**Tamya Rocha Rebelo[1]**

[1]Escola Superior de Propaganda e
Marketing - International Relations, São
Paulo, Brazil
(tamya.coutinho@espm.br)

iD ORCID ID:
orcid.org/0000-0001-8260-2037

Article

# Paving the way to the Security Council: NGOs' activism on women's and children's issues

## Abstract

The relationship between the United Nations Security Council and Non-Governmental Organizations has scarcely been considered in scholarship on international security. This lack of academic interest contrasts with accounts on the engagement of NGOs in the production and advancement of UNSC discussions on women and children. By drawing on international relations and social movements' theoretical contributions, the paper traces NGOs' strategies to participate in UNSC thematic debates. By looking at the actions of the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict and the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace, and Security, the analysis finds that NGOs have built coalitions among themselves and maintained networks with friendly countries and UN specialized agencies to capitalize on favorable political and institutional opportunities and expand the access to the security sector.

**Keywords**: Advocacy networks; Coalitions; Non-Governmental Organizations; Security Council.

## Introduction

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have participated in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) debates for the past decade. While NGOs continue not to have an official role in the UNSC's procedures, member states have increasingly invited them to provide expertise and testimony, mainly through informal settings, such as the Arria Formula meetings and formal Open Debates. So, what are the driving forces behind the growing attendance of NGOs in UNSC's debates? Under which conditions do NGOs manage to engage with security matters?

This paper traces the strategies of two coalitions of NGOs, to date the only ones created to approach the UNSC on children's and women's issues. By looking at the actions of the Watchlist on

Rev. Bras. Polít. Int., 65(1): e005, 2022

Rebelo ▶

Children and Armed Conflict (Watchlist) and the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace, and Security (NGOWG on WPS), the paper demonstrates how NGOs have adapted their strategies according to the environment they wanted to approach. They sought to forge coalitions and build advocacy networks with like-minded countries and United Nations (UN) specialized agencies to deal with the institutional and ideational barriers at the security debates. Such a combination of initiatives was decisive to NGOs' access and engagement in security debates.

International Relations scholars have already identified the significance of coalitions (Joachim and Locher 2008; Yanacopulos 2015; Wong 2012) and advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Khagram et al. 2002; Price 1998; Risse et al. 1999) in expanding NGOs' access in international institutions. Nevertheless, how these concepts apply regarding the interaction between NGOs and the UNSC has not received much scholarly attention. The lack of official status for NGOs in the UNSC, as well as a broad perception that non-state actors do not belong in matters of international security, turns the topic particularly challenging and explains, in part, the exceptions in the literature (Binder 2008; Graubart 2008; Paul 2004; True-Frost 2007).

This article adds to the existing knowledge by providing an empirical contribution to the role of activists in the security policy framework. Overall, it confirms previous analyses highlighting that NGOs impact security negotiations, albeit through informal rather than official and formal channels (Wisotzki 2008; Mayer 2008). Specifically, it reveals that NGOs create coalitions and try to impact security decisions by directly providing expertise to governments and capitalizing on allies to channel the information to Council members. By illuminating these efforts, the research uncovers the interplay of different actors positioned in and outside the institutional structure, and points out that activists' chosen strategies are crucial in spurring policy changes in a restricted environment such as the UNSC.

The study is based on twenty-five interviews conducted in English with activists, policymakers and scholars involved with the women's and children's debates within the UNSC. Conversations lasted around an hour each and were conducted in New York, Boston, and via email between August 2015 and June 2016. The first group of interviewees was selected based on scholarly work that accounts for initiatives of the Watchlist and the NGOWG on WPS. These interviewees named other civil society representatives, UN staff, and state bureaucrats to contribute to this study. Individuals were asked questions about their roles and the strategic partnerships created to sustain the thematic debates. The interviews were then coded with NVivo, according to the themes that appeared in each of them.

Additionally, the content of Security Council Resolutions was compared with materials produced by the two coalitions of NGOs. The selection of the resolutions followed indications from the interviewees. After being requested to reflect on whether NGOs exert impact on the work of the Security Council, several individuals used examples of language/themes defended by NGOs that were incorporated into the Council resolutions.

The paper is organized as follows. The first section establishes the conceptual and theoretical frameworks for evaluating NGO's strategies at the UNSC. It then touches on the institutional

Rev. Bras. Polít. Int., 65(1): e005, 2022

Rebelo ▶

and political dynamics to identify the enabling factors to the growing participation of activists in the UNSC. Next, it reveals the activities carried out by the Watchlist and the NGOWG on WPS. Finally, it concludes by reflecting upon NGO's actions concerning children's and women's issues at the UNSC.

## Theoretical reflections on coalitions of NGOs and advocacy networks

Research on the strategies NGOs employ on "institutionalised and regulated forms of inter-organisational cooperation, most notably the official participation of NGOs in IGO meetings" (Steffek 2013, 994) has advanced considerably over the past years. The literature has mapped out their strategies (Joachim and Locher 2008), their expertise (Steffek 2013), and networking activities (Keck and Sikkink 1998). While highlighting relationships constrained in a contract or consultative status (Vabulas 2013, 191), these works have downplayed a puzzling question: are NGOs' informal relations with security institutions relevant for explaining policy outcomes?

