



# WOMEN, PEACE, SECURITY AND COVID-19

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A Feminist Security Agenda Beyond the Crisis

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## **A Feminist Security Agenda Beyond the Crisis: Women, Peace, Security and COVID-19<sup>1</sup>**

The abrupt and demolition forthcoming from the pandemic has shown us how frail feminist conquests of the last decades<sup>2</sup> has been. The extra care-work women do, the soaring increase in violence, especially in domestic violence, economic inequality and informality among other factors bear a woman's face in this unprecedented sanitary crisis.

The pandemic, however, has also helped hasten the process of reviewing global agendas in terms women's rights. Claims have been pushed forward by feminist academics and activists demanding the international community take action. One of these demands is in the core of the United Nations System (from here on UNS) where violence and other unequal systemic burdens are burnt by women which are deepened and worsened during crisis.

One of the agendas pushed forward is the agenda of Women, Peace and Security (from now on 1325 agenda or MP&S). Inaugurated over 20 years ago, it has become one of the main tools of feminist protest on a global level and also one of the main focuses of the criticism of the institutionalization of certain gender sensitive discourses in the highest international power settings. Two of the main criticisms done towards the agenda consist in pointing out on the one hand, its crisis like approach which conducts the efforts of combating violence against women only in exceptional settings or atypical settings such as armed conflict. This is oblivious to the fact that even without war women are still subject to the horrors of violence in all of their areas of life. On the other hand, and derived from the crisis approach, the agenda seems to have little tools to encourage the nations of the world (not all at war) to vehemently address the structural causes of inequality and violence that are faced by women on a daily basis and that hinder their access to human rights.

In contrast, in a sense of institutional contrition, the latest developments from different organizations at the UNS including the Secrecy General, acknowledge that the superficial commitment of the advance on women's rights and the poor results are in many cases the reason why women suffer the devastating effects of the pandemic and other crises this has brought along. So, in an incessant demand to steer the wheel, the gaze is finally being placed on the root causes that have brought us to where we are today, as well as a call to action to create or adjust existing mechanisms to eradicate

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<sup>2</sup> Secretario General de la Organización de las Naciones Unidas. Informe de Políticas: Las repercusiones de la Covid-19 en las mujeres. 9 de abril de 2020.

once and for all the causes and not only the symptoms of the other pandemic: discrimination against women.

In this text, I will argue that the new guidelines of the UN to address the pandemic with a gender-based approach mean a radical detour from the classical crisis approach to a daily lives approach in regard to “peace and international security”. The day-to-day approach involves acknowledging that even in the most pressing contexts that endanger global security, like a war or a pandemic the daily affairs to ensure survival, routine problems and interpersonal security are what worry women, as opposed to what the global community thinks is the risk that is posed to its communities”<sup>3</sup>.

In this sense, the pillars of action of the agenda 1325, founded on the global mandate of advancing in a more peaceful and safer world for women must be linked with the action guidelines that address the pandemic: yet another threat towards women’s safety. This will enable the consolidation of an agenda of feminist peace and global security.

The aforementioned means there must be an understanding of “a vision of security that goes beyond a state centered approach, and that acknowledges the needs of individuals”<sup>4</sup>.

The effect of this new political gaze must be reflected on the actions of the Security Council when addressing the pandemic and the MP&S agenda. These two are intertwined and they both affect women’s security in a harsher manner, stemming from systemic exclusions which aren’t extraordinary. On the contrary, these harsher effects come from the day to day lives of women in scenarios such as relationships at home, access to the labor market, the ability to walk freely and have access to decent and comprehensive mental, sexual and reproductive health services. In short, scenarios where the lack of equitable distribution of resources reflects its most misogynistic and patriarchal face.

In this context, I will commence the first section with a brief description of the effects of the pandemic on women, underlining which are the assessments that the General Secretary has called “a female faced crisis”<sup>5</sup>.

In the second section I will give an outline of the standards built till this day in the inside of the UNS to address the effects of the pandemic in women’s lives, I will highlight how the pivot of all of the aforementioned ideas is the logic of violence and structural exclusion as mediate causes of the crisis.

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<sup>3</sup> Wenham, Clare. *Feminist Global Health Security*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. Oxford Scholarship Online, 2021. doi: 10.1093/oso/9780197556931.001.0001

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Secretario General de las Naciones Unidas. Una crisis con rostro de mujer. 03/04/2020.

Recuperado el 9 de julio de 2021. Disponible en:

<https://www.un.org/sg/es/content/sg/articles/2021-03-04/crisis-womans-face>

In the last section I will assess the forms of articulation of the MP&S, particularly placing emphasis on the update of its pillars in the light of the guiding principles of the Secretary General and highlighting how a change could be introduced towards a daily life approach. I will then share some conclusions.

1. The pandemic has a female face: the differential gender impacts of COVID 19 and the response of the UNS.

A. Differentiated COVID-19 impacts on women.

During one of the first declarations done by the Secretary General of the United Nations (from here on SGUN) he indicated that the pandemic had “a woman’s face. Even though during April 2020 it was impossible to foresee the impact that the pandemic would have on women, in a manner of prediction, the Secretary warned that everyone would lose during the pandemic but that women would be the worst affected.

The pandemic has primary and secondary effects. The primary ones are the result of the direct contagion of the virus<sup>6</sup>. In this category, we include the casualties and people who have contracted the virus and have recovered from it. As of July 26, 2021, 194,139,772 people have contracted the virus and 4,158,700 have died<sup>7</sup>. After breaking down the numbers by gender, 49.1% of the infected persons and only 39.8% of the fatal victims have been women<sup>8</sup>.

