

# Reimagining Peace through the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

Fleur Heyworth  
November 2023

GCSP Policy Brief No.11



**GCSP**  
Geneva Centre for  
Security Policy

# Geneva Centre for Security Policy

The Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP) is an international foundation that aims to advance global cooperation, security and peace. The foundation is supported by the Swiss government and governed by 54 member states. The GCSP provides a unique 360° approach to learn about and solve global challenges. The foundation's mission is to educate leaders, facilitate dialogue, advise through in-house research, inspire new ideas and connect experts to develop sustainable solutions to build a more peaceful future.

## The GCSP Policy Briefs Series

The GCSP Policy Briefs series addresses current security issues, deduces policy implications and proposes policy recommendations. It aims to directly inform policy- and decision-making of states, international organisations and the private sector.

Under the leadership of Ambassador Thomas Greminger, Director of the GCSP, the series is edited by Professor Nayef Al-Rodhan, Head of the Geopolitics and Global Futures Programme, and Mr Tobias Vestner, Head of the Research and Policy Advice Department, and managed by Ms Christine Garnier Simon, Administration and Coordination Officer, GCSP Geopolitics and Global Futures.

### Geneva Centre for Security Policy

Maison de la paix  
Chemin Eugène-Rigot 2D  
P.O. Box 1295  
1211 Geneva 1  
Switzerland  
Tel: + 41 22 730 96 00  
E-mail: [info@gcsp.ch](mailto:info@gcsp.ch)  
[www.gcsp.ch](http://www.gcsp.ch)

ISBN: 978-2-88947-420-2

©Geneva Centre for Security Policy, November 2023

The views, information and opinions expressed in this publication are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the GCSP or the members of its Foundation Council. The GCSP is not responsible for the accuracy of the information.

## About the author

**Ms Fleur Heyworth** leads the GCSP's executive education, dialogue and policy analysis on gender and inclusive security. Working closely with the GCSP's Leadership Alliance, she designs and facilitates courses on leadership for women, and for male and female leaders to create more inclusive working environments. She also delivers modules on gender and inclusive security to the multi-disciplinary, multi-cultural participants on GCSP's core courses, incorporating the frameworks of the Women Peace and Security Agenda, and the Sustainable Development Goals to apply a 'gender lens' to security policy. Fleur has published numerous policy analysis on topics ranging from gender, diversity and inclusion to women in mediation and has designed and facilitated customised courses for women mediator networks <https://www.gcsp.ch/topics/gender-inclusive-security>.

Fleur also heads the International Gender Champions Secretariat ([www.genderchampions.com](http://www.genderchampions.com)), a global network of almost 300 leaders advancing gender equality, extending across six multilateral hubs, which is currently being incubated by the GCSP. In this capacity, Fleur leads governance, partnerships, and the team responsible for programmatic and communications work, including the development of a new network wide pledge to speak up and stand up for zero tolerance of gender based violence, sexist attitudes and behaviour. Fleur regularly facilitates and moderates in person, virtual and hybrid meetings.

Fleur began her professional career as a Barrister and spent 5 years advocating in court, representing government and private clients in family law proceedings in England and Wales. In Geneva, she worked at the UK Mission to the UN where she represented the UK government in negotiations in International Humanitarian Law at the Red Cross Conference 2015, and on a range of thematic topics during three Human Rights Council sessions including sexual violence in conflict, disasters and emergencies, and on gender equality. She also worked with NGOs during UPR sessions and drafted recommendations to CEDAW. Fleur has a Geography Degree from Cambridge University, and took her post-graduate studies in law at Nottingham Law School.

## Introduction

The United Nations (UN) Secretary-General's recent annual report on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) stated that the world is “experiencing a reversal of generational gains in women’s rights while violent conflicts, military expenditures, military coups, displacements and hunger continue to increase”.<sup>1</sup> In July 2023 the Secretary-General released a policy brief entitled *A New Agenda for Peace* (NA4P)<sup>2</sup> in support of his *Our Common Agenda* report<sup>3</sup> and the Summit of the Future due to take place in 2024. Both place the rights and full participation of women and girls at the centre of a more peaceful and sustainable world; indeed, evidence repeatedly proves that more gender-equitable societies are inherently more peaceful and less prone to violence.<sup>4</sup> Yet tensions around the normative status of the WPS Agenda remain that are symbolic of the tensions at the heart of our multilateral system more broadly and divisions over the future vision and priorities for our collective security.

