

# RECLAIMING POWER, RESTORING PEACE

## KEY FINDINGS FROM ICAN'S 2022 WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY FORUM

As 2022 draws to a close, around the world, women peacebuilders find themselves at the center of a complex web of intersecting and escalating crises. Russia's war on Ukraine is devastating the country with profound ripple effects that have led to rising food prices, spikes in energy costs, tightening financial conditions, and growing political insecurity worldwide.

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to ebb and flow with complex social, economic, and security implications. The implications of climate change and environmental degradation were more evident and extreme, marked by the floods in Pakistan, the famine in Somalia and the drought in Iraq has been deficient.

The weaponization of ethno-national and religious identities has become prevalent in the strategies of states like Russia in their war on Ukraine, and in the operations of transnational extremist groups elsewhere. Yet the global counter terrorism agenda has contributed to the insecurity giving rise to authoritarianism at the cost of shrinking civic space.

The inconsistencies in global responses to these crises have been stark. The world is rightly inspired by the courageous women and girls of Iran who, for the first time in history, are leading a revolution with a feminist clarion call of "Woman, Life, Freedom" that is uniting men and women as protesters across ethnic, class and geographic other socio-economic division. Yet, little global attention is paid to Afghan women and girls who have resisted the Taliban's regressive and violent policies since their victory in August 2021.

While the war in Ukraine has galvanized the attention of the world's richest nations, the wars and crises in countries such as Yemen, Syria, Myanmar, Palestine, and Sudan and elsewhere have fallen out of the global spotlight, even though they continue to fuel

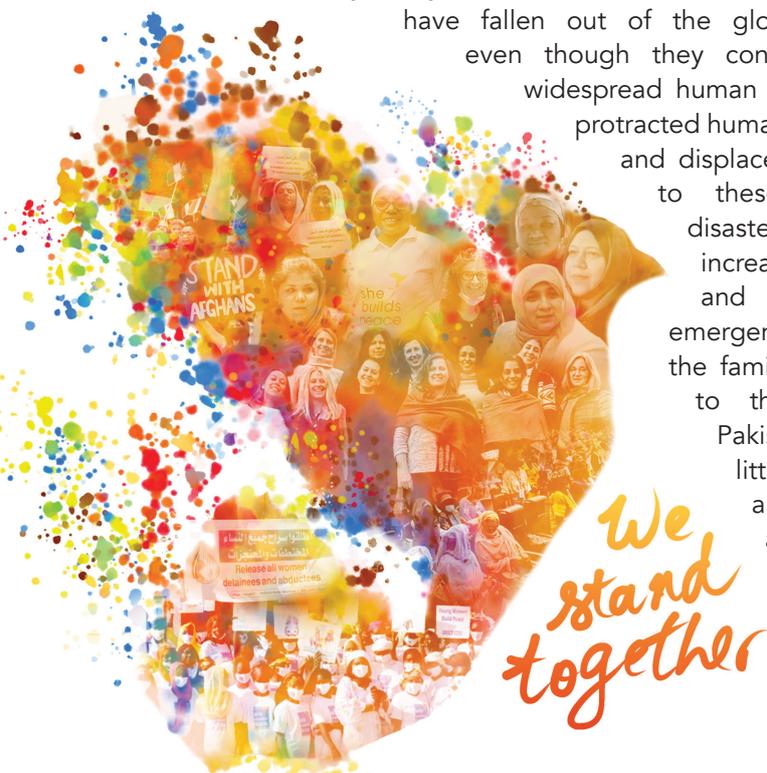
widespread human rights abuses, protracted humanitarian crises, and displacement. Added to these man-made disasters are the increasing climate and environmental emergencies. From the famine in Somalia to the floods in Pakistan, there is little attention and even less aid available for the people impacted.

This briefing paper collates the perspectives and approaches of 63 women peacebuilders from 39 countries, members of the Women's Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL), who gathered in spring of 2022 during ICAN's 9th Women, Peace, and Security Forum "Reclaiming Power, Restoring Peace" (see Box I).

Drawing on their analysis and experiences, and reflecting on the decade that followed the first ICAN forum in 2012, the paper seeks to inform international policy debates and offer recommendations for programming.

### WOMEN PEACEBUILDERS CHART THE PATH AHEAD

1. Emergency First Responders in Climate Crises and Conflict
2. The Triple Nexus in Practice: Food, Water, Energy, Health, Education, Livelihoods, and Peace
3. Self-Reliance through Self-Resourcing and Solidarity
4. Advocacy through Public Activism
5. Citizen Peacebuilding: Raising Awareness, Broadening Participation
6. Peace Education for a Pluralistic World
7. Diaspora as Peacebuilders



The net result is sobering. Peace can no longer be taken for granted anywhere, and international systems of aid are woefully inadequate. Economic inequalities within and between states are also heightened and exacerbating fundamental trust and social cohesion. The world has become less peaceful, with global peacefulness declining for 11 of the past 14 years.<sup>1</sup> Today only 3% of the world's population live in countries with "open" conditions for civil society action.<sup>2</sup>

