

Women as Key Players for Mediation, Peace and Security

Loredana Teodorescu. Head of EU and International Affairs, Istituto Luigi Sturzo, and member of WIIS-Women in International Security

In 2000, the UN recognized the role and responsibilities of women at the centre of the international security agenda. As nowadays most conflicts affect civil society, especially women and children, women must be seen as actors who can provide important resources and powerful voices of peace for the prevention and resolution of these conflicts. Since the UN recognition, the participation of women in mediation processes and the gender sensitivity of peace agreements have increased to some degree but not enough: women can often be found but not always seen at the forefront of conflicts and violence prevention innovations. In order to enhance their work, networks of women have an important role to play. The Mediterranean Women Mediators Network is a good example in this direction, as it is working to promote women's contributions to stability in the Mediterranean region.

Enhancing the Participation of Women in Mediation and Peace Processes

The participation of women in all aspects of society and their inclusion in decision-making processes, together with a gender perspective, are essential for inclusive and democratic societies. While this is a goal that is yet to be completely achieved, in the last few decades fresh attention has been focused on the important role that women can play as contributors to sustainable peace and security.

In October 2000, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325¹ was a landmark

in this respect: its adoption represented a significant development in the UN's history concerning women's rights, putting the role and responsibilities of women at the center of the international security agenda for the first time. It stresses the impact of armed conflicts on women and recognizes that emancipation and gender equality are meaningful to ensure stability and sustainable growth, as they generate well-being and functional state-society relations.

The Resolution points out that women experience conflict differently to men, and this requires tailored attention and expertise. Today most conflicts are intra-state rather than

1. UN Security Council, "Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) [on women and peace and security]", 31 October 2000, S/RES/1325 (2000), available at: <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1325>

inter-state, in which civilians are increasingly targeted, affecting mostly women and children. The focus should therefore shift from the security of states to the security of the population, including human security. The Resolution also recognizes women as actors who can provide important resources and powerful voices of peace for the prevention and resolution of conflicts, stressing the critical role that women can and already do play in peace-building efforts. The involvement of women represents a benefit not only for women themselves but for society as a whole. The Resolution therefore urges all actors to increase women's participation and incorporate gender perspectives in all United Nations peace and security efforts.

The Women, Peace and Security Agenda has a transformative potential to prevent or overcome conflicts, to create inclusive and more democratic peace-making and to foster local dialogues

Since the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, a broadening agenda on Women, Peace and Security has been established, with seven further resolutions (UNSCR 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122 and 2242). Followed by multiple national and international efforts to implement the commitments, they call for greater and more effective participation of women in conflict mediation processes; for the inclusion of dedicated gender expertise in all peace-making efforts; for the specific needs and concerns of women and girls to be addressed; and for the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence.

The Women, Peace and Security Agenda has a transformative potential to prevent or

overcome conflicts, to create inclusive and more democratic peace-making and to foster local dialogues, better policies and more equitable peace deals. In addition, in a broader sense, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) prohibits discrimination and disparaging treatment on the basis of gender. Two CEDAW recommendations provide particular guidance on the application of temporary special measures to promote the participation of women (recommendation 25) and on the role of women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations (recommendation 30).²

Nowadays, there is increasing agreement that women's perspectives are crucial to fully understand the impact of a conflict and to establish lasting peace. A gender-responsive mediation process is not only about enhancing the representation of women; it is also about gender mainstreaming, ensuring that all policies and activities take into account the effect they will have on individuals as a result of their gender, and the inclusion of gender dimensions of crucial topics on the agenda. Ensuring the systematic and structured participation of women leaders, gender experts and women's organizations help to identify the gender dimensions of the negotiation and bring a different understanding of the causes and consequences of conflict, thus creating a truly inclusive conflict settlement or peace process and generating more comprehensive and targeted proposals for its resolution. Finally, enhancing female representation and including women's needs and concerns allow a more comprehensive response to be delivered, which can create a more stable and secure peace.³

