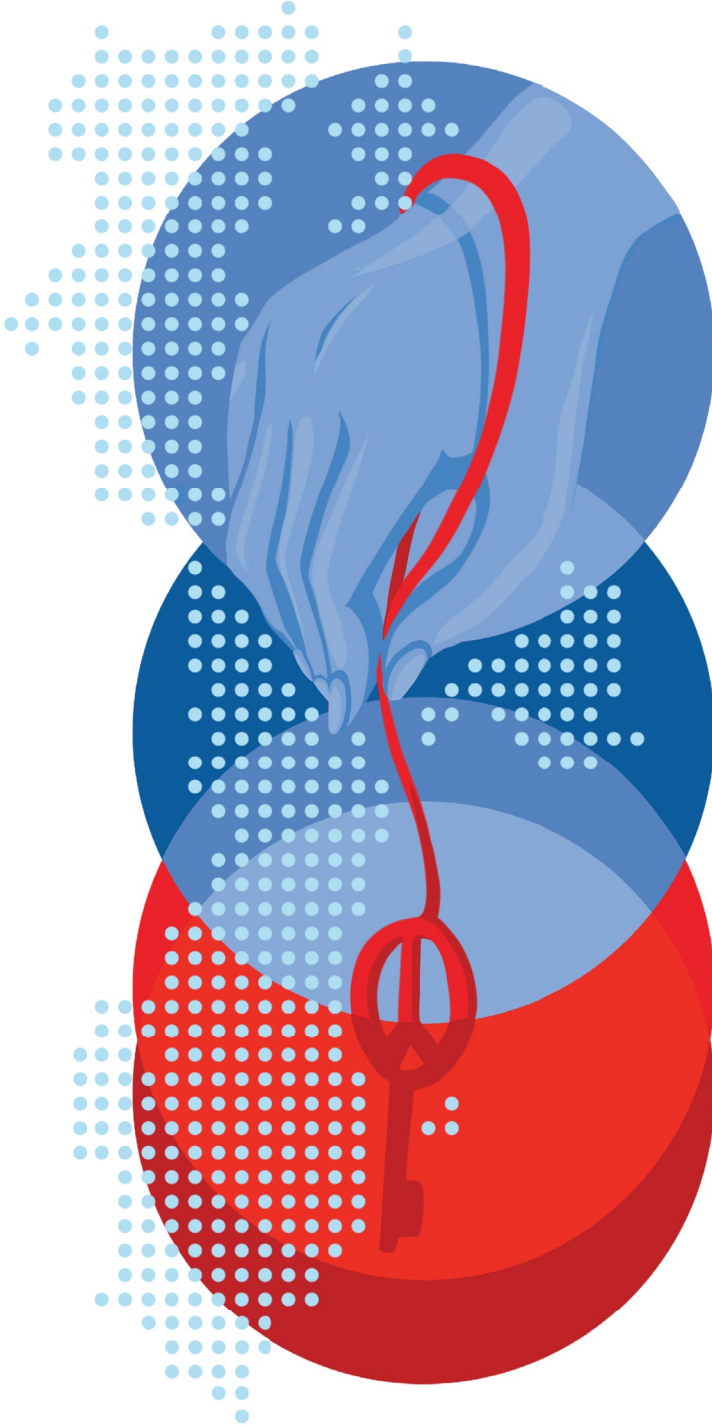




# UNSCR 1325: IMPLEMENTATION IN TURKEY AND ISRAEL

CAN CIVIL SOCIETY COOPERATION IMPROVE  
THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS?



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Burcu Değirmenciođlu - Merav Kahana-Dagan



## SUMMARY

October 2020 marks the 20th anniversary of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security<sup>1</sup>. This marks a fitting moment to assess the resolution's challenges and achievements and to offer some suggestions for better implementation of the resolution in two Middle Eastern countries – Israel and Turkey. Two countries with shared bilateral and regional interests as well as disputes and critical roles in many of the area's conflicts. Israel and Turkey responded to UNSCR 1325 positively, but did not implement it on the ground. UNSCR 1325 led many United Nations (UN) member countries to adopt a National Action Plan (NAP) to implement the ideas and ideals of the resolution (Peacewomen 2020). Most of those countries are in Europe, while only a few of them are in the MENA region. There are eleven Regional Action Plans (RAP) around the world, but there is no formal RAP for the MENA region<sup>2</sup>. Due to many barriers, such as political divisions between countries in the region, ongoing conflicts, and women's underrepresentation in politics and in decision-making, the push for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in the MENA region must be supported by the international community. Though the implementation of UNSCR 1325 through a regionwide framework is unlikely, due to political and cultural differences and the ongoing disputes between states, a push for its implementation could also originate from sub-regional cooperation and bilateral agreements.

