ICAN's Statement on our Gender- and Conflict-Sensitive Response to COVID-19:

We Stand With Women Peacebuilders

Every day we hear news of the latest statistics and the most recent spread of this new virus. Amidst all that we still don’t know and cannot fathom, COVID-19 is showing us how we are all the same as human beings. Regardless of where we live, this pandemic is knocking on our doors.

As we watch our own leaders react, we at ICAN are reminded and humbled by the strength and dignity of our partners in the Women’s Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL). For years they have faced the threat of war and militarism, of displacement and life-threatening diseases, and at each turn, they have stepped up to the plate to be the first responders, the caretakers, and the peacemakers in their communities. Regardless of the threats and difficulties, they have shown grace and courage, humor, compassion, intellect, and immense practicality in dealing with the challenges.

Our partners teach us that crises bring out the best and the worst in humanity. Women peacebuilders are among the very best. It is our privilege to have them in our lives and to support them now.

This pandemic is also, yet again, revealing the critical role of community-based organizations in crisis response. With governments either responding too slowly or being overwhelmed by the demand, we see the creativity and care of ordinary people rising everywhere. Among our WASL partners across forty countries affected by war and violent extremisms, many have already pivoted to face the COVID-19 challenge. Their agility and creativity in producing masks and sanitizers, using both the most modern technology (such as social media) and age-old systems (like rooftop exchanges) to share the latest guidance, and the trust that they have built over the years thanks to their peacebuilding work, enables them to reach deep into their societies. They are drawing our attention to the most vulnerable and forsaken in our midst, from the differently-abled in Kenya and the internally displaced in Somalia and Syria to the political prisoners in Yemen and the women at risk of femicide in Mexico. Day in, day out, they show that the first step for prevention, mitigation, and recovery is to care.

Their work as peacebuilders remains essential and urgent. This crisis will pass, but it will leave its scars. The expertise that women peacebuilders have in allaying fears, building community, fostering social cohesion and gender sensitivity, dealing with the racism and hatred that is already spiking, and highlighting the risk of police brutality is and will continue to be profoundly important.

We need to ensure that the world is gender- and conflict-sensitive in dealing with COVID-19 and its aftermath. With our partners, we can do it.

Right now, we may be caught in a state of stagnation and uncertainty, but here is our promise to our partners in the WASL network and globally amongst our donors and policy-making community:
As we take care of our families, friends, and colleagues, we are also here for you. In March 2020, prior to the COVID-19 lockdowns, we launched the global 5-year She Builds Peace campaign to “Stand with Women Peacebuilders”. Thus far, our partners have launched the campaign in 15 countries. Now we are adapting activities to ensure relevance to the current crisis, while remaining sensitive to women peacebuilders and maintaining our focus on inclusive and gender-responsive peacebuilding and P/CVE.

1. Gendered Analysis, COVID-19 and Peace Policy Guidance
   • **Thought Leadership:** On March 25th ICAN’s Founder/CEO, Sanam Anderlini, posted “Women, Peace and Security in the Time of Corona,” articulating the necessity and urgency of the WPS agenda for the prevention, mitigation, and recovery from this pandemic. We will continue to publish new perspectives.

   • **Policy and Programming Guidance:** We are providing informal advice and guidance to our policy community partners in relation to responding to the pandemic. We continue our technical mediation support and global advocacy on gendered prevention of violent extremism (PVE) and women’s participation in peace processes such as Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, Libya, and elsewhere. This includes supporting our partners in issuing statements, such as Food4Humanity’s call for a ceasefire in Yemen, which catalyzed other actors.

   • **Peacebuilding and Planning for Recovery:** In coordination with the LSE Centre for Women, Peace, and Security, we are planning virtual Global Solutions Exchange (GSX) multi-stakeholder roundtables to provide policymakers with practical solutions and guidance to inform development and peacebuilding aid policies in 2021 and beyond.

   • **Weekly Global Situation Reports and Partner Highlights:** On a weekly basis, we are producing a summary of the evolving issues that our WASL partners are experiencing. These reports provide a real-time ground-up perspective from contexts that are not often covered by the media. In addition, we highlight the activities of different partners daily.

   • **Collective Advocacy:** ICAN is also supporting the Global Ceasefire call, engaging partners and peer organizations to ensure sustained support for peacebuilding policies, funds and programming.

2. Grantmaking and Technical Support to Sustain Women’s Peace Organizations:
   Following discussions with our donors, ICAN is pleased to have the opportunity to provide flexible funding through our existing Innovative Peace Fund (IPF) grantmaking program. We have always approached grantmaking as “investing in trust”, as we value our partners’ understanding of local contexts and needs. With the COVID-19 crisis we are offering the following options:

   • **Continuing support to our existing IPF partners, and offering them flexible funding for this period. If they have the humanitarian capacity and know-how, they can pivot their immediate activities to prepare and respond to COVID-19 in a gender- and conflict-sensitive manner. We consult our partners to ensure that they are safe and have the capacities and materials to conduct their**
community care work without risking their own lives or others. Other partners can pause activities or adapt them online. We will support access to the Internet, software, equipment, and technology for secure connections. We will also support organizational strengthening for financing, monitoring & evaluation (M&E), capacity building and advocacy as needed.

- We are also responding to partners’ enquiries and sharing information about other funding opportunities that are being announced.

- We drafted the ICAN COVID-19 Guidance relevant to those conducting activities (both humanitarian and peace and security) in conflict or fragile settings. This is being shared with all ICAN partner organizations to ensure they are taking all necessary precautionary steps to implement Do No Harm principles and ensure the safety of both their staff and beneficiaries.

3. Partner Solidarity and Support

Remaining in touch and sharing news and information is essential during these times. In the absence of in-person gatherings, ICAN has maintained its close daily contacts with partners through email and phone applications. In addition, we have initiated the following activities:

- We are hosting a weekly WASL virtual community check-in. Our partners join to hear and share news of their communities as well as their activities.

- We regularly compile the latest guidance available regarding safety and wellbeing. This ranges from information about sanitization and working in community settings to resources on psychosocial and mental health care, gender-based violence, and social stigma.

- We are assessing how to move planned capacity development activities online.

- We are supporting WASL statements and collective advocacy to ensure that the multi-faceted gender dimensions of this pandemic are addressed and that women peacebuilding organizations are fully included in the national and international response and recovery efforts.

- The WASL Humanitarian Working Group: We have established a working group of our partners to share resources, lessons, and good practices in their current humanitarian work. We enable peer-to-peer sharing of materials, translated texts, and other resources.

We wish you and your families good health and safety in these difficult days. Together we will get through this and make a difference.

Sincerely,
Sanam Anderlini, Founder/CEO
Olga Andrew, France Bognon, Helena Gronberg, Melinda Holmes, Stacey Schamber, Yodit Willis, Rana Allam, Juliana Jackson, Maya Kavaler, Malalai Habibi