The NA4P integrates a feminist perspective by making bold calls for the dismantling of oppressive structures, particularly the patriarchy, and a transformation of power, yet its recommendations are not new and would not be sufficient to transform power structures.<sup>5</sup> This GCSP Policy Brief analyses the security challenges of today and what we can learn from the achievements and shortcomings of the WPS Agenda, in particular the recent (and current) intentional and unintentional backsliding. It then looks at potential areas for innovation and the strengthening of the WPS Agenda in support of the NA4P. Ultimately, it shows that the NA4P will likely be confronted with the same challenges faced by the WPS Agenda in a period of securitisation and militarisation unless there is a paradigm shift in the security imagination to prioritise human security, elevate the role of women in state security structures, and provide direct funding and resources to realise both agendas.

---

<sup>1</sup> A. Guterres, *Women and Peace and Security: Report of the Secretary-General*, S/2022/740, New York, UN, 5 October 2022, <https://undocs.org/S/2022/740>.

<sup>2</sup> A. Guterres, *A New Agenda for Peace*, Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9, New York, UN, July 2023, <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-new-agenda-for-peace-en.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> A. Guterres, *Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary-General*, New York, UN, 2021, [https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common\\_Agenda\\_Report\\_English.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common_Agenda_Report_English.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> V. Hudson et al., *Sex and World Peace*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2012; M. Caprioli, “Gendered Conflict”, *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol.37(1), 2000, pp.53-68; M. Caprioli and M. Boyer, “Gender, Violence, and International Crisis”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol.45, August 2001, pp.503-518; P.M. Regan and A. Paskeviciute, “Women’s Access to Politics and Peaceful States”, *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol.40(3), 2003, pp.287-302.

<sup>5</sup> F. Heyworth, “Transforming Gendered Power Dynamics in Peace and Security: The New Agenda for Peace”, LinkedIn Pulse blog, 27 July 2023, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/transforming-gendered-power-dynamics-peace-security-new-heyworth>.

## The security challenge

The current security landscape is characterised by a dichotomy. On the one hand, the dividends of seven decades of global peace are expressed in human, technical and scientific progress, resulting in people on average living longer, healthier and wealthier lives. In the two decades from the year 2000 there was a significant reduction of both inter-state and intra-state conflict worldwide, and a decrease in military expenditure. On the other hand, this trend appears to be reversing. The world is facing the highest number of violent conflicts since the Second World War,<sup>6</sup> the vast majority of which are civil wars, and close to half of all conflicts in 2021 were internationalised.<sup>7</sup> Many national security doctrines depict international relations mainly as a landscape of heightened geostrategic rivalry that demands a military build-up, thus military expenditures have surged, reaching an unprecedented total of US\$2.24 trillion in 2022. Nuclear states are modernising their arsenals through large investments, while the NA4P highlights the danger of a resurgence of inter-state conflict.

Moreover, responses to challenges, including those of cyber security or terrorism, have been excessively focused on security measures that serve to reinforce cycles of violence in countries.<sup>8</sup> For instance, measures that restrict civil liberties or disproportionately target certain ethnic or religious communities can exacerbate pre-existing tensions and radicalise affected populations. Rising inequalities and a lack of trust in governments and public institutions are fuelling grievances and violence.<sup>9</sup> Between 2015 and 2021 intentional homicides claimed an estimated 3.1 million lives and organised crime equalled armed conflicts in its death toll.<sup>10</sup> Feminist scholars point to masculinist protection, masculinist competition and mobilisation for survival as key drivers of violent conflict.<sup>11</sup> However, insights into the critical role of gender in addressing fragility and violence are rarely acted upon to create an integrated framework,<sup>12</sup> and the COVID-19 pandemic bore witness to how crises and conflicts exacerbate

<sup>6</sup> UNDP (UN Development Programme), *Special Report 2022: New Threats to Human Security in the Anthropocene: Demanding Greater Solidarity*, New York, UNDP, 2022, <https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/srhs2022pdf.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Uppsala University, "Armed Conflict by Type, 1946-2021", Uppsala Conflict Data Program Database, n.d., [https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/charts/graphs/png\\_22/armedconf\\_by\\_type.png](https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/charts/graphs/png_22/armedconf_by_type.png).

<sup>8</sup> R. Kleinfeld, *A Savage Order: How the World's Deadliest Countries Can Forge a Path to Security*, New York, Pantheon Books, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> UNDP, 2022.

<sup>10</sup> An estimated 700,000 people died in armed conflicts during the period. See UNODC (UN Office on Drugs and Crime), *Global Study on Homicide 2023*, forthcoming.

<sup>11</sup> E. Prügl, "Gender as a Cause of Violent Conflict", *International Affairs*, Vol.99(5), September 2023, pp.1885-1902.

