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WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY: WOMEN PEACE BUILDERS & HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

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Women, Peace and Security: Women Peace Builders and Women Human Rights' Defenders

Background: The Urgent Need for Action

The UNSCR 1325, adopted on 31 October 2000 by the Security Council of the UN, reaffirms that women must have an important role in peace-building, peace negotiations, prevention and resolution of conflicts, pointing out the importance of their equal participation and involvement in processes for peace and security(1). The equal participation of women in decisions and initiatives concerning peace and security is imperative for successful outcomes. Besides social, cultural, and legal barriers, their right to participate in decision-making is often undermined by a negative perception of them and too often they are required to have increased levels of resilience and more achievements to be considered valid.

Between 1992 and 2019, seven out of every ten peace processes did not include any women mediators or women signatories. Women were, on average, just 13% of negotiators, 6% of mediators, and 6% of signatories in major peace processes worldwide(2). In 2020, women represented 23 per cent of conflict parties delegations in UN-supported peace processes – a share that would have been even lower without persistent measures by the UN(3).

Mapping Women's Perspectives

1. Increasing the inclusion of women in the Peace and Security-focused decision-making process

Women, despite being one of the most affected stakeholders in conflicts, are underrepresented in the decision-making and peacekeeping processes. In almost every conflict, when seeking solutions, the International Community accounts for the situation of women but they are not included in the decision-making and peacekeeping processes. The debate about the participation of women is often reduced to how many women are in the parliament or organisation, depicting a question of numbers but not as effective participants in the decision-making.

Even if we only consider numbers, we can see that only two countries have at least 50% of women in the parliament, and

and roughly 10 countries achieve 40% of women participation(5). There remains a lack of women representation in the decision-making processes whereas women are sharing the responsibility of peace promotion at multiple levels.

“If there isn't a chair for women in the meeting, build that chair, bring your chair to the meeting” Seyran Khalili

Recommendations

- States should ensure the inclusion of women in decision-making and peacekeeping processes, empowering them to provide the solutions for conflicts and to act as peace-builders. This will be achieved through providing spaces for developing women-led projects and the creation of frameworks at the State levels to enable women to contribute effectively.
- States should form a core group of WPS champions who can coordinate with relevant government agencies for oversight of the WPS agenda to ensure that certain security measures are not contributing to women's insecurity or harming women's rights. This group of WPS experts will fill the gap between legislation and reality at the State level.

2. Improving cooperation

In application of UNSCR 1325, 70 out of 98 countries adopted National Action Plans (72%) which allocate a specific role to civil society organisations for implementation(6). This number, although it is positive, should improve in the next few years, as only 70 out of 170 countries that participate in WPS established these roles in civil society. This cooperation consists in engaging all stakeholders including the CSOs and youth, to develop realisation and ownership of the WPS agenda in the communities. Cooperation of civil society is a key to having wider and inclusive perspective of the problem ahead.

There is a lack of cooperation between actors, and in many cases, they act as an “I” and not as a “WE”. Visibility and connexions are not enough right now for creating strong cooperation between actors.

Youth are the one of the main actors who have to keep the momentum ongoing in the future and bring realisation to the WPS agenda. Youth participation is inadequate at this point owing to lack of role models but also incentives and platforms for active participation. Moreover, there are not enough young women leaders in WPS to express the perspectives of the younger members.

“To make the change in the ground, civil society and especially women must be part of the decision-making” - Mossarat Qadeem

Recommendations

- International Peace Organisations should join UNSC to provide platforms and support networks to include key stakeholders particularly CSOs and youth organisations in order to provide spaces for dialogue with the communities for implementation of the WPS agenda.
- Every signatory country of WPS should engage young women to ensure a synergy between WPS and the youth peace and security agenda. CSOs, acting as the voice of the people, should be closer to international youth organisations and give young people relevant positions in their internal organisation and let them express their feelings and thoughts about the way the organisation is developing.

3. Changing from passive to active participation

According to 2020 research studies, women only represent 25,58% of seats held in the national parliaments, which means that although women representation is increasing in numbers, they still don't have active participation in the decision-making(7). Women form an essential part of the WPS agenda. They must not be seen as passive victims but as change-makers and peace-builders.

