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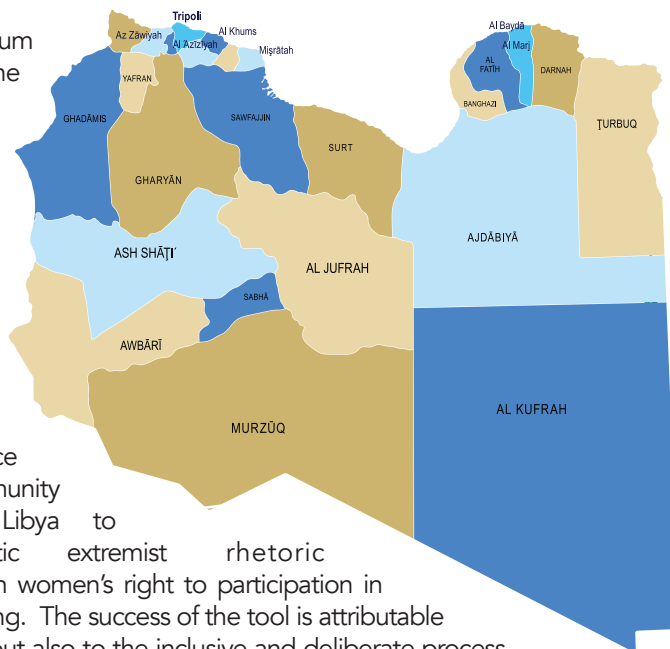
CASE STUDY

CHAMPIONS FOR PEACE: THE ROLE OF ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES IN RECLAIMING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN LIBYA

A Case Study on the Role of Gender and Identity in Shaping Positive Alternatives to Extremisms¹

SUMMARY

The Libyan Women's Forum (LWF) has developed the Islamic Peace Tool (IPT), a guidebook which draws on Islamic texts, traditions, and law to deconstruct narratives that create an enabling environment for violent extremism, and affirm the need for peace, pluralism, and gender equality. The IPT is used by peace activists and community leaders throughout Libya to challenge misogynistic extremist rhetoric and advocate for Libyan women's right to participation in politics and peacebuilding. The success of the tool is attributable not only to its content, but also to the inclusive and deliberate process by which it was developed.









Taking a Gender-Based Plus (GBA+) approach,² this case study discusses how Libya has become home to extremist narratives justified by conservative interpretations of Islam that position women as weak, belonging in the domestic sphere, and in need of protection. The case analyzes how militant groups have deployed these gendered narratives to systematically curtail women's legal rights and exclude women from reforming Libya's post-war political institutions and promoting a more inclusive, equitable and gender just state.

Since the 2011 revolution, Libya has been characterized by civil war, a deeply fractal political situation, and rising extremism. Despite the silencing of Libyan women's voices in the aftermath of the uprising, many women have emerged as agents of community change and civil society leaders, advocating for peace and providing essential service to their communities. They have also come under attack, with women activists subject to death threats, smear campaigns, and assassinations.

1. The International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) was commissioned by Global Affairs Canada to produce this set of case studies on the role of gender and intersectional identities in countering violent extremism and counterterrorism. For more information or to contact the authors please email info@icanpeacework.org.

2. Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) is an analytical process that provides a rigorous method for the assessment of systemic inequalities, as well as to assess how diverse groups of women, men, and gender diverse people may experience policies, programs and initiatives. More info on the GBA+ approach is accessible [here](https://www24.international.gc.ca/gba/gba-plus/index.aspx?lang=eng).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