While resources are desperately needed to address the triple nexus of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding needs, the opposite is occurring. Governments are reducing overseas development aid budgets and increasing their defense and military

### THE FORUM: AT A GLANCE

► Box 1

**28 Sessions**

**4 Themes:**



**May 31 to June 3**

**92 Participants**



Including **63** members of the Women's Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL)



**Addu Women's Association (AWA)**  
Strong, economically independent, confident and empowered Addu women.

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Representing **39 Countries** Across **4 Continents**



expenditure. The UK, for instance, reduced its national target for aid spending from 0.7% to 0.5% of GDP, but pledged to increase its target for defense spending from 2% to 3%.<sup>3 4</sup> The US and NATO's withdrawal from Afghanistan was meant to end the "forever war", yet in 2022 global military expenditure topped \$2 trillion.<sup>5</sup> As we look forward, the likelihood of a new cold war and proxy conflicts between military superpowers is rising.

As the demands rise, despite the pressures, women - particularly peacebuilders and rights activists living in crisis zones - are not only the first responders to crises but are also assuming the on-going responsibility to protect their communities. They are also taking collective action. Countless vibrant global and localized social movements ranging from climate action to racial justice, women's and LGBTQI+ rights have mobilized to resist the rise of authoritarianism and extremisms, risked their lives to fight against private sector encroachments of their lands, and harnessed the power of technology to connect and spread their message. They have implemented solutions that arise from and are embedded in their communities. Their commitment to fostering peace, deepening resilience, and fighting for equality and respect for pluralism despite the overwhelming nature of the challenges, is humbling and inspiring. As state-based multilateralism is struggling and top-down solutions are failing, the locally rooted, globally connected ecosystem of civil-society based peacebuilding is ever-more necessary and relevant.

**“** All of you here are at the frontlines of seeing the problems of conflict, extremism, hate speech, our societies fragmenting, climate change, and so forth. There are those who are running away and then there are those who are looking at it and saying: what do we do? And you're here.

- Sanam Naraghi Anderlini, MBE, Founder and CEO, ICAN, ICAN Forum Opening Ceremony

**“** Please let me take this opportunity to thank ICAN, WASL and all changemakers everywhere for setting an example in propagating our regions for peace. There is no doubt that women play a central role in this arena. When peace breaks down, we find that women are disproportionately impacted. Yet even today, women are often left out of traditional power structures and negotiation processes, their voices unheard.

- Honorable Usthaazaa Mariya Didi, Maldives Minister of Defence, ICAN Forum Opening Ceremony

1. Institute for Economics and Peace. (2022). Global Peace Index 2022: Measuring peace in a complex world. ([access here](#)).  
 2. Freedom House. (2021). New Report: The global decline in democracy has accelerated. ([access here](#)).  
 3. Devex. (2020). Tracking the UK's Controversial Aid Cuts. ([access here](#)).  
 4. DefenseNews. (2022). Despite economic woes, UK leaders tout massive defense-spending hike. ([access here](#)).  
 5. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). (2022). World military expenditure passes \$2 trillion for first time. ([access here](#)).

## WHAT THE WOMEN SAY: THEN AND NOW

### SUMMARY OF 10 KEY THEMES FROM 2012 FORUM

- ▶ 1. Women are active and vocal in their stance for plural, rights-based, democratic, and just societies, but they need assistance to amplify their message and vision.
- ▶ 2. Extremism is systematic, spreading and supported by regional actors. The suppression of women is integral to this ideology.
- ▶ 3. The indigenous history of women's roles and status in society is being erased.
- ▶ 4. There is backsliding on equality and human rights laws. The risk of discrimination against women and minorities in new constitutions is very high.
- ▶ 5. Solidarity among civil society is a positive development and needs support.
- ▶ 6. Censorship is rising and freedom of expression is restricted. Negative messaging on women is pervasive, and should be countered.
- ▶ 7. There is little political will for transitional justice, so gender sensitive, grassroots initiatives are needed to address past injustices and promote reconciliation.
- ▶ 8. Security sector reform initiatives must integrate gender, human rights issues and take on a strong human security perspective.
- ▶ 9. Economic empowerment of women is urgent and fundamental but it must be progressive and come with a strong legal protection framework.
- ▶ 10. The provisions of UNSCR 1325 (1820/1888/1889) are urgent and relevant to the region.

When the first ICAN Forum convened in 2012, it was a time of great hope following the 2011 wave of Arab revolutions. Democracy movements led by women and youth were gathering momentum in many countries in the Middle East and North Africa. Yet, women peacebuilders and rights activists were already warning against the rise of political forces steeped in Islamist ideology and the backsliding on equality and human rights, including increased censorship and reduced freedom of expression. The signs of the growing influence of extremist militant movements were already evident in Libya, for instance, where they desecrated shrines and threatened women's rights and democracy activists.

