

Women, Peace & Security: Experiences and Lessons



REFLECTIONS FROM KARAMA'S DISCUSSIONS ON THE
WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA, PUBLISHED AS
PART OF OUR COMMITMENTS TO THE WPSHA COMPACT

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Hibaq Osman (right) at Karama's leadership workshop in Cairo

Introduction

Since the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 more than two decades ago, Africa and the Arab region have experienced extraordinary levels of conflict and violence.

Women activists from across the world had campaigned fiercely for many years for recognition of the particular way that women experience conflict, and for an international framework for women peace and security. It is difficult now to reconcile the feelings of relief and jubilation that many of us felt 2000 with the reality of women and girls affected by conflict in the years since.

To hear from women and girls forced to flee from war, women suffering the multitude of indignities and violations of every aspect of their lives under occupation, women denied their right to sit at peace tables, women and girls born in the 21st century sold into slavery.

From Karama's inception in 2005, the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda has been fundamental to our work and the work of our partners.

We continue believe that women, peace and security is a vital agenda not because we ignore or are ignorant of its failures and weaknesses, rather it is because we work every day with the reality of women, peace and security that we recognize its value, see its successes, and understand where progress can and must be made.

As a board member of the Generation Equality Forum Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action Compact, Karama has made a series of commitments to take transformative action to make the promise of the women, peace and security agenda a reality.

In particular, we want to document and share knowledge, effective practices and lessons learned on women's and young women's leadership and contributions to peace and security, resilience (D.4.4).

We are committed to establishing and strengthening partnerships between international civil society organizations and national and local women's organizations to strengthen capacity and eligibility to receive and manage donor funding, and address barriers to that funding (A.4.6). Partnership and building the capacity of the groups and activists has long been our priority.

We have fostered discussions that have sought to bring in the experience of activists working across the world, young activists, as well as male allies, in order to benefit from the greatest range of voices and experience.

It has been our great pleasure to provide a space to speakers with truly remarkable experience. With this privilege comes an appreciation that we must do more with the incredible contributions, and to ensure they can be shared and used widely.

This publication aims to be the first in a series that will record and present key lessons from the practical implementation of women, peace and security, and the ongoing work of women's rights activists from Africa and the Arab region.



Radhika Coomaraswamy, Sri Lanka

A diplomat, academic, and activist, Radhika served as United Nations Under Secretary-General and Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict. She was the lead author of the Global Study on the Implementation of Resolution 1325 published in 2015, and was the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women from 1994 to 2003.

I want to thank Karama for asking me to speak today and specifically Hibaaq for contacting me in Sri Lanka. I've heard about the good work you have done over the years. This is the first time I have had the pleasure to address you directly. We have a new executive director, at UN Women, Dr Sima Bahous. She is from your region. I want to wish her all the best, especially with regard to the area of women, peace and security. This will be one of the most challenging aspects of her mandate.

When we speak about women, peace and security, we must always remember its history and inherited tradition. Resolution 1325 came after the wars in Bosnia, Rwanda: some of the worst was on record for women. The resolution came at the time when the Security Council was united.



Radhika Coomaraswamy presents the Global Study on Women, Peace and Security in 2015.

Photo: UN Photo/Devra Berkowitz

“I hear people saying that WPS is a security agenda, and not a human rights or social justice agenda. If you know the history and the circumstances, you know this is just not true.”

In 2000 for the first time the Council passed a resolution that saw serious violations of human rights and humanitarian law as a threat to international peace and security, after years of trying to ward this off.

Today I hear people saying that WPS is a security agenda, and not a human rights or social justice agenda. If you know the history and the circumstances, you know this is just not true. Women, peace and security is born in the ferment of those events in the 1990s when human rights, women's rights, and social justice were front and center.

The terrible violence in Bosnia & Herzegovina and Rwanda made sexual violence, or what we today call gender-based violence, the first item on the WPS, agenda. The Security Council since then has put in place quite a strong architecture in this regard. It has created a Special Representative on Sexual Violence. It has a monitoring apparatus in the field of sexual violence. There's regular reporting to the Security Council, and a great deal of information is gathered.

The International Criminal Court also has comprehensive provisions with regard to sexual violence. And yet there is great disappointment. Very few cases are public, very few women come forward. The stigma, the shame, the lengthy process keeps them away. States, prosecutors and courts are also just not doing their job. We have so much faith in these criminal justice systems, and too little action.

This is forcing many to work towards new approaches at the community level to deal with sexual violence. We must then keep the door open for those women who want accountability in the courts, while also exploring new ideas and new processes of transformative justice for women who want other options. This is a really important area for civil society to continue its work.

The second major issue that came thereafter on the women, peace and security agenda was representation and participation of women in peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Today it is the overriding item on the women, peace and security agenda. We have a strong desire to have women involved in all aspects of the peace process. Gender parity has been and always will be the advocacy position in the negotiating teams, in the technical teams, and in the military team supporting the process. There always must be constant consultation with women's groups while peace processes unfold. There is also a call for parity in the post-conflict situation in all aspects of peacebuilding.

Over the years, we have some successes, but not enough progress. The argument we have made from the beginning: it is not only fairness - 50 percent of the population should be present in any form of decision making - but also research has shown that there's a link between women in the peace processes and the sustainability of the peace. For how long are we going to make these arguments before people listen? We must continue to push hard on this issue.

In all these discussions that have taken place, we must ask ourselves what happened to the original peace agenda? Women first began mobilizing on the international stage in the 1920s, fighting for peace and disarmament just before and after World War 1, when peace was also the battlecry in Sixties and Seventies during the Vietnam War.

Today we have given up on that battle. Our leading intellectuals are saying that we have strengthened humanitarian law, but this in a sense has led to endless war. Nation states will not fight for peace in and of itself, but civil society must never give up the battle for peace.

We have now spent a decade trying to put women in the military to get gender parity in the military. We should put the same effort into making peace, and to making waging war difficult - if not impossible.

The time is also come to make new strides and try to take new directions in the area of women, peace and security. Early templates for the UN's engagement in peace and security were based on the wars in Southern Africa. New wars are drastically changing the nature of warfare - and women, peace and security, must keep up with the changes. The issue on how to fight violent extremism and face the consequences of the politics and policies of counterterrorism are very important to us, especially in the Middle East and in my region, South Asia.

Women are often in very ambivalent situations in these very fraught contexts. I once travelled five hours from Kabul into a remote village in Afghanistan, when I was Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women. Unlike in Kabul, women were very ambivalent: one son was in the army, one was in the Taliban. They were just trying to survive. We must have conceptual clarity, we want women as peacebuilders - those who have access and can help humanitarian work and help bring peace. Such women do yeoman's work, we must respect their independence and autonomy.

On the other hand, we cannot support having women as instruments of any counterinsurgency strategy. We cannot put them at risk at present or in the future.

This is a crucial lesson to learn from our recent experiences in South Asia, and the Middle East. Increasingly also, we are seeing women and girl combatants in wars in the Middle East and South Asia. I have met both women and girl combatants in my work. Again. I remember one in Nepal. When she met me, she was actually very angry with me.

She spoke to me with tears in her eyes. She did not want to be rescued. She had left home because of the cruelty of her stepmother. She was angry that I was trying to send her home.

This just reminds us that reintegration plans with female combatants must be well-thought out.

In some countries these battle-hardened women are packed off to learn beauty culture or sewing as livelihoods, and they're quite miserable. They have skills that can be used in the society at large, the system must take their issues seriously. The problem of female combatants should be an important part of the women, peace and security agenda.

Having said that, we must accept that terrorism in the form of acts of terror by non-state actors is a serious issue in our regions, but I think in the back of all our minds who come from the Middle East or South Asia is the definitional problem. What is terrorism, what is violent extremism?

Counter terrorism laws, some very draconian provisions have been developed and implemented to deal with these concerns all over the world. Securitization policies are the norm. Women and their communities face a great deal of pressure, counterterrorism can become an assault on the community as a whole.

A new issue that no one has really studied is also emerging. There are now deradicalisation programs all over the world for young man and women accused of being susceptible to terrorism. Some of these programs are held in concentration camp-like settings, others are more flexible and take the role of mentor/student. Different countries have different programs. There's a serious need to study these programs - especially with regard to young women - to ensure their rights and dignity are protected.

Another problem in the Middle East and South Asia is the very nature of war, the use of new technologies of destruction and surveillance. There's the use of unmanned drones and all manner of weapons we know nothing about. Technology in areas of surveillance, cyber warfare, spyware, all new areas that have real consequences. Even social media - I was on the fact finding mission in Myanmar, the hate speech connected to Facebook and Whatsapp leading to appalling violence.

The global community must come together to begin regulating all these unregulated, destructive aspects of technology that are linked to war and violence. The Middle East and South Asia are often the guinea pigs for these technologies. Civil society should be in the forefront in calling for national action. Nations by themselves may not act.

One must also appreciate that there is technology for good. There have been a lot of scientists now working with humanitarians developing satellite phones in Congo to stop sexual violence, new style of ovens in Sudan so there's no search for firewood. You must encourage this more, have more scientists and innovators to do humanitarian work.

We must harness technology for good and regulate that which is bad.

The WPS agenda as it stands today is also very silent on the political economies at the local level where these wars are fought. In the 2015 Global Study, for women in the developing countries, economic and social issues were the most important part of the women peace and security agenda. Basically today we have global templates of economic recovery for women, and basically they transferred livelihood skills for women from earlier projects from mainly Southern Africa. Low-skilled training for saturated markets. We produce hundreds of tailors, cooks and beauticians. There's a need to think differently, different, more imaginative, programs are necessary.

And at the national level, much of their advice and management in our regions come from consulting firms, short-term consultancies - one does a report and goes home. Little coherence, Little cohesion. The macro picture is often very messy. The developments in Afghanistan should give us force to think. We really need to seriously think about post-conflict rebuilding in our region given the experience of the past few decades.

