

# Enhancing women's participation in peace processes

## Submission to the Global Study on Women, Peace and Security

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Women's peace and security (WPS) agenda has advanced notoriously in the last 15 years. The adoption of the seven UNSCR on this issue as well as National Action Plans and other regional tools have contributed to the political impulse the WPS agenda has acquired during this period. Nevertheless, there is a long way ahead before the objectives that were clearly set up in 2000, and further developed afterwards, are fully accomplished: the protection of women and girls from the devastating effects of armed conflicts and the equal participation of women in all peace efforts. These issues constitute preconditions for the full achievement of gender equality and global peace and security in a world free from armed conflict and violence.

This submission will focus on the need to enhance and increase women's participation in peace processes as these initiatives constitute one of the main collective efforts to put an end to armed conflict. Furthermore, peace processes concentrate many human, political and economic resources aimed at ending wars and building peace.

Peace processes represent exceptional occasions for the societies that have been affected by armed conflicts to end direct violence, but also, to act as the starting point for more profound transformative processes. Nevertheless, both women inclusion and gender equality agendas are far from being a political priority.

### **Women continue to be notoriously absent in peace processes...**

In spite of the international obligations that States and international organizations have, women continue to be absent or severely underrepresented in peace talks. In 1995 the Beijing Platform for Action called the States to "take action to promote equal participation of women and equal opportunities for women to participate in all forums and peace activities at all levels, particularly at the decision-making level". UNSCR 1325 delved deeper into this issue and urged for an "increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict" as well as to integrate a gender perspective "when negotiating and implementing peace agreements".

Although an exhaustive calculation of how many women have participated in peace negotiations in the last decades does not exist for the moment, there is some partial data available. An analysis made in 2008 on 33 negotiations undertaken in the previous years with armed groups in 20 countries, showed that of the 280 people who had intervened in them in various functions related to the negotiations, only 11 were women, meaning 4% of the total.<sup>1</sup> Other studies reveal similar patterns. Data provided by United Nations

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<sup>1</sup> Fisas, Vicenç, *2008 Peace Process Yearbook*, Icaria editorial / School for a Culture of Peace, UAB, 2008.

shows that only 4% of signatories, 2.4% of chief mediators, 3.7% of witnesses and 9% of negotiators are women.<sup>2</sup> There continue to be many diplomatic efforts where neither women nor equality concerns are sufficiently represented. Syria or Afghanistan, for example, are two of the most dramatic cases where women continue to be insufficiently taken into account.

### **...but there are some good examples of women's participation**

There are many examples of recent peace talks where women have been excluded, but it is also worth pointing out that some peace talks that began with no women on the table have undergone important transformations leading to the inclusion of women. The existence of UNSCR 1325 has served in these cases as an important tool for the empowerment of women organizations that have been reinforced in their demands appealing to the States' international commitments on gender equality and peace. The Philippines peace talks with the MILF or current peace negotiations between Colombia's government and the FARC show us that women's inclusion is not only possible but desirable given the strength that their presence and contribution add to the dialogue processes.

#### **Gender, inclusivity and peacebuilding. Negotiations in the Philippines and Syria.**

2014 was a crucial year in the peace processes in the Philippine region of Mindanao<sup>3</sup> and in Syria<sup>4</sup>. Despite being very different contexts due to both the dynamics of the armed conflicts and the peace processes that have taken place, a comparative analysis of some elements can be made, particularly with regard to the participation of women (and other civil society actors) and the inclusion of a gender perspective in the negotiating processes.

In March 2014, the final agreement was signed that put an end to the armed conflict that pitted the Philippine government against the MILF guerrilla movement in Mindanao for decades. One of the most significant aspects of the peace process was its inclusiveness, which was prominent among the parties to the conflict as well as the players accompanying the negotiations and other observers. Women held meaningful positions on both negotiating teams, and the leader of the government's team was a woman. In fact, in an unprecedented milestone, the agreement was signed on behalf of the Philippine government by a woman, Miriam Coronel Ferrer. Alongside the inclusion of women in the negotiating teams, women's civil society organisations have also played –and continue to play– an essential role in monitoring the implementation of the different agreements reached, including the ceasefire agreement. While the presence and

<sup>2</sup> UN WOMEN, *Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations: Connections between Presence and Influence*, UN WOMEN 2012.

<sup>3</sup> For more information on women's participation in this process see: Carolyn O. Arguillas, "The women in the Bangsamoro peace process: history, herstory", *Minda News*, 29<sup>th</sup> January 2014; Kristian Herzbolzheimer, *Muslim women in peace processes: reflections for dialogue in Mindanao*, Conciliation Resources, 28<sup>th</sup> January 2013.

<sup>4</sup> For more information on women's participation in this process see: Cynthia Enloe, *Report from the Syrian Peace Talks*, WILPF, January 2014; DemocraShe, Human Rights Watch, ICAN, Kvinna til Kvinna, Oxfam, WILPF, *Ensuring the Effective Participation and Rights of Women in the Syrian Peace and Mediation Process: A Five-Step Approach*, December 2013.

participation of women in peace negotiations is a positive development in and of itself, in the case of the Philippines, it must be noted that the presence of women has also been reflected in the content of the peace agreement, which guarantees having women in the new institutional mechanisms emerging from the peace process and the inclusion of a gender perspective in economic aspects through development plans specifically aimed at improving women's quality of life. Thus, women's involvement has been reflected in content, clearly showing that the inclusion of different social groups in peace negotiations leads to peace agreements that are more embracing and representative of the needs of the people they affect.

