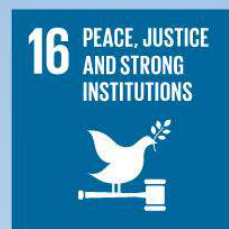


Promoting equal rights and women's participation towards peace



Summary and recommendations: Online panel discussion, 23 March 2022



Promoting equal rights and women's participation towards Peace

MODERATOR

DR. UMESH PALWANKAR (GENEVA CENTRE)

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

AMBASSADOR DR. GEORGE PAPADATOS (EPLO)

SPEAKERS

Ms Visaka Dharmadasa

Founder and Chair,
Association of War
Affected Women

Prof. Dr. Noreen Naseer

Tribal Women Network,
Department of Political
Science, University of
Peshawar

Ms Prasansa Karki

Program Development
Coordinator, Nagarik
Aawaz

Ms Saba Ismail

Co-Founder, Aware
Girls

Ms Kawkab Al-Thaibani

Co-founder,
Women4Yemen

23 MARCH 2022

11:00-12:00 CET

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FOREWORD

The present publication is the result of an online panel debate organized by the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue, in collaboration with the European Public Law Organization (EPLO) on 23 March 2022, entitled “Promoting Equal Rights and Women’s Participation Towards Peace”, held on the occasion of the 49th regular session of the Human Rights Council.

The panel, composed of Ambassador Papadatos, Head of Office EPLO Geneva, who delivered the keynote address, and five experts from academia and organizations working in the field, addressed a host of crucial issues in the complex and challenging domain which was the theme of the panel.

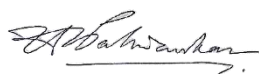
In today’s post-Covid reality, women bear the brunt of inequalities in various domains and acutely suffer the impact of conflicts on their lives and societies. There is an urgent need to both, effectively protect their human rights and actively promote their invaluable role, through their meaningful empowerment in conflict prevention, dialogue and peacebuilding. These were the two main thrusts of this panel’s considerations. The presentations addressed, among others, issues such as innovative ways to promote gender equality and reinforce participation of women in society, capacity-building at the national and local levels in this regard, the vital role of women in countering extremist discourse and fostering intercultural and interfaith dialogue, particularly at the community level, implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 Women, Peace and Security agenda, and the role of digital technologies to enhance women’s participation in conflict prevention and peace building.

The Geneva Centre and EPLO have had the privilege to benefit from the remarkable expertise and field experience of the five panellists to whom we take this opportunity to renew our deep gratitude.

The present publication contains a summary of the panel presentations and the Q & A session, an analytical piece on lessons learned from the panel and ways forward, the full statements of the panellists.

Dr Umesh Palwankar

***Executive Director
Geneva Centre for Human Rights
Advancement and Global Dialogue***



PANEL DISCUSSION

On the occasion of the 49th Human Rights Council session, the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue in collaboration with EPLO organized an online event “**Promoting Equal Rights and Women’s Participation towards Peace**”, 23 March 2022. The event took place on Zoom.

Moderator:

Dr. Umesh Palwankar, the Executive Director of the Geneva Centre

Keynote speaker:

Dr. George Papadatos, Ambassador and Head of Delegation, EPLO Geneva

Panellists:

Ms. Visaka Dharmadasa, Founder and Chair, Association of War Affected Women, Sri Lanka

Prof. Dr. Noreen Naseer, Tribal Women Network, Department of Political Science, University of Peshawar, Pakistan

Ms. Kawkab Al-Thaibani, Gender and Communication Expert Co-founder, Women4Yemen, Yemen

Ms. Prasansa Karki, Program Development Coordinator, Nagarik Aawaz, Nepal

Ms. Saba Ismail, Co-Founder of Aware Girls, Pakistan

The banner has a blue background. At the top left, the title "Promoting equal rights and women's participation towards Peace" is written in white. To the right of the title are the logos for the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue and EPLO (European Public Law Organization). Below the title, the date "23 March 11-12 CET" is displayed. Five circular portraits of the panelists are arranged in a row. Below each portrait is the name and affiliation of the panelist in white text.

Panelist	Organization
Prof. Dr. Noreen Naseer	Tribal Women Network, Department of Political Science, University of Peshawar
Prasansa Karki	Program Development Coordinator, Nagarik Aawaz, Nepal
Kawkab Al-Thaibani	Co-founder, Women4Yemen
Visaka Dharmadasa	Founder and Chair, Association of War Affected Women, Sri Lanka
Saba Ismail	Co-Founder of Aware Girls, Pakistan

SUMMARY OF PRESENTATIONS

In his introductory remarks, the **Geneva Centre's Executive Director Dr Umesh Palwankar** welcomed the esteemed panelists and thanked them for having accepted the invitation to share their analyses and insights flowing from their extensive experience in the field in regard to the subject of the panel.



Dr Umesh Palwankar, Executive Director of the Geneva Centre

Dr Palwankar briefly presented the Geneva Centre and panel co-organizer the European Public Law Organization (EPLO). The Geneva Centre, founded in 2013, is an independent human rights think-tank with Special Consultative status at ECOSOC. The Centre's work rests on four pillars: research and publication on vital human rights issues, training and national capacity building in the field of human rights, advocacy through reporting on important human rights developments and conferences, in particular the Human Rights Council, and the promotion of global inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue through the organization of international conferences and panel debates.

The panel co-organizer EPLO is an international organization dedicated to the creation and dissemination of public law and governance. It develops, promotes and supports educational, research, training, institution building and other activities that provide assistance to democratic institutions and actively participates in events organized by civil society. EPLO has been granted the Observer Status at the UN General Assembly other major international organizations.

Dr Palwankar observed that among the crucial and challenging issues the panel would consider are innovative ways to promote gender equality, reinforce participation of women in various decision-making processes, their role in addressing root causes of violence, countering extremist discourse and fostering inter-cultural and interfaith dialogue, and build capacity in this regard at the national and local levels.

He indicated that the proceedings of the panel will be published and distributed universally online. The publication will comprise a summary of the panel presentations and ensuing discussions, the full statements of the panelists and an analytical piece on lessons learned from the panel and ways forward.

In his keynote address, **Ambassador George Papadatos** observed “Women and Inequalities” is a topic that is immensely serious; we are very seldomly able to look over the horizons putting aside all the customary taboos. Papadatos gave an overview of the COVID-19 impacts on the challenges and problems women are facing globally and examined possible remedies.

As violent conflict is likely to affect different segments of society to varying degrees, this raises a question about inequalities, the distributional effects of conflict, and how persistent these effects are. Horizontal inequalities between religious, ethnic groups, and women not only are seen as one major outcome of violent conflicts but as a cause as well. The Gini coefficient, however, measures vertical inequality, i.e., income inequality between individuals, and thus fails to capture the conflict-resulting disparities between different societal groups.



Ambassador George Papadatos, PhD, Head of Delegation and Permanent Observer of EPLO at the United Nations and other International Organizations

The COVID-19 crisis has been described widely as the most disruptive global experience in decades. The world has been spectacularly ill-prepared for political realities which come dangerously close to wading into political realms that are usually out of bounds. Its socio-economic impacts could smolder for several years attributed to an intolerable mix of science and politics.

We live in a period of global uncertainty, the multiplication of multifaceted conflicts, the threat of WW III, the destruction of the environment, natural disasters, and the rise of hatred, violent extremism, xenophobia, religious intolerance, racism, and racial discrimination and the geopolitical shock of the Ukraine conflict. One could argue that this period is bubbling into a highly combustible mix akin to being in a dark room flooded with gasoline rising to knee level and the only way out of it is to light a match to see where the exit is. Before COVID-19, progress toward gender equality had been uneven with significant gender gaps remaining. One factor that can be singled out as a major blow to women is austerity measures imposed on a number of countries by different institutions.

The COVID-19 crisis is having disproportionate and multiple impacts on women with enormous implications for human development, labor markets, productivity, GDP growth, and inequality. The impact of COVID-19 on women and on the war in Ukraine is where two crises meet. After women have been traversing a very long pandemic tunnel with glimmers of hope that the end was approaching and what they have endured will be recognized and addressed at many levels, the Ukraine crisis has opened another dark chapter for women and the world. Ironically the consequences of the Ukrainian crisis have not yet been fully assessed. Papadatos highlighted, that we should turn our attention to women's political representation and raise some questions. No government, no politician that he is aware of has said that the issues he raised are beyond reach. However, when we observe governments that have departed from pursuing these objectives they must be brought back in line and greater political participation by women can do that.

Ms. Visaka Dharmadasa, the first panelist, addressed in her statement a number of issues, including her experience on bringing women together across the lines of conflict to work for peace, dissemination and implementation of the landmark UN Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Security and Peace and her contribution as gender focal point for South Asia of the GPPAC (Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict) network.



Visaka Dharmadasa, Founder and Chair, Association of War Affected Women

Dharmadasa noted that 22 years down the road after UNSCR 1325 was unanimously passed, women have made some significant progress, thanks to the global normative framework which can be used to demand their due places. Countries coming out of war have also made some progress, such as Rwanda with over 60% and Nepal with more than 40% women in their elected governance bodies.

However, Dharmadasa observed that only a few decides who sits in formal peace talks. This fact underlines the dire necessity of equal rights specially because women peace builders' core values are fairness and inclusivity, and the firm belief that everyone should be included, at an equal level. Thus, equal rights are an integral aspect of peace building.

Respect to each other and upholding human dignity enable trust to be build, because trust is the most vital ingredient in peace building. The journey towards peace is a journey of trust.

Dharmadasa concluded by stressing that there are no short cuts to achieve peace, being genuine is key, as is making efforts to understand the other and being ready to settle for the least common denominator.

The next panelist, **Dr Noreen Naseer**, touched at length on the issues affecting women in the Pak-Afghan region due to different conflicts and drew parallels with affected women in other conflict regions.



**Prof. Dr. Noreen Naseer, Tribal Women Network, Department of Political Science,
University of Peshawar**

Dr Naseer stated that women have fought no wars, they have not killed people in the name of national interest, they have not set-up concentration camps to punish people on the basis of their religion and they have not buried people in mass graves to avenge humanity. This shows that women do not subscribe to the idea of violence, while ironically, women are kept away from peace building processes.

Examining Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Pakhtun inhabited border areas of Pakistan, Naseer said the terms 'pre-conflict', 'conflict' and 'post-conflict' societies are misnomers as no conflict has a definite end and start. This is so particularly for women as the inequitable gender power structures have disempowered women in different degrees and forms.

Dr Naseer's analysis of the challenges for tribal women in conflict areas revealed that the patriarchal Pakhtun society and culture of borderland has created numerous hurdles in the way of women to actively participate in any social, economic or political/public processes, therefore their role in the tribal societies is neither recognized nor appreciated. The role for Pakhtun women is mostly limited to the private sphere of family and indoor activities. According to a Pashto proverb, "A woman's place is either at home or in a grave".

Naseer concluded by observing that it cannot be denied that peace-building is a multi-tasked process and it decides the hierarchy of priorities. The most important priority is the inclusion of people affected by conflict in planning and implementing process of peace. And in many conflicts, women heads of household and care givers become important actors in the peace processes.

The following panelist, **Ms. Kawkab Al-Thaibani**, shared her perspectives on the work of advocating for women in peace and security in Yemen, and how digital technologies have enhanced opportunities to uplift the voices and participation of women in the context of peace building.



