



**Submission to the 4th cycle of the
Universal Periodic Review of
NIGERIA**

45th session of the UPR Working Group (22 January - 2 February 2024)

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About the submitting organisation

WILPF Nigeria is a national section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (**WILPF**), an international organisation in consultative status with ECOSOC. WILPF Nigeria works with a non-violent approach to transform political structures and increase women's participation in conflict prevention and peace-building decision-making processes. This led to the creation of Women's Situation Room Nigeria (**WSRN**) in 2015. The initiative was created in collaboration with a network of 13 women and feminist organisations. WSRN plays a key role in ensuring peaceful elections. WSRN identifies, observes, and reports on electoral and gender-based violence before, during and after the elections. It engenders women's leadership skills by promoting and supporting women's political leadership to build and sustain women's constituency (i.e., by establishing a platform for the promotion of women's representation in policy making and implementation.)¹

WILPF Nigeria has supported the process for the development of the National Action Plan (**NAP**) on UN Security Council resolution 1325 (**UNSCR 1325**) by participating in the drafting and review processes of the first and second generation of the NAP and alongside other women's organisations and is currently involved in the process for the development of the third NAP. WILPF Nigeria has also supported in the areas of advocacy, sensitisation and capacity building on the NAP and translated the UNSCR 1325 into four indigenous languages. WILPF Nigeria uses the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (**CEDAW**) and UNSCR 1325 to support the women peace architecture such as the Women's Situation Room Nigeria and Women Mediators platform in promoting women's participation in peace processes.

WILPF Nigeria actively engages with men as allies in promoting the Women, Peace and Security agenda. This engagement has been through civil society spaces at national, state and community levels through consultative dialogues, community dialogues and also formal alliances with key government entities. WILPF Nigeria has also been active in the areas of advocacy, alliance building and strategic engagement with men groups and networks in promoting peace and security.²

WILPF Nigeria has engaged with previous cycles of the UPR making recommendations for the second cycle in 2013¹ and through a joint submission with the CEDAW Coalition on Women, Peace and Security to third cycle in 2018.² The joint submission focussed on gaps in the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda,³ and was based on a report by the Coalition to the CEDAW Committee for its review of Nigeria in 2017.⁴

¹ For additional information, see <https://www.wilpf.org/focus-countries/nigeria/>

² CEDAW Coalition on Women, Peace and Security, 'Joint report for the Universal Periodic Review of Nigeria' (March 2018). Available at: <<https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/UPR-Nigeria-Final.pdf>>

³ The thematic issues raised in the 2018 joint report were: The challenges of domestication of legal instruments; The National Action Plan 1325; Women's participation in decision making processes; Proliferation of small arms and light weapons; Legislations on discriminations and gender-based violence; Domestic violence and access to justice; Cultural and religious norms; Rural women; Women and girls' access to education; Women with disabilities.

⁴ CEDAW Coalition on Women, Peace and Security, 'Joint Shadow Report, CEDAW Committee, 67th Session', (June 2017). Available at: <https://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Nigeria_CEDAW_FINAL_June_2017.pdf>

Acronyms

ATT - Arms Trade Treaty

CEDAW - Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

CSO - Civil Society Organisation

ECOWAS - Economic Community of West African States

FCT - Federal Capital Territory

GEO Bill - Gender Equal Opportunities Bill

IPU - Inter-Parliamentary Union

IPOB - Indigenous People of Biafra

NAP - National Action Plan

SAP - State Action Plan

SALW - Small Arms and Light Weapons

UNSCR 1325 - UN Security Council resolution 1325

UPR - Universal Periodic Review

VAPP - Violence against Persons (Prohibition) Act

WILPF - Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

WPS - Women, Peace and Security

WSRN - Women's Situation Room Nigeria

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I. Women in decision-making

Despite the actualisation of democracy in Nigeria in 1999 and the principle of equal rights of men and women enshrined in the Constitution,⁵ women remain largely underrepresented at all levels of governance.

