



## We are all a piece of peace: Young women leaders call for greater inclusivity for sustainable peace

*October 30, 2018 by Alexandria Kazmerik\**

*Edited by Katrina Leclerc and Mavic Cabrera-Balleza*

On October 26, 2018, the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP) launched the new name of the Girl Ambassadors for Peace program: **Young Women for Peace and Leadership (YWPL)**. The launch was part of a three-part event entitled “Young

Women Speak Out for Conflict Prevention and Sustainable Peace” that was held on the sidelines of the Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security.

The event included a presentation of a background paper on Young Women, Peace and Security; panel discussion among young women leaders on the impact of their peacebuilding work and the challenges they face through intergenerational dialogue between young women leaders and policymakers.

Sophie Giscard D’Estaing from UN Women who presented the highlights of the Young Women Peace and Security Background Paper ([click here for paper](#)) highlighted the risks of definitions and categorization in policy, as it often causes young women to face double discrimination based on their age and sex. She used the example of a fourteen-year-old Syrian refugee who is married with a daughter, asking, “Is she a mother, or is she a child? It depends who you ask.” The paper demonstrated that recognizing the intersectionality of young women in policy is key to their success as leaders.

Two members of the Young Women for Peace and Leadership, Emilie Katondolo from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Lynrose Jane Dumandan Genon from the Philippines, along with GNWP’s Program Coordinator, Katrina Leclerc, and new Cora Weiss Peacebuilding Fellow, Susan William, were the featured young women panellists.

Emilie Katondolo, a member of YWPL from Goma, the Democratic Republic of Congo, spoke about using economic empowerment as a means to prevent sexual and gender-based violence. When women are economically empowered, their vulnerability is reduced because they are regarded with more respect by their own families and communities. Emilie highlighted successes in the micro-businesses undertaken by the YWPL in DRC including the production of accessories and handbags, which she leads. Members of YWPL who are participating in the economic empowerment project supported by GNWP have been able to support and meet their own financial needs – no longer relying on others, according to Emilie. “So long as young women in DRC are able to engage in productive endeavours such as this, they will be able to contribute to sustainable peace,” she added.

“We are a piece of peace,” Lynrose Jane Dumandan Genon, a YWPL member from Iligan City, Philippines powerfully stated. We are all interconnected and have a role to play to achieve sustainable peace, she stressed. She highlighted the need for stronger collaboration and intergenerational dialogue between the “young ones and the young once”

which can lead to the sustainability of the peace movement. She appealed for support to enable young people to lead and implement their own projects; as well as continued mentorship and support for the meaningful inclusion of young women in peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

Susan William, GNWP's Cora Weiss Peacebuilding Fellow from South Sudan, focused on the interconnection between poverty, sexual exploitation, and the lack of involvement of young women in South Sudan. Because of the lack of economic independence amongst many of the young women, they are often forced to marry or are sold to older men, she explained. She pointed out the invisibility of young women in policies and in decision-making, two of the reasons why they remain vulnerable to sexual violence and abuses. She also appealed for funding for young women-lead organizations in South Sudan to support their advocacy.

Katrina Leclerc, GNWP's YWPL Program Coordinator, raised awareness of the often-overlooked forms of violence in Canada particularly the 1,200+ Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) in Canada. "Gender-based violence is not limited to rape as a weapon of war," she stressed.

Despite young people's leadership and a government commitment towards the inclusion of youth, Katrina highlighted the problem of tokenism that remains in Canadian society. This tokenism makes it difficult for Canada's young women leaders to have meaningful engagement with government leaders and change-makers. "Youth want to be the change and they are trying to be the change," she pointed out. She shared that young women leaders in Canada have rallied together to call for action against the missing and murdered, to lobby parliamentarians for change, and lead the response to climate change in order to achieve lived rights for all.

During the intergenerational dialogue, the young women leaders asked questions to policymakers that included Hon. Marilou McPhedran, independent Senator from Canada; Ambassador Kai Sauer, Permanent Representative of Finland to the UN; Marc-André Franche, Chief, Financing for Peacebuilding Branch of the UN Peacebuilding Support Office; and Faiyaz Murshid Kai, Minister Counsellor, from the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the UN. The dialogue included discussions on actions that policymakers can take to ensure the meaningful participation of young people in decision-making; and the

development of Finland's National Action Plan on UNSCR 2250, the international law that recognizes young people's important role in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security. They also presented information on funding for youth-led peacebuilding initiatives; the work of the Peacebuilding Commission in bringing together relevant actors to marshal resources and to advise on and propose integrated strategies to help Member States in post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery; and the impact Member States may have in implementing court-based justice for victims of sexual violence.

The following is the ***summary of the recommendations from the young women leaders addressed to Member States, civil society, the UN, and the rest of the international community, and donors:***

- 1. Invest in meaningful participation of youth as leaders and peacebuilders; and allocate resources to initiatives in peacebuilding, prevention of violent extremism, and sustaining peace that are led by young women;***
- 2. Create enabling conditions and facilitate spaces for young women to gather, and formulate their own strategies to ensure their effective participation in policy- and decision- making;***
- 3. Support economic empowerment initiatives led by young women; and***
- 4. Guarantee the protection of women and girls' rights and their protection from sexual and gender-based violence.***

In her opening remarks, Åsa Regnér, UN Assistant Secretary-General and UN Women Deputy Executive Director put an emphasis on the diverse roles young women play in development, peace, and humanitarian contexts. She stated that the bias around age and sex limits the inclusion of young women in leadership and decision-making processes despite the vast positions they already hold. She called for a sense of urgency and for women to stop needing to explain why they deserve to have their solutions heard when they come to the table. During her remarks, Mavic Cabrera-Balleza, GNWP's Chief Executive Officer pointed out the reality that in most conflict-affected countries, the majority of the population are young people. She underlined that the discrimination, marginalization and

the sexual and gender-based violence that women confront often start in their youth. Hence, in GNWP's work to implement the Women, Peace and Security resolutions and in promoting sustainable peace, young women are actively involved. Anneka Knutsson, Chief of the Sexual and Reproductive Health Branch of UNFPA called on male leaders to give way to more women's voices to ensure gender equality in policy- and decision- making. "We do not want to diminish the involvement of men and boys, but to pinpoint the harmful patterns of toxic masculinity and find ways to create new masculinity together where men and boys are supportive of young women and girls in the peacebuilding process," said Ms. Nutsson.

The "Young Women Speak Out for Conflict Prevention and Sustainable Peace" event was jointly organized by GNWP, UN Women, UNFPA, the UN Peacebuilding Support Office, and the Permanent Missions of Finland and Bangladesh to the UN.

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*GNWP established the YWPL program to promote young women's leadership and participation in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, sustaining peace, and decision-making at all levels—beginning in local communities. It is based on the Localization of Resolution 1325 program that GNWP implements in various countries around the world. The YWPL program is operational in DRC, South Sudan, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Bangladesh.*

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