

BEYOND RHETORIC



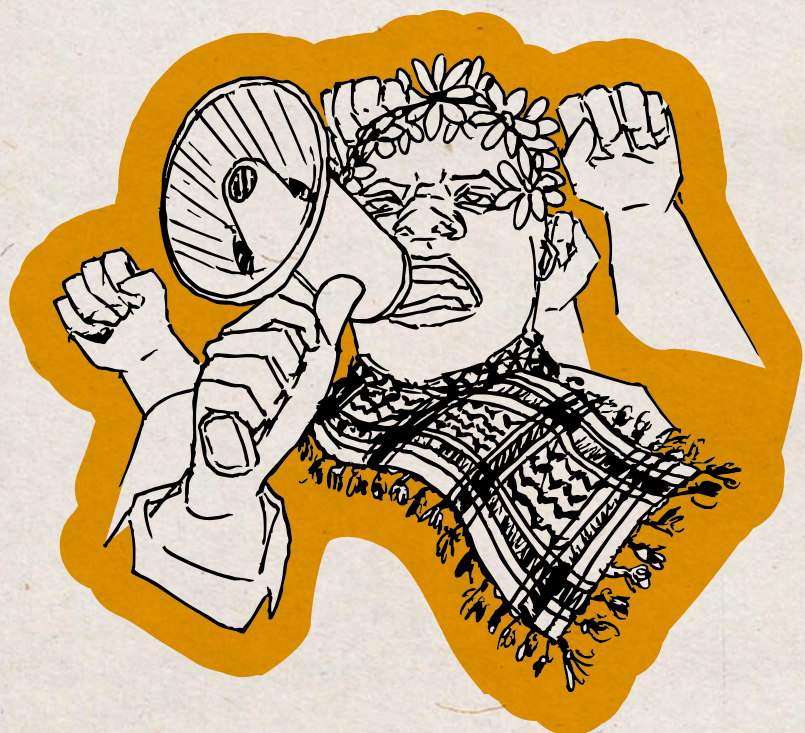
Feminist Leadership for a Transformative
Women, Peace and Security Agenda at 25:

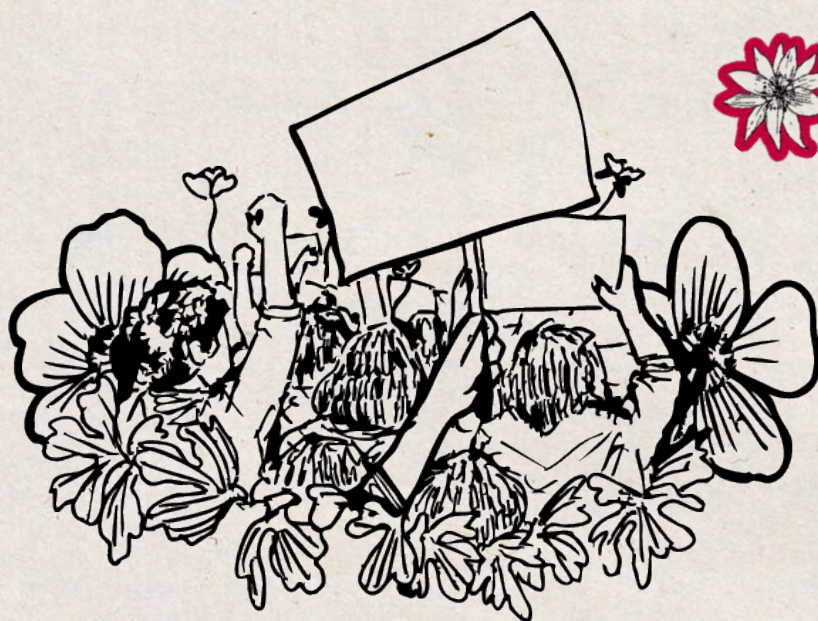
Case Studies from Colombia, the Democratic
Republic of Congo, the Occupied Palestinian
Territory and South Sudan

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Helen Kezie-Nwoha, Maria Alabdeh, Marie Sophie Pettersson



Twenty-five years after the United Nations adopted Resolution 1325, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda is both a landmark in diplomacy and a study in unfulfilled promise. Its most profound achievement has been to force open a conversation about the gendered power structures that fuel conflict. But that opening is narrowing. Escalating wars, a backlash against gender justice and a collapse in funding now threaten to strip the agenda of its transformative edge. The WPS agenda remains an essential tool for women peacebuilders. Whether it survives as a force for justice depends on whether the global community backs its principles with the resources and political will to make them real. Without that, the resolution's 25th anniversary will mark the start of its decline, not its maturity.





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Oxfam acknowledges the assistance and significant contributions of Nesrine Aly, Amina Hersi, Anna Chernova, Christine Lundambuyu, Gabriel Cutrim Naumann, Hadeel Qazzaz, Irene Kuizinga, Jenny Patricia Gallego Munoz, Leah Mugehera, Maria Alejandra Rodriguez Buitrago, Martin Butcher, Marwa El-Ansary, Padmini Iyer, Peter Sorro, Raghda Daboub, Rosalie Ataya, Sharon Matingwina and Swonty Kone to the production of this research report.

In particular, Oxfam sincerely acknowledges all key informants and focus group discussion participants participating in this research. Further, Oxfam acknowledges Sanam Naraghi Anderlini, Founder & CEO of the International Civil Society Action Network, as well as Genevieve Riccoboni, Women, Peace and Security Programme Coordinator with Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, who both contributed with technical review inputs to the final draft paper.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ATT	Arms Trade Treaty
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CRS	Creditor Reporting System
CRSV	Conflict-Related Sexual Violence
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EU	European Union
EVAWG	Ending Violence Against Women and Girls
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GCPS	Gender, Conflict, Peace and Security
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IDP	Internally Displaced People
KII	Key Informant Interview
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual plus
NAP	National Action Plan
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OHCHR	UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights



OPT	Occupied Palestinian Territory
PRIO	Peace Research Institute Oslo
R-ARCSS	Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
SOGIESC	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sexual Characteristics
SWANA	Southwest Asia and North Africa
UCDP	Uppsala Conflict Data Program
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
US	United States
WILPF	Women International League of Peace and Freedom
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
WROs	Women's Rights Organisations
WLOs	Women-Led Organisations



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The contributions of Women, Peace and Security to international relations so far, do not lie in counting the number or percentage increase of female peacekeepers, or female negotiators—although these are milestones and important goals to have. The real contributions of the Women, Peace and Security agenda for the past twenty years is that it has allowed more policymakers and practitioners to examine and question unequal power structures—and change them from the inside out.¹

Sahana Dharmapuri wrote these words in October 2020 on the twentieth anniversary of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 that establishes the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda in October 2000 with all its transformative potential. In the five years that have passed since this last anniversary of the resolution, the world has experienced record levels of armed conflict and militarisation; an increase in crises of forced displacement and closed borders, of protection and hunger; a pandemic; rapidly escalating climate change; a shift from multilateralism to a multi-polar world; challenges to the rules-based order; multi-pronged assaults on civil society; and a growing backlash against gender justice and the rights and bodily autonomy of women, girls and LGBTQIA+ people. All of these challenges have been compounded by a rapidly shrinking funding landscape. We have also seen how governments have increasingly adopted and then failed to implement or fully retrenched National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security, as well as Feminist Foreign Policies.

This report – published jointly by Oxfam and Researchers Without Borders – draws on extensive, first-hand evidence from four countries where feminist actors work against staggering odds: Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) and South Sudan. The research involved 46 participants in focus group discussions, including women’s rights and women-led organisations in urban and rural Colombia; across Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem in OPT; in Juba in South Sudan; and in Kinshasa and Goma in DRC. It also included 11 key informant interviews with leaders from the DRC, South Sudan, the United Kingdom, the United States, Uganda and global advocacy spaces. These conversations were conducted primarily online, with additional in-person sessions conducted in Colombia, and were guided by a feminist research methodology centring lived experience, survivor-led insights, and intersectional analysis.

¹Dharmapuri, Sahana (2020). Twenty Years of the WPS Agenda: Doing Foreign Policy with Feminist Norms, Global Security Project Blog. Available at <https://www.gendersecurityproject.com/wpsanalysis/twenty-years-of-the-wps-agenda-doing-foreign-policy-with-feminist-norms>



The findings tell a story of remarkable resilience and innovation operating within severe constraints. In Colombia, women leverage the 2016 peace agreement's unprecedented gender provisions, which place strong emphasis on intersectionality, and engage in cultural resistance through activism, even as they face rural exclusion and violence against women human rights defenders. In eastern DRC, women drive survivor-led advocacy and localised peacebuilding, despite scarce funding and constrained political space in a protracted conflict fuelled by mineral extraction and widespread militarisation with high levels of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence. In the OPT, despite decades of occupation and the war on Gaza since 2023 that have reduced WPS protections to rhetoric, women continue to lead humanitarian response, regional and international advocacy. In South Sudan, women work within quotas that have not translated into influence amid repression and pervasive sexual and gender-based violence used as a weapon of war.

Across these challenging contexts, the patterns are consistent. National Action Plans (NAPs) exist but are underfunded, weakly enforced and often symbolic. Legal frameworks are not implemented in practice. Marginalised groups – including women, Indigenous, Afro-descendant, displaced people, LGBTQIA+ individuals and people with disabilities – are inconsistently included. Meanwhile military budgets rise while gender-responsive peacebuilding remains starved of resources. Our analysis of the 2014-2023² official development assistance (ODA) data, undertaken for this report, shows that while funding for gender, conflict, peace and security (GCPS) has been rising and has doubled since 2014, it still accounts for just 2.6 per cent (\$7.5 billion) of total ODA (\$289 billion) and remains disconnected from NAP priorities. More starkly, between 2014 and 2023, just 0.1 per cent of ODA reached women's rights and women-led organisations directly; cuts in 2025 threaten to close almost half of such organisations in crisis settings within months. This crisis has intensified because ODA, which has provided the bulk of investment in gender equality, has collapsed in 2025, and the WPS agenda has been deprioritised by many governments previously seen as champions of the agenda.³

² 2023 is the latest year for which complete OECD DAC data was available at the time of the analysis.

³ Key OECD DAC donors who have cut or planned to reduce ODA from 2025 onward include Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The largest providers among DAC members who have announced ODA cuts in 2025-27 accounted for 80% of bilateral ODA towards the health and population sector. <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/policy-issues/official-development-assistance-oda.html>



At the same time, the increased global insecurity has led many OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members to increase their military spending while cutting their ODA allocations – for example in Europe, where the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine has accelerated militarisation.⁴

This report underscores that in the face of so much turbulence, the voices and leadership of women and LGBTQIA+ individuals persist. They are redefining peace through care, resistance and collective liberation. In countries such as Colombia, the DRC, the OPT and South Sudan feminist actors are actively engaged in the WPS agenda and are also shaping its transformation and the societies in which they live. They are co-creating a feminist peace agenda which seeks to disrupt rather than accommodate power and vested interests, and which recognises that poverty, inequality, exploitation of natural resources and a failure to address the climate crisis are forms of violence. Across all four focus countries, feminist peace was defined by civil society actors beyond the absence of war to include justice, care, equality as well as dismantling patriarchy, militarism, and colonial legacies. A feminist peace agenda “must not be instrumentalised or depoliticised, because it is inherently political.”⁵ Real and sustainable change will come from bottom-up organising and network-building that listens to women and people of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics, and centres their knowledge.

Following the UN Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security this year, marking the agenda’s twenty-fifth anniversary, Oxfam calls on governments to resource and enforce their WPS commitments through strengthened accountability mechanisms for NAPs, reformed laws that dismantle systemic inequalities, ensuring the interconnectedness of the four WPS pillars, and centring feminist, survivor-led, intersectional approaches. Donors must also shift from short-term, project-based aid to long-term, flexible, direct funding for feminist actors, and resist the politicisation and militarisation of international assistance. The international community must ensure that accountability remains at the heart of the agenda; without this, there will be a trust deficit and delegitimisation that undermines the entire WPS framework.

⁴Welch, Zoe and Laub, Kristin (2025). The Impact of Defense Spending on ODA: Outlook and trends. Donor Tracker Insight. Available at <https://donortracker.org/publications/the-impact-of-defense-spending-on-oda-2025>

⁵Smyth, Fionna; Hersi, Amina; Baldoumas, Abigael and Tonelli, Anna (2020). Transforming Power to Put Women at the Heart of Peacebuilding. Oxfam: Oxford. Available at: <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621053/dp-feminist-peace-security-introduction-210920-en.pdf>



METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a feminist research design that centres the lived experiences and leadership of women's rights and women-led organisations (WROs/WLOs) in conflict-affected settings. Primary data was gathered between 2023 and 2025 through eight focus group discussions (FGDs) involving 46 participants and 11 key informant interviews (KIs) with activists, peacebuilders and civil society leaders.

Fieldwork combined face-to-face discussions in Bogotá and Cartagena, Colombia, with virtual consultations across Gaza and the West Bank in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT); South Sudan; and Kinshasa and Goma, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Participants included refugee women, displaced persons, LGBTQIA+ activists, and grassroots peacebuilders, ensuring a diversity of perspectives often excluded from mainstream peace and security narratives.

This study employed a feminist research methodology that prioritised the lived experiences, agency and leadership of WROs/WLOs, especially those operating in conflict-affected and fragile contexts by generating feminist and practice-informed evidence from Colombia, DRC, OPT and South Sudan. The four country case studies were selected based on the following criteria: countries that are regularly on the agenda of the UN Security Council, countries where Oxfam is engaged in Women, Peace and Security (WPS) policy and programming with WRO/WLO and civil society organisation (CSO) partners, and where Oxfam country offices and CSO partners expressed confirmed interest and capacity to be involved. Recognising the long-standing exclusion of local actors from dominant narratives on peace and security, the research is grounded in the belief that knowledge production should reflect the realities and priorities of those most affected by conflict. It emphasises the lived experiences, leadership and resistance of women, including the specific experiences of displaced, refugee women and girls and LGBTQIA+ people.

The research team conducting this study was intentionally constituted to break down the us/them binary between researcher and subject and to centre the lived experience of those most affected by conflict. The research lead is an African feminist researcher with more than two decades' experience within the area of WPS. Four members of the research team are from states affected by conflict, two of whom are refugee women. Based on their lived experience, these women provided critical insider insights that helped shape the process and the content of this report. This report is also about us.



Qualitative research design was adopted for most of the report. Data collection methods included KIIs with a range of stakeholders such as women peacebuilders, civil society leaders and global actors. In addition, FGDs were conducted with local and national organisations, internally displaced women, women refugees, LGBTQIA+ women and women peace advocates. Where possible, FGDs were held in two locations per country to ensure a wider representation of views. Primary data was collected in four countries – Colombia, DRC, OPT and South Sudan – through interviews and FGDs. All interviews and FGDs except for the cities of Bogota and Cartagena in Colombia were conducted online with a mixture of representatives of urban and rural WROs/WLOs (see Table 1.1 for details).

Table 1.1: KII & FGD Participant Data

Focus Group Discussions

Stakeholder Type	Location	Number	Country
WROs/WLOs/Networks			
Facilitated by Oxfam	Bogota (urban)	6 (F2F)	Colombia
WROs/WLOs /Networks			
Facilitated by Funsarep	Cartagena		
(coastal/rural)	12 (F2F)	Colombia	
WROs/WLOs	Virtual across Gaza, East Jerusalem and the West bank	6	The OPT
WROs/WLOs	Juba (urban)	15 (2 FGDs)	South Sudan
WROs/WLOs	Kinshasa/Goma	7 (1 FGD)	The DRC
Key Informant Interviews			
WROs/WLOs	Juba (urban)	4	South Sudan
WROs/WLOs	Kinshasa/Goma	4	The DRC
WROs/WLOs	Global	1	The UK
Refugee-led organisation	(Virtual) Refugee living in Kenya	1	Uganda
WRO	USA	1	Sudan

A purposive sampling strategy guided participant selection to ensure a diversity of perspectives and to foreground the voices of those with direct experience in peacebuilding and WPS-related advocacy. The research prioritised ethical integrity and participant safety. All KIIs and FGDs were conducted with informed consent, and participants were assured of confidentiality and the voluntary nature of their participation. Do-no-harm principles guided the research process.



INTRODUCTION



So, from one standpoint, I would say we have come a long way... rhetorically. In practice... you want a quadruple syndrome of ad hoc, amnesia, apathy, and accountability deficit. ”

Sanam Naraghi Anderlini, Founder and Executive Director of the International Civil Society Action Network

Feminist movements across conflict-affected regions have long reminded the world that peace is not the silence of guns; it is the presence of justice. In 2000, global women's rights organisations and allied civil society movements succeeded in establishing the WPS agenda through United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325. The WPS agenda is often criticised as being Western and UN-centric.¹² However, importantly, the WPS agenda was not borne in UN conference rooms nor was it Western and liberal by design. It emerged from women on the front lines of conflict, and its essence lies in women's largely unwritten lived experiences of war and the mobilisation of a transnational civil society of women organising, mediating and peacebuilding through time and across cultures.¹³

As Bangladesh's Ambassador Anwarul K. Chowdhury told the UN Security Council on 24 October 2000, "finally the voices of women had reached the Security Council, as it began today to openly address how conflicts shaped their lives and how women were coming together to shape peace and security..."¹⁴

The Resolution 1325 affirms the critical role women play in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, humanitarian action, peacebuilding, and post-conflict recovery and reconstruction (see Box 1). Since 2000, the agenda has been reinforced through nine additional resolutions, forming a normative framework that commits United Nations (UN) member states, regional bodies and civil society to ensure women's full, equal and meaningful participation in peace and security processes. The WPS agenda has continued to evolve globally, reflecting progress while also facing persistent challenges in embedding gender justice into peacebuilding, conflict resolution, relief and post-conflict recovery frameworks. More than 100 countries¹⁵ have adopted NAPs on WPS, and there have been tangible gains in terms of policy visibility and normative commitments, including through several hundred CSO women leaders briefing the UN Security Council.

¹¹ See e.g. Pratt, Nicola and Richter-Devroe, Sophie (2011). Critically Examining UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*.

¹² Naraghi Anderlini, Sanam (2025), *Overlooked Origins: The Past as a Guidepost for the Future of WPS*. Unpublished. For more details on the origin of the WPS agenda see also Naraghi Anderlini, Sanam; Manchanda, Rita; and Karmali, Shereen (1999), *Women, Violent Conflict and Peacebuilding: Global Perspectives*; and Naraghi Anderlini, Sanam (2001), *Women and the Peace Table: Making a Difference*. UN Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

¹³ United Nations. (2000, October 24). Stronger decision-making role for women in peace processes is called for in day-long Security Council debate (Press Release SC/6937). Chowdhury, A. K. (2000, October 24). Statement at Security Council meeting on "Women in Armed Conflicts" (S/PV.4208)

¹⁴ WILPF, 2024. *Nations Action Plans at a Glance*.

¹⁵ See <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/>



Box 1: Pillars of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda¹⁵

Participation: ensuring full, equal, safe and meaningful participation of women at all levels of decision-making (national, regional and international) and in all mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict; in peace negotiations; in electoral processes; in peace operations, as soldiers, police and civilians; in UN positions; and in the broader social-political sphere.

Protection: ensuring that women's and girls' rights are protected and promoted in conflict-affected situations or other humanitarian crises, including protection from sexual and gender-based violence.

