21–22 OCTOBER 2024

RECLAIMING WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY: DEFINING A PATH FORWARD

6TH CAPITAL-LEVEL MEETING
UNITED NATIONS SECRETARIAT, NEW YORK

WPS FOCAL POINTS NETWORK

WPS FOCAL POINTS NETWORK

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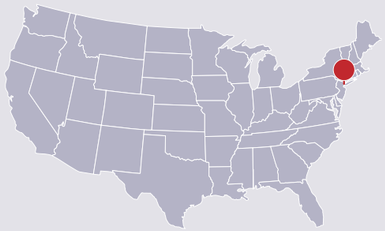
2024 LEADERSHIP QUAD

United States of America, Romania, Switzerland and South Africa



PLACE OF THE MEETING

United Nations Secretariat, New York

The event was hosted by the Network's 2024 Leadership Quad, comprising the United States of America, Romania, Switzerland and South Africa, in collaboration with UN Women as the Network Secretariat.

SIXTH CAPITAL-LEVEL MEETING
OF THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY FOCAL POINTS NETWORK

Reclaiming Women, Peace and Security: Defining a Path Forward

NUMBER OF FOCAL POINTS

TOTAL **103**

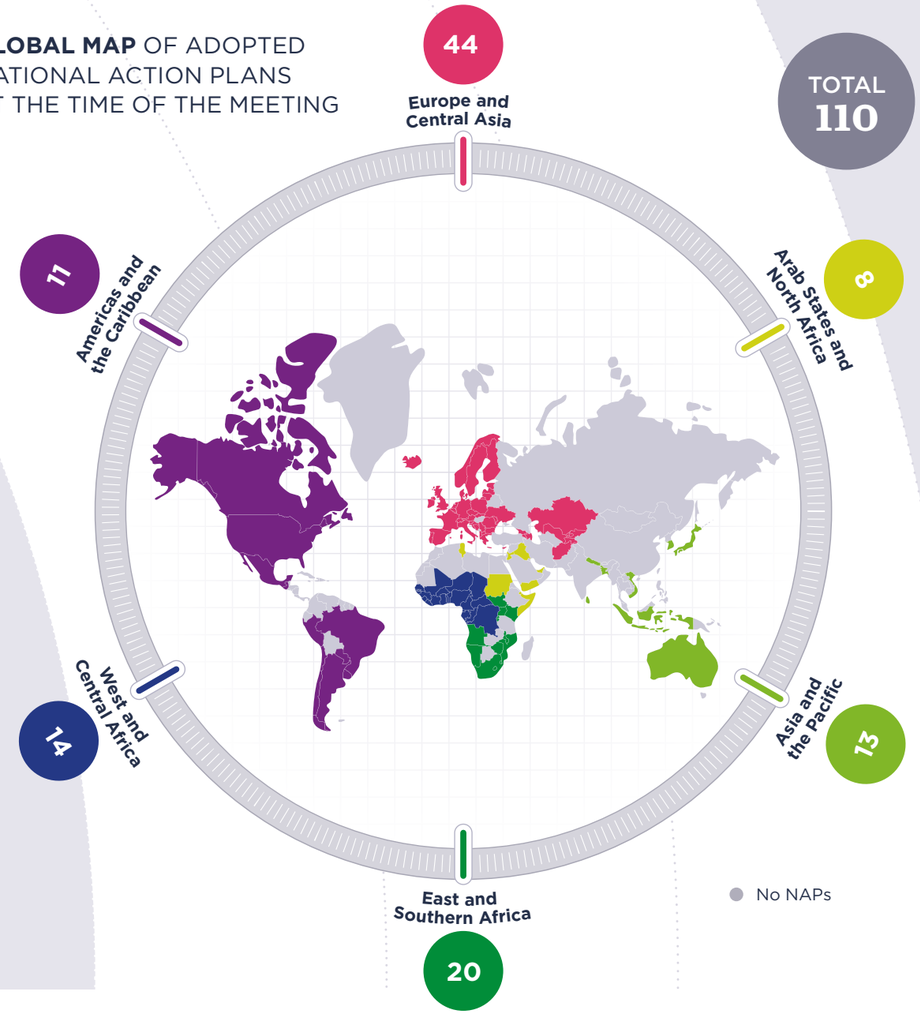
- Number of network members at the time of the meeting

NUMBER OF NATIONAL AND REGIONAL ACTION PLANS

As of October 2024, some 110 countries and territories have adopted action plans on women, peace and security (WPS). Additionally, 13 regional organizations have established action plans to further implement the WPS agenda within their respective blocs. Copies of all National Action Plans (NAPs) and Regional Action Plans (RAPs) can be accessed through the Resources page on the WPS-FPN website.

GLOBAL MAP OF ADOPTED NATIONAL ACTION PLANS AT THE TIME OF THE MEETING

TOTAL **110**



DAY 1 – 21 OCTOBER 2024

Introduction

The Women, Peace and Security Focal Points Network (WPS-FPN) held its sixth capital-level meeting at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on 21 and 22 October 2024. The theme of the meeting was "Reclaiming women, peace and security: defining a path forward". The Network's 2024 leadership quad – the United States of America, Romania, Switzerland and South Africa – in collaboration with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) as the Network Secretariat, hosted the event. More than 200 participants from over 50 countries and regional organizations – representing governments, academia, international organizations and civil society organizations – participated in the two-day meeting. Participants discussed solutions to meet ongoing and new challenges to implementing the WPS agenda. Presentations on the latest research at regional, national and local levels; high-level dialogues; and thematic working group sessions enabled Network members to share knowledge, best practices and lessons learned to reinvigorate their solidarity and commitment to cross-regional and cross-sectoral partnership and collaboration.

The WPS-FPN has grown to 103 members since it was formed on the 15th anniversary of Resolution 1325 in 2015. So far in 2024, the WPS-FPN has welcomed the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Zimbabwe and Somalia as new members. The Network is now the largest global platform, comprising Member States and regional organizations, dedicated to advancing the WPS agenda through sharing knowledge, building expertise, and improving coordination and cooperation among Members, and with civil society and WPS practitioners.

This year's capital-level meeting was held on the eve of critical milestones and in the context of unprecedented global conflict and crisis. The year 2025 marks the 25th anniversary of Resolution 1325 and the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action.

> *"As we face the highest level of violent conflict since the Second World War, women peacebuilders around the world are calling for more decisive action from Member States and regional organizations to implement the WPS agenda fully, and to honour their commitments to the full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of women in all aspects of peacebuilding, peacekeeping, post-conflict reconstruction and humanitarian response.*

The United Nations will also undertake its Peacebuilding Architecture Review in 2025, while the Pact for the Future will begin to implement its Security Council reform plans. As we face the highest level of violent conflict since the Second World War, women peacebuilders around the world are calling for more decisive action from Member States and regional organizations to implement the WPS agenda fully, and to honour their commitments to the full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of women in all aspects of peacebuilding, peacekeeping, post-conflict reconstruction and humanitarian response.

The capital-level meeting built upon the discussions on the key priorities of the WPS-FPN during the high-level side event of the Network, which was held at ministerial level on 25 September 2024 on the margins of the 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly, which addressed the same theme.

This report captures the highlights and key considerations of the capital-level meeting, which focused on sharing lessons learned in WPS implementation, coordination and advocacy. Plenary and breakout discussions on strategies for financing and sustaining action on emerging threats to peace and security. Discussions from each session are summarized, and speakers' remarks are paraphrased for brevity, except where direct quotes are noted. The breakout sessions were held under Chatham House Rule.

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Welcome Remarks by the 2024 leadership quad

MODERATOR : Ms. Païvi Kannisto

Chief, Peace, Security and Resilience, UN Women

During welcome remarks moderated by Ms. Paivi Kannisto, Chief of Peace, Security and Resilience at UN Women, representatives of the 2024 leadership quad – comprising the United States of America, Romania, Switzerland and South Africa – recognized that the Network is a vital space for sharing knowledge and generating innovative approaches to new challenges. In light of the meeting theme, the leadership quad emphasized that the women, peace and security agenda must be reclaimed from the margins of decision-making processes and the sidelines of the security sector. The four co-chairs reinforced the objective of the meeting to identify effective measures in policy and practice that can be taken immediately and in the long term, to ensure that implementation is truly fit for purpose in facing ongoing and emerging threats to security. The quad emphasized that the WPS framework exists to eliminate and prevent war and conflict by addressing root causes and creating gender-equal systems that uphold human rights and humanitarian law.

Ms. Kat Fotovat

Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Global Women's Issues, United States of America WPS Focal Point

Ms. Kat Fotovat asserted that WPS is not a women's issue, a monolithic concept with a single approach, or a concern separate from the broader security sector. Rather, WPS is essential to human security and full implementation of the WPS 10-resolution framework is critical for resolving current conflicts, rebuilding conflict-affected societies, and preventing new conflicts. She explained that the four pillars of the WPS framework – prevention, participation, protection, and relief and recovery – are designed to align with all tools and avenues for strengthening human security, and creating just and lasting change for those worst affected by conflict and crisis.

Ms. Fotovat highlighted the growth of the United States of America's partnership network through its WPS Centers of Excellence, which have been recently established in Colombia, Kosovo[1] and the Philippines. Each Center of Excellence (CoE) serves as a regional hub for government and civil society to strengthen partnerships through research, knowledge production and learning exchanges. Ms. Fotovat explained that the Centers focus on implementation in national and regional contexts, and bring together experts to advance WPS research, policy and programming in new ways to address emerging challenges such as climate change, as they uniquely impact each region. Ms. Fotovat acknowledged the crucial role of the WPS-FPN during the consultative process that guided the creation of the CoE.

Colonel Manuela-Elena Mihai

Ministry of National Defence, Chief of Gender Management Office, Romania WPS Focal Point

Colonel Manuela-Elena Mihai, Romania's WPS Focal Point, echoed the significance of the meeting's theme and the role of Network members in protecting and promoting the full and equal human rights of women and girls. Col. Mihai announced the adoption of Romania's fourth WPS National Action Plan (NAP) in August 2024, and acknowledged that the positive momentum of their NAP development and implementation is made possible through support from political leaders, and the Ministry of National Defence.

She shared that a group of gender advisors from across all government ministries serve on a national monitoring board under the Ministry of National Defence and this group is entrusted with ensuring gender parity in ministerial representation, in the armed forces and in law enforcement, while striving for integration of WPS across all areas of Romania's national and foreign policy. As a new signatory to the Compact on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action (WPS-HA Compact), Romania reaffirmed its commitment to bringing government and civil society together to design new policies on emerging threats and improve existing practices. Romania further recognized the power and potential of the Network in pushing back against the rising anti-gender movement and measures to restrict women's human rights.

Ms. Talia Wohl

Senior Adviser, Women, Peace and Security, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland WPS Focal Point

Ms. Talia Wohl elaborated on the urgency to stem growing conflicts and address the democratic backsliding seen across all regions where laws protecting women's rights and bodily autonomy are being rolled back. She declared that "trust has become a scarce commodity" and that restoring trust between Member States and civil society in multilateralism and the international rule of law is essential for carrying the WPS agenda forward. As a current elected member of the United Nations Security Council, and as co-chair of the WPS Shared Commitments group, she highlighted that Switzerland prioritizes women's leadership in peacebuilding. To work toward this objective, the Government of Switzerland launched the Swiss Women in Peace Processes Network in 2021, and continues to invest in women's leadership and meaningful participation in peacebuilding through this mechanism. Noting that local and regional networks of women mediators and peacebuilders are the foundation stones of all WPS implementation, Ms. Wohl asserted that we must be more attentive to the needs and local solutions of these networks and follow their lead in determining how, when and where to invest in their efforts. Stating that "today's challenges can't be overcome without partnerships among Member States", Ms. Whol affirmed Switzerland's commitment to increasing trust and strengthening cross-sectoral and cross-regional cooperation, and to carrying this mission forward after they transition from the Network leadership.