To mitigate further threats, the women peacebuilders at the 2012 forum boldly called on government institutions to align their policies with peacebuilding and human rights objectives, particularly in the areas of economic rights, legal protection, security sector reform and transitional justice. A decade later, their calls have gone largely unheeded. Security institutions remain geared towards advancing state interests and

regularly deploy security, military, and intelligence forces to target those who question the status quo. The space for dissent and civic activism has shrunk dramatically. At the 2022 ICAN forum women peacebuilders articulated they felt unsafe in public and faced higher-than-ever security risks, retaliation, and violence for their public peace work, often at the hands of state security forces. With "security" still defined as national security, to be preserved through militarization, states have failed to prioritize human welfare. As a result, weapons have proliferated in societies, but when the COVID-19 pandemic struck, the shortage of basic protective masks was stark and deadly.

**We have issues of safety and access in the communities where we work. There are kidnappings and women have been brutalized by non-state armed groups and by armed forces.**

- Esther Omam, Executive Director, Reach Out, Cameroon

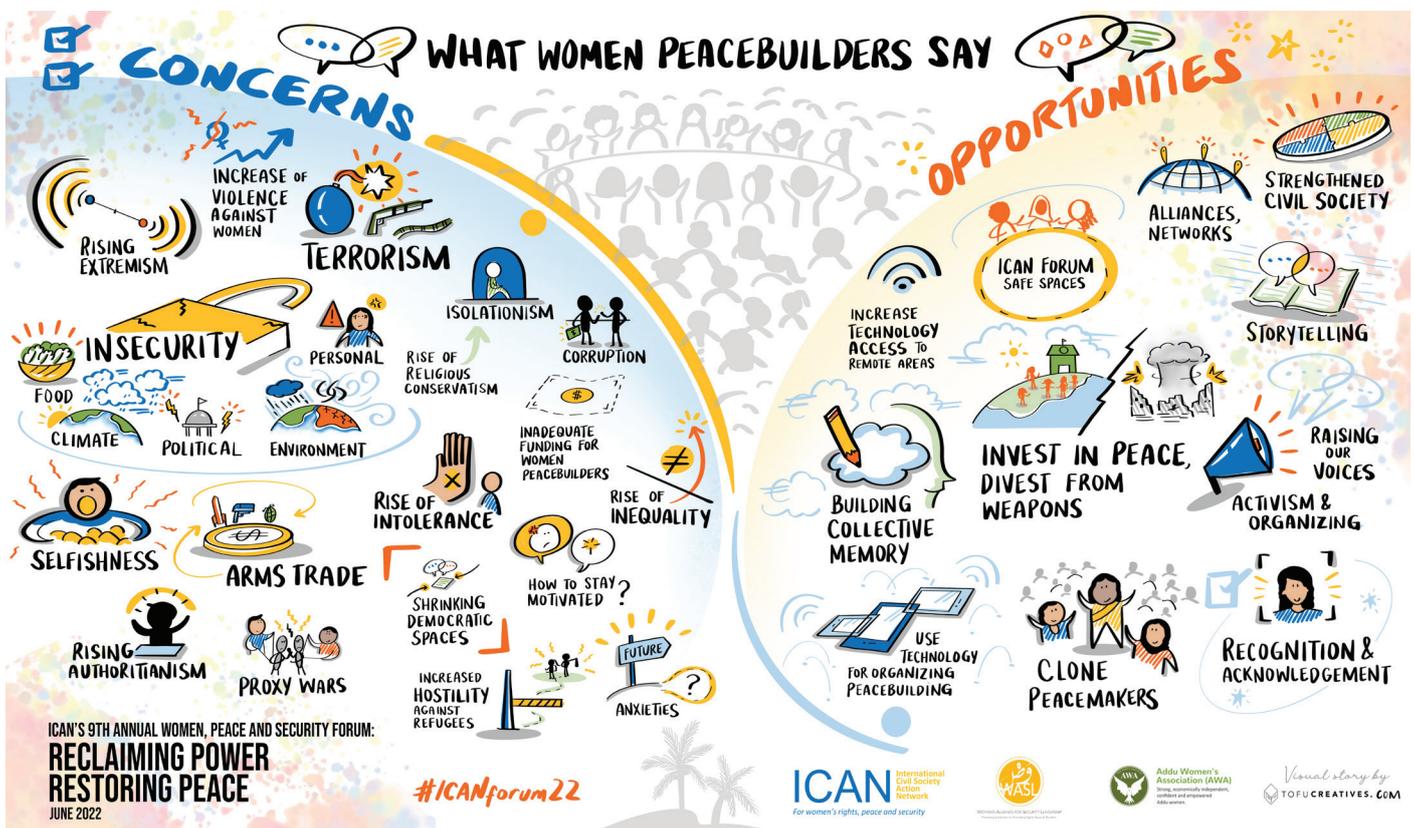
Calls for the implementation of progressive economic policies that would sustainably and equitably ensure that the economic and social rights of citizens are protected failed to gain real traction. Government deregulation of and divestment in key sectors such as education, health, and community security continued. The role of austerity and private sector growth in exacerbating inequality, extreme poverty, conflict, and extremism – noted in ICAN’s 2017 policy brief *From the Ground Up – The Nexus of Economic Policy, Gender and Violent Extremism* – only re-entered more mainstream conversation in recent years, with organizations holding neoliberal policies responsible for causing a “global inequality crisis.”<sup>6</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic starkly exposed the consequences of decades of erosion of public infrastructure: a lack of trained healthcare workers, equipment, and supplies; limited access to livelihoods and food networks; fragile public education and low literacy; and poor internet connectivity and access to electricity. Yet, governments have failed to make a real effort to shift their economic policy and

undo the damage done in the past decades.

