A Gendered Discourse Analysis:

Examining how Women and Gender in the Syrian Conflict are addressed by the United Nations Human Rights Council

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Executive Summary

PURPOSE: This report provides a gender analysis of both the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria (COI) reports and Human Rights Council (HRC) resolutions. It investigates how women, and more broadly gender, are viewed by these bodies, and examines how different gender issues are dealt with by the HRC, COI and key member states. It then suggests recommendations for how a fully gender-integrated approach could be adopted. Furthermore, recommendations are presented to the Women’s International League of Peace and Freedom (WILPF) on how forthcoming advocacy campaigns could utilise this information.

METHOD: This report uses a quantitative discourse analysis to scrutinise the ways that the COI and HRC have dealt with particular gender issues. In Part 1, the eight COI reports were analysed for their references to women, and specific incidents of gender-targeting across a spectrum of key-words including: ‘Civilian’, ‘Women/Female’, ‘Children’ including ‘Girls’ and ‘Boys’, ‘Sexual Violence and Rape – male and female’ and ‘Torture’. In Part 2, the 14 HRC resolutions were recorded for their reference to the following issues ‘Women’, ‘Refugees’, ‘Children’, ‘Chemical Weapons’, ‘Detention’ and ‘Torture’, as well as recording the different views that the HRC held about ‘Women’ and ‘Children’. Finally, in Part 3 the statements of six key member states at the HRC meetings were deconstructed in order to establish the degree of consensus on issues of ‘humanitarian access’, ‘prisoners’, ‘children’s detention’ and ‘sexual violence’.

MAIN RESULTS: In both the COI and HRC women are treated as agentless participants in the Syrian conflict. They have an almost exclusive association as victims of sexual violence, impacting upon any possible role that women could play in future peacebuilding processes. The best model for future gender integration of women in the COI reports comes from their treatment of the discourse on children. Children are regarded as an independent discourse in every section of the reporting, with no association to a single act; the discourse on women should be given the same independence.

The HRC has a cyclical nature, focussing on particular issues for a period of two to three sessions before moving on. The most recent HRC resolutions have focussed on detention; this offers a possible issue upon which WILPF could advocate further. Notwithstanding, there has been little consensus among key states regarding the key issues to be addressed within the conflict. Varyingly, humanitarian access has received the most consistent support. Amongst smaller states, children’s detentions has garnered the most attention from the widest number of HRC member states.

RECOMMENDATIONS: The COI should ensure that its reports are fully gender-integrated, treating women as a separate category in line with their treatment of children. Both the COI and HRC should ensure consistency in the language and terminology used, and acknowledge the different ways that the conflict affects both men and women. WILPF should heed the cyclical nature of the HRC and plan its advocacy campaigns accordingly. To date, children’s detentions (and to a lesser extent humanitarian access) represent the most poignant issues on which to gain the greatest states’ consensus.
Introduction

The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), along with the Syrian Women’s League and UN Women, has been working to promote the role and improve the attitude towards women in the Syrian Conflict within the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria (COI) Reports and Human Rights Council (HRC). WILPF believe that greater account needs to be taken of the different gendered experiences in the conflict, particularly in the publication of reports and resolutions. They argue that important information on women and children is either not being gathered or not being utilised in the COI reports, whilst the HRC member states are failing to advocate strongly enough for consistent resolutions towards women. This failure has contributed to Syrian women’s lack of inclusion in all processes related to the COI and HRC, which WILPF views as being fundamentally harmful to any later peace process.

WILPF is proposing a more gender-integrated approach to the COI reports and HRC resolutions, and has commissioned us to produce a discourse analysis, with a focus on women and gender, of the COI reports, HRC resolutions and HRC meeting summaries and member states’ statements. To this end, this report aims:

- To investigate how women, and more broadly, gender, are treated by the COI reports and HRC resolutions
- To corroborate this with a gendered discourse analysis of the meeting minutes and statements from key states in the HRC
- To identify where the gaps in the discourse are and what is missing from the current reporting of the Syrian conflict
- To provide recommendations to the COI and HRC on how to incorporate a gender integrated approach into their future work.

Through the course of our research we have defined and quantified the references to gender issues in order to establish links, breaks, and cycles in the discourse. What is consistent throughout the reports and resolutions is the lack of agency attributed to women in the Syrian
population, and the dearth of attention on the particular effects the conflict is having upon their lives. In contrast, issues affecting children in the conflict, particularly children’s detention, have been given thorough consideration and consequently have far greater potential of being addressed by bodies like the HRC in comparison to women and gender issues.

In Part 1 of this report we examine the COI reports for their references to women, and specific incidents of gender-targeting across a spectrum of key-words including: ‘Civilian’, ‘Women/Female’, ‘Children’ including ‘Girls’ and ‘Boys’, ‘Sexual Violence and Rape – male and female’ and ‘Torture’. Through a quantitative account of gender-targeting in the discourse we were able to gain an understanding of what areas women and gender were, or were not, being mentioned. We were then able to conduct a more specific analysis on the subjects of Women, Children and Sexual Violence within the discourse and identify where the reports were lacking a gender-integrated approach.

In Part 2, we investigate the issues which have dominated the 14 HRC Resolutions on Syria in order to discover what issues the council have focussed on and the way these issues were viewed. Again, we have used a quantitative discourse analysis, whereby each issue is given a score in a resolution based on a combination of the frequency of its appearance and the priority placed on it within the resolution. The issues we focussed on included: ‘Women’, ‘Refugees’, ‘Children’, ‘Chemical Weapons’, ‘Detention’ and ‘Torture’. This method allowed us to both identify cycles of focus to the resolutions, as well as showcasing the different ways that the HRC views ‘women’ and ‘children’.

In Part 3 of this report, taking into consideration the analyses collected in Parts 1 and 2, we provide a discourse analysis of key members states’ statements in the HRC meetings from the outset of the Syrian Conflict in April 2011. We undertook this to discover any trends or patterns amongst states’ support that could be utilised by WILPF to support their advocacy campaigns on specific issues. The six key states selected were the United States of America (US), the European Union (EU), Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, while the focus of our discourse analysis, as identified by WILPF, was limited to the issues on ‘Children’s Detention’, ‘Torture’, ‘Humanitarian Access’ and ‘Sexual Violence’.
The following report attempts to bring together a comprehensive gender analysis and provide recommendations for WILPF to incorporate into their advocacy initiative for Syrian women at the HRC. We provide here a critique of the current framework of the COI reports, the HRC resolutions and key states’ statements rhetoric in order to identify when gaps in the current discourse are apparent, and therefore address the importance of a more gender-integrated approach to their work. The recommendations at the end of the report are the sum of the conclusions reached in each section and supply the COI and the HRC with a new approach for future investigations, reports and resolutions.

Why A Discourse Analysis?

This paper has adopted a discourse analysis approach in order to investigate the use and role of gender in both the COI reports and HRC resolutions. Discourse analysis has a distinct advantage as it allows for systematic comparison, across a large number of documents, of the way that the different bodies use language around gender issues. The language and terms used hold a form of productive power; referring to an issue through certain language influences the way that this issue is subsequently treated. For example, whether an individual is considered as a ‘civilian’ or ‘combatant’ has real effects on their treatment under international law.¹

Accordingly, a discourse analysis approach allows us to see how these international entities refer to gender issues in the Syrian conflict, the effects this has on how these issues are dealt with as well as crucially informing us what issues are being left out of the COI reports and HRC resolutions. Finally, and with particular reference to the HRC resolutions, the language used is chosen exceptionally carefully and is the subject of intense negotiation between states; this further justifies our decision to adopt the discourse analysis approach.

Although discourse analysis has been used throughout all sections of this paper, there are slight divergences in the methodology used due to the differences in the structure, content and

¹ Barnett and Duvall, “Power in International Politics”, pp.55-57
length between the COI reports and the HRC resolutions. The reports are catalogues of the human rights abuses committed, between 30 and 130 pages long, and have a far broader focus than the HRC resolutions, as they aim to record a variety of instances of abuse rather than concentrating on one specific issue. Due to this Part 1 quantitatively measures gender-targeting within the COI reports, which we deemed the most efficient way of determining where gender was being mentioned in the reports, and the extent to which women were associated with certain forms of gender-targeting. With this narrowing-down of the content of the reports to analyse what the existing approach to gender has been, we were then able to address where a fully gender-integrated approach in the reports was lacking.

In contrast, the HRC resolutions are two to three pages long and are the result of multiple negotiations between member states. Many issues are mentioned in these resolutions, however, the strength and priority with which individual issues are advocated varies considerably across the resolutions. Similarly, as there is less content to analyse then it allows for more detailed examination of the different ways in which issues are viewed. Therefore, Part 2 likewise adopts a quantitative methodology, although the focus is less on gender-targeting and more on the strength with which it is advocated and marking the different ways an issue is viewed.
Part 1: Gender Analysis of the Reports by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic

Introduction

The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI) was established in August 2011 by the HRC after a preliminary fact-finding mission on human rights abuses in Syria found that “patterns of human rights violations may amount to crimes against humanity”\(^2\). The COI’s mandate is to “investigate all alleged violations of human rights law since March 2011,”\(^3\) including the establishing of “facts and circumstances surrounding instances, as well as identification of perpetrators”\(^4\) with the express purpose of holding those people to account. In this section we will investigate how women, and more broadly, gender, are acknowledged by the COI with the goal of providing a gender analysis specific to the eight COI reports published thus far. This will include the identification of discourse trends on the coverage of gender-targeted acts in the reports, and a specific focus in the analysis on ‘women’, ‘children’ and ‘sexual violence’ with the aim of distinguishing flaws in the current COI discourse that causes it to lack a gender-integrated approach.

