

This issue features:

Sweden cancels arms sales to Saudi Arabia as part of its feminist foreign policy

Commitment against sexual violence in DR Congo

Women's participation in peace dialogue between Turkey and the PKK

Impact of conflicts

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

The chief of staff of the Congolese Armed Forces signed a statement committed to combating sexual violence and to implementing a government action plan within the military. Various analysts see the statement as a decisive and comprehensive step towards implementing the first Action Plan against Sexual Violence approved by the country's government in September 2014, a historic watershed that is now setting out on the path of potential implementation. The Action Plan aims to strengthen and increase the visibility of military justice and improve the protection of women and witnesses, building on the commitment shown by DRC to carry out more decisive actions to halt continuing sexual violence in the country as part of the global summit to end sexual violence in armed conflicts held in London in June 2014. The UN Secretary-General's special representative on sexual violence in conflict, Zainab Hawa Bangura, hailed the decision when the statement was signed, together with commanders of the Congolese Armed Forces; different senior government officials like the ministers of justice, defence, gender, education and health; the Congolese

president's special representative on sexual violence and child recruitment and various senior officials of UN mission in the country (MONUSCO). The statement must be put into practice by each Army commander and requires the implementation of a series of concrete actions by military leaders, such as respect for human rights and international humanitarian law related to sexual violence and the application of specific measures against sexual violence committed by soldiers under their command. The statement also includes the prosecution of alleged perpetrators of sexual violence, the provision of access to military justice in areas under their control and the delivery of perpetrators under investigation, whether convicted or merely suspected. Finally, it seeks to instruct soldiers in the zero-tolerance policy and to carry out specific measures to ensure protection for victims, witnesses, court officials and other key actors involved in the matter. Notably, the minister of defence established a commission to monitor implementation of this Action Plan, which includes representatives from the Army, the ministries of justice, health and gender, MONUSCO and UN Women.

- UN News, [DR Congo: UN welcomes 'milestone' declaration aimed at combating rape in war](#), 31 March 2015
- Fox News, [Congolese commanders sign declaration to combat sexual violence in war, a move welcomed by UN](#), 31 March 2015

Pakistan

The armed conflict in Pakistan between the government and the Taliban insurgency is having serious consequences on the lives of women, especially in the areas most affected by the violence, the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The International Crisis Group cited various effects, including direct persecution and constant attacks on women, especially activists, professionals and women involved in sectors such as education and development, sexual violence, serious deterioration in living conditions and forced displacement. Institutionalised discrimination and violence against women has

worsened because of the extreme impunity that prevents women from exercising their rights and obtaining access to justice. Sexual violence has become endemic and IDP women, who together with dependent children account for 74% of the displaced population, have serious problems accessing humanitarian assistance. Moreover, insecurity and threats directed at women are having a serious impact on girls' access to education. Current discriminatory legislation against women in the country presents a serious impediment to any progress. Another hindrance is found in some groups' lack of commitment, particularly the security forces.

- International Crisis Group, [Women, Violence and Conflict in Pakistan](#), Asia Report no. 265, 8 April 2015

Russia

Local and federal authorities continued to harass and pressure women's rights activists, women's organisations, organised civil society and human rights groups in the northern Caucasus in general and in Russia as a whole. Events of the quarter included reports in January of the

appeal filed by the union Women of the Don, in Rostov (in the central federal district) against the ruling of a Moscow court last December that recognised the validity of the decision of the Russian ministry of justice to forcibly include women's organisations in the registry of NGOs considered

“foreign agents”. Since 2012, Russian legislation has required non-profit organisations that receive international funding and that the authorities consider involved in “political activity” to register under that category. In Russia, the term “foreign agent” has a very negative social connotation, linked to treason against national interests and the concept of the motherland. The organisation Women of the Don works to promote human rights, gender equality and peacebuilding. Among other initiatives, some of its members have participated in projects to build trust and promote dialogue between women in Georgia and the Russian Federation. In its December ruling, the district court of Zamoskvorechye alleged that the organisation’s activities were aimed at shaping public opinion and influencing public institutions responsible for making decisions. Also during the quarter, there were new acts of pressure against human rights organisations and women’s rights activists across Russia, specifically in the northern Caucasus and especially in Chechnya. The office of the Russian NGO Memorial in the Chechen city of Gudermes was attacked by unidentified men who assaulted two

