

## Working with women's organisations and acting to prevent violence against women in conflict, critical to development

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As the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 on Women Peace and Security approaches, EEAS Secretary General Helga Schmid joined UN, NATO and civil society representatives to discuss and define how to act to prevent conflict and violence against women at the European Development Days on 6 June 2018.

"I was 12 years old when I was first abducted by ISIS and raped more than 136 times. They shot my father and brother in front of me and made me mother and I their sex slaves. We were daily abused and gang raped. We eventually managed to escape and almost reached the border when ISIS caught us. They gang raped my heavily-pregnant mother and shot her 6 times in the stomach in front of my little sister and I."

The harrowing story of a Yezidi girl called Hawla from Iraq, told by young activist Tafan Ako Taha, powerfully brought home to the attendees of the European Development Days how conflict related sexual violence is a matter of life and death and lifelong traumas and that while support and commitment to the cause is important, the only thing that counts is action.

The EU, working closely with the UN and NATO, is steadfast in its mainstreaming of gender throughout its policies, missions and operations for conflict prevention, for security and development – including the security of women and girls. With EUR 500 million committed last year to the UN's Spotlight Initiative to end violence against women and girls, the EU is in the forefront of international efforts to end the scourge of gender-based violence. However, said EEAS Secretary General Helga Schmid, such stories as that of Hawla remind us all how urgently more needs to be done.

This was strongly supported by Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict UN, who emphasized the important of prosecutions and to hold perpetrators of these crimes accountable.

We need to act together, said Rose Gottemoeller, Deputy Secretary General of NATO, highlighting close cooperation between the EU and NATO on women, peace and security, focusing primarily on early warning and capacity building. Gender sensitive early warning indicators and systems and conflict analysis are critical to conflict prevention and thus this cooperation between EU and NATO is a positive step forward.

Women's organisations are crucial actors in conflict prevention, resolution and reconciliation. The EEAS Secretary General pointed to the examples of the peace movements in Colombia and the Philippines, where women contributed successfully through complex networks of pro-peace movements; in Northern Ireland, Burundi, Liberia there were female coalitions across warring partners. These are however the exceptions and women's participation must be improved.

The whole panel expressed deep concerns over that in recent years, increased levels of rising nationalism; violent extremism and the growth of populist movements have contributed to shrinking the civic space in many countries around the world. While this threatens many types of civic actors, it particularly affects women peace activists. Women carry out a large proportion of grassroots peacebuilding and development activities and are thus crucial actors for prevention. However, since formal political processes are often inaccessible to them, women primarily engage through the civic space.

They also agreed that it must continue to be a priority to stand behind and support women including through ensuring that they are protected, included and consulted in everything that has to do with them and their communities. Helga Schmid said she systematically meets with women and women's organisations when she travels and pointed out the importance of making this very visible and central to the agenda as this type of political support strengthens women's organisations. Petra Tötterman Andorff, Secretary General of the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation also pointed out the necessity for long-term stable funding for women's organisations as well as the need to ensure that these women, activists and human rights defenders are safe so that they can contribute to the fulfilment of the women, peace and security agenda including prevention of conflict and violence.

### Organiser

The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation has supported women's organisations in conflict affected countries for 25 years and is today one of the leading organisation globally working on Women Peace and Security. The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation is based in Sweden and supports over 100 women's organisations in 20 countries. Kvinna till Kvinna is a member of EPLO, Concord, EuroMed and collaborates closely with NGO Working Group on WPS.

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