The COI, a self-described “fact-finding body”, was formed by the HRC as the primary body for human rights investigations on Syria. The COI works separately to, but in parallel purposes with, the HRC, which in turn reports to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN General Assembly. The mandate of the COI can be divided into two parts. Firstly, the establishing of “the facts”, the method for which is not embedded in international legal proceedings but instead in the concept of “reasonable suspicion”\(^5\); if events and incidents can be validated by several sources then the narrative can be considered under the “reasonable suspicion” clause and it acts as evidence in the body of a report. The second part of the mandate concerns identifying those responsible for said events, and is again tied in with this validation of incidents; the reports do not name perpetrators, only mentioning

\(^2\) A/HRC/S-17/2/Add.1:4  
\(^3\) A/HRC/S-17/2/Add.1:4  
\(^4\) A/HRC/S-17/2/Add.1:4  
\(^5\) A/HRC/S-17/2/Add.1:4
locations and sometimes even these are withheld by sources. The information is obtained using a qualitative collection of narratives from a variety of sources, including defectors, refugees, aid workers, journalists and Syrian video and popular media. However, the length of the reports differs quite significantly (from 30 to 130 pages), suggesting that they are written with varying degrees of thoroughness applied to the information gathered. The structure of the reports has also changed over time, particularly with the fracturing of the opposition, so that the most recent report has whole sections devoted to ISIS and Jabhat-al Nusra. This considerably detracts from the consistency with which issues in the conflict are discussed.

Immediately, it is possible to identify large gaps in the fidelity of this methodology: for each report the COI samples between 200 and 300 people. The total population of Syria, according to the UNHCR’s most recent estimates is just below 18 million, with 2.4 million registered as refugees, therefore the level of accuracy of a sample of 200 has to be questioned. As the survey pool is very small, this in itself possibly contributes to the lack of gender-integration in the main body of the report. However, the language used to interview these sample groups is important as, for example, if the only questions the COI are asking women are about rape, then the rape of women will appear more frequently in the reports than that same woman’s occupation or role in her community. Likewise, if the COI only questions soldiers, who have defected, about the government’s torture methods, then the only reference to torture will be in the context of governmental torture. There could also be cases that do not make it into the reports because they are not validated under this bracket of “reasonable suspicion” that the COI designed for themselves. Lastly, the information has to be gathered outside of Syrian territory, because the Assad regime will not give official consent for the COI to enter Syria and conduct their analysis first-hand, therefore all the information is coming from the perspective of the refugee population.

Taking all of the above into account, the COI reports are essential to the cataloguing and conveyance of human rights abuses to the UN and the HRC in the protracted and developing Syrian conflict. Having this form of investigative system in place is paramount both internally to the potential for conflict resolution in the future and externally to the international

\[6\] A/HRC/19/69:5, A/HRC/24/36:3

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community’s understanding and assistance during what is becoming know as “the Syrian Civil War”\(^7\). However, WILPF has identified a serious deficiency of gendered-integrated reporting on the part of the COI, and is particularly concerned by the limited references to women in the reports.

The scope here is to provide a specific breakdown in the form of a gender analysis of the eight published COI reports. To that end, we will begin this analysis with a review of the ‘gendered language lexicon’\(^8\) that surrounds general international reporting on the subject of women in conflict, which allows us to identify the key discourses related to women and gender. This is turn provides the basis for our quantitative discourse analysis of the COI reports, which we have honed as the identification of gender targeting. This section then provides an in depth analysis of the three most significant discourses to WILPF, that of ‘women’, ‘children’ and ‘sexual violence’, examining the major gaps in the COI’s discourse and providing suggestions as to how a more gender-integrated approach would be applied.

**Gendered Language Lexicon**

There is a tendency in international agencies, and specifically the United Nations, to model their reports under theories of “gender mainstreaming”, which look to incorporate gender-sensitive topics into their literature and so increase inclusivity and equality\(^9\). However, in reality, this mainstreaming more often turns into a bandying of essentialist rhetoric that seeks to fill certain tick-boxes without properly taking into consideration the identification and use of the terms. The greatest difficulty when one comes to conduct a gender analysis of such a report, therefore, is avoiding this gendered essentialism, without omitting the crucial points of reference that one began one’s analysis from.

\(^{7}\) Walter & Martin, “Why no one wants to call Syria a civil war”, pp 1  
\(^{8}\) Eckert & McConnell-Glinet, *Language and Gender*, pp 67  
\(^{9}\) Valenius, “A Few Kind Women”, pp 511
To follow the model of Carpenter:

“Explanatory gender analysis involves (1) demonstrating that a taken-for-granted belief about men and women is actually socially constructed rather than biologically inherent; and (2) demonstrating that those adhering to the belief act differently than they would in the absence of the belief.”\(^{10}\)

In feminist thought, “gender subordination” is perpetuated by a hegemonically masculine ‘just war’ tradition based on the assumption that combatants are all men, and civilians are all women.\(^ {11}\) As Thompson similarly explains, this is the frame under which women tend to be identified in conflict discourses: as victims, as actors without agency, as people whose roles are secondary to that of fighter or warrior\(^ {12}\). Women are contrived as moralistic, politically passive, bastions of motherhood and vulnerability, but these essentials are also the basis for a deeper understanding of women’s status. A status as the majority of refugees and IDPs in conflicts, as the sole providers for their families, as the subjects of physical oppression and sexual violence, as the protectors of their property, and the rebuilders of their communities, in substance as well as in thought\(^ {13}\). Thompson calls this the identifying of the “capacities” of women in conflict in correlation with their vulnerabilities\(^ {14}\). She believes the continual essentializing without capacity building, is in part, a product of gender-blindness in reporting; something that can only be resolved through a different view on how one defines gendered approaches and measures their impacts.

In the following gender analysis of the eight COI reports we have attempted to distinguish where this gender blindness exists and how it is impacting the reports by failing to address where women’s capacity to act with free agency is hindered by the protracted violence. Sexual violence, particularly rape, is the most common feature of the reports’ attempts to bring in a gender-integrated dimension to their accounts. However, their mention seems more of an belated afterthought to consider gender as an issue in this context,\(^ {15}\) which as Thompson

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10 Carpenter, “Women and Children First”, pp 663
11 Sjoberg, “Gender Realities of the Immunity Principle”, pp 892
12 Thompson, “Women, Gender and Conflict”, pp 348
13 Sjoberg, “Gender Realities of the Immunity Principle”, pp 901
14 Thompson, “Women, Gender and Conflict”, pp 343
15 Valenius, “A Few Kind Women”, pp 513
points out, only serves to further contribute to “women’s invisibility in the political economy of war”\textsuperscript{16}.

Gender-mainstreaming is not the same as gender blindness in reporting, as, to follow Caprioli’s model, it should seek to establish greater degrees of equality in the discourse between the genders, rather than attempting to avoid the issue of gender altogether\textsuperscript{17}. This in turn transforms those ‘taken for granted beliefs’ about women, as the reporting more accurately depicts the extent of their agency and diversity of their roles. If gender-mainstreaming was instead addressed through Carpenter’s questioning of the ‘vulnerability of women’, then a gender-integrated discourse would look at reassessing these issues in terms of a general human vulnerability, regardless of age or gender\textsuperscript{18}.

The eight COI reports follow a very specific model of UN institutional reporting which focuses directly on the oppression of women, which limits their recording to specific sections of the reports: ‘Civilian Victims’ and ‘Victims of Sexual Violence’. Sjoberg attests that “wartime rape is steeped in gendered oppression”\textsuperscript{19} and the COI by not properly mainstreaming women in their recording has only served to solidify the extent of that oppression, which exists not only on the ground, but also in the international arena claiming to offer assistance. In turn, gender oppression can also be view in terms of the power struggles that exist during conflict in what Thompson describes as the condoning of the “successful altering of social relationships though the widespread violation of cultural norms and gender identities”\textsuperscript{20}. The COI, as a potential documenter of this oppression is therefore also part of that power dynamic, as their reports will present certain relationships and identities as norms. Accordingly, failing to incorporate gender mainstreaming precipitates the failure of future conflict resolution.

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{16} Thompson, “Women, Gender and Conflict”, pp 348
\textsuperscript{17} Caprioli, “Gendered Conflict”, pp 57
\textsuperscript{18} Carpenter, “Women and Children First”, pp 668
\textsuperscript{19} Sjoberg, “Gender Realities of the Immunity Principle”, pp 901
\textsuperscript{20} Thompson, “Women, Gender and Conflict”, pp 346
\end{footnotesize}

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How Gender is Recorded in the Reports

Methodology

The gender analysis of the COI reports has been executed with the identification of five key discourses, these are: ‘civilian’, ‘women/female’, ‘children: boys and girls’, ‘sexual violence and rape of men and women’, and ‘torture’. In order to establish to what extent gender has been recognised, we recorded not only how many times the word was mentioned in the reports, but also how many times the discourse was associated with gender targeting within each of these reports. Gender targeting, a form of measurement developed from our study of the ‘gendered language lexicon’, includes any action upon someone either because of, or to emphasize, their gender; this can include anything from house raids where women’s underwear is taken, the separation of men and women at checkpoints, to the sexual assault of a person’s body, to the use of rape as a weapon in the conflict. Gender-targeting has been utilised to analyse the COI reports in order to: firstly, gain an understanding of where gender is being included; and secondly, to measure to what extent women and gender-targeting are associated. Through this particular focus it then becomes easier to identify where gaps in the current method of reporting are, in addition to highlighting how a more gender-integrated approach could be implemented.

