

High-Level Seminar

Strengthening Women's Participation in Peace Processes: What Roles and Responsibilities for States?

Concept Note



Sala delle Conferenze Internazionali

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

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Introduction

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) is organising an international seminar on **Strengthening Women’s Participation in Peace Processes: What Roles and Responsibilities for States?** The high-level seminar is scheduled to take place in Rome, Italy, on 3 to 4 December 2019. Building on Italy’s goal to strengthen the role of women in peace processes and in all decision-making processes as formalised in its Third National Action Plan on the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000); its spearheading of the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network (MWMN); as well as its active facilitation of women’s participation in peace and political processes across the Mediterranean region, the high-level seminar will examine the role of Member States in advancing the full and effective participation of women in mediation and peace processes. The meeting will bring together approximately one hundred and thirty participants including members of the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network and representatives from other regional networks of women mediators, Member State officials and representatives from regional and international organisations, as well as women peacebuilders, academia and think tank representatives.

Background

The adoption by the UN Security Council of resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions facilitated the development of the women, peace and security agenda, which over time has established and reinforced a global framework to promote women’s active and effective participation in peacemaking and peacebuilding.¹ In addition, the UN General Assembly has adopted a series of resolutions that address the need to strengthen the role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and resolution, which endorsed the need for mediation to incorporate the women, peace and security agenda.² By adopting these resolutions, the UN and its Member States have committed to promoting women’s rights and their inclusion in peace processes; they also sought to engender peace negotiations by ensuring, gender and equality issues are discussed during all phases of peace processes, including the implementation of peace agreements.

The 2015 Global Study on the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) first provided evidence of the results, women’s meaningful participation and influence bring to the success and sustainability of peace and security initiatives.³ An analysis of 40 peace processes since the end of the Cold War, conducted by the Graduate Institute of Geneva showed,⁴ in cases where women’s groups were able to exercise a strong influence on the negotiation process, chances were higher that an agreement would be reached than when women’s groups exercised weak or no influence. Strong influence of women in

¹ United Nations Department of Political Affairs, Guidance on Gender and Inclusive Mediation Strategies, United Nations, 2017

² Ibid.

³ Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, UN-Women, 2015, available at: http://wps.unwomen.org/pdf/en/GlobalStudy_EN_Web.pdf

⁴ Thania Paffenholz et al., “Making Women Count: Assessing Women’s Inclusion and Influence on the Quality and Sustainability of Peace Negotiations and Implementation”, Graduate Institute of Geneva, Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding, April 13, 2015

negotiation processes also positively correlated with a greater likelihood of agreements being implemented. The Global Study findings have been reaffirmed by the sustaining peace agenda, which also highlights the indispensable role, women play in preventive diplomacy and mediation, and as key drivers of sustainability and inclusiveness. Moreover, the role of mediators, and of women mediators in particular, was also confirmed as one of the key factors determining the quality of women's participation in peace processes.⁵

Yet, while women are often actively engaged in mediation processes at community level, their expertise is still overlooked when it comes to formal, high-level peace initiatives, and they continue to be mostly marginalized. Low numbers of women in formal mediation roles persist despite various commitments proclaimed by States, regional organisations and the United Nations. Between 1990 and 2017, women still constituted only 2 per cent of mediators, 5 per cent of witnesses and signatories, and 8 per cent of negotiators in all major peace processes. Addressing the UN Security Council during its Open Debate on women, peace and security in October 2018, the Secretary-General underscored the significant gap that continues to exist between the statements in the Council's Chamber, and action on the ground: "We repeat statistics about the sustainability of inclusive peace processes – but that is not how we mediate most conflicts... We know that women's meaningful participation is directly linked to more sustainable peace – and yet we continue to support and lead processes that are not inclusive". Women's exclusion from negotiations perpetuates their political marginalization, reduces chances for political reform, and undermines the durability of peace.

Towards the 20-year anniversary of UNSC resolution 1325 (2000)

As the international community and women across the world prepare to mark the 20-year anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), Member States, regional organizations and the United Nations are stepping up efforts to increase results and demonstrate transformative implementation of the women, peace and security agenda. The adoption of a gender parity strategy by the UN has resulted into women now comprising 41 per cent of heads and deputy heads of peace operations, who often play sensitive roles in good offices and peace negotiations. In addition, a renewed focus on conflict prevention and preventive diplomacy resulted in the establishment of a gender-equal Secretary-General's High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation, and terms of reference for UN mediators have been developed, that aim to create a fairer selection process.