The failure by governments and the wider multilateral system to prioritize peacebuilding and human rights in policymaking, combined with little understanding of and limited availability of funding for peacebuilding work contributed to diminished trust among women peacebuilders in institutions they formerly considered allies. While women peacebuilders still find partnerships with national and international structures fruitful and understand that they carry strategic benefits, many feel they can no longer rely on them to help prioritize peace, equality, and pluralism or guarantee the security of their communities. Some participants pointed out that the time and energy they spend lobbying, conducting advocacy, and providing governments with guidance for policy change may be better spent elsewhere. In the words of Mahbouba Seraj, Executive Director of the Afghan Women Skills Development Center (AWSDC), “The governments I know are not for people, by people. They are for themselves, by themselves.”

As a donor it’s so incredibly important for us to hear the stories from the women themselves, about not only what they say, but what they do.

- Krista House, Deputy Director, Peace and Stabilization Operations Program, Global Affairs Canada



6. Oxfam. (2017). An Economy for the 99%. (access here).

## WHAT THE WOMEN DO: SEVEN ACTIONS

Despite the mounting challenges, women peacebuilders continue to be active and vocal agents of change. When asked whether their work still matters and if there is still hope, the answer is a resounding “yes.” Instead of relying on state and multilateral institutions, however, women peacebuilders are prioritizing actions and strategies that center self-reliance, movement-building, and innovative collaborations to expand their reach, impact, and communities of practice. Seven of these actions are detailed below.

### 1. Emergency First Responders in Climate Crises and Conflict

“We are the foot soldiers, we are the first responders. We are more powerful than any soldier, we are the most powerful people on earth because we have the capacity to do what others cannot do.”

- Mossarat Qadeem, Co-Founder, PAIMAN Alumni Trust, Pakistan

When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, and governments failed to adequately deliver social services, women peacebuilders stepped up as emergency first responders. Many adapted their peacebuilding work to include urgent pandemic response, supporting the drafting of response plans and addressing issues such as food insecurity, disease awareness, distribution of personal protective equipment and mental health and psychosocial support. The wealth of trust they built in their communities through their peacebuilding work and their deep cultural understanding enabled them to respond rapidly, effectively, and holistically to the crisis. For example, in

Pakistan, a network of women peacebuilders established by PAIMAN Alumni Trust to identify radicalization and prevent violent extremism mobilized to distribute personal protective equipment, using traditional rooftop communication networks to share health guidance. In other countries women peacebuilders supported framing of social distancing and hygiene messaging in culturally appropriate ways, translating COVID-19 guidelines into local languages, and challenging xenophobic myths and conspiracy theories about the origin of the virus.



In turn, the trust and access women peacebuilders gained through their humanitarian and emergency response efforts strengthened their peacebuilding work. By providing aid and cooperating across territories, they initiated dialogue and forged relationships. By reaching out to marginalized populations, women peacebuilders alleviated tensions among social groups. For instance, in Yemen Food4Humanity repaired water pumping stations to prevent local conflict among communities. Women peacebuilders have also leveraged the distribution of food packages and medical supplies as an entry point for negotiating ceasefires between armed groups, by asking them to provide a humanitarian corridor.



#### ▶ ICAN'S SUPPORT:

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, ICAN's Innovative Peace Fund (IPF) allocated **\$622,502 in rapid response funding** to support women peacebuilders, of which **\$123,688 went directly to COVID response work**. During the pandemic, ICAN began hosting weekly solidarity Zoom calls to yield real-time analysis of trends across conflict zones and provide partners with summaries of WHO and U.S. CDC guidelines for local dissemination.

## 2. The Triple Nexus in Practice: Food, Water, Energy, Health, Education, Livelihoods, and Peace

We often talk about peace as a big concept (...) but peace is bringing water to your community or making food communally. It's not just what happens at the negotiations table, it happens in little ways, often led by women.