<sup>12</sup> OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), *States of Fragility 2016: Understanding Violence*, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2016, [https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/states-of-fragility-2016\\_9789264267213-en#page19](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/states-of-fragility-2016_9789264267213-en#page19). OECD recommendations have not been acted on.

pre-existing patterns of discrimination and inequality.<sup>13</sup> The interdependent and indivisible UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were agreed in 2015, but only 12% of them are on track to be achieved by 2030 and none of SDG 5's 14 indicators to achieve gender equality have been met, while only one is "close to target".<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, the reversal of gains in gender equality and women's rights is in tandem with the trend towards securitisation and militarisation. Although more men die in conflict or organised crime, more women are killed and abused in their homes and a woman's gender is more likely to be central to the act of violence, leading to the term "femicide".<sup>15</sup> The NA4P draws attention to a growing backlash against women's rights, including in the area of sexual and reproductive health, and a rise in misogyny, both offline and online.<sup>16</sup> It identifies a rise in threats, persecution, and acts of violence against women, including women politicians and human rights defenders, and highlights that misogyny is often part of the narrative used to justify terror attacks. Perhaps the starkest examples of oppressive patriarchal power structures are in Afghanistan and Iran, where women are facing severe institutional discrimination and violent persecution: an international coalition is calling for this to be recognised as gender apartheid under international law.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> The time to reach gender equality was set back by a generation. See WEF (World Economic Forum), *Global Gender Gap Report 2023*, Geneva, WEF, June 2023, [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2023.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2023.pdf). By way of comparison, the wealth of the world's ten richest men doubled during the COVID-19 pandemic. See N. Ahmed et al., *Inequality Kills: The Unparalleled Action Needed to Combat Unprecedented Inequality in the Wake of COVID-19*, Oxfam International, January 2022, <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/inequality-kills-the-unparalleled-action-needed-to-combat-unprecedented-inequal-621341/>.

<sup>14</sup> SDG 5 aims to achieve gender equality; see A. Guterres, *Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Towards a Rescue Plan for People and Planet: Report of the Secretary-General (Special Edition)*, A/78/80-E/2023/64, New York, UN, 27 April 2023, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4014344>.

<sup>15</sup> More sex-disaggregated data is needed; see A. Alvazzi del Frate et al., *Gender Counts: Assessing Global Armed Violence Datasets for Gender Relevance*, Geneva, Small Arms Survey, March 2020, <https://smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/SAS-BP-Gender-Counts.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> The prevalence of ICT-facilitated violence against women and girls globally may range between 16% and 58% and impacts political and economic participation, and personal safety and well-being; see UN Women, "Accelerating Efforts to Tackle Online and Technology-facilitated Violence against Women and Girls", 2022, [https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/Accelerating-efforts-to-tackle-online-and-technology-facilitated-violence-against-women-and-girls-en\\_0.pdf](https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/Accelerating-efforts-to-tackle-online-and-technology-facilitated-violence-against-women-and-girls-en_0.pdf). More than 45% of 18-45 year-old women who used Facebook or Twitter in West and Central Africa reported having experienced some form of gender-based violence on social media; see Internet Without Borders, "Online Gender-based Violence Affects 45% of Women on Social Media in West and Central Africa", 2019, <https://internetwithoutborders.org/iwd2019-online-gender-based-violence-affects-45-of-women-on-social-media-in-west-and-central-africa/>.

<sup>17</sup> International Service for Human Rights, "End Gender Apartheid", 2013, <https://ishr.ch/campaign/end-gender-apartheid/>.

Climate-change-induced food and water shortages will exacerbate inequalities and insecurity still further. Women and girls are 14 times more likely to die during a natural disaster and this is directly linked to women's unequal economic and social rights.<sup>18</sup> As women and girls are forced to migrate,<sup>19</sup> many face unwanted pregnancies, lack of sexual and reproductive care and rights, and trafficking for forced labour or sexual exploitation.<sup>20</sup>

## Policy implications

One of the paramount questions of our era and a critical question of the NA4P is how to avert the escalation of competition into direct confrontation and conflict and generate solidarity to address the manifold threats to human survival. The NA4P identifies three core principles for an effective collective security system: trust, solidarity and universality. Recommended actions include preventive diplomacy and redressing economic, political and gender inequalities and injustices, including colonialism and slavery.<sup>21</sup> The joint 2018 UN-World Bank *Pathways to Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict* report<sup>22</sup> cited by the NA4P clearly identified the need to tackle the root causes of conflict, including access to power, natural resources, security, and justice in order to create and sustain peace. However, we have seen the opposite trend emerging.