Below the reader can see the tabulated discourse analysis of gender targeting in the eight COI reports. Every number in black counts the number of times that the word is mentioned in a report, while every number in red shows, within that word-count, the number of instances of gender targeting that were recorded which involved the use of that particular discourse. For example: in the first report (column 2), the number of times the discourse ‘women/female’ (row three) is mentioned in the report is five while the number of times that discourse was mentioned in coordination with gender targeting was once. In contrast, the discourse ‘civilian’ is mentioned 33 times in the first report, but with no related instances of gender-targeted, therefore there is no red number in that column. As the reader will note, the numbers for ‘sexual violence and rape in male and female’ all appear in red, as we counted these actions
as being blatantly gender-targeting. The last row and last column in the table total the number of instances of a gender-targeted action by discourse (last column) and by report (last row).

Tabulated Discourse Analysis of gender targeting in the eight COI reports

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<th>2nd</th>
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</table>
A total of 474 instances were mentioned over the course of eight reports however, as can be seen, the frequency of gender-targeted instances change dramatically with each report, already suggesting some large inconsistencies with the COI’s attempt at a gender-integrated approach. The graph below visualises that inconsistency with the orange line denoting all instances of gender-targeting, whilst the points mark individual reports. The yellow line provides an indication of the exponential trend of the numbers, which due to the vast difference between the reports, has a very weak incline, proving gender-targeting is not being reliably incorporated into the reports.

Record of Specific Gender Targeting by Report

![Graph showing gender targeting and trend over reports](image)

Analyses of Gender Targeting in Reports’ Discourse

The graph below shows the five discourses’ instances of gender targeting as recorded by the COI reports. We have also included two extra categories in the table before and the graph now: ‘international law’ and ‘human rights’. As one can see from the table there is very limited mention of either of these two discourses, and hardly any in relation to gender targeting. They are included to show that not all areas of the reports included gender
targeting, consequently the reports are failing to gender-mainstream all areas of their recording.

**Gender Targeting by Discourse**

![Graph showing gender targeting by discourse](image)

An example of this lack of gender-mainstreaming that would provide a degree of equality between gender-targeting and other issues in the conflict, can be seen when one compares the instances of sexual violence and rape in reports three and four, with the references to gender-targeting, related to human rights and international law. As is clear from both the table and the graph, despite the extreme prevalence of sexual violence and rape in these reports, there is no mention of it as a gender-targeting issue in relation to either human rights or international law. The COI has failed to comprehensively address the issue in the context in which the COI was supposedly created, to record human rights abuses and to identify the perpetrators. Ideally the COI should always be relating any instance of gender targeting back to international law, as it is only through this mainstreaming of the issue as a human rights issue that the possibility for a gender-integrated approach to the reports could exist. The sections below will now go on to identify and discuss further the extent of recorded
gender-targeting in the five discourses with proposals of where the gaps in the discourse are and how these could be filled to provide a more gender-integrated approach.

Civilian

The term ‘civilian’ is consistently used, throughout the COI reports, to refer to anyone in a non-combat role. As Carpenter identified in her study of the Yugoslav conflict, ‘civilian’ should be used as a gender neutral term to include all genders and all ages however, when a civilian is described as ‘vulnerable’ this is more likely to refer to women and children, and the elderly, regardless of the actual measures of vulnerability. However, in the case of the COI reports, the gender of civilians remains ambiguous; ‘women and children’ are only distinguished when they are the victims of an attack implying that ‘civilian’ actually refers to men in non-combatant roles.

However, the stereotyping of ‘women and children’ in not a good way to implement gender-mainstreaming in a report. Firstly, it denies women as a category, independent from the masculine based societal role of caregiver whilst secondly it fails to more generally acknowledge the agency of individuals when they are subject to gender-targeting in the conflict. This generalisation of the discourse on civilian refutes not only the agency of individual men and women, but also the individual experiences of communities affected by the conflict. The instances of gender-targeting related to civilians are admittedly mostly related to female gender-targeting by male security forces, whereas a more gender-integrated approach would assess the gender targeting of civilian men and women with equal focus on the different actions and effects this has. It would identify exactly whom in the civilian population was affected and what relation this had to their human rights and its effects on the individual and community.

The comments to the civilian discourse, with reference to gender-targeting across the reports, are average across all the discourses. Some reports mention civilians far more frequently than others, suggesting report writers’ focus changed between reports. The instances of recorded

21 Carpenter, “Women and Children First”, pp 662
gender-targeting are also very sporadic, once again suggesting a shift in focus between reports. Unfortunately, for the COI, this only serves to illustrate the lack of appreciation for proper gender mainstreaming. If the purpose of these reports is to provide a record of human rights abuses, then consistency in measurements of various key discourses should be a priority for gathering evidence. However, the lack of attention given to the gender-targeting of the civilian population suggests that they do not regard all human rights violations with equal impunity. Likewise, it implies that the diversity of abuses perpetrated against the civilian population in the conflict is not important; only the fact that the civilian population was abused is important. This lack of specificity however, has only served to create large gaps in the discourse that would make it more difficult for specific war crimes, like those abuses of gender-targeting which do not include sexual violence, to be reprimanded and catalogued: for example, the compulsory separation of men and women at checkpoints, or the specifications of ceasefire agreements that only allow ‘women and children’ to leave the area.

**Torture**

Torture is clearly regarded as an independent discourse in the reports, as a separate issue to be recorded, unlike civilians, whose discourse is interdependent with other discourses, such as women and children. Torture and the discourse on sexual violence run in tandem, as torture can include sexual violence as well as broader forms of gender-targeting such as forcing women to wear headscarves in public and punishing men if the woman they are with is not wearing a headscarf. Torture already has a gender dimension to it, as far more men than women are recorded as having undergone some form of torture in the reports. Torture on men is also described far more graphically than torture on women, suggesting either a lack of information regarding instances of female torture, which is a gender-mainstreaming issue in itself, or a deliberate targeting of men for the purposes of torture. This specific targeting of men and boys is utilised both as a large-scale tactic to dissuade them from joining an opposition group, and as a tactic of control of the civilian population through the patriarch, in what is a traditionally patriarchal society. Early reports reference the use of torture more as punishment for male conscripts who refused to follow orders, or for captured male protesters,
but its use has expanded to become a norm of violence in almost all governmental and non-governmental groups mentioned in the reports.

If torture is being deliberately perpetrated as a tactic against one gender over another, in this case men over women, then the specific and long-term effects on physical, mental and reproductive health have to be considered as part of a gender-integrated approach to future recording. CEDAW describes torture in Syria being “used as a weapon of war to intimidate parties to the conflict, destroying identity, dignity and the social fabrics of families and communities”. The current reports only catalogue instances of torture, and do not touch upon the psychological and social effects of these actions, however, as the conflict continues to progress, these issues are going to become more integrated into the development of the conflict. Therefore the discourse on torture is one of many opportunities for the COI to utilise gender-mainstreaming not only as an instrument to improve women’s representation in reports, but also men’s. Where acts of torture are deliberately designed to dehumanise the individual, the reports should be re-humanising these people through the identity provided by gender-integration in the discourse.

**Deconstructing Women, Children and Sexual Violence in the COI Reports**

**Women/Female**

The discourse on women, particularly when compared to other discourses in the reports like civilian or children, is not as strong. We refuse to believe that this is due to a dearth of female presence in the conflict, rather it is a result of a lack of recording of women by the COI. This could be ascribed to previously discussed policies of gender-blindness in report writing, however, in a complex situation like the Syrian conflict, a gender-blind approach is not appropriate for addressing the diverse ways that different groups, in this case women, are being affected and how their roles change.

22 CEDAW, “Seeking Accountability and Demanding Change”, pp 6
Instead the reports tend towards only mentioning women in the context of sexual violence, whereas men would have a variety of references as civilians, combatants, medical personnel or journalists. This method of reporting serves only to disenfranchise women from the conflict, denying them agency and relegating them specifically as sexual victims to the conflict, rather than as social or cultural entities who are more than just sexual beings, ending with what Thompson calls the “faceless victims” to the conflict.\(^{23}\)

This attitude is clear in the recordings of gender-targeting of women in the reports, where in every report, between a quarter and a half of all the recordings of the ‘women’ discourse were related to gender-targeting (in comparison to the discourses of civilian and torture where it is often less than one tenth).

**Gender Targeting of Women**

![Graph showing gender targeting of women](image)

The above graph shows that the recordings of women’s gender-targeting in the reports is as sporadic as the overall record of gender targeting across all the discourses. However, the fact

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\(^{23}\) Thompson, “Women, Gender and Conflict”, pp 348
that such a high proportion of the instances involving women are related to gender-targeting suggests that the COI is not addressing the discourse of women as an independent actor in the conflict, but rather solely as the subject of sexual violence and other forms of gender-targeting. If one regards the numbers from the seventh and eighth reports, the recorded discourse on women has increased but with a lower proportion of related instances of gender-targeting, which could symbolise an awareness of the previous inconsistency with reporting on women that the COI is now trying to amend.

Increased reporting on women as a separate subject from civilians, and outside of the category of ‘victim of sexual violence’ is the most essential element to a gender-integrated approach to future COI reports. By incorporating their inputs at the social, political and humanitarian level, as well as at the military level, the COI can reaffirm the agency of women in the Syrian conflict and influence future reporting by both themselves and other organisations.

