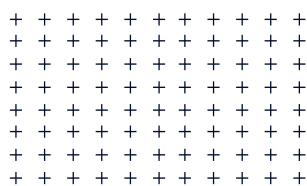


MEETING REPORT

Third meeting of the Women, Peace and Security Working Group for the Arab States/MENA Region

January 2025

Doha, Qatar



This report provides a summary of the key findings of the third meeting of the WPS Working Group for the Arab States/MENA Region. The views expressed in this publication emanate from the meeting discussions and do not necessarily represent the views of the convening organizations, including the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the United Nations or any of its affiliated organizations.

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Content

Report

I.	Executive Summary	04
II.	Overview of the Third Meeting of the WPS Working Group	06
III.	Identified Key Challenges and Priorities for the WPS Agenda in the Region	07
IV.	External Meetings And Engagement With Doha-based Stakeholders	10
V.	Key Insights: Women at the Table – Reclaiming Narratives of Peace & Inclusion	11
VI.	Summary of Key Meeting Findings and Action Points	12

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The third meeting of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Working Group for the Arab States took place between January 27- January 29, at the Middle East Council on Global Affairs office in Doha, Qatar.

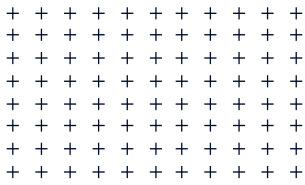
The Working Group—comprising of WPS experts, including peacebuilders, policy specialists, researchers, and private sector representatives engaged in peacebuilding and conflict resolution across conflict-affected countries in the Arab States/ MENA region—is led by the WPS Regional Hub at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI) and the UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States.

The Working Group also benefits from the collaboration of esteemed regional and global partners, including the Middle East Council on Global Affairs (ME Council), the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa (SDI), the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung MENA (FES), the Arab Reform Initiative (ARI), and Inclusive Peace.

This three-day meeting was part of an ongoing series of dialogue sessions contributing to developing a “WPS White Policy Paper. The paper outlines a regional approach to WPS, proposing tangible steps to advance its implementation across the Arab States. Additionally, it seeks to integrate regional perspectives into global discussions on WPS, particularly targeting the 25th anniversary year of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2025. While the paper’s content will remain adaptable to reflect evolving regional dynamics, it will be widely disseminated to the international community, as well as regional, national, and global stakeholders, throughout the anniversary year.

During the meeting, members from Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine Sudan, and Syria were joined by new participants from Gulf countries to discuss strategies for increasing the Working Group’s visibility and impact and disseminating the White Paper. Participants engaged in discussions on various themes, including alternative approaches to peace, community-driven solutions, and the integration of gender perspectives in peace processes.





Additionally, the group delved into the implications of the WPS agenda in the context of occupation, highlighting the necessity of addressing systemic barriers that hinder women’s meaningful participation in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction. The conversation also examined the potential of WPS National Action Plans (NAPs) as strategic tools for advancing peacebuilding efforts, underscoring the need for stronger commitments from governments and regional actors to ensure their effective implementation. Finally, as the global community prepares to mark the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 25th anniversary of UNSCR 1325, the Working Group reflected on past achievements and ongoing challenges, reinforcing the urgency of sustained advocacy and concrete policy measures to advance the WPS agenda in the Arab States.

The meeting culminated in the organization of external meetings with Doha-based stakeholders, allowing the working group participants to advocate for the meeting’s outcomes and the white paper’s recommendations and findings directly with regional stakeholders. Furthermore, a public panel discussion on women’s contributions to mediation processes in the Arab States Region was organized on the final day of the working group meeting to elevate participants’ voices and recommendations with Doha-based stakeholders, including the international community representatives.

The meeting reaffirmed the importance of regional collaboration and knowledge exchange in promoting women’s leadership in peace and security efforts. By bringing together diverse voices and expertise, the Working Group continues to work towards a shared vision of inclusive and sustainable peace in the region.