The NA4P's recommendations to "transform gendered power dynamics in peace and security" through equal representation in decision-making, the eradication of gender-based violence and increased financing<sup>23</sup> are critical contributors to peace.<sup>24</sup> Yet they also date back to at least 1995<sup>25</sup> and are unlikely to be

<sup>18</sup> International Union for Conservation of Nature, "Disaster and Gender Statistics", n.d., [https://www.unisdr.org/files/48152\\_disasterandgenderstatistics.pdf](https://www.unisdr.org/files/48152_disasterandgenderstatistics.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), "Summary for Policymakers: Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change", in *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*, Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 2022, pp.3-33, [https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/downloads/report/IPCC\\_AR6\\_WGII\\_SummaryForPolicymakers.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGII_SummaryForPolicymakers.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> IOM Regional Office for Central America, North America and the Caribbean, "Gender and Migration", 2023, <https://rosanjose.iom.int/en/gender-and-migration>.

<sup>21</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report 2019: Beyond Income, beyond Averages, beyond Today: Inequalities in Human Development in the 21st Century*, New York, UNDP, 2019, <https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/hdr2019pdf.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> UN and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*, Washington DC, World Bank, 2018, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28337>.

<sup>23</sup> i) to secure women's full, equal and meaningful participation at all levels of decision-making on peace and security; ii) the eradication of all forms of gender-based violence; iii) provide sustained, predictable and flexible financing for gender equality.

<sup>24</sup> On participation, for example, an analysis of 58 conflict-affected states between 1980 and 2003 found that when women are absent from parliament, the risk of a conflict recurring increases over time, but when 35% of the legislature is female, this relationship almost disappears, and the risk of relapse is near zero; see J.H.R. Demeritt et al., "Female Participation and Civil War Relapse", *Civil Wars*, Vol.16(3), 2014, p.262.

<sup>25</sup> Gender parity in governance was recommended in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. The same

achieved without a deeper societal transformation and consideration of the power dynamics at play, ranging from the legacy of patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism, and militarism to geopolitical rivalries and competition. This requires an understanding of gendered power relations across all aspects of the NA4P, from arms control and peacekeeping to climate peace and security, which the WPS Agenda has been seeking to do for over two decades. The next section analyses the achievements and shortcomings of the WPS Agenda, in particular intentional and unintentional backsliding, and how insights gained can inform our approach to peace.

## Lessons from the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

Women have mobilised to defend and uphold human rights and fight for peace since at least 1915,<sup>26</sup> defining peace and security comprehensively to include the promotion of social justice (“positive peace”), ending militarism as a way of thought, and the elimination of violence in all its manifestations and at all levels of society. The WPS Agenda developed since the year 2000 has been marked by idealism, pragmatism and criticism, aiming to transform the security architecture while simultaneously working within it.

In terms of progress, the WPS Agenda has succeeded in many areas. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and nine subsequent resolutions that form the agenda have created an international legal framework for the four pillars of participation, prevention, protection, and relief and recovery, which are reviewed annually and updated as appropriate. Resolutions have served to expand on the reach and understanding of the agenda by addressing violent extremism, child soldiers and non-traditional security issues such as HIV/AIDS. By 2023, 107 countries had developed national action plans (NAPs), 85% with monitoring indicators,<sup>27</sup> and a dozen regional action plans and strategies had been developed. The Informal Expert Group on WPS created in 2016 to coordinate action and strengthen the systematic oversight of implementation within the UN, together with the WPS Focal Point Network now comprising 91 members, have continued to guide and advocate for the accelerated implementation of the WPS Agenda in all countries.<sup>28</sup>

---

recommendation for financing was made in UN Women, Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, New York, UN Women, 2015, [https://wps.unwomen.org/pdf/en/GlobalStudy\\_EN\\_Web.pdf](https://wps.unwomen.org/pdf/en/GlobalStudy_EN_Web.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> J. Addams et al., *Women at The Hague: The International Congress of Women and Its Results*, Amherst, Humanity Books, 2003; J.A. Tickner and J. True, “A Century of International Relations Feminism: From World War I Women’s Peace Pragmatism to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda”, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.62(2), June 2018, pp.221-233; A. Jabour, “Why Women’s Peace Activism in World War I Matters Now”, *The Conversation*, 3 April 2017, <https://theconversation.com/why-womens-peace-activism-in-world-war-i-matters-now-75254>; and O. Figes, “The Women’s Protest that Sparked the Russian Revolution”, *The Guardian*, 8 March 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/08/womens-protest-sparked-russian-revolution-international-womens-day>.