To avoid the terrible cost of war, the international global system has focused on prevention. The Secretary-General's common agenda report for the 75th anniversary of the UN puts prevention at the center. There will be now after the report is adopted global risk reports, early warning systems will be spelt out.

The Global Study in 2015 spelt three areas of prevention.

Firstly, the presence, if all parties agree, to civilian or uniformed presence in their area. The use of technology through drones and satellites to monitor situations, but used in a positive sense. And constant dialogue. Lahkdar Brahimi from Algeria, who was one of my mentors said, there's the need for dialogue and discussion every time, all the time, at all levels, and with all stakeholders. And women's groups must listen to that advice: women should be in the forefront of dialogue, and in the forefront of prevention.

In the Middle East and South Asia, women's issues are also part of the political and ideological struggle. It is not a byproduct of conflict, like in Rwanda.

How do we solve a problem like Afghanistan? That is the elephant in all our rooms. It is an extremely urgent issue. It is not going to be easy, and yet, it has so many consequences. We can repeat and we must repeat that all of women's rights are human rights. That everyone must implement CEDAW. But it must also brace ourselves to know that nothing may happen, except some basics.

This is true for both our regions. So how do we move forward? In the 1990s I was with the International Centre for Ethnic Studies in Colombo, we did a lot of work on religion, women and ethnicity. We brought together all the leading women religious scholars from the different religious traditions of Asia to meet with feminists and activists.

We tried to work toward what we call the minimum core of rights that have to be adopted and perhaps advocated for, those that had likelihood of being adopted and were what women of that religious tradition were comfortable with. Rights that have protected women's consent, and autonomy, and also ensured economic survival and physical security. All religious and what we call personal laws in our part of the world are subject to scrutiny, it is not only Muslim law, all based on religious orthodoxies or ethnic orthodoxes. So while waiting for our countries to meet their CEDAW obligations in the short term, we cannot abandon the women. We must push for a minimum core to protect women in the immediate future.

“We have strengthened humanitarian law, but this in a sense has led to endless war. Nation states will not fight for peace in and of itself. But civil society must never give up the battle for peace.”

Parts of your region and mine have become the center for instability in the world, with regard to war and violence. Women, peace and security is a crucial item on the agenda for us, for Southern women the political economy above and the technologies of war and are as important as the fight against sexual violence and the struggle of representation.

The WPS agenda, which has come a long distance, must now be ready to move forward in ways that give it full global acceptance. We must struggle hard for all these issues: to fight impunity for sexual violence. To fight for gender parity in peace processes. To deal with the dilemma of women combatants. The use of technologies of war that are just developing as we speak. The rights of women and girls under counterterrorism regimes, and the political, social and economic rights of women in peace building.

But most importantly, we must unite on a global struggle for peace. Peace as an end in itself, your organization has a major role to play in this regard. I wish you all success.

Suad Khubieh, Syria

Suad is an investigative journalist and human rights activist. She is a member of the Human Rights Committee of the Syrian Women's Network (Shams), Former Emeritus Member of the Board of Directors of the Human Rights Association in Syria (2004-2007), founder and member of the Syria Gathering and the Committee to Support Women's Issues in Syria 2005-2008)

When I consider the women, peace and security agenda as a Syrian woman and as a human rights activist, I unfortunately will have to convey my disappointment. The Syrian situation is living in the aftermath of the protracted conflict, and still living under war, division, displacement, abductions, arrests, and detentions. All of these affect women in particular, we know that women are the most vulnerable element in conflict and they bear the brunt.

Participation is one of the four pillars of the 1325 agenda, so let's consider women's political participation in Syria.

The situation in Syria pushed many Syrian women to engage in public life, whether it is the social, or the civic, or even political life - though certainly with more restrictions in relation to politics. There are major challenges that Syrian women encountered that have prevented them from significant participation and from significant achievements.

My own experience can give you an indication about the general state of woman's political participation in Syria.



Five years ago, I was invited to participate as an advisor within a women's advisory group to the High Negotiations Committee (HNC) that was being formed at the time. The membership of the commission, which is an umbrella group for the opposition, was predominantly men, at the time perhaps 90 percent male.

I joined with a number of others in this group and we were invited to participate in the second round of elections. There we were utilized as advisers. However, in practice this served no real purpose other than something to show off in front of the international community. Whenever there was media, whenever there was a foreign and ambassador we would be invited and would be introduced as advisors to the HNC. But we were not allowed to attend any of the formal or the informal dialogue sessions.

And so we were kept there simply to be shown off.

This felt like a harsh lesson on me as an activist, a person who was deeply interested in human rights and very interested in politics for more than 20 years. It was a very harsh reality for me and for the others because we were only exploited as decoration and performance that the HNC, who had invited us, used to claim that they are giving women space.

The situation Syria had generally opened up the opportunity for women to engage politically, however, it did not allow them in reality to engage in politics. Instead women were always used as statistics, whose utility ended after their presence was used to prove that there were women who are participating politically. In reality, women are not really engaged.

Unfortunately, it was the United Nations who were the first to introduce the idea of women engaging in politics in secret by establishing the Woman Advisory's Group to the UN Special Envoy.

This is something that we hold against the United Nations and the UN Special Envoy. Even though this had some advantages, it had also major disadvantages because it set the precedent for Syrian women to work in secrecy and it belittled us, establishing women in a disadvantaged position.

It limited politically-engaged women into an advisory role. Even that advisory role was not really fulfilled because we were just convened performatively to show off. We were exploited by both the government and the opposition.

We should also note that the Syrian Constitutional Committee, in which women were again marginalized and disadvantaged, was directly sponsored by the United Nations. So this is done under the watch of the UN. And without any intervention to rectify the underrepresentation, or at least provide some guidance.

We are not requesting the United Nations to, let's say, impose gender quotas in any of the meetings and any of the entities, however, we blame the UN for legitimizing this marginalization of women. This is what we are opposed to very strongly. This was also associated with the hegemony of the patriarchal political entities on all of the different institutions. For example, the political entity of the alliance: there are only a few women within the assembly. However, it was at least better than the previous round which had no women at all.

Generally speaking, we can say sadly that women's presence is always marginalized. Crucially this is not because there are no women, or that the women are not effective or active. It is because of a disparaging perspective or view of women that is held by all of the players - the different political blocks and different formal and informal entities, and even including the United Nations, even though the UN is sponsoring the negotiation process in Syria.

There are so many obstacles and tremendous challenges facing women and preventing women from benefiting or reaping the fruits of UNSCR 1325.

This includes violence against Syrian women - and this is the most important obstacle. Syrian women are surrounded by violence; there is direct violence as a result of the armed conflict, and there is also the violence perpetrated by the different groups that control the different areas. There is also legalized violence under the penal code and other laws, like the provisions that allow for 'honor killing', to which many victims have fallen.

“The United Nations was the first to introduce the idea of women engaging in politics in secret by establishing the Woman Advisory’s Group to the UN Special Envoy.”

There is also economic violence, which is today a very widely spread, and pushes many women to prostitution or into human trafficking black markets. All of these forms of violence are unfortunately widely spread in Syria. They are not the result solely of the armed conflict, but they have accumulated for many decades.

Today there are so many internally displaced women, as well as refugees. Internally displaced women live in many different areas, and are suffering the highest level of violence from all parties, though chiefly the State.

The State has perpetrated violence against women since the beginning of the Syrian revolution in 2011, in which we activists who participated had hoped would be a point of transition in favor of women.

However, this movement unfortunately was militarized and has actually regressed in relation to the space available for women to speak and to participate within it.

This is a result of the general regression in many of the gains that we had been able to accomplish up until today. There are organized campaigns against women and against activist women. So we are very concerned whenever we try to work in our structured space, which is shrinking every year.

We are fighting on different fronts today, we are fighting for equal representation of women, in all of the different entities and we are still struggling to amend the personal status laws, and to convert it into non-discriminatory laws.

Unfortunately, we are still seeing that receiving our

rights and imposing ourselves as active partners should start from actual international support and pressure for the implementation of UNSCR 2254, because it is the only guarantee for ending violence against women in Syria, without which women cannot actually make any progress.

Full implementation of this resolution, which should start with a civilian transitional authority, that would impose stability and also calling all parties to comply with the minimum 30 per cent quota for women in all decision making positions, whether this is in State entities, or in political parties.

We need to see the adoption of full gender equality, the ending of all gender-based discrimination, ending the exclusion of women, and also establish clear provisions to ensure the protection of women’s rights economically and socially in the new Syrian Constitution, which will face many obstacles. We need to ensure women’s participation in the negotiation processes and relation to participation, and also increase women’s political participation.

Syrian woman, active Syrian woman, we are not victims. We are not always victims, we have suffered and been abused, but we are leaders.

What we need is for the world to stand behind us, we need to be supported in order to establish peace in our country on a democratic basis and not on the basis of reproducing the totalitarian regime that is currently in power.

Susan Safar, Iraq

Sozan Safar is the founder of Dak Organization for Yazidi Women Development. Sozan was a teacher before founding Dak in 2014. The organisation was started by volunteers and now has over 60 employees aimed at developing a peaceful, stable community dedicated to the protection of women's rights and human dignity.

My name is Susan Safar. I am the head of Dak foundation for Yazidi women. We are a religious minority. At the onset of ISIS, when our areas were invaded by Daesh, or ISIS, many of my community members were actually subject to violations, abductions, especially the grave atrocities that Yazidi women have been subject to, in addition, to abduction also, being sold as slaves.



Photo: Susan Safar/Dak Organization

“When I talk about women, peace and security or peacebuilding, my community tells me ‘we did not wage a war, *they* are the ones who waged a war.’”

As women activists were adversely affected by this, and we started from scratch.

We started out of the rubble and we established Dak Foundation, which means ‘mother’ in the Kurdish language.