Prevention: focusing on actions to prevent violence and human rights violations and abuses against women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations, including conflict-related sexual violence.

Relief and Recovery: ensuring that women's and girls' specific needs and priorities are met in repatriation and resettlement; in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes; in the design of refugee camps and support to internally displaced people (IDPs); and in the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

This report responds to the growing demand for evidence-based, context-sensitive and feminist research that highlights not only the gaps and challenges in WPS implementation, but also the innovations, resilience and leadership of women peacebuilders in diverse and often hostile environments. Strengthening this evidence base is crucial for informing policy, donor engagement and international advocacy, particularly as the WPS agenda turns twenty-five. To that end, this study surfaces critical insights on the role of women's rights and women-led organisations (WROs/WLOs) and allied civil society in holding institutions accountable, creating alternative peace infrastructures and advancing gender-just responses to conflict and insecurity.

WPS AT 25: AN UNEVEN TRACK RECORD

The implementation of the WPS commitments remains uneven and often symbolic and tokenistic.¹⁶ There have been gains: KIs and FGDs at country level point to the fact that one of the most significant achievements of the WPS agenda is the increased knowledge of the agenda, awareness of the gendered impacts of conflicts and the importance of women's participation in conflict resolution and peace building. The agenda has delivered on its promises to promote women's participation in informal community-level peace building and, to some extent, formal peace processes.

¹⁶ O'Reilly, Marie (2015). Why Women? Inclusive Security and Peace Agreements Inclusive Security. Available at <https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/publication/why-women-inclusive-security-and-peaceful-societies/>

For example, there has been an increase in the participation and leadership of women in informal community-level peacebuilding efforts in eastern DRC and South Sudan where women peace mediators conduct community peace dialogues (Key Informant; FGD South Sudan; FGD, Taiz). Findings reveal that the WPS agenda has enabled increased support for WROs and activists to use the provisions of UNSCR 1325 to advocate and demand increased participation of women in decision-making and peace processes.

Modest diplomatic successes include women's participation as signatories to the 2005 South Sudan Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the referendum and the Revitalized Peace Agreement (R-ARCSS) (Key Informant, South Sudan). In DRC, the participation of women in the Sun City Peace Process, the push for women's participation in the Nairobi and Luanda peace processes and the appointment of a female prime minister are seen as a significant achievement of the WPS agenda (Key Informant, DRC). About 40 per cent of those invited to participate in the Nairobi III Inter-Congolese Dialogue in November 2022 were women (Key Informant, DRC; UN Women, 2025b).¹⁷ In OPT, FGD participants noted that "1325, despite its strengths and weaknesses, has been adopted by all of us" and has provided a valuable tool for WROs/WLOs to participate at the national and international level.

In Colombia, while not perfect, the 2016 peace agreement was inclusive and actively attempted to address the issues identified by WROs. Despite progress stalling under the Duque government, the Petro government elected in 2022 has introduced a 'Total Peace' plan¹⁸ – an ambitious alternative that, while not fulfilling its promise, shows political will. Passed through Congress in November 2022 as Ley 227, the bill's primary purpose is to endow the government with legal powers to advance talks and negotiations that could lead to peace agreements with the country's main armed groups.¹⁹ In addition, women have been appointed to senior ministerial positions, including the office of vice president. However, formal peace processes remain male-dominated, with women comprising only 5 per cent of negotiators and 9 per cent of peace negotiators in UN-led processes in 2023.²⁰ None of the peace agreements concluded in 2023 included a women's group or representative signatories.²¹

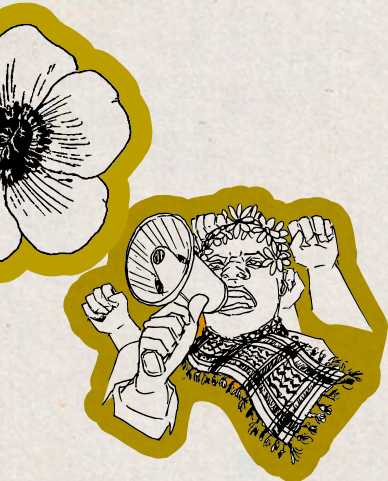
¹⁷ United Nations (2025b). State of Women, Peace and Security. Available at <https://www.un.org/en/peace-and-security/page/women-peace-and-security#:~:text=In%202023%2C%20women's%20participation%20in,conflict%20prevention%2C%20resolution%20and%20peacebuilding>

¹⁸ Breda, Tiziona (2024). Colombia: Petro's policy reduced violence, but armed groups grew stronger. Available at <https://acleddata.com/report/total-peace-paradox-colombia-petros-policy-reduced-violence-armed-groups-grew-stronger>

¹⁹ Cruz, Carlos (2024). Justice for Colombia: Colombia's Total Peace Plan Achieving Slow but Steady Progress. Available at <https://justiceforcolombia.org/news/colombias-total-peace-is-achieving-slow-but-steady-progress/>

²⁰ UN Women (2024). Impact 4: Women, peace, security, humanitarian action and disaster risk reduction. UN Transparency Portal. Available at https://open.unwomen.org/en/global-results/sp-impact/SP_D_4/2022-2025?year=2024

²¹ UN Women (2025). Facts and Figures: Women, Peace and Security. Available at https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/facts-and-figures/facts-and-figures-women-peace-and-security#_edn2



Moreover, of the 26 peace agreements signed in 2023, only 8 contained gender provisions, underscoring the limited integration of gender perspectives in formal peace processes.²²

Interviewees argued that despite rhetorical progress, actual implementation of the agenda remains sporadic and superficial. Nowhere does this stand out more clearly than in the OPT after 58 years of occupation (since 1967) and two years of Israel's war on Gaza have once again exposed the inability of the UN Security Council and the wider international community to employ the WPS agenda, with its focus on protection, prevention, relief and recovery and participation, and the unwillingness of the international community to take action in the face of impunity and violations of international humanitarian law. As highlighted in the Oxfam paper "Arming Injustice with Impunity"²³, the Security Council has been briefed by Palestinian CSO representatives on the highly gendered impact of Israel's illegal occupation on Palestinian women and girls. Additionally, the Security Council has on multiple occasions acknowledged this through analysis included in regular reports by the UN Secretary-General, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and UN human rights expert mechanisms. Despite this evidence, the Security Council has not specifically addressed the gendered aspects of violations of international law under Israel's illegal occupation in any adopted resolutions, including in the four Security Council resolutions adopted since the beginning of Israel's war on Gaza.²⁴

Even where progress has been made, women's participation is often tokenistic, fragile and faces constant backlash. In the OPT, WROs and activists who attempt to engage in advocacy have been subjected to harassment, surveillance and in some cases criminalisation. In South Sudan, despite the 2018 Revitalized Peace Agreement that provides for 35 per cent of positions for women, continued shrinking civic space and political repression inhibit women's participation and action²⁵.

²² UN Women (2025). Facts and Figures: Women, Peace and Security. Available at https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/facts-and-figures/facts-and-figures-women-peace-and-security#_edn2

²³ Oxfam (October 2025). "Arming Injustice with Impunity: How Support for Israel's illegal occupation and militarization undermines States' commitments to gender equality and the WPS Agenda"

²⁴ See Security Council Resolutions 2712 (2023), 2720 (2023), 2728 (2024) and 2735 (2024).

²⁵ Human Rights Watch (2025). World Report 2025: South Sudan. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/south-sudan>; SIHA Network (2024, August 16). Round table on women's political participation and legislative reforms in South Sudan. <https://sihanet.org/round-table-on-womens-political-participation-and-legislative-reforms-in-south-sudan/>; United Nations Security Council (2018, October 17). Security Council 8378th Meeting (AM) [Press release]. <https://press.un.org/en/2018/sc13585.doc.htm>

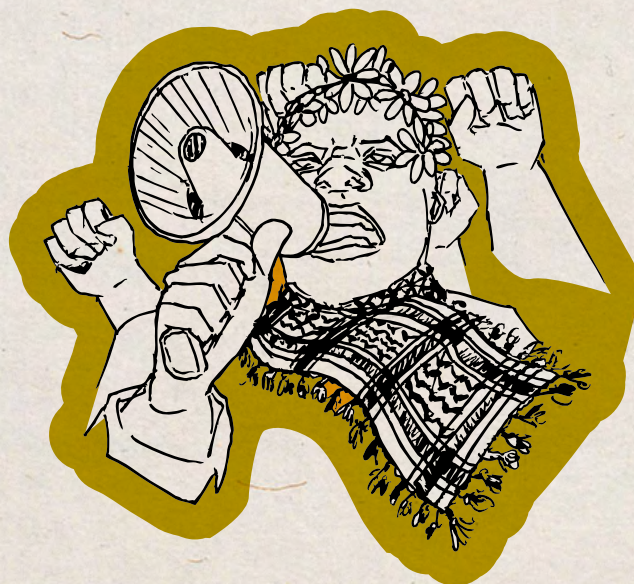


The following **SECTION 1** explores the impact of recent global trends, including increasing conflict and insecurity and the rise of the right-wing backlash against gender justice and other rights-based agendas, on the WPS agenda. It analyses the lack of accountability among state actors both within their domestic contexts and in the international arena.

SECTION 2 dives deeply into an analysis of financing for gender, conflict, peace and security (GCPS). It provides a comprehensive analysis of ODA data from 2014 to 2023 as well as a preliminary analysis of how investment in GCPS is changing in the wake of widespread cuts.

SECTION 3 provides an in depth look at the country case studies, focusing on how WROs and allied civil society are implementing the WPS agenda. Each country presents unique dynamics related to the implementation of the WPS agenda, allowing for comparative analysis and insights.

SECTION 4 examines how WROs, WLOs and activists understand feminist peace and how adopting this feminist paradigm can ensure that the WPS agenda maintains its transformative potential. After a quarter of a century and in the face of what is referred to as a 'polycrisis', protecting the status quo is not an option. The final section sets out our recommendations for action.





WPS IN AN ERA OF POLYCRISIS



Using arms and feminism don't go together, as peacebuilders, the first thing that should stop is arming the Israeli military that is targeting Palestinian women and children.



FGD, the OPT

INCREASE IN CONFLICT AND INSECURITY

Already confronting a context of financial crisis after the pandemic, a reversal of development indicators, and climate breakdown,²⁶ the world has become more unsafe with increased wars and fatalities.²⁷ In 2023, the United Nations recorded approximately 33,443 civilian deaths due to armed conflict, representing a 72 per cent increase compared to 2022.²⁸ UN statistics show a 40 per cent rise in armed conflict fatalities in 2024 compared to 2023,²⁹ and the International Committee of the Red Cross have reported more than 120 active conflicts in 2024, warning of a global failure to protect civilians.³⁰ According to the latest Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) report,³¹ which examined global conflict trends between 1946 and 2024 using data from Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), "2024 marked a historic peak in state-based conflicts, with 61 active conflicts across 36 countries, the highest number recorded since 1946. It was also the fourth most violent year since the end of the Cold War, driven largely by the civil war in Ethiopia's Tigray region, the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the bombings in Gaza." The 2025 Global Peace Index indicates there are currently 59 active state-based conflicts, the highest figure since World War II, resulting in over 152,000 deaths in 2024.³²

Women, girls and people of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) are disproportionately impacted by crises and conflict, yet their voices are seldom heard. This marginalisation is rooted not only in pre-existing gender norms, discrimination and violence, but also in patriarchal colonial power structures that continue to shape global governance and

²⁶ World Bank (2022). World Development Report 2022: Finance for an Equitable Recovery. <https://www.world-bank.org/en/publication/wdr2022>

²⁷ Statista (2025). Conflicts Worldwide 2025: Facts and Statistics. Available at <https://www.statista.com/top-ics/13125/conflicts-worldwide-2025/#topicOverview>

²⁸ Security Council Report (2024, May 22). Protection of civilians in armed conflict: Annual open debate. What's in Blue. <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2024/05/protection-of-civilians-in-armed-conflict-annual-open-debate-3.php>

²⁹ United Nations Statistics Division, SDG 16 Report (2025). Available at: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2025/Goal-16>

³⁰ ICRC, "Upholding Humanity in Conflict", December 2024. Available at: <https://www.icrc.org/en/article/icrc-2024-upholding-humanity-conflict>

³¹ Rustad, Siri Aas (2025). Conflict Trends: A Global Overview, 1946–2024. PRIO Paper. Oslo: PRIO

³² Institute for Economics and Peace (2025). Global Peace Index 2025. Available at <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/GPI-2025-web.pdf>



humanitarian response. These structures perpetuate hierarchies that exclude marginalised groups from decision-making spaces, reinforcing a cycle of dependency and disempowerment. As a result, these groups are often denied access to life-saving services, relief and information, and are excluded from initiatives that determine their lives and futures. For instance, 9 out of 10 peace negotiations at national level are dominated by men as the decision-makers,³³ reproducing a cycle of gendered imbalance while ignoring intersectional realities. This exclusion is counter-productive to achieving lasting peace: Research shows that peace agreements are 64 per cent less likely to fail when women participate³⁴ and that their inclusion significantly increases the durability of peace.³⁵ Moreover, militarised and patriarchal gender norms, which are legacies of colonial militarism and global capitalist extraction, continue to drive violence and conflicts.³⁶

This increased conflict and militarisation has slowed progress on the WPS agenda, leading to stagnation and regression across key WPS indicators, while at the same time increasing the need for progress in this area. Data from 2023 indicated that the number of women killed in armed conflict doubled that year compared with 2022, amounting to 40 per cent of all civilian deaths in 2023.³⁹ Similarly, the number of UN verified cases of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) increased by 50 per cent compared to the year before,³⁸ and there was a 35 per cent increase in the number of girls affected by grave violations in situations of armed conflict.³⁹

This rise in violence and conflicts has been accompanied by a rise in militarisation and militarism. It can be contrasted with a failure to invest in conflict prevention.⁴⁰ Militarisation is presented as a deterrent; however, studies show that it heightens the risk of further conflict and shapes social norms.

³³ UN Women – Women in Peace Processes Monitor (2023)

³⁴ Nilsson, D (2012). 'Anchoring the Peace: Civil Society Actors in Peace Accords and Durable Peace', *International Interactions*, 38:2, 243-266

³⁵ Krause, Jana; Krause, Werner; and Bränfors, Piia (2018). 'Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations and the Durability of Peace', *Inter-national Interactions*, 44:6, 985-1016

³⁷ Saferworld (2014). *Masculinities, conflict and peacebuilding: Perspectives on men through a gender lens*
³⁷ UNSC (2024). *Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Report to the Secretary General S/2024/385* Available at: <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2024/385>

³⁸ UNSC (2024). *Conflict Related Sexual Violence: Report to the Secretary General S/2024/292*. Available at: <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2024/292>

³⁹ Based on internal data see UNGA (2024). *Children in Armed Conflict: Report to the Secretary General S/2024/384*. Available at <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2024/384>

⁴⁰ Women's International League for Peace and Freedom & PeaceWomen. (n.d.). *Does Militarism Lead to Violence? Fact Sheet Building on the Global Study on UNSCR 1325*



"[M]ilitarism serves to uphold and perpetuate structural inequalities that in turn operate to disenfranchise women and girls from public goods, entrench exclusion and marginalisation, and create the ingredients for a platform of broader inequalities that increase the potential for violent conflict to occur".⁴¹ In addition, external research shows that higher military expenditure leads to decision-makers deprioritising civilian expenditure such as universal public services.⁴²

In 2024, military spending increased as a percentage of the GDP in 84 countries,⁴³ amounting to a total increase of approximately \$1.5 trillion.⁴⁴ Globally, military expenditure grew from 2.2 to 2.5 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) between 2022 and 2024, with Europe and the Middle East recording the sharpest rises.⁴⁵ At the same time, in 2024, ODA fell by 7.1 per cent in real terms, with only four donors meeting the commitment of providing 0.7 per cent of GDP.⁴⁶ Furthermore, in 2025 the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Hague Summit mandated all 32 members of NATO⁴⁷ to more than double their defence and related expenditure to 5 per cent of GDP a year by 2035.⁴⁸ Spending 5 per cent of GDP in 2035 would require an additional almost \$2.7 trillion, putting the allies' total NATO spending at approximately \$4.2 trillion.⁴⁹ UN estimations predict that overall global military spending could reach between \$4.7 trillion and \$6.6 trillion by 2035.⁵⁰ In an open letter in June 2025 ahead of the NATO Hague Summit, Oxfam and more than 120 CSOs signed a joint letter urging NATO leaders to increase investment in WPS.⁵¹ There is a strong correlation between OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donors and NATO membership with 24 countries belonging to both alliances.

⁴¹ UN Women (2015). The Global Study on the Implementation of the UNSC Resolution 1325

[Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 | UN Women](#)

⁴² UN Women (2022). *The Impact of Militarisation on Gender Equality* Available at <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/Impact-of-militarization-on-gender-inequality-en.pdf>

⁴³ Institute for Economics and Peace (2025). *Global Peace Index 2025*. Available at <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/GPI-2025-web.pdf>

⁴⁴ Tian, Nan; Scarazzato, Lorenzo and Guiberteau, Jade Ricard (2025). *Nato's New Spending Target: Challenges and risks associated with a political signal*. Available at: <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/essay/2025/natos-new-spending-target-challenges-and-risks-associated-political-signal>

⁴⁵ United Nations (2025, September 9). *The Security We Need: Rebalancing Military Spending for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future* [Report]. United Nations Secretary-General.

⁴⁶ United Nations. (2025, September 9). *The Security We Need: Rebalancing Military Spending for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future* [Report]. United Nations Secretary-General.

⁴⁷ North Atlantic Treaty Organisation- intergovernmental military alliance between 32 North American and European countries

⁴⁸ NATO (2025). *The Hague Summit Declaration*. Official Text. Available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_236705.html

⁴⁹ Tian, Na; Scarazzato, Lorenzo and Guiberteau Ricard, Jade (2025). *Nato's New Spending Target: Challenges and risks associated with a political signal*. Available at: <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/essay/2025/natos-new-spending-target-challenges-and-risks-associated-political-signal>

⁵⁰ United Nations (2025, September 9). *The Security We Need: Rebalancing Military Spending for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future* [Report]. United Nations Secretary-General.