women that worked for the NGO. In turn, in the first quarter of 2015, the Russian legislative context worsened with Parliament’s approval of a law on “undesirable foreign agents” that expands the law on “foreign organisations”. Under this new law, “foreign organisations” deemed a threat to defence, national security, public order or public health must be registered as “undesirable” in order to “protect constitutional order, morality and other people’s rights and legal interests”. After organisations are added to this special list, the authorities may prohibit them from opening offices in Russia, spreading information, organising public activities or participating in them. The new legislation may have serious impacts on the work of human rights organisations, including those working specifically for the rights of women and the rights of LGBTBI people, as well as women’s rights activists and women’s organisations in regions of conflict or socio-political crisis, such as in the northern Caucasus, and organisations that work to promote dialogue with parties in conflict with Russia or that work on human rights-related issues as part of the conflicts affecting Russia.

- SOVA Centre, [Misuse of Anti-Extremism in January 2015](#), SOVA Centre, 24 February 2015
- Amnesty International, [Russia: Law on ‘undesirable organizations’ will further tighten the noose on dissent](#), AI, 20 January 2015, AI
- Human Rights Watch, [Russia: New Assault on Independent Groups. ‘Foreign Agent’ Law Used to Stifle Public Debate](#), HRW, 26 January 2015
- Frontline Defenders, [Russian Federation – Human rights organisation Union ‘Women of Don’ recognised as a ‘foreign agent’](#), 18 May 2014
- Caucasian Knot, [Union “Women of Don” appeals against Court’s decision on registration of NGO as “foreign agent”](#), 13 January 2015
- Caucasian Knot, [Attack on HRC “Memorial” office in Chechnya evidences tactics of suppressing the dissent, rights defenders assert](#), 15 January 2015

Sudan (Darfur)

A new report validates the persistence of sexual violence in the Sudanese region of Darfur by security forces and the Sudanese Army. The report, created by the international human rights organisation Human Rights Watch (HRW), states that the Sudanese Army raped 221 women and girls in an organised attack on the town of Tabit, in the region of North Darfur, in October 2014. According to the organisation, the mass rapes would be considered crimes against humanity if part of a widespread or systematic attack on the civilian population. Radio Dabanga, a media outlet based in The Netherlands, raised initial alarms in early November when it conducted the first investigation into what happened. The Sudanese government denied this first report and prevented the hybrid UN-AU (UNAMID) mission from accessing the site. A week later, the security forces allowed the mission to

briefly access the town, but blocked it from conducting a credible investigation. Despite the blocking of access to the town, HRW later conducted an investigation that interviewed current and former inhabitants of Tabit, local human rights activists, government employees and staff members of international organisations working in the area, as well as two deserting soldiers that participated in the military operation and documented 27 separate incidents of rape and obtained credible information about another 194 cases. The Sudanese Armed Forces carried out three different military operations during which troops sacked the town, arrested the men, tortured and mistreated the inhabitants of Tabit and raped the women and girls. Most of the population belongs to the Fur community and the town had been under the control of armed groups, although HRW has stated that there is

no evidence that the combatants were near on in Tabit at the time of the attack. The authorities have arrested and tortured residents of Tabit for revealing information related to the incident. Since then, the government has denied access to the international community, prompting HRW to demand that the UN and the AU take the steps necessary to protect the civilian population, prevent future abuse and conduct a credible investigation into the incident. HRW added that sexual violence was committed by government forces not only in Darfur, as

it also found in November that the government's Rapid Support Forces were responsible for attacks and sexual violence against civilians in Blue Nile State. In January 2015, the UN Panel of Experts on the Sudan reported that 3,000 villages in the region had been burned down in 2014, mostly in attacks by the government. OCHA has determined that at least half a million people were displaced as a result of attacks in 2014, and at least 70,000 people were forcibly displaced in the first three weeks of 2015.

