



Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
and International Cooperation



## High-Level Seminar

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

**Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation**

**Rome, Italy**

**3 - 4 December 2019**

### **Meeting Summary**

In collaboration with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) convened a high-level seminar on Strengthening Women's Participation in Peace Processes: What Roles and Responsibilities for States? in Rome, Italy, on 3 and 4 December 2019. The high-level meeting sought to examine the role of Member States in advancing the full and effective participation of women in mediation and peace processes. The seminar was jointly opened by Italy's Deputy Foreign Minister, H.E. Ms. Emanuela Claudia Del Re, and UN Women Deputy Executive Director and Assistant Secretary-General Ms. Asa Regnér, with the keynote address delivered by Ms. Leymah Gbowee, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate 2011 from Liberia and Member of the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Board on Mediation. The high-level meeting brought together approximately one hundred and thirty participants from sixty countries 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. This summary highlights the main points discussed by the participants during the seminar.

- Persistent narratives continue to enforce discriminatory practices that disenfranchise mostly women. On one hand, women's knowledge and experiences, especially at grassroots level, do not reach formal settings of conflict resolution and peacebuilding; community-based initiatives are still overlooked. On the other hand, there is a concern that discussions about the women, peace and security agenda are becoming increasingly elitist. Efforts must therefore strengthen dialogue between women and other actors who are involved across peace process tracks.
- Efforts are also needed to convince the gender sceptics and to show that women's participation in peace processes is in our common interest. Women's meaningful participation must be acknowledged and made legitimate through a comprehensive understanding of gender as an integral part of the sustaining peace process. Such analysis calls for a renewed reflection on the feminist paradigm, and broadening of the spectrum of the so-called women's issues to reclaim questions such as disarmament, demilitarization, reduction of military spending, preventing violent extremism, etc.



- Member States, regional organisations and the UN are the first guarantors of women’s inclusion and meaningful participation in peace processes. The development and implementation of “high-impact” national action plans on women, peace and security is the main tool, Member States have for advancing the agenda. Inclusive NAP development processes, the building of linkages between WPS implementation, foreign policy and the development and cooperation agendas, are among the strategies, countries utilise to promote women’s participation in peace processes. The importance of monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the WPS agenda across different government departments and agencies is also key.
- Member States are developing specific approaches to advance women's meaningful participation in peace processes. Finland and Spain spearheaded the Commitment 2025 on women’s inclusion in peace processes, which Italy formally joined at the seminar. Countries, including donor countries and development partners, are encouraged to adopt concrete commitments to guarantee the presence of women within their delegations to peace negotiations, and to encourage other parties to act accordingly. In this regard, reference was made to the conference on the future of Libya, Germany is planning to hold in conjunction with the UN in 2020. The importance of convening inclusive meetings that target Member States, namely those that are not committed to the WPS agenda, must ensure that we do not only “preach to the converted”.
- Special measures are essential to achieve notable change. The adoption of a quota system for women’s representation in peace processes was recommended, and if no women are appointed, their reserved seats should remain empty. Moreover, women peacebuilders must be recognised and included as an independent delegation to peace talks, building on the examples of Somali women who constituted the 6<sup>th</sup> clan of peace talks in 1999, and of the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition.
- Gender-sensitive appointment policies developed by the African Union, the European Union, and some Member States foster women’s participation in high-level decision-making positions and make more feasible the appointment of women as mediators. The implementation of such tested policies must be strengthened, and clear criteria for nomination and appointment of mediators must be developed.
- The creative leadership of mediators, including women mediators, must be acknowledged. At the same time, the difference between women’s representation in peace processes, including the appointment of female mediators, and gender expertise must be clarified. The aims of increasing the presence of women mediators and of incorporating gender advisors to facilitate gender-responsive peace processes are still being pursued interchangeably, which both obscures the role of gender advisors and limits the technical and thematic scope of the negotiations to which women can contribute.
- Regional and national networks of women mediators continue to develop. Looking ahead, these networks need to address challenges related to greater political will for women’s inclusion – including by decentralizing the networks and establishing regional and



national antennas, – the need to secure enough funding for the networks to stay active, and for network members to be able to document their success. To that end, strategies must be developed, to sensitize media on the importance of positive reporting on women’s roles in peacebuilding and peace processes. Support must be provided to the documentation of women’s conflict prevention and mediation work at grassroots level. Moreover, synergies and the development of ‘sisterhood’ among networks were emphasised.

- Despite recognizing its benefits, prevention is neither prioritized nor sufficiently backed with political will and sustainable funding. It is important to continue building early-warning and early-response mechanisms that are gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive. It is also crucial to support the implementation of these mechanisms, which must involve civil society, with sustainable institutional and financial resources.
- Training as a strategy to foster women’s participation is often viewed as an end rather than as a means, which limits a wider understanding of the structural barriers that constrain women’s meaningful participation. As expressed by seminar participants, “developing competences without creating opportunities of participation does not create gender inclusive peace processes”.
- The debate on “urgent peace versus early involvement of women in peace processes” persists, which shows limited awareness of the importance of engaging women from the early stage of the peace process. Actors involved in mediation must strengthen the dialogue with women’s civil society organisations from the preliminary phase of negotiations and facilitate women’s inclusion at all stages and at all levels of the peace process, through to the implementation and monitoring of peace agreements.
- Strategies to foster women’s participation in peace processes still lack an effective intersectional approach. The need to strengthen protection measures for women peacebuilders and women human rights defenders to take safely and effectively part in peace processes was noted. The perennial challenge of adequate and sustainable funding to women’s organisations was raised. – In this regard, tapping into innovative funding actors and sources, including the private sector and diaspora communities, is an approach to develop.
- To address the lack of acknowledgement of youth, especially young women, as key actors in peace processes, intergenerational dialogue among women’s organisations and mechanisms that foster youth’s involvement in peace processes must be established.
- Finally, existing accountability mechanisms remain insufficient to ensure women’s meaningful participation in peace processes. States non-compliance with their commitments to the latter, and to the implementation of the WPS agenda in general, still escapes shaming. While the international community should steer away from creating more accountability mechanisms, it is urgent to implement effectively the tools that are already available and improve their operationalization. UN bodies, regional organisations and Member States must ensure they track and report on the fulfilment of their commitments concerning women’s participation in peace processes.