



***No Peace Without Us:***  
**How does the UN Peacebuilding Architecture internalize  
the Women, Peace and Security Agenda?**

27 October 2020, 8.30am – 10.00am EST

*Summary note*

With discussions on the 2020 Peacebuilding Architecture Review underway, there is consensus that international policy and practice must focus on the implementation of the UN Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace resolutions and the achievement of concrete results at regional and country levels. To support this effort, the International Peace Institute (IPI), the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP) and the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) have initiated a series of roundtable discussions on *Operationalizing Sustaining Peace* to examine the strategies and pathways towards the implementation and full realization of the Sustaining Peace resolutions.

The thirteenth roundtable discussion in the series was held on 27 October 2020 and convened experts from Permanent Missions to the UN in New York; representatives from UN departments and entities at Headquarters and country level; and civil society actors working with international and local organizations. The online roundtable was held in the week leading up to the UN Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the landmark UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on WPS (2000). It provided a space for participants to reflect on progress made in the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and the nine successive resolutions that make up the normative framework on WPS.

While recognizing the WPS agenda and Sustaining Peace resolutions as being distinct in their own right, the roundtable served to highlight the inherent link between the two transformative frameworks, and how they mutually reinforce one another.

The WPS and Sustaining Peace resolutions encourage a shift in the way the international community approaches security, with the prevention of all forms of violence, as well as inclusivity and meaningful participation of a broad spectrum of actors in realizing their goals at the heart of both agendas. Prevention is one of four pillars that uphold the WPS agenda, focusing on *'prevention of conflict and all forms of violence against women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations.'*<sup>1</sup> The twin Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace resolutions ([A/RES/70/262](https://undocs.org/A/RES/70/262) and [S/RES/2282](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2282)) are aimed at "preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict."<sup>2</sup> Both WPS and Sustaining Peace resolutions call for the meaningful participation of women and recognize *'the importance of women's leadership and participation in conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding, and (...) the continuing need to increase representation of*

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<sup>1</sup> S/RES/1325 (2000), [https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/1325\(2000\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/1325(2000)). Note: The other pillars that make up the Women, Peace and Security agenda are: *participation and representation; protection; and relief and recovery.*

<sup>2</sup> S/RES/2282 (2016), [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2282\(2016\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2282(2016)).

women at all decision-making levels.<sup>3</sup> Essentially, the resolutions provide a necessary reminder that women’s experiences, knowledge and expertise are critical not only in conflict but also in the context of peacebuilding, and require a renewed commitment to their integration across peacebuilding work at all levels. Women’s leadership and meaningful participation in the prevention and resolution of conflict, which lies at the heart of the WPS agenda, is essential to the effective implementation of the Sustaining Peace resolutions.

This online roundtable provided an opportunity for a diverse group of participants to explore the link between WPS and the Sustaining Peace resolutions in recent processes taking place within the UN Peacebuilding Architecture to advance women’s participation in peacebuilding. It also offered space to examine how women peacebuilders have benefited from these processes, and to discuss practical ways to advance these efforts.

The following is a summary that captures key themes raised and examples shared during the discussion, as well as recommendations and next steps for action that were put forward to address persisting challenges.

### **The Peacebuilding Commission’s recognized role in advancing the WPS agenda**

The Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) plays an important role in supporting the engagement of women in efforts to build and sustain peace, working to amplify the active participation of women and youth in peacebuilding initiatives at the national, regional, and global levels.

The PBC promotes interactive and coherent dialogue on gender analysis and effective implementation of the WPS agenda in peacebuilding. As an intergovernmental body, the PBC has strong convening power that allows it to facilitate interaction and exchange with a wide range of stakeholders. Moreover, PBC serves in an advisory capacity to the Security Council, General Assembly and Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on issues related to peacebuilding. The convening and advisory functions of PBC make it uniquely placed to promote diverse women’s meaningful participation in global policy discussions about peacebuilding and sustaining peace; and to bring a gender lens into these discussions.

