

# Acting as If

S/Res. 1325 and Liberia's National Action Plan

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**Abstract:**

This research is meant to serve as an in-depths analysis of the four pillars of the National Action Plan of Liberia for the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 – Women Peace and Security. A thorough review of the Action Plan reveals the relative successes and failures of the government of Liberia to respond to the specific needs of its women and girls as the country attempts to mainstream gender concerns into its understanding of security. The research identifies key areas in which the Liberian Government should devote increased resources in order to achieve its goals.

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## Introduction

Liberia is a country in transition. After a protracted and brutal civil war that touched all corners of the small state, it has rebounded – electing Africa’s first female head of state, meeting its debt obligations, and beating the odds in preserving the peace more than 10 years after the signing of a peace agreement. Between 1989 and 2003, Liberia was engulfed in civil conflict. Led by Charles Taylor, the conflict was based less on ethnicity and was more the result of a set of complex and unequal relationships between the rich and poor, who felt the effects of political repression, lack of access to basic services, and economic discrimination.

After nearly two decades of conflict, the current government of Liberia faces the enormous task of rebuilding society and trust in the legitimacy of the democratically elected government. Legitimacy comes in the form of accountability, economic invigoration, and bringing an end to corruption and impunity. As well, legitimacy comes in the form of physical security. Violence against women and children continues to be at crisis levels, despite the cessation of armed conflict, and must be addressed by the Liberian government in order to sustain peace.

Understanding that women and men experience conflict differently, and face different challenges in the post-conflict peace building process, the United Nations adopted Security Council Resolution 1325 – Women Peace and Security as a mechanism by which to promote women’s inclusion in all processes that affect their peace and security. It is

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the first binding international legal document adopted by the Security Council dealing specifically with the experiences of women and girls in conflict (Adrian-Paul & Popovic, 2009, p. 10). Notably, Liberia was one of the first states, conflict-ridden or otherwise, to respond to the United Nations (UN) call for the development of a national action plan (NAP) to outline and coordinate a timeline for implementation of processes to include women and girls in peace and security operations. Every state is responsible for developing their own NAP based on their own unique needs and challenges.

The newly elected Sirleaf administration quickly got to work in 2007, mandating that the Ministry of Gender Development work on the Liberian National Action Plan (LNAP) in coordination with United Nations bodies operating in the country, and civil society groups active in this sphere (Gayflor, 2007, p. 4). A main area of focus for the LNAP is the promotion of physical security, and efforts to combat sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). The levels of sexual violence remain troublingly high. In order to make good on its promise to rebuild society and restore legitimacy and to fulfill its obligations under UN Security Council Resolution 1325 Women, Peace and Security, Liberia must devote considerable time and energy to addressing this issue. It, like all other member states, is bound by the resolution and must deliver on its promises under S/Res. 1325 – as must all UN apparatus in the country.

The research conducted for this project will focus specifically on the Liberian National Action Plan for implementation of S/Res. 1325 Women Peace and Security. It will

investigate the 4 pillars of the LNAP (protection, prevention, participation and empowerment, and promotion) and seek to identify crucial areas of focus for the Government of Liberia (GoL).

Even as conditions on the ground improve in Liberia, and the international community applauds its efforts to place women at high ranking levels of political power in the country, the numbers of women who are raped every day remain voiceless: *‘There is no longer fighting, just women being raped, so everyone is happy’*. This reflects the prevailing opinion that a security situation has improved when inter-group fighting has ceased or become sporadic, even though large numbers of women continue to be raped (United Nations 2010, p. 14). The high-level success of a small group of women often obscures the more likely reality of the majority of Liberian women, that of sexual and gender based violence.

The reported data supports this point. In a 2010 fact sheet published by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in accordance with the Universal Periodic Review of Liberia by the Human Rights Council revealed that even seven years after the CPA, rape and sexual violence remain the most frequently committed serious crime in the country, and that of those reporting the crime to the police, victims are most often female children under the age of 15. Given the taboo nature of sexual and gender-based violence, it is commonly understood that this type of violence traditionally goes unreported. Thus,

these numbers are generally believed to be under-representative of the actually levels of violence. The consequences of such systematic violence however, are well understood:

The use of sexual violence as a means of warfare has diverse, yet predictable consequences including: forced dispersal of populations as they flee feared atrocity; submission of an invaded community through fear of reprisal rape; intensification of bonding among perpetrators through commission of brutal acts; demoralization of an entire people through violence against their women, genetic subversion through impregnation of women; and destruction of a social fabric by attacking women whose denigration or deal often destroys the entire family unit. Communities threatened by mass rape in war may also be more likely to choose flight in advance of the enemy attack and may delay return to captured areas. For those who choose to return to their communities, experiences of rape and atrocity often have sapped their capacity for rebuilding and rehabilitation (United Nations, 2010, p.7).

## **Historical Overview**

The country of Liberia was formed as a colony of American slaves. Arriving in the 1810s, a movement of American Quakers brought the freed slaves to the settlement, named Monrovia after American President James Monroe. The colony kept close ties to the United States, even after its independence in 1847. Over the next 40 years, 19,000 African American repatriates, known as Americo-Liberians, settled in Liberia, along with some 5,000 Africans recaptured from slave ships, and a small population of immigrants from the Caribbean (Mitter Duva, p. 2). This process of repatriation led to the development of a two-tiered society modeled after the Southern plantation system. The country’s 16

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indigenous groups were discriminated against and exploited for their economic productivity by the Americo-Liberians. The Americo-Liberians were a small but strong majority that ruled from independence until 1980.