OVERVIEW OF THE THIRD MEETING OF THE WPS WORKING GROUP

The third meeting of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Working Group for the Arab States convened on 27-29 January 2025 at the Middle East Council on Global Affairs in Doha, Qatar. The meeting brought together a diverse array of experts, including peacebuilders, policy analysts, academic researchers, and representatives from the private sector, creating an enriching platform for advancing discussions on the effective implementation of the WPS agenda across the Arab states. The meeting included participants from Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Sudan, and the Gulf region, reflecting a broad spectrum of perspectives regarding the unique peace and security challenges present in conflict-affected contexts throughout the region.

Building on the outcomes and findings from the first meeting held in [Amman](#) and the second in [Geneva](#), both held in 2024, this session concentrated on refining the content of the WPS White Policy Paper. The paper articulates a regional perspective on WPS and serves as a foundational piece to guide future initiatives and strengthen the meaningful implementation of the agenda. Deliberations during the meeting focused on finalizing the paper's language, strategizing its dissemination to key stakeholders, and identifying innovative methods to enhance the visibility of the Working Group both regionally and on the global stage. Participants engaged in in-depth discussions about alternative and more inclusive approaches to peacebuilding, highlighting the concept of peace dividends and emphasizing how localized, community-driven solutions can foster sustainable stability in post-conflict settings.

The integration of gender perspectives in ceasefire agreements emerged as a critical topic of discussion,

underscoring the necessity of inclusive dialogue processes that genuinely reflect the realities and experiences of women, particularly in areas affected by conflict. The meeting also provided a valuable opportunity to assess the role of WPS National Action Plans (NAPs) as strategic instruments for peacebuilding. Participants candidly reflected on various obstacles hindering the effective implementation of NAPs and collectively stressed the need for stronger commitments from governments and regional stakeholders to overcome these barriers.

Another key discussion focused on the impact of prolonged occupation on implementing the WPS agenda. Participants emphasized the systemic barriers brought by occupation, which impede women's meaningful participation in peace negotiations and subsequent reconstruction efforts after a conflict. Recognizing these challenges, the group collectively strategized for innovative strategies that could mitigate these barriers and enhance women's roles in peace processes.

As the international community marks the 25th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 2025, the group reaffirmed its commitment to regional collaboration, advocacy, and sharing knowledge and best practices. The meeting underscored the importance of sustaining momentum for the WPS agenda in the Arab States, to ensure that women's voices, agency, and leadership remain at the forefront of peace, security and anticipated reconstruction efforts. The discussions and outcomes from this session are poised to shape future engagements and initiatives, particularly as the Working Group gears up to tackle key advocacy milestones throughout 2025.



IDENTIFIED KEY CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES **FOR THE WPS AGENDA IN THE REGION**

1. Western Narratives and the Erasure of Agency

A significant challenge persists in the dominant Western narrative surrounding Arab women. This narrative frequently reduces their complex identities by often portraying them solely as victims, undermining their agency and contributions. This narrative overlooks the diverse roles women in the region play across various sectors, including politics, diplomacy, activism, and even involvement in extremist organizations. Such a simplistic portrayal misrepresents women's experiences and fails to acknowledge their capacity for leadership, resilience and influence in their societies. Recognizing the multifaceted realities of women from the region, one can challenge harmful stereotypes and foster a more nuanced understanding of their identities and roles in contemporary issues.

2. Occupation as a Barrier to Gender Equality

Occupation severely undermines efforts to achieve gender equality by significantly limiting women's rights and their political and social participation. This constraint restricts their involvement in leadership roles and decision-making processes and hampers their ability to influence policies that directly affect their lives and communities. As a result, women are often excluded from critical discussions and opportunities that are essential for advancing their rights and enhancing their overall societal involvement.

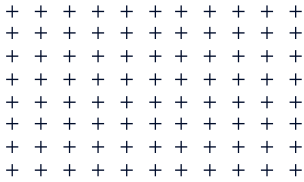
3. Exclusion from Ceasefire Agreements

Despite international recognition of the vital role women play in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, they continue to be systematically excluded from ceasefire negotiations and consequent peace agreements. This exclusion not only marginalizes their voices but also hinders comprehensive and sustainable conflict resolution and the effectiveness of post-war reconstruction efforts. Women's perspectives and experiences are critical in addressing the root causes of conflict, requirements for equitable post-conflict reconstruction, and fostering lasting peace. Yet, their absence from these critical discussions results in an incomplete, inequitable, and thus less effective approach to rebuilding war-torn societies.