The 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 should also serve as an opportunity to prioritize it on the agenda of Israeli-Turkish civil society activities. Furthermore, international exchange amongst female diplomats and security services and gender trainings as well as leadership programs for women in such positions can support the acceptance and the career opportunities for women in foreign and security policy.

Jointly, motivated women from the region and a push from the international community together can achieve improvements for women through inclusion in peace building processes and regional cooperation. This needs long term commitment from young women, who can take up the issues and set the groundwork for the next generation of Middle Eastern women.

## INTRODUCTION

Israel and Turkey are important powerful players in the MENA region with a complicated relationship and shared interests such as security, economy, and energy. They are both involved in local and regional conflicts while managing an ongoing dispute between one another, which is highly connected to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Both countries formally adopted National Action Plans in the spirit of UNSCR 1325.


UNSCR 1325 touched upon two main issues – women are much more affected by conflicts, yet their voices are underrepresented in decision-making. Research shows that women's participation in peace negotiations increases the sustainability and the quality of the agreements (UN Women 2019). However, for more women to be included in such processes, many steps need to be taken.

Israeli-Turkish relations are unstable and complicated. In 2010, after the Mavi Marmara Gaza flotilla clash, diplomatic relations reached their lowest point. Since then, the two countries reached a reconciliation agreement and for two

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1-UNSCR 1325 reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peace-keeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.

2-In 2015, the Arab League presented a regional Arab action plan, focusing on the league member states (UN Women 2015). However, this declaration was not formally implemented.



years worked on normalizing their bilateral ties. These efforts did not last long when in May 2018 another political crisis occurred in the wake of the relocation of the US embassy to Jerusalem, and ambassadors from both countries were sent back to their countries. During the past 10 years, NGO's, think tanks, and civil society organizations worked in order to strengthen Israeli-Turkish relations<sup>3</sup>. The work of NGOs touched upon many aspects of the Israeli-Turkish and regional relations but did not focus on women empowerment or women inclusion in particular. This paper argues that it should.

## CASE STUDY: ISRAEL

Israel is a country in ongoing conflict where militarism plays a major role in society, history, and the national narrative. The nation's need for security usually overshadows other necessities and efforts. Therefore, when it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or any other security-related issue, women are rarely represented in decision-making processes.

## WOMEN'S POLITICAL INCLUSION

The Israeli Parliament does not set a good example for increasing participation of women in politics. In the current parliament, women only hold 25% of all seats and only 8 of 36 ministers are women, which is a local record-breaker (The Knesset 2020). Israel is ranked 83 out of 189 states in terms of percentage of women in national parliament (Avgar & Fiedelman 2020). Furthermore, none of the political parties today is led by a woman. In two (Orthodox) party lists, there are no women represented at all.

It is important to acknowledge that there has been a significant improvement in the percentage of women represented in the Israeli parliament during the past decade. However, examining their positions of power,

the picture looks more sombre: only one woman was speaker (chairwoman) of the parliament; none were ever chairwomen in three of the main committees (Foreign Affairs and Defence; Constitution; Law and Justice; Finance); and only less than 10% of all other parliament committees combined were chaired by women.

The underrepresentation in Israeli parliament mirrors the place of women in other aspects of Israeli society. Women's voices are heard, but not enough. Women in Israel fight for their equality and progress was made but it is still a long way. This can be seen in the army, for example, as the options for women's military service grow, still there is much more work to be done to reach equality (Shafran-Gittleman 2020).


## POLICY AND PRACTICE REGARDING UNSCR 1325

The UNSCR 1325 was taken seriously by civil society in Israel. Dozens of civil society organizations are constantly working on making policy changes and implementing the principles of the resolution<sup>4</sup>. Israeli parliament members (MK's) from different parties expressed their support of the resolution and civil society activities. Israel was one of the first countries to take legal steps in the spirit of the resolution when in 2005 changes were made to the women's equal rights law.

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3-For instance, Israeli-Turkish policy dialogues were conducted by Mitvim Institute, GPoT and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and the Turkish-Israeli Civil Society Forum, supported by the Friedrich-Naumann Foundation for Liberty.

4-For example, see the work of "Itach" organization on UNSCR 1325 (Itach 2020).



In 2005, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) launched the International Women's commission (IWC) for a Just and Sustainable Palestinian-Israeli Peace. The idea was formulated in an activists' meeting held in Istanbul, with 35 leading Israeli, Palestinian, and international women. The IWC worked until 2011, delivering few outputs such as speeches, policy papers, and press releases (UN 2020), but eventually this initiative failed to gain traction. The fact that the IWC did not meet its main goals<sup>5</sup> does not mean that it is meaningless, and there is still room for new platforms and initiatives with similar missions and ambitions, in the spirit of UNSCR 1325.