- Human Rights Watch, [Mass Rape in Darfur: Sudanese Army Attacks Against Civilians in Tabit](#), HRW, 11 February 2015
- The Guardian, [‘True hell’ of mass rape in Darfur revealed in report on Sudan](#), 11 February 2015

Sweden – Saudi Arabia

Due to human rights violations in Saudi Arabia that especially affect women, the Swedish government decided to cancel arms sales to the Arab country, thereby ending a military cooperation agreement in force for a decade. The measure was promoted by Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallström after Saudi Arabia vetoed her participation in the Arab League's meeting in Egypt. Wallström had been invited to the meeting in acknowledgment of the fact that in 2014, Sweden became the first country to formally recognise Palestine as a state. However, in light of Wallström's previous criticism of the Saudi regime regarding the human rights situation in the country, particularly the sentence of one thousand lashes handed down to a dissident blogger that she described as “mediaeval” punishment, as well as the speech that she was planning to give in Cairo, the Saudi authorities pressured for her invitation to be withdrawn. The speech, which Wallström made public, did not specifically refer to Saudi Arabia, but underscored the need for reform in the area of women's rights. Riyadh interpreted these comments as interference in its internal affairs. According

to press reports, this incident settled a matter that the Swedish government had been debating in previous months related to military cooperation with Saudi Arabia, the second-largest arms importer in the world. Various analysts highlighted the impact and significance of the move, taking into account the economic impact (between 2011 and 2014 alone, Swedish companies sold 500 million USD in weapons to Riyadh) and the break it makes with Western countries' traditional position that prioritises their relationship with Saudi Arabia and does not question its policies or human rights credentials. Wallström, who has extensive experience defending the rights of women, has stated her intention to carry out a feminist foreign policy and this new approach of hers received acclaim from some quarters and criticism from others that favour relations with Riyadh. According to some observers, Sweden's new stance, which lies outside the West's traditionally uncritical deference towards Riyadh, should strike up a discussion in Europe and the United States about the type of relationship to maintain with Saudi Arabia.

- Ishaan Tharoor, [“At last, a Western country stands up to Saudi Arabia on human rights”](#), *The Washington Post*, 12 March 2015
- Leonid Bershidsky, [“Europe Stands Up to Saudi Arabia”](#), *Bloomberg*, 14 March 2015
- David Gardner, [The implications of the Swedish-Saudi Arabian clash for the US and Europe](#), NOREF Expert Analysis, March 2015
- Madeleine Rees, [“This is what a feminist foreign policy looks like”](#), 50/50, *Open Democracy*, 23 March 2015

United Nations

Throughout 2014, the United Nations received a total of 79 complaints of sexual exploitation and abuse against employees of the organisation. According to the UN Secretary-General's report, titled *Special measures*

for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse and published in February 2015, most of these complaints (51) were filed against members of nine peacekeeping missions and a special political mission,

implicating UN officials and volunteers and members of UN military, police and observer contingents. Thirty-eight of the complaints of sexual exploitation and abuse in 2014 (around 75%) focused on three peacekeeping missions: MONUSCO in DR Congo, MINUSTAH in Haiti and UNMISS in South Sudan. At least 13 of the cases referred to sexual activities with minors. The reported abuse also affected civilian officials at UN agencies, including the WFP, UNDP, UNRWA and UNHCR. The UN agency for refugees received 16 complaints, including cases of sexual assault, human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation and offers of money, goods or services in exchange for sexual favours, among other practices. The report states that the total number of complaints in 2014 was lower than in 2013, when there were 96, and that the figure referring to mission staff is not only lower than the year before (51 in 2014, compared to 66 in 2013), but is the lowest since special measures for protection against sexual exploitation and abuse were established. Although the report observes a falling trend since 2010, the UN Secretary-General stressed that more measures must be adopted to eradicate these forms of abuse.

According to the UN report, 243 of the complaints lodged between 2010 and 2013 were considered to

have a background for conducting an investigation. Excluding 14 cases still pending resolution, 38% of the complaints were determined to be founded and 62% were unfounded. However, the report qualifies this proportion by recognising that the situation could be due to a lack of evidence or of available witnesses. Some organisations like AIDS Free World have accused the UN of presenting a flattering image of UN efforts to prevent sexual exploitation in which organisation workers have been implicated, underscoring that it is a phenomenon that is not reported adequately, so a situation of impunity prevails. The Secretary-General's report includes a series of recommendations to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse, including capacity-building for UN staff, bolstering mechanisms for conducting background investigations, improving the processing of complaints, expediting investigations (setting a six-month deadline is recommended) and accountability processes. The text also suggests that governments contributing troops to UN missions hold *in situ* martial trials in countries where the complaint is made in order to ensure greater transparency. However, media outlets stated that the UN General Assembly has rejected initiatives of this kind in the past and in prevailing practice, the staff member subject to the complaint is often returned to his country of origin.

