

## Co-Chairs' Summary

### ***Beyond 2020: Taking Leadership and Action to Realize the Women, Peace and Security Agenda***

Women, Peace and Security Focal Points Network

Co-hosted by Uruguay and Canada

Thursday, September 16, 2021

08:30 -11:00 EDT/New York

Virtual, hosted on Zoom by WPS FPN UN Women Secretariat

*Simultaneous Interpretation in English, French, Spanish and ASL*

#### **Introduction:**

This summary provides highlights from the September 16, 2021 high-level WPS Focal Points Network event held on the margins of the 76<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly, and hosted by Canada and Uruguay, the co-chairs of the Women, Peace and Security Focal Points (WPS-FPN) Network, with UN Women's support as the Secretariat of the Network. High-level speakers representing Network members and civil society representatives discussed the theme, "Taking Leadership and Action to Realize the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda" by sharing their reflections on the lessons learned and best practices developed as a Network in 2020 and 2021. In particular, Network members highlighted their own leadership and action on WPS, with a focus on developing and implementing impact-driven national action plans, and supporting and protecting women peacebuilders. Civil society representatives presented their perspectives on these issues and identified gaps in the implementation of the WPS agenda. Canada and Uruguay also formally handed over the co-chairship of the Network to Switzerland and South Africa who will co-chair the Network in 2022. A [video](#) by the Secretariat featured highlights of the Network's achievements in 2020-2021 under Canada and Uruguay's co-chairship.

#### **SUMMARY:**

**Pravina Makan-Lakha, Women, Peace and Security Advisor at the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD)**, moderated the event and highlighted the history of the Network, as well as examples of leadership and adaptability in the implementation of the WPS agenda.

**Pramila Patten, Executive Director a.i. of UN Women and Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict** gave opening remarks and affirmed UN Women's continued support to the Network as its Secretariat. She highlighted that 21 years after the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and nine additional WPS resolutions, 50% of UN Member States have adopted WPS National Action Plans and 12 regional organizations have adopted WPS action plans or related strategies. In 2020, UN Women supported nearly 1300 civil society organizations in influencing peace processes to advance gender equality. Ms Patten called on all members of the Network to continue to work towards empowering women and girls all over the world in the complex times of the pandemic and conflict and crisis in contexts such as in Afghanistan, Haiti, Myanmar, Syria, Yemen and all corners of the world. We need to continue to harness collective commitment to address the gaps in the WPS agenda.

#### **Ministerial and Senior Level Remarks from Troika Members**

**Carolina Ache Batlle, Uruguay's Vice Minister of Foreign Relations**, remarked on the strong and continuous collaboration between Canada and Uruguay as co-chairs of the Network during the turbulent

times of the COVID-19 pandemic that has affected women, peace and security from different angles. These range from racism, xenophobia, economic security and health. Being flexible and using creative methods, such as developing the Network website, the Network's meetings have continued in these complex times and members have increased. She highlighted the importance of regional approaches to the implementation of the WPS agenda, which Uruguay plans to continue working on together with Canada. The Vice Minister highlighted progress in the development of Uruguay's WPS NAP and expressed gratitude for the support of the Network, UN Women and civil society in this regard. Uruguay aims to continue its work in the development of women's rights not only in conflict and post-conflict settings but also in the construction of peaceful and inclusive societies. Uruguay is committed to engaging more women in peace operations and police forces as well as in peace processes, negotiation and mediation processes. She invited the international community to continue with a creative, resilient and consistent initiative to continue building upon the path of the implementation of the WPS agenda.

**Jacqueline O'Neill, Canada's Women, Peace and Security Ambassador**, acknowledged the challenges and also the opportunities of working during a co-chairship that took place mostly online, but emphasized how Canada really benefitted from having Uruguay as a co-chair and trusted partner. She highlighted the importance of truly inclusive, accessible, intersectional, and sustained implementation of WPS commitments. This means more investment in conflict prevention, and greater participation of diverse women in mediation and negotiation. There must also be real accountability, particularly for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. We also need to see dramatically greater and more predictable funding for women peacebuilders. Overall, there needs to be an automatic reflex response across all our systems to consistently focus on Women, Peace and Security, and especially during crises. She closed by acknowledging how much this Network has learned from including civil society.