However, the secondary effects have had a differential impact by gender, which has been discussed around the world. These secondary effects refer to the economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions of the pandemic in people's lives<sup>9</sup>. In this regard, it has been widely documented how during the last year several vital dimensions of women lives have been impacted with peculiar intensity in terms of side effects. The Gender and Covid Group, an academic alliance made up of all the experts on gender related terms, international relations, public policy, security, and public health have identified six dimensions of differentiated impact that the pandemic has had on women.

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<sup>6</sup> Gender & Covid-19. How to create a gender responsive pandemic plan Addressing the secondary effects of COVID-19, p. 2. Retrieved July 9, 2021. Available at: <https://www.genderandcovid-19.org/tools/>

<sup>7</sup> The New York Times. Coronavirus World Map: Tracking the Global Outbreak. Source: Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University. Daily cases are the number of new cases reported each day. The seven-day average is the average of a day and the previous six days of data. Retrieved July 26, 2021. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/world/covid-cases.html>

<sup>8</sup> UN Women. COVID-19 and gender monitor. Updated July 25, 2021, with information from the World Health Organization. Retrieved July 26, 2021. Available at: <https://data.unwomen.org/resources/covid-19-and-gender-monitor>. Op. Cit., Gender & Covid-19. How to create a gender responsive pandemic plan... p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Op. Cit., Gender & Covid-19. How to create a gender responsive pandemic plan... p. 2.

First of all, women were victims of an *exponential increase in gender-based violence, especially domestic violence*. The Secretary-General's Policy Document and the supporting document of the World Health Organization have stated that “the women who are in abusive relationships and their children are more likely to be exposed to violence when the government enforces new lockdowns”<sup>10</sup>.

According to the Gender & Covid Group, “the data on emergencies and viral outbreaks from the past and Covid-19 show an increase in levels of gender-based violence across different contexts compared to previous pandemics”<sup>11</sup>. Although in general the main cause of this increase is confinement, global patterns associated with the economic pressure suffered by households, stress, and loss of access to support systems have been identified as factors that aggravate the situation of women at risk of suffering these violence<sup>12</sup>.

In Colombia, Sisma Mujer has stated that according to reports from the Attorney General's Office in 2020 there were “110,071 victims of domestic violence (which includes intimate partner violence) due to events that allegedly occurred that year. Of these, 83,023 corresponded to women, that is, 75.43% of the total, 22,409 to men, that is, 20.36%, and in 4,639 cases (4.21%) the victim's gender was not on file. This means that “at least one woman was a victim of domestic violence every 6 and a half minutes”<sup>13</sup>.

Second, *the pandemic has worsened the very complex mental health situation in the world, with a special impact on the lives of women*. As the Gender & Covid Group points out, “the first reports from several countries indicate a worsening of mental health conditions in the general population since the beginning of the pandemic. These include an increase in drug use, as well as levels of anxiety and depression”<sup>14</sup>. Women are part of the social groups exposed to greater risks to mental health given that care responsibilities fall on them. Therefore, many must “balance work, home, and care activities”<sup>15</sup>. According to Ángela Cifuentes-Avellaneda, Danny Rivera-Montero, Camila Vera-Gil et. Al., in Colombia, 78% of the women who were part of the *Anxiety, depression and fear: drivers of poor mental health during physical distancing in Colombia* study perceived one or more negative effects on their mental health.

“75% of the people who answered the survey reported having had one or more symptoms associated with the deterioration of their mental health. Women reported

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<sup>10</sup> World Health Organization. Gender and Covid-19. Supporting Document. May 14, 2020, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Op. Cit., Gender & Covid-19. How to create a gender responsive pandemic plan... p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Sisma Mujer “Día Internacional Por Los Derechos De Las Mujeres” March 8, 2021, p. 9.

Retrieved on July 9, 2020. Available at:

<https://www.sismamujer.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/8M.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

greater symptoms than men. 58% of the women felt nervous compared to 44% of the men. Likewise, it stands out that 49% of the women felt more restless or impatient compared to 41% of the men”.<sup>16</sup>

Third, *women have had to face a decrease in the access to sexual and reproductive health services*. Data from various regions around the world, with special emphasis on Latin America and the Caribbean, show that in an effort to prioritize access to priority care measures associated with the containment of the virus, state health institutions are likely to take advantage of this situation to limit women's access to necessary care for high-risk pregnancies, treatment of sexually transmitted diseases and access to voluntary pregnancy interruptions under the conditions allowed by law wherever it is permitted.<sup>17</sup> In the case of Colombia, Sisma has stated that “given that the health resources are focused on the emergency response, this can cause interruptions in access to reproductive health services, making it impossible, in turn, to purchase menstrual care products, or contraceptives”<sup>18</sup>.