This question unfolds into more specific considerations on whether and how NGOs can have meaningful participation through non-official channels. According to the power-based assumption, the wishes of influential state parties, who promote particular interests through non-state actors, explain the access offered to NGOs in international organizations (Steffek 2013). Therefore, NGOs, acting purely as states' vehicles, do not have autonomy, and consequently, their off-stage work would not significantly impact the policy processes. Evidence used in this study contest this view, mainly because NGOs explore ways to engage in the UNSC in the face of the explicit resistance of powerful actors such as Russia and China. Other countries, such as the United States, France, and the United Kingdom, do not need NGOs to advance their specific political agendas. In overemphasizing that NGOs act as a conduit for the state's interests, scholars disregard that these are self-interested actors who possess priorities and specific agendas.

Regarding the resource exchange perspective, partnering between NGOs and international institutions arises when both actors perceive the benefits they can take from cooperation as higher than their costs. It follows that NGOs would consider approaching a particular institution if it offers them something valuable, which would justify the investment of time and resources. Mayer (2008, 119) argues that a "rationalist explanation operating in terms of the functions and resources of the organizations involved provides a plausible 'first cut'" in explaining NGOs' engagement with the security sector. The paper subscribes to this argument, noting that NGOs perceived opportunities for access when the UNSC undertook changes in its repertoire and practice in the post-Cold War period. Member states needed more resources, including the expertise of NGOs, to deal with new demands in the international arena. For the NGOs, targeting the UNSC meant gaining access to the main UN body, putting human rights norms and ideas into the international security agenda, and influencing the policy processes (Wisotzki 2008, 75).

Rev. Bras. Polít. Int., 65(1): e005, 2022

Rebelo ▶

Previous studies have also noted that NGOs calculate which tactics are better suited to impact states' deliberations (Joachim and Locher 2008). Notably, the literature has stated that coalitions of NGOs and advocacy networks are critical in channeling NGOs' demands to policymakers. Coalitions, as Tallberg et al. (2018, 219) argue, "permit NGOs to join forces with like-minded groups, build collective strength, and wield more power together than any single actor could have done on its own." Joachim (2007) suggests that the individuals or groups, who do not necessarily have the material assets to push for change, can join efforts with other actors to explore a new set of resources. Besides facilitating the exchange of human and material resources, coalitions can also reduce potential frictions with unfriendly states. For example, countries unwilling to communicate and collaborate with one specific NGO can accept dialogue with a larger unified entity. The alignment of policies and practices, in this sense, helps them convey similar ideas, recruit new members, start campaigns, disseminate technical information, and foster new norms or reframe old ones (Risse et al. 1999).

In addition to forming coalitions, several scholarly works have analyzed the impetus of NGOs to sustain advocacy networks as a way to expand their institutional access (Bob 2005; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Price 2003). Here, advocacy networks refer to "actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and a dense exchange of information and services" (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 2). An essential dimension of advocacy networks is that actors (NGOs, states, epistemic communities, or individuals) are typically positioned in and out of the targeted institution. Although the depth of involvement of each actor within the network may vary, they are connected by their belief in the norm's value and are interested in dealing with the costs for supporting it.

Agents located in different institutional settings can push for and promote a set of similar goals, thus combining their power and reach to create new opportunities for action. Experts working at specialized agencies possess more procedural expertise about UN activities than NGOs (Steffek 2013). Working inside the UN system, they are endowed with specific know-how, functioning as an essential source of information concerning the rules and procedures of the institutions NGOs wish to approach. Alignment with like-minded policymakers can also be crucial for NGOs. Governmental delegations might support and replicate norms and ideas proposed by activists through statements and resolutions. Furthermore, in situations where there is no consensus on the topic under debate, a common situation at the UNSC, friendly delegations can support NGOs by fighting against opposition from other states and working actively to gain support from other potential allies (Cooper et al. 2002).

Joachim and Locher (2008, 7) pointed out that these strategic choices connect with the particularities of the institutional context NGOs want to approach. The paper corroborates this opinion and relies on the political opportunity structure literature to uncover constraints and incentives affecting activists' strategies. By political opportunity, Tarrow (1998, 85) defines "consistent – but not necessarily formal or permanent – dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action." Access, political alignments,

Rev. Bras. Polít. Int., 65(1): e005, 2022

Rebelo ▶

and discursive openings can be conceived as features of the political opportunity structure, as pointed in Wisotski's (2009) study. She develops an account of how NGOs aiming to influence negotiations on disarmament and arms control have adjusted their strategies to overcome the lack of authorized access and states' reluctance. NGOs, as argued, capitalized on discursive opportunities and networked allies to reach governmental representatives in corridors, managing to provide expertise in essential phases of the policy processes.

Based on these works, the paper argues that the Watchlist and the NGOWG on WPS have followed a similar pattern of action, relying on alliance building and networking to mobilize windows of opportunities and facilitate understandings with member states.