**Neville Gertze, Permanent Representative of Namibia to the United Nations**, opened his remarks by focusing on the impact of the COVID-19 as a pandemic that provided an important perspective for understanding and responding to conflict and instability. The differentiated impacts of conflict and crisis on women and girls became ever more clear, as did the need to put women at the centre of efforts to curb the pandemic and achieve sustainable peace. He highlighted the launch of Namibia's International Women's Peace Centre in October 2020 as one of the opportunities for Namibia to engage with various stakeholders and partners in developing operational strategies geared towards achieving the objective of advocacy on WPS networking, partnership, capacity building and training and online dialogues. He announced Namibia's interest and commitment to reduce the rates of sexual and gender-based violence which have increased due to the pandemic.

**Livia Leu, State Secretary Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland** emphasized that women should be present at the negotiation tables. She added that their full, equal and meaningful participation in peace processes should be systematic and unquestionable. This principle is one of Switzerland's foreign policy priorities. She also highlighted the importance of the work of civil society organizations that are on the frontlines when responding to conflict and crises. She stressed that the role and inclusion of civil society in peace processes should be strengthened. She explained how in Switzerland women's groups and civil society have played a key role in the follow-up and implementation of the fourth National Action Plan on Security Council Resolution 1325. She concluded by sharing Switzerland's enthusiasm toward co-chairing the Network with South Africa in 2022 and their mutual commitment to put mediation and dialogue at the centre of priorities.

**Mathu Joyini, Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations**, underscored South Africa's commitment to the WPS agenda and co-chairing the FPN with Switzerland. South Africa has adopted its first national action plan on WPS for 2022-2025, which speaks to local realities and localizing (UNSCR) 1325, as well as regional, continental and global responsibilities in the area of WPS. She shared that South Africa launched the Charlotte Maxeke Women's Initiative on Economic Justice and Rights Initiative in August 2021 as part of South Africa's Generation Equality Forum commitments. South Africa will also continue to support annual youth and women's training programs on conflict resolution mediation and negotiation. These programs are for women and youth in Africa and the emphasis is on localizing peacebuilding efforts and interventions. She highlighted the work of the Gertude Shope Women Mediators Networks comprised of South African women from across all sectors of society. The network has a Women's Peace Table focusing on women leaders in building, social cohesion and reconciliation processes, and also hosts a national chapter of FemWise-Africa.

### **MEMBER INTERVENTIONS**

**Bineta Diop, African Union Special Envoy on Women, Peace, and Security** shared that 50% of African Union members have adopted National Action Plans and that the African Union will not stop until 100% of members have National Action Plans. In addition, she highlighted the success of the Continental Results Framework as a monitoring and accountability tool to bridge the gap between policy and practice. When starting to monitor using the Continental Results Framework in 2018, only nine member states reported while in 2019, 20 member states and three regional economic communities reported. She emphasized that the African Union will continue advocating for full and accountable reporting and that there will soon be a second report published with data coming from the Continental Results Framework.

**Helga Maria Schmid, Secretary-General of OSCE** highlighted the need for stepping up efforts to reverse the trend of gender inequality, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. She also drew attention to the situation of Afghanistan where the gains of 20 years on women's rights must be preserved. She described OSCE's strong commitments for the Promotion of Gender Equality embedded in the 2004 OSCE Action Plan. In over 40 subsequent Ministerial Council Decisions and in OSCE's extensive work in integrating a gender perspective in the conflict cycle, they have strengthened commitments to achieve gender equality with the WPS agenda being one of the cornerstones of the work on promoting gender equality. She found it crucial to provide support to women mediators and to help them build their confidence and skills through an upcoming mediators networking platform. She continued with highlighting the fact that the OSCE is proud to be a catalytic member of the Compact on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action and will focus on supporting the Compact's priority areas of working towards women's full, equal and meaningful participation and inclusion of gender-related provisions in peace processes.

**Ulyana Bogdanska, Bulgaria's General Director on Global Affairs**, highlighted Bulgaria's commitment to promoting the participation of women in all spheres of social, political and economical life. She mentioned that Bulgaria is now 38<sup>th</sup> on the Global Gender Gap Index in 2021 and also provides leadership professional positions and one of the best packages of paid maternity leave for women. Bulgaria also adopted its first WPS National Action Plan for 2020-2025 with the support of the Network, especially Ireland that has shared best practices and advice for the development of the plan.