⁵¹ Oxfam (June 2025). Open letter: NATO leaders must scale up investment in Women, Peace & Security 18 June 2025. Available at: [Letter WPS NATO 062025 EN .pdf](#)



The military expenditure from NATO members has grown 17 per cent from 2014 to 2023, or by around \$159 billion in volume.⁵² Analysis for this report found that GCPS ODA has grown 139 per cent or by \$4.4 billion in volume over the same period. Going into 2024, defence and related expenditure was expected to rise by a further \$116 billion,⁵³ while GCPS ODA was expected to decline by \$80 million.⁵⁴ This massive rise in military spending has been at the expense of ODA and spending on peace and security.⁵⁵

Funding data shows that militarisation continues to be prioritised over gender-responsive peacebuilding with devastating impacts. “Militarisation, coupled with the uncontrolled supply of weapons and the provision of unconditional political and military support, has become a critical enabler of the ongoing violence and conflict” (FGD, OPT). Analyses by UN Women⁵⁶ further argue that defence spending frequently diverts resources away from essential health, education and care infrastructure services that women and gender-diverse groups disproportionately rely upon. PeaceWomen’s evaluation underscores how militarism perpetuates impunity, weapons proliferation and sustained cycles of GBV.⁵⁷

This militarisation is not confined to state armies. The uncontrolled flow of small arms is due to a failure to implement the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)⁵⁸ and the rise of non-state armed actors: “There are so many arms in the hands of civilians. It is one of the reasons that makes it hard to maintain peace, especially in the cattle corridors. The availability of guns has turned localised conflict into major violent clashes” (FGD, Juba). Notably, Oxfam and civil society globally succeeded in advocacy to incorporate women’s rights to the ATT (a first for any treaty), recognising gendered impacts and risks of an arms transfer leading to the perpetration or facilitation of GBV.⁵⁹

52 NATO (2025). *Defense Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2024)*. Press Release. Available at https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2024/6/pdf/240617-def-exp-2024-en.pdf

53 NATO (2025). *Defense Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2024)*. Press Release. Available at https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2024/6/pdf/240617-def-exp-2024-en.pdf

54 Knox, Duncan (2025). *Aid to Gender, Conflict, Peace and Security*. Unpublished paper.

55 Pudussery, Jessica and Gulrajani, Nilima (2025). *Aid and Defense: A story of two targets*. ODI Global: Expert Comment. Available at <https://odi.org/en/insights/aid-and-defence-a-data-story-of-two-global-targets/>

56 UN Women (2022). *Research on military expenditure and women, peace and security*. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/08/research-on-military-expenditure-and-women-peace-and-security>; Benson, M., & Gizelis, T.I. (2022). *Militarization and women’s empowerment in post-conflict societies*. Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security. <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/resource/militarization-and-womens-empowerment-in-post-conflict-societies/>

57 PeaceWomen (n.d.). *Sexual violence, conflict, and militarism*. *Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)*.

58 Arms Trade Treaty. Available at <https://thearmstradetreaty.org/>

59 GAPS and Oxfam (19 June 2012). *Putting Women’s Rights Into the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)*. Available at: [Putting Women’s Rights Into the Arms Trade Treaty \(ATT\)](https://www.gaps.org.uk/publications/putting-womens-rights-into-the-arms-trade-treaty-att) GAPS Report - GAPS UK



While the risk of GBV is a criterion to refuse an arms transfer,⁶⁰ it is fair to say that implementation of this article has been grossly inadequate. The UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (UNPoA) has been similarly ineffective in preventing the illicit circulation of such weapons and thus armed crime and conflict.

The lack of effective demobilisation of soldiers from military service back to civilian life in contexts such as South Sudan is contributing to increased exposure of women and girls to all forms of GBV.⁶¹ Demilitarisation must be recognised as a core pillar of any feminist peace agenda and should include advocating to channel military spending to social services and reconstruction to further advance sustainable and just peace. *"You see ex-combatants returning with arms and forming new militias. This perpetuates violence and makes the situation unsafe for women and girls"* (FGD, Juba).

THE RISE OF RIGHT-WING POPULISM

The rise of right-wing populism in many countries, sometimes funded by opaque think tanks or even some evangelical movements, is driving the escalating backlash against women's rights and gender justice.⁶² Shrinking civic space, weak political will and a lack of accountability as well as fragmentation across humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts are further undermining efforts to deliver the agenda. These challenges compound the structural and systemic barriers that are hindering the effective implementation of the WPS agenda.

The GCPS funding deficit reflects a broader failure to recognise and invest in the vital work of local actors in sustaining peace and responding to crises. This can be contrasted with the dramatic rise in funding for the anti-gender agenda, organised opposition to gender justice, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and LGBTQIA+ rights, which are well-financed, globally coordinated and driving much of the backlash today.⁶³ "Between 2013 and 2017, anti-gender funding far outpaced funding to the global LGBTQIA+ movement in the same period. LGBTQIA+ movements worldwide received just \$1.2 billion, while the anti-gender movement received three times as much at \$3.7 billion".⁶⁴

60 See Article 7.4 in the text of the Arms Trade Treaty https://thearmstradetreaty.org/hyper-images/file/ATT_English/ATT_English.pdf?templateId=137253

61 FGD in South Sudan

62 Narayanaswamy, Lata and Hersi, Amina. *Personal to Powerful: Holding the line for gender justice in the face of growing anti-rights movements*. Oxfam (6 March 2025) and UNSC (2024) Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Report to the Secretary General S/2024/385 Available at: <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2024/385>

63 Narayanaswamy, Lata and Hersi, Amina. *Personal to Powerful: Holding the line for gender justice in the face of growing anti-rights movements*. Oxfam (6 March 2025)

64 Harper, Caroline, Khan, Ayesha, Brown, Evie and Michalko, Jan (2025). 'There's not enough money, so why spend it on gender equality', ODI Global expert comment. Available at <https://odi.org/en/insights/theres-not-enough-money-so-why-spend-it-on-gender-equality-and-justice/>





The backlash against women and gender justice has concrete manifestations in the countries researched and intersects with existing manifestations of patriarchy. WROs/WLOs and allied civil society face increasing repression, including anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation (Key Informant, Uganda) and a rise in politically and religiously motivated backlash. In the OPT many WROs that attempt to engage in political advocacy have been subjected to state violence in the form of harassment and surveillance and in some cases criminalisation (FGD OPT).

In DRC, Somalia and South Sudan, KII and FGD participants expressed that deep-rooted customs and traditions prevent women from assuming leadership roles, with some conservative elements actively resisting women's public roles: *"The structural barriers to participation faced by displaced women and girls are exacerbated by prevailing patriarchal cultural norms"* (Key Informant). However, there are no deliberate strategies to deal with these structural barriers as is seen in the lack of actions to dismantle patriarchal systems and structures.

A FAILURE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Across all the FGDs and KIIs undertaken for this report, a lack of government accountability was the most cited critical failure of the WPS agenda. Article 11 of UNSCR 1325 "emphasizes the responsibility of all States to put an end to impunity and to prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes including those relating to sexual and other violence against women and girls". However, Article 11, as stated by one of our Palestinian focus group participants, "merely encourages states to implement it voluntarily, with no legal obligation or enforcement mechanism. This has allowed governments to ignore many of its provisions, particularly when it's not in their own strategic or geopolitical interests." This report illustrates that while many states have signed UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions, nearly all have failed to implement this provision meaningfully. Without built-in accountability, the WPS agenda becomes a "cafeteria approach": optional, selective and inconsistently applied" (Key Informant, Global).

Even governments that claim to have adopted a feminist foreign policy continue to fund or arm Israel despite its gendered implications.⁶⁵ Most have failed to speak out in the face of some of the grossest violations and infringement of rights this century.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Oxfam (October 2025). "Arming Injustice with Impunity: How Support for Israeli Occupation and Militarisation Undermines States' Commitments to Gender Equality and the WPS Agenda."

⁶⁶ Cohen, Marc; Croome, Amy and Nalbandian, Elise (2024). Vetoing Humanity: How a few powerful nations hijacked global peace and why reform is needed at the UN Security Council. Oxfam: Oxford. Available at <https://www.oxfam.org/en/vetoing-humanity-how-few-powerful-nations-hijacked-global-peace>



The world is witnessing two years of war on Gaza, amounting to a genocide – including the latest military escalation started by Israel to “take over” Gaza City aimed at displacing around 1 million Palestinians again, while powerful nations risk complicity over arms exports and enabling these atrocities to happen. For example, Germany, the world’s second-largest provider of arms to Israel⁶⁷ and a state that claims to have a feminist foreign policy, has recently sustained these violations of international law. Despite its most recent announcement of no longer authorising arms to Israel for use in Gaza, it remains unclear if this also includes previously agreed arms transfers.⁶⁸ In contrast other European nations such as Spain⁶⁹ have imposed a full arms embargo on Israel.⁷⁰ In their discussion, the OPT FGD participants identified the following issue: “Arming Israel is one of our major problems; therefore, we have to fight against that, and disarmament is one of the tools to fight it. Using arms and feminism don’t go together, as peacebuilders, the first thing that should stop is arming the Israeli military that is targeting Palestinian women and children” (FGD, OPT).

Even though the UNSC is the custodian of UNSCR 1325 and the WPS agenda, it has yet failed to take decisive action,⁷¹ and the five permanent members (P5) of the UNSC have a track record of vetoing resolutions not in their interest. From 2014 to 2024, the P5 members – China, France, Russia, the UK and the USA – vetoed 30 UNSC resolutions on protracted crises, including resolutions on the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) and Israel, Syria and Ukraine.⁷²

Russia and the USA have cast 75 per cent of the 88 UNSC vetoes since 1989; China has cast the remaining 25 per cent.⁷³ In 2025, US policy took a noticeable turn against gender equality, WPS and foreign aid.

67 <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/10/16/middleeast/where-israel-get-its-weapons>

68 <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/berlin-risks-being-complicit-in-gaza-genocide-warns-former-german-en-voy/3687712>

69 On 12 February 2024, Spain issued a statement confirming that no arms sales to Israel had been authorised since 7 October 2023 and that it would not buy weapons from Israel. Subsequently, in April 2025, Spain’s government rescinded a deal worth \$7.8m to buy bullets from an Israeli company for use by the Spanish Civil Guard police force. Spain has also refused permission for ships carrying arms from other countries to Israel to dock at a Spanish port. In May 2025, Spain’s Prime Minister described Israel as a ‘genocidal state’ and said Spain does not do business with it. Source: France 24, “Spain scraps contested Israeli arms deal after uproar”, 24 April 2025. Democracy Now, “Spain Rejects Arms Ships Headed for Israel; Canadian Palestinians Sue Trudeau Gov’t over Genocide”, 8 November 2024. Cited in: “Arming Injustice with Impunity: How Support for Israel’s illegal occupation and militarization undermines States’ commitments to gender equality and the WPS Agenda”, Oxfam (October 2025).

70 <https://www.politico.eu/article/spain-pm-sanchez-permanent-weapons-embargo-israel/>

71 Dahl-Eriksen, Tor (2023). The UN Security Council: Legitimacy and Organized Hypocrisy. Available at <https://munin.uit.no/bitstream/handle/10037/32814/article.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y>

72 Cohen, Marc, Croome, Amy and Nalbandian, Elise (2024). Vetoing Humanity: How a few powerful nations hijacked global peace and why reform is needed at the UN Security Council. Oxfam: Oxford. Available at <https://www.oxfam.org/en/vetoing-humanity-how-few-powerful-nations-hijacked-global-peace>

73 UN DAG Hammarskjöld Library (n.d.). UN Security Council Meetings and Outcomes Table: Veto List available at <https://research.un.org/en/>, Marc Cohen, Amy Croome and Elise Nalbandian (2024). Vetoing Humanity: How a few powerful nations hijacked global peace and why reform is needed at the UN Security Council. Oxfam: Oxford. Available at <https://www.oxfam.org/en/vetoing-humanity-how-few-powerful-nations-hijacked-global-peace>



Key developments included the Pentagon's cancellation of their WPS programme; executive orders targeting "gender ideology" and dismantling diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives; and a sweeping freeze on foreign development aid, with explicit clauses excluding gender-related programming from exemptions, accompanied by the dismantling of USAID's operations.⁷⁴ The UK Government holds the pen on the WPS Agenda and has previously positioned itself as a champion of gender equality. However, it has radically cut aid for gender equality⁷⁵ and, while having suspended some arms sales to Israel, is still indirectly via the global supply system sending F35 components⁷⁶ for planes that are used to bomb civilians in Gaza. The structural power of the P5 is a manifestation of the asymmetric power and hypocrisy embedded in the international peace and security architecture.⁷⁷ This asymmetry is mirrored by the OECD DAC's privileged position in the international aid architecture. Both institutions – the UNSC and the OECD – reify the post-World War II balance of power, which in turn marginalises former colonies and other states.⁷⁸ Meanwhile, the dominant states are able to use their position to protect and extend their spheres of influence with impunity.

At national level, the lack of accountability shows up in the absence of meaningful legal protections for women and marginalised groups or specific protections for women's rights activists and organisations. Participants from the countries studied in this paper indicated the existence of laws and legal provisions to protect women's rights; however, most of these laws are not adequately enforced. From a context of relative stability (Uganda), through post-conflict recovery (Colombia), fragility (Somalia, South Sudan), severe security degradation (Burkina Faso, Niger), active conflict (DRC) and to ongoing unlawful occupation⁷⁹ (OPT), women highlighted continued impunity and lack of enforcement of existing legal provisions meant to guarantee their safety, rights, participation and influence.

74 Hennessey, K. (2025, April 29). *Pentagon chief cancels program for women and security that was signed into law by Trump*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/pentagon-chief-cancels-program-women-security-that-was-signed-into-law-by-trump-2025-04-29/>, Wax-Thibodeaux, E. (2025, April 29). *Defense Secretary cancels Pentagon's Women, Peace and Security office*. The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/04/29/hegseth-wps-rubio-noem/>, Ms. Magazine. (2025, May 13). *The U.S. is dismantling the Women, Peace and Security framework—here's why that matters*. <https://msmagazine.com/2025/05/13/women-peace-security-framework-wps-defense/>

75 <https://www.careinternational.org.uk/press-office/press-releases/uk-aid-for-women-and-girls-slashed-worldwide-new-research-reveals/>

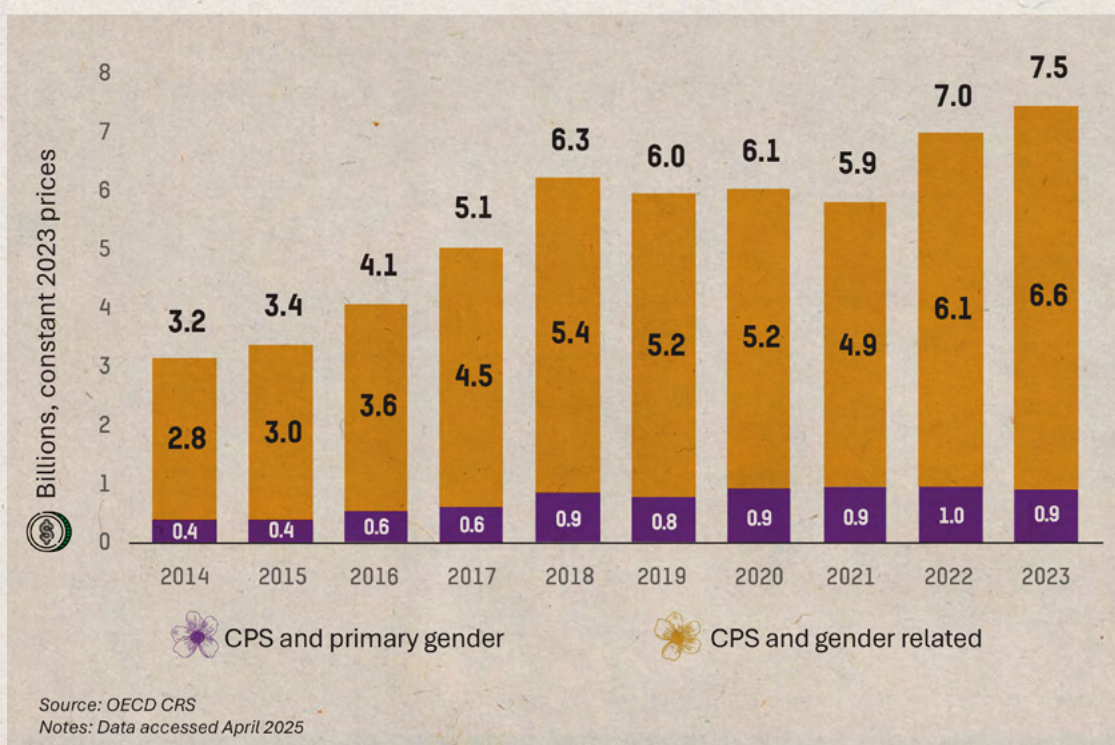
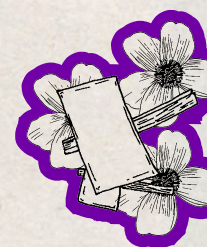
76 <https://www.oxfam.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-with-oxfam/gaza-israel-crisis-sign-petition-call-for-ceasefire-now/does-the-uk-sell-arms-to-israel/>

77 Cohen, Marc, Croome, Amy, and Nalbandian, Elise (2024). *Vetoing Humanity: How a few powerful nations hijacked global peace and why reform is needed at the UN Security Council*. Oxfam: Oxford. Available at <https://www.oxfam.org/en/vetoing-humanity-how-few-powerful-nations-hijacked-global-peace>

78 <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2024/03/29/un-security-council-reform-the-urgent-need-to-decolonize/#:~:text=The%20composition%20of%20the%20UN,minority%20of%20the%20global%20population>

79 International Court of Justice (2024, July 19). *Press release: Legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem (Request for Advisory Opinion)*. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/icj-pressrelease-19jul24/>





The findings from the ODA analysis conducted for this report reflect the lack of resources for NAP implementation that is consistent with the findings from KIs and FGDs in all focus countries. While 28.2 per cent of all ODA in 2023 was gender-relevant, just 2.6 per cent also had a conflict focus. In addition, while funding continues to be released for gender equality work in focus countries, such allocations are often not closely tied to the provisions of either donor or recipient countries' NAP objectives. This disconnect suggests that donor countries' development cooperation strategies are not aligned with their WPS NAPs.

Box 2: Mapping the four pillars on the GCSP ODA: What we know

This analysis briefly explores how the GCPS ODA used in this study can map onto the four pillars. While this exercise poses some challenges due to the OECD CRS data not being set up for donor reporting to each of the pillars specifically, the following analytical points can be drawn:

- The relief and recovery pillar, which has a focus on gender-responsive approaches to humanitarian action, early recovery and post-conflict reconstruction efforts, could link to the humanitarian GCPS ODA. A narrow estimate of this (based on GCPS humanitarian aid) returns \$2.1 billion in 2023, 28% of the GCPS total.
- The protection pillar, which holds a focus on protection against sexual and gender-based violence, could link to the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) purpose code specifically, in 2023 the GCPS portion of this amounted to \$149 million, 2% of the total.



