region persist and economic inequality deepens, governments are prioritizing responses to the economic, political, and security crises in ways that preserve the status quo. As a result, women are pushed to the periphery.
- It is crucial that both men and women see the strong connection between implementation of the objectives of 1325 and long-term national security and economic development.

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Introduction

In the post-Arab Spring period, the MENA region has faced major obstacles to creating conditions for sustainable peace and lasting economic and social security. The five case studies in this report—Egypt, Iraq, Israel, the Palestinian territories, and Tunisia—explore the struggles and divides in the region. The report focuses on women’s adaptations to a predicament exacerbated by rising expectations from the Arab Spring, while simultaneously being pushed to the periphery and bearing the burden of family responsibilities due to economic instability and continuing political, social, and cultural unrest.

Security in the MENA region remains dire and inconsistent, especially for women. United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 evolved as one approach to address these security concerns. It acknowledges the disproportionate impacts of conflict on women and girls and calls explicitly for the inclusion of women in conflict management, conflict resolution, and sustainable peace processes. As of January 2016, fifty-eight UN Member States have developed NAPs in order to implement 1325. At the same time, many countries and groups have pursued the 1325 commitments on a broader scale and without the use of formal NAPs.

This report explores the effectiveness of 1325 in the MENA region, especially in its effort to recognize women’s unique situations in conflicted areas, to protect them from violence, and to expand their contribution to conflict prevention and resolution. The necessity for women and men to work together for these larger definitions of peace and security frame the interviews in this report and subsequent recommendations. Moreover, these interviews provide strong evidence from the field that viable peace will be achieved only by integrating gender equality with national security.

One common finding from the thirty personal interviews is the significance of training both men and women to promote inclusion. A key question for all those reading this report is how they as individuals and through their organizations can best work together with the people in the MENA region, in the words of one interviewee, “to help us prepare for peace.”¹

Diverse Implementation

There are significant differences in the development, implementation, and understanding of 1325 among the various case studies as well as within each nation.

Egypt

Egypt does not yet have a 1325 NAP. When Egypt hosted the Arab League, however, the League presented a WPS regional action plan on October 12, 2015, as part of the United Nation’s review of 1325. The next day, at the UN “Discussions on 15 Years after 1325,” the Egyptian Minister for Foreign Affairs mentioned that the National Council for Women of Egypt “worked out a national plan for follow-up and implementation of resolution 1325.”² However, the future of the NAP’s implementation remains uncertain. Interviewees suggested that Egypt has not passed a 1325 NAP largely due to lack of awareness of the resolution. For those aware of 1325, it is perceived as irrelevant in the Egyptian context, as the country is neither at war nor experiencing protracted violent conflict.

Simultaneously, there are local efforts in Egypt that reflect the “spirit” of 1325. Interviewees reported that holding trainings and summer schools for youth, as well as roundtables for local leaders and powerholders, resulted in small changes in local-level mentalities. Rasha Dewedar, former program manager at the Noon Center for Women and Family Issues, expressed her organization’s emphasis on “Islamic feminism,” utilizing religious texts and

tenets to advocate for women's rights.³ Interviewees saw small but significant changes as a result of their programming—particularly roundtables involving imams, sheikhs, and Muslim and Christian community leaders. It was noted that post-training, discourse on women's rights has improved. First-time participants are often more inclined to attend additional courses and follow-up trainings, and they influence their colleagues as well.⁴

It also appears that there is at least some interest in the WPS agenda among Egyptian government and civil society organization (CSO) actors. Interviewees reported that external actors, including the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the North Africa Regional Capability, have launched a few initiatives in collaboration with the Egyptian government to provide gender-sensitive training for security officers and prosecutors. Yet such training remains infrequent, small-scale, and does not reach the general populace.⁵ A prominent male leader in conflict resolution also reported new interest among the Egyptian Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Interior in providing women peacekeepers in Egyptian operations, largely resulting from an understanding that the WPS agenda is now high on the international radar due to 1325's fifteen-year anniversary. Additionally, he noted that more local CSOs have recently become interested in WPS efforts out of a desire to link their individual agendas to the international WPS agenda.⁶

Iraq

In early 2014, Iraq became the first country in the region to launch a 1325 NAP. Less than a year later, ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) surged out of eastern Syria to seize Mosul and other key cities and towns in Iraq. Gender equality advocates have continued to exert efforts, and in May 2015 an Emergency NAP to implement 1325 was passed by the government. Key actors express the importance of Iraq's 1325 NAP and Emergency NAP, particularly that they provide a "common language" and approach for unification. At the same time, these actors are frustrated with the lack of implementation, largely due to insufficient political will and a dearth of resources.

The Emergency NAP focuses primarily on including women in all peacebuilding efforts and providing legal, psychological, and health support for affected women and girls. It consists of three pillars—prevention, participation, and protection—and it focuses on the current conflict with ISIS. A common refrain among interviewees, however, was that 1325 and its NAPs remain "ink on paper" without the tools and support to ensure their implementation.

Israel

In July 2005, Israel became the first UN member state to enshrine parts of 1325 into law. The Knesset passed an amendment to the 1951 Equality of Women's Rights Law that committed the government to include "appropriate representation" of women in all national policy-making committees, including teams that focus on the peace process. The amendment is notable because it went beyond 1325 to require representation of diverse groups of women.⁷

To expand the role of 1325 in Israel, over thirty CSOs and feminist activists, under the leadership of Women Lawyers for Social Justice, the Center for the Advancement of Women in the Public Sphere at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, and an NGO called Agenda, began a process in 2011 to develop a Comprehensive Action Plan for 1325. Funding came from international support, including the European Union, the Heinrich Böll Stiftung Foundation in Germany, and the U.S.-based National Council of Jewish Women. The two-year development process included a series of open meetings and consultations across the country. In 2013, the organizations released *A Comprehensive Action Plan for the Application of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (CAP)*.⁸

A common refrain among interviewees, however, was that 1325 and its NAPs remain "ink on paper" without the tools and support to ensure their implementation.

