



Kingdom of the Netherlands



Permanent Mission
of the Republic of Albania
to the United Nations - New York



Concept note

The nexus between the WPS agenda and elections unpacked: Women's participation in elections in the DRC, South Sudan and other contexts

Date: Tuesday October 24th, 08.30 - 10.00 EDT

Venue: Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the UN, 666 3rd Ave, 18th floor

While women's full, equal and meaningful participation in peace processes has become a key component of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda at the UN, women's meaningful participation in elections, particularly in fragile states, is often overlooked or even neglected. Electoral processes form an important peacebuilding opportunity, particularly during transitional processes from less to more democratic governance in conflict-affected countries. The timing, regularity, inclusiveness and credibility of the elections can determine if elections contribute to or undermine peace. Ensuring a participatory and gender-sensitive approach in supporting elections is crucial for the further implementation of the WPS agenda. More attention needs to be placed on the participation pillar, especially with upcoming and ongoing election processes in countries that are impacted by conflict such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and South Sudan.

This expert meeting will feature women activists from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), South Sudan and other countries discussing crucial issues, lessons learned and offering necessary recommendations on gender, peace and security before, during and after elections.

Purpose of the session: In an interactive debate, women's rights activists from among other the DRC and South Sudan will discuss crucial issues and lessons learned, offering recommendations to UN member states and governments on gender, peace and security before, during and after elections. The objectives are:

- Raise awareness on the current situation of shrinking civic space and challenges around women's political participation
- Increase insights on the obstacles for women's participation in election processes
- Explore opportunities to promote women's participation during elections; building on lessons learned from peace processes in DRC, South Sudan and other countries
- Provide recommendations to policymakers on how to support meaningful engagement and design and promote interventions promoting women's meaningful political participation.

Guiding questions:

- How do women's rights organizations invest in women's political participation against the background of shrinking civic space?
- How can we overcome the barriers that prevent women's meaningful participation in the electoral processes in the DRC? How should international actors support DRC's electoral processes to build peace and prevent violent conflict?
- What can be learnt from the peace process in South Sudan and how can these lessons be used for the electoral processes? How should international actors support South Sudan's electoral processes to build inclusive peace and prevent violent conflict?
- How can we apply lessons learned from the ongoing peace processes to support increased women's participation in electoral processes?



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Planning:

| Time (EDT) | Event |
|-------------|---|
| 8.15 – 8.30 | Entrance with coffee & light breakfast |
| 8.30- 8.35 | Welcome and introduction of the program |
| 8.35- 8.40 | Opening speech - by Bahia Tahzib-Lie , deputy Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the United Nations |
| 8.40- 8.45 | Framing remarks – by Ferit Hoxha Permanent Mission of the Republic of Albania to the UN (TBC) |
| 8.45- 9.25 | Panel debate – with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Esther Soma - Deputy Country Director at PAX South Sudan • Rasha Al Aqeedi – Head of Non-State Actors program at Fairfax University • Claudine Tsongo- Founder and Coordinator of Dynamique des Femmes Juristes, Democratic Republic of Congo |
| 9.25- 9.45 | Moderated Q&A’s with the audience |
| 9.45- 9.55 | Final recommendations of the speakers |
| 9.55- 10:00 | Closing remarks- by Sonia Farrey , Deputy Director of Gender and Children in Conflict Department and UK WPS Focal Point, Foreign & Commonwealth Development Office, UK |



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Speakers:



Esther Soma (South Sudan) is an experienced policy and gender professional, currently Deputy Country Director at **PAX South Sudan**. Esther recently completed her Master of Public Policy (with Distinction) from the Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford (2022) as a Chevening Scholar. Prior to Oxford, Esther worked for 4 years at UN Women South Sudan as Program Specialist, Women, Peace and Security (WPS). Esther designed and implemented women, peace and security projects including UN peacebuilding funded projects and served as a member of the Technical Support team to the women and civil society delegates at the 2018 South Sudan peace process. Esther is the author of the 2021 research report “*Our Search for Peace: Women in South Sudan’s National Peace Processes 2005-2018*,” jointly published by Oxfam and UN Women. Esther holds a Bachelor of Arts in Global Affairs from Yale University (2016).



Claudine Tsongo (Democratic Republic of Congo) is a lawyer and activist. She is the Director and co-Founder of **Dynamique des Femmes Juristes (DFJ)** based in Goma, North Kivu. DFJ campaigns for the promotion of women's rights and leadership, the fight against VAWG including GBV and impunity of its perpetrators, the promotion of gender and the construction of gender-equal communities in situations of humanitarian crises as well as in the context of peace and the development process (triple nexus between emergencies, development and peace).



Rasha Al Aqueedi – Head of Non-State Actors program at Fairfax University, Middle East Editor at New Lines Magazine and associated with Mosul University, Iraq. Activist, editor, writer, journalist, and team leader in the fields of security and political analysis, international relations and geopolitics, with focus on women’s political participation in Iraq and Middle East. Her work transcends analysis and uses storytelling and journalism to convey key political analysis on the Iraqi and wider Middle East contexts. Bylines include The New York Times, The Atlantic, The American Interest, and others.