CHAPTER 56

WPS AND THE CONVENTION AGAINST TORTURE

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The emergence of the women, peace, and security (WPS) agenda with the adoption of the landmark UN Security Council resolution 1325 in 2000 effectively marked the end of an era where the international peace and security paradigm had been “gender-blind” to the detriment of millions of women and girls worldwide. While being grounded in the UN Charter, the WPS agenda cuts across four branches of international law, notably human rights law. This chapter explores to what extent the UN Security Council resolutions on WPS take into account the international human rights framework against torture and ill-treatment, notably the UN Convention against Torture (GA Resolution 39/46) and how the UN human rights mechanisms with a mandate relating to torture have addressed situations specific to women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations.

Do UN Security Council Resolutions on WPS Reflect the International Human Rights Framework against Torture and Ill-Treatment?

Resolution 1325 was essentially conceived as part of the international legal framework that upholds the rights of women and girls in the context of conflict and post-conflict, and it was lobbied for as a human rights resolution (UN Women 2015: 15). Accordingly, Resolution 1325 reaffirms the need to fully implement international human rights law that protects the rights of women and girls during and after conflicts. However, the WPS policy architecture does not refer to any core international human rights treaties other than CEDAW (GA Resolution 34/180) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (GA Resolution 44/25),
let alone the absolute and non-derogable prohibition of torture (Nowak and McArthur 2008: 89). Yet, of the WPS agenda’s four-pillar mandate (George and Shepherd 2006: 298; and Rees and Chinkin 2016: 1211–1226)—protection, prevention, participation, and relief and recovery—the UN Convention against Torture (UNCAT) is particularly relevant to the pillars of protection and prevention.

The “protection pillar” addresses the protection of women against sexual and other forms of gender-based violence (GBV) (S/RES/1820 2008; S/RES/1888 2009; S/RES/1889 2009; and S/RES/1960 2010). Seen through a human rights and criminal justice lens, the concept of protection primarily revolves around the obligation to end impunity for such violence. This overall obligation is accompanied by several specific obligations, such as ensuring full accountability for acts of sexual exploitation and abuse, prosecuting those responsible, undertaking thorough and timely investigations, prohibiting sexual violence, ensuring that victims are protected and receive redress for their suffering, and undertaking legal and judicial reforms.

The WPS obligations related to the protection against violence are firmly rooted in international humanitarian, human rights, and/or criminal law. Importantly, the Convention against Torture requires States Parties to criminalize torture (UNCAT, Articles 1, 4), to establish jurisdiction (UNCAT, Article 5), to undertake prompt and impartial investigations (UNCAT, Article 12), to submit cases of alleged torture to competent authorities for prosecution (UNCAT, Article 7), to protect victims and witnesses (UNCAT, Article 13), and to ensure an enforceable right to redress for victims (UNCAT, Article 14). As such, there is a large degree of congruency between the WPS regime and UNCAT.

By comparison, the “preventive pillar” has historically been less developed, (Skjelsbæk 2012: 163; and Kirby and Shepherd 2016: 377–378) arguably because the effective prevention would require states to take measures addressing the underlying structural barriers to substantive and transformative equality. Currently, preventive measures—within the scope of UNCAT—are limited to training of police and military personnel, and heightening awareness and responsiveness to protect women and children.

By contrast, the Convention against Torture contains a broad spectrum of preventive obligations, with their point of departure being a general obligation to take effective legislative, judicial, or other measures to prevent such acts (UNCAT, Articles 2 and 16). Added to this are specific obligations to respect the principle of non-refoulement (UNCAT, Article 3), to review detention and interrogation practices (UNCAT, Article 11), and to ensure training of public officials involved in the custody or interrogation of individuals (UNCAT, Article 10). When comparing the WPS agenda with UNCAT, it becomes evident that the interface between the two is rather limited, and that the UN Security Council resolutions only mirror a fraction of UNCAT’s preventive obligations.