It has been seven years since ISIS took over our land. To liberate our areas, many countries and many Yazidi women have been subject to atrocious crimes. And it has continued until today. 70% or 80% of the Yazidi women who are survivors of sexual violence still live in internal displacement camps. Until today we have about 2,500 Yazidi children and women who have been abducted and whose destiny is not known.

About 3,500 women and children have been released so far. It includes also women and children and young people. These women live in a very dire conditions.

Iraq in 2014 had of course announced its first edition of the National Action Plan for 1325, and had also announced the contingency plan. However and unfortunately, I can say the NAP has marginalized Yazidi woman and what they have been subjected to. Despite announcing the contingency plan and the many programs they have launched.

We live in the north of Iraq and we have internally displaced people living here, and there are continuous clashes between the central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government, which is the reason why many women have been deprived of many basic services. In fact, Yazidi women and women who have been abducted and kidnapped are not among the priorities of the Iraqi government, they weren’t among the priorities of the protection programs they have launched.

This year, they have announced the second edition of the NAP on 1325, which did include some specifics for women. However, the implementation of programs is very slow. The majority of activists - maybe all of the activists - do not know what 1325 is.

As a feminist organization, we have launched several programs for the protection of women, including advocacy campaigns to raise awareness of the survivors, to lobby the Iraqi government to recognize or to actually ratify the act on survivor Yazidi women. Dak foundation, with the support of international organizations has worked intensively on establishing a law for the protection of Yazidi women. This law includes reparations and compensation for them. The advocacy campaigns that we have launched as a local organizations were very significant. In 2021, the Yazidi survivor women law was ratified by the Iraqi government, and this was significant. However, the implementation of this law is taking only baby steps.

Generally speaking, the status of women in Iraq, in general, is a dire one. The protection of women is not at the level that we should expect. Until today, there are hundreds of Iraqi women who are being killed in ‘honor crimes’, and on social media we are seeing violence is increasing against women.

The situation for women in refugee, and IDP camps is worsening by the day. And despite all the developments that are designed to address these issues, there are still many challenges.

As a member of a religious minority, when I talk about the agenda of women, peace and security and even when I work on peace building, my community criticizes, me and tells me that “we did not wage a war, *they* are the ones who waged a war.”

So as women activists, we are faced with the greatest challenges because the local community sometimes rejects the idea of us having to initiate peace projects, especially in Sinjar area, which has the majority of the Yazidi population, as well as the Turkoman minority, the Muslim minorities there.

The areas where we work are areas teaming with conflicts, there are areas of Christian, majorities or Christian minority or Muslim majorities or Muslim minorities. Sometimes there is resistance from the community or even the society at large, they resist, the notion of having women initiate.

This is not easy for us and we are faced with tremendous challenges. However, I always say that our will as Iraqi women and even in religious minority, we have a strong will to change our reality. Because of being subject to being sold as a slave in the 21st century, this is something that no human being would accept.

So therefore as women activists, we feel responsible to address what happened to us, and our situation.

Today, thousands of Yazidi women from rural communities are illiterate. Allow me to share with you this small story, that one Yazidi refugee, told us. She said that she was captured by ISIS in Mosul, and she had the opportunity of getting hold of a mobile phone to call her family and she was able to escape.

However, she was illiterate, she couldn't read and write and she couldn't actually give the location or the address to which she was to go. What's strange and also great about this is she had her daughter with her. Her daughter is seven years of age, but she was about to read. She looked out of the window and she read the name of the neighborhood on a street

sign.

So with the help of her seven year-old daughter, this woman was able to escape from ISIS and to find their way home.

You can see just how important teaching women and literacy for women is. Thousands of Yazidi women and Iraqi women are still illiterate. And the biggest testimony of that is that until today many Yazidi women were not able to escape the ISIS presence because they don't know how to use mobile phones that they don't know how to write or read.

This huge injustice that Iraqi women have been faced with - especially Yazidi woman - is very painful. Today, with all of our energy as women activists we are trying to raise awareness among women, reaching as many as is possible. Convincing them that women must be equal to education. They must be aware of their rights and their obligations and aware of their surroundings through this. We can even build upon the knowledge and we can maybe read about the international context, read about 1325 and also the Iraqi constitution and the laws related to women.

So our journey today is not easy at all because we are faced with many challenges and we are faced with many painful stories. Stories that we hear, stories that we recognize, stories that we experienced ourselves, stories that are very harmful to us to psychologically. We are hearing and reading and seeing this tremendous injustice against women. What's even more painful that it is still continuing until today, and the evidence is that is that many women are still living in dark conditions in refugee and IDP camps.

Mouna Ghanem Syria

Mouna is the founder and Coordinator of the Syrian Women's Forum for Peace and Democracy. Mouna is a doctor who has held national and regional roles for international organizations such as UNFPA, UNIFEM, and INSTRAW. As a peace activist, Mouna served on the Women's Advisory Board to the UN Special Envoy for Syria.

The challenge we face in women, peace and security is not the procedures. We have a problem at the stage of political will at the international level. There is no international political will to advance women's movements. But we face our own problems as well. Now we are limiting our focus to women only as victims in war. We have forgotten about the Beijing Platform for Action; we have forgotten about CEDAW. We have forgotten about collective work. We have forgotten about solidarity among women across the world.



“What about the Syrians who paid with their lives for political change, for democratic change? Everybody has forgotten about them.”

We have a serious problem with the international women's movement - just as we have the same indicators of a serious crisis in the international democratic movement across the world. I always link the women's movement to the democratic movement because without democracy, there is no women's equity and equality. I think this is a serious problem and it's a very important one.

That is my first point, the second point is that we as women have failed to see the changes across the world, and we have to look at the crisis in state building across the world. We keep asking the government to do this and that, while our region doesn't have governments. We do have a shape, a structure of government, but at the end of the day, they are fragile governments, which in Syria is run by a regimes or a gang of people working together for themselves, I'm sorry to say that.

At least in Syria, we don't have a government where we can really ask the regime to be accountable. This regime doesn't care about the UN, it doesn't care about our accountability system, it doesn't care about human rights - on the contrary. Almost everybody who cares about or believes in human rights is now outside of the country. So this is a serious problem.

The third problem is the UN.

The UN, while I cannot say it has dropped the women's agenda, being gender-sensitive is not a requirement to be an employee of the UN.

When I myself was a member in the Women's Advisory Board for the UN Special Envoy to Syria, I was asked by one of the envoy's advisors to submit my resignation from the board based on my political activity - because he didn't like me as a politician. He said this place is only for activists. So UN employees were themselves installing a glass ceiling for politically-engaged women.

It's a very serious and dangerous phenomenon.

I think my colleagues from Yemen, from Libya, and many countries have similar experiences with UN special envoys, or with his - and always it is always *his* - staff who avoid gender or are anti-gender. They don't like political women.

So we have a serious problem with the UN. As I see it, they are trying to recruit women who don't believe in the women's agenda.

I think if we were to study where funding goes in these systems, we would see that very little funding went to feminist movements in the Arab world, while a lot of money ended up with the radical Islamist jihadist groups in Syria.

As my colleague Suad said, we want democracy, we want political change. And now there are women being recruited in these processes who don't believe in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, people who don't believe in the UN, but they themselves are funded by the UN.

At the UN Women meeting in Beirut, one of the participants told me that she didn't want to update the Personal Status Code in Syria because it's okay with her for a man to have four wives, that it was okay too for her to be second class citizen in the family, because according to her belief that this is fine, this is okay.

And people who hold these beliefs are nevertheless getting support, not only financial support but also political support at the political level.

But at the same time, even the women who are radicals, who are in my view conservative, were not given a political role in the Syrian opposition institutions in Syria. They too were excluded.

So, I feel very frustrated. I have the feeling that it's all lip service. I wonder what we are doing here, what are we doing in Geneva? I resigned from the Women's Advisory Board because I felt it was useless. Even with the UN being at this high level, with the UN Special Envoy, it was useless, a waste of time. It's better for me to do something else in life rather than go and waste my time and spend money for nothing, just be there, to give legitimacy for the other people who work against my agenda. If I were not there, the UN could not continue the charade with just a whole group of reactionaries, but the presence of people like me would give legitimacy for the other people. We were being used for that.

My fourth point: I don't think anybody is serious about peace in the Middle East. I think we have a serious problem with this. I don't think anybody cares about peace in Syria, or peace in Yemen, or peace in Libya. If they cared. They would find a solution, we all know that.

They don't care, they are just trying to recycle the same regime, and I think we also see this in Libya. They recycle the same people, recycle the same regime and now look at what is happening in Syria. They are recycling the regime, they are recycling the president. All the Arab countries are saying "we should call him, he should call us".

And what about the people who paid with their lives for political change, for democratic change? Everybody has forgotten about them. They were encouraged at the beginning because it looked good for some European or Western politicians in their internal political agenda.

I feel that we were used as a people, only to be kicked out of our own country, kicked out of our political context for the sake of some people to be promoted at their national level.

I'm sorry. I'm very frank here. I'm very frustrated. I think rather than focusing on the procedures and documenting this case or that case we should really advocate for reviving the international women's movement, and for women's solidarity in different parts of the world. Not only the Middle East, or the Arab region.

We should really advocate for women activists to work with all feminists. And we should revive this world 'feminist'. When we have the strength of the international women's movement behind us, then we can truly influence the procedures.

Amal Basha, Yemen

Amal Basha is the co-founder and chairwoman of Sisters Arab Forum for Human Rights (SAF) in Yemen. Amal was elected to the Yemeni National Dialogue, and served as spokesperson. She recently coordinated the work of the Yemeni NGOs CEDAW Coalition.

After everything that has been said and especially after what Mouna Ghanem has spoken about, I feel that she is talking about the same hardship and the same circumstances that we have had as strong women. The United Nations, the government, political parties, and even civil society, does not prefer having a strong, and a critical voice - a voice that speaks against the conventional wisdom.