In December 2014, an inter-ministerial committee was tasked with reviewing and implementing the CAP. The committee, which as of publication has only drafted a preliminary program, is far from gaining approval or implementing the action plan.⁹

Palestinian Territories

In the Palestinian territories, some activists questioned the value of 1325. Eileen Kuttab of the Institute of Women's Studies at Birzeit University stated that "[UN] resolutions such as 1325 are largely irrelevant. Palestine is not in conflict or postconflict but in the midst of a national liberation movement in which women's rights are being overlooked...We can't keep thinking that the state of Palestine is a normal state...what works here doesn't work anywhere else, we are unique in that sense."¹⁰ Furthermore, 1325 makes no mention of social or economic rights, such as the right to basic living conditions or right to housing, and thus does not fully cover women's actual needs and priorities on the ground.

In order to help 1325 appeal to a broad Palestinian audience, the NGO Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy (MIFTAH) framed the resolution as essential for both the national struggle against Israel and the social struggle against patriarchy. A 2009 MIFTAH report introduced 1325 by stating that the resolution is "particularly important for Palestinian women" because they "suffer from two forms of oppression: one is the oppression, violence and brutality of occupation, and the other is the male oppression that impedes their full equality as citizens in accordance with Palestinian references, namely the Charter of Independence and the Palestinian Basic Law."¹¹ Tying the resolution to the agenda of the Palestinian women's movement, MIFTAH argued that 1325 "merges between the demands for national liberation and the need of women to achieve comprehensive and just peace as well as women's need for social progress and rights to enshrine values of democracy and equality."¹² The necessity to tie the national and social movements was echoed by Jamilah Abu-Duhou, a gender studies expert with UN Women. She stated that "When we're building a state, we know what kind of a state we want: democratic, liberal... within that ideology we build rights, and women's rights should be at the forefront of the national rights movement...one shouldn't take a precedence over the other."¹³

In 2014, the National Coalition for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 held an international conference called "Women's Freedom, Peace and Dignity in Palestine UNSCR 1325 for Accountability" sponsored by the World Young Women's Christian Association. The conference was framed around how 1325 could provide accountability on the national and social level.¹⁴ The official Palestinian NAP was approved by cabinet ministers in May 2015.

Tunisia

While there have been some grassroots efforts to incorporate a WPS agenda in Tunisia, the country does not yet have a NAP for 1325 implementation, nor does there appear to be one in the pipeline. Similar to findings from Egypt, interviewees suggested that Tunisia has not passed a 1325 NAP largely due to a general lack of awareness and understanding of the resolution. There are local efforts that reflect the spirit of 1325, however. For example, under the new transitional government following the revolution, women's groups successfully pushed to drop Tunisia's reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which were officially lifted in April 2014.

The International Institute of Human Development (IiDH) is also currently focusing on involving Tunisian women in efforts to prevent radicalization. Since July 2015, they have been working with the Tunisian Ministry of Interior to suggest a strategy for the National

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Center for Reintegration and Rehabilitation for Foreign Fighters to incorporate a WPS lens. IiDH also collaborated with the Ministry of Women's Affairs to hold a conference in February 2016 dealing with women, peace, and security in Tunisia. Conference objectives included both working toward a charter that would pressure the state to focus on a WPS agenda and building a network focusing on gender and security issues.¹⁵

Women have also risen to notable positions in civil society as a result of such efforts. One such example is Wided Bouchamaoui, president of the Employers' Union (UTICA). In the wake of the 2013 anti-government protests catalyzed by the assassination of two opposition politicians, UTICA joined three other civil society forces to form the National Dialogue Quartet. As a leader of the Quartet, Bouchamaoui played a prominent role in the National Dialogue, which produced a political road map forward. In recognition of their struggle to mediate through crisis and instability, the four groups were awarded the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize. However, the cohesion of the Quartet—and Bouchamaoui's role in it—remains uncertain, as UTICA is currently in dispute with its fellow Nobel winner the Tunisian General Labor Union over corporate pay increases while strikes and industrial protests continue nationwide.

Women's Affairs Minister Samira Marai, as well as the broader Ministry of Women's Affairs, have also recently ushered in positive change. On November 10, 2015, the Tunisian parliament approved a new law (143 to 1, with 4 abstentions) that will allow women to travel with their minor children without needing to obtain permission from the children's father. Notably, the new law "recognizes that women are equal partners in making decisions about their children."¹⁶

Benefits of UNSCR 1325

The most important benefits of 1325 are the provision of a "common language" and an approach capable of uniting diverse women's groups. UNSCR 1325 is broad enough that it is relevant to the work of many NGOs. It has facilitated the formation of coalitions, established advocates, and improved interactions between women's NGOs and government actors. Women's organizations have also benefitted from 1325 because of international funding for related projects—projects for which they have struggled to obtain local government funding.

In Iraq, for example, the path to the NAP began in 2012 with directed efforts to build a common understanding and strengthen collaboration among various Iraqi women's groups. A series of workshops and meetings held in cooperation with the European Feminist Initiative revealed that a major challenge for civil society groups in Iraq was a lack of networking and "insufficient will among CSOs to work together." Addressing this gap was seen as a precondition for the success of the women's rights movement and, consequently, for the development of a 1325 NAP.¹⁷ Active efforts were made early on to reach out to activists and representatives from major women's rights organizations and networks and to ultimately form a civil society-led focus group that would work together to ensure an inclusive consultative process for developing a 1325 NAP.

The Civil Society Strategic Meeting in Beirut on July 28–29, 2012, brought together major Iraqi women's rights organizations. The meeting developed an outline of a NAP framework and formed a national reference group, the Iraq NAP 1325 Initiative (I-NAP 1325), as well as a cross-sector taskforce consisting of both local NGOs and state actors from various ministries in Iraq, including the Kurdistan region. Following a number of consultations and working meetings, I-NAP 1325 developed a six-pillar NAP focused on political participation, prevention, protection, economic empowerment, legislation, and monitoring. Former prime minister Nouri al-Maliki signed the plan into action in February 2014, making Iraq the first country in the region to pass a NAP. However, he omitted the

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pillars on economic empowerment and legislation and failed to allocate a budget for the NAP, largely obstructing its implementation.

