



Action Coalition 6: Feminist Movements and Leadership

Interlinkages between the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda and the work of the Generation Equality Action Coalitions and the Compact for Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action

SUMMARY

Feminist activism is the most important and consistent driver of policy change to create just and equitable communities.¹ Through powerful grassroots organising, women have championed and advanced social justice, gender equality, and human rights across local, national, regional and international platforms. Across the globe, feminist movements have opened public spaces to women and other marginalised populations to voice their political demands, from changing the way power works to decentralising and democratising governance and diplomacy and engaging and amplifying diverse voices and contributions as individuals, in families and households, neighbourhoods and local communities. Feminist movements, women's civil society organisations, and women peacebuilders and human rights defenders are vital to the building of equitable communities based on social justice and collective care and well-being. To achieve this vision, feminist agendas must be actively supported and promoted.

THE ISSUE

Background

As part of a strong, global movement for peace, justice, and nonviolence that aims to make the planet livable for all people, feminist peace activists have influenced powerful changes in international policies and laws. They advocated for world conferences on women, including the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing that gathered around 50,000 women to create and adopt the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA)—the most progressive gender equality blueprint to date. They contributed to the framing, implementation, and monitoring of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the framing and adoption of the Rome Statute, leading to the founding of the International Criminal Court (ICC), where cases of sexual violence in conflict have been prosecuted; the establishment of UN Women; and the adoption of Resolution 1325—the landmark resolution of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda—and advancing the normative framework to promote and protect the rights of all women and girls before, during, and after armed conflict and prevent violence and instability.

¹ Laurel Weldon & Mala Htun. 2013. "Feminist Mobilisation and Progressive Policy Change: Why Governments Take Action to Combat Violence Against Women." *Gender & Development*. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13552074.2013.802158>

How has women's peace activism reframed security?

Women's organising to demand equality as a common goal for all has helped create a different language and set of social values, including around peace and the meaning of security.

Feminist peace activists, through lived experiences and expertise, have linked gender injustice and patriarchy with militarisation, capitalism, imperialism, and environmental destruction, emphasising how systems of exploitation and violence are interconnected.

They have articulated a vision for the world that places the interests and rights of human beings at the centre of security, rather than militarisation and profit making, and have been on the frontline of struggles for ending and preventing violence, war, poverty, environmental pollution, and inequalities. Likewise, it was through the concerted efforts of feminist activists and women's civil society organisations that Resolution 1325 was adopted, recognising the pivotal role women play in conflict prevention and peacebuilding processes, with the nine subsequent resolutions highlighting the importance of women's full, equal, and meaningful participation in all peace and political processes and decision-making spaces for sustainable peace.

Coupled with the many gender equality frameworks that it is built upon, the Women, Peace, and Security agenda holds a transformative potential to build just, inclusive, and sustainable societies through its holistic application. This includes addressing the root causes of violence with a feminist lens and promoting conflict prevention; integrating a gender analysis of power into political discussions and policy making; and dismantling patriarchal systems and practices that deepen traditional gendered roles and impede women and other marginalised populations from participating in social, political, and economic life as well as fuelling conflict and militarised security. Women, Peace, and Security Resolutions 1889 (2009) and 2242 (2015) call on member states to implement Resolution 1325 by adopting National Action Plans (NAPs), developed through substantive consultations with women's organisations. As the original owners and partners of Resolution 1325, women's civil society organisations, feminist peace activists, and women human rights defenders are pivotal to the holistic implementation of the WPS agenda, and its cross-cutting pillars, to achieve gender equality; transparent and accountable governance; and sustainable development and peace.

Why hasn't more progress been made towards institutionalising women's leadership?