4. Women's Representation in Politics

Women's political representation is a vital step toward inclusive governance, but it is important to recognize that increased numbers alone do not necessarily translate into advancements in gender equality. A diverse range of women enter politics, each bringing unique perspectives shaped by their backgrounds and ideologies. Encouraging broad participation ensures that all women have the opportunity to contribute to political decision-making, while also highlighting the need for ongoing efforts to advance gender equity. By moving beyond tokenistic inclusion, we can work toward meaningful representation that fosters substantive progress for all.





5. Legitimacy and Credibility Challenges for Women-Led Peace Initiatives

Women-led peace initiatives often encounter significant skepticism and scrutiny, undermining their perceived legitimacy and effectiveness. Critics frequently question their capacity to influence formal peace processes, arguing that traditional power dynamics favor male-dominated leadership structures. This skepticism can stem from deeply entrenched societal norms that undervalue women’s roles in conflict resolution and decision-making arenas. As a result, these initiatives face substantial barriers in gaining recognition and support from key stakeholders, which limits their overall impact on peace negotiations. The challenges further complicate efforts to integrate diverse perspectives into the dialogue, thereby diminishing the potential for comprehensive and sustainable peace outcomes. Addressing these legitimacy and credibility challenges is crucial for empowering women’s voices and ensuring their essential contributions are acknowledged in the pursuit of lasting peace.

6. Political Exclusion and Underrepresentation of Grassroots Voices

Global discussions, particularly within the United Nations and various international forums, tend to be heavily influenced by elite stakeholders and decision-makers. This dominance not only skews the representation of diverse voices but also marginalizes grassroots movements, particularly women’s movements. Nevertheless, these movements play a crucial role in peacebuilding efforts, as they provide unique insights and solutions rooted in the lived experiences of communities. However, their vital contributions often go overlooked, resulting in a significant gap in the discourse surrounding effective and inclusive peace processes.



7. Lack of Transformative Global Peace Measures

There is growing skepticism regarding global peace processes, particularly as it has predominantly struggled to yield significant advancements in the WPS agenda. The global peace diplomacy initiative has not only struggled to advance gender equality, but it has also been ineffective in addressing and mitigating the deep-rooted systemic gender inequalities that continue to exist in conflict-affected regions. Observers note that without a robust commitment to integrating women’s perspectives and addressing the unique challenges they face in these areas, the peace process risks perpetuating cycles of violence and marginalization. Such shortcomings raise pressing questions about the efficacy of existing strategies and underscore the urgent need for a more inclusive and targeted approach that prioritizes the voices and needs of women in negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction efforts.

8. Contradictions in International Policy

One of the most pressing challenges facing global peace initiatives is the deep-rooted contradictions within key Member States (MS) policies that simultaneously advocate peace while engaging in actions that undermine it. Many MS that sponsor or influence peace processes, or support broader peacebuilding efforts, are also deeply involved in the international arms trade or are increasing their own military spending. This contradiction significantly weakens their credibility and hampers their ability to foster genuine peace. For instance, while these states frequently call for comprehensive disarmament agreements aimed at curbing the proliferation of weapons, they continue to engage in substantial arms sales and transfers to conflict zones—often the very same regions where they act as mediators. This practice not only fuels ongoing violence but also poses a substantial barrier to diplomatic negotiations, thereby undermining the very principles of peacebuilding. Moreover, the moral and ethical dilemmas arising from this duality—advocating for peace while facilitating the influx of arms into unstable regions—raise serious questions about their commitments to global stability. This is particularly evident in the role of third-party MS sponsors in peace processes, such as the United States, which plays a crucial role in mediation while simultaneously maintaining significant military investments and arms exports. As long as this dissonance persists, efforts to forge lasting peace will remain critically compromised. There is an urgent need to reevaluate priorities within international peace efforts, with greater scrutiny on the role of influential MS that engage in these contradictory practices.

OUTREACH AND IDENTIFICATION OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS FOR THE WHITE POLICY



During the Working Group meeting, the focus was also given to enhancing the visibility and impact of the group and to the planned dissemination of the white policy paper in 2025. A key discussion point was developing a stakeholder outreach strategy to integrate the WPS agenda into high-level debates.