**Children: Girls and Boys**

The discourse on children is the most interesting in the reports because their mention is consistent with treatment as an independent subject, with recognition of the specific ways in which the conflict has affected them. Children, like women, do not have a great degree of agency in the reports, but they are recognised as their own group which is involved in diverse areas of the conflict. The phrase “women and children” is mentioned only on the margins of the concept of children, and consistently more often than the separate terms of women or sexual violence are mentioned. The reports are also careful in recording the specific gender of the children in different situations, unlike in the discourse on civilians where gender is rarely mentioned. This is most evident when comparing the first and second reports, with the third and fourth reports, where the former mentions more boys than girls, while the latter more girls than boys.
Gender Targeting of Children (including Girls and Boys)

When one comes to addressing instances of gender targeting of children, the results again mimic the sporadic pattern of the reports in general. However, one striking element is the marked increase in recordings of gender-targeting of girls in the later reports, and apparent decrease in the targeting of boys. As it is unlikely that gender-targeting of boys has actually declined, there is cause to believe that the accurate recording of such gender-targeting is the real issue, which is again a product of the failure to incorporate gender-mainstreaming into the reports. The other element that the COI misses is that fact that the targeting of children, either because of gender or due to their presence at the time, is as much an attack on parents. The reactions of parents need to be included in the recording as part of the civilian population’s diverse roles and agency in the conflict, which can particularly affect women, whom the reports mention as often being the sole guardians of their children.

In spite of this, the COI are closest to a model for a gender-integrated approach to the reports in their specific handling of the discourse on children as, by treating them as an independent subject in the conflict, they have already acknowledged that children exist in all elements of the discourse. Therefore increasing the elements of gender in their discourse which again goes
beyond victimisation due to sexual violence, is one model that could then be expanded to other discourse areas.

**Sexual Violence and Rape: Women and Men**

All the reports include a specific section on sexual violence where the three most common occurrences referenced are the threat of rape, the act of rape, and sexual assault. The recording of male and female discourses on sexual violence do differ, most often according to the roles ascribed to them in the reports, for example: soldier versus civilian. However, the references to sexual violence are not exclusive to women, as can be seen from the graph above, records sexual violence committed on men are also prevalent. Men are recorded as being the predominant victims of sexual assault and rape during torture in detention, although the reports state that there is a general assumption in the population that women in detention are raped but not men. This suggests that instances of male rape could be much higher than the recorded figure because of the stereotypical association of rape and women.
This is significant to the overall gender-mainstreaming of the reports as it proves that both genders are affected by a variety of abuses during conflict. There has also been, as mentioned previously, a degree of sexual violence and rape committed upon children. A poignant argument to motivate ways to address sexual violence and rape in the reports come from Sjoberg: “wartime rape is steeped in gendered oppression”. Instead of addressing sexual violence and rape as the product of violence committed on agentless subjects to the conflict, if the COI regards it as one of the tools of oppression preventing gender-mainstreaming in the society at large, they can incorporate that gendered element into their own reporting.

From the first report onwards, the COI has provided a cultural disclaimer on the lack of reporting of rape and sexual violence by Syrians because of social stigma. However, in the same time that the COI recorded 181 instances of sexual violence and rape, the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network and partners recorded upwards of 6000 rapes since 2011. This suggests that while there could be a stigma around reporting, it has not stopped people from coming forward about said instances, and that it could be that the COI is not properly recording the frequency. This could be either because they are not addressing a broad enough range of interviewees, due to their legal limitations, or because they are apprehensive about including the full extent of gender-targeting and sexual violence as they have previously failed to use a gender-integrated approach in their analysis. To remedy this inconsistency, the COI need to start increasing the diversity and number of interviewees, as only then can they begin to grasp the full extent of the issues at work and the numbers of people affected by them.

24 Sjoberg, “Gender Realities of the Immunity Principle”, pp 901
Part 2: Gender Analysis of Human Rights Council Resolutions

Introduction

Since the establishment of the COI through HRC resolution A/HRC/S-17/2 at the seventeenth special session of the Human Rights Council (HRC) in August 2011 there have been a total of 14 resolutions pertaining to Syria. These were all passed at regular sessions of the HRC except for the 19th special session, which was convened to discuss the killings in El-Houleh.

All of these resolutions were adopted by an overwhelming majority of the HRC member states. However, during each session in which China and the Russian Federation were members of the HRC, they continuously voted against each resolution and were joined at various times by Venezuela, Cuba and (occasionally) Ecuador.

In addition to the HRC resolutions, the UN Security Council has published five resolutions on different aspects of the Syrian Civil War, which have impacted the direction and focus of the HRC resolutions: two establishing and extending the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS), one creating the framework for the removal of chemical weapons and a further two resolutions calling on all sides in the conflict to allow the unfettered access of humanitarian aid.

This part of the report will focus primarily on an analysis of the 14 HRC resolutions in order to answer three key questions:

1. What are the issues that have dominated the HRC resolutions?
2. How have ‘gender’, ‘women’ and ‘children’ been treated as issues throughout the resolutions?
3. What are the ‘gender issues’ that have been left out of the resolutions?
Trends across the HRC Resolutions

Methodology

This section of the report focuses on the issues which have dominated the 14 HRC resolutions, with an aim of attempting to uncover patterns and trends in the HRC’s approach. To achieve this aim, a quantitative discourse analysis approach is used whereby each resolution is given a score for how an issue is featured in it based on a combination of the frequency of its appearance and the priority that issue is given within the resolution.

The following system was used to ensure equal treatment of each resolution:

- The resolution was broken down into each of its constituent preamble and operative paragraphs, with a possible score of 1 for each operative paragraph and 0.5 for each preamble paragraph. This higher score for an operative paragraph reflects the greater influence that it holds and the priority placed on it by the HRC.

- If an issue, such as violation of children rights, is the only issue exclusively mentioned within an operative paragraph then the issue receives a full possible score of 1. The following example is taken from resolution 25/23 (paragraph 7):

  “Strongly condemns all violations and abuses committed against children, and urges all parties to fully respect international law”

As the paragraph exclusively concerns the violations of children’s rights in an operative paragraph then that issue receives a mark of 1.

- Contrastingly, if an issue is merely mentioned in an operative paragraph, rather than being the exclusive focus of it, then it will receive a score of 0.5. The following example drawn from Resolution 25/23 (paragraph 4) shows that both ‘sexual violence’ and ‘torture’ would receive a score of 0.5:
“Calls upon all groups in the Syrian Arab Republic to refrain from retaliation and violence, including sexual violence and torture, and urges all parties to the conflict to prevent violations of international humanitarian law and human rights violations and abuses;”

By using this systematic evaluation it allows for easier identification of trends across the 15 resolutions and furthermore details when and how issues became the priority for states.

After an initial reading of the 15 resolutions this process was applied to the following 13 issues:


A Cyclical Shift in Focus

Over the four year span of the 15 HRC resolutions it is clear that a number of different issues have occupied the HRC in a fairly cyclical fashion. Between one and two particular issues are the focus of the HRC’s resolutions for a period of around 2 sessions, before new issue(s) emerge to replace them as the priority of the council. Consequently, the timespan of the resolutions can be broken down into four stages, each being dominated by one or two issues:

*Stage 1- December 2011 to July 2012 (18th to 20th HRC Session) - Violation of Children’s Rights*

Between this five resolution period, the issue of ‘children’s rights’ was by far the highest priority of the council. It was mentioned far more than any other issue, scoring a total of 12 across the resolutions, which is five more than the next highest priority issues: ‘torture’ and ‘detention’. Moreover, it was the only issue that managed to constantly sustain the HRC’s attention with other issues briefly rising in priority for one resolution before falling back into obscurity.
This graph, showing the score of a select number of issues during this stage, highlights the above points:

![Issues in Stage 1 Graph](image)

**Stage 2- October 2012 to June 2013 (21st to 23rd HRC Session) - Women and Refugees**

Following the 20th HRC session in July 2012, the issue of children remained a pertinent focus of the HRC being the third highest scoring issue throughout this period. However, it was overtaken in priority by both the issue of women and refugees, which sustained this focus until June 2013. However, after this session, women were dropped as the priority whilst refugees managed to maintain their focus into the next stage.

This graph details the various issues throughout this stage:

![Issues in Stage 2 Graph](image)
**Stage 3 - October 2013 to July 2014 (24th to 26th HRC Session) - Refugees and Chemical Weapons**

This stage, between October 2013 to July 2014, is the first time that chemical weapons have been mentioned as an issue for the HRC. As explained below this sudden interest in chemical weapons can be easily explained by the worldwide attention placed on the Ghouta Attacks in August 2013. Interestingly, refugees remained a priority throughout this period whilst women and children, though not a primary focus, still scored relatively highly as issues throughout this period:

![Issues in Stage 3 Graph]

**Stage 4 - September 2014 (27th Session) - Detention and Torture**

The final trend in the resolutions is a dramatic shift, abandoning both refugees and chemical weapons as an issue, to focus almost exclusively on detention and torture. In previous resolutions both issues had received some interest and priority however, during the 27th Resolution detention became the highest scoring of any issue throughout the resolutions with a score of six (torture scored four). It is interesting to note that at the latest resolution women were completely dropped as an issue, failing to be mentioned for the first time in two years.
This graph visually represents these changes with the 26th Resolution included to show the difference between Stages 3 and Stage 4:

![Issues in Stage 4](image)

This graph, which shows the issues across all the resolutions, visually highlights the differences in the stages and the trends which have occupied the HRC:

![Issues Across all the Resolutions](image)

**What Causes this Cyclical Shift in Focus?**

This section will address some of the factors, which might have caused the cyclical nature in the HRC resolutions.
Some part of this shift between stages can be explained as the HRC’s reaction to ongoing events in Syria that have caused a necessary shift in its priorities. This is most obviously exemplified through the issue of Chemical Weapons, which had not appeared in any of the ten previous resolutions before its focus at the 24th Session in October 2013. It is a clear reaction to the August 2013 Ghouta chemical attack and the UN Security Council Resolution 2118 that established a framework for the elimination of chemical weapons in Syria.