Tensions between Americo-Liberians and the country’s indigenous groups erupted in 1979 when the military opened fire on protesters demonstrating against a proposed increase in the price of rice, a staple of the Liberian diet. The majority of Liberians were struggling economically and basic amenities were scarce. The price increase of this dietary staple was for many, too much to bear. After the military opened fire, riots ensued, leading to a year of demonstrations and protests. By 1980, President William Tolbert had been overthrown in a military coup led by Samuel Doe. Doe ruled as a dictator for the next ten years, doing little to alleviate the existing inequalities and economic stagnation that had led to discontent with previous regimes. Despite promises to the contrary, Doe’s commitment to include the popular majority in his government failed to be realized, as his paranoia of a coup led him to favor his own ethnic party.

Popular discontent again led to agitation, this time led by Charles Taylor, who organized a group of indigenous people from the north outside the country, in Cote d’Ivoire. Calling themselves the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, they launched a rebellion in 1990 against the Doe regime. For the next six years, a full scale civil war raged in the country as small rebel factions formed throughout Liberia, seizing land and causing terrible disruption and dislocation of communities there. Doe was killed early on in the fighting,

but the rebel group responsible for his death was too poorly organized to garner recognition as the legitimate government responsible for ruling the country. Instead, Taylor was able to gain control over the area surrounding Monrovia, effectively ruling the entire country, except for the capital.

Finally, after 13 failed attempts at achieving a peace agreement, Taylor and the other rebel groups conceded to a timetable for elections, in July of 1997 at a meeting of the Economic Community of West African States Military Observer Group (ECOMOG). To the surprise of many, Taylor was elected in a decisive vote, and became President of Liberia. His control over the country was so strong, that his slogan, “He killed my ma, he killed my pa, but I will vote for him” was heard throughout the country. Many Liberians felt that peace would only be sustained if Taylor was permitted to rule. But, fighting continued and in less than two years, the country again found itself embroiled in full-scale conflict, as rebel groups attempted to unseat Taylor from the presidency.

Fourteen years of civil conflict claimed the lives of 270,000 Liberians, and thousands more were traumatized, displaced, and left without access to basic services at the time the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed (Luppino & Webbe, 2011, p. 106).

After the CPA took effect, Taylor was exiled to Nigeria, and the country began the process of rebuilding itself. Subsequently, the UN organized the United Nations Mission to Liberia (UNMIL), dispatching more than 15,000 peacekeeping troops to support the peace process. UNMIL has also been instrumental in security sector reform, voter registration

and recovery projects across the country. A transitional government was established, giving the country a two year timetable for free and fair elections in 2006. Those elections were without scandal, and brought the current president (reelected to a second term in 2011) Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to office.

In a civil war such as Liberia’s, it is not a far stretch to conclude that ‘everyone’ was affected. Over the fourteen years of protracted conflict, it touched nearly every corner of the country, as extreme levels of brutality were committed by all factions. This included widespread killings, rape, sexual assault, abduction, torture, forced labor and recruitment of child soldiers. As a result of these violent experiences, many Liberians suffer with a wide range of psychological problems and/or addiction to drugs and alcohol (Liebling-Kalifani, et al., 2011, p. 10). The violence committed by Liberians against fellow Liberians can be classified as human rights abuses, particularly when that violence was targeted at vulnerable groups such as women and girls.

President Sirleaf is Africa’s first elected woman head of state, and her administrations, though heavily burdened, have left the country relatively stable. Fourteen years of civil conflict have essentially destroyed Liberia’s social and economic infrastructure. Liberia today is among the world’s poorest countries. It ranks 162 of 169 on the Human Development index and is plagued by many challenges including unemployment, poverty, low literacy and other serious problems (Luppino & Webbe, 2011, p. 10). Almost an entire generation has missed out on formal primary schooling, learning instead to live by a warlord culture where force is the response to many of life’s challenges. With a

literacy rate estimated at less than 60%, there are few economic opportunities for Liberians. The country is heavily indebted to international financial institutions and though some of its debt has been cancelled Liberia remains on the verge of fiscal insolvency (Junge, 2007).

Liberia at a Glance	
Population	3,480,000
Literacy Rate	58.9%
Adult Literacy Rate: Females as a percentage of Males	86%
Gross Primary Enrollment Rate	91%
Female	86%
Male	95%
People living on below \$1.25 a day	83%
Population Growth Rate	4.1%
Fertility Rate	5.1
Maternal Mortality Rate (per 100,000 live births)	1,200
Life expectancy	55.5

Table 1 - Data from HDI Report and World Development Indicators

(Luppino & Webbe, 2011)

### Women in the Conflict

Women played a variety of roles in the Liberian civil conflict. Some women served as combatants, even reaching the rank of general within rebel factions. Research reveals that the social navigation tactics of young Liberian women during the war included the establishment of a network of relationships within and among boyfriends, and as the co-wives of commanders, peacekeepers, NGO staff and fellow citizens. Women and girls

often switched back and forth both received humanitarian aid and participating directly in the conflict. In this sense, women have successfully altered between survival tactics as they navigated the precarious reality of the war zone (Mats U. , 2005, p. 410).

It is true as well that women were made to endure significant sexual and gender based violence throughout the conflict. A World Health Organization study conducted shortly after the signing of the CPA in 2005 revealed that 82% of women endured multiple forms of violence, and 77% were the victims of rape (Luppino & Webbe, 2011, p. 12). This kind of pervasive SGBV is not unique to the Liberian conflict. According to Turshen in (Clarke, 2008, p. 53), a study of the political economy of rape during armed conflict in Africa “reveals that systemic rape and sexual abuse of women are among the strategies used to strip women of their reproductive and productive labor power as well as their possessions and access to land and livestock. The abduction of women and girls to serve as porters, farmers, cooks cleaners, launderers, tailors, and sex workers is perhaps the crudest way of using women’s productive labor to sustain armies and militia groups.”