Kawkab Al-Thaibani, Gender and Communication Expert, Co-founder of Women4Yemen

Al-Thaibani, referring to the seven years of conflict in Yemen, identified two dominant factors of the current peace process — the poor representation of women and their priorities, and aspects of human rights and accountability. The exclusion of women is unjust and painful given how they are shouldering the burden of the conflict, contrary to their past gains, and particularly during the transitional period (between 2011-2014). Peace is a human rights value in essence, she observed, while the lack of accountability has significantly contributed to the failure of the transitional period.

For Al-Thaibani, the main challenges with regard to effective participation of women in and their contribution to peace process are the absence of political participation of women particularly at the local level, the use of social norms against women through enforcing dress codes, beating up women in public, using religious speech to domesticate women, and discouraging their engagement in public life, restrictions on women's civil freedom requiring them to travel with male escorts, which imposes a difficulty on their mobility—a core human right value, the collapse of the state institutions which has created a political vacuum and resulted in a lack of accountability, the dominance of armed non-state actors, lack of support to both women-led organizations and human rights organizations, the dramatic increase of gender-based violence and, the deterioration of basic services for which women pay a high price.

Among the recommendations proposed by Al-Thaibani are to vigorously promote a bottom-up approach, bolster support to women-led organizations, establish new accountability mechanisms, support human rights organizations, including accountability and human rights dimensions in the peace process, and reinforce advocacy through the involvement of the international community.

The next panelist, **Ms. Prasansa Karki**, spoke about her work and experience at the local level in enhancing women's role in peace building, strengthening social harmony and decreasing structural violence in communities, and the importance of empowering women in this regard.



Ms. Prasansa Karki, Program Development Coordinator, Nagarik Aawaz

Karki recalled that the effect of the conflict in Nepal was wide-spread, and women were the hardest hit through gender specific violence and inequalities exacerbated by the conflict. Even in the post conflict period, due to the patriarchal social structure, women were sidelined from the mainstream political discussions and decisions.

For a constructive way to build peace, laws and policies are not enough. The crucial step is to root the value of everyday peace and care in all the initiatives to help women feel valued and ease their struggle to survive while fighting for their justice. Karki stated that her organization does so by investing in the psychosocial well-being, socioeconomic growth, leadership promotion and creating space for women to share their needs, exchange experiences and learn from diverse groups of conflict affected.

However, Karki pointed out an existing resistance to conflict affected women's leadership in the community. When attempting to engage in community decision-making, women face considerable discrimination. Government authorities and the local stakeholders are rarely supportive and undermine women's legitimacy. Nevertheless, with a long term and tireless engagement with the local government and stakeholders, conflict affected women have also been successful in establishing their identity beyond that of victims.

Unless the distribution of power and resources is balanced and the male centric general perception of leadership is changed, women leaders in the post conflict society will continue to encounter challenges that are associated with the socio-politic and socio-economic structure of the society. For Karki, inclusiveness, trust, building relationships, providing a healing space and moving ahead with small efforts to create a larger impact is essential. She concluded by stating that peaceful transformation requires a long-term view that involves ongoing changes to relationships and addressing both the episodic expressions of conflict and its relational core. Conflict resolution is not about focusing on reaching an agreement, rather healing a damaged relationship.

The final panelist **Ms. Saba Ismail** observed that while women are most severely affected by conflict, when it comes to interventions, prevention and countering violent extremism, the focus is heavily on men while leaving women behind. Women have for long been portrayed as passive victims of conflict, ignoring their diverse roles in promoting peace.



Saba Ismail, Co-Founder of Aware Girls

The organization Aware Girls, that Ismail co-founded with her sister Gulalai, is a young women-led organization working for gender equality, women empowerment, and peace. The organization actively works in Pakistan and Afghanistan to counter women's exclusion from the peace and security agenda through working with thousands of young women and empowering and inspiring them into citizens with equal rights and responsibilities.

Aware Girls has also established a network of women peacebuilders from Pakistan and Afghanistan called "Pul-e-Niswan Baraye Aman". The network was established to harbor bridges between women peace activists of Pakistan and Afghanistan, enabling a women-women exchange of learning and strategizing together for peacebuilding and countering extremism.

Saba Ismail noted that the UNSC Resolution 1325 recognizes women as political actors. However, weak governance structures are one of the factors that give more space to the militant groups and their ideologies. Therefore, strengthening governance structures through the effective participation of young women is influential in achieving the objectives of the resolution.

To be systematically effective and achieve sustainable peace, Ismail highlighted the following recommendations:

- 1) There is an urgent need to have a gendered response to crises and counterterrorism. Women are equal and essential partners for peace. To achieve the sustainable development goals, a comprehensive approach with women at its center is the key to achieving SDG16.
- 2) Effective engagement and inclusion of young women would speed up the process of addressing the core causes of conflict and achieving sustainable peace. Young women can be engaged through UNSC Resolution 2250, which is fully dedicated to the important and positive role of young people and for which Aware Girls powerfully advocated.
- 3) It is not enough to translate UNSC Resolution's Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda at the national and local level, societies must be transformed through it. A 2018 constitutional amendment in Pakistan merged the north-western tribal areas with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. This has extended rights and legal and institutional protections to women of the former federally administered tribal areas that they lacked previously.
- 4) Protection and investment in women peacebuilders will allow women to participate in peacebuilding processes effectively and meaningfully, leading to the governments to effectively implement the WPS agenda. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, women have been actively taking part in grass-root movements and raising the issue of sexual violence in conflict. However, women who raise these issues face the fear of being targeted and persecuted.
- 5) Lastly, a gender-sensitive national road map to effectively implement the WPS agenda is vital to building sustainable peace. A gender-sensitive road map represents the best guarantee to fully integrate gender in national counter extremism policies and mechanisms, ultimately helping to achieve the challenging but crucial global women, peace, and security agenda.

Q & A

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Ms. Visaka Dharmadasa

- *You spoke of trust as the most important ingredient of peacebuilding, and respect for each other. Does cultivating trust bring women automatically in and enhance equal rights, or what other concrete actions could be done to support this trajectory?*

VD: Cultivating trust does not bring women automatically in nor does it enhance equal rights, but when women make peace there are fundamental principles that we adhere to, and they are Fairness and Inclusivity. We strongly believe that we should include all because we do know very well how exclusion hurts, and not only to include but also in an equal footing and equal level, that is why Peace negotiations only happen on a round table, to make sure all are equal. And those qualities automatically build trust. Do not forget wars are made on Men's egos, so as I said equality is an integral aspect of peace building not only among men and women but of every segment of the society, state or non-state.

- *We are aware of the great support and contribution that huge organizations and certain external political support are putting in the role of empowering women and their protection. That said, do you think some external political intervention do more harm than help certain communities in this regard?*

VD: Very good questions, some have used protection of women in the past as a tool. I don't believe that protection for women can be done by external factors, it has to be inbuilt to the society and specially the communities, and that can be done within the community. Protection is more of a social, societal issue rather than a political issue, and best practices come from women's groups where they speak with their own youth and build safety nets, just like in India "Rakhi" where a string is tied in a girl's hand sending a message that she is our "sister" and we have a duty to protect her.

Prof. Dr. Noreen Naseer

- *In societies where informal power structures sometimes trump formal powers, how can we increase women's access to a judicial mechanism that works in their favor?*

NN: The border areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan is inhabited by the Pakhtun/Pashtun, Pakhtu or Pashto speaking population organized under tribes, subtribes and clans follow a centuries old set of traditions called Pakhtunwali/Pashtunwali. In Afghanistan, Pakhtuns are divided politically and linguistically into two large distinct groups: *Durrani* inhabiting the southwest in the regions bordering Baluchistan, and *Ghilzais* in the eastern Afghanistan border that also overlap Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In Pakistan, Pakhtuns living in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and former Federally Administered Tribal Areas comprise a third largest group called Karlanri. Pakhtun tribal system is based on inter familial and clan linkages uniting tribes. The eldest, grandfather or an elder son heads family; every family is part of a khel, clan, subtribe and then tribe. In a village khel/clan/tribe is headed by village elder called Malik/Khan/Sardar/Arbab. Association with a tribe is necessary for individual identity and protection of tribesman's economic and social rights. A tribesman without a tribal association and land has no guarantee of security. Possession of land and natural resources is also determined according to clan or tribe, each clan/tribe is in charge of land and resources within its own area. Property is divided among the tribes and families according to the traditional setup of Veysh (distribution).

Land ownership in Pakhtun tribal areas' is mostly unrecorded (except in settled parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) but orally known and some clan or tribes jointly own land, known as Shamilaat (collectively owned by a clan/tribe). Agnatic rivalry (Tarburwali) is also common, where scarce resources in a patrilineal society and shared lands result, most of the times, in developing enmity. Inheritance law is regulated under Pakhtunwali where only male inherits. In case of no male issue, family is deprived of the property under a common customary practice called Miratah (one without a male member). Marriage solemnized according to Pakhtun Riway and Nikah (Muslim marital contract), amount of bride price (Valver) paid according to the custom prevalent in that area. The evolution of Jirga (Council of Elders) within community is an important institution of Pakhtunwali, dealing with every sort of social and economic activity, also resolving conflicts and maintenance of social order in tribal society.

Unfortunately, in such traditional and militarized societies, the state deliberately created gatekeepers to keep the informal set-up and traditional mechanism of (patriarchal) justice intact. In case of both Afghanistan and border districts (North Waziristan, South Waziristan, Kurram, Bajaur, Mohmand, Orakzai and Khyber), the state extended prioritized development and gave support to informal mechanism to avoid any burden on their ex-chequer. Hence, with minimized development, both states ignored health, education and justice systems. In this scheme, women are the most adversely impacted.

Therefore, certain emergency steps are required to make the justice system accessible to women and children. Demilitarizing border areas under UN and implementing Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in Pashtun conflict hit areas. Abolishing informal mechanisms of justice such as Council of Elder (Jirga - patriarchal traditional system that does not allow women in public spaces), and Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR) in these border areas. There is a need to introduce quotas in different decision-making setups and systems to recognize gender parity in governance structures. With the assistance of UN human rights bodies, centers and international civil society, there is a need for creation of a commission to record atrocities of Taliban and militants against women in the conflict-ridden borderland. Besides extension of formal judiciary, there is a need to form special tribunals/desks (consist of human rights activists, sensitize judges and lawyers) to provide speedy justice to women affected by both state and society atrocities. It is pertinent to involve, empower and include tribal women in social, political and economic spheres.

- *I think we have a similar situation in Lebanon where we need to include women who live on all the borders to be a part of the peace process, discussions and education.*

NN: In traditional societies and unfortunately in militarized borders, the problems and issues related to women are similar. We need connectivity not only amongst militarized borderlands but also to the international community that is working for world peace. Armed conflicts and militarization in different parts of the world are not only complex and hence it needs world's response to stop atrocities against women and children. There are several states and groups trying to implement their policies and agendas on local population. The recent victim is Ukraine, which has to bear the brunt of a New Cold War building-up in Eastern Europe. It is also observed that in militarized border areas such as Kashmir, state and non-state international actors are involved, and they complicate the conflict and thus people living in these militarized spaces are left with no option but unite and appeal to international community in different ways to build pressure on states to push for more inclusive structures that can provide space to women. Also, in many instances, state's militarization and apathy has disconnected local people from both national and international justice processes. We need to unite against militarized approaches of states towards their borderland and its people with international community working for peace.

Ms. Prasansa Karki

- *What is the role of capacity building and what are the key groups/levels in the society that should receive training in order to change the narratives that continue to exclude women in decision-making and peace processes?*

PK: Nagarik Aawaz has been contributing to the justice-seeking mechanism of conflict-affected women and promoting their recognition as community peace leaders in their society. The overall goal of the capacity building is to help the conflict affected women create momentum to their fight for justice through localizing the issues of transitional justice. Nagarik Aawaz closely works with conflict affected women from both the sides (victims from the state and the then Maoist). Through years of engagement in promoting their leadership Nagarik Aawaz have been successful in localizing the issues of transitional justice among the local government and the non-affected communities. Equally, our effort has been in promoting the mental health of these most vulnerable groups through providing them individual counselling and family counselling. As most of these women are single and head of the house, they bear multiple roles of caretaker, bread winner, along with their fight for justice.