The recent focus on detention and torture in the latest resolution can similarly be at least partly attributed to a rise in attention placed on groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the COI reports. Their treatment of detainees and use of torture have received extensive coverage in the 8th report of the COI, it is therefore unsurprising that the first resolution passed after the publication of this report should focus on this development.

In spite of the relevance of contextual factors, the reports do not explain all the stages in the resolutions. Violations against children have been a permanent feature of both the Syrian civil war and the resolutions, managing to stay near the top of the HRC’s agenda across the four years. Contrasting, women have faced a trickier time, swinging from being the main priority of the council to barely being mentioned at all. This likewise has little to do with events in Syria; women have been constant victims of the conflict and faced mass violations of their rights, as testified by the COI reports.

Accordingly, this suggests that there is a space in the nature of the HRC for a concerted advocacy campaign to shift the focus of the issues discussed by the council. In previous meetings WILPF revealed that they undertook extensive lobbying efforts to push the participation of women onto the agenda around the 21st HRC session. The results are evident from the above analysis; following this lobbying effort women were at the core of the HRC’s agenda for the first time. Therefore WILPF should take note of this success and realise that targeted lobbying on a specific issue can affect the agenda of the HRC resolutions.
Deconstructing Women, Children and Sexual Violence in the HRC

Resolutions

Introduction

In this section of the report, we will breakdown the different ways in which the resolutions treat ‘women’, ‘children’ and ‘sexual violence’ as issues. Each mention of these issues will be analysed in its surrounding context to uncover the implicit assumptions that frame each issue and to understand how these assumptions subsequently affect the manner in which the HRC deals with these issues. Accordingly, this section aims to understand both how and why the issues are used by the HRC and the effects of this on each issue’s development.

Women

The Three Views of Women

Women were not mentioned as an ‘issue’ until the 6th resolution during the 19th HRC Session in June 2012. During the previous resolutions women had failed to feature as an issue despite both ‘children’ and ‘men’ being mentioned numerous times.

In the subsequent resolutions, women were always treated as an issue in three specific ways:

1. As victims of a general event
2. As victims of sexual/gender based-violence
3. As a group who should fully participate in high level decision making and the political process

Not all of these three themes were present in each resolution rather, throughout the resolutions, different aspects of women as an issue have been highlighted. The graph below shows the various ways women have been treated across the resolutions:
This graph shows that the view of women across the resolutions is constantly changing and is not fixed to one dominant theme. Rather at various points the HRC has had a different concept of what ‘women’ constitutes as an issue in the Syrian conflict. The following table breaks down the frequency of how women have been treated in the resolutions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency of Mention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Victim</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim of Sexual Abuse</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation of Women</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Women as Victims**

In 62.5% of the references to women throughout the resolutions there is a direct association with them as victims of either general or sexual abuse. This statistic could be undoubtedly higher as, in the three resolutions before women were first mentioned (S-18/1, 19/1 and 19/22), the references to sexual violence were as follows:

“*Strongly* condemns sexual violence against civilians including against male detainees and children”
The clear assumption held by the HRC was that sexual violence is almost exclusively an issue affecting women, as they would not need to specify that both men and children are victims of sexual abuse if that wasn’t the case. If this implicit reference to females as victims of sexual abuse is included in the statistic, then 68% of references to women throughout the report view women as an issue solely in terms of being general victims or victims of sexual abuse.

**Participation of Women**

The issue of participation of women in the decision-making process accounts for a minority of the references throughout resolutions (32%) and is the only reference in the resolutions which doesn’t refer to women as victims. However, this attempt to include women’s participation is woefully inadequate: almost 33% of the references are mere statements in the preamble welcoming the work of UN Women in encouraging this issue, whilst only 4 paragraphs in 15 resolutions directly call for the increased participation of women in that sphere.

From the above timeline it is clear that this perspective of women is a relatively new phenomenon reaching its peak over the 25th and 26th sessions. This is the only time in which increasing participation has received more attention than women as victims of both general and sexual abuse. This can perhaps be seen as a direct result of advocacy efforts by different groups, including WILPF, to ensure that women had a voice during the Geneva II Peace Talks. Likewise it can be seen as a reaction to the adoption of Resolution 2122 by the UN Security Council in October 2013 which reaffirmed the UN’s commitment to 1325.

However, in other areas of the HRC resolutions, there have been calls for political consultation and negotiation which have neglected to mention women as a party that ought to be involved in the process. One of the numerous examples occurs in Resolution 25/23:

“Calls for the parties to negotiate constructively based on widespread consultation”
There is no integration of women in this call, either as parties or actors to be consulted in the negotiation. This is further evidence that the participation of women is an issue that is not taken seriously by the HRC and that they have failed to adequately integrate women into the various peace mechanisms that their resolutions have called for.

The HRC’s View of Women and Its Effects

From the above analysis it is possible to build a picture of ‘women’, as constructed by the HRC, through these resolutions. Women are an agentless actor in the Syrian civil war, whose main position in the conflict is as helpless victims to acts committed by the main actors in the war. The HRC, by equating women with victims, has removed the potential for women to be seen as influential actors who can have a positive impact on the peace process. The meagre attempt to include them, at the urging of the Security Council and Advocacy Groups, has failed perhaps due to this assumption of the HRC that women only serve as victims in the conflict.

In contrast to women, men are very rarely mentioned as a separate entity within the HRC resolutions. The sole exception to this rule is the above mentioned use of men in the early resolutions concerning sexual violence, this stopped however, at the beginning of the 20th session and men were never referred to again. Instead the HRC resolutions use a wide variety of terms including ‘civilian’, ‘people’ and ‘population’ to refer to the men and women together in the conflict.

This focus on women as victims has also limited the gender-mainstreaming of the resolutions. Issues which clearly affect men and women differently are not distinguished in the resolutions; ‘refugees’ are considered as one homogenous group, as are ‘prisoners’, ‘detainees’, ‘IDPs’ amongst many others. By creating only one separate category for ‘women as victims’, it implies that this is the sole gendered issue occurring in the conflict; in reality the majority of the issues that the HRC resolutions address ought, and need, to be broken down into how they affect men and women differently. This would be one way to address the
different realities and needs of both genders in the conflict without perpetuating a view of either gender that is not based on reality.

**Children**

In comparison to women, the number of different themes related to children in the HRC resolutions are substantial. At various times the HRC have referred to children as an issue in the following ways: as victims of detention, torture, targeted killings, general abuse, sexual violence, denied medical treatment and forced recruitment to armed groups and the regime. Accordingly the HRC’s approach to children has been quite considerable and varied however, this has come at a cost of inconsistency, with the HRC often focusing on one theme before disregarding it for another.

This graph below testifies to this point, highlighting the multiple approaches that the HRC have taken across the resolutions:

![Children's Issues Across the Resolutions](image)

In spite of the irregularity of the HRC towards children, there are a number of issues which occur more than others. These are investigated further below.

**Children and Detention**

‘Children and detention’ is the most frequently referenced children’s issue, accounting for 30% of all references to children. In almost all cases the resolutions call for the immediate
release of all children alongside the publication of detention centers where child prisoners are being held. From the graph below it is clear that this issue has not been consistently at the forefront of the HRC’s priorities. Instead there were two stages of interest: September 2011 to June 2012 and April 2014-present, intersected with a lull in focus:

**Children’s Detention Across the Resolutions**

![Children’s Detention Across the Resolutions](image)

**Children and Sexual Violence**

The second most frequent issue concerns children as victims of sexual violence, accounting for 19% of the total references. In the majority of the resolutions, the text reads:

“*Strongly* condemns sexual violence including against children”

However, during the 23rd and 24th sessions, the mention of children was completely removed from the resolution and instead the resolutions condemned sexual violence against girls and
women whilst in the following resolutions the issue was dropped completely. This shows that over the period of four years, the HRC determined that sexual violence became an issue that affected girls rather than boys.

This graph shows how children and sexual violence has been treated as an issue throughout the resolutions:

**The HRC’s View of Children and Its Effects**

As with women, the HRC has constructed a very specific view of children in the Syrian conflict. They are considered almost exclusively as agentless victims, who have faced abuse at the hands of the armed forces and opposition groups during conflict. Throughout all the resolutions there is only one mention of the recruitment of children as soldiers which the COI reports have documented substantially.

Despite the HRC dealing with children in the Syrian conflict in a more nuanced and multifaceted way in comparison to women, it still falls woefully short of a true integrated analysis of children into the report. There is no mention at all of the specific needs that children require as refugees whilst the paragraphs referring to the prevention of access to medical treatment merely refer to the ‘Syrian population’ as its reference, thus implying that the medical needs of the entire adult (male and female) and child population are the same. Accordingly, as with women, the HRC needs to impose an integrated approach to children’s issues in its reports. The current focus on children as victims actually draws attention away from the need to ensure that in each issue the HRC considers, be it refugees, health or arbitrary detention, there is a separate analysis of how this impacts upon children specifically.
Part 3: Gender Analysis of the Discourses in the HRC of Key States

Introduction

In this section of the report, we were requested to provide a discourse analysis of key states’ statements in the Human Rights Council meetings, in order to discover any trends or patterns which WILPF could utilise in their subsequent Syrian advocacy initiatives. As this section acts as a followup to the dual discourse analyses of the COI reports and the HRC resolutions we aim to provide both further validation of the lack of appreciation for gender issues, and particularly women’s experience of the conflict, as well as further insight into the international climate around these reports and resolutions that would enable development of a more gender-integrated approach.