Box 2: Mapping the four pillars on the GCSP ODA: What we know

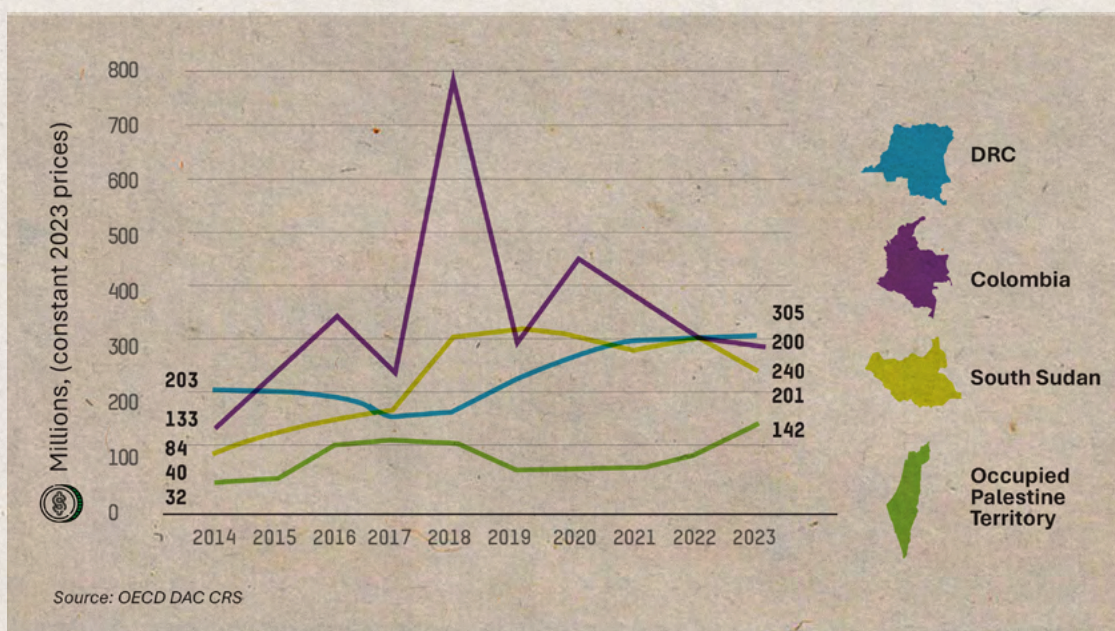
- The prevention pillar, which is focused on preventing conflict-related gendered violations and sexual and gender-based violence, including through promoting gender equality and addressing the root causes of conflict. A narrow estimate on this, based on the conflict, peace and security sector and the government and civil society sector (excluding EAWG) returns \$3.3 billion, 44% of total.
- The participation pillar, which has an aim to increase women's meaningful participation in peace processes, conflict resolution, peacebuilding and decision-making at all levels, can be argued to be crosscutting in the context of aid allocation. For example, an activity could relate to one of the other pillars and also meet a criterion for participation. The OECD DAC does not have a marker designed to capture participation specifically. However, a text search of broad terms such as 'participation', 'leadership', 'empowerment', 'women-led' in the GCPS ODA projects amounted to approx. 14% in 2023, and levels have grown more than four-fold since 2014.
- A portion of GCPS aid to other sectors is more challenging to pin down to a specific pillar.

Germany was the largest donor to GCPS in 2023, followed by the EU, the USA, Sweden and Canada.⁸⁷ The top five recipients in 2023 were Ukraine (\$733 million), Ethiopia (\$320 million), Syria (\$308 million), DRC (\$305 million) and Colombia (\$290 million). South Sudan and the OPT also made the top 15 recipients.⁸⁸ Figure 1.2 provides a trend analysis for GCPS funding to the four focus countries from 2014-2023. DRC and South Sudan are also the top recipients of gender ODA overall.

⁸⁷ Knox, Duncan (2025). Aid to gender, conflict, peace and security unpublished paper. Analysis drawn from publicly available OECD DAC data.

⁸⁸ Knox, Duncan (2025). Aid to gender, conflict, peace and security unpublished paper. Analysis drawn from publicly available OECD DAC data.





There is a general perception among respondents that international funding bypasses feminist actors and WROs and is absorbed by local governments or international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with less transformative agendas.⁸⁹ The ODA analysis conducted for this report shows that in 2023 just 2 per cent of GCPS ODA was directly channelled to NGOs based in recipient countries and 9 per cent to recipient governments. INGOs and UN agencies were the two largest primary recipients of GCPS ODA, with 34 per cent and 30 per cent respectively. An additional 12 per cent was channelled through donor governments and 6 per cent through multilateral institutions like the EU or World Bank. Some of the funding channelled through UN agencies, INGOs and multilateral institutions will have eventually reached recipient NGOs and governments, and some of this may also have gone to security actors; however, it is not possible to trace this with existing data, despite several calls from civil society globally to disaggregate ODA data accordingly.⁹⁰ The lack of funding was prominent in KIs and FGDs across all countries in the research.

The OECD DAC CRS database has a purpose code that allows donors to indicate if funding is going to “women’s rights movements and organisations”. This allows us to estimate how much of the GCPS ODA directly reaches WROs/WLOs. Of the total \$148 million reported against this purpose code in 2023, just \$4.7 million (3.1%) was initially channelled through recipient women’s organisations. This means that only 0.06 per cent of GCPS ODA can be shown to go directly to recipient WROs/WLOs.

⁸⁹ See also Dolker, Tenzin (2021). *Where is the Money for Feminist Organizing: Data snapshots and a call to action*. AWID. Available at [https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/AWID Research WITM Brief ENG.pdf](https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/AWID%20Research%20WITM%20Brief%20ENG.pdf); UN Women (2025). *At Breaking Point: The impact of foreign aid cuts on women’s organisations in humanitarian crises worldwide*. UN Women: NY. Available at <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2025-05/at-a-breaking-point-the-impact-of-foreign-aid-cuts-on-womens-organizations-in-humanitarian-crises-worldwide-en.pdf>

⁹⁰ E.g. in the UK, there is a standing ask from civil society to the WPS NAP to disaggregate and report on such data. <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/141275/pdf/>



THE GCPS FUNDING LANDSCAPE GOING FORWARD

Official development assistance had already started declining by 2024. In 2025, it is facing a cliff edge, and funding for gender equality and the WPS agenda is likely to take an outsized hit. According to preliminary data collected by the OECD, international aid from official donors fell in 2024 by 7.1 per cent in real terms compared to 2023, which is the first drop after five years of consecutive growth,⁹¹ and further cuts are expected. A total of 17 of the 33 DAC donors, most significantly the USA (38% drop expected), France (17% drop expected), Germany (9% drop expected) and the UK (4% drop expected), have announced significant cuts. Donor Tracker estimates that ODA from the 17 largest DAC donors will fall by around 16 per cent between 2024 and 2025.⁹² It is expected that ODA levels will continue to decline in 2026.

Overall, the impact of this is likely to reverberate into the GCPS sector; the analysis conducted for this report using OECD DAC CRS data shows that the USA, Germany, Canada and the UK, whose ODA is expected to decline from 2025, are among the largest donors of GCPS-related ODA. Analysis of the successive rounds of cuts to UK ODA since 2020 have revealed a disproportionate impact on funding for gender equality compared to overall ODA.⁹³ Cutting ODA for gender equality has been a priority for the US since the start of 2025. In June, the US government wrote to Congress to officially withdraw funding for WPS programmes alongside plans to disband the State Department's Office of Global Women's Issues.⁹⁴ In 2025, the Netherlands, which was ranked first for the proportion of ODA spent on gender equality in 2023, initially proposed to cut a large proportion of the budget for women's rights and gender equality, including the budget on Women, Peace and Security, although funding to sexual health and reproductive rights was largely upheld.⁹⁵

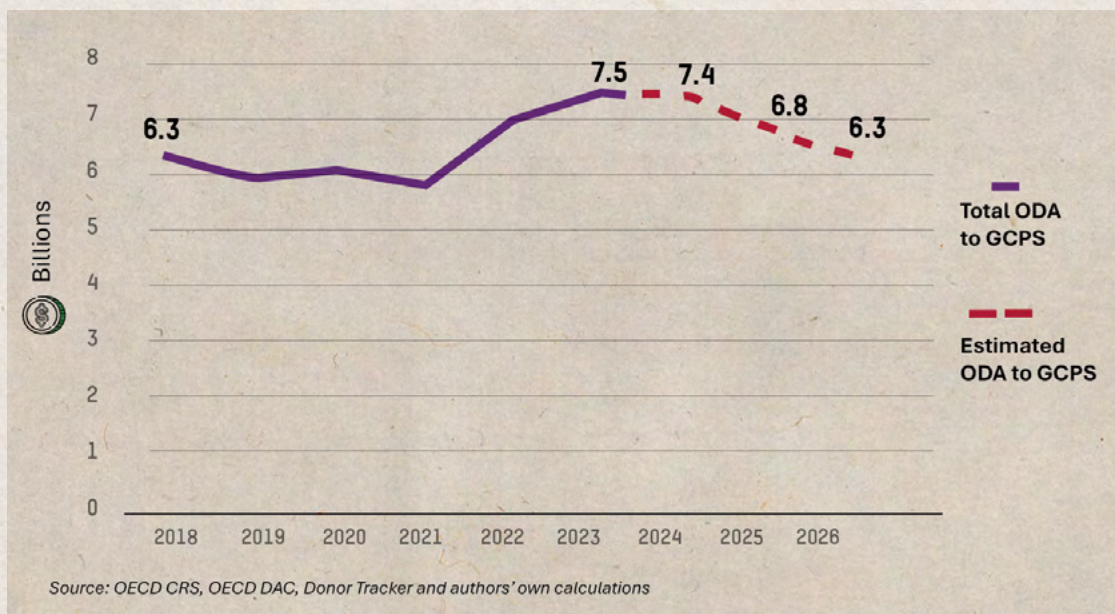
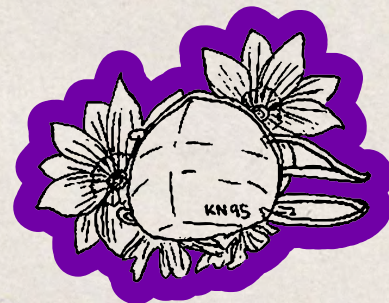
⁹¹ OECD (2025). International aid falls in 2024 for the first time in six years, says OECD. Press release. Available at <https://www.oecd.org/en/about/news/press-releases/2025/04/official-development-assistance-2024-figures.html#:~:text=ODA%20by%20member%20countries%20of,Secretary%20General%20Mathias%20Cormann%20said>.

⁹² Laub, Kristin et al. (2025). The Budget Cuts Tracker. Donor Tracker. Available at: <https://donortracker.org/publications/budget-cuts-tracker/>

⁹³ Care International and Evidence Enabled (2025). Fixing UK ODA's Gender Gap: Bold choices, real Change. Available at https://careinternationaluk.ams3.cdn.digitaloceanspaces.com/media/documents/Fixing_UK_ODAs_Gender_Gap-Bold_Choices_Real_Change-Final.pdf

⁹⁴ GIWPS (2025). What does the State Department's Reorganization mean for Women, Peace and Security. Blog. Available at <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/state-department-reorganization-wps/>

⁹⁵ Donor Tracker (2025). Netherlands, Country profile. Available at https://donortracker.org/donor_profiles/netherlands/gender



Notes: Estimates are based on application of preliminary ODA 2024 changes to 2023 GPCS data. 2025 and 2026 estimates are derived from Donor Tracker estimates and authors' own calculations for multilateral agencies.

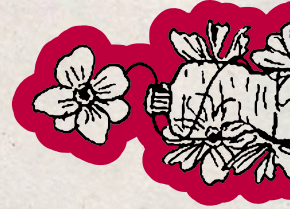
In July 2025, after pushback from civil society, the Dutch Parliament voted against these proposed cuts and managed to largely turn back the proposals to cut funds on gender equality. Gender equality is the main objective of the government's strategic partnerships with civil society, the so-called "FOCUS" framework for 2026-2030.⁹⁶

WROs/WLOs, particularly those based in recipient countries, were already last in line for funding, often struggling to meet their communities' needs on fragmented, short-term grants. Recent data from UN Women shows that the latest reductions in ODA have pushed many of these organisations to the breaking point: 47 per cent expect to close their doors within six months if current funding levels persist, 72 per cent have been forced to lay off staff, and overall 90 per cent have been impacted financially.⁹⁷ These cuts illustrate the precarity of the current donor-led ODA system, where women's access to lifesaving services and women's rights is at the mercy of donors' agendas and whims.

⁹⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Netherlands (27 June 2025). Subject Policy framework for cooperation with civil society organisations in development aid 2026-2030

⁹⁷ UN Women (2025). At Breaking Point: The impact of foreign aid cuts on women's organisations in humanitarian crises worldwide. UN Women: NY. Available at <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2025-05/at-a-breaking-point-the-impact-of-foreign-aid-cuts-on-womens-organizations-in-humanitarian-crises-worldwide-en.pdf>





3. CASE STUDIES: WPS IN COLOMBIA, DRC, THE OPT AND SOUTH SUDAN

The country case studies critically examine the intersections of conflict, gender and governance through an unapologetically feminist and intersectional lens. Centring the voices and experiences of women, particularly internally displaced people, refugees and those on the margins of society, the authors explore how systemic violence and deep-rooted political instability in Colombia, the DRC, the OPT and South Sudan disproportionately affect women and SOGIESC diverse individuals. Despite different sociopolitical contexts, a common pattern emerges: Patriarchal power structures, militarised governance and state neglect continue to hinder women's agency, rights and meaningful participation as well as progress on the WPS agenda.

This review not only uncovers the deep-rooted structural and intersectional inequalities that sustain conflict and exclusion but also emphasises feminist resistance and grassroots leadership. It calls for a transformative reimagining of peacebuilding based on justice, accountability and the full inclusion of those most affected by conflict.

“*Peace is not a vague or idealistic dream, but a tangible reality embedded in the agreements signed between the FARC and the Colombian State. ... I recognise that sometimes, even I forget that we are building Peace. Sometimes, we forget that peace is a fundamental right that encompasses all other rights. Because with Peace, we can truly live in Peace.*”

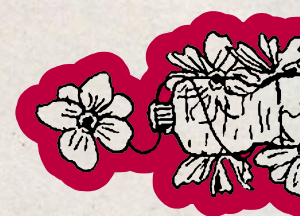
FGD, Cartagena, Colombia

COLOMBIA

Colombia's political and security context is shaped by the legacy of more than 50 years of internal armed conflict deeply affecting communities, especially women and marginalised groups. The five decades of war were deeply rooted in a profoundly unequal socioeconomic structure marked by a significant urban-rural divide that perpetuates inequalities, particularly in land ownership, where 1 per cent of land-owners possess 80 per cent of the territory.⁹⁸

The 2016 peace agreement between the Colombian State and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) marked a historic step toward ending violence. However, there are still several active conflicts taking place across the country, compounded by internal displacement and returnees from Venezuela due to the crisis.

⁹⁸ San Pedro, Paula (2019). Women Defenders of Agricultural Territorial and Environmental Rights in Colombia. Oxfam. Available at <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620872/bp-colombia-women-environmental-defenders-021019-en.pdf;jsessionid=234F72C9F4FCC96550B50795537FBF6?sequence=2>



There are also emergent armed groups who have not accepted the peace process or have failed to demobilise who continue to use violence for economic gain. Examples of this are the rise in narco-crime and the illegal mining groups patrolling the lands, threatening indigenous and rural men and women. This has led to the increase in the murder of women leaders and environmental human rights defenders.

The peace agreement centred women's rights and perspectives in peacebuilding efforts. It gave rise to what is often called the 'feminist peace agreement', an approach that goes beyond the cessation of armed conflict to include social justice, gender equality and intersectionality as essential pillars of sustainable peace.⁹⁹ The peace agreement is one of the most gender inclusive in the world, with over 100 gender provisions, including the creation of a Gender Sub-Commission and a Special Forum on Gender.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, Act 1448 of 2011 legally recognises CRSV and mandates reparations.¹⁰¹

The process was widely praised as inclusive by our FGD participants; however, they also noted that, despite the conflict mainly occurring in rural areas, rural women were not included in the process, and valuable knowledge and experience was lost.

“***It hasn't been easy to even talk about peace, there is often exclusion in rural places, and women who have experienced the conflict are still not valued or seen as relevant. This remains a gap.***”

FGD, Bogota, Colombia

However, under the Duque Government, the peace agreement was paralysed and the finances were not dispersed. The election of Petro has put renewed energy into a 'Total Peace'¹⁰² plan; however, focus groups participants pointed to the speed “a shock plan to implement the peace plan fast, focused on management rather than impact” (FGD, Bogota, Colombia).

⁹⁹ Engström, P. (2012). *Transitional justice and ongoing conflict*. Routledge EBooks. Available at <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203084359-10>

¹⁰⁰ UN Women (2023). *Colombia: Gender Provisions in the Peace Accord*. Available at <https://www.unwomen.org>

¹⁰¹ Ley 1448 DE 2011. Available at <https://www.unidadvictimas.gov.co/sites/default/files/documentosbiblioteca/ley-1448-de-2011.pdf>

¹⁰² <https://acleddata.com/report/total-peace-paradox-colombia-petros-policy-reduced-violence-armed-groups-grew-stronger>



This plan is struggling to end the conflicts, with many armed groups walking away from peace negotiations and continuing to perpetrate violence.¹⁰³

Participants identified a need to implement not only the peace agreement, but also a need to implement the policies that are aligned with the peace agreement, the human security policy, the national human rights plan and the territorial committees: “The 1325 National Action must not be seen as a rival to the peace agreement but can revitalise and put energy behind it. It should be used as a coordinating tool for public policy” (FGD, Bogota, Colombia).

NATIONAL ACTION PLANS

Colombia has been seen as a regional leader in implementing the WPS agenda. Its first NAP (2017–2022) focused on women’s participation, protection and access to transitional justice. A second NAP (2023–2028), released under President Gustavo Petro’s administration, is seen as a hard-won milestone, but implementation and resourcing remain serious concerns.¹⁰⁴ Despite their deep engagement, many women feel excluded from the formal monitoring mechanisms and lack access to meaningful resources to implement the NAP.



In the Colombia National Action Plan, economic autonomy is recognised, as is protection of territorial areas, especially where extra-activist economic models dominate. Women are the guardians of peace, and care for the community must be acknowledged. Comprehensive health and spiritual well-being are now part of the NAP, as are services for women who are victims of armed conflict. It was a hard-won fight, but it’s finally recognised.

FGD participant, Bogota, Colombia

Women’s political participation in Colombia has slightly improved, due to Act 1475 (2011), which mandates a 30 per cent women’s quota on electoral lists. However, actual representation still remains below target: in 2024, women held only 28.6 per cent of seats in congress and less than 15 per cent of mayoral posts.¹⁰⁵ Colombia has passed progressive legislation, including Act 1257 (2008) on GBV. Yet, violence against women remains endemic, with nearly 29,000 cases of sexual violence reported in 2023 affecting mostly Afro-Colombian, Indigenous and displaced women.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ <https://acleddata.com/report/total-peace-paradox-colombia-petros-policy-reduced-violence-armed-groups-grew-stronger>

¹⁰⁴ Government of Colombia (2023). *Segundo Plan de Acción Nacional de Resolución 1325 (2023–2028)*.

¹⁰⁵ Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (2024). Women in Parliament 2023 Report. Available at <https://www.ipu.org>

¹⁰⁶ Sisma Mujer (2024). Informe sobre violencia sexual y de género en Colombia. <https://www.sismamujer.org>



Despite the progress made in putting in place legal frameworks, the implementation of WPS commitments remains inconsistent. Participants in the focus group described how, despite policy alignment, budgets are not allocated, and local governments do not operationalise what women had proposed in participatory planning processes.



Intersectionality is not just a lens; it's a budgetary and policy demand. Too often, institutions co-opt feminist agendas without allocating resources to the grassroots organisations that built them. This undermines our work and weakens our movements. If the State is serious about peace and gender equity, it must invest directly in feminist organising and ensure that resources flow to the women on the frontlines.



