

**Final Report: *Opportunities for the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the Americas*
Workshop in Montevideo, Uruguay, 16-17 December 2019**

Summary:

On 16-17 December 2019 in Montevideo, Canada and Uruguay held a two-day workshop on the “*Opportunities for the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the Americas.*” It was the first such workshop in the region, gathering more than 100 participants from governments in the Americas, members of the WPS Focal Points Network, civil society, Indigenous peoples, the UN, police and military. 17 countries from the Americas region were represented: Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, and the USA.

The aim of the workshop was to create greater regional awareness of the applicability of the Women, Peace and Security agenda to current peace and security challenges in the hemisphere, and to encourage expanded and stronger regional networks of women peacebuilders, mediators, and human rights defenders. It was also an opportunity to share information on the Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations and learn from women peacekeepers from the region who have been deployed to peace operations. The results of this workshop are informing Canada and Uruguay’s co-chair year of the Women, Peace and Security Focal Points Network in 2020 – the 20th anniversary of landmark UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

Key points raised in this workshop:

- Our approach to peace and security in the Americas must look beyond the traditional focus on the impact of armed conflict that has dominated the conversation on the Women, Peace and Security agenda both regionally and globally. More inclusive, gender-equal and peaceful societies require women’s participation in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and post-conflict state building;
- Recent incidents of violence and instability in the region point to the need to strengthen women’s leadership in conflict prevention and resolution;
- Low levels of women’s political participation in the region are critical to address as this contrasts with the enormous grassroots leadership of women, particularly at the local, community level;
- Women’s leadership, particularly when recognized and supported, is a fundamental component of any conflict prevention and sustainable peace initiative; and
- Barriers facing women from the region in deploying to UN peace operations include gender inequality, UN standards, low recruitment of women, a lack of representation and leadership, and entrenched gender roles.
- Protection of Civilians is a pillar of peace operations, and the UN is adjusting its approach to engaging with civilian populations by creating Engagement Platoons: a gender-balanced new capability to enhance peace operations by facilitating community engagement. These Engagement Platoons will require a comprehensive approach to training to ensure peacekeepers have a holistic understanding of the contexts within which they work.

Key outcomes of the workshop include:

- Improved understanding of how the WPS agenda is relevant to peace and security in the Americas context, which will help shape discussions on the application of WPS beyond armed conflict during the Canada-Uruguay co-chair term of the WPS Focal Points Network in 2020-21;
- Greater trust and connections made between civil society and military and police in the region;
- Strengthened networks of women peacebuilders, mediators, peacekeepers, military and police;
- Clear opportunities for increased regional efforts on WPS were identified, which Canada and Uruguay, among other countries in the hemisphere, can help advance;
- Increased and improved engagement with police and military institutions in the region on women in peace operations, and the challenges faced by women in military and police organizations;
- Greater awareness about the WPS Focal Points Network and the Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations; and
- Groundwork laid for future Americas regional discussions on WPS.

Report:

Uruguay and Canada are co-chairing the Women, Peace and Security Focal Points Network (WPS-FPN) in 2020 - the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325, the foundation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. Under the auspices of this co-chair term, Uruguay and Canada hosted a regional workshop: *Opportunities for the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the Americas* in Montevideo, Uruguay, December 16 to 17, 2019. The workshop focused on the importance of greater regional engagement on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, including through the empowerment of women as key actors and agents of change for peace in the region and worldwide. Interactive discussions ranged from strengthening women's networks for peacebuilding and mediation in conflict prevention and peace processes, to increasing the meaningful participation of women in peacekeeping through the Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations.

There were over 100 participants including WPS national Focal Points, civil society organizations and Indigenous representatives from the US, Latin American and Caribbean countries and Canada as well as police and military service members from countries engaged on the Elsie Initiative and Elsie Initiative target countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). See **Annex A** for a list of participants.

Opening Session

Opening remarks by Ana Teresa Ayala, Director General of the Secretariat, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Uruguay, focused on the shared values between Canada and Uruguay, particularly on human rights and peacekeeping. She noted that this co-chair year of the WPS Focal Points Network is an opportunity to convene different actors in the region to reflect on this important agenda to build peaceful, inclusive and tolerant societies in the Americas. Countries in the region are invited to consider the WPS agenda beyond their existing commitments to human rights and troop contributions to peace operations, and Ms. Ayala challenged participants to make new and more ambitious national and regional commitments.

