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In 2004, the U.S. Representative to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, Ellen Sauerbrey, acknowledged that “No approach to peace can succeed if it does not view men and women as equally important components of the solution.”

As a woman with almost twenty years of hands-on experience in mediating one of the world’s most brutal and longstanding conflicts, I couldn’t agree more with this statement. Based on my experiences and my observations, I can tell you with certainty that the inclusion of women in mediation and negotiation processes is an essential element to achieving a sustainable and lasting peace.

Women often demonstrate significant amounts of patience and tenacity, which are incredibly useful tools considering that peacemaking is almost always a long and strenuous process. To give you a sense of perspective, the conflict in northern Uganda has been raging since 1986. In my capacity as a government official and then later as chief mediator, I have remained intimately involved in the efforts to bring peace to my country. It has not been an easy task, but I have resolved to keep at it and to secure a solution. In 2004, for example, despite the fact that prospects were bleak, I went back to Uganda, where I organized the first ever face-to-face meeting between Ugandan government representatives and the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), along with traditional leaders, women, and youth. This initiative, which later became known as the “Bigombe 2 Initiative,” eventually paved the way for the ongoing peace talks taking place in Juba, south Sudan, which will hopefully soon lead to the signing of a final peace agreement.

There are many other compelling reasons why women serve as effective peacemakers. In my own experiences I have found that women are often very pragmatic when it comes to getting their sons, brothers, and husbands to lay down arms. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, I had the honor of meeting and working with a number of courageous and resourceful women in the internally displaced people's camps in northern Uganda. These women carried out the footwork for an initiative I had developed, aimed at strategically targeting rebel combatants and providing them with incentives to defect from the LRA. The plan was clear: I drafted letters assuring physical security and resettlement kits, which were then delivered by the women to their loved ones involved in the fighting. Within the span of two short months, through persuasion and sheer perseverance, our letter-writing initiative resulted in approximately 5,000 rebels defecting and returning to the camps. It was an incredibly simple yet effective plan, and one which reduced the size and capacity of the LRA without any military showdowns or bloodshed.

Women have also been active through civil society channels. In the late 1980s, for example, when few others dared to speak out, countless women joined together in peaceful demonstrations against the war. More recently, a coalition of Ugandan women participated in a five-day trek to Juba, south Sudan, carrying the Women's Peace Torch and calling for women's perspectives and experiences to be included in the official negotiations.

What these dedicated women know—indeed what they have always known—is that their involvement in the peace process is pivotal. In fact, within the context of negotiation, being a woman can actually bring about an entirely different type of communication dynamic. When talking to Joseph Kony and other LRA commanders, for example, I was granted the special status of 'Mother,' which, in the African cultural context meant that I had earned a certain respect. This enabled me to assume an almost parental tone of authority with them—one which was both reprimanding and hard-lined, and yet not perceived as threatening. As a result, I could be bold in what I said, which proved very strategically useful. This approach, if taken by a man, may well have been interpreted as aggressive or combative, and might not have been as effective.

Another reason that women's inclusion in mediation and negotiation efforts is so imperative is that their perspectives will often broaden the scope of the peace process by taking a more forward-looking, development-oriented approach. Underpinning this argument is my observation that women have a fundamentally different conception of 'peace' than many men. In my experience, a woman's vision of peace is far more comprehensive and expansive than simply the cessation of violence. Ending hostilities is obviously crucial, but to succeed in the post-conflict transition to a peaceful, stable, and prosperous society, basic issues such as education, health, social service provision, justice, and community reconciliation must be taken into account.

I have also observed that uniformed men appear typically to use negotiations as a way to discuss and exact demands, often seeking to guarantee their own interests as an integral condition of whatever agreement is reached. What this means is that the needs of the community are frequently sidelined or treated as secondary. Women, on the other hand, tend to bring issues to the table that will have a profound and tangible impact—both immediate and long-term—on the family and the community at large. In Uganda, for example, it is the women who tirelessly and successfully lobbied to create a victims' compensation fund. It is women who spearheaded the movement to ensure that the definition of 'ceasefire' includes halting gender-based violence by combatants. In terms of promoting reconciliation, much can be said for the growing networks of female "peace animators" who help recruit and train other women to manage inter-community conflicts. Overall, it is a people-centered approach that women tend to advocate, with a focus on rebuilding the fundamentals of society that are key to achieving a sustainable peace.

