

MEETING REPORT

# GENDER-INCLUSIVE PEACE PROCESSES

STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S MEANINGFUL  
PARTICIPATION THROUGH CONSTITUENCY  
BUILDING





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CONSTITUENCYBUILDING



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

New York, October 2021



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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This report is informed by contributions gathered in the context of the global conference Gender-Inclusive Peace Processes: Strengthening Women's Meaningful Participation through Constituency Building (7-27 July 2021).

The conference was organized by UN Women 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.

On behalf on UN Women and CMI, we would like to thank all the participants in this convening for their insightful contributions and productive engagement.

The conference and meeting report were made possible through a collaborative process involving UN Women's Peace, Security and Humanitarian Aid and Communications teams at headquarters, UN Women regional and country office staff across the Arab States and other regions, and CMI's Women in Peacemaking and Communications teams. Many thanks to all those involved for their invaluable support and continued cooperation.

Finally, we are especially grateful to UN Women's partners and donors at BMZ and GIZ for the productive long-term collaboration and generous financial support that has once again made this conference possible. We also extend our appreciation to the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs for their programmatic partnership that enabled CMI's role and contribution to the convening.



# 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

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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.<sup>1</sup> 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 2018<sup>2</sup>; 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**.<sup>3</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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.

# INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, violent conflicts and humanitarian crises continue to pose grave threats to civilians and erode progress towards gender equality and sustainable development. As global peace continues to decline and high-level peace processes have largely stalled, communities are paying the price in the absence of political settlements and sustainable peace. This is particularly true in the MENA region, where high-intensity armed conflicts continue to proliferate, making it the world's least peaceful region.<sup>4</sup>

Women are often the most impacted by these crises, bearing the brunt of the devastation – from increased gender discrimination and violence to waning or abolished gender-sensitive structures and programming. Yet, they continue to be largely excluded from meaningfully participating in peace processes. This is in spite of overwhelming evidence showing that their involvement in peacebuilding and mediation leads to lasting, positive peace that goes well beyond just the silencing of guns.

Despite the important strides made since the passing of the landmark United Nations Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on women, peace and security (WPS) in 2000, women's direct participation and representation in formal peace processes remains extremely low, and it continues to be the one area that lags in the implementation of the WPS agenda. Over the years, women's inclusion in high-level peace processes has been limited – women have served as only six percent of mediators, six percent of signatories and 13 percent of negotiators between 1992 and 2019.<sup>5</sup> This has hampered the likelihood of reaching durable peace agreements.

The COVID-19 emergency, which continued to intensify throughout 2021, exposed the full extent of gender inequality and its impact in contexts affected by conflict: armed conflicts, dire humanitarian needs and mass human displacement collided with the unprecedented public health and economic crisis of the pandemic, creating ever-more erosion of equality and inclusion, and diminishing prospects for sustainable peace and development.

In this context, empowering women leaders to participate in peacebuilding remains crucial and urgent. In July 2021, UN Women convened the global online conference 'Gender-Inclusive Peace Processes: Strengthening Women's Meaningful Participation through Constituency Building', organized 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 was hosted online for the first time since its inception in 2018, using Zoom (synchronous component through live online events) and SparkBlue (asynchronous engagement, complementing live discussions). **More than 320 peace practitioners from around 70 countries worldwide, with a focus on the MENA region**, participated, ranging from political party and civil society actors from conflict-affected contexts, policy leaders, analysts and scholars in their individual capacity and/or from non-governmental organizations, think tanks, the UN and regional organizations. Particular attention was directed at engaging participants that had not previously contributed to global conversations on women, peace and security.

The main aim of the conference was to **explore good practices to strengthen women's meaningful participation and representation in all aspects of peacemaking, with a focus on constituency building approaches**, and with a strong emphasis on contributing towards new and existing peace efforts in the MENA region. Discussions revolved around the

4 Institute for Economics & Peace (2021), *Global Peace Index 2021: Measuring Peace in a Complex World*, Sydney, Australia. Available at: <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/GPI-2021-web.pdf>

5 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>

existing, **critical need to deepen thinking, policy and practice on the linkages that exist between constituency building and gender-inclusive peace.**

### Two main discussion sub-threads:

- **The work of building constituencies:** What are some effective strategies used by women delegates in formal peace processes to build and nurture a base of support in their communities, including the diaspora? How can digital methods or other tools be used in this regard? How might the gender dimensions of constituency building vary depending on a representative's affiliation to a government, armed group, civil society or political party?
- **Encouraging constituency building in peace processes:** How do constituency dynamics shape the peace process overall, or a given representative's participation therein? How does the process of constituency building affect constituencies themselves, including their views of a peace process and the legitimacy of its outcomes? What are some effective measures, tools, sequencing considerations and other design options (e.g. media engagement) that mediators and external partners can adopt to enable constituency building in the context of formal peace processes?