Other women formed groups and worked tirelessly protesting the war, and contributing to the peacemaking process. Their contribution to ending the war is not to be underestimated. The achievements of Leymah Gbowee and the women she organized have become an ‘iconic representation’ of the role that women can play in the resolution of major conflict. Gbowee and her work have been featured in the documentary film

‘Pray the Devil Back to Hell’ and she, along with President Sirleaf were honored as recipients of the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize for their work in sustaining peace in the country.

### **Institutional Frameworks for Addressing Women, Peace and Security**

The post-Cold War era marked an important shift in the type and scale of conflict that necessitated international intervention. The reluctance of international actors to intervene led to disastrous consequences, particularly in regard to the Bosnian War and Rwandan genocide in the early/mid 1990s. This failure was a black eye for the United Nations, and many there questioned the UNs role in preventing conflict, and began to reconceive the notion of protection. The international community made a significant conceptual shift, recognizing its ‘Responsibility to Protect’ vulnerable citizens, and its right to intervene in complex humanitarian emergencies (CHEs).

These new conflicts have demonstrated the shift away from traditional battlefields and the regimented armies of the past. Today’s frontlines are now villages and fields, where women and children retain an important strategic value. Civilians now account for 90% of war casualties (Naraghi Anderlini & Tirman, 2010, p. 10). Children are abducted and compelled through violence, drugs and alcohol to act as child soldiers. The bodies of women and girls, an important symbol of the community are considered viable targets. Because identity plays an important role in many of today’s conflicts, their bodies are targeted. They endure abuses meant to destroy the social fabric of the community – rape, genital mutilation, forced pregnancy, prostitution, torture and forced marriages –

available evidence<sup>1</sup> suggests that communities often struggle to recover from such personal trauma. In fact, victims of these abuses are often shunned by their families and the wider community, as their trauma is seen as dishonorable.

At the same time, women experience indirect violence as well. They shoulder an intense responsibility to care for those left behind. The sick, the elderly, and children all look to women after villages are attacked, homes destroyed and the survivors are forced out. It is women who must begin the rebuilding process. As conflicts end, more than 50% of households are typically headed by women (Naraghi-Anderlini, 2001, p. 12). These women must not only process their own traumas, but deal with the loss of their husbands, sons and other family members, while determining a means of earning a living while raising and educating the children. It is this kind of indirect violence that had remained largely outside of the discussion about the international response to conflict prior to the popularization of the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ paradigm.

After a decade of shifting norms of conflict, and attempts to place the role of women in conflict onto the international agenda, the UN Security Council took up the mantle in early 2000. With the backing of UNIFEM, Bangladesh introduced the issue of women, peace and security to the Security Council in March, 2000. This resulted in the first statement in the history of the Security Council dealing directly with women. SC/6816 formally recognized that “the equal access and full participation of women in power

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<sup>1</sup> See (Jaye, 2009) (Jennings K. M., 2008), (Sherif) for additional information

structures and their full involvement in all efforts for the prevention and resolution of conflicts are essential for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security” (Naraghi-Anderlini, 2001, p. 15). Following this declaration, Security Council member governments, UN agencies, and NGOs got to work building consensus for language that could be adopted as a formal resolution, thereby solidifying the differential impact of conflict on women, and their role in sustaining peace and security.

Resolution 1325 Women, Peace and Security was unanimously adopted in October, 2000. The Resolution is critical in reshaping the protection of women in conflict zones, and also provides space for including women’s groups and other civil society actors in the peace process.

As previously stated, the UN has been very active in the last 10 years addressing the need to incorporate a more holistic view of human security in order to guarantee the safety of women and girls in times of conflict and transition. It has largely been a symbolic measure, as the UN struggles to find ways to operationalize and implement its progressive policies to affect tangible change in the behavior of armed groups around the world. Landmark resolutions have been passed by the Security Council to this effect.

#### **2000: Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security**

Upon the adoption of Resolution 1325 by the Security Council, a mandate has been passed down to all states, peacekeeping operations, and UN missions worldwide, as gender issues have been placed on the agenda, elevating the role of women from passive victims of

conflict to active participants in sustaining peace. Women now must be considered as a part of all political, military, development and humanitarian decisions made in conjunction with the maintenance of peace and security in the country. The Resolution “clearly incorporates (i) a gender perspective in training and in peacekeeping operations, (ii) it advocates for the full participation of women in decision-making and in conflict resolution and peace processes, (iii) it highlights the protection of human rights of women and girls, and (iv) promotes gender mainstreaming in the UN reporting systems as well as programmatic implementation mechanisms (Nagelhus Shia & de Carvalha, 2009, p. 1).”

Subsequent to the landmark 1325 Resolution, the Security Council has recognized gaps in intention and monitoring that necessitated the approval of three additional resolutions which deal with specific aspects of with women and conflict. They are as follows:

*2008: Security Council Resolution 1820, Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict*

- ▶ Security Council demands “the immediate and complete cessation by all parties to armed conflict of all acts of sexual violence against civilians with immediate effect” and called for sex crimes to be exempt from any amnesty provisions within peace agreements (Resolution 1820 (2008), 1)

*2009: UN Resolution 1888 on Women, Peace and Security*

- ▶ Calls for rapid deployment of experts to “situations of particular concern” in order to strengthen rule of law by working with UN personnel and national governments.
- ▶ Considers prevalence of rape and other forms of sexual violence when imposing or renewing sanctions
- ▶ Calls for retraining of peacekeepers, national forces and police (Goetz and Jenkins 2010, 21)

*2009: Security Council Resolution 1889 on Women in the Peace Process*

- ▶ Follow-up to UNSCR 1325, the original resolution that focused on women, peace, and security.
- ▶ Emphasizes the participation of women in all phases of the peace process. Most important, it calls for monitoring and introduces accountability mechanisms UNSCR 1325 lacks.
- ▶ The resolution strongly encourages cooperation with civil society, particularly women’s organizations.

