

Recommendations from Women Human Rights Defenders from Yemen, Libya and Syria

New York – October 2016

The UNSC and member states have made commitments to empower women to contribute to decision-making on peace and security issues through UNSCR 1325 and 1820.

WILPF partners in Yemen, Libya and Syria believe that the various political processes currently taking place in the Middle East and North Africa are key opportunities to translate those commitments into action, and encourage the international community to implement the following recommendations:

I. Strengthen Women's Participation in Peace-Making

The armed conflicts continue and women continue to be absent from leadership and decision-making positions at all levels within the various political actors and processes engaged on peace-making efforts. To remedy this:

1. Promote meaningful participation of women in peace-making, peacebuilding and post-conflict governance processes that promote gender equality. Take extra efforts to ensure involvement of grassroots women organisations in all levels of decision making.
2. Pursue all possible endeavours to put women leaders involved in negotiation processes on equal footing as their male counterparts, including through sharing information and resources and making sure that they have active and decisive role in the negotiation rather than a mere consultative or parallel position.

II. Strengthen support for women civil society groups

Civil society groups and organisations are the actors which best understand the challenges and opportunities on the ground and can identify, design and implement practical strategies to address these. We believe member states should strengthen support for them:

1. Adopt a holistic and long-term approach to support the agency of local civil society organisations in Yemen, Libya, Syria, in country and in diaspora, and adopting funding strategies to promote their organisational growth, sustainability and independence.
2. Encourage the United Nations agencies, Special Envoys and other actors engaged in peace-making efforts to adopt best practices in meaningful participation by civil society and women's rights organisations in the negotiation process including the redrafting of gender-sensitive constitutional and legal documents to include fair participation of women and provide financial and technical support and monitoring to ensure implementation.
3. Promote and integrate gender mainstreaming and gender equality across all aspects of its support to civil society.

4. Hold all agencies accountable for promoting the agency of women across all sectors of humanitarian action.
5. Empower women from crisis-affected populations to participate in humanitarian assistance, protection and recovery programmes, the formulation of humanitarian policy, as well as in 'accountability to affected populations' efforts.

III. Strengthen action to prevent conflict and re-emergence of conflict which has disproportionate impact on women and girls

The armed conflicts and subsequent break down of rule of law together with a traditionally patriarchal society have created a dangerous environment for women and girls. In order to provide increased protection for them and to achieve justice and accountability, conflict prevention is critical. We argue for the following solutions:

1. Take all measures to press parties to the conflict, and those states which support them, to promote the end of indiscriminate and targeted violence against civilians, such as the use of explosive weapons in highly populated areas.
2. Build all policies and responses in the region on comprehensive analysis of the disproportionate impact of the conflict on women's lives and freedoms. These policies should prioritise addressing such impact in a holistic and comprehensive manner.
3. Support international mechanisms to hold all parties to the conflict accountable for violence against civilians and human rights abuses, such as through the International Criminal Court. The safety, dignity and longer-term needs of survivors and their families should be at the heart of such efforts; and grassroots civil society, including local women's groups, should be supported to advocate such an approach.
4. Promote a more appropriate, integrated and longer-term approach to gender based violence and protection in humanitarian action including functional referral system for survivors to medical and psychosocial support services.