## Points of access at the UNSC

The UNSC is one of six principal organs created by the United Nations Charter (1945), with the main thrust to maintain international peace and security. It comprises fifteen members, out of which five are permanent, and the General Assembly elects ten. In addition to its small membership, there are specific and unique dynamics driving decisions within this body. The five permanent members (China, France, Russia, Great Britain, and the United States) can veto any decision. The ten non-permanent members are elected for a two-year term, according to regional blocs configurations.

Considering these political particularities and the high perception among policymakers that the UNSC is a state domain, NGOs have been purposefully set aside this environment. According to Paul (2004), in many instances, "NGOs ran into frustrating and unshakeable opposition from veto-bearing permanent members, whose national interests ran counter to NGO priorities." This observation is corroborated by Weschler (2004) as she notes that "the Council was beyond the reach of NGOs and initial attempts at openness by some diplomats were promptly undermined." A change in this relationship started around the 1990s when rising attention to human rights issues in parallel to the inclusion of new issues on the security agenda pushed for new modes of interaction between NGOs and the UNSC.

The participation of NGOs in security meetings is visible in informal (Arria Formula) and formal settings (Open Debates). Arria Formula meetings are off the record and do not constitute a formal activity of the Council. They are organized upon member states' request, which determines the level of NGOs' engagement. Most interestingly, since the 1990s, NGOs have also started to be invited to attend formal meetings on the Security Council. Open Debates are an inclusive format, with participation open to all UN member states upon their request. These meetings are recorded, published in the official languages, and covered by the UN and public media.

The invitation for NGOs to attend these meetings occurred in tandem with a growing emphasis on the human security approach throughout the UN system. This concept, used to refer to people's security, went beyond the physical safety or territorial boundaries to include

Rev. Bras. Polít. Int., 65(1): e005, 2022

Rebelo ▶

development, human rights, and socioeconomic issues as root causes of conflicts (MacFarlane and Khong 2006). For a long time, Council members discussed essentially a militarized agenda, comprised of topics such as weapons and international conflicts. However, a shift in its content has been observed with the adoption of resolutions such as women's issues, children's issues, civilians, HIV, and food aid. In this moment of "humanization" of the UNSC (Cohn 2004, 136), "nobody any longer seriously questions the relevance of human rights to the Council's work and the need for human rights information and analysis at every stage of Council action" (Weschler 2004, 55).

The commitment of the UNSC to such issues led to activities of verification and monitoring of human rights in emergency and conflict situations. Within this context, NGOs started to be recognized as partners and contracted by states to deliver social services, particularly in scenarios of peacekeeping and humanitarian interventions (Gordenker and Weiss 1995). Paul (2004, 375) states that "Council-built peace depended on economic and social development, respect for human rights, disarmament, and other areas of NGO expertise." Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Save the Children, CARE International, and Oxfam International, for example, contributed to Council meetings on the premise that they had already been involved in armed conflict situations and, therefore, better understood the opportunities and the challenges for achieving success on the ground.

Besides, the 1990s were a moment in which Council members struggled to handle several crises worldwide. Non-permanent members, mainly, could not keep up with the exponential increase in UNSC attributions and responsibilities. Hill (2002, 3) finds that NGOs were invited to participate in some meetings, usually when the delegations needed to obtain more precise information about what was happening in the field. For Paul (2004, 376), non-permanent members started to "sought information, expertise and policy ideas from NGOs that could help them fulfill their responsibilities in the Council."

These developments illustrate not only political and institutional openings conducive to NGOs' engagement with the security sector but also institutional factors that influence their course of action. What strategies activists have come up with to harness these conditions and overcome institutional and ideational barriers is the object of the following sections.

## The Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict

In 1999, the Security Council approved Resolution 1261, inaugurating the thematic agenda of the Children and Armed Conflict (CAC). The primary concern of Resolution 1261 was to depict the devastating impact of armed conflict on children, recognizing that they were used as child soldiers[1] and left under-attended in refugee camps. True-Frost (2007, 169) mentions that

---

1  The Paris Principles on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (2007) defines "child associated with an armed force or armed group refers to any person below 18 years of age who is, or who has been, recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, spies or for sexual purposes."

Rev. Bras. Polít. Int., 65(1): e005, 2022

Rebelo ▶

in addition to state support, many factors played a role in the Security Council's decision to adopt such thematic debate, "including pressure from other International Organizations organs, knowledge developed by epistemic communities, and persuasion efforts by transnational advocacy groups." Holzscheiter (2005, 738) names the Watchlist as one of the main driving forces behind the development of the Security Council's CAC agenda.

The Watchlist was formed in 2001. A couple of years after Resolution 1261 was adopted, NGOs, which were already involved in projects related to the situation of children in armed conflicts, found an important entry point for advocacy. As one representative of the Watchlist stated:

> […] here is a new opportunity in the Security Council, the most powerful entity within the UN, now that they have picked up this agenda, we can play a real role in shaping the way it goes forward. (Interviewee 11 2016)

Many NGOs were large aid agencies, had well-established humanitarian programs and reliable data, but lacked a mechanism for reaching policymakers.

