

Civil Society Takes the Wheel: UNSC Resolution 1325 and the Path Towards Sustainable Peace

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Abstract

Resolution 1325's contribution to a more sustainable peace is now widely recognized, not only in post-conflict settings, but also in preventing violence, in various forms, in contexts of immanent or latent conflict. One of the most important factors for the Resolution's success lies in its influence on civil society, but also in the impact that civil society itself has on the application and operationalization of this Resolution, revealing the gender perspective as essential and generating a dynamic of very fertile reciprocity for the possibility of peace. In the article, we will analyze the impelling action of civil society for the affirmation of women as central actors in peace processes - as well as in the political, social, economic and cultural reconstruction that follows. Through several examples and suggestions, we will see how this dynamic for sustainable peace was reinforced and expanded through the Sustainable Development Goals and the special place reserved there for women.

Keywords: Woman; Peace; Security; Resolution 1325; Society.

Artigo recebido: 14.09.2020

Aprovado: 05.11.2020

<https://doi.org/10.47906/ND2020.157.02>

Resumo

Sociedade Civil Lidera: A RCSNU 1325 e o Caminho para Uma Paz Sustentável

O contributo da Resolução 1325 para uma paz mais sustentável é hoje amplamente reconhecida, não só em cenários pós-conflito, mas também na prevenção de violência, sob várias formas, em contextos de conflitualidade imanente ou latente. Um dos fatores mais importantes para o sucesso da Resolução reside na sua influência sobre a sociedade civil, mas simultaneamente também no impacto que a própria sociedade civil tem sobre a aplicação e operacionalização desta Resolução, revelando a perspetiva do género como essencial e gerando uma dinâmica de reciprocidade muito fértil para a possibilidade da paz. No artigo analisaremos a ação impulsionadora da sociedade civil para a afirmação das mulheres como atoras centrais nos processos de paz – bem como na reconstrução política, social, económica e cultural que se lhe segue. Através de vários exemplos e sugestões perspetivar-se-á ainda como esta dinâmica para uma paz sustentável foi reforçada e ampliada através dos Objetivos para o Desenvolvimento Sustentável e o lugar especial que aí é reservado às mulheres.

Palavras-chave: Mulheres; Paz; Segurança; Resolução 1325; Sociedade.

*A woman must have money
and a room of her own
if she wants to write fiction.*
Virginia Woolf (1929)

The paths towards peace have been, ever since, build in silence. War is noisy. Violent conflicts are piercing. And many Peace Treaties are loudly celebrated. Peaceworks, however, the continuous, manifold and everyday efforts to achieve sustainable peace, are often not only silent but also silenced. So is the role of women in peace processes. Even though their contribution to peace is today widely proven, women are still excluded from official negotiations and peace agreements, as well as from post-war decision-making, power-sharing and political reconstruction. The point is that peacebuilding without the participation of women in institutions and government, alongside an active role in civil society organisations, is simply not possible.

Peace is, by definition, all-inclusive and comprehensive. There is no “half-peace” or “sliced peace” only for this or that area or my or your group. In this same sense, peace is also not “gendered”. It might have gender aspects or perspectives and specific contributions, of course, but peace remains a complete and positive concept (with an autonomous meaning) (Dietrich, 2012), a political “Gesamtkunstwerk” as task and goal. Accordingly, sustainable peace cannot be divided, but only shared (completely).

Now, for too long, peace has been thought of as a “men’s business” that could be made by decree. But unlike wars, that can be made, peace must grow. It is not just the absence of direct violence and dispossession in a timespan between wars, sung by men, but a whole political culture “free from fear” and “want” and fostered in trust and participation on all levels of community / national life. Women are a substantial part of that life (ranging from healing, nurturing, educating to organizing, building and planning). Therefore, they must be given the concrete possibility to engage actively and also visibly, getting a role on the main stage (they already play on backstage). And this is not only an appeal for women, as Virginia Woolf claimed almost 100 years ago, or Emily Pankhurst or Olympe de Gouges and many others before. It is not simply a case for women empowerment. It’s a quest for peace, where women do participate side by side with men and where their contribution is, as we will see, crucial.