Stakeholder mapping included categorizing actors into public (academic institutions), media, private (local governments), community, and international (such as the UN). The working group members noted the distinct potential of engaging with the Gulf region, given its leverage in economic and diplomatic spheres and growing influence in regional peace processes. The Working Group, therefore, identified a key opportunity for further advocacy to ensure better alignment of the WPS agenda in ongoing and future diplomatic efforts emanating from the Gulf.

Furthermore, another key advocacy opportunity identified was the expansion of outreach beyond women and women's organizations to include young people and youth organizations. The group also highlighted the importance of leveraging South-South cooperation to strengthen regional solidarity and amplify voices from the Global South. This approach can facilitate knowledge exchange, build mutual support, and create platforms for joint advocacy on the WPS agenda in diverse cultural

and political contexts. Challenges identified include overcoming skepticism about the efficiency of global peace efforts, integrating regional perspectives into Western-driven narratives, and ensuring advocacy aligns with local cultural sensitivities.

The white policy paper, still being finalized, must evolve from theoretical concepts into actionable strategies that can be practically implemented. The session emphasized the critical importance of credibility, legitimacy, and building partnerships and alliances, especially within conservative contexts where gender-related discourse often faces significant resistance. A key element in overcoming such resistance is ensuring that the advocacy strategy is not only relevant but also culturally sensitive to the specific challenges of each region. This includes framing gender issues in a way that resonates with local values, while still adhering to international human rights standards.

In addition to careful messaging, a targeted communication strategy must leverage diverse channels, including social media, to reach a broad audience. It is crucial that these platforms are used not only to promote the WPS agenda but also to engage with a variety of stakeholders—from regional policymakers to grassroots movements. As part of this strategy, the involvement of influential figures, including religious authorities, community leaders, and regional political figures, is essential for reinforcing the legitimacy and reach of the message. These figures can serve as powerful allies in advocating for the WPS agenda, particularly in conservative settings.

Moreover, for the advocacy efforts to have a lasting impact, they must be anchored in regional ownership. This requires building policy ownership by regional leaders and institutions, ensuring that local actors feel invested in the goals of the campaign and have the capacity to lead these efforts. As the campaign moves forward, it will need to streamline its core messages, ensuring they are consistent and resonate with all stakeholders. Additionally, concrete tools and frameworks must be developed to effectively challenge entrenched patriarchal structures and cultural barriers while safeguarding and promoting women's rights in the region. The goal is to create a sustainable advocacy model that can address both immediate concerns and long-term structural change.

EXTERNAL MEETINGS AND ENGAGEMENT

WITH DOHA-BASED STAKEHOLDERS

To advance the objective of the WPS Working Group in amplifying women's voices from the region within the international community, and regional stakeholders, the working group held two key external meetings in Doha. These engagements provided valuable opportunities for members to connect with critical stakeholders involved in humanitarian efforts and media discourse on conflict and peacebuilding. The first meeting was with the Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD), focusing on the impact of conflict in Palestine, Syria, and Libya. The working group shared insights into their work and objectives, emphasizing their role in advocating for women's inclusion in peace and security efforts. Discussions centered on the challenges women face in these conflict-affected regions and explored potential avenues for collaboration to address urgent humanitarian and development needs. The meeting also allowed the working group to highlight the role of women-led initiatives in conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts, reinforcing the importance of gender-responsive approaches in development aid and assistance programs.

The working group also had the opportunity to visit Al Jazeera, a key regional media stakeholder, where participants had the opportunity to tour the media network's headquarters. This engagement was a result of previous working group meetings in which the media was identified as one of the important actors in advancing the WPS agenda, highlighting its role in shaping public discourse and influencing policy on women, peace, and security.

These engagements in Doha strengthened the working group's international outreach, fostering connections with development agencies and media stakeholders while emphasizing the critical role of women's voices in peace, security, and humanitarian efforts.



