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Panel discussion

Women peacebuilders advancing sustainable peace

37th session of the Forum of Women Parliamentarians

Saturday, 23 March 2024, 14:30–16:30
Plenary A (level 0)

Background

With only six years to go to achieve – or fail to attain – the Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 16 on peaceful societies, our world is facing unprecedented challenges to international security. Many tragic wars are underway, geopolitical tensions are rising and violations of international commitments to protect civilians are growing. A rearmament race is unfolding, marked by increased military spending that diverts resources away from safeguarding socio-economic rights, endangering progress made in the fight against inequalities and marginalization, and furthering vulnerabilities. Can the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda provide the much-needed solution to steer us back on course towards sustainable peace for sustainable development?

The WPS agenda, as represented by UN Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and the nine WPS resolutions¹ that have followed it, stresses the importance of women's full and effective participation as active agents in promoting peace and security. It advocates for incorporating gender perspectives and women's equal and meaningful participation into peace processes, peacekeeping, peacebuilding and security efforts. It also addresses how women and girls are affected by armed conflict and crisis in specific ways – and therefore calls for the implementation of measures to prevent, address and provide reparations for violations of their human rights.

The WPS agenda makes it clear that when women are excluded, the world misses out on invaluable contributions to building sustainable peace. However, despite some progress, national and international diplomatic and security practices have failed to truly implement the agenda, particularly as regards the participation of women in decision-making processes on peace and security, which remains very low. Yet women peacebuilders are at the forefront of negotiating or mediating with armed groups and governments to secure food and medicines for the most vulnerable, and of helping displaced people and providing support to victims of gender-based and sexual violence in conflict. Their actions are not limited to formal and informal peacemaking procedures, but also encompass livelihood activities, humanitarian aid and traditional practices of dialogue within communities. In close contact with communities, they are therefore the main channel through which war-affected populations express their concerns, experiences and needs.² In line with the WPS agenda, women peacebuilders should be present at the table of any inclusive decision-making process on peace and security. But their critical action is too often unrecognized and unsupported. In addition, they are exposed to risks and are often the prime targets of political and gender-based violence.

¹ <https://peacemaker.un.org/wps/normative-frameworks/un-security-council-resolutions>

² Sanam Naraghi Anderlini, *Recognizing Women Peacebuilders: Critical actors in effective peacemaking*, International Civil Society Action Network, 2020.

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Parliamentarians work closely with local community groups and civil society organizations in areas such as women's rights and peacebuilding. Through partnerships with women peacebuilders, parliamentarians can benefit from their expertise and skills on the ground, as well as the trust of the communities whose voices they amplify.³ Women peacebuilders can draw on the convening power of parliamentarians to strengthen their advocacy efforts for peace, both nationally and internationally. Parliamentarians are also well placed to ensure that the exceptional and courageous work of women peacebuilders is recognized and supported.

By joining forces, parliamentarians and women peacebuilders can amplify the impact of their actions. And as highlighted in the recent IPU-OHCHR handbook for parliamentarians, [*The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol*](#), there are many areas where parliamentary action in armed conflict can advance the WPS agenda. These range from ensuring women's participation in peace negotiations and peacekeeping activities; to decision-making at all levels on preventive diplomacy, mediation, reconciliation and humanitarian assistance; to involving women in the design, operation and monitoring of transitional justice mechanisms; as well as allocating resources and adopting effective measures to ensure that survivors of conflict-related gender-based violence, including sexual violence, have access to comprehensive medical care and treatment. This list is not exhaustive and close collaboration between parliamentarians and women peacebuilders can cover other areas, including the development of a national action plan on WPS, and ensuring that the agenda is implemented and adequately funded.

Moreover, by working closely with women peacebuilders, parliamentarians can become peacebuilders themselves and use public forums or other means to build inclusive, gender-sensitive peace processes within communities and beyond. Parliamentarians can also encourage their supporters to endeavor to reduce polarization and tensions, and to respect human rights, including women's right to live in safety and peace. In the aftermath of conflict, parliamentarians can also promote reconciliation between warring groups, address the harms suffered by women and girls, and develop strategies to address them.

Objectives

The panel discussion aims to amplify the voices of women peacebuilders and highlight their actions. It will explore how parliamentarians can improve implementation of the WPS agenda and work with women peacemakers to promote inclusive and gender-sensitive processes that are more likely to lead to sustainable peace.

- ***What is needed to advance implementation of the WPS agenda? How can parliaments and parliamentarians contribute more effectively to this agenda, including by joining forces with women peacebuilders?***
- ***How can parliamentarians support the actions of women peacebuilders in their own countries and in countries in conflict?***
- ***How can parliamentarians ensure that women peacebuilders are safe, included in peace and security decision-making and have the resources to continue their critical work?***

³ UNDP, *Parliaments as Partners Supporting the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: A Global Handbook*, 2019.