NEGOTIATING A BETTER PEACE:
WOMEN & CIVIL SOCIETY AT THE TABLE

Warrenton, VA
June 22-25, 2014

#betterpeace
Background and Context

Throughout history, negotiations about war and peace have been highly exclusive processes dominated by male political and military leaders. But traditional approaches are inadequate for tackling the complexity of contemporary conflicts. Current peacemaking and mediation approaches are not resulting in sustainable peace. Between 2000 and 2011, one in five peace agreements failed within five years. When agreements or processes breakdown, violence often escalates, making the next round of peacemaking even more difficult. The World Bank estimates that over 90% of conflicts in the past decade took place in countries that had experienced war in the past thirty years.

In 2000, the UN Security Council recognized in Resolution 1325 that a more durable peace required the involvement of all sectors of society. In particular, it demanded that greater attention be given to the inclusion of women in peace processes. Inclusivity was also recognized as a key principle for effective mediation by the UN Secretary General's 2012 Guidance for Effective Mediation – a report that reflects the experiences of mediators over more than six decades. Unfortunately, these important insights about inclusivity have not been translated into practice. All too often, peace negotiations are conducted between the immediate warring parties and exclude large segments of society. Negotiations are hence defined by those who hold the guns instead of also including those who emphasize cooperative approaches to establishing a better peace.

Experiences in conflict areas - reflected in quantitative and qualitative studies - demonstrate that greater inclusion of unarmed non-state actors (civil society) in peace processes improves the chances of success. Early engagement and direct representation and/or access to the negotiating table can make positive differences. Internationally, there is growing interest and support for more inclusive peace and mediation processes. But the practicalities of ‘how’ to do this remain a challenge.

The Symposium

On June 22-25, 2014, the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN), UN Women (UNW), US Institute of Peace (USIP), Crisis Management Initiative (CMI), the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP), and Cordaid, with assistance from the Institute for Inclusive Security, Women in International Security (WIIS), and Athena Consortium, will host a gathering for representatives from civil society, governments, international organizations (UN and other multilateral organizations) and academia to move beyond the question of ‘why’ inclusivity matters, to ‘how’ it is being practiced, with attention to effective strategies and ongoing challenges in recent and ongoing cases. The diverse list of attendees will allow for information and experience sharing amongst peace process actors who do not often get a chance to connect.

The symposium will reflect on the existing precedence of inclusive peace processes as well as practical strategies used to promote gendered and inclusive mediation and peace negotiations and overcome common obstacles. The meeting will address three key topics:

1. Experiences of women civil society leaders who have participated in peace processes; the range of processes and mechanisms being used to ensure women’s active involvement and access of civil society voices to negotiations; as well as approaches to overcoming the most persistent obstacles.
2. Experiences and importance of ensuring inclusivity and gender sensitivity in the negotiation agenda and the range of issues negotiated during peace talks.

3. The development of standards of practice and tools to enable governments, multilateral organizations and other international actors to improve peace processes through practical means of enabling the inclusion of civil society, particularly women’s rights focused and women-led organizations.

What is the value added of civil society?

A 2012 statistical analysis of peace agreements reached between 1989 and 2004 shows that the involvement of civil society reduced the risk of failure by 64%.\(^1\) Research and experience has also shown that broader representation – including the involvement of women – can lead parties to consider important issues not previously on the table; move forward a stalled process\(^2\); advocate humanitarian rather than military incentives for a political settlement; increase public buy-in of a negotiated settlement; contribute on-the-ground perspectives on substantive agenda topics such as security and reparations; emphasize humanitarian rather than military incentives for a political settlement; and strengthen the accountability of belligerent parties to their own societies and to each other.

Women can bring legitimacy through the values they uphold, the work they do, and their social affiliations, roles and identity groups. Yet civil society and women remain largely excluded from formal mediation and negotiation efforts. Some posit that civil society would complicate and perhaps undermine an already complex process, but data suggests that the involvement of civil society in peace processes has no negative impact on the outcomes\(^3\), even though processes are increasingly complex, multi-polar and multi-layered.