FGD participant, Cartagena, Colombia

The Kroc Institute (2023) found that gender-related provisions are among the least implemented, due to limited funding, institutional fragmentation and continued violence.¹⁰⁷ Women leaders, especially from Afro-Colombian, Indigenous and rural communities, face life-threatening risks. In 2023, over 180 social leaders were killed, many of them women.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, while women's quotas exist, weak enforcement and systemic exclusion hinder women's influence in decision-making.¹⁰⁹

INDIVISIBLE AND INTERDEPENDENT

During the focus groups, women leaders shared deeply personal and collective narratives, offering lived experience of how the four WPS pillars – participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery – are experienced by women in practice. Their accounts revealed how these pillars must remain fluid in conflict-affected and post-conflict settings, where political violence mutates into criminality, governments change and community resilience adapts. For example, protection may dominate during times of heightened violence, while participation resurges when peace negotiations or local elections offer entry points for influence. This leads to a non-linear approach, which one participant described as a “move forward, step back” process. This fluidity contrasts with international programming that often imposes a static, siloed approach to the WPS pillars.

¹⁰⁷ Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies (2023). *Fifth Report on the Monitoring of the Implementation of the Final Accord*. Available at <https://kroc.nd.edu/news-events/news/fifth-kroc-institute-report-on-colombian-peace-agreement-shows-continued-progress-despite-adversity/>

¹⁰⁸ OHCHR (2023). *Annual Report on Human Rights in Colombia*. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

¹⁰⁹ IDEA (2023). *Gender Quotas Database: Colombia*. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. Available at <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas>



Since the 2016 Peace Agreement, WROs, particularly those led by Indigenous, Afro-descendant and peasant women, have been at the forefront of redefining peace. Feminist groups have pushed for recognition of intersecting inequalities: “We are not only women. We are Black women, and that matters in how we experience violence and peace” (FGD, Colombia). Their work transcends the cessation of armed conflict and calls for a transformative, feminist peace rooted in justice, sustainability, healing and collective rights.

“***Our understanding of feminist peace has been shaped by lived experiences, struggle, and, most importantly, collective transformation. When we began our work, what we understood as peace was not only the absence of war but the presence of care, dignity and connection among women. We’ve reshaped that understanding through years of training, mutual recognition and intentional dialogue.***”

FGD participant, Cartagena, Colombia

Focus group participants in urban and coastal areas felt that peace must include resolving intra-community conflicts and transforming patriarchal and racist practices within civil society and peace institutions. They challenged militarised, top-down peace paradigms and instead centred lived experiences, care economies, spiritual and territorial wellbeing, and collective memory. Likewise, protection is locally defined, not only as defence against armed actors but as safeguarding territorial wisdom, food security, and ancestral knowledge – a distinctly feminist, decolonial framing of security. For many women in Colombia, land is not simply a resource; it is the basis of identity, sustenance and spirituality, and therefore the foundation for peace.

“***We still understand what feminist peace means. It’s not just about ending conflict, it’s about transforming the systems that cause it, including patriarchy, racism, and economic exploitation. Healing from violence must be part of peace.***”

FGD, Colombia





THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

FRAGILE PROGRESS AMID PERSISTENT CONFLICT

The DRC has endured decades of political instability, protracted armed conflict and governance challenges, particularly in its eastern provinces. Despite the democratic transition that began with the 2006 elections, the country continues to face chronic insecurity driven by more than 100 armed groups operating in the east.¹¹⁰ These conflicts are fuelled by competition over natural resources, regional power struggles and unresolved historical grievances wrapped in neo-colonial economics. Politically, the DRC has made some progress toward democratisation. Félix Tshisekedi's election in 2019 marked the first peaceful transfer of power, but the electoral process remains contested, with reports of irregularities and limited civic space.¹¹¹ Institutions suffer from corruption, weak rule of law and limited state authority in conflict-affected regions. Gender justice remains elusive. Women and girls in the DRC face discrimination, exclusion from decision-making processes and high rates of GBV, including CRSV, and according to a key informant in the research "women and girls continue to face limited access to justice, particularly in cases of GBV" (Key Informant, DRC). While WPS implementation has made strides in the area of participation, the pillars of prevention, protection, and relief and recovery remain under-addressed, weakening the holistic impact of the agenda (Key Informant, DRC). The country ranks 150 out of 191 in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Gender Inequality Index.¹¹²

The DRC adopted its first NAP in 2010. The country's second NAP covering the period 2018–2022 outlined five strategic objectives including prevention of conflict, women's participation in peace processes, protection from violence and recovery.¹¹³ However, implementation has been inconsistent, underfunded and poorly monitored (FGD, Kinshasa/Goma, DRC).

The third NAP has been developed and is currently waiting for approval by the cabinet. While the DRC has ratified key international and regional instruments on women's rights, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Maputo Protocol, domestic implementation remains limited.

110 Human Rights Watch. World Report (2024). Democratic Republic of Congo Events of 2023. Available at <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/democratic-republic-congo#:~:text=a%20police%20officer.-,Attacks%20on%20civilians%20by%20armed%20groups%20and%20government%20forces,%2C%20recruiting%20children%2C%20and%20pillaging.>

111 Human Rights Watch (2023). World Report: Democratic Republic of Congo. Available at <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/democratic-republic-congo>

112 UNDP (2023). Human Development Report. Available at: <https://www.hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-2023-24>

113 Ministère du Genre, Famille et Enfant (2018). Plan d'Action National de la Résolution 1325 (2018–2022).



The 2015 Gender Parity Act aims to increase women's representation in public institutions, but enforcement is weak. In the 2023 elections, women won just 13 per cent of National Assembly seats, far below the goal of 30 per cent.¹¹⁴

Despite the achievements, the implementation of the WPS agenda in the DRC continues to face several challenges. Women's participation in formal peace processes remains extremely limited, as seen in the recent Nairobi peace process where financial constraints particularly related to travel and accommodation prevented many women from taking part. Moreover, according to one key informant, "the reduction in international aid including cuts from major donors such as USAID has further constrained resources available for WPS programming, weakening the capacity of both government and civil society to implement and sustain key initiatives" (Key Informant, Kinshasa, DRC). Patriarchy remains deeply embedded in DRC society, manifesting even in local peace committees, national dialogues, and electoral politics (Key Informant, Goma, DRC). The Ministry of Gender, Family and Children established a WPS Secretariat responsible for leading WPS coordination, but it lacks sufficient resources and political influence (Key Informant, Kinshasa, DRC). The WPS Secretariat has received significant support from WROs and development partners to develop, implement and monitor the DRC NAP. Civil society has played a critical role in pushing the WPS agenda, including through monitoring, awareness campaigns, and capacity building for women leaders (Key Informant, Goma, DRC).

THE ROLE OF WROS IN ADVANCING THE WPS AGENDA

The ongoing conflict in eastern DRC has transformed the country's protection crisis into one of the world's most severe. In 2024, about a quarter of the population (25.4 million people) were in need of aid, particularly in the eastern region. In addition, there were 6.4 million internally displaced people; this figure is second only to Sudan.



The implementation of the WPS agenda in the DRC faces challenges due to the on-going conflict in eastern DRC, which continues to shift the focus from peacebuilding to humanitarian response. Women and girls are often caught in the midst of violence, making it difficult to sustain or build on past achievements. In the eastern DRC, failed security exposes women and girls to sexual violence.

KII, Goma, DRC

¹¹⁴ Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (2024). Women in National Parliaments: DRC Profile. Available at: <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/CD/CD-LC01/data-on-women/>



As indicated, women and girls are affected by the ongoing conflict due to their role in the household and the fact that they are often left to care for children and older relatives on their own when fleeing. In addition, women and girls are the main victims/survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), which is often used as a weapon of war and sexual exploitation and abuse through “survival sex” a means of subsistence in many cases where there is food shortage.¹¹⁵

Among the four WPS pillars, relief and recovery shows the highest level of implementation, albeit inadequately relative to the growing needs. Most support is directed toward income-generating activities aimed at enhancing women’s resilience. Participation ranks second, though it is mostly limited to WPS-themed meetings rather than meaningful participation in peace and security decision-making spaces. However, these meetings offer valuable platforms for advocacy, networking and increasing government accountability on NAP commitments. Protection remains the most challenging pillar, as women continue to bear the brunt of conflict with limited systemic safeguards. Preventive efforts are also weak, with little investment in measures that could mitigate conflict-related GBV. Overall, the protracted conflict renders WPS gains extremely fragile, and there is limited discourse on how the agenda applies in such volatile contexts (FGD, DRC).

Women’s rights organisations are instrumental in advancing the WPS agenda in the DRC. They support the development and localisation of the NAP and play a critical role in awareness-raising and popularisation, making WPS instruments accessible to local communities. WROs spearhead activities, mobilise financial and technical resources, and work alongside government actors to draft, refine and contextualise the NAP (Key Informant, Goma, DRC).

Beyond policy support, WROs deliver capacity-building programmes that equip local stakeholders with the skills needed to advance gender-responsive peace-building. They also establish monitoring mechanisms that track progress and highlight gaps in WPS implementation (FGD and Key Informants, Kinshasa/ Goma, DRC). Through advocacy efforts, they hold leaders accountable, while also providing vital support in documentation and evidence generation by producing reports and tracking progress on WPS indicators. In this way, WROs serve as watchdogs, holding both national authorities and the international community accountable for fulfilling WPS commitments (Key Informants, Goma and Kinshasa, DRC). WROs also take the lead in organising annual meetings to evaluate WPS implementation and propose areas for improvement, though this once-yearly frequency is insufficient (Key Informant, Kinshasa, DRC).

115 Oxfam Song Sheet, 2025 (Internal Report).



Overall, WROs have played a central role in leading these advocacy efforts, leveraging both their proximity to communities and contextual knowledge to ensure women survivors of conflict influence in policy matters and to mobilise support. Their leadership has helped to elevate local voices, foster accountability and ensure that advocacy messages are both relevant and impactful. One of the most effective approaches has been advocacy grounded in concrete case studies and evidence. As indicated by a key informant: “when the women speak themselves, when they are involved in the advocacy of the initiatives, the leaders are convinced because they are touched by the expression of the voice of the women affected by conflict. The women advocated for the survivors to be included in the design and management of a fund for victims of the war in DRC. As a result, some of the survivors were appointed as members of the fund committee”¹¹⁶ (Key Informant Kinshasa, DRC).

Feminist Approaches and Survivor-Led Advocacy for Transformative Change

In the context of eastern DRC, where conflict disproportionately affects women and girls, adopting a feminist approach to WPS advocacy is essential. The impact of violence is intensified by existing gender inequalities, patriarchal systems and widespread GBV, which together further marginalise women and girls in times of crisis. A feminist perspective emphasises gender justice and the rights of women and girls, addressing both immediate needs and the root causes of their marginalisation. By centring advocacy on their rights, agency and safety, this approach not only responds to the specific harms they face but also contributes to reducing the overall impact of conflict on affected communities.

The FGDs highlighted that the implementation of the WPS agenda remains fragile when there is a lack of government accountability and leadership. One key lesson is that for the WPS agenda to be sustainable and impactful, the government must take ownership and lead its implementation. Strong institutional commitment is essential to ensure coherence, resource allocation and the effective coordination of efforts across sectors and actors. Without active government engagement, progress risks being inconsistent and heavily dependent on external support.

¹¹⁶ The “Pamoja Tutaweza” fund project supported by AVSI and the Fonds Spécial de Réparation et d’Indemnisation des Victimes des Activités Armées de l’Ouganda en RDC (FRIVA0) offers support to survivors of violence in the DRC.

The most significant insight from the DRC context is that women survivors and grassroots actors are most impactful when directly involved in advocacy and decision-making, especially when supported by WROs. In DRC, local women-led documentation, survivor networks, and lived experience-centred advocacy are key methodologies of feminist knowledge production. “Women organise by province, collect testimonies, and link it to national advocacy – it’s not external researchers, it’s survivors speaking for themselves” (Key Informant DRC). This survivor-led, bottom-up approach is seen as transformative. This finding underscores the power of lived experience, meaningful participation and the need to support grassroots leadership in advancing an inclusive and effective WPS agenda in the DRC.

THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY (OPT)

Nearly eighty years after what Palestinians refer to as the Nakba (‘catastrophe’ in Arabic); the mass displacement and dispossession of Palestinians) Israel’s forced displacement has not ended. Following its seizure of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip in 1967, and now two years into Israel’s war on Gaza (with forced displacement numbers exceeding those of the Nakba), Palestinian women and other marginalised communities continue to endure and resist the structural violence of unlawful occupation. “We cannot speak about peace and security without considering that people need an immediate stop to Israeli aggression” (FGD, OPT).

Mass forced displacement and deportation of Palestinians cannot be seen in isolation of Israel’s broader unlawful conduct in the OPT aimed at annexation of territory, which amounts to ethnic cleansing. The ongoing, unlawful Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory is carried out through systematic and sustained actions, including land and resource confiscation, military and settler (state-backed) violence, arbitrary arrests, demolitions of homes and infrastructure, explicit calls for population transfer and denial of aid and services, which are all severely impacting women and girls.¹¹⁷ For decades, Palestinians have continued to pay the price for the failure of governments to end one of the longest military occupations in modern history.¹¹⁸ The action and inaction of powerful states have aided Israel with its impunity and are complicit in Israel’s grave human rights violations, crimes against humanity and genocide.

¹¹⁷ OCHA (2024). *Humanitarian Needs Overview: Occupied Palestinian Territory*

¹¹⁸ International Court of Justice (2024, July 19). Press release: Legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem (Request for Advisory Opinion). United Nations. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/ici-pressrelease-19jul24/>

PROTECTION THREATS

In September 2025, the UN Independent Commission of Inquiry found that Israel is responsible for the commission of genocide in Gaza, including by concluding that its forces have been responsible for committing four out of five genocidal acts as described in the 1948 Convention of the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide¹¹⁹:

- killing,
- causing serious bodily or mental harm,
- deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about the destruction of the Palestinians, and
- imposing measures intended to prevent births.

Since October 2023, as per conservative estimates, nearly 65,000 people have been killed in Gaza, including at least 19,400 children,¹²⁰ with many more bodies still buried under the rubble. A former Israeli army commander confirmed that more than 200,000 Palestinians have been killed or injured in Gaza.¹²¹ Entire families have been eradicated.¹²² In September 2025, after 22 months of relentless violence, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) announced that over a quarter of Gaza's population is facing famine (IPC 5). Another 1.07 million people – 54 per cent of the population – are facing emergency (IPC Phase 4), and 396,000 people are in crisis (IPC Phase 3).¹²³

In May 2025, UN Women noted that more than 28,000 women and girls have been killed, thousands more injured, and nearly one million forcibly displaced.¹²⁴ An estimated 13,000 women are now single heads of households. In July 2025, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and Girls, Reem Alsalem, referred to the violence perpetrated against women and girls as an unfolding "femi-genocide" in Gaza, saying the scale and nature of the crimes inflicted by Israel on Palestinian women and girls by Israeli forces are so extreme that existing concepts in legal and criminal frameworks can no longer adequately describe or capture them.¹²⁵

119 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/09/1165856>

120 Palestinian Ministry of Health in Gaza cited in <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/3/18/gaza-tracker> accessed 16/09/2025

121 We took the gloves off': ex-IDF chief confirms Gaza casualties over 200,000 | Israel-Gaza war | The Guardian

122 <https://pchrgaza.org/israel-persists-in-genocide-exterminating-entire-families-and-forcibly-displacing-them/>

123 <https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipc-country-analysis/details-map/en/c/1159696/>

124 UN Women (May 2025). UN Women's latest analysis estimates that more than 28,000 women and girls have been killed in Gaza since the onset of hostilities in October 2023
<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/news/2025/05/un-women-estimates-over-28000-women-and-girls-killed-in-gaza-since-october-2023>

125 OHCHR (2025). *Gaza: Expert denounces genocidal violence against women and girls* Press Release 17 July 2025. Available at: <https://ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/07/gaza-un-expert-denounces-genocidal-violence-against-women-and-girls>

¹³² <https://www.hrw.org/report/2025/01/28/five-babies-one-incubator/violations-pregnant-womens-rights-amid-israels-assault>

There have been many direct attacks on hospitals, ambulances and convoys evacuating pregnant women.¹³³ Israel has repeatedly delayed or denied permits for pregnant women and newborns needing urgent care outside Gaza, leading to preventable deaths.¹³⁴ The UN Independent Commission (March, 2025) has documented specific evidence of genocidal acts by Israel in Gaza against Palestinians through systematically destroying women's healthcare facilities focusing on the intentional destruction of an IVF clinic and 4000 embryos. This action relates directly to Article II (d) of the Genocide Convention, as do the attacks on health facilities for pregnant women, which directly cause the prevention of births and involve the use of sexual gender-based violence as a war strategy.¹³⁵

Israel's commission of genocide in Gaza has profoundly affected all Palestinian women, and despite the global commitment to the WPS agenda under UNSCR 1325, the experiences of Palestinian women reveal its limitations and its failure to deliver accountability, protection or justice. This is summed up by one of the FGD participants from Gaza: "1325 has failed to protect the women in Gaza, 80% of the buildings have been destroyed, and one tool [that is being used] is to force people to emigrate, aiming to force people to leave, it is an attempt to depopulate Gaza" (FGD, Gaza).

According to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, "sexual, reproductive and gender-based violence has become a weapon of choice of the Israeli military both in Gaza and in the West Bank. There is no escape from the conclusion that Israel has employed sexual and gender-based violence against Palestinians to terrorize them and perpetuate a system of oppression that undermines their right to self-determination."¹³⁶ This kind of abuse is not limited to Gaza. Palestinian women and girls in the West Bank face increasing levels violence, threats, intimidation, restriction on movement and discrimination from Israeli forces on a daily basis, and Israeli authorities continue to impose policies that strictly violate international humanitarian and human rights law.¹³⁷ This highlights the gendered impacts of Israeli policies and practices, including unlawful occupation, increasing illegal settlement activity, threatened evictions and house demolitions in the West Bank.¹³⁸

133 <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/14984/pdf/>

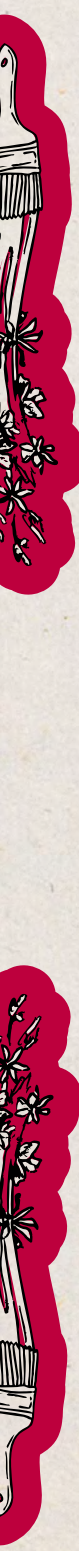
134 [https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/report/auto-draft/Gaza - No-Safe-Pregnancies-During-Israeli-Assault.pdf](https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/report/auto-draft/Gaza-No-Safe-Pregnancies-During-Israeli-Assault.pdf)

135 UN News (2025, March 13). *UN inquiry finds Israeli actions in Gaza may constitute genocide, citing attacks on reproductive health*. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/report-of-the-commission-of-inquiry-israel-gender-based-violence-13march2025/>

136 Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem: *"More than a human can bear": Israel's systematic use of sexual, reproductive and other forms of gender-based violence since 7 October 2023*. Available at <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/report-of-the-commission-of-inquiry-israel-gender-based-violence-13march2025/>

137 UN Social and Economic Commission for Western Asia (2023). Social and economic situation of Palestinian women and girls

138 UN Social and Economic Commission for Western Asia (2023). Social and economic situation of Palestinian women and girls



In the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, women face immense pressure due to frequent night raids by Israeli forces, settler attacks on rural communities and harassment at the more than 1,000 military checkpoints.¹³⁹ These experiences create extreme anxiety for mothers concerned about the safety of their children who are frequently shot at, killed¹⁴⁰ or held in arbitrary detention.¹⁴¹

Palestinian women have always played an integral role in community mobilisation, regional and international advocacy, calling for peace and justice. They have led humanitarian response and care work under siege and Israel's unlawful military occupation in the OPT as was noted by the FGD participants: "Women in Gaza have led humanitarian responses... acted as de facto peacebuilders" (FGD, OPT). Yet the international WPS agenda often reduces them to passive recipients of aid or protection, ignoring their role as active agents of change. Women in the FGDs were resolute, displaying great strength as they stated: "We are not just grieving mothers or helpless widows. We are community leaders, journalists, medics and organisers. We need to be at the table where decisions are made, including about the reconstruction of Gaza" (FGD, OPT). As Palestinian women have been stalwart activists resisting the unlawful military occupation and supporting Palestinian society for decades, they know the priorities and the needs of women better than anyone. They therefore cannot be excluded from decision-making on recovery and reconstruction (FGD, OPT). Participation must go beyond token opportunistic representation. As emphasised by the Global NGO Working Group on WPS,¹⁴² participation must enable women to influence both the structure and outcomes of negotiations, not just be present as symbolic actors. This requires dismantling structural barriers, not just increasing parity. It requires safe spaces as well as legal protection from surveillance, arrest and violence, none of which are guaranteed to Palestinian women. Without real political inclusion and freedom from intimidation, participation under UNSCR 1325 remains symbolic and even dangerous, as Palestinian women's rights activists report often being targeted by Israel and themselves becoming victims/survivors of violence.