2. See CEDAW/C/GC/25 and CEDAW/C/GC/30

3. See Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, "Enhancing Gender-Responsive Mediation. A guidance note", 28 October 2013, available at: <https://www.osce.org/gender/107533?download=true>; United Nations Department of Political Affairs Guidance on Gender and Inclusive Mediation Strategies, 2017, available at: <https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/1.%20English%20-GIMS.pdf>

Therefore, a gender perspective is needed not only because principles of gender equality and women's empowerment are firmly grounded in international law and should be reflected in all legislation and policies but also in terms of efficiency, comprehensiveness and effectiveness of the process, and, in the end, for a truly sustainable post-conflict stability and security.⁴

The participation of women in mediation processes and the gender sensitivity of peace agreements have increased only gradually and women are very often excluded from decision-making

Even so, the participation of women in mediation processes and the gender sensitivity of peace agreements have increased only gradually⁵ and women are very often excluded from decision-making. Bridging the gap between aspirations, commitments and reality still remains a challenge.

According to the 2018 Report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security,⁶ “women remain underrepresented and unrepresented in efforts to negotiate peaceful political resolutions to conflict [...]”. Although women continue to play instrumental roles in all efforts to resolve conflict, including humanitarian access agreements, ceasefires and corresponding efforts related to development, their successes often go unrecognized and their work, largely, does not result in ac-

cess to subsequent political processes. Between 1990 and 2017, women constituted only 2 per cent of mediators, 8 per cent of negotiators and 5 per cent of witnesses and signatories in all major peace processes.⁷ The report also highlights that “the inclusion of gender-responsive provisions in peace agreements is still not consistent”⁸ and that “the barriers to the full and effective participation and leadership of women in decision-making are still very present”. In this respect, it stresses that “little progress has been made [...] in increasing the political representation of women in conflict and post-conflict countries”⁹ and “as at July 2018, only 17 countries had elected a woman to the position of Head of State or Government, none of which were post-conflict countries.”¹⁰

Women, Peace and Security Agenda and the Role of Civil Society: The Networks of Women Mediators

The role of civil society in backing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda is very important, and a number of projects are being developed to raise awareness of the issue, creating a stronger network among women and supporting them. Networks of women mediators have continued to evolve and connect across regions as a way to enhance the influence of women throughout peace processes, providing an important resource for linking knowledge and capacity across mediation efforts locally and globally.¹¹

4. See, for example, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2013, cit.

5. See, for example, United Nations Department of Political Affairs, “Guidance on Gender and Inclusive Mediation Strategies”, 2017, cit.

6. United Nations Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security”, 9 October 2018, S/2018/900, available at: <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/S/2018/900>

7. Ibid., p. 7.

8. Ibid., p. 11.

9. Ibid., p. 23.

10. Ibid., p. 23.

11. United Nations Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security, 16 October 2017, para.17, S/2017/861, available at: <https://undocs.org/S/2017/861>

Women's organizations are indeed particularly active in civil society peace initiatives, developing alternative political solutions to the conflict, building trust, engaging in joint projects or bringing parties across conflict lines together to talk.¹² Moreover, they are usually a rich source of information and are able to liaise with both men and women, even if some segments of the society are not accessible by males.

As Sanam Naraghi Anderlini points out, "wars today are mostly affecting societies, there are not just two nations fighting each other"; "women are often on the frontlines, but they are not only passive victims, being affected, attacked or displaced, being raped or sexually assaulted. They are also often the first people to rise up and start to try to end a conflict, to bring relief or create bridges between their communities."

I had the chance to meet Sanam,¹³ internationally renowned for her pioneering work in the field of women, peace and security, who advises and trains women activists around the world. She played a role in the issue: an Iranian, she experienced the revolution and developed an interest in non-violent conflict transformation, acknowledging the role women often play as peace actors. This is how she started supporting their voice and lobbied for UN Resolution 1325. She wrote about that experience in the book *Women Building Peace: What They Do, Why It Matters* (Lynne Rienner, 2007) and she herself founded a network called Women's Alliance for Security Leadership based in the USA.

When I asked her why it is so important to involve women in the peace process, she pointed out that women can always be found, but not always seen, at the forefront of local conflict and violence prevention innovations.