*SGBV in Liberia*

Though rape has always been an element of war, the persistently high levels of rape in Liberia during and after the conflict demonstrate how this brutal tactic can be co-opted as a means of coercion which systematically instills fear in the civilian population and destroys hope sustainable recovery post-conflict. Similar conflicts in Bosnia, Kosovo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and elsewhere provide evidence that this is not a phenomenon limited to Liberia. “The evident migration of these war atrocities into

civilian relationships between men and women raises the stakes of understanding this war-time and now peace-time rape even higher” (Kelly, VanRooyen and al 2009, 4-5).

The movement of the UN in the early 2000s, towards adopting a platform and language with the expressed intent of forming an operational framework for peacekeepers to more adequately ensure human security for all civilians represents an important step toward addressing SGBV. The growing trend of warring parties explicitly targeting civilians has led to the institutional paradigm shift within the UN’s approach toward protection of civilians as evidenced by UN publications, *Comprehensive Strategy on Combating Sexual Violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo* as well as *Addressing Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, an Analytical Inventory of Peacekeeping Practices*, which demonstrates the commitment of the United Nations to addressing these issues. Since 2000, the United Nations has adopted landmark resolutions, S/Res. 1325, 1820, 1888, 1889, which attempt to provide better protection for women and girls in conflict. To date, implementation has been inconsistent in providing tangible results in the behavior of armed groups, as individual states are responsible for implementing and monitoring progress.

### **The LNAP**

In accordance with the Resolution, the Security Council (UNSC), Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and UN office of the Special Advisor to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI) encouraged all member states to develop national strategies of action for implementation of S.Res 1325. Notably,

Liberia was among the first post-conflict states to respond to this call. The government of Liberia and its Ministry of Gender Development collaborated with the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW) and the UN Mission in Liberia Office of the Gender Adviser (UNMIL OGA), as well as with civil society members in 2007 to begin drafting language for a national action plan.

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf unveiled the Liberian National Action Plan (LNAP) at the 2009 International Women’s Colloquium held in Monrovia, Liberia. The LNAP has a comprehensive 4 year timetable for implementation, and is meant to serve as a monitoring tool for the Liberian government as well as for the UN to assess progress made on achieving women’s equality. It was written to work in tandem with the GOL’s existing Poverty Reduction Strategy, and with joint programs between the government and UN mission. It has identified four key areas of focus; protection, prevention, participation, and empowerment. Each serves as a pillar under which strategic issues and areas of priority are to be addressed. Its progress will be monitored by an independent ‘Observatory’, which includes individuals from key government ministries, women’s groups, NGOs, and the 1325 National Steering Committee (LNAP).

### Liberia – Acting as If<sup>2</sup>

Because Liberia is in a unique position – as a country that has experience a ‘successful’ resolution to a protracted conflict and in the process has succeeded in advancing female leadership at the highest levels, it has often been cited as a success story for women’s representation (Adams, 2008, p. 480). Undoubtedly, women have played key roles in ending the Liberian conflict, and in maintaining its stability since, but there are still major hurdles to overcome before its success becomes sustainable.

Its NAP outlines clear goals toward including women in peacemaking by implementing programs, quotas, and other strategies which will benefit both the overall number of women, and the quality of their training, in the hopes of achieving sustainable peace.

### Direct and Indirect Violence against Women

It is evident that as feminist analyses argue, acts of rape and violence not only at the hands of ex-rebels as well as the Liberian military and must be incorporated into the overall concept of security there. (Ruiz 2005, p.13). This is in stark contrast to conventional IR views that security should be focused on protecting the state from attack by other states. In light of the changing nature of contemporary conflicts this is especially true. The bottom-up approach taken by feminists in their analysis of the impacts of armed conflicts is in direct contrast with top-down approach traditional of security studies. “A bottom up approach starts by looking at the presence of direct and

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Acting as If’ is the subtitle of the Swanee Hunt authored chapter ‘Moving Beyond Silence: Women Waging Peace’ in the book, *Listening to the Silences: Women and War*, edited by Helen Durham and Tracy Gurd

indirect violence and the unorganized and organized levels. As such, analysis at this level can help determine what elements are missing from conventional and critical security perspectives (McKay 2004, p. 160).” Table 1 identifies these forms of violence.

Without question, women in Liberia have suffered with the effects direct and structural violence at both the organized and unorganized levels. But, “within non-feminist human security discourses structural violence is usually given limited attention, despite its major effects on women’s lives (McKay 2004, p. 159). In order to bring the ideas of structural violence experienced by women in line with the goals of the LNAP, an investigation of the human security model might offer some insight.

**Table 1: Women’s and Girl’s Human Security During and After Armed Conflicts:  
Indirect and Direct Violence/Unorganized and Organized Threats**

	<b>Direct Violence</b>	<b>Structural Violence (indirect)</b>
<b>Unorganized: Violence occurs from individual acts at the micro-level</b>	<p><b>Cell 1</b> Violence from rape, partner battering, verbal/emotional abuse by partner and family members, “honor” killings. Exposure to sexually-transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, during and after armed conflicts from partners or individual acts of rape. Harassment, injury, and murder of women and girls in post-war societies</p>	<p><b>Cell 2</b> Fewer household resources compared with boys and men compromised health because of poor-quality water, food and housing. Environmental damage that affects quality of life and lifespan. Lack of personal and political freedom of choice. Forced marriage. Difficulty marrying post-war due to stigma, shame and psychological trauma resulting from forced maternity. Lac of economic opportunities. Prostitution for economic survival and to feed children. Pressure to wear garments to cover the head and body despite personal choices.</p>
<b>Organized: at institutional/societal (macro) levels</b>	<p><b>Cell 3</b> Violence from military and other organized groups including murder, beatings, abductions, systematic ape with high risk from sexually transmitted diseases, forced abortions, gender-specific torture, abductions into fighting force, sex slavery, physical and psychological assaults. Gendered effects of land mines planted as a military maneuver. Sex trafficking. Female genital excision.</p>	<p><b>Cell 4</b> Neglect during formal disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes. Exclusion or marginalization within peace negotiations and post conflict peace accords. Lack of decision-making authority within political and economic systems. Inability to participate in elections and public life. Lack of gender justice. Religious based oppression. Lack of access to skills training, schooling, primary health care and reproductive health services.</p>