**Rebecca Annie Kenda Bakajika, Head of Legal Department, National Coordinator for the Implementation of 1325 on Women Peace and Security, the Democratic Republic of the Congo**

The Democratic Republic of Congo has made significant progress in terms of the participation of women: in less than two years the rate of women's engagement in the government has increased from 12% to 27%. The implementation of National Action Plans cannot be successful without funding. In order to obtain financial resources, a structure called a 1325 Trust Fund has been set up which aims to support the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo and NGOs, more particularly national NGOs, in their desire to carry out actions in favor of the promotion of WPS in the national and provincial level with particular emphasis on the areas identified in the National Action Plan. To further advance the implementation of the WPS agenda, she recommended the reforms of the security sector and electoral laws to eliminate discriminatory provisions as well as setting up transitional justice mechanisms. She also highlighted the importance of the connection between the YPS agenda and the WPS agenda. Acknowledging the support of civil society, she invited these organizations to continue advocacy for the resolution of certain discriminatory provisions of laws which hinder the participation of women in decision-making spaces while raising awareness on NAPs at the local level. Lastly, she urged technical and financial partners to take ownership and support the implementation of the WPS agenda through operationalizing the 1325 Trust Fund, consolidating the Group of Friends of 1325 and by supporting coordination mechanisms for the monitoring and implementation of WPS agenda.

**Helga Barth, Director on Human Rights, International Development and Global Health of Germany,** emphasized that linking multilateral, bilateral and local peacebuilding is a critical element of Germany's WPS strategy as mentioned in its third WPS National Action Plan adopted in early 2021. She announced that since the end of Germany's recent membership in the UN Security Council 2021, Germany's focus will be on implementing the WPS agenda including Resolution 2467 in crisis situations and multilateral fora alike. Germany also aims to continue support for women's participation in conflict and crises settings as well as implementing survivor-centred approaches and mainstreaming accountability as two core areas of Resolution 2467. Additionally, she emphasized that a gender-responsive approach will be critical to addressing the situation in Afghanistan. Germany has increased support for the case of Afghanistan and its neighboring countries by expanding their programmes and allowing women peacebuilders and human rights defenders to seek shelter in Germany for temporary stays. She noted that Germany demands that the Taliban respect basic human rights and the rights of women and minorities. She invited the members to think about partnership in their approach to facing a new government in Afghanistan, particularly in the area of international development and aid.

**Mavic Cabrera Balleza, Founder and CEO of Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP),** shared examples of GNWP efforts across different avenues of support to the WPS agenda ranging from developing protection protocols for women and youth peacebuilders to providing consultations to the development of WPS National Action Plans and strategies. She noted that it is in the best interest of Member States, the UN and everyone to ensure that civil society and local women and youth are equal partners in implementing the WPS agenda. Civil society representatives often put their lives at risk in implementing the women, peace and security agenda. Women peacebuilders break silos and embody the triple nexus as both human rights defenders and humanitarian frontliners. Women and young women spearhead effective implementation of the WPS agenda, even when they are severely underfunded. She emphasized that regional organizations and donors know what civil society brings to the table. Yet, year after year, though wonderful commitments to support civil society, protect women peacebuilders and human rights defenders are made, listening to empty commitments is frustrating. She expressed her hope that the next time the Network gathers, everyone will be inspired by collective achievements.

**Áine Hearn, Director, Conflict Resolution Unit, Department of Foreign Affairs of Ireland**, emphasized the erosion of women's rights during the pandemic. Ireland conducted research in partnership with UN Women and GNWP in 2020 to assess the impact of the pandemic on the ability of women peacebuilders to work at grassroots level consulting with women from Northern Ireland, South Africa, Uganda and Colombia. She highlighted challenges including the lack of resources, funding, limited access to digital technology, and the shrinking civil society space. More flexible and predictable funding is also important. Since Ireland took its seat on the Security Council in January, it has become a priority to mainstream WPS across the country, thematic and peacekeeping files including through co-chairing informal groups of WPS experts with Mexico and by highlighting the situation of Afghanistan and other in-country priorities. She also emphasized the importance of the full and meaningful participation of women in peace processes highlighting that Ireland and Mexico held an event titled "Call to lead by example, ensuring the pole equal a meaningful participation of women in UN-led peace processes" on International Women's Day.

**Anne Goedert, Luxembourg's Ambassador-at-large for Human Rights**, acknowledged the importance of the responsibilities that all Member States have in order to implement the WPS agenda, especially in the wake of the pandemic that has exacerbated the situation for the full realization of the rights of women and gender equality across different sectors and areas. She continued by reporting that Luxembourg is in the process of conducting the first mid-term report on its first WPS National Action Plan – 2018-2023 with the support of civil society. The plan uses a whole-of-government approach and encompasses outward-looking dimensions, especially with regards to aspects pertaining to diplomacy, development and defence while inwardly-looking it is paying attention to justice, immigration, health and national security elements. She added that Luxembourg is pursuing a gender strategy to systematically mainstream gender in public aid and international development which taps into 1% of its GDP. In 2021, Luxembourg was engaged as a catalytic member of the WPS-HA Compact, launched as part of the Generation Equality Forum. Luxembourg also joined the Group of Friends of Women in the Sahel. The aforementioned commitments have been carried out through Luxembourg's feminist foreign policy.