- Magda Zenon, Cyprus

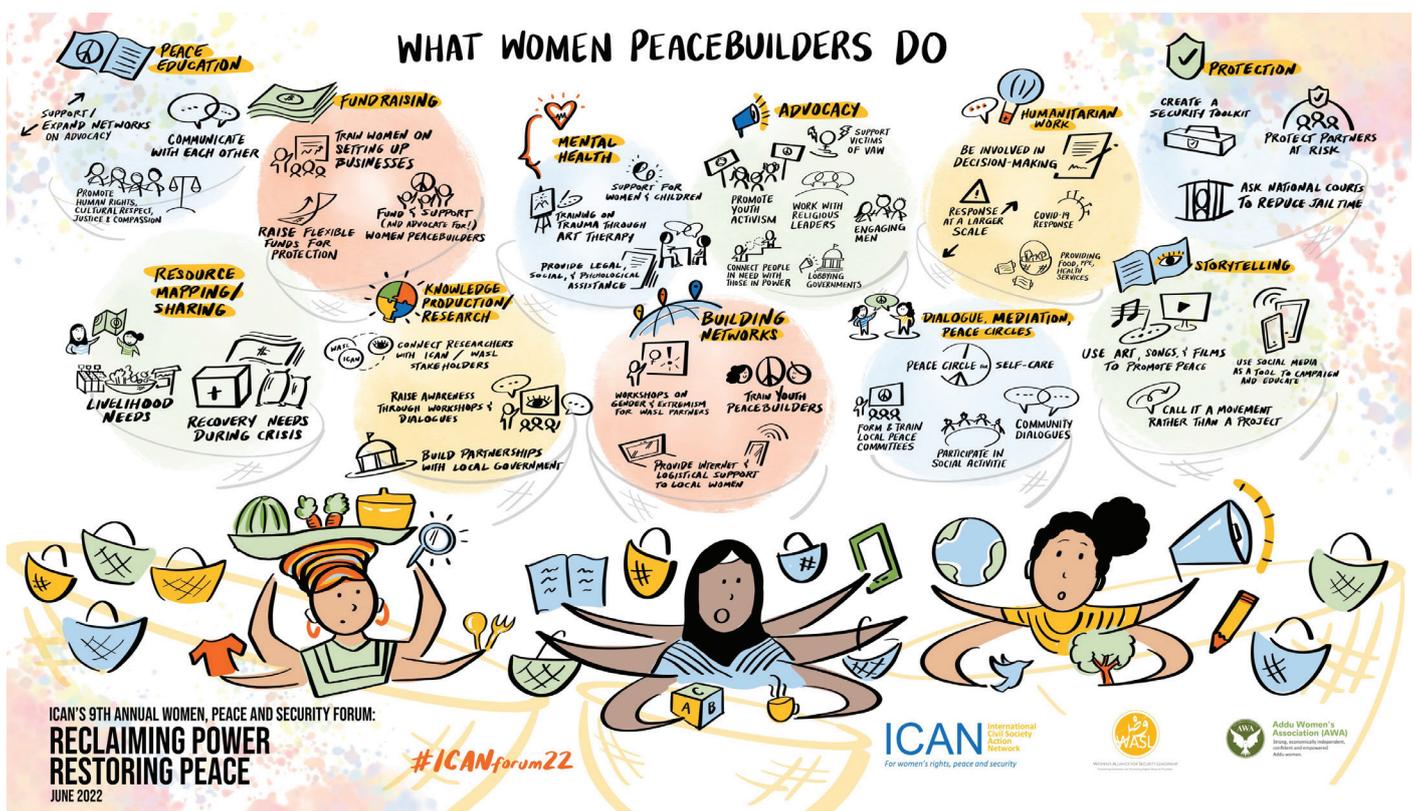
Women peacebuilders increasingly and intuitively integrate their interventions across the "triple nexus" of humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding work. Many incorporate humanitarian and development interventions – such as livelihoods, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship skills training – alongside their peacebuilding. These approaches complement each other organically when they have the flexibility to evolve their programming according to the needs of their communities. The effects are mutually reinforcing: beneficiaries who receive livelihood support later become engaged as community peace ambassadors; small livelihood projects offer opportunities for communities in conflict to come together and work towards a shared

objective; and economic activities support integration of internally displaced persons or serve as positive alternatives to participation in violent extremist groups.

Women peacebuilders view peacebuilding through a holistic lens. The provision of humanitarian and development assistance is a critical component of their work, because the equitable distribution of (food, water, energy, financial) resources and opportunities for employment and education are necessary prerequisites for positive peace. At the 2022 forum, women peacebuilders noted the importance of identifying new opportunities to exchange knowledge with experts in other sectors, for instance around sustainable energy production, engaging in crisis response, mapping and tracking economic markets, food production and water management. The key limiting factor for further expansion of their work along the triple nexus is the dominant, siloed donor funding structure, which constrains their ability to implement holistic and flexible approaches.

### ICAN'S SUPPORT:

Since its inception, ICAN's IPF has disbursed **\$3.9m in project-based funding** including to various projects that combine livelihood support with peacebuilding work. **Peer learning opportunities** through the WASL network encourage the sharing of best practices around integrating humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding approaches.



### 3. Self-Reliance through Self-Resourcing and Solidarity

[At the forum] I connected with other ladies who do art therapy and psychosocial support so that we can learn from each other and support women's livelihoods, trauma-healing, and resilience.

- Nancy Yamout, Co-Founder, Rescue Me, Lebanon



psychologists and social workers, seeing therapists, and finding time to carry out spiritual practices.