During the years 2012-2014, women's organizations and NGOs drafted and promoted a national action plan. On December 2014, the Israeli government announced the establishment of a team to work on the creation of a National Action Plan for gender equality, implementing UNSCR 1325. Between 2016-2018, as part of the European Union (EU) funded project named "Building a Shared Future: Women as Catalysts for Peace and Security," 500 women from diverse groups in Israeli society participated in seminars and activities and were trained on issues related to Resolution 1325. The project was implemented by three civil society organizations: Women Wage Peace, Women Lawyers for Social Justice, and the Adam Institute.

However, there is a huge gap between rhetoric and practice. The changes in the women's equal rights law have only been partially implemented. Moreover, the moderate improvements are mainly due to civil society pressure and several petitions to the High Court of Justice. The NAP was never formally created or accepted by the Israeli government.

Women's absence from decision-making platforms was also obvious during the recent struggle due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Once an emergency situation is declared, women are pushed aside both in terms of presentation and personal security. The percentage of domestic violence during the time of the COVID-19 quarantine rose dramatically; turnings to the police increased in 30% between March – April 2020 (Yaron 2020).

Resolution 1325 shows the importance of incorporation of a gender perspective in all aspects, especially on peace and security. Though women serve in the army and all security services, there is still a glass ceiling, and these organizations stay male-dominated. While women are very active and at the frontlines of peace NGO's, research shows that in previous rounds of peace negotiations between Israel and the PLO only 5% of the Israeli negotiation team were women (Aharoni 2015: 39). Aside from former Minister and MK Tzipi Livni, who had an important role in advancing Israeli-Palestinian peace-making, Israeli women mainly acted in the background and in backstage roles (Finkel 2012). Therefore, it is important that the government of Israel takes more decisive efforts to move from rhetoric to action and make sure that women are represented in all political discussions and committees.


## WHAT CAN BE DONE?

The Israeli government should translate the announcement given in 2014 into practical steps, by increasing women representation and incorporating gender perspectives in all decision-making platforms. A special attention should be given to peace talks and negotiations, by making sure women experts are included. The recent normalization agreement between Israel, the UAE and Bahrain, signed in September 2020, emphasizes the male dominance in the field.

In recent years, the international community and its representatives (NGOs, EU parliament, USAID, local embassies and delegations, etc.) became heavily involved

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5-The IWC goals: ensure the meaningful participation of diverse women, including those from civil society, in any Israeli-Palestinian peace process, including negotiations and supportive initiatives; guarantee gender equality and that women's perspectives and experiences be incorporated in any future resolution of the conflict; work for an end to the occupation and genuine negotiations towards a just and sustainable peace; promote a process of political dialogue that rectifies ongoing asymmetries and addresses all elements of reconciliation.



and played an important role in strengthening civil society and women's organizations in Israel through donations, partnerships, seminars, expert workshops and more. Such international support should focus on gender equality, gender mainstreaming, and women's empowerment. The international community's role is also important on the governmental and political level. International actors within Israel, such as embassies, delegations, foundations, and funds could encourage and put pressure on their Israeli counterparts to implement Resolution 1325 through carrying out the NAP adopted by civil society. This can be done by official statements from local and international representatives, or through joint work in parliamentary friendship groups.

## CASE STUDY: TURKEY

Turkey is a signatory of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Istanbul Convention, which aims to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence. Nevertheless, UNSCR 1325 has not been reflected within the official policies, but rather functions as a substantial reference document for the actions and demands of women's Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

Since its modernization period started with the establishment of the Republic, Turkey's socio-political nature is characterized by cultural clashes of its Middle Eastern and European identities. Being a modernized, well-developed Western country (in which the rule of law prevails, and individual freedom proliferates) has always been very important for secular people of Turkey. At the same time, the vast majority of the population is sticking to a conservative mindset mainly derived from Islamic teachings. Although patriarchal hegemony is still rooted in every sphere of the social, economic, and political life in the country, the modernization period paved the way for an atmosphere where women could pursue their rights and voice their demands within a male-dominated society.

## WOMEN'S POLITICAL INCLUSION

As an ethnically and religiously diverse population, Turkey's society has been faced with several long-standing internal conflicts. Kurdish, Armenian, and Alawite minorities in Turkey have been experiencing discriminatory policies and even violence of various Turkish governments in the past. Like the above-mentioned minorities, Turkish women have been suffering from the political culture that rests on majoritarian rule, to the disadvantage of minorities or underrepresented groups.