Ms. Nthabiseng Malefane

Director of Vulnerable Groups, Department of International Relations and Cooperation, South Africa WPS Focal Point

Ms. Nthabiseng Malefane reflected upon South Africa's year as a member of the leadership quad and offered insights into new areas where WPS must be implemented. Acknowledging the declining levels of women's participation in peace processes, Ms. Malefane announced that, as the incoming president of the G20 for 2025, South Africa will prioritize WPS integration and establish a working group on women's empowerment as a means of advancing the WPS agenda among the G20. She further described how digital inclusion of women and girls will be a key priority during their G20 tenure and that South Africa has taken up the issue of access to new technologies and digital literacy among women and girls as a WPS-related priority. Ms. Malefane mentioned that the Pact for the Future and the Global Digital Compact – the outcome documents of the Summit for the Future – provide a policy framework for advancing these goals and for addressing technology-facilitated gender-based violence as an emerging threat to women's rights. Along with the other quad leaders, South Africa raised climate security as a top priority and a critical area of focus for the Network that they will continue to amplify as they transition from the leadership quad at the end of the year.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY UN WOMEN

Kirsi Madi

United Nations Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director for Resource Management, Sustainability and Partnerships, UN Women

Ms. Kirsi Madi opened her statement with a powerful reminder to Network members that: "The value of the Network as a force of collective action and solidarity is more relevant today as we push forward against the pushback on women's rights." She continued to explain that, while it is a sign of significant progress that today we have 110 NAPs and 13 Regional Action Plans, implementation must be urgently accelerated. Ms. Madi observed that most WPS interventions currently focus on capacity-strengthening, training, advocacy and research. However, these are all on the margins of track one United Nations-led peace processes. She noted that the United Nations set minimum targets for women to comprise one third of all participants in peace processes and at least 15 per cent of all budgets to support conflict mediation and negotiation to go directly to women's inclusion. However, those targets are far from being met, while military spending continues to increase. Ms. Madi appealed that "instead of investing in conflict, we must invest in peace by channelling resources to women's organizations who are on the frontlines of crisis response through mechanisms such as the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund". Through providing direct, flexible and predictable funding to women's civil society organizations and movements, we are investing in evidence-based practices that increase the efficacy and success of conflict prevention, intervention and mitigation, she said.

Women have made significant advancements in the military and security sectors, said Madi. The first global report published by the United Nations on the status of women in defence sectors in October 2024 indicates that the number of women in defence forces has grown from 11 to 14 per cent in the last six years, among the 30 Member States that reported on these data. However, she stated, merely increasing the number of women in the military and defence is insufficient. It is also critical to ensure that women have equal opportunities and representation in the highest levels of leadership and decision-making, and that internal systems are gender-equal and actively prevent gender discrimination. Further, it is essential to have diverse women in the security sector who represent the full spectrum of society. Finally, Ms. Madi reinforced the need for accountability among Member States and United Nations bodies at all levels. Without firm and reliable metrics, reporting systems and enforcement of WPS, our current system will not be able to meet ongoing challenges.

PLENARY SESSION -

Present yet absent: where is the WPS agenda in global peace and security efforts?

While the global WPS agenda has progressed over the past 24 years, the world has not become more peaceful or a safer place; particularly not for women. This is evidenced by the record number of armed conflicts currently happening in every region, and their impacts on women and other marginalized populations and groups.[2] Civilian casualties in armed conflicts surged by 72 per cent in 2023, and the number of women killed in armed conflict increased for the first time since 2015.[3] Marking the 12th consecutive annual increase, the number of people forced to leave their homes due to conflict, violence, human rights violations, persecution, disasters and the impact of climate change was 120 million in May 2024, and children experienced an unprecedented level of grave violations in 2023. There was a 50 per cent increase in United Nations-verified cases of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) in 2023 compared with 2022.[4] In this context, the first plenary panel discussion of the sixth capital-level meeting provided a framing context for participants to examine the current status of WPS implementation in the global responses to conflict and humanitarian crises, and to assess where collective efforts must be increased. The discussion was moderated by Ms. Harriette Williams Bright, Secretariat Coordinator of the WPS-FPN.

PANEL DISCUSSION REMARKS

Ms. Jacqueline O'Neill

Canada's Ambassador for Women, Peace and Security

Ambassador O'Neill stated that, while WPS has progressed over the past 24 years, the world is not more peaceful or safe, especially not for women and girls. Quoting recent United Nations reports, she highlighted that globally we face a record number of armed conflicts, with an estimated 71 conflicts ongoing across four regions, and an estimated 165,273 incidences of political violence recorded in the past year. Further, civilian casualties reached an all-time high in 2023, representing a 72 per cent increase. The number of women killed in conflict has doubled since 2022, leading to an estimated 4 women being killed out of every 10 casualties. We are also witnessing a 50 per cent increase in the number of United Nations-verified cases of CRSV. Further, for the 12th consecutive year, there has been an increase in the number of people who are being forcibly displaced due to conflict and crisis. Meanwhile, the United Nations estimates that, every day, 500 women and girls in conflict-affected countries die from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth. On this trajectory, according to Ambassador O'Neill, these numbers will likely rise, as internal and cross-border conflict and humanitarian crises continue unchecked. As Ambassador O'Neill frankly stated: "the world is on fire".

Despite commitments to promoting women's full, equal, meaningful and safe participation – which are enshrined in the WPS 10-resolution framework – women comprised less than 10 per cent of negotiators in more than 50 peace processes during 2023. A lack of funding for women's leadership and participation in peacebuilding and peace processes remains a persisting challenge, with global military expenditures reaching a record of $2.44 trillion in 2023, compared with only 0.3 per cent of total overseas development assistance going to organizations and movements that support women's rights. Ambassador O'Neill noted there are other barriers, including a "crisis of credibility" for the normative frameworks that women's and feminist movements have advocated to establish for decades. She observed that the credibility of our international legal system is compromised when Member States and parties to a conflict are not held accountable for upholding the rule of law and when anti-gender political movements erode practices and norms. This is further exacerbated by a pervasive misconception that the WPS agenda is a Western notion, propagated by elites in the United States of America and its Western allies. Countering this narrative, she said, closing the gap between policy and practice requires leadership and active participation of WPS experts and practitioners who represent conflict-affected women in all peace and security dialogues and decision-making. This is particularly important as we address new challenges and existential threats from climate change, biological contaminants, technology-facilitated gender-based violence and artificial intelligence.

In closing, Ambassador O'Neill reminded the Network that women's grassroots movements across conflict-affected communities already have solutions and effective approaches in place. Positive stories of impact exist, and we must document and disseminate them as a means of expanding evidence to inform investments in WPS implementation.

Ms. Irene Fellin

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Secretary General's Special Representative for WPS

Ms. Fellin reflected on her first presentation at the United Nations in 2017 as a representative of the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network alongside the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs. Discussions around ways to promote understanding and support for women peacebuilders touched on the same needs and priorities then as they do today.

She asserted that NATO must comply with its mandate to uphold WPS; however, the current security environment presents significant challenges. Ms. Fellin explained that, three years ago, WPS was implemented among NATO members primarily on a parallel track alongside other security measures, rather than as an integral component. When the Russian Federation launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the spotlight shifted to how WPS must be fully integrated into all areas of NATO's work. As Ms. Fellin stated, this means that, while maintaining its mandate to provide defence for its members, NATO is now concentrating on deterrence and conflict prevention by applying a gender perspective to all policy areas. Since the beginning of the Russian Federation's war on Ukraine, NATO has increased cooperation with Ukraine and focused on threats from the Russian Federation, which have disproportionate impacts on the lives of women, girls and historically marginalized communities. Within these efforts, she said, all policies and actions have been designed from a gender perspective. More broadly, NATO is updating its WPS policies in response to the new security environment and to emerging concerns ranging from cyber-security, artificial intelligence, technology-facilitated gender-

based violence, climate change and climate security. A key deliverable of new policies is to improve coordination among NATO members and strengthen connections between the secretariat and its members and allies.

In closing, Ms. Fellin presented a success story of gender inclusion within the military. Ukraine has increasing numbers of women service members who require appropriate uniforms and protective clothing, which were designed for men. NATO supported the production of uniforms tailored for women, which enabled women in the armed forces to serve more effectively and equally to their male counterparts. Ms. Fellin noted that this example may be a small victory, but it is nonetheless significant given the widespread systemic discrimination against women in the armed forces and security sector overall.

Ms. Hilary Anderson

Senior Gender Specialist
Organization of American States (OAS)

Ms. Anderson discussed challenges and opportunities for WPS implementation in the Americas. She began with an overview of women's movements in the region and explained that civil society women's rights movements have had a WPS agenda since 2000, when United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 was introduced. However, she explained, OAS has experienced challenges in implementing this agenda. While there are many factors involved, a primary challenge is that many OAS countries do not want to identify as countries that are in conflict, and there is a widespread perception that the WPS agenda only applies to countries that are experiencing conflict. Additionally, Ms. Anderson explained, implementation and support for the WPS agenda at the national and regional levels is challenged by a widely held belief across the region that WPS is solely the domain of the United Nations.

However, according to Ms. Anderson, there are new entry points and increasing political will across the region, which is generating more concrete discussions about WPS implementation. Eleven of the OAS 32 Member States have WPS NAPs. Overall, OAS members are addressing various aspects of WPS in their domestic and foreign policies, without having adopted NAPs. Many of the NAPs already prioritize addressing women's participation in the armed forces and in United Nations peacekeeping operations; or from a development cooperation angle, as in the case of the United States of America and Canada. Only El Salvador and Guatemala have had an internal perspective in their NAPs, yet these are not supported by an operational framework that would enable implementation. OAS is aiming to support Member States in strengthening their NAP development and in the development of operational frameworks for NAP implementation.

As Anderson elucidated, what has worked well is changing the focus from formal armed conflict, to other forms of conflict including economic, social, health and environmental crises and conflict. These other forms of conflict are just as destabilizing as armed conflict, and fertilize the ground for authoritarian leadership to thrive. She stated that at the OAS, "we are no longer able to achieve consensus on gender equality as a term". Therefore, Anderson continued, in the current political climate within the Americas, it would be challenging for OAS Member States to negotiate regional plans or agreements for implementing the WPS 10-resolution framework, or the Beijing Platform for Action, due to the high level of disagreement on the definition of "gender equality" and the goals for these frameworks.

OAS is currently focusing on trans-national organized crime and climate change. These critical issues provide entry points for addressing conflict in ways that armed conflict has not.

We are, therefore, working with Member States to identify how the impacts of trans-national organized crime and climate change present security challenges within their borders, and how climate change in particular is a driver of forced migration. Additionally, Anderson expanded, the overall approach of OAS to WPS has concentrated on advancing women's leadership at all levels. The need to increase women's leadership came into stark relief during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and, in the aftermath, OAS is working to support women's leadership within communities and at the national and regional levels. One strategy to achieve this objective is safeguarding spaces for women's movements to organize their collective activism, and for women human rights defenders to continue advocacy for legal and policy change, freely and safely. Ms. Anderson stated, "We can't ask women to go out and organize and fight for their rights if we can't protect them." In closing, she affirmed that one of our goals for the coming year must be to protect spaces for women's civil society.

