

Policy Paper

# WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY IN THE ARAB REGION



# Introduction

This policy paper is developed within the process of preparing for Beijing +25 and the Generation Equality Forum 2021. Given the pluralistic nature of the Arab region, and in view of UN Women's commitment to participation and inclusivity, a series of policy papers on four gender thematic areas are prepared by the Arab States CSOs and Feminists Network to amplify the voice of civil society and feminist organizations and push forward the gender equality agenda.

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# Women, Peace and Security Agenda

The WPS agenda is composed of nine UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions; it is part of the international normative agenda on women and it incorporates some core feminist principles into its framing. WPS's first resolution 1325, which was passed unanimously by the UNSC on the 31st of October 2000, calls for women's increased participation in conflict prevention and resolution initiatives, as well as their protection during conflict.<sup>1</sup> UNSCR 1325 is a ground-breaking commitment that recognizes the importance of women and gender issues to peace and security and has served as a reference point for UN Member States in shaping the policies and programs of a wide range of organizations that are working to integrate gender-sensitive approaches to peace building and human security efforts. The resolution highlights men's and women's differential experiences of war, conflict and post-conflict and redefines sexual violence as a weapon of war, rather than an 'unfortunate byproduct', and recognizes the significant role played by women at the grassroots level in rebuilding the lives of their communities after conflict.<sup>2</sup>

## Feminist Critique to the WPS Agenda

The WPS agenda is caught between an urge to reflect existing international power structures and normative frameworks and the desire to eliminate, or at least reduce, gender inequalities and include women in peacebuilding, as it excludes the anti-war approaches and feminist critiques of military solutions.<sup>3</sup>

The UNSC's tendency to associate peace with security has led WPS to also be framed within security discussions. This resulted in WPS agenda drifting away from an anti-war and rights-based agenda to one for making wars safer for women and sometimes, using military measures to protect women. There is a heavy focus in WPS on the protection element with regards to women's position in war, and protecting them

through military force and securitization. The 'protection' language with regards to women and children victimizes women, thus reinforcing gendered structures of military and security.<sup>4</sup>

WPS agenda, and despite its emphasis on the participation of women in conflict resolution and peace-making processes, mainly focuses on adding women into existing structures and processes and thus can be exclusionary and doesn't account for intersectional analysis.<sup>5</sup>

1325 marginalizes anti-militarist feminism in advocating for international peace and security. Military weapons are being sold to perpetuate conflicts in

1 Sheri Lynn Gibbings (2011) No Angry Women at the United Nations: Political Dreams and the Cultural Politics of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 13:4, 522-538, DOI: 10.1080/14616742.2011.611660

2 Pratt, N. & Richter, D. S. (2011). Critically Examining UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 13:4, 489-503. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2011.611658>

3 Pratt, N. & Richter, D. S. (2011). Critically Examining UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 13:4, 489-503. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2011.611658>

4 Kaya, Z. (2020). "Feminist Peace and Security in the Middle East and North Africa". OXFAM, 21 September 2020. Available at <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621055/dp-feminist-peace-security-mena-210920-en.pdf>

5 Kaya, Z. (2020). "Feminist Peace and Security in the Middle East and North Africa". OXFAM, 21 September 2020. Available at <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621055/dp-feminist-peace-security-mena-210920-en.pdf>

countries such as Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Palestine, thus exacerbating violence committed against women and girls. Implementing states and agencies interpret the principles of WPS in a way that suits their interests, with minimal improvements to women's participation by adopting 'add women and stir approach', rather than rethinking, restructuring or adopting exemplary measures.

UNSC resolutions on WPS are global and do not address country-specific issues nor the situations of

countries under foreign occupation, such as the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). Women in the MENA region find it essential to look at the body of international law from a totalistic approach by referring to international human rights and humanitarian law when addressing resolution 1325 and the subsequent resolutions. This is well manifested in CEDAW Resolution No. 30 which provides a more comprehensive interpretation to resolution 1325 by combining it to the body of international law and situations of conflict and occupation.

## WPS within Governmental Structures

As conflicts in the region persist and economic inequality deepens, governments are prioritizing responses to the economic, political, and security crises in ways that preserve the status quo. As a result, women are pushed to the periphery.<sup>6</sup> There is significant diversity within and across country contexts across the Arab States region, and distinct political dynamics and histories of women's organizing, and WPS implementation across the region has been uneven, however, at best, limited.<sup>7</sup> Also, the existent significant evidence deficits and data gaps, highlight the fact that the full complexity of these issues is still unknown.