Fourth, as the Secretary General predicted in his policy brief, “COVID-19 will disproportionately affect the economic and productive lives of women, and not in the same way as men [...] and the situation is more difficult in developing economies, where the vast majority of women's employment - 70% - is in the informal economy”<sup>19</sup>. Indeed, as the Gender & Covid Group concluded, the pandemic has affected women in this aspect for three main reasons. First, because it has meant a substantial loss of acquisitive capacity and a decrease in the means of subsistence due to the generalized economic crisis. Second, because due to the fact that most women earn their basic income from their work in the informal sector of the economy, closures, and the inability to carry out their usual activities have affected women's ability to support themselves. Third, because traditional gender roles make women take on care related labor at a much higher rate than men, so that the unpaid care work gap continues to expand<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> Ángela Cifuentes-Avellaneda, Danny Rivera-Montero, Camila Gil-Vera, Rocío Murad-Rivera, Sandra Marcela Sánchez, Lina María Castaño, Marta Royo and Juan Carlos Rivillas-García. *Ansiedad, depresión y miedo: impulsores de la mala salud mental durante el distanciamiento físico en Colombia*. Profamilia: 2020, p., 9. Retrieved on July 9, 2021. Available at: <https://profamilia.org.co/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Informe-3-Ansimonio-depresion-y-Fear-Drivers-Poor-Mental-Health-During-Pandemic-Study-Solidaridad-Profamilia.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Op. Cit., Gender & Covid-19. How to create a gender responsive pandemic plan... p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Sisma Mujer Corporation. Bulletin N° 25 / Día Internacional Por Los Derechos De Las Mujeres. Retrieved on July 20, 2020. Available at: <https://www.sismamujer.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/8M.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> Op. Cit., Secretary General of the United Nations. Policy Brief: The Repercussions of Covid-19 on Women. April 9, 2020.

<sup>20</sup> Op. Cit., Gender & Covid-19. How to create a gender responsive pandemic plan...p. 5-6.

Moreover, in Colombia, women have had to face the harsh economic consequences of the pandemic. In the field of informal work, the Presidential Council for Women's Equity found that between January and August 25% of women who make a living in the informal sector stopped working, versus 17% of men<sup>21</sup>. This issue is especially serious if we consider that 60% of Colombian women are employed in the informal sector<sup>22</sup>. Furthermore, even in a formal work setting, during the pandemic women had to face massive job losses. According to Sisma, “Although the unemployment rate had decreased slightly for women and men in December 2020 (10.1% for men and 17.9% for women), this took a turn for the worst, because in January 2021 the unemployment rate for men was 13.4%; while the unemployment rate for women rose to 22.7%”<sup>23</sup>. Finally, the impact of Covid-19 on the economy has been mainly reflected in the overwhelming increase in care jobs, historically women jobs that affect the economic and social progress of women due to their social and cultural undervaluation. In this regard, DANE found that “a. The increase in these home care burdens has fallen to a greater extent on women, according to labor market data for August. When comparing August 2020 versus August 2019, women increased their total weekly working hours (from 62.8 to 63.1), while men reduced them (from 55.3 to 53.4)”<sup>24</sup>.

Fifth, despite the fact that women have had to face the aforementioned consequences of the pandemic, they have been underrepresented in the scenarios where decisions have been taken with relation to the handling of the pandemic<sup>25</sup>. Furthermore, in Colombia, the socio-political violence against women that has been on the rise since the signing of the Final Peace Agreement worsened due to the pandemic, especially

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<sup>21</sup> Sisma Mujer “Derechos de las mujeres y niñas durante la pandemia de covid-19 en Colombia”, November 27, 2020. Retrieved July 20, 2021. Available at: [https://www.sismamujer.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/27-11-2020-Derechos-de-las-Mujeres-y-COVID-19\\_-Sisma-Mujer.pdf](https://www.sismamujer.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/27-11-2020-Derechos-de-las-Mujeres-y-COVID-19_-Sisma-Mujer.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística. Women and men: gender gaps in Colombia. 2020. Retrieved July 20, 2021. Available at: <https://www.dane.gov.co/files/investigaciones/genero/publicaciones/mujeres-y-hombre-brechas-de-genero-colombia-informe.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Sisma Mujer. Bulletin N ° 25 / Día Internacional por los Derechos de las Mujeres. Retrieved July 20, 2020. Available at: <https://www.sismamujer.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/8M.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística. Report on employment figures and gender gaps. Changes in employment in paid care activities due to COVID-19. October 2020, p. 16. Retrieved July 20, 2021. Available at: <https://www.dane.gov.co/files/investigaciones/boletines/ech/Informe-sobre-cifras-de-empleo-y-brechas-de-genero-10-2020.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> Brechenmacher, Saskia & Hubbard, Caroline. How the coronavirus has exacerbated the political exclusion of women. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 2020. Retrieved July 25, 2021. Available at: [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Brechenmacher\\_Hubbard\\_Women\\_Exclusion\\_Esp.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Brechenmacher_Hubbard_Women_Exclusion_Esp.pdf)

against women human rights defenders<sup>26</sup>, which deepens the participation gaps in public sphere, which once again hits women harder.

Finally, pandemics is general, and particularly the Covid-19 one, has expanded the education gap between men and women, due to the fact that many girls and teenagers have had to take extra care related labor at their homes, an issue that is aggravated when the girls come from poor rural areas.<sup>27</sup> In this regard, according to Sisma in the context of online education, girls and young women are “at greater risk, as they are exposed to violence such as online sexual exploitation and cyberbullying. Moreover, they can be pressured to assume risky behaviors online such as sexting or exchanging sexualized content that can expose them to extortion, harassment, and humiliation”<sup>28</sup>.

Hence, the gender impacts of the pandemic are far from extraordinary. Care work, domestic violence, access to education or the precariousness of the exercise of civil and political rights due to adverse social and political climates are an expression of the degradation of daily life related to the pandemic. To that extent, the UNS responses have been aimed precisely at assuming the collective responsibility that allowed all this to happen and promoting a discourse to address causes of gender exclusion that confined women to that place of vulnerability. A topic we will explain further below.

