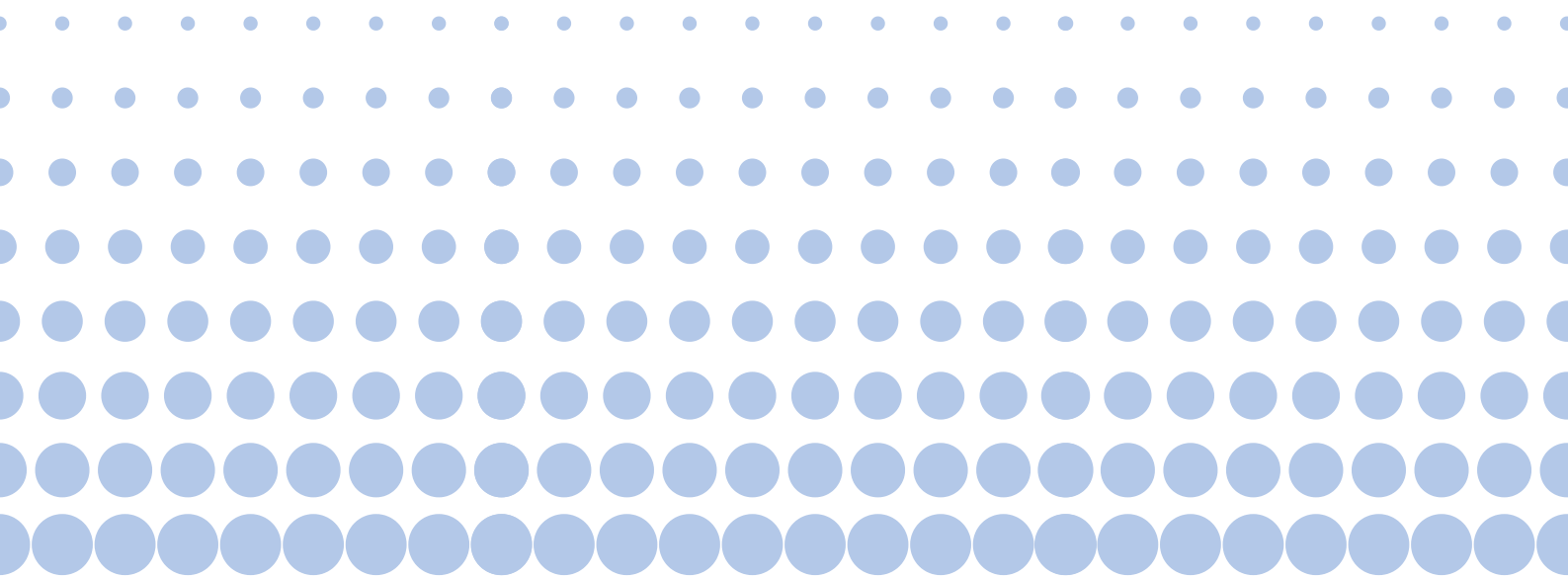




Taking forward the UN's New Agenda for Peace: WILPF's Analysis and Recommendations on WPS and Gender

September 2023



What the New Agenda for Peace says:

“As generational gains in women’s rights hang in the balance around the world, so does the transformative potential of the women and peace and security agenda. Incrementalism has not worked and the realisation of the agenda in its entirety is urgent. More political will is required. Precipitating women’s meaningful participation in all decision-making, eradicating all forms of violence against women, both online and offline, and upholding women’s rights would not just help shift power, but also result in giant steps forward in sustaining peace.”

—A New Agenda for Peace, pg. 20

Background

In July 2023, the UN Secretary-General launched [A New Agenda for Peace](#), which is the ninth policy brief in a series that builds on the proposals outlined in [Our Common Agenda](#), the Secretary-General’s vision for the future of global cooperation.

The New Agenda for Peace brief provides recommendations for states to prepare for the 2024 [Summit of the Future](#), which will focus on reinvigorating the multilateral system and addressing gaps and challenges in current global governance. It will discuss and aim to address the challenges of the past 75+ years of the UN, in order to prepare for the coming 75 years. Therefore, it is an opportunity to potentially address many of the long-standing critiques that feminists and others have of how the UN system has worked thus far.