In fact, the exclusion of civil society presents a range of problems: the resulting agreements may not address (or worse, sell out) the needs of half the population – women – as well as key sectors of society (e.g. victims and survivors of violence and abuse, and minorities); breed further public mistrust in the parties and the process; limit civil society and public ownership of the negotiated settlement; and reduce the chances of successfully transforming the understand and practices of warring parties, ultimately constraining broad support for the implementation of any agreed outcomes. When peace processes are exclusive, the chances of belligerent parties reneging on agreements are high.

Which ‘civil society’?

In theory, admittance to the negotiating table is determined by the legitimacy and credibility of the parties. In reality, however, groups or parties which have the power to perpetrate violence and internationally anointed ‘opposition leaders’ often sit at the table regardless of whether they have any legitimacy or credibility in their own societies. In effect, the capacity for violence or acting as spoilers is often the primary determinant for inclusion in the process.

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\(^3\) Nilsson.
In the past, state-based institutions were severely constrained in their ability to engage with non-state and ‘sub-state’ armed actors - a clear violation of the principles of non-interference and state sovereignty. But the changed nature of warfare since the end of the Cold War forced international systems to evolve. Today, external governments and multilateral organizations readily engage non-state armed groups, providing them with technical and financial resources to participate in peace talks, and their security is often guaranteed. But the commitments to engaging non-state unarmed actors have remained unfulfilled. When unarmed civil society actors – especially women - seek to participate in the process, international actors and governments will often challenge their legitimacy and identity and depict such actors as either ‘too elite or politicized’ or ‘too grassroots and unqualified’.

From “Who are they” to “What do they do and what values do they uphold?”

It is not realistic to demand that all civil society actors should be included in transition and peace processes. But the inability to identify and include all groups should not become an excuse to exclude them. In 2010, the MIT/ICAN report recommended identification of specific criteria for civil society entities to participate in peace processes, based on how their activities and perspectives contributed to peacemaking.

In 2011, the World Bank’s World Development Report on Conflict argued that, to be sustainable, the process, substance, and participants of peace processes must be representative and ‘inclusive enough’ of the stakeholders that are affected by the decisions made. There is evolving work on these concepts, including a 2013 ICAN/Institute for Inclusive Security/Nonviolent Peaceforce report based on consultations with international experts and a survey of Syrian activists that offers a range of criteria that could be applied to identify Civil Society Organizations for inclusion in peace processes. (see box “Sample Criteria for Civil Society Inclusion in Peacemaking Processes”). The symposium will reflect on these concepts and determine if/how they could be used to guide practice in current and future processes.

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<th>Sample Criteria for Civil Society Inclusion in Peacemaking Processes</th>
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<td>1. Committed to core human rights, peace, non-violence values</td>
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<td>2. Gender sensitive and inclusive</td>
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<td>3. Commitment and connection to a base or constituency on the ‘ground’</td>
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<td>4. Feedback loops that connect their constituency to their actions, and vice versa</td>
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<td>5. Diverse/representative of minority groups, women, youth, and geographic representation</td>
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<td>6. Politically independent</td>
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<td>7. Mobilization capacity &amp; capacity to influence public opinion</td>
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<td>8. Practical technical expertise, experience and ground knowledge (e.g. in humanitarian issues, reconciliation, politics, human rights, transitional justice, etc.)</td>
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The criteria are useful on two counts. First, they can help determine what might be inclusive enough – in other words, still limited but wider than just the elite and armed groups. Second, they can help bring in groups and resources that complement each other, thereby adding value and strengthening the process. Women peace and security advocates have also persisted in moving the discourse by offering practical solutions on ‘how’ processes could be made more gendered and inclusive.