Therefore, Nagarik Aawaz provides multiple support through income generation activity, counselling service and trainings to help them ease their struggle to survive each day. Nagarik Aawaz has developed a survivor-to-survivor approach to reach out to their rights. Many local governments have acknowledged their existence and segregated budget to promote women's socio-economic well-being. These interventions have helped in overall leadership growth of these women. As they are at all the levels of leadership, it has helped to provide space to coin their voice. Women have been changing narratives from being mere victims to leaders. One of our prominent initiatives is the *Women Peace Table* which we conduct in all the seven provinces and provide a space to learn and share. Women Peace Table has become a safe space for women, those who have faced multi-layer trauma to share stories and talk about their collective grief. Also, women who never went out of their houses have come out and started educating themselves on their issues.

Ms. Kawkab Al-Thaibani

- *We've seen political struggle influence the international response to the war in Yemen. In your opinion, what are the most promising instruments for women to deflect political hindrances and advocate for themselves on the global stage?*

Yemeni women inside and outside should work on forming alliances to support each other. They should work on filling the gap in building women's capacity. Women are lagged behind in terms of political growth, education, and the economic market. They should be working on improving the situations of women economically, socially, and politically. In addition, there should be linkages between the Yemeni feminist movement to an international one. This will give them strong platforms for them to gain political leverage.

Ms. Saba Ismail

- *How do you see the potential of partnerships and how can they be cultivated to bring both policy and practice closer together? Breaking existing silos and working as a united front - is there a united front as the world is facing conflicts on many sides?*

SI: UNSCR 1325 is a global agenda that calls on all member states to address the impact of conflict on women and girls and to systematically include women in peacebuilding efforts, including peace talks, peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Without partnership between policy and practice, these goals cannot be achieved. Solutions can be identified by applying a gender lens to the policies that will eventually get translated into practice and change the dynamic around peace and security overall. The approach toward partnerships between practice and policymaking must be bottom-up as one size fits all approach will not be helpful due to the different realities and diverse contexts. Local voices must be included and can act as a united front to achieve the WPS agenda.

- *What would be a pragmatic solution for abating the hardships/challenges of women in war? Is there an emergency response which could give them security?*

SI: Women are not a homogenous group, they experience violence and conflict differently based on their age, income status, education, and geographical location. For example, the experiences of women going through war in Ukraine and Afghanistan are not the same, so ideally, any interventions to relieve women and provide them with security will depend on the local context and the needs of the women in those communities.

LESSONS LEARNED & WAYS FORWARD

LESSONS LEARNED AND WAYS FORWARD¹

Introduction

Since the end of the cold war, the concept of a gender dimension in conflict has gained prominence in the fields of human rights and peacekeeping. The discourse on women in crisis and conflict has taken two intermingled angles: the disparity of impact on women and their unequal participation in peacebuilding.

Women's equal participation in political life has been an uninterrupted battle, with the oldest women's peace organization, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, dating back to 1915. Yet today, women still face major systemic and cultural obstacles regarding their participation in peace processes. As of 2021, the Inter-Parliamentary Union recorded only 26.1 percent of women parliamentarians across the globe². Reports of women being kept out of peace talks and conflict recovery processes are flowing in from all countries and regions. A 2016 report shows that more than 80 per cent of the women members of parliament (MPs) interviewed experienced psychological violence; one in three, economic violence; one in four, physical violence; and one in five experienced sexual violence³. Other identity components often come into play when women are targeted. An intersectional understanding of women's issues is primordial when addressing conflicts. As a result of rampant social injustice in conflict-affected regions, women who are part of marginalized or vulnerable groups are isolated from public and political life, with no access to judicial institutions and limited ability to protest and voice discontent. As an example, limited access of certain groups to identification documents excludes them from rights and services provided by national and private institutions, such as opening bank accounts⁴.

Gender inequality and conflict reinforce and exacerbate inequalities. There is growing evidence from literature pointing out that conflict and crisis have a disproportionate adverse effect on women⁵. The Covid-19 crisis has been one the latest evidence that a seemingly genderless disaster ignites gender inequalities in the working environment i.e., unpaid care and domestic work, emotional and physical well-being, access to goods and services; and relief and social protection measures⁶.

¹ Written by Imane Charif, a representative of EPLO, in close cooperation with the Geneva Centre.

² *Women in parliament in 2021*. (2022) Inter-Parliamentary Union, <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2022-03/women-in-parliament-in-2021>

³ *Sexism, harassment, and violence against women parliamentarians*. (2016) Inter-Parliamentary Union. <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2016-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-parliamentarians>

⁴ Hanmer, L., Esquivel-Korsiak, V., & Pande, R. (2021). *Barriers to the inclusion of women and marginalized groups in Nigeria's ID system*. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/35507>

⁵ This section draws on research commissioned by UN Women from academics, policy analysts and practitioners for the Global Study, including: Thania Paffenholz et al., "Making Women Count: Assessing Women's Inclusion and Influence on the Quality and Sustainability of Peace Negotiations and Implementation" (Graduate Institute Geneva, Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding, April 13, 2015); Christine Bell, "Text and Context: Evaluating Peace Agreements for Their 'Gender Perspective'" (University of Edinburgh, Global Justice Academy, UN Women, March 2015); Christine Bell, "Unsettling Bargains? Power-Sharing and the Inclusion of Women in Peace Negotiations" (University of Edinburgh, Political Settlements Research Programme, March 2015); Virginia Bouvier, "Gender and the Role of Women in Colombia's Peace Process" (UN Women, April 27, 2015); Christine Bell and Vanessa Utley, "Chronology of Mindanao Peace Agreements," 2015; Christine Bell and Helia Farahnoosh, "Chronology of the Peace Process and Peace Agreements between the Philippines and the National Democratic Front," 2015; Christine Bell, Sissela Matzner, and Catherine O'Rourke, "A Chronology of Colombian Peace Processes and Peace Agreements," 2015; and Irene M. Santiago, "The Participation of Women in the Mindanao Peace Process," June 2015. as well as a growing body of existing research on the impact of women's participation: O'Reilly, Ó Súilleabháin, and Paffenholz, "Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes"; Laurel Anne Stone, "Women Transforming Conflict: A Quantitative Analysis of Female Peacemaking," Available at SSRN 2485242 (2014) http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2485242

⁶ *Women and girls left behind: Glaring gaps in pandemic responses*. (2021) UN Women Data Hub, from <https://data.unwomen.org/publications/women-and-girls-left-behind-glaring-gaps-pandemic-responses>

Likewise, the unfolding events in Ukraine and across Europe displayed instantly gender-specific predicaments linked to displacement and the absence of public infrastructure.

Unanimously adopted on 31 October 2000, the United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 enshrined the Women, Peace and Security Agenda (WPS) and helped establish a global normative framework that guides agents through the realization of equal involvement of women in peace efforts. Built on the four pillars of prevention, protection, participation, and relief and recovery, the WPS agenda acknowledges the different gendered experiences of armed conflicts, calls for women's participation in conflict prevention, resolution, peace processes and post-conflict reconstruction, and demands the protection of women in armed conflict. It provides a tool for advocacy and makes explicit the imperative of equal participation of women. However, despite women's crucial role in achieving lasting stability, the vast majority of peace processes and agreements continue to exclude women. In 15 of 16 examined national dialogues, the decision-making was left to a small group of male leaders⁷.

Progress regarding women's participation in political life and peace processes is slowly underway but suffers regular drawbacks due to economic and environmental crisis, conflict, or health crisis, as has been stressed by Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund⁸. As of 2021, 98 countries have adopted a National Action Plan on WPS to be implemented in 2 to 5 years. However, little measurable or striking results have been achieved⁹. These action plans fall short in inclusivity; funding; placing the plan at the heart of domestic policies; and collaboration with civil society. Paradoxically, women peacebuilders from civil society were the first to campaign for resolution 1325 and its subsequent mechanisms. Their monitoring and input in regard to operationalization ensure that accountability and adequacy are commensurate with the real needs of their communities. In principle, their voices are reverberating among communities, governments and foreign actors.

Conflicts in which women are ensnared often involve international interference and geopolitical power play. Their ramifications on health, safety, social cohesion, unpaid care work, social norms, judicial institutions, and the environment therefore become objects of accountability for the international community. In that sense, international organizations could play an active role in advocacy welcoming women from civil society, not only in the confines of human rights conferences, but also at the negotiation table.

The unique capacity of women to foster peace

The necessity of having women involved in peace processes does not exclusively stem from a moral standpoint. Not only is the protection and participation of women a matter of principle, but also a prerequisite for an efficient and comprehensive peace process. Women, by virtue of their position in conflict-affected societies, display a remarkable ability for empathy and bridging divides. Indeed, women are seldom the wagers of war, yet they bear a disproportionate amount of costs and liabilities associated with conflict. Women are the first to lose their jobs and access to financing opportunities¹⁰. They work in the informal sector which is more vulnerable to conflict situations and offers less to no social protection¹¹.

⁷ UN Women. (2021), Preventing Conflict Transforming Justice Securing the Peace, A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325, from <https://wps.unwomen.org/index.html>

⁸ *The Managing Director's Remarks to the UN Security Council Session on Women's Economic Inclusion and Participation As a Key to Building Peace (as prepared for delivery)*, March 8, 2022 from <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2022/03/08/sp030822-md-remarks-at-the-un-security-council>

⁹ Lippai, Z., & Young, A. (2017). *CREATING NATIONAL ACTION PLANS: A GUIDE TO IMPLEMENTING RESOLUTION 1325*.

¹⁰ *Overview*. (n.d.). World Bank. Retrieved March 29, 2022, from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/gender/overview>

¹¹ Quek, Y. (2019). *WOMEN'S WORK AMID FRAGILITY AND CONFLICT KEY PATTERNS + CONSTRAINTS*. The Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security.

As it has been observed, conflict impairs social and civil infrastructures such as schools, public transports, and health clinics. As a result, the traditional role of women as primary caregivers, head of households or single mothers becomes an added burden and a factor of vulnerability when it should be harnessed to promote intercultural and interfaith dialogue.

Through their roles as mothers and/or caregivers, women transmit strong values of peace, motivated at the very least by an imperative to keep their families and communities safe¹². An interview published in the Graduate Institute's International Development Policy Journal with women from the farmers' organization *Organisasi Petani Wongsorejo Banyuwangi* revealed that "motherhood and pregnancy were far from a hindrance; indeed, motherhood was a motivator and gave women's activism legitimacy¹³". There is also a missed opportunity to value the strategic ability of women to heal broken relationships. Through rituals or simply by listening, they traditionally initiate practices that mend war-affected psyches. In Kenya, for instance, the Luo women's performance of healing rituals was instrumental to peace-making¹⁴. Unfortunately, when it comes to women, the human factor is reduced to a subsidiary element and contained within the private sphere. Nowadays, we are witnessing a growing trend of civilian mobilization in conflict, either as propaganda props, human shields or fighting bodies¹⁵. The consequent social polarization and hatred necessitates the mediation of those who have suffered through a war they didn't instigate, often women.

Recommendation: Promoting a narrative that extols the value of women's unique strengths and experiences. Challenging typical approaches to peacebuilding and allowing for an emotional approach to peacebuilding.