Table 2 - Human Security Needs for Women and Girls During and After Armed Conflicts (McKay 2004, 160-161)

### **The Four Pillars – LNAP Framework**

Traditionally, the identity women and girls occupy within international relations has been one of victimhood – in need of protection and assistance and deserving of pity. Until recently the global agenda has not adequately accommodated ‘women’s issues’ beyond this limited identity. Feminist perspectives of international relations argue that the traditional emphasis on human security as guaranteed by the existence of military security fails to adequately provide for the human security of women (McKay 2004, p. 156). A feminist analysis of international relations would argue that how we think about security in the international context is gendered. Female perspectives are not objectively sought after or incorporated within the security framework. The inevitable result of this process of forming and evaluating concepts of human security without the inclusion of female perspectives is a de facto construction of human security around automatically male-centered ideas of what is standard and normal (Ruiz 2005, 12).

For feminist IR theorists the success of having achieved a more complete view of the security needs of women and girls through such landmark resolutions is a short lived victory.

As a result of the overwhelmingly patriarchal construction of international relations theories, few feminist analyses have found their way into international debates on human security. Instead of being mainstreamed, “sophisticated and insightful feminist analyses are usually ghettoized within feminist international studies and the academic literature of

sister disciplines (McKay 2004, 154).” Seeking to change that, feminist IR scholar J. Ann Tickner suggests that international relations is gendered to “marginalize women’s voices,” and stresses “that women have knowledge, perspectives and experiences that should be brought to bear on the study of international relations (Ruiz 2005, 12).” Tickner also suggests:

Feminist perspectives on security start with the individual or community, rather than the state or the international system. Rejecting universal explanations that, they believe, contain hidden gender biases, since they are so often based on the experiences of men, feminists frequently draw on local interpretation to explain women’s relatively deprived position and their insecurity... feminists seek to uncover how gender hierarchies and their intersection with race and class exacerbate women’s insecurities (McKay 2004, 156).

Psychologist Eileen Zurbriggen contributes her analysis of the endemic nature of rape during times of conflict, positing that a correlation exists between rape and war because the traditional construction of masculinity underpins both rape and war. Citing anthropological studies which “have shown that societies in which rape is more common are also societies in which war is waged more frequently”, Zurbriggen believes the socialization of men toward more traditionally masculine identities ensures that rape will be prevalent while leaving both genders ill-equipped to deal with the consequences. “In contrast,” she concludes, “war is infrequent or unknown in societies where rape is

infrequent. Thus, rape and war have been shown at a macro level, to be correlated (Zurbriggen 2010, 538).”<sup>3</sup>

As Zurbriggen’s research notes, men in traditional societies are not socialized to express feelings of fear and humiliation. Instead they learn to be stoic and strong, burying feelings of powerlessness when female members of their family and community are victims of systematic rape. Chris Dolan, director of the Refugee Law Project, commenting on a 2010 study published by the United Nations Population Fund stated: “The hurt born by men is not always directly physical. There is also, often hidden, psychological trauma inflicted, often for the purposes of intimidation and humiliation (UN Integrated Regional Information Networks 2010, 2).” Based on this, it would appear that the entire community is destabilized when failing to account for the security of women in this context. The LNAP seeks to address many of these gaps through strategic priorities identified within its four pillars of Protection, Prevention, Participation and Empowerment, and Promotion.

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<sup>3</sup> Appendix 1 contains Zurbriggen’s table, “Dimensions and Subdimensions of Masculinity, Masculinity Theorists, and Hypothesized Relevance to Rape and War

## **Pillar 1 – Protection**

The LNAP outlines the following strategic issues under the Protection Pillar, embedding them in a framework of existing UN resolutions and goals:

### **Strategic Issue 1: Provide psycho social support to women and girls.**

*UNSC Resolution 1325 (Art. 8A): Consider the special needs of women and girls during repatriation, resettlement and for rehabilitation, reintegration and post conflict reconstruction.*

### **Strategic Issue 2: Protect rights and strengthen security for women and girls.**

*UNSC Resolution 1325 (Art. 8A): Consider the special needs of women and girls during repatriation, resettlement and for rehabilitation, reintegration and post conflict reconstruction.*

*UNSC Resolution 1820 (Art. 4): Exhorts all actors to ensure that all victims of sexual violence, particularly women and girls, have equal protection under the law and equal access to justice and stresses the importance of ending impunity for such acts as part of a comprehensive approach to seeking sustainable peace, justice, truth, and national reconciliation.*

### **Strategic Issue 3: Increase access to quality health education or women and girls with specific emphasis on reproductive health and HIV/AIDS**

*UNSC Resolution 1820 (Art. 13): Urges all parties concerned, including Member States, United Nations entities and financial institutions, to support the development and strengthening of capacities of national institutions, in particular of judicial and health systems, and of local civil society networks in order to provide sustainable assistance to victims of sexual violence in armed conflict and post-conflict situations.*

*Millennium Development Goal (MDG6): Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases.*

As discussed previously, violence against women remains one of Liberia’s major problems. A 2007 assessment found that rape was the most reported crime in Liberia (Medie, 2009). Crime statistics of violence against women are overwhelming. Rape persists in 2009 as the most frequently reported crime: “On average 54 reported cases per month countrywide. Only during this year Women and Children Protection Section of UNICEF handled 2,352 cases of which 707 were gender-based violence including sexual violence. Out of the 707 cases, 272 cases were sent to court, 235 pending and 200 cases withdrawn” (Nagelhus Schia & de Carvalho, 2009, p. 15).