<sup>27</sup> Guterres, 2022, paras. 70, 72.

<sup>28</sup> Learn more about the WPS Focal Points Network at <https://wpsfocalpointsnetwork.org>.



Since 2021, UN member states, regional organisations, UN entities, and civil society have been part of a multistakeholder process known as the Compact on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action (WPS-HA) to strengthen partnerships and monitor and assess progress. Prioritised themes include financing, participation in peace processes, ensuring women’s economic security, leadership and agency, and the protection of women’s human rights.<sup>29</sup> All these frameworks create spaces for collaboration among states, international organisations, and civil society, and road maps for leadership and action at all levels.

The WPS Agenda has also elevated the role and value of women and shown that “peace is possible” and that the chances of peace are increased when women are fully and meaningfully participating in decisions and actions, as a result of which societies are more likely to both prevent and resolve conflict.<sup>30</sup> Women’s participation in parliament, peace processes, and peacekeeping are associated with more solid, viable, and sustainable outcomes.<sup>31</sup> Women are socialised to be the predominant caregivers, educators, and informal leaders in households and communities. This enables them to promote dialogue and build trust, contributing to a more holistic understanding of peace that addresses both long-term needs and short-term security. Gender equality is a better predictor of a state’s peacefulness than its religion or levels of democracy and wealth.<sup>32</sup>

Women’s leadership has also enabled the building of coalitions and movements to develop global norms. In the field of humanitarian disarmament, landmark treaties such as the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty are renowned for the strategic role played by women leaders in the process from the conceptualisation to the negotiation and implementation of these treaty regimes. Furthermore, frameworks such as General Recommendation 30 of the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Arms Trade Treaty, the SDGs, and national feminist foreign policies that are integrating gender perspectives and analysis have been seen to be moving towards transformational change.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Learn more about the Compact on Women Peace Security and Humanitarian Action at <https://wpshcompact.org/>.

<sup>30</sup> M. Caprioli, “Primed for Violence: The Role of Gender Inequality in Predicting Internal Conflict”, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.49(2), June 2005, pp.161-178; E. Melander, “Gender Equality and Intrastate Armed Conflict”, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.49(4), December 2005, pp.695-714.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*; Caprioli and Boyer, 2021, p.514; M. O’Reilly et al., *Reimagining Peacemaking: Women’s Role in Peace Processes*, New York, International Peace Institute, June 2015; S.N. Anderlini, *Women Building Peace: What They Do, Why It Matters*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 2007; S.N. Anderlini, *Women at the Peace Table: Making a Difference*, New York, UN Development Fund for Women, 2000.

<sup>32</sup> V. Hudson et al., *Sex and World Peace*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2012.

<sup>33</sup> A. Swaine and C. O’Rourke, *Guidebook on CEDAW General Recommendation No. 30 and the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security*, New York, UN Women, 2015, <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2015/Guidebook-CEDAW-General-Recommendation-30-Women-Peace-Security-en.pdf>.

However, empirical evidence that tracks the impact of all national commitments and actions by organisations globally is lacking. The UN has made internal progress,<sup>34</sup> the African Union adopted a Continental Results Framework to monitor the implementation of the WPS Agenda in 2018, and the Compact on WPS-HA released its first accountability report in 2022,<sup>35</sup> but national and international governance structures rarely adopt a truly comprehensive and integrated approach applying gender markers and gender-responsive budgeting.

Meanwhile, wars rage on and there has been a growing focus on women's increased participation in the military and security sectors, and on conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence. Ultimately, it is impossible to make war safer for anyone, let alone women, and some argue that the agenda has been coopted by an ever-increasing process of securitisation. Furthermore, while war and insecurity are on the rise, fear and othering tend to create greater polarisation and reduce the likelihood of finding common ground.

In 2019 the common ground around the WPS Agenda began to erode, and intentional and unintentional backsliding became evident in the UN Security Council: Resolution 2467 called for a survivor-centred approach in preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence, but was the first WPS resolution not to be adopted unanimously. China and Russia cited concerns about what they perceived as undue expansion of the Security Council's mandate and the United States threatened to exercise its veto over the proposed inclusion of language on sexual and reproductive health.<sup>36</sup> Resolution 2493 called for full implementation of all previous resolutions on WPS, but a proposed call for an annual update on progress towards implementing recommendations of the Informal Expert Group was removed following objections from Russia and China. In 2020 Russia only proposed one resolution, which focused on socio-economic issues. It was not passed, and no others have been proposed since, due to concerns about language regression and a lack of progress in implementing previous resolutions.