Indeed, the 2015 Global Study on WPS highlights that gender equality is among the key predictors of peace and that women's participation in peace agreements make those agreements 35% more likely to last for at least 15 years.² Nevertheless, patriarchal and militarised power structures often exclude women from social, political, and economic decision-making venues and processes, and gender equality is still seen as disconnected from peace and security. This is exemplified by the fact that in all major peace processes that took place between 1990 and 2017, women comprised only 2% of mediators, 8% of negotiators, and 5% of witnesses and signatories. Between 1990 and the end of 2018, less than 20% of peace agreements included provisions addressing women, girls, or gender. In 2018, less than 8% of peace agreements included gender-related provisions, showing a drastic decrease from 39% in 2015.³ Moreover, of the 30 gender-specific recommendations put forth by the three 2015 peace and security reviews, only 50% were being implemented or fully progressing, with 10% of those either having gone backwards or not progressing at all.⁴

2 UN Women. 2015. *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325*. pp. 206 and 41-42. https://wps.unwomen.org/pdf/en/GlobalStudy_EN_Web.pdf

3 S/2019/800. para. 15, p. 6/38. <https://undocs.org/S/2019/800>

4 S/2019/800. para. 7, p. 4/38. <https://undocs.org/S/2019/800>

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All the while, powerful institutions, including entities within intergovernmental organisations, international NGOs, military and regional organisations, adopt the language of feminism and mould it into neoliberal, identitarian formulations of rights to promote “adding women” to power positions and structures of violence, including under the pretence of peacekeeping, without substantive change in the lives of women, girls, and other marginalised populations. Furthermore, structural inequalities ingrained in racist and colonial histories and practices still inhibit women and Black, Indigenous, and other people of colour from having a significant impact on many key institutions and reinforces the tendency that political decision-making, at international and national levels, remains the domain of mostly white men.

What are the challenges and risks facing human rights defenders and peace activists?

Women activists and human rights defenders carry out tremendous work to impact change in their communities, as well as at the national and transnational levels, and do so under increasingly precarious and volatile circumstances, in conflict and non-conflict settings alike. The 2019 annual report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders demonstrated that the increase of misogynistic, sexist, and homophobic rhetoric by political leaders led to the normalisation of violence against women human rights defenders.⁵ More than 300 human rights defenders, 13% of whom were women, were killed in 2019.⁶ The Women, Peace, and Security Resolution 2122 (2013) acknowledges the critical information provided by women’s organisations within the Security Council chamber through briefings and field missions, while WPS Resolutions 2467 (2019) and 2493 (2019) urge states to condemn and prevent all acts of intimidation and violence against civil society and human rights defenders. Nevertheless, WHRDs continue to be shunned and targeted by state actors as being anti-government, or with the accusation of defaming the name and status of the country in which they are based. Such fears of reprisal place serious limitations for WHRDs to speak in international engagements, including as briefers at the UN Security Council. Anti-terrorism laws also impact WHRDs in a similar way, restricting their freedom of speech and movement.

Furthermore, women’s civil society organisations and women activists, who provide valuable knowledge and expertise on root causes of conflict, conflict prevention, resolution and peace processes at local and national levels, continue to remain underappreciated and undervalued. As a stark demonstration, in 2016, the total operating budget of 740 feminist organisations worldwide (\$106 million USD) was less than the cost of one F-35 fighter plane (\$137 million USD).⁷ In 2017-2018, women’s organisations received only 0.2% of the total bilateral aid to fragile and conflict-affected states.⁸ Alarming, precautions and restrictions implemented as a result of COVID-19 have already been used as a pretext to divert funds from gender equality programs and gender-sensitive services, declaring them as non-essential with the pretence of an emergency.⁹

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5 UN OHCHR. 2019. “Women Human Rights Defenders Face Worsening Violence, Warns Un Human Rights Expert.” <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24232&LangID=E>

6 Frontline Defenders Global Analysis. 2019. https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/global_analysis_2019_web.pdf

7 WILPF. 2016. WILPF’s Statement on the 61st Commission on the Status of Women: Toward a Political Economy of Feminist Peace. <http://www.peacewomen.org/node/96776>

8 UN Women. 2020. “Chronically Underfunded, Women Peace Builders Need Support More Than Ever.” <https://data.unwomen.org/features/chronically-underfunded-women-peace-builders-need-support-more-ever>

9 European Women’s Lobby. 2020. *Women Must Not Pay the Price for COVID-19! Putting Equality between Women and Men at the Heart of the Response to COVID-19 across Europe.* https://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/ewl_policy_brief_on_covid-19_impact_on_women_and_girls-2.pdf

What needs to change?

