

Japan urged to back equality push

Action not speeches needed for women's rights: ex-U.N. official

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Staff writer

Has the world become safer and more peaceful for women and girls in the past 10 years? Not so much, says former United Nations Security Council President Anwarul K. Chowdhury.

This October marks the 10th anniversary of the U.N. Security Council's adoption of Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. In 2000, the Security Council for the first time in its 55 years of existence addressed the need for women to be equally involved with men in postconflict peace-building processes.



Anwarul K. Chowdhury

Chowdhury, the Bangladesh ambassador to the U.N. who held the rotating Security Council presidency in 2000 and 2001, made a presidential statement on equality between women and men in security and peace in 2000 that led to the adoption of Resolution 1325.

But nothing much has happened, Chowdhury said in a recent interview in Tokyo with The Japan Times.

Japan has not done anything, he argued. "Japan's involvement on (the resolution) is only speeches. Nothing else," he said.

Japan should "prepare its national action plan for the 1325

national implementation without any delay," he said. "Civil society in Japan should be much more proactive in raising awareness for equal participation of women at all levels."

Chowdhury said Resolution 1325 is important because it will change the global concept of peace and security.

"Involving women brings in a more sustainable dimension of peace, not the so-called power-sharing dimension of peace promoted by men," he said.

As a former career diplomat, Chowdhury said he is still strongly committed to the implementation of the resolution because of his experience as a U.N. official in conflict-hit countries such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan.

During his term as Security Council chief, he visited Kosovo with his team to see how they could promote peace there. Women's groups were hoping to talk with him, so he asked a local representative to organize a meeting.

"When I arrived, I found no women's meeting in my program. I asked (the representative) what happened," he said, noting how women can be excluded from the peacemaking process.

Although he was told he didn't have the time, he managed to meet the women's groups at 11 p.m. — after all of his scheduled programs had ended.

"They were so delighted that they were able to convey their thinking to the Security Council members."

After hearing the groups' opinions, he realized "women have a longer term interest in the society, while men have mostly power-related aspirations out of peace processes."

But the implementation of his work has been slow.

In April, U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki Moon announced a set of indicators to implement the resolution. The indicators basically ask developing countries to collect data on women's participation in peace and security issues. But the secretary general acknowledged that it would take two to five years for full implementation, Chowdhury said.

"(Data collection) will be a burden for developing countries. As a result, they will not give (it their) full attention."

Instead of focusing on statistics, the key to turning the resolution into reality is to make the secretary general's role more active and engaged, he said.

"I want the secretary general to discuss it with all the world leaders. He should tell them, 'What is happening to 1325 in your country?'"

In doing so, Chowdhury said, the secretary general could eliminate the two- to five-year wait.

He also argued that it is crucial to involve the private sector, especially multinational corporations, because they are becoming an important player in peace and security.

"They employ a lot of people, for example, in Iraq. Security there is controlled by the private sector," he said. "And they're not bound by the U.N. resolution or anything. They're guided by profit-oriented involvement, making money. So I want them to be involved."

Getting all of the parties related to Resolution 1325 on board, however, has not been easy.

In the case of U.N. peacekeepers, some have committed acts of sexual abuse against local women, but the U.N. has not been able to stop it, according to Chowdhury.

If a man from one of the member states is involved in sexual violence, a report is made and he is sent back to his home country. The report is also sent back, asking the army to make an inquiry and punish him.

This year, 39 cases were reported, but the U.N. has dealt with only 13 of them.

In many cases, the punishment — such as being docked a month's salary — is small compared with what those peacekeepers have done, he said.

"It's a miscarriage of justice," he said, adding that the head of the U.N. mission should be held responsible in these cases.

While much still needs to be done to improve women's involvement in peace and security issues, Chowdhury is still hopeful.

"The four numbers (1325) have become known worldwide because of enthusiasm (in society)," he said. "(The 10th anniversary) is a good occasion for us to get energized and actually do something (to put the resolution into practice)."

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