We are trying to open our eyes to the reality, without any hidden political agenda, without having any personal interest. My experiences have seen some failures and some successes, sufficient to extract some conclusions. Whenever we were moving and surprising the government and the international community, when they were not prepared for us, we succeeded.



For example, we succeeded in the National Dialogue when we gathered as women, and we created a huge lobby with the international community, with the United Nations, to engage in the National Dialogue. And when we were engaged we succeeded, and when we worked as civil society and women and youth, we succeeded greatly. This is historic for us.

After what we achieved, the political parties have conglomerated together and they wanted to attack the success. They started side dialogues after the National Dialogue to implement the outcomes, where they abandoned women. As women, we were 30 per cent in the National Dialogue, and after that there was only one woman included, despite huge pressure by women, while all the other representatives were all men from the political parties.

They told the female representative at that time, “we don’t want anymore headache”. So unfortunately, women disappeared completely from the political scene after the National Dialogue, and after the violence returned, women were completely absent.

Of course, on paper, we are great: 30 per cent in the National Dialogue, prohibition of child marriage, and so on. However, on the other side, the Yemeni government issued a National Action Plan for UNSCR 1325 and just a few months following that there were no women appointed in the Yemeni government, even though that same government issued the National Action Plan stating it would apply a quota of 30 per cent.

We were not able to influence the four successive UN Special Envoys. The one before the last asked us, “do you want peace, or do you want women around the table?” Because the political parties and the government refused to have women around the table. And we told them that there is UNSCR 1325 - the United Nations should be concerned with implementing this resolution, so there should be pressure from the Special Envoy and from the countries sponsoring the peace process.

We said, you need to exercise pressure to include women because women are the voices of peace.

Women are the ones who will push for the women, peace and security agenda to be on the table seriously. All of the other parties involved are involved in arms deals, in war crimes, in crimes against humanity. Women bear the brunt of the conflict. Women today are leading their households in the absence of the main breadwinner. There are hundreds of thousands of women who have sustained permanent disabilities as a result of the conflict. However, this is not looked into closely.

The decision to go to war is unfortunately a decision taken purely by men, while women bear the brunt. So, we have a government that refuses the presence of women completely, while they also refuse to have women around the negotiation table. The UN representative allocates 12 seats for the government and then refuses to have a women’s quota, because they say they want the government to sit around the negotiation table with the other party. They say it is not important to have women around that table. So we suggested having a shadow negotiation table with civil society, but all of our attempts unfortunately failed.

I told you that there have been successes and failures. UNSCR 1325 talks about participation and protection. We failed miserably in relation to participation around the table, so let’s consider protection.

Three years ago, we started celebrating and dancing because Sister’s Arab Forum and Karama succeeded in extracting a decision by the Human Rights Council to form the team monitoring the violations in Yemen. The Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen were able to document war crimes and established in their three reports that war crimes were perpetrated by all parties, including the countries supplying arms.

“How can a country that is infamous for human rights violations be on the Human Rights Council?”

We believed then that these reports would lead to further developments, maybe forming an investigation committee or maybe remitting that file to the UN Security Council, or holding the perpetrators accountable - whether the parties involved are Yemeni parties or others who supplied weapons used in the commission of human rights violations.

However, what happened?

The United Nations and Security Council have let us down on protection, refusing to extend the mandate of the Group of Eminent Experts.

On the Security Council there are many European countries that could have applied diplomatic pressure. They have not exerted any pressure to ensure Yemeni perspectives are on the agenda of the Human Rights Council, they have only played a very weak role. These are the same European countries who have claimed to be supportive of us. Just three years ago they made promises when we secured the expert group. We provided information and facts to monitor and to expose to the world the reality of war crimes.

But this has been confounded, through backroom diplomacy, economic blackmail, threats to the continuity of arms deals.

In contrast to many of the countries involving themselves in the conflict, Yemen is a poor country. It cannot threaten economic pain. It's not like Libya or Syria because they are very close to the Mediterranean, those countries are very close to the smuggling boats, but we are not an oil-rich country, we are not really a strategic country.

So while some countries were lauding the protection of the women peace and security agenda, when it comes to reality, we were abandoned and we are left to fall victim to the impunity politics, the refusal to hold all the perpetrators and violators accountable.

We need reform in the United Nations. We need the Human Rights Council and the Security Council to have better standards. We succeeded briefly at the Human Rights Council, however, we see again the recycling of failure, bringing the same people, the same agenda, the same approach. How can a country that is infamous for human rights violations be on the Human Rights Council?

We also need a mechanism to monitor the performance of the Special Envoys, whether it is special envoys to Yemen, or Libya or Syria, or other countries. We need to appraise their performance. How successful or how unsuccessful are they at bringing women around the negotiation table? At enabling women to be active?

We need to look internally as well. In some of our new constitutions we claim to be democratic, but we cannot claim to be so if we do not include women. If we are democratic then 50 per cent of the population cannot be excluded entirely from decision making. Holding governments accountable for the status of women is off the priorities for European capitals.

The women, peace and security agenda may have benefited some countries in one way or another, however for us in Yemen, it is an issue of a huge failure. We hope that this failure will not continue, because we still have some hope of achieving something. Despite all of these developments, we still are hopeful we can return back to the peace process and we can return to having a woman with a strong voice around the table.

Zahra' Langhi, Libya

Zahra' Langhi is a peace activist, gender expert, and scholar, and co-founder of the Libyan Women's Platform for Peace. Zahra' participated in the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum, where she blew the whistle on corruption in the process to name the interim government.

It's the same story of the betrayal of universal values, of not walking the talk, of lip service, of being tokenistic by the UN, the international community and definitely by our national institutions and regimes.

And I completely agree with Mouna Ghanem - the problem is the siloing, not linking the human rights agenda with women's rights. We need to know and believe strongly and actually implement it as we go. Not just another tokenism. Human rights are universal, inalienable, indivisible, interdependent, interrelated and everyone is born with and possesses the same rights regardless of where we live.

We have now representative of international organizations who believe that, in the name of cultural sensitivity, they have to appease our authoritarian regimes. That they have to compromise the agenda of women.



“The problem is the siloing - not linking the human rights agenda with women’s rights”

Just a week ago when we had the international stabilization conference, just on arrival of the Under-Secretary General of the UN, the head of the peace operations, Rosemary de Carlo, we had the interim Prime Minister of Libya initiate an investigation into the Ministry of Women’s Affairs for signing an MoU with UN Woman to develop Libya’s woman and peace and security national action plan.

Can you believe such an outrageous thing could happen? The Minister for Women at the moment is not in the capital, is not there to go to her office, is in her to a hometown and she is threatened with her children. Can you imagine that?

Just two days ago, the head of the Iftah, the Mufti, who is a radical extremist, makes claims and pressures the government in a statement. He calls it Fatwa - a religious, official Fatwa - that the prime minister has to immediately cancel this MoU, and that Libya - which ratified CEDAW in 1989 with only two reservations - has to withdraw from CEDAW. This happens just as Indonesia, with the largest Muslim population in the world, and Egypt, with the largest Muslim population in the Arab world, are participating in their reviews with the CEDAW Committee, this government with its Iftah, are calling for the withdrawal of Libya from CEDAW.

As was said in the Karama statement: WPS is not a crime, it’s actually a duty of the State. And imagine, this is a government that was not elected democratically by Libyans, but a government that was selected by a peace process led by the UN.

So what I want to say is, we need always is a whole process, it’s a path, it’s not a tick-box experiment, the process where we need to uphold human rights, where we need to have a gender mainstreaming throughout. We fought so much in this peace process to make sure

that in this interim government that will lead us to elections on 24th of December - now they are trying to defraud Libyans from the right to vote for their representatives.

We’ve fought so much that Libyan woman are represented by minimum 30 per cent in this government, we managed to get five women ministers. The Minister of Foreign Affairs a few months ago at Generation Equality in Paris announced that Libya will have a feminist foreign policy. But what happens later when she is developing her initiative on stabilization? After pressures from this prime minister, the stabilization initiative has mention of women, it lacks completely any gender responsive approach for recovery and reform. Though they are marketing this initiative that is basically saying that we don’t want to have elections now, basically they’re saying that it’s Libyan-owned Libyan led when Libyans themselves as civil society were not even consulted.

So it’s not only about bringing women to the table. It’s what kind of women and it’s about the follow-up that we’ll have later on building movements. That will make sure that whatever the agreement - sometimes we have political agreements that will mention 1325 - and by the way, in the mess that we are in today, when I went back and I checked all the agreements that we’ve done that the UN itself supervised, that the UN itself in its mandate, has to make sure that it implements 1325.

There’s no mention of 1325 explicitly in the political Agreements. So this is one of the problems that we need to make sure and to make sure that there will be a follow-up.

Amal Kreishe, Palestine

Amal Kreishe is a Palestinian feminist, activist and a political leader who has served as a general director of the Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development since 2006. Amal is a member of the steering committee of the Palestinian National Women Coalition to Implement the UNSCR 1325, and was a member of the drafting team of the National Action Plan for the Implementation of UNSCR1325 on Women Peace and Security in the State of Palestine 2017-2019.

In the beginning, I would like to say that this high-level discussion Karama platform that has a great staff of human rights advocates has actually contributed to lifting me up from my frustration in relation to the effectiveness of UNSCR 1325 on a women's status towards more peace and security.

Honestly, the discussions related to the feminist and political analysis were very comprehensive on the local and regional, and international level. Indeed, this has given me more motivation to address or to approach the women, peace and security agenda with more positivity as compared to yesterday, for example.



Here, I'm referring to my frustration, especially in the Occupied Territories because there is a systematic operation with an international dimension and an occupational dimension to crack down on civil society. The Israeli defense minister has announced that there are six Palestinian human rights organizations and feminist organizations that he described as a "terrorist organizations".