In September 2016, the Commission became the first UN intergovernmental body to adopt its own Gender Strategy, following a series of consultations with Member States, practitioners, representatives of UN entities, and civil society organizations. The Strategy seeks to ensure a more systematic integration of gender perspectives across its work, taking into account the specific needs and contributions of women, and promotes gender equality with an aim to make peacebuilding more effective. Four years after its adoption, the PBC conducted a review of the implementation of the Gender Strategy ahead of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UNSCR 1325 and committed to the adoption of an Action Plan to bolster implementation of the Strategy.

The discussion explored findings and key recommendations from the “Review report on Implementation of the PBC Gender Strategy”<sup>4</sup>, prepared by the UN Peacebuilding Support Office within the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (PBSO/DPPA) and UN Women with support from an independent expert consultant. Speakers noted that there has been some progress in the implementation of the Gender Strategy. In 2018, only 29% of PBC documents contained gender references, compared to 88% of PBC documents in 2020. Gender-responsive peacebuilding has increasingly been seen in the PBC documents and briefings to the Security Council. At the same time, roundtable participants voiced concern that women are still referred

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<sup>3</sup> See footnote 2.

<sup>4</sup> DPPA/PBSO and Un Women, ‘Review report on Implementation of the PBC Gender Strategy’, [https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/review\\_report\\_of\\_the\\_pbc\\_gender\\_strategy\\_implementation.pdf](https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/review_report_of_the_pbc_gender_strategy_implementation.pdf)

to as a homogenous group, without recognizing the diversity of their expertise, contributions and experiences. Encouragingly, the review found that gender considerations across the PBC have improved in recent years, with a broadened definition of a woman peacebuilder; a diversification of briefers to the Security Council; and more, richer discussions informed by women peacebuilders and leaders. Increased travel to countries on the PBC agenda, and the use of virtual platforms (particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic), were noted as having allowed for more diversity among women peacebuilders invited to engage with the Commission on thematic discussions. However, participants emphasized that more work is required to systematically engage diverse women peacebuilders and echoed the review's call for efforts at meaningful participation of diverse women to be further bolstered. Furthermore, it was highlighted that information exchanged during these consultations was not systematically reported on or incorporated into PBC meetings referring to that specific regional or thematic context.

The review proposed four key recommendations for consideration of the PBC, to strengthen the systematic implementation of the gender strategy. These include: (1) improved intersectional gender analysis; (2) regular monitoring and review of the gender strategy; (3) strengthened consultations with diverse women leaders as part of thematic, country-specific and regional discussions; and (4) enhanced advocacy by the PBC to promote gender-responsive peacebuilding. Participants recognized the importance of the PBC Chair in ensuring that meetings remain structured by systematically integrating input from consultations with diverse women peacebuilders. Discussions highlighted on the need to develop concrete mechanisms for implementing the Gender Strategy, noting the commitment to develop an Action Plan to advance and allow for a better evaluation of the work of the PBC. Participants underlined that all briefers during PBC meetings should integrate a gender analysis, rather than only having select briefers who provide interventions specifically on gender-related issues.

### **Good practices exist, but challenges persist in implementing the WPS agenda**

Progress has been made in implementing the WPS agenda in peacebuilding, but implementation remains slow and uneven, especially at the national and local levels. Participants pointed out that women play many roles in preventing, building and sustaining peace. Participants also noted how women support in developing gender-sensitive early response mechanisms, offering input to joint country analyses, mobilizing support for the cessation of hostilities and as driving forces for peace in formal and informal peace processes. Recent years have seen a noticeable shift in understanding the need for the integration of a gender perspective in peacebuilding discussions and decisions in the Security Council, General Assembly and ECOSOC – as well as in UN system-wide programming at Headquarters and the country level. Participants emphasized that during the COVID-19 pandemic, women have been at the forefront of prevention and response efforts. The discussion also welcomed the use of online technologies that enable online meetings, consultations, and knowledge-sharing to continue in the wake of lockdowns and social distancing requirements, and to be more inclusive than ever.