Where donor funding is scarce, women peacebuilders have found new ways to autonomously fund and sustain their work. In light of growing insecurity, and the rigidity and reduced availability of donor funding, several WASL members have made strides towards implementing income generation and self-resourcing strategies. In Yemen, the Youth Leadership Development Foundation (YLDF) has developed a café to serve as a safe learning space for women and girls and uses the income generated to support the organization. In Cameroon, Pathways for Women's Empowerment and Development (PaWED) operates a women-led poultry farm, which provides livelihoods for women while simultaneously funding the organization's peacebuilding activities.

In addition to financial self-reliance, several WASL members have strengthened their organization's resilience to environmental threats such as climate change and power outages by installing solar panels. Self-reliance strategies also involve protection from physical security threats, for instance targeting and retaliation by armed groups, by implementing physical security measures around their offices and places of work such as building walls, setting up camera systems, and hiring guards and security officers. Self-reliance requires staying energetic and motivated by maintaining good mental health and healing from trauma. Women peacebuilders are increasingly implementing strategies to maintain the emotional well-being of themselves and their staff, including by integrating psychosocial and mental health support into their operations, leaning on their own skills as

Several WASL members are providing trainings and accompaniment to their peers to improve their self-reliance and equip them with the tools to further the resilience and capacities of their communities. The Secure, Here, Now tool, designed and implemented by Corporación de Investigación y Acción Social y Económica (CIASE) leads women peacebuilders through a holistic process to address their physical, cognitive-emotional, economic, political, and spiritual safety. Neem Foundation organizes trainings to build the capacity of women-led peacebuilding organizations to provide counseling and psychosocial support in their communities.

Finally, locally rooted and globally connected networks like WASL and the solidarity they provide are essential for fostering the self-reliance of women peacebuilders. When WASL members have faced intimidation, threats, or even violence against themselves or their families in retaliation for their peacebuilding work, others are there for them: offering words of support, sharing their own experiences, providing practical advice, and taking action. WASL members have advocated for the release of peacebuilders from detention, ensuring and providing protection, and assisting with evacuation and resettlements for those at risk

#### ▶ ICAN'S SUPPORT:

At the outset of the pandemic, ICAN's IPF established new funding channels to support the complex and fast-changing needs of WASL members. By the end of 2022 the IPF had disbursed **\$2.3m in flexible funding** that supports partners' institutional sustainability and strengthening, including their financial self-reliance, physical security, and resilience to external threats such as climate change. ICAN also provides **strategic accompaniment** to women peacebuilders to enhance their financial sustainability and physical, institutional, and psychosocial resilience to emerging threats, changes, and risks.

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## 4. Advocacy through Public Activism

We need to move beyond using the language of “project,” and start using the language of “movement”.

- Ruby Dwi Kholifah, Country Representative, Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN), Indonesia

Women peacebuilders effectively deploy activist methods such as non-violent protest, civil disobedience, alliance-building, and movement organizing that fall outside of traditional NGO funding and project structures. Women have long been at the forefront of such protest movements. From the 2011-12 revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen, to the October 2019 protests in Iraq, the Myanmar struggle for democracy, the Sudan revolution and in 2022 Iran, women are present, organized and vocal in public spaces.

In Latin America they are leading indigenous and social movements for the environment. Historically and across the world, women-led movements have tended to be grounded in non-violent action and transformation. Their movements are also highly inclusive, protecting and advocating for the needs of everyone in their communities, including men.

That said, a persistent risk that many have encountered is the takeover by other forces, once a conflict reaches the point of negotiations, or an authoritarian state is toppled.

Too often, women at the frontlines, see themselves marginalized from the future they envisioned and erased out of the history they made.

- Sanam Naraghi Anderlini, MBE, Founder and CEO, ICAN

Despite these risks, today women in Sri Lanka, Cameroon, Sudan, Myanmar, Yemen, Afghanistan, and many other contexts are once again on the streets demanding change. In recent years women and girls have also been at the forefront of climate activism and feminist and anti-racist movements such as #MeToo and Black Lives Matter.



For women peacebuilders, approaching their work as movement-building is critical to sustainability and authenticity. It is also more engaging than using short-term projects and NGO-centric language as it reaches a broader swath of people who then participate as citizens, rather than beneficiaries.

Conducting peacebuilding advocacy through activism and protest instills public ownership: the messages belong to the people, rather than being set and approved by funders. Activist tactics also allow women peacebuilders to operate entirely outside of existing power structures and institutions, vocally demonstrating their resistance and practicing the new structures they envision.

Finally, besides being an advocacy tool, protests can themselves be a peacebuilding strategy. They build unity around shared aims of peace, justice, and equality; provide a sense of agency, hope, and purpose; and offer a non-violent avenue to channel grievances.

### ▶ ICAN'S SUPPORT:

The She Builds Peace campaign, initiated by ICAN and implemented by 48 WASL members in 31 countries as of 2022, provides a collaborative framework **for building a global, women-led peace movement**. Through the campaign, partners constructively engage in activism and advocacy by aligning their actions in different countries along shared aims, calls to action, and values. Partners have integrated She Builds Peace messaging and imagery in protests, peace walks, and other movement-building activities.