The legislative response to the WPS agenda in the Arab region, assuming there is one, has been piecemeal. In best cases, laws address specific issues, such as sexual violence, support for victims or the role of women in combatting violent extremism. Moreover, a particular challenge in the region is to overcome resistance to the integration of a gender perspective into peace and security policies. The WPS agenda is still overwhelmingly seen as a gender issue rather than one encompassing peace and security across the region.<sup>8</sup>

In 2014, Iraq was the first country in the region to adopt a National Action Plan (2014-2018) on WPS, followed by Palestine (2017-2019), Tunisia (2018-2020), Jordan (2018- 2021), Lebanon (2019-2022), and Yemen (2020-2023) while the League of Arab States (LAS) has also adopted a 'Regional Strategy' on WPS. The findings of a review of three NAPs-WPS (Iraq-Jordan-Palestine) showed that they were responsive to the local contexts and capture a wide range of positive and much-needed actions addressing the realities of the lives of women and girls yet, there was limited diversity of identity of women in all three plans.<sup>9</sup>

The passage and implementation of National Action Plans (NAPs) by governments have proven difficult, largely due to insufficient political will, a dearth of governmental leadership, a lack of necessary and targeted resources, and general unawareness which presents a major obstacle to both launching viable campaigns for 1325 and recruiting actors necessary for its implementation.<sup>10</sup> In Palestine, where women continue to face intentional exclusion from national reconciliation and peace building efforts, the implementation of NAP-WPS seems impossible due to the

6 Rayman, M.P. Izen, S. and Parker, E. (2016). SPECIAL REPORT ON "UNSCR 1325 in the Middle East and North Africa Women and Security". UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE. Available at <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/196915/SR388-UNSCR-1325-in-the-Middle-East-and-North-Africa-Women-and-Security.pdf>

7 Parke, A, Farr, V, and Alodaat, L. (2019). "Eighteen Years On: Assessing the Implementation of the UNSCR 1325 Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the Arab States Region". UN WOMEN REGIONAL OFFICE FOR ARAB STATES. CAIRO. JANUARY 2019. Available at [https://www2.unwomen.org/media/field%20office%20arab%20states/attachments/publications/2019/01/unw%20report\\_eighteen%20years%20on\\_a4\\_rnd%209\\_web.pdf?la=en&vs=5923](https://www2.unwomen.org/media/field%20office%20arab%20states/attachments/publications/2019/01/unw%20report_eighteen%20years%20on_a4_rnd%209_web.pdf?la=en&vs=5923)

8 ESCWA. (2017). The Role of Institutions in Times of Peace and War in the Arab Region. Available at <http://peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/women-peace-security-institutions-war-arab-english.pdf>

9 Balancing Priorities: Lessons from Iraq, Jordan and Palestine for NAP-1325 Drafting teams. UN WOMEN 2018

10 Rayman, M.P. Izen, S. and Parker, E. 2016. SPECIAL REPORT ON "UNSCR 1325 in the Middle East and North Africa Women and Security". UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE. Available at <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/196915/SR388-UNSCR-1325-in-the-Middle-East-and-North-Africa-Women-and-Security.pdf>

systematic human rights violations committed by Israeli authorities which disproportionately impact women. Palestinian women's needs and priorities in resolving conflicts and peace-building are completely neglected.

In Syria and Yemen, women are included in formal peace processes, but they are expected to speak with

one voice and to only represent their gender. In Libya, the efforts to include women in peace processes have been disappointing because the UN and state have not ensured the meaningful participation of women.<sup>11</sup>

## CSOs Roles and Initiatives

The current limitations facing the Security Council<sup>12</sup> as it conducts its work virtually undoubtedly pose challenges to civil society participation, resulting in a 38.9% decrease compared to 2019 in the civil society briefers who have delivered statements to the council, and issues related to women, peace and security are less likely to be raised if they aren't raised first by a civil society briefer.<sup>13</sup>

