



'LEADING THE WAY'

Women driving peace and security in Afghanistan,
the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Yemen

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In Afghanistan, the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) and Yemen, women's rights organizations are leading efforts to realize the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, in spite of ongoing conflict, insecurity and occupation. But without national duty bearers and international actors stepping up to meet their commitments, implement National Action Plans (NAPs) and provide resources and support, the full potential of the agenda will not be reached. This briefing paper explores challenges, lessons learned and opportunities related to realizing the WPS agenda, and makes recommendations to a range of national and international stakeholders on how to support its implementation in Afghanistan, OPT and Yemen.

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For further information on the issues raised in this paper please email advocacy@oxfaminternational.org

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Front and back cover photo: Bissan Oudah, a 21-year-old student from the Gaza Strip, OPT: 'The 2014 war on Gaza completely changed my life.... I was wondering whether I was going to die, or my mother, or my brothers and sisters.' Photo credit: Marwan Mustafa/Oxfam 2020.

SUMMARY

This briefing paper explores challenges, lessons learned and opportunities related to realizing the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda in Afghanistan, the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) and Yemen, and makes recommendations to a range of national and international stakeholders on how to support its implementation.

Years of advocacy and activism by feminists, women's rights organizations (WROs) and civil society led to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000 – the first UN Security Council Resolution on WPS. This was the first time that world leaders recognized the crucial role of women in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding, and that conflict affects women and men differently.

Since then, civil society has bravely undertaken efforts to advocate for women's meaningful participation in decision-making on peace and security, in spite of ongoing conflict, insecurity and occupation. But while national and local women's organizations are key agents for realizing the WPS agenda, without national duty bearers and international actors stepping up to meet their commitments, implement National Action Plans (NAPs) and provide resources and support, the full potential of the agenda will not be reached.

In Afghanistan, while intra-Afghan peace talks started in September 2020, there are concerns that they will jeopardize fragile gains made for women's rights over the past two decades. Systematic challenges and weak cooperation persist, and civil servants have limited awareness and knowledge on the implementation of policies and practices on gender equality. Still, civil society has been able to push the WPS agenda forward in Afghanistan and progress has been made in recent years.

In OPT, the Israeli occupation has had devastating impacts on the lives of Palestinians – especially women, who experience a 'double jeopardy' of structural violence under both occupation and patriarchy. Yet women's and human rights organizations have been at the forefront of localizing the WPS agenda in OPT, and contributed significantly to the development and implementation of the Palestinian NAP.

In Yemen, women were on the frontlines of the uprising in 2011 but have become increasingly marginalized since the conflict escalated in 2015. They are among the most badly affected by the country's humanitarian crisis, which is one of the worst in the world. Despite lack of political will from authorities, insufficient donor support and severely restricted civic space, women's organizations in Yemen remain committed to WPS and national peace efforts.

OPPORTUNITIES AND WHAT WORKS

Women's organizations and civil society in Afghanistan, OPT and Yemen have made crucial efforts to drive the agenda forward.

- **Awareness raising, training and mentoring** about the WPS agenda among political leaders, duty bearers and the public by civil society

have been crucial. However, such initiatives have often suffered from challenges such as staff turnover. In Afghanistan, our project has explored more long-term solutions through mentorship programmes.

- Research and **evidence-based advocacy** have been key to create spaces for engagement. For instance, in OPT our partner's submission contributed to making the outcomes of a UN Commission more gender-sensitive.
- **Creating linkages between diverse stakeholders and levels** – for instance through dialogues with a broad range of actors across sectors – has been working well to find joint solutions.
- To counter fragmentation, our project in Yemen has made valuable contributions to increasing **collaboration** by connecting women peacebuilders across generations and governorates. Similarly, in OPT **coalition building** has been significant to build critical mass on WPS and create a unified approach.
- **Localization of the WPS agenda** is essential to create buy-in from political leadership. Developing a NAP adapted to national and cultural priorities can create local ownership and make WPS less vulnerable to being labelled as a 'foreign agenda'.
- **Civil society organizations play important watchdog roles** in monitoring the implementation of the WPS agenda and NAPs. For example, the NAPs in Afghanistan and OPT have been valuable tools to **hold governments accountable** to their commitments and monitor progress.

BARRIERS

Multiple, complex and intersecting barriers must be overcome to realize the WPS agenda and make inclusive peace and security a reality for all.

- One of the most significant challenges is **lack of political will**, which also manifests in lack of allocated budgets for NAPs. In Yemen, many organizations are struggling with rejections of projects by authorities, and ongoing war is used as an excuse to defer action on women's rights.
- **De facto governments and internal divisions** result in lack of accountability for policy implementation, marginalization of women living in certain areas, confusion among communities and other context-specific challenges.
- **Patriarchal gender norms** – such as conservative views that reject women in leadership and political positions – negatively affect efforts on WPS across countries. Societal and institutional resistance to women's rights and empowerment results in strong pushback both globally and at national levels.
- In all three contexts, **civic space is restricted and WROs face a backlash** – they are systematically targeted with violence and harassment for speaking up, for example through defamation and smear campaigns. There is a need for greater efforts from the international community to defend civic space.
- **Lack of coordination** within and between government ministries, civil society and donors in all three contexts limits impact by making it challenging to work on WPS in a coherent manner.

- **Funding for WPS and NAPs is limited and often driven by donors.** There is a need for increased and more flexible WPS funding which allows agenda-setting by national and local civil society.
- Despite important efforts, most WPS work and NAPs still **do not reflect the diversity of women and girls** or address their intersectional needs and voices. **Intersectionality** is essential for the WPS agenda to fulfil its transformative potential.

Against such barriers, civil society efforts are immense and often bold. But they require support from those in positions of power – at community, national and international level. Public commitments and statements of support for the WPS agenda by UN entities and Member States have not sufficiently translated into action. In some cases, stakeholders in the international community have actually reinforced barriers – for instance, UN Security Council members challenging the integrity of the WPS agenda through watered-down language on previously agreed issues. When national authorities are hesitant to involve women, international actors have the power to make a difference by providing more **diplomatic and financial support** to women's organizations and civil society more broadly. They must also **leverage their influence over actors in authority to include women in meaningful ways**.

It is time to turn rhetoric into action.



Freshta Yaqobi, a peace activist from Herat, Afghanistan, taking a book from a bookstore shelf. The book is titled *Minority Rights in International Law*. Photo: Elaha Sahel.

1 INTRODUCTION

Years of advocacy and activism by feminists, women's rights organizations (WROs) and civil society led to Resolution 1325 in 2000¹ – the first United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). This was the first time world leaders recognized the crucial role of women in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding, and that conflict affects women and men differently. Since then, nine more resolutions have been added to the WPS agenda,² and there have been substantial efforts to ensure the international framework translates into meaningful changes for women³ and girls affected by violent conflict. However, not enough progress has been made. Clear gaps remain between rhetorical commitment and actual implementation, prioritization and funding of the WPS agenda.⁴

Day by day, and against many barriers, women's organizations and civil society inch forward the WPS agenda – from grassroots peacebuilding to providing protection services for women, from campaigning for women's rights nationally and internationally to monitoring governments' commitments. In Afghanistan and Yemen, WROs are calling for an end to violent conflict and for sustainable, inclusive peace.⁵ In the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), they are advocating for an end to occupation, and for accountability and equality.⁶

These efforts are bravely undertaken in spite of ongoing conflict, insecurity and occupation. With COVID-19 negatively impacting the lives of women and girls already disadvantaged by conflict, there is a pressing need to critically reflect on the barriers that prevent full implementation of the WPS agenda. During lockdowns in OPT and Afghanistan, sexual and gender-based violence soared and social and economic strains increased.⁷ In Yemen, the ongoing shortage of funding has further exacerbated poverty and insecurity.⁸ Digital connectivity is becoming more important than ever, exacerbating the systemic exclusion of women living in areas where conflict has destroyed infrastructure, such as the Gaza Strip.⁹ National and local women's organizations are key agents for realizing the WPS agenda, but its full potential will not be reached without national duty bearers and international actors stepping up to meet their commitments and provide resources and support.