Key to the success of the Prevention Pillar of the LNAP is gender-sensitive police reform. To date, the GoL has taken specific steps toward achieving the kind of reform that encourages women and girls to report crimes against them, particularly SGBV, and by recruiting more women to the police force. They offer free high school education to girls interested in joining the Liberian National Police, and make a concerted effort to promote females up the chain of officers (Bastick, 2007, p. 168). Women find themselves at the highest ranks of the Liberian National Police, and are able to focus special attention on the needs of women and girls throughout the country.

To this end, the government formed the Women and Children Protection Unit (WACPU), a dedicated unit focused on addressing crimes against women. It is staffed almost exclusively by female police, trained with special skills to investigate sexual crime,

and comfort victims. These units are heavily financed by the international donor community and have been met with success thus far.

According to the UNIFEM Report, ‘Gender-Sensitive Police Reform in Post-Conflict States’ (p.6): “WACPU has acquired something of the prestige of an elite task force within the larger body of the police, in part because donor support has ensured that these police units are better equipped than some of their counterparts. Police officers thus want to be associated with gender-related work; it does not carry the stigma of being a neglected or low-priority backwater.”

In addition to police reforms, addressing the health needs of women and girls is crucial. In 2003 at the end of the conflict a survey of health clinics in Monrovia found that “all female patients – most of whom said they had been raped by former government soldiers or armed opposition – tested positive for at least one sexually transmitted infection” (Ward & Marsh, 2006, p. 10).

A follow up study revealed that the situation had not improved much, 5 years after the CPA. The 2008 study on the impact of SGBV in Liberia by Liebling-Kalifani found that significant damage had been done to the sexual and reproductive health of victims of sexual violence. Of those responding, 68.5% of women had a gynaecological complaint, ranging from unwanted pregnancy, faecal fistulae, infertility, to genital prolapse. A further analysis of the data also revealed that women with gynaecological complaints were also more likely to have other health issues, including psychological problems,

attempted suicide, and abuse of drugs and alcohol (Liebling-Kalifani, et al., 2011, p. 10).

The impact of SGBV on women individually, and on a macro-level is hiding in plain sight.

## **Pillar 2 – Prevention**

The LNAP outlines the following strategic issues under the Prevention Pillar, embedding them in a framework of existing UN resolutions and goals:

### **Strategic Issue 4: Prevent all types of violence against women and girls, including sexual and gender based violence.**

*UNSC Resolution 1325 (Art. 10): Calls on all parties... to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape, and other forms of sexual abuse, and all other forms of violence in situations of armed conflict.*

*UNSC Resolution 1325 (Art. 11): Emphasizes the responsibility of all States to put an end to impunity and to prosecute... those responsible for war crimes including those relating to sexual and other violence against women and girls.*

*UNSC Resolution 1820 (Art 4): Ensures that all victims of sexual violence, particularly women and girls, have equal protection under the law and equal access to justice and stresses the importance of ending impunity for such acts as part of a comprehensive approach to seeking peace, justice, truth, and national reconciliation.*

*UNSC Resolution 1820 (Art. 13): Urges all parties concerned, including Member States, United Nations entities and financial institutions, to support the development and strengthening of capacities of national institutions, in particular of judicial and health systems, and of local civil society networks in order to provide sustainable assistance to victims of sexual violence in armed conflict and post-conflict situations.*

Women and girls have also called for an improved justice system in which perpetrators of rape are punished for their crimes. Lack of punishment was cited as one of the reasons sexual violence continues to become more common in civil society. However, women are

often reluctant to access legal services, either because they are afraid of being stigmatized as ‘rape victims’ or because of hardship related to accessing police services and evidence gathering.

In 2005 existing rape laws were amended. The law broadens the definition to include marital rape. The age of consent was raised from 16 to 18 years as an additional effort to combat SGBV (de Carvalho & Nagelhus Shia, 2011). While these represent significant steps in the right direction, the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia reported 2 years after their passage that only 5 rape cases had been assigned a trial date, and that there had only been one successful prosecution of a rape case since 1999 (Jaye, 2009).

The evidence that SGBV continues to occur in times of peace is undeniable, and troubling. As law enforcement continues to be weak, its strong laws against sexual violence are often not enforced. There is little hope expressed by victims of SGBV for their assailants to ever be punished for their crimes, particularly as little to no energy or financial resources were spent on the psycho social well-being of male combatants as they reentered society. With little economic opportunity, and many who continue to be addicted to drugs or alcohol, the ability of the GoL to address SGBV will remain limited.

### **Pillar 3 – Participation and Empowerment**

The LNAP outlines the following strategic issues under the Participation and Empowerment Pillar, embedding them in a framework of existing UN resolutions and goals:

**Strategic Issue 5: Promote women’s full participation in all conflict prevention, peace building and post-conflict recovery processes.**

*UNSC Resolution 1325 (Art. 1): Urges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional, and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts.*

*UNSC Resolution 1820 (Art. 12): Urges the Secretary-General and his Special Envoys to invite women to participate in discussions pertinent to the prevention and resolution of conflict, the maintenance of peace and security and post-conflict peace building, and encourages all parties to such talks to facilitate the equal and full participation of women at decision-making levels.*

**Strategic Issue 6: Empower women through increased access to housing and natural resources and strengthen their participation in the management of the environment.**

*UNSC Resolution 1325 (Art. 8A): Calls on all actors involved, when negotiating and implementing peace agreements to adopt a gender perspective including inter-alia the special needs of women and girls during repatriation and resettlement and for the rehabilitation, reintegration, and post-conflict reconstruction.*

Participation and empowerment of all Liberians to navigate the political and economic channels may be the country’s best bet for achieving sustainable peace for the long term.