Nigeria has regularly made commitments to include women in decision-making at all levels and to support the Nigerian Women Trust Fund,⁶ an institution tasked with the mandate to bolster women's political participation in the parliament.⁷ In 2017, the CEDAW Committee made several relevant recommendations to Nigeria regarding women's participation in political and public life.⁸ During the third cycle of the UPR (**UPR III**), Nigeria supported four recommendations to strengthen equal political participation,⁹ including to "Adopt legislation that includes special measures to increase the participation of women in political and public life."¹⁰

A joint report submitted by WILPF Nigeria as part of the CEDAW Coalition on Women, Peace and Security to UPR III¹¹ highlighted some of the barriers to women's participation in decision-making such as, discrimination regarding access to employment and economic resources, the lack of a specific legislation on women's political participation or the 35% affirmative action quota,¹² and some regulations in the

⁵ The Nigerian Constitution (1999) Section 40 states that: "Every person shall be entitled to assemble freely and associate with other persons, and in particular he may form or belong to any political party, trade union or any other association for the protection of his interests". Section 42(1) also states that: "A citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he is such a person be subjected to any form of discrimination." Furthermore, the National Gender Policy (2006), Objective 5, target b, stipulates that the State is committed to: "Adopt special measures, quotas and mechanisms for achieving minimum critical threshold of women in political offices, party organs and public life by pursuing 35% affirmative action in favour of women to bridge gender gaps in political representation in both elective and appointive post at all levels by 2015". See <http://www.aacoalition.org/national_policy_women.htm>.

⁶ During the second cycle of the UPR (UPR II), Nigeria supported recommendation 135.57. Continue its positive approach in improving the socio-economic conditions of women, including intensifying support for women political aspirants through its Women Political Trust Fund (Malaysia).

⁷ The Nigerian Women Trust Fund, accessible at: <<https://womenfund.org/>>.

⁸ See: Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 'Concluding observations on the combined seventh and eighth periodic reports of Nigeria' (24 July 2017) UN DOC CEDAW/C/NGA/CO/7-8, paragraph 18 a), 20, 30 a) and 36 a).

⁹ Human Rights Council, 'Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Nigeria, Addendum' (8 February 2019) UN DOC A/HRC/40/7/Add.1, 148.193. Adopt legislation that includes special measures to increase the participation of women in political and public life (Chile); Recommendations 148.196. Strengthen political and institutional safeguards to ensure free and fair elections and call upon all parties and the security forces to refrain from violence and intimidation and accept the results declared by the Independent National Election Commission (Germany); 148.195. During the preparation of the February 2019 general elections, respect the recommendations of previous election observation missions concerning equal political participation (Czechia); 148.197. Further consolidate the legal electoral framework in order to improve the inclusivity and transparency of the electoral process and equal political participation (Romania).

¹⁰ Human Rights Council, 'Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Nigeria' (26 December 2018) UN DOC A/HRC/40/7, Recommendation 148.193.

¹¹ CEDAW Coalition on Women, Peace and Security, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (Nigeria) and others, 'Joint report for the Universal Periodic Review of Nigeria' (March 2018). Accessible at: <<https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/UPR-Nigeria-Final.pdf>>

¹² See page 6 of the Joint report for the UPR of Nigeria by the CEDAW Coalition on Women, Peace and Security, accessible at: <<https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/UPR-Nigeria-Final.pdf>>.

electoral system (e.g. the lack of provisions for independent candidatures.¹³) It also noted that the persistence of these barriers has led to a steady decline in the representation of women into elective offices.