Thania Paffenholz

Director and Founder of Inclusive Peace

Ms. Paffenholz began her address to the Network with an appeal, "to approach the 25th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 with critical introspection". She focused her remarks on ways to improve how WPS advocates and how practitioners communicate the priorities and goals of the WPS framework. She asserted that, in WPS advocacy spaces, there is a lot of "complaining", and observed that WPS advocates dominate the discourse with their focus on problems and challenges. Rather than continue emphasizing what is *not* happening, Ms. Paffenholz urged the Network to "do active marketing" of the WPS agenda and to be more strategic in how we communicate WPS priorities. This requires creating coherent action plans and unified messaging that can be amplified by all WPS advocates and practitioners, and received more readily by those who resist the WPS agenda. Ms. Paffenholz affirmed that WPS-FPN is a good starting point for seeing how communication can be more strategic and more coherent.

First, she explained, this requires an understanding of why our context has changed, but our policies and practices largely have not. Questioning "Where are the women in peace processes?" is futile if there are no peace processes. We need differentiated guidance for each context, and our policies and strategies must be specific to different contexts and environments. Second, it is important to assess our communications on WPS. While knowledge production has increased since 2000, the way in which we communicate and share knowledge is not coherent. There is no unifying message on WPS. According to Paffenholz, we want to showcase the successful work that is already being done on the ground, but we also want to push for more and not replicate practices that are not always effective. Third, Network members are urged to ask, "What is WPS and what is feminism in this age of militarization?" and, "How can we address militarization as WPS advocates in ways that are more strategic, innovative and coherent?" It is critical to have a unified message and clarity around the definition of WPS as a whole, to counter resistance to the agenda by anti-gender political movements. We must be more clear about how we address militarization. To this end, we must be honest and prepare for 2025 by being more strategic and more coherent.

Kaavya Asoka

Executive Director of the non-governmental organization (NGO) Working Group on Women, Peace and Security

In her address, Ms. Asoka agreed with the previous speakers' messages, and that Ambassador O'Neill's frank declaration that "the world is on fire" aptly summarizes her key messages on behalf of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security. As a critical civil society voice, the NGO Working Group acts across women's civil society in all countries that are on the Security Council's agenda. "It is important to talk about WPS not in the abstract but in terms of substantive issues and the country contexts where WPS is most at stake", Ms. Asoka stated. "The tools we have as an international community are actively being eroded and protections for women and girls are being violated with impunity". She explained further that civic spaces are under assault in many contexts worldwide. Looking at a few specific examples, Ms. Asoka highlighted Afghanistan as an illustration of the greatest crisis in women's rights globally. The de facto authorities have issued over 100 gender-apartheid policies restricting every aspect of women's and girls' lives. The lives of women and girls have been erased from view. Meanwhile, the ongoing dialogues led by the United Nations in Doha, Qatar – between Special Envoys and the Taliban – have excluded women from the onset. This exclusion of women from a United Nations-led process contravenes WPS resolutions.

In Libya and Iraq, the governments criminalized public mention of the word "gender" in an effort to silence advocacy for women's rights, asserting that it contradicts Islamic values. In these contexts, civil society advocacy for women's rights is criminalized and advocates are being actively targeted. Women are worst affected by humanitarian crises and yet, the provisions for their protection in the WPS framework is not being implemented. Women's sexual and reproductive rights have long been under attack, and this is increasingly worse in the current crises. For example, in Gaza, attacks on the healthcare system have created a situation where 180 women per day give birth without adequate medical care or medication. Similarly, in Sudan, there is currently a crisis caused by a proliferation of conflict-related sexual violence. Sudan already had one of the highest maternal mortality rates, and now 2.6 million women have no access to life-saving humanitarian aid.

"Every target that the United Nations Secretary-General set out for gender parity, women's participation, and gender-responsive humanitarian systems is not being met", Ms. Asoka said. This existential crisis is also reflected in the United Nations Security Council, where there has been a downward trend in advancing WPS implementation over the past seven years. Ms. Asoka argued that the failure to uphold international human rights law and stop the current crises normalizes armed conflict and impunity. To reverse this trend and transform impunity into accountability, she called upon all actors to double down on the fundamental message of conflict prevention. In closing, Ms. Asoka stated "as civil society and the United Nations mobilize around Security Council reform in the coming year, we must ensure that WPS implementation is representative, transparent and democratic. And, we must not lose sight of delivering on the United Nations Charter's promise of peace. With 25 years of promises, do we believe these words mean something? If we do, what are we willing to do to defend it?" Looking ahead to next year's milestones, Ms. Asoka urged all stakeholders to reaffirm that women's rights are fundamental to secure peace. "There can be no security without respect for the rule of law", she said.

DISCUSSION

During the discussion, the representative from Ukraine pointed out that calling for an end to all military spending is not realistic when many conflicts necessitate Member States acting in self-defence against military attacks, or threats to their national security and territorial integrity, as a State right enshrined in the United Nations Charter. The case of the Russian Federation's illegal war on Ukraine was raised as an example of when military spending is required. Military assistance to Ukraine from its allies is needed to maintain its defence against Russian aggression. It was argued that, in the case of Ukraine, military spending is not contradictory to the WPS agenda as it is critical to ending the conflict, and to increasing women's protection and leadership both during it and in the anticipated recovery and reconstruction process. Panellists agreed that the case of Ukraine highlights the complexity of military spending and exposes how calling for an end to all military spending is not universally applicable and that the issue must be examined in specific contexts.

The representative from South Africa highlighted the use of the term, "gender apartheid" and noted that apartheid refers to a specific regime of separation by colour and ethnicity in South Africa under colonial rule. The representative presented the view that adopting the term "gender apartheid" could overshadow the history of apartheid in South Africa and cause misunderstanding over the meaning of the word in its original context. Panellists noted that the term is understood by Afghan women's rights defenders and legal scholars as an apt description of the Taliban's regime of oppression of women and severe gender discrimination that divides men and women in nearly every aspect of public and private life. It was acknowledged that for South Africans, the use of the term can be contentious.

> *"Every target that the United Nations Secretary-General set out for gender parity, women's participation, and gender-responsive humanitarian systems is not being met.*

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Insist that women are at the negotiating table in all peace processes, especially in United Nations-led track one processes. It is time to move away from generic calls for women's participation and patriarchal structures of conflict mediation that relegate women to the sidelines. Women must participate at the highest levels of peace processes and comprise at least half of conflict resolution, negotiation, and peacebuilding teams.

- Hold Member States and United Nations bodies accountable for holding and protecting space for civil society input and participation, and provide sustainable support through political and financial resources. Pragmatism must not be used as an excuse to avert accountability. For example, the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group has a code of conduct for Member States to pledge they will not vote against a draft resolution before the Security Council aimed at stopping mass-atrocity crimes. This, and similar measures, can be promoted by both civil society and Member States.

- Implement both short-term and long-term strategies that are locally led, gender-transformative and sustainable.

- Develop coherent and unified advocacy messages on the WPS framework that makes its goals and principles clear. As a Network, we must communicate our unified message on the urgency to realize the full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of women and girls in all aspects of conflict prevention, response, peacebuilding, recovery and reconstruction. We must also ensure that our messages are accessible and received by decision makers, funders and political actors who we call upon to take action.

- Identify, document and disseminate "success stories" and practices that are generating positive change at the grassroots, subnational and national levels. It is critical that awareness is raised about the work of women peacebuilders and mediators, and their networks. They are achieving results, particularly in local communities, and we must amplify their voices and raise their profiles as part of our communication strategy and our process of evidence-generation and knowledge-sharing.

BREAKOUT SESSION –

Implementing WPS NAPs, legislation and strategies

Since 2000, the United Nations Security Council has consistently called on Member States to take decisive action to realize the full promise of the WPS agenda. As a result, 24 years on, over half of United Nations Member States and territories (a total of 110) have adopted a WPS NAP at least once. As of September 2024, some 87 per cent of States in the WPS Focal Points Network had adopted a NAP, and 70 per cent of regional organizations had adopted a regional action plan or strategy. These plans and strategies outline key commitments on participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery, among others.

This breakout session brought together Member States at different stages of NAP development to discuss priorities, challenges and solutions to effectively implement NAPs and WPS in national legislation and strategies. Discussants shared lessons learned in forging strong partnerships across their national, state and local government agencies and with civil society. The session discussions were divided into two parts: (1) emerging Issues; (2) implementation challenges.

EMERGING ISSUES

The global security landscape is increasingly shaped by a range of interconnected threats, including climate change, cybersecurity risks and resource scarcity. These emerging issues not only jeopardize vital resources but also exacerbate existing vulnerabilities, particularly for women during crises. Despite the urgency of these challenges, many NAPs struggle to effectively address these and other emerging issues.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. How can we ensure that the WPS NAP transcends mere commitment and becomes an actionable framework for integrating emerging issues?

2. What successful examples exist of mainstreaming WPS into other national and international policies? What are the opportunities, as well as the risks, associated with these approaches?

3. What role can academic partnerships, particularly at national level, play in piloting innovative approaches to WPS initiatives and measuring their impact in your country?

4. How can resolutions, statements and commitments on new security challenges at global level be effectively reflected in national WPS decision-making processes?

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

Coordination among various stakeholders frequently lacks coherence, with differing priorities leading to inefficiencies and overlaps in efforts. Moreover, many states struggle with inadequate data collection and monitoring and evaluation frameworks, complicating the ability to assess the effectiveness of WPS efforts. There is a need for more effective policy responses to prevent conflicts, increase women's meaningful participation in formal peace processes, strengthen accountability mechanisms for conflict-related sexual violence, protect women peacebuilders and defend women's human rights.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. What common hurdles do your countries face in implementing their NAPs? What have been the best strategies to address them?
2. How can we foster a culture of translating NAP commitments into direct impact in cases of ongoing conflicts and crises?
3. What collaborative frameworks have proven effective in bridging the gaps within government, and between government and civil society in the context of WPS NAPs?
4. What successful outcomes have emerged in parliaments, and between lawmakers and civil society organizations to promote and foster accountability for WPS?

DISCUSSANT REMARKS

South Sudan

South Sudan just finalized its second NAP, which is informed by the findings of a nationwide mapping exercise, which covers: trafficking of children and women; increasing forms of criminality; climate change and climate-related forced migration; illicit trade in small arms and light weapons; internal displacement and the conflict in neighbouring Sudan. South Sudan's NAP includes two cross-cutting issues: the integration of security sector reform and emerging security threats across the four pillars. Since the adoption of the recent NAP, women's participation in the security sector has increased, networks of women peacebuilders have been established, and WPS has expanded beyond the Ministry of Gender and is integrated across several ministries and government agencies.

Based on lessons learned from the previous NAP, South Sudan developed a security sector-specific NAP, which implements WPS across all the security institutions, in addition to a general NAP that is the responsibility of the entire national government. Regional versions of the NAP are now being developed as part of national efforts towards localization. Another new development is the creation of a body to ensure the participation of civil society in evaluating implementation. However, a major challenge is still the absence of government funding; donor-driven funding can tie national strategy to external agendas. A key recommendation to donors is to better coordinate bilateral assistance among themselves and with partner countries.

Tunisia

Tunisia offers another example from the development of its first NAP in 2018. Tunisia had support from Finland and UN Women to implement an extensive process for consulting with diverse civil society representatives to identify the key priorities for their NAP. These include addressing terrorism and the consequences of the 2011 refugee crisis across their region. The first NAP was designed with an understanding of how the rise in terrorism and violence by non-state actors contributed to the worsening refugee crisis. By addressing these interconnected issues, Tunisia took a more holistic human security approach to NAP implementation. This was made possible through the ongoing engagement with women's civil society in the planning and development stages, and continued engagement with women-led civil society organizations in implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Terrorism and increasing flows of forcibly displaced people continue to be urgent challenges. As such, the role of women's civil society in NAP implementation is increasingly essential. Tunisia has achieved measurable success in working with grassroots women's organizations and activists in addressing terrorism and forced migration. Plans for building on the successes of the development of the first NAP are underway.

