

**The International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) and
the Women's Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL) Statement:
The U.S. and Israel's War on Iran and its Regional Ramifications**

March 18, 2026

Over 1,400 civilians, including 181 school children killed in Iran Over 850, including more than 100 children, killed in Lebanon.

19 days into the U.S. and Israel's war on Iran, and the violence is escalating against civilian targets.

In Iran, U.S. and Israeli bombs have targeted schools, 18 medical facilities, residential apartment buildings, police stations, water desalination plants, energy sites and oil facilities, border guards, UNESCO historic heritage and environmental sites, and an iconic sports venue: Azadi Stadium. Azadi means freedom in Farsi.

Across the region, violence is causing havoc, death, and human suffering.

The death toll of civilians in Iran, Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, and the region grows daily. Young soldiers and sailors—Iranians, Israelis, and Americans, conscripts and volunteers—are losing their lives in an illegal war.

The pattern of warfare being waged—asymmetric by the Iranian regime, and overpowering force of “death and destruction,” from the U.S. and Israel, as described by U.S. Secretary of War Pete Hegseth—is leading to exponential escalation in an already fragile region.

Our WASL partners in Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, and beyond warn that further militarization could trigger retaliatory attacks, intensify regional proxy conflicts, deepen sectarian tensions, drive radicalization, and destabilize societies that remain highly vulnerable. Nearby Persian Gulf states, and communities around the world, are already feeling the economic and security impact.

Why? What for? For whose benefit?

This war was initiated on false premises. It is a war of choice.

The use of force without legal justification, and outside the framework of the UN Charter, undermines the international laws that mitigate aggressive war and protect civilians. It has taken over 500 years of human endeavor, and millions of lives lost, to attain the body of international laws governing war, peace, and human rights. We must not stand silently as one generation of leaders rips this apart.

Some justify this as a war of liberation in response to the Iranian regime's violent suppression and killing of protesters in January. That violence was heinous. Perpetrators must be held accountable. But the death of innocent Iranians must not be instrumentalized to justify the killing of other innocent people, or the destruction of a nation.

The Iranian public protested for dignity, rights, and self-determination. Bombs do not deliver democracy or human rights. War does not bring peace and security.

When nuclear tensions and military rivalries are already dangerously high, further escalation carries grave global implications.

Women peacebuilders across WASL have long warned that cycles of militarization and retaliation do not create security. Sustainable peace requires diplomacy, accountability, and the inclusion of local civil society actors—especially women—to resolve conflict and to build a just and inclusive peace.

ICAN and WASL urgently call on governments and international institutions to act immediately to prevent further escalation and protect civilians.

We urge them to:

1. Cease engagement in this illegal war through immediate de-escalation.

2. Establish immediate guardrails.

- Reaffirm rules of engagement consistent with international humanitarian law: civilian and heritage sites must be proactively avoided and independently monitored.
- Explicitly prohibit the use of extreme escalatory weapons and cease the use of force.

3. Support regional de-escalation mechanisms, reducing tensions, and enabling space for political transformation.

- Enable and support urgent diplomatic engagement by trusted parties to de-escalate tensions and prevent the expansion of the conflict.
- Call for the release of Iranian political prisoners.
- Endorse an inclusive national dialogue process in Iran, drawing on lessons from Yemen and South Africa.
- Ensure meaningful inclusion of women peacebuilders and diverse civil society leaders in diplomatic, conflict-prevention, and national dialogue efforts, in line with the UN Women, Peace, and Security agenda.
- Ensure the principles of freedom of expression, civic participation, and the protection of peacebuilders and human rights defenders to create an enabling environment for inclusive peacebuilding and democratic dialogue.

4. Advocate for a grand bargain, reciprocal containment, and tangible Palestinian statehood

Without a tangible and enforceable pathway to Palestinian statehood, regional de-escalation will lack legitimacy and durability. A credible grand bargain must also include:

- Israel ceasing attacks on Iran and in the region.
- Iran ceasing threats and attacks against Israel.
- A unified global commitment to Palestinian statehood based on the 1967 borders, and containing Israel within its 1948 borders under international law.
- Immediate safeguarding of the West Bank and Gaza, including freedom of movement within Palestinian territory.
- Restoring Palestinian fiscal control, including control over goods, and returning Palestinian tax revenues.

Heed the wisdom of women peacebuilders: this war will deepen instability and human suffering globally. The international community must act now to halt this dangerous escalation and prioritize diplomacy, civilian protection, and inclusive peacebuilding before the conflict expands beyond control.