In May 2022, it was reported that the former Minister of Women Affairs, Pauline Tallen, identified the low number of women in politics and other leadership positions as a major setback to the country's development.¹⁴

In February 2023, the Gender Partnership Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) issued a statement calling for more women in decision-making in Nigeria, in which it expressed disappointment that in the elections to the National Assembly on 25 February 2023 "only 381 women are standing in these elections out of a total of 4,223 candidates and in 5 out of 36 states, there are no female candidates for the Senate."¹⁵ It added: "The road to more gender balanced political decision-making in Nigeria remains difficult especially as the 9th National Assembly failed to pass, prior to these elections, constitutional amendments aimed at enhancing women's participation in politics."¹⁶ According to the IPU, the country is among the lowest-ranking globally in terms of women's representation in national parliaments.¹⁷

This correlates with women being significantly marginalised in the political space. Out of the 15,336 candidates featured by 18 political parties for the 2023 general elections, only 1,524 were women, representing 10.1% of the total number of candidates. Only 4% of women candidates won (76 out of 1,533). Of the 92 women who ran for elections to the Senate, only three women were elected. Only 15 of the 286 women who contested seats in the House of Representatives were elected, and 7 as deputy governors

¹³ The current electoral legislation mandates that candidates for elections must be sponsored by political parties. Given the reluctance of political parties to include women in their lists, could help to bypass some barriers providing a pathway for women who cannot rise within party ranks. Some steps have recently been taken towards changing the law to allow for independent candidatures. On 16 May 2023, the Senate approved the participation of independent candidates in presidential, governorship, national and state assemblies, and local elections. Consequently, the Senate instructed the Clerk of the National Assembly to submit Constitutional Amendment Bill No. 58 for the President's consideration. The Bill seeks to modify specific sections of the Constitution to allow the inclusion of independent candidatures in Nigerian elections. On 16 May 2023, Radio Nigeria reported that the Senate directed the Clerk to the National Assembly to forward the Constitutional Amendment Bill No.18 to President Buhari for assent. It also reported that the state assemblies of Jigawa, Kebbi, Kwara, Plateau and Taraba are yet to forward their resolutions on the Constitution Amendment Bills. See, Ene Oshaba, 'Gender Bills: What Women Want From Lawan, 9th Nass' (Blue Print Newspapers, 5 May 2023). Accessible at: <<https://www.blueprint.ng/gender-bills-what-women-want-from-lawan-9th-nass/>>; and Amaka Ene and Annabel Nwachukwu 'Senate transmits constitution alteration bill to buhari' (Radio Nigeria, 16 May 2023). Accessible at: <<https://radionigeria.gov.ng/2023/05/16/senate-transmits-constitution-alteration-bill-to-buhari/>>.

¹⁴ 'Low number of women in politics, bane of Nigeria's development — Minister' (The Premium Times, 7 May 2022). Accessible at: <<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/528219-low-number-of-women-in-politics-bane-of-nigerias-development-minister.html?tztc=1>>.

¹⁵ Inter-Parliamentary Union 'More women needed in decision-making in Nigeria' (24 February 2023). Accessible at: <<https://www.ipu.org/news/statements/2023-02/more-women-needed-in-decision-making-in-nigeria>>; Rahma Jimoh 'Nigeria election: Women denounce poor political representation' (Aljazeera, 16 February 2023). Accessible at: <<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/2/16/nigerian-women-decry-poor-representation-in-nigerian-politics>>.

¹⁶ Inter-Parliamentary Union 'More women needed in decision-making in Nigeria' (24 February 2023). Accessible at: <<https://www.ipu.org/news/statements/2023-02/more-women-needed-in-decision-making-in-nigeria>>.

¹⁷ See Inter-Parliamentary Union, Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments, available at: <<https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=6&year=2023>>.

and 48 as members of state houses of assembly.¹⁸ This is the lowest in the history of Nigeria's elections. More women were fielded by the new parties, while the established parties tend to have more male candidates. Because of the staggered elections and the peculiarities of the 2023 elections,¹⁹ WILPF Nigeria is still working on an in-depth analysis that goes beyond the numbers.

Young women are the least represented amongst political leadership. The side-lining of young women in the legislative process, budget negotiation, and oversight of government bodies undermines their significant contributions that could greatly benefit future generations.