Somalia

Somalia's implementation of its NAP emphasizes localized approaches to WPS. Its NAP is guided by strategic priorities identified through civil society dialogues and participation in NAP development. These priorities include:

- Alignment with national priorities and embedding WPS objectives in existing national policy and strategic planning frameworks;
- Engaging with local communities in the design and implementation of the NAP, especially women from across diverse communities and rural areas;
- Ensure accountability among all partners, including government ministries;
- Investing in capacity- and skills-strengthening for local and traditional community leaders, training for local women in the WPS framework, monitoring and evaluation, and data collection.

To address these priorities systematically, the Government of Somalia established an inter-ministerial working group that bring ministries together to align agendas and contribute their core capacities to the overall implementation plan. This includes the Ministries of Finance, Justice and National Security. Further, Somalia established a civil society platform that brings together women civil society leaders and government representatives to maintain open and consistent channels for reporting on changing conditions and shifting priorities as they emerge. The establishment of an early warning system that operates in partnership between the government and women's civil society increases national capacity to prevent and intervene in inter-communal conflict and escalations of violence, particularly sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). This is further supported by networks of women peace advocates, including young women, who work at the grassroots level to promote understanding of the WPS framework and prevention of SGBV. These networks are connected with government-sponsored gender-based violence (GBV) centres and serve a critical role in reporting incidences of conflict-related SGBV.

Ukraine

Following the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion, the NAP was amended to address new challenges resulting from the war. The revised NAP addresses conflict-related sexual violence and includes new target groups for prevention and intervention measures, including survivors of CRSV, survivors of abuse, torture and captivity, families of Ukrainian military personnel, and the families of prisoners of war.

During this conflict, the Ukrainian Government must now address the broad

implications of CRSV and its lasting impacts on both military and civilian populations. The increasing reports of CRSV among male prisoners of war and men in the military, and the disproportionate number of male survivors compared to female survivors, add to the complexity of this issue. Strategies that can be executed as part of NAP implementation are being developed. Access to justice and ending impunity for perpetrators of CRSV is also critical and is an ongoing concern addressed in the NAP. Sustainable peace is not possible without accountability, especially for survivors of CRSV.

Ukraine is working to achieve gender-mainstreaming throughout the government, and to formalize commitments made on WPS by the Deputy Prime Minister. Gender equality and WPS are seen as cross-cutting issues that are integrated in all areas of policy. This is reflected in Ukraine's strategies for joining NATO and the European Union (EU). Supporting strategic cooperation between government, civil society and international organizations is central to Ukraine's NAP adaptation and implementation processes. Ukraine has very strong coalitions of women-led civil society organizations that work on the full range of WPS implementation nationally and regionally. Ongoing partnerships among government and civil society organizations are central to Ukraine's war response and its recovery and reconstruction. Donors must continue to support these coalitions and partnerships to ensure they can lead gender-responsive recovery and reconstruction and build stronger gender-equal public systems after the war.

Indonesia

There were three main challenges in developing Indonesia's first NAP. The first was finding ways to improve coordination between central and regional governments. The second was creating pathways for government agencies to work together with communities and grassroots organizations. The third was developing monitoring, evaluation and learning systems that fit the local context.

The lessons learned in the first NAP process informed the development of Indonesia's second NAP, which is currently being implemented. There has been significant improvement in coordinating efforts among civil society, academia and the private sector. Furthermore, the foundation laid during the first process allowed central and local government agencies to improve their communication and collaboration, and to further align NAP priorities at the local and national levels. Based on lessons learned, the Government of Indonesia launched monitoring guidelines with indicators to measure success, and moved to include parliament in the collaborative framework for implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands

For some, climate issues are seen as separate from the WPS agenda, and climate change and climate adaptation are not integrated into the current NAP. The nexus between climate, peace and conflict is evidenced by mounting research; however, more tools are needed to break down silos, particularly across funding streams. The growing anti-rights movement in Europe is also a new major threat. Anti-rights and anti-gender movements are enjoined and emboldened by their influence on governments.

The Netherlands' NAP does not address this issue, but there is civil society momentum to integrate it into the forthcoming NAP. Further, the NAP addresses the needs of refugees and migrants from climate-affected countries and asylum procedures, especially for survivors of SGBV and CRSV (e.g. refugees from Ukraine). However, there are significant gaps in support systems for migrant and refugee survivors that come under the purview of WPS but are not yet integrated into policy.

Romania

Romania just launched its second NAP, covering 2024–2028. Romania's best practice is in its coordination among government ministries, beyond the Ministry of Defence. In addition, the NAP is legally binding, making implementation mandatory. A national implementation group that includes civil society representatives was created with specific terms of reference and a group chair. Civil society is tasked with preparing yearly evaluations of the implementation. Government focal points compile these into annual summaries which are posted online as a means of increasing government transparency.

Romania is focusing on the fourth WPS pillar – resilience and recovery – in response to the large influx of refugees from Ukraine. One significant lesson learned is the need to find and elevate WPS champions. Champions in all sectors are effective in raising awareness and generating support for NAP implementation and WPS as a whole.

KEY OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite advancements, NAPs are not adapting fast enough to meet new challenges and emerging threats to peace and security. A primary challenge in addressing ongoing and emerging issues is a general lack of operational understanding of how to design and execute government interventions that respond to intersecting issues. During the breakout group discussions on the guiding questions, participants identified the following issues as some of the most urgent and emerging challenges.

- Climate change and climate security.
- Forced migration spurred by climate and conflict, and the attendant crisis of human trafficking across borders; and unprecedented numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers.
- New technological threats including artificial intelligence and technology-facilitated gender-based violence.
- Pandemics and outbreaks of new viruses in humanitarian settings and conflict-affected regions.
- Terrorism, violent extremism and armed non-state actors.
- Political influence of anti-gender rights movements and the attendant reversal of laws and policies that protect women's human rights and bodily autonomy.

When Member States were asked how many of their NAPs incorporated concrete actions on emerging challenges, approximately 10 per cent of one of the breakout groups mentioned actions linked to climate security; and approximately 5 per cent mentioned that their NAPs addressed migration and human trafficking. None reported that their NAPs address cybersecurity or threats from new technologies such as artificial intelligence. Further, participants identified the need to include counter-measures to anti-gender political movements in their NAPs and discussed how new laws and policies that restrict women's rights and bodily autonomy inhibit WPS implementation. This is particularly the case in Europe, across the Americas and in countries in the Global South with strong anti-gender movements supported by religious factions.

A West African Member State cited political instability in the region linked to the growing threat of violent extremism and terrorism as new challenges that are not addressed in their current NAP, but must be integrated in their forthcoming NAP. They pointed out that these threats fuel illegal migration and human trafficking, and Member States should work as a region to develop NAPs that address these cross-border issues. Climate change-induced natural disasters, such as the recent floods in Senegal, increase food insecurity, which exacerbates violence and conflict. Other West African Member States also advocated for additional support in redesigning their NAPs and implementation strategies to address these interconnected emergencies.

Similarly, Member States in the Asia–Pacific region who are particularly vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters raised the need to extend bilateral aid for disaster relief and climate mitigation in NAPs. Indonesia highlighted that they need to integrate these measures, but are not able to begin their NAP development process from zero. Several other Member States cited water, fuel and electricity scarcity as a factor in conflict and gender-based economic deprivation. However, civil society and government champions face resistance to standardizing actions on these issues with NAPs due to the siloing of WPS and lack of political will.

Just as multiple forms of discrimination against individuals must be addressed, multiple intersecting threats to peace and security must be addressed through holistic interventions and whole-of-government approaches. NAP implementation is confounded by artificial divisions between policy areas and their attached funding streams. In practice, compounding threats from climate change, new technologies, armed actors and anti-gender, anti-democratic political movements cannot be separated. This is partly attributed to a persistent need for training on the WPS resolution framework within governments and capacity-strengthening among the government agencies responsible for implementation.

An additional concern raised is that most NAPs are not structured on quantifiable metrics and tangible outcomes. Most NAPs are designed according to the four pillars of the WPS agenda, which serve as the guiding principles of the WPS framework. Some Member States discussed restructuring their NAPs to be more flexible, and actions can be structured under more than one pillar so they are more integrated across practice areas.

INTEGRATION WITH NATIONAL POLICIES

Member States report that NAPs are commonly treated as standalone documents alongside broader policy frameworks, and are not integrated with national strategies on foreign policy, humanitarian aid, development plans, climate mitigation strategies, GBV prevention strategies and equality plans. These frameworks and foreign policies are not developed with a gender approach or informed by gender analyses as a standard global practice. This results in fragmented approaches across policy areas, from trade and economic development, to natural resource stewardship and climate adaptation. For example, climate policies do not universally account for the gendered dimensions of access to natural resources, land ownership, or local economies built around agriculture, fishing or mining. Consequently, these policies lack protections for women environmental defenders. This gap highlights the need for a cohesive, multidisciplinary approach to incorporating WPS into all areas of national policies relating to both domestic and foreign affairs as a standard universal practice.

A South American country that experienced a successful peacebuilding and reconciliation process after a long internal conflict includes the protection of Indigenous territory as a pillar of their NAP, and addresses the interconnectedness of land, climate and conflict. During their internal conflict, armed groups targeted oil lines, forests and water supplies. Indigenous communities – especially women and girls – whose livelihoods depend on their natural resources, suffered. This experience is the basis for including Indigenous land and environmental protection along with protection and leadership of Indigenous women and girls as a core component of their NAP.

Similarly, a third NAP recently adopted in North America addresses climate-related conflict. The relationship between the government and Indigenous people heavily influences their NAP, and all areas of national and foreign policy. Indigenous women leaders actively participated in the development of their NAP from the outset, and shaped national climate policies as the historical stewards of the land and natural resources. Through this partnership with Indigenous communities, the NAP includes measures on systemic violence against Indigenous women and girls, and formalizes the position of Indigenous people as environmental stewards and experts in natural resource management.

NEED FOR EXPANDED PARTNERSHIPS

There is still a need to expand partnerships, particularly with academic institutions and civil society researchers to promote knowledge generation and NAPs backed with evidence-based data. Additionally, there is a need to expand partnerships within and across governments; and between governments at all levels and civil society. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the coordination of partnerships is particularly challenging within its complex political structure that includes 14 distinct governments in a population of 2.5 million. Despite their political segmentation, government representatives were able to come together and collaborate with civil society organizations to develop the first NAP in 2010.

MONITORING, EVALUATION AND REPORTING

Many Member States entrust WPS implementation to a single government agency. This restricts other national ministries from having ownership over WPS strategies and prevents them from ensuring accountability for the WPS mandate. Siloing WPS also inhibits the development and application of standardized monitoring, reporting and evaluation systems that allow WPS implementation to be tracked across all areas of policies and practice. One participant mentioned: “Usually, monitoring translates to meeting every six months for each ministry to say what they have done. Sometimes people report on actions that are not even linked to WPS. Most coordination structures do not serve an actual coordination.”

Mandatory, periodic budget assessments that use impact-level and output-level indicators are required to establish a standard method for ensuring that all stakeholders are accountable for meeting the goals of their NAP. Accountability for NAP implementation can be supported by enforcement through national law. Enshrining NAPs into national law and making implementation a legal obligation of all government ministries can hold all stakeholders and implementing agencies accountable for meeting objectives and quantifiable targets. This could also safeguard the NAP from being revoked, or being diminished by changing government administrations.

One Member State shared success stories from workshops held across government ministries on feminist monitoring and evaluation. This continued education for elected officials and civil servants keeps all agency members updated and equipped to ensure alignment with feminist principles enshrined in their NAP. They also reported that holding standing “office hours” for all government staff provides a platform to continuously share information and raise questions about implementation as they arise.

African Member States established gender working groups in local communities, which report on WPS priorities and emerging needs to the national government. Their reports are compiled and elevated to the African Union for national and regional action.

RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS

Implementing NAPs requires dedicating sufficient financial and technical resources that are flexible, so they can be used for any programme or intervention that is WPS-related. Many Member States struggle with funding overall, and gaining the internal support required to allocate budgets for WPS is difficult, as WPS is not widely considered a priority alongside other components of foreign and domestic policy. Where dedicated funding exists, it is usually restricted to specific types of programmes and interventions, and does not allow for quick responses to emerging crises and conflicts. Member States mentioned that WPS funding is typically attached to a specific budget line restricted for one kind of programme, such as women’s political leadership. When implementing partners from women’s civil society report other urgent needs and priorities, the dedicated budgets cannot be easily transferred, thereby making it extremely difficult for governments to invest in WPS actions that meet the most critical immediate needs. For example, in Libya, women-led civil society organizations could not use funds for the flood response because their funding was earmarked for peacebuilding. Siloed funding prevents effective responses and NAP implementation.

Similarly, failure to conduct costing for NAPs is another challenge. Many Member States have not costed their NAPs and, therefore, they are unfunded mandates that rely upon funds from other government budgets to implement programmes. This adds another layer of restrictions to implementation.

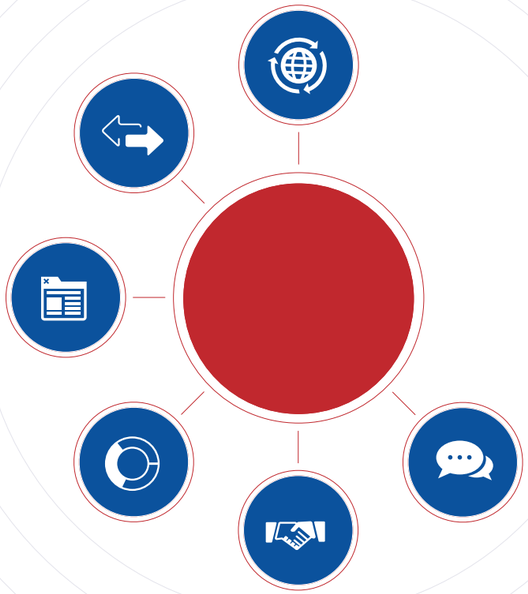
IMPROVING COORDINATION AND COOPERATION

A West African Member State reported on their success in enhancing coordination among civil society and academic institutions to develop evidence-based communications on their WPS strategies. They also appointed gender focal points across agencies to ensure that decision-making across all policy areas is informed by gender expertise, and to promote enhanced collaboration across government ministries and departments. Similarly, neighbouring countries in the region are now cooperating on the development of cross-border policies that address human trafficking, illegal migration and counterterrorism.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

An EU Member State introduced an innovative radio programme focused on WPS that is hosted weekly by a recognized public personality. Each segment highlights experts and practitioners in various areas of WPS; from military, diplomacy, government, youth organizations and grassroots women leaders. The programme has gained popularity and supports public engagement and political commitment to WPS.

To increase awareness and support for their NAP, a Francophone West African state brought delegates from each region to the capital and briefed them on UNSCR 1325 and the NAP, in French and in Indigenous languages. The briefings focused on how the NAP applies to regional priorities and needs. This process also allowed them to overcome harmful cultural norms, such as women not being allowed to travel without the permission of their husbands.



DAY 2 – 22 OCTOBER 2024

Updates from the 2025 co-chairs, and Focal Points on G7, G20 and Commitment 2025

The session on updates from Focal Points was moderated by Ms. Sarah Douglas, Deputy Chief of Peace, Security and Resilience at UN Women. The session focused on updates from the 2025 co-chairs, as well as from Italy and Brazil, who respectively hold the presidency for the G7 and G20. Spain and Finland also facilitated updates on Commitment 2025 (C-25).

UPDATES FROM THE 2025 CO-CHAIRS

Japan

Ms. Seiko Kiyohara, Principal Deputy Director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, represented Japan as the WPS-FPN's 2025 co-chair, and announced that Japan is honoured to host a capital-level meeting in Tokyo in 2025. On behalf of the Government of Japan, she extended gratitude to the leadership quad for their excellent work in 2024, and their encouragement and support in joining as co-chair. "The international community is facing complex and multifaceted challenges. As we commemorate the anniversary of UNSCR 1325, we must reflect on the gains made so far and work together to accelerate implementation of the WPS agenda", Ms. Kiyohara said. Japan integrated WPS in its foreign policy and promotes WPS diplomacy, calling for increased international cooperation, as articulated in its "WPS+ Innovation" policy platform announced last year. "As co-chair, we will strive to take these efforts to the next level", she said.

Together with Norway, Japan will focus on three themes in 2025. The first is development of NAPs and Regional Action Plans, and broader support for implementation, domestically and internationally. The second is the role of women in conflict mediation and peacebuilding. Japan aims "to raise the political will for women's meaningful participation and leadership in conflict mediation". The third theme is the need to advocate for integrating knowledge of disaster risk reduction and disaster recovery, prevention and response into the WPS agenda: "We aim to highlight the risks of disaster for women and girls. We aim to integrate WPS principles into the disaster recovery process. We further aim to include dialogue on 'non-traditional' aspects of WPS." For example, in the United Nations Security Council open debate, Japan focused its intervention on investment in people and human security approaches. In addition, the Government of Japan declared its plans for using the anniversary of UNSCR 1325 to focus on women's economic empowerment. Ms. Kiyohara closed by stating, "We have crucial responsibilities to redouble efforts in implementing the WPS agenda, and are particularly honoured to serve as co-chair with Norway as we commemorate the 25th anniversary of UNSCR 1325."

Norway

Ms. Signe Guro Gilen, Special Envoy, Women, Peace and Security for Norway addressed the WPS-FPN, representing Norway as incoming co-chair. Reflecting on Norway's fruitful partnerships with the WPS-FPN leadership quad, UN Women, the United Nations Department of Peace Operations, and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, Ms. Gilen affirmed Norway's commitments to strengthening these partnerships as co-chair, and to build upon their record of support for WPS implementation. "Learning from experience, it is important to recognize our success in generating broad support for the WPS agenda and in integrating new challenges, namely climate change, into the agenda. This should be continued by all of us. It is essential that we increase our partnerships and collaboration among regional networks of women mediators and peacebuilders to continue this success", she said.

In 2025, in Oslo, Norway will host a Network meeting focusing on peace mediation and peacebuilding. In the face of new challenges, Norway will focus on operationalization, resource mobilization and implementation. In these efforts, cooperation is key for operationalizing NAPs, as is the work to influence fellow Member States, diplomatic partners and civil society, to ensure that women's organizations on the front lines of conflict and crisis receive the direct, flexible and predictable funding they need. At the top of Norway's leadership agenda is addressing unmet needs for increased investments in women mediators, negotiators and peacebuilders. Researchers are currently documenting how women mediators are effective in preventing and mediating conflicts. Ms. Gilen stated, "analyses show that mediators can and do mitigate escalating tensions in conflict, and preventing conflict by tackling its root causes. Intergenerational aspects of the WPS agenda is another key concern. Having a thematic focus on mediators during an upcoming Network meeting will help us collaboratively support these efforts."

Looking towards the meetings in Tokyo and Oslo, Ms. Gilen urged the Network to examine how we can integrate these overlooked priorities into our observance of the 25th anniversary of UNSCR 1325. Ms. Gilen highlighted Norway's co-chairship of the WPS-HA Compact and described how the Compact and the Focal Points Network are complementary and mutually reinforcing. Closing with an appeal for fellow WPS-FPN members to join the WPS-HA Compact, she emphasized Norway's full commitment to international cooperation, collaboration and partnership.

> *"The international community is facing complex and multifaceted challenges. As we commemorate the anniversary of UNSCR 1325, we must reflect on the gains made so far and work together to accelerate implementation of the WPS agenda.*

G7 AND WPS

Mr. Luca Fratini, Coordinator for Women, Peace and Security, Youth and Mediation, addressed the G7's efforts to advance WPS under the Italian presidency this past year. The G7 working group on gender and women's empowerment led members in reformulating commitments to gender equality so they align with international standards and targets for 2030 Sustainable Development Goal 5. Gender equality was a priority agenda item in the G7 Capri meeting, where members affirmed that it is "a fundamental prerequisite to eradicate poverty, to stimulate prosperity and sustainable and inclusive growth, and to build peaceful, just, and inclusive societies". The G7 is focused on women and girls as "disproportionately affected by conflicts and crises which can exacerbate existing gender inequalities and expose women and girls to heightened risks of violence, exploitation and discrimination" and affirms "The involvement of women and girls in all areas related to the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts, as well as disaster risk reduction, is crucial to creating and ensuring sustainable and inclusive peace, and address the root causes of conflicts." Under Italy's leadership, G7 members announced their commitment to implementation of UNSCR 1325 and the WPS 10-resolution framework in recognition of "the importance of women's full, equal, and meaningful participation and leadership in all areas of policy decision-making spaces and tangible implementation, and through women's civil society organizations, non-government partners, and throughout the political, security and development spheres".

During the Apulia Summit, the G7 Heads of State and Prime Ministers of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, plus the EU committed to advancing the WPS agenda. This includes its application to disaster risk reduction and to eradicating all forms of gender-based violence, including CRSV; as well as by supporting women peacebuilders in conflict settings.

The WPS commitments made in the two recent G7 summits will be replicated in the forthcoming ministerial segments. The G7 is committed to ensuring women's full participation in political and economic decision-making. This

encompasses promoting gender quotas, mentoring programmes and leadership development to increase the number of women in top positions in both the public and private sectors. Moving forward, the G7 gender equality initiatives will need to evolve to address new challenges, including the impacts of climate change, digitalization and global health crises; ensuring that progress is sustained and accelerated for women and girls worldwide. Mr. Fratini also announced that the Government of Italy has recently joined the WPS-HA Compact as a signatory, which expands its capacity to share knowledge and best practices with partner governments and civil society across all regions. Strengthening partnerships and utilizing new platforms for learning, particularly among youth peacebuilders, is one of Italy's priorities for WPS in 2025.

G20 AND WPS

Ms. Viviane Rios Balbino, Minister Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Brazil to the United Nations, reviewed the successes and lessons learned from Brazil's presidency of the G20 this year. Noting the G20's focus on the international financial system, Brazil put the spotlight on Sustainable Development Goal 5 – to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls – and focused on women's economic empowerment. Towards this goal, in 2015, a G20 working group on gender equality and women's empowerment was established, called the "W20". This led to the establishment in 2020 of a G20 group to support governments in their gender equality strategies. All public and foreign relations policies must address multiple intersecting forms of discrimination and contribute to gender equality. Brazil, therefore, applies an intersectional approach to fighting hunger, poverty and inequality by addressing national priorities in energy and sustainable development.

The G20 ministerial meeting in Brazil concentrated on four areas: equality, particularly in bodily autonomy; the care economy and unpaid labour; GBV; and climate justice. WPS was identified as the priority area for collaboration among G20 members, as a cross-cutting framework. In this process, G20 members are undertaking strategies to promote women's leadership at all levels of conflict prevention, response and peacebuilding. WPS will be a key priority during the G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro in November 2024.

COMMITMENT 2025

Dr. Jessica Smith, Director of Research, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, presented updates on the C-25 initiative. C-25 was introduced by Finland and Spain in 2019, with the goal of increasing meaningful coordination among its signatories to advance the WPS agenda.

