



# Women building peace, women keeping peace



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## Compulsion needed to ensure women's peacebuilding role

Ensuring that women play a full and equal role in peacebuilding and security requires mandates, quotas and consequences for institutions that don't comply, a Friends of Europe event, entitled "Women building peace, women keeping peace" and hosted by Canada's Mission to the European Union, was told on 16 May 2023.

More than 20 years after the landmark United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda falls short of its stated goals. Entrenched societal structures, conflicting national policies and lack of access to negotiating tables are among the barriers to giving women an equal voice in peacemaking. Barely 30% of peace agreements contain provisions that reference women and children, noted the event's moderator, **Krystal Gaillard**.

The event marked the official launch of the Friends of Europe's **Women Thought Leadership Network**, which aims to give voice to the diversity of experiences that women face in conflict and to streamline their knowledge into gender-sensitive recommendations for peacebuilding, conflict resolution, diplomacy and security policy and practices. The group will hold bi-monthly, closed-door brainstorming sessions, bringing together policy officials, activists, academics and private sector figures to share expert testimony and develop concrete proposals ahead of a Friends of Europe's Policy Insight event on the WPS agenda in November 2023. The network will initially run for the course of one year, with an ambition to host iterations of the working group and the event in 2024 and the years that follow.

*“It's time to be more inclusive and more strategic*

**Jacqueline O'Neill**, Canada's Ambassador for WPS

In a video message, Canada's Ambassador for WPS, **Jacqueline O'Neill**, welcomed the initiative and said that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had adopted an explicitly feminist foreign policy and everyone in the government and the armed forces had been alert to the fact. It was important that NATO's new Strategic Concept and the EU's Strategic Compass – key long-term policy documents adopted in 2022 – had for the first time incorporated the WPS agenda. Once the right policies were in place, there was no need to renegotiate each time an issue arose and the focus instead was on taking action. Women's networks could help by bringing more men and gender diverse people into the forces driving the agenda. "It's time to be more inclusive and more strategic," O'Neill said.

**Laurence Gillois**, Acting Head of the UN Women Brussels Office, made a strong case for an element of compulsion to speed up change. As long as the WPS agenda was mostly pursued through training, guidance and networking, there would not be decisive change in the global imbalance. "We need mandating women's participation in the meetings and decision-making processes," she argued, urging the network

to insist on “mandates, conditions, quotas, funding earmarks and consequences for non-compliance”. Gillois suggested that EU ambassadors be obliged to address the WPS agenda as a standing item at every meeting of the Political and Security Committee, which develops the EU’s common foreign and security policy.

She warned that there was now a clear backlash against women’s rights, not just in Sudan or Afghanistan but also in Europe, including through the growing phenomenon of online threats.

**Floor Keuleers**, Senior Analyst on Gender and Conflict at the International Crisis Group, an independent NGO, gave harrowing examples of how women activists who tried to participate in peace processes from Colombia and Cameroon faced threats to their own safety, including sexual violence and media intimidation. Women’s networks could highlight places where civic space is shrinking and work with concerned women on the ground to help ensure their safety, notably by insisting that donors conduct proper security assessments with women participants.

*“ We shouldn’t make enemies of our menfolk. We need the support of men to get us where we need to be. ”*

**Jane Morrice**, Former Northern Ireland politician and European Commission official

Keuleers said it was vital to change the sequencing of mediation efforts so that women’s rights and gender issues were addressed from the outset and not relegated to “a nice-to-have afterthought” once a ceasefire, stabilisation and enforcement had been worked out. She cited the examples of current peace efforts in Yemen, where all the initial talks were held exclusively among men, as well as the EU programme to train Ukrainian military forces, where problems such as assisting victims of sexual violence were set aside in the name of urgency.

Former Northern Ireland politician and European Commission official **Jane Morrice** recounted how the EU had funded grassroots women’s groups campaigning for peace in the province, contributing to the 1997 Good Friday Agreement that ended 25 years of sectarian violence. Morrice helped form a women’s political party that won seats in the Northern Ireland Assembly and propelled two women into the UK-Irish peace negotiations. She cautioned: “We shouldn’t make enemies of our menfolk. We need the support of men to get us where we need to be.”

**Irene Fellin**, the NATO Secretary General’s Special Representative for WPS, said in a video message that women had come together in the alliance to fight exclusion from decision-making and develop a new approach human security in NATO. “We are establishing tools to make the alliance gender responsive across all its contexts,” she said. The position of a WPS special representative was established in 2012 in an effort to mainstream gender equality in alliance thinking.

Fellin’s advisor, **Teresa Finik**, said NATO was incorporating the gender perspective into all its work, from its core tasks of deterrence and defence, crisis prevention and cooperative security to new fields such as its Artificial Intelligence Strategy, which

includes work on gender bias mitigation, and its action plan on climate change and security addressing the differential impacts on women. Courses on gender perspectives were offered to military and civilian personnel.

In 2021, women served in just 12% of full-time roles in NATO armed forces; that percentage has doubled over the last 20 years. More significantly, women comprise 43% of NATO's international staff and held one-third of senior management positions.

Challenged by Afghan journalist and women's rights activist Lailuma Sadid as to why the UN was continuing to deal with her country's Taliban rulers despite their imposition of gender apartheid and exclusion of women from education and public life, Gillois said that while she shared the questioner's sadness, the UN had decided to stay and deliver assistance in Afghanistan "no matter what, to support women in the country."

A former NATO and UN official said she and other veterans had formed a private evacuation team and managed to send 652 women and girls to Europe after the official evacuation had ended because Western militaries had been focused on rescuing interpreters.

**Viviane Teitelbaum**, European President of the International Federation of Women, appealed on behalf of the group's Ukrainian members for a gender response to the humanitarian crisis caused by Russia's war in Ukraine. Among the pressing issues were access to health care and protection for women refugees from sexual exploitation, she said. Women had played a crucial role in the war effort but "don't receive the support they need on the ground".

**Mary Collins**, Senior Policy & Advocacy Coordinator at the European Women's Lobby, said proposed EU legislation to fight violence against women, currently working its way through the European Parliament and member governments, needed to be strengthened to explicitly include the offence of rape. Some countries were reluctant to put rape in the directive, pretexting the absence of an agreed common definition.

## Recommendations

- Demand mandatory women's participation in meetings and peace processes, with consequences for non-compliance.
- Ensure that the WPS agenda is addressed in peacemaking from the outset and not as an afterthought.
- Develop better ways to measure progress in women's inclusion, collect disaggregated data and communicate results.
- Broaden collective reach to address resistance, challenge gender stereotypes and combat pushback against women's rights.
- Build on the UN Women's Peace Fund to channel more assistance to women's organisations in conflict zones.
- Work with donors, authorities and NGOs to permit women peace activists to operate more safely; conduct security assessments with women participants; and work with authorities to make it easier to report incidents and threats of violence, and to reduce impunity.
- Ensure that EU bodies such as the European External Action Service, the Directorates-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) and for International Partnerships (INTPA) and other agencies use WPS targets in their own programming.



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