Palestinian women and girls are not only targeted by genocide, ethnic cleansing and unlawful occupation: they also face disproportionate suffering as a result of deeply embedded discriminatory systems.¹⁴³

139 Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem: *"More than a human can bear": Israel's systematic use of sexual, reproductive and other forms of gender-based violence since 7 October 2023*. Available at <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/report-of-the-commission-of-inquiry-israel-gender-based-violence-13march2025/>

140 UNICEF Statement: <https://www.unicef.org/mena/press-releases/palestinian-child-killed-and-four-severely-injured-west-bank-past-two-weeks>

141 Btselem; Statistics on Palestinian minors in Israeli custody. Available at https://www.btselem.org/statistics/minors_in_custody

142 NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security (2020). *Civil Society roadmap on women, peace and security*. <https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/roadmap-2020/>

143 Gender discrimination against young women in Palestine – Global Campus of Human Rights



Gender justice in the OPT is further constrained by entrenched patriarchal norms, discriminatory laws and political marginalisation. Women hold just 14.5 per cent of seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council, despite the presence of women quotas of 18 percent¹⁴⁴ in municipal councils and party lists.¹⁴⁵ Legal reform has been slow; most notably the Family Protection Act, which would criminalise GBV, has faced persistent delays due to opposition from conservative factions.¹⁴⁶ While the OPT ratified CEDAW in 2014, its implementation is hampered by plural legal systems and weak enforcement mechanisms,¹⁴⁷ implementation has been limited by resource constraints, political instability, and the lack of full sovereignty or indeed a Palestinian state to implement the recommendations due to the unlawful Israeli occupation.

In the absence of a fully sovereign Palestinian state, civil society has stepped into the role that the state would normally play. Women's organisations have played a central role in the OPT's WPS advocacy, service delivery and localisation of the WPS agenda.

To complement existing efforts, the Palestinian women's civil society coalition for UNSCR 1325 developed its own fourth strategic plan (2025-2026) on WPS, which takes into account the views and voices of various women's groups based on extensive consultations conducted amid the genocide. The plan centres Palestinian women's voices and leadership in justice work and in advancing WPS agenda, while demanding urgent implementation of UNSCR 1325 as a political imperative.

NATIONAL ACTION PLANS

The OPT adopted its first NAP in 2017, followed by a second NAP (2020-2023), focusing on protection, participation, prevention, and relief and recovery under occupation.¹⁴⁸ Despite its significance, implementation has been limited by resource constraints, political instability, and the lack of full sovereignty or indeed a Palestinian state to implement the recommendations due to the unlawful Israeli occupation.

144 Carter Centre, *Municipal Elections in West Bank/Gaza*, March 26 2022. Available at https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/west-bank-gaza-expert-mission-municipal-elections-final-report-041522.pdf

145 Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (2024). *Women in Politics Database: Palestine*. Available at <https://www.ipu.org/parliament/PS>

146 Al-Shabaka (2022). Gender, Law, and the State in Palestine <https://al-shabaka.org/commentaries/palestine-beyond-partition-and-the-nation-state/>

147 Al-Shabaka. (2022). Gender, Law, and the State in Palestine. Available at <https://al-shabaka.org/commentaries/palestine-beyond-partition-and-the-nation-state/>

148 Ministry of Women's Affairs – State of Palestine (2020). Second National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 (2020-2023).

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As FGD participants noted: "The Palestinian Authority has little control of the situation, it doesn't have full of control security or protection so has limited scope to deliver accountability" (FGD OPT). They further noted: "The National Action plan needs an international action plan, because our national one has failed. We don't have many freedoms or abilities to deliver a national action plan under occupation, but an international one could be more valuable" (FGD, OPT). Despite these weaknesses, the participants acknowledged that they all accepted the WPS agenda:



1325, despite its strengths and weaknesses, has been adopted by all of Palestinian women's civil society. However, 25 years after its implementation, the resolution is open-ended and has no set time frame for implementation in Palestine. Its relevance is inherently linked to other unresolved issues, such as the end of the Israeli unlawful occupation and withdrawal of illegal settlements. This means the resolution cannot truly guarantee safety and security for Palestinian women, because their safety and well-being are tied to that of broader Palestinian society [impacted by the Israeli occupation and genocide].



FGD, the OPT



¹⁴⁹ Palestine Second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security- Palestine Second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security | UN Women – Arab States



As Cynthia Enloe stated “Imperial domination drives everything else out of the room”¹⁵⁰, referring to the perspective that for people living under colonisation or foreign occupation, that very reality becomes their biggest problem in life and the root cause of all other issues and struggles. Hence, similarly, Palestinian feminists participating in this study prioritised ending the unlawful occupation above all other issues.

TRANSNATIONAL SOLIDARITY?

The struggles of Palestinian women must be understood within the context of the unlawful Israeli military occupation. The FGD in the OPT highlighted the gaps between mainstream liberal feminism – which focuses on promoting women’s individual rights and autonomy without recognising the need to dismantle structural barriers through radical transformation and intersectional approaches – and Palestinian women’s needs. FGD participants indicated how such liberal feminist approaches not only fail to acknowledge, but also marginalise and erase, Palestinian women’s lived experiences¹⁵¹: “Western feminism talks about feminism, everything except Gaza. It’s shameful....we need to build on positive solidarity with women from the Global South, the global feminist movement has failed to connect feminist solidarity with the end of the genocide” (FGD, OPT).

Palestinian feminists have repeatedly called for global solidarity from global feminist movements. The silence of many Global North feminists on the situation in the OPT and across the region has caused an inevitable rupture in the international feminist movement.¹⁵² As FGD participants noted: “Too often, mainstream Global North feminist liberal discourse focuses narrowly on generic gender-based violence frameworks, frequently erasing the political context of the unlawful occupation. Some Western feminists’ silence on the OPT reflects a lack of intersectional solidarity” (FGD, OPT). Some Western feminists have even echoed Israel’s atrocity propaganda, saying Israel’s bombing campaign will liberate Palestinian and SWANA women, thereby exposing how Western feminism has been entangled with colonialism and imperialism.¹⁵³

Palestinian feminists in the FGD for this study called for an international feminist conference focused on Gaza, where women affected by war crimes and systemic violence can speak directly to the world. They wanted this conference to include participation by not only the feminist CSO leaders and activists who are often represented in such fora, but also individual women in the OPT who have faced these challenges.

150 Enloe, Cynthia, at lecture at London Metropolitan University attended by Fionna Smyth, 23/06/2025

151 https://www.linkedin.com/posts/kavita-nandini-ramdas-313958_when-feminist-foreign-policy-fails-the-cffps-activity-7273549372758315008-ycg5/

152 Saleh, Layla: Palestine, (2024). A Test for Feminist Foreign Policy <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/gender/2024/01/16/palestine-a-test-for-feminist-foreign-policy/>

153 Pratt, N., (she/her); Jabiri, A., (she/her); Ajour, A., (she/her); Shoman, H., (she/her); Aldossari, M., (she/her); and Ababneh, S., (she/her). (2025). Why Palestine is a feminist issue: a reckoning with Western feminism in a time of genocide. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 27(1), 226–250. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2025.2455477>

SOUTH SUDAN

Fragile Peace Amid Prolonged Conflict and Gender Inequality

South Sudan has faced persistent instability and violent conflict since its independence in 2011. A brutal civil war erupted in 2013, followed by intermittent violence and political fragmentation despite the signing of the 2018 Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS). While the transitional government formed in 2020 brought temporary calm, key provisions of the R-ARCSS such as security sector reform, transitional justice and elections remain largely unimplemented.¹⁵⁴

More than eight years after Sudan plugged back into conflict and three years after a peace agreement was signed, the security situation in South Sudan remains extremely sensitive and fragile, with ongoing political instability, postponement of elections, corruption, shrinking civic space,¹⁵⁵ intercommunal conflicts, armed group activity, and increased displacement coupled with climate shocks that have compounded the effects of the violence.¹⁵⁶ More than 9 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, and more than 2 million remain internally displaced.¹⁵⁷ Women and girls are disproportionately affected by the violence, including widespread SGBV, which has been described by the UN as a “weapon of war” in South Sudan.¹⁵⁸ In addition, the historic lack of investment in essential services, declining economy, lack of infrastructure and allegations of corruption are contributing to and exacerbating an urgent hunger crisis¹⁵⁹ and impacting the achievement of the objectives of the WPS agenda.

Gender inequality is persistent in South Sudan society due to its entrenched patriarchal norms, harmful traditional practices (e.g. forced marriage) and weak enforcement of laws. The country ranks near the bottom of global gender indexes, and women are significantly underrepresented in decision-making at all levels.¹⁶⁰ Despite constitutional provisions for equality, customary law systems dominate in many regions, often prioritising male authority and reinforcing discriminatory norms. In addition, South Sudan is one of the most dangerous countries in the world to be a woman.¹⁶¹ Most women lack access to basic health and education and about 65 per cent of women and girls will experience sexual and/or physical violence in their lifetime¹⁶².

¹⁵⁴ Liaga, A.E. (2021). South Sudan's Transitional Government: Realities, Challenges and Opportunities. Institute for Security Studies. East African Report 41. https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/EAR-41.pdf?utm_source

¹⁵⁵ UNHCR (2025). Escalating conflict in South Sudan forces many thousands to flee just as aid dwindles. Press Release. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press-releases/escalating-conflict-south-sudan-forces-many-thousands-flee-just-aid-dwindles> and [South Sudan: Freedom in the World 2024 Country Report-](https://www.unhcr.org/news/press-releases/south-sudan-freedom-in-the-world-2024-country-report)

¹⁵⁶ Oxfam (2022). South Sudan Internal Report

¹⁵⁷ OCHA (2024). South Sudan Humanitarian Response in View. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/2024-south-sudan-humanitarian-response-review#:~:text=In%202024%2C%20multiple%20shocks%20and,quarters%20of%20South%20Sudan's%20population.>

¹⁵⁸ United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and OHCHR (2023). Access to Justice and Accountability for Sexual Violence. Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/unmiss-brief-violence-affecting-civilians-april-june-2023>

¹⁵⁹ Oxfam (2022). South Sudan Internal Report

¹⁶⁰ UN Women and Government of South Sudan (2025). Country Gender Equality Profile for South Sudan. Available at https://africa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2025-01/south_sudan_country_gender_equality_profile_0.pdf?utm_source.

¹⁶¹ The five most dangerous places to be a girl, IRC, 2019. <https://www.rescue.org/uk/article/five-most-dangerous-places-be-girl>

¹⁶² Oxfam (2022). South Sudan Internal Report



Women's Participation and the Roles of WROs in Peacebuilding

In South Sudan, women's participation in peace processes can be traced back to the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement to the referendum and the Revitalised Peace Agreement (R-ARCSS) where women are signatories (Key Informant, Juba, South Sudan). South Sudan adopted its first NAP for the period 2015–2020. This NAP focused on five key pillars: prevention, protection, participation, relief and recovery, and coordination and partnership. A second-generation NAP (2023–2027) was later launched with enhanced focus on inclusive peacebuilding, implementation of the peace agreement and addressing SGBV (Government of South Sudan, 2023).

The country has ratified several international instruments relevant to women's rights, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Maputo Protocol. The 2011 Transitional Constitution guarantees gender equality and includes provisions for affirmative action. Article 16(4)(b) of the Constitution and the Revitalized Peace Agreement mandate 35 per cent affirmative action for women in executive and legislative appointments. Despite these commitments, legal enforcement remains weak (FDG and Key Informants, Juba, South Sudan). The Penal Code does not fully criminalise all forms of SGBV, and legal frameworks for addressing GBV including the Family Law and Anti-GBV bills remain under development. Customary courts, which handle the majority of legal disputes, often apply patriarchal interpretations that disadvantage women and girls.¹⁶³

The NAPs have led to a significant increase in the participation of women in peace processes, particularly through advocacy to secure women's participation and the 35 per cent quota in the Revitalized Peace Agreement. According to a key informant, "the first South Sudan NAP was an entry point for women to be included in the peace process, particularly the Track 1 peace process. The NAP was used to lobby for women's participation. Secondly, during the revitalised process, CSOs and women's groups were included, and this allowed the inclusion of the 35% of women's participation" (Key Informant, Juba, South Sudan). This provision has in turn enabled civil society to lobby for women's participation in monitoring the Agreement.

Beyond formal processes, gender-responsive legal and policy reforms are now in place, such as the GBV Bill and Women's Equality Bill. At the community level,

¹⁶³ UN Women and Government of South Sudan (2025). Country Gender Equality Profile for South Sudan. Available at: https://africa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2025-01/south_sudan_country_gender_equality_profile_0.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com



WROs are actively involved through the establishment of Women Peace Committees and Mediators Networks: “WROs form peace committees... promote justice and mediation” (FGD, Juba, South Sudan).

They also raise awareness on gender justice, provide legal aid to survivors of violence and implement livelihood programmes to support women’s economic resilience in conflict-affected areas. As first responders – “Women are recognised as first responders in flooding and community crises” (FGD, Juba, South Sudan) – WROs are deeply embedded in their communities’ social fabric, making their contributions to peacebuilding indispensable (FGD, Juba, South Sudan).

However, despite their vital role, many WROs in South Sudan continue to face significant challenges. Resource constraints severely limit their effectiveness: “Limited funding and weak infrastructure make such initiatives difficult” (FGD, Juba, South Sudan). Equally problematic is their systematic exclusion from formal policy and decision-making spaces where key security and peacebuilding strategies are shaped. Shrinking civic space¹⁶⁴ has created an atmosphere of fear and restriction: “Poor internet, lack of safe spaces ... Meetings are not allowed, only in secret sites” (Key Informant, Juba, South Sudan). These external pressures combine with limited institutional capacity to constrain WRO’s ability to scale up and sustain their advocacy initiatives. Compounding these individual challenges is systemic fragmentation within the WPS ecosystem. A lack of coordination among international donors, government entities and WROs themselves undermines collective impact (Key Informant, Juba, South Sudan). Without deliberate efforts to include and empower WROs, their potential to transform South Sudan’s peace processes through inclusive, gender-responsive approaches remains largely underutilised.

Emerging Best Practices

In South Sudan, several promising best practices have emerged from WROs that enhance the effectiveness of their engagement in peacebuilding and the implementation of the WPS agenda. Firstly, coalition-building and unity among women across ethnic, tribal and sectoral divides have proven essential in amplifying women’s voices and influencing change. By coming together in networks and alliances, women leaders and activists are able to present a united front, bridge historical divisions and collectively push for policy reforms and inclusive peace processes.

¹⁶⁴ South Sudan: Freedom in the World 2024 Country Report



This solidarity counters the fragmentation that often weakens advocacy efforts and helps ensure that the priorities of diverse groups of women are represented at local and national levels. According to a Key Informant, “Women put aside their differences and developed a common vision for peace” (Key Informant, Juba, South Sudan).

Secondly, evidence-based advocacy has gained traction as a powerful tool. WROs increasingly use research findings, data and policy briefs to support their calls for gender-sensitive interventions.

“Dialogue has been the best approach, as women’s contribution is not valued, so there was no need to use force, so we conduct research, show evidence and then engage” (KII, Juba, South Sudan). This approach has allowed women’s groups to engage more credibly with policymakers, donors and international partners, and to ground their demands in lived realities and measurable needs. It has also helped to shift conversations from anecdotal appeals to structured, results-oriented policy discussions.

Thirdly, Key Informants and FGD respondents indicated that WROs have found that constructive and non-confrontational dialogue with policymakers tends to yield better outcomes than protest-based strategies. Engaging government officials and community leaders through consultation, dialogue and informal exchanges helps to reduce defensiveness and foster mutual understanding. This strategy respects cultural norms around hierarchy, while still enabling women to advocate for change in meaningful ways: “Dialogue has been the best approach... show evidence and then engage”, “Policy briefs, constructive dialogue with policymakers, coalition building” (Key Informant and FGD, Juba, South Sudan). This is aligned with participatory anthropology and peacebuilding theory on community-based consensus-driven dialogue and non-coercive social transformation through traditional mediation and truth and reconciliation practices.

Five years ago, in 2020, feminist peace emerged as a serious discussion in women’s rights spaces, and groups were coming together to develop a collective understanding of the concept. Oxfam’s 2020 discussion paper ‘Transforming Power to Put Women at the Heart of Peacebuilding’¹⁶⁵ identified a series of principles which underpin feminist peace as a contribution to that conversation.

¹⁶⁵ Smyth, Fionna; Hersi, Amina; Baldoumas, Abigael and Tonelli, Anna (2020). *Transforming Power to Put Women at the Heart of Peacebuilding*. Oxfam. Available at <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621053/dp-feminist-peace-security-introduction-210920-en.pdf?sequence=1>



4. A 'FEMINIST' WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA

Feminist Peace Principles¹⁶⁶

- Applies post-colonial and anti-racist approaches
- Seeks to understand how power is structured, maintained and exercised
- Challenges social norms and practices that sustain inequality
- Challenges gender norms and binaries
- Acknowledges that toxic masculinity impacts entire society, not just women
- Seeks to address and eliminate the root causes of violence experienced by women before, during and after conflicts
- Understands violence as occurring across personal, household, public and community spheres
- Recognises the multiple roles that women play at individual, familial and community levels, and seeks to provide a support mechanism
- Positions peacebuilding as intersectional and active, and centres those affected by conflict in all response mechanisms
- Acknowledges that violence manifests in various forms – economic, social and political.

Since then, feminist peace has been further elaborated in several Oxfam publications focusing on specific countries and regions, including by outlining lessons learned from Oxfam's feminist peace approach to policy and programming¹⁶⁷ and by the establishing of feminist foreign policy principles.¹⁶⁸

The findings in this report substantiate and build upon the components of the feminist peace definition. This indicates a shared understanding among global actors and practitioners at the national level that feminist peace goes beyond the absence of war to include systemic change, justice, human security, care as well as economic and climate justice. The discussions undertaken for this report demonstrate that feminist peace points to the need to challenge patriarchy, cultural norms and colonial legacies and a recognition that conflict affects women and girls differently and is context specific, making their inclusion and leadership vital. Across all countries, feminist peace is defined as the presence of justice, dignity and transformative systems that centre women's agency.