Analysis of 13 of the signatories' NAPs shows they share three main focus areas: violent extremism, climate change and technology-facilitated GBV. Key targets measured by C-25 for 2023 include increasing gender representation in ambassadorships among G20, EU and C-25 Member States. Among these 49 countries, the top five are: Canada, Finland, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Analysis of women's representation within cabinet and ministerial positions in 2024 shows that the top five are: Finland, Belgium, Norway, Iceland and Spain; in each of these countries, at least 50 per cent of parliamentarians are women. Measurements of official development assistance for 2022 indicate a slight drop in the volume of funding spent on gender equality and women's empowerment among signatories, at just under $6 billion. The Kingdom of the Netherlands is the largest contributor of gender equality funding, with allocations just above $20 billion for 2022; this is followed by Iceland, who delivered approximately $12 billion in 2022. In 2024, the share of women in peacekeeping operations rose to 10 per cent; however, gender provisions in formal peace agreements declined to just under 30 per cent in 2023.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Disaster risk reduction and response, recovery and resilience must be understood as a human security issue, and therefore must be standard components of NAPs and WPS strategies.
- Focal Point Network Members should join the WPS-HA Compact as signatories, as a means of strengthening partnerships that support knowledge exchange, capacity-strengthening and resource mobilization.
- Measures to address security threats from climate change, digitalization, pandemics and global health crises must be built into NAPs and national strategies for WPS. Incorporating responses to these rapidly evolving challenges as standard components of all WPS strategies is necessary for ensuring that progress is sustained and accelerated for women and girls worldwide.
- NAPs and WPS strategies must acknowledge that women and girls face multiple intersecting forms of discrimination, and all implementation measures must account for these factors.
- C-25 appeals to their signatories, WPS-FPN members, and all stakeholders with their call to action for the 25th anniversary of UNSCR 1325:
  - Where C-25 countries play an active role in conflict mediation, push for the inclusion of specific gender provisions within peace agreements.
  - Advocate actively for direct and indirect inclusion of women in negotiations at community, national and multinational levels.
  - Incorporate considerations and actionable recommendations related to key cross-cutting WPS themes into NAPs; including extremism, climate change, and online violence against women.
  - Appoint more women to government leadership roles, including ambassador and cabinet positions.
  - Expand investment in development aid for gender equality, and specifically dedicate funding to local women's organizations.
  - Increase the share of women represented among United Nations peacekeeper contributions and ensure that women have equal access to military service roles.

PANEL DISCUSSION -

WPS action across regions: leveraging institutions, networks and mechanisms

The discussion was moderated by Dr. Sarah Taylor, Policy Specialist, Peace, Security and Resilience, UN Women

African Union Commission

Mme. Bineta Diop
Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on Women, Peace and Security

Mme. Diop shared with the Network her experiences in the field, where she witnessed first-hand how the pushback against women's rights and gender equality is impacting women's civil society across the African region. Among the more than 36 countries in Africa that have NAPs, she explained that the African Union had identified two main challenges: the first is ensuring women are at the table; and the second is endemic violence against women and SGBV. She shared that, together with Namibia, South Sudan convened the African Union Peace and Security Council, to discuss how to implement WPS policies. Mme. Diop asserted that partnering with women leaders and regional networks of women mediators is a requirement for effective implementation, but this requires political leaders to commit to working with women's networks and civil society leaders. She continued to describe the increasing political support for the WPS agenda across Africa. However, in her words, "This must go further. We must also ensure that partnerships and collaboration with women's networks reflect regional diversity and a geographic balance in representation."

The African Union established regional hubs for knowledge exchange, research and training across the continent as part of its WPS initiatives. These are supported through partnerships with European Member States, but financial resources are still needed to expand and promote new research, and to translate evidence from the field into programmes and policies that are tailored to specific national and local contexts. Mme. Diop closed by stating that identifying more sustainable methods for carrying the WPS agenda forward throughout the African Union is a top priority.

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

Dr. Lara Scarpitta
Senior Adviser on Gender Issues

Dr. Scarpitta spoke on behalf of the OSCE, the largest global security organization, with 57 participating states. She stated that the OSCE is uniquely placed to promote WPS implementation because of its diverse membership. She reminded the Network that back-tracking on women's rights, along with climate change and corruption are some of the main drivers of conflict. These are exacerbated by emerging threats from technology-facilitated GBV, violent extremism and terrorism. All of these are at the top of the OSCE agenda. Given this reality, she asked, "how do we leverage regional organizations to promote more implementation of the WPS agenda?"

As a regional organization with broad representation, OSCE uses its convening power to bring countries together for knowledge exchange and mutual support. In total, 70 per cent of OSCE members have adopted NAPs, and each brings a wealth of experience and knowledge. Recently, the Organization convened five countries in Central Asia together with Canada and Japan, who provided expertise in developing NAPs. Through supporting multilateral collaboration, OSCE creates a needed platform for fostering dialogue and bringing together government and civil society working at the regional, national and local levels. OSCE is a catalytic member of the WPS-HA Compact, which allows the Organization to build further synergies and share best practices more widely, and use financial resources to boost partnerships. For example, OSCE mobilized partnerships with the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders and, in June 2024, brought together civil society mediators for training on the WPS-HA Compact.

In 2021, the former Secretary-General of OSCE formed a new programme to support women peacebuilders and mediators. Dr. Scarpitta explained how this initiative supported high-level mentoring and training of women peacebuilders, and the continued work to invest in womens' networks across the peace and security sector, including the Mediterranean Women's Mediator Network, Fem-Wise and the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders. "It is essential to invest more in young women", Scarpitta declared. This is a major regional priority for OSCE, particularly in Asia where there are significant investments in intergenerational programmes that provide training and learning opportunities for young women. Through these collected efforts, the OSCE aims to respond to the needs of young women and enable them to take their seats at the peacebuilding table.

European Union

Mrs. Jonna Naumanen
Senior Adviser, Gender Equality and WPS

EU Member States drive the WPS agenda and are among the top donors for WPS worldwide. However, as a political entity, the EU is able to engage with political leaders of its Member States and address WPS as part of the broader gender equality agenda and as part of those nations' political agendas. Women's participation in politics at the national level directly feeds into this process and influences the success of implementing the WPS framework. These policy frameworks are integral to the EU's Gender Action Plan III. Over the past few years, the EU has had to adapt its WPS agenda due to the changing political environment. A primary concern is increasing polarization between countries and within countries, particularly between different generations. Second, climate change and climate security has risen to the top of the political agenda. A recent study found that achieving gender equality would have a positive impact on the average EU Member's gross domestic product, raising it by approximately $9 million per day.

The EU embodies gender-responsive leadership, and strives to move beyond gender parity. This is reflected in the latest council agreements adopted by EU foreign ministers. These agreements recognize that women's safety and protection is a prerequisite for increasing women's political participation and leadership; however, these should never be used as an excuse for excluding women from political processes. Within our polarized environment, where there is a rising anti-gender movement, civil society voices are needed most. Participation of women in conflict-affected contexts, such as Afghanistan, is critical and must not be overlooked. It is critical to know when EU members must step in, and when it is more effective for EU members to support civil society actors in taking the lead. The EU includes civil society in its advisory councils and emphasizes that civil–political partnerships must continue to grow and be strengthened. The EU has been a strong champion of WPS within the G7 and the G20, and pledges to continue as a strong ally in the coming year.

Colombia

Dr. Arlene Tickner
Ambassador-at-Large for Gender Issues and Feminist Global Policy

Globally, Member States and regional organizations are failing in their attempts to address conflicts and crises. This is especially evident in the provision of well-being and safety among girls and women, and those who are most vulnerable. Within the broader crisis of multilateralism, WPS cannot be fully implemented if the foundational structures of multilateralism are not working.

Latin America and the Caribbean is one of the most violent regions in the world, despite the fact that most countries in the area are democratic. This is largely attributed to the proliferation of organized crime and armed non-state actors. However, individual states have not been able to counter these forces, demanding that we consider the implementation of WPS in different ways. The Brasilia Convention was one of the most successful attempts at regional coordination. Latin America and the Caribbean has a biregional Pact for Care with the EU, which addresses how economies of care and the undue burden of unpaid care work on women and girls impact WPS implementation. While these biregional partnerships are needed, we must also use measures that promote peace and security from the ground up; starting with grassroots networks of women mediators and negotiators. It is also important to "network the networks" by linking them together to analyse processes, monitor progress and investigate gaps, towards the goal of establishing more robust groupings of women peacebuilders.

Addressing violent masculinities is a priority throughout the region, where at least 90 per cent of homicides are committed by men, of whom at least 80 per cent are homicide victims. Unless we address this and the root causes of this violence, we will not be able to create stronger systems to prevent it from continuing. It is not possible to reclaim Women, Peace and Security without dismantling patriarchies, and this needs to be our ultimate collective aim in moving forward.

PLENARY DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS

During the discussion following the panellists' remarks, some Member States shared their experiences in leveraging institutions, networks and mechanisms in their national contexts. The representative from Kenya discussed how local and national government agencies collaborate to determine WPS funding allocations. Their NAP includes provisions to ensure there are budget commitments to WPS at the level of federal ministries, state-level ministries and local governments. The representative from Indonesia mentioned challenges with decentralization and changing personnel, requiring stronger coordination. Sustaining progress in NAP development and in implementing WPS strategies through political transitions is another ongoing challenge for nearly all Network members.

The representative from Mali shared their experience with civil society and government collaboration. The national government, together with women-led civil society organizations, coordinates "women's circles" that meet regularly to discuss and monitor progress in local peacebuilding processes. Peacebuilding in the Sahel faces added challenges from climate change, forced migration and arms trafficking. The evolving concerns can be effectively addressed by the women's circles in affected communities, the members of which have direct experience with how these forces impact the daily lives of girls and women. The national government prioritizes gathering input from the women's circles as part of the national monitoring and evaluation process for NAP implementation. The women's circles demonstrate how Indigenous community structures offer culturally relevant and meaningful platforms for gendered communication. This allows women who would otherwise not be represented within political decision-making at the capital level to influence conflict prevention and peacebuilding processes that impact their lives. This is proving to be more effective in achieving inclusivity, diversity and efficacy in peacebuilding than other government-led measures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

» **Strengthen understanding across governments and civil society of the full WPS agenda.**
Seek success stories and positive examples of how NAPs are operationalized and apply these to policy development. Integrate best practices and success stories into practical guides for WPS interventions in emerging areas such as climate security, cybersecurity, counterterrorism, forced migration, and human trafficking. This can inform strategies for resisting anti-rights movements and gender backlash, and ensure that NAPs respond dynamically to evolving issues.

» **Strengthen integration with regional strategies and cooperation with regional organizations**
NAPs must be harmonized with national and domestic policies, and promote regional coordination and cross-border cooperation. Effective NAP design and delivery requires a whole-of-government approach and should align with regional gender strategies, agreements on tariffs and trade, migration policy, peace and security at borders, and law enforcement cooperation, along with other areas of concern.

» **Expand partnerships across sectors**
Gender expertise exists in all sectors and various perspectives must be brought together to develop evidence-based, data-informed approaches. This is particularly critical in developing metrics for monitoring and evaluation and standardized reporting systems that inform all areas of government, substantiate NAP objectives and measure progress in concrete terms. Partnerships among governments and academic institutions advance knowledge production, expand gender expertise, and build the body of evidence required to adapt national policies and strategies to meet the actual needs and priorities of women and girls, in all their diversity.

» **Enforce accountability through monitoring structures**
Establishing quarterly reviews and streamlined reporting protocols across all national ministries and agencies can foster government ownership of WPS. Network members indicate that structured, cross-departmental coordination meetings can allow for genuine reflection, learning and actionable outcomes for each agency.

» **Resource allocation and mobilization**
Advocate for increased funding allocations for WPS commitments, and prioritizing resources for the implementation of newly integrated and emerging priorities.

» **Improve coordination and collective delivery**
Ensure that the coordination structure encourages synchronization, collective learning and readiness, with a focus on actionable outcomes, collaborative partnerships, and sustained progress in WPS efforts. Develop clear terms of reference for roles, responsibilities and accountability in each government ministry and agency.