For this section we, in consultation with WILPF, selected six key states and analysed their various statements delivered in HRC meetings alongside UN-published meeting summaries. The analysis itself focused on the four most poignant issues that WILPF has taken a particular concern in: Children’s Detention, Torture, Humanitarian Access, and Sexual Violence. The hope was to discover trends or patterns in the discourse that could be beneficial to further advocacy, however, only two states were found to have convergence in their discourses, and only one discourse was found to have any level of consensus between all six states analysed.

This section of the report includes our methodology for this discourse analysis, an examination of the patterns found in the discourse, an assessment of each of our agreed individual states’ discourses throughout the HRC, and a broader look at where issues of women’s rights, children’s rights and sexual violence have been mentioned by other states not in our initial selection. These issues were chosen as they were the most prominent themes that emerged from the discourse analysis in the previous sections of the report. This section then provides some conclusions about the discourse analysis undertaken with mention of how it
can be addressed within the gender-integrated approach missing from the other two sections of the report.

**Methodology**

This section focuses the majority of its analysis on six states: United States, Saudi Arabia, European Union, Turkey, Iran and the Russian Federation. These states were selected, in consultation with WILPF, as they are currently the most influential and most involved state level actors in the Syrian conflict. Accordingly, this section analyses, where available, both these states written statements submitted to the HRC alongside the meeting summaries to see if and when these states advocated for any of the following four issues: children’s detention, sexual violence, prisoners and humanitarian access.

For each written statement and meeting summary, every time a state advocated or drew attention specifically to one of these issues it was marked. For example during the 18th HRC special session, the US Ambassador Eileen Donahoe mentioned the following:

“*Syria must immediately admit Arab League monitors, independent human rights monitors, and humanitarian organizations, with no restrictions on their activities.*”

Accordingly, the United States were recorded as advocating for humanitarian access during the 18th special session. Using this systematic system allows for broad comparison between the six states, across the 11 HRC sessions under investigation, in order to see if there are patterns and trends in the way that states advocate (or not advocate) for specific issues.

Finally, this section has also taken note of which states have supported the following issues throughout the HRC sessions: children’s rights, women’s rights and sexual violence. Therefore each HRC meeting summary concerning the Syria crisis was analysed every time a state advocated or drew attention to one of these issues it marked. For example, Belgium during the 17th HRC special session was summarized as stating the following:

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26 Full statement available here: https://geneva.usmission.gov/2011/12/02/us-statement-special-session-syria/
“Belgium was shocked to learn that children had not only been targeted by security forces and had been repeatedly subjected to the same human rights and criminal violations as adults, including torture. Belgium deplored that the Syrian authorities kept on violating their international human rights obligations, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; and strongly condemned the summary executions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, torture and ill-treatment committed in the brutal campaign by the Syrian authorities against its own population”27

Thus Belgium would be recorded as supporting the cause of children’s right during the 17th HRC Special Session.

**Patterns Amongst the Six States**

*Recent Convergence Between the United States and the European Union*

One of the most prominent patterns amongst the six states is the recent convergence around the issues of humanitarian assistance and prisoners between the US and the EU. This table compares the US and EU’s responses to the four issues under analysis:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>EU</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>EU</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>EU</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>EU</th>
<th>US</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17th SS</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18th RS</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18th SS</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th RS</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th RS</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21st RS</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22nd RS</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>23rd RS</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24th RS</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25th RS</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26th RS</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>27th RS</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

27 Taken from the Meeting Summary available here http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=11324&LangID=E#sthash.wnE2i8YP.dpuf
From the above table it is evident that there was little consensus between the EU and the USA during the first seven sessions of the HRC. Moreover, there has been little agreement between the two entities over the issue of sexual violence and children’s detention, with both states showing strong support for these issues but at different times.

However, during both the 25th and 26th HRC session there was agreement on the need to advocate strongly for humanitarian assistance. Furthermore, there was harmony between the two on the issue of prisoners during the 25th and 27th (most recent) HRC sessions, which accords with the cyclical pattern identified in the previous session where prisoners and detention are the current focus of the HRC.

**Consistency of Support for Humanitarian Access**

Humanitarian access is the most consistently mentioned of the issues across the countries, though they talk about it in varying forms. If any advocacy policy should be pursued further by WILPF regarding these key states, our suggestion is that it works along the lines of a humanitarian access initiative. There is a clear window of opportunity to be utilised to gain consensus on action for this issue, from which other policies could develop.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session/State</th>
<th>EU</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>Russia</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
<th>Iran</th>
<th>Saudi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17th SS</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>18th RS</td>
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<tr>
<td>18th SS</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>19th RS</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>20th RS</td>
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<tr>
<td>21th RS</td>
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<tr>
<td>22nd RS</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>23rd RS</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>24th RS</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>25th RS</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>26th RS</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>27th RS</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
As the US and the EU have been the most active in this discourse they would be ideal partners for WILPF. However, if Russia, Syria’s primary ally in the Security Council, is now reconsidering Humanitarian Access in their agenda, as is alluded to in their most recent comments to the HRC, then this would be an ideal time to seek their support for humanitarian initiatives. Additionally, with Turkey’s consistent support for the Syrian people (as discussed further below), and their geographical proximity to the conflict, there is also the possibility of including them in a consensus on the access issue.

With much of the information of states like Russia and Turkey taken only from meeting summaries, it is difficult to know the full extent of their policies, but the areas where they have shown support in the past prove that the call for humanitarian access is not completely western-centric. This centrism, would be the only problem with any new humanitarian initiative as both Iran and Turkey, Syria’s regional neighbours, have stated their opposition to international intervention, and emphasized that the Syrians need to resolve the conflict internally. Therefore if only western states are pressuring for humanitarian access, as has been the case up till now, this is less likely to achieve a positive outcome, compared to a variety of regional and international actors advocating together.

**Country by Country Focus**

**United States**

The US’s focus of interest is closely aligned with the cyclical nature of the HRC resolutions detailed in the previous section, possibly indicating the strong influence that the US holds over the HRC negotiations.

During the 18th and 19th sessions the US focused on the violation of children’s rights in the conflict, which they did not return to until the 25th session. This closely follows the first phase of the cyclical HRC resolutions which likewise prioritized children’s rights over any other issue.
Similarly, the US has latterly exhibited strong interest in the issue of prisoners and civilians held in detention centres. From the 24th to 27th session the US consistently adopted a strong position on this issue making it the core of their statements to the HRC. This latter attention on prisoners is again in accordance with the final phase of the HRC’s cycle which was centred on the same issue.

The US, out of all the six states analyzed, has shown the most attention to the issue of sexual violence. In seven out of eleven HRC sessions the US has mentioned sexual violence and advocated for the HRC to condemn this gross violation. Accordingly, the US would be both a useful and influential state to approach if WILPF decided to use the issue of sexual violence as an issue upon which to build consensus around.

**European Union**

The issue that the EU has most consistently advocated for humanitarian access; it has made humanitarian access the focus of its HRC statements in seven out of the eleven sessions. In contrast to the US, the EU has not concentrated as much on sexual violence and children’s detention mentioning it in only three and two sessions respectively.

As mentioned previously, the EU has latterly shown a strong interest in the role of prisoners in the Syrian conflict. Therefore the EU would perhaps be a good country for WILPF to approach if it was basing its advocacy campaign around prisoners and detainees.

**Saudi Arabia**

Due to the lack of available statements the analysis of Saudi Arabia is solely based on the meeting summaries of the HRC. During almost of all the sessions it didn’t comment, draw attention to or advocate for any of the issues under discussion: sexual violence, children’s detention, prisoners and humanitarian access. The sole exception is during the 19th HRC session where Saudi Arabia took a strong stand against sexual violence in the conflict.
Rather than these issues, Saudi Arabia’s statements tend towards general condemnation of human rights abuses committed in the conflict without specifying any particular issue. The only issue counter to this trend was chemical-weapons which was named and condemned by Saudi Arabia across a number of sessions.

Based on this analysis, Saudi Arabia is unlikely to be a useful state for WILPF to approach if they were going to base an advocacy campaign around one of these issues.

**Iran**

Similarly to Saudi Arabia, due to the lack of availability in full statements, the analysis of Iran is solely based on meeting summaries of the HRC. Whenever Iran was present it did make some comment about the situation in Syria, though rarely about the specific issues that we have been analysing.

The only time Iran does discuss one of our major issues, humanitarian access, is during the HRC’s *Urgent Debate on Human Rights and the Humanitarian Situation in Syria*, from the 28th February to the 1st March 2012. During this Iran criticised the HRC debate for undermining humanitarian efforts, and advised that all concerned should be seeking the permission of Syria to conduct such humanitarian activities\(^\text{28}\).

The bulk of Iran’s comments instead focus on the lack of criticism in the HRC of the “terrorist threat” in Syria, and the imposition of intervention as a tool of “The West” and not necessarily in the interests of the Syrian people. Consequently, Iran cannot be viewed as an active advocate of any of the discourses we followed and is not a useful partner for WILPF. Their lack of mentioning key issues such as children’s detention, sexual violence, and prisoners can be seen as a reflection on and validation of their own human rights record in the HRC, as well as their support for the incumbent regime.

\(^{28}\) Taken from meeting minutes available here: http://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=11885&LangID=E
**Russian Federation**

As with Iran, the Russian Federation also has no published transcripts of their full statements therefore this analysis is entirely based on the meeting minutes’ summaries of the HRC. Russia, as a P5 member, has been present at most of the HRC meetings regarding Syria, and has supported the incumbent regime of President Assad openly at each of these meetings.