However, participants underscored that many of the challenges that shaped the WPS agenda twenty years ago persist. Women and girls are still not systematically included in peace processes, negotiations, or decision-making. When included, they are often treated in a tokenistic way or seen as representatives of all women and girls in their communities. Instead of being given an equal seat 'at the table', with the ability to influence decisions and outcomes of a given peace process, women are included through advisory groups, or their role is limited to informal (Track 2 and 3) processes. While informal processes are critical to ensure broad-based support and sustainability of peace, restricting women's participation in these spaces limits their ability to influence agendas for peace in their country and communities.

Furthermore, the perception of women and girls as ‘victims’, rather than changemakers, remains. It was noted that this narrative continues to act as an impediment to the inclusion of women in all peacebuilding efforts. For example, a meeting hosted in Libya between local women peacebuilders and a Special Representative of the Secretary-General was not discussed publicly, making women’s participation invisible to the stakeholders.

The exclusion is further aggravated by the fact that women peacebuilders, human rights defenders and leaders face increasing violence.<sup>5</sup> This is a worrying trend identified by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres at the 63rd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2019 as a threat to women’s rights around the world.<sup>6</sup> In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, rates of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and targeted attacks on women peacebuilders and human rights defenders have increased. Even though the virus disproportionately affects women and girls, and regardless of women’s leadership in crisis response at all levels, especially as frontline workers and peacebuilders, gendered impacts of the pandemic have been ignored in the development of response strategies.

***A more comprehensive understanding of the linkages between the WPS agenda and the Sustaining Peace resolutions is needed***

The WPS agenda is a comprehensive normative framework composed of 10 UN Security Council resolutions, as well as many regional, national and local plans, strategies and policies aimed at implementing it. Given this breadth, it was noted that a better understanding of what the agenda entails remains limited in the context of peacebuilding work.

Participants noted that the agenda is sometimes interpreted narrowly, in terms of hard security targets, such as the involvement of women in Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) processes or the number of female peacekeepers in UN Peacekeeping Operations. However, this does not capture the full scope of the agenda, whose foundational objective was to prevent violent conflict. Similarly, while meaningful participation of women in peace negotiations and implementation of peace agreements, including the involvement of women as negotiators and mediators, is integral to the implementation of the agenda, its scope goes beyond calling for women’s participation in formal peace processes.

It was highlighted that the WPS agenda takes into account the importance of human security, identified as “an approach to assist Member States in identifying and addressing widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of their people.”<sup>7</sup> Prevention of violence lies at the core of human security, by addressing root causes of vulnerabilities, strengthening local capacities to build resilience, and promoting solutions that emphasize early action, social cohesion and “people-centered” responses. Understood in this way, the WPS agenda is inextricably linked to the Sustaining Peace resolutions.

In this regard, participants noted a lack of state leadership in advancing the WPS agenda, particularly in countries that are not on the Security Council’s agenda. Even less emphasis is placed on implementing the agenda in post-conflict areas or country contexts that have not experienced armed conflict in recent history. Such a narrow geographical focus reinforces the interpretation of WPS that favors hard over human security. This has had increased implications

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<sup>5</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, ‘Women human rights defenders face worsening violence, warns UN human rights expert’, 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24232&LangID=E>

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Secretary-General, ‘Remarks at the opening of the 63rd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women’, 2019, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2019-03-11/csw-remarks-opening-of-63rd-session>

<sup>7</sup> A/RES/66/290 (2012), <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/66/290>

during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the importance of health, information and education systems– all areas in which women disproportionately play a key role – has been highlighted.

***Sustaining Peace and implementing the WPS agenda requires women at the grassroots level being given the support needed to lead the way***

One of the key conclusions of the roundtable discussion was the necessity for a grassroots-led implementation of both the WPS and Sustaining Peace agendas. Women play essential and life-saving roles in their communities. Participants particularly noted the work of local women in humanitarian action, including in supporting displaced communities; addressing the needs of refugees and IDPs; as well as advocating for their communities to get local issues heard in national-level or global discussions. In countries like Sudan, women, including young women, have played an important role in calling for the state- and constitution-building and an end to corruption and violence during the recent revolution.