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Extremist groups manipulate religious narratives to emphasize women's subordination to men in order to exclude women from the public and political sphere, with far-reaching negative consequences for sustainable peace. In Libya, the erasure of women from the political arena has thwarted the country's transition to an inclusive, peaceful, and democratic state.
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Online violence, harassment and abuse limit women's ability to participate in public and political life by confining them to private and women-only fora, disrupting their political campaigns, and obstructing their organizing and activism. Online incitement campaigns perpetuate extremist narratives; these are commonly used to silence and discredit women, including through sexual defamation.
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Understanding the specific leverage points used by extremist groups enables countering violent extremism (CVE) interventions to be more strategic in targeting their alternative narratives. In the Libyan context, where extremist narratives seek to undermine women's political participation, alternative narratives that draw on the Qur'an to promote the roles of women in peacebuilding and conflict resolution are particularly effective.
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Peacebuilding and CVE interventions should strengthen the legal safety net for women and women peacebuilders and take care not to reinforce paternalistic protection narratives. Impunity for violence against women enables extremist actors to position women as vulnerable, justify containing them to the domestic sphere, and expose women to increased insecurity under the guise of protection.
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The process of developing alternative narratives is of equal importance to the content of the narratives in order to ensure ownership, sustainability, and dissemination across different sectors of society. This can be achieved by including religious scholars in the conceptualization of narratives, engaging in a deliberate validation process, and initiating a media campaign to reach a wide audience.
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Creating and maintaining alliances, networks, and spaces for trusted local actors to collaborate on shared advocacy and activism is key to amplifying peaceful discourse and ensuring its sustainability. Alliances build empowerment, unity, and partnership – all necessary ingredients to keep alternative narratives alive in social consciousness.

CONTEXT ANALYSIS

Since the 2011 uprising that removed then President Muammar Gaddafi from power, Libya has been characterized by widespread political instability and violent internal conflict exacerbated by the presence of transnational terrorist groups, mercenaries, and criminal organizations. Following the 2020 ceasefire, a failure to hold presidential and parliamentary elections in December 2021 has, once again, left the country to be ruled by two rival administrations and sparked fear of renewed violence and a resurgence of extremist groups.³ Although the Islamic State was ousted from Libya militarily and politically in 2019, the factors that facilitated its rise – widespread political fragmentation, structural inequalities, and interference by international actors – persist.⁴ Various militant groups including militias allied to the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafi militias, and jihadists aligned with Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State maintain control over parts of Libyan territory and influence its governing actors. These groups leverage the country's protracted insecurity, poor governance, and factionalism to spread extremist narratives that foster division across political and tribal lines in order to consolidate their influence and recruit mostly young men to their ranks.⁵



Libyan women played a pivotal role in the 2011 uprising - also referred to as the February 17 revolution - yet their voices were rapidly silenced in its aftermath.

3. Wintour, P. (2022). Libya elite told to end game of 'musical chairs and focus on elections.' The Guardian. ([access here](#)).

4. International Crisis Group (2016). How the Islamic State Rose, Fell and Could Rise Again in the Maghreb. ([access here](#)).

5. Council on Foreign Relations (2022). Global Conflict Tracker. ([access here](#)).

Libyan civilians, especially women and girls, have borne the brunt of the violence inflicted by armed actors and their international supporters. The conflict has claimed an estimated 1,000 – 3,000 civilian deaths, and some 160,000 Libyans remain internally displaced, most of them women and children.^{6 7} Thousands of people, including many human rights and political activists, have been subjected to enforced disappearance, torture, and prolonged detention at the hands of militias, some of which have been integrated into formal state security institutions.⁸ The country houses over 600,000 migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers who are at high risk of exploitation, extortion, and enslavement.⁹

Women played a pivotal role in the 2011 uprising - also referred to as the February 17 revolution - yet their voices were rapidly silenced in its aftermath, and they have experienced a continued situation of insecurity in Libya's post-revolution context. The revolution started when the wives, mothers and children of prisoners killed in the 1996 Abu Salim prison massacre took to the streets in Benghazi to demand freedom for their lawyer who had been arrested by Gaddafi's forces, inspiring Libyan civil society to call for an end to dictatorship.¹⁰ Activists hoped that the shift in political circumstances after the revolution would catalyze women's political, social, and economic empowerment. Instead, when the civil war broke out, Libyan women were ignored and dismissed by both national stakeholders and international actors who blamed the resistance against their participation on Libyan actors.¹¹ While recognizing the patriarchal structure of Libyan society, Libyan women saw it differently. They argued that the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) failed to include them despite clear mandates to do so under UN Security Council Resolutions 2376 (2017) and UNSCR 2323 (2016), which called for "women's effective, full, and equal participation in all activities related to the government's democratic transition, ending conflict, peace-building, and peace-keeping, as well as [...] facilitating a wider base of women's participation of all the different demographic segments in Libya in the political and public sphere."¹² This systematic erasure of women led to their exclusion from formal peace and political processes.