It is utilizing a double standard in dealing with the rights of the Palestinian people and in an attempt to politicize the work of civil society, and to weaken civil society. This is because civil society, whether it is through networks or individually, based on humanitarian law continuously engages against the politics of the Israeli occupation on the international arena.

I am active in the area of human rights and I'm also active in the area of peace and security. And I have a big problem with the UN Security Council, as many colleagues have already mentioned. Many of the resolutions and many of the approaches regarding the women, peace and security agenda have not addressed the stereotypes and the lack of the structural equality that discriminates against women.

In our experience, 1325 is a very fragile resolution, even though it was issued by the highest international entity. However, the lack of accountability mechanisms has made the women, peace and security agenda very fragile. It makes it a futile gesture when the Secretary-General of the United Nations appeals within the context of COVID-19 to different entities to a ceasefire and for peace in countries that are facing civil clashes

So I believe that our problem with the Security Council is dealing with the women, peace and security agenda and its approach is that they do not really analyze the root causes of conflicts from a gender perspective.

Practically, they do not prevent conflicts by not standing clearly or not taking a clear position about the monitoring and accountability in relation to the arms deals that fuel conflicts, and which are used clearly against the Global South.

These deliberations also do not really address women's issues and how these conflicts actually affect the social and economic status of people, and specifically women.

As an observer of the deliberations that take place in the Security Council, the briefing reports submitted by the peace and security envoy in the Middle East, they do not talk about the implications of the occupation's measures against women and girls.

It is very difficult for us to change the Security Council and it's very difficult to change the mechanism of resolutions. Perhaps we could submit some proposals to the Secretary-General of the United Nation to recommend maybe establishing a committee for women, peace and security agenda, similar to the CEDAW committee that would hold states accountable, according to specific standards that we can borrow from the CEDAW committee, for example.

In addition to maybe assigning a special commissioner for UNSCR 1325 and the women peace and security agenda. I am really surprised. It seems that as if UNSCR 1325 was designed specifically for the countries of the South. For example, the Netherlands, submitted in its National Action Plan focus on Syrian women, as though Dutch women do not have any struggles or do not have any role in strengthening peace and security in their countries, in terms of monitoring the arms supply, in terms of their role in holding accountable countries that violate international humanitarian law.

So I believe that we need to also apply pressure on the European Union and the different countries in order to have a comprehensive vision about women's right to live in peace and security in the same Western countries, and how female refugees are treated - and to break stereotyping, to avoid linking migrants to terrorism in these countries, to politicize the hijab and link it to radical Islamic movements.

All of that needs to be reconsidered.

In relation to Palestine, I am part of the Women's Alliance for the Implementation of Resolution 1325, and we have submitted a new iteration of our strategy. The strategy is based on avoiding impunity and holding the occupation force accountable, also interlinked with the other domains of the women, peace and security agenda, and relation to protection and prevention, and also representation in peacebuilding and peacemaking.

“The lack of accountability mechanisms has made the women, peace and security agenda very fragile.”

Our main issue is to hold the occupation accountable within this strategic framework, in order to prevent impunity. Primarily we are using all contractual and non-contractual instruments in the United Nations. And we are trying to pressure countries individually as well as collectively, like the European Union, and we are also communicating with the League of Arab States and the other conglomerates in order to ensure that the Israeli occupation is held accountable.

We also submit shadow reports and the voluntary reports about the women, peace and security agenda in Palestine. Our work overlaps with the government work because we have actually developed a National Action Plan with a number of the civil society organizations, and this plan aims at implementing UNSCR 1325.

Our main problem, however, is that many resolutions in the Security Council, including that on the illegitimacy of the occupation and the illegitimacy of the settlements are simply ignored.

Today, under the government of the new Prime Minister there seems to be an acceleration not only of land annexation and settlement, but anything related to the settlement. Confiscation of water, the restriction of mobility, and also the siege of the blockade over a Gaza, to send the Palestinians into isolated pockets, which undermines the notion of establishing an independent Palestinian state, which is supported by the Security Council.

All of these actions by Israel are against the opinion of the Hague Court, which submitted to the General Assembly of the United Nations saying it is necessary to stop settlement and to stop the demolition of the houses and all the arbitrary measures, considering the apartheid wall as a part of the settlement, and also considered Eastern Jerusalem as a part of the occupied territories.

With our strategy, one of the main topics that we address in our advocacy is to expand coordination with different networks and to provide interventions and facts to the Human Rights Council. Commissioner Michelle Bachelet was a member in the international community on fair justice, and she is well acquainted with the implications of the occupation on Palestinian women and girls. However, there are double standards and politicization even of the Human Rights Council - something noted regarding the deliberations about the war crimes in Yemen, impunity for those who have bombed and a wedding occasion in Yemen, and those who bombed, these schools and the children, and have bombed the civilians in Yemen.

This honestly puts us in front of tremendous challenges. That's why I would say that we will continue our struggle. However, practically, we need to work through Karama and other networks to set specific demands that we can submit to the Security Council. I believe that this is very important to be the outcome of our vision of the 21st anniversary of UNSCR 1325 because as Palestinians, we keep saying that we want action, that we want sanctions on the Israeli occupation.

Suzan Aref, Iraq

Suzan Aref is a human rights activist, and the founder and director of Women Empowerment Organization based in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq. She has served as the coordinator of the Iraq Cross- Sector Task Force (CSTF) for 1325.

Iraq is a country which has lived in successive wars, one after the other. So, the women, peace and security agenda is absolutely vital, and it is vital that it is implemented on the ground. However, from bitter experience we know that governments usually do not really care about women's causes, especially in times of war. Our issues are not important or not their priority.



Photo: UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

Those who have made the change and made women, peace and security a priority have been the civil society organizations, especially women's organizations.

They have played a significant role in reflecting the recommendations and the points of UNSCR 1325, and they have worked towards developing a National Action Plan (NAP), through synergy of the civil society organizations, and this way they have created political will. We remember that twice the UN Security Council has sent a warning to the government of Iraq reminding them of the necessity to implement UNSCR 1325, without any response by the government to those warnings or reminders.

It has been over two decades since UNSCR 1325, and it seems in that time other civil society organizations, beyond feminist and women's organizations, have started appreciating the importance of this resolution.

So this broader group has started working together towards creating the political will, working with different sectors, including the judiciary, and also working with the media specifically on advocacy. Civil society organizations have become an integral part of the structure working on the NAP, and they also continue to work on implementation, writing reports and monitoring.

Of course, the greatest role of feminist movements in Iraq was in ensuring that Iraq became the first country in the Arab region to issue a NAP, which it did in 2014, and again in 2018. Iraq was also the first country in the region to have reported on its NAP.

However, the most important achievements made by civil society organizations has been in creating the political will and had drawing the attention of the government that this is a government mandate. In the second edition of the NAP, the role of civil side organizations had declined, the role is no longer primary of civil society organizations, but rather, the larger responsibility is on the shoulders of the government, with the secondary role for civil society organizations. With that we consider ourselves to have achieved a great accomplishment because the government did not really pay attention to the resolution itself and wasn't really interested in developing a NAP.

However, when civil society came into play and demonstrated to the government how important it is and how important it is to develop in a NAP - and also the achievements following the adoption of the NAP - the government has now taken over the responsibility.

Now, the roles have shifted for us as civil society organizations, we have taken a different approach: that we would remain in to play the advocacy role to support the implementation of the plan, and for it not to remain just a piece of paper, because we know that government routine and government work is often reduced to just to show off. We want to continue the advocacy and support the implementation of the second edition of the NAP, and we want to also monitor and to follow up on the implementation, meaning that we need to create regular reports about the progress on the NAP, what are the indicators, and how women have improved their situation or status with this plan.

In terms of the most important lessons learned as civil society and working in the partnerships that we have built, firstly and critically we cannot have NAPs without having allocated budgets. It is necessary to have a budget with the NAP in order to ensure its implementation.

Secondly, the local ownership of these NAPs, meaning, how can we make these NAPs relevant to local need and to be women focused? In Iraq this is especially necessary as we have a huge number of displaced women and women whose rights were violated and who were subjected to many crimes.

Depending on the area, the areas that were occupied by ISIS for example, how can the NAP respond to the needs of women in that locality? And how can it meet the urgent needs of women according to their location? How can it actually respond to the needs, and how can we engage civil society organizations or society in general in all of the phases - in the design development, as well as implementation and then monitoring and evaluation?

These are just some of the quick lessons learned that I wanted to mention but also I would like to note some of the challenges that we encounter - sustainable support or financing, especially in conflict-affected countries.

“Civil society’s most important achievement has been in creating political will, drawing the attention of the government that WPS is a government mandate.”

It is very rare that we can rely on financing. In Iraq, for example, financing was redirected immediately during the ISIS occupation, away from development programs and into humanitarian assistance. So even the donors are usually focused on one aspect at the expense of other areas, which adversely affect peace and security programs.

According to our experience, in Iraq we have regressed a lot because the majority of financing was redirected to humanitarian assistance and relief after they were originally allocated for development. So how can we actually learn from this experience? Women, peace and security needs sustainable financing. Resources should be distributed in terms of need, rather than redirecting financing to one aspect at the expense of the other.

Financing for civil society is very low and is unsustainable. Projects are usually short-term projects. We want the impact to be long-term and to be tangible. So, short-term projects - six months, or one year - we cannot properly measure the impact thereof.

Financing is really the clearest way you can measure political will. I noted earlier that how important it was and how proud civil society was in creating the political will that saw the government endorse the NAP. However, that political will is still fragile. Why? Because even then the NAP is still lacking a budget.

Women, peace and security is still not a top priority, even though with all that has happened since 2012 until today, for more than nine years, we have been working on the women, peace and security agenda. And there is progress, however, it is still very slow. So how can we work more effectively?

What are the opportunities that we have been able to make use of? In Iraq, one is the presence of the international community. In addition to the huge role played by women’s organizations, this is also a great opportunity. Also the awareness of women, peace and security is another important opportunity.