In sum, several obligations embodied in UNCAT are reflected in the WPS regime, particularly with regard to protection and to some extent prevention. However, the obligations in the resolutions are clearly drawn from other international treaties, notably CEDAW, given the lack of any reference to UNCAT and the divergence in language between the WPS resolutions and UNCAT.
HAVE UN HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS WITH A SPECIFIC MANDATE RELATING TO TORTURE ADDRESSED WOMEN AND GIRLS IN CONFLICT AND POST-CONFLICT SITUATIONS?

This section explores whether and how the UN human rights bodies with a mandate relating to torture—the Committee against Torture, the Sub-Committee on Prevention of Torture, and the Special Rapporteur on Torture—each within their mandate, have integrated the WPS agenda into their respective monitoring of state compliance with the Convention against Torture vis-à-vis women and girls during and after conflict.

Committee against Torture

Protection of women during armed conflict is the WPS dimension that is addressed most often by the Committee. In the context of conflict, the Committee routinely expresses concern about reports of sexual violence against women; the systematic use of rape as a “weapon of war” (Committee against Torture [CAT] 2007; 2010); the underreporting of rape and other sexual violence against women and girls (CAT 2013b), the limited number of investigations, the absence of sentences, and the lack of effective redress to victims of rape and other sexual violence (CAT 2011a; 2005; 2008; 2011b; and 2013b)

In continuation hereof, the Committee regularly recommends State Parties to criminalize violence against women in conflict areas (CAT 2015a); to promptly and impartially investigate all allegations of rape and other sexual violence; to prosecute and punish perpetrators with penalties appropriate; and to end impunity for both state officials and non-state actors (CAT 2005; 2008a; 2008b; 2013a; 2015b). In some cases, the Committee has also required States to ensure that women fleeing conflict-related sexual violence have access to shelter, medical and psychological care and rehabilitation, and that they are able to access such services without discrimination based on gender (CAT 2015b). Finally, in order to facilitate the monitoring of states’ implementation of UNCAT, the Committee increasingly requires states to provide statistical data, disaggregated by sex (CAT 2012).

Prevention of violence against women in conflict and post-conflict settings has been given less, although increasing attention since the adoption of the General Comment no. 2 on the implementation of Article 2 of the Convention in 2008. The General Comment reinforces the obligation to prevent torture vis-à-vis women by emphasizing the principle of non-discrimination as integral to the definition of torture, the gendered nature of violations that women—and men—suffer, and the need to build a culture of respect for women.

In its examination of state parties, the Committee has required that a variety of gender-specific preventive measures be taken, notably to redouble efforts to prevent sexual violence and abuse against women and children (CAT 2008c); to ensure that procedures are in place to monitor law enforcement officials (CAT 2005); to provide mandatory training
on human rights, and the prohibition of SGBV, in particular against women and children, for the military and other officials (CAT 2006; 2011b); and to conduct information campaigns to raise awareness that sexual violence are offences under criminal law, to break the taboo on sex crimes, and to eliminate the stigmatization and exclusion of victims (CAT 2007).

Women’s participation in peace-building or peacekeeping is seldom addressed by the Committee. A rare exception is the recent consideration of Burundi, where the Committee recommended the State Party to ensure that women police officers take part in security operations as a measure to protect women against sexual violence during searches and protest control operations (CAT 2016).

Overall, it emerges from the Committee’s concluding observations that it has expanded its sensitivity to and awareness of the issue of violence against women in the past decade (Gaer 2012: 303). It addresses a wide range of violations vis-à-vis women within the broader continuum of violence in conflict and post-conflict settings as well as beyond, and while its focus has predominantly been on state actors, growing attention is given to violence perpetrated by non-state actors. Despite the developments in understanding sexual and other GBV as torture and the explicit mention of women and girls in many cases, SGBV is nevertheless often not addressed in an engendered manner that takes into account underlying structural barriers to substantive and transformative equality.

Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture

The Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture¹ (SPT) (GA Resolution 57/199).² has not explored torture and ill-treatment in times of conflict or post-conflict, let alone gender-specific violations. In its eighth annual report it addresses women deprived of their liberty,³ but without reference to conflict or post-conflict situations. A short section in the seventh annual report on “Conflict and Political Repression” also does not reflect on such settings or the WPS agenda.⁴

However, it should be recognized that the SPT’s mandate only covers a limited part of the WPS agenda, and that its working methods are rather unsuitable for countries in conflict and post-conflict situations. Primarily acting through country visits, fragile security situations restrict the ability to engage meaningfully.⁵

UN Special Rapporteur on Torture

The challenges associated with country visits by the Special Rapporteur on Torture (SRT)⁶ to states involved in armed conflict may also explain the limited coverage of torture in these contexts by the SRT.⁷ A screening of the mandate’s country reports shows that where violations specific to women have been addressed, they did not relate to conflict or post-conflict situations.⁸ However, in recognition of the need to address gender-specific forms of torture and other ill-treatment, the SRT dedicated the 2016 thematic report to this topic.
The report provides a valuable source for identifying women-specific violations (SRT 2016), which are “often amplified during conflict” (SRT 2016).

The “protection pillar” of the WPS agenda is reflected in a chapter on rape and other forms of sexual violence as a gender-specific form of torture and ill-treatment when carried out by, at the instigation of, or with the consent or acquiescence of public officials, or through lack of due diligence. The SRT reiterates that such acts “unequivocally amount to torture under international criminal law jurisprudence,” and that torture can be committed by both states and non-state armed groups (SRT 2016). Importantly, the SRT’s report provides insights into the relationship between the WPS terminology of “violence” and UNCAT language (“torture and ill-treatment”).

The SRT clarifies that gender-specific forms of torture are those “committed against any person because of their sex and socially constructed gender roles.” (SRT 2016) Noting a tendency to consider violations against women as ill-treatment even where they would more appropriately be identified as torture, the SRT recalls that “if an act [of violence] is gender-specific or perpetrated against persons on the basis of their sex, gender identity ( . . . ) or non-adherence to social norms around gender and sexuality,” the “purpose and intent elements of the definition of torture are always fulfilled.” (SRT 2016)

With regard to investigations into abuse, the SRT stresses the need for gender-sensitive practices of inquiry and emphasizes that “States” due diligence obligations to ensure redress remain intact when non-State actors perpetrate conflict-related sexual violence. At the same time, the Rapporteur states that “Reparations must be premised on a full understanding of the gendered nature and consequences of the harm suffered and take existing gender inequalities into account.” In fact, victims must be empowered to help determine what forms of reparation are best suited to their situation. Moreover, the importance of gender equality in judicial procedures is singled out alongside the need for equal weight afforded to the testimony of women and the prohibition of “discriminatory evidence.” The SRT also recalls refugees as a population exposed to torture and other ill-treatment in the context of armed conflict, noting that women and girls are “particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, exploitation and slavery along migration routes.”

Reflecting the “prevention pillar,” although in less detail, the SRT notes the failure of states to comply with their obligations where “laws, policies or practices perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes in a manner that enables or authorizes, explicitly or implicitly, prohibited acts to be performed with impunity,” where “failure to intervene encourages and enhances the danger of privately inflicted harm” and where states fail to “exercise due diligence to protect against such violence.”

Practices reflected in the report include female genital mutilation, child and forced marriage, and honor-based violence, representing acknowledged types of GBV that constitute ill-treatment and torture. While these forms of violence do not specifically occur during conflict or in post-conflict situations, due to the non-derogable nature of the prohibition of torture, states continue to be obliged to exercise due diligence to prevent and protect from such acts. Moreover, the SRT notes that child and other forms of forced marriages “increase during conflict.” The “participation pillar” is not reflected in the SRT’s reports, “relief and recovery” is not part of the mandate.
HOW HAVE RESOLUTIONS SETTING UP PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS REFLECTED THE FRAMEWORK AGAINST TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT SPECIFIC TO WOMEN AND GIRLS?