Despite the persistent silencing of Libyan women's voices in high-level political, peace and security processes, they have continued to play a powerful role in civil society and activism. The country's lack of functional state institutions means that civil society organizations – the majority of which are women-led – play an even more critical role in working for peace, social cohesion, and women's rights while also providing for basic needs and essential services in their communities.¹³

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From Hope to Exclusion: Gendered Narratives as Tools for Women's Disempowerment

Following the 2011 revolution, the proliferation of gendered extremist narratives directly undermined Libyan women's ability to reform post-war political institutions and build a more inclusive, equal, and peaceful state. Militant groups have deployed extremist narratives on women's rights and Islam as a deliberate strategy to create barriers to women's political participation and exclude them from competing to fill the post-revolution power vacuum. These tactics were identified by Libyan women early on. In October 2011, the Chair of the Transitional National Council declared that a law limiting polygamous marriages would be repealed, stating it was contrary to (their interpretation of) Shariah or Islamic law.¹⁴ Women activists vocally opposed the removal of restrictions on polygamy – which included the need for consent from the first wife - but the repeal went through in 2013.

The reversal of limitations on polygamy constituted a warning sign for a broader conservative shift in Libya's cultural discourse, accompanied by constraints on women's rights. Militant groups popularized patriarchal, regressive narratives, justified by ultra-conservative interpretations of Islam, that framed women as weak, futile, subordinate to men, and belonging in the domestic sphere.¹⁵ These narratives underpin their advocacy for conservative Shariah-based family law, gender segregation and guardianship, which subjects adult women to the authority of their closest male relative and limits their independent access to public spaces and services.¹⁶ In the aftermath of the revolution, extremist gendered narratives – adopted by the general population with "frightening speed"¹⁷ - justified barring women from participating in drafting a new constitution. Their exclusion deprived them from the opportunity to draft a constitution that could enshrine gender equality in Libyan law, remove restrictions to women's political participation, and criminalize violence against women.¹⁸

6. Imhof, O. (2021). Ten years after the Libyan revolution, victims wait for justice. *Airwars*. ([access here](#)).

7. Reliefweb (2022). Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Libya IDP and Returnee Report: Mobility Tracking Round 40 (December 2021 - January 2022). ([access here](#)).

8. Lawyers for Justice in Libya (2020). Unforgotten: Enforced Disappearance in Libya. ([access here](#)).

9. Elham, S. and C. Orsini (2022). International engagement in Libya is worsening prospects for peace. *The New Humanitarian*. ([access here](#)).

10. Johansson-Nogues, E. (2013). Gendering the Arab Spring? Rights and (in)Security of Tunisian, Egyptian and Libyan Women. ([access here](#)).

11. Atlantic Council (2019). How the exclusion of women has cost Libya. ([access here](#)).

12. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (2018). A Roadmap to Sustainable Peace in Libya: A Feminist Approach towards Achieving Peace and Security in the Face of Patriarchy, Militarism and Fundamentalism. ([access here](#)).

13. Ragrag, N. (2021). Libyan Women and Political Participation: Ten Years Since the Revolution. The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy. ([access here](#)).

14. International Civil Society Action Network (2013). From Subjects to Citizens: Women in Post-Revolutionary Libya. ([access here](#)).

15. Johnston, M. et al (2019). Gender Equality and Violent Extremism: A Research Agenda for Libya. ([access here](#)).

16. International Crisis Group (2019). Addressing the Rise of Libya's Madkhali-Salafis. ([access here](#)).

17. International Civil Society Action Network (2013). From Subjects to Citizens: Women in Post-Revolutionary Libya. ([access here](#)).