Founding peacebuilding on values

In practice, peacebuilding entails a journey towards social cohesion. Peacebuilders aim at actualizing the values that bind people into a stable social fabric. Throughout our panel discussion, experienced peace practitioners have asserted their conviction in an earnest approach based on values rather than agendas. According to them, women have an ease for understanding body language and non-verbal communication. This faculty allows for better dialogue between ethnic or linguistic groups and fosters genuine rapport. Shared hardships among women from all sides of conflict cultivates an all-encompassing compassion and therefore serves social justice and social harmony, two fundamental ingredients for peace. As for peacebuilders who reach out to conflict-affected communities, understanding their specific values is the first step towards trust. The only effective peace solutions are those which embrace the ethics and ideals of each group.

In his publication on the occasion of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations, Secretary-General H.E. António Guterres, warned against the "human rights agenda being instrumentalized for political purposes"¹⁶. Conflict-recovery and women's protection are topics of choice when governing powers attempt to gain popularity or absolve themselves from international law violations. In short, values are consistent, political canvassing is not.

¹² Prüggl, E., Onyesho, J., Kunz, R., Myrtilinen, H., Rahmawati, A., Udasmoro, W., Achakpa, M., & Rigual, C. (2021). *Gender in peacebuilding: Local practices in Indonesia and Nigeria*.

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibok, A. K. & Ogar, O. T. (2018). Traditional Roles of African Women in Peace Making and Peace Building: An Evaluation. *GNOSI: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Human Theory and Praxis* 1 (1):41-56.

¹⁵ Wenger, A. & Mason, S. (2008). The civilianization of armed conflict: Trends and implications. *International Review of the Red Cross*. 90. 835-852.

¹⁶ António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General. (2020). *Before and after urban warfare: Conflict prevention and transitions in cities*.

This notion is paramount considering peacekeeping is a long and tireless endeavor that can hardly ever withstand tribulations caused by political or social struggles. Nonetheless, negotiations regarding political interests are a part of peacebuilding processes. Sticking to universal values will confer civil society actors an identity _ which is essential for effective advocacy_ amidst diverging political visions. Isike and Okeke Uzodike¹⁷, citing Fleshman, recounted the example of the Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET), uniting women from Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone, who demonstrated impressive tenacity driven by values of common understanding. In 2002, their organization succeeded where the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) failed to bring presidents of the three aforementioned states together for peace negotiations¹⁸.

Recommendation: Realigning peacebuilding practices with the values of all stakeholders by confidently affirming them throughout every step of peace negotiations.

The hidden dangers of portraying women solely as victims

When attempting to counter the vicious effects of crisis and conflict on women, it is far too common to focus on fulfilling physical and psychological needs. Indisputably, relief is vital in crisis situations but the provision of gender-responsive assistance is often unsatisfactory. The recent health crisis reinforced this observation. At state and global level, the Covid-19 responses in conflict affected areas not only inadequately catered to women, but they also reflected a clear lack of forward-looking aspirations in regard to women's rights advancement in their societies¹⁹. Thus, labelling women as victims or mere beneficiaries of humanitarian assistance undermines their capabilities as agents of change.

A distinction can then be drawn between immediate support and long-term empowerment. Suffering through war and crisis endows women with experience and unique hindsight that often fails to be captured in reconciliation and recovery programmes. Learning from real world experiences can enrich communication among all parties provided that they aren't just put down in reports but actually put forward in the most contentious dialogues. As peace processes lay the groundwork for new beginnings, planning for peace is akin to writing history. The incorporation of marginalized women's narratives is needed to commence fruitful reconstruction. In the case of Colombia, victim hearings successfully steered the negotiations that led to the Final Peace Agreement²⁰.

Victimizing women as a means of silencing is a widespread and recognized technique. As it has been mentioned by our speaker Ms. Kawkab Al-Thaibani, armed groups in Yemen deliberately use gender-based violence to terrorize and control the population, which has been reported by the group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen (A/HRC/48/20). Ironically, the role of women in conflict is more nuanced than simply victims. In Sri-Lanka and Nepal, women made up around one-third of soldiers²¹. Yet as it has been emphasized in the discussion by Dr Noreen Naseer, this did not grant them better seats at the table when time came for reconstruction.

¹⁷ Isike, C., & Uzodike, U. O. (2011). Towards an indigenous model of conflict resolution: Reinventing women's roles as traditional peacebuilders in neo-colonial Africa. *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, 11(2).

¹⁸ Fleshman, M. (2003). African women struggle for a seat at the peace table. *Africa Recovery*, 16 (4), pp. 15–19.

¹⁹ Asi, Y.M., Bebasari, P., Hardy, E. *et al.* (2022). Assessing gender responsiveness of COVID-19 response plans for populations in conflict-affected humanitarian emergencies. *Confl Health* 16, 4

²⁰ *Getting back to what matters: Victim voices and the making of international law.* (2022). IFIT. <https://ifit-transitions.org/commentaries/getting-back-to-what-matters-victim-voices-and-the-making-of-international-law/>

²¹ Rajivan, A. K., & Senarathne, R. (2011). Women in armed conflicts: Inclusion and exclusion. *Asia-Pacific Human Development Report Background Papers Series*.

On the other hand, parties of conflicts have used the narrative of women and children victimhood to disrepute their opponents or justify militarized action. Embedded feminism undermines women's rights in order to militarize sensitive areas and perpetrates structural inequalities as has been seen in Afghanistan²². The inclusion of the WPS agenda into national security policies and the overall trend to involve women in security issues poses questions as to what women's role in armed conflict and counterterrorism is evolving towards. Women are put in the frontlines with no protection against security forces and heightened surveillance over their behavior on the basis of gender-typical norms²³. Instead of welcoming women's meaningful participation there is a deliberate tendency to entangle them in inflexible security strategies that exacerbates violence against them.

Recommendation: Drawing attention to the instrumentalization of the victim narrative and increasing visibility of women that are active in peacebuilding through traditional media, social media, and peace forums.

Political and developmental challenges

As Dr Noreen Naseer stated, the notion of conflict and post-conflict fails to capture the endemic nature of many unstable zones today. Societies that have experienced conflict are likely to experience it again due to structural realities or poorly resolved tensions²⁴. Socio-economic injustices that afflict women are some of the missing pieces in the puzzle of peace and prosperity. The Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women Ms. Sima Bahous stated when speaking at the United Nations Security Council that half of the World Bank's fragile and conflict-affected countries are in sub-Saharan Africa, where economic losses due to gender inequality stand at \$2.5 trillion²⁵. Parallely, the Mackenzie Global Institute estimates that the global gross domestic product could be boosted by \$28 trillion by 2025 if gender gaps in the workforce were reduced and the presence of women in leadership positions was increased²⁶.

Right to education represents another major driver for poverty and social imbalance. The IMF found that "20 million girls in developing countries may never return to school"²⁷, leading to dramatic economic losses. Additionally, a recent report by the secretary general of the Commission on the Status of Women asserted that the environmental crisis exacerbates conflict, namely by increasing competition over resources within and between countries²⁸, adding that "evidence suggests that climate displacement disproportionately affects women and girls in developing countries, including in distinct ways such as a heightened risk of gender-based violence and child marriage, impacts on maternal and neonatal health and a greater burden of unpaid care and domestic work". Displaced women all over the world are neglected in the peace-making process and subjected to the reverberations of hostilities waged by local, national, and external actors.

²² Newby, V. F., & O'Malley, A. (2021). Introduction: WPS 20 years on: Where are the women now? *Global Studies Quarterly*, 1(3).

²³ Mesok, E. Meyer, C. et al. (2019). Women, Peace and security and the prevention of violence: Reflections from civil society in the context of the fourth Swiss national action plan 1325. *Swisspeace*.

²⁴ Ibok, A. K. & Ogar, O. T. (2018). Traditional Roles of African Women in Peace Making and Peace Building: An Evaluation

²⁵ Speech: We must give peace a chance. (2022). UN Women – Headquarters.

²⁶ Woetzel, J. Madgavkar, A. et al. (2015). How advancing women's equality can add \$12 trillion to global growth. *Mckinsey.Com; McKinsey & Company*. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/employment-and-growth/how-advancing-womens-equality-can-add-12-trillion-to-global-growth>

²⁷ The Managing Director's Remarks to the UN Security Council Session on Women's Economic Inclusion and Participation As a Key to Building Peace (as prepared for delivery), March 8, 2022

²⁸ "Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies, and programmes. Advanced Unedited version," (2022). *66th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women*.

Recommendation: Increasing public-private partnerships and monitoring the implementation of policies and national action plans.

The gender dynamics of militarization

Increased militarization is directly linked to gender inequality. Multiple studies²⁹ unveil various ways in which militarization impacts women's protection and equal participation:

- a) military conflict perpetuates patriarchal norms and transforms gender relations
- b) negative effects on democracy and economies which reduces women's ability to exercise their rights.
- c) a culture of impunity that is installed by a lack of accountability from military personnel and non-judicial protection against them.
- d) increased surveillance and censorship of women, especially human rights defenders, under the guise of peacekeeping and counterterrorism
- e) fragmentation of society through informal law enforcement that geographically and socially isolates women from their support systems and from public life.
- f) Finally, military spending takes away from social services budgets which provide women with essential services such as healthcare.

Ms. Sima Bahous had also lamented in her speech that "military spending increased, there were more coups, and the world saw the 'multilateral system against the ropes'"³⁰. Militarization also poses lingering challenges, as militarized regimes become entrenched in civilian life³¹.

State intervention in geopolitical hotspots silences and marginalizes local communities to make room for military operations and proxy wars. The cases of Kashmir, the Pak-Afghan border and Yemen came up in the panel discussion. Belligerent groups are financed by foreign powers and the social divide is fueled, even weaponized, for the sake of strategic territorial control. Local voices, in particular those of women from marginalized groups, are virtually absent from peace negotiations since the debate falls under the scope of international security issues and interests of states. On the global stage, human rights violations are justified by invoking peacekeeping and national security. At the 49th Session of the UN Human Rights Council, during the interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism, a number of Council members expressed concern about the "ongoing human rights violations in the name of countering terrorism across the globe"³².

²⁹ See for example: Satkunanathan, A. (2017). *Sri Lanka* (F. Ní Aoláin, N. Cahn, D. F. Haynes, & N. Valji, Eds.). Oxford University Press; Elveren, A. Y., & Moghadam, V. M. (2022). Militarization and gender inequality: Exploring the impact. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 1–19; Preliminary findings from Carlitz, R. (2021) Comparing Military and Human Security Spending (forthcoming) commissioned by UN Women <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/facts-and-figures#notes>

³⁰ Kossaiy, E. (2022, March 9). UAE calls for women to be given key roles in post-conflict recovery efforts. *Arab News*. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2038911/amp>

³¹ Satkunanathan, A. (2017). *Sri Lanka*. Oxford University Press.

³² UN: *States must stop abuse of counter-terrorism measures*. (2022, March 15). ARTICLE 19. <https://www.article19.org/resources/un-states-must-stop-abuse-of-counter-terrorism-measures/>

Gender mainstreaming across all levels of governance is challenged; there is a disconnect between local, regional and national authorities. Despite the adoption of quotas and anti-discriminatory laws at the international and national level, groups that fall outside of the state's control, external actors, belligerent groups and rural societies are not overseen by these policies and therefore are not held accountable. Customary law in rural areas explicitly excludes women from peace talks. Panelist Ms. Saba Ismail pointed out that in Afghanistan, women were not allowed in negotiations with the Taliban, in compliance with their gender policies.

Recommendation: Normalizing democratic processes in the contest of security policies while fully involving women. Shedding light on the gendered realities of militarization for civilians.