With specific regard to the issues under analysis, Russia rarely touches upon these topics in comparison to other states. They twice mention humanitarian access: firstly, in the preliminary months of the conflict where they advocate for the promotion of humanitarian access into Syria, taken as an example of the Assad regime’s commitments to reform. However, they also stress that the situation does not require international intervention. At the most recent *Interactive Dialogue on Syria*, held by the HRC in September 2014, Russia congratulated the international community and the Assad regime for improvements to humanitarian access.

Russia continues their support for the regime in other areas of the discourse as well; mentioning women and girls once in the context of detention by the opposition and condemns sexual violence committed by opposition groups in Syria. They are proving their awareness of the human rights situation in Syria, but are being careful not to implicate or criticise the incumbent regime in their discourse. Russia has clearly established their position on the Syrian conflict and will only ever advocate for the incumbent regime, avoiding many of the key issues we are analysing. As Russia has been most consistent in its stance on Humanitarian Access, this would be recommended as the optimal route for WILPF by which they could gain some assistance.

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Turkey

Like some of the previous states, Turkey has no full statements available and therefore this analysis is based solely on the meeting summaries of the HRC. Turkey has been an advocate of the “Syrian people” from early on in the conflict\(^{31}\) however, they have rarely mentioned any of the specific issues under analysis.

As with Iran and Russia, Turkey has been a proponent of greater humanitarian access, mentioning it twice throughout the course of HRC meetings over the past three years. They have been a strong endorser of the liberalisation and democratisation of the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as being critical of the current leadership; in early statements stating they are not “coming to grips with reality”\(^{32}\), and latterly by openly opposing the regime for failing its people\(^{33}\).

Therefore, while Turkey has not touched upon many of the specific issues we were analysing, they have shown clear support for the Syrian people’s efforts, as well as strong criticism of the Syrian regime. Turkey could thus be a useful partner for WILPF in general advocacy initiatives that support the efforts of the Syrian people, as well as being persuaded to discuss more in depth the issues of sexual violence and children’s detention.

Issues Amongst Other Countries

This section of the report details which countries have advocated for children’s rights, women’s rights and highlighted the role of sexual violence in conflict, based on an analysis of the HRC’s meeting summaries. These three issues were selected as they are the most prominent themes which emerged from the previous two sections of the report. Their

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Matthew Bamber        Louise Hemfrey
integration into future HRC resolutions is essential to the process of establishing a more gender-integrated approach to the HRC.

The following table details which countries have supportively discussed sexual violence, women’s rights and children’s rights across the 11 sessions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HRC Session</th>
<th>Sexual Violence</th>
<th>Women’s Rights</th>
<th>Children’s Rights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17th SS (22/08/11)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Malaysia, Qatar</td>
<td>Australia, Belgium, Czech Republic, Malaysia, Maldives, Norway, Portugal, Qatar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18th RS (09/2011)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Germany, Indonesia</td>
<td>Botswana, Croatia, Israel, Germany, Indonesia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18th SS (02/12/2011)</td>
<td>Austria, Chile, Hungary, Mexico, Romania</td>
<td>Canada, France</td>
<td>Belgium, Chile, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Libya, Nigeria, Qatar, Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th RS (02/2012)</td>
<td>Chile, Qatar</td>
<td>Belgium, Libya, Qatar,</td>
<td>Belgium, Chile, Hungary, Qatar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th RS (06/2012)</td>
<td>Croatia, Netherlands, Qatar</td>
<td>Ecuador, Netherlands, Romania, Thailand, Venezuela,</td>
<td>Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Ecuador, EU, Netherlands, Nordic Countries, Spain, Thailand, Venezuela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21st RS (09/2012)</td>
<td>Austria, Botswana, Croatia, Morocco, Nordic Countries</td>
<td>Austria, Botswana, Croatia, EU, Morocco, Nordic Countries</td>
<td>Austria, Botswana, Canada, Morocco, Tunisia, UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22nd RS (02/2013)</td>
<td>Australia, Canada, Chile, Germany, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UK, USA</td>
<td>Australia, Brazil, Chile, Germany, Romania, Thailand, UK</td>
<td>Brazil, Canada, Germany, Netherlands, Paraguay, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Thailand, UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23rd RS (06/2013)</td>
<td>Belgium, France, Ecuador, Nordic Countries</td>
<td>Bahrain, Belgium, Botswana, US</td>
<td>Belgium, Morocco,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24th RS (09/2013)</td>
<td>Australia, Croatia, Latvia, Maldives, Norway</td>
<td>Croatia, Libya</td>
<td>Denmark, Norway, Portugal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25th RS (03/2014)</td>
<td>Australia, EU, Maldives, Netherlands, Poland, UK</td>
<td>EU, Nordic Countries, UK</td>
<td>Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26th RS (06/2014)</td>
<td>Canada, Chile, UK</td>
<td>Botswana, Chile, Poland</td>
<td>Libya, Mexico, Poland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27th RS (09/2014)</td>
<td>Botswana, Canada, Chile, Germany, Iceland, Korea,</td>
<td>Belgium, Botswana, Chile, Czech Republic, Netherland, Portugal</td>
<td>Belgium, Botswana, Canada, Chile, Czech Republic, Estonia, Korea, Switzerland, Thailand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above table it is clear that children’s rights is an issue that has been constantly adopted by a large number of states throughout the HRC sessions. Countries that have been consistently advocating for children’s rights include Belgium, Canada, Chile and the Nordic Countries that have all mentioned this issue at least five times during the HRC sessions.
Accordingly, if WILPF wanted to try and build consensus around this issue then these states would perhaps be better to approach as they have exhibited sustained interest in it previously.

Echoing the findings in the previous section of our analysis on the HRC, there has been a large spike in interest in the role of children in the conflict during the most recent HRC session (the 27th). Ten countries advocated for children’s rights during this section, which is almost the total amount of countries that had advocated for children’s rights during the previous four HRC sessions. Therefore, this pattern supports our own conclusion that children’s detention is currently the focus of the HRC and its member states, subsequently offering a potential issue for which WILPF could attempt to advocate state consensus around it.

In comparison, the issue of women’s rights has not received as much attention by states in the HRC, with only Botswana, Chile and the Netherlands having the most consistent support for women’s rights. The peak interest in women’s rights occurred between the 20th-22nd HRC sessions, which coincide with the spike in records on women in the COI reports and the main period of focus on women in the HRC resolutions (as shown in the previous sections).

Finally, sexual violence has been shown to receive more attention in the latter half of the HRC sessions compared to the first. The countries that have most consistently drawn attention to the scale of sexual violence occurring in the conflict are Canada, Chile, the Netherlands and the Nordic Countries. The escalating interest in this sexual violence indicates that this could be an issue to be drawn into focus in future HRC sessions.

**Conclusion**

As can been seen from the above analysis only humanitarian access has been found to have a sustained support. While the US and the EU appear to be reaching a consensus on the importance of this issue, other key states we analysed have not followed suit. However, all the states analysed, apart from Saudi Arabia, did mention a need for Humanitarian Access at some point throughout the HRC meetings of the past years of the conflict.
Otherwise, the key issues WILPF focus on, of children’s detention, prisoners and sexual violence, do not hold great consensus amongst the six states analysed. However, when we broadened our net of analysis to include other states present at HRC meetings, and searched under specific themes such as sexual violence, women’s rights and children’s rights, we did find a consistent pattern. The tendencies validated parts 1 and 2 areas of consensus on children’s rights, and the lack of mention of women outside of the area of sexual violence.

While the majority of the states under examination did not strongly advocate for the issues under investigation, they do make clear the purpose of their statements, and where their support lies at any particular time. This could be useful to WILPF when they are looking to expand their advocacy beyond states with clear ties to the discourse; for example, Turkey has projected itself as an advocate of the Syrian people, which could prove useful for WILPF’s broader based advocacy for Syrian civil society in the future.
Conclusions

The following section outlines our conclusions based on our analysis of the COI report, HRC resolutions and member states’ statements in the previous sections.

Similarities Between the COI Reports and HRC Resolutions

Exclusive Association of Women as Agentless Victims of Sexual Violence
Across both the COI reports and HRC resolutions women are treated as agentless victims, whose primary portrayal is as victims of sexual violence in the conflict. In both the COI and HRC the varied function and activities that women have performed in the war are either not considered or receive seldom and neglected attention. This exclusive association of agentless women with sexual violence has formed a compelling narrative which has most likely impacted the lack of representation afforded to women at the various peacebuilding and reconstruction initiatives launched since the outbreak of the conflict.

Harmony Between the COI and the HRC Over Women and Children in the Early Stages
During the early stages of the Syrian conflict at the HRC, between September 2011 and February 2013, there is accord between the focus on the COI reports and the HRC resolutions. Both entities have a strong focus on children followed by a shift in focus to women in the conflict.

As the COI reports are published just before the beginning of the HRC sessions, and indeed are the subject of HRC interactive dialogues at numerous sessions, this suggests that the COI reports held a strong influence over the HRC resolutions in the early stages. Accordingly, the HRC’s shift in focus from children to women can be seen as a concurrent reaction to the COI’s shift in attention. As outlined below however, the influence of the COI over the HRC appears to have waned from the beginning of 2013.
**Recent Focus on ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra and Other Rebel Factions**

From February 2014 (25th HRC regular session) both the COI reports and HRC resolutions have devoted considerable attention to cataloging and condemning the human rights abuses committed by a number of rebel factions with particular focus on the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Jabhat al-Nusra.

Whilst this attention is a reflection of the increasing prominence of these groups in the conflict, they threaten to deflect attention away from the issues under consideration in this report. In the resolutions and reports published since the first inclusion of these groups, there has been a noticeable decrease in the scrutiny of both women and children’s role in the conflict.