The Watchlist functioned as a platform for NGOs to approach the Security Council on children's issues. Initially, it was composed of six international NGOs: Human Rights Watch, Norwegian Refugee Council, Save the Children, Terre des Hommes, World Vision International, and War Child. Positioned in New York, these NGOs agreed early on to "influence the content of the UNSC resolutions, liaising with the special representative's office, and making recommendations for the Secretary-General's reports to the Security Council." (Interviewee 11 2016). Such activities reveal an impetus to impact statements and outcome documents in accordance with, rather than against, the Council's procedures.

Indeed, one of Watchlist's main advocacy initiatives was producing periodic reports, called Monthly Updates, with recommending actions to the fifteen Security Council representatives and CAC experts within the state's delegations. Reflecting on Watchlist's production and dissemination of information, one interviewee noted: "Watchlist pulled out together information from members of the coalition, from their programs, from their contacts and then tried to do a standardized template of all the different issues covered" (Interviewee 19 2016). This level of organization has proved crucial to deliver knowledge and reach the Council's members who wanted to know more about activities on children's issues. There was a common perception among the diplomats interviewed that identifying talking points in advance of the UNSC's debates and understanding the procedures and timing of the negotiations were essential aspects of the Watchlist's strategy for engaging in the CAC agenda (Interviewee 6 2016; Interviewee 12 2016; Interviewee 24 2016).

Watchlist's *modus operandi* corroborates Yanacopulos's (2005, 95) findings that coalitions create a more substantial commitment, originated from "sharing resources, decreasing costs through group specialization, and increasing legitimacy and power by speaking with one voice." One state representative noted that the format of coalitions helped a lot with the country delegations. "It

Rev. Bras. Polít. Int., 65(1): e005, 2022

Rebelo ▶

helps us when we need to reach a particular NGO on the ground […] Their Monthly Action plans are also very helpful and we work a lot on them. It simplifies, sets a global vision and summarizes the debates." (Interviewee 21 2016).

Furthermore, the alliance has sought to combine efforts with potential allies to dilute resistance from some member states. Russia and China mainly argued against opening too much space for non-state actors in the security sector. They avoided relying on NGO reports and often requested UN-verified information. "In the earlier years, we had limited access, and everything had to have a UN stamp. [Russia and China] would not accept looking at any data or anecdotal information unless it was coming through a UN channel" (Interviewee 19 2016). Within this context, the collaboration with insider allies provided activists with a channel to diffuse new norms and understandings along with UN technical guidelines. Particularly, the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) assisted in making information more acceptable and palatable to Security Council members by giving it UN credentials.

Partnering with friendly governmental delegations was also a relevant strategy to dilute resistance from some stakeholders and guarantee NGOs' engagement with children's debates. The Watchlist constantly tried to meet with three permanent country delegations (France, the United States, and the United Kingdom) and offer them information on the topics soon to be addressed in the UNSC. There was a high perception among policymakers that the Watchlist had attuned and weighted their actions and demands according to the UN political and institutional constraints, allowing them to approach country delegations in a less confrontational manner:

> [The Watchlist] would not be upset or trying to criticize us when we were unable to take something on board because of the political constraints in the UNSC [...] They have the diplomatic tools to play the Security Council's game. I would not call them activists in terms of aggressive activists. They are major actors and players at the UN (Interviewee 21 2016).

The interaction with the Security Council's elected members was another key initiative of the Watchlist's repertoire. The newcomers are often keen to participate in security debates but do not always have the necessary tools or desk information to promptly act (Paul 2004). As a result, they tend to be more prone to team up with NGOs in search of updates and recommendations on how to proceed regarding the CAC agenda. As noted by one respondent: "when new Council members come on board, Watchlist often try to meet with them to share reflections on the agenda […] and cultivate that relationship" (Interviewee 11 2016). "We relied a lot on information provided by Watchlist," said a representative from an elected Security Council delegation (Interviewee 17 2016). Such networked alliances are precisely what previous studies have shown as important for expanding institutional access in restricted environments.

Rev. Bras. Polít. Int., 65(1): e005, 2022

Rebelo ▶

Although NGOs have managed to build ties with Security Council members, their presence in the highly politicized environment of security affairs has constantly been constrained to adapt to the political interests in place. A central challenge mentioned during interviews was that states are very cautious when accepting the information produced by NGOs as part of their formal statements. The explanation for such behavior relies partly on their fear of being labeled as countries that non-state actors drive. In many cases, diplomats confessed that they took into consideration the information produced by the Watchlist but reframed it to fit with their political jargon, leaving much of the evidence on cooperation between these two actors to the backstage, as noted above:

> I go to see them and ask what can we do […], and then I try to work on the information they share, taking into consideration our political interests […] I try to reformulate in a political way […] we take it up or not depending on all the constraints that we have from the capital. I make a little bit of selection because I know exactly what will go through or not in our mission. This is how it works (Interviewee 21 2016).

These consultations reveal that interactions between NGOs and member states regularly occur, although rather informally, and that ideas defended by activists are considered despite the political constraints. An example to further this point is Watchlist's role in discussing the military use of schools by actors in conflicts, including peacekeepers. The coalition found it unacceptable and extensively shared information to convince countries on the relevance of this issue. Both activists and state representatives recognized that the Watchlist fueled UNSC's negotiations with their inputs. As recounted during interviews, one of Watchlist's contributions was to provide friendly country delegations with specific language on addressing the problem. In November of 2014, the UNSC published a resolution prohibiting parties "to attack, occupy or use for any purposes schools, school buildings or property" (United Nations Security Council 2014). In the Monthly Update of November 2014 ("Children and armed conflict monthly update. 2014), NGOs concurrently demanded: "that the military immediately vacate the 124 schools currently under occupation". Similar to those used in the Council's document, the ideas circulated in the Monthly Update support the argument that NGOs' actively worked with states to include the issue within the institutional radar.