Feminist activists have long called for flexible funding schemes that elevate women's organisations as equal partners and decision-makers in the design and implementation process. Women, Peace, and Security Resolution 1889 (2009) also calls for the participation of women leaders and women-led grassroots organisations in the managing and planning of aid as well as encourages consultations with women's organisations to determine and address the needs and priorities of women and girls in post-conflict settings. Nevertheless, funding mechanisms still mostly remain project-based, temporary, and ad hoc as well as including complex application and reporting procedures that favour donor priorities rather than local needs and realities. The restrictive nature of funding regulations negatively impacts the work of women's organisations and feminist activists on the ground.

The Generation Equality Forum, the Action Coalitions and the Compact for Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action present an opportunity to focus momentum and implement commitments on the Women, Peace and Security agenda to shape a feminist future. We urge UN Women, Member States, Action Coalition leaders and other stakeholders to ensure that the Women, Peace, and Security agenda is reflected in the priorities of the coalitions and the compact for continued implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and its contribution towards the full realisation of human rights for all.

Priority Actions

Defund all programs and efforts that promote and perpetuate militarisation, including weapons production, and invest in collective care and wellbeing as well as building and strengthening the work of feminist peace activists and women's civil society organisations. Governments and civil society organisations, including donors, must invest in and fund long-term strategies to enable the participation of women and other marginalised populations in social, political, and economic life. This includes providing comprehensive support to grassroots organisations that work on peacebuilding and conflict prevention to ensure bottom-up change and non-violent alternatives to conflict.

Facilitate mechanisms to remove restrictions for women to engage in political dialogue and access high-level decision-making spaces. This includes easing visa restrictions, bolstering freedom of movement, and protecting women against reprisals. At the domestic level, governments must open up spaces, without penalty, for women activists to meet and exchange knowledge, expertise, and perspectives and build and strengthen partnerships for local-to-global transformation.

Redesign peace processes to ensure women are equal partners and decision-makers, with full, equal, and meaningful participation throughout the process. This includes proactive, long-term investments to eliminate structural barriers that limit the participation of women and other marginalised populations in peace processes and other high-level decision-making spaces that lead up to the negotiating table. Additionally, governments and international organisations, including the UN, must design gender-sensitive peace processes, which includes gender awareness training for mediators and facilitators.

Adopt comprehensive strategies to support and protect women peacebuilders and peace activists, with specific measures for women human rights defenders (WHRDs), that account for the heightened risk they take to conduct their work in volatile conditions. Governments must ensure that policies and practices, such as emergency response measures for COVID-19 or counter-terrorism laws, are not used as a pretext to target or silence WHRDs. Comprehensive safety measures must be put in place for women activists, peacebuilders, and human rights defenders invited to brief high-level meetings, including within the United Nations Security Council. Additionally, governments should promptly investigate any murders, attacks or threats against activists and rights defenders.

Increase predictable, accessible and flexible funding for women’s informal and formal civil society organisations and networks on peace and security at all levels. This requires dismantling current funding and aid mechanisms that operate on and perpetuate a neo-colonial development framework that is not gender-sensitive. International organisations must support local women’s groups and organisations to bolster grassroots activism and impact local change, including by incorporating women activists as equal partners and decision-makers in program design and implementation.

Adopt National Action Plans (NAPs) that are enshrined in a rights-based framework and promote gender equality. This includes tailoring NAPs to country-specific needs and realities, with civil society, including feminist activists and women’s civil society organisations, placed as active partners and decision-makers in all stages of the NAP development, implementation, and monitoring process. NAPs must include allocated budgets to ensure substantive change towards sustainable peace and gender equality. Through NAPs, member states must also prioritise raising awareness about the WPS agenda at the local, regional, and national levels, and focus on WPS implementation in a holistic way.

This series of briefs was produced as part of the broader Generation Equality consultation process, supported by UN Women to inform the Generation Equality Action Coalitions. This brief would not have been possible without the tireless work of WILPF National Sections and groups, civil society partners across the globe, and financial support from UN Women and the Government of Switzerland. The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of our donors, UN Women, the United Nations or any of its affiliated organisations.