This briefing paper addresses the question: **'What are the challenges, lessons learned and opportunities related to realizing the WPS agenda in Afghanistan, OPT and Yemen?'** It outlines the status of the WPS agenda in each context, with particular reference to the role of National Action Plans (NAPs) as tools for states to localize and implement their commitments. It traces challenges to the implementation of WPS in the three countries, investigates opportunities by reflecting on what worked in programming to support the WPS agenda, and looks into the role of NAPs. It explores the role of international stakeholders in hampering or moving forward WPS. It makes recommendations to authorities in Afghanistan, OPT and Yemen, the UN Security Council and other international stakeholders, including donors and NGOs, on how they can support the implementation of the WPS agenda in ways that are locally driven and owned by women from civil society.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on 19 semi-structured interviews:¹⁰ 14 with WROs and other civil society organizations working on WPS in Afghanistan, OPT and Yemen, including Oxfam's partners; one per country with Oxfam programme staff; and two with government ministries in Afghanistan.¹¹ The paper builds on the learning of our partners and staff during WPS programming over the last five years.¹² It is also informed by project reports and a literature review.

2 WPS: 20 YEARS ON

In the past 20 years, the WPS agenda has grown into a robust framework for women's rights in conflict. Since not all UN Security Council resolutions are understood to be legally binding, additional legal frameworks have emerged to reinforce Resolution 1325's commitments.¹³ In 2013, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) – a legally binding international treaty which originally entered into force in 1981¹⁴ – introduced General Recommendation 30 (GR 30), which guides states on how to meet their obligations 'to protect, respect and fulfil women's human rights in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict contexts'.¹⁵ GR 30 linked international human rights law with humanitarian law and Resolution 1325.¹⁶

To encourage implementation of Resolution 1325, the Security Council called on Member States and UN agencies to develop national initiatives and strategies with clear timetables for operationalization.¹⁷ These NAPs are considered key tools for localizing the WPS agenda and grounding it in a country's policies and institutions.¹⁸ However, there is still a gap between rhetorical commitment and meaningful implementation.¹⁹ This is evident in a lack of funding²⁰ and accountability mechanisms, including within the UN system.²¹ It remains in question to what extent NAPs are effective tools to ensure full, equal and meaningful participation, or genuinely reflect the needs of women and girls in all their diversity, including cis- and transgender women and girls and non-binary persons of every socio-economic background, ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion, age and level of ability.

Research shows that, to be effective, NAPs must be developed in an inclusive manner;²² be adapted to local contexts;²³ build on coordinated efforts with civil society; contain clear monitoring and evaluation frameworks, as well as allocated resources;²⁴ and, most importantly, be driven by political will.²⁵ Lack of resources is a major barrier to effective implementation of the WPS agenda,²⁶ and many NAPs do not include allocated budget²⁷ – by December 2019, only 33% did so.²⁸ Civil society organizations are consistently underfunded, even though the WPS resolutions recognize their vital role²⁹ and they are considered key actors in localizing the agenda:³⁰ in 2016–2017, only one percent of funding allocated for gender equality was directly channelled to women's organizations.³¹ Donor states have considerable influence over the WPS agenda through decisions on which activities or projects to fund and

support.³² Sustainable funding is essential so civil society can support and monitor WPS efforts.³³

Despite these legal tools, policy frameworks and strategies, 20 years since the first resolution the transformative potential of the WPS agenda has not been fully tapped. Some argue it does not challenge existing power structures,³⁴ and women remain marginalized from decision-making on security and peacebuilding.³⁵ Although it is essential that women's voices are heard in the Security Council,³⁶ some say the agenda lost its feminist transformative roots in the resolutions.³⁷ Critics argue that the WPS agenda is Western-centric³⁸ as it situates conflict in the 'Global South'³⁹ and takes an essentialist view of women as peacemakers and victims;⁴⁰ this often leads to the protection pillar of WPS getting more attention than participation.⁴¹ Security Council decisions focus more on ending than preventing conflict,⁴² and take a state-centric view of security that reinforces patriarchal and militaristic approaches⁴³ rather than putting people at the centre.⁴⁴ It is problematic that governments are seen as the main implementers of the agenda⁴⁵ in contexts where they are implicated in perpetrating violence against people in their care – including stateless persons – and marginalizing groups.⁴⁶ Thus, the WPS resolutions reproduce colonial, patriarchal, militarist narratives and hierarchies by failing to reflect on the legacies of colonial violence.⁴⁷ They are weak on intersectionality and not yet inclusive enough.⁴⁸

3 WPS IN AFGHANISTAN, OPT AND YEMEN

In Afghanistan, OPT and Yemen, our partners and other civil society organizations (CSOs) are advocating for women's meaningful participation in decision-making in political and peace and security processes by lobbying authorities, providing recommendations to those in power, raising awareness in communities, training women peacebuilders and government officials on WPS, facilitating dialogues, mediating humanitarian access and much more.

Conflict contexts are often rapidly evolving, with high levels of insecurity and restricted civic spaces. They pose particular challenges for implementation of the WPS agenda, and work on women's rights more generally. Despite civil society efforts across the three countries to call for a just and durable peace, inclusive processes, and the realization of women's human rights, WROs continue to face strong opposition.

This chapter provides a snapshot of the current contexts in Afghanistan, OPT and Yemen, specifically as they relate to WPS and NAPs (see Box 1).

Box 1: National Action Plans (NAPs)

Afghanistan

- Afghanistan developed its first NAP in 2015. It is valid until 2022.⁴⁹
- As part of the NAP development process, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), with support of the Afghan Women's Network and other stakeholders, conducted regional consultation workshops⁵⁰ and various meetings with civil society to discuss drafts and inputs,⁵¹ and established multiple bodies and working groups,⁵² including a steering committee of which Afghan civil society is part.⁵³
- Interviewees perceived the NAP development process as coordinated and co-created.

OPT

- The Palestinian Higher National Committee (HNC), which includes ministries and representatives of civil society and is led by the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA),⁵⁴ developed and launched its first NAP covering 2017 to 2019.⁵⁵ It includes strategic objectives and a breakdown of activities and the actors responsible.
- Another key document is the WPS Advocacy Strategy (2015), developed by the Palestinian Women Coalition for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 – a coalition of over 70 WROs and CSOs from the West Bank and Gaza.⁵⁶ In November 2020, the Coalition launched its second advocacy strategy (2020-2023), which will enable a unified approach to WPS.

Yemen

- In 2019, the internationally recognized government of Yemen approved a NAP.⁵⁷
- Very few organizations (two INGOs and seven women-led Yemeni organizations) from government-controlled areas were involved in the NAP development process,⁵⁸ and CSOs are of the view that their inputs were not sufficiently considered.⁵⁹ Knowledge about the NAP among civil society and WROs in Yemen is quite limited.⁶⁰ The NAP lacks a clear monitoring and evaluation framework and budget. According to recent analysis, it does not adequately address women's needs.⁶¹
- The NAP is contested: some CSOs reject it because they do not feel it reflects their positions,⁶² and it is said to lack ownership within the government.

AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan finds itself in a state between hope and fear – hope that the peace negotiations that started in Doha in September 2020 will finally put an end to the conflict, which has intensified in recent months;⁶³ and fear that these negotiations will jeopardize the fragile gains made for women's rights and gender equality over the past two decades.

Violence continued to severely impact women in the first half of 2020, with 397 casualties.⁶⁴ The protracted conflict and recurrent natural disasters have left 37% of the population in humanitarian need.⁶⁵ COVID-19 has caused an unprecedented crisis,⁶⁶ disproportionately affecting women through reduced access to basic services such as healthcare and education,⁶⁷ increased domestic violence and deepened economic

inequality.⁶⁸ Afghanistan has a very poor track record on including women in peace talks: they were present at only 15 out of 67 formal and informal talks tracked between 2005 and 2020. This means they were excluded from nearly 80% of meetings.⁶⁹ The women who participated were mostly members of parliament, in high government positions or well-known civil society leaders.⁷⁰ While the peace process could change Afghanistan's political system, laws and policies around women's rights, equality and protection are currently quite strong⁷¹ and the key challenge relates to their implementation.

Afghanistan has reported some progress since developing a NAP in 2015.⁷² However, there are serious doubts about how structural these improvements are in the face of persistent systemic challenges⁷³ including weak cooperation among stakeholders⁷⁴ and ongoing conflict.⁷⁵ As interviewees noted, the Afghan NAP is not inclusive of all social groups⁷⁶ – it tends to reflect educated women from urban areas rather than women in all their diversity, including those who are illiterate, disabled or based in remote areas.⁷⁷ Similarly, programming has largely targeted people in urban areas.⁷⁸ The NAP is coordinated by the MoFA. Civil society, media and the private sector are considered to be 'supporting agencies',⁷⁹ whose role is mainly to monitor implementation, hold the government accountable and support projects in areas that are inaccessible to government entities.⁸⁰ Both leading and supporting agencies are required to regularly report on their activities. However, during the first phase of the NAP, civil society monitoring resulted in various parallel reports and scattered monitoring.⁸¹

International stakeholders and donors play an important role in providing technical and financial support to implementing agencies, so far mostly through support for civil society projects rather than direct support to the government. Multiple civil society structures and platforms have been established under different programmes in Afghanistan, and civil society has been able to push the WPS agenda – often through their own projects (see Box 2), though where these projects rely on government officials for implementation, their limited awareness and knowledge is a bottleneck.⁸² Despite many initiatives to increase government officials' thematic and operational knowledge on the NAP, progress is very limited for reasons including staff turnover, inefficient training modalities and lack of follow-up trainings.⁸³ The worsening security situation also poses severe challenges.⁸⁴

'The National Action Plan did not determine our work – our work determined the National Action Plan!'

Wazhma Frogh, Founder (WPSO), Afghanistan

Box 2: Inclusion and protection of Afghan women in the police

Since 2010, Oxfam and partners have stressed the importance of women's integration and meaningful participation in the police.⁸⁵ Oxfam and its principal partner, the Women and Peace Studies Organization (WPSO), have worked in an informal network with allies in civil society, international organizations and the Afghan government. Efforts on inclusive security and security sector reform have been ongoing since 2001, and have benefited in recent years from an increased focus on WPS, especially in the form of various donor-funded programmes. For example, funding from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported Oxfam and partners to work on including women in the police through awareness raising, trainings with civil servants, and advocacy for policy development and implementation. While challenges remain, around 4,000 women have now joined the police.⁸⁶

Four lessons learned stand out. First, although slow, progress is possible. A growing number of champions and role models are contributing to small shifts in behaviour and perceptions, gradually normalizing women's presence in the police force. Second, working through informal networks is critical. Building on personal relations is crucial to promote inclusive security and complement more formal, bureaucratic networks. Third, social and gender norms need to be addressed at district level to support the implementation of existing policies to protect policewomen from harassment. Fourth, long-term international support is still needed to support awareness raising, training and the implementation of key policies such as the female integration strategy.

THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY (OPT)

After over half a century under Israeli occupation, prospects for peace and justice for Palestinians remain bleak. The impacts on the lives of Palestinians, especially women, have been devastating and far-reaching: Israeli authorities have demolished Palestinians' homes⁸⁷ and supported the expansion of illegal settlements on Palestinian territory. Israel's 13-year blockade of Gaza has led to a protracted humanitarian crisis,⁸⁸ crippling of the economy and denial of access to basic services and resources. The prolonged military occupation has led to fragmentation of Palestinian society in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, contributing to internal political division and sowing greater instability. Palestinian authorities and security forces are increasingly cracking down on dissent and are implicated in human rights violations.⁸⁹ National reconciliation efforts between Fatah and Hamas – the two major Palestinian parties – have made limited progress, while the peace process with Israel is entirely stalled.

Palestinian women and girls are disproportionately affected by the occupation.⁹⁰ The 'militarised nature of occupation is inherently masculine [...] [and] the occupation continues to substantiate and reinforce the patriarchal structure of Palestinian and Israeli societies.'⁹¹ Women experience a 'double jeopardy' of structural violence under both occupation and patriarchy. Restrictions on movement make it extremely

'The international community needs to open all doors for Palestinian women, so they can reach all platforms and organizations, to elevate their needs and make their voices heard on the differentiated impact of occupation on women and girls.'

Rima Nazzal, Coordinator (Palestinian Women Coalition for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325), OPT

challenging for WROs in the Gaza Strip to meet face-to-face with their counterparts in the West Bank or participate in international advocacy.⁹²

Women's and human rights organizations have been at the forefront of localizing the WPS agenda in the OPT,⁹³ despite their initial hesitation to engage with UNSCR 1325: '[W]e felt our experience of being Palestinian women living under occupation was not addressed,' an interviewee explained.⁹⁴ Operative Paragraph 11,⁹⁵ which addresses accountability, serves as an entry point⁹⁶ for efforts to hold the Government of Israel to account for violations of international law, as well as on participation and protection. Their central demands include an end to the occupation; increased recognition of the gendered impact of the occupation and efforts to address it; Israel upholding its obligations under international law;⁹⁷ gender equality; and women's meaningful participation in all stages of peace processes. In the OPT, WROs are leading important efforts to document violations under the occupation and ensure that women's protection needs are met.⁹⁸

Palestinian women's and human rights organizations and activists contributed significantly to the development and monitoring of the NAP: '[M]ost of the results achieved under the NAP were through the efforts of civil society,'⁹⁹ said one interviewee, or joint collaboration between civil society and ministries.¹⁰⁰

Civil society worked to make the NAP more inclusive, for example by visiting Palestinian villages surrounded by Israeli settlements to document the impact of the occupation on women and girls in all their diversity.¹⁰¹ Despite this, it remains a challenge to sufficiently implement the NAP in Gaza, as political division limits its meaningful implementation in the Gaza Strip.¹⁰² Overall progress on realizing the WPS agenda remains limited in the context of the ongoing occupation and internal political divisions.

