# Amplifying Women's Voices Towards Sustainable Peace

**Women CSO-Led Panel Discussion during the High-Level Meeting on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace, *April 24-25 2018***

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### Intro
Good morning everyone. My name is Agnieszka Fal-Dutra Santos and I am a Program Coordinator/Policy Specialist at the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP). We are extremely proud and grateful to be able to co-host this important discussion. Huge thanks to our co-organizers: UN Women, Peacebuilding Support Office; the Permanent Mission of Canada; Permanent Mission of Japan; and Permanent Mission on Liberia, for their unwavering support to making sure that women civil society's voices are front and centre of global policy debates, including especially those around the Sustaining Peace agenda.

Before we hear from my fellow panelists – amazing women's rights and peace activists from around the world – I would like to share with you some **emerging trends** from a large-scale Civil Society Study on Sustaining Peace that GNWP is coordinating. I hope these will serve as a useful background for the experiences, challenges and recommendations from Bangladesh, Colombia, Liberia and the Philippines which we will hear later.

### Rationale
Civil Society are the pioneers and leaders in implementing the Sustaining Peace agenda. GNWP works with women's civil society organization in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America, Eastern and Western Europe and the Middle East and Arab World. This work has showed us that the principles of long-term vision; local leadership; inclusivity; and sustainability, that are at the core of the Sustaining Peace agenda, have long been applied and implemented by women's civil society organizations, especially in their efforts to implement the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.

### Methodology
The Study, which we are conducting in 15 countries, together with our local civil society members and partners, will ensure that the voices of local women and women's organizations are brought into the global policy discussions about what "sustaining peace" means and how it should be operationalized. The research, consisting of Focus Group Discussions; Key Informant Interviews; and a survey, is taking place across countries affected by conflict; post-conflict; and those that have not experienced conflict in the past half-century. Our sample includes: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burundi, Canada, Colombia, Liberia, Libya, Mali, Mexico, the Philippines, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Sweden, Syria and Ukraine.

The research looks at what "Sustaining Peace" means to women civil society; at the work that is already done by women civil society around the world to sustain peace and that needs to be recognized, highlighted and supported; at the challenges faced when sustaining peace; and at how the international community can support local women's civil society more effectively. The

target respondents are women's civil society organizations working on peace and security, but also women's empowerment, women's rights, violence against women, development and other related themes.

The data collection is planned to take place between April and August 2018. In fact, it started only just over a week ago. However, we have already received **over 100 survey responses;** and our partners have conducted **4 Focus Group Discussions** and **several Key Informant Interviews.** This is a testament to the mobilization and capacity of local women. It shows how determined they are to get their voices heard in global policy discussions, and how important it is to them to achieve sustainable peace.

This data we have so far comes from 6 of the 15 countries, and is only a drop in the ocean of what we expect at the end of this research. Nonetheless, it provides a glimpse into the emerging trends regarding the Civil Society's Perspectives on Sustaining Peace, which I will share.

**Emerging trends**

**1. Peace is more than an absence of war – it is a culture and a way of life.** "Sustaining Peace" cannot be successful without rule of law; equality; participation; and economic development. When asked about what constitutes "peace", some 1/3 of respondents defined peace in "negative" terms, as absence of conflict, or – as one of the respondents put it – the ability to live normal life, with no need to escape. However, 2/3 of respondents focused on the "positive" aspects – rule of law, good governance, economic development, access to education, and equality as the essential ingredients of peace.

When asked what it means to <u>sustain</u> peace, <u>all</u> of the respondents focused on the positive aspects, highlighting in particular the need to create a **culture of peace**, rooted in respect, dialogue, and meaningful inclusion of all groups – including, importantly, women, youth, indigenous persons and other marginalized groups.

This brings me to the second important finding:

**2. Exclusion – of women, youth, indigenous people and other marginalized groups – is a key obstacle to sustaining peace.** Women have been increasingly involved in peace negotiations and the implementation of peace agreements – some 50% of respondents said women's civil society has been included "to some extent" in formal and informal peace negotiations, and the implementation of peace agreements. And between 15% and 25% said that women's civil society was "fully included".

Yet, the challenge of full and meaningful inclusion was identified by 40% of respondents as a key obstacle to implementing peace agreements. The exclusion was linked to a number of factors – patriarchal culture; lack of education and awareness of one's rights; poverty and restricted mobility; and lack of channels for meaningful participation. When asked about the main challenges faced by women civil society in participating in formal peace processes, 18% of the respondents pointed to lack of a platform for meaningful participation, due to women's limited access to the media; and lack of clear, coordinated and accessible structures or fora for women's participation, such as consultations or meetings. 10% of respondents also highlighted the importance of resources in enabling women's participation, confirming what we already know and have highlighted repeatedly: that sustainable, inclusive peace is impossible without predictable and adequate funding.

This was also confirmed by the FGDs and KIIs – with respondents highlighting in particular the importance of providing funds to grassroots women and peacebuilding organizations; facilitating access to funds for the civil society; and the need to find a "simpler way of interaction between community organizations and the UN".

Last but not least, several respondents raised the issue of inclusion that cuts across different types of marginalization – including, for example young women; indigenous women; or rural women.

**3. Women's roles in sustaining peace** range from working to prevent electoral violence, through organizing neigbourhood watch; through advocacy; awareness-raising and peace education to foster the culture of peace; supporting those affected by the conflict; to working towards social justice and development to address the root causes of conflict.
I will not go into too much detail on this important work, since we will hear about it first hand from my fellow panelists.

Finally, the last trend I wanted to highlight today is that

**4. The International Community's efforts to support gender-sensitive peacebuilding initiatives are appreciated; but there is a need for stronger local leadership.** Almost 65% of the respondents characterized the approach of donors and international partners on peacebuilding as "Rather gender-sensitive" or "Very-gender sensitive". On the other hand, almost 65% said that the local civil society was able to influence the design of donor programs and priorities "to a limited extent"; "to a very small extent"; or "not at all". This is an important message that the international community has still a long way to go in learning to listen to the local communities – and especially local women and youth – in designing its programs and initiatives to sustain peace.

**Recommendations**
I would like to conclude with three recommendations, based on our initial research findings:

**1. To the donor community: To increase funding for peacebuilding, conflict prevention and Sustaining Peace initiatives, especially those led by women's civil society, and make sure this funding is long-term and predictable.**

**2. To Member States: ensure that women, especially young women, local women, and women civil society, are at the forefront of the implementation of the Sustaining Peace agenda; that their voices are heard; and their contributions recognized and supported.**

**3. To international community: Recognize that peace is not merely an absence of war, by strengthening the nexus between the Women, Peace and Security agenda, development, and the humanitarian action; and addressing the structural and root causes of conflicts, including gender inequality, in all conflict prevention, response, and peacebuilding interventions.**

Thank you very much.