Local women breathe life into the WPS resolutions

Thank you, Senator McPhedran.

- Ms Desiree Schweitzer, Director General for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance, Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, Austria

- Ms Kristen Bell, Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) Global Advocate

- Ms Paivi Kannisto, Chief of Peace and Security Division, UN Women

- Ms Nibras Abdulhussein Nahi, Director of Iraqi Women Journalists Forum,

- representatives of civil society, governments, regional organizations, the United Nations, friends and colleagues, good morning!

I’ll start with a story from my country the Philippines. In the mountain province of Kalinga, indigenous people practice a centuries-old peace pact and judicial system called the Bodong. I believe the name was adapted from the sound of the drums. 100 + of years ago, when tribal leaders gathered people in their villages, they beat the drums. The Bodong is very important because it is responsible for making decisions and resolving conflict in local communities including disputes over land, couples separating, domestic violence, and tribal conflicts. The Bodong impacts people’s everyday lives. People don’t go to Manila to file charges in court. It’s expensive, it’s complicated. Instead, they bring their cases to the Bodong. However, for centuries, the 24 judges who make up the Bodong were all male. Following GNWP’s work with grassroots women, mayors and indigenous leaders on the Localization of UNSC Resolution 1325, five women were included in the Bodong –for the first time after centuries! When we visited Kalinga in 2016, two years after the women were admitted to the Bodong, the tribal leaders said: The female Bodong judges made a lot of difference in our work. More village people, especially women, are coming to the Bodong to bring their cases. They report about violence, they make suggestions on how schools should be run, how roads should be maintained. We have only one regret said the tribal leaders: We did not include the women a lot sooner!

From the Kalinga, Philippines, let’s travel to Kitgum, Uganda. GNWP’s work with local women peacebuilders led to the establishment of Gender-Based Violence Desks in police stations; and appointment of Community Liaison Officers. In an interview with the Kitgum District Police Commander, he said “the GBV Desk and Liaison Office bridged the gap between the police and the local communities. Confidence was built and trust was earned. They encouraged women to report cases of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV); and motivated the police to improve investigation and reduce the backlogs of GBV cases.” Following this change, reporting SGBV increased by six times – from 435 cases in 2014, to over 2,500 each year since Localization took place.

These stories, from two different parts of the world, show that with the necessary technical support, funding, and enabling conditions, local women can break down patriarchal barriers, hold authorities accountable, and improve the functions of state and traditional institutions.

Undoubtedly, it is the local women who breathe life into the WPS resolutions; it is the local women who translate the words of the resolutions into necessary and practical actions on the ground; it is the local women who use them as instruments to demand participation in leadership and decision-making, conflict prevention, and peacebuilding; so that their children and grandchildren, will not live the same inequalities and violence they grew up in.

This is why we are extremely grateful to the Austrian Development Cooperation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Austria, the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund, UN Women, and all our donors and partners for emphasizing that local women peacebuilders and humanitarian actors are up, front and center in this Global Forum.

The WPS agenda is an essential component of global affairs and a key instrument in strengthening the effectiveness of UN efforts in conflict prevention and resolution, and humanitarian action. As the UN Secretary-General emphasized in his 2017 report to the Security Council, the WPS agenda contributes to transformative change across the three pillars of the UN – security, human rights and development.
However, we do need to take stock of the reality that nearly 20 years after the adoption of Resolution 1325, and 25 years after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, armed conflict continues to be a major obstacle to the fulfilment of women’s rights and gender equality. The gendered impact of conflict increases the levels of sexual and gender-based violence, marginalization, and discrimination experienced by girls, young women, women of all ages, and LGBTQIA+ persons. It makes me wonder and extremely worried that UN actors and Member States who are leading the processes around the 25th anniversary of the BPFA and the Generation Equality Forum, do not seem to appreciate the central role of women and youth peacebuilders in making gender equality a reality for all. They do not see the necessity for a standalone WPS and YPS Action Coalition. The more than 150 grassroots feminist and women’s rights organizations, national, regional, and global civil society networks who signed this Open Letter strongly disagree.

We cannot allow the Women and Peace and Security and Youth and Peace and Security agendas to be marginalized. We cannot allow women and youth peacebuilders and gender equality activists to be invisible.

Thank you and a peaceful morning to all of us!

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