

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GENDER-INCLUSIVE PEACE PROCESSES

STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S MEANINGFUL
PARTICIPATION THROUGH CONSTITUENCY
BUILDING



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**PEACE, SECURITY AND
HUMANITARIAN ACTION SECTION
UN WOMEN**

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ACRONYMS

BMZ German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development

GIZ Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit

MENA Middle East and North Africa

TAG Technical Advisory Group

TSM Temporary Special Measure

UN United Nations

UNDP United Nations Development Programme

UNSCR United Nations Security Council resolution

WPS Women, Peace and Security

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As violent conflicts and humanitarian crises intensify globally, and especially in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), communities are paying the price in the absence of political settlements and sustainable peace. Women, in particular, are severely impacted by these crises, but they remain mostly excluded from meaningfully participating in peace processes. This is despite overwhelming evidence showing that their involvement in peacebuilding and mediation contributes to lasting peace that goes well beyond just the silencing of guns.¹ The COVID-19 pandemic exposed even more starkly the extent of gender inequality in conflict-affected contexts, prompting ever-more urgent calls for inclusion.

In this context, UN Women convened the global conference ‘Gender-Inclusive Peace Processes: Strengthening Women’s Meaningful Participation through Constituency Building’ in July 2021, in partnership with CMI – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation, and with financial support from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) in cooperation with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH and the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The conference attracted the participation of more than 320 peace practitioners from 70 countries worldwide, with a focus on the MENA region. It was hosted completely online for the first time since its inception in 2018²; taking place over Zoom (live events, synchronous component) and SparkBlue (asynchronous engagement) platforms.

Discussions focused on how to **leverage the practice of constituency building to foster inclusive peace and enhance women’s meaningful participation in formal peace processes**.³ Scholars have found that one reason why women’s inclusion in peacebuilding is correlated with more durable agreements is because of the strong and extensive linkages that women signatories establish with constituencies of women’s civil society groups. Yet, for women leaders in particular, the practice of constituency building also brings about challenges, including the risk of being relegated to spaces generally perceived as women-only, and the assumption that one woman leader represents *all* women, or that women can represent “women’s issues” only.

A reconceptualization is necessary that considers women as equal political actors and that deepens the general understanding of the gendered dynamics of accountability and representation in contemporary peace processes.

With technical inputs and facilitation from experts and thought leaders, the conference offered a safe space for the sharing of experiences and cross-fertilization of ideas among practitioners with deep knowledge of different country contexts. Participants reflected, among other issues, on how to mitigate the **increased security risks** that women activists and politicians face for their participation in political processes – from being retaliated against for their activism to becoming the target of other political groups. They shared their perspectives on the **opportunities and challenges of digital methods in constituency building**, including the use of social media and digital tools to amplify women’s voices, and the heightened risks women can face as targets of hate speech and cyber harassment. Participants also discussed the ambivalent nature of **temporary special measures (TSMs)** and debated the efficacy of **gender quotas** as a long-term, transformative tool to shape societies, given their existing limitations in breaking the glass ceiling and meaningfully challenging gender-discriminatory cultural norms. Finally, participants pointed out that the best way to foster women’s **meaningful inclusion** is to ensure that women hold strategic leadership and decision-making roles.

1 See UN Women (2018), Infographic: Women’s Meaningful Participation Builds Peace. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/multimedia/2018/10/infographic-womens-meaningful-participation-builds-peace>

2 Previous convenings include “Women’s meaningful participation in peace processes: Modalities and strategies across tracks” (Geneva, 2018) and “Gender perspectives and confidence building for inclusive peace: Getting parties to a shared negotiation table through trust” (Tunis, 2019).

3 See the Global Conference Concept Note. Available at: <https://www.sparkblue.org/content/global-convening-concept-note>



Photo: UN Women Humanitarian Work with Refugees in Cameroon, UN Women/Ryan Brown



Photo: UN Women Humanitarian work - Za'atari Refugee Camp, Jordan, UN Women/Christopher Herwig

Key overarching recommendations from participants

1. Leverage constituency building to foster inclusive peace

Use and expand the practice of constituency building to increase women's meaningful participation in peace processes, enhance their relevance and strengthen their resilience.

2. Build connections among women peace practitioners

Create opportunities for women in Women, Peace and Security (WPS) with different expertise, and across different country contexts, to connect and exchange lessons learned, including through creating a database of women actors.

3. Strengthen alliances with local and global actors

Consolidate women's networks through building alliances at the regional and global levels, and through securing the buy-in of international actors for more inclusive peace.

4. Act on commitments to foster progress of the WPS agenda

Move past the 'talking for the sake of talking' attitude and translate existing commitments and recommendations into action to further the WPS agenda.

5. Allocate sufficient funding, including civil society funding

Earmark funding to specifically enable women representatives to engage with their constituencies.

Building on the prior discussions and efforts of many others working to create feminist change in this space, these recommendations are intended to suggest further opportunities for coordination, prioritization, and strategic change and investment. Looking ahead to 2022 and beyond, and informed by the outcomes of the conference, UN Women and CMI will explore new areas of emphasis, including partnership building with mediation actors outside of the United Nations system. The vision going forward must be bold: the public health and humanitarian

emergency brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic – particularly when considered in light of the 20th anniversary of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 in 2020 – has highlighted how, now more than ever, transformative policy and practice shifts are needed in peacebuilding. With increasingly visible and powerful demands for women's meaningful participation in peace processes, UN Women, CMI and their partners remain committed to protecting existing gains and contributing to further inclusive and holistic change.

**UN WOMEN IS THE UN ORGANIZATION
DEDICATED TO GENDER EQUALITY
AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN.
A GLOBAL CHAMPION FOR WOMEN
AND GIRLS, UN WOMEN WAS
ESTABLISHED TO ACCELERATE
PROGRESS ON MEETING THEIR
NEEDS WORLDWIDE.**

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide. It works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls and stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on four strategic priorities: Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems; Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy; All women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence; Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian action. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



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