- Somini Sengupta, "[United Nations Workers Accused of Sexual Abuse](#)", The New York Times, 16 March 2015
- Report of the UN Secretary-General, [Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse](#), A/69/779, 13 February 2015

Peacebuilding

Afghanistan

After the Afghan government declared that it could begin peace negotiations with the Taliban insurgency in the near future, different organisations asserted that any possible peace talks must not exclude women or compromise their human rights. Human Rights Watch demanded that the Afghan government include women in the negotiating team and urged all parties to ensure a significant presence of women in the negotiating delegations. Transparency in the process was also demanded in order to avoid the situation in all previous negotiating attempts in which it was generally impossible for human rights organisations,

women's organisations and civil society groups to contribute to the process. Afghan women's activists demanded a clear commitment from the government to women's rights in any negotiations. The debate about the peace negotiations and the role that women may have in them arose amidst different acts of protest over the situation of extreme violence and discrimination that Afghan women continue to experience, demonstrated in recent weeks by the media coverage of the attack and murder of a young woman accused of burning the Quran by a group of men.

- HRW, [Afghanistan: Don't Leave Women Out of Peace Talks](#), HRW, 1 March 2015

Peace negotiations in Colombia

The subcommittee on gender in the peace negotiations between the government of Colombia and the FARC-EP guerrillas held its second and third meetings with delegations of representatives of women's organisations and the LGBTI community. The visit of the second delegation came in February, composed of representatives of the organisations Alianza tejedoras de vida, Corporación Caribe Afirmativo, Departamento de Mujeres de la Coordinación Nacional de Desplazados CND, ANMUSIC, Red Mariposas and Red Nacional de Mujeres Ex Combatientes de la Insurgencia. Participants in the third meeting, held in March, included representatives of Asociación Campesina del Catatumbo (Ascamcat), Asociación de Mujeres Araucanas Trabajadoras (AMART), Colombia Diversa, Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca (CRIC) and a leader of the university student movement. As on previous occasions, the participating organisations urged the negotiating parties to agree to a bilateral ceasefire and an immediate de-escalation of the armed conflict and to put an end to violence against women, in addition to making an explicit statement condemning discrimination against the LGBTI population. Moreover, after the civil society representatives' visit, a subcommittee meeting was held with experts Magalys Arocha, Mireia Cano and Hilde Salvesen in order to present recommendations to guarantee the inclusion of a gender perspective in the agreements already reached. Meanwhile, various representatives of women's and LGBTI organisations that have participated in the subcommittee on gender performed a public act in Bogotá to explain their experience of involvement in the talks and the different proposals and demands that made it to the negotiating table, including:

- remaining at the table until an agreement is reached;
 - a bilateral ceasefire and reduction of the intensity of the conflict;
 - the promotion of the equal participation of women with measures of alternation and universality in all stages and mechanisms of the peacebuilding process;
 - inclusion in a potential truth commission of a women's rights perspective, particularly related to sexual violence, political violence, the rights of human rights advocates and violence against the LGBTI population;
 - recognition of the diverse identities of black, indigenous, peasant, rural, urban, young and LGBTI women;
 - guarantees to distribute goods, services, resources and wealth to women under equal conditions, including property and land ownership;
 - guarantees of the rights of female victims of the conflict to the truth and justice and guarantees of non-repetition;
 - an increase in the representation of women of the FARC-EP and the government as plenipotentiaries at the negotiating table as an affirmative action measure to make them visible as decisive political actors in the agreements and in peacebuilding;
 - a review of security policies to guarantee the safety of women and their right to the truth, justice and reparations;
 - the complete dismantlement of paramilitary forces at all levels;
 - guarantees to normalise the civilian life of female former combatants in accordance with Resolution 1325, taking the specificity of female former combatants into account and consulting with them regarding a process of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration;
 - support for strengthening the peace initiatives of local women and guarantees of their participation in the mechanisms developed by the agreements;
 - guarantees of full protection of the political rights of women as stipulated in the Constitution, the electoral system and the judicial system in areas affected by the conflict;
 - the fight against impunity from war crimes, especially those related to sexual violence.
- El Espectador [Segundo grupo de expertos en temas de género ya está en La Habana](#), El Espectador, 11 February 2015
 - El Espectador [Mujeres piden cese el fuego bilateral y “desescalamiento” del conflicto](#), El Espectador, 6 March 2015
 - AFP [“Mujeres piden ‘desescalamiento’ en conflicto armado colombiano”](#) AFP, 7 March 2015
 - District Department of Women, [Symposium on Women, Culture and Peace: Women of the Gender Subcommittee, advising negotiations in Havana, share their experience](#), 19 March 2015
 - Table of Talks for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace in Colombia, [Joint Statement 53. Havana](#), 27 March 2015