Sivananthi Thanenthiran, Malaysia

Sivananthi Thanenthiran is the Executive Director of the Asian-Pacific Resource & Research Centre for Women (ARROW), a regional partnership organization working across 15 priority countries in Asia-Pacific, and with regional organisations and networks across the global south.

This is actually a very critical time, especially for the Asia Pacific region. Previously Arrow has been advocating as a member of the Asia Pacific Women's Alliance for Peace and Security, APWaps, which provided a space for collaboration and conversation. APWAPS has is going through something of a low period, but we are also a member of the Global Network for Women Peacebuilders. And we have generally been advocating for the implementation of the WPS agenda through regional and global processes, through the annual open debate.

Our key focus is actually the nexus between conflict and sexual and reproductive rights, which is often neglected both in the time of conflict, as well as in peace building processes. There are several trends we see in the region, which I think are particularly pertinent, and which I'm sure that all of you have experienced previously in your own context.



Photo: ARROW

In our region, just recently we've had a tremendous breakdown in certain countries, I recall Myanmar, the military dictatorship took over. Prior to that, we saw the clamping down on the fragile democracy that was emerging in Myanmar, we actually saw a protracted struggle between different ethnic groups and especially the Rohingyas, who were deeply discriminated against, and a lot of violence was perpetrated against this community. This caused a refugee exodus from Myanmar into different countries in the region.

We have also seen the situation in Afghanistan where the Taliban takeover has also caused another huge exodus from Afghanistan, bleeding out into the borders around it.

So we have these two situations happening and we can expect this exodus and this refugee crisis to spill over the borders of our countries in the region.

As previously speakers have noted, we seem to be at a contestation point between China and the West. This has just heated up because Australia, the UK and the US have militarily positioned themselves in the South China Sea against the Chinese vessels, and China also continues to harass a number of countries in the South China Sea. So we can see this tension building up at the border areas across some geographical areas.

The third trend that I also wanted to highlight was, of course COVID-19. Asia was particularly badly affected, but one of key things, that emerged during the pandemic has been the securitization aspect. We have seen the removal of women from many processes, for example, women have been underrepresented in COVID-19 response, women represented just 25 per cent of members of COVID-19 task forces in 36 conflict and post-conflict countries.

Through this reduced role of women in response, the poor levels of inclusion of women's rights organizations in peace and resilience processes, new securitized laws that limit civil society movement and engagement, we are actually seeing that soft conflict is also on the rise across different borders.

So I think that this is very timely for us to join this conversation. And of course, we'd like to advocate that, you know, perhaps we can work across organizations to put the immediate situation of Myanmar and Afghanistan as well as this new emerging conflict situation between China and the West onto the global agenda so that it does not undermine stability in the region.

We see civil society organizations, women's rights organizations, feminist activists, playing a really important role in WPS and in the development agenda. From the time of the Beijing Platform for Action, ICPD, CEDAW, the general recommendation 30 from the CEDAW process right on women in conflict, prevention conflict, and most conflict situations. This is really a win for us and we also echo the need for us to utilize human rights mechanisms to strengthen the feminist and women's rights ask and hold on the mandate of the WPS agenda. Within the SDGs, trying to intervene and report on both, SDG 16 has been an aspiration on the part of Arrow, but we have not been able to fully do it, although, we are the really involved in both the regional SDG processes. So this is some avenue perhaps we can work with other organizations, maybe interested in pursuing that.

CSOs have actually played a significant role in the national and regional efforts on the implementation of the women, peace and security resolutions. In the ninety countries that have developed the NAPs for the implementation of UNSCR 1325, interestingly 13 countries adopted the first country was the Philippines followed by Nepal in 2011. And the NAPs that country level are aligned with the national development agendas, and gender equality policies.

However, unsurprisingly most of the NAPs are not supported by allocated budgets for implementation.

In terms of regional coordination efforts, there's the Asia Pacific Regional Symposium on National Action Plans on women, peace and security, where member states alongside civil society representatives, share their lessons learned and best practices and implementation of UNSCR 1325..

We have also endeavored through regional documents such as the outcome document of the Asia Pacific Population Conference and the APFSD also recognized the importance of the 1325 and subsequent resolutions, and generally these outcome documents call for a commitment to develop peace by engaging women in peace, negotiations, amongst others.

However, as you know, we in Asia Pacific region, we are not free entirely from different forces in our region. So interestingly at the regional commissions, we have the happy pleasure of being joined by the United States and Russia. So we know that in the last Beijing +25 regional review, we had two resisting governments to the inclusion of that women, peace and security commitment inside the outcome documents: Russia, and Saudi Arabia.

Within the ASEAN region itself, we as feminist NGOs think that women's voices and leadership are key to sustaining peace and sustainability. And while sometimes we can intersect with ASEAN, we know very well that the ASEAN intergovernmental meeting and the civil society meetings are often very separate, so in terms of the aspirations within those outcome documents, there is very little follow-up to advance the actual peace and security agenda.

ASEAN is not the friendliest to human rights aspirations; even before COVID-19, we have seen that secularization approaches taken to maintain political stability have very often been against the human rights agenda itself. So in principle, while most of the countries are rhetorically supportive of the WPS agenda, they are very resistant to actually check governments such as Myanmar, which they have let off scot-free for many, many years until the most recent unsettling developments took place. Even then they have only gone as far as to not include Myanmar in their meetings.

So we can see a very toothless approach to people who transgress the WPS agenda.

Amongst this, I want to highlight as another opportunity is the women, peace and security agenda in the Generation Equality Forum. And I know that a lot of people have actually given feedback that it seemed that the action coalitions are not inclusive of the women, peace and security agenda, or are resistant to including it.

However, we did think that there was some opportunity. ARROW is within the leadership of the SRHR action coalition, we would be more than happy to see how we can actually broker and make sure that the compact on women peace and security and women humanitarian action is in line with the action coalition's targets and goals and achievements as well, as right and principles.

We saw that the areas where the women peace and security agenda is integrated into the action coalitions is in the gender-based violence action coalition. We can see this scale up implementation and financing of evidence driven prevention strategies and of course uplifting women's rights organizations and feminists organizations like ourselves to actually be strong stakeholders and drivers of action within these coalitions, it gives us an opportunity to play a role. The other of course the SRHR action coalition, which I have talked about before because there is a need to put in not only comprehensive sexuality education but access to contraception and safe abortion within humanitarian and crisis settings, so this inclusion is also there.

The third, of course, is the economic justice and rights and you know, so there's women's access and control over productive resources which, the target also talks about in fragile and conflict situations. So this is also an opportunity maybe for these three action.

Our inroads into this work of the three action coalitions that have mentioned this.

So for us we feel that the WPS agenda should not only be seen in the context of conflict and war, because 1325 includes participation protection, prevention, relief and recovery, which are relevant in any context where gender equality is yet to be achieved. For effective implementation at the national level, NAPs should be supported with adequate resource allocation and effective implementation and an uplifting of those women's rights organizations who have been pioneering the efforts.

Domesticating international and national human rights mechanisms pertaining to WPS is important, especially if you consider the context: Asia is vulnerable to increasing conflicts and impact. So engaging the communities specifically with women and girls, in the

process of localizing and contextualizing human rights instruments not only strengthens the capacity, but also allows these women's rights groups to take ownership for achieving peace and security.

And WPS should always try to incorporate sexual and reproductive rights, because as another speaker also said, you know, the governments in these conflicts situations are very often taking the side of fundamentalists or groups with a very hard stance, and alignment with those groups does not bode well for the rights of women.

We feel that a feminist approach to peace calls for non-violent means to resolve conflict in this kind of environment it looks like a very beautiful dream, but we always believe that we should pitch our aspirations to the stars So that hopefully that will at least reach somewhere.

I think that our biggest achievement in this agenda was when we tried to broker an intersectional meeting between the different different agendas in the region, inviting the women, peace and security organizations alongside SRHR, those in economic justice.

We were able to actually build a sort of a process - or at least a perspective development amongst different organizations on why that solidarity between the different issues was important. We find that the climate or the political atmosphere at country level is deteriorating, and it is difficult for us to work on the agenda in that very siloed or isolationist approach, getting all the different organizations to come together across different sectors and different issues was a challenge. We think we should all go back to that original kind of feminist organizing, being able to work together across the different agendas. Now the we are funded into work in only specific spaces.

And that issue is actually something that donors created - say they only a particular organization to work in just peace and security in a particular region. So building the bridges across regions and across issues is something that we have to actually reclaim back as a feminist way of working, essential for us to actually be able to uplift the agenda for women at the ground level.

Samira Budeiri, Palestine

Samira Dajani Budeiri is a Palestinian Jerusalemite from Sheikh Jarrah. Samira worked as an Arabic teacher in several Jerusalem schools from 1972 to 2003 before working as an Arabic Academic Counsellor till 2008. Samira has lived through the consecutive events of displacement of Palestinians in Sheikh Jarrah, from witnessing the eviction of 3 of the neighborhood's families in 2009 to facing imminent eviction in 2021 following a decades-long legal battle.

It is my pleasure and honor to have this opportunity to tell you about what is happening in a neighborhood that has become well known around the world now.

Of course, we are very grateful to all of those who stood behind us and stood with us last May. Very briefly, this is the second attempt of displacement, and I say that with great pain. We've belonged to people who were displaced and who were treated unjustly and we are still being treated, as they say, the "black sheep", because this is how our enemies portray us. However we keep saying and insisting that we are rightful and it is our land.

I would like to demonstrate the role of women in this neighborhood, in the struggle against the occupation and forced displacement, whereas women, in all societies, as we heard from all of the great colleagues, women are usually marginalized.