Conference participants exchanged **knowledge and perspectives relating to the status of peace processes globally and in the MENA region, as well as strategies and challenges to women's meaningful participation** in countries including Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Cameroon, Nigeria, Western Sahara, Uganda, Sudan, among others. Valuable insights and **recommendations were offered relating to the specificities of challenges and opportunities of constituency building.** The conference also included an active learning and knowledge-sharing component, with two working group sessions on the following themes:

### 1. How to build and nurture a constituency?

- Opportunities and challenges of digital methods in constituency building
- Consultative processes as a tool for constituency building
- How to engage diaspora and displaced people in constituency building
- Representing political movements in peace processes: who and how
- Representing civil society actors in peace processes: who and how

### 2. Dynamics between constituency building and formal peace processes

- How can process design enhance participants' representation
- Temporary Special Measures (TSMs) in formal peace processes and constituency-building
- How to sequence steps in peace and transition processes in view of constituency building
- Constituency building and confidentiality
- Opportunities and risks for media engagement in constituency relations

While no report can fully do justice to the insightful and varied discussions that took place over the course of the conference, this document aims to highlight the key thematic areas, ideas and issues raised, as well as recommendations that emerged to guide and inform future efforts in inclusive peacemaking.

Women's meaningful participation in peace processes has proven to be an area particularly resistant to change – exclusion remains the norm and gender perspectives are often an add-on in high-level discussions instead of an integrated part of agenda design and discussion. According to conference participants, **the time for urgent change and action is now.**

# ABOUT THE GLOBAL CONVENING: STRUCTURE AND PARTICIPATION

The 2021 online global conference ‘Gender-Inclusive Peace Processes: Strengthening Women’s Meaningful Participation through Constituency Building’ took place on the following platforms:

**Zoom**, where a series of live sessions and discussions took place between 7-27 July (synchronous component).

**SparkBlue**, the online platform managed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) that served as a safe, private space for online engagement among conference participants between 1-31 July, and as a repository of key information and resources (asynchronous).

All live events were open to select invitees nominated by CMI and UN Women/UN Women’s regional and country offices, except for the opening and closing sessions that were public. Sessions offered a safe space for live, synchronous engagement, where participants could listen to contributions from key peace experts and share their views and experiences. Events followed the Chatham House Rule of non-attribution to facilitate open discussion, and simultaneous translation in Arabic, English and Spanish was made available at all times.

**More than 400 logins were recorded from participants across the five days of engagement<sup>6</sup>**, with spikes in engagement during the opening and closing events (167 and 119 participants respectively). For a more detailed evaluation of live events and data on Zoom engagement, please see Annex B.

On SparkBlue, a private space was set up to facilitate asynchronous engagement among conference invitees and foster discussion ahead of and following the live Zoom discussions. The space was invite-only and accessible exclusively to UN Women and CMI nominated participants. It was organized into two separate rooms: “Working group session 1 – How to build and nurture a constituency?” and “Working group session 2 – Dynamics between constituency building and formal peace”, each moderated by civil society actors and experts from Independent Diplomat and Inclusive Peace. Conference invitees shared their views, experiences and best practices for constituency building, read others’ contributions and engaged with other attendees ahead of, during and after the live sessions on Zoom. The private space remained open

## On Zoom, the following live events were held:

- **7 July (10:00 - 11:30 EST)** – High-level opening event: Constituency-building for inclusive peace processes (public)
- **8 July (10:00 - 11:30 EST)** – Key topics: Framing key issues and concepts of constituency building (invite-only)
- **14 July (09:00 - 11:30 EST)** – Working group session 1: How to build and nurture a constituency? (invite-only)
- **15 July (04:00 - 06:30 EST)** – Working group session 2: Dynamics between constituency building and formal peace processes (invite-only)
- **27 July (10:00 - 11:30 EST)** – Closing session: Reflection on key themes, topics and trends (public)