**Shifting Patterns of SGBV**

There is fear among many that this phenomenon may be explained away in the rush to reach reconciliation and or, ‘get back to peace’, leaving women’s security needs largely out of the picture. As a result, the UNDPKO has adopted the stance that,

Sexual violence challenges conventional notions of what constitutes a security threat. It is often invisible: the world does not witness rape in the same way as landmine injuries. Cheaper than bullets, it requires no weapons system other than

physical intimidation, making it low cost, yet high impact. This may also render sexual violence resistant to the disarmament process and ceasefire monitoring, aimed to rid communities of conventional weapons and ensure the cessation of shooting and other openly hostile acts. Yet Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) without psychological debrief, rehabilitation or follow-up may exacerbate sexual violence by reinserting ex-combatants into civilian settings in closer proximity to women and children, or by integrating past perpetrators into the national armed forces without a credible vetting process. Limited livelihood options for ex-combatants combined with militarized notions of masculinity, learned patterns of aggression, and drug and alcohol abuse, may perpetuate violent behavior (United Nations 2010, p.12).

Interviewees in a study conducted by Peace Medie most often cited poverty as the major cause of gender-based violence in Liberia. For them, the underlying instability and frustration of a lack of economic opportunity led their partners to sexual and gender-based violence (Medie, 2009, p. 17). For this reason, the GoL has begun to tie the strategic objectives of the Participation and Empowerment Pillar to its national Poverty Reduction strategy.

The World Bank estimates that roughly 50% of households are headed by women, and nationally the rate of unemployment reaches nearly 80%. Without formal sectors offering employment opportunities for women, or men, many are forced to enter the informal economy. They scrape by – collecting scrap metal, operating small enterprises such as restaurants, food carts or other simple jobs. By World Bank estimates, between 80 and 90% of the workforce operates in this informal economy.

Though economic invigoration has largely been delegated by the GoL to the International Financial Institutions in the form of philanthropic projects, it has begun to focus more sharply on this sector. The country’s poverty reduction strategy has attempted to formally integrate aspects of the informal economy by setting up sanctioned markets and asking vendors to apply for permits. However, this process has been met with little success, and can be seen as particularly harmful to women, who share disproportionate burdens when compared to men.

The impact of a shift to a formal economy might mean very different things for women, who have to deal with factors such as finding reliable child care, having less formal education when compared to men, not having proper training due to their exclusion from many DDR job training programs, and by the very influx of men into a now regulated economic market. The GoL has much work to do in this area before the underlying instability of poverty can be eradicated.

#### **Pillar 4 – Promotion**

**Strategic Issue 7: Promote the involvement of women’s groups in the implementation of the LNAP and advocate for increased access to resources for both the government and women’s groups.**

**Strategic Issue 8: Promote the participation of girls in conflict prevention, early warning, peace security issues and post conflict recovery issues through education and training.**

**Strategic Issue 9: Enhance the technical and institutional capacities of governmental and civil society actors, including women’s groups to effectively implement the LNAP.**

**Strategic Issue 10: Promote the full involvement of government and civil society actors, including women’s groups in the monitoring and evaluation of the LNAP.**

*UNSC Resolution 1325 (Art. 7): Urge Member States to increase their voluntary financial, technical and logistical support for gender-sensitive training efforts, including those undertaken by relevant funds and programmes, inter-alia the United Nations Fund for Women and the United Nations Children’s Fund and the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, the Peacebuilding fund, and others.*

In many ways, the women of Liberia continue to live up to their legacy. As Swanee Hunt proclaimed, they are “*acting as if*” (Hunt, 2005), meaning that they have continued to push forward, and acting as if the situation on the ground were more hospitable to them than it is in reality.

At the highest levels, the GoL has achieved success in placing Africa’s first female head of state, and promoting five women to the position of Minister (within the ministries of Justice, Agriculture, Commerce & Industry, Gender & Development, and Youth & Sports). Sirleaf’s election follows the pattern established by Adams that women most often achieve election to the executive branch when countries are politically unstable and lack effective political institutions (Adams, 2008, p. 476). But it also follows the uniquely Liberian culture of strong women – ‘Iron Ladies’ – who have demanded change from their governments, both legitimate and otherwise. One of Sirleaf’s main priorities among taking the presidency was to battle corruption that threatened to scare away the international donor community.

Among national and local legislative bodies, women’s representation remains relatively low, despite the influx of foreign aid monies tied to increasing the representation of women in political offices. Citing a the difficulty experienced by female candidates in fundraising, the National Elections Commission’s Gender Officer, Jابه Kawa said that many of the women he spoke to said that outside of Monrovia, significant barriers still exist to women’s participation. Despite this, nearly all women believe that conditions have improved overall (Luppino & Webbe, 2011, p. 110).

### **Conclusion: Making it Right**

The unequal power relation between men and women has led to a massive human rights crisis in Liberia. If women continue to be seen as subordinate to men, as second-class citizens, sexual and gender-based violence will continue to haunt Liberia well into its transition toward peace and state-building. It will also fail its commitment to the LNAP for S/Res. 1325 if it does not get serious about addressing the pervasive crimes of sexual and gender based violence. Feminist analyses of international relations support this prediction. Without real and comprehensive incorporation of the perspectives of women on addressing needs of human security, the insecurity of women will be perpetuated.