Security Council Resolution 1325 was designed in precisely that spirit. Accordingly, by giving voice to silenced women in conflicts and silent women in peacebuilding, the UN dared to introduce both a “gender perspective” and a “gender approach” in the search for security and conflict resolution to reach out for peace “beyond

gender”, that is, as an inclusive and genuinely sustainable peace horizon. But it was a long way to get there. In order to illustrate this path, our article will reflect on the role of civil society groups where women could find a common ground to participate in concrete projects that responded to local needs – and learned to engage politically and to contribute for just and sustainable peacebuilding from this grassroots perspective.

Opening the way to UNSCR 1325

Based on the promises of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Optional Protocol, representatives from 189 countries and ten thousands of women’s organisations came together in 1995, during the Fourth World Conference on Women in China, to unanimously approve the Beijing’s Declaration and Platform for Action¹, enforcing that “human rights are women’s rights”. Echoing the hopes of women activists from at least 200 years, the gender-based principles emanated from this gathering were fundamental to build the concept of “gender mainstreaming”, here understood as a reorganisation of political processes in order to integrate gender equality in all policy-making phases and at all levels. By articulating an intersectional and targeted-oriented approach to gender equality and women empowerment, the Beijing Declaration set into motion the development of an international agenda calling for action.

Following the mobilisation of nearly 50,000 government delegates, experts, civil society representatives and activists, the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action portended major steps toward advancing “the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere in the interest of all humanity” (The Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security & The Rockefeller Foundation, 2020). But it wasn’t until 2000 that the Beijing seeds sprouted.

As the world ushered into a new decade, the international system succumbed to the escalating global challenges – ranging from climate change and poverty to fragile and violent states that sponsor new forms of warfare and where civilian-military interface aggravates. In modern warfare as conceptualized by Mary Kaldor (2013), civilians are seen as both victims and weapons, with women and children remaining the most affected ones – from losing their children or loved ones to the conflict to facing brute force of sexual violence, human trafficking and becoming

1 <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf> (accessed on September 4th 2020).

combatants, women in these scenarios are particularly vulnerable and often feel exposed, explored and dispossessed (of all).

Drawing from Mr Boutros-Ghali's preventive diplomacy and post-conflict peacebuilding (A/RES/47/120B), the United Nations Security Council finally presented a new architecture for conflict resolution that included women's perspective and contributions. On October 31, 2000, recalling the commitments of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (A/52/231), Resolution 1325 was unanimously adopted by the United Nations Security Council – the first landmark resolution on the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

From 2000 onwards, the terrible humanitarian consequences of the ever-changing and ever-evolving warfare nature laid bare the long-term structural vulnerability of women in the theatre of war but has also revealed their pivotal role in humanitarian work and peacebuilding efforts. Put differently, not only were women pictured as the “spoils of war”, but they also became the linchpin for successful “boots on the ground” operations – by being in charge of logistics, medical support and of essential household chores.

The “Three P's of the first resolution called for 1) the participation of women at all levels of decision-making, including in national, regional and international institutions; 2) the protection of women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence; 3) the prevention of violence against women through the promotion of women's rights, accountability and law enforcement (S/RES/1325). Although the path towards an effective implementation of these goals is still a long one, there have been a number of successes over the last decades, as the UN Global Study on WPS highlights: It is worthwhile keeping in mind the following achievements: 1) A comprehensive normative framework with regard to sexual violence in conflict has been universally adopted; 2) Organisations and national governments have begun to understand the importance of national and communal healing as part of holistic justice and accountability processes; 3) UN Member states understand that implementing resolution 1325 is their responsibility; 4) Since the adoption of UNSC Resolution 1325, 27 per cent of peace agreements have referenced women and “of the six agreements resulting from peace talks or national dialogue processes supported by the UN in 2014, 67 per cent contained references relevant to women, peace and security”; and among many others 5) Women's senior representation within the UN is increasing and bilateral aid on gender equality to fragile states has quadrupled in the last decade (Coomaraswamy, 2015).