The restricted focus of the WPS framework is also reflected in resolutions establishing UN peacekeeping operations (PKR), which determine their mandate and priorities to re-establish peace and security.23

The PKR reflect an imbalance in favor of protection to the detriment of prevention and participation. Although formulated in general terms and with little detail, women are regularly highlighted as particular beneficiaries, with the deployment of “Women Protection Advisers” constituting the most common commitment to addressing issues for women and girls within peacekeeping forces. The aspect of investigations and prosecution of SGBV during conflict is the most common task specified for peacekeeping missions, while most resolutions remain silent on victims’ assistance needs and ongoing and future exposure to gender-specific violence (Huber and Rytter 2017). For example, UN Security Council Resolution 2100 (2013) requested “that MINUSMA take fully into account the need to protect civilians (. . . ), including, in particular women.”24 In the case of MINUSCA,25 the “specific protection for women and children affected by armed conflict” featured as one of the priority tasks of the mission.26

The “preventive pillar” in PKR is usually limited to the provision of training for security forces, and coaching needs tend to be formulated in general terms (human rights training) rather than explicitly requiring the incorporation of gender-specific training. For instance, UN Security Council Resolution 2313 (2016) encompasses a provision on capacity-building and training of police and corrections personnel, but lacks mention of training on gender issues or the protection of women.27

With regard to the “participation pillar,” PKO at times call for “robust vetting, enhanced recruitment procedures and training”28 or for professional, ethnically representative, and regionally balanced recruitment,29 but they do not mention the objective of a gender balance within security forces. Despite efforts by UN agencies to this end, in 2014 women still only represented 3 percent of the military personnel and 10 percent of police personnel.30

CONCLUSION

Overall, the WPS paradigm and the UN human rights bodies with a mandate relating to torture have led relatively separate lives with a few noticeable exceptions. While recognizing the importance of ensuring coherence and avoiding duplication among UN human rights bodies, UNCAT could be attributed a greater role by the Security Council within the WPS framework. As Barrow argues, Resolution 1325 often appears to be considered as an independent framework, and stronger links need to be established with legal provisions of international law (Barrow 2010: 229, 234). Drawing upon UNCAT as a normative basis for
future WPS resolutions would strengthen the focus on post-conflict security and justice sector reform, which is currently overshadowed by the focus on “coming to terms” with past violations. This would also help bolster the WPS agenda, which does not recognize the “continuum of violence” (Cockburn 2004) that characterizes the experience of women whose lives are not only marked by the “extraordinary violence of ‘rape as a weapon of war,’” but everyday forms of violence that occur in all contexts (Kirby and Shepherd 2016: 380).

Notes

1. The SPT was established by the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT, Articles 5–17) and started its work in February 2007. Its mandate is the prevention of torture and ill-treatment in any place where persons may be deprived of their liberty. The Subcommittee’s main functions are to undertake visits to states parties, which may include visits to any place of detention, and an advisory role with regard to National Preventive Mechanisms, which OPCAT requires state parties to establish at the national level.

2. For the purposes of this article, the author screened the Subcommittee’s annual reports (First Annual Report of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment [CAT/C/40/2], May 14, 2008; Second Annual Report of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment [CAT/C/42/2], April 7, 2009; Third Annual Report of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment [CAT/C/44/2], March 25, 2010; Fourth Annual Report of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment [CAT/C/46/2], February 3, 2011; Fifth annual Report of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment [CAT/C/48/3], March 19, 2012; Sixth Annual Report of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment [CAT/C/50/2], April 23, 2013; Seventh Annual Report of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment [CAT/C/52/2], March 20, 2014; Eighth Annual Report of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment [CAT/C/54/2], March 26, 2015; Ninth Annual Report of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment [CAT/C/57/4, March 22, 2016].

3. Eighth Annual Report of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment [CAT/C/54/2], March 26, 2015, paras. 63 et sqq.