Implementation of the WPS agenda by international actors

By disseminating the WPS agenda, UN agencies and other international organizations such as the World Bank put in place close collaboration with governments and civil society groups, attempting to bridge the gap between the two and promote gender equality on the legal, social and economic front. Despite the establishment of many regional initiatives and technical assistance programmes, gender mainstreaming must be included in all UN resolutions and policies. Additionally, more flexible and reliable funding mechanisms are needed to sustain peacebuilding initiatives. Drawing from the UN Secretary General's Annual Report on Women, Peace and Security of October 2021, the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund details that "despite new funding commitments, the share of funding that is channeled directly to women's organizations remains strikingly low at only 0.4 percent of bilateral aid to conflict affected contexts³³". Unreliability of foreign donors establishes insecurity in protection and humanitarian efforts. For Yemen, several states did not fulfil their pledge to the UN which received \$1.7bn. less than originally expected³⁴. In her address to the Security council, Bahous also called out the lack of political will to implement the WPS agenda³⁵. Participation of states in international peacebuilding mechanisms are often politically motivated and therefore do not open doors for those who were previously side-lined in decision-making. For instance, Deborah Lyons, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) claimed "peacebuilding in Afghanistan has been intrusive, externally driven, top down and technocratic for two decades, as powerful countries exploited the process for their own ends³⁶".

It is important however, not to overlook the accomplishment of civil society networks and the success of UN agencies' collaboration with peacebuilders. In Sudan for example, the UN and African Union hybrid mission in Darfur (UNAMID) created an umbrella body of 34 women's organizations who joined forces to ensure equal participation was included in the Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan³⁷.

Recommendation: Increasing meaningful and balanced collaboration between grassroots women's organizations and international donors/ implementing partners, focusing on gender inclusive people-driven initiatives

³³ *A Missing Brick for Sustaining Women's Movements, Flexible Institutional Funding for Local Women's Organizations*. (2021). Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund.

³⁴ Yemen condemns international donor funding shortfall as UK cuts aid. (2021 May 1), *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/01/uk-under-pressure-over-plan-slash-aid-yemen-civil-war-famine>

³⁵ *Speech: We must give peace a chance*. (). UN Women – Headquarters.

³⁶ *Women must be given space to lead if Afghanistan is to find peace: Bachelet*. (2022, March 10). UN News. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1113742>

³⁷ Gender Unit, Department of Peace Operations. (2021). Leaders and changemakers women transforming peace and security amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. *Women, Peace, and Security Highlights - UN Peacekeeping in 2020*. United Nations Secretariat.

Threats to civil society and cultural barriers

International organizations and civil society actors zealously push for national constitutions and laws that protect women's equal political participation. Legislation on access to leadership roles is often lackluster and limited to quotas, either in elections, parliament seats or within political parties. In nature, quotas do not target the root causes of unequal participation between genders and non-compliance to these targets is common in conflict-ridden states. In the context of peace processes, women's inclusion is avoided so as to not contradict the parties who hold sexist ideologies. This has been the case with the Taliban in Afghanistan and in Myanmar in 2011-2015 when less than 6 percent³⁸ of the representatives were women. In addition, women are excluded from informal peace talks and their concerns do not make it to higher levels of governance. This exclusion led to women's civil society organizations operating on the margins. The UN Secretary General António Guterres warned of a global decline in civic space, citing that just three per cent of people around the world live in countries where civil society organizations can operate in freedom³⁹. In view of these challenges, women's peace networks are a strong instrument for advocacy. FemWise-Africa for instance, counts approximately 80 high-level politicians, experts, and young peace practitioners to provide support and capacity building. Organizations such as FemWise strengthens women's influence on policy-making. President of the Network of Women Economic Operators in the Ségou region of Mali, Ms. Moussokoro Coulibaly, recalled the women's movements of Liberia, Northern Ireland, and Colombia and in Liberia which helped to bring about an end to the civil war⁴⁰.

In the context of gender advocacy and participation in peacebuilding, oppression and violence are rampant. Violence is both verbal and physical, online and in person. Oppression takes place in the private sphere as well as public spaces. Women human rights defenders are especially targeted as was highlighted by the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders (A/HRC/49/49/).

There is a need for societal transformation as formulated by panel speaker Ms. Saba Ismail. At the community level, elders and people who hold symbolic power uphold oppressive and restrictive norms. The cost of misogyny is a less resilient society, as women do not have the resources to contribute positively to economic growth and conflict prevention. As Bahous mentioned, "We know that women are more likely to spend their incomes on family needs and make a larger contribution to recovery⁴¹". It cannot be expected of authorities who hold sexist beliefs to protect women's full enjoyment of their rights. Therefore, the work must be done from the bottom up, focusing on the education of youth, the creation of safe spaces for conflict affected women and girls, investing in microfinance for young entrepreneurs, providing capacity building and training for young activists, supporting bodily autonomy through healthcare and education, and implementing gender-responsive assistance. A bottom-up approach is also crucial to espouse existing gender-neutral peace practices that best align with the communities' values and cultural heritage. For example, in the Igbo societies of Nigeria, the Umuada are eldest daughters who are tasked to resolve domestic and intra-community conflicts pertaining to economic, political, and ritual matters.⁴².

³⁸ Council on Foreign Relations. (n.d.). *Myanmar Case Study Current Peace Effort*. <https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/myanmar>

³⁹ *Gender equality 'fundamental prerequisite' for peaceful, sustainable world*. (2022, March 16). UN News. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1114072>

⁴⁰ *Investing in women's empowerment yields major peace, prosperity dividend, Security Council hears*. (2022, March 8). UN News. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1113552>

⁴¹ *Speech: We must give peace a chance*. (2022, March 8). UN Women – Headquarters. Retrieved March 28, 2022,

⁴² Prügl, E., Rigual, C. et al. (2019). *Taking a gendered bottom-up approach to peacebuilding* (No. BOOK). The Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Gender Centre.

These practices are often eroded by larger scale conflicts and poverty, as gendered norms are manipulated to further silence women. In conflict-affected societies, violent groups will stiffen gender norms in order to exercise control over the population. Sadly, this will have a detrimental effect on post-conflict societies, as the social injustices linger. In pursuing equality for all women, we must allocate greater efforts towards youth empowerment to speed up post-conflict recovery and break hostility cycles.

Recommendation: Expanding outreach across regional and national borders, generations, ethnic groups and others, in order to reach a critical mass of civically engaged women and girls and overweigh gender norms.

FULL STATEMENTS

FULL STATEMENTS

Keynote Address by Ambassador Dr. George Papadatos
Ambassador and Head of Delegation, EPLO Geneva

Let me just say that it is really a pleasure to have this opportunity to share this virtual platform with such distinguished panelists but also to have Director Palwankar as a moderator. I welcomed the chance to talk on an issue such as “Women and Inequalities”, a topic that is immensely serious and which we are very seldom able to look over the horizons putting aside all the customary taboos.

I shall attempt to give an overview of the Covid -19 impacts on the challenges and problems women are facing globally and to examine possible remedies. The objective of the panel discussion is to flank rational discourse and to contribute, to react and cope better with a world that should be more sustainable, fairer to women, and fit for the future. Hopefully, it will change perceptions and influence policies, and contribute to a more progressive and different political vision.

The COVID-19 crisis has been described widely as the most disruptive global experience for decades. The world has been spectacularly ill-prepared for political realities which come dangerously close to wading into political realms that are usually out of bounds. Its consequences were severe in medical, ethical, economic, political, juridical, psychological, social, and other areas. Its socio-economic impacts could “smolder” for several years attributed to an intolerable mix of science and politics. We live in a period of global uncertainty, the multiplication of multifaceted conflicts, the threat of WW III, the destruction of the environment, natural disasters, and the rise of hatred, violent extremism, xenophobia, religious intolerance, racism, and racial discrimination and the geopolitical shock of the Ukraine conflict. One could argue that this period is bubbling into a highly combustible mix akin to being in a dark room flooded with gasoline rising to knee level and the only way out of it is to light a match to see where the exit is. The discussion calls for multidisciplinary, creative thinking, not only for inspecting immediate problems and possible reactions. New concepts and bold ideas could constructively challenge established thoughts about global interactions, production and logistics, work, women's issues, healthcare, social systems, mobility, and other factors.

Before Covid-19, progress towards gender equality had been uneven with significant gender gaps remaining. One factor that can be singled out as a major blow to women; austerity measures imposed on a number of countries by different institutions. Strangely enough, the word austerity has disappeared nowadays even from EU statements. The Virus exposed structural inequalities across every sphere, from health to the economy, security to social protection. Young women & girls were disproportionately impacted during conflicts, migration, and economic downturns. Violence against women has increased together and so has domestic violence. Now women are facing increasing challenges in their daily lives which vary from country to country and from region to region. The Covid -19 crisis is having a disproportionate and multiple impact on women with enormous implications for human development, labor markets, productivity, GDP growth and inequality.

According to the McKinsey and Co article “Covid-19 and Gender Equality: Countering the regressive effects” women’s jobs are 1.8 times more vulnerable to this crisis than men’s. Women make up 39 percent of global employment but account for 54 percent of overall job losses.

The impact of COVID-19 on women and of the war in Ukraine is where two crises meet. After women have been traversing a very long pandemic tunnel with glimmers of hope that the end was approaching and what they have endured will be recognized and addressed at many levels, the Ukraine crisis has opened another dark chapter for women and the world. Ironically the consequences of the Ukrainian crisis have not yet been fully assessed.

As violent conflict is likely to affect different segments of society to varying degrees, this raises a question about inequalities, the distributional effects of conflict, and how persistent these effects are. Horizontal inequalities between religious, ethnic groups and women not only are seen as one major outcome of violent conflicts but as a cause as well. The Gini coefficient, however, measures vertical inequality, i.e., income inequality between individuals, and thus fails to capture the conflict-resulting disparities between different societal groups. We are talking about a conflict that could develop into Europe's biggest since WWII. A war that has shattered hopes of a strong global economic recovery from Coronavirus at least in the short term.

We should seriously think through the dimensions of this unfolding political moment. Though it is too early to be conclusive about either the immediate or long-term political effects of COVID-19 or the Ukraine crisis we should constantly realign our objectives and policies with progressing developments.

In closing my statement, I think we should turn our attention to women's political representation and raise some questions. Studies are telling us that it has indeed come a long way since the turn of the century, and it does not seem to have been affected by the pandemic. Women in 2020 were 49.58% almost half of the world's population. Has the increase of women in politics impacted policy choices? Does a larger share of women in political offices have broader effects on women's empowerment? Has it increased the collective commitment and determination of governments to reduce inequalities, empower women and achieve gender equality? No government, no politician that I am aware of has said that the issues raised in my questions are beyond reach. However, when we observe governments that have departed from pursuing these objectives they must be brought back in line and greater political participation by women can do that.

Visaka Dharmadasa

Founder and Chair, Association of War Affected Women, Sri Lanka

22 years down the road after UNSCR 1325 was unanimously passed, we are happy that we women have made some significant progress, specially we do have a global normative framework which can be quoted and used to demand our due places. We shouldn't forget even the small steps that we were able to walk together in the right direction. Countries coming out of war or conflict have made some progress, Rwanda with over 60% and Nepal more than 40% women into their elected governance bodies. These are very significant progress made after wars.

But have we really made the change that we all envisage? And why have we not made that change even after two decades of the world's highest body comprising 193 countries recognizing that women should be in the decision-making levels of peace building and governance. One answer come to my mind

- a) In elections for any tier of governance more than few people vote
- b) But when deciding who sits for formal peace talks it is only a few decide.