The emergence of ISIS in Iraq in June 2014 undermined much of I-NAP 1325's work and led to further challenges. Leaders of the initiative realized that they needed to expand the reach of collaboration. As Suzan Aref, director of the Women Empowerment Organization (WEO) in the Kurdistan region, expressed, "We needed more organizations to be stronger and to have unified voices to put more pressure on the government."¹⁸ I-NAP 1325 merged with related groups to form the 1325 Alliance in 2014. After talks and workshops supported by the U.S. Institute of Peace, the thirty-group Alliance produced a one-year 1325 Emergency NAP with support from the Iraqi Ministry of Women's Affairs and the High Council in the Kurdistan region. On May 26, 2015, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi signed the 1325 Emergency NAP into action. Once again, it was passed without a budget.

Despite varying circumstances and continued tensions between Iraq and its Kurdistan region, 1325 brought together different women's groups from both areas and enabled them to reach common ground beyond what was accomplished by the Iraqi Women's Network, established in 2003. Liza Hido, president of the Baghdad Women Association, reported that Iraq's 1325 NAP required extensive negotiation, but various actors—religious, secular, conservative, and liberal—eventually reached consensus. The consultative process also led to widespread ownership of the NAP among the diverse groups involved in both the Kurdistan region and the rest of Iraq.¹⁹

Moreover, 1325 and the process of developing Iraq's NAP helped build relations between Iraqi women's groups and state actors. As Hido explained, the years spent developing the NAP led to strong support from the cross-sector taskforce—as well as from the Independent High Commission for Human Rights of Iraq.²⁰ The NAP also generated an increase in international attention, and women's organizations received more international funding for 1325-related projects, which would have struggled to obtain sufficient local government funding. The resolution, and the international funding and attention it generated, was therefore helpful to "move from a government adaptation to a civil society movement"²¹ through its impetus to unite diverse women's groups, establish advocates, and offer new resources.

In the West Bank and Gaza, 1325 is seen as a unifying force among women's groups. Soraida Hussein, director of the Women's Affairs Technical Committee, referred to the resolution as "a language" and "a common tool throughout the world." She called the resolution "a gateway for all to communicate and learn using common language and terminology."²² Khaleda Abusoboh of the Palestinian Authority (PA) Ministry of Interior stated that 1325 is "like a code for individuals who believe in peacebuilding" and that activists can "take advantage of the plan to bridge the cooperation and ties between the Palestinian factions."²³ Even though movement limitations and governmental differences have frustrated efforts to build a unified movement between the West Bank and Gaza, Abusoboh noted: "We believe we can overcome this because a woman is the same whether she is a mother of Hamas or Fatah."²⁴

In Israel, however, where approximately 20 percent of the country's citizens are Palestinian Arab,²⁵ 1325 has only served as a unifying force among the Israeli Jewish women's organizations who joined together to develop a CAP. While Israel's Arab women's organizations were invited to participate in the development process for the CAP, they were told that there would be no guarantee that the process would acknowledge Israeli responsibility to end the occupation. As a result, they refused to participate. The Arab women's organizations in the country, and broader-based left-wing Israeli women's groups, issued a position paper criticizing the CAP and its development process. They argued that their positions were "silenced and marginalized."²⁶ According to feminist scholar Sarai Aharoni, one could read through

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the fifty pages of the Israeli Action Plan (excluding the introduction) and not be aware that Israel is involved in an armed conflict.²⁷ The words “occupation” or “occupied territory” are only mentioned once each in the introduction and not at all in the CAP.”²⁸

Challenges of UNSCR 1325

Political Will

Beyond passing an international resolution such as 1325, tangible change in the MENA region requires buy-in from key actors, political will to allocate resources, and awareness and understanding of the resolution. Activists and organizations not directly working on 1325 either remain predominantly unaware of the resolution or do not regard it as an important or relevant goal. This lack of awareness is also prevalent among those actors needed to implement it.

According to the 2015 Global Gender Gap report, Egypt ranks 136th out of 145 countries in the world on gender equality. Despite a number of new articles related to women’s rights in Egypt’s 2014 constitution—including a 25 percent quota for women in local councils—the 2015 ranking highlights a large decline, as Egypt ranked 125th in 2013.²⁹ The decline suggests that while new legislation and legal reforms may have symbolic value, they have achieved little ground-level change due to a lack of implementation and enforcement mechanisms, as well as entrenched societal norms. Interviewees noted that the lack of political will to actually implement change remains a key issue, for both existing legislation and potential new initiatives such as a 1325 NAP.

Moreover, while state actors and political parties have expressed surface-level support for women in politics, this commitment has not played out on the ground level, and women remain relegated to lower-level positions.³⁰ Upon taking power, Egypt’s Supreme Council of the Armed Forces issued a decree abolishing the previous sixty-four seat quota in the People’s Assembly (the lower house of Egypt’s parliament). On the first day of Egypt’s October 2015 parliamentary elections, Omar Marwan of the High Elections Committee expressed that the number of female voters so far was “four times greater” than that of men. Yet as candidates, women were greatly outnumbered.³¹ Out of 568 members of parliament (MPs), 73 female MPs were elected, representing 12.8 percent of all elected MPs, in addition to 14 women appointed by the president, according to legal requirements.³² The 2014 Egyptian Constitution does, however, assign a quota of one quarter of the seats for women in elected local councils.³³ Yet activists highlighted the tendency to nominate largely unqualified and noncompetitive women, as well as place them lower on electoral lists.

Interviewees stated that the greatest challenges toward furthering a WPS agenda in Egypt are the continued societal acceptance—on the part of both men and women—of gender inequality and prevailing “negative attitudes” toward women’s empowerment. This is particularly true in rural areas, in Upper Egypt, and with the older generation. Although more women and girls participated in volunteering and grassroots activities after the 2011 Egyptian revolution, this change is largely limited to youth, and their ability to be politically active is mostly at the grassroots level, not the governmental level.