Women are also disproportionately affected by the ongoing ethnic and religious conflicts. Women and girls face unique challenges and bear the burden of conflict. While human rights and freedom of expression are threatened, sexual violence and harassment rates

increased. Moreover, the levels of trauma and stress associated with conflict, the access to healthcare and education remains limited for women in Turkey. Women are grossly underrepresented in high-level positions of politics and the security sector. A better representation in these spheres would allow women in Turkey to make their voices heard. As of 2020, only 102 of 589 parliament members are women, and they hold two of the ministerial positions out of 17 (UN Women 2020). According to the 2017 NATO Country Report, the average ratio of women members in armed forces of NATO countries is 11%. Turkey has the lowest rank among the member countries with only 0.8% of its armed forces are formed by female personnel (NATO 2017). As of February 2017, 6.4% of Turkey's Police Force comprises women.

## POLICY AND PRACTICE REGARDING UNSCR 1325

Turkey has an explicit clause in its constitution, as of 2004, which ensures gender equality, stating that “men and women have equal rights and the state is responsible to ensure this equality.” As of 2010, the clause was extended with the following: “the measures to be taken for this purpose shall not be construed as contrary to the principle of equality.” In addition, certain legislative improvements were made in civil, penal, and labor codes between the early 2000s and mid-2010s. In 2009, the Parliamentary Commission on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men was established at the Grand National Assembly of Turkey to monitor and manage the implementations regarding UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.

In 2002, Turkey started to implement reforms (Council of the European Union 2004), which enhance the sociopolitical status of women as addressed in the Copenhagen criteria for membership in the EU<sup>6</sup>. The well-developed women’s movement in Turkey was the major driving force behind pressuring the Turkish government to take steps to improve the situation of women. Nonetheless, these efforts remained insufficient because of the large gap between the law and its implementation, mainly caused by the patriarchal mentality entrenched within the institutional structures.

Although freedom of speech and civil society activism were vitally wounded in the recent crackdown that started after the Gezi Park Protests in 2013 and peaked after the military coup attempt in 2016, there are several women’s CSOs who directly emphasize the necessity of drafting and adopting a NAP for UNSCR 1325. These CSOs are mostly formed by well-qualified women who attach importance to the international cooperation<sup>7</sup> in their cause.

However, the AKP government did neither take these CSOs’ nor CEDAW Committee’s recommendations into account. Specifically, their main demand to draft a NAP specifically to ensure the implementation of UNSCR 1325 was not taken into account. Instead, two national plans on Gender Equality 2008-2013 (Directorate General for Status of Women 2008) and Action Plan on Women’s Empowerment 2018-2023 (Ministry of Family and Social Policies 2018) have been produced. The second document mentions Resolution 1325 only once, as “In accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1325, on conflict resolution, peace and security women will be encouraged to take part” without any further clarification on how this inclusion will be implemented, while the first document includes no reference to UNSCR 1325 at all.

### WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Despite the government’s half-hearted steps towards women empowerment, Turkish women’s CSOs are finding inspiration from international organizations, such as NATO and OSCE which both recently adopted Women Peace and Security agendas. At this point, the role of the International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) to support more steps to implement the agenda of UNSCR 1325 in Turkey through cooperation and capacity building with local NGOs and civic initiatives remains crucial to keep up the pressure from within the Turkish civil society. INGOs should also reach out to official authorities in Turkey, arguing for the proliferation of holistic policies on gender equality and support the draft of an NAP. INGOs can actively promote the government to cooperate with the local and national women’s CSOs within the prepa-

<sup>6</sup>-Copenhagen criteria enables a strong atmosphere to flourish women’s rights by attaching importance to stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities.

<sup>7</sup>-Examples for national initiatives: Women in Foreign Policy Integrating Women’s Perspective into Foreign Policy Initiative and The Project on the First Steps for UNSCR 1325 National Action Plan. These initiatives are also engaged in international dialogue with their peer organisations such as Operation 1325 POWER TO WOMEN IN PEACE PROCESSES: Women’s Organisations Cooperating in Realising Resolution 1325 and Mediterranean Women Mediators Network.

aration and implementation phases of an NAP to ensure it reflects the issues and meets the need of women.