## **B. Responses of the United Nations System to the differential impacts of Covid-19: towards a feminist recovery agenda.**

The fast advance of the Sars-Cov-2 coronavirus during the first months of 2020 perplexed international institutions, which, just as domestic ones, lacked the preparation for the upcoming public health crisis.<sup>29</sup> It is largely because of this perplexity that the first

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<sup>26</sup> Corporación Sisma Mujer. "Derechos de las mujeres y niñas durante la pandemia de covid-19 en Colombia", November 27, 2020. Retrieved July 20, 2021. Available at: [https://www.sismamujer.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/27-11-2020-Derechos-de-las-Mujeres-y-COVID-19\\_-Sisma-Mujer.pdf](https://www.sismamujer.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/27-11-2020-Derechos-de-las-Mujeres-y-COVID-19_-Sisma-Mujer.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> The information in this section was prepared based on: Gender & Covid-19. How to create a gender responsive pandemic plan Addressing the secondary effects of COVID-19, p. 4. Retrieved July 9, 2021. Available at: <https://www.genderandcovid-19.org/tools/>; World Health Organization. Gender and Covid-19. Supporting Document. May 14, 2020.

<sup>28</sup> Corporación Sisma Mujer. "Derechos de las mujeres y niñas durante la pandemia de covid-19 en Colombia", November 27, 2020. Retrieved July 20, 2021. Available at: [https://www.sismamujer.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/27-11-2020-Derechos-de-las-Mujeres-y-COVID-19\\_-Sisma-Mujer.pdf](https://www.sismamujer.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/27-11-2020-Derechos-de-las-Mujeres-y-COVID-19_-Sisma-Mujer.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> According to the Council of Foreign Relations' Independent Working Group on Covid-19 “Disease outbreaks are complex events, and no established global mechanism coordinates the diplomatic, economic, health, scientific, security, and surveillance resources needed to mobilize an effective response. This pandemic has been characterized by a patchwork of inadequate domestic responses, a breakdown of compliance with IHR, and a disastrous lack of cooperation



pronouncements of the United Nations System on the pandemic were made at the end of March and beginning of April, almost a month after the World Health Organization announced the decision to classify the Covid-19 outbreak as a pandemic.<sup>30</sup>

Reaching out to the mandate of the United Nations Charter, the Secretary General issued a first statement on March 23, 2020 calling all parties involved in conflicts to a global ceasefire, so that all efforts could be focused on addressing the pandemic and advancing "the end of the disease of war".<sup>31</sup> Only a few weeks later, The Secretary stated "violence is not limited to the battlefield" and "for many women and girls, the threat is highest precisely where they should be safest. In their own homes".<sup>32</sup>

With six recommendations, this statement launched a multiscale agenda at the United Nations level to address the pandemic with an arsenal of gender measures that cut across recovery and reconstruction policies during and after the pandemic. The following is a brief synthesis of the standards of recovery with a gender approach.

1. Economic recovery measures with a genre approach: According to the Secretary General, "gender-sensitive economic and social policies must be included here and give women's economic lives a central place in pandemic response and recovery plans.". In this measure, one of the Secretary's clearest messages has been to put cash in the hands of women urgently. Likewise, UN Women has established that bridging the digital divide is essential to advance women's economic empowerment in the long term. For his part, the Secretary has said that social security systems must be expanded to recognize unpaid domestic and care work as a basis for social provision, all of which aggravate the social and economic position of women.

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and coordination across nations in the multilateral settings where an effective response both to the disease and to its massive economic fallout could have materialized". In: Independent Task Force. Independent Task Force Report No. 78: Improving Pandemic Preparedness Lessons From COVID-19. October 2020 p 34. Retrieved July 22, 2020. Available at:

[https://www.cfr.org/report/pandemic-preparedness-lessons-COVID-19/pdf/TFR\\_Pandemic\\_Preparedness.pdf](https://www.cfr.org/report/pandemic-preparedness-lessons-COVID-19/pdf/TFR_Pandemic_Preparedness.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> World Health Organization. WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the press conference on COVID-19 held on 11 March 2020. Retrieved July 20, 2020. Available at: <https://www.who.int/es/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020>

<sup>31</sup> Secretary-General's Appeal for Global Ceasefire. 23/03/2021. Retrieved July 9, 2021. Available at:

<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-03-23/secretary-generals-appeal-for-global-ceasefire>

<sup>32</sup> Secretary General of the United Nations. A crisis with a woman's face. 03/04/2020. Retrieved July 9, 2021. Available at:

<https://www.un.org/sg/es/content/sg/articles/2021-03-04/crisis-womans-face>

2. Health recovery measures, particularly in women's sexual and reproductive health: In his Policy Paper, the Secretary General stated that since health crises tend to worsen access to general health services to the detriment of the most socially and economically vulnerable, one of the main measures to reduce the effects of the pandemic is, on the one hand, to guarantee access to quality public information on the virus and its treatment, and on the other hand, to prioritize that women in confinement have safe and accessible means to seek sexual and reproductive health care.
3. Recovery measures in the key of care work: As the exponential increase of care related work has imposed particularly severe burdens on women, the Secretary General "Immediate measures also need to be taken to ensure that COVID-19 does not undo the gains made in recent decades in terms of gender equality, particularly those related to women's participation in the workforce."<sup>33</sup> In this sense, the State must ensure that people who require care have access to it in a context in which the remuneration and the time spent in such activities correspond to the effort of the people in charge of it and without excessively burdening women who work in the domestic field. This in turn implies looking not only at women who take on these tasks while employed in the formal sector, but mainly at those who access their daily means of subsistence through informal work.