18. Human Rights Watch (2013). A Revolution for All. Women's Rights in the New Libya. ([access here](#)).

In 2012, women obtained 33 out of 200 seats (16%) in the General National Congress, a substantial gain from the Gaddafi years. Yet, only two women ministers (of 40) were subsequently appointed to the new Libyan cabinet.¹⁹ Over the following decade, Libyan women were never meaningfully included in national politics. When women have been able to participate, such as when the Government of National Unity (GNU) elected five women ministers to its government in June 2021, they have not been able to act on their revolutionary vision for equality. As a result of women's exclusion from political life and from constitution-drafting, they have been denied the opportunity to participate in shaping Libya's post-war institutions and pass legislation that would create a more inclusive, equitable and rights-based state for all. Consequently, many of the laws implemented under Libya's rival governments continue to restrict women's civil liberties, participation in politics, bodily autonomy, and economic status.²⁰ Both administrations have used gendered religious discourse to support their agendas, and leading faith figures such as Libya's grand mufti, Saddiq al-Ghariani have had great influence over national politics.²¹ While his fatwas on, among other things, the need for female teachers to cover their faces when teaching teenage boys, stirred controversy, the influence of Al-Ghariani and his supporters cannot be underestimated.²² Patriarchal attitudes, militarism, and machismo have become embedded within all political parties, including progressive leftist parties.²³ In deploying extremist narratives to justify women's subordination and exclusion, religious leaders, politicians, and militant groups strategically maintain and deepen structural and gender-based inequalities.

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In addition to confining women's legal and political rights, militant groups and their supporters have used gendered extremist narratives both online and offline to silence women active in the public space, such as female politicians, peacebuilders, human rights defenders, journalists, and activists. Militias, armed groups, and individuals have targeted them with threats, online abuse and smear campaigns that leverage gender stereotypes in order to damage their credibility and force them to retract from the

public sphere.²⁴ The extremist hate speech and images used to target them are highly gendered in nature, including accusations of immorality and dishonor, depictions of them as prostitutes and adulterers, and suggestions that they go back to the kitchen.²⁵ A common tactic to discredit women is to portray them as being "divorced," since divorce is perceived as bringing shame to a woman and her family.²⁶ These narratives have a significant impact on women's political engagement. Female politicians are targeted with online abuse at all stages of their political involvement, including campaigning, running for office, and during their time in office.²⁷ Online abuse carries the threat of real-life violence in Libya: female activists, journalists and political candidates have been beaten, abducted, tortured, and assassinated.²⁸ As a result, many women have withdrawn from public life to protect themselves and their families. While online activism offered an important avenue for Libyan women to make their voices heard in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising, online abuse has since curtailed these opportunities. In the face of threats, women are more likely to engage exclusively in private and women-only fora, limiting their ability to participate in democratic discourse.²⁹

The Vicious Cycle of Protection Narratives

While gendered extremist narratives are used to restrict Libyan women's legal and political rights, the absence of those rights is in turn used to create narratives that frame women as vulnerable and in need of protection, further justifying gender discrimination and women's exclusion from the public sphere. Extremist actors have cited the absence of legal accountability for sexual violence as a reason to keep women inside the domestic sphere where it is "safer."³⁰ Due to fear of sexual violence encountered on the way to school, parents curtail girls' education and restrict their movement.³¹ To further protect girls from insecurity and from legal penalties associated with extramarital sex, parents may be more likely to enter them into child marriage.³² Domestic violence is not explicitly prohibited by law in Libya and there is no recourse for online abuse, cyberbullying or death threats. At the regional and city level, women's exposure to online violence has therefore been used as an excuse to prevent them from running for political office, under the pretext of protecting them and their families.³⁴

Some Libyan women have chosen to support extremist actors in exchange for protection by affiliated militias, armed groups, or tribal structures.³⁵ Such "protection bargains" enabled by extremist ideology and restrictive gender norms undermine the agency of women and girls to assert the terms of their protection, leaving them at the mercy of their "protector." They often result in increased or renewed insecurities for women: women may be

19.Johansson-Nogues, E. (2013). Gendering the Arab Spring? Rights and (in)Security of Tunisian, Egyptian and Libyan Women. ([access here](#)).

20.The Borgen Project (2020). Room to Advance Women's Rights in Libya. ([access here](#)).

21.United States Institute for Peace (2017). Libya's Religious Sector and Peacebuilding Efforts. ([access here](#)).