As Yanar Mohammed, cofounder and president of the Organization of Women’s Freedom in Iraq (OWFI), stated during her remarks at the UN Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security on October 13, 2015, implementation of 1325 and international human rights standards “...provide a roadmap for the prevention of armed conflict and the integration of gender equality across all peace and security actions. What is primarily lacking is the political will.”³⁴ The responses of both former prime minister Maliki and Prime Minister Abadi to the original 1325 NAP and the subsequent Emergency NAP reflect this statement.

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The lack of effort to create and promote opportunities for women and girls to develop their skills and leadership qualities reveals that the Iraqi government and society “have symbolically acknowledged women’s rights, but they haven’t invested in them enough.”

WEO director Suzan Aref claimed that the exclusion of two major pillars—the economic and social participation of women and the representation and status of women in legislation and law enforcement—proved the “fragile political will” behind the resolution and NAP.³⁵ Haider al-Ibrahimi, executive director of Sanad for Peacebuilding in Iraq, further argued that Maliki’s refusal to allocate a budget to implement the NAP confirmed that it was little more than a “marketing plan” on Maliki’s part to garner votes in Iraq’s 2014 elections and to gain international accolade.³⁶

For Dlawer Ala’Aldeen, a former government minister and current president of the Middle East Research Institute (MERI) in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, the lack of effort to create and promote opportunities for women and girls to develop their skills and leadership qualities reveals that the Iraqi government and society “have symbolically acknowledged women’s rights, but they haven’t invested in them enough.”³⁷ Such a training deficit disadvantages women in terms of political participation, negotiations, and other 1325-related activities because they lack exposure to the appropriate technical language and processes.

There are few state actors that profess to support efforts toward 1325 implementation and gender equity, and most of these politicians’ commitments to women’s issues are widely perceived as mere rhetoric or “propaganda” used for electoral campaigns.³⁸ Women remain in lower-level positions within political parties and are not offered decision-making roles. As Liza Hido expressed, “You will see no women in the steering committee of the [political] parties.” Moreover, she added that the present focus remains on gender-based violence response—treating women as “victims” rather than as “participants” and empowering them to work to improve situations for themselves and others.³⁹

According to al-Ibrahimi and Ala’Aldeen, the situation is somewhat different in the Kurdistan region.⁴⁰ Ala’Aldeen believes the political will exists to implement a 1325 NAP, despite a lack in resources, because of the strength of numerous women’s rights groups in the Kurdistan region “who pushed it [1325] down the system” in collaboration with the UN. He largely attributed the success of women’s organizations to investments made over time in women and girls’ trainings and education, both in the Kurdistan region and abroad. Such investments led to a “critical mass” of well-qualified women who gradually took on more and more leadership positions in the government, NGOs, and the Kurdish Peshmerga forces. Since the ISIS escalation, young female fighters have become even more prominent. This image of women as protectors of their communities, according to Ala’Aldeen, has provided a powerful argument for women’s rights and inclusion, an argument that is largely lacking in the rest of Iraq.⁴¹

A common refrain among interviewees was that 1325 and its NAPs lack the tools and support to ensure their implementation. While the UN passing 1325 was significant, the UN does not lobby for the resolution locally, spread awareness, convince leaders to buy into the resolution, or designate time and resources for implementation—nor do local organizations receive support for most of these activities. As Ala’Aldeen explained, passing any NAP or WPS agenda is not a one-off job.⁴² It takes an active process to get the whole system to comply, and a lack of follow-up prevents larger structural change. A number of interviewees agreed that the UN and international NGOs need to be more active with local groups to lobby for the resolution. Such efforts must engage rural women to make them aware of their rights and expose rural men to the benefits of a WPS agenda.

In Israel, there remains significant skepticism about the future of the implementation of 1325 given that the inter-ministerial committee established in December 2014 to consolidate and implement the NAP missed its summer 2015 deadline. Furthermore, Dr. Tamir Magal, a research fellow at Hebrew University, pointed out that the minister in charge of the committee, Gila Gamliel, is the head of a newly created ministry of Social Equality and therefore has limited resources to advance any plan.⁴³

Knesset member Merav Michaeli of the Zionist Union, reflecting on the lack of women in the ministry positions in the government formed in April 2015, said, “No one should be surprised that the third Netanyahu government authorized Resolution 1325 just so the fourth Netanyahu government can immediately ignore it.”⁴⁴ The appointment of only one woman to the current fourteen-member security cabinet in Israel exemplifies the limited role women continue to possess in affairs of national security.

In the Palestinian territories, the lack of awareness about 1325 is a serious issue. International funders often earmark contributions for projects with deliverables. Therefore, awareness-raising, which is not easy to measure with metrics, is not a funder priority. For activists, however, raising awareness is of paramount importance. “The most important thing,” according to Khaleda Abusoboh, “is to start discussing and raising awareness about this resolution in our own communities [because] women may be oppressed and treated unfairly, but that doesn’t mean [they] shouldn’t be informed of her rights.”⁴⁵ One gender rights activist from Bethlehem, Rami Khader, stated that he was familiar with numerous UN resolutions but had never heard of 1325.⁴⁶ Indeed, international resolutions such as 1325 are not widely known or seen as relevant to the lives of ordinary women whose primary focus is on daily survival.⁴⁷

Activists in the West Bank are also skeptical about the implementation of 1325. Sama Aweidah, director of the Women’s Studies Center, pointed to how the PA had decided to do a gender mainstreamed budget three years ago but no work had been done toward its completion. The government was not willing to put financial or human resources to the task.⁴⁸ This is compounded by the lack of binding mechanisms for enforcement or implementation.