In another example, NGOs shaped debates about implementing a monitoring and reporting mechanism (MRM), established by Security Council Resolution 1612 (2004). Besides issuing a comprehensive handbook on the topic (Violations Against Children in Armed Conflicts: An Action Plan for Monitoring, Reporting, and Response), NGOs intensively worked backstage. They delivered information from the ground to critical policymakers and maintained close contact with allies as they deliberated on the following steps to implement the UNSC directives. The MRM has been crucial for expanding NGOs' access to the CAC agenda. For a state representative, it has given these NGOs, who are "the experts on the subject," the possibility to regularly channel rough data about local situations, counterbalancing the technical information that UN departments

Rev. Bras. Polít. Int., 65(1): e005, 2022

Rebelo ▶

and agencies provide to Council members (Interviewee 17 2016). In light of access limitations, making strategic calculations was crucial for NGOs to discuss CAC documents and mechanisms.

## The NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security

By the time the first resolution on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) was passed, in October 2000, the Security Council had already adopted resolutions on children. The inclusion of human rights topics in the UNSC's agenda, therefore, was not a novelty. However, the surprising aspect was that all state delegations reached a consensus and unanimously decided to frame "women in situations of armed conflict" as a matter of international security. This decision, viewed as a success by many policymakers and activists, put women and gender issues into the Security Council's purview, a significant change since these topics were historically connected to the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council's activities.

There was momentum for discussing non-traditional security issues at the UNSC and Resolution 1325 came as a product of such opening. That was the perception shared by a member of the NGOWG on WPS:

> We saw the demise of the Cold War, we saw the rise of civil wars. We saw a moment at the international level at the Security Council where they were beginning to be interested in sort of non-traditional security issues (Interviewee 25 2016).

Building upon this opportunity, activists formed the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace, and Security (NGOWG on WPS), a network of NGOs committed to strengthening the link between gender and women's issues with the security repertoire.

Well-known and highly professionalized NGOs have acted as members of the coalition, such as Amnesty International, Consortium on Gender Security and Human Rights, Femmes Africa Solidarité, Global Justice Centre, Human Rights Watch, International Rescue Committee, Madre, Open Society Foundations, Oxfam International, Refugees International, the Institute for Inclusive Security, Women's Action for New Directions, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and the Women's Refugee Commission. Located in New York, with permanent staff and a chief coordinator, the NGOWG on WPS has performed tasks ranging from the briefing of delegations, report analysis, the organization of informal meetings and seminars with member states and local grassroots movements, to the delivery of letters and speeches at the Security Council's request.

One of the initial challenges to create such a coalition of NGOs and networks of NGOs, an interviewee noted, was to reach a consensus on the projects and ideas that they would advance as a group: "The working group had to go through an initial strategic planning process, where it was not just building a plan, but also building a way to work together" (Interviewee 18 2016). As part

Rev. Bras. Polít. Int., 65(1): e005, 2022

Rebelo ▶

of this process, NGOs had to bargain and compromise aspects of their specific agendas to settle their differences and come up with a unified voice. According to Klot (2015, 25), "the strategic focus on militarism was a major source of conflict among working group members." Controversial issues were left out, as Cohn (2004, 12) mentions, because "talking about the international arms trade, militarism or even worse, militarism's relation to masculinities (as WILPF wanted to do) was deemed by these groups to be in the 'too political' category".

Another critical step in preparing terrain to approach the Security Council was establishing an organizational structure. By arranging themselves into a coalition, the varied group of NGOs sought a way to connect their initiatives and discourse to shape the policies and practices of the UNSC. One respondent noted:

> I think that the professionalization of the coalition in terms of having a strategic plan and having sort of regular meetings and a work plan was really important in both creating momenta and keeping the momentum going over time. […] No matter who stepped into the pool, people were able to go in and build on that (Interviewee 18 2016).

This organization was important to facilitate the work of the NGOWG on WPS in channeling local movements' demands to the policymakers in New York. They regularly sought to bring "women who were doing the hard work […] in Liberia, in Sierra Leone, in Burundi, to the UN to talk with people who could actually make a difference in terms of advancing the kinds of things they were focusing on" (Interviewee 18 2016). Nyamugasira (1998, 301) has already noted that "the real strength of INGOs lies in their simultaneous access to grassroots experience in the south and to the decision-makers in the north." Similarly, Jordan and Tuijil's (2000, 2053) state that "NGO networks are often formed to allow for the expertise and experience of multiple NGOs to be heard in varying political arenas." In this case, activists have certainly gained leverage by acting as a bridge.