Their work is often neglected. However, the role these women are playing, in dangerous conditions, needs to be recognized, together with the expertise, experience and knowledge they gain, which can be very useful for peace negotiations. She also emphasized that it is important to bring women perspectives to the table and that their involvement can improve the dialogue. Finally, she stressed that women know the cultural context and how to talk with local people, which is an invaluable resource.

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Indeed, women's participation has a broader effect. First of all, it has a direct correlation with the sustainability of peace. Secondly, if women are involved in the processes, the chances of reaching an agreement that is more gender equitable is higher. Finally, this is strictly related to democracy itself, as the consensus is reached by dealing with different voices.

When asked if she can see any progress 19 years after the 1325 Resolution, she is cautious. She sees progress in terms of acknowledgement and awareness: civil society is very active and the number of countries that are supportive of this agenda is increasing. However, the change is taking time: there is still a lot to do to make the peace process really inclusive and to translate the promise embedded in the UN Resolution 1325 into effective policy and practice.

Networks of women also have an important role to play in this respect, and possibilities are emerging for women to become actors in the security field and play a critical role. The

12. H. Burgess and G. Burgess, "Conducting Track II Peacemaking", USIP, 2010, available at: http://www.usip.org/files/resources/PMT_Burgess_Conducting%20Track%20II.pdf

13. Private interview conducted in April 2019 in Rome during the "Training and Experience Sharing on Inclusive and Gendered Mediation" promoted by the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network.

Mediterranean Women Mediators Network (MWMN)¹⁴ is an important example that goes in this direction.

Both shores of the Mediterranean are confronted with common challenges, such as increasing general insecurity and instability, migration, terrorism, cultural divide and polarization. And, at the same time, stability in the Mediterranean is a prerequisite for security in the whole region. Advancing the role of women in the complex socio-cultural context of the region and their involvement in responding to these challenges could have a number of positive outcomes, from the way gender balance in negotiations can help parties to dialogue to the role of women in the prevention of radicalization and in fostering greater economic development. Even in countries that are not primarily affected by high security-related issues, polarized societies are still an obstacle to dialogue and inclusion, and women often pay a high cost.

The MWMN is an example of a new commitment arising from civil society. The Network was initiated at the time of Italy's mandate as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council and launched at the end of 2017 by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in cooperation with the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and the Italian branch of WIIS Italia (Women in International Security). It combines Italy's role in the Mediterranean area with the support of preventive diplomacy and the commitment to empower women in conflict prevention, resolution processes and peace-building and promotes gender equality policies.

It aims to fulfill the need to increase the number of women involved in peace-making efforts and facilitate the appointment of

women mediators at local and international level, thus reducing the networking capacity gap in the Mediterranean area. The Network has now brought together 50 women from different age groups, skills and backgrounds, from 25 Mediterranean countries. The project seeks to enhance women's mediation capabilities, delivering educational and networking programs, in order to promote their contributions to the region's stability. This could be a catalyst for mediation efforts in ongoing and potential crises and post-conflict stabilization processes and it could also foster synergy and coordination among existing initiatives.

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According to Maria Hadjipavlou,¹⁵ member of the MWMN and expert in conflict resolution and gender, the contribution of the regional Network is bringing together the diversity of the Mediterranean region and connecting women who are facing the same challenges in societies where too often only male voices and the male understanding predominate. In her opinion, the Network is indeed creating a new gender consciousness in women's contribution to social change, bringing out women's talent and demanding that it is used and acknowledged. It is useful to strengthen and raise awareness of the skills that women may have, at different levels, and can really contribute to settling a conflict, mediating or bringing people together. The initiative also brings out the need for solidarity between women: exchanging experiences, talking face to face and helping

14. <https://womenmediators.net>

15. Private interview conducted in April 2019 in Rome during the "Training and Experience Sharing on Inclusive and Gendered Mediation" promoted by the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network.

to develop a feeling of closeness to the other's struggles.

The Network is now also bearing its fruit in terms of consolidation and strengthening women's involvement at the local level. The first National Antenna of the MWMN was launched in Cyprus in May 2019,¹⁶ and will be followed by Turkey at the end of June. Another example of how this kind of initiative can be inspiring for many women, help them advance their agenda and gradually bring about change.