4. Measures to fight against gender-based violence: because women are overexposed to macho culture violence during long periods of confinement and particularly in a pandemic, to stop violence against women is a priority. The Secretary General has said that the recovering plan from COVID-19 must include taking action or paying urgent attention to the women that are being confined with their aggressor, taking as an example the experiences of alliances between private and public sectors in order to receive the denounces through safe forms, specially through places like pharmacies or supermarkets. Likewise, the Secretary has pointed out the importance of the justice system to continue their normal course of action in due time and that the increase their capability of monitoring risk situations for patriarchal violence in order to prevent it from happening. Finally, UN Women has indicated that it is essential to expand the horizon of protection against violence, giving attention, and strengthening the networks of care and support for women, which is why it is important to ensure access to these networks as well as to psycho-legal support mechanisms for women<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> Secretary General of the United Nations. Policy Report: The impact of Covid-19 on women. April 9, 2020.

<sup>34</sup> UN Women. COVID-19 and provision of essential services to survivors of violence against women and girls. 2020. Retrieved July 20, 2021. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2>

5. Measure of recovery in the midst of humanitarian frailty and human rights violations. Finally, the secretary has made a call to implementing the Peace, Security and Women agenda particularly regarding the measures related to attention and protection of women. In the following section I will elaborate further regarding the relation of public policy to face Covid-19 with the Women, Peace and Security agenda particularly in relation to the report presented in 2020 by the SG to the Security Council about the advance of the implementation of the agenda.

## **II. Alliances and prospects of a global feminist agenda on peace and international security: from the crisis approach to the daily life approach.**

The need to react to the pandemic has brought to the forefront the need to optimize the existing institutional and policy frameworks in order, to advance in the consolidation of concrete results in improving the living conditions of women and, to fix the structural conditions that sustain the inequality and violence that women experience every day, and that in moments of crisis such as wars, natural disasters or global public health crises tend to deepen.

As discussed in the previous section, the UNS quickly actioned all the mechanisms available to improve the conditions of women's lives. One of them, without a doubt was the agenda of Women Peace and Security.

To that effect, in the political report of April 2020, The SG called to urgently implement the measures found in the 10 resolutions of the Security Council as well as to take action from the recommendations stemming from the reports of the special rapporteur on sexual violence in armed conflict who stated

"The effective implementation of this agenda on women, peace and security must still be a priority for this period. The 2242 (2015) resolution of the Security Council was, in fact, one of the first resolutions that acknowledged that pandemics were part of the peace and security spectrum and highlighted the need that in all the answers the principles of prevention, protection, participation and leadership of women were taken into account".<sup>35</sup>

Although there has been plenty criticism throughout the years from different groups about the efficacy and the depth and scope of the agenda to address violence against women in conflict and the representation deficit of these in the peace building scenarios, given the limitations of the present analysis only two fundamentals to

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<sup>35</sup> Secretary General of the United Nations Organization. Policy Brief: The Repercussions of Covid-19 on Women. April 9, 2020.

advance in the necessary articulation of the two agendas. The first called the crisis approach.

#### **A. The crisis approach: looking at the securitization model of human emergencies in detail.**

In her recent paper on the future of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda regarding the attention to the effects of the pandemic, Catherine O'Rourke mentions the text by Hillary Charlesworth where she criticizes the crisis model as a dominant element in the approach taken by people who practice international law. Charlesworth argues that having grown as a discipline that aims to contain the spread of wars, its logic is mostly reactive. Therefore, the crisis approach of international law prevents us from reflecting on the complexity of the facts that make up the tragedies that hit humanity, limits analytical progress because we must "constantly rediscover a problem without relying on previous knowledge"<sup>36</sup> and leads us to "concentrate on a single event or a series of events, thus losing sight of the whole picture"<sup>37</sup>. This, in turn, prevents this discipline from asking itself questions about the complex and structural causes of the events that jeopardize international peace and security"

For O'Rourke, Charlesworth's criticism of the crisis model takes on special relevance when evaluating the performance of international institutions to face the Covid-19 pandemic. Indeed, the treatment of Covid as a new problem overshadows the fact that its devastating effects are a "manifestation of, for example, engrained capitalist development models and a long-standing tradition of indiscriminate damage to nature"<sup>38</sup>. Therefore the 'problems' caused by the pandemic refer to immediate and specific needs such as filling the lack of personnel or technical knowledge to produce a vaccine, and not addressing the causes that put women in that vulnerable position in the first place.

In this sense, the Security Council has implemented two resolutions related to the pandemic. On one hand, one identifies it as a threat to international security that requires their attention and provides general political guidelines for this purpose, and another one on the global distribution of vaccines. As O'Rourke has stated, these actions fragment the international response to the crisis, ignoring the work carried out by the World Health Organization, and ignoring their Women, Peace, and Security agenda when addressing the impact of the pandemic on women. In short, it is a reaffirmation of the reactive logic present in most of the resolutions of this agenda, which even in the point on participation focuses on preventing violence, mitigating its

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<sup>36</sup> Charlesworth, Hilary. "International Law: A Discipline of Crisis." *The Modern Law Review*, vol. 65, no. 3, 2002, pp. 377–392. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/1097579](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1097579). Accessed 20 July 2021, p. 384.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 384.