Another strategy often used by the coalition was to combine efforts with insider allies to advance the WPS agenda. Indeed, the adoption of Resolution 1325 is highly considered as a response to the emergence of an alliance – comprised of NGOs, UNSC member states, and UN specialized agencies – that combined efforts to link women's issues with international security (Gibbings 2004; Hudson 2010). As noted by one interviewee: "it could not have been done by civil society alone. It would not have done by governments or the UN alone. It was a very collaborative process" (Interviewee 6 2016). The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)[2], Namibia and Bangladesh are often cited as the prominent actors, alongside the NGOs, in the process leading up to the publication of Resolution 1325 (2000) (Cohn 2004, 2).

---

2   In 2010, the UN General Assembly created UN Women, a UN entity to address gender equality and the empowerment of women. The idea was to condense resources and mandates from different parts of the UN system that were already working on these issues, such as Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW); International Research and Training; Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW); Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI); United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

Rev. Bras. Polít. Int., 65(1): e005, 2022

Rebelo ▶

As previously noted in the case of Watchlist, UN staff can strengthen the impact of NGO strategies as their technical expertise allows them to have closer contact with the member states. In the case of the WPS agenda, UNIFEM initially assisted the NGOs in drafting Resolution 1325 (2000), and later it also supported the organization of the Arria Formula meeting on this topic. For Gibbings (2004, 53), "UNIFEM, having greater political weight than NGOs because of its status as a 'UN agency,' was able to negotiate and lobby with Security Council delegations." NGOs' activities can also complement the work of the specialized agencies. As Gaer (1995) notes, there is a dependence of the UN institutions, especially in the human rights sector, on the information made available by the NGOs.

Besides reaching out to UN representatives, NGOs relied on the collaboration with friendly-states for pushing for the adoption and evolution of the WPS agenda. This strategy was critical to expand activists' access mainly because the Security Council is a highly masculine environment and often resistant to feminist political ideas and practices. For instance, China and Russia have been long arguing that the UNSC should not expand the debates on WPS. They defend, whenever possible, that discussions on women's issues fit better within other UN bodies (ECOSOC and General Assembly). In 2015, during an Open debate on Women, Peace, and Security, the representative of Russia declared crucial to avoid any distortions in the Security Council's activities and called upon all members to maintain the existing divisions of labor between UN organs. He also warned country delegations to be cautious when expanding the security debate beyond the spectrum of "situations of armed conflicts" (United Nations Security Council 2015). The other permanent members– the USA, the UK and France – although more prone to engage with the WPS thematic debates – do not have similar priorities regarding the agenda. The US has engaged more with sexual violence topics while the UK has been inclined to foster discussion on women's participation and prevention. Their engagement with the agenda seems to be particularly attached to specific political interests.

Within such an environment, the NGOWG on WPS has usually capitalized on elected members to reduce or change the resistant attitudes in the institutional setting. One of the strategies is the engagement with governments on a one-to-one basis. According to interviews, activists targeted the missions in New York that were most friendly and, through them, reached out to permanent members (Interviewee 8 2016; Interviewee 13 2016).

A notable example of the interaction between NGOs and friendly countries traces back to the efforts around the adoption of Resolution 1325 (2000). The alliance of NGOs combined efforts with Namibia and Bangladesh to push for the publication of the document in spite of the several efforts from Russia and China to downplay the endeavor. The connection between the NGOWG on WPS and Bangladesh was mainly established through ambassador Anwarul Karim Chowdhury. At that time, Chowdhury, president of the UNSC, gave a speech on behalf of Women's International Day, in which he connected gender equality with peace. The connection between up until then very distant concepts opened up a discursive space for debating the relevance of demands and experiences of women in the Security Council's documents. As put by one respondent:

Rev. Bras. Polít. Int., 65(1): e005, 2022

Rebelo ▶

> After that we did a lot of advocacy with other members of the SC. I remember at one point chasing the Namibian foreign minister after a meeting and asking him if they would be interested or willing to meet with us. So we were going country by country and providing them with background (Interviewee 25 2016).

The proximity with Namibia was also a driving force for the publication of Resolution 1325. Hill et al. (2003, 1258) observed that NGO members were excited with the meeting with Namibia for the country had previously been engaged with related topics on women's issues. Namibia had organized an important seminar on Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multidimensional Peace Support Operations in May 2000. Being the next country to occupy the UNSC presidential seat, the NGOWG sought to advocate for the inclusion of gender debates into the security domain.

Another example of the partnership between NGOs and elected members is the collaboration between activists with the Vietnamese delegation before the adoption of Resolution 1889, in 2009. When Vietnam assumed the presidency of the Security Council, it indicated the intention to share its experience from conflict, focusing on the importance of women's education and other development issues to achieve peace (Security Council Report 2010). Some Council members expressed concern about the adoption of another resolution within such a short period – only months after the adoption of the previous Resolution 1888 (2009). After several negotiations on the draft resolution, Resolution 1889 was approved. A UN representative noted that Vietnam worked in the backstage together with the NGOWG on WPS for taking up the issue at the Security Council. The Vietnamese delegation received inputs and attended a workshop prepared by members of the coalition, which helped them to better engage with the Council's negotiations (Interviewee 10 2016; Interviewee 13 2016). In parallel, the coalition kept its discourse tightly attached to what Vietnam was proposing in official meetings and pushed, whenever possible, for the passage of such resolution.