The situation is exacerbated by the lack of political will to decisively address the issue of women's political participation, exemplified by the non-adoption of the five gender bills²⁰ presented to the 9th Nigeria national assembly.

Recommendations

- Ensure the 10th Assembly review and adopt the five gender bills²¹ in order to increase the participation of women in political and public life, education and employment in all areas covered by the CEDAW where women are under-represented or disadvantaged including employment;
- Implement the CEDAW Committee's recommendations to:
 - "Introduce temporary measures, such as quotas, for political appointments and the accelerated recruitment of women to decision making positions, to accelerate their full and equal participation in elected and appointed bodies, including in Parliament, in senior leadership positions in the diplomatic service and at the ministerial Level;"²²
 - "Provide adequate human, technical and financial resources to the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development to enable it to effectively undertake its activities as the national machinery for the advancement of women;"²³

¹⁸ 'Meet 48 Women Who Made It To State Assemblies' (Daily Trust, 25 March 2023). Accessible at:

<<https://dailytrust.com/meet-48-women-who-made-it-to-state-assemblies/>>.

¹⁹ For example, before the elections, the Independent National Electoral Commission told citizens that they would adhere to the electronic transmission of results as mandated in the updated electoral act. However, this did not happen across a wide range of states. This led to voters' apathy after the presidential elections because a large number of voters felt they were disenfranchised, and their votes did not count.

²⁰ The five gender bills are: the Bill on Citizenship, which seeks to amend section 26 to grant citizenship to foreign husbands of Nigerian women (as is currently guaranteed in section 26(2)(a) for foreign wives of Nigerian men); The Indigeneship Bill, which addresses section 31 318(1) to allow women claim their husbands' state of origin; the Affirmative Action Bill that seeks to give women access to occupy 35% in political party administrations and appointive positions; the Bill on Ministerial or Commissioner Nomination, which grants women 35% as nominees; and the Reserved Seat Bill, which seeks to create additional 37, 74 and 108 seats for women at the Senate, House of representatives and the State Assemblies, respectively. See, Ene Oshaba, 'Gender Bills: What Women Want From Lawan, 9th Nass' (Blue Print Newspapers, 5 May 2023). Accessible at: < <https://www.blueprint.ng/gender-bills-what-women-want-from-lawan-9th-nass/>>.

²¹ Bill on Citizenship; Indigeneship Bill; Affirmative Action Bill; Bill on Ministerial or Commissioner Nomination; and Reserved Seat Bill.

²² Paragraph 30 a), UN Index CEDAW/C/NGA/CO/7-8, Concluding observations on the combined seventh and eighth periodic reports of Nigeria, 24 July 2017.

²³ Paragraph 18 a), UN Index CEDAW/C/NGA/CO/7-8, Concluding observations on the combined seventh and eighth periodic reports of Nigeria, 24 July 2017.

- Finalise the process to include in the Constitution provisions for independent candidatures in Nigerian elections;
- Support networks of women in government, non-governmental groups and experts who can analyse the situation of women in politics, offer solutions and require substantive direct involvement of women to shape social, economic and political life;
- Build the capacity of female politicians and other women interested in getting involved in politics through targeted training and mentoring on leadership and negotiation skills;
- Ensure that the Electoral Reform Committee undertake a review of the lessons learned and challenges from the implementation of the amended electoral act, including the measures that have negatively affected women's participation, and make necessary amendments to prevent obstacles from reoccurring;
- Conduct awareness-raising campaigns for the public throughout the country in collaboration with media and private initiatives, in particular targeting rural women on the importance of women's participation at all levels of decision-making, including the importance of the political participation of women;
- Support initiatives like the Women's Situation Room Nigeria and Young Women in Politics Forum in the promotion of women's participation in politics, including through funding, training on requisite skills and mentorship.