<sup>38</sup> O'Rourke, Catherine. International Law, Covid-19 and Feminist Engagement with the United Nations Security Council: The End of the Affair? In: *Feminist Legal Studies* (2020) 28:321–328, p. 325.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10691-020-09440-4>

impacts, and ensuring the participation of women to prevent these events from happening again in the future. However, it fails to mention the historical discrimination that is at the core of said violence. Much like, Resolution 2532, 2021 related to Covid-19 barely manages to name the:

“...disproportionate negative impact of the pandemic, especially at a socioeconomic level, on women and girls” and “calls for concrete measures to be taken to minimize this impact and guarantee the full, equitable, and meaningful participation of women and youth in preparing and implementing an adequate and sustainable response to the pandemic.”<sup>39</sup>

In any case, the urgency of convening the Security Council to direct the destiny of the international response to the pandemic is understood as a sign of the phenomenon of the securitization of public health. For the past twenty-five years, threats to global public health along with other non-traditionally security-related issues have been included under a new paradigm. Originating from the Copenhagen School, the securitization approach seeks, through discursive acts or speech acts towards something or someone, to label any matter as a “security threat”<sup>40</sup>. With this, it seeks to overcome the idea that the field of security and what threatens or endangers it are defined acts with an objective (neutral) basis, in order to account for the existence of threats that can be recognized only by the individuals who face them, which in turn implies the provision of resources and extraordinary measures to mitigate the threat and an audience that accepts that effort as legitimate<sup>41</sup>.

In short, the securitization of public health entails, on the one hand, “giving a sense of urgency, providing an issue prominence and priority on the political agenda and, therefore, greater attention and resources from the international community”<sup>42</sup>, and on the other a strategic practice in which, depending on the configurations of power in local or global environments, they identify a problem as a threat to security to advance their agendas and interests.

In relation to the last point, the securitization of public health has been criticized, especially in the face of uncontrolled outbreaks of viruses such as Covid-19. Said criticisms are directed mainly at the actors who pose a problem as a security issue,

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<sup>39</sup> United Nations Security Council. Resolution 2535 (2020). 01/07/2020.

<sup>40</sup> Roberts, Hannah. The Dangers of Securitizing Health. En: E-Internacional Relations, 04/12/2019, ISSN 2053-8626, pp. 1-6. Recuperado el 23 de julio de 2021. Disponible en: <https://www.e-ir.info/2019/12/04/the-dangers-of-securitizing-health/>

Wenham, Clare. Feminist Global Health Security. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. Oxford Scholarship Online, 2021, p. 33. doi: 10.1093/oso/9780197556931.001.0001

<sup>41</sup> Wenham, Clare. Feminist Global Health Security. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. Oxford Scholarship Online, 2021, p. 33. doi: 10.1093/oso/9780197556931.001.0001

<sup>42</sup> Op. Cit. Roberts, Hannah. The Dangers of Securitizing...p. 1.

since they generally obey hyper-militaristic, state-centric, and colonial logics of the exercise of power at a global level<sup>43</sup>. For example, in this sense, faced with the circulation of lethal viruses that put the survival of humanity at risk, the most powerful governments in the world adopt measures that restrict migration<sup>44</sup>. Such measures can (and generally do) hide discriminatory agendas towards population groups that under “normal” conditions, that is, in the absence of security threats, would be radically unjustified.

The response to Covid-19 has reflected these problematic practices. Indeed, at the beginning of the pandemic in countries such as Colombia, Peru, and Panama, measures were imposed to restrict free movement to get food and other basic goods based on different criteria such as gender<sup>45</sup>. This allowed the police authorities in charge of enforcing the restriction measures to exercise vigilance over people's gender expressions, thus triggering cases of violence against people with dissident gender expressions and identities or contrary to the gender hegemonic canon of femininity and masculinity<sup>46</sup>. In the same way, as aforementioned, measures have been adopted that indirectly deprive or restrict women's access to sexual and reproductive health services, especially pregnancy termination, by prioritizing other urgent measures to contain the spread of the virus<sup>47</sup>.

The response to criticism may be to advocate for eliminating the securitizing paradigm or for transforming its logic, particularly that of its responses once a problem is categorized as a security threat. Thus, within the United Nations, following the postulates of this new security paradigm, a human security agenda has been consolidated over the last two decades, which “redirects the attention of the States and the international community towards survival, the means of subsistence, and the dignity

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 2-3.

<sup>44</sup> This was the case with the Ebola virus in 2014, when the United States, without further evidence than a potential case of a citizen from West Africa, closed its borders to citizens from that region.

<sup>45</sup> In Bogotá, for example, these measures were known as “*pico y género*”, whereby some days women could go out, and other days it was the turn of men.

<sup>46</sup> United Nations General Assembly. Violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity and gender identity during the coronavirus disease pandemic (Covid-19). Report of the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, Mr. Víctor Madrigal-Borloz, July 28, 2020, A / 75/258, para. 14.

<sup>47</sup> The international organization Women's Link Worldwide has followed up on the emergency measures adopted in different Latin American countries, expressing its concern about the neglect and mistreatment suffered by pregnant women and others seeking sexual and reproductive health services such as pap smears, emergency contraception, among others. See: WLWW & Colectiva Feminista para el Desarrollo Local. State response to Covid-19: No Gender focus. Views from El Salvador. December 2020, available at: <https://www.womenslinkworldwide.org/informate/sala-de-prensa/mujeres-las-grandes-orgdas-durante-la-atencion-del-covid-19-en-el-salvador>

of people as the basis for achieving peace, development, and human progress”<sup>48</sup>. This model seeks to expand the traditional conception of security, that is, beyond the interests of the States, giving space to a comprehensive look at the needs and threats of humanity that transcend military threats.