**From Policy to Practice**

In 1995 at the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing, the women of Bosnia, Northern Ireland, South Africa, Israel, Palestine and others articulated why and how women should engage in peacemaking. In 2000, women peace activists and civil society leaders mobilized to demand the Security Council’s attention and recognition of their experiences. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) was adopted, paving the way for wider participation of women and civil society actors in peace processes. There is growing recognition and support for women’s inclusion, not least because of the persistence of the women, peace and security global community. The success of this relatively young community is evident in the significant growth of norms policies, directives and action plans that have emerged, including the six Security Council resolutions that have followed UNSCR 1325: 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013) and 2122 (2013) and related regional resolutions and 47 National Action Plans.

However, the lack of effective sharing of experience and documentation of approaches as well as collaboration with women’s peace organizations, coupled with an absence of political will and limited accountability of senior figures, has hindered the progress of governments and multilateral institutions (see box “Reasons Given for the Exclusion of Women and Civil Society”).

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<td>When pressed into action, mediators, governments and other institutions respond by:</td>
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<td>• Claiming that multiple actors complicates an already delicate situation;</td>
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<td>• Blaming the belligerent parties for excluding other voices;</td>
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<td>• Leaving the selection of civil society to the belligerent parties such as armed groups, governments or often self-appointed opposition leaders;</td>
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<td>• Stating that the priority topics of negotiations – typically security issues related to ceasefires (and DDR and SSR later on) – are technical and ‘not relevant’ to civil society;</td>
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<td>• Demanding that civil society ‘organizes itself’ around a single shared agenda, without providing them with timely information or guidance on the nature of the processes at hand;</td>
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<td>• Challenging the legitimacy of non-state unarmed groups, and setting a higher bar of ‘legitimacy’ for them than for the armed groups;</td>
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<td>• Challenging the legitimacy of women’s coalitions by questioning their ‘representativity’.</td>
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<td>• Agreeing to widen the process only after the agreements are signed so that civil society can support ‘implementation.’</td>
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In addition, misunderstanding and resistance to the rationale for women’s inclusion in formal peace processes still prevails (see box “What the Women Say: Participation and SCR 1325”).

**What the Women Say: Participation and SCR 1325**
Selection of Key Findings

1. **Many governments, UN personnel, and CSOs are still unaware of, or misunderstand, UNSCR 1325.** Lack of awareness is crippling effective implementation.

2. **Governments and international mediators are not doing their job.** Outreach, consultation with, and inclusion of women’s voices is not part of standard operating procedures of governments or mediators involved in peace processes. When and where it does happen, it is either personality-driven, due to women’s own lobbying, or rests on the occasional presence of gender advisors.

3. **Serendipity, not systematization, still drives interventions that support women’s participation in peace processes.** Neither the UN nor Member States have developed or applied a systematic approach or set of guidance tools to ensure more inclusive peace making.

4. **Donors are not practicing what they preach.** There is a profound disconnect between donors’ policies on UNSCR 1325 and actions, aid programs, and diplomatic interventions in conflict-affected settings.

5. **Entry to talks is still based on the “Who are you? Do you have any Army?” criterion.** Women leaders pressing for a ceasefire in the Philippines were asked these questions to demonstrate their legitimacy; violence remains a key criterion for participation in peace talks. It seems women only qualify to participate if they are simultaneously prominent leaders with experience in high-level negotiations and grassroots activists with a large constituency. Even then, there are no guarantees. The qualification for armed actors is their capacity to wreak violence.

6. **Peace talks are not seeking a comprehensive peace.** Rather, they tend to focus on ceasefires, political arrangements, and conflict management that suits political elites on all sides.

7. **Governments and international actors (including bilateral donors) pay lip service to women’s concerns but are not supporting them in mainstream interventions.** Some basic concerns include: 1) The rise of militarism and inattention to basic human security; 2) Inattention at a national level to priorities and perspectives on community and national security policies; 3) Sexual and gender-based violence – often perpetrated by security and police personnel – and ineffectiveness of international prevention efforts at local levels; 4) A need for grassroots mobilization to address security issues and tackle sexual violence in early conflict prevention.