II. The 1325 National Action Plan (NAP)

In past UPR cycles, Nigeria committed to fully implement its National Action Plan for the implementation of UN Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and to combat gender-based violence and discrimination.²⁴ It also committed to work closely with civil society organisations and NGOs for the protection and promotion of human rights.²⁵ In 2017, the CEDAW Committee recommended that Nigeria ensure women's participation in decision-making, conflict prevention, peace building and post-conflict reconstruction, in line with UNSCR1325, and allocate adequate budgetary resources and enhanced coordination for the implementation of the second National Action Plan (NAP) 2013.²⁶

²⁴ Human Rights Council, 'Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Nigeria' (16 December 2013) UN DOC A/HRC/25/6, recommendation 135.56: 'Fully implement its national action plan on the UN Security Council resolution 1325 to meaningfully involve women in peace process and to combat gender-based violence and discrimination (Estonia)'.

²⁵ Human Rights Council, 'Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Nigeria' (5 October 2009) UN DOC A/HRC/11/26, Recommendation 103.7 Continue to focus on policies and programmes that would further strengthen the protection and promotion of human rights of its people, including by working closely with the relevant civil society organizations and NGOs (Malaysia); Human Rights Council, 'Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Nigeria'(16 December 2013) UN DOC A/HRC/25/6, Recommendations 135.52 Ensure achieving more development in executing cases analysis programmes regarding child rights cases and cooperation with the civil society (Sudan); 135.131: Strengthen its cooperation with civil society and undertake a review of its involvement in the provision of core social services for children (Egypt).

²⁶ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 'Concluding observations on the combined seventh

Nigeria adopted its first NAP in 2013 for a three-year period (2013-2016). A second NAP, adopted in 2017, was developed to tackle emerging issues and gaps identified in the first NAP, including, but not limited to: insecurity and violent extremism; the absence of crisis management and recovery strategies; ambiguous language; and monitoring and evaluation.

Nigeria has made considerable progress in the implementation of NAP since its first adoption in 2013. Examples of this progress are the adoption of policies and frameworks to address sexual and gender-based violence like the Violence against Persons (Prohibition) Act (**VAPP**); review of the National Gender Policy, the establishment of a technical committee on Women, Peace and Security (**WPS**), and state localisation of the NAP through the adoption of State Action Plans (**SAPs**) (at the time of writing, 15 out of 36 states, in addition to the Federal Capital Territory (**FCT**) have adopted the NAP through a State Action Plan.)

However, despite Nigeria's commitments to accelerate the adoption of the Gender Equal Opportunities Bill (**GEO Bill**) and ensure the full implementation of the VAPP, considerable challenges remain. For example, the VAPP is not justiciable in all states because it needs to be domesticated at the state level²⁷ and not all states have done so yet; at the time of writing, 34 states of the federation, including the FCT, have domesticated the VAPP; Kano, Katsina and Zamfara are yet to do so;²⁸ and the GEO Bill, first introduced in the Senate in 2016 and which seeks to domesticate relevant parts of CEDAW and also prohibit certain discriminatory practices against women has not been adopted yet.²⁹

The implementation of the 1325 NAP has faced a number of challenges, both in terms of the national context and evolving situation as well as institutional and bureaucratic hurdles. In terms of broader factors, the evolving conflict situation; underlying patriarchal norms; traditional and cultural practices; low levels of literacy among women; and increased militarisation of peacebuilding and conflict resolution processes are significant challenges. In addition, there are institutional issues which are hindering implementation; these include the lack of an earmarked budget for NAP implementation, low level of dissemination of the NAP; poor capacity at the Federal and State Ministry of Women Affairs for effective implementation; ineffective coordination between the ministry and civil society and other Ministries, Departments and Agencies; the lack of a solid legal framework; nepotism in politics; and heavy monetisation of the political process.