In broadening our understanding of the WPS and Sustaining Peace resolutions, a greater effort must be made to connect local peacebuilding efforts to the broader Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace frameworks. For example, significant work has been done in Yemen by civil society to localize these agendas, helping local women peacebuilders understand how their acts at the grassroots level connect to global peacebuilding. As such, actors work to advance the WPS and Sustaining Peace agendas to support existing conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives led by local women and to include women at all levels of conflict prevention, peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

***Greater gender analysis and gender disaggregated data are essential***

A recurring message raised in the discussion was the need for increased and more systematic gender analysis, as well as an increase in sex and age-disaggregated data. A key recommendation of the review of the PBC Gender Strategy was the need for improved intersectional gender analysis as a way of building on the progress made and in moving towards “more substantive gender discussions which address the gendered root causes of conflict.”<sup>8</sup>

Participants discussed the importance of strengthening the skills and knowledge of peacebuilders everywhere, in particular local women peacebuilders to conduct gender analyses. Greater capacities in gender analysis, as well as systematic collection of sex and age-disaggregated and reliable data helps to inform and address the intersectional and multiple factors that result in exclusion from peacebuilding efforts. Systematically incorporating gender analysis and data into discussions and programming would enable all actors, from local peacebuilders to Member States and UN entities to have a significantly more substantive gendered discussion on peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

The term ‘gender analysis’ and the transformative capacity of the WPS agenda also implies the commitment to inclusion that cuts across the gender binary and incorporates various gender identities. While activists see both the WPS agenda and Sustaining Peace resolutions as an opportunity to broaden understanding of how diverse groups of individuals are impacted by conflict and engaged in peacebuilding, there is a need for greater consideration of what gender analysis entails and who is included.

***Accountability mechanisms are needed to evaluate implementation of the WPS agenda***

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<sup>8</sup> DPPA/PBSO and Un Women, ‘Review report on Implementation of the PBC Gender Strategy’, [https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/review\\_report\\_of\\_the\\_pbc\\_gender\\_strategy\\_implementation.pdf](https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/review_report_of_the_pbc_gender_strategy_implementation.pdf)

Roundtable participants discussed the importance of establishing and strengthening accountability mechanisms to track implementation of the WPS and Sustaining Peace resolutions. The 2015 Global Study on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325<sup>9</sup> noted that there is no systematic approach to taking stock of implementation of the 10 resolutions that make up the WPS normative framework and of the 196 recommendations drawn from these resolutions, of which a majority have not been pursued or implemented. This is still true today, although important initiatives have been taken to address this gap. This includes the establishment of the Informal Expert Group on WPS in 2016, providing space for UN Security Council Members to discuss progress on WPS implementation and take coordinated action on key country situations on the Council agenda; UN Women-led process to systematize existing WPS indicators, currently underway; and the creation of the Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action Compact as part of the Generation Equality Forum. These initiatives represent progress towards stronger accountability, but more work is needed to ensure that progress and impacts are effectively and systematically monitored and documented.

In a similar vein, the review of the PBC Gender Strategy called for regular monitoring and review of the strategy, including through an Action Plan or a monitoring and evaluation framework. This effort can complement the initiatives undertaken to strengthen WPS monitoring and serve as an opportunity to reinforce the synergies between WPS and Sustaining Peace resolutions. Participants reflected on the need to set minimum requirements on the integration of a gender perspective into mandates of UN entities, as has been instituted within UN Women. Other examples provided included the institution of an eminent and independent expert, appointed by the Secretary-General, to oversee effective implementation of the agenda. Participants also pointed to the importance of the UN at the country level in overseeing the implementation of the agendas, not just through the use of gender experts or advisors but through Peace and Development Advisors (PDAs) and political officers as well. Importantly, accountability and increased transparency must be mainstreamed broadly not just across the UN Secretariat and agencies, funds and programs but across the work of Member States as well.