The New Agenda for Peace has a strong emphasis on conflict prevention as a political priority and also introduces progressive language on dismantling patriarchal power structures. As such, it represents an important opportunity to advocate for and draw attention to feminist perspectives on peace.

Over the past year, WILPF has contributed to the New Agenda for Peace process through the lens of our [antimilitarist feminist approach](#) to the [Women, Peace and Security \(WPS\) agenda](#). In our [submission](#), we argued that the New Agenda for Peace must prioritise a holistic implementation of the WPS agenda that is grounded in human rights obligations, that focuses on conflict prevention and is against the militarisation or narrowing of WPS. In addition, we highlighted that the four pillars of participation, protection, prevention, relief, and recovery are cross-cutting and complementary.

Our submission called for the New Agenda for Peace to recommend peaceful, feminist responses to all forms of violence; invest in conflict prevention and peacebuilding; holistically implement the WPS agenda; demilitarise peace and security; and ensure meaningful engagement with civil society.

The below article expands and comments on the content of the policy brief in order to provide suggestions for how member states and the UN system can take it forward and interpret its calls. It is especially important that member states weave gender throughout their efforts to take forward the recommendations of the policy brief, including in areas where it is not explicitly linked in the text.

WHAT DOES THE NEW AGENDA FOR PEACE SAY ON WPS?

The Agenda does not introduce any new recommendations on WPS, although it does incorporate WPS and gender in some areas of action. Action 5 of the Agenda, “Transform gendered power dynamics in peace and security” under the section “preventing conflict and violence and sustaining peace” most directly flows from the WPS agenda. This action is paired with two other actions, one on shifting the prevention and sustaining peace paradigm and one on 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Under Action 5, there are three main recommendations:

01

Concrete measures to secure women’s participation

02

Eradication of gender-based violence

03

Financing for gender equality, including by earmarking 15% of Official Development Assistance with minimum 1% for women’s organisations

These are not new recommendations, but do reflect important areas around which there has been very limited progress on the Agenda over the past 22 years.

On funding specifically, civil society has been consistent in calling for flexible, sustained, core and long-term funding that enables women and feminists to advance their own agendas and priorities for peace.

The New Agenda for Peace also includes important language on misogyny, patriarchal and oppressive power structures and demilitarisation. The New Agenda’s “vision for multilateralism” includes:

Prevention as a political priority
People-centred approaches
Prioritising comprehensive approaches over securitised responses
Dismantling patriarchal power structures

It calls on member states to “dismantle the patriarchy and oppressive power structures which stand in the way of progress on gender equality or women’s full, equal and meaningful participation in political and public life.” It also argues on page 13 that “[f]or as long as gendered power inequalities, patriarchal social structures, biases, violence and discrimination hold back half our societies, peace will remain elusive.”

The WPS agenda originated from civil society as a feminist agenda with the primary focus on women and girls. However, the implementation of the agenda by feminist activists has increasingly and rightfully encouraged a more intersectional approach. This has included challenging the uniform category of “woman” and expanding space for the participation of gender-diverse persons, members of marginalised groups and broader civil society.

Despite these calls to take into account diverse perspectives, intersectional gender analysis is absent in many areas of the New Agenda for Peace brief, making it important that member states emphasise these aspects in their implementation and interpretation.

In a few places, the New Agenda for Peace brief highlights the need to take into account different people’s perspectives, with a focus on Indigenous women, older persons, persons with disabilities, women from racial, religious or ethnic minority groups and LGBTQI+ persons and youth. There is mention of men and boys as well, with an emphasis on addressing men’s traditional domination of decision making. However, there is little mention of how violence is perpetuated through patriarchal and militarised masculinities.

BEYOND NUMERICAL REPRESENTATION TOWARDS EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION

Under Action 5 on transforming gendered power dynamics, the Secretary-General specifically recommends that states “Introduce concrete measures to secure women’s full, equal and meaningful participation at all levels of decision making on peace and security, including via gender parity in national government cabinets and parliaments, and in local institutions of governance. Support quotas, targets and incentives by robust accountability frameworks with clear milestones towards achieving women’s equal participation.”

In its context analysis, the New Agenda for Peace reflects further on participation by calling for states to “listen to, respect, uphold and secure the perspectives of women impacted by compounding forms of discrimination, marginalization and violence.” It also recognises the role of civil society in building peaceful societies: “Civil society actors, including women human rights defenders and women peacebuilders, play a crucial role in building trust in societies, by representing the most vulnerable or marginalized and those often unrepresented in political structures.”