22.Ibid

23.Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (2018). A Roadmap to Sustainable Peace in Libya: A Feminist Approach towards Achieving Peace and Security in the Face of Patriarchy, Militarism, and Fundamentalism. ([access here](#)).

24.Lawyers for Justice in Libya (2021). We Will Not be Silenced: Online Violence Against Women in Libya. ([access here](#)).

25.Ibid.

26.Ibid.

27.Ibid.

28.Amnesty International (2018). Silenced Voices: Libyan Women Human Rights Defenders Under Attack. ([access here](#)).

29.Lawyers for Justice in Libya (2021). We Will Not be Silenced: Online Violence Against Women in Libya. ([access here](#)).

30.International Civil Society Action Network (2013). From Subjects to Citizens: Women in Post-Revolutionary Libya. ([access here](#)).

31.Bearat, H. (Working paper). Early Marriages in Middle East and North Africa. ([access here](#)).

32.Ibid.

33.Cordaid (2018). Women's rights in Libya. "We have stamina. Because our struggle is our Life." ([access here](#)).

34.Lawyers for Justice in Libya (2021). We Will Not be Silenced: Online Violence Against Women in Libya. ([access here](#)).

35.Johnston, M. et al (2019). Gender Equality and Violent Extremism: A Research Agenda for Libya. ([access here](#)).

protected within their communities, but unable to safely move in between communities due to their affiliation with a particular armed group or militia, domestic violence is frequently considered to be a private, family matter and thus beyond the scope of protection, and women may have to ask for permission from their protector to exercise basic rights, such as access bank accounts or identity documents.^{36 37} Protection is also doled out in an uneven manner, with gender, race, nationality, and class identities intersecting to determine who gets which level of protection.³⁸ Despite being routinely exposed to sexual abuse and exploitation, for instance, refugee men and boys are not afforded protection by local actors.³⁹ The invocation of gendered extremist narratives thus sets off a vicious cycle: Libyan women are stereotyped as weak, subservient, and domestic, justifying their exclusion from the public and political spheres. This leads to the preservation of discriminatory laws and proliferation of hate speech that put them in danger, which reinforces that they are weak and in need of protection and further rationalizes their exclusion from public life. In essence, they are treated as objects, rather than as subjects of democracy – a serious impediment to Libya's successful transition to peace.

A cohesive communal identity that prioritizes connection, non-violence, and gender equality can form a source of resistance to extremist narratives.

Tribal Identity as a Source of Resilience

Notably, members of matrilineal tribes in Libya's southwest have demonstrated significant resilience and resistance to recruitment by violent extremist actors and their narratives, despite exhibiting several characteristics that make them more vulnerable to recruitment such as marginalization, high violent extremist activity in their region, limited access to employment opportunities, and lack of government presence. Among the Toubou and Tuareq, two semi-nomadic tribes active across North and Central Africa, cultural gender norms are flexible, men are generally supportive of women's participation in national politics, and masculinities are less identified with dominance and aggression and more with social connectivity to the community.⁴⁰ In contrast to the conservative gendered narratives promoted by extremist organizations, Tuareq boys and girls are raised together, education for girls is prioritized, and women can freely choose their husbands.⁴¹ Gender norms play a role in

tribal resilience to recruitment, with rigid gender norms negatively correlated with resistance to recruitment. In addition, tribal association and community offer young men a set social identity that confers meaning and honor, leaving them less likely to find identity from participation in violent extremist movements.⁴² The traditions and values of these tribes demonstrate how a cohesive communal identity that prioritizes connection, non-violence, and gender equality can form a source of resistance to extremist narratives.