It is not only the fight for women's rights; it is about being part of peace and security processes and having a voice in the decision making. It is not merely implementing the projects that concern them but also designing and planning the initiatives. There is a lack of recognition of women as peacemakers, mediators and negotiators.

“Accepting to cope with the difficult reality is a negative resilience. We are not victims, we are champions” - Fatima Outaleb

Recommendations

- The International Community should direct resources for the provision of platforms for engaging women as role models to actively participate, and promote and recognise their work as negotiators, mediators, and peacemakers.
- The EU States should take the lead in cooperation to establish networks to ensure that women are included in peace and security initiatives and have a seat and a voice in every aspect of it. Women are not a separate part of the collective, they are inside the collective. The International Community should localise peace initiatives led by women and empower them to create new projects, giving visibility to those actions led by them.

4. Including a diversity of perspectives/actors

The third edition of the Women Peace and Security Index (WPS Index) affected and brought 170 countries together(8). This huge and almost global participation allows us to analyse different situations. However, the fight for women's inclusion in peace initiatives sometimes tends to work from only one perspective and creates general measures. This is a barrier to the implementation of measures in specific situations as they are not adapted to different social contexts.

Discrimination against women does not represent itself in the same ways in all parts of the world. There is an urgent need for global solidarity in ensuring increased participation of women while paying attention to local barriers to women's inclusion in the WPS agenda.

Some measures that succeed in one context may fail in other. Making a common base for everyone while adhering to contextual and cultural diversity is lacking in many situations and impedes achieving desired outcomes of WPS.

“Security is to have a trust relationship which is inter-religious and intercultural. We need to understand more about each other and empower each other to achieve peace.” Dima Mahjoub

Recommendations

- EU should direct resources to bring together local governments, women-led and women-focused CSOs and youth to facilitate dialogue between a diversity of stakeholders with different contextual backgrounds. Local governments should facilitate this dialogue through cooperation between each other.
- The EU Member States should facilitate the establishment of networks where different cultures can be included to have a complete view of a problem that is world-spread. This inclusion should be at the local level, as only the work at that level allows us to find out the specific circumstances of each situation. This implementation should be done with the help of CSOs, youth and other groups to bring perspectives of women representing diverse groups.

5. Redefining priorities

World military spending has risen to almost \$2 trillion in 2020. The reason for this is that countries involved in conflicts try to achieve peace through war and by investing more in the army. This, far from being reduced, we see it increasing(9). Moreover, spending in military results in lower investment in other areas such as peace & security, health or education(10). Women are crucial for changing this tendency, as data shows that governments with more women in legislative and executive power tend to improve the social investment rather than the military one(11).

On the other hand, WPS is only relevant at times when it has relation with another conflict that is considered as a priority.

Since WPS is not considered as one of the main priorities by itself, it doesn't receive enough funding for achieving its goals. As a consequence of this, women also do not receive the support required to work, being this a barrier to achieving WPS goals.

“We need the recognition that WPS Agenda is important, women need to be recognised as peace-builders and we need our space for work” Mossarat Qadeem

Recommendations

- National governments and international entities should give priority status to WPS agenda as it has direct interdependence with the agenda of gender equality and empowerment of women and, therefore, with one of the essential goals to achieve the SDGs for 2030.
- The International Community should invest in peace promotion and conflict prevention and not merely in conflict management afterwards. Disarming and stopping the use of war to achieve peace should be part of this change from management to prevention of conflicts.

Conclusions

Across the globe, women contribute to peace initiatives and play a key role as peacemakers, negotiators and mediators at multiple levels. In order to ensure their equal contribution to the peace processes, States and International Organisations should promote women peace-builders and change-makers, and give a voice and a seat to them in the decision-making and peace-building processes in order to achieve the WPS agenda.

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- Ms Mossarat Qadeem (UN - N Prize 2016 for Action for Change, visiting fellow of WPS Centre of London School of Economics, Expert on Women Peace and Security)

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New Women Connectors is a refugee women-led initiative that actively advocates for “gender transformative changes” in EU migration policies. We promote equal opportunities and inclusion while avoiding stigmatization of vulnerable groups.

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