

## The Importance of Global Connectivity in Peacebuilding

*By Morgan Mitchell*

The concept of interconnectedness is one that ICAN has directly addressed through the formal establishment of WASL, meaning “to connect” in Arabic, Farsi and Urdu, which convenes women peacebuilders who are locally rooted and globally connected. WASL members shared their stories of what this alliance means to them as a family and community of support. Maryam Monsef, the Canadian Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, joined the 12<sup>th</sup> weekly call with the Women’s Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL).

A Libyan peacebuilder reflected on her experience of fleeing Libya and the accompanying feelings of disillusionment and isolation. She identified her connection with ICAN as being a turning point for her. She rebuilt her community within WASL and has relied on the connections she has made through the network as she has continued to work towards peace for Libya. A recent member from Cameroon commented, “ICAN is always there to show us the support that we need. Every time we meet, I feel relieved. When we share our stories, we are able to identify where we have come from and where we are all going, together.” An Algerian peacebuilder remarked, “ICAN and WASL offer moral and political support to women. They energize us and empower us to raise our voice.” She highlighted how ICAN and WASL aid women as they struggle with the turbulent and unpredictable reality of the international environment, whether providing women with encouragement and hope to utilize their collective voices internationally, or with support and guidance as they seek to grow the reach of peacebuilding organizations within their communities.

With the support of ICAN/WASL, women peacebuilders have served on the frontlines to respond to the needs of their communities. In Palestine, they have provided economic support to women and a peacebuilder ran for public office. Another peacebuilder in the Maldives, who identified with Minister Monsef’s experience of being an “oval in a circle” while advocating for political change, worked as a politician to address rising concerns about human trafficking and violent extremism. In addition, women peacebuilders continue to demand their participation in international peace processes. A local peacebuilding organization in Yemen advocates for the release and security of abductees and political detainees. Since 2016 the association has aided in the release and reintegration of 940 detainees (compared with the UN’s one release) and has benefited from the experiences of other WASL members. An Afghan peacebuilder helped secure the representation of 4 women out of 21 in the negotiation team but stated that “our voices are still not heard.”

The support and recognition from large countries like Canada gives these grassroots organizations, and the communities within which they work, hope. “If big countries like Canada start talking about these issues more, we might be able to better address them at the international level,” said a peacebuilder



from the Maldives. Women peacebuilders have increasingly relied on the WASL community to propel their messages to international key players

The Canadian government also recognizes the importance of global connectedness and how this is particularly crucial for locally rooted peacebuilding organizations. Minister Monsef committed to continuing to advocate for funding for international women-led grassroots organizations. Additionally, she indicated that she would work alongside Senator Jaffer to strategize next steps to bringing women closer to the peace table.

During these times of isolation “you may feel alone, but you are not” said ICAN’s founder and CEO, Sanam Anderlini. As an organization, all we need to do is enable the women we work with to be present in the decision-making rooms. “We just need to open the door and let them in and listen to them. Unfortunately, this is one of the hardest things to achieve. We are constantly in a space where we feel like the UN is competing with us, not enabling. We want the UN to use its platform to enable us based on our comparative advantage” stated Anderlini. ICAN continues to keep its partners globally connected while advocating for their meaningful inclusion. After all, ICAN is about what I can do, collectively.