Based on this idea of refocusing the priorities when raising an issue as a security problem, it seeks to advance in “the adoption of people-centered, exhaustive measures, appropriate to each context and aimed at prevention, that try to reduce the possibility of conflict, help overcome obstacles to development and promote human rights for all”<sup>49</sup>. This means, a new focus that finds in the daily emergencies and in the established structures a threat that requires less reactive, preventive, and organized actions that suppress the factors of vulnerability of individuals and entire communities to the most critical situations given that their mere existence is already risky.

In this sense, the WHO has adopted a notion of health security composed of a “set of proactive and reactive activities necessary to reduce as much as possible the vulnerability to acute public health incidents capable of endangering the collective health of populations in various geographic regions and across international borders.”<sup>50</sup>

Thus, rather than abandoning the Security Council and global governance in matters of collective security, I consider it of vital importance to undertake mixed mobilization strategies that combine, on the one hand, initiatives such as the *Women's Policy Group from Northern Ireland*, aimed at identifying multidimensional barriers to accessing rights for women in different settings (economic, cultural, social justice, health, political representation), and focus on creating alliances at the local level with state actors and other social movements to promote *bottom-up* empowerment initiatives<sup>51</sup>. On the other hand, advocacy strategies before global decision-making bodies to influence a radical transformation of the notion of international peace and security so deeply focused on the problems that occupy the male logics of power (primarily wars), so that we move towards a feminist analysis of reality. This means seeing the world with the eyes of those who face daily emergencies and do not have access to power, or it is very limited. In the next section, I propose an articulation between the UNS responses to the daily

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<sup>48</sup> United Nations Trust Fund. Human security at the United Nations. New York, 2012, p. 5.

Available at:

[https://www.unocha.org/sites/dms/HSU/Outreach/12-41684\\_Spanish%20HUMAN%20SECURITY%20Brochure\\_web\\_December%2010.pdf](https://www.unocha.org/sites/dms/HSU/Outreach/12-41684_Spanish%20HUMAN%20SECURITY%20Brochure_web_December%2010.pdf)

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Taken from: Ronderos Torres, Margarita. *¿Qué tan segura es la seguridad sanitaria? Reflexión en tiempos de pandemia*. Rev. Gerenc. Polit. Salud, Bogota (Colombia), 8 (17): 5-8, June-December 2009. Retrieved June 20, 2020. Available at:

<https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/545/54514009001.pdf>

<sup>51</sup> Women's Policy Group. COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan. July 2020. Retrieved June 20, 2021. Available at:

<https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/WPG-NI-Feminist-Recovery-Plan-2020-.pdf>

life approach to Covid-19 and the future responses of the Security Council as clues for activism in the field of gender, peace, and security.

## **B. The daily life approach: a feminist commitment to understanding international peace and security.**

In the first section of this document, I stated that the impacts of the pandemic are far from extraordinary or unexpected. Furthermore, the pre-existing violence and expressions of inequality have been exacerbated and have demonstrated the fragility of the exceptionalism or crisis approach of the international peace and security agenda. With this in mind, how can we implement the Charlesworth and O'Rourke suggestion to overcome the crisis focus in global security policies? The first step is to lay the political and conceptual foundations. The commitment to a feminist recovery of different organizations and academic groups, as well as security studies with a feminist perspective, propose a relatively simple formula: identify how global political agendas are articulated with local ones in order to address the daily needs of women in the pursuit of emancipation and the full exercise of their rights. In other words, moving from a crisis approach to one of daily life, where it is assumed that the life of women in a patriarchal context is a life in constant crisis in which it is difficult to separate the effects of events classified as such by institutions of global governance, such as a war or a pandemic, from “normal” situations.

To a large extent, the recommendations made by the Secretary General and the UNS point precisely in this direction: without addressing the structural conditions of discrimination that women face on a daily basis, no Covid-19 recovery measure will be enough to contain and mitigate the immediate effects of the pandemic.

This might be why in his 2020 report to the Security Council, the Secretary General stated that although “the Women, Peace, and Security agenda is a program for the prevention of crisis”<sup>52</sup> that has the potential to join the fight against the effects of Covid-19 in the lives of women, in any case:

“The COVID-19 pandemic is a wake-up call to the international community, which has already been questioned by growing nationalism and attacks on multilateralism and global norms. We are faced with the urgent need to build more equitable and inclusive societies. Either we lose the hard-earned wins made in relation to women's rights, the Sustainable Development Goals, and international security, or we emerge from the pandemic with greater equality and resilience, and towards a lasting and inclusive peace. Twenty years after transnational feminist movements successfully pushed through resolution 1325 (2000), the time has come to realize their transformative vision and build a fair

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<sup>52</sup> See: Security Council. Report of the Secretary General: Women, Peace and Security. September 25, 2020, S / 2020/946, para. Four.



and sustainable peace for all. One that is based on inclusive power structures that sustain our economies, our political systems, and peace processes.”<sup>53</sup>

This opportunity to take advantage of the political conditions that the crisis offers to the international community may allow us to lay the foundations for the future and understand international security with a transformative and feminist gender approach. Meaning, one that considers the daily crises that women face. In order to do this, it is necessary to update the mechanisms for the evaluation and implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda. Indeed, as the Secretary said in his 2020 report to the Security Council, the verification mechanism by indicators and pillars prepared by his office completed ten years last year and must be updated as soon as possible. This update must include issues such as climate change, and factors such as race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, which from an intersectional perspective, affect the social position of women not only in conflicts but in all scenarios where the safety of women is threatened and, of course, global health crises such as Covid-19.