In implementing these recommendations, member states must understand that increasing numerical representation is necessary, but this is not participation in and of itself.

Full, equal and meaningful participation requires an environment where diverse women and LGBTQI+ people are equally represented at all levels and stages. It also means that they are able to shape a process rather than just be inserted into a pre-designed agenda, and that their perspectives have equal potential to influence outcomes as those of men.

Progress on participation is directly linked to the shape that processes take, including how they are designed, who leads them and which topics are on the table for discussion. In order to implement this recommendation, member states and the UN should work with local, national and international civil society to identify ways to reshape existing processes, expand participation and weave gender considerations throughout.

It is also important to learn from peace processes over the past 20 years to understand which kinds of mechanisms have enabled or prevented women from being able to meaningfully participate. These include mechanisms to address the logistical, technical, legal, accessibility-related and financial barriers to participation. The UN must also lead by example by mandating women’s participation in all processes it leads or supports.



“Participation is a radical demand for genuine agency over decisions impacting our bodies and lives. But women’s participation and quantitative representation alone are not the end goal of our movement; they are part of a broader goal of structural transformation that requires reshaping institutions to be democratic, responsive, and equal, and abolishing institutions that perpetuate oppression and marginalisation.”

- WILPF comment on CEDAW discussion on women in decision making, February 2023



In several different sections, the New Agenda for Peace speaks about the shrinking civic space for free expression around the world. It links participation and protection in the WPS framework by specifically including material on reprisals and violence against women human rights defenders and political leaders. The policy brief states that “Demands for more civic engagement have also been met with physical attacks and the use of force. Of note is the rise in threats, persecution and acts of violence against women, including those in politics, and human rights defenders” (pg. 6). However, the New Agenda does not provide concrete actions to address shrinking civic space or reprisals, which is a key missed opportunity given the recommendation on participation.

Protecting civic space is the obligation of member states, but many member states themselves are the actors responsible for attacks against activists, journalists and civic leaders. It is critical that the UN places more emphasis on this issue and elevates it in order to work towards accountability.

RECENTERING THE FOCUS ON PREVENTION

Placing the WPS section of the policy brief under prevention aligns with the vision of the feminist peace activists. In addition, the Agenda introduces a positive shift in discourse from the UN around prevention, calling on member states to “commit to reducing the human cost of weapons by moving away from overly securitized and militarized approaches to peace, reducing military spending and enacting measures to foster human-centered disarmament.” It highlights that militarised responses can reinforce rather than address the root causes of conflict and result in “blowback from local populations, human rights violations and abuses, exacerbation of gender inequalities and distortion of local economies,” thus further driving recruitment into armed groups and violence. It also highlights that gender-based violence can be a precursor of political violence and armed conflict.

As we outlined in our report, UNSCR 1325 at 20 Years, it is critical that states which claim to have a commitment to WPS also prioritise prevention in order to have any sustainable impact. For example, over 100 states have National Action Plans on WPS, but many of these states are simultaneously pursuing actions that undermine the vision of the agenda. These include democratic backsliding, human rights violations, increasing spending on military, police and weapons and repression of the rights to free expression and assembly.

Additionally, as we stated in our submission to the New Agenda, “prevailing and unquestioned militarism, including within the UNSC, has further resulted in a WPS agenda entangled with militarised power dynamics that impede substantive progress towards sustainable peace and the realisation of women’s human rights before, during and after conflict.”

While the New Agenda for Peace calls for reinvigorating the UN peacebuilding architecture, it does not explicitly call for a gender perspective on this. However, it is essential that any work on peacebuilding include a gender focus, and that this is informed by work with women-led and feminist civil society.

This recommendation is particularly crucial in light of the 2020 review of the UN Peacebuilding Commission’s (PBC’s) Gender Strategy, which found that the PBC did not sufficiently include gender analysis beyond broad statements of support, and also lacked an intersectional analysis that accounted for different experiences based on race, ethnicity, religion, culture, age, disability or gender identity.

Against this backdrop, when taking forward these recommendations, it is critical that there is meaningful and continuous consultation of women’s civil society by UN peacebuilding architecture. In addition, there must be better integration of gender throughout peacebuilding discussions and across different peace and security fora.