Now that brings me into today's discussion. I would like to look at the issue of "promoting equal rights and women's participation towards peace" beyond the rights angle and concentrate on success angle. While upholding the common call and importance and the dire necessity of equal rights specially because we as women peace builders our core values are fairness and inclusivity. We firmly believe that we should include all in an equal level. Thus, equal rights is an integral aspect of peace building. Respect to each other and upholding human dignity enable trust to be build, because **TRUST** is the most vital ingredient in peace building.



Founder and Chair of the Association of War Affected Women & Parents of Servicemen Missing in Action, struggling to end the civil war, Visaka was able to bring women together across the divide to work for peace. She was awarded the prestigious Humanitarian award for 2006 by Interaction of Washington DC and was nominated for a collective Nobel Peace Prize in 2005.

Visaka was a team member of the Special Rapporteur to investigate the violence and the ceasefire violations and Consultation Taskforce on Reconciliation Mechanisms of Sri Lanka. She is a member of Women Waging Peace, Women's Alliance for Security Leadership, Resolution to Act, Global Network of Women Peace builders, and Women Mediators Across the Commonwealth.

Visaka is the gender focal point for GPPAC in Sri Lanka and former member of the Civil Society Advisory Group of UN Women. She holds degrees in negotiations and mediation skills and in women and security from Harvard.

Then **Why women?** I wish to share my own experience here as a mother of a missing Sri Lankan Military officer, I was able to win the trust of both my government, its military and of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam equally, and that is why I say only a women can do it, because our compassion our ability to understand not only when one speak but from their facial expressions, and more than any quality our intuition of knowing how the person whom you are with feel even if he she doesn't tell you. I also told the mothers of Military, if we are to save our children we do need to talk to the mothers of LTTE and understand how they feel, when one brings the women across the divide together, Magic and miracles happen, they embrace each other and cry and share the pain, this is the beginning of a journey of trust, and remember it is only women who can do this embrace the mother who may be the person who killed your own son. This unique quality of women has to be further utilized for peace making,

A couple of points to remember:

1. There are no short cuts to achieve peace
2. Being genuine is the key, no under cutting trying to be smart, because you fool yourself.
3. Understanding the other and getting into their shoes is extremely important to understand why they do what they do
4. No personal ambitions
5. Be ready to settle for the least common denominator.

Women Impacted by Wars and Politics of Peace

Abstract

Unfortunately, women have fought no wars, they have not killed people in the name of national interest, they have not set-up concentration camps to punish people on the basis of their religion and they have not buried people in mass graves to avenge humanity. It shows that women folk do not subscribe to the idea of violence and war. However, it is ironic to mention that many wars are fought on women's bodies, and they were kept away from peace building processes. It is observed that South Asia's developing countries, involved in proxy wars are investing in building arsenals of weapons instead of investing in their people. In fact, the unfortunate women populations of these conflict-ridden regions are trapped in a situation where their governments in the name of security are militarizing their societies instead of empowering and protecting them. This paper starts with a debate of how women in South Asia is affected by different conflicts and narrow it down with women of Pakistan and Afghanistan borderland. It also draws parallels that how in these wars, women from different conflict zones are deliberately kept away from peace processes and talks.



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Noreen was a part of an online outreach program of the Women's Regional Network, and she has published several publications in international and academic journals on Pak-Afghan border areas' conflict, peace building and issues related to women and children. Her work entitled FATA "A Permanent War Zone": Breaking Silence published in Women and Politics of Peace: South Asia Narratives on Militarization, Power and Justice, (2016) is a pioneer research on women in the Pak-Afghan borderland.

Noreen was nominated for the N-Peace Untold Stories Award 2018 by the UNDP for her efforts on peace building. Currently, she is a member of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Commission on the Status of Women.

Introduction

Johan Galtung father of peace studies states that a society will have positive peace if along with ending of violence, structural and cultural violence is also curbed. However, I believe that peace can be positive and sustainable if women are equal partners in ending different forms of violence and active participants in peace processes. At the back-drop of different conflicts and women being non-combatant victims, the United Nations' General Assembly in 1974 adopted the Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict. Later the risks to women and children, and the importance of involving women in peace issues, were also recognized during the discussions at the United Nations Conference on Women in Mexico in 1975. During the International Decade for Women (1976 to 1985) equality, development and peace were central themes, and the Nairobi Forward -Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, adopted at the 1985. Third World Conference on Women advanced the discussion on women, peace and security. Throughout the 1980s, the United Nations increasingly took account of the impact of armed conflict on women, mothers and caregivers.

However, this perspective did not reflect a full understanding of the differential impact of armed conflict on women and UN security resolution 1325. Therefore, today we see gendered and disproportionate impact of conflict on women. Unfortunately, interventions like the UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 have just acted as management tools of making wars safe for women and have not addressed the politics related to these conflicts. And women have been marginalized in all the peace processes underway.

Examining Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Pakhtun inhabited border areas of Pakistan, the term 'pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict societies' is a misnomer as no conflict has a definite end and start. This is so particularly for women as the inequitable gender power structures have disempowered them in different degrees and forms. In all such cases, we find out that meaningful participation of women both in writing new constitutions and/or in formal post-conflict political institutions is minimal. In Afghanistan, for example, along with cultural oppression, the return of Taliban regimes has crippled women and consequently affected their ability to participate in any normal activities. In Bangladesh, Chittagong Hill Tracts women complained about being left out, but emphasize that their gender related concerns would best be addressed if the hill people get self-determination and autonomy. They see their lack of access to power structures as a result of reduced democratic space for the hill people, and the resultant insecurity.

Nepali peace process perhaps is the most fascinating case in South Asia as far as women are concerned. They formed nearly one third of the Maoist forces for a decade and were, therefore, visible in politics in an unparalleled manner. Given the ideological underpinnings of Maoism, informed by the need for more fighting bodies during the Nepal war from 1996-2006, women got the opportunity to question traditional gender roles. A valid assumption would be that they would be an effective and essential part of the political processes after the end of the war. However, women initially were more visible in conflict and now unfortunately included through quotas in their Constituent Assembly, which ensured their presence, albeit in the face of reassertion of old-style patriarchy wherein women complain that their voices are not heard by the senior political leadership.

In case of Kashmir conflict, it has adverse effect of militarization on women. Ironically, women have been instrumentalized by different sides of the conflict to suit their agendas by using them as representatives of virtue or victimhood. It also has facilitated the increasing strength of regressive right-wing ideologies of groups like Dukhtaren-e-Millat. The Indian security forces, in turn, have co-opted women as informers and spies. Along with manipulation and oppression that the Kashmiri women face, militarization in Kashmir has re-entrenched patriarchy and reduced the spaces for women activism. In Pakistan's Pakhtun inhabited border areas provides one of the least studied regions of the South Asia and is never highlighted as a conflict zone. However, I call it a zone of 'permanent war.'

We can also compare and draw parallel of Pak-Afghan border areas with the case of Ukraine too. Both areas' location has been militarized for nearly two centuries - Ukraine by former USSR and Pakhtun borderland by British and then by Pakistani state, both established cantonments to serve their national interests. During the Soviet takeover of Afghanistan, Pakhtun borderland was the launching pad for the American-assisted fight back; and it acted as a training ground for the Kashmiri separatists too. Both Pak-Afghan border areas and Ukraine were used as proxies in the Cold War period and still do so. This persistent militarization and radicalization have impacted women and children the most in both the regions.

Pak-Afghan Borderland and Women Victims

Unfortunately, the conflict ridden Pakhtun borderland's social, cultural and political conditions have created particular forms of narratives and perceptions about women, conflicts, war and peace-building. These perceptions have deliberately silenced the tribal women and made them invisible in the peace building and in rehabilitation processes, although women are always flagging warnings about the conflict building in their respective communities and areas.

The UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on "Women, Peace and Security" stresses the importance of women's equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution. However, the situation on the ground with respect to women's participation in peace-building efforts in many countries is still not very encouraging and especially in Pak- Afghan borderland.

Challenges to Tribal Women in Conflict Areas

- 1) The patriarchal Pakhtun society and culture of borderland created numerous hurdles in the way of women to actively participate in any social, economic or political/public processes, therefore their role in the tribal societies is neither recognized nor appreciated. The role for Pakhtun women is mostly limited to the private sphere of family and indoor activities. According to a Pashto proverb, "*Khazaya da kor da, ya da gor da*", meaning that "A woman's place is either at home or in a grave". This indicates the strong line between public and private spheres for a woman and advocate that a woman has nothing to do with the outside world beyond the four walls of the house.
- 2) Tribal culture perceives war and peace making as men's domain; hence the internal conflict, wars and peace building are associated with men only, however ironically in internal conflicts and feuds, women are always used as tool of peace making amongst the warring tribes.
- 3) The institution of all male jirga (council of elders) played a role of peace making and breaking. It systematically excludes marginalized and weaker groups including women and children to play any role in making important decisions that affect their lives. Similarly, people from lower socio-cultural backgrounds are not welcomed to be part of jirga. As a result, women are denied any formal platform from where they can play a part in peace-building activities. It is considered against the basic principles of Pakhtunwali (customary law of borderland) to allow women to play a leading role in the peace-building. In the absence of women, it is no wonder that most of the peace deals failed in the world.
- 4) The state of Pakistan is also silent over the exclusion of women from peace processes. Not only that, but its policies have further strengthened the patriarchal structure by excluding women from local and national committees dealing with peace-building. In order to negotiate peace with the terrorists, the government of Pakistan has constituted "Peace Negotiation Committees" (MasalehatiJirgas/Amn Committees) but none of this apparatus had a woman as a member. Similarly, Taliban is also keeping women from all the processes of peace-building and making.

It is pertinent to discuss that those tribal women in the conflict-ridden border areas were warning communities about the conflict building and also tried to stop it but failed to counter militarized and oppressive tribal culture. In conversation with several tribal women from conflict affected borderland stated "we were warning our tribal elders that it was coming but no one was listening and now you see all this. It was not dealt quickly and efficiently, thus got out of control".

The women stated that small brawls and skirmishes developed into outbreaks of full-fledge violence, yet they did not have the power or forum to address it or stop it. This is a challenge that is faced by the communities all over the world. Women neglected in post-conflict reconstruction and peace-building programs are also the first that detected early warnings of conflict. Women knowing these signs can be effective both in conflict prevention and in peace making.

It is an established fact that peace-building is a political mission of a legitimate political authority, possessing power, tries not to escalate the violence again. However, it cannot be denied that peace-building is a multi-tasked process and it decides the hierarchy of priorities. The most important priority is the inclusion of people affected by conflict in planning and implementing process of peace. And in many conflicts, women heading families and care givers become important actors in the peace processes.

It is understandable that in many conflicts, support of external actors becomes imperative and vital in the post-conflict reconstruction; however, these actors shall be put under legal obligations to include local women impacted by the conflict. With proper work plan of including external and internal actors (women) in peace processes, doable and sustainable peace can be achieved.

The capacity of the local women from conflict areas shall be developed to sustain the peace. Post-conflict reconstruction is a long process; it may take a generation to get lasting result. Thus, women shall be included in funding processes to maintain the process of post-conflict reconstruction. It is a known fact that women do no harm, and it is the most important commitment needed in peace-building process in the post conflict societies and areas.

Conclusion

Pak-Afghan border defined by diverse geographical realities has been subject to varied invasions, complex contestations and intense power plays by the regional and international stakeholders. The physical interference of both local and major powers in the geographical landscape of the region has made conflict a permanent feature of the region, which has not adversely affected women status in traditional tribal society but also isolated them from justice structures and peace processes. This marginalization of the tribal women living on the border land can end if given access o justice mechanism and included in both formal and informal structures of peace-building.

