

Sustainable peace possible? With women it could be

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By Joanna Hayter

You can't have viable and sustainable peace and security if you don't include women, writes Joanna Hayter, CEO of the International Development Agency. The Government's only just learning how to do this, and must pull from the decades of experience of women's rights organisations.

Every year in Canberra there is a national dialogue which brings together civil society organisations and representatives across government agencies such as Defence, Australian Federal Police, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Office for Women in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. It is an event you may not have heard of, but one that is focussed on an agenda that is crucial for us all – women, peace and security. In 2000, the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution which held out a promise to women and girls – a promise that the barriers to women's equal and substantive participation as actors for peace and security would be removed.

A promise to women and girls that their rights would be protected. A promise that conflict prevention would be at the centre of our approach. This matters. We know that the inclusion of women - their presence, participation and perspectives - will improve the chances of attaining viable and sustainable peace. Peace negotiations influenced and guided by women are more likely to end in agreement, with the chances of lasting 15 years increasing by as much as 35 per cent, according to UN Women.

Australia has a National Action Plan to drive our work on Women, Peace and Security. We also have a Civil Society Coalition which works to both support the implementation of the plan, and hold the Government to account on its progress and impact. Yesterday's we held our Annual Dialogue in Canberra. This is a vital step in ensuring collaboration for women, peace and security, in Australia and overseas, has a whole of society engagement.

This year we've seen an overwhelming new emphasis on confronting violent extremism. We need to be really clear how Australia is addressing this issue at home and off-shore. This can't just be a federal responsibility. If we are engaging with communities and impacting on people's lives - we need to be engaging with all levels of government and across society. We are seeing too much emphasis placed on the protection of women. We need to rebalance the agenda towards prevention or we will be trapped in a perpetual cycle of dealing with the symptoms instead of working towards solutions

Defence continue to take the bulk of responsibility for women, peace and security commitments – currently 17 of 24 actions in the plan. We need to broaden this responsibility so that it is truly cross-government and reflects priorities across society. We need to substantially change the representation of women in Defence. We are

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seeing numbers improving but so little of this representation is in senior and leadership roles Earlier this year we saw a Defence White Paper supported by a significant budgetary investment – an increase to 2% of GDP by 2021.

Women, peace and security is a vital part of the defence strategy but it is completely invisible in terms of where and when financial resources will be dedicated. Investment in training the military on gender analysis is not what the women, peace and security agenda is about. We need resources to coordinate the comprehensive nature of the National Action Plan including investment in women's rights organisations, women human rights defenders and women centred networks in conflict-affected countries.

As women's rights organisations and women human rights defenders we need to be recognised as the strategic advisors. Government can learn from our experience. Our message for Government - We've been doing this forever. You're just learning. We need more dialogue, more resources and more recognition. The Australian Civil-Military Centre said at Wednesday's event – "If we can get some proper representation of women into peace building we will see real difference overnight.

We've been saying this for decades. What are we waiting for?