Another priority for WILPF in our submission to the New Agenda for Peace was the need to emphasise root causes of conflict. In its annex on the links between the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the New Agenda for Peace, the policy brief argues on page 35 that “Conflicts exacerbate pre-existing patterns of violence, discrimination and gender-based inequalities...The asymmetries and inequities that exist among and within States, and the structural obstacles that sustain these inequalities, are a barrier to peace as well as barriers to development and human rights.”

It is important that the New Agenda has a focus on the roles and obligations of nation-states, and calls on states to work towards prevention. However, the roles and responsibilities of the UN, regional bodies and the multilateral system as a whole are also critical to achieving this end. This is especially the case given that in the status quo, many member states themselves are currently pursuing what they perceive to be their national interests through violence, militarism and escalation of conflict.

There is, therefore, an urgent simultaneous need for momentum on UNSC and other UN reform, and for the UN to take on an active leadership role, particularly where national action is moving in the opposite direction. The UN must also be responsive to the calls of civil society for stronger and more effective leadership that supports them in their efforts for peace.

STRUCTURAL DIMENSIONS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Much of the implementation of the WPS agenda has focused on protection, specifically protection of women and girls from sexual violence in conflict (SVIC). However, this approach has been critiqued by feminists, who emphasise that it is impossible to end sexual violence in conflict without looking at the structural drivers of this violence and its continuum with gendered violence outside of conflict. In addition, feminists have argued that addressing SVIC requires preventing and resolving armed conflicts, curbing the proliferation of weapons and working for accountability.

The New Agenda for Peace focuses on the systematic nature of gender-based violence, citing how misogyny plays an important part in fueling sexual- and gender-based violence all over the world, both online and offline. The document stresses how – particularly in conflict settings – institutional weaknesses, impunity and access to weapons aggravate violence and femicides. It recommends that states “commit to the eradication of all forms of gender-based violence and enact robust and comprehensive legislation, including on gender-based hate speech, tackle impunity for perpetrators and provide services and protection to survivors.”

The policy brief highlights that both the actions on WPS as well as on reducing the human cost of weapons will advance SDG 5 on gender equality. In addition, there is an emphasis on violence which occurs outside of traditional armed conflict, such as in the household or due to organised crime.

This is important for shaping responses to SVIC that will be survivor-centred and effective in the long run, outside of the peacetime–wartime binary.

CONCLUSION

The New Agenda for Peace has been unveiled at a time where the foundations and future of multilateralism are being called into question. This makes it even more urgent that states take forward its calls on prevention – which are critical for sustainable progress on the SDGs, prevention of conflicts and recovery from economic crisis. Safe and effective participation is a key part of working to end all forms of violence, across the peacetime-wartime continuum.

In summary, WILPF has provided recommendations throughout this review for how member states and the UN system can take forward the New Agenda for Peace and interpret its calls on prevention. It is critical that diverse perspectives and intersectional gender analysis informs implementation of peace and security resolution. This must go beyond quotas and be underpinned by full, equal, and meaningful participation in all peace and security fora, including peace processes. This also means member states, the United Nations, and the international community remain vigilant and accountable for the role they play in the shrinking of civil society spaces, the continuing attacks on rights activists, journalists, and civic leaders, and do more to protect civic space.

–

For a comprehensive review of the disarmament and demilitarization language in the New Agenda for Peace, [see the analysis](#) by Reaching Critical Will, WILPF's Disarmament Programme.

RESOURCES AND ADDITIONAL READING

UN resources:

- [A New Agenda for Peace](#)
- [Our Common Agenda](#), the UN Secretary-General's vision for the future of global cooperation
- [Women, Peace and Security agenda](#)
- [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)

WILPF resources:

- [WILPF's Women, Peace and Security Programme](#)
- [UNSCR 1325 at 20 Years report](#)
- [WILPF's assessment of the disarmament and demilitarisation-related portions of A New Agenda for Peace](#)



READ FURTHER:

For a comprehensive review of the disarmament and demilitarization language in the New Agenda for Peace, see the analysis by Reaching Critical Will, WILPF's Disarmament Programme.

CONTACT:

Genevieve Riccoboni
Women, Peace and Security (WPS)
Programme Coordinator
genevieve.riccoboni@wilpf.org
www.peacewomen.org | @peace_women