Libyan Women Forum: Advocating for Women's Political Participation through Peaceful Islamic Narratives

In November 2011, following the mobilization of Libyan civil society during the revolution, a group of women from diverse age groups and segments of society established the Libyan Women Forum (LWF). LWF's stated vision is to, "empower women to play an effective role and participate in the reconstruction phase, influence the decision-making process and to reach executive positions in the social, economic and political sectors."⁴³ In the aftermath of the revolution, LWF carried out awareness programs, workshops and training sessions on the electoral process, reconciliation, constitution drafting, and the national disarmament initiative. Leading up to the 2012 and 2014 elections, they worked with women candidates on campaign skills to build their capacity to run for and take office. They developed a weekly radio program entitled Women and Politics which, due to political insecurity, was suspended in 2014.⁴⁴

LWF also recognized the value in using religious scholarship to counter the prevalent extremist interpretations of Shariah, which threaten women's liberties and undermine efforts to reform Libya's post-war political institutions and promote a more inclusive and equal state. In 2015, in direct response to the increased radical religious discourse, LWF began the development of the Islamic Peace Tool (IPT).⁴⁵ Published in 2016, the IPT is a guidebook that draws on peaceful, pluralistic interpretations of Islamic to support female inclusion in peacebuilding, politics, policy-making, and CVE, as well as build resilience against narrow and exclusionary extremist thinking more broadly.

Islamic Peace Tool: Alternative Narratives to Foster Acceptance for Women's Participation

Initially, LWF's programming was framed around the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution

36.Donovan, O. (2021). Trading Freedoms for Protection: Gender and Localised Protection in Libya. ([access here](#)).

37.Donovan, O. (2021). Gendered impacts of the localised protection of civilians: insights from Libya. ([access here](#)).

38.Ibid.

39.Women's Refugee Commission (2019). "More Than One Million Pains": Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys on the Central Mediterranean Route to Italy. ([access here](#)).

40.USIP (2017). Matriarchal and Tribal Identity, Community Resilience, and Vulnerability in South Libya. ([access here](#)).

41.Ibid.

42.Ibid.

43.Euro-Mediterranean Women's Foundation (2016). Libyan Women Forum profile ([access here](#)).

44.LWF internal documents, accessed February 18, 2022

45.Ibid.



LWF initiated a media campaign that prompted public discussions on the ongoing conflict in Libya and its effects on communities and on the role of women in promoting peace.

(UNSCR) 1325, using the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) framework to advocate for women's political participation. UNSCR 1325 reaffirms women's contributions and role in preventing and resolving conflicts, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction. It stresses the importance of women's full and equal participation in all efforts to maintain and promote peace and security. However, in framing work on women's participation in the context of UNSCR 1325, LWF was confronted with resistance and skepticism among parts of their target audience. For many Libyans, advocating for the presence of women in the political sphere purely through a UN framework was experienced as foreign and regarded as an extension of a Western agenda.⁴⁶

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Consequently, LWF recognized the importance of anchoring their work on WPS and women's political participation in Islam. In efforts to address the reservations around female participation, LWF turned to the Qur'an to illustrate the public roles and achievements of women throughout Islamic history. LWF worked with a well-respected Libyan Islamic scholar to demonstrate that in Islam, women have the right to participate in public life and

engage in peacebuilding work. The scholar participated in workshops and trainings to provide readings of UNSCR 1325 and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) grounded in Islamic values⁴⁷ The idea was to develop peaceful messages based on examples from Islamic texts and traditions that urge tolerance, social cohesion, equality between women and men, peaceful coexistence between communities, and emphasize the individual's responsibility to help ensure peace and harmony.⁴⁸ In the words of a Libyan female spiritual guide (locally referred to as Morsheda), "Terrorism has no religious affiliation. Islam as any other divine religion calls for peace and renounces violence and terrorism." The workshops provided the blueprint for the IPT.

In 2016, as part of the validation process of the IPT, LWF leadership decided to bring together scholars from religious schools in Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco with Libyan women activists in a series of discussions. The discussions centered on the responsibilities of scholars in supporting the participation of women in the public sphere, the use of culture and education to cultivate community dialogue and peaceful coexistence, and the role of women in fostering peace and social cohesion.⁴⁹ The scholars presented on the importance of promoting moderate interpretations of the Qur'an and Islamic law to counter increasingly radical religious discourse across the region and support women's roles in promoting social cohesion and peace.⁵⁰ They offered examples from the recorded life of the Prophet Muhammad and from Islamic history that challenge extremist discourse, gender misconceptions and stereotypes. By engaging in a deliberate validation process around the IPT's narratives, LWF gained the backing of a wider community of Islamic scholars on the IPT, strengthened dialogue between Islamic scholars and Libyan women peacebuilders, and built their capacity to jointly advance

46. LWF presentation of at the Tunis Forum on Gender Equality, May 2019

47. Interview with Shahrazad Magrabi, January 2022

48. LWF internal documents, accessed February 18, 2022

49. Libyan Women Forum (2019). Taking the Lead: Promoting Peace, Pluralism, and Inclusion. LWF final project report to ICAN (internal document).