Civil society organizations contribute much to the design and implementation of responses to the WPS agenda. Women's organizations have benefitted from 1325 because of international funding for related projects which they have struggled to obtain from local governments. Their work includes awareness-raising, policy research and advocacy, documentation of human rights violations and of the abuse of authority, and the provision of services, including health-care assistance and legal counsel to women survivors of gender-based violence, humanitarian aid, microcredit and skills development. In Iraq and Palestine, civil society has led the way in raising public awareness and advocating for the adoption of WPS national action plans. In Iraq, their work has included training of law enforcement and court officials on the WPS agenda.<sup>14</sup>

Country	CSO activities
Iraq	<p>Conducted several initiatives to reach the various religious and ethnic groups of both sexes and promote the principles of peaceful coexistence and tolerance in the areas experiencing high levels of sectarian violence.</p> <p>Organized trainings in the fields of conflict resolution, dialogue and development.</p> <p>Women's movements in Iraq successfully lobbied for the adoption in the constitution of a quota system which ensures the participation of women by no less than 25%.</p>
Egypt	<p>Regional office of UN Women in Cairo organized capacity building workshops gathering representatives of women machineries across the MENA-region and training on how to draft applicable, cost-effective and coordinated NAPs was provided, alongside conducting research and generating knowledge. Local CSOs have become interested in WPS efforts out of a desire to link their individual agendas to the international WPS agenda.</p>

11 Kaya, Z. (2020). "Feminist Peace and Security in the Middle East and North Africa". OXFAM, 21 September 2020. Available at <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621055/dp-feminist-peace-security-mena-210920-en.pdf>

12 K. Asoka. (2020). Support Civil Society at the UN Security Council. Available at <https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/support-civil-society-security-council/>

13 NGOWG on WPS, Mapping Women, Peace and Security in the UN Security Council: 2018, 2019. Available at <https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/files/NGOWG-Mapping-WPS-in-UNSC-2018.pdf>

14 Kaya, Z. (2020). "Feminist Peace and Security in the Middle East and North Africa". OXFAM, 21 September 2020. Available at <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621055/dp-feminist-peace-security-mena-210920-en.pdf>

Country	CSO activities
<b>Syria</b>	Syrian Women's Initiative (SWI) was created with more than 40 women-activists (representing different ethnicities, backgrounds, geographical locations, political affiliations, etc.). This SWI managed to form a parallel track to the official political dialogue and created a vivid space for women's voices
<b>Libya</b>	Six women were members in the Constitution Development Assembly and a women's track was introduced to the formal political dialogue composed of 25 active women.
<b>Palestine</b>	<p>The NGO Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy (MIFTAH) framed resolution 1325 as essential for both the national struggle against Israel and the social struggle against patriarchy.</p> <p>The National Coalition for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 held an international conference called "Women's Freedom, Peace and Dignity in Palestine UNSCR 1325 for Accountability". WCLAC General Director was the first Palestinian woman from Civil Society in Palestine to brief the UNSC during the open day of the WPS week in 2018, to highlight sufferings of Palestinian women under occupation and call on the international community and SC to meet their legal obligations and end the longest belligerent occupation worldwide.</p> <p>Recently, Palestinian NGO Coalition developed the second generation WPS NAP (2020-2022) in close cooperation with the Ministry of Women's Affairs and official duty-bearers and framed it under the three main pillars of prevention&amp; protection, accountability and meaningful participation. (The second NAP was launched on 28 October, 2020).</p>

All this have contributed to an increased focus on having more women in the security sector, greater women's political participation and women's protection from sexual violence. But these developments have come at the cost of limited understandings and interpretations of peace and security in general and WPS in particular since they diminished the feminist agenda that incorporates actual inclusion, meaningful participation, conflict prevention through disarmament and transformative change.

## Good Practice

The Peace Track Initiative (PTI) in Yemen have introduced a protection program for women/LGBT human rights defenders and women peacebuilders aiming to provide these women with emergency protection guarantees and easing increasing accessibility to international accountability mechanism. PTI was able to connect women survivors of conflict with international accountability mechanisms in Yemen, resulting in an improved documentation of sexual and gender-based violence and consequently led to the inclusion of sexual and gender-based violence as a crime in the sanction list imposed on Yemeni perpetrators.

# Conclusion

It is essential to understand the existing causes of violence in the specific context of each country, as conflict amplifies existing trends. In order to achieve transformative feminist peace, a shift from protection alone to the prevention of conflict needs to take place.<sup>15</sup> The focus must shift from disarming individuals in the post-conflict environment, to preventing the use of arms in the first place and dismantling the burgeoning arms industry.