4. It notes that state agents “use more violence, including torture and ill-treatment” in countries where there is or has been conflict; however, it only explores general links to democracy, referring to a “heightened risk of suppression or political dissent by means of torture” in non-democratic states (Seventh Annual Report of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment [CAT/C/52/2], March 20 2014, chap. F, paras. 87, 88).

5. In fact, reviewing visits undertaken by the SPT to countries associated with conflict or post-conflict, the mission was either conducted prior to escalation of conflict (e.g., Mali in 2011, Ukraine in 2011), and/or the respective report remains confidential (e.g., Lebanon,
Turkey). SPT country visits have taken place, for example, to Mali (visit December 2011); Lebanon (report confidential); Nigeria (July 2014, report confidential); Ukraine (planned visit suspended May 2016; previous report on visit May 2011); Tunisia (April 2016, no report yet); Turkey (October 2015, report confidential); Philippines (May/June 2015, report confidential).

6. The Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment was established with a mandate to work on all countries, irrespective of whether they have ratified the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The mandate comprises the following main activities: urgent appeals to states with regard to individuals at risk of torture; communications on alleged individual cases of torture; fact-finding country visits; and annual reports to the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly.

7. For example, visit requests have been pending to Afghanistan (first made in 2005), Côte D'Ivoire (requested since 2005), Egypt (request first made in 1996), Iraq (2005), Israel (2002), Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (2005), Pakistan (2011), Russian Federation, with respect to the Republic of Chechnya (2000), Syrian Arab Republic (2005), Thailand (2011), and Yemen (2005).

8. For the purposes of drafting this article, the authors have conducted a search using the Universal Human Rights Index (http://uhri.ohchr.org/). Reports reviewed included, for example, “Report of the Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Juan E. Méndez— Addendum, Mission to Ghana” (A/HRC/25/60/Add.1), March 5 2014: para. 103; “Report of the Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Manfred Nowak, to the General Assembly— Addendum, Mission to Jordan” (A/HRC/4/33/Add.3), January 5, 2007: para. 70(4); “Report of the Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment to the Human Rights Council— Addendum, Mission to Papua New Guinea” (A/HRC/16/52/Add.5), February 7, 2011: paras. 69, 84; “Report of the Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Manfred Nowak, to the Human Rights Council— Addendum, Mission to Jamaica” (A/HRC/16/52/Add.3), October 11, 2010: summary; paras. 31–33; “Report of the Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Juan E. Méndez— Addendum, Mission to Morocco” (A/HRC/22/53/Add.2), April 30, 2013: para. 92; “Report of the Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Manfred Nowak, to the Human Rights Council, Mission to the Republic of Moldova” (A/HRC/ 10/44/Add.3), February 12, 2009: paras. 49–55; “Report of the Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Manfred Nowak, to the Human Rights Council, Mission to Togo” (A/HRC/7/3/Add.5), January 6, 2008: paras. 2, 53, 54, 71, 97, 104; “Report of the Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Manfred Nowak— Addendum, Mission to Uruguay” (A/HRC/13/39/Add.2), December 21, 2009: para. 68–76, 84, 103, 105(s) et al.<AU: Please check the usage of et al here is appropriate.>


10. A/HRC/31/57, para. 7.
18. A/HRC/31/57, para. 31; for considerations regarding victims of trafficking see paras. 40–41.
21. Convention against Torture, Article 2(2); International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, Article 4(2). According to the Committee against Torture, the absolute and non-derogable character of the prohibition of torture has become accepted as a matter of customary international law (CAT /C/GC/2/CRP.1/Rev.4, Committee against Torture, General Comment no. 2, para. 1). The prohibition of torture is also enshrined in international humanitarian law—for example, the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of June 8, 1977.
22. A/HRC/31/57, para. 64. The SRT also notes that, like rape, forced marriage is used as a tactic of war and to fulfill strategic objectives such as domination, intimidation, and degradation. It has been recognized as a crime against humanity by the Special Court for Sierra Leone (para. 64, with reference to Inter-American Court of Human Rights, González et al. ["Cotton Field"] v. Mexico, judgment of November 16, 2009).
25. MINUSCA (Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation de la République centrafricaine).

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