<sup>6</sup> More than 400 logins were registered over the five days of engagement and across all events, with some participants participating in multiple sessions.

for posting between 1 to 31 July. Thereafter, participants continued to have access to download resources, read updates by conference organizers and stay informed on key actions and future developments. Out of all registered participants, **138 logged onto the platform (around 45%) from more than 40 countries.**<sup>7</sup> Of these, **28<sup>8</sup> posted in the discussion rooms, accounting for 90 posts** across the two rooms. See Annex B for the full evaluation and data on conference engagement across SparkBlue and Zoom.

In addition, a public dashboard was set up on SparkBlue to allow everyone with an interest (beyond invited conference participants) to access dedicated material on constituency building and gender-inclusive peace-making. The dashboard features exclusive material in relation to the conference and beyond, including topical publications and recommended readings; featured resources; and multimedia assets, including social media packages, podcasts and other audio-visual material. (See Annex A for a list of useful links).

# I. CONSTITUENCY BUILDING: DEFINITIONS AND GENDER PERSPECTIVES

Ideas around constituency building within peace processes, and the many gendered dimensions associated with it, continue to be strikingly underexplored. While there is no universally accepted definition of constituency building, it can be described as **the process through which deliberation between representatives in political processes and their support base, or constituencies, is sought and achieved.** On the one hand, the term reflects the efforts of formal representatives to build a support base, a “group of people with shared interests or political opinions” and “[...] from different social sectors, who act in concert to build peace.”<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, it implies that these same representatives, who are deemed to represent the views of others or particular sets of ideas and interests in peace processes, must be held accountable by these same constituencies that help appoint them.<sup>10</sup>

In the context of this conference, 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. 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 all-too-common assumption that one woman leader represents all women, or that women can represent “women’s issues” only.

Similarly, discussions should also avoid creating yet another set of higher expectations of women political figures and their qualifications as representatives. Rather, 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. In this context, efforts to broaden constituencies can contribute to democratizing peace processes and generating social buy-in for lasting agreements.

7 This is a conservative estimate based on data provided by participants when registering on SparkBlue. As country information was not mandatory, some participants chose not to provide this.

8 This number includes some conference organizers and SparkBlue moderators.

9 Mouly, C. and Idler, A. (2013), “Peace constituency or peace infrastructure: yeast or cobweb?”, Conference paper at International Studies Association Conference, San Francisco, USA, 2013, p. 5. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342515597\\_Peace\\_constituency\\_or\\_peace\\_infrastructure\\_yeast\\_or\\_cobweb](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342515597_Peace_constituency_or_peace_infrastructure_yeast_or_cobweb)

10 See background paper by Inclusive Peace: “Towards Meaningful Inclusion: How to Build Constituencies During Peace Processes” for a more in-depth overview of constituency building and further references



## Defining constituency building<sup>10</sup>

Constituency building in the context of peacemaking cannot be fully explained without looking at the following interlinked concepts that underpin it:

- **Constituency:** largely defined as a support base, in the context of peace processes it can be described as a group of people with shared interests or political opinions, regardless of geographic and social identity.
- **Inclusive peace process:** all groups and actors in a society can be included in a peace process in various capacities (from joining negotiation delegations to serving as advisers or observers, or joining informal, consultative mechanisms) and have their concerns addressed. The idea has risen to prominence within peacemaking and peacebuilding policy, research and practice, and it has been embedded in an international normative framework, including through the introduction of UN Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 2535 (2020). Still, this definition is often contested and seen as too limited and biased. The practice of inclusion within peace processes has also been criticized for often being superficial in nature.
- **Participation and representation:** while participation in peace processes can be described as individual engagement, representation brings with it the idea of constituency and a collective dimension, and it can be described as the act of advocating for and representing the voices, opinions and perspectives of a segment of society. It requires a commitment from formal leaders to identifying the constituencies to be represented, and to establishing and giving voice to their shared priorities.



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

## II. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF CONSTITUENCY BUILDING

The starting point for discussions on constituency building was one of critical reflection on the challenges women face for their involvement in peacebuilding and peacekeeping, despite the positive and strong linkages between women peace actors and their constituencies that help uphold women's presence and efforts in peace fora.