In Gaza, the Wissal Coalition has focused its implementation efforts on combatting gender-based violence and working on bringing moderate Hamas and Fatah women together for national unity. Activism in Gaza with the Hamas government is difficult, and members call their current situation “a depressing one in which we see no real avenues for women’s participation and limited space for us to work.”⁴⁹

Tunisian interviewees indicated that new legislation and legal reforms may have symbolic value but have achieved little ground-level change. There was consensus that most legislation relevant to women’s rights and gender equality remains weakly implemented, contains vaguely worded language, or allows for loopholes that have impeded large-scale change. In particular, interviewees cited Article 46 of the country’s 2014 constitution which says that “The state commits to protect women’s established rights and works to strengthen and develop those rights.” Yet as Emna Jebblaoui, the president of Tunisia’s International Institute for Human Development, expressed, “It’s not enough to have a law. It’s important to have it respected and adopted and for people to take ownership.”⁵⁰

Along the same lines, the 2014 Tunisian Constitution declares that “the State is obliged to take measures to eliminate all forms of violence against women,”⁵¹ and rape is illegal under the Tunisian penal code. Very few cases, however, are prosecuted and Article 227 states that in the case of a statutory rape involving a minor female, legal proceedings against the perpetrator may be dropped if the victim agrees to marry the perpetrator. Similarly, although domestic violence has been ruled a criminal offense punishable by imprisonment for up to two years, societal acceptance of domestic violence remains prevalent. In the results of the first national survey on violence against women in Tunisia, conducted in 2010 by the Office National de la Famille et de la Protection, 73 percent of violence survivors reported not seeking help from anyone due to shame and fear of aggravating the situation.⁵² Thus, despite promising new legislation, activist and human rights defender Lina Ben Mhenni remarked, “When it comes to real life, it’s different. We aren’t really enjoying these laws.”⁵³

The appointment of only one woman to the current fourteen-member security cabinet in Israel exemplifies the limited role women continue to possess in affairs of national security.

Understanding That Women's Rights Are for Everyone

In the MENA region, there is a lack of involvement, collaboration, and trust between male and female powerholders and activists toward 1325, while immediate political and personal interests are prioritized. In order for a real difference to be made on women's equality, men and powerholders must see that it is in their best interests to expand access to shared power and increased capacity for women now rather than later. Advancing women into positions of power is not enough, as many of the women who have recently gained power tend to belong to majority groups resistant to large changes to the status quo. They follow their party leadership and oppose agendas that might threaten their positions of power. What matters is for women and men in leadership roles to recognize that social and legal equality benefits everyone.

A young, local female CSO worker explained that there are many organizations with resources working for women's rights in Egypt. However, they tend to focus on training women alone and teaching them about their rights, rather than raising awareness within the broader communities.

All Egyptian interviewees agreed that advances in women's rights are still largely viewed as only beneficial for women. Ghada Hammam, country program manager of Dia-konia Egypt, explained that there is "confusion that gender just means women's rights and supports just women" rather than the greater society.⁵⁴ These interviews also revealed that difficulties have arisen in advancing a WPS agenda, reaching "the right people," and keeping them involved. A young, local female CSO worker explained that there are many organizations with resources working for women's rights in Egypt. However, they tend to focus on training women alone and teaching them about their rights, rather than raising awareness within the broader communities. There is currently no organized national platform for peacebuilding and dialogue work, nor is there a prominent political party or unified movement advocating for women's rights. In addition to their difficulties in reaching and collaborating with other local women's rights and peace groups, interviewees also expressed their limitations in accessing rural communities. At the same time, interest in the subject does not necessarily indicate long-term commitment to advancing a WPS agenda. As a prominent male CSO representative explained, "It's hard to find people who will actually commit to doing the work of the women, peace, and security agenda."⁵⁵

The instability following the events of 2011 has also obstructed government officials and powerholders from advancing a WPS agenda in Egypt. Inactive parliaments and inconsistent regulations have led not only to decreased confidence in state institutions but also to a lack of mechanisms by which to debate escalating tensions and implement reforms. Funding is also an issue—particularly given Egypt's ongoing economic crisis—and many foreign organizations have been reluctant to fund in Egypt. Even when CSOs are allocated funding, a lack of transparency makes it difficult to ascertain whether it reaches its intended recipients and therefore to build trust. As a local NGO representative explained, there is a general belief that NGOs who receive foreign funds have "special agendas." NGOs also cannot receive any funding without government approval and must be a registered association to do so. "Some organizations have refused this step...they don't want to be registered because they believe that NGOs should work freely without restrictions," the representative stated.⁵⁶

Moreover, despite the large number of registered CSOs in Egypt, Hammam estimated that only a small percent work in the realm of advocacy, peacebuilding, and human rights, while the rest work in service provision.⁵⁷ Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, UN assistant secretary-general for Peacebuilding Support, explained that approximately 2 percent of global funds allocated to peace and security efforts go to gender empowerment activities or projects.⁵⁸

Within the Iraqi political system, a climate of fear dominated by sectarian politics has prevailed. Although grassroots women's organizations have been able to create networks that bridge party and religious-secular divides through their collaboration on the NAP and

Emergency NAP, this has not been the case within the actual political system necessary for implementation. Many of the women in government were elected for symbolic purposes, and rather than wielding real power they tend to defer to male higher-ups. Moreover, government institutions and structures themselves continue to change.⁵⁹ For example, the Iraqi Ministry of Women's Affairs was instrumental in advocating for and passing the NAP and the Emergency NAP. However, in Prime Minister Abadi's reforms in August 2015, the Ministry of Women's Affairs was dissolved, making relationships difficult to maintain.