Box 3: Coalition building in OPT and advocacy efforts

Palestinian WROs have participated in advocacy efforts nationally and on the international stage. Ms. Randa Siniora, General Director of the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC), highlighted the gendered impact of the occupation in a speech at the UN Open Debate on WPS and called for greater support from the international community to end the occupation: 'Member States continue to trade arms with, and offer political support to Israel, while Israel continues to impose policies and practices that are in clear violation of international law.'¹⁰³ Formal briefings by civil society are important opportunities to influence decisions by the UN Security Council.¹⁰⁴ The Israel-Palestine conflict is deeply rooted in international politics, making it extremely difficult for Palestinian civil society to influence change – however, visibility ensures ongoing attention for the conflict and a more gendered response to its impacts. Ms. Siniora felt that states' responses to her statement were focused more on adding women to existing security and justice structures than creating more substantial change. 'What Palestinian civil society want to see is the Security Council taking measures to end conflict – to find a just and durable solution.'¹⁰⁵

At the national level, networks and coalitions of WROs and human rights organizations in OPT have had various successes in calling for the realization of the WPS agenda. For example, they successfully pushed for the adoption of a 30% quota on women's representation in all state and official institutions by the Palestinian Central and National Councils of the Palestine Liberation Organization.¹⁰⁶ They also played a major role in the reform of laws relating to femicide, and in 2018, an article in the penal code applicable in the West Bank – which had exonerated perpetrators of rape if they married the survivor – was repealed as a result of advocacy efforts.¹⁰⁷

Exerting collective influence on the Palestinian Authority through unified demands has brought about policy change. Programme resources have been essential to ensure time and space for coalition building, development of evidence-based research and joint positions, and training on – for example – digital campaigning and international advocacy.

YEMEN

Women and youth were on the frontlines of the uprising in Yemen in 2011,¹⁰⁸ protesting against corruption and lack of economic opportunities, and calling for greater accountability and good governance.¹⁰⁹ During the transitional phase following the protests, an inclusive National Dialogue Conference (NDC) was held between March 2013 and January 2014 to find solutions and lay the ground for a new constitution.¹¹⁰ Diverse groups across Yemeni society, including women, youth and civil society, played prominent roles in the NDC, in part thanks to a quota.¹¹¹ Although the 30% quota was not achieved, it came close – women made up 28% of conference participants, including as members of the parties to the conference and participants in an independent delegation.¹¹² During the conference, women came together to stand up for their rights and people's needs, making significant contributions to the outcomes.¹¹³

In 2015, the conflict between multiple parties in Yemen escalated, with dire consequences for the Yemeni people. Two-thirds of the population face hunger in what is often described as the worst humanitarian crisis in the world.¹¹⁴ Women – particularly pregnant or breastfeeding women – and children are among the groups worst affected.¹¹⁵ Gender-based violence increased by 70% in the first six months of the conflict.¹¹⁶ Economic insecurity has driven early and forced marriage.¹¹⁷ The use of explosive weapons has disproportionate gendered impacts, driving displacement and contributing to violence against women.¹¹⁸ Since the conflict escalated, women have largely been marginalized from peace efforts¹¹⁹ and women activists and peacebuilders often face threats.¹²⁰ Only one woman was present during the latest rounds of peace talks in Stockholm in 2018.¹²¹

Although a NAP has recently been approved by the internationally recognized government, its development was exclusionary and the document is contested (see Box 1). According to interviewees, many organizations are not familiar with the NAP's existence, let alone its content.¹²² This fragmentation and lack of information and coherence reflects the divisions in the country. For this reason, the Oxfam-supported projects on WPS in Yemen were conducted irrespective of a NAP.

Instead, WROs refer to Resolution 1325 itself and other relevant documents, such as CEDAW.¹²³

While many CSOs in Yemen focus on humanitarian responses rather than peacebuilding, WROs in the country overwhelmingly remain committed to WPS and national peace efforts. As much as possible, they are driving the agenda forward through advocacy work, awareness raising, influencing, training communities and government officials, research and campaigning;¹²⁴ political authorities do little in this regard.¹²⁵

They have succeeded in creating linkages between different groups and generations of peacebuilders, and approaching government officials on issues related to WPS. However, they have faced many challenges and restrictions. A shift in the political climate at the end of 2017 led to changes in political staff and the loss of hard-won gains, severely impacting local organizations' efforts to influence policymakers.¹²⁶ Civic space became increasingly restricted,¹²⁷ with limitations on the movement of humanitarian organizations and interference by authorities.¹²⁸ The environment became more hostile towards women's organizations and civil society,¹²⁹ to the extent that gender-related programming is no longer being approved in the north of the country.¹³⁰ There is a clear role for diplomatic stakeholders and donors to support local organizations on WPS and amplify their messages, but – as interviewees noted – many donors have shifted their priorities and funding to humanitarian concerns at the expense of WPS.¹³¹ As one interviewee stated: 'the strategies worked, but the political context changed and stopped us'.¹³²

'[We] cannot stop the achievements [made through WPS projects] just because the political situation changed.'

Rehab Althamari, Gender Program Officer (Oxfam), Yemen

Arish district in the southeast of Aden, Yemen, where many houses were destroyed by aerial bombardments. This area was the scene of intense fighting between the two sides of the conflict due to its strategic location at one of the entry points to the city. The people who were living here had to flee. Photo: Pablo Tosco/Oxfam.



Box 4: Creating political will in Yemen

By engaging government officials through a training series in 2017 and early 2018, Oxfam and partners AWAM¹³³ and YLDF¹³⁴ successfully raised the profile of WPS and gender mainstreaming. Targeting high-level participants from 11 ministries, the workshops aimed to raise policymakers' awareness on Resolution 1325, CEDAW and other provisions on women's rights and gender equality, and create an enabling environment in which more women are involved in decision-making in the ministries.¹³⁵ Many participating officials considered WPS to be a foreign agenda at the start of the workshops, but their mindsets gradually changed. Localizing CEDAW and the WPS agenda by adapting it into more culturally accepted language played a significant role in changing participants' attitudes. For example, one Deputy Minister apologized to his women staff after the trainings for not having taken them seriously before, and made himself available for future collaboration.

Over the course of the trainings, deputy ministers and legal officers identified gender gaps in their ministries' policies, developed policy guidelines on 1325 and increasing space for women within the ministries, and developed monitoring plans for the new policies. The Minister of Civil Servants was selected as a focal point to monitor the government's progress on women's participation. Together with CSOs and private sector entities, the ministries formed a national alliance on 1325 to strengthen women's participation in decision making in government entities. Eight of the 11 participating ministries changed their internal policies as a result of the trainings to make them more gender sensitive. Two women workshop attendees from the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation successfully pushed their directors to mainstream gender into humanitarian response plans.

The workshop series was very successful in changing harmful gender norms and creating political will on gender and women's participation in decision-making. Unfortunately, most of this progress was lost following a change of power in late 2017: most of the staff who had participated in the trainings left the country or were replaced by new authorities who are unwilling to support gender equality.¹³⁶ Since then, space for women's visibility and voice has shrunk significantly.

4 OPPORTUNITIES AND WHAT WORKS

The case studies provide examples of the day-to-day work of civil society, the strategies they have used and the gains they have made to realize the WPS agenda. Building on these insights, this section outlines what has worked and identifies opportunities for accelerating the WPS agenda.