Participants flagged the difficulty of striking a balance between navigating political spaces and pushing the agendas of their constituencies. Some pointed out that, even when women peace actors are granted enough resources and support to access political and decision-making spaces, underlying power dynamics can limit their participation and prevent their voices from being heard. This can generate mistrust towards peace actors and lead to accusations of elitism from constituencies, and to the subsequent withdrawal of support. This leaves women leaders vulnerable and walking a tight rope between the political savviness required to get a seat at the decision-making table and their commitment to representing constituents' interests and pushing the agenda of women's participation.

Experts and practitioners alike reflected on the importance of mitigating the security risks women face, both online and offline, for their participation in political processes – from being retaliated against for their activism to becoming the target of other political groups. Some pointed to cooperation and coalition-building as key tools to address risks, requiring both women and men working collectively to achieve inclusive, substantive negotiations. Additionally, support from their respective political parties was seen as central in helping women navigate the political sphere safely. Women activists from Sudan and Iraq shared their experiences dealing with severe security threats and gender-based violence, highlighting the daily risks that women face and calling for coordinated action

led by women on the ground. Yemeni activists also raised concerns for women leaders in their country and called for stronger cooperation among women to guarantee clarity within the mandate of the Technical Advisory Group (TAG)<sup>11</sup>, which has struggled to become an effective mechanism for inclusion due to its weak links with existing women's networks.

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**“Yemeni women are the carriers of peace and have been instrumental in leading the country to a more stable and peaceful transition. Yet, we don't have full legitimacy to support peacemaking initiatives and be involved in the peace process in a meaningful way.”**

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The opportunities and challenges of digital methods in constituency building emerged as another critical issue. While participants praised the opportunities afforded by social media and digital tools to amplify women's voices and more easily establish links among different actors, they also recognized that major gender-based discrepancies persist in access, use and connectivity. For example, just 48 per cent of women have access to the internet compared to almost 60 per cent of men, with women in rural communities being particularly marginalized. This gap (often linked to a lack of internet infrastructure or to connectivity issues due to ongoing crises), paired with limited technology literacy, can be a significant barrier to women's ability to participate in discussions and influence decisions about their own countries and futures.

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<sup>11</sup> The Yemeni Women's Technical Advisory Group was formed by the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen (OSESGY), in line with United Nations Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008) and the outcomes of the Yemeni National Dialogue Conference, which calls for a 30 per cent quota for women in public positions as well as in negotiations delegations and committees. See: <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/>.

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“Women are more likely to participate in online discussions because they can do so mostly anonymously and flexibly, balancing their care burdens. Yet, we must ensure these methods are underpinned by robust gender analysis that explores the opportunities and challenges for women’s participation. We want to continue to leverage the huge potential of digital tools for constituency-building while ensuring that existing access discrepancies do not further inequalities.”

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“The introduction of quotas as a temporary measure to achieve greater gender equality in political participation is necessary. We must not underestimate the importance for women and girls of seeing women in leadership positions and the power of role-modeling. However, quotas have increasingly become a box-ticking exercise for governments, rather than a tool to foster positive change. We need to set a 50/50 benchmark if we truly want to see structural transformation.”

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Furthermore, despite the benefits of online advocacy for constituency building, the use of social media is not without risk – for instance, revealing one’s identity online can result in women being targeted through hate speech and cyber harassment. Participants pointed to complementary approaches, such as radio messaging, that do not require internet access or the sharing of personal information online, and that can more easily reach people from grassroots communities. Face-to-face and telephone surveys, in addition to online questionnaires, were recommended as tools for pitching and voting on projects, ensuring the two-way engagement that is critical for discussing ideas and proposals with others.

Participants raised concerns about the enforcing and enabling of **temporary special measures (TSMs)**, including **gender quotas** and gender advisory bodies to UN mediators. While there was consensus around the huge transformative potential of quotas and other TSMs, participants also highlighted risks associated with them such as growing resistance from political parties and mediators; lack of prioritization of women’s issues in favour of other themes; and inherent limitations of TSMs themselves to achieving gender equality and to challenging gender-discriminatory cultural norms. The discussion pointed to best practices from contexts such as Syria, where some participants said women “achieved 28-30 per cent participation in the three blocks of the Constitutional Committee.” In addition to quotas, capacity-strengthening and advocating for survivor-centered approaches were mentioned, particularly in terms of linking the high-level aspects of the peace process to realities on the ground.