Mistrust between NGOs and the Iraqi government, as well as internal politics and red tape, make the process more convoluted as well. Because both the 1325 NAP and the Emergency NAP went unfunded, it became the responsibility of each individual ministry to allocate resources for implementation. However, ministries have easily justified their lack of implementation by arguing that they do not possess the funds to do so. Even when ministries demonstrate the will to implement 1325, as Liza Hido explained, the issue becomes further politicized because the ministries must obtain parliamentary approval for each budget.⁶⁰

Furthermore, the capacity of local CSOs to provide much-needed services is not protected, let alone promoted. In fact, in most situations, CSOs are blocked. As OWFI president and cofounder Yanar Mohammad explained at this year's UN Security Council's Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security, "In the absence of government-sponsored services, local women's groups meet the needs of those most vulnerable to the conflict. We are at the forefront of providing aid and services in places unreachable by international aid organizations. Yet we remain vastly underrepresented in our efforts to prevent and address conflict and violent extremism." She cited several examples of civil society efforts that have been stifled by the government: "Iraqi authorities do not allow women's organizations to provide shelter to the thousands of women fleeing conflict-related violence, and independent radio stations that promote peace across sectarian divides, dispel misogyny and combat homophobia have been shut down."⁶¹ Mohammad herself has established a secret network of safe houses for honor-killing runaways and survivors of rape and abuse. The lack of collaboration and trust between relevant state and civil society actors, as well as the prioritization of more immediate political and personal interests, have hindered 1325 NAP implementation in Iraq.

In Israel, the power and representation of women who are members of the majority Ashkenazi⁶² Jewish population tends to increase when the Women's Equal Rights Law is implemented. Sometimes the women who advance professionally possess sharply different political views than the organizations that helped support their advancement. Aida Touma Suleiman, one of the two Arab women who are members of Knesset, summarized the dilemma by stating: "Though I'm a feminist and support female representation everywhere, some of the women [ministers] do not really represent what I want to see: Feminist values, democratic values, support for the rights of the marginalized and oppressed. I very much hope that there will be more feminist voices in the Knesset and not just a higher number of women."⁶³

Many other groups of women who are not part of the majority have been left behind; Arab women and Ethiopian and Mizrahi⁶⁴ Jewish women have not shared in the increasing representation intended by the 2005 amendment. In the push to advance women, the reality that women are not a "monolithic" group and that they suffer from double exclusion as a result of the intersection of their femininity with religious, ethnic or economic affiliations⁶⁵ was overlooked. This realization contributed to the new focus on using gender mainstreaming tools to achieve gender equality.

A central goal of 1325 is increased participation of women in national and international decision making. Including women's voices in government is more difficult than simply appointing female ministers. An activist from Gaza stated that female members of the

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legislative council are unable to make their own decisions since they are bound by the agenda of their party: "Although we have seven sisters from Hamas in the Legislative Council, I consider them all as one woman or as one man in terms of political perception or position, they all represent one line." She finds the same phenomenon in Fatah and concludes that since "men do not listen to women and they have no trust in their views so when men give them high positions it is usually more symbolic than substantive."⁶⁶

Ultimately, substantive implementation of 1325 in the Palestinian territories may rely as much upon the involvement of men as of women, according to activist Rami Khader. Based on his experience, Khader stated that solely empowering women in a patriarchal society doesn't lead to change. Rather, men need to be educated to help them understand why it is important for women to participate in politics and the legal system. The status quo can only change with men's support.⁶⁷

In Tunisia, struggles and nuances of local power politics have also proven challenging for advancing a WPS agenda. University professor and writer Olfa Youssef explained that many commitments to gender equality, such as the decision to drop Tunisia's reservations to CEDAW, are perceived as mere "political propaganda" by politicians seeking to gain approval from progressive Tunisians and the international community. "Interests supersede the desire to achieve rights and equality," she stated.⁶⁸ Insufficient training and awareness of recent women's rights legislation have also led to a lack of trust in such legislation and agendas, let alone in a broader WPS agenda. Both Youssef and Emna Jebblaoui explained that the French term for HIV is SIDA, which sounds like CEDAW. "So CEDAW has been linked with HIV, as the pronunciation is similar to the French word for AIDS—that gives you an idea of the level of ignorance we are dealing with," Jebblaoui expressed.⁶⁹

A gap has also emerged between elite women activists and more marginalized women, with the different groups having divergent interests rather than a unified vision. According to several interviewees, a majority of public-facing feminist activists in Tunisia have developed into an elitist movement, adopting a western model of feminist activism that is less applicable and relatable to marginalized women, largely located in the country's interior region. This "feminist elite" receives a large proportion of international funding and attention, thus widening the gap. There are also fissures in the women's political movement over a number of other factors, including women's religious practices. The difficulty in bridging various geographic, religious, class-based, and political identities to build trust and advocate for common concerns has proven difficult in Tunisia's dynamic environment post-revolution.

Promoting Women as Part of the Security Agenda

There is an inadequate understanding of the critical connection between gender and national security, as well as between gender and economic benefits. As conflict and economic inequality continue in the MENA region, societies are prioritizing responses to the economic, political, and security crises in ways that preserve the status quo. In the process, women are pushed to the periphery. It is crucial that both men and women see the link between the implementation of 1325 and increased sustainable national security and economic growth.

Interviewees in Egypt revealed that many Egyptians are uncertain how to define *conflict* and *peacebuilding*. Ghada Hammam explained that the general societal belief in Egypt is that conflict requires arms and that peacebuilding only takes place in situations of armed conflict, such as the current crises in Syria and Yemen.⁷⁰ Yet she highlighted that there is still much internal conflict in Egypt—particularly between supporters of the "old" versus the "new regime." Such internal strife often leads to violence, yet it is not seen as conflict related to peacebuilding. Interviewees also expressed that CSOs in Egypt remain largely unaware of 1325. Hammam noted that conflicts affecting Egyptians today are not viewed as "high

level” conflicts that necessitate peacebuilding efforts, therefore, 1325 is largely considered irrelevant to those familiar with the resolution.⁷¹ A prominent male CSO representative also explained that this lack of awareness of 1325 includes the general public, governmental institutions, and officials.⁷²

Decades of war and violence, economic sanctions, and corruption and misrule in Iraq have left many women widowed, displaced, or unemployed, and the security situation continues to interrupt many girls’ schooling, adding to the gender gap.⁷³ Moreover, the ongoing conflict in Iraq has led to a large increase in male adult mortality, which has meant that many women are now bringing up children alone, often in situations of considerable financial hardship and vulnerability.⁷⁴ The context of structural violence has greatly impinged on their financial independence and security.