The physical, economic, and political security of women is central to achieving a sustainable peace there, and it has been woven into the structure of the LNAP’s four pillars. However, the underlying instability and insecurity that has remained since the signing of the comprehensive peace agreement has compromised the integrity of the

NAP. The GoL reported “in the aftermath of the conflict, women continue to suffer the physical, emotional, psychological, and economic effects of the conflict, face high incidents of rape and sexual violence, and confront significant traditional and cultural challenges to maintain meaningful participation in public and political spheres” (Amneus, 2011, p. 75).

Despite identifying best practices, and making some progress toward the goals outlined in the LNAP, there are underlying issues which affect the peace and security of Liberian women. As women continue to be the targets of sexual and gender based violence, they are forced to make choices about when and how they advocate and become involved in political life, particularly in rural parts of the country. The full execution of the NAP will not be realized without addressing the basic physical security needs of women.

Because of this reality, and its government’s strong commitment to S/Res. 1325 (and subsequent resolutions), Liberia’s would benefit from adopting a human-based security model, rather than a nation based one. As Amneus explains, “post-conflict peace is in reality only a ‘relative peace’ for many women and children due to the endurance of these human security threats, in particular in the private sphere” (Ibid, p. 74) Without a focus on human security, over that of traditional security, peace will only ever be relative for the women of Liberia. When a human security model is adopted, the door is opened to a concerted and well planned strategy to combat social ills that underlie tensions that lead to conflict. By framing Liberia’s hope for success in this context, and redefining what it

means to keep the country secure, Liberia can not only meet its LNAP commitment to women – it can achieve a sustainable peace that will benefit all Liberians.

## **Policy Recommendations**

### **Adoption of a Human Security Model for LNAP Phase 2:**

The GOL has the tools and the desire to continue to lead the world in its approach to ensuring equality among women, but it must not ignore the most fundamental barriers to achieving success in this regard. A human security model would go a long way in promoting the reforms necessary to help guarantee that Liberia does not fail to protect its women from sexual and gender based violence. A model of human security will challenge the state to reconceive its notion of security, away from traditional (masculine) concepts, and allow for a more universal framework that promotes the safety, security, and equality of all citizens, thereby helping to ensure that the conditions that existed prior to the outbreak of war in 1989 do not again come to by. By reconceiving its basis for security, Liberia is not only furthering the cause of its female citizens, it is achieving the kind of sustainable peace it is so desperately seeking.

Liberia can deliver on the promises it made to its women. At the same time, it can further stabilize the security situation, thereby promoting a sustainable peace. As the country is already thought of as a leader in women’s political representation, Liberia could further change the landscape by adopting such a view of security.

### **Enhanced Access to Psycho Social and Substance Abuse Counseling**

Because of the collective traumas suffered by those who lived through the conflict, and those that have been the victims of SGBV, it is evident that a significant portion of the population would benefit from the increased access to psycho social and substance abuse counseling.

### **Continued Support by the GoL and International Community for Gender-Sensitive Policing and Enhanced Rule of Law for SGBV**

The GoL and international donor community must continue to support the gender-sensitive policing it established at the outset of the LNAP. Despite all of their efforts, the true numbers women affected by SGBV remain a mystery because prosecution of the crime remains scarce.

As the Ministry of Justice attempts to remedy this, it should designate benchmarks for training lawyers and judges in this area, and publicize a timetable for prosecutions going forward.

### **Diversified Education and Training Opportunities**

As many Liberians continue to work in the informal economy, the GoL should be sensitive to the demands it is making of its citizens to walk before they can run. Based on the fact that many still lack basic education and workforce training, the government

should continue to appeal to the international community to provide financial and programming commitments to help formalize the economy in a context that does not hurt women. One potential avenue of funding is to pursue many available funds for entrepreneurship and social enterprise, which will encourage Liberians to become self-sustaining and help to secure their economic freedom.

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Acting As If – S/Res. 1325 and Liberia’s Plan of Action

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**Appendix 1 - Dimensions and Subdimensions of Masculinity**

**Dimensions and Subdimensions of Masculinity, Masculinity Theorists, and Hypothesized Relevance to Rape and War**

Dimension of Masculinity	Theorist	Relevant to	
		Rape	War
Femininity Avoidance	Brannon; Cheng; O’Neil; Thompson & Pleck	X	
Status and Achievement	Brannon; Levant; O’Neil, Thompson & Pleck	X	X
Hierarchy and ‘Pecking Order’	Cheng	X	X
Toughness and Aggression	Brannon; Cheng; Levant; Thompson & Pleck	X	X
Adventurousness	Brannon		X
Athletic Prowess	Cheng		X
Physical Size and Strength	Cheng	X	X
Willing to Take Physical Risks	Brannon; Levant	X	X
Capable of Violence	Brannon; Cheng	X	X
Restricted emotionality	Brannon; Levant; O’Neil	X	X
Empathy (low)	Brody & Hall; Cheng; Levant	X	X
Stoicism	Cheng		X
Self-Control	Cheng		X
Fearlessness	Levant; O’Neil	X	X
Anger is Only Allowable Emotion	Levant	X	X
Self-Reliance	Brannon; Levant		X
No Weakness or Vulnerability	Brannon; Cheng; Levant; O’Neil		X
Repression of Human Needs	Goldberg		X
Non-Relational Sexuality	Levant; O’Neil	X	
Homophobia	Brannon; Cheng; Levant; O’Neil		
Dominance/Power/Control	O’Neil; Cheng; Goldberg	X	X
Competitiveness	Cheng; O’Neil		X
Distrust of Others	Goldberg	X	X
Ability to Manipulate Others	Goldberg	X	X

(Zurbriggen 2010, 539)