PUBLIC EVENT: WOMEN AT THE TABLE

RECLAIMING NARRATIVE OF PEACE & INCLUSION

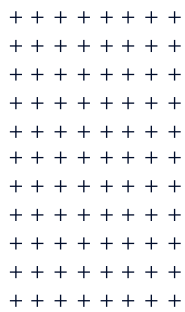
The third working group meeting culminated in the organization of a public panel discussion, to provide the working group members the opportunity to address the national stakeholders and the international community based in Doha. The panel discussion, 'Women at the Table: Reclaiming Narratives of Peace and Inclusion in the Middle East,' held on January 29, 2025, brought together prominent scholars and activists to emphasize the critical role of women in peacebuilding and security. Organized by the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut, in collaboration with the Middle East Council on Global Affairs, the event addressed systemic challenges facing women in conflict zones and highlighted their resilience in shaping peace processes. The Panel involved the following speakers:

- Dr. Dalal Iriqat, associate professor at the Arab American University Palestine
- Dr. Noura Shuaibi, Assistant Professor, Kuwait University
- Dr. Rouba Mhaissen, founder of Sawa for Development and Aid
- Ms. Karma Ekmekji, lead advisor for the WPS Regional Hub at IFI AUB

During the Panel Discussion, Dr. Dalal Iriqat shed light on the shifting impact of conflict on Palestinian women, who now constitute the majority of victims and yet remain active agents of change. Meanwhile, Dr. Rouba Mhaissen underscored the struggles of displaced Syrian women, many heads of households, and leading mediation efforts despite their exclusion from formal peace negotiations.

The discussion also explored the evolving role of women in diplomacy and political leadership. Dr. Nourah Shuaibi emphasized the transformation of traditional gender roles, with women playing vital roles in protests, peacebuilding, and humanitarian efforts across the region. Ms. Karma Ekmekji reinforced the importance of proactive engagement and "diplo-preneurship," advocating for women's early involvement in negotiations and diplomacy. The panelists collectively called for institutional reforms that ensure women's representation moves beyond grassroots activism to formal peace processes. The event concluded with a strong message: achieving sustainable peace in the MENA region requires rhetoric and concrete policies integrating women as key decision-makers in conflict resolution.





SUMMARY OF KEY MEETING FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following section summarizes the key findings and recommendations from the WPS Working Group's third meeting. These points build upon prior discussions and reinforce the importance of actionable, regionally led peace and security strategies. The forthcoming white policy paper will detail a comprehensive set of recommendations.

1. Leveraging Gulf States' Influence for Regional Stability

The Gulf States should utilize their financial and political influence to support regional stability through economic investments, diplomatic mediation, and development-driven peace strategies.

Their role should extend beyond short-term political interventions to long-term efforts that foster sustainable stability.

2. Shifting from Theory to Action

WPS policies must move beyond theoretical frameworks and be translated into localized, actionable peace strategies that directly address conflict dynamics.

Advocating for peace while engaging in arms sales and militarization undermines credibility; policies should align with on-the-ground realities to ensure consistency and trust.

3. Advancing Regional Agency

Strengthen collaboration among Global South nations to challenge dominant Western narratives and promote regionally driven and localized peace processes.

Shift from externally imposed frameworks to locally informed strategies that reflect regional histories, political landscapes, and societal needs.

Peacebuilding efforts should prioritize regional agency over Western-centric models, ensuring sustainable and context-specific solutions.

4. Incorporating Gender Provisions in Peace Agreements

All ceasefire and peace agreements should include mandatory gender provisions, with structured monitoring mechanisms to track implementation and effectiveness.

5. Supporting Women Under Occupation

WPS actors and policy spaces must acknowledge and address the realities of occupation, particularly its impact on women's rights, safety, mobility, and political participation.

6. Prioritizing Early Conflict Prevention Over Reactive Responses

National security strategies should shift from reactive crisis management to proactive conflict prevention.

Women must be supported to play a central role in early warning systems, mediation efforts, and community resilience-building, as their involvement leads to more sustainable peace outcomes.

7. Strengthening Legal Protections for Women in Post-Conflict Settings

Post-conflict legal frameworks should be strengthened to protect women's rights, with a specific focus on preventing gender-based violence (GBV) and addressing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

8. Expanding Ceasefire Agreements Beyond Military Actors

Ceasefire and peace agreements should go beyond military actors to include civilians, particularly women, and civil society organizations, ensuring more inclusive and representative peace processes.

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