Amid Iraq’s more volatile security situation, violence against women remains widespread. Survivors of violence lack mechanisms for protection. Liza Hido noted that security problems, bureaucratic hurdles, and funding deficits have forced many NGOs to close down.⁷⁵ As such, women survivors of violence often have nowhere to seek sanctuary and ensure that their rights are protected. Currently, formal women’s shelters exist only in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. Multiple sources also report that the number of honor killings in Iraq has increased dramatically since the 2003 invasion.

Particularly in the context of the ISIS escalation, security has taken the front seat in government and media rhetoric. Women’s rights are perceived as a humanitarian burden and beneficial for women alone, and the link between women’s rights and security is largely misunderstood. Therefore, as interviewees explained, the prevailing excuse is that now is not an appropriate time, and women’s rights “will come later.” Suzan Aref explained that before the approval of the Emergency NAP, the 1325 Alliance attempted to hold its last conference within the Parliament in Baghdad, but the MPs said, “No, it’s not a good time because we are busy with ISIS...We don’t have money—this is a war and not a good time.” To which the Alliance responded, “Okay, but women are part of this, and they are the biggest victims of this war. This is why we have to talk about it.”⁷⁶

During her remarks at the UN Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security, Yanar Mohammad stated, “Building a state on a corrupt foundation subjected millions to poverty and hunger in a climate of sectarian hatred. These are the politics that paved the way for the creation of ISIS.”⁷⁷ Women’s positions in the current crisis and conflict with ISIS therefore cannot be understood without consideration of the broader context since 2003 and the widespread marginalization that arose on the basis of gender, sect, and ethnicity. This marginalization is inextricably linked to the security and well-being of the country, therefore focusing on 1325’s emphasis on equality would benefit security and society as a whole.

The situation in the Kurdistan region of Iraq—where women have been engaged in armed resistance for decades and are currently contributing to the fight against ISIS⁷⁸—shows how efforts to strengthen women’s training over time have largely contributed to security benefits and enhanced women’s participation rather than their victimization. As MERI president Dlawer Ala’Aldeen explained, more and more women, in Sulaymaniyah in particular, have taken on key positions in the police and Peshmerga military forces—positions not traditionally available to women. As a result, women “have now gradually advanced their cause, removed boundaries, and are seriously considered, on merit, for sharing government leadership positions.” Further, Ala’Aldeen juxtaposed two main images that have recently affected perceptions of Iraqi women and women’s rights since the 2014 ISIS escalation: “On the one hand, we have the female fighters of Kobane [in Rojava in North Syria], the Shingal [with Peshmarga of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq], who actually did

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a lot more to free women and make people respect their rights. More girls were inspired to follow such role models and express their individual rights and political independence." The other image is of "weak and helpless" women and girls who have fallen victim to ISIS. According to Ala'Aldeen, "People felt they needed to do more to protect women, enhance their capacity, and enable them to protect themselves. The Kurdish authorities had previously failed to invest sufficiently in training and educating women, particularly in the rural areas, and in making them more independent individuals in charge of their own destiny." MERI, a policy-research institute based in Erbil in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, focuses on promoting women's rights as part of nationbuilding, peace, and stability "...because we believe you can't have peace and stability with one half of society not being free."⁷⁹ In monitoring rule of law as key to peacebuilding and stability, Ala'Aldeen explained that MERI's "...best indication of progress is women's rights and the data that we get for violence against women and the measures taken by the authorities to combat them."⁸⁰ While women's rights in Iraq are still widely regarded as a humanitarian burden and beneficial for women alone, the link between women's rights and security has begun to take root in organizations such as MERI.

In 2013, thirty women's organizations in Israel released *A Comprehensive Action Plan for the Application of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325*.⁸¹ Given the prominence of the word "security" to Israeli discourse, the authors of the NAP decided to frame it around a redefinition of the concept of "security." According to this redefinition, "security for the people of Israel is a broad concept which includes: protection from violence in public and private spaces; termination of the ongoing state of warfare; protection and advancement of political, civil, and economic rights; freedom from religious coercion; freedom from oppression born of denial of personal and collective rights; freedom from violence, and equal opportunities for women from all parts of society in the economy, education, employment, health, and housing."⁸²

The Israeli NAP has five main objectives, including promoting gender equality, implementing gender mainstreaming, preventing violence against women, preventing violence against all groups, and establishing a government committee to enact the NAP into law.

In discussing some of their hopes for 1325, Palestinian women spoke of security and dignity. Khaleda Abusoboh stated, "Security for Palestinians is not about jet fighters and martyrs and tanks. Security has been identified by Mahmoud Darwish, [regarded as the Palestinian national poet, as the following:] Security means we have a safe place for our children to go to school to return home and to drink coffee with their mothers."⁸³ Yet she bemoaned that "even this kind of security is unreachable today." Lara Nassar of the Young Women's Christian Association Palestine said, "Dignity is the most important aspect; you can't get anything from UNSCR 1325 without dignity. Society doesn't see women as human beings. Women are viewed as mothers, daughters, wives, and lovers and not as human beings of their own. Therefore we should focus on ensuring and respecting women's dignity."⁸⁴

As with other countries in this study, the greatest obstacle in the Tunisian context appears to be a lack of political will for advancing and implementing women's rights guarantees given Tunisia's current focus on security and economic recovery. Particularly in the wake of the Bardo (March 2015) and Sousse (June 2015) tourist attacks, as well as a November 2015 suicide bombing, Tunisian politicians have placed immense importance on scaling up Tunisia's security. This emphasis, however, has come largely without attention to women's capacities in augmenting security and addressing root causes of violence. As Monia Zgarni, visiting fellow at Women in International Security, expressed, "I do not see any serious work done from the government and parliament to advance the goals of UNSCR 1325 in Tunisia. This fact results from the unstable situation in Tunisia. There is a big fear from the situation in Libya, plus the critical economic and security situation."⁸⁵

Moreover, even among the few Tunisians aware of 1325, it is largely seen as relevant during times of national war and armed conflict alone. Tunisian activist Moutaa Amin stated that 1325 “...has never been an issue in Tunisia...Maybe because this resolution is supposed to be functional in the times of wars and armed conflicts, which is not the situation in Tunisia till now hopefully.”⁸⁶ Once again, this reflects a lack of understanding of 1325 and its benefits for the larger society. Sana Ghenima, president of the Femmes & Leadership association and a top Tunisian CEO and entrepreneur, expressed that there is no national plan in Tunisia to establish durable solutions and examine the impact that women can have at addressing root causes of instability, as well as women’s role in security and peacebuilding.