The Turkish government should take immediate action to increase awareness on gender equality within its institutions. It should draft and adopt a UNSCR 1325 NAP enabling government agencies to implement a structural harmonization of its government, parliament, and armed forces by ensuring women's equal representation in decision-making positions. International actors like EU and UN agencies alongside NATO and OSCE have leverage on the Turkish government. They should use their leverage to push the governmental elite to support women's CSOs and hear them out in legislative processes affecting women. They should also monitor how Turkish authorities internalize and adopt international principles laid out in UNSCR 1325 and highlight the gaps between laws and practices.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Turkey and Israel are taken here as examples for two Middle Eastern countries, with cultural differences, yet with similar challenges for women and similar efforts taken by civil society to push for women's rights and the inclusion of a gender sensitive approach in peace and security policies. Due to lack of supportive and protective regulations for women's active participation in formal politics, both women of Israel and Turkey are more engaged in civil society, rather than in official political institutions. As a direct result, the underrepresentation of women in political decision-making reiterates prevalent patriarchal attitudes and enhances the gender-blind political traditions.

Though the national and cultural contexts differ, women in Israel and Turkey have much in common and can gain from cooperation through sharing experiences and best practices in relation to issues of underrepresentation in politics or fighting for gender sensitive peace and security policies. A joint Israeli-Turkish women's rights civil society network could serve as a platform for such an exchange.

We suggest that with the assistance of the international community, the following steps be taken in order to enhance the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Israel and Turkey:

- Fund international leadership seminars – for women or with the participation of at least 50% women and with at least 50% women lecturers and speakers. These kinds of seminars are being run by international NGO's and funds (such as the German political foundations, USAID, or others) or by local women organizations supported by the international community (for example, in Israel, the work of Women Wage Peace, with the support of the EU, and in Turkey, Women in Foreign Policy, with the support of the Consulate General of Sweden). Such efforts strengthen young women and provide them with a platform and an opportunity. Targeting such women's rights activists or professionals in the field of peace and security policy from Israel and Turkey through seminars or workshops can contribute to women inclusion and to improving Israeli- Turkey relations.
- Regularly arrange meetings in embassies with women leaders from various fields to enrich the national dialogue on women in peace and security. For example, in Israel in 2019 alone, Canadian, Swedish, and Swiss ambassadors hosted women involved in peace and security and events were organized together with local NGOs. This practice could also be implemented in Turkey with the joint efforts of German, Danish, and Swiss Embassies, as they are very active and engaged in the fields of conflict resolution and woman's rights.
- Share and exchange knowledge regarding women's inclusion in armed forces. In both countries, the army plays a major role in society. The fact that women are involved in the military forces but underrepresented at all levels

is indicative of persisting inequality and discrimination. In Turkey and in some sectors in Israel as well, the perception that women do not belong in the armed forces prevails. Exchanging knowledge and sharing experience in this field, through expert dialogue between police or armed forces, can assist in changing perceptions and raising awareness regarding the importance of equal representation of women in the military and police force. This can provide an opening point for a career that can lead more women to policy and decision-making positions as well as peace-building efforts.

- Create incentives for increasing women's participation in EU funded programs. Women inclusion is usually a condition for EU funded programs and NGO projects. This criterion should be adapted to all EU grants and not only directed to civil society organizations. For example, two EU funded flagship projects include HORIZON 2020 (Israel) and Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) (Turkey). While the former focuses on research and innovation, the latter mainly aims at assisting refugees in their host country. Entering evaluation criteria on woman participation in such grand schemes (not only as in quantity of participants, but also when relevant and possible, in the quality of the positions they hold) would be beneficial to raise awareness on inclusion of women and may pave the way for future women's representation in the fields of peace and security.

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## Authors:

Burcu Değirmencioğlu is a board member of Momentum Youth Network Association, which mainly focuses on participation and representation of the youth in the Turkish politics as well as generating social democratic values among the youth in Turkey. She holds a Bsc. in International Relations from Gazi University and is a graduate student in the Eurasian Studies Programme (MA) at the Middle East Technical University (METU), focusing on Civil Society Activism, Gender Equality and Democratization. She has been working in the CSO sector within several national and international projects on democratization, migration, Syria crisis response-resilience and social movements, since 2015.

Merav Kahana-Dagan is the Deputy Head of the Mitvim Institute-The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies. She worked as a director of programs at Mitvim, project manager at the Geneva Initiative and the Council for Peace and Security while also actively volunteering with the Peace Now movement. Merav has participated in several local and international leadership training programs and delegations. She holds a B.A and an M.A in Middle Eastern Studies and an M.A in Conflict Resolution and Mediation from Tel Aviv University.

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung | Department for Middle East and  
North Africa | Hiroshimastr. 28 | 10785 Berlin | Germany

Responsible:

Elisabeth Braune, Head, Department for Middle East and  
North Africa

Referat Naher/Mittlerer Osten und Nordafrika

Tel.: +49-30-269-35-7420 | Fax: +49-30-269-35-9233

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