In more recent attempts to reinvigorate the Agenda, Ireland, Kenya and Mexico pledged to make WPS “a golden thread” through their presidencies of the Security Council in 2021, and eight more countries signed a Statement of Shared Commitments to also make it a “top priority” during their membership.<sup>37</sup> The

<sup>34</sup> Learn more about the UN System-Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment at <https://gendercoordinationandmainstreaming.unwomen.org/un-swap>.

<sup>35</sup> Compact on WPS-HA, *Accountability Report 2022*, 2022, [https://wpshcompact.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/WPS-HA-Compact\\_Accountability\\_Report\\_2022.pdf](https://wpshcompact.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/WPS-HA-Compact_Accountability_Report_2022.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> UNSC (UN Security Council), Resolution 2493, S/RES/2493, 29 October 2019; and Security Council Report, *In Hindsight: Negotiations on Resolution 2467 on Sexual Violence in Conflict*, in *What's in Blue*, 2 May 2019, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2019/05/in-hindsight-negotiations-on-resolution-2467-on-sexual-violence-in-conflict.php>.

<sup>37</sup> Albania, Brazil, France, Gabon, Niger, Norway, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom signed on to a 1 December 2021 Statement of Shared Commitments on Women, Peace and Security, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2022-12/women-peace-and-security-one-year-of-shared-commitments.php>.

strongest focus of the Shared Commitments has been on participation, with visible results. Between September 2021 and September 2022, 78 women civil society briefers addressed the Security Council, compared to 41 in 2019 and 28 in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the heightened visibility, this has not translated into better implementation of the WPS Agenda, because members are yet to develop systematic processes to follow up on briefers' recommendations and concerns, and during some months WPS was barely discernible among priorities and the Security Council's regular reporting and mandate cycles. In addition, there have been significant reprisals against women human rights defenders, including one in three Security Council briefers.<sup>38</sup> In New York, Geneva, and several multilateral bodies, debates around the meaning and interpretation of gender and diversity are polarising countries and consuming precious time and energy.

## The need to innovate

On the one hand, one can critically analyse the WPS Agenda to identify promises that have not been delivered at the national, regional and global levels. Almost a quarter of a century after its inception, there have been insufficient resources and investment to give real power to well-intentioned words and statements, just as with SDG 5. Having been selectively applied in conflicts geographically, the WPS Agenda is still not "mainstreamed" through processes involving gendered analyses of conflict, and resources are not allocated to match needs. Many NAPs have an international rather than domestic focus, which risks perpetuating a colonial mindset.<sup>39</sup> There is also a lack of systematised research, data, and assessments on the implementation of NAPs, undermining the agenda's integrity and efficacy.

On the other hand, one can look at the WPS Agenda through the current militarised and securitised paradigm that we are in, which has inhibited not just the progress of gender equality and the peaceful resolution of conflict, but has fundamentally deepened the inequality and injustice that give rise to conflict in the first place. Governments and international financial institutions remain fixed on measuring development and well-being by growth in gross domestic product (GDP), and private actors are rarely seen as peace actors, nor is their potential contribution harnessed. One could argue that it is our governance architectures and ideologies that are not working, not the WPS Agenda.

To achieve a paradigm shift we need to both expand the security imagination towards a multilevel, multidimensional definition of security – i.e. human security – and fully invest in the WPS Agenda as a vehicle that can be used to

---

<sup>38</sup> Security Council Report, *Golden Threads and Persisting Challenges: The Security Council Women, Peace and Security Presidencies Initiative*, in *What's in Blue*, 30 December 2022, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/research-reports/golden-threads-and-persisting-challenges-the-security-council-women-peace-and-security-presidencies-initiative.php>.

<sup>39</sup> F. Ní Aoláin, "The 'War on Terror' and Extremism: Assessing the Relevance of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda", *International Affairs*, Vol.92(2), 2016, pp.275-291.

understand and transform power relations. This includes applying a political economy analysis to more fully understand how power manifests; ending the artificial divide vis-à-vis human rights and centralise them in security policy; and investing much more in gendered analysis, mainstreaming, and coordination. Finally, it requires a governance architecture that allows for multiple pathways for peace, including the safe participation and inclusion of women, youth, and marginalised groups at the multilateral, national, and local levels and the decentralisation of power.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> As identified by the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), “Participation should be 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, “Submission to the CEDAW Committee’s Half-day General Discussion on the Equal and Inclusive Representation of Women in Decision-making Systems”, 14 February 2022, p.2, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/cedaw/general-discussion/2023/gr40-womens-international-league-peace-and-freedom.docx>.