**Cecilia Attard-Pirota, Malta's Ambassador for Women, Peace & Security**, highlighted that Malta adopted its first WPS National Action Plan in 2020 for the period of 2020-2025, and that Malta is currently active in raising awareness, building partnerships and addressing the gaps that exist on the WPS agenda through engagement with civil society and academia and by coalition-building across governments in both conflict situations and peaceful societies. She highlighted Malta's concern regarding the situation in Afghanistan. Malta also expressed her support for platforms such as the WPS Focal Points Network in order to best benefit from peer learning, communication and capacity development.

**Pascalie Grotenhuis, Director of Social Development & Ambassador for Women's Rights & Gender Equality of the Netherlands**, drew attention to the complex situation of crisis and conflict in Afghanistan and by highlighting the importance of collectively working towards the implementation of the WPS agenda at all levels. She spoke on Netherland's positive experience with the Network in the development of its National Action Plan, as well discussions on emerging issues and collaborations with members of the Network. The collaborations led to developing knowledge and expertise on strengthening accountability, monitoring and evaluation and close engagement with civil society, non-governmental organizations, women-led organizations and human rights defenders. She encouraged Network members to not only share good practices, but also the challenges that they face in the implementation of the WPS agenda across different countries, and suggested that the Network also engage in dialogue through smaller thematic and donor groups.

**André Mundal, Ambassador and Special Representative, Women, Peace and Security at the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs** highlighted the importance of full, equal and meaningful participation of women in all areas of life and shortcomings in implementation. He emphasized that Norway, like many other countries, can facilitate, can fund and can push the implementation of the WPS agenda but it cannot replace a lack of political will elsewhere or give promises that it is unable to fulfil. He noted the importance of action over words and invited Member States to work on the development of WPS National Action Plans, join the WPS-HA Compact as signatories, and commit to work closely with civil society. In the bigger picture, he emphasized that doing all the work on WPS must be carried out in the strategic space with attention to compositions of delegations, signals and messages given and with both inward and outward perspectives.

**Charles Vandi, Director of Gender at the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs of Sierra Leone**, described Sierra Leone's steadfast commitment to the WPS agenda by elaborating on the measures taken to recruit women into the armed forces of the Republic of Sierra Leone at various levels. He highlighted that the appointed Deputy Inspector General of Police is also a woman which encourages more participation of women across different segments of the society, especially armed forces. He also highlighted that Sierra Leone is a Board Member of the WPS-HA Compact.

**Saumya Uma, Board member of Women's Regional Network and Law Professor at Jindal Global Law School, India** illustrated the risks that women take when targeted for their important contributions to peace, security and justice in different roles such as judges, lawyers, medical professionals, academics and educators, journalists, human rights defenders, peace activists, justice seekers and community peacebuilders. She emphasized how women's act of taking on non-traditional roles have made them highly vulnerable to militarized tactics, open life-threatening confrontations, and direct targets for killings and violence, including but not limited to sexual and gender-based violence, 'honour' killings, acid attacks, arbitrary arrest and detention under blasphemy and other repressive laws, custodial torture, rape and extrajudicial killings, cyber violence, and targeted violence by state and non-state actors. Her account highlighted the fact that despite struggles, women have exercised their agency, asserted their rights, amplified the voices of women at the community level, supported women's pursuit of peace, justice and accountability, and have fought against entrenched patriarchy and misogyny at all levels with resilience and courage towards building peaceful and just societies. She invited the members of the Network to take action on appealing to the South Asian governments to honour their national and international obligations on human rights, implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and other related resolutions. She encouraged members to collectively raise their voice to end the ongoing tensions in the region, promote cross border peacebuilding and justice-seeking initiatives, integrate women's voices and leadership at all levels of law and policy discourses, peace negotiations and decision-making processes and counter discrimination and exclusion of women. She concluded with the need to continue including South Asian regional women's rights networks and organizations in high-level events to bring the concerns of women peacebuilders from the region to the table.