Gwyneth Kutz, Director General of the Peace and Stabilization Operations Program of Global Affairs Canada and Canada's WPS Focal Point, delivered opening remarks focused on Canada's strong partnership with Uruguay in the context of the Elsie Initiative as well as Canada's and Uruguay's co-chair year in 2020 of the WPS Focal Points Network. She spoke of Canada's own challenges in the realm of security for

women, particularly the intersecting violence and discrimination faced by Indigenous women and girls, and outlined that Canada's National Action Plan on WPS is focused both on domestic and international issues. She underscored Canada's leadership on the Elsie initiative that aims to catalyze transformational change in increasing uniformed women's meaningful participation in UN peace operations.

Regional Trends on Women, Peace and Security

In the opening plenary panel, speakers from UN Women and civil society organizations underscored that the peace and security agenda in the Americas goes beyond the traditional notion of armed conflict that has dominated the global conversation on women, peace and security. The greatest peace and security challenges in the region are related to high levels of political and social conflict, along with factors related to higher crime and corruption rates, deterioration of the human rights situation and greater human mobility flows: migrants, refugees, displaced persons and asylum seekers in increasingly vulnerable situations. Recent incidents of violence and instability in the region indicate the need to strengthen women's leadership in conflict prevention and resolution.

In LAC, women still face great obstacles in accessing decision-making spaces, especially at the local level. This deficit of political participation is critical because it contrasts with the enormous grassroots leadership exercised by women in their communities at the local level. Women's leadership, when recognized and supported, becomes a fundamental component of any conflict prevention and sustainable peace initiative.

Violence against women has increased throughout the region. The Latin American region includes 5 of the 12 countries with the highest rate of femicide in the world. There has been an alarming increase in political violence against women who participate in national and local decision-making spaces as well as women leaders, human rights defenders and activists mobilized in the fight against violence, inequality and corruption. Many of those targeted women are young, Indigenous, of African descent or LGBTI.

Some suggested key actions to help secure implementation of human rights conventions and WPS norms in the Americas included:

- Forging greater alignment between key gender equality frameworks (including *the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW), ratified by all Latin American countries); developing more National Action Plans on WPS; and localizing the implementation of these frameworks/tools;
- Strengthening institutions – in particular the interface between human rights and the security sector, and taking concrete action on security sector reform (SSR);
- Focusing on conflict prevention and building sustainable peace;
- Protecting women who defend human rights and amplifying their voices; and
- Building on projects that have a positive impact on women, for example, empowering women mediators on the local and international level.

Women Mediator and Peacebuilding Networks, Inclusive Peacebuilding, Gender and Violence, and Generating Trust in Post-Conflict Settings

Women Mediator and Peacebuilding Networks

In the current context in Latin America, women mediator networks can play an important part in peace and security efforts given their role in conflict prevention at all levels, but particularly at the community

level. Women peacebuilder networks are also important, with distinct roles from individual mediators or negotiators. More secure resources for these women's organisations are essential to ensure progress on implementation of the WPS agenda in the region. The level and quality of effort depends on funding, and this work is frequently undertaken on a voluntary basis. The creation of a new network of women mediators in the Southern Cone was highlighted: Red de Mujeres Mediadoras del Cono Sur. This network includes the participation of women from Chile, Paraguay, Brazil, Uruguay, and Argentina.

Amassuru, a new LAC regional network of 350 women members working in security and defence, was also introduced to workshop participants. Amassuru looks at security issues from a broad perspective, including citizen security, human security, international security and justice and promotes women's visibility and participation in regional discussions on security and defence. Members include women working in research, education, public policy and prevention, journalism, non-governmental organizations, national and local governments, international organizations and academia, among other sectors.

Inclusive Peacebuilding

This discussion focused on the importance of diverse voices and building trust to ensure inclusive peacebuilding. It is particularly important for Indigenous peoples to be able to share their own paradigms and models for peacebuilding with other Indigenous communities across the region and continents. For example, a community-based support program for Indigenous families in Winnipeg, Canada, applies a model learned from the Maori of New Zealand on family group conferencing. Mediated formal meetings between family members and other officials including social workers and police are key to resolving issues in communities ranging from care and protection to navigating the criminal justice system (particularly for children and adolescents).