## 5. Citizen Peacebuilding: Raising Awareness, Broadening Participation

What we still need to show is that peacebuilders are not the weak ones with the flowers and pigeons. We need to show off that this is the most powerful action a person can take. More powerful than using arms and weapons.

- Abir Hajibrahim, Co-Founder, Mobaderoon, Syria

Peacebuilding as a practice, especially in the realm of civil society and among ordinary citizens is still relatively nascent. But peacebuilders see the need and urgency for greater awareness and involvement of citizens in efforts to mitigate the polarization and rising hate speech and weaponization of identity within their communities and nations.

In Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and Libya and elsewhere, women peacebuilders have successfully trained local, “insider” mediators to resolve problems before they escalate into violence. Women peacebuilders have also recruited, trained, and organized cohorts of local peacebuilders who engage in advocacy, conflict resolution, and extremism prevention. In Tunisia, for instance, Ahlem Nasraoui, President of Young Leaders Entrepreneurs organized a virtual hackathon to bring together young people during which they developed gendered peacebuilding projects.

Women peacebuilders have also recognized the importance of engaging the media to share their work and approach. They highlight the importance of media training and production in their grant proposals, including podcasts and alternative forms of media outreach. Since the media require short, messaging, a key issue is enabling and building peacebuilders’ confidence to share their stories and the tangible impact of their work. International recognition and awards are also essential for enabling them to access media outlets. That said, because peacebuilding is often sensitive and nuanced work in highly polarized contexts, there can also be significant risks as messages can be edited and warped out of context. Visibility is therefore a double-edged sword and working with trusted media outlets is essential.

To sustain and develop peacebuilding practices, it is vital to train and educate the next generation of peacebuilders, not only to pass the baton and



to bring new energy and ideas to the field. Younger peacebuilders generally have a better understanding of social media and its effective use for outreach. WASL members are involved in developing and integrating peace education curricula and clubs in schools, teacher trainings and recruiting young people as peace ambassadors. The inclusion of young people in peacebuilding processes is also needed. In Liberia, for instance, youth-led organizations participated in national peace and security meetings and fora. Looking ahead, documenting women’s peacebuilding methodologies, best practices, and guidance will be critical to ensure knowledge transfer to the next generation.

### ▶ ICAN’S SUPPORT:

The She Builds Peace campaign is an invitation to all citizens to stand with women peacebuilders, take action, and mobilize their communities. Through the Better Peace Initiative, ICAN has developed **animations and ten-step guides** that explain gendered approaches to peacebuilding in simple terms and can be used to raise awareness about the importance of women’s participation in peacebuilding. ICAN is **documenting methodologies and best practices** for gendered peacebuilding and transforming extremism in a series of Case Studies on the Role of Gender and Identity in Shaping Positive Alternatives to Extremisms.

judging interpretations



## 6. Peace Education for a Pluralistic World

Addressing any problem should start right from the beginning, a child's mind is progressing... that is the time you can frame them and shape them.

- Bushra Hyder, Founder and Director, Qadims Lumiere School and College, Pakistan

Women peacebuilders understand that peace education is an essential method for promoting the knowledge, skills, values and mindset needed to dismantle cultures of violence and war, while building capacities for nonviolent conflict resolution and the respect and practice of human rights, pluralism, and equality.

### ICAN'S SUPPORT:

Under its Gender and Extremisms program, ICAN is **documenting best practices around peace education** in a series of Case Studies on the Role of Gender and Identity in Shaping Positive Alternatives to Extremisms. ICAN has also released a brief on Education, Identity, and Rising Extremism summarizing lessons learned from peace education work.

In a world where educational, media and religious spaces (schools, universities, mosques, churches, temples) are increasingly fragmented and captured by political and extremist movements that spread rigid interpretations of religion and culture, and weaponize identity, peace education is an urgent and vital antidote.

Across the WASL network, women peacebuilders such as Bushra Hyder and Mossarat Qadeem from Pakistan have developed peace education curricula that can be scaled up and adapted by women peacebuilders in other contexts.

Their curricula promote inclusivity, pluralism, active citizenship, and the peaceful resolution of conflict and include modules on shared cultural heritage, modalities of conflict resolution and peacebuilding, peace and religions of the world, and human rights, cooperative values and active communication. They integrate arts and culture in their teaching, as well as volunteerism and exchanges with other faiths and identity groups.

In Nigeria, Libya and Iraq, members have developed curricula on the nexus of Islam and Peacebuilding to counter extremist ideologies and provide youth with peaceful alternatives to practice their faith. The efforts to widen faith-based teachings that celebrate diversity and promote gender equality is also critical to the work of WASL members in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines.

## 7. Diaspora as Peacebuilders

ICAN provided us with one home. Now that we are in our home we can save lives and help others.