Besides networking with insider allies, the coalition constantly tried to provide information to country delegations, especially when a new document was to be passed. One of the tools used "to get better language in UNSC resolutions" (Interviewee 8 2016) was the Monthly Action Plans, a set of recommendations on thematic and country issues prepared to guide the Security Council on how to respond adequately to WPS debates. The policy papers are available to all the Council delegations and tailored to their informational needs. State representatives acknowledged the need for the information provided by the NGOWG on WPS, especially on experiences and needs of women and girls, and the relevance of their support in indicating civil society speakers for the Open Debates (Interviewee 8 2016; Interviewee 15 2016; Interviewee 24 2016).

An example of the efforts made by activists was the incorporation of language provided by NGOs into the Resolution 1935 (United Nations Security Council 2010) on the renewal of the mandate of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). The NGOWG published a MAP in July of 2010 suggesting that the UNSC "prioritize the call for all parties to the conflict to protect civilians, including women and children, from sexual

Rev. Bras. Polít. Int., 65(1): e005, 2022

Rebelo ▶

violence […]" and requested the Secretary General "to report on progress made in creating and implementing a strategy to protect women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence […]" (NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, 2010). Since the NGOWG on WPS had knowledge and experiences about the field, country delegations valued their viewpoint and the information released (Interviewee 8 2016). The similarity of NGOs' recommendations with the document's content is evident. In paragraph 18 of Resolution 1935 (United Nations Security Council 2010), the UNSC "demands that the parties to the conflict immediately take appropriate measures to protect civilians, including women and children, from all forms of sexual violence, in line with resolution 1820 (2008); and requests UNAMID to report on the implementation of its comprehensive strategy for providing protection to women and children from sexual violence and gender based violence […]" (United Nations Security Council 2010).

These examples illustrate that carefully choosing how to approach the member states was particularly relevant for sustaining NGOs' access to WPS debates. Felicity Hill summarizes the attitude regarding the UNSC: "Whatever the code words, let us in! Peace-builder, decision-maker, whatever argument works, let us in! Let us in so we can wrestle with the discussion at least; contest the parameters, and react, in real time and not after the fact." (Cohn 2004, 138).

## Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that NGOs, rather than moving away from the largely closed arena of the security sector, choose to explore alternative venues to advance the thematic agendas. Specifically, NGOs have forged coalitions (the Watchlist and the NGOWG on WPS) and actively worked together with friendly member states and intergovernmental offices in the backstage of UNSC chambers to impact debates on women's and children's issues. By drawing on interviews and content analysis techniques, the research confirmed previous scholarly work on the strategic role of NGOs in adapting their activities to participate in relevant debates even in the face of limited access.

While establishing links with insider allies was crucial for NGOs' participation in such a setting, progress would not have been achieved without the decision of activists to create coalitions of NGOs. The Watchlist and the NGOWG on WPS have developed an organizational architecture to accumulate knowledge and regularly share information. Founding a collaborative platform for action has allowed NGOs to minimize the costs of conflicting interests with states and increase their legitimacy when dealing with more skeptical UNSC members. This move has proven to be particularly valuable in a restricted environment such as the security sector. Most importantly, because of the high rotation of elected members and resistant attitudes mainly from China and Russia, activists gained from displaying an organizational structure that helped them constantly build new relationships and strengthen ties with like-minded policymakers.

Rev. Bras. Polít. Int., 65(1): e005, 2022

Rebelo ▶

In tracing the strategies used by both coalitions, the research advanced knowledge about the interaction between NGOs and states in the security sector. Although it is difficult to measure the direct impact of NGOs' strategies, mainly because ideas championed by activists may only come to fruition years or decades later, there is compelling evidence that NGOs are placing relevant information in the hands of policymakers.

# References

Binder, M. *The politicization of international security institutions: the UN Security Council and NGOS*. Berlin: Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung, 2008. Discussion Paper, No. SP IV.

Bob, C. *Rights on the rise*: *international mobilization for new human rights*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University, 2005. Accessed June 15, 2017. https://ssrn.com/abstract=902692

"Children and armed conflict monthly update." *Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict*, November 2014. Accessed June 12, 2021. http://watchlist.org/publications/children-and-armed-conflict-monthly-update november- 2014

Cohn, C. *Mainstreaming gender in UN security policy: a path to political transformation*? Boston, MA: Boston Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights, 2004. Working Paper no. 204.

Cooper, A. F., J. English, and R. C. Thakur, eds. *Enhancing global governance: towards a new diplomacy*? Tokyo: United Nations University, 2002.

Gaer, F. D. "Reality check: human rights nongovernmental organisations confront governments at the United Nations." *Third World Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (1995): 389-404. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/01436599550035960

Gibbings, S. L. *Governing women, governing security: governmentality, gender mainstreaming and women's activism at the UN*. Toronto: York University, 2004.

Gordenker, L., and T. G. Weiss. "NGO participation in the international policy process." *Third World Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (1995): 543-555. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/01436599550036059

Graubart, J. "NGOs and the security council: authority all around but for whose benefit." In *The UN security Council and the politics of international authority*, edited B. Cronin, and I. Hurd. New York, NY: Routledge, 2008.