On the other side of the coin is the so-far unsuccessful peace process to end one of the most serious armed conflicts in recent years, the civil war devastating Syria since 2011. Talks known as Geneva II, the first direct meeting between the mixed opposition and the Syrian government, were held in January 2014 in Switzerland with the mediation of the United Nations. The meeting was preceded by different initiatives led by women's organizations that asked to participate substantively in the peace negotiations. Although both delegations included women, the call for the inclusion of third party representing civil society, where the presence of women was guaranteed, had no official echo, which was widely criticised. The initiatives that preceded Geneva II included a meeting in Geneva organised by UN Women, the appearance of three female civil society leaders before the UN Security Council, the "Women Lead to Peace" campaign promoted by various international organisations and a summit focused on women's role for peace in Geneva alongside the peace negotiations with the participation of Syrian women and women involved in other peace processes.

It is worth noting the different positions taken with respect to women's involvement in peace negotiations in Syria. The United Nations and some Syrian organisations defended the participation of women in negotiating delegations and the inclusion of female civil society activists as observers in the negotiations, while other international and Syrian organisations called for a specific space for civil society—in which women would participate—at the negotiating table. The international organisations that supported these requests (CODEPINK, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), MADRE, Karama and Nobel Women's Initiative) criticised the international community and the United Nations' failure to meet the commitments acquired as part of the women, peace and security agenda by not guaranteeing the substantive participation of women. Some of the women's organisations' main demands regarding the negotiating process included the immediate signing of a ceasefire agreement that would give humanitarian organisations access to the population, the withdrawal of foreign combatants and the end of all arms exports to Syria. The Syrian women participating in the various forums stressed that the role played by women early in the protests against the Assad government had become overshadowed by the rise in violence and militarisation of the conflict and discussed the importance of strengthening the social fabric during it, since before the war Syrian civil society was very weak because of the regime's authoritarian and repressive nature.

The peace processes in the Philippines and Syria are very different examples of how to include women in peacebuilding, and specifically in negotiations. Although the contexts are clearly different, the international community's obligations are the same regarding women affected by armed conflict. Thus, the reluctance to genuinely give a voice to Syrian women in the Geneva II negotiations shows how the results of the women, peace and security agenda can differ from the commitments adopted. On the contrary, the peace negotiations in the Philippines show how inclusiveness is an asset that can be enhanced to achieve successful processes.

## **The road ahead: women's inclusion, gendered agendas**

The inclusion of women in peace processes is an obligation for UN Member States and women have the right to be present in all peace efforts. But in addition of being a right, the importance of women's presence at negotiation tables has to do with women's efforts to bring gender and equality issues to the discussions and agendas. Therefore, women's participation is a requirement for the construction of a democratic society based on equality and justice principles. Furthermore, their presence is also an important asset in order to engender peace processes. Women's inclusion implies bringing to the conversation the views of many social groups, as gender identity intersects with other layers such as ethnicity, religion or class.

Women have to be considered not as a minority but as a significant group in itself, a group that embodies experiences and ideas of many others.<sup>5</sup> The absence of women implies the absence of justice, equality and inclusion principles and therefore a partial approach to peacebuilding. Not always will women have specific demands different from the demands of other social groups. But they can contribute to improve methodologies, communication among the parties and can help building trust among them. Having a specific agenda does not have to be a requirement to take part in the process. Nevertheless, quite often women will have their very own specific demands that will need to be addressed.

## **Recommendations for the Global Study on Women, Peace and Security**

Escola de Cultura de Pau recommends that the Global Study on Women, Peace and Security:

- Contains a wide set of women's experiences of participation in different peace processes analyzing the mechanisms and dynamics that led to women's inclusion.
- Analyzes what concrete effects women's inclusion in negotiations has had in those processes where they have been actively present and what have been the consequences of women's exclusion in those where women have not had the chance to be present.
- Strengthens the call to member states and United Nations to include more women in diplomatic efforts to promote peace as well as peace negotiations.
- Calls the United Nations to make mandatory the inclusion of gender experts in all peace negotiations where the UN is taking part in whatever role.
- Makes a call for women civil society organizations to be broadly consulted by the UN, governments and other armed actors in all peace negotiations.

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<sup>5</sup> Karam, Azza. 2000. "Women in war and peace-building: The roads traversed, the challenges ahead" *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 3, (1): 2-25.

-Develops strategies for promoting that non-regular armed actors are offered and provided with gender training when engaged in peace talks.

-Strengthens the call to member states and United Nations for more women to be appointed in decision-making positions.

The Escola de Cultura de Pau (School for a Culture of Peace, hereinafter ECP) is an academic peace research institution located at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. It was created in 1999 and it is directed by Vicenç Fisas, who is also the UNESCO Chair on Peace and Human Rights at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

The fields of action of the Escola de Cultura de Pau are:

- Research. Its main areas of research include armed conflicts and socio-political crises, peace processes, human rights and transitional justice, the gender dimension in conflict and peacebuilding, and peace education.
- Second track diplomacy. The ECP promotes dialogue and conflict-transformation through second track initiatives, including facilitation tasks with armed actors.
- Consultancy services. The ECP carries out a variety of consultancy services for national and international institutions.
- Teaching and training. ECP staff gives lectures in postgraduate and graduate courses in several universities, including its own Graduate Diploma on Culture of Peace at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. It also provides training sessions on specific issues, including conflict sensitivity and peace education.
- Advocacy and awareness-raising. Initiatives include activities addressed to the Spanish and Catalan society, including contributions to the media.