BREAKOUT SESSION –

Sustaining the WPS agenda amid resource constraints

As we navigate a landscape fraught with crises and escalating instability – from Ukraine to Sudan to Gaza – the urgency of the WPS agenda has never been more pressing. However, governments face increasing resource constraints that limit their ability to implement NAPs and maintain long-term efforts. To advance WPS effectively in this resource-constrained environment, innovative strategies and a rethinking of budgeting and implementation approaches are essential. Ensuring the sustainability of initiatives requires elevating the WPS agenda as an organizational priority, focusing on measurable results and embedding these principles in decision-making.

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

1. What specific measures can help ensure the sustainability of WPS in the face of resource constraints, and ensure that WPS work is institutionalized and adequately resourced?
2. In what ways can the roles of Focal Points be better integrated into government processes to support WPS efforts?
3. How can WPS principles be prioritized in funding decisions on peace and security?
4. How can we strengthen cooperation between government, civil society, the United Nations system, and the private sector to create real change and see the impacts of WPS NAPs at the local level? What innovative examples can serve as models?

Georgia

Georgia experiences significant challenges to the WPS agenda in the context of growing political and social polarization. Youth, in particular, are exposed to radicalized political messages and disinformation through social media, which worsens existing threats to their safety and well-being. Resource constraints for investment in youth-focused programming prevents countermeasures against disinformation and propaganda to match the scale of its threats. Women human rights defenders and political leaders are targeted by gender-based disinformation campaigns, which undermine their roles and credibility. Increased resources are needed to prevent disinformation and technology-facilitated GBV.

Advancing the Youth, Peace and Security agenda is also hindered by resource constraints. Youth-led peace organizations need more resources and visibility. The political environment silences alternative voices, particularly with upcoming elections on the horizon. As such, It is essential to leverage all platforms and strengthen coalitions of WPS Focal Points and champions in our shared efforts. Building knowledge and spreading awareness can transform negative perceptions and raise the profile of WPS as a priority in foreign and domestic policy.

Spain

WPS is adopted as a government priority that benefits Spanish citizens as much as their foreign partners. Spain emphasized that bilateral and multilateral partnerships are essential and that sharing resources and expertise can fill some funding gaps. By engaging all ministries in NAP operationalization, resources for programme and policy areas previously considered separate from WPS can be integrated into a single agenda that employs a whole-of-government approach. Bringing government ministries together transformed perceptions of WPS as a side issue.

Uganda

Uganda has experienced a series of conflicts since gaining independence in 1962. The Government of Uganda is currently implementing its third NAP, which was launched in 2020. The national government worked closely with women-led civil society organizations in the planning and drafting process, and in developing an operational plan for implementation. With the primary goal of mainstreaming WPS across all ministries, the Government of Uganda is employing a whole-of-government approach to NAP operationalization. To work towards this goal, they established a national steering committee on WPS, which is chaired by the Minister of Gender and Social Development. The steering committee is composed of civil society and government representatives, who all work to ensure that stakeholders across each sector are equally and meaningfully engaged in implementing the NAP at the local, national and regional levels. Uganda's NAP includes a comprehensive framework for monitoring, evaluation and learning, and incorporates metrics for tracking progress in actions relating to each of the four pillars.

Within the Great Lakes region, Uganda is active as a leader and facilitator in peacebuilding processes, and will host an upcoming international conference on peacebuilding in the region. Uganda is currently the chair of the African Union's Specialised Technical Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, under the leadership of Betty Amongi Ongom, the Minister of Gender, Labour and Social Development of Uganda. In this capacity, Uganda engages in peace processes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Lesotho and other countries in the region, and promotes exchanges of knowledge between Uganda and African Union Member States. Facilitating dialogue among practitioners across the African Union, promoting platforms for mutual training and support, and sharing best practices in NAP and WPS strategy implementation is most critical. She closed with urging the Network to continue seeking new pathways to support cross-sectoral and cross-regional exchanges as a key component of strengthening WPS mainstreaming and increasing the efficacy of WPS implementation overall.

KEY OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

GENDER-RESPONSIVE BUDGETING

- Gender-responsive budgeting is an evidence-based best practice standard for integrating WPS into all policy areas, and for ensuring that NAPs are fully funded and aligned with national gender equality strategies, foreign assistance, and bilateral agreements. However, applying gender-responsive budgeting is a challenge due to the lack of gender analysis and data to inform the highest areas of need for investment, and a lack of gender and WPS mainstreaming across government ministries and agencies. Integrating strategies from different sectors proves to be a constructive strategy for institutionalizing gender-responsive budgeting.
- A Middle Eastern Member State shared that they integrated military and civilian gender equality and protection strategies, and connected both to their NAP. They successfully apply gender-responsive budgeting to support the implementation of both policies. This increases financial sustainability for WPS implementation by treating it as a cross-cutting issue that requires equitable funding. They also employ a "tagging system", which allows government-wide monitoring of funds that go towards gender-related programming. Women-led civil society partners are critical in implementing the NAP, especially in local communities that host refugees. However, more investigation is needed into how to best engage civil society in implementation across other areas, and in monitoring and evaluation of the NAP implementation. Engaging with the Multi-Party Trust Fund has made it possible to bring together government and civil society to more fully implement the most recent NAP.
- One Member State in the Mediterranean region adapted its NAP to focus on gender mainstreaming across all government ministries and agencies, aligning actions with EU-funded gender financing initiatives. Although this is on track, further work is required to strengthen coordination and align decision makers.
- Another member shared that strategies to influence local governments are as important as influencing national governments. This can be effective at the county and municipal levels, where civil society and other actors influence governments to invest funding in implementation of broader strategies, such as Vision 2030.
- No Member State has fully implemented WPS and we are seeing backsliding even within countries that have championed gender equality. The backsliding on gender equality is a global trend and is tied to increasing authoritarianism and militarism. All Member States are bound to uphold international and humanitarian law, and invest in actions that promote gender equality to counteract this trend.

EMPLOY A WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT APPROACH

- Participants reviewed the call for WPS-FPN to take the lead in communicating a coherent, unified advocacy message that WPS is essential to peace and human security, and is based on conflict prevention, not merely making war safer for women. As such, it is inseparable from other policy areas related to peace and security, and equal levels of funding are needed if we are to achieve our national and global goals for a peaceful and gender-equal world.

KEY OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Participants also examined how standard government budgeting practices often exclude financial and technical support for NAP implementation. Emphasizing the need to invigorate advocacy for WPS resourcing, discussions centred on some alternatives that can be presented to government ministries for securing funds and gaining “buy-in” for WPS mainstreaming. The first of these is to call for establishing a standing budget line item in each ministry or agency for WPS-related activities. Ideally, this will be supported by fiscal policy and legislation that establishes national funding requirements and benchmarks. The second is to establish a dedicated budget for NAP implementation that includes activities that come under the mandates of different ministries or agencies. For example, a NAP budget that includes activities related to climate security can be connected to the ministries overseeing energy, transportation, environment, economic development and trade, and other climate-related areas.

ADDRESS EMERGING ISSUES AND NEW THREATS

- Resource constraints are worsened by the increasing political influence of anti-rights and anti-gender movements worldwide. Proponents of these agendas within political and civil leadership in countries across every region have redirected funding away from gender equality and women’s rights and, in many contexts, reversed laws and policies that protect women’s human rights. This is coupled with military rather than diplomatic responses to emerging threats, militarization of borders, and normalization of violence against women in political leadership and human rights defenders. These alarming trends contribute to the scarcity of funding for NAP implementation, and for the failure to place the WPS framework at the centre of peace, security and sustainable development. Meeting participants from all regions expressed concern about the extent to which these movements are making it more dangerous and more difficult for women human rights defenders, humanitarian responders and peacebuilders to continue their critical work. Further concern was expressed over the influence of these movements in multilateral decision-making.

STRENGTHEN ALLIANCES AND ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY

- Civil society participants emphasized the importance of investing in alliances. The discussion examined how work in coalitions with other stakeholders from across all sectors can amplify key messages on the urgency of WPS implementation. Further, coalitions share resources, knowledge and offer mutual support. Civil society participants urged their counterparts in government to be more vocal in multilateral spaces about prioritizing WPS, and urged other Member States to leverage all existing mechanisms and diplomatic channels in holding each other accountable for their commitments to WPS.
- Throughout the breakout group discussion, participants underscored the need for alliances, sustainable financing and accountability to maintain progress on the WPS agenda. Specific calls were made for:

  1. Stronger civil society engagement and youth inclusion in peace processes;
  2. Gender-responsive budgeting to ensure sustainable funding for WPS initiatives;
  3. Global cooperation to counter backlash and militarization efforts undermining human rights;
  4. Sustained, active leadership by UN Women and Member States to reinforce WPS principles at all levels.

- These discussions highlight the importance of shared responsibility, international cooperation across sectors and localized interventions in advancing the WPS agenda and making peace more inclusive and tangible for all.

Meeting reflections by Focal Points

Namibia

Ms. Morina Muuondjo
Ambassador, Ministry of International Affairs and Cooperation, Government of Namibia *remarks redacted

The UNSCR 1325 on WPS did not come out of a vacuum in 2000. Women's participation in peace processes is not a new phenomenon. As the President of the United Nations Security Council at the time, Namibia and many other countries had experienced the value of women in peace and security. Namibian women featured in the long and bitter fight for liberation, including the early colonial resistance that led to the first genocide of the 20th century, and the survival of the affected communities. Studies have shown that women's participation in peace and security efforts have featured in human history across the globe; however, this is usually underdocumented, underresearched and undervalued. Therefore, we are not only reclaiming the WPS agenda, but the presence that women have always had in peacebuilding efforts. It is true that, "we stand on the shoulders of other great women before us".

Twenty-four years after the unanimous adoption of UNSCR 1325, Namibia is humbled and proud that the importance of this agenda continues to be upheld at international forums, and that United Nations Member States continue to discuss the necessity, the best practices and the challenges of inclusive and sustainable peace, in order to improve efforts that would ensure the full and effective implementation of the WPS agenda.

Over the two days of discussions, the phrase, "The world is on fire", was mentioned more than once. The significantly increased spending on militarization has been highlighted as an indicator of a disheartening shift in the priorities of the global community. We are witnessing the violation of human rights livestreamed from the ground; affecting men, women and children, and devastating communities. Regrettably, we are seeing that the violations of some human rights are treated as less significant than others, due to existing geopolitical biases. There are also some violations that the world has become desensitized to, particularly on the African continent, to the point that human rights violations have become the norm in some contexts. Among emerging issues, climate change, food insecurity and cybercrime has been highlighted. The list is long. Our approach to the WPS agenda has to be intersectional and context-specific. Through understanding regional and local contexts, we are able to envision innovative solutions to peace processes that respond to the different realities.

> *"The significantly increased spending on militarization has been highlighted as an indicator of a disheartening shift in the priorities of the global community. We are witnessing the violation of human rights livestreamed from the ground; affecting men, women and children, and devastating communities. Regrettably, we are seeing that the violations of some human rights are treated as less significant than others, due to existing geopolitical biases.*

RECOMMENDATIONS

- We should breathe life into our WPS resolutions so that we can move from rhetoric to action. During the meeting, one of the panellists said that the "WPS agenda is tangible". It improves operationalization, diversifies mediation so that all voices are at the table, and offers protection and services to women and girls who are disproportionately affected by conflict. Therefore, beyond action, we have to continuously share examples of best practices, so that we may all learn and benefit from these tangible results. We need to strategically market the WPS agenda as tangible and non-negotiable.