¹⁶⁶ Smyth, Fionna; Hersi, Amina; Baldoumas, Abigaël and Tonelli, Anna (2020). *Transforming Power to Put Women at the Heart of Peacebuilding*. Oxfam. Available at <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621053/dp-feminist-peace-security-introduction-210920-en.pdf?sequence=1>

¹⁶⁷ Pettersson, Marie Sophie; Ayikoru, Lydia; Diasso, Souhadou; Jaffer, Fatma; Jamal, Moath; Kjar-Levin, Katja; Lundambuyu, Christine; Okello, Robert; Peter, Sorro; Situma, Everlyne (Oxfam 2025) *No Women, No Peace - A Snapshot of Oxfam's Engagement with the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: Lessons and Opportunities - Oxfam Policy & Practice*

¹⁶⁸ [Oxfam-Novib-input-feminist-foreign-policy-08072021.pdf](#)



In Colombia, feminist peace was described by FGD participants as being realised through harmony with nature, intergenerational justice and a care-based economy. Feminist peace, as expressed by the FGD participants is not a monolithic concept but a plural, contextual practice. It challenges militarised, top-down peace paradigms and instead centres lived experiences, care economies, spiritual and territorial well-being, and collective memory. In South Sudan, feminist peace is defined as a holistic and intersectional approach that emphasises women's meaningful participation, the transformation of harmful social norms and addressing the differential impact of conflict on women and marginalised groups (Key Informants and FGD, Juba, South Sudan).

In the OPT, feminist peace means justice, the end of the occupation and genocide, protection of civilians and accountability to international humanitarian law, "especially now, it goes beyond the end of the war or a ceasefire, it includes dismantling settlements, halting the annexation process, ending the war on Palestinian refugee camps and stopping the attacks on UNRWA" (FGD, OPT).

The connection between the private and the public sphere is clear from respondents, who defined "feminist peace as a deep balance, a spiritual and physical connection with Mother Earth and the territory" (FGD, Bogota, Colombia). "Indigenous movements have always practiced peace, even if they haven't always called it that. Peace is something built every day, in the home, the community, through political work and advocacy. Healing, learning, and unlearning are crucial. Peace must be woven collectively with others. This is the deepest form of peace, it becomes national when it is rooted locally and spiritually" (FGD Bogota, Colombia).

Across all four focus countries (Colombia, the DRC, the OPT and South Sudan), there was a remarkable shared understanding of what constitutes feminist peace. This could suggest that a taxonomy of feminist peace is moving from the margins into a widely accepted paradigm. Peace and security are not the mere absence of conflict but must address systemic injustices, power inequalities and structural violence. Across the four focus countries, the perspectives converge on the urgency of centring women's lived experiences and creating pathways for meaningful participation and leadership while addressing structural violence to achieve sustainable and just peace.



REDEFINING SECURITY

Feminists usually redefine security as a people- and planet-centred holistic “human security”.¹⁶⁹ Feminist peace builders traditionally prioritise nonviolent action and usually believe that demilitarisation is a prerequisite to achieving a just and sustainable peace.¹⁷⁰ However, it must be recognised that in the face of a war of aggression or occupation, the idea that feminist peace automatically means pacifism is contested.¹⁷¹ Even though the respondents in this report all challenged militarism, some also mentioned the right to ‘resist’ oppression.¹⁷² It is critical that feminist peace is seen as a discourse that leaves room for diverse voices and can contain different perspectives, by understanding and recognising context and how power is shaped by global and local conflict dynamics.¹⁷³

TRANSFORMATIVE, INCLUSIVE, INTERSECTIONAL AND ACCOUNTABLE

Feminist peace reinforces the idea that peace must be transformative, inclusive and based on justice to be sustainable.¹⁷⁴

Feminist peace was in FGDs articulated as a transformative and inclusive vision that extends beyond the cessation of conflict to embrace gender equality, social justice and the dismantling of patriarchal structures.¹⁷⁵ There was the understanding that feminist peace is a strategy to achieving gender justice, by advocating for equity, dismantling systemic oppression and addressing the specific needs and experiences of marginalised groups. It seeks not just the idea of equality but the practical implementation of justice, recognising that historical injustices require specific remedies to create a truly fair society. It calls for transforming patriarchal structures and societal norms through the intentional inclusion of both women and men, while remaining centred on transforming inequality.

169 Feminist Human Security, Broadening the framework for the Interpretation of UNSCR 1325. https://limpal-colombia.org/images/documentos/por1325_2021_V2.pdf

170 See for example, WILPF’s approach to feminist peace. <https://www.wilpf.org/about-us/our-values-and-approach/>

171 Fal-Dutra Santos, Agnieszka (2022). Towards Feminist Peace, Reimagining a world without war. Feminist Perspectives, Kings College London. Available at: <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/towards-feminist-peace-imagining-a-future-without-war>

172 [The Human Right to Resist in International and Constitutional Law](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108974134.007) , pp. 15– 40. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108974134.007>. Publisher: Cambridge University Press
Print publication year: 2025

173 Fal-Dutra Santos, Agnieszka (2022). Towards Feminist Peace, Reimagining a world without war. Feminist Perspectives, Kings College London. Available at: <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/towards-feminist-peace-imagining-a-future-without-war>

174 Smyth, Fionna; Hersi, Amina; Baldoumas, Abigail and Tonelli, Anna (2020). Transforming Power to Put Women at the Heart of Peacebuilding Oxfam. Available at <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621053/dp-feminist-peace-security-introduction-210920-en.pdf?sequence=1>

175 Smyth, Fionna; Hersi, Amina; Baldoumas, Abigail and Tonelli, Anna (2020). Transforming Power to Put Women at the Heart of Peacebuilding Oxfam. Available at <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621053/dp-feminist-peace-security-introduction-210920-en.pdf?sequence=1>



This perspective aligns with feminist peace principles that seek structural transformation, not just inclusion or representation. According to one of the participants: “Feminist peacebuilding... for me, it is the process of building peace, but with a specific focus on equality between men and women. Because for me, feminism is not only a matter of, or an issue of women, but it is a struggle for equality... using approaches that are led by women, but the focus is on equality” (Key Informant, DRC).

Furthermore, a key respondent used the phrase “the personal is international” (KII, Global). She anchored her understanding of feminist peace in lived experience of sexual violence, widowhood, displacement and being the breadwinner of her family. This notion centres women’s experiences of violence and resilience, and emphasises that they are context specific. The ‘personal’ operates as highly political and is sometimes even a component of international diplomacy. A compelling example given by the respondents is the role of inter-ethnic marriages in mediation. Women who bridge two ethnic clans can connect divides and initiate reconciliation (KII, Global). This is a uniquely gendered role that often remains invisible in traditional, male-dominated peace negotiations. Feminist peace theory acknowledges these hidden infrastructures of care and mediation as foundational to sustainable peace.¹⁷⁶ The respondent highlighted the strength of her matrilineal lineage: her mother and grandmother, who defied forced marriage and challenged gender norms. This narrative locates feminist peacebuilding within indigenous, culturally grounded resistance to patriarchy, rather than within imposed external frameworks. It emphasises that feminism in peacebuilding must be decolonial and context specific.

In the OPT, feminist peace is defined as a call for justice, liberation, accountability and the dismantling of all oppression particularly in the face of the unlawful Israeli occupation. This feminism is rooted in resistance and self-determination as illustrated in the following quote:

“It’s time for [Western feminists] to revise their feminism and think about feminism from our [Palestinian women’s] perspective based on self-determination, liberation, and ending the occupation” (FGD, OPT). This definition of feminist peace explicitly critiques the limitations of UNSCR 1325, emphasising that peace without justice and accountability is hollow, and calls for a decolonial, intersectional and politically conscious feminist movement that includes the voices and lived realities of Palestinian women.

¹⁷⁶ Smyth, Fionna; Hersi, Amina; Baldoumas, Abigael and Tonelli, Anna (2020). *Transforming Power to Put Women at the Heart of Peacebuilding* Oxfam. Available at <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621053/dp-feminist-peace-security-introduction-210920-en.pdf?sequence=1>



QUEER, INTERSECTIONAL AND LIVED EXPERIENCES

Interviewees emphasised the importance of intersectionality recognising the distinct needs of internally displaced women, refugees, young women, women with disabilities and LGBTQIA+ individuals. Feminist peace was described as a challenge to both structural and cultural power hierarchies, including patriarchy and militarised governance.

While the WPS agenda acknowledges the gendered dimensions of conflict and the role of women in peacebuilding, it remains embedded in a binary, normative framework omitting explicit references to people of diverse SOGIESC.¹⁷⁷ As explained by a key informant, the queer community and in particular queer women experience double marginalisation: first as women in patriarchal societies, and second as queer people in deeply heteronormative and often violently homophobic cultures. It often involves stigma – such as being labelled as ‘evil’, ‘bewitched’ or ‘demonic’ by communities and religious institution – lack of safe spaces, threats, imprisonment, public humiliation and all too often exile. Constant questioning of queer identities is used to delegitimise non-gender conforming individuals and communities from gaining access and influence; people of diverse sexual orientations often must hide their identity, working ‘in disguise’ as neutral paralegals, human rights defenders or counsellors to protect themselves and be heard. “Feminist researchers and activists recognize thatfor women and sexual and gender minorities, violence experienced during conflict is intimately connected to violence and oppression experienced in the private sphere, and forms a ‘continuum’ that extends from war to peacetime.”¹⁷⁸

Feminist peace must be about people of diverse SOGIESC leading movements, making decisions and demanding space in public and political life. It includes fighting for bodily autonomy, economic equality and justice within patriarchal and heteronormative systems.¹⁷⁹ It is rooted in the belief that “a woman’s ‘no’ must be respected,” and that rights are not earned through submission but guaranteed through resistance. “Peace without justice is not peace, and that solidarity must be rooted in intersectionality, inclusion, and action” (KII).

¹⁷⁷ For more on the queer agenda for peace and security, see Outright International (2023). *LGBTQ lives in conflict and crisis: a queer agenda for peace, security and accountability*. New York: Outright International; Cooper-Cunningham, D. et al. (2023). *Queering Peace and Security: Recommendations to the United Nations Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*. Sheffield: University of Sheffield.

¹⁷⁸ Fal-Dutra Santos, Agnieszka (2022). Towards Feminist Peace, Reimagining a world without war. Feminist Perspectives, Kings College London. Available at: <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/towards-feminist-peace-imagining-a-future-without-war>

¹⁷⁹ Centring heterosexual orientation as the default or normative experience and invalidating other identities.



FEMINIST PEACE IS INTERGENERATIONAL

“To understand where we’re going, we have to understand where we’ve been”.

Carmen Perez-Jordan, American activist and Chicana feminist¹⁸⁰

The intergenerational transmission of feminist peace demonstrates how legacy and education must be core tenets of feminist peace. This further involves the need to reframe the WPS agenda as a broader community priority rather than just a women’s issue. As the baton is passed from women leaders who have been fighting for peace for decades to the next generation, it is critical to foster inter-generational dialogues between those feminists who have many years of wisdom and experience of navigating power and the new generation who bring their own skills and experience.

On November 24, 2016, when the Colombian Peace Agreement was announced, I danced in my living room with my four-year-old granddaughter. She didn’t yet understand the significance, but she felt the joy. Today, at ten, she writes about what peace means to her. That moment planted a seed – a feminist legacy passed down not through textbooks, but through lived joy and embodied memory.

FGD participant, Colombia

Building connections between generations will help strengthen feminist peace and ensure that the WPS agenda is transformative and is able to shape gender norms as well as power dynamics in society. It also means peace will be more sustainable if it is bought into by the younger generation, as coined by the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda and UN Security Council Resolution 2250.¹⁸¹ Despite the recent increase in conflicts and new threat multipliers such as the climate crisis, and in the face of the anti-gender backlash, FGD participants highlighted that young feminists continue to be at the forefront of reshaping power structures and advancing peace and demanding a world of justice and peace.

THE ROLE OF TRANSNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

A critical and often underappreciated feminist peacebuilding strategy is diaspora engagement. This engagement is rooted in the notion of transnational solidarity,¹⁸² where diaspora women and young people act not only as financial contributors but also as peacebuilders and civic educators. Feminist peacebuilding recognises the multiplicity of actors beyond formal state structures, and this kind of horizontal, community-driven engagement aligns directly with that vision.

¹⁸⁰ Perez-Jordan, C. (2025). Intersectional Feminist Organizing: An Intergenerational Epistemology Rooted in Liberation Movement. *Women & Therapy*, 48(1), 62–87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02703149.2025.2455828>

¹⁸¹ Youth, Peace and Security | PEACEBUILDING

¹⁸² Mutual support and shared understanding between people or groups across national borders who are working together to achieve a common goal, often a political one. It connects movements and struggles across different regions and time periods- <https://africanarguments.org/2021/10/what-is-transnational-solidarity-and-who-gets-to-define-it/>



One example used by a key informant is dialogues between returnees and young people from the local community: organising summits and workshops to address tensions between the returnee diaspora and local Somali young people serves as an example of relational peacebuilding and impactful non-financial remittances (KII, Diaspora). The tension regarding access to opportunities reflects gendered dynamics often seen in conflict-affected settings: structural exclusion, marginalisation and identity-based grievances. These initiatives consciously prioritise inclusion and healing divisions, core feminist peacebuilding practices that extend beyond ceasefires to tackle root causes of social rupture.

CONCLUSION

UNSCR 1325 and the subsequent resolutions have a role in ensuring that women and marginalised communities are included, can lead and are central to any solutions. However, the resolution operates within a broader peace architecture that includes various human rights and humanitarian instruments, including CEDAW, international humanitarian law, and international human rights law. It is just one tool, and it must be used alongside these other tools at the disposal of international bodies including the UN Human Rights Council and International Courts.¹⁸³ To maintain credibility amongst the very stakeholder groups it seeks to support, states must hold each other accountable for full implementation of all the resolutions, including addressing genocide, war crimes and violations of international human rights and humanitarian law that have been committed.

The four pillars of the agenda are too often cherry picked by states and/or donors. However, for the agenda to be fully realised the pillars must be recognised as inter-related and interdependent. Additionally, 'participation' should be seen as central to all the pillars of the WPS agenda, as this study has highlighted the importance of the WPS agenda being shaped by feminist leadership for it to be truly transformative.

The fact that states retrench from feminist foreign policy when they hit political headwinds, funding squeezes or a change in government is a lesson to all in the sector. True innovation and sustainable change happen from below, in the cut and thrust of the contestation of power.¹⁸⁴ The very institutions that are mandated to realise the WPS Agenda are compromised. A truly transformative agenda must seek to transform the very institutions that are responsible for global governance.¹⁸⁵

183 CEDAW, Universal Periodic Reviews, International Humanitarian Law, International Human Rights Law, and more.

184 Smyth, Fionna; Hersi, Amina, Baldoumas, Abigael and Tonelli, Anna (2020). Transforming Power to Put Women at the Heart of Peacebuilding. Oxfam. Available at <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621053/dp-feminist-peace-security-introduction-210920-en.pdf?sequence=1>

185 Smyth, Fionna; Hersi, Amina, Baldoumas, Abigael; and Tonelli, Anna (2020). *Transforming Power to Put Women at the Heart of Peacebuilding*. Oxfam. Available at [Transforming power to put women at the heart of peacebuilding: A collection of regional-focused essays on feminist peace and security](https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621053/dp-feminist-peace-security-introduction-210920-en.pdf?sequence=1)



The global financial and security architecture must be reformed to address systemic inequalities and power imbalances, and to ensure more equitable global governance by fully supporting a reform agenda driven by representation and principle rather than funding cuts, and by investing in feminist economies.

A feminist foreign policy that uses the language of feminism but fails to practice it can lead to co-option and disempowerment – whether through concentrating rather than distributing power, continuing arms sales used against civilians, or rapidly withdrawing gender equality funding.

Feminist peace is not an optional addition; it is a political commitment to justice, care, dignity, and structural change. It calls for a decisive break from tokenistic inclusion and addresses the root causes of violence: militarism, patriarchy, colonial legacies and systemic inequality. This report calls on national governments, donors, intergovernmental and regional institutions, and civil society to invest and properly fund a truly transformative agenda. To act with urgency and intention; to allocate sustained, quality and flexible funding to grassroots women's rights organizations; to ensure domestic financing and monitoring frameworks for NAPs; to institutionalise gender-responsive inclusive governance and legal reform; and to challenge the militarised, extractive systems that perpetuate conflict. The promise of the WPS agenda will remain unfulfilled until feminist peace is recognised not only as a strategy but as a political imperative. Now is the time to reclaim and transform the agenda through solidarity, accountability and bold investment in feminist visions of peace.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADVANCING THE WPS AGENDA

ALL ACTORS SHOULD:

- Adopt feminist leadership and support survivor-led approaches and document grassroots WRO/WLO innovations to inform policy and practice.
- Centre women's meaningful participation as an essential starting point and dismantle the silos between the WPS pillars, seeing them as interdependent and indivisible. All pillars should be included in all NAPs.

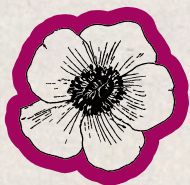


THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY (DONORS, INGOS, UN AND OTHER MULTILATERALS) SHOULD:

- Address the accountability deficit within the WPS agenda by exploring and co-creating with WROs/WLOs an accountability framework for the UNSC resolutions (1325, 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122, 2242, 2467, 2493) related to the WPS agenda.¹⁸⁶ This framework should build on lessons learned from the Global Compact on Women, Peace, Security and Humanitarian Action¹⁸⁷ and link to relevant existing international legal instruments and mechanisms (International Criminal Court, International Court of Justice, UN Human Rights Council, UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies, etc) that uphold human rights, international law and international humanitarian law, and be able to more effectively hold states, non-state armed actors, the UN and corporations to account.
- Appoint a UN Special Envoy or Special Representative to the UN Secretary General on Women Peace and Security with a clear mandate to convene and engage with civil society in crisis and conflict contexts, as well as provide strategic and technical guidance and support to ensure accelerated implementation of the WPS agenda.
- Facilitate local WROs/WLOs, LGBTQIA+ organisations and allied civil society to deliver the WPS agenda by:
 - Investing in increased quality, flexible, core and multi-year funding to local women-led, women's rights and LGBTQIA+ organisations and movements.
 - Establishing an independent international civil society advisory group on WPS comprising leading global, regional, national and sub-national civil society women's rights, feminist and peacebuilding networks, with direct access to the UN and Member State senior leadership – to advise, alert, liaise and convene as needed on the WPS agenda overall and in country/region specific contexts – and with independence to ensure accountability of processes.
 - Creating the conditions for inclusive partnerships that dismantle colonial power dynamics and promote the co-creation of interventions that are designed in line with the priorities of local women-led, women's rights and LGBTQIA+ organisations and movements and their communities.

