

How Women Lead Us to Peace

WHY MUST WOMEN BE INCLUDED IN PEACEBUILDING?

Data shows that it works in ensuring lasting peace. Broadened peace processes—that are inclusive of women and civil society groups—35% more likely to last at least fifteen years than those that include only armed actors and political parties. However, women represent only 4% of major peace accord signatories in the last 20 years.

US law and policy mandates the participation of women. The Women, Peace and Security Act, which was signed into US law in 2017, requires the creation of a government-wide strategy to improve the meaningful participation of women in peace and security processes, along with training for diplomats, contractors, defense, and development personnel. This law builds upon the first US National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security in 2011. The Trump administration has not yet released this Congressionally-mandated strategy on Women, Peace and Security, delaying crucial action.

There is a growing global legal and policy consensus on women's inclusion in peacebuilding. The participation of women in peace negotiations is required under international law, including UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 2122. Sixty-nine countries, from Afghanistan to the South Korea, have adopted National Action Plans to strengthen the role of women in peace and security.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

ENSURE WOMEN ARE AT THE NEGOTIATING TABLE

(1) Advocate for women's meaningful inclusion in formal peace negotiations. Women's exclusion from negotiations is undemocratic, fuels instability, and increases the chances of conflict renewal.

- When women joined formal peace talks in Northern Ireland, they were able to negotiate terms that laid the groundwork for a peace that has held since the signing of the Belfast Agreement. Through their participation, they broadened the negotiating agenda to include victims' rights and reconciliation—key items that many credit for the public approval of the Belfast Agreement.

(2) Develop channels for grassroots movements to feed into policy spaces. A peace agreement holds when it reflects community priorities and when it is widely viewed as legitimate. This requires a deliberate strategy to incorporate grassroots perspectives and feedback, such as side forums and consultations, pushing back at the tendency to limit access to an elite subset of armed actors.

- The activism of Women Cross DMZ has revitalized the movement to formally end the Korean War. Women activists have organized Peace Walks across the demilitarized zone, held international peace symposiums, and met with senior officials in the US, South Korea, North Korea and Canada.

When foreign ministers met in Vancouver in 2018, women activists organized to advance a peace agenda rooted in dialogue and engagement. Their activism has elevated the priorities raised by women at the grassroots – including the impact of sanctions on North Korean civilians, family reunification, and demilitarization.

(3) Ensure gender is on the agenda for peace talks.

Gender analysis can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the realities of conflict and the meaning of security. It can also help ensure the development of long-term solutions that recognize and redress the impact of conflict on women – including by meeting needs for justice and reparations for wartime sexual violence survivors or supporting land rights for women.

- During negotiations over the 50-year armed conflict in Colombia, women peace activists—who had spent years aiding and protecting communities on the frontlines of war—pushed for the right to participate in formal peace talks. After a struggle for a voice at the table, women ultimately comprised up to one-third of the total number of negotiators and played an essential role in talks that eventually led to a peace agreement. They also won a Gender Sub-commission, which conducted a gender analysis of each provision of the Peace Accord. Many of the Peace Accord’s key protections and advancements for the rights of women, as well as Afro-Colombian and Indigenous Peoples, were only secured due to this concerted effort. While there remain serious gaps to implementation, this work created mechanisms by which peace advocates can demand accountability.

FUND WOMEN’S EFFORTS TO ADVOCATE FOR PEACE AND SUPPORT AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

(4) Empower women with the funds and resources needed to provide essential services to communities in conflict.

By ensuring women are able to meet crucial needs, policymakers bolster the leadership of women in the eyes of local communities, lending legitimacy to the peaceful alternative women often represent.

- Women’s leadership was successfully elevated when they led service provision efforts in Syria. There, women negotiated local ceasefires, brokered prisoner releases, and set up humanitarian aid corridors in areas beyond the reach of international agencies—offering a vital, peaceful alternative to extremist groups like ISIS, who won acquiescence from some war-weary communities by meeting basic needs.

(5) Fund and support networks that leverage the strengths of insider policymaking knowledge with the expertise and moral authority of grassroots activists.

The establishment of credible “insider-outsider” networks can help women in conflict zones build influence in the peace process both at home and abroad.

- Activists from Syria, Iraq, and the broader global women’s movement convened to co-create solutions to confront ISIS at a series of gatherings called Strategies for Change. In these, participants shared and discussed challenges, best practices and recommendations for their governments and the international community to better inform policy decisions that affect their communities.

SUPPORT EFFORTS TO PROACTIVELY PREVENT CONFLICT

(6) Support denuclearization to ensure lasting peace. Denuclearization is crucial to promoting a long-term, sustainable peace and preventing a global arms race. Yet, the US recently withdrew from a long-standing treaty with Russia that restricted nuclear arsenals, following its withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal in 2018. Diplomacy remains our best and only avenue to containing the immense threat of nuclear weapons.

- Before the US withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal, the 2015 agreement had resulted in positive gains. The International Atomic Energy Agency conducted inspections and certified that Iran had eliminated 98% of its uranium stockpile, removed over 13,000 centrifuges, and destroyed the core of its plutonium reactor.

(7) Close unnecessary US military bases. The US maintains up to 800 military bases in more than 70 countries. Maintaining these bases also encourages nuclearization; for instance, the US military presence in South Korea incentivizes North Korea to build its nuclear arsenal. In 2014, the cost of maintaining foreign bases and troops, including those in conflict zones, totaled \$160 to \$200 billion – money that could be invested more effectively in peace and development.