However, now thanks to you we will be spearheading all of the seminars and webinars and we will be on the front lines. Women in a Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood have participated. We have participated and took to the streets against forced displacement, just like what happened in 2009, where seven families were displaced from the neighborhood, Unfortunately, with the children and elderly people. We owned these homes. Thanks to Jordan, which had a great vision and had a great position to bring in 23 displaced families from Palestine. For example, myself, I was displaced in Jerusalem, I was displaced from West Jerusalem to East Jerusalem -they called out to West and East, but it's one Jerusalem.

We were displaced from one of the greatest places in Palestine. And thanks to Jordan, we moved to this new house against handing over our refugee cards. We had to hand them over to UNRWA. This was the promise. We were supposed to be renting these homes for three years and then after the three years, we would own these houses.

However, unfortunately after the 1967 war, we did not own them. The occupation came in and we attempted to defend these homes, which settlers claim to be their own. Of course, we fought and we struggled and thanks to all of the supporters, we were resilient and we stood resilient.

Women in this neighborhood were subject to suppression and silencing. However, we did not capitulate, there are many examples. There were very prominent journalists like Jubarra Abuderi. For example, a very prominent journalist for Al Jazeera. She was covering what was happening on the ground similar to any other journalists. However, unfortunately, she was subject to violence and her arm was broken, and she was abused and assaulted all because she is a Palestinian woman who is covering what's happening on the ground, before the TV camera.

There is Zana al Haruwami who was also a journalist and who was arrested. There is a young girl, many of you will know, Marwa Alfifi, who participated in the protests. She was arrested and detained.

All of this did not create any fear among Palestinian woman. There is also Muna Al Kurd, a Palestinian woman. Her voice was conveyed to the whole world and with her small smartphone, she was able to convey the reality of what is happening in the neighborhood, the barbaric actions of the occupation forces.

They were actually standing horses to stand on top of the adults on children and they were releasing sewage water. And unfortunately, there are still using sewage water in Babyl Amoud. But they were also beating us with batons and they dragged women by their hair, and this is an actual testimony without any exaggeration.

They were beating women with their boots, military boots, in addition to administrative detention all of this is because the woman is standing next to her brother and her husband and her son and she stood to defend the dwelling - not only the dwellings or the house, but the land and the homeland because Sheikh Jarrah is the center of Jerusalem.

All of us know how settlers have annexed many of the lands and confiscated many homes in this area; we wanted to say that we are the owners of these houses. However, we do not have ownership documents. We stood in the streets during the night; under the hot sun; during the month of Ramadan fasting.

We wanted to convey our voices, in our streets, in our farms, in the different courtrooms as well. All of that hoping to protect the displaced women and children, who constitute a high percentage in the Arab communities and specifically the Palestinian communities.

Of course I cannot say that women are alone in Palestine. Women are supported by men, usually in Palestine. Me defending my land is defending my family, my husband and my children, because a husband, who is taking as captive, or who is killed, or a son who is arrested like Murad Abdul Hay, we do not abandon them because when they are arrested and detained, we lose the main breadwinner.

There are many non-working women. We are a community that is demanding women to be self-sufficient. However, men are also supportive of us, and we cannot say that we can live without each other. So, we are together men and women.

So this is exactly what I am trying to convey, this hardship that we are living in and to have the feminist movement and organizations around the world to work on that.

Even though many states including Israel itself had ignored the UN Security Council resolutions and especially 1325, we demanded establishing peace and security in our country. And we appeal to the international community, to ensure that these resolutions are implemented on the ground and translated into reality. Of course, this will only happen with the voices of women around the world.

The feminist civil society will never stop demanding freedom. In our case Sheikh Jarrah, we did not accept ethnic cleansing. The residents of this neighborhood have already been displaced in 1948, but we will not be displaced again.

We thank very much all of those who support us today, we are in a crisis that no people would accept twice. So we need to make a decision, we have the option of either accepting the suggestions of the unjust Israeli courts: to be considered as temporary renters. And this is very painful. We only have this option and unfortunately we have to accept it painfully because we need to protect our children.

Emad Al-Garash, Yemen

Emad Al-Garash is the Executive Director of the Yemen Organization for Defending Democratic Rights and Freedoms. Emad is also a member of the Coordinating Committee in the MANN ('Together') network, a youth initiative launched in Cairo in cooperation with Karama.

For Yemen and what has happened in Yemen, the bloodshed and the war, and what's happened in the previous years; we cannot deny that it has adversely affected our freedom as activists, freedom of movement and ability to carry out our activities.

It has also devastated peace and the civil framework for which we had been advocating, with the escalation of violence, proliferation of weapons and the influence of the armed forces on the ground. All of this has adversely affected the mentality of people, and therefore the peace and civil mechanisms have been severely weakened..



“When we as civil society had to reflect on ourselves, we discovered that we were applying methods that are not suitable for the current situation.”

Unfortunately, the international community is exaggerating or exacerbating this, as they have only dealt with national entities, and do not deal with civil society groups advocating for peace, security and partnership. The international community only deals with the parties that have arms and that are committing violence.

All of this has left Yemeni civil society deeply confused. We don't know how to continue to work in light of all of these obstacles and challenges restricting our activities. Some of us have become desperate. People have lost hope and they think that there is no use to what we do, nothing that can be achieved in the present moment.

However, there is something that keeps us going as advocates for human rights.

Those who have become desperate have forgotten a very important thing. When we started our activities advocating for human rights and women's rights, this was based on a firm belief. The firm belief that we have a legitimate struggle to advocate for these issues on the ground, and there will be obstacles and challenges, and there will be setbacks that we will suffer. However, these will not affect our convictions and our beliefs.

It is true that there has been confusion and setbacks. However, when we looked at our mistakes and when we drew the lessons learned, we found out that we were still applying the same methodologies and the same strategy prior to the setbacks, meaning that we did not identify the current priorities or the priorities prompted by the current reality.

We were applying the same methods, for example, and selecting the activities, the marches and the initiatives and the protests, it's like we are tweeting outside of the flock, as if we are not living in a war, as if we are living somewhere else in a different country or on a different planet altogether.

This is what made civil society organizations decline a lot, and to stop being influential. However, when we started to think together, when we had continuous meetings, where we had to reflect on ourselves and restructure our strategies and to become more synergistic in our work and to identify our mistakes in the previous time, we discovered that we were applying methods that are not suitable for the current situation.

For example, we had initiatives about national reconciliation. These initiatives advocating for ceasefire or to stop the war or to build peace, initiatives related to the women, peace and security agenda and the international resolutions related to women. These initiatives were not successful and did not have any effects because the country was in a different place completely and were completely disconnected from the initiatives we were proposing.

We went back to reflecting on all of the things that we were doing and we discovered that we need to calm down a little bit in relation to proving the populous effects. And we need to realize that we cannot really achieve a lot in light of this chaos, and under the influence of the different forces fighting on the ground and controlling everything in the country.

So we wanted to start affecting our influencing leaders before we influence the public opinion. We wanted to have small meetings with those in charge, or those who are leading the negotiation process. Because there are things that these people need to commit to and need to carry out and there should be buy-in from them. They should be aware of what women are subject to and what people are subject to because of the violence, because of the armed conflict, because of the bloodshed.

We tried to identify some allies who would be willing to hear us, meaning they understand common sense, who had previous history of cooperation with civil society. We also thought that we needed to send messages to the international community, however using a different format. The international community, especially this special envoy, were excluding civil society and excluding women. They cannot even secure one place for women, even if it's away from the fighting parties.

Even when they formed a group of women to monitor the negotiations, this group was not really influential or had any importance in the process. Through the discussion event, I felt that the majority of people were frustrated about what is happening in different societies, around the region, not only in Yemen. That people are hopeless or that we have seen several setbacks and that the international community have let us down.

I wanted to remind all the leaders here, especially the women leaders, that there are pressures, there are setbacks and obstacles. There are unprecedented crises. Maybe the experience was very harsh on us, however, I would like to remind them that today we are talking about issues - especially in relation to women - that we would not have even imagined to be talked about today. And what we are struggling for today will one day become the reality in Yemen one day.

Arez Hussein, Iraq

Arez Hussen is an Iraqi activist and researcher whose work on YPS/WPS centers around changing policies and procedures, enhancing the capacity of local entities (CSOs and Government), and working directly with the target group (Prisoners, Minorities, and Workers).

I hope to shed some light on the condition and the context for youth in Iraq, what the condition and the context has been for women and for young women, especially in Iraq. Now it's important for me to address my positionality as a male talking about these specific topics.

This is important and I will try to link it to the end of my contribution. Why is it important to understand the positionality of the individuals, the actors that are actually working on these specific topics? And how has this created not more understanding, but the absence of understanding, the context and positionality have actually created more violence and myopic plans that regenerate the violence in itself.

Vital context: 55 per cent of the population of Iraq is under the age of 18, and that is a substantial number. Iraq has one of the youngest populations in the world.



“The government is smart enough to add women to meet their quota, to show that Iraq meets international standards, but the reality on the ground is very different.”

However, we need to appreciate that the participation of youth in most of the elements of governing bodies is very low. The employment rate for youth is 36% while the overall national employment is 60%. So that actually tells you that unemployment is very high among Iraqi youth. And when I say youth, using the context of employment I'm talking about those aged 28 and below.

Now the poverty rate has exponentially increased from 20 to 32-33 per cent due to COVID-19 and crisis, in a country that has 97 per cent of its revenue being generated from oil. So, you understand that these elements intersect together, and could actually create violence toward the two groups that I am going to talk about.

The election that we had on 10th October 2021, had the lowest voter turnout, with almost 41 per cent of registered voters - not population overall - turning out to vote.

The youth were among those that boycotted the population the most. We also need to keep in mind that this was actually an early election, leading from the series of protests that have been happening since 2016, and which led to the changing of the former Prime Minister, having him replaced with a new leader who called an early election.

So these numbers are important for us to keep in mind when we talk about the youth, peace security agenda, and the woman, peace and security agenda because there's so much to learn from the previous mistakes so that we can integrate into the future agendas that are being developed.

