

PEACEBUILDING IN A TIME OF PESSIMISM

The 10th International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN)
Women, Peace, and Security Forum

ICAN International
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Network
For women's rights, peace and security



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Concept Note

Amid rising geopolitical turbulence, a reliance on hard security approaches and militarization has become the de facto answer for major powers, rationalized in the name of peace and security. Global military expenditure reached an unprecedented \$2.2 trillion in 2022 (SIPRI, April 24, 2023). Attention and resources for climate change adaptation, conflict prevention, development, and humanitarian relief are diminishing, as a new arms race takes shape. Meanwhile, the same states issue rhetorical commitments to the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS), feminist foreign policy, and similar human security and rights agendas through laws, policies, and national action plans, but with limited implementation or accountability for noncompliance. Unsurprisingly, civil society leaders are frustrated that these agendas are being used to “pinkwash” or “peacewash” the actions of the powerful.

There is also growing alarm that militarized responses are not fit for purpose to tackle the complexity of contemporary security challenges. Instead of stemming the cycles of violence they are, and will, exacerbate the human and environmental costs across geographies and generations to come. The evidence is already clear: new wars starting each year, and as 2024 commenced 100 million people were displaced or refugeeed due to the violence.

Set against this fear and uncertainty about the future, the 10th ICAN Forum will bring alternative perspectives and innovative solutions into the global discourse from frontline peacebuilders—those who do not have the privilege of pessimism. Co-hosted by the Women’s Center for Development and Culture Albania (WCDCA), the Forum will convene leading women peacebuilders from over 40 countries in the Women’s Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL) together with policymakers and practitioners to focus on effective strategies for promoting peace, resilience, equality, and pluralism.

“ [The Forum] is the place where we can think strategically without neglecting the day-to-day of our struggles. It is the place where we can position ourselves as political actors for peace.
– Rosa Emilia Salamanca, Colombia

“ [The Forum] is an opportunity to move beyond the individual level to strategizing and taking action as a collective, sharing the knowledge that a family of peacebuilders are behind you.
– Sabrina Mowlah-Baksh, Trinidad and Tobago

At a time when the international rules-based order is in crisis, the civil society-based peacebuilding ecosystem, and this movement of locally rooted, globally connected women peacebuilders, are ever-more necessary. They bring deep care and commitment to addressing the multilayered challenges facing their communities and nations. Anchored in their own cultural contexts, they blend traditional practices and universal norms to provide unconventional, holistic, and sustainable solutions. As expert peace practitioners and mediators, they also have valuable insights for international policymakers.

Through a combination of interactive plenary sessions, small group discussions, simulations, and practical workshops, we will delve into **three inter-related themes**:

I. State of the world – The ICAN Forum is unique in featuring geopolitical analysis by women working at the nexus of peacebuilding, development, and humanitarian relief. This first track of discussion will examine pressing global challenges—from humanitarian crises and climate change to authoritarianism and election violence—with attention to the practical strategies and innovative solutions that women peacebuilders use at the local level to prevent and mitigate violence and transform crises and conflicts.

***Key outcome:** Collate civil society contributions and recommendations to inform global agendas and multilateral efforts such as the forthcoming United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture Review and Summit of the Future, as well as states' foreign policies, strategic priorities, and national action plans.*

“ [The Forum] is an important space for sharing information and updates from other contexts and to receive support to expand our thinking of conflict resolution, conflict management, and conflict prevention.
– **Rajaa Altalli, Syria**

II. State of our field – With securitization on the rise, multilateralism in decline, and necessary discussions of decolonization prevalent, the field of peacebuilding faces mounting challenges. A second track of discussion will focus on the state of the field, the innovations we offer, and the adaptations needed to sustain the sector's best practices. We will candidly confront the politics, funding, and practical realities of doing work in this space and address questions central to our global community of practice: How do we navigate relationships with governments, address protection concerns, and evolve strategic partnerships to ensure equitable practices and nurture the next generation of peacebuilders?

***Key outcome:** Elaborate new strategies for partnership and collaboration to strengthen the impact of WASL's collective work, including the She Builds Peace campaign.*

“ Each gathering might be seen as refuge allowing women to discover themselves, and evaluate their work in a new light, from their own perspective and experience. This allows them to question contemporary society, its challenges and their own circumstances from a new perspective.
– **Amel Grami, Tunisia**

III. State of ourselves – Amid this geopolitical turbulence, the leadership and vision we seek resides within those who rise to take on the responsibility of tackling local, national, and global challenges. Women peacebuilders and other social innovators are those leaders. Too often their lives and families are threatened, and they absorb the pain and trauma of those for whom they care. To sustain their efforts, protection strategies and self-care are essential. During the Forum, we will reflect on and develop their strategies and tactics for security, practice skills for mediation, and seize moments to feed the soul and ensure physical wellness.

Key Outcome: Use various experiential approaches and share new resources to support participants' capacities to assess, sustain, and apply security and self-care strategies across different contexts.

“ [The Forum is] a healing therapy for me after all the trauma and stress I go through as I struggle to build peace in my community...I get to meet sisters from around the world and draw more inspiration, energize, and re-strategize. I always leave the forum ready to work even more.

– **Clotilda Andiensa Waah, Cameroon**

We will gather in Albania, a country with its own legacy of conflict and peacemaking, that has demonstrated its own commitment to the Women, Peace, and Security agenda by hosting thousands of Afghan women activists and their families who were forced to flee the country following the Taliban's return to power in 2021.

“ This [2022] forum helped me to keep myself together during the war and to find the strength, knowledge and motivation not to give up and to move forward.

– **Nina Potarska, Ukraine**

This Forum is dedicated to the memory of our sister in peacebuilding Enass Muzamel, whose name means to bring joy, unity, and peace, as she did in life.