Many initiatives, promoted by bilateral and multilateral agencies, governments and civil society, aim to reduce gender inequalities, empower women and enhance their participation at all decision-making levels.

The National Antennas are intended to function according to the local needs of each country. In Cyprus, for example, as pointed out by Magda Zenon,¹⁷ peace and human rights activist and member of the MWMN, it is also an opportunity, also in physical terms, to bring all women of the island together, bridging the divisions that are still affecting the country and possibly help find a solution. Moreover, in a country where the conflict has been mostly discussed along ethnic lines, the initiative could help frame the issues in a more inclusive way, enriching the discussion with gender-related aspects of the conflict and enhancing the un-

derstanding of how women and men experience the divided society in their daily life.

Future Prospects: From Commitments to Action

There is an increasing understanding of the key roles women can play, and international commitment to improving the lives of women and girls. Many initiatives, promoted by bilateral and multilateral agencies, governments and civil society, aim to reduce gender inequalities, empower women and enhance their participation at all decision-making levels. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes the specific target of ensuring "women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life" (5.5).¹⁸

The UN Beijing Action Plan called for measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making, and urged steps to increase women's ability to participate.¹⁹ And the UN Security Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security recognizes women's key role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and aims at engaging women in providing security for all.

These initiatives provided and could still provide the momentum to push the agenda on women's political power and leadership.²⁰ If a core aspect of mediation, negotiations and

16. Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Cyprus launches first Antenna of the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network, Press release, 5/17/2019, available at: https://www.esteri.it/mae/en/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/retediplomatica/a-cipro-la-prima-antenna-rete-donne-mediatrici-mediterraneo.html

17. Private interview held in April 2019 in Rome during the "Training and Experience Sharing on Inclusive and Gendered Mediation" promoted by the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network.

18. UN General Assembly, Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 21 October 2015, A/RES/70/1, available at: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>

19. United Nations and World Conference on Women, The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action: Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, China, 4-15 September 1995, New York, Dept. of Public Information, United Nations, 1996, available at: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>

20. See T. O'Neil and P. Domingo, "The Power to Decide: Women, Decision-Making and Gender Equality", Briefing, ODI, September 2015, available at: <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9848.pdf>

peace processes is to promote human rights, one of the best ways to accomplish it is to showcase in practice how it can be done, challenging any stereotype and ensuring that women are strategically placed and also occupy leadership positions, serving as role models for other women.²¹

If a core aspect of mediation, negotiations and peace processes is to promote human rights, one of the best ways to accomplish it is to showcase in practice how it can be done, challenging any stereotype and ensuring that women are strategically placed

The EU could also play a stronger role: raising awareness of the importance of the issue; encouraging member states to improve gender balance; appointing more women in missions, and supporting initiatives arising from civil society at local, national and regional level. Com-

mitment to equality between men and women, as well as more awareness of the meaningful participation of women in conflict resolution, must be backed up with concrete policies.

Several challenges are still limiting progress. As highlighted by the Expert Group Meeting hosted by UN Women in May 2018 on the issue,²² they include patriarchal systems and persistent gender inequality, institutionalized gender bias and discrimination, institutional and cultural barriers, and limited recognition for women's expertise and experience. Presumptions around lack of "capacity" or relegation of women to "women's issues" also pose a significant obstacle to women's meaningful participation.

After all, the most important factor for the future is related to a real change in mindset. Women's organizations and networks of women mediators could make a positive and tangible contribution towards this.

21. See, for example, I. Bratosin D'Almeida, R. Haffner and C. Hörst, "Women in the CSDP: strengthening the EU's effectiveness as an international player", *European View*, December 2017, Vol. 16, No. 2, pp. 313-324, available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12290-017-0467-1>

22. UN-Women, "Women's Meaningful Participation in Negotiating Peace and the Implementation of Peace Agreements: Report of the Expert Group Meeting", report of the meeting convened by UN-Women in New York on 16 and 17 May 2018, available at: www.unwomen.org/en/digitallibrary/publications/2018/10/egm-report-womens-meaningful-participation-in-negotiatingpeace#view



Environmental Education Project in El Nassr Area, Egypt (EU Neighbours South).