The importance of land acknowledgements was shared as one way to bring inclusivity to the forefront of peacebuilding. These statements acknowledge the original inhabitants of the land and are a small but important way to bring change and to amplify voices of those who have traditionally been marginalised and excluded from important decision-making discussions that affect them. In general, our current national histories do not reflect truth, only a certain perspective. An important part of building inclusive peaceful societies is changing the educational narrative in our schools. Cultural competency legislation can be a useful tool in this regard. The importance of including Indigenous women's networks in peace processes was emphasized by many participants.

Participants were reminded to actively look for marginalized voices with different perspectives and to lift them up. Every woman has important potential and peace cannot be built together if the person in front of us is not respected. Some successful approaches to peacebuilding in the region have addressed the family dynamics of hierarchy and male chauvinism. It is important to work directly with men to change the fundamentals of this family environment to achieve gender equality.

It was noted that women and feminist organizations are at the forefront of protest movements and are targeted with violence by state actors, including with sexual violence. Women human rights defenders, particularly Indigenous women, are criminalized for engaging in protests and many have been killed; accountability remains a serious issue. One of the challenges with inclusion is that it can be politicized. For example, both gender parity and Indigenous representation are equally important and one aspect of inclusion should not disadvantage another.

Gender and Violence

The importance of the *Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women*, known as the *Convention of Belém do Pará* (1994) was underscored as a strong framework for the WPS agenda in the LAC region. The *Convention of Belém do Pará* not only addresses violence in the private sphere but also in public spaces. More women in the region are occupying public spaces, as exemplified by recent protests in the region led by women, but they face violence. There is a backlash and rejection of gender equality influenced by ultra conservative forces in the region. It is important for efforts to respond to this to cover the multiple forms of violence faced by women, including increased migration flows in the Americas, which will continue with the onset of climate change, and more social protests.

Addressing violence against women is key to broader peace and security issues as it can be an early warning for conflict. Both international and regional organizations, including the United Nations and the Organisation of American States (OAS) should apply the WPS agenda in the context of the Americas region. Mechanisms to support advancing the WPS agenda in the region include the OAS *Inter-American Convention on Human Rights*, and the UN *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)*, in addition to the *Convention of Belém do Pará*.

CEDAW General Recommendation 30 (on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations) was raised as an important link between human rights frameworks and the WPS agenda, particularly as all countries in LAC have ratified *CEDAW*. *Recommendation 30* broadly reflects the peace and security concerns of Latin America, including how *CEDAW* can be applied in relation to crises, terrorism and in times of peace: it goes beyond the narrower scope of the UNSC WPS resolutions. It could help provide the region with a clear framework for advancing the WPS agenda in non-armed conflict situations. It was also noted that movements working to end gender-based violence should connect the WPS agenda to their efforts.

Generating Trust for Implementing Peace

This discussion underscored the importance of generating trust in post-conflict situations. When a society has been militarised, combined with more power given to men during conflict, it is important to consider how to regenerate the social fabric after conflict.

Inclusion and transparency in peace processes are very important. For example, the UN Verification Mission for Colombia had a tripartite mechanism with Gender Focal Points for the FARC, Government and the UN. This made an important difference in addressing women's concerns, including sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA). Gender focal points also had direct access to the Chief of Mission. As a result of this process, it was decided that all women ex-combatants from both sides of the conflict would be involved in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process. This helped rebuild trust between these women who stayed in the same tent, drank coffee together and played football (soccer). As well, because women were involved in negotiating the terms of the ceasefire agreement in Colombia, a prohibition on sexual violence was included, and this generated broader trust in the peace process. It was concluded that as part of successful DDR, we must remember women ex-combatants and design the DDR processes to reflect their reality and needs.

Deploying women's humanitarian demining teams was another practical example for peacebuilding from Colombia. Women deminers often work in the most isolated, conflict affected and vulnerable communities to help restore peace and rebuild livelihoods post-conflict. The humanitarian demining

model recruits local women in land mine-affected regions and the all-female demining units work alone or alongside male colleagues to restore post-conflict access to key infrastructure (markets, schools, roads, and water) and agricultural land. Women on the same demining team may well have been on different sides in the conflict but they worked together to help create the conditions for a return to peace. The benefits to local peacebuilding efforts of female humanitarian demining units in post-conflict stabilization has been demonstrated in many regions around the world.