Awareness raising, training and mentoring: Civil society has been crucial in raising awareness about the WPS agenda among political leaders, duty bearers and the public. In Afghanistan, the project engaged members of *jirgas* – traditional assemblies of community leaders – through visits to courts to gain a better understanding of how formal justice systems work and handle rights and responsibilities.¹³⁷ This is improving the functioning of informal justice providers, increasing referrals to the formal system and helping to ensure better protection and justice outcomes for both men and women. In Afghanistan, as in Yemen (see Box 4), training of civil servants has been an important approach; however, it has often faced challenges such as staff turnover, lack of follow-up and not having the right staff in the training. The project in Afghanistan has successfully explored alternatives to training, including placing mentors – former civil servants with many years of experience – in key ministries to work directly with women focal points on gender integration, protection mechanisms and policies.

Evidence-based advocacy: Research and influencing work targeting local, national and international stakeholders has been a key approach. In OPT, project partners developed evidence-based reports on violations of international humanitarian law and human rights. This opened up space for them to participate in international fora, including the UN Human Rights Council, the Commission on the Status of Women, and WPS Week, and to undertake trips to European countries to advocate for women's rights under occupation. WCLAC's submission to the UN Commission of Inquiry on the 2018 protests in the OPT highlighted the targeting of civilians – including human rights defenders – and its gendered impact, and Israeli occupation forces' excessive use of internationally prohibited weapons.¹³⁸ Their submission informed the Commission's conclusions and made them more gender-sensitive.¹³⁹

'Regardless of who is in the lead in country, we want them to have proper plan regarding protection of women's rights, that's [what] we are advocating for and want from politicians.'

Roya Dadras, Spokesperson
(Ministry of Women's Affairs),
Afghanistan



A woman walking next to a People's Movement for Peace' wall in Herat, Afghanistan. Several peace marches have been organized across Afghanistan to ensure awareness regarding peace talks among the population. Photo: Elaha Sahel.

Creating linkages between diverse stakeholders and levels:

Engaging with a broad range of stakeholders has worked particularly well in Afghanistan, where the project brought together not only women and civil society, but also religious and community leaders, the police and justice sector, and government entities. These stakeholders engaged in dialogues to discuss the government's roles and responsibilities, and worked together on solutions to specific challenges citizens raised in these meetings.¹⁴⁰

Coalition building and collaboration: While there is still a high level of fragmentation in Yemen,¹⁴¹ the project has helped to increase collaboration. In communities across three governorates, peacebuilding platforms ('Bilqis Granddaughters') were created to connect young women, build their leadership skills and support them in undertaking joint advocacy on peace. At the national level, project partners organized trainings for Women Partners for Peace (WPP) and the Yemeni Women PACT for Peace and Security (Tawafaq) – two civil society initiatives often represented in international spaces – to support them in building alliances within the women's movement in Yemen. The trainings also enhanced their abilities to influence authorities on WPS, and better reflect the needs of community-level women in national and international spaces. The project connected different generations of women peacebuilders by bringing together the Bilqis Granddaughters with WPP and PACT.¹⁴² In OPT, where project partners are part of a number of women's coalitions, working through networks has been crucial to build critical mass on WPS (see Box 3). For example, the National Advocacy Strategy – which was developed by the Palestinian Women civil society Coalition – unifies the vision and approach of Palestinian civil society on WPS and has strengthened their collective power. Coalitions have ensured the calls of Gazan WROs are heard.¹⁴³ By collectively responding to risks and defamation, they have made individual organizations less vulnerable (see the next section on restricted civic space and backlash against WROs).

Localization of WPS: As shown in Box 4, localization of the WPS agenda in Yemen has been essential to create buy-in from political leaders and local ownership. Although women worldwide were building peace long before international resolutions on WPS, powerful voices in Yemen nonetheless called it a foreign agenda that is not compatible with cultural, religious or traditional norms.¹⁴⁴ Developing a NAP that adapts the WPS agenda and aligns it to national and cultural contexts and priorities makes it less vulnerable to such arguments. As NAPs lay out states' commitments and strategy on WPS, they are valuable reference points for civil society advocacy.

Civil society's watchdog role and accountability: CSOs monitor implementation of the WPS agenda and NAPs. In their capacity as part of the HNC, Palestinian CSO MIFTAH drafted a voluntary report on successes and challenges of the NAP, which MoWA used to inform its own monitoring and evaluation efforts. Overall, the OPT NAP has been an important tool to benchmark progress¹⁴⁵ and push the Palestinian Authority to meet its own targets.¹⁴⁶ Similarly in Afghanistan, civil society plays a crucial watchdog role in monitoring implementation of the NAP and holding the government accountable to its commitments.¹⁴⁷ CSOs share their annual reports with relevant ministries (mainly MoFA) through the Afghan Women Network and provide suggestions and recommendations for better implementation of the plan.¹⁴⁸

These are just a few of the approaches Afghan, Palestinian and Yemeni WROs and civil society have used to push forward the WPS agenda. These crucial efforts are particularly impressive in light of the multiple, complex barriers they face.

5 BARRIERS

The progress made by WROs and wider civil society in realizing the WPS agenda in Afghanistan, OPT and Yemen has come despite extremely challenging circumstances, including violent conflict and insecurity, and violations of their rights. This section examines the obstacles they continue to face in each national context.

A lack of political will: Interviewees said lack of political will to realize and mainstream the WPS agenda, including implementing the NAPs, is a significant issue.¹⁴⁹ In Yemen, authorities are often unwilling to involve women, youth and civil society in peacebuilding and decision-making processes; delay or do not grant project approvals for WPS-related work; change regulations arbitrarily;¹⁵⁰ and, using the excuse of ongoing war, do not consider gender equality or WPS as priority issues:¹⁵¹ ‘unfortunately, the conflict parties do not have a true will to involve women in peace and security.’¹⁵² This has significantly delayed implementation of the project.¹⁵³ Lack of political will in OPT and Afghanistan manifests in the NAPs being unfunded and underfunded respectively – despite global recognition that adequate resources are crucial for effective implementation¹⁵⁴ – and the insufficiency of efforts to coordinate across ministries and monitor progress.

De facto governments and internal divisions: Ongoing conflict and internal political divisions were central issues for our interviewees. In OPT, authority is divided between Fatah (governing the West Bank) and Hamas (the de facto authority in Gaza), and the Legislative Council has been dormant for years. This has led to fragmented policies, lack of accountability for policy implementation, and the marginalization of Gaza in NAP-related initiatives: ‘Due to the political division [...] Gaza has been forgotten when it comes to meetings [with the Ministry of Women’s Affairs]. Therefore, civil society has not been much involved in the implementation and monitoring of the WPS NAP in Gaza.’¹⁵⁵ In Yemen, the need to deal with multiple governing authorities across the country – all with their own ideas about women’s rights and gender equality – creates confusion and division among communities and challenges for WPS work. One interviewee stated: ‘the work is always being hindered because it gets put on hold and/or starts from scratch each time a new person is put in charge.’¹⁵⁶ This means projects need to be flexible to adapt to different political dynamics.

Patriarchal gender norms: While gender roles and norms differ across and within Afghanistan, the OPT and Yemen, interviewees from all contexts pointed to the negative impact of patriarchy on their efforts to realize WPS. Authorities and communities in more conservative areas of Yemen often do not approve of women in leadership and decision-making positions.¹⁵⁷ In the OPT, women’s ability to demand increased political participation is hampered by widely held beliefs about the role of

‘Gaza is always forgotten when it comes to attending [international] conferences and meetings.’

Huwaida Al-Dreimili, Case Manager (CFTA), OPT

‘When women have space, they lead.’