The important themes of **participation and representation** were explored in-depth. Discussions underlined that not all participation is meaningful, and the best way to foster women’s meaningful inclusion is to ensure that women hold leadership and decision-making roles. Moreover, it was noted that not all women who take part in peace and political transition processes are automatically gender champions, so it was important to also ensure that men were committed to the gender equality/women’s rights agenda. This could be supported through expanding awareness and knowledge about gender equality and women’s rights tailored to specific negotiation processes and contexts.

Finally, **empowering women and bringing learning back to communities** was cited as being key to strengthening links among women involved in Tracks I and II and to maintaining constituencies. It was suggested that support from the international community must be continuous and include mentorship and training of trainers to amplify the impact of individual interventions. Such support should not only be tied to active rounds of UN negotiations, as peace and political processes often stall for lengthy periods.

A broad outline of key conference views and main discussion insights is offered below. (More detailed information and a full set of recommendations is available in the conference [engagement summary – Annex D](#).)



## Key discussion highlights

1. **Constituency building as a tool to increase women's participation.** Building and nurturing constituencies requires a deliberate effort to enable the inclusion of women, increase their relevance and strengthen their resilience.
2. **Safety and security of women activists and peacebuilders on the ground.** The retaliation against and the targeting of women by governments and political groups remains a key concern for activists and organizations when carrying out in-country operations. The backing of international organizations and UN agencies can help provide protection and give legitimacy to their efforts.
3. **Cooperation across political and civil society spaces.** Stronger links between women in political groups and those working in civil society capacities are critical to exchange views and enable civil society voices to feed into peace negotiations. When civil society actors cross over into the political space, accusations of elitism may arise. Additional resources to support women civil society actors in their transition into political fora can ensure they remain effective and are able to maintain support from their constituencies.
4. **Support for women in conflict prevention.** Women can play a role at the early stages of conflict in identifying warning signs and imminent crises. In addition to supporting women's participation in peace processes, the international community must support women's involvement in peacebuilding from the early stages of crisis, ahead of the peace process and conflict phases, to enable conflict prevention.
5. **Women's involvement in the security sector.** Security spaces are dominated by men, with women remaining insufficiently represented. It is important for women to serve in strategic leadership positions to influence security engagement and more gender-sensitive operations that effectively protect those who are most marginalized, including women and children.
6. **Amplifying the voices of women and women-led organizations.** The value and importance of amplifying women's voices and messaging in conflict and peacebuilding settings was emphasized. In this context, the issue of online retaliation and the need for a cautious approach that is mindful of such risks was also raised, as well as the importance of using the right terminology in order to be understood by constituencies and wider communities.
7. **Opportunities and challenges of digital tools.** Despite the huge opportunities offered by online tools, unequal access to information and to tools themselves remains an obstacle that hinders women's inclusion. Discrepancies – including gender ones – in accessing digital tools for advocacy and outreach must be addressed so as not to deepen existing inequalities.
8. **Consultative processes as a tool for constituency building.** The design processes and mechanisms that help ensure women's protection were explored. Suggestions included the development of strategic communications plans and platforms to ensure messages are communicated both ways, expectations are managed, and mediators communicate their role clearly. The international community should also provide research and preparatory material to support consultations, allow sufficient time for constituency building, ensure donor flexibility to operate in complex contexts, develop systems to enhance security, and recognize that constituencies are not only political or regional but also intersectional.
9. **Representing political movements in peace processes.** The international community must ensure women who engage in high-level politics receive the support necessary to engage effectively. This includes moving away from traditional forms of capacity-building or 'empowerment' towards concrete technical support and facilitation of high-level access.

