

“Increasing synergies to deliver the SDGs for women and girls in conflict and fragile settings”

Side Event to the General Debate of the 2019 UN General Assembly

Presentation by Abigail Ruane,
Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
Women, Peace and Security Programme Director

Wednesday 25th September 5:00-6:30PM
United Kingdom Mission to the United Nations
One Dag Hammarskjold Plaza, New York, NY 10017

It is important to be here to discuss how to increase synergies to deliver the SDGs for women and girls in conflict and fragile settings. However, it is somewhat ridiculous that we need to have this conversation. Five years in to a fifteen-year Sustainable Development agenda, we should be further.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) may be our last best hope for a liveable future. But we are failing to address systems of power, and therefore we are not creating the change we need.

Last week I was in Abuja, Nigeria for the launch of the Nigerian Women Mediators Collaborative Initiative (NWMCI), which aims to identify and support women mediators across tracks for peace. While I was there, I met a woman traditional leader with eyes that flashed fire and a laugh that boomed across the room. She told me: “I am not a woman. I am a rebel.” She said that she refused to be seen as a woman, because women were treated as objects of domination. Instead, she demanded respect, recognition, and partnership for her vision of peace.

The WPS Agenda is a foundational commitment aimed at strengthening women’s participation, protection, and rights across the conflict spectrum. It was created due to pressure from the women’s movement - like women I met in Nigeria - demanding action to end war and build systems of human security based on women’s meaningful participation and gender justice. Because the WPS Agenda already embodies a cross-sectoral approach in line with SDG 5 on gender equality and 16 on peace, it is critical for the SDGs to accelerate action on the WPS Agenda.

The SDGs also are committed to WPS principles. The 2030 Agenda has what can be seen as a feminist vision of peace and development: It is the intersection of three dimensions: economic development that protects the environment and supports social development, including women’s human rights. It includes targets around participation, (SDG 16.7, SDG 5.5), protection and elimination of violence (SDG 5.2, 5.4, 16.1), prevention (i.e., non-discrimination, freedom and equality, arms flows - SDG 5.1, 5.C, 16.10, 16.4, 16.B), and relief and recovery (i.e., access to justice, social protection - SDG 16.3, 5.4) across goals 5 and 16, among others.

Both the WPS and 2030 Agendas are based on a foundation of human rights, including women's rights, and international and humanitarian law. This includes the CEDAW Convention General Recommendation 30 on women in conflict, the Arms Trade Treaty gender criterion, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action including Area E on Conflict, and otherwise. These frameworks support action to progressively realise women's human rights in and out of conflict, progressively, without retrogression, using maximum available resources.

Both the WPS and 2030 Agendas also require an integrated approach that links up cross-sectoral agendas around inequalities, participation, protection, justice, and peace.

Three main principles are key:

First is the principle of universality. The SDGs are a **universal agenda**, which means that developed countries, as well as developing countries, must take responsibility for their own gender and peace footprint.

Second is the principle of **policy coherence**. Member states should basically be applying a gender, peace, and environment impact assessment of everything they do, and then taking action for people and planet.

Third, is the need to address "spillover effects". Rather than cherry picking, governments must take holistic and coordinated action **both within and across borders**.

What does this look like in the real world?

Today we know that gender equality is the number one predictor of peace, and feminist movement building is the number one predictor on policies reducing violence against women. Yet in 2018, there was a \$1.8 trillion arms trade, and in 2016 WILPF calculated that the global feminist movement had the approximately the same budget (US\$ 110 million) as one F-35 fighter plane (US\$ 137 million).

How can we tackle these structural obstacles to gender equality and peace?

Today we need a power shift that re-centres work on equality, development and peace around the voices, human security and rights of women and those most marginalized. We don't need just technical fixes. We need structural transformation.

There are clear actions governments can take, today.

First, governments should strengthen coordination mechanisms that link up sustainable development, human rights, gender equality, and peace and security. For example, countries such as Germany, Sweden, Netherlands and South Korea have high level coordination bodies that oversee planning and implementation of the SDGs. Other tools include: including WPS focal points in SDG coordination mechanisms, cross linking NAPs on 1325, small arms, and SDGs, strengthening gender and peace budgeting, and using post-conflict reconstruction to redress inequalities and promote social protections.

Second, governments should stop action that undermines gender equality and peace. For example, Sweden, passed a law which entered into force in April 2018 that restricts arms exports to authoritarian states. A UK court has also recently ruled arms sales to Saudi are unlawful. Other tools include: preventing arms transfers that risk GBV in line with the Arms Trade Treaty, refraining from militarizing development aid, reporting on military versus social spending in line with Beijing and Agenda 21, and accelerating action on disarmament.

Third, governments should accelerate implementation of existing WPS and women's human rights commitments as part of action on the SDGs especially SDG5 on gender equality and SDG16 on peace. For example, at the July High Level Political Forum ECOSOC segment, Canada, Finland, and Spain all affirmed commitments to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda under the discussion on SDG16. Other tools include: accelerating action on UNSCR 1325 NAPs as part of commitments on SDG 5 and 16, institutionalising leadership for gender equality and peace, preventing austerity, strengthening social protection, and championing country specific WPS action such as around women's participation in peace processes from Afghanistan to Korea.

Four years after the SDGs were created and 19 years after the 1325 was created, we are off track to realising both the 2030 and WPS Agendas. This year, over 80 organisations signed an open letter calling on member states to strengthen synergies between WPS and the SDGs. At the Friends of 1325 meeting on WPS and the SDGs earlier this year, civil society called on the "Friends of SDG16+" and "Friends of 1325" to work together more closely on synergies between WPS and SDG16+, and to hold a meeting in the next year to reflect on progress on coherence across the two agendas.

As women peacebuilders have said repeatedly, **peace is not a project**. It requires listening to the women around the world, and taking action to realise their rebellious visions for systems change.

We call on you to take concrete action to strengthen linkages between these agendas. We look forward to working with you to raise the bar for action.

Thank you.