Antelak Almutawakel, Chairwoman (YLDF), Yemen.

women being in the private rather than public sphere.¹⁵⁸ The insecurity created by the occupation also strengthened such gender norms.¹⁵⁹ Patriarchal norms in Afghanistan translate into persisting societal and institutional resistance to women's rights and empowerment, with strong pushback against the efforts of WROs and wider civil society.¹⁶⁰

Restricted civic space and backlash against WROs: Civic space is dynamic and context-dependent. According to the CIVICUS Monitor, civic space is repressed in Afghanistan and OPT and entirely closed in Yemen.¹⁶¹ Social groups that experience marginalization and discrimination – such as women's organizations – are often disproportionately affected by restricted civic space.¹⁶² Women and women's rights activists in Afghanistan have been routinely targeted and murdered¹⁶³, and in Yemen face harassment, arrest, violence and risks to their reputation.¹⁶⁴ In OPT, there is strong concern about the impact of the pro-occupation lobby, as CSOs involved in documenting rights violations by the Israeli government have lost funding and access to decision-making spaces.¹⁶⁵ Speaking up on women's issues has also led to backlash from conservative Palestinian groups: in 2019, following efforts by WROs to ensure Palestinian laws uphold CEDAW commitments, conservative groups and tribal leaders launched a defamation campaign, describing WROs as 'Western' and calling on the Palestinian Authority to withdraw from CEDAW. Such campaigns can be extremely damaging as they risk rupturing trust between WROs and the local communities with which they work.¹⁶⁶ WROs pushed back by broadening their work with coalitions to strengthen their collective voice on the WPS agenda, and engaging with a wider range of constituents such as informal networks of young women at grassroots level. However, they continue to face severe security threats and risks of personal and professional damage. The international community needs to make greater efforts to defend civic space.¹⁶⁷

Coordination challenges: Insufficient coordination within and between government ministries, civil society and donors in all three countries makes it challenging to work coherently on WPS and limits impact. In Yemen, interviewees pointed to the lack of an umbrella mechanism to coordinate civil society,¹⁶⁸ which results in fragmented WPS efforts and interrupted flows of information.¹⁶⁹ In Afghanistan, coordination is more formalized but still limited by lack of cooperation and information flow between the ministries leading implementation of the NAP, and the supporting ministries and civil society.¹⁷⁰ An urban-rural divide further complicates coordination, leading to gaps or duplication of work.¹⁷¹ In the OPT, greater efforts are needed by the HNC to increase coordination on the NAP,¹⁷² information sharing and harmonization of different entities.¹⁷³

Limited and donor-driven funding for WPS and NAPs: Interviewees across all contexts highlighted the need for increased and more flexible WPS funding, allowing agendas to be set by national and local civil society. In OPT, particularly, civil society felt constrained by donor requirements – a recent report highlighted how WPS funding is largely determined by donor rather than national priorities.¹⁷⁴ Donors have a strong preference to support programming that does not address the occupation, but internal issues such as accountability of the Palestinian Authority – this is perceived as 'depoliticization of the agenda' and is not well aligned with the primary focus of civil society.¹⁷⁵ Some donors provide funding under 'post-conflict' funding streams; one interviewee spoke about her organization's policy of not applying for such funding, as

she felt it normalises and legitimises the occupation.¹⁷⁶ Interviewees in Yemen highlighted that donors' attention shifted away from WPS in light of the ongoing humanitarian crises – in effect, donors bought into the arguments of warring parties that ongoing war is not the right time for women's rights. The lack of budget for the OPT and Yemen NAPs, and limited funding for the Afghanistan NAP, also reflect the low prioritisation of WPS efforts.

Lack of diversity and intersectionality: Despite important efforts, work on WPS – from programming to engagement with NAPs – often does not go far enough to be inclusive of women and girls from diverse backgrounds. An interviewee from Afghanistan noted that the NAP and programming are more reflective of women from urban than rural areas.¹⁷⁷ As previously noted, political divisions in OPT mean women from the Gaza strip are often marginalized in WPS/NAP-related efforts, though strategies such as civil society networks go some way to remedy this. Interviewees in Yemen stated that only very few organizations were involved in the development of the recently approved NAP, which largely fails to reflect the diversity of the country's women.¹⁷⁸ Intersectionality is essential for the WPS agenda to live up to its transformative potential.

These multiple, complex and intersecting barriers must be overcome to realize the WPS agenda and to make inclusive peace and security a reality for all. Against such barriers, civil society efforts are immense – and often bold – and require support from those in positions of influence.

6 GUARDIANSHIP OF THE WPS AGENDA

'We want to see more progress on the implementation of resolutions, not more resolutions.'

Randa Siniora, General Director (WCLAC), OPT

Realizing the WPS agenda in diverse national and community contexts depends on factors including sufficient resources and political will of duty bearers.

International stakeholders – including the UN Security Council and other UN entities, and states in their diplomatic and donor capacities – have an important role to play. While the WPS agenda is deeply rooted in civil society, the UN Security Council resolutions give the UN a particular role in ensuring its implementation. However, commitments and public statements of support by UN entities and Council members have not translated into action. In some cases, those in the international community actually increase barriers, including through sales of weapons – which have a gendered impact – to warring parties in Yemen;¹⁷⁹ marginalizing women from negotiation tables, such as the US-Taliban talks in 2019–2020;¹⁸⁰ or failing to hold Israel accountable for human rights violations in OPT.¹⁸¹

Yemeni interviewees stressed that many international stakeholders – including donors and UN entities involved in setting up peace negotiations – do not 'walk the talk on 1325' by pushing for women's meaningful participation as much as they could.¹⁸² Only one woman was present at the latest round of UN-mediated peace talks on Yemen in Stockholm in 2018.¹⁸³ In the words of one Yemeni interviewee: 'During

one of the meetings with [an] ambassador where we suggested more support and putting more pressure on authorities to involve women in the political process, we got the idea from him that even the international community is leaning more towards the [Yemeni] politicians saying that there is war happening and women shouldn't be involved [in political processes] now.'¹⁸⁴ Women's participation cannot be deprioritized: it is a right, and evidence shows that when women and civil society are at the table and able to influence agreements, lasting peace is more likely to be reached.¹⁸⁵

In **Afghanistan**, the US-Taliban troop withdrawal agreement of February 2020 completely side-lined women.¹⁸⁶ It was limited to troop withdrawal, exchange of prisoners and security safeguards, and did not put any conditions on the Taliban related to human rights or political inclusion. This set an unfavourable precedent for the intra-Afghan peace negotiations that started in Doha in September 2020. The Afghan government's delegation of 21 included only four women. The Taliban delegation, which is pushing for the US-Taliban deal to be the basis of the current negotiations, included none at all.¹⁸⁷

'The authorities are making it harder to work on WPS in Yemen, and I think the international organizations can step in and make a difference.'

Dr. Bilqis Abu-Osba, Chairwoman (AWAM), Yemen.

In **OPT**, civilians are consistently let down by international stakeholders. Despite calls by women's organizations, the UN Security Council has largely failed to pass resolutions to stop de facto annexation and ongoing illegal Israeli settlements on Palestinian territory, due to the threat of a US veto. In September 2020 the UN Economic and Social Council adopted a resolution¹⁸⁸ that shows solidarity with Palestinian women, but it has very limited influence,¹⁸⁹ and supportive rhetoric is rarely followed by actual implementation. History shows that international stakeholders more broadly fail regularly to hold Israel accountable for violations of international law or to support Palestinians working to end the occupation.