Hill, F. "How and when has security council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security impacted negotiations outside the Security Council." Master diss., Uppsala University, 2005.

Hill, F., M. Aboitiz, and S. Poehlman-Doumbouya. "Nongovernmental organizations' role in the build-up and implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325." *Signs* 28, no. 4 (2003): 1255-1269. doi: https://doi.org/10.1086/368321

Holzscheiter, A. "Discourse as capability: non-state actors' capital in global governance." *Millennium* 33, no. 3 (2005): 723-746. doi: https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298050330030301

Rev. Bras. Polít. Int., 65(1): e005, 2022

Rebelo ▶

Hudson, N. F. *Gender, human security and the United Nations: security language as a political framework for women*. Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2010.

Joachim, J. *Agenda setting, the UN, and NGOs: gender violence and reproductive rights*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University, 2007.

Joachim, J., and B. Locher. *Transnational activism in the UN and the EU: a comparative study*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2008.

Jordan, L., and P. Tuijl. "Political responsibility in transnational NGO advocacy." *World Development* 28, no. 12 (2000): 2051-2065. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-750X(00)00078-4

Keck, M., and K. Sikkink. *Activists without borders: advocacy networks in international politics*. New York, NY: Cornell University, 1998.

Khagram, S., J. Riker, and K. Sikkink. *Restructuring world politics: transnational social movements, networks, and norms*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 2002.

Klot, J. "The United Nations Security Council's agenda on 'Women, Peace and Security': bureaucratic pathologies and unrealised potential." PhD. doct., The London School of Economics and Political Science, London, 2015.

MacFarlane, S. N., and Y. F. Khong. *Human security and the UN: a critical history*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 2006.

Mayer, P. "Civil society participation in international security organizations: the cases of NATO and OSCE." In *Civil society participation in european and global governance*, edited by J. Steffek, C. Kissling, and P. Nanz, 116-139. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security - NGOWG/WPS. *Monthly Action Points (MAP) for the Security Council: July 2010*. New York, NY, 2010. Accessed June 13, 2017. http://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/map/map-july-2010/

Nyamugasira, W. "NGOs and advocacy: how well are the poor represented?" *Development in Practice* 8, no. 3 (1998): 297-308. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/09614529853594

Paul, J. A. "Working with nongovernmental organizations." In *The UN Security Council: from the cold war to the 21st century*, edited by D. M. Malone, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2004.

Price, R. "Reversing the gun sights: transnational civil society targets land mines." *International Organization* 52, no. 3 (1998): 613-644. doi: https://doi.org/10.1162/002081898550671

Price, R. "Transnational civil society and advocacy in world politics." *World Politics* 55, no. 4 (2003): 579-606. doi: https://doi.org/10.1353/wp.2003.0024

Risse, T., S. C. Ropp, and K. Sikkink, eds. *The power of human rights: international norms and domestic change*. New York, NY: Cambridge University, 1999.

Steffek, J. "Explaining cooperation between IGOs and NGOs: push factors, pull factors, and the policy cycle." *Review of International Studies* 39, no. 4 (2013): 993-1013. doi: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210512000393

Tallberg, J., L. M. Dellmuth, H. Agné, and A. Duit. "NGO influence in international organizations: Information, access and exchange." *British Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 1 (2018): 213-238. doi: https://doi.org/10.1017/S000712341500037X

Tarrow, S. *Power in movement: social movements and contentious politics*. New York, NY: Cambridge University, 1998.

True-Frost, C. "The security council and norm consumption." *Journal of Legislation and Public PolicyInternational Law and Politics* 40, (2007): 115-217.

United Nations Security Council - UNSC. *Resolution 1935: Adopted by the Security Council at its 6366th meeting, on 30 July 2010*. New York, NY, 2010. Disponível em:<http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_ doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1935(2010)>. Acesso em: 25 jan. 2017.

United Nations Security Council - UNSC. *Resolution 2187. Adopted by the Security Council at its 7322nd meeting, on 25 November 2014*. New York, NY, 2014. Accessed February 22, 2017. http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/ un-documents/document/sres2187.php

United Nations Security Council - UNSC. *Women and peace and security: 7533rd UNSC meeting*. New York, NY, 2015. Accessed January 25, 2021. http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf / cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3- CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/spv_7533.pdf

Vabulas, F. A. "Consultative and observer status of NGOs in intergovernmental organizations." In *Routledge handbook of international organization*, edited by B. Reinalda. London: Routledge, 2013.

Weschler, J. "Human rights." In *The UN security council: from the Cold War to the 21st century*, edited D. M. Malone, Boulder, CO: Lynne Ripener, 2004.

Wisotzki, S. "Negotiating human security at the UN." In *Transnational activism in the UN and the EU: a comparative study*, edited by J. Joachim, and B. Locher. New York, NY: Routledge, 2008.

Wong, W. *Internal affairs: how the structure of NGOs transforms human rights*. New York, NY: Cornell University, 2012.

Yanacopulos, H. "The strategies that bind: NGO coalitions and their influence." *Global Networks* 5, no. 1 (2005): 93-110. doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-0374.2005.00109.x