I believe that the issue of addressing victims' needs, particularly victims of sexually-based violence, is one of the most compelling reasons why women's voices in peace talks are so critical and why they must be heard. Women have a unique expertise and experience in dealing with gender-related violence, which in my view serves as the basis for why they need to be involved in devising gender-appropriate responses to these issues.

This includes considering the needs of female ex-combatants, who are often the most invisible victims in these types of conflicts. To give some background from the Ugandan case, countless young women—many of them merely girls—have been abducted by the LRA. Once conscripted, they are forced to serve as both sex slaves (the common term here is “bush wives”) and domestic slaves, cooking and cleaning for rebel commanders. They are also expected to engage actively in the perpetration of violence. One commonly used practice is to send these young girls to their own communities to kill or loot—even victimizing their own family members in some cases—thereby foreclosing the possibility of return.

As a result, when the conflict begins to wind down women end up facing dual rejection—first by their so-called “bush husbands” and then by their own families and communities. The public health and security consequences of this are far greater than may be readily apparent. These women are often forced to turn to prostitution, for example, where they risk increased exposure to HIV/AIDS.

Female ex-combatants are likewise neglected within the context of post-conflict disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs. Many of these girls have become child mothers as the result of rape and sexual slavery. The psycho-social rehabilitation required—not only to restore the girls’ dignity or to reintegrate them into a society where they face stigma and ostracism, but to transform them into productive members of society—is enormous and complex. While SCR1325 has affirmed that “the different needs of female and male ex-combatants...and the needs of their dependants” should be taken into account during post-conflict planning, in my view, much remains to be done in order to make this a concrete reality, calculated to provide tangible solutions to the *de facto* situation on the ground.

We are reminded that in October 2000, in commemoration of the successful adoption of SCR1325, the United Nations emphasized the interrelatedness of women and peacemaking. I quote the then-Secretary-General: “When society collapses, women play

a critical role in ensuring that life goes on. When ethnic tensions cause or exacerbate conflict, women tend to build bridges rather than walls. When considering the impact and implications of war and peace, women think first of their children and their future, before themselves.”

The reality, however, is that SCR1325 is still not being fully implemented. Women continue to play a marginalized, and all too often token, role in peacemaking processes. In 2006, for example, a full five years after the resolution was passed, only four out of sixty-one United Nations senior peacemaking officials were women. Today, only one United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General is a woman. Moreover, women are not currently serving in leadership positions in any of the high profile conflict resolution cases such as Darfur, Uganda, Congo, or the Middle East, despite their demonstrated capacity and widespread involvement in track two and grass roots peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts.

Ambassador Ellen Sauerbrey has said that the United States “places great emphasis on the role of women in resolving conflicts and building peace,” and I agree that in certain ways the United States has acted as a leader in helping move SCR1325 beyond rhetoric. Your government’s invaluable assistance through multilateral partners and non-governmental organizations, as well as through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Endowment for Democracy, has demonstrated a commitment to increasing women’s political participation, economic opportunities, education, and their role in civil society, in many regions of the world.

It should be mentioned that the United States has also been helpful in promoting public-private initiatives such as the “Women Leading Women in Peace: Fostering Courage for Change,” which was launched to facilitate exchange and interaction between *Fortune* magazine’s Most Powerful Women in Business and women trying to make a difference in post-conflict societies.

These measures represent a good beginning. I believe, however, that the United States can and should do more. Developing a comprehensive action plan for implementing SCR1325, along the lines of those adopted by Sweden, Canada, and Liberia, just to name a few, would send a strong message to the rest of the world that the United States is serious about giving this resolution teeth and addressing its existing implementation gap. Having an action plan would also lend weight and credibility to American diplomatic efforts, by allowing the U.S. to put more pressure on other member states—particularly those emerging from armed conflict and political instability—to be more robust and rigorous in their domestic implementation of the resolution.

I would also urge the United States House of Representatives and the Senate to pass the International Violence Against Women Act (HR.5927 and S.2279 respectively), as a way to ensure that issues relating to women in peace and security are put squarely on the United States foreign policy agenda and become a greater priority in diplomatic efforts and in United States foreign assistance programs.

I conclude by emphasizing that pressure for more effective implementation of SCR1325 must be kept up. Time is of the essence. The public health and security implications of the failure to deal with these issues in a meaningful fashion are real, present, and urgent. There are many obstacles yet to overcome, but I believe a clear, firm, consistent, and timely effort from the United States will make a considerable impact on increasing the substantive participation of women in peacemaking processes, thereby contributing to the achievement of sustainable solutions to serious and complex conflicts.