Last, but certainly not least, we must consider the symbolic achievements of the Resolution that revealed not only a changed perception of women in conflict and peace processes, but also its transformative value regarding political culture, so often based on fossilised patriarchal structures. As is referred by a US based global organisation in the *Civil Society Organizations Survey for the Global Study on Women*,

Peace and Security (2015), “The resolutions on WPS are important steps in shifting the paradigm/perception at the global level from women being victims to women being agents of change and peacebuilders.” (Goldberg, D. 2015:26). And even if there are still many shortcomings given the fact that the Resolution is (and should obviously be considered as) law-biding and not optional, we must focus on its potential as ultimate red line and foundation to hold on, as an organisation from DRC expressed very clearly: “At least we have a document we can use to conduct our activities toward different targets” (Goldberg, D. 2015:26).

By integrating a gendered-sensitive lens in all United Nations peace and security endeavours, this Resolution embodies the idea that peace is only sustainable if women are fully included and vividly participating in decision-making processes. And this is not a result of good-will, but of blatant facts for research has shown that a gender-mainstreaming framework to peacebuilding is instrumental to heal back the community and lay the foundations for sustainable peace as well as for a united and prosperous society.

Recognising that there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development, the United Nations have helped build resilience among national and local governments for the implementation of Resolution 1325 – either through the development of national action plans and gender mainstreaming or through monitoring, evaluation, reporting and impact assessment. Two decades and ten resolutions later, the overarching Women, Peace and Security Agenda (WPS) gradually penetrated national governments’ legislations and priorities, but undergirding these commitments is civil society, turning rhetoric into action as a primary agent of change.

Civil Society Organizations as Voice & Deed for the WPS Agenda

As different reports on the implementation and success of UNSCR 1325 have stressed, civil society organisations is one of the most important arenas for women to empower and to engage in peaceworks so as to strengthen the hazardous ways from war to peace.

In fact, as sphere outside the strict political (governmental) and the economic realm, as well as beyond the family, civil society has always been a vital sphere for women to organise and to participate in the community or city life. The CIVICUS Civil Society Index characterises it as “the arena outside family, government, and market where people voluntarily associate to advance common interests based on civility” (Anheier, 2008: 30) and according to Larry Diamond, one of the most influential thinkers in this field, civil society is:

(...) the realm of organized social life that is voluntary, self-generating, (largely) self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order to a set of shared rules. It is distinct from "society" in general in that it involves citizens acting collectively in a public sphere to express their interests, passions and ideas, exchange information, achieve mutual goals, make demands on the state, and hold the state officials accountable. Civil society is an intermediate entity, standing between the private sphere and the state. Thus it excludes individual and family life, inward-looking group activity (e.g., for recreation, entertainment, or spirituality), the profit-making individual enterprise of business firms, and political efforts to take control of the state. Actors in civil society need the protection of an institutionalized institutional legal order to guard their autonomy and freedom of action. Thus civil society not only restricts state power but legitimates state authority when that authority is based on the rule of law (Diamond, 1995: 228).

This very comprehensive definition features civil society as a lively and progressive field of mediation and conflict resolution, and most experts agree with Diamond that civil society, characterised like this, is crucial for democracy to consolidate. Now we could certainly add that without this idea of a vibrant civil society – schooled in participation and voluntary target-oriented engagement for public good that expresses as day to day conflict management – true peace is equally difficult to develop.

Civil society is a vital element of peacebuilding. What interests us most, however, is that civil society defined in these terms is a sphere where women moved ever since. As women were (and still are) excluded from realms such as the state or other political institutions and big business, they took over tasks for the public good beyond family and household life – for example, healing the wounded, supporting the widows, educating the orphans, feeding the poor, as well as fixing concrete problems that occurred in everyday social life. In the sense that women were denied formal political participation, but allowed to associate for charity and philanthropy, they were closer to basic needs of community life usually ignored by the state (or the public realm of politics and economy). They could not vote, sign agreements, nor make laws and decide public policies on a top-down scale, but they could act on a "grassroots level". As they had to respond to concrete demands of life (and death), they had to come together in an organised and autonomous way and became responsible for their neighbourhoods and communities. The case for taking up "gendered" responsibility was particularly necessary in times of war and its aftermath. So, many women's civil society organisations started as "leagues for peace", and women were crucial to the beginnings of the peace movement in the 18th and 19th centuries (Benedetti, 1978).