Women in Peace Operations

Moderated by Canada's WPS Focal Point Gwyneth Kutz, a highlight of the two-day workshop was the panel with women peacekeepers from Brazil, Mexico, and Uruguay. This group of inspiring women peacekeepers shared a wide range of experiences and a commitment to paving the way for more women to participate in their national forces and in UN missions. Notably, Lt Cdr Marcia Braga of the Brazilian Navy, 2019 recipient of the UN's Gender Advocate of the Year Award, delivered heartfelt and compelling remarks on the protection of civilians. She built a network of trained gender advisors and focal points among the UN's Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic's (MINUSCA) military units, and promoted the use of mixed teams of women and men to conduct community-based patrols. In the Central African Republic, sexual and gender-based violence is a serious issue, and these mixed engagement teams allowed the Mission to gather critical information to protect the vulnerable populations and understand the different protection needs of women, men, girls and boys. Lt. Cdr. Braga explained that UN missions needed more women to ensure that local women can speak more freely about the issues that affect their lives. Lt Cdr Braga also worked to ensure Mission leadership engaged with local women leaders, so that local women's voices were heard in the ongoing peace process.

The panelists were deployed to various UN missions including in CAR, DRC, Mali, Haiti and Timor-Leste. They were asked about the obstacles they may have faced pre-, during and post-deployment; culture in UN peace operations missions; the importance of leadership; physical infrastructure of the missions; and the impact deployments have had on their personal and professional lives. Many were the first or one of a small number of women deploying from their home forces, and all shared that the experience of deploying on a mission was both personally and professionally enriching. All highlighted how creating informal links, and engaging with other women on mission is important. The panelists offered reflections and advice for their national forces, for the UN, as well as for potential future women peacekeepers, including the need to provide advancement opportunities and role models, and the need to prepare and to trust oneself and one's own capacities.

Engagement Platoons and Protection of Civilians

Canada and Uruguay delivered a joint presentation on the work they are leading at the UN focused on mixed Engagement Platoons, a new gender-balanced unit for UN peacekeeping, and the role these Engagement Platoons play in the protection of civilians. Discussions focused on how Engagement Platoons are a new capability for the UN to further enhance the protection of civilians in UN peace operations. Participants highlighted the need for all members of the engagement platoons to be fully trained and have a holistic understanding of the context within which they work. It was noted that engagement platoons should engage women's organizations beyond gender issues given their expertise in different areas.

Barriers and Opportunities for Women in UN Peace Operations

Participants broke out into two groups to discuss the barriers and opportunities facing women deploying to UN peace operations. Discussions were open, frank and candid, with active participation of civil society from the region, military and police officers, and government representatives.

The breakout session on barriers facing women to deploy to UN peace operations discussed issues such as gender inequality in Latin American cultures, UN standards, recruitment of women, a lack of representation and leadership, and entrenched gender roles. Notably, one police officer from Uruguay indicated that she was unable to deploy not because she did not meet all of the requirements, but because of her age. She had all of the requisite training, but was only 24, while the UN's requirement is 25 years of age to deploy. Other uniformed individuals and civil society members around the table stressed that generational gender differences should not be an impeding factor. One member of civil society stated: "you can be a young man, but a young woman is different."

The second breakout session focussed on the opportunities facing women in the Americas to deploy to UN peace operations. The importance of women having access to information about how to deploy and what to expect was raised as was the need to create networks of women peacekeepers, not only within national contexts, but across the Americas. A key take-away from the session highlighted the opportunity for changing stereotypes about gender with a police officer from the region noting "increasing women means an opportunity to break stereotypes, not only within countries, not only in units, but in the communities we serve. That means we can avoid reinforcing stereotypes that local leaders might have, but also generate change for women in the community and beyond."

Elsie Initiative Fund

A comprehensive presentation on the Elsie Initiative Fund highlighted how to apply to the Fund, the criteria for the proposals and the timelines and steps of a full programme cycle. Elsie Initiative Fund Manager, Deborah Warren-Smith, offered advice and continuing support for applicants. With Canada's support, the Fund was launched by UN Women in March 2019 and is designed to incentivize troop and police contributing countries (T/PCCs) and UN organizations to accelerate progress in uniformed women's meaningful participation in UN peace operations. There are three funding modalities: 1) funding for barrier assessments of T/PCCs military and police institutions; 2) flexible project funding to allow T/PCCs and/or UN organizations to access financial assistance to support the deployment of trained and qualified women over the short and long term; 3) financial premiums to T/PCCs for the deployment of "gender-strong units" to UN peace operations. Gender-Strong Units are military battalions or formed police units that include substantial representation of women overall and in positions of authority; have provided gender-equity training to all unit members; and have adequate material to ensure parity of deployment conditions for both women and men peacekeepers.

Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations Introductory session

H.E. Martín Vidal, Ambassador of Uruguay to Canada, delivered the introductory presentation on the Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations, including Uruguay's involvement and the importance the Initiative has in the Americas. Ambassador Vidal is Uruguay's representative in the Elsie Initiative Contact Group, and has been involved from its inception. Canada created the Contact Group of 11 countries (Argentina, France, Ghana, Netherlands, Norway, Republic of Korea, Senegal, South Africa, Sweden, UK and Uruguay) to provide advice and lend support to the Initiative. Lt Col Carina de los Santos of the Armed Forces of Uruguay also spoke about the barrier assessment process in their Armed Forces and Marcella Donadio of RESDAL explained the barrier assessment methodology. With funding from Canada and

Norway, the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF) has developed a comprehensive barrier assessment methodology in relation to the Elsie Initiative. The barrier assessment is seen as a ground-breaking tool, intended to change how institutions understand reform, and identify pathways to create measurable change.

Americas “Marketplace of Ideas”

The innovative Marketplace of Ideas format in this workshop encouraged additional interaction between participants on WPS related issues. This was a more informal opportunity to exchange ideas, expand networks, and strengthen collaboration between Member States, civil society organizations and other WPS stakeholders. Participants chose sessions that interested them in order to explore and share diverse perspectives, and make new connections. Twelve participants/organizations were broken into three groups of four, and each participant hosted two or three conversations over a thirty-minute period. The result was more active participation with dynamic conversations on WPS themes and issues.

Uruguay National Action Plan and More Efforts Needed Regionally on WPS

In closing remarks for the workshop, Noelia Martinez Franchi, Director for Multilateral Affairs in the Uruguayan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and WPS Focal Point for Uruguay, shared that her country was finalising its first Action Plan on WPS. She noted that the Americas have already contributed in important ways to the advancement of the WPS agenda, and this should be recognized. Ms. Martinez called on the region to seize on the opportunity created by this unprecedented WPS workshop to be more ambitious and suggested that a regional approach to WPS could be an effective way to address some of the key peace and security concerns in the region.

Gwyneth Kutz provided the final remarks as Canada’s WPS Focal Point, reiterating the importance of National Action Plans as an important tool to make the ambitions and objectives of the WPS UNSC resolutions more concrete on the ground. She encouraged countries and regional organisations who were not yet members to join the WPS Focal Points Network. Ms. Kutz noted the strong partnership between Canada and Uruguay on both the WPS Focal Points Network and the Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations and assured participants that discussions in Montevideo would help inform global discussions of the WPS Focal Points Network in 2020.

Comment/Next Steps: A number of important outcomes can be attributed to this first-of-its-kind workshop on WPS in the Americas. The most apparent is an improved understanding with key stakeholders in the region of how the WPS agenda is relevant to the Americas context, which will help shape discussions on the application of WPS beyond armed conflict during the Canada-Uruguay co-chair year of the WPS Focal Points Network in 2020. The applicability of the WPS agenda outside armed conflict is not frequently acknowledged globally, despite CEDAW General Recommendation 30, which underscores that the WPS agenda applies in times of both crisis and in peace.

The preparations and delivery of the workshop by Canada and Uruguay were achieved in a context of true partnership with Uruguay providing important input in identifying key issues that would resonate in the region and identifying some key players. UN Women also assisted greatly by providing their contacts from civil society in the region.

While difficult to measure, it was apparent that connections and trust were improved between civil society and military and police participants as a result of the workshop. The workshop format, as well as some of the more interactive elements of the conference, such as the Elsie Initiative breakout session and



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the Marketplace of Ideas, helped bring people of different backgrounds and expertise on WPS together. Groups with similar objectives and interests, for instance Canadian, American and Latin American Indigenous representatives, women mediators, or women peacekeepers (many meeting for the first time), were exchanging contact information, sharing experiences and discussing future collaboration.

There are some clear opportunities for continued leadership on WPS in the region proposed during the workshop. Notably, efforts could be made to further socialise the WPS agenda in of the region through engagement with the Organisation of American States. There are also further opportunities for bilateral engagement between countries in the region to support mutual WPS efforts as well as with the UN to help advance global WPS discussions and better reflect peace and security concerns in our region.