**Ahood Abdulla Al Zaabi, Director of the United Nations Department at the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs** announced the launch of the UAE's first WPS National Action Plan 2021-2024 in March 2021 as the first Gulf country to adopt a NAP. She highlighted that the plan is built upon national and foreign policies that prioritize gender equality and includes short- and long- term objectives targeted at advancing the participation of women and the maintenance of peacebuilding, security and politics. It also focuses on strengthening humanitarian aid efforts targeted at women and girls to ensure their equal access to

education, healthcare and the economy while also protecting women and girls from gender-based violence and other forms of sexual abuse. She highlighted an example of UAE's success to be the gender-sensitive curriculum at Khawla bint Al Azwar Military School which has been used to train over 300 people from different regions to contribute to peacekeeping, peacebuilding and military operations. As a non-permanent member of the Security Council for 2022-2023, she shared that the UAE will continue to advocate for the WPS agenda in partnership with Network Members.

**Alice Burt, Deputy Director, Office for Conflict, Stabilisation and Mediation, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, UK,** opened her remarks by drawing attention to the case of Afghanistan and the necessity of the WPS agenda, the fragility of human rights and the importance of international collaboration to deliver this work. She also emphasized the importance of the protection of women peacebuilders as a moral responsibility to protect and also under the implementation of the WPS agenda. The protection of women peacebuilders as a priority for the government of the UK and mentioned that the UK has funded and supported the International Civil Society Action Network's (ICAN) Protection Framework for the protection of women peacebuilders while encouraging states to sign up to this framework. She illustrated the importance of tackling sexual violence, raising the case of Tigray, and advocating for prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence, support for survivors and strengthening accountability mechanisms. The UK is developing its fifth WPS National Action Plan and aims to demonstrate impact on the ground while also bolstering WPS normative frameworks and strengthening commitments at the Security Council.

**Gayatri Patel, Vice President of the Women's Refugee Commission,** expressed gratitude for the 21 years of building solidarity around the idea of women's leadership and participation in peace and humanitarian action. She highlighted the need for effective planning, resourcing, and institutionalizing WPS principles into national and global structures as tools bringing this vision to life. Reflecting on the experience of the Women's Refugee Commission with a displaced population who often face multiple barriers and discrimination, she elaborated on how these women are often not recognized for the important role they play as peacebuilders and humanitarians. They are still regularly excluded from the discussions about peace, aid programs, and reconstruction in their own communities. She invited the Network to take critical action in four areas to support women's leadership and participation: First through taking proactive measures to ensure the full, equal, and meaningful participation of diverse women peacebuilders, so they can influence the outcome of negotiations. This means consulting with women early on to identify and overcome barriers to their participation, including the context-specific challenges that lead to their exclusion. It also requires setting the example by inviting diverse women to be a part of national delegations and ensuring that their roles go beyond symbolic representation to actual and meaningful engagement. Second, through institutionalizing women's participation which should not be ad hoc or have to depend on individuals to demand it; it should be a normalized, regular expectation in decision-making and peacebuilding. It is long overdue, and the UN must make direct participation of diverse women a requirement in all UN-led or co-led peace processes. Third, by listening to, supporting, and funding the work of women peacebuilders in crises, for which she highlighted the case of Afghanistan as an example where women's voices are ignored, and their rights traded away. Ensuring funding that is flexible and accessible is critical, including through mechanisms such as the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund. She recommended that national action plans be inclusively designed with an early, extensive, and genuine engagement of a broad constituency of civil society, including women-led civil society organizations, and allocation of sufficient resources for implementation.

## CLOSING REMARKS

**Gwyn Kutz, Director General for the Peace and Stabilization Operations Program, Global Affairs Canada** underscored the importance of an open and honest approach in order to achieve real progress in implementing the WPS agenda. Co-chairs Canada and Uruguay worked closely together to create an environment of inclusion, respect and trust in all of the Network's events. In the last two years, the WPS focal points and civil society partners have discussed both the progress made over the last 20 years on WPS and the many challenges that remain. The COVID-19 pandemic changed the working modality of the Network from in person to online events but this allowed the focal points to meet more frequently and supported more inclusive and diverse participation. Focal Points had more opportunities to learn directly from local women peacebuilders and benefit from the guidance of WPS specialists and experts to help ensure WPS action plans and strategies are results-based and impact-driven. Reflecting on lessons learned for leadership and action on WPS, Ms. Kutz said three words came to mind: persistence, resilience and humility. We often face serious and overwhelming challenges working on WPS, but we are determined to persevere. It is important to approach our work with humility. We must seek out and really listen to women who are fighting for their rights. It is also a great privilege to engage and collaborate within such a strong and resilient global community of practice on WPS. She invited the focal points to benefit from the library of WPS resources hosted on the new Focal Points website. In closing, she expressed her gratitude to UN Women and the Troika members for their strong support during Canada and Uruguay's co-chairship and she congratulated Switzerland and South Africa on the beginning their 2022 co-chairship, noting that the Network will remain in good hands.