The outstanding role of women in civil society organisations as voice & deed for sustainable peace holds on until today. Probably a large part of the efficiency of

women's organisations contribution in conflict management and peaceful post-conflict negotiation is rooted in this long tradition of taking responsibility for the "small things" of community life as an expression and possibility of "self-government". Furthermore, it was based on trust, a fundamental element of peace, gained by continuous experiences in dealing with common difficulties, in sharing tasks and in mutual help to overcome challenges. Women were doing it on their own – and grassroots responsibility became a competence that enables peacebuilding. When it comes to the assessment of 20 years of the UN Agenda on Women, Peace and Security, the impact of civil society is unchallenged. The *Civil Society Organizations Survey for the Global Study on Women, Peace and Security* (2015) highlighted the achievements of CSO recognising that the most fruitful ways of operating was obtained when two or more Civil Society Organisations cooperated or when they could build networking and coalition relations with one another. The survey presented a valuable explanation for this particular propensity to collaborate and that enhanced the chances for peace:

Many attribute CSO collaboration to their ability to better understand realities on the ground, to leverage each other's resources and expertise, apply pressure to the international community, hold their government accountable and legitimise the mission of their organisation.

Likewise, better results were attained when the UN focused less on elite organisations and more on grassroots CSO. This is an important recommendation that is worthwhile keeping in mind for the future: "A consistent theme expressed throughout the survey results was the importance of engaging grassroots CSOs – particularly women's groups – as equal partners in all matters related to peace and security" (Goldberg, D. 2015:84).

Unfortunately, women are still too often excluded from peace negotiations, peace agreements and the conception of a post-conflict political order. Many times the post-conflict order perpetuates the former patriarchal power relations in apparently new political arrangements where old conflicts start anew. Post-conflict becomes pre-conflict, again. Here it is clear that the UN Women Agenda must be applied in a more effective way reminding each and every signatory state that UNSCR 1325 is not a mere list of lose (and lost) recommendations, but as a law-binding document for peace and sustainable development. As is emphasised on the website of the *Women's International League for Peace and Freedom*:

The vital role of civil society, particularly women's Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), is so important but often unrecognised, marginalised and under-valued. The significant work of women's CSO in conflict situations is all the more extraordinary

because they are frequently excluded from formal conflict resolution processes, political dialogue, and post-conflict peacebuilding systems, including the mechanisms and institutions responsible for the implementation of peace accords and post-conflict planning processes.²

Women's substantial participation in peace processes on a governmental and institutional level, or wherever the defining decisions concerning peace and order are taken is, in fact, one of the most uncomfortable shortcomings of WPS. Most of the reports in this field reveal that the concrete numbers and cases regarding women's participation are below the expectations and suggest that we still have a long way to go.

At the same time, this evidence stimulates us to ask critical questions and find creative answers in order to enhance the participation of women – and reach out for a more fruitful peace. Going back to Virginia Woolf's words regarding the lack of opportunities for women to "write fiction" (and, broadly, to tell their stories), there are still many women who simply cannot afford to act politically, either because they are not allowed to, or because they simply do not have the conditions regarding free time, private space, money or education to participate in a full (and demanding) "political life". Within the daily work and family obligations, they just have no opportunity, nor motivation, nor power to engage in public affairs. Accordingly, one of the greatest challenges to the implementation of the UN Women Agenda is "political culture" (Ingelhart and Wenzel, 2005), still dominated in many parts of the world by stiff patriarchal structures. Breaking up these traditions is a whole generation's task that must be not only focussed on women (via education, funding and institutional changes to promote participation), but specially on men, to whom the advantages of women's participation must be explained in a more convincing way. If men's (equally) "difficult" situation in this process is not considered, namely regarding the fear of change and loss of power, the necessary cultural turn might be impossible to achieve, for it can only be reached out with men's understanding and acceptance.