8. **Capacity building for women is not directly linked to peace and security issues.** Even when there is training for women, often there is insufficient attention paid to issues that are specific to conflict/peace processes, ranging from root causes of conflict, to negotiation strategies, to specific agenda items such as security issues (ceasefires, DDR, SSR etc) and governance issues such as power sharing or transitional structures. In effect, the trainings do not prepare women adequately to tackle or challenge many of the key issues at hand.

Despite reservations about civil society, states and multilateral institutions have expanded outreach to partner with religious leaders and non-governmental mediation organizations. They also consider the private sector as an important actor. But on the question of women - despite the norms, policy directives, action plans and vociferous rhetoric - matching words with practice remains ad hoc at best.

To date, there is no peace process that has comprehensively reflected international commitments for women’s representation and inclusion of civil society and gendered perspectives. There are pockets of progress and positive practical experience, but there is also weak follow-through. There is a great need for policymakers, mediators and civil society practitioners to engage collectively, clarify misunderstandings, and develop concrete steps and a shared basic standard of practice to improve peacemaking efforts.

**Negotiating a Better Peace: Agenda and Goals**

The symposium in June, 2014 will primarily focus on current cases, notably Syria, South Sudan, Colombia, Afghanistan and Burma, in addition to drawing on the Philippines, Yemen, and past processes where women have succeeded in achieving some level of representation and voice at the peace table. Participants will assess lessons, address common obstacles, and consider effective strategies to widen peacemaking processes and enable the effective participation of civil society.

The overarching goals are to:

- Inform and strengthen ongoing efforts by actors in the focus countries;
- Help develop the first practical due diligence checklist and action points to be used by governments seeking to enable inclusion of women and civil society in peace making;
- Inform the 2015 High Level Review and Global Report on the implementation of UNSCR 1325;
- Put the words and spirit of the UNSCR 1325 agenda, General Assembly’s resolution on the Peaceful Mediation of Disputes (2011) and the UN Guidance on Effective Mediation (2012) into practice.

Possible products include a symposium outcome paper with next steps for communication and implementation of participants' recommendations; actionable inclusivity techniques for the symposium participants, including activists, INGOs and governments, in the specific contexts of the symposium’s focus countries; as well as a mediator’s due diligence guidance for inclusion of women and civil society in peace processes, including effective implementation of UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions.

Participants will discuss three interrelated areas for practical application, with sub-topics listed below to be addressed by working groups.

**Day 1: Identifying ongoing good practices and overcoming the common and critical obstacles to civil society/women inclusion in formal peace processes.** Working groups will address:

- Resistance by states and opposition groups to civil society and women’s inclusion;
- Exclusion of women/civil society from early talks that are defined as ‘technical and security oriented’;
- Marginalization and sidelining of informal Track II and community-based peace making;

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Tensions between women political delegates and the demands of women based civil society groups.

**Day 2: Integrating gendered and inclusivity perspectives into the substance of peace agreements.**

Working groups will address:
- Governance issues, notably power sharing and transitional institutions;
- Security issues, particularly ceasefire accords and implementation mechanisms;
- Transitional justice issues, including reparations;
- Economic issues, including resource sharing and property rights;
- Integration of specific social cohesion and peacebuilding measures to promote a culture of peace and unity in divided societies.

**Day 3: Understanding and improving international practices.**

Working groups will address:
- Reflections from senior international diplomats/envoys and their experiences in mediation;
- Civil society perspectives on international actors’ perceptions and aspirations;
- Setting standards of practice to support women’s inclusion through specific action points;
- Developing a due diligence checklist to assess and encourage inclusivity and gender sensitivity.

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**The Chatham House Rule**

We hope to provide a space for the frank exchange of ideas, challenges and solutions. The meeting will be conducted in accordance with Chatham House Rules. In other words, the ideas and statements can be repeated and shared widely but not attributed, unless with explicit permission.

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**Selection of Relevant Research and Resources**

- John Tirman and Sanam Naraghi-Anderlini, “Participation and SCR 1325”, MIT/ICAN 2010
- Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, “From clause to effect: including women’s rights and gender in peace agreements” by Cate Buchanan et al., Dec 2012.