**Minister Noelia Martínez Franchi, Former Director of Multilateral Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Uruguay** expressed gratitude to Canada for close collaboration during a complex period of co-chairship while also extending her thanks to UN Women and the members of the Network for their commitments to the implementation of the WPS agenda. She highlighted the importance of learning from different members of the Network and also for Uruguay being able to develop its first WPS National Action Plan. She considered the upscaling of the implementation of the WPS agenda from the national to the regional and international levels to be of great importance. She concluded with the importance of going from rhetoric to action as one of the main goals of Uruguay and Canada's co-chairship that South Africa and Switzerland will take forward.

**Madiapetsana Charlotte Lobe, Acting Chief Operations Officer, Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) South Africa**, opened her remarks by referring to the experiences gathered and shared with the Troika and Members of the Network in the past years, especially during the pandemic. She highlighted the critical that role women play in peace and security in conflict and non-conflict settings and post-conflict environments. She elaborated on South Africa and Switzerland's close cooperation with regional organizations to ensure the success of the work of the Network, especially South Africa's plan for close collaboration with the African Union Office of the Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, in order to reach out to other AU members and mobilize them behind the WPS agenda and ensure that more Members States commit to the work of the Network. The upcoming co-chairship is an opportunity to provide concrete, bold and transformative actions that will contribute to ensuring that Africa evolves out of conflict peacefully through the involvement of women as peace anchors in their communities. South Africa's WPS National Action Plan is a product of both government and civil society. It also assisted South Africa to raise awareness and open space to discuss and exchange information, as well as holding seminars and training sessions on WPS. Highlighting the intergenerational dimension of South Africa's work, she

emphasized the continuation of investment in African women and youth through the training on conflict resolution, mediation and negotiation due to the fact that the African population is constituted of 52% women and 60% youth. South Africa will be hosting a regional meeting for the WPS Focal Points Network on 30-31 July 2022, which will also mark the celebration of Pan African Women's Day.

**Talia Wohl, Senior Advisor, Women, Peace and Security, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, State Secretariat, Peace and Human Rights Division of Switzerland** opened her remarks with great enthusiasm towards co-chairing the Network in the upcoming year. She highlighted the WPS agenda as one of Switzerland's foreign policy strategies and the Network as one of the most important tools for the implementation of this agenda due to the wealth of knowledge and experience gathered within it. She encouraged open sharing of concerns and perspectives coming from members of the Network and also highlighted inclusivity as being at the heart of Switzerland's approach. Hoping for more enabling circumstances for meeting in person, she announced that the capital meeting of the FPN Network is scheduled for 18 and 19 May 2022 in Geneva, Switzerland. To conclude, she expressed Switzerland's strong interest in collaborating closely with the members of the Network, especially Troika Members, and South Africa as the incoming co-chair, with the support and coordination of UN Women in order to find creative and innovative solutions to overcome the challenges in the implementation of the WPS agenda.

## Background

The Women, Peace and Security Focal Points Network was launched in September 2016 as a unique forum for national and regional representatives (Focal Points) to share best practices and lessons learned on the WPS agenda. There are 89 members of the Network from UN member states and regional organizations. The Focal Points are responsible for WPS implementation (frequently through national action plans and strategies on WPS) within their respective governments and regional organizations. The UN and civil society also play an active role in the Network, with UN Women serving as Secretariat.

Canada and Uruguay are Co-Chairs of the WPS Focal Points Network for 2020 and 2021. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the annual capital-based Network meeting has transitioned to a series of online engagements over the spring, summer and fall. These online sessions focus on two main themes for: supporting and protecting women peacebuilders, and the power of impact-driven national action plans.



*This friendship symbol celebrates the partnership of Canada and Uruguay as Co-Chairs of the WPS Focal Points Network in 2020 and represents the spirit of collaboration and cooperation. Designed by Uruguayan graphic designer, Gabriel Benderski, the symbol is also inspired by the indigenous Bunchberry flowering plant found in all regions of Canada and the combined color palette of the Canadian and Uruguayan national flags.*