Alongside the UN, Member States have the responsibility to increase women's meaningful participation in peace processes. Countries hold the primary obligation to advance the women, peace and security agenda, including women's representation in peace negotiations. As such, the continued development and implementation of effective national action plans on women, peace and security, illustrates States' resolve to turn formal commitments to the WPS agenda into reality for women, including by facilitating their greater inclusion at all levels of decision-making in national, regional and international conflict prevention and resolution institutions and mechanisms. As of April 2019, 81 countries (or 42 percent of UN Member States), have adopted a NAP on women, peace and security. The Women, Peace and Security

⁵ Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace, op. cit.

Focal Points Network, which includes over 80 Member States and regional organizations, provides a forum to strengthen approaches and strategies for implementation.

As part of the implementation of its Third National Action Plan in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000)⁶ and a flagship initiative of its mandate on the UN Security Council, Italy initiated the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network (MWMN). The Network was launched in Rome in October 2017. It brings together a multigenerational group of women mediators and mediation experts from Mediterranean countries. The MWMN has engaged in concrete actions and forward-looking discussions that aim to strengthen women's participation and influence at all levels of peace processes. In collaboration with UN Women and the Nordic Women Mediators' Network, the MWMN has also supported the meaningful participation of Libyan women political leaders in the Palermo Conference for and with Libya, convened by Italy in November 2018.

Other countries including Finland, Norway and the United Kingdom, have also utilized their NAP to advance women's participation in peace processes. Finland and Norway, together with Denmark, Iceland and Sweden, belong to the Nordic Women Mediators' Network (2015), while the UK spearheaded the Network of Women Mediators across the Commonwealth (2018). These networks of women mediators, like the African Union Network of Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation or FemWise-Africa (2017) and the ASEAN Women for Peace Registry (2018), all point to renewed attempts to advance and support the meaningful participation of women throughout the duration of peace processes, from conflict analysis to preventive diplomacy, and to peacemaking and post-conflict peacebuilding and reconciliation.

Comprised of experienced women involved in different track levels of peace negotiations, regional networks of women mediators constitute a pool of highly-qualified women mediators and mediation practitioners, who can contribute to peace processes and are mostly available for senior appointment by Member States, regional organisations and the United Nations. Meeting in New York in October 2018, the members of the women mediator networks called on Member States, among other actions, to push for more inclusive peace processes, include women in delegations to peace negotiations, and to provide financial and political support to civil society groups with a view to ensuring, their voices are heard by negotiating parties to peace talks.

Objectives

Building on Italy's goal to strengthen the role of women in peace processes and in all decision-making processes as formalised in its Third National Action Plan on the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000); its spearheading of the MWMN; as well as its active facilitation of women's participation in peace and political processes across the Mediterranean region, the proposed meeting will examine the role of Member States in advancing the full and effective participation of women in mediation and peace processes.

The meeting will interrogate countries' support in relation to regional networks of women mediators, as they strive to increase the inclusion of women and of gender perspectives in peace processes and related peace agreements. Political and technical aspects of Member States' involvement will be considered,

⁶ Italy's Third National Action Plan in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) covers the period 2016-2019.

including the formulation of mediation mandates, the appointment of female Envoys, or the provision of incentives, including financial incentives for women's representation in negotiating parties' delegations. The seminar will also assess the role of international contact groups or "friends of mediation" forums, in advocating and coordinating efforts to advance women's meaningful participation in peace processes, including the implementation phase of peace agreements.⁷

Specifically, the meeting will:

- Assess the normative, political and funding opportunities, challenges and prospects that exist for Member States to step up their support, nationally and through regional and international organisations, to networks of women mediators and to enhanced women's participation in peace processes;
- Share best practices and lessons learned for Member States to advance women's meaningful participation in peace processes and the implementation of peace agreements, including their support to civil society organisations;
- Discuss the existing and potential tools to strengthen monitoring and reporting on Member States efforts to increase the participation of women, including women mediators, in peace processes; and
- Identify and agree on concrete commitments Member States could adopt and implement towards more gender-inclusive peace processes and peace agreements ahead of the 20-year anniversary of the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 1325 in 2020.

Participants and Format

The two-day meeting will bring together approximately one hundred and thirty participants including members of the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network and representatives from other regional networks of women mediators including the Nordic Women Mediators' Network, FemWise-Africa, the network of Women Mediators across the Commonwealth, the Arab Network of Women Mediators, and the ASEAN Women for Peace Registry. Member State officials and representatives from regional and international organisations namely the European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the League of Arab States, the African Union, NATO, as well as the United Nations will also participate in the meeting. In addition, women peacebuilders, academia and think tank representatives will be invited to the seminar.

The conference will take the format of an evening reception with a keynote address and high-level panel discussion, followed by a full-day seminar organized around moderated sessions and Q/A.

⁷ United Nations Department of Political Affairs, Guidance on Gender and Inclusive Mediation Strategies, op. cit.