The productive work of women in civil society organisations is an excellent proof of the advantages of women's contribution in political life and the benefits it brings to the community as a whole might convince men to accept gradual but substantial/concrete changes. As we have already referred, the transformative value of the UNSCR 1325 becomes very expressive here, as civil society organisations shed new

2 <https://www.peacewomen.org/civil-society> (accessed September 5th, 2020).

awareness on the role of women as agents of peace processes. These “perceptions” are fundamental. Targeting a substantial development in this field, two other Security Council Resolutions have been approved during the last year (UNSCR 2467 and UNSCR 2493), and women’s participation was rightfully identified as the main goal to foster.

The relevance of CSO and women’s participation is particularly stressed in Resolution 2493 as it urges member states to promote “the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in all stages of peace processes, including through mainstreaming a gender perspective, and remain committed to increasing the number of civilian and uniformed women in peacekeeping at all levels and in key positions”, as well as more specifically in “peace talks from the outset, both in negotiating parties’ delegations and in the mechanisms set up to implement and monitor agreements;” (S/RES/2493). And within this context, it openly and definitively acknowledges and supports the role of civil society encouraging governments:

to create safe and enabling environments for civil society, including formal and informal community women leaders, women peacebuilders, political actors, and those who protect and promote human rights, to carry out their work independently and without undue interference, including in situations of armed conflict, and to address threats, harassment, violence and hate speech against them (S/RES/2493).

Threats to CSO and to WPS

As we are celebrating the “coming of age” of Resolution 1325, much more must be demanded for the present – and much more must be dared for the future. But new threats are challenging the prospects for a more sustainable peacebuilding, jeopardising not only the goals ahead, but also the past achievements so bravely conquered. In spite of the developments made in information technology and communication, creating global networks, fostering world-wide cooperation and empowering individuals and communities (once deprived of identity), the world today is a more insecure place.³

3 The order of the cold-war with clear blocks and power distribution has not been replaced by any new international understanding on power management. In an age described as “uncertain” and “liquid” times” (Zygmunt Bauman, 2007) where borders dissolve and states erode, new wars, terrorism, nuclear proliferation, cyberattacks and new mass migrations endanger and confuse contemporary international politics.

Accordingly, the many accomplishments of WPS have not yet consolidated women's safety, freedom and equality of opportunities. Particularly in the last decade, we could perceive a certain setback, as women have been caught up in violent conflicts, in radicalisation of societies and the re-emergence of strong patriarchal structures in politics and culture. As the *Women's International League for Peace and Freedom* claims:

These growing trends of political uncertainty and instability in countries previously considered stable and democratic signal a real threat to the legitimacy of existing human rights, rule of law and the normative framework of international peace, security and development that emerged in the aftermath of World War II. These threats are also testing the resilience of institutions and norms that we have taken for granted in supporting peace and equality.

Civil society has been severely endangered by this drift.

Take for example the resurgence of (new) terrorism that spreads fear and anxiety, making it impossible to meet, to discuss and to work together – and leading often to the withdrawal of vital international support including funding and personnel. In addition, in many regions the hideous attacks by terrorist “gangs” target specially women beating, raping, kidnapping and using girls and women as shields and weapons.⁴

Another example for the assault on civil society could be the recent revival of (extreme) nationalism, polarising ethnic groups and closing open and plural spaces so elementary to community life. The interference on or freezing of international funding of NGOs, the imprisonment of its leaders or its prohibition in general are further examples of the ways nationalist governments try to stop “subversive” civil society organisations (Rutzen, 2016). In these cases, but also in those of new authoritarian regimes that are becoming an appealing alternative to liberal democracy in some regions, women are marginalised again in a patriarchal political matrix and are supposed to retreat into the sphere of household and reproduction, as well as into the role of a beautiful asset or a fragile (and frail) victim (Autesserre, 2019). Decreasing activities for women in civil matters are a serious consequence of growing restrictions on civil society, but the return to patriarchal

4 The assaults of Boko Haram in the North of Nigeria or the most recent attacks in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique, by Al-Shabaab, targeting particularly girls and women are only two of extreme violent cases, affecting community life in a whole region. For further reading: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/2322/2020/en/> (accessed on October 30th 2020).

structures imply also the imposition of the veil system, early marriages, sexual mutilation of children, closing of schools, honour killings and domestic violence.⁵ These are all areas where the WPS Agenda must act very firmly – and urgently. But what matters most is that the pressures on civil society threatening women’s participation in peace processes are, thus, risk the possibility of peace itself.

