

## **TOWARDS A PEACE WITH A FEMININE FACE: THE EXCLUSION OF WOMEN IN PEACE PROCESSES**



*Libyan women meeting in the framework of political dialogue (UNSMIL)*

Violence against women is a terribly effective weapon of war to morally destroy the enemy. In conflict contexts, sexual abuse are attacks directed at the entire community, not just towards the women who suffer them. They are an affront to everything they represent: the integrity, honor and mothers of the rival's future generations.

Sexual violence represents more than a quarter of political violence directed specifically against women, who in turn are 95% of the victims of sexual violence in conflict zones, according to ACLED.<sup>1</sup>

Chaos and lack of legality make it difficult to effectively protect women during war; however, the inclusion of

women in peace processes opens the door for the new post-conflict scenario to be more inclusive and egalitarian.

Is there a relationship between the participation of women in peace negotiations and the durability of the agreements? Yes. The effective inclusion of women in discussions leads to higher rates of implementation of the agreements and a more lasting peace. When they have been signatories, the agreements include a significantly higher number of agreement provisions and a higher rate of implementation of these provisions than those not signed by women.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Fact sheet: Sexual violence in conflict. ACLED.  
<https://acleddata.com/2019/06/19/fact-sheet-sexual-violence-in-conflict/>

<sup>2</sup> Jana Krause, Werner Krause & Piia Bränfors (2018) Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations and the Durability of Peace, *International Interactions*, 44:6, 985-1016, DOI: [10.1080/03050629.2018.1492386](https://doi.org/10.1080/03050629.2018.1492386)

However, in 2020 women only represented 10% of negotiators in the Afghan process and 20% in political discussions in Libya.<sup>3</sup> In the Yemeni case, no women participated in the negotiations for the 2019 Riyadh agreement or in the subsequent ceasefire negotiations.

Historically, women have been excluded from high-level negotiations.

Between 1992 and 2019, women made up 13% of negotiators, 6% of mediators and 6% of signatories in major peace processes around the world, according to data from the Council of Foreign Relations.<sup>4</sup> Ensuring greater participation of women in peace processes has become a multilateral objective after Resolution 1325 (2000)<sup>5</sup> was adopted by the Security Council, and yet this remains a pending goal.

Does that mean that women are totally cut off from peacebuilding processes? Certainly not. But their presence is not manifested in formal negotiations or Track I diplomacy but in informal interactions between civil society actors, diplomats and academics, actions known as Track II diplomacy.

These actions, seemingly irrelevant in comparison with the formal discussions in the upper echelons of diplomacy, foster a meeting between the parties and lay the foundations for starting negotiations, which are later channeled into a signed agreement. More than half of peace processes include informal talks, in which women's groups are significantly involved in forging peace.

Unlike the formal negotiation tables, still very masculinized spaces, women play a great role in the informal world of peacebuilding.

On the other hand, women also represent a low percentage of the UN's 'blue helmets'. In 2020, women made up 5% of military contingents and 11% of police units of approximately 95,000 personnel in UN peacekeeping missions.<sup>6</sup> In conflict zones, women can

better access the population, so they can gather critical information, in addition to building trust with affected communities and proposing solutions with a gender perspective. They also represent a reality that girls can aspire to. "What a woman peacekeeper represents for a girl in a remote village is very powerful, it shows that they can follow their dreams, and they don't need to limit themselves", says UN police officer Martina de Maria Sandoval.<sup>7</sup>

Why is the inclusion of women in formal negotiations important?

Women are rarely combatants and are therefore often absent from negotiations aimed at ending violence. On the other hand, if the objective is to build a lasting peace, it is necessary to include other social actors that will be affected by those decisions - women among them. Furthermore, the participation of women and the coverage of their particular needs shifts the focus from State security towards the individual.

In this last year, the Covid-19 pandemic has proved the importance of human security. The spread of the virus has exacerbated inequalities in an already terribly unequal world, and the most vulnerable groups - women, children and people with disabilities- have been particularly affected by restrictions and cuts in healthcare and aid programs. The situation is especially critical in conflict zones.

The UN Secretary General, António Guterres, made a global call on March 23 to all parties in conflict in the world to initiate a ceasefire in order to face the coronavirus pandemic. In July, the Security Council adopted Resolution 2532, which reflects this urgency but also "acknowledges the critical role that women are playing in Covid-19 response efforts" and calls for "ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and youth in the development and implementation of an adequate and sustainable response" to Covid-19. The Secretary General's call for a ceasefire was quickly seconded by 170 member

<sup>3</sup> Women's participation in peace processes. *Council of Foreign Relations*. <https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/>

<sup>4</sup> Women's Participation in Peace Processes. *Council of Foreign Relations*. <https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/>

<sup>5</sup> S/RES/1325 (2000), retrieved from: [https://www.un.org/womenwatch/ods/S-RES-1325\(2000\)-S.pdf](https://www.un.org/womenwatch/ods/S-RES-1325(2000)-S.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Women in Peacekeeping. *United Nations Peacekeeping*. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/women-peacekeeping#:~:text=It%20is%20an%20operational%20imperative,units%20in%20UN%20Peacekeeping%20missions.>

<sup>7</sup> First Person: Women peacekeepers a 'powerful image for girls in remote villages'. *UN News*. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1087112>

states; on the other hand, the participation of women in the peace accords that were being forged was insignificant and was relegated to informal spheres of negotiation.

But this new reality has moved the discussions to the virtual realm, offering an opportunity for participation to traditionally excluded groups, including women.

The positive implications of the inclusion of women at the negotiating table -more lasting peace and greater

compliance with what was agreed- highlight the importance of their active participation, especially in a context of war and health crisis in which women are one of the most affected vulnerable groups.

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