10. **Representation by civil society actors in peace processes.** Women from civil society who engage in peace processes can be perceived as too qualified (i.e., elitist) or not qualified enough, and are often stereotyped and constrained by social norms. They also face threats to their security and harassment, which has become pronounced in the digital sphere. Stakeholders must work together to address these issues and the continued exclusion of women civil society actors.
11. **Advisory structures and parallel mechanisms in formal peace processes.** Participating in advisory structures and mechanisms like the Syrian Women's Advisory Board and Yemen's TAG is key to supporting women's direct and meaningful participation in talks and building/maintaining a constituency. Often, advisory bodies outside the context of active negotiations do not have a clear link to the agenda of negotiations or consultations between the parties. To ensure the effectiveness of parallel mechanisms, UN or other mediators should invest more in these structures and utilize them as a true resource.
12. **Track II/Track I transfer.** Ideas and outcomes of parallel mechanisms must be 'transferred' to formal peacemaking negotiation processes. Barriers to transfer remain in contexts like Syria and Yemen, where peacemaking and peacebuilding initiatives struggle to shape the Track I level, especially for women-led initiatives.
13. **Representation vs. participation.** Not all participation is meaningful, so the best way of fostering women's meaningful participation is to ensure that women can access leadership and decision-making roles.
14. **Role of the media.** The media (both traditional and social) play a key role in constituency building, including in the MENA region, where many social movements rely on social media for information sharing, trust-building and advocacy. The interaction of peace practitioners with their constituencies, both through the media and via alternative channels, also shapes the constituencies' perception of the peace process and ensures they are onboard and more engaged.
15. **Value of TSMs and quotas.** The use of TSMs in peacebuilding can lay the groundwork for strengthening women's social, economic and political rights, and participation more broadly. Among others, the value of gender quotas was debated. While they have huge transformative potential, there is a danger that they may unintentionally serve as a ceiling that restricts greater women's participation, or that they may be perceived by conflict parties as a relatively low-cost way to appear inclusive while making little progress in advancing meaningful political inclusion.
16. **Inclusive process design to enhance representation.** Mediation process design elements can enable or hinder participants' ability to represent and liaise with their constituencies. Some of the challenges peace actors encounter include lack of funding; venue choice and lack of access; process agenda and schedule that do not allow actors time to reach out to constituents. To mitigate these, proper gender analysis must be included in process design from the outset, so that gender advisors are viewed as allies and complementary to the peace process.
17. **Involvement of local women actors.** Local women on the ground must be involved in peace processes to ensure local instances are voiced and the challenges of the most vulnerable segments of society are addressed.
18. **Importance of dedicated long-term funding.** The need to allocate funding to specifically enable women representatives to engage with their constituencies was emphasized.

# III. RECOMMENDATIONS

The conference discussions revealed the impressive breadth and depth of leadership from women peace practitioners and experts in the field of constituency building and gender-inclusive peace processes, despite the continued hurdles and systemic discrimination they face in their efforts. Following the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of UNSCR 1325 as it did, the conference offered an opportune moment for stocktaking and reflection on women's experiences, for sharing comparative learning, and for discussing collective, decisive action for inclusive and sustainable peace.

Some of the key recommendations on constituency building that were put forward by participants are presented below. In addition, the conference engagement summary (see Annex D) offers further participant perspectives on how to further the practice of constituency building and leverage it to foster gender-inclusive peace.

Some recommendations reframe points made in other fora on inclusive peace processes, while others suggest further opportunities for coordination, prioritization and strategic investment among actors working on confidence-building initiatives.

## Key overarching recommendations:

### 1. Leverage constituency building to foster inclusive peace

The practice of constituency building must be used and expanded to increase women's meaningful participation in peace processes, enhance their relevance and strengthen their resilience.

### 2. Build connections among women peace practitioners

Further opportunities must be created for women peace practitioners in WPS and related contexts to connect and exchange lessons learned. Among others, creating a database of relevant women actors in different countries and with different expertise would help facilitate such engagement.

### 3. Strengthen alliances with local and global actors

Women's networks for inclusive peace must be further consolidated through building alliances at the global and regional levels and through securing the buy-in of international actors.

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

There is a pressing need to move past the 'talking for the sake of talking' approach and move towards more targeted implementation of the WPS agenda, following up more closely on the outcomes of engagements and discussions.

### 5. Allocate sufficient funding, including civil society funding

Sufficient funding must be allocated to specifically enable women representatives to engage with their constituencies. In addition to increased financial and political support from the international community, flexible and long-term funding is required to sustain and build upon the strength of women peacebuilders.

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220 East 42nd Street  
New York, New York 10017, USA

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