Dynamics of Reciprocity for Peace: WPS & SDG

Within two decades, the Women, Peace and Security Agenda has broadened its scope of work and it is now inextricably interwoven with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, implied in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. According to the United Nations, this Agenda is a “plan of action for people, planet and prosperity”, pledging to leave no one behind – the ambitious Agenda lists 17 *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) that fall within the scope of the economy, society and environment (A/RES/70/1).

Among the plethora of synergies for action found between the Sustainable Development objectives and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, it is particularly worth mentioning how SDG16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), SDG5 (Gender Equality and Women’s empowerment), and SDG4 (Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education), contribute to promoting effective and inclusive peacebuilding because they empower women and girls in the civic, economic and political realm.

This progressive architecture implies the reduction of all forms of discrimination, exploitation, violence, harmful practices and abuse against civilians, particularly women and girls (SDG 5.1, 5.2., 5.3; SDG 16.1, 16.2, 16.b) the mitigation of corruption, bribery and all forms of organized crime while developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions through international cooperation (SDG 16.4, 16.5, 16.6, 16.8, 16.10, 16.a.); the promotion of equal access to education justice, economic resources, political participation and leadership opportunities (SDG 4; 5.5, 5.a.; SDG 16.3, 16.7, 16.9); the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels through enforceable legislation and public access to information (SDG 5.4, 5.6, 5.b, 5.c; SDG 16.10).

In the aftermath of armed conflict, crippling societies and weakened institutions are more prone to change and to embrace new norms. The rupture in the old order

5 In liberal democracies, gender violence is still present, of course, but there is more awareness and there are more chances and channels to publicly denounce it and to change violent patterns, giving victims more alternative to empower, compared with illiberal or authoritarian regimes.

and in the rule of law ensued by complex conflict - whether it be violent state-based warfare, civil war, internal conflict or violent extremism - represents a window of opportunity to endorse both the 2030 Agenda and the principles of the Beijing Platform and UNSCR 1325. Three examples could be outlined to underscore these dynamics of reciprocity:

Firstly, by fostering peaceful and inclusive societies that provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels (SDG 16), women are more likely to raise their voices and concerns and, thus, to occupy high-profile positions in the public and private sector. In addition, by focusing on strengthening the rule of law; and ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory, representative and gender-responsive decision-making at all levels this approach recognizes that without the right legislation and strong institutions, sustained peace and security cannot be achieved.

Secondly, while we are now seeing some progress in health and education access to women and young girls, we are still lagging behind in the effective and qualitative representation of women within the political arena, particularly in elected offices. Despite the commitments advocated in SDG 5 to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, politics and defence remain a male-predominant sector. Data has shown that when women actively participate in the political and civic life, there is a greater level of concern for health, educational and family-related issues, which are fundamental to promote stable economic growth, to improve human development levels in a country and to guarantee sustainability at all levels.

And thirdly, by ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education, and by promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, SDG 4 strongly contributes to leverage the Women, Peace and Security agenda from the grassroots level. Therefore, by closing the gap between women and men's disproportionate access to education, states are enabling women to have the power and the knowledge to claim their rights and climb the ladder by themselves.

In short, the feminist vision of peace entitled in the 2030 Agenda is crucial to galvanize action on the WPS agenda. The important links between long-lasting and sustained peace, a gendered-sensitive and inclusive approach to post-conflict reconstruction and the various sustainable development goals prove how these agendas can mutually potentiate and complement each other. And if we conceive peace as comprehensive and all-inclusive place, only a multilayered "holistic" pathway can put us on the right track. Civil society is already taking the wheel and striving in this direction. With more opportunities for CSO, with a stronger commitment from the UN towards this grassroots activism, the upcoming decade might, eventually and indeed, lead to a more sustainable and just peace.

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