WPS agenda should facilitate local women's peace and human rights organizations to generate their own conflict resolution and peacemaking initiatives, and support these. This is essential for being able to truly transform the international peace and security agenda, rather than merely adding women into existing structures and processes. Locally driven processes may be a way to help deliver more inclusion, as the local level can be more open to influences from the non-military and non-elite, and can be more inclusive towards women's organizations.<sup>16</sup>

Understanding women's experiences and responses to conflict, along with other social categories, such as, nationality, age, class, ethnicity or religion, among others, rather than favoring a universal gender identity, is vital to enhance and promote women's agency. The intersectionality of age in the Arab region should be emphasized as young women face many challenges that impede their participation in implementing WPS because of their age, stereotype and social stigma. Policies on the WPS agenda cannot be successfully implemented at the local, national or global sphere without the meaningful engagement and participation of young people. Partnership and synergy between the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda and the WPS are key for implementation. Bridging these two agendas would address the gap in participation of young women in peacebuilding and work cohesively to address the violence and discrimination faced by women and girls on all levels.

<sup>15</sup> G. Heathcote. (2011). Feminist politics and the use of force: theorising feminist action and Security Council Resolution 1325. *Socio-Legal Review* 7: 23-43. Available at [https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/13161/1/SLR\\_GH\\_103-344-1-PB.pdf](https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/13161/1/SLR_GH_103-344-1-PB.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> C. Bell and C. O'Rourke. (2010). Peace Agreements or Pieces of Paper? The Impact of UNSC Resolution 1325 on Peace Processes and Their Agreements. *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 59.



# Recommendations

## 1. Prevention

- Call on UNSC to meet its legal obligations in maintaining peace and security by taking measures to resolve conflicts and not manage them.
- Promote progressive gender-perspective in preventing conflict and creating peace at the local, national and international levels.
- Research, lobby and advocate for disarmament in line with the UN Program of Action (PoA) and Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) international mechanisms.
- Put Upfront Early Warning Early System mechanisms

## 2. Protection and Provision of Services

- Fund rapid, effective, and gender-sensitive responses that can help alleviate the suffering of communities in crisis, after a disaster, or other critical conflict situation.
- Ensure protection of women peacebuilders and human rights defenders.
- Strengthen national legislation and programming regarding gender equality including regional frameworks for WPS monitoring and reporting as well as zero tolerance on sexual exploitation and harassment. This includes adoption of laws on gender equality, domestic and sexual violence, gender and security, as well as integration of gender responsive budgeting and plans to address violence against women.

## 3. Inclusion and Coordination

- Promote the design, funding, and implementation of National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security as tools to coordinate, guide, and report on national progress while emphasizing a framework of inclusion of all women (young women, refugees, LGBTQ, rural...) in the development of all NAPs-WPS
- Recognize the key role of civil society and youth movement in all aspects of the Women, Peace and

Security agenda, and strengthen their capacities and protect their rights to speak out and contribute to the implementation of the agenda.

- Link National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security with national commitments to CEDAW and other human rights frameworks to allow for cross-linkages and reinforce accountability.
- Institutionalize the linkages between Youth, Peace and Security and Women, Peace and Security agendas

## 4. Enhanced Knowledge and Capacity Building

- Implement effective advocacy and lobbying initiatives to hold governments accountable and mobilize key stakeholders to transfer from commitments to accomplishments.
- Help feminist organizations to increase access and use of online tools, as well as online advocacy messaging and campaigns, and accommodate non-traditional advocacy channels in order to reach new and bigger audiences.
- Address knowledge gaps on the role of institutions, including educational, legal, judicial, and security sector institutions, with regard to their responsibilities to advance the Women, Peace and Security agenda at the local level.
- Document the experiences of women in peace and security; women who engage in peace building processes and women involved in violence.

Finally, and most importantly, an intersectional feminist approach must be adopted. The multiple factors leading to discrimination and marginalization such as poverty, unemployment, sexual and gender-based violence, racism, sexism, marginalization and exclusion of rural women and communities, etc must be identified and addressed. The solution should not be militarizing women or marginally including them into peacekeeping operations, instead, efforts should focus on demilitarizing men; thus, having a gendered understanding of the root causes of conflict and a context-sensitive approach that safeguards against future conflicts, with women peacebuilders at its heart.<sup>17</sup>