Now to understand that the context of Iraq is at the intersections of political, economic, social ethnic, religious, military, humanitarian environmental, post-ISIS crisis, and all of these elements come together and create conditions that do not necessarily allow youth and women to operate, or to go further and to be on the tables of decision making.

Now to move on to where the women are in society because that's an important topic that I want to bring up, and to learn when we talk about developing new agendas for youth, peace and security.

I agree that Iraq is actually one of the countries that has not exactly engaged but signed a lot of international treaties. However, unfortunately, a lot of these signatures have been on the shelf when it comes to actual practical changes on the ground. It is very sad to see that very limited change, very limited willingness to make change, very limited space for youth and women being given to these two groups to participate.

Now, the word 'participation' itself could have a lot of meaning. When we talk about participation, one could hear the argument "oh, by the way, how can you say women don't have participation because the Iraqi constitution has a 25 per cent quota?" And in this election, the percentage of women's representation in the Iraqi parliament increased to 28 per cent.

Now, instead of having 84 women in parliament, you have 98 women members of parliament. That's true. Now, the question is, how many of these women actually have a feminist agenda? How many of these women actually understand the core values of women? How many of these women are actually even connected to the sufferings of women?

I am sorry to bring this up, but when you have a woman who on her election banner, instead of having her picture, there is a picture of her husband, or instead of having her name, it says "vote for the wife of Sheikh X". Why would you think that this woman will actually represent the voice of women?

And that is dangerous. And we have seen examples. It is sad to talk about but in 2016, there was a push in the Iraqi parliament to reduce the age of marriage to eight. And who was pushing for his agenda, for the Jafari law? It was done by women. Women in the Iraqi parliament pushed for this.

So you can understand that even those women who were actually participating, they are not really representing, or they are in the words of Cynthia Enloe - an amazing, sociologist, theorist, and feminist writer - "adding women and stir". That concept, 'add women and stir'.

The government is smart enough to add women to meet their quota, to show that Iraq is a country that meets international standards, but when it comes to the reality on the ground, that's actually not the case.

When it comes to women's participation in terms of women being able to go to work, that is the real participation. Let us consider how many female journalists you have in public life.

We recently conducted research that looked into how many women we have in the Iraqi media working as journalists. You have approximately 20 percent of the media workforce that are women, and only 12 per cent in decision making positions. I will give you some numbers. For example, in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, out of 457 editors-in-chief of newspapers in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq only 17 are women. Out of 686 magazines in the region 56 editors are women. So you have about 7 to 8 per cent women in decision making.

So how can you not have violence? And we need to appreciate that women are at the intersection of so many elements around them. You have the law, you have society, you have the family, you have that culture, you have the religion, you have all of these elements coming together, and creating units of violence, that compete with each other, and they interact with each other, and they create more violence.

And then when you have people who don't understand their positionality, and don't understand the context, what is going to happen? Things are not going to change, you're going to have more violence.

Ola Alaghbary, Yemen

Ola Alaghbary is a Yemeni social entrepreneur whose work is focused on empowering young people and women to make a positive change in their societies. Ola is the founder and CEO of the Sheba Youth Foundation for Development and Peace, and the focal point of Youth Platform of Peace (A National Youth-led Coalition for Peacebuilding in Yemen).

Our organization is a very new group, and we started with this program. In 2019 we started the empowerment programs based on the Security Council resolution on youth, peace security. So we started implementing many programs to build the capacities of young people in public policymaking, as well as the digital platforms and political participation

Prior to 2019, we found that international donors - including the United Nations - did not actually focus on youth programs. Indeed one of the international players said that these are not actually urgent programs in Yemen, and they needed to focus on humanitarian assistance.

But from 2019 there were some international organizations that helped us to build our capacities socially and politically, so we started forming a youth alliance. The United Nations then helped us to establish the Youth Compact. There have been also other people who participated in the platforms.

From working on political participation, empowerment and with support from the United Nations for these in Yemen, we discovered that these youth groups and youth alliances are working in silos, without connecting with the others. That's why in 2021, we formed the first youth group to bring this work together. And of course, the purpose of this group is to pressure the UN Special Envoy to Yemen to engage youth and bring them around the negotiation table.

One of the significant things that we have done on the ground has been carrying out a mediation campaign between the armed factions and the national institutions. I've carried out this campaign along with fellow women, and we have succeeded, and we were able to reestablish water access to many of the areas we are working in.





Photos: Ola Alaghbary

This picture (top left) shows that the water was under the control of the military. And however, after 15 days of lobbying, we were able to restore it.

This is also another picture (bottom image) at the other conclusion of a successful lobbying campaign.

It is important to let the international community know that there are so many young people working on the ground, who are very interested in building their capacities, and we want the international community as well as national organizations to actually utilize young people.

We still find that adolescent girls do not have any resources allocated to them, and we need to have more focus on them.

Regarding Resolutions 1325 and 2250 in Yemen, we have a NAP for 1325 for the first time since it was agreed in 2000. However, this NAP is not really implemented. Resolution 2250, even though it was issued in 2015, is still considered to be an emerging resolution and there is not much achievement on it, except for fragmented efforts here and thereby the youth organizations.

Shirine Jurdi, Lebanon

Shirine Jurdi spearheaded the establishment of the MENA Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security; and establishment of a Network of women and conventional weapons in MENA. Shirine works to localize global agendas such as Women, Peace and Security, Youth, Peace and Security, the 2030 Agenda on sustaining peace, Responsibility to protect, and Small Arms and Light Weapons (UNPOA and ATT).

The issue of armament and disarmament: several people today were asking, why are we in a case of perpetual war? Instead of talking about sustainable peace we are talking about perpetual war.

A large portion of that is armament. However, we can say that there are many countries that have arms but they are not using the arms. So therefore there are other factors behind the wars in our conflicts in our region. I don't want to enter into the details of this because this is very long topic. Undoubtedly there is a study can be conducted called "Connecting the dots" between the women peace and security agenda and the studies related to small weapons.

When the women, peace and security agenda started, it did not really talk about small and light arms, but it spoke about demobilization disarmament reintegration (DDR). And later on, in other resolutions of the same family as women, peace and security, we started seeing small and light weapons being integrated or incorporated.



Photo: Shirine Jurdi

In Lebanon, the National Action Plan was adopted in 2019 by the cabinet. It is the only national action plan in the whole Arab region in which there is mention under the prevention pillar of small and light arms. This is something that we need to give credit to the Lebanese government.

However, on the other hand, we see that there is a complete absence of implementing this item for civil society. So we conducted a study to see the reality of the small and light arms, and to explore what are the implications of this issue on women in the household. So we took this very small domain and to see what are its implications.

We should note here that that Lebanon is signatory to the anti-proliferation convention. According to our study, the majority of women are not really aware of the laws that apply to them and they do not know that when an arm or the weapon is not licensed what they should do. They do not know about the reporting channels to law enforcement if there is threat by weapons, because there is not only the use of weapons or the arm that threatens women, but having that weapon in the household is a risk in itself, especially as the majority of the case is related to the personal status law.

Women do not have equality. So women are being threatened, whether the weapon is used or not. And at the same time, women are threatened that if their partner leaves home, then she will lose custody of her children. So there are all of these deterrents. Therefore, it has an impact.

And the effect of weapons in society is amplified. It's very important that we have recommendations on what can be done. So, one recommendation, I would like to suggest I hope that National Action Plans would incorporate emergency planning, maybe incorporate the issue of small of weapons, not to politicize this issue but to put to humanize it or to humanize political debate around small and light weapons.

Secondly, I hope for organization working on gender-based violence in our trainings and in our discourse, let us not be hesitant or let us not reluctant to talk about this issue. We are not talking about self-defense or resistance. We are talking about these small and light weapons, which can be common in the household, which are causing loss of many lives.

And in Lebanon unfortunately, there is a complete chaos and relation to unlicensed arms. Similar to Syria, similar to Libya and Yemen, similarly, to other countries. Unfortunately, however here I would like to say in the final thing that in the context of our work because I wear several hats, volunteer work is very important.

So I volunteer in the global partnership for the prevention of armed conflict. And we are the liaison here and we work also in a small alliance related to small and light weapons. And that relates to women peace security and youth peace and security.

From your perspective, how can young people and especially young women organize their efforts and their movements to promote the effective implementation of these resolutions? And how can they achieve the effective participation in decision-making process and peace building, in the political sphere. What do you think are the most important prerequisites to start doing this and start achieving this and seeing this on ground?

This is very important. I think the first thing is, we need to acknowledge is our positions. We need to acknowledge and celebrate our small successes. What we need at first. In terms of organization, we need to know each other. We need to map our expertise. We need to have a pool of expertise to know exactly who is doing what and where. We need to create coalitions and networks because there is more sustainability that way - especially when we look not only at the lack of resources and sufficient resources for the youth but insufficient resources in general for these marginalized groups and to these agendas.

So this is another thing to look at. Partnership and coalitions that we can make together, especially with regard to youth, is vital and that aspect. And the way that we advocate: advocates for, by and where.

Regarding effective implementation, it's not only about NAPS. It's not only about the Security Council resolutions, it's about how to connect and this is where the role of international networks. These networks will enable the use linkages between the local national regional and international platforms for us to reach. It's not always that the international level will know what is happening at the local level, especially with the donor communities, going to this huge NGOs and sometimes like it goes with these local networks for and unnoticed one.

We need to go away from silos. It's not only about working on the YPS agenda, or the WPS agenda, but digging for example in the Sustainable Development Goals, the sustainable peace and peacebuilding agenda, how we look around and how we look into all these resources, all these agendas and try to work collectively towards our common objectives.

I think these are some of the things that I see as relevant in terms of how to organize and little better, be effective. But definitely at the roots, we need to know the agenda, we need to understand them very well, we need to have this capacity building regarding this, and we need to move away from resilience as coping. We have to move as resilience as real empowerment, as agency.



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THE COMPACT
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