Another significant challenge identified by interviewees involves Tunisia’s current economic woes. Ghenima cited the statistic that 70 percent of Tunisia’s jobless graduates are female—more than double the percentage of jobless male graduates.⁸⁷ The issue is more acute in Tunisia’s marginalized interior and southern regions, where the gender gap increases. In short, within the government and broader society, security and economic focuses have taken priority, yet the link has not been made between advancing a WPS agenda and potential security and economic benefits for the society as a whole.

Conclusion

Events in the MENA region in recent years have shaken the stability of communities and families and made the task of building support for 1325 more difficult to obtain. Calls to increase women’s participation in conflict resolution mechanisms and implementation of effective NAPs in the region have been met with stiff resistance. However, as this report uncovers, the benefits of the resolution have been to provide a common language and an approach capable of both uniting diverse women’s groups and procuring international funding for related projects.

On a larger level, Sanam Anderlini, a leader on women, peace, and security issues, has noted that “attention to the gender dimensions of recovery and rehabilitation benefit[s] not just women but society at large.”⁸⁸ Female and male interviewees from the five case studies all agreed that in order to promote sustainable peace and security, values of inclusivity would need to replace business-as-usual conflict resolution methods. The social and economic costs of continuing cycles of violence in the region have undermined security for everyone.

As this report explores, the challenges of successfully implementing the vision and values of 1325 in the MENA region are substantial. For example, Israel demonstrates the challenge of overcoming a series of complex internal divides to forge a unified movement. In Egypt, a strong divide exists between women and men in rural versus urban settings and the tension between customary laws and laws of central state governance. As all politics are “local,” how these internal divides are used and addressed will make a major difference in the likelihood of future success in advancing women, peace, and security.

Yet the interviewees raised important examples of both resiliency and hope. Efforts are underway in the MENA region to establish networks of CSOs to deepen analysis and awareness of women, peace, and security challenges and opportunities. Women requested that donors help create internal, safe spaces to further discussions. There is an emerging recognition that linking the development of NAPs to binding legislation can ensure that commitments do not disappear when there is a regime change. Both women and men shared how donors and international parties can link their aid to outcome measures that address the ending of violence against women and increased representation of women

The social and economic costs of continuing cycles of violence in the region have undermined security for everyone.

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in peace processes. Though there is a continued need to raise understanding and awareness of 1325, there is widespread support for systemic approaches and related training programs for women and men of the region.

Recommendations

- **Rather than elevating security and economic crises above (and often at the expense of) a WPS agenda, the case should be made that a WPS agenda enhances and complements current and future security and economic objectives.** During this fluid transitional phase, efforts to balance the need for passing new gender-focused legislation and supporting its implementation amidst economic and security crises presents a challenging task. Yet local governments should be encouraged to fully implement the intentions of newer, more progressive laws related to gender equality with an eye to their broader societal benefits. Findings from the 2015 UN High Level Review and the empirical studies that it draws upon indicate that a WPS agenda can greatly enhance and complement other security and economic efforts. The potential economic and security-related leverage that a WPS agenda and a 1325 NAP could offer presents a starting point in advocating for implementation.
- **Focus should be on training and awareness-raising with local powerholders—especially men, politicians, and religious leaders—stressing that women’s rights are beneficial to society as a whole. Funding should target these critical awareness-raising activities.** Common findings across this report’s five case studies reveal the crucial need for political and societal will for implementation, as well as the significant role that can be played by local powerholders when they understand and buy into the contributions that a WPS agenda and 1325 can offer. Activists across the board reported that funding for awareness-raising is extremely difficult to acquire, however. Providing funding for trainings and awareness-raising efforts that reach wider communities would allow for a broader understanding of WPS and 1325. Outreach toward men and boys would also help to cultivate new advocates, expand support bases, and challenge violent notions of masculinity.
- **The international community should be encouraged to look beyond the well-recognized NGO actors in order to focus on capacity building for local NGOs and CSOs working to empower rural women.** Such efforts must reach beyond the capital and national level engagement, as changes at the national level mean little if rural women do not know their rights and local governance continues to be dominated by male elites who do not see the benefits of a WPS agenda. In order to take advantage of opportunities offered in new legislation, local women leaders should receive training. In particular, economic empowerment programs and small business projects for women could provide them the resources and social capital to participate in other aspects of society, including conflict prevention and resolution as well as political participation. This effort also includes removing the barriers in both law and practice that inhibit NGOs’ ability to provide vital services, as well as increasing protection for women’s organizations.
- **There should be efforts to foster and fund safe spaces for internal conversations between diverse groups.** These conversations should bring together men and women across boundaries so that they can deepen trust, develop a greater voice, and begin to create a greater sense of inclusivity. Providing a forum through which civil society organizations can seriously engage with religious groups and thought leaders is also

key. Shahira Shalaby, a Palestinian activist in Israel, spoke of the increasing difficulty for Israeli Jews and Palestinian citizens of Israel to find safe spaces for dialogue. She urged international funders to create the opportunities for activists to come together, across divides, to “prepare for peace.”⁸⁹

- **The international community should continue to support the development and implementation of 1325 NAPs by governments that reflect the wide collaborative efforts of CSOs.** In order to be successful, NAPs must be enacted by governments and supported by respected and informed CSOs. International funding, training, and capacity building can temper the challenges of cooperation by establishing lead groups and setting a common vision. Without international funding, as has been the case in Egypt and Tunisia, it is more difficult for groups to coalesce around 1325 and NAP development by their governments. At the same time, it is important that NAP development is seen as an “internal” country initiative and not an imposed “external” initiative.

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