The process for the development of the third NAP began in 2022 with stakeholder consultations and the establishment of a committee providing technical advice. However, the process is moving very slowly despite expectations that three years after the expiration of the previous NAP in 2020, Nigeria should be moving forward proactively to review the second NAP and draft the third, given the evolving conflict situation in the country.

and eighth periodic reports of Nigeria' (24 July 2017) UN DOC CEDAW/C/NGA/CO/7-8, paragraph 16 g) and 16.

²⁷ The legal system of the Federal Republic of Nigeria requires domestication at the state level of legislation adopted at the federal level. This requirement depends on the law in question.

²⁸ Partners West Africa Nigeria, VAPP tracker, accessible at: <<https://www.partnersnigeria.org/vapp-tracker/>>.

²⁹ The bill sponsored by Olujimi Biodun, a Senator from Ekiti state, reportedly encountered insurmountable opposition on the Senate floor, led by Senator Ahmad Rufa'i Sani of Zamfara State. Sani called for the withdrawal of the legislation, arguing that "... it is in conflict with the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which enshrines the Freedom of Religion; adding that the issue of equitable sharing of inheritance between male and female is equally in conflict with the provision of the Constitution and the provisions of Sharia law." See, Hanibal Goitom 'Gender Equality Bill Fails in The Senate' (Library Of Congress, 28 March 2016). Accessible at: <<https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2016-03-28/nigeria-gender-equality-bill-fails-in-the-senate>>.

WILPF Nigeria is represented on the NAP technical committee and, among other recommendations, has stressed the need for an inclusive review process, which should entail state dialogues. It has also advocated for women mediators' representation within the Institute of Peace and Conflict Resolution and similar state agencies to enable women mediators' participation in official peace delegations. WILPF Nigeria has urged for earmarked funds for the NAP implementation.

Recommendations

- Ensure that the third National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 and subsequent related resolutions is fully implemented, with the allocation of adequate and earmarked budgetary resources including to the Ministry of Women's Affairs and enhanced coordination. The federal government should establish a timeline for the development of State Action Plans (SAPs) in states that are yet to adopt one, as well as ensure budget allocations for these;
- Strengthen the Ministry of Women Affairs to support the process of adoption and implementation of State Action Plans (UNSCR 1325) across states through high level advocacies. The Ministry of Women Affairs alongside the WPS committee should develop a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to ensure the effective implementation of the NAP across states; and states should develop a mechanism for reporting on progress on their respective SAP;
- Ensure women's participation in decision-making, conflict prevention, peace building and post-conflict reconstruction, in line with UNSCR 1325 and subsequent related resolutions and implement the CEDAW Committee's General Recommendation No 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and in post-conflict situations;³⁰
- Strengthen existing peace architecture such as the Women Mediators' Network in order to promote women's participation in peace processes.

III. Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons

Insecurity is a recurring phenomenon that threatens the well-being of people, and the proliferation of weapons is one of the major reasons for insecurity across Nigeria. In the context of the UPR, Nigeria has committed to restore security with due consideration to rule of law and human rights.³¹ Disarmament,

³⁰ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, 'General Recommendation No 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and in post-conflict situations' (18 October 2013) UN Doc CEDAW/C/GC/30. Accessible at: <<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/CEDAW/GComments/CEDAW.C.CG.30.pdf>>.

³¹ See for example, Human Rights Council, 'Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Nigeria, Addendum' (8 February 2019) UN DOC A/HRC/40/7/Add.1, Recommendations 148.108 Strengthen the fight against impunity, notably guaranteeing respect for rights in the fight against terrorism and law enforcement (France); 148.164 Adopt measures to fight against impunity with an increased focus on Boko Haram's crimes (Portugal); 148.170 Ensure that the perpetrators of violence and crimes against children as well as adults are brought to justice (Holy See); Human Rights Council, 'Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Nigeria' (16 December 2013) UN DOC A/HRC/25/6, 135.79. Adopt a comprehensive approach to the security situation which ensures that the perpetrators of violence are brought to justice and that the security forces' rules of engagement take full account of due process and human rights (Ireland); 135.80. Take further steps to restore security with due consideration to the rule of law and human rights (Japan).

addressing root causes of conflicts and ensuring women's equal and meaningful participation in peacebuilding and conflict resolution and decision-making processes are fundamental elements of conflict prevention and sustainable domestic security. Structural inequality, power dynamics and militarisation influence a continuum of violence.

The proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (**SALW**) fuels armed conflicts and facilitates gender-based violence and insecurity. The resulting insecurity also compromises women's capacity to participate in public life, as the CEDAW Committee has recognised in numerous occasions, including in its General Recommendation No 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and in post-conflict situations.³² Nigeria was the first African country to ratify the Arms Trade Treaty (**ATT**), which includes regulations and restrictions on the export and import of SALW. In 2017, the CEDAW Committee stated its concerns that women in Nigeria are affected by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and recommended that Nigeria "Ensure the effective regulation of conventional and illicit arms, including small arms and light weapons."³³ In 2018, Nigeria accepted a UPR recommendation to accelerate the process to incorporate international human rights to which is a party into national legislation.³⁴

Nevertheless, the proliferation of SALW in Nigeria is very high; it is estimated that over 70% of illicit SALW in West Africa are located in the country.³⁵ The easy access to arms significantly contributes to the increase in insecurity. Rising rates of kidnapping and banditry, once concentrated in the north where Boko Haram has been active since 2009, have now spread nationwide. The country faces diverse threats from armed robbery, village raids, indiscriminate killings, gender-based violence, ransom demands, and destruction. This situation, which has worsened over the past five years, endangers human security, particularly impacting women and girls.

There is an urgent need for Nigeria to translate its strong commitments to the ATT and the UN Programme of Action on the illicit trade of SALW into concrete actions.

On 3 May 2021, a National Centre for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons was established by an executive directive of the President; and part of its mandate is to prevent and control the proliferation of SALW in collaboration with stakeholders towards strengthening peace and security. This was followed by the passage by the Senate of a consolidated bill on 26 July 2022 to establish the National Commission for the Coordination and Control of the Proliferation of SALW, envisaging that the functions of the body shall be in line with article 24 of the Economic Community of West African States (**ECOWAS**) Convention on the proliferation of SALW.³⁶ The process for the establishment of this commission has not been completed yet.

³² Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, 'General Recommendation No 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and in post-conflict situations' (18 October 2013) UN Doc CEDAW/C/GC/30. Accessible at: <<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/CEDAW/GComments/CEDAW.C.CG.30.pdf>>.

³³ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 'Concluding observations on the combined seventh and eighth periodic reports of Nigeria' (24 July 2017) UN Docs CEDAW/C/NGA/CO/7-8, Paragraphs 15d) and 16d).

³⁴ Human Rights Council, 'Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Nigeria, Addendum' (8 February 2019) UN DOC A/HRC/40/7/Add.1, Recommendations 148.27.

³⁵ 'Insecurity: 70 percent of illegal weapons in West Africa domiciled in Nigeria' (Nigerian Tribune, 19 April 2021). Accessible at: <<https://tribuneonlineng.com/insecurity-70-per-cent-of-illegal-weapons-in-west-africa-domiciled-in-nigeria-%E2%80%95>

unrec/#:~:text=Citing%20statistics%20from%20the%20United,cent%2C%20are%20domiciled%20in%20Nigeria>.

³⁶ 'Senate passes bill for establishment of a national commission for coordination and control of small arms and light weapons' 8PLAC, 24 August 2022). Accessible at: <<https://placng.org/Legist/senate-passes-bill-for-establishment-of-a-national-commission-for-coordination-and-control-of-small-arms-and-light-weapons/>>.

