

Who's making policy? What difference does it make?
Thursday, October 19, 2006

From Colombia to Uganda, Nepal to Sudan, the experiences and contributions of women to governance and security filled the first full day of the conference *Who's making policy? What difference does it make?* Following the presentations of distinguished speakers from around the world, delegates engaged in in-depth discussion in interactive working groups on issues such as quotas, constitutions, peacekeeping, and gender justice.

The opening plenary session *Making Democracy and Peacebuilding Work for Women and With Men* highlighted the constraints and entry points for women in political positions following armed conflict. Women have drawn on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and various tools to advance women's participation. While quotas, constitutional mandates, and institutional transformation can facilitate this effort, formidable obstacles remain and sustaining initial gains proves very difficult. The independence, legitimacy, and gender sensitivity of women officials, the challenges of implementation of mandates, quotas, and laws, and the complex environment of a new governance system are issues that must be addressed if gender equality is to be realized in post-conflict states.

Before democracy and governance can be addressed, security must be provided, and women have critical contributions to make in this area—the topic of the afternoon panel *Getting Gender-Inclusive and Gender-Sensitive Military and Peacekeeping Policies into Action*. While women's role in peacebuilding has received increased attention in recent years, the area of security policy continues to neglect the needs, concerns, and contributions of women. Despite the existence of peace agreements, women experience violence and exploitation—even at the hands of those charged with their protection. It is necessary for women to assume military, police, civilian, and leadership roles and work alongside gender-sensitive men if peace operations are to be effective at delivering real security for the entire population—men, women, boys, and girls.

A human face to governance and security issues was revealed through case examples from East Africa, Lebanon, Nepal, and the Philippines, which formed the evening panel *Women on the Frontlines*. In Nepal, women played a key role in the movement for non-violent democratic transformation, but were relegated to the sidelines as the formal processes began. The subsequent outcry of women has led to some initial commitments for their participation by the parties, and the coming months will reveal their sincerity. Similarly, women's needs and gender sensitivity remain of secondary concern in the humanitarian response in Lebanon—despite international mandates in this area—and only intense advocacy and attention might rectify this situation. During bilateral peace talks in the Philippines, female negotiators operated with a “win-win” mindset and drew on a unique set of skills to resolve conflicts within and among the parties. While women in Somalia, Sudan, and Uganda were able to make concrete gains for their constituencies during peace negotiations and post-conflict processes, many of these have been reversed by the resumption of violence, illustrating again the complex context on the ground and the need for support for women's efforts to bring sustainable peace.