- In order to evolve with the times, NAPs should incorporate emerging issues such as food insecurity, pandemics, cybercrime and climate change, among others. Complex issues compound insecurities, and this again highlights that our approach should be context-specific. As Namibia begin reviewing their first NAP and moving towards the development of the second NAP, we will be sure to incorporate the emerging realities that affect our nation. Our approach should be intergenerational. Our youth are innovative and should be brought into national discussions. If the impacts of conflict and violence do not discriminate against age, then our solutions should encompass all voices and all innovative ideas.

- Monitoring and evaluation is key. We need data to identify gaps. We need data to determine successes and positive outcomes. And we need data in order to be more strategic and informed. The data will also substantiate the importance of the WPS agenda through advocacy. Additionally, we need to continuously promote the inclusion of civil society. The participation of civil society over the two days of the meeting enriched our discussions and is a reminder that we need to include them in a meaningful way. In Namibia's NAP on WPS, civil society were included in our development process, and are considered our implementing partners. As Namibia begins to review their first NAP, civil society will be included, as we are convinced that their contributions will surely improve our second NAP.

- We must keep elevating the WPS agenda at all high-level meetings. South Africa made mention of the G20 Summit, which has included WPS on the agenda, and that is commendable. We need to unapologetically take up space in the presence of world leaders. The importance of the WPS agenda should be deafening. Finally, we must address violent and toxic masculinities in pursuit of positive masculinities. The violence experienced by many women and girls is not unique to times of conflict alone; however, it is exacerbated during times of insecurity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Therefore, there are underlying trends that need to be transformed for the benefit of gender equality.

- As we reclaim WPS and define a path forward, we should celebrate achievements such as the increased participation of women in peace processes, and greater awareness of SGBV in conflict settings. At the same time, it is equally vital to acknowledge the persistent barriers many women face, including systemic discrimination, lack of access to resources, and underrepresentation in decision-making roles. Thus, we should continue to advocate for, and create spaces for, women at the table. If spaces are non-existent, create tables for women to enable them to share their unique experiences in order to contribute to peace and security efforts and through that create a more inclusive, equitable and peaceful future for all.

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Ms. Sonia Farrey
Deputy Director, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Government of the United Kingdom * remarks redacted

We have an extremely challenging global context. But, we also have learned a lot over the past 24 years and have many positive and inspiring stories from women peacebuilders around the world. Learning from peace processes how we can put women leaders and survivors at the centre, and how we can engage with civil society in the development of NAPs. Looking towards next year, we must be resolute in the face of challenges and must redefine our agenda and focus forensically on action and results, and less on process.

Over the two days of the meeting, we benefitted from the expertise of civil society and it is important that we continue to find meaningful ways to include civil society in developing and implementing our NAPs. The United Kingdom includes civil society in policy meetings, and holds quarterly meetings with civil society representatives. The United Kingdom also works closely with survivors of CRSV to ensure their needs and perspectives are at the heart of our agenda.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- With regard to financing, the United Kingdom emphasized the importance of flexible, accessible, dedicated and predictable financing for WPS implementation and direct support for women peacebuilders and civil society organizations. The United Kingdom has a partnership of $33 million with the Equality Fund, and is in the process of mainstreaming funding for WPS in its country programmes.

- Preventing and responding to CRSV and ending impunity for perpetrators must also be a top priority going forward. The United Kingdom is committed to the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) and will meet with Colombia, which is chair of the International Alliance on PSVI, to address justice and accountability in the global response, including in the draft articles in the crimes against humanity treaty.

- We must also future-proof against emerging threats, particularly from artificial intelligence and technology-facilitated GBV. New technological threats have unique gender dimensions that must be better understood and addressed. At the same time, new technologies offer effective tools for improving humanitarian services and GBV prevention measures.

- Our methods of work must also be adapted. Gender must be considered within responses to complex crises from the onset, rather than be retrofitted into our responses. This must be hardwired into the DNA of organizations, even though these processes are intensely political. This is not merely a technical issue, but an imperative of peace and security. Political will, leadership and capability are the foundations of these efforts and should be examined more deeply in our discussions next year.

Closing remarks by UN Women

Ms. Sarah Hendriks, Director, Policy, Programme and Intergovernmental Division, UN Women, inspired the Network with a call to action in advance of the 25th year of WPS.

Ms. Sarah Hendriks

Director, Policy, Programme and Intergovernmental Division, UN Women

"My congratulations to Romania, South Africa, Switzerland and the United States of America as they come to the close of their tenure as the Network's leadership quad. Thank you for your strong commitment to this Network. As we look ahead past this WPS week, my congratulations and a warm welcome to Japan and Norway as the incoming 2025 co-chairs of the Network. I often hear members refer to this Network as a family and I want to say what a privilege it is for UN Women to be a part of this family as the Network's secretariat.

The theme for this year's discussions, "Reclaiming Women, Peace and Security: defining a path forward" has been an apt framing for the discussions you have had on the critical issues that the WPS agenda faces as it enters its 25th year.

Developing and implementing NAPs, engagement at the Security Council and regional organizations, the status of the WPS agenda in G7 and G20 discussions, the application of WPS principles in ongoing conflicts and crises around the world, and addressing emerging security challenges, are all complex discussions that will shape the agenda for the next decade.

At the core of it all is making the WPS agenda fit for purpose. As WPS Focal Points, you all have a commendable and worthy task, in partnership with civil society, to continue to shape this agenda for impactful results. Whether on issues of women's participation in peace processes, accountability for CRSV, upholding international human rights and humanitarian law, climate security and technology-facilitated gender-based violence, these are issues that are best solved through strong political will, and cross-regional partnerships and collaboration.

It is commendable that you already have this growing Network, the largest Network of Member States and regional organizations working on this agenda. As we approach the 25th anniversary, I urge you to continue to use this Network to amplify that collective messaging and action that was discussed during the opening plenary session to push forward more strongly against the rollback of women's human rights.

As we close this wonderful sixth capital-level meeting as part of WPS Week, I would like to leave you with three points to reflect on:

1. Let us strengthen the connections between the national and the global and ensure that globally agreed principles on WPS and human rights are reflected in national decision-making and efforts.

2. Let us ensure that we are more innovative and more agile in our response than the movements that are pushing back against this agenda and women's human rights.

3. Let us embody and advance cross-regional partnerships and solidarity for women's human rights in conflicts and crises from Africa to the Americas, Asia, the Middle East and the Pacific.

UN Women is committed to continue lending our support and expertise to this Network, and to all of you in the countries and regions where you work."

Passing the baton from the 2024 leadership quad to the 2025 co-chairs

CLOSING REMARKS FROM THE 2024 LEADERSHIP QUAD

Ms. Kat Fotovat

Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary
Office of Global Women's Issues, US WPS Focal Point

As co-leader, we are cognizant that we are facing the highest levels of conflict since World War II and knowing that all WPS-FPN members are facing this every day is our driving force. To build on this momentum, the United States of America is considering establishing a global caucus of women parliamentarians to complement its WPS Centers of Excellence. All WPS-FPN members are encouraged to participate. We will continue to work together and support our fellow WPS-FPN members as we keep growing. "The world is on fire, but we all are the fire-fighters and will carry water to each other! We will make sure to put out every fire together."

Colonel Manuela-Elena Mihai

Ministry of National Defence, Chief of Gender Management Office
Romania WPS Focal Point

In recognition of Romania's successful and fruitful partnerships with the United States and UN Women during their 2023 co-chairship, Romania awarded the United States Focal Point and the WPS-FPN Secretariat Coordinator an "Emblem Partner for Defence". Romania also pledged its ongoing support to the incoming co-chairs and fellow WPS-FPN members.

Ms. Talia Wohl

Senior Adviser
Peace and Security, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland WPS Focal Point

On behalf of the Government of Switzerland, Ms. Wohl acknowledged how the WPS-FPN has a critical role in convening experts from all sectors to exchange and share, and is inspired by the productive exchanges during the sixth capital-level meeting. "Looking ahead, our positive interactions and solidarity will be even more important in strengthening our coordination and resolution in formulating our responses to emerging challenges. Our strategies must be fit for purpose and sharing good practices among the Network informs the development and improvement of forthcoming NAPs among Member States." Ms. Wohl expressed deepest gratitude to Switzerland's fellow co-chairs and affirmed that Switzerland will proudly stand beside the new co-chairs as they take the lead in 2025.

Ms. Nthabiseng Malefane

Director of Vulnerable Groups
Department of International Relations and Cooperation, South Africa WPS Focal Point

Ms. Malefane reflected that one consistent outcome of Focal Points meetings is that members come away feeling invigorated by being part of a larger movement. She expressed her solidarity with fellow leadership quad members and agreed that the previous speakers' remarks echo South Africa's views on the past year in their leadership role.

South Africa is currently planning its second NAP and the major task ahead is to balance the UNSCR 1325 objectives with the new and emerging issues that have been discussed at length during this capital-level meeting. It will be challenging to adapt the WPS resolution framework to ensure that it adequately meets the changing needs of women and girls into the future. Women had a powerful influence in the South African apartheid resistance movement, which, Ms. Malefane explained, is often overlooked. She shared a story about women protesters who marched to the Union buildings in 1956 to protest against the apartheid regime. During the march, they sang a song with the lyrics "to strike a woman is to strike a rock". Today, in South Africa, women activists still refer to one another as "rocks", meaning that because of their solid unbreakable spirits "if you want anything done, you need to get a woman to do it". Initiatives such as the FPN prove the meaning behind this song: that women are powerful and strong, and can resist any force directed against them.

Ms. Malefane commended her fellow quad leaders for their dedication, insight and persistent focus on achieving the goals of the Network and of the WPS agenda. On behalf of South Africa, she expressed her gratitude for the WPS-FPN Secretariat and congratulated the incoming co-chairs, who she and her colleagues look forward to collaborating with in the coming year.

On behalf of the WPS-FPN Secretariat, Paivi Kannisto, Chief of the Peace, Security and Resilience Division, UN Women, formally welcomed the new co-chairs, Japan and Norway.

Ms. Seiko Kiyohara

Principal Deputy Director
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan

Minister Kiyohara urged the Network to not miss the perfect opportunity to rouse political will in each country during the 2025 milestone year. It is critical for us to reaffirm commitment to the WPS agenda and strengthen our collaboration in realizing our collective aspirations. The coming year is an opportunity to consolidate our will and focus the WPS agenda on meeting the challenges ahead. On behalf of Japan, she expressed determination to promote the WPS agenda and closed with stating that she is proud to stand with the Network and "fight with all of you as fellow firefighters".

Ms. Signe Guro Gilen

Special Envoy,
WPS, Norway

Ms. Gilen urged the Network to keep everyone who is currently living in war zones at the top of our minds because they are the reason why we do this work. She shared an anecdote about a woman who was stopped by the police while driving her car. The officer told her she could not continue on the road and must go back. The woman replied that her car did not have a reverse gear and could only go forward. In the same way, Ms. Gilen urged fellow Network members, we cannot go back, there is no choice but to continue forward. On behalf of Norway, she thanked her fellow co-chair, Japan, and is looking forward to the road ahead and the next capital-level meetings in Tokyo and Oslo.

Endnotes

1. References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

2. In 2023, the number of conflicts involving states totaled 59, the highest number since 1946. Source: Uppsala Conflict Data Program, Uppsala University (2024). UCDP: record number of armed conflicts in th world, 3 June. https://www.uu.se/en/press/press-releases/2024/2024-06-03-ucdp-record-number-of-armed-conflicts-in-the-world

3. *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024:* https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/

4. Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (2024). "Remarks of SRSG Pramila Patten at the Security Council Open Debate on 'Preventing Conflict-Related Sexual Violence through demilitarization and gender-responsive arms control'", New York, 23 April. https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/statement/remarks-of-srsg-pramila-patten-at-the-security-council-open-debate-on-preventing-conflict-related-sexual-violence-through-demilitarization-and-gender-responsive-arms-control-new-yor/

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