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# THE ROLE OF WOMEN NEGOTIATORS AND MEDIATORS IN THE MAINTENANCE OF REGIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY

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Over 1-2 July 2020, the Southeast Asian Women Mediators Network hosted a webinar led by the Indonesian Foreign Affairs Office, titled “The Role of Women Negotiators and Mediators in the Maintenance of Regional Peace and Security”. The webinar was split into three sessions, with prominent female speakers from around the globe to discuss the importance of women’s involvement in peacebuilding situations, especially in Southeast Asia. Important topics were discussed, such as the emerging issues that threaten women, peace, and security. Additionally, the solution was broached that women are vital in decision-making and should be brought to the political “table” so peace can be achieved in the region.

To begin, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, H.E. **Retno L.P. Marsudi**, introduced the significance of the webinar and why it is vital for the women of Southeast Asia. She stated the importance of women’s role in peacebuilding processes is an issue that Indonesia is “mainstreaming” to all of Asia. She announced her plan to establish a Southeast Asia network for women mediators and peace negotiators, that could be part of the Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks and reinforce the already existing ASEAN Women, Peace and Security Registry. Perhaps, the most influential quote from her introduction was her statement, “I believe women are equal to peace, and peace is equal to women”, thus, setting the stage for the concept that peace cannot be achieved unless women are involved in the process.

Madam Marsudi presented three facets of the network’s plan in order to achieve their goal for more female representation and involvement in the region. First, she stated it is important to check the culture and the mindset of the target community. This can be done by recognizing the structural barriers that a society has in place and implementing educational resources in order to slowly introduce their goals. Furthermore, it is vital that women in power can change the mindsets of their male counterparts to prove that “together we can”, meaning that the government and supportive men must “create a safe and enabling environment” for women to contribute to the conversations as a team member. Her second point encompassed the idea that governments and organizations



must enhance the capacity for women to contribute. Women must have a space where they can express their ideas and make room for constant improvement and experience in the processes at hand. Lastly, she expressed for the need for “fostering likeminded networks” so women can grow together. This is the area the webinar covers, through mentoring opportunities by women who are established and can support younger women in their growth.

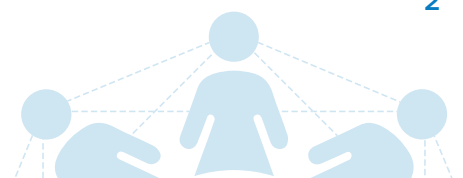
Madam Marsudi closed by quoting Article 1 from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, stating, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”, signifying women should receive ample opportunities to promote peace throughout our world and not be hindered by any discrimination.

The first panel of the webinar consisted of experts who focused on the experiences they have had in conflicts in South East Asia maintaining the need for a female network. The second panel of women expanded on this theme by expressing the need for women to involved in negotiations in order to pursue peace.

During the third session of the webinar, the moderator, Ms. **Adhyanti Sardanarini Wirajuda**, posed a discussion between four speakers from different global women’s networks. Session three was focused on the involvement of regional networks as part of international efforts. The speakers consisted of Ms. Pravina Makan-Lakha, a women’s activist and peacebuilder with FemWise-Africa; Dr. Emma Leslie, an Australian-Cambodian women’s activist with Women Mediators Across the Commonwealth; Ms. Siri Skare, a conflict resolution expert with Nordic Women Mediators Network; finally, WIIS’s own Ms. Irene Fellin, whom represented the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network (MWMN) as the head of the secretariat.

Throughout the conversation, it was apparent that networks must determine their motivation for their function. For **Pravina Makan-Lakha**, it was a long-term effort to eradicate sexual violence against women and children and to ensure peace processes in Africa are being shaped by female leaders. Additionally, **Emma Leslie** discussed the importance of shared learning between networks, specifically advocating for women to gain decision making positions. **Siri Skare** echoed these sentiments while adding the necessity to amplify the voices of women in areas that are being affected by conflict. She also suggests that there is presently no justification for women not being involved on a peacebuilding team, so advocacy and action is essential.

**Irene Fellin** described for the MWMN it was important to look to the future and to expand the network of women, so they can each participate individually and display various strengths and experiences. She also expressed the importance of involving younger women with different backgrounds into the network, so various groups are represented, thereby a greater amount of voices can be heard. The creation of the MWMN came from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ desire for greater human security in the region, as well to promote women in the peace and security agenda. Fellin describes how networks are vital for women because they provide a sense of belonging and shared interests among women. She, of course, added on behalf of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs





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and International Cooperation, the MWMN would be glad to share their experiences with all other regional networks involved in the process. To conclude her speech, Fellin assured the panel that launching a network is only the beginning of the journey; the solidarity of incredible women and education from each other's experience is what fuels the mission.

Ms. **Shadia Marhaban** concluded the webinar on 2 July 2020 by reviewing what had been spoken by the prominent female team that presented their experiences. Going forward, in Southeast Asia and all over the world, it is vital to identify new emerging issues that women face, especially if women are involved in the creation of solutions to these problems. The strength of networks come from women sharing the lessons they have learned and the best practices for negotiation in conflict. She reiterated the statement Foreign Minister Marsudi said, "women are equal to peace, and peace is equal to women", to emphasize how engaging women in peace processes is necessary for success. She closed the seminar by encouraging women to not give up, to be creative and think outside of the box in their ideas for peace. These networks bring new power to women to have the ability to mediate and share ideas through different networks while advocating for a similar cause. As Madam Marsudi said in her introduction, it is time for the region to have its own network. The seminar concluded with the sentiment it is our duty to start the process for women everywhere.