Turkey (southeast)

Since January, the delegation of Kurdish political and social representatives participating in the peace dialogue between Turkey and the PKK has included Ceylan Bağrıyanık. The Kurdish activist and writer is involved in the talks as a representative of the Kurdish women's movement. Promoted by the Kurdish movement and the Kurdish women's movement, her involvement had to overcome Turkey's reluctance and implies the strengthening of women's participation in the process due to the greater interaction and direct communication between the women's movement and the delegation and the greater opportunity it provides

for defending the specific demands of Kurdish women. Bağrıyanık has been participating in meetings between the delegation and the leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, who has been in prison since 1999, and in the delegation's trips to PKK bases in northern Iraq. This scheme of meetings forms part of the peace process launched in early 2013 between Turkey and the PKK through dialogue between state representatives and Öcalan, with the additional participation of the delegation of Kurdish representatives that meets periodically with Öcalan, with Turkish authorities and with PKK leaders.

- Bianet, [Kurdish Delegation Heads to Qandil Mountain](#), 13 February 2015,
- Hürriyet Daily News, [Five-member delegation meeting jailed PKK leader Öcalan](#), Hürriyet, 14 March 2015

International commitments to gender equity

The fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW59) was held in March, marking the beginning of a 2015 full of meetings and events related to the international gender equity agenda. Events coinciding this year include the twentieth anniversary of approval of the Beijing Platform for Action (Beijing+20), which had to be reviewed during CSW59, review of implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 after its approval 15 years ago by conducting a high-level global study and the promotion of a new agenda for sustainable development with the conclusion of the Millennium Development Goals process. Thus, 2015 is an extraordinarily important year for the gender equity agenda. However, following CSW59, the balance of women's organisations in civil society was negative, indicating

governments' worrying lack of commitment to real progress in the international gender equity agenda. No document of final results was approved when CSW59 concluded, though a political declaration was released that 1,000 women's organisations from around the world considered low-profile, too general and written in language distant from a human rights approach. Thus, the content of the political declaration contrasted sharply with the great importance of rights-based gender equity in the Beijing Platform for Action 20 years before. Some of the most important matters missing in the declaration dealt with sexual and reproductive rights, the impact of climate change on the lives of women, the situation of female human rights activists and the feminist movement's decisive role in moving towards gender equality.

- Commission on the Status of Women – Political declaration on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women
- AWID, [CSW59–Beijing Betrayed](#), 20 March 2015
- [Statement on the Political Declaration on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women](#)

1325

Kosovo

Women's organisations in the Balkans are participating in preparatory consultations for developing the Global Study on the Implementation of Resolution 1325, in which they highlight challenges related to protection from sexual violence, access to transitional justice processes and

economic and social welfare. In a meeting hosted by the EU and linked to preparatory work for this global study, the Kosova Women's Network (created in 2000 and including nearly 90 women's organisations of various ethnic origins) stressed the need to pay more attention to women's

security and wellbeing in post-war contexts, among other issues; to more effectively coordinating between UN agencies and other international players; to attending to matters of justice and redress, especially with regard to sexual violence, a subject they consider neglected in Kosovo; to participation in peace negotiations, including through consultations with local women's organisations; to an adequate budget for initiatives to implement Resolution

1325; and to improvements in the indicators used by the EU and the UN to supervise implementation of the resolution, which they think should have clearer goals and time frames.

- Kosova Women's Network, [KWN Comments on UNSCR 1325 Implementation at EU Task Force Meeting](#), 23 January 2015, KWN

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