To that extent, I propose that the process of updating the pillars of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda include the response and recovery measures for Covid-19 presented schematically in the first section of this document, as seen below:

Pillar	Description	Covid-19 Recovery Measures guided to the update of pillars
1. Preventing all forms of gender-based violence.	<p>Especially sexual violence and gender-based violence. This pillar has been transformed to include measures not only related to the obligations of investigation, prosecution, and punishment of violence against women that take place in connection with conflicts, but also attention to the structural dimensions of the justice system and state policies that support systems of legal and social impunity, which continue to perpetuate violence.</p> <p>Recovery measures with a gender focus in this scenario precisely mean facilitating the complaint processes for women and avoiding paralysis of</p>	Measures intended to fight gender-based violence.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, par. 111.

	the justice systems that particularly harm women who are victims of gender-based violence.	
2. Guarantee women's participation in peace making and its sustainability.	"All conflict prevention, resolution, and recovery activities must revolve around the full, equitable, and meaningful participation of women and the defense of their rights, not only exposing and addressing discrimination and gender bias in planning and decision-making, but also by establishing solid building blocks for their inclusive participation." <sup>54</sup>	Measures of participation of women in decision-making related to public health.
3. Protection of women and girls.	The protection mechanisms have been considered in the development of the agenda, mainly in relation to the measures and services that women and girls need to access to heal from acts of violence related to the conflict and the creation of prevention measures of new forms of violence against them when they have already been victimized.	Health recovery measures, particularly in women's sexual and reproductive health.  Measures to fight gender-based violence.
4. Relief, recovery, and peacebuilding.	Since the three reports published in 2015, this component of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda has changed from its traditional reactive approach to one that seeks to address the structural causes of discrimination that affect women, particularly in relation to the political participation of women in economy and inclusion and recovery measures.	Financial recovery measures with a gender perspective.  Recovery related to care work.  Recovery measures in environments of vulnerability and human rights violations.

Credit to the author.

### III. Conclusion

Although women and girls are not necessarily the ones who die the most or the direct victims of the pandemic, a long year of health crisis has revealed that they are the ones who endure and will endure the catastrophe the most. Different analyses on global

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<sup>54</sup> Security Council. Report of the Secretary General: Women, Peace and Security. September 25, 2020, S / 2020/946, para. 13..

crises have given the same diagnoses. Women suffer the most during wars, not because they are the ones who die the most or are victims of mutilation, but because they assume the longest-term consequences<sup>55</sup>, even though at a structural level conflicts and transition processes are windows of opportunity to advance in the development of their rights.<sup>56</sup>

With this in mind, there are at least three reasons to think that the mechanisms of the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda are the most suitable to complement the international response to the health crisis caused by the pandemic. First, because both wars and pandemics can be classified as exceptional situations or 'crises' that require the implementation of extraordinary measures for their containment and prevention in the future. Second, because in both cases, there are gender-differentiated impacts that are directly related to circumstances of structural exclusion aggravated by the crisis. Third, because by the same logic of exception or crisis of law and international relations there is no other institutional basis or concrete powers in the world to appease violence against women like the Women, Peace, and Security agenda, at least at the discursive level.

However, as explained in this paper, it is precisely the logic of crisis or exception that hinder these agendas from preventing devastating effects on the lives of women in the next war. The same will happen with the next pandemic if it is assumed that these international measures built from the crisis approach are the only possible or desirable measures to face the effects of the current pandemic.

That is why this current situation offers an opportunity not only to think about models of reaction to global health crises with a gender perspective, but also to radically transform the logic of peace and international security scenarios in terms of women's human rights. This implies that, as the Secretary General has stated throughout this year, the mechanisms that exist are insufficient, the achievements made are fragile, and the real work to avoid the devastation on the lives of women is yet to be done. This means, dismantling the structural causes of discrimination against women from a daily life approach in response to policies, war, pandemics, climate change, natural disasters, and in general, everything that puts human life on Earth at risk.

The way to do it is in an articulated and virtuous analysis of the very rigorous work of activist and academic communities and of the United Nations itself, that goes beyond the poor and increasingly illegitimate leadership of the Security Council. This work must include the analysis of feminist authors regarding the diagnoses of the impact of crises on women in order to come up with response policies based on evidence on the daily needs of women before, during, and after crisis events. Moreover, it is crucial to create international, regional, and domestic monitoring mechanisms for the implementation of

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<sup>55</sup> Hoover Green, Amelia. 2019. "'Mind the Gap': Measuring and Understanding Gendered Conflict Experiences," *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Conflict*, eds., Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, et. al., Oxford University Press [DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199300983.013.25]

<sup>56</sup> WEBSTER, K., CHEN, C. and BEARDSLEY, K., 2019. Conflict, Peace, and the Evolution of Women's Empowerment. *International Organization*, vol. 73, no. 2, pp. 255–289. DOI 10.1017/S0020818319000055.

response and recovery measures that have been created within the United Nations and that offer guidelines in terms of gender policies for the world.

In short, I suggest that these observation standards are included in the verification that the Secretary makes annually in his reports on the implementation of the measures on the Women, Peace, and Security agenda, adapting the response policy recommendations with a gender perspective and the standards of the special procedures to the four pillars of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda. On this last point, a possible future of activism and advocacy before the Security Council would mean adjusting the adequacy of the pillars and the articulation of the response to Covid-19 to a resolution that provides political guidelines. This would support the recovery of the legitimacy of the Council as director of crises, at least politically, and help to transform the notion of 'international peace and security' to something closer to the daily needs of the women and girls who today endure the harshness of Covid-19, wars, and any other type of 'crisis', which, for them, is just another situation in the long list of crises they face in their daily lives.

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