The proliferation of resolutions on WPS – there are now 10 – has not been matched by examples of implementation. The WPS agenda is meant to be safeguarded by the UN Security Council, but Council members themselves have challenged the integrity of the framework by watering down language on issues that had previously been agreed on, including sexual and reproductive health and rights.¹⁹⁰ This problem is exacerbated by competing power dynamics in the UN system, as Member States – especially the five permanent members of the Security Council – seek to push forward their own national agendas, and by 'limited means to enforce decisions'.¹⁹¹

As one interviewee from Yemen stressed, international actors have the power to make a difference by influencing national authorities that are hesitant to involve women, and must do more to exercise it.¹⁹² While military spending expanded to \$1,917bn in 2019,¹⁹³ funding for gender equality – and especially directly for WROs – remains very limited. There is a critical need for international stakeholders to provide **diplomatic and financial support** to women's organizations and civil society more broadly, and **increase pressure on actors of authority to include women in meaningful ways**. Without wider and more systematic international support, conflicts and processes that exclude women, WROs and wider civil society will continue. It is time to turn rhetoric into action.



Malak (name changed), 13, had to get married at an early age to save her younger brother, around five years old, who lost his leg and needed a prosthetic one. The family was already living in bad conditions, as they fled the fighting to a safer place. They are now living in an IDP camp. Malak and her mother said they wouldn't have accepted the marriage if they were in a better position to pay off their debts and help them cover Malak's brother's medical treatment and other needs and expenses. Photo: Sami Jassar/Oxfam.

7 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In Afghanistan, OPT and Yemen, WROs are leading efforts to realize the WPS agenda, using diverse strategies to advocate for change in communities, nationally and internationally. They continue to face intersecting barriers, including ongoing conflict and insecurity, threats and defamation campaigns, a severe lack of political will nationally and internationally, and limited funding. Many of these challenges should not exist, given the broad policy framework for WPS – including UN resolutions, international treaties, NAPs and regional strategies, all of which commit national governments and the international community to realizing women's full, equal and meaningful participation in building and maintaining peace and security. There is a risk that important gains could be lost, especially as the impact of COVID-19 is felt. We must renew and redouble efforts as we enter the next decade of the WPS agenda.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON AFGHANISTAN:

- During the intra-Afghan peace talks in Doha, **the Afghan government and international stakeholders** should ensure that women can make meaningful contributions across all agenda points of the negotiations, from setting the agenda to implementing and

monitoring any agreements. This includes women participating informally, and formally in the delegation of the Afghan government.

- **The Afghan government** must ensure that women's rights are safeguarded in any peace agreements.
- **All parties to the peace talks, including the Afghan government and international stakeholders**, should ensure transparency, sharing the results of negotiations publicly and consulting the public, particularly civil society and women.
- **All parties to the conflict, including the Afghan government**, should commit to a sustainable ceasefire agreement to create favourable conditions for the peace talks to prosper, the country to rebuild, and Afghans – including women – to safely express their opinions on the peace talks, claim their rights and demand access to basic services.
- **The Afghan government** should ensure the full implementation of existing policies to protect human rights – especially women's rights – and gender equality, and use the peace talks to expand these protections to other areas of decision making. Taking as a model the role of the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the NAP, ministries should coordinate on the implementation of such policies. Gender should be mainstreamed in all government entities through well-resourced Gender Units and Gender Advisors, and long-term training and mentorship programmes to strengthen capacity.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON OPT:

- **The Government of Israel** should adopt and maintain internal polices, standards and operations, as well as external positions, that are fully consistent with international law, including International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law. It must abide by its obligation as an occupying power to ensure the protection of the Palestinian population and immediately end its systematic violation of their human rights, especially those of women and girls.
- **The Palestinian Authority** should ensure the full and effective implementation of the NAP, providing sufficient budget and resources – including personnel – and strategic steer to facilitate its integration into the plans of relevant ministries and its implementation, led by the Ministry of Women's Affairs.
- **The Higher National Committee for the implementation of UNSCR 1325** should enhance coordination between its members to increase inclusivity of WPS efforts and NAP implementation. It must broaden its membership by including more community-based organizations and WROs representing marginalized groups, from the Gaza Strip in particular.
- **All Palestinian factions** must ensure the meaningful participation of women and WROs in the intra-Palestinian reconciliation process; widely consult with WROs representing diverse groups on creating a Palestinian unity government; and commit to fair, comprehensive and inclusive elections.
- **The international community** should take all necessary measures to ensure the Government of Israel, the Palestinian Authority and other parties respect their obligations under international law, including the

prohibition of settlement expansion, annexation, attacks on civilians and use of indiscriminate weapons and torture. In particular, the international community should pressure the Government of Israel to ensure full accountability and actively support WROs operating in and on OPT.

- **The international community** should align funding mechanisms with foreign policy, and share information to help coordinate the WPS efforts of national duty bearers, civil society and donors. Donors should either integrate WPS into an existing coordination mechanism or establish a mechanism to coordinate funding efforts, which should also be aligned with the NAP and the Women's Coalition Advocacy Strategy.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON YEMEN:

- **UN Member States** should suspend all sales and transfers of weapons to any governments, other parties or groups directly and indirectly involved in fuelling the ongoing conflict in Yemen. They should assess the gendered impact of explosive weapons and other risks of weapon transfers.
- **Parties to the conflict in Yemen** should prioritize women's rights, ensuring that women are protected against threats and violence – including abduction, forced disappearances, unjustified imprisonment and gender-based violence – and that they can meaningfully participate in all decision-making, especially related to peace and security.
- **The internationally recognized government** should consider revising the NAP to ensure it addresses recommendations made by women's organizations and civil society during the development process. It should ensure that women and girls in all their diversity from all areas of Yemen are consulted on NAP revisions and implementation, and budget is allocated to each activity.
- **International stakeholders – particularly UN entities, donors and states** with influence over the warring parties – should defend and protect civic space, particularly in northern areas of Yemen, using a mix of pressure and incentives. This includes providing sufficient and sustainable funding and training to protect and empower local civil society and WROs.
- **The UN Special Envoy for Yemen, other UN entities in Yemen and embassies of donor states** should publicly support local civil society and WROs by amplifying their messages and condemning crackdowns on CSOs and individual activists.
- **The international community** should not accept ongoing conflict as an excuse to defer women's rights, but instead ensure that women, WROs and civil society have access to forums, channels and decision makers who can take their inputs forward.
- **Parties to the conflict** should commit to a ceasefire and start peace negotiations, which should include a minimum quota of 30% for women's participation.
- **The international community** should continue to call for parties to the conflict and their supporters to implement the Stockholm Agreement of 2018 and Riyadh agreement of 2019, ceasing military

support – which would greatly incentivize parties to the conflict to start negotiations – exerting diplomatic pressure wherever possible.

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS:

The UN Security Council should:

- Focus on coordinating and mainstreaming the existing resolutions and norms that make up the WPS agenda across the UN system and the entirety of the Council's agenda, rather than developing new WPS resolutions.
- Ensure that recommendations from the Informal Expert Group on WPS and women civil society briefers are consistently reflected in Council outcome documents, including Council member statements.