²⁶ National Centre for Small Arms and Light Weapons, accessible at:

A Firearms Act 2004 (Amendment) Bill 2021 was adopted by the Senate in June 2021.³⁷

Recommendations

- Ensure the effective regulation of the importation of arms and the civilian access or possession of conventional weapons, including small arms and light weapons;
- Fully implement all ratified treaties relevant to small arms control, including the ATT and the ECOWAS Convention on small arms, and the 2001 Firearms Protocol.³⁸ In the implementation of the ATT and the UN Program of Action on small arms and light weapons, particular attention should be given to ensuring the implementation of provisions around gender-based violence and armed conflict, for example, Article 7(4) of the ATT;
- Strengthen regional mechanisms for the control, prevention and regulation of SALW;
- Strengthen the National Centre for the Control of Small arms and Light Weapons to work with critical stakeholders, including women civil society organisations, to address the issues of high circulation of arms so as to curb security challenges, conflict and high rates of gender-based violence.

IV. Confronting harmful masculinities

In recent years, there has been an increase in tensions due to a variety of reasons, including the under representation of women in politics, poor governance, corruption, insecurity, ethnic and religious disputes, Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) agitations, Boko Haram insurgency, kidnapping and banditry.

In this context, the narrative of men as a homogeneous group that perpetrates violence against women and girls has emerged because of these reasons and others. The existence of discriminatory gender norms and patriarchy further fuels these narratives promoting harmful and militarised masculinities. The wide availability of SALW compounds this problem, as the possession and use of guns, including by the civilian population, is often perceived as a sign of “masculine strength” and of power and control. A 2021 Small Arms Survey report on Nigeria found that, ‘with very few exceptions, respondents from armed households indicated that the primary owner(s) of firearms are males, typically in their thirties or early forties (34%) or older (41%)’. The same study found out that the main motivation to own arms was the need to protect their person or property.³⁹ This is in line with societal gender roles that ascribe ‘protector’s role’ to men.

Over the years, the strategy of engaging men as allies to prevent gender-based violence and achieve gender equality has been identified globally as key to confront harmful masculinities, by changing social norms and promoting positive masculinity. WILPF Nigeria has been active in engaging with men as allies in promoting

<<https://nccsalw.gov.ng/#:~:text=The%20National%20Centre%20for%20the%20Control%20of%20Small,ECOWAS%20Convention%20on%20Small%20Arms%20and%20Light%20Weapons>>.

³⁷ ‘Senate passes firearms amendment bill’ (Nigerian Tribune, 30 June 2021). Accessible at:

<<https://tribuneonlineng.com/senate-passes-firearms-amendment-bill>>.

³⁸ Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, their Parts and Components and Ammunition

³⁹ Small Arms Survey, ‘Nigeria: National Small Arms and Light Weapons Survey’ (August 2023). Accessible at:

<<https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/SAS-Report-Nigeria-NSALWS.pdf>>.

the WPS agenda.

In 2021, the African Heads of State and Government adopted the Kinshasa Declaration on Positive Masculinities and Ending Violence against Women and Girls⁴⁰ expressing concerns over the persistence of violence against women and girls in Africa and committing to recommendations and actions to prevent and eliminate all forms of discrimination against them.

Recommendations

- Ensure that the National Orientation Agency in its mandate engage in grassroots advocacy and sensitisation in the promotion of positive masculinities and countering norms that promote harmful masculinities;
- Embark on consistent and effective implementation of existing policies on arms and ammunition control, and build programmes to address the connections between SALW, violence, and harmful masculinities;
- Mobilise men to change discriminatory gender norms and promote gender justice, including through community-based awareness and education, community mobilisation, radio programs, working with religious leaders;
- Endorse and commit to implement the African Union's Kinshasa Declaration on Positive Masculinities and Ending Violence against Women and Girls and evaluate annually the implementation of the commitment at the beginning of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence.

⁴⁰ African Union, Kinshasa Declaration and Call For Action Of The African Union Heads Of State On Positive Masculinity In Leadership To End Violence Against Women And Girls In Africa' (25 November 2021). Accessible at: <https://au.int/sites/default/files/pressreleases/41226-pr-Declaration_Mens_Conference_English.pdf>.