186 United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), S/RES/1325 (2000); United Nations Security Council Resolution 1820 (2008), S/RES/1820(2008); United Nations Security Council Resolution 1888 (2009), S/RES/1888(2009); United Nations Security Council Resolution 1889 (2009), S/RES/1889 (2009); United Nations Security Council Resolution 1960 (2010), S/RES/1960(2010); United Nations Security Council Resolution 2106 (2013), S/RES/2106(2013); United Nations Security Council Resolution 2122 (2013), S/RES/2122(2013); United Nations Security Council Resolution 2242 (2015), S/RES/2242(2015); United Nations Security Council Resolution 2467 (2019), S/RES/2467(2019); United Nations Security Council Resolution 2493 (2019), S/RES/2493(2019)

187 Compact on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action



- Dismantling the barriers to their full, equal, meaningful and safe participation in both formal and informal peace processes at sub-national, national, regional and global levels.
- Reverse militarised approaches to diplomacy, security and peace, reduce the arms industry's influence, and instead invest in non-violent demilitarised human-rights based approaches that foster creative, inclusive dialogue that centres the voices of women, young people and marginalised communities. A feminist peace vision prioritises peacebuilding, disarmament, reparations and the protection of human rights over militarisation. This includes ensuring that increased military spending does not happen at the expense of ODA, including for gender justice in development, peace and humanitarian efforts.
- Use peacebuilding funds to preserve and build Feminist Peace Infrastructure such as grassroots mediation networks; fund structured platforms for joint planning, monitoring, and information sharing; and provide safe spaces and protection mechanisms for women, girls and SOGIESC diverse people.
- Transform the global financial and security architecture to address systemic inequalities and power imbalances to ensure more equitable global governance by:
 - Implementing reforms that make decision-making power in the international financial institutions more balanced and fair to the Global South, for example by changing IMF quota allocation and ensuring no one country has effective veto power in the World Bank or IMF. In addition, adopt a UN Framework Convention on Sovereign Debt to shift decision-making power over debt restructurings from the creditors-dominated IMF to a body independent from both creditors and debtors.
 - Expanding geographic representation in the G20 and democratising the OECD to make it more inclusive, transparent, representative and accountable – especially to countries and populations beyond its core membership of mostly high-income, Global North countries.
 - Democratising the UN Security Council including by renouncing the P5 veto and penholding monopoly and, instead, expanding membership to represent people and not military power.
 - Investing in feminist economies¹⁸⁸ that prioritise people and the planet over extractive, trickle-down models of economic growth. It should promote fair redistribution, debt justice and policies that advance mutual growth and wellbeing as well as the care economy, rather than the exploitation of labour, resources and land in the Global South.

¹⁸⁸ Oxfam (2024). Gender Justice Strategy 2024-2029: Fighting for a Feminist at Gender Just World



REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS (E.G. AFRICAN UNION, LEAGUE OF ARAB STATES, ASEAN AND THE EUROPEAN UNION) SHOULD:

- Ensure integration of feminist and decolonial perspectives and demilitarised approaches in regional peace frameworks.
- Facilitate regional solidarity through convening and capacity-sharing, learning and peer-exchange platforms with women-led, women's rights and LGBTQIA+ organisations and movements.

NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS SHOULD:

- Allocate national budgets to WPS implementation by earmarking a percentage of the budget to NAP implementation using WPS markers disaggregated by the 4 pillars and type of actor receiving the funds.
- Ensure all line ministries such as Ministries of Finance, Education, Security, Foreign Affairs, Internal Affairs, Gender Equality and Disaster Management are involved in NAP development and implementation to enable effective budgeting.
- Establish and fund technical support and national accountability and monitoring frameworks for NAPs to track achievements, identify gaps and develop time-bound strategies to close gaps.
- Strengthen inclusive participation and decision-making – institutionalise women's participation across all levels of peace and governance and enforce laws and policies on women's participation in peace and political processes.
- Invest in non-violent conflict resolution, local peacebuilding and participatory governance mechanisms. By prioritising dialogue over force, diplomacy can address root causes of conflict and build a sustainable, just peace.
- Increase investment in protection and prevention of gendered violations in conflict, including SGBV and its root causes.
- Ensure that the agenda is considered and implemented holistically, seeing each pillar as interdependent and interconnected. Participation should be seen at the heart of the entire agenda; however, all pillars should be included in all NAPs.
- Reform legal and policy frameworks to address structural and cultural violence – ensure existing laws and policies address systemic and structural issues.
- Work with women and other peacebuilders to co-design national dialogues and solutions, to align WPS NAP processes with the priorities and objectives of local women-led, women's rights and LGBTQIA+ organisations and movements.

Invest in increased quality, flexible, core and multi-year funding to local women-led, women's rights and LGBTQIA+ organisations and movements.



WOMEN'S RIGHTS, WOMEN-LED AND LGBTQIA+ ORGANISATIONS AND BROADER CIVIL SOCIETY SHOULD:

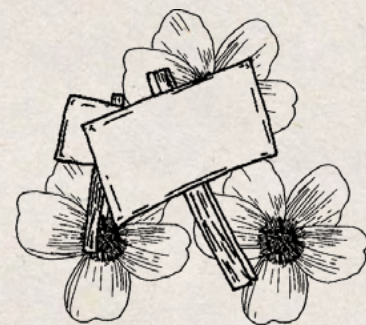
- Foster collaboration and coalition-building across movements to counter fragmentation, including competition over funding.
- Document and amplify grassroots innovations and community resilience.
- Centre the leadership of survivors and ensure inclusion of all marginalised voices such as IDP women, women refugees, women living with disabilities and LGBTQIA+ individuals.
- Continue to build on progress towards a genuinely intersectional understanding of peace and security that incorporates the rights, needs and perspectives of all marginalised groups.

NATIONAL LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

COLOMBIA

THE GOVERNMENT OF COLOMBIA SHOULD:

- Recognise and fund territorial peacebuilding by allocating quality, flexible, long-term funding for grassroots women's initiatives, particularly in indigenous and Afro-Colombian territories.
- Integrate healing and memory into peace processes by ensuring psychosocial support, truth-telling and reparation strategies that include women's experiences, including their role in community healing.
- Support land rights and ecological justice by ensuring that peace includes collective land titling, environmental protection and respect for ancestral knowledge.
- Broaden definitions of peace and participation by moving beyond formal negotiation tables to include daily practices, care economies and cultural continuity.
- Protect women human rights defenders by enhancing security protocols for WHRDs in rural and conflict-affected regions, ensuring state accountability.
- Foster intercultural and intersectoral dialogue by building alliances across intercultural and intersectoral dialogue by building alliances across feminist, Indigenous and Afro-descendant movements to strengthen collective impact and overcome fragmentation.



THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE DRC SHOULD:

- Accelerate approval and implementation of the 3rd NAP by advocating and pushing for cabinet approval of the 2023–2027 NAP and ensuring it includes strong monitoring and financing mechanisms.
- Strengthen the WPS Secretariat by providing adequate political support, autonomy and sustained resources to the secretariat.
- Expand survivor-led justice mechanisms by promoting survivor-centred approaches to transitional justice and ensuring survivors are included in reparations and fund management.
- Ensure women's inclusion in all formal peace negotiations (e.g. Nairobi/Luanda processes) and allocate resources to overcome logistical barriers (e.g. travel).
- Fund and scale local WROs by providing direct, flexible funding to grassroots WROs leading documentation, peace education and advocacy efforts.

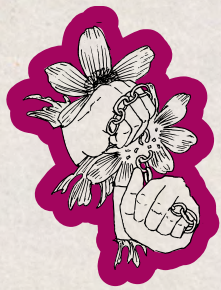
THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY SHOULD:

- Third party countries must end all military activity and support for non-state armed groups.

SOUTH SUDAN

THE GOVERNMENT OF SOUTH SUDAN SHOULD:

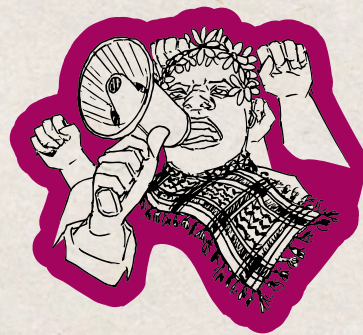
- Ensure full implementation of the 35 per cent quota by enforcing the affirmative action provisions of the Revitalized Peace Agreement and Constitution.
- Institutionalise women's participation in peace monitoring by including WROs and peace committees in the monitoring and implementation of the R-ARCSS and humanitarian responses.
- Invest in customary law reform by supporting efforts to harmonise statutory and customary laws to eliminate discriminatory practices against women and girls.
- Improve protection and relief services by strengthening services for survivors of SGBV, particularly in camps for internally displaced people, and by ensuring a gender-responsive humanitarian architecture.
- Fund peacebuilding and first responder work by recognising and supporting the role of women as first responders in crises, including with resources for mediation, early warning and climate resilience.



THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND THIRD STATES SHOULD:

- Uphold their legal obligations under the Genocide Convention and take all measures within their power to stop the commission of genocide in Gaza, including taking immediate steps to ensure the lifting of the siege and preventing the forced displacement of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, and to discontinue any military assistance, including arms sales, that would enable or facilitate genocide, and other crimes under international law.
- Ensure the protection of civilians against war crimes and atrocities. This involves not only safeguarding civilians, women and children from attacks but also ensuring that those responsible for violations are held accountable. International law and humanitarian principles must be upheld to protect the rights and safety of civilians in conflict zones.
- Demand and ensure an immediate permanent ceasefire and the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure, especially hospitals, schools, WASH facilities and shelters.
- Exert all that is in their power to implement necessary and effective restrictive measures to ensure the protection of civilians, and should call for the dismantling of all illegal settlements and halting the annexation process, and for ending the unlawful occupation in the OPT, in line with the ICJ Advisory note of July 2024 and the UNGA A/RES/ES-10/24.
- Call for the end of all acts of armed violence against Palestinian women and girls, including torture, ill-treatment and sexual and gender-based violence, and hold perpetrators to account and ensure justice. States must also cease and halt all arms transfers to Israel, as well as transit states that are being used to ship weapons to Israel.
- Ensure that Israel immediately lifts the blockade, closure and illegal siege of Gaza, allows immediate and unhindered humanitarian aid including delivery of food, water, medical supplies, fuel, electricity and other essential goods to meet the humanitarian needs of the population. This must include unimpeded access of humanitarian workers and medical staff.
- Hold Israel accountable and end impunity for all breaches of international law, including international human rights and humanitarian law, to prevent any further commitment of war crimes, crimes against humanity and other possible atrocity crimes, including violations by Israel's military forces committed against Palestinian women and girls.
- Integrate the concerns of Palestinian women into the global WPS Agenda, ensuring that the WPS Agenda recognises occupation as a threat to peace and security. The international community must report on their action and accountability measures in relation to Israel's occupation during the annual Open Debate on WPS at the Security Council and at the General Assembly.



- Examine all potential accountability options at national and international levels for human rights violations against Palestinian women and girls, including targeted sanctions regimes, and apply universal jurisdiction in national courts for all crimes under international law, including gender-based violence committed by the Israeli occupation, its leaders, commanders and forces, including all relevant ancillary offences.
- Ensure that transitional justice and other accountability efforts include gender-responsive processes and the meaningful participation of Palestinian women. Third states must also ensure that all victims/survivors and their families have access to effective remedies, gender-responsive reparation and truth, including psychological support for victims/survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.
- Support and ensure sufficient funding for women human rights defenders and WROs/WLOs to facilitate their documentation of the grave humanitarian and human rights situation. This should include funding and supporting independent documentation efforts by civil society that integrate a gender lens, which will be essential to support future accountability.
- Ensure that WROs/WLOs are central to both humanitarian responses and peacebuilding efforts, and advocate for the end of restrictions on their work and space, including hyper surveillance, criminalisation and movement restrictions.
- Ensure that the rights of Palestinian women, including human rights defenders, journalists, humanitarian workers, medics and other women professionals, are upheld and respected.
- Conduct consultations with Palestinian women, women human rights defenders and WLOs/WROs, to understand their views and benefit from their lived experiences. This must be an essential basis for the formulation of policies, positions, future programmes and actions.
- Ensure gender-responsive and locally led recovery and reconstruction in Gaza and the West Bank.

THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT SHOULD:

- Reclaim space and agency and increase accountability to allow women affected by war crimes and systemic violence to speak directly to the world, including through a feminist conference in the OPT.



ANNEX: DEFINITION OF TERMS/GLOSSARY

The following terms used in this report are defined and understood as stated in the glossary.

ARTIVISM: the practice of using artistic expression to advocate for social or political change. It is a tool of resistance and social transformation that combines artistic expression with activism to raise awareness, provoke dialogue (intergenerational dialogue), fight systemic injustice, inequality, racism and imperialism and inspire action to influence needed change.

BACKLASH AGAINST GENDER JUSTICE AND FEMINIST ACTIVISM: Backlash against gender justice and feminist activism refers to the often covert, dismissive or hostile political, cultural and institutional responses that seek to undermine, delegitimise or reverse the gains of feminist movements in relation to promotion of gender justice and women's rights. It manifests through the portrayal of feminism as outdated, divisive or unnecessary, and works to fragment solidarity, restrict funding and conceal the need for transformative change.¹⁸⁹

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS (CSOS): Independent, non-profit groups or consortiums that represent citizens' interests and operate outside of government structures. In the WPS context, they engage in advocacy, peacebuilding, service provision and monitoring efforts to ensure the implementation of the agenda for the benefit of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict settings.

COLONIALITY: A set of attitudes, values, ways of knowing and power structures upheld as normative by Western colonising societies and serving to rationalise and perpetuate Western dominance.

GENDER, CONFLICT, PEACE AND SECURITY (GCPS) ODA: Official Development Assistance that has been categorised (based on purpose codes, channels of delivery, policy markers, project titles and descriptions) as funding that encompasses both gender justice, conflict, peace and security.

DECOLONIAL APPROACH: A framework that critically examines and challenges the ongoing effects of colonialism and colonality on knowledge, power structures and external dominance in research, policy and peacebuilding. It seeks to dismantle colonial legacy and create more equitable and just societies by centring marginalised perspectives including indigenous, local and historically marginalised knowledge systems and leadership.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ Bromley, V. & Ahmad, A. (2006). Wa (i) ving solidarity: Feminist activists confronting backlash

¹⁹⁰ de Lima, A.C; Cappelle, M. C. A & Pereira, S.B. (2019). Decolonial approach and critical discourse analysis: Theoretical convergences for organizational studies



FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY: A feminist foreign policy is a state's foreign policy approach that prioritises gender equality and the human rights of all, particularly marginalised groups, in all aspects of its international interactions. It goes beyond simply including women in existing structures and aims to transform those structures to address power imbalances and promote a more just and equitable world.

FEMINIST PEACE: This approach to peacebuilding is transformative and rooted in equality, justice, care and systemic change. It is intersectional, decolonial and anti-racist; it goes beyond the absence of war to dismantle structural power and militarism, challenging harmful norms including gender binaries and toxic masculinity and addresses the root causes and multiple forms of violence across all spheres of life, while centring those most affected and supporting women's diverse roles in society.

GENDER JUSTICE: Gender justice is a concept that promotes the full realisation of rights and opportunities for all genders. It seeks to realise equality between men and women, as well as between diverse gender identities, in terms of rights, responsibilities and opportunities.

INTERSECTIONALITY: Intersectionality emphasises how different dimensions of identities – such as race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, nationality – overlap to create distinct experiences of oppression and privilege.

LOCALISATION (OF THE WPS AGENDA): The adaptation and implementation of WPS commitments at local levels, mostly led by local organisations including CSOs and WROs to ensure that strategies reflect the needs and realities of local communities.

MILITARISM: Militarism, the glorification of military power and the prioritisation of military interests above all else. This ideology weaponises security and gender relations, and often leads to an emphasis on military training, spending and influence over political decisions and in constructing social norms. It can impact gender dynamics by reinforcing traditional gender roles, perpetuating violence and weaponising security.

MILITARISATION: When a country prioritises military approaches and invests in the military and in the armament of weapons at the expense of civilian-led peacebuilding, gender justice and investment in social services such as health, education social protection.

NATIONAL ACTION PLANS (NAPS): A national policy or plan developed by governments to implement the WPS agenda, outlining the country's context, goals, objectives, responsibilities and strategies for promoting women's participation, protection, prevention of violence and gender-responsive relief and recovery.

Patriarchy: A systemic structure of power in which men hold dominance in political, social and economic life, contributing to the marginalisation and subordination of women and gender-diverse individuals.



POLITICAL CAPTURE: Political capture refers to a situation where special interest groups or powerful stakeholders including corporations can exert influence over government policies or decisions to benefit their own interests at the expense of the public good. This phenomenon often leads to a distortion of democratic processes and can significantly affect economic strategies.

QUEER: An umbrella term used by some people to describe sexual and gender identities that fall outside of heterosexual and cisgender norms. It can be a political and personal expression of resistance to social norms, though not all individuals with diverse identities choose to use this term.

REPRODUCTIVE VIOLENCE: Reproductive violence is often connected to sexual violence but is also distinct in that it constitutes a violation of reproductive autonomy and is directed at people because of their reproductive capacity.

SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE: A situation in which governments and non-state actors restrict civil society's ability to operate freely through legal, political or violent means, thus limiting freedom of association, expression and assembly. It limits the ability of CSOs and WROs to participate in peacebuilding or conduct advocacy for change.

SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: Gender-based violence is violence directed against a person because of that person's gender or violence that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately. Sexual violence is a form of GBV and encompasses any sexual act perpetrated against an individual against their will. Sexual violence takes multiple forms and includes rape, sexual abuse, forced pregnancy, forced sterilisation, forced abortion, forced sex-work and trafficking.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER IDENTITY AND EXPRESSION, AND SEX

CHARACTERISTICS (SOGIESC): A comprehensive term encompassing the diverse experiences of individuals related to:

- Sexual Orientation – whom someone is attracted to
- Gender Identity – how one sees oneself in terms of gender
- Gender Expression – how one expresses one's gender (e.g. through clothing, behaviour)
- Sex Characteristics – biological traits (e.g. chromosomes, hormones, genitalia) that vary across a spectrum beyond the male/female binary.

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE: A form of harm embedded in social, political and economic systems and institutions that perpetuates inequality, marginalisation and limited access to rights and resources for certain groups that could lead to resistance and contributes to conflict.



TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE: An approach to development that leads to systemic and long-term shifts that address the root causes of inequality and oppression. Usually results in sustainable, inclusive and equitable outcomes, especially for oppressed and marginalised populations.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS (WROS): Feminist or women-led organisations that work specifically to promote and protect the rights, empowerment and leadership of women and girls.

WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY (WPS) AGENDA: A global framework initiated by UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions, which calls for the protection of women's rights in conflict, their participation in peace processes, and the integration of gender perspectives in peacebuilding and security efforts.

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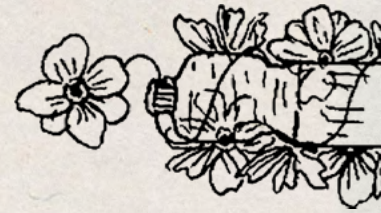
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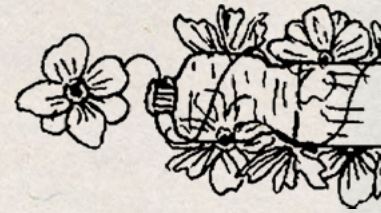
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The information in this publication is correct at the time of going to press.

Published by Oxfam GB for Oxfam International under
DOI 10.21201/2025.000094 in October 2025

Oxfam GB, Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 2JY, UK.



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