

INSIGHTS

WOMEN IN PEACE & NEGOTIATION PROCESSES

It is Time to Bring Women to the
Negotiation Table

By: Dr. Marzia Marastoni
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Since the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000, women's inclusion in peace and security processes has been formally recognized as a global priority. Resolution 1325 marked the beginning of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, which calls for the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women in conflict prevention, peace negotiations, post-conflict reconstruction, and political transitions. Yet, despite global and regional commitments and the efforts of countless women peacebuilders and advocates, the number of women included in formal peace processes remains notably low.¹

Between 1991 and 2011, women constituted only 2% of chief mediators, 4% of signatories and witnesses, and 9% of official negotiators. More recent figures point to a continued underrepresentation of women in peace processes. In 2022, they made up just 16% of negotiators in UN-led processes, a decline from 23% in 2020. In some of the most critical and protracted conflicts – such as those in Ethiopia, Myanmar, the Balkans, -

Sudan, and Yemen – no women were included in official negotiating teams. Of the eighteen peace agreements concluded in 2022, just one included a woman signatory, and only one-third contained dedicated provisions for women and girls.²

Too often, women are also excluded from the early, agenda-setting phases of peace processes, where priorities are shaped and access is negotiated. This early-stage exclusion has long-term consequences, limiting their influence and the visibility of gender perspectives throughout the process. Even in negotiations where women are present, their participation tends to diminish during implementation, a stage critical to ensuring that gender commitments translate into lived realities. This gap contributes directly to delays or failures in realizing the provisions that are meant to support a gender-responsive peace.³

Women's participation in peace processes is not only a right but it also positively impacts peace outcomes. Thus, women's exclusion in peace processes is not just a failure of -

representation; it is a failure of effectiveness. A growing body of research demonstrates that women's meaningful participation in peace processes improves both the quality of agreements and the likelihood of sustainable peace. When women are able to influence negotiations, peace agreements are more likely to be reached, signed, and implemented. Research showed that women are able to exercise stronger influence on negotiation processes, significantly increasing the chances of a final agreement. Women presence also increased the chances that the resulting peace would be sustained. In many cases, women were more likely than any other group to pressure parties toward agreement.⁴ Furthermore, women's participation leads to better accord content and higher implementation rates. Research found that peace agreements signed by women included more provisions, a higher proportion of gender-sensitive provisions, and higher rates of implementation, all of which are associated with longer-lasting peace.⁵

Despite persistently low levels of participation in formal peace talks, women have consistently found creative and courageous ways to make their voices heard in peace processes. When excluded from official negotiation spaces, they have organized parallel processes to articulate their priorities. When physically locked out of the rooms where decisions are made, they have pushed their position papers and their recommendations through the gaps under the doors.⁶ Women actively -

advocate for inclusion in formal negotiations, support the legitimacy of official talks, push for women's rights in peace agreements, provide crucial information on human rights violations, engage in local conflict resolution, and advocate on behalf of parties involved in the conflict.⁷

It is time to stop treating inclusion as a gesture and start treating it as a core strategy. The exclusion of women is a structural problem, and it demands a structural solution. We must go beyond merely giving women a seat at the table and begin redesigning the table itself. This means creating processes where diverse women are able to participate meaningfully and influence decisions, from the early stages of negotiation to the long arc of implementation.

The future of peace depends on it.

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