Kawkab Al-Thaibani

Gender and Communication Expert, Co-founder, Women4Yemen, Yemen

Women's Human Rights-Peace Nexus in Yemen

At least seven years of conflict has resulted in a humanitarian crisis described as the worst on earth. More than 20 million people are in need, and malnutrition is amongst the highest, particularly among pregnant women and children. Gender-based violence increased by 80 percent, according to UN estimates. In addition, Yemen has faced a range of grave human rights violations with some of them mounting to be war crimes with no end in sight, or accountability or redress measures. Despite peace efforts exerted by international political powers, and UN agencies to end the war, new circles of conflict have erupted.

Two dominant factors of the current peace process are the poor representation of women and their priorities, and aspects of human rights and accountability.

The exclusion of women is unjust and painful given how they are shouldering the burden of the conflict, contrary to their past gains, particularly during the transitional period (Between 2011-2014). Peace is a human rights value in essence, and there is a debate if human rights should take the back seat for the sake of the peace process to succeed. Some advocates believe that compromises should be made to open windows of agreements.



Kawkab Al-Thaibani is co-founder of Women4Yemen, a network of women activists in media, human rights and civil society who advocate for women in peace and security in Yemen. She serves on the advisory board of the Yemeni Archive, an independent platform for documenting human rights and other violations by parties to the conflict in Yemen.

In 2019, Kawkab was recognized as one of TRT's "Women of War" to highlight the significance of women's role in peace. TRT World Research Centre is a non-profit research and policy institute based in Istanbul.

Kawkab's aim as a communications professional, researcher and journalist is to empower the visibility and voice of women, especially at the grassroots level. She holds a master's degree in Gender and Development from Sana'a University (Yemen) in a joint program with Roskilde University.

I tend to disagree with that sentiment because, in Yemen's case, it has always been a matter of accountability. Every historical phase bred on an earlier one and resulted in new conflict rounds, new grievances, and vulnerabilities. The lack of accountability and the lack of impunity by the Gulf-brokered initiative has significantly contributed to the failure of the transitional period.

For the brevity of this paper, the paper will focus on the challenges and recommendations concerning women which are considered both human rights and peace issues.

Challenges

1) Political participation of women

War resulted in impacting women from being actively involved in the political parties and being part of the peace process along with youth and minorities. Since the war, political parties and the government did not include women in their bodies, particularly from the local level. As a result, for the first time in 20 years, the Yemeni cabinet was formed without women. The peace process is affected where women are not inclusively involved. Unfortunately, this sends a message that only those with arms and violent influence are the ones to be invited to the peace table.

2) Use of social norms against women

The Covid pandemic and the consequences of the conflict eroded some of the positive norms and negatively used some gender norms. The de facto authorities in the north have enforced dress codes, beating up women in public, using religious speech to domesticate women, and discouraging their engagement in public life. It is noticed that in the South and Taiz (two governorates known for their respect of women's rights) there is an increased extreme religious attitude towards women. But the groups supported by Saudi Arabia and the UAE have reduced gender equality during the conflict.

Let alone the defamation campaigns, particularly by the de facto authorities where they stigmatize women working in peace or international organizations. These violations and threats are meant to discourage women from participating in public life, which will consequently affect the peace-building efforts.

3) Civil freedom

Women are forced by conflict parties to travel with male escorts, which imposes a difficulty on their mobility — a core human right value. Women are also unable to claim their passports by themselves, they need to provide a male escort to the concerned authorities. Though after a massive campaign, the local authorities issued a directive to end this practice and allow women to issue their passports with no male approval. With each year, women's civil freedom is declining, starting from banning contraceptives, imposing gender segregation in public places,

4) Poor state presence

The collapse of the state institutions created a political vacuum and impacted the system of the delivery of basic services. This resulted in a lack of accountability, impacting people's living and therefore boosting war economy which contributed to the prolonging of the war. Consequently, this has a grief impact on women and peace.

5) Lack of accountability mechanisms

The disapproval of the extension of the UN Group of Eminent Experts is a setback for both women and peace. In a statement by Women4Yemen Network, it is mentioned that "the endemic impunity present in Yemen must end if we hope to achieve reconciliation in the future and rebuild the social fabric required for a peace that lasts." The reports of the Group of Eminent Experts were the first to highlight the horrific violations against women, including sexual assault and defamation. In addition, the UNGEE was an independent human rights body calling for accountability and highlighted violations that undermine the society of Yemen—an important aspect for any future peace process.

6) Rise of non-state actors against poor institutions

Yemen is unfortunately plagued with the dominance of armed non-state actors who cannot be held accountable to international political mechanism. The rewarding and impunity culture empowers these actors to further expand and undermine the public institutions. In addition, those armed groups act as proxy groups for regional powers—particularly KAS, UAE, and Iran. The negative regional intervention in Yemen is a major threat to both peace and women's rights.

7) Lack of support to both women-led organizations and human rights organizations

Women-led organizations working on peace face threats to shut their organizations, and they also face funding difficulties. On the human rights front, with the focus on the humanitarian response in Yemen, there is major negligence to empower the human rights organizations in Yemen. This could be attributed to that most of the donors to Yemen are involved in one way or another in the war—regionally by the Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, and Iran or internationally (In the form of logistical support or by selling arms to conflict parties) including countries such as USA, UK, Canada, and France.

8) Gender-based violence

The dramatic increase of gender-based violence requires laws to criminalize these acts. Women movements in Yemen are calling for enacting this law and ensuring the protection of women. In addition, since 2020, women peace activists report that violent incidents by male colleagues in the workplace have been experienced—the practice that is considered new and was used to be frowned upon in Yemen. Yet the war's pressure, social norms, and the consequences of the pandemic resulted in the emergence of this new practice. *"A simple incident like moving a glass can trigger anger by a male colleague. Some of them are under lots of pressure but they cannot direct it towards their other male colleagues. Let alone, some of the men are jealous of women's work promotion,"* said a woman activist in the Mukala area, who was consulted for this statement.

9) Deterioration of basic services

Yemeni women are paying the highest price for the deterioration of basic services. Women are the first ones to drop out of education. In the absence of income providers and the deterioration of the economy, women become household leaders financially and domestically. Young girls are being married off so they can either provide a dowry for the family or save extra expenses.

Recommendations

1) Bottom-up approach

In order to achieve political participation for women, political parties and the government should both work on including and empowering women. It is noticed that the empowerment of women increased the opportunity of sustainable peace because of women.

2) More support to women-led organizations

Many women-led organizations are facing funding issues and cannot work towards community needs and priorities. A community perspective is important for both human rights and peace.

3) Establishing new accountability mechanisms

After the failure to renew the mandate of the UNGEE, an alternative monitoring body to promote accountability and justice in Yemen should be created.

4) Supporting Human Rights Organizations

There is a dire necessity to support human rights and women's rights organizations to boost and include grassroots and local efforts of human rights perspective.

5) Peace process should include aspects of justice and accountability

Until now, the peace process has no mention of the human rights aspect and accountability, except for the detainees' exchange which then turns into a political bargaining chip. The inclusion of accountability will obviously be championed by women and youth organizations working in peace.

6) Support of the institutional system in Yemen

The Yemeni state is facing a challenge to operate because of the increased presence of other non-state actors either in the south or the north. The international community should put pressure on the regional powers to allow the country to have its full sovereignty.

7) Enforcement of Shadow Reports of the CEDAW

There should be an enforcement to the various recommendations presented in Shadow reports of the CEDAW in Yemen by feminist and women-led organizations. These recommendations include key aspects of women's issues, providing strategic insights, including fields of economy and health. These recommendations are relevant for both peace and human rights.

Conclusion

To create sustainable and positive peace, the inclusion of human rights and accountability is significant. In Yemen, peace and human rights should work together because both serve the purposes of each other. Yet peace is aiming towards reconciliation which is a step further than justice for the victims of human rights violations. Peace is aimed towards a community that respects all human rights, including women. In Yemen, the inclusion of accountability and justice is challenging, but not impossible, and extremely necessary.

Historical experiences in Yemen should inform the current peace process of the necessity to include aspects of justice and accountability. And without empowerment and the full inclusion of women, justice for all sects of the community cannot happen, and sustainable peace will not be achieved. Therefore, international actors and decision-makers should advance for the nexus of peace and women's rights as they complement each other and share the same values.

For the purpose of informing this statement, six women activists in Yemen were consulted.

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Prasansa Karki

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Women and Peacebuilding: Redefining their roles in building peace

During conflict both the men and women suffer. The suffering has a huge impact on physical, psychosocial and socioeconomic wellbeing of an individual. Looking at the conflict from a gendered lens, women and men have different roles, access to resources, power and decision-making before, during and after the conflict. Approximately 80% of today's civilian casualties are women and 80% of all refugees and internally displaced people worldwide are women and children. Women are caught in the vicious circle of victimization. On the one hand, because of their gendered status they lack means to protect themselves during the conflict. And on the other hand, they are often ignored and sidelined in post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation efforts.

Between 1992 and 2019, women were, on average, just 13 per cent of negotiators, 6 per cent of mediators, and 6 per cent of signatories in major peace processes worldwide. About seven out of every ten peace processes did not include any women mediators or women signatories.

The Maoist party fueled the armed conflict in Nepal taking up structural issues of class, caste, gender, marginalization of indigenous groups. Nepal formally concluded the decade long armed conflict by signing the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in November 2006 leaving a legacy of 17000 dead and 13000 forcibly disappeared. The effect of the conflict was widely spread, and amongst all, women were hit the hardest. The plights of women were more severe due to gender specific violence and inequalities exacerbated by the conflict. Even in the post conflict period, due to the patriarchal social structure, women were sidelined from the mainstream political discussions and decisions.



Prasansa is a peace practitioner, engaged in the field of human rights and peacebuilding for the past eleven years. Her aptitude is promoting peace work, conflict transformation, and nonviolent movement. She holds a master's degree in Applied Conflict Transformation Studies from Cambodia and was awarded the Faculty Excellence Award by the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies. At present, she is working as a Program Development Coordinator at Nagarik Aawaz, a peacebuilding organization promoting youth and women engagement in community peacebuilding.

Prasansa contributes to designing peacebuilding projects and developing organizational policies and strategies. I also invest in designing and delivering trainings. Her interest is in gendered peacebuilding and she feels blessed to meet and learn from wonderful women who are directly affected by the armed-conflict. Nepal has yet to recognize their narratives therefore she dedicates her personal energy, education and professional career in mainstreaming their narratives in Nepal.

After 15 years of Peace Accord, conflict affected women continue to suffer in their never-ending road to justice. The government has failed to deliver services to help them meet their multiple needs to sustain their lives. They are equally subjected to social conflict as their past is still strongly present in the form of stigma for the society. Conflict affected women who were part of the conflict as cadres, family members of the cadres or from the security forces, being married to inter caste as part of the initiatives of the Maoist agenda to eradicate caste- based discrimination, being pregnant and/or mother out of marriage resulted to stigmatization and usually rejection from the society.

The rejection and the need to survive was an added pressure to their already depleting mental, physical and economic condition. The trauma and stress have been observed among the second generation of the conflict affected as a result of long haul of struggle for justice.

Nepal has also adopted the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 which have acknowledged women's engagement as an instrumental tool for conflict resolution and peace building. In 2011, Nepal formulated its first National Action Plan on Resolutions 1325 and 1820, but unfortunately it has not been able to make any remarkable contribution in uplifting the situation of these women. Therefore, for a constructive means to building peace, laws and policies are not enough. The crucial step is to root the value of everyday peace and care in all the initiatives to help them feel valued and ease their struggle to survive while fighting for their justice.

