

## Concept Note



1

# Partnering for Change: Translating the Women, Peace and Security Agenda into Action

WPS Focal Points Network Fourth Capital-Level Meeting  
18 – 19 May 2022  
Geneva, Palais des Nations, Switzerland  
Hybrid format – In-person attendance encouraged

## Introduction

The theme of the 2022 Swiss-South African co-chairship of the WPS Focal Points Network, “*Partnering for Change – Translating the Women, Peace and Security Agenda into Action*,” embodies the idea of cooperation between states, regional and international organizations and civil society as a source for innovative and transformative strategies to advance the implementation of the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda.

During the 20-year anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR1325) in 2020, the landmark resolution was rightly celebrated for recognizing the importance of the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in conflict prevention, resolution and post-conflict reconstruction and development. The anniversary was an opportunity to review the progress achieved in the past twenty years, and it was also a moment to reflect on the challenges to translate global WPS commitments into action, not only in countries experiencing conflict, but in all countries, where conflicts are preventable. With nine ensuing resolutions, UNSCR1325 has created a sophisticated normative framework around the WPS agenda. Resolution 2493, which the Security Council unanimously adopted in 2019, urged States to recommit themselves to the WPS agenda, including by creating a safe environment for women leaders, peacebuilders, and human rights defenders. Yet, implementation remains a challenge.

In the past two years, the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities, revealed a surge in gender-based violence and directly impacted women’s opportunities and rights. Amidst worsening socio-economic conditions, the load of unpaid care work undertaken by women and girls increased unabatedly. Structural barriers and gender stereotyping, among others, are a further hindrance to women’s full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership in political and in peace processes. The UN Secretary-General noted in last year’s WPS report that “*[t]his juxtaposition of violence targeting women and their rights, on one hand, and their extreme marginalization and exclusion, on the other, still encapsulates the women, peace and security agenda in 2021.*”

<sup>1</sup> The symbol combines the national flowers of both South Africa and Switzerland. The South-African Protea and the Swiss Edelweiss symbolize strength and diversity - values that inspire the co-chairship. The orange circle at their center, reminiscent of the WPS Focal Points Network logo, reflects continuity and unity in purpose. The color combination is further inspired by the flags of both South Africa and Switzerland.

There is an evident need to address the widening gap between the policy framework and its impactful implementation on the ground. National and Regional Action Plans (NAP / RAP) and strategies on WPS provide an operational and action-oriented framework to embed the global WPS agenda in regional, national and local contexts. The WPS Focal Points Network, for its part, as the largest global network of its kind on WPS, is a valuable instrument at the disposal of its Member States and Organizations, at the international, regional and national levels, that facilitates the capitalization of experience and knowledge within the Network to advance the implementation of the WPS agenda.

## Objectives

In 2020 and 2021, under the capable leadership of Canada and Uruguay, the Network focused on impact-driven NAPs. Despite the unprecedented challenges Covid-19 posed to the interaction and engagement of the Network, the virtual discussions specifically highlighted the need to support and protect women peacebuilders.

Building on the outcomes of these discussions and previous gatherings of the Network, the meeting in Geneva, which marks the resumption of in-person events for the Network, will focus on two interrelated pillars of the WPS Agenda: participation and protection.

The participation of women in all phases of peace processes and at all levels of decision-making is interlinked with the protection of women's rights. One does not work without the other. Women are actors in their own right. At the same time, the gradual erosion of their rights is impacting women's opportunities and affecting the implementation of global WPS commitments. The aim of the capital-level meeting is to encourage the development of transformative strategies that can be integrated into National Action Plans, policies, strategies and regional WPS frameworks.

## Format

The meeting will take place in a hybrid format over the course of two days and will adhere to applicable Covid-19-related regulations. As the situation allows, in-person attendance is encouraged.

Plenary and working group sessions will allow for interactive discussions. A joint communique will summarize the main outcomes and members commitments.

## Thematic areas for working groups

### 1) *Women's participation in peace processes*

Women continue to be underrepresented at all levels and stages of peace processes. Participants will explore options to address the barriers and challenges women mediators and negotiators still face in accessing and participating in official negotiations as well as the opportunities related to the inclusion of civil society. Drawing on good practices, the participants will strive to identify new strategies for the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in peace and political processes.

### 2) *Protection of women's rights and recognizing women's agency*

Violence and abuse against women pose serious impediments to their participation in peace and political processes. The proliferation of small arms has been highlighted as a contributing factor to sexual and gender-based violence, including in situations of conflict. It also contributes to the reinforcement of gender inequalities. Women's and civil society's contributions remain insufficiently harnessed to reduce arms-related violence. In the context of participation and protection, participants will deepen the specific interlinkages between the WPS Agenda, arms control and disarmament.

3) *WPS action plans and responding to conflict and crisis situations*

National and regional action plans, policies and strategies on WPS that meaningfully engage civil society are the essential building blocks to advance impactful implementation of the WPS agenda. Inclusive, well-resourced and well-coordinated action plans with strong accountability mechanisms are critical to ensure a gender-responsive approach to ongoing and emerging conflicts and crises. Equally, strengthened interlinkages between the WPS agenda and multilateral instruments, such as CEDAW, the Human Rights Council and others, serve this objective. Participants will gain practical knowledge on developing and implementing action plans that are fit for purpose to effectively address conflict and crisis situations.