**Generalisation of Civilians**

In the COI’s reporting on civilians, but also to a lesser extent in the HRC’s handling as well, there is frequent generalisation of the term, as if all civilians belong to one large homogenous group of vulnerable and agentless subjects to the conflict. This attitude from the COI is failing to take proper account of the diversity of ways in which the Syrian population is being affected by the conflict depending on gender, geographical location, and the kinds of abuses to human rights being perpetrated.

This has the potential to influence how issues such as humanitarian access are discussed at the HRC whilst in the long-term, a lack of proper recording of the variety abuses that civilians have endured could impact upon the viability of any peace process.

**Differences Between the COI Reports and the HRC Resolutions**

**HRC’s Recent Focus on Chemical Weapons, Refugees and Torture**

Amongst the most noticeable differences between the two bodies is the divergence in focus from February 2013. Whilst the HRC has focussed on chemical weapons, refugees and torture
over a number of cycles, the COI has resolutely failed to address any of these issues within their reports.

Chemical weapons are only mentioned twice throughout the COI’s eight reports, in contrast it was the centre of the HRC resolutions between October 2013 and July 2014. This difference can be partly explained through the overtly political nature of the HRC against the mandate of the COI. The issue of chemical weapons became a hot political issue reflected in the ‘red line’ approach by the US and the unanimous UN Security Resolution 2118 on the elimination of Syria’s chemical weapons. It is therefore unsurprising that the political HRC resolutions reflect the issues that are currently in vogue amongst states.

The difference between the focus on refugees is explained through the methodology of the COI. The COI gathers its evidence from refugees outside of Syria and specifically focuses on documenting human rights abuses at a personal level. In contrast the HRC has to consider the broader picture of conflict and draws attention to the aid and assistance required by member states hosting the refugee population.

Finally, although torture has received a moderate amount of attention in the latest COI report it is not comparable to the overwhelming focus on torture in the latest HRC resolution. There is no obvious explanation for this divergence beyond the view that member states might consider torture and detention as the best possible issue on which to gain the greatest consensus.

**Men and Sexual Violence in the COI Reports**

The COI reports are careful to differentiate between sexual violence perpetrated against men and sexual violence perpetrated against women. While the majority of sexual violence instances recorded are those against women, there are a significant number of attacks on men being mentioned. This recognition of sexual violence as not an exclusively women's issue (although women are almost exclusively associated with it) is accounting for the different...
ways that men are being affected by the conflict outside of their role as combatants, which is one step by the COI towards gender-mainstreaming in their reporting.

However, the HRC continually fails to appreciate gender diversity in key issues like sexual violence, with resolutions almost exclusively referring to women in this context, with the exception of the early HRC sessions 18 and 19, which had a particular focus on sexual violence. Similarly other areas discussed, such as refugees and IDPs, also fail to recognise the presence of men among them. The HRC, by ignoring the full extent of the issue of sexual violence in the population, amongst both men and women, is preventing itself from creating the most effective resolutions to deal with the problem, which have to take account of the similarities, as well as the differences, of men’s and women’s experiences.

**Differences Between Member States’ Discourse and the HRC Resolutions**

There is a clear difference between the cyclical focus of the HRC resolutions and the statements of the six member states under analysis. Almost all of the member states failed to address any of the issues which the eventual HRC resolutions focussed on; the exception being the US’s recent focus on prisoners and children’s detention which mirrors the HRC.

This suggests that the states are very reticent about advocating for these issues in their public statements. The US, European Union and Saudi Arabia have consistently supported the resolutions without advocating for the issues which constitute the resolutions they are supporting. Therefore this implies that these states prefer campaigning for these issues in backroom negotiations, away from the public spotlight.

Interestingly humanitarian access, which is the most politically neutral issue analysed, receives the most consistent support. This confirms the above assumption that many member states are afraid to publicly advocate for the more contentious issues under analysis.
What is not being mentioned by the COI and HRC

As the ultimate outcome of this report was to promote a gender-integrated approach in the COI and HRC we have attempted to identify through our analysis where such an approach is lacking. Consequently, we believe that an alternative discourse should take into account the negative characteristics of the current framework while seeking ways to incorporate a more gender-integrated approach.

The current reports do not include any recognition of the diverse roles that men and women play outside of being victims and agentless subjects to the developments in the conflict. A gender-integrated approach would record the discourse on women throughout the reports, incorporating their presence and contributions to the conflict: for example, as leaders in their communities, as doctors in hospitals, as human rights monitors and as carers for the homeless or the orphaned. The current reports and resolutions, with their tendency to stereotype women as only present in the conflict when sexual-violence is occurring, do not provide for this diversity of ability, adding to what we have termed as the denying of agency to these women. This denying of agency is also attributed to the discourse on civilians, limiting the roles that men, other than as combatants, are being recorded in. This denying of women’s and men’s agency as independent actors means that the COI and HRC are de facto preventing them from being accepted as constructive contributors in any future conflict resolution process.

In order to fulfil this recognition, the easiest way forward for the COI would be to include women as their own subject category in the reports that would provide key accounts of the extent of their part in the conflict. This would give the HRC new information they could utilise in order to move beyond resolutions which solely treat women as victims of sexual violence. A gender-integrated approach most of all should look beyond the sexualisation of women in the reporting, as this only serves to further contribute to frameworks of gender oppression that are in existence in the conflict. These gross violations do need to be recognised, as the recordings on the frequency of sexual violence prove, however, without a separate subject category for women, there will be a continued denying of agency that the COI and HRC are actively contributing to.
In the current reports and resolutions there is clear coverage of the human rights abuses being perpetrated against civilians, particularly torture, however, the COI is careful to never explicitly describe these actions as human rights issues. A gender-integrated approach has to identify these abuses for what they are if recording and analysis is to move beyond the generalisation of the civilian community experience, and appreciate the long-term effects at the individual level that these abuses entail. Specifically, when addressing torture and sexual violence, recording does not go beyond the physical act however, torture is as much an attack on an individual’s identity and dignity as a physical infringement. Therefore, a gender-integrated approach would not only record the person’s torture itself, but the subsequent psychological and social effects of the actions, and the treatment of them by their communities.

At the broader level, ‘civilians’ are not a homogenous group, therefore the impacts and reactions both at an individual and community-based level, to the variety of attacks and human rights abuses committed against them will be different. A gender-integrated approach would record such attacks in relation to an individual community, acknowledging the number of men and women present, the geographical positioning, the economic and infrastructural impact, and the resultant action taken by those in the community after the attack. Recognition of the long-term effects of human rights abuses provides a crucial basis for the inclusion of all those affected in future conflict resolution, and how they process the resultant peace. The current methods of recording by the COI and HRC are hindering the prospects for an inclusive peace by not properly recognizing the diverse effects from the conflict.
A Gendered Discourse Analysis

Recommendations

Based on the above analysis of the COI reports, the HRC resolutions and key state’s HRC meeting statements, this report proposes the following recommendations to the COI and the HRC:

- With reference to the COI reports: The COI should conduct a more thorough assessment and review of gender in their reporting, taking into account the gender of “civilians” in their reporting and references to women outside of a purely sexual-violence context.

- With reference to the COI reports: 1) The COI should make all efforts to utilise partners and networks recommended to them by WILPF in order to develop a more gender-integrated approach to their reporting. 2) The COI should communicate more directly with WILPF and their partner organisations about the scope and framework of said gender-integrated approach.

- With reference to the COI reports and the HRC resolutions: 1) The COI should consider a more holistic method of addressing gendered torture tactics and sexual violence in the Syrian conflict that appreciates both men’s and women’s experiences of sexual violence as different but equal in its psychological and emotional impact. 2) The HRC should acknowledge gendered torture tactics and sexual violence as an issue that affects both men and women with equal severity in the conflict.

- With reference to the COI reports: The COI should identify the power dynamics present between militant groups in the conflict, which directly impact upon the gendered treatment of men and women, to provide a mediator with points of reference that can be developed for future peace-processes.

- With reference to the HRC resolutions: The HRC should improve the consistency of their approach and terminology when discussing key issues across a number of resolutions. They should also not fall into the trap of ‘presentism’ whereby previous issues are removed from the agenda due to the focus on current events in Syria.

- With reference to the COI reports: The COI should consider a reformatting of their documents to allow a more comprehensive focus on women. Currently women are not treated as a separate category of analysis, being only referred to under the umbrella term ‘civilian’. The COI reports should therefore adopt the same method which currently when analysing ‘children’ in the conflict, recognising that women are independent agents and clearly distinguish their presence in all section of the reports.

Recommendations for WILPF:
- WILPF should take note of the cyclical nature of the HRC’s agenda and plan its advocacy campaign accordingly.

- With reference to the HRC resolutions: Children’s detention is the issue that has remained most consistently part of the HRC’s focus and is also currently the main
focus of the last HRC resolution, therefore WILPF should concentrate its advocacy efforts on achieving member state consensus around this key issue.

- The most recent trend of both the HRC resolutions and COI reports is to breakdown violations and abuses into sub-sections according to which group perpetrated the crime (e.g. ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra). This threatens to deflect attention away from gender issues and move the current focus away from children’s detention, therefore WILPF should remain aware that they might have to advocate strongly in order to keep these issues on the agenda.

- As the only consistent discourse trend between states in the HRC was their mentioning of Humanitarian Access, we recommend that WILPF focus on this element in their advocacy directed towards key states.

- With reference to smaller states, as discussed in Part 3 of this report, the sustained focus on children’s rights during HRC meetings provides a window for WILPF to unite these states behind children’s rights advocacy to affect future resolutions in the HRC.
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