- Hassina Neekzad, Executive Director, Afghan Women's Organization for Equality (AWOE) Afghanistan

Heightened levels of global insecurity have forced a growing number of women peacebuilders to leave their home countries and continue their work from the diaspora. At the 2022 forum, women peacebuilders from countries including Yemen, Syria, Myanmar, Afghanistan, and Ukraine shared their migration journeys and the complexity that comes with practicing peacebuilding from the diaspora.

They described the difficult circumstances that they faced balancing their peacebuilding work in exile with the financial, logistical, and psychological challenges that come with emigration. Staying engaged in activism helps many feel connected to their countries of origin. It can also be a strategy for managing the emotional trauma and loss of control that comes with being distant from their homeland and its people.

Working from the diaspora, however, can also offer new opportunities for keeping the attention on their countries and advocating solutions to the international community. Communication platforms such as WhatsApp and Signal are immensely helpful in maintaining a connection to people back home and

### ▶ ICAN'S SUPPORT:

ICAN's response to the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan **supports Afghan women peacebuilders and their organizations** financially and practically to continue their vital peacebuilding work, both inside the country and from the diaspora. The WASL network connects women peacebuilders active in the diaspora to a **broader community of practice**.

to other diaspora members who share messages of support and hope.

But diaspora activism can also prompt vicarious trauma and anxiety. Women peacebuilders may feel guilty about living in relative safety while their home countries are experiencing violence.

Many feel obligated to provide financial remittances, even when their own economic situation is precarious. Despite their best efforts to stay connected with their home countries, women peacebuilders often struggle to sustain their legitimacy while living abroad.

Access to mental health and psychosocial support, and to an ecosystem of diaspora peacebuilders that can relate to and validate their experiences is therefore critical. Maintaining their membership and participation in global networks such as WASL is also crucial, since often the skills and experiences gained in one setting can be adapted to others. This opportunity to share their knowledge and experience with peers across other countries is personally validating, professionally enhancing and has immense value and impact for their peers.

Recent conflicts, the pandemic and social challenges have magnified the inequalities towards women, but they also highlighted the immense capacity, resilience and positive impact that women can have and provided women with new platforms and opportunities to bring about transformative change.

- Dr. Mariyam Shakeela, Chairperson, Addu Women's Association (AWA), Maldives

## HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT WOMEN PEACEBUILDERS

In the midst of a world in turmoil, the solidarity, energy and solutions that peacebuilders shared at the ICAN 2022 Forum revealed new depths of possibility and potential for positive change. Scaling the work of women peacebuilders across communities to create a vibrant ecosystem of community led efforts is both possible and necessary.

As conflicts, climate and other crises ebb and flow, the women peacebuilders at the frontlines will remain the first responders and the points of contact for the delivery of assistance to marginalized regions and communities. They bring a deep reserve of cultural and political know-how, trust, and care, because it is their homes and communities that are at risk. But they cannot do the work alone. Support for their localized efforts, including capacity and technical resources to address the food, water, health, and energy crises that may arise is crucial.

### TO SUPPORT AND STRENGTHEN WOMEN PEACEBUILDERS AND THEIR WORK, FOUR KEY RECOMMENDATIONS EMERGED FROM THE ICAN 2022 FORUM:

1. Provide essential flexible, rapid response and innovation funding to deepen reach, enable proactive solutions that combine peacebuilding with humanitarian and climate related needs, and strengthen and sustain the institutional capacities of women-led peacebuilding organizations.
  - **How?** The ICAN [Innovative Peace Fund](#) has tried and tested modalities to ensure secure management and transfer of funds. The IPF also provides technical support in project design, budgeting, and monitoring and evaluation support.
2. Support the expansion and increased participation of women's peacebuilding networks to deepen their work, broaden their reach and impact in fragile, conflict affected contexts including those with closed political space, and seed the next generation of peacebuilders.
  - **How?** The [She Builds Peace campaign](#) has been launched in 31 countries and has proven to be a highly popular and effective means of raising public recognition and interest in peacebuilding. Supporting WASL members to expand their SBP campaigns and enable greater collective action, including through government engagement, is effective, efficient and would amplify the impact, sustainability, and success of their work.
3. Facilitate peer-to-peer, multi-stakeholder, and cross-country learning and exchange of analysis, strategies and solutions to avoid duplication, build on tested solutions, and ensure division of labor based on comparative advantage and collaboration across sectors;
  - **How?** Support the ICAN/WASL peer-to-peer exchanges and multi-stakeholder Global Solutions Exchanges (GSX). These tailored virtual and in-person gatherings enable deep strategy and lessons learning, and provide space for multi-stakeholder analyses and solution development, especially for tackling new and emerging issues.
4. Document and disseminate women's peacebuilding strategies, practical guidance on inclusion and gender responsiveness, and approaches that integrate legal, cultural, faith and traditional practices anchored in local contexts to develop the field of practice and avoid erasure of a generation's efforts.
  - **How?** Support ICAN/WASL's story-telling and curriculum development initiatives.
  - Explore ICAN's [publications](#), and use the guidance to inform policies and programming.