### ***The need for increased gender-responsive, accessible and long-term funding***

Member States, experts, and civil society organizations attending the discussions all underlined the need for long-term, flexible and core funding for gender initiatives and women-led grassroots organizations. According to the 2019 Interim Report on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace ([S/2019/448](#)), “financing committed for peacebuilding activities at present is unpredictable, ad hoc in nature and insufficient to ensure that the root causes of conflict are addressed.” Participants noted the limited progress made on financing for peacebuilding, as well as the challenges with the way funding is currently structured. Local peacebuilders are often limited in applying to funding streams for conflict prevention and peacebuilding due to rigid funding requirements that make it difficult for many local or informal organizations to apply. Moreover, the short-term nature of many funding streams, a lack of flexible or core funding for local organizations, and the extensive administrative requirements in applying for and reporting on funding take away human resources from peacebuilding work.

The Women’s, Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) was labeled as a good practice to stimulate a shift in women’s participation and leadership in conflict contexts through pooled and flexible funding channeled directly to local women’s groups working in communities in conflict or humanitarian contexts. However, these initiatives are limited and could benefit from further support.

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<sup>9</sup> UN Women, ‘Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace – A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325’, 2015, [https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/UNW-GLOBAL-STUDY-1325-2015%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/UNW-GLOBAL-STUDY-1325-2015%20(1).pdf)

The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected access to already limited sources of funding for women peacebuilders. Emergency responses to the pandemic have also threatened to draw vital resources away from existing gender initiatives. Participants discussed the need for Member States to amplify their financial support to conflict prevention and peacebuilding as a central element of COVID-19 recovery, in particular by making efforts to ensure funding is available to women peacebuilders. It is crucial for Member States, International Financial Institutions, pooled funding mechanisms like the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) and other financial instruments to apply a gender lens when allocating funding and to utilize available disaggregated data to ensure coherence.

### ***Recommendations: Strengthening the synergies between the WPS agenda and Sustaining Peace***

During the roundtable discussion, the following recommendations were identified to address the challenges outlined above:

- *The United Nations should lead the implementation of the WPS agenda by example. Gender perspectives should be integrated across all UN peacebuilding work, and Resident Coordinators and PDAs should lead to supporting and overseeing the implementation of the WPS agenda. All dialogues, consultations and processes should be gender-inclusive. Options should be considered for the UN to modify its engagement in peace processes where women are not meaningfully included, including possible withholding of select support.*
- *The PBC should step-up its leadership in ensuring women's meaningful participation. Briefers to the PBC should incorporate gender considerations in their presentations and inputs. The UN Security Council and the Peacebuilding Commission should actively increase opportunities to be informed by diverse women.*
- *The UN, Member States and bilateral donors should amplify their efforts and investment to build the skills and awareness of local peacebuilders to conduct gender analysis and collect sex and age-disaggregated data, clarifying for these local actors how their work contributes to the bigger peacebuilding picture.*
- *Member States should strengthen their leadership on the implementation of WPS and Sustaining Peace agendas. The adoption of National Action Plans (NAPs) on WPS and ensuring that these NAPs are adequately financed and meaningfully evaluated. Resident Coordinators should support this process by mobilizing political will for WPS implementation and women's meaningful participation.*
- *Member States must show further leadership on effective implementation of these two frameworks by requesting and contributing to collection of reliable sex and age-disaggregated data to inform peacebuilding efforts.*
- *All peacebuilding actors must commit to consistent and systematic use of an intersectional gender analysis of diverse communities to better understand the gendered root causes of conflict and to ensure that the multiple factors resulting in exclusion from peacebuilding efforts are addressed.*
- *The Peacebuilding Architecture should put diverse women peacebuilders at the center of its ongoing review to better reflect both the gendered impacts of armed conflict and the specific needs and contributions of women, particularly at the local level.*