## Policy recommendations

These policy recommendations are intended to complement concrete recommendations in the NA4P, including those focusing specifically on WPS<sup>41</sup> and those that are broader, such as the ones stemming from the High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism.<sup>42</sup>

### Refocus on human security by applying a gendered perspective

As Yuval Noah Harari has posited, the human imagination has enabled us to cooperate and live interdependently over the centuries, giving birth to concepts such as nations, human rights, money, and gods.<sup>43</sup> Yet the security imagination is being dominated by militarisation, weaponisation, securitisation, fear, and othering, when we need cooperation, creativity, and innovation to redress global insecurity. The continued narrow focus on state security leads to increased spending on the defence of state sovereignty, but threats to our safety no longer respect borders. Inequality within nations and threats that transcend them, such as climate change, pandemics, and cyber security, undermine our national and collective security. Neglecting to address the well-known root causes of conflict, including inequality, marginalisation and poverty, increases the prospects of violence. Only by reprioritising human security and focusing on the well-being, dignity, and rights of individuals will we achieve security for all. Applying a gendered perspective enhances our understanding of the root causes of conflict and our capacity to address them.

### Rebalance and transform power

#### Undertake a political economy analysis

A political economy analysis from a gender and intersectional perspective exposes where power lies, how it is used, and where it creates inequalities and discrimination.<sup>44</sup> Hence it is a diagnostic that facilitates the development of policies to enable reform. This includes, for example, developing models that move beyond GDP to acknowledge the value of the informal economy, which is gendered, invisible, and devalued, but has significant potential to strengthen

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, V. Amrein et al., *Switzerland's Advancement of the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda: Tools for Impact and Modernization of the WPS Agenda during Switzerland's Term in the United Nations Security Council*, Bern, Forum Aussenpolitik, 2023, [https://www.foraus.ch/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/WPS\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.foraus.ch/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/WPS_WEB.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism, "Fifth Statement by the Co-Chairs of the High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism", 10 February 2023, <https://highleveladvisoryboard.org/fifth-statement-by-the-co-chairs-six-transformational-shifts/>.

<sup>43</sup> Y.N. Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, New York, Harper, 2015.

<sup>44</sup> G. Mlinarević and N. Porobić, *The Peace that Is Not: 25 Years of Experimenting with Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Feminist Critique of Neoliberal Approaches to Peacebuilding*, WILPF, 2021, [https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/WILPF\\_The-Peace-That-is-Not\\_final.pdf](https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/WILPF_The-Peace-That-is-Not_final.pdf).

our social fabric and rebalance the negative consequences of capitalism. Emerging feminist foreign policies represent steps towards this shift, but need to be matched by domestic policies and a “whole-of-society approach”, which, as highlighted in *Our Common Agenda*, facilitates a new social contract that provides for education and health care and a transition to a more inclusive, just, and green economy.<sup>45</sup>

### **End the artificial divide vis-à-vis human rights and centralise them in security policy**

The NA4P recognises the essential role of human rights as being at the heart of national conflict and violence prevention strategies. However, divisions have remained over the prioritisation of civil and political vis-à-vis economic, social, and cultural rights. As demonstrated in the power of a political economy analysis, civil and political rights will continue to be undermined unless socio-economic rights are also upheld, because policies will fail to address the structural causes of violence. This is particularly evident in the context of climate change and security.<sup>46</sup> Such questions are questions of security, and there is a need for better coordination between human rights mechanisms in Geneva and security mechanisms in New York, and with national and regional bodies, so that empirical evidence can be strengthened and resources allocated accordingly. It would also enable recognition, definition, and action in response to gender persecution and apartheid.

### **Invest in gendered analysis, mainstreaming and coordination**

Even though the SDGs are interdependent and indivisible, we still think and operate in silos. While SDG 5 is a stand-alone goal, greater recognition that it is a precondition to achieving all the other goals is necessary. More integrated and gender-responsive analysis across conflict, human rights, law, trade, aid, health, humanitarian action, climate action, and emerging technologies requires institutional investment and the use of technology to gather disaggregated data and ensure a holistic and integrated approach across the system. Two clear areas for better coordination are in more holistic NAPs and aligning multilateral commitments with bilateral agreements and aid.