50. Interview with Shahrazad Magrabi, January 2022

women's participation in peacebuilding.⁵¹ As evidenced by the methodology and process used by LWF, influential scholars can play a key role in advocacy and bringing public awareness to the issue of women's participation.

Building on the recommendations and discussions, the final IPT booklet provides concrete examples from the Qur'an, the Hadith (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) and the Sunnah (the customs and practices of the Prophet Muhammad) which are the sources of Islamic law, to illustrate the harmony between Islamic values, women's and human rights. The handbook provides historical examples of women building peace, resolving conflict, and countering extremism. It deconstructs narratives that enable extremist rhetoric and negates widely spread misconceptions that limit women's participation in politics and the public sphere. Beyond advancing female inclusion, the IPT elevates peaceful and pluralistic interpretations of Islam that encourage critical thinking about new ways of understanding Libyan culture, history, and religion. In doing so, the tool builds resilience against the rigid interpretations of Islamic identity promoted by extremist groups.

"Terrorism has no religious affiliation. Islam as any other divine religion calls for peace and renounces violence and terrorism."
- Libyan female spiritual guide

Deliberate Dissemination

To disseminate the knowledge and learnings from the IPT, LWF carried out awareness-raising sessions targeting primarily activists, teachers, civil servants, housewives and female spiritual guides (Morsheda).⁵² The aim was to encourage local organizations to develop and implement their own peacebuilding activities that would challenge extremist discourse and promote social cohesion in their communities. To reach larger segments of the population, LWF initiated a media campaign that prompted public discussions on the ongoing conflict in Libya and its effects on communities, as well as on the role of women (including challenges they face) in local mediation efforts and in promoting peace. The campaign was rolled out on national television programs, local radio shows, and in newspaper articles featuring interviews with public figures, activists, politicians, journalists, and working professionals on their perspectives and reflections on the peacebuilding efforts. Bringing the discussion into



"Peace Circles" serve as a mechanism for coordinating peacebuilders to jointly advocate for women's participation in politics and peacebuilding.

the public discourse was a deliberate effort by LWF's Executive Director Shahrazad Magrabi to encourage dialogue and debate, popularize peacebuilding, and inspire others to launch similar initiatives. These efforts bore fruit as the tool became a sought-after instrument, referred to by the Ministry of Culture and mentioned in Parliament.

Building on these initial dissemination strategies, LWF recognized that there was a need for an instrument to localize the IPT and mobilize peacebuilders to promote social cohesion and societal peace.⁵³ They conceived of "Peace Circles" as a mechanism for coordinating peacebuilders to disseminate the message of the IPT and jointly advocate for women's participation in politics and peacebuilding. By creating and sustaining an alliance of peacebuilders throughout Libya, LWF has been able to capitalize on their work with Islamic scholars and the media campaign, ensuring that the discourse around why women have the right to participate and engage in political life continues and is amplified. The Peace Circles have become an important mechanism for promoting the use of positive, peaceful and gender equal narratives to justify political participation, share strategies on countering extremist rhetoric, and consolidate partnerships among local peacebuilders. They also provide much-needed spaces for Libyan women to unite, coordinate efforts, and amplify their voices. As noted by a regional Peace Circle coordinator: "I see the Peace Circles network as the start of a movement for [Libyan] women to unite and coordinate their efforts and amplify their voices for the mutual benefit of our nation. Women can contest the stereotype for being the weaker link. I believe all women, as they are strong, can be the champions for peace in Libya."

51. Ibid.

52. Libyan Women Forum (2019). Taking the Lead: Promoting Peace, Pluralism, and Inclusion LWF final project report to ICAN (internal document).

53. Ibid.