Nagarik Aawaz (NA) is one of the leading peace building organization engaging with more than 1800 conflict affected women since its establishment in 2005. NA practices the value of everyday peace, care, safe space, relation building and listening to unheard voices within its working culture and in its initiatives. It firmly believes that by empowering and engaging conflict affected women through leadership development that inherits self-assurance, they could be the change agents for their communities and support other less privileged people. It does so by investing on the psychosocial well-being, socioeconomic growth, leadership promotion and creating space for sharing their needs and exchange learning from diverse group of conflict affected.

Women played an influential role as community peace builders, mediators and negotiators before, during and after the conflict. Estimates suggest that women made up 30–40 percent of the total Maoist combat force. Yet, women are confined into a narrow definition of 'victim' with an assumption that women experience war and peace uniformly. The government and the community have failed to see beyond their physical, emotional and socioeconomic needs. Their experience and learning can be instrumental in developing government plan and policies that promotes peace and minimizes the reoccurrence of armed conflict. There is resistance to conflict affected women's leadership in the community. Women share that when they attempt to engage in community decision-making, they face considerable discrimination. Government authorities and the local stakeholders are rarely supportive and undermine their legitimacy. Kalpana Subedi (single women whose husband had been killed during the conflict) shared that stigmatization is attached with the label "conflict affected" as needy, always demanding and nothing to offer back to the community. However, with a long term and vigorous engagement with the local government and the local stakeholders, conflict affected women have also been successful to establish their identity beyond just victims. It doubles the effort in the society that is heavily influenced by patriarchal norms and values.

As feminist leadership theory asserts, women leadership in a society where leadership is embedded within a deeply engrained gender system, its social acceptance is highly questionable. Unless, the distribution of power and resources is balanced and the male centric general perception of leadership is changed, women leaders in the post conflict society will continue to encounter challenges that are associated with the socio-politic and socio-economic structure of the society. Moreover, an environment conducive for the leadership development will gradually form when the conflict affected women start getting along with the community life. The external intervention would be required in the beginning to support them to withstand such numerous social barriers and the role of the NGOs becomes subordinate.

NA has been putting its effort in bridging the gap between the local government, other community members and the conflict affected women through orienting them on this issue. The local level initiatives also focus on bringing gender-based violence and structural violence into discussion. The Women Peace Table which is one of the major initiatives of NA has been able to localize the issue of transitional justice. The local level Women Peace Table (WPT) have helped to expand the outreach of the conflict affected women with their local government to advocate on their issues and seek support to actualize their needs. The program has been helped to inform the local federal structures about the issues of transitional justice and prioritize the needs conflict affected women in their resources. There are good number of examples where the local federal government have taken steps to acknowledge their contribution through segregating annual funds for conflict affected women, provided medical insurance and also worked on memorialization.

Women have different status and opportunities based on the geographic, ethnic, class and caste they belong to. Tharu women (one of the ethnic groups of Nepal) have less access to information and resources due to lack of command in nepali language which is the official language of Nepal. Kriti Chaudary, ex-combatant and peace activists shared that, “due to lack of fluency in nepali language, many conflict affected women have less reach to services such as psychosocial counseling and other services at the local government level”. In these years, the conflict affected women have reached in different levels such as elected members at province and ward level, community to ward level activists along with their role as house head and single women. NA practices intersectional lens while addressing the context, needs and overlapping forms of sexual and gender-based violence during the conflict. Capturing these intersections has helped to ensure that the most affected women and girls are at the heart of initiatives and advocacies of transitional justice.

NA’s strength lies in its foundation of inclusiveness, trust, building relationships, providing a healing space and moving ahead with small efforts to create a larger impact. As John Paul Lederach, in his book *The Moral Imagination- the art and soul of building Peace* states that peaceful transformation requires a long-term view that involves ongoing changes to relationships and addresses both the episodic expressions of conflict and its relational core. This is matter of being capable of responding to day-to-day issues while also launching new ideas for long-term change. It also highlights that conflict resolution is not about focusing on reaching an agreement, rather healing a damaged relationship.

Saba Ismail

Co-Founder of Aware Girls

Thank you so much to the Geneva Center for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue and the European Public Law Organization for organizing this event in the backdrop of the 49th session of the Human Rights Council.

When it comes to peace and security, the first thought that comes to the mind of many people about women is that of victims. When it comes to interventions, prevention and countering violent extremism, and designing policies for CVE/ PVE, they are heavily focused towards men while leaving women behind. It is evident that women are severely affected by the conflict. Millions of women are displaced due to wars, few women join the militant groups, but we cannot ignore the most critical point that many women contribute towards peace. For so long, women have been portrayed as passive victims of conflict, ignoring their diverse roles in promoting peace.



Saba is an award winning human rights activist who has been working for the empowerment of young women for over two decades. She is the Co-Founder of Aware Girls, a women-led organisation working towards gender equality and peace in Pakistan. Over the years, Saba's work has focused on addressing GBV, strengthening leadership skills, political participation and economic empowerment for young women, sexual and reproductive rights, legal advocacy, countering violent extremism and promoting peace. She has been involved in setting up numerous networks and support helplines for youth and women and served as a speaker and advisory group member at the UN and World Bank.

Saba has received prestigious fellowships including the Hurford Youth Fellowship (Washington D.C), Vital Voices Fellowship and the Do School Fellowship (Germany). She is the recipient of the Chirac Prize for Conflict Prevention (2016) and the Red Bangle Award (2017). In 2013, Saba was recognized as one of the "100 Leading Global Thinkers" by Foreign Policy, and among the "30 Under 30" youth activists by the National Endowment for Democracy. Her work has been mentioned in numerous international publications. Saba is pursuing an M.A. in International Human Rights.

Consequently, women remain excluded from the decision-making and peace processes at all levels and stages. The world witnessed what happened in Afghanistan when women are not heard and are sidelined. With the US withdrawal and the control of the Taliban over Afghanistan, women's rights advances have been rolled back. Women in Afghanistan are subjected to targeted assassinations, abductions, disappearances, and physical torture. It will be ironic to expect the Taliban to take the Women, Peace, and Security agenda forward. For women and girls in Pakistan and Afghanistan, stakes are high when groups like the Taliban are in power. With the Taliban in power in Afghanistan, the group has been reactivated in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan, bringing de-stability to the region.

The organization, Aware Girls, that I co-founded with my sister, Gulalai, is a young women-led organization working for gender equality, women empowerment, and peace. The organization actively worked in Pakistan and Afghanistan to counter the women's exclusion from the peace and security agenda through working with thousands of young women and empowering and inspiring them into citizens with equal rights and responsibilities. Aware Girls worked to prevent violent extremism and promote peace by establishing Young women's peace networks that promoted the values of non-violence, tolerance, compassion, and pluralism. The network identified potential peace activists, organized them in groups, and strengthened their peacebuilding and conflict resolution capacity. Through the network, we have been bringing communities together and reconstructing the bonds in the community by bringing people of different faiths, cultures, and ethnicities together through interfaith and intercultural dialogues. Through inter-faith dialogues, people understand each other better, collectively build a narrative of tolerance and pluralism, and heal the rifts between individuals and communities- which is of paramount importance for sustainable peace.

We also established a network of women peacebuilders from Pakistan and Afghanistan called "Pul-e-Niswan Baraye Aman" to strategize together for preventing violent extremism in the region. The network was established to harbor bridges between women peace activists of Pakistan and Afghanistan, enabling a women-women exchange of learning and strategizing together for peacebuilding and countering extremism.

Young women from the platform of Aware Girls have been working to create a conducive environment where there is no space for violent ideologies and which is more conducive for peacebuilding, and co-existence, and non-violence. The most important part of our work has been the young women because research has shown that gender-equal societies are more resilient to conflict and violent extremism.

Resolution 1325 recognizes women as political actors. Weak governance structures are one of the factors that give more space to the militant groups and their ideologies. Therefore, strengthening governance structures through the effective participation of young women is influential in achieving the objectives of the resolution. To counter extremism, women from the platform of Aware Girls have been working for addressing the vacuums which provide fertile ground to the extremist groups and narratives by promoting active civic engagement among women, promoting good governance and democracy, interfaith harmony, and gender equality- because when we invest in girls and women empowerment and political stability, we take away the oxygen from the violent extremist groups.

The Women Peace and Security Agenda and the overall struggle for gender equality are tied together. We cannot achieve one without the other while working in silos; women's participation in peacebuilding is linked to women's social, economic, and political participation. Through our work- we have proved that women and girls are investing in the communities for countering violent extremism. We dealt with the issue with a holistic approach. We are aware that countering violent extremism is not just about preventing young people from being getting recruited, it is just one part of a bigger problem of violent extremism, and part of the solution is to ensure policies that ensure inclusion, pluralism, social cohesion, protection of the freedoms of the citizens and women empowerment.

To be systematically effective and achieve sustainable peace; I put forward the following recommendations:

- 1) First, there is an urgent need to have a **gendered response to crises and counterterrorism**. The heavy military spending and wars are stealing from everyone, and we can see the unfortunate devastation caused by wars at times when Russia have invaded Ukraine. Weapons and wars do not give housing to the people; instead have displaced 84 million people worldwide. Wars do not help us get an education rather have deprived millions of their fundamental right to education or don't help us cure the disease or assist us in getting out of a pandemic. The militarized counterterrorism and security initiatives have already taken a lot of resources that need to be redirected towards peacebuilding in which women must be engaged at the decision-making levels. Women are equal and essential partners for peace. To achieve the sustainable development goals, a comprehensive approach with women at its center is the key to achieving SDG16.
- 2) Second, **effective engagement and inclusion of young women** would speed up the process of addressing the core causes of conflict and achieving sustainable peace. Today, the world has more than 1.2 billion young people; their potential must be tapped. Young women can be engaged through UNSCR 2250, which is fully dedicated to the important and positive role of young people. Aware Girls advocated for this resolution because we believe that both young men and young women can play an important role in maintaining and promoting international peace and security.
- 3) Third, it is not enough to translate the WPS agenda at the national and local level, **societies must be transformed through 1325**. A 2018 constitutional amendment in Pakistan merged the north-western tribal areas with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The merger has extended rights and legal and institutional protections to women of the former federally administered tribal areas that they lacked previously. As a civil society, I appreciate these developments. However, the women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa still have innumerable hurdles before them on the road to full political, economic, and social emancipation, which can only be overcome through societal transformation.

- 4) Fourth, **protection and investment in women peacebuilders** will allow women to effectively and meaningfully participate in peacebuilding processes leading the governments to effectively implement the WPS agenda. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, women have been actively taking part in grass-root movements and raising the issue of sexual violence in conflict. Women who raised the issue of sexual violence in the conflict were targeted, harassed, and put on a state kill list. According to the International Human Rights Law, the states have the obligation to protect the rights of women and their right to life even during conflict. As a member of the Human Rights Council, Pakistan must work on the provisions of UNSCR 1820 which confronts sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations.
- 5) Lastly, a gender-sensitive national **road map** to effectively implement a women's peace and security agenda is vital to building sustainable peace. In the past few years, the government of Pakistan has developed and implemented several security policy instruments such as National Action Plan, National Counter Extremism Policy Guidelines, and Anti-Terrorism Act. Most of these instruments do not even acknowledge that there is any gender inequality in Pakistan, they ignore the critical issue of protection of women in a conflict/war and fail to present a road map for fully integrating women and their concerns into security policy. A gender-sensitive road map will help fully integrate gender in national mechanisms ultimately helping to achieve the global women, peace, and security agenda.

Thank you!



**GENEVA CENTRE
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ADVANCEMENT AND
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