States, donors, the diplomatic community and UN agencies should:

- Leverage their power, influence and relationships with national authorities – including de facto authorities – and political leadership within the UN system and donor states to realize the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in all their diversity in ongoing and future peace, reconciliation and security processes. This includes direct participation in peace talks, consultations, workshops and commissions.¹⁹⁴ Outside of these processes, protect civic space for WROs and provide diplomatic support to protect women activists and WROs from threats, harassment and violence.
- Consistently create space for and reinforce the calls of WROs in their meetings with authorities and conflict parties ahead of and during peace talks, and facilitate conversations between conflict parties and diverse women's civil society. Hold regular consultations with diverse women ahead of country-specific briefings of the UN Security Council. This recommendation applies specifically to the UN Special Representative for Afghanistan, the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, the UN Special Envoy for Yemen and the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs.
- Increase core, flexible and long-term funding for the implementation of the WPS agenda and NAPs, including for national and community-based WROs; work with WROs to identify and overcome barriers that prevent them from accessing funding; and support WROs to develop risk mitigation strategies against shrinking civic space.
- Align funding with the priorities and objectives of WROs working on WPS, not only to support WPS projects but also to strengthen their infrastructure and leadership role. Information about funding to WROs should be reported transparently and periodically, with clear targets for funding of WPS and NAPs.
- Provide financial support and resources to ensure women in all their diversity can meaningfully participate in international, national and local peace and security fora and decision-making spaces – including travel-related costs and support with visa processing and other context-specific travel barriers. Identify and remove barriers faced by

community-based women-led initiatives, particularly those from marginalized communities, in accessing funding.

- Strengthen – and where needed, establish – coordination mechanisms between donors, UN entities, national authorities and civil society to avoid overlap, identify gaps and encourage synergies, including regular meetings and transparent communication with national and local civil society. Support collaboration and coalition-building between different WROs and networks, including through resources to facilitate alliance building and strengthen WPS efforts linking the grassroots, national and international level.

INGOs should:

- Amplify the voices of national and local civil society by using their brand and networks, and speak out where local organizations cannot due to security risks. Create spaces for engagement between WROs and international stakeholders – including donors, UN entities and states – to improve understanding of the challenges faced by WROs, and ensure the priorities of women and girls affected by conflict are better reflected in states' policies peace and security and in donor-funded projects.
- Support initiatives to protect and monitor civic space, such as Oxfam's Civic Space Monitoring Tool,¹⁹⁵ and develop strategies and trainings to mitigate shrinking civic space and identify international influencing opportunities.
- Support WROs to build and strengthen networks and coalitions, and access and participate in regional and international events, conferences and peace and security decision-making. Recognize and work to overcome specific barriers to movement, such as those faced by women in the Gaza Strip. Based on needs identified by WROs, provide long-term training opportunities in areas such as international advocacy and campaigning.

NOTES

All links last accessed 1 December 2020, except where specified.

- 1 A. Björkdahl and J.M. Selimovic. (2019). WPS and Civil Society, in S.E. Davies, and J. True (eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace and Security*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 428–438, here pp. 428, 430.
- 2 Res. 1820 in 2008, Res. 1888 and Res. 1889 in 2009, Res. 1960 in 2010, Res. 2106 and Res. 2122 in 2013, Res. 2242 in 2015, and Res. 2467 and Res. 2493 in 2019.
- 3 The use of the term ‘women’ in this paper encompasses any persons identifying as women, including cis- and transgender women, as well as non-binary or gender fluid persons, identifying fully or partially as women, and others. The authors recognize that women are a heterogeneous group with diverse views, voices and needs and intersecting identities based on their socio-economic background, ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion, age, level of ability and others.
- 4 C. Hamilton, N. Naam, and L.J. Shepherd. (2020). *Twenty Years of Women, Peace and Security National Action Plans: Analysis and Lessons Learned*. Sydney: University of Sydney, p. 16.
- 5 NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security. (2019). *UN Security Council Briefing on Afghanistan by Jamila Afghani*. <https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/peacebuilder-resource-un-security-council-briefing-jamila-afghani-07-2019/>; Peace Track Initiative. (2018.). *Joint Statement of Yemeni women’s rights civil society organizations to the Universal Periodic Review (UPR)*. https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/document/yemen/session_32_-_january_2019/3._peace_track_initiative_presession_statement.pdf
- 6 NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security. (2018). *Statement by Ms. Randa Siniara at UN Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security*. <https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/resource/statement-unsc-wps-open-debate-october-2018/>
- 7 Al-Ashqar and M. Shua’ibi. (2020). *The Political and Economic Reality of Palestinian Women after the Declaration of the State of Emergency*. MIFTAH. http://www.miftah.org/Publications/Books/The_reality_of_political_participation_and_economic_implications_for_Palestinian_women_during_the_state_of_emergency_En.pdf; Women’s Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC). (2020). *COVID-19 and Women’s rights in Palestine: WCLAC Gender Assessment Report*. <https://www.wclac.org/files/library/20/07/aoazpvvgscgipswyhc3fqr.pdf>; Oxfam. (2020). *A new scourge to Afghan Women*. <https://asia.oxfam.org/latest/policy-paper/new-scourge-afghan-women-covid-19>
- 8 *Joint INGO Statement on Yemen 2020, 75th session of the UNGA*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/joint-ingo-statement-yemen-75th-session-un-general-assembly>, p. 1.
- 9 Interview with Ms. Nadia Abu Nahle, feminist activist on WPS and member of the Palestinian Women Civil Society Coalition on UNSCR 1325, OPT (October 2020).
- 10 In total, eight interviews were conducted with Yemeni stakeholders, six with Palestinian and five with Afghan stakeholders. Interviews were conducted online in English, Arabic and Dari and either directly translated or transcribed into English. All interviewees but two were women.
- 11 Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Afghan Ministry of Women’s Affairs.
- 12 This programming is part of Oxfam Novib and SOMO’s Strategic Partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, 2016–2020; as well as ‘*Safhe Jaded: Implementing the Afghan NAP 1325 by linking inclusive security and justice*,’ 2016–2020, ‘*Bayan I*’, 2012–2013, and ‘*Bayan II: Inclusive Governance and Improved Security through Influencing*, 2014–2016, funded by the same donor.
- 13 A. Swaine and C. O’Rourke, C. (2015). *Guidebook on CEDAW General Recommendation No. 30 and the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security*. UN Women. <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/55dec2074.pdf>, p. 8.

- 14 United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. (1979). *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* New York, 18 December 1979. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cedaw.aspx>
- 15 A. Swaine and C. O'Rourke, C. (2015). *Guidebook on CEDAW General Recommendation No. 30 and the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security*, op. cit., p. 9.
- 16 Interview with Ms. Randa Siniora, General Director of the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC), OPT (September 2020).
- 17 United Nations Security Council (UNSC). (2002). *Statement by the President of the Security Council*. S/PRST/2002/32. <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/ods/S-PRST-2002-32-E.pdf>
- 18 A. Björkdahl and J.M. Selimovic. (2019). *WPS and Civil Society*, op. cit., p. 432; M.M. Jacevic. (2019). *WPS, States and the National Action Plans*, in S.E. Davies and J. True (eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace and Security*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 273–290, here p. 273.
- 19 C. Hamilton, N. Naam, and L.J. Shepherd. (2020). *Twenty Years of Women, Peace and Security National Action Plans*, op. cit., p. 16.
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- 21 A.M. Goetz and R. Jenkins. (2018). *Participation and Protection: Security Council Dynamics, Bureaucratic Politics, and the Evolution of the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda*, in F. Ní Aoláin, N. Cahn, D.F. Haynes, and N. Valji (eds). *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Conflict*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 119–131, here p. 120.
- 22 C. Hamilton, N. Naam, and L.J. Shepherd. (2020). *Twenty Years of Women, Peace and Security National Action Plans*, op. cit., p. 20.
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