### **Create multiple pathways to peace by building on the WPS architecture**

Collective security will only be achieved through collective intelligence and the diversification of agency beyond multilateral and national bodies to local communities. The WPS Agenda has bridged formal and informal power structures through networks that include gender focal points, civil society, mediators, and

---

<sup>45</sup> For examples of progressive economic models, see WILPF, “WILPF’s Women, Peace and Security”, n.d., <http://www.peacewomen.org>; The Club of Rome, *Earth for All: A Survival Guide for Humanity*, 2022, <https://www.clubofrome.org/publication/earth4all-book/>; and K. Raworth, *The Doughnut of Social and Planetary Boundaries*, 2017, <http://www.kateraworth.com/doughnut/>.

<sup>46</sup> See above: women’s limited socio-economic rights make them 14 times more vulnerable to disasters.

political leaders.<sup>47</sup> It is also increasingly working in harmony with the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda. We already see the rise of “multiple peace tables” to reflect the complexity of conflict actors, moving beyond Track 1 peace talks to include Tracks 1.5, 2, and 3 and engaging a wide variety of actors. This trend is likely to continue as the climate and insecurity nexus becomes stronger and the WPS community can support these connections.

Those advancing the WPS Agenda have identified ways to transform organisational structures and practices – in both state institutions and the security sector<sup>48</sup> and in state engagement with civil society.<sup>49</sup> There is now a need to ensure the equal, meaningful, and “safe” participation of civil society and human rights experts in all governance mechanisms, including the Security Council,<sup>50</sup> to ensure protection from reprisals. To build trust, governments must also ensure adequate funding of civil society organisations as recommended in the NA4P and act upon their recommendations.<sup>51</sup>

Finally, NAPs to implement the WPS Agenda in 107 countries have the potential to integrate the areas identified above, including a future focus on the achievement of climate security.<sup>52</sup> It is time for governments to apply them to both domestic and foreign policy questions and end any illusion that security can be achieved by focusing on threats from the outside rather than addressing the root causes of violence from within.

<sup>47</sup> C. Turner, *Women in Mediation: Connecting the Local and Global*, Geneva, Geneva Centre for Security Policy, August 2017, <https://www.gcsp.ch/publications/women-mediation-connecting-local-and-global>.

<sup>48</sup> See UNDP, *Gender Parity Strategy 2022-2025*, New York, UNDP, 2023, <https://www.undp.org/media/888886/download?inline>; UN Women, “Promoting UN Accountability (UN-SWAP and UNCT-SWAP)”, n.d., <https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/un-system-coordination/promoting-un-accountability>; and H. Huhtanen, *Organizational Culture Reboot*, Geneva, DCAF, October 2021, <https://www.dcaf.ch/organizational-culture-reboot>.

<sup>49</sup> See, for instance, WILPF, “Women, Peace, and Security Programme”, 2022, <https://www.wilpf.org/women-peace-and-security/>.

<sup>50</sup> C. O’Rourke and A. Swaine, *Full, Equal, Meaningful and Safe: Creating Enabling Environments for Women’s Participation in Libya*, New York, International Peace Institute, July 2023, [https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Full-Equal-Meaningful-and-Safe\\_2307.pdf](https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Full-Equal-Meaningful-and-Safe_2307.pdf).

<sup>51</sup> The Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund has begun to direct more resources to women civil society actors; however, even more are needed. See <https://wphfund.org/>.

<sup>52</sup> A. Abdenur et al., “How Can Climate Considerations Be Better Integrated into the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda?”, IPI Global Observatory, 15 October 2021, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2021/10/how-can-climate-considerations-be-better-integrated-into-the-women-peace-and-security-agenda/>.

## Conclusion

The multilateral system faces the challenge of creating a conducive environment for the transformation that the NA4P calls for. Currently we are witnessing a troubling regression in women's rights and safety, which is symptomatic of a broader, self-perpetuating cycle of competition, militarisation, and securitisation undermining everyone's safety and states' capacity to govern. To chart a course towards a safer future, the NA4P must more effectively integrate the WPS Agenda, building upon its accomplishments while addressing its shortcomings. Above all, this requires a shift away from the current militarised and securitised paradigm in favour of a heightened emphasis on human security. By reshaping our multilateral framework we can strengthen gender-responsive policies and practices to achieve security for all.



# People make peace and security possible

## **Geneva Centre for Security Policy**

Maison de la paix  
Chemin Eugène-Rigot 2D  
P.O. Box 1295  
1211 Geneva 1  
Switzerland  
Tel: + 41 22 730 96 00  
E-mail: [info@gcsp.ch](mailto:info@gcsp.ch)  
[www.gcsp.ch](http://www.gcsp.ch)

ISBN: 978-2-88947-420-2



**GCSP**  
Geneva Centre for  
Security Policy