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

Better Peace: Five Actions for the Next Secretary-General

An appeal to candidates for United Nations Secretary-General

Dear Candidates,

We welcome the new Secretary-General of the United Nations.

This is a once-in-a-generation moment. Amid warfare, climate pressure, and technological change, humanity is increasingly securitized. But the UN and the new Secretary-General have the opportunity to humanize security and prioritize peace.

This letter is our offer of support and a shared appeal to draw on the power and potential of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda to enable better peace strategies and practice across the UN's political, humanitarian, and peace architecture.

We assert the importance of a robust UN Women/UNFPA entity active in the realm of socio-economic development and equality. But such an entity needs a strong counterpart in the UN's peace and security pillar.

Over 26 years, the Security Council has adopted 10 WPS resolutions and 113 member states have committed to National Action Plans. Globally, we have amassed extensive evidence and experience showing that women peacebuilders are first responders devising critical peace strategies, responding to humanitarian crises, and addressing the hardest security issues.

Yet they remain marginalized, sexual violence continues, and humanitarian aid remains gender-blind. Without clear responsibility, consistency, and political commitments, good practices are lost rather than built on.

Engaging women peacebuilders could transform the UN's ability to deliver its core mandate: to prevent the scourge of war.

It is common sense. Governments devise strategies for defense, security, and the economy. Better Peace—peace that is inclusive, just, and responsive to people and the planet—deserves the same strategic approach, political attention, and resources.

Emerging from ICAN's 2026 Women, Peace and Security Forum, and aligned with the NGO Working Group on WPS's October 2026 letter, we propose the following five actions for your first 100 days:

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1. Mandate: Make Peace Strategy a Priority (conceptual)

- **Make actionable peace strategies standard practice,** built with women peacebuilders.
- **Create a Code of Better Peacemaking** through the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), with women peacebuilders, mediators, civil society, and member states, to turn existing standards into practical guidance.
- **Prioritize ending the forever wars and test the approach in three live conflicts within 100 days** with named political leads and local partners, committed resources, and established review dates.

2. Political: Ensure Leadership and Mediation Deliver (political)

- **Appoint a Special Representative of the Secretary-General for WPS** with direct access to the Secretary-General, envoys, agencies, and civil society, with conflict-related sexual violence leadership integrated.
- **Establish a standing, independent Global Women Peacebuilders Council** with direct access to the Secretary-General, regular consultations, and a clear process for responding to its recommendations. Build on the 2010 UN Civil Society Advisory Group on WPS.
- **Make UN mediation the gold standard** by engaging women's peace movements from the outset. Violence must not be the only ticket to the negotiation table.

3. Institutional and Professional Responsibility (technical)

- **Set delivery deadlines.** Require DPPA, the Department of Peace Operations (DPO), and other relevant departments to name leads, resources, and deadlines for their WPS action plans.
- **Link training to role-specific delivery plans**, and assess delivery in performance reviews, senior appointments and renewals, with practical handovers so lessons survive staff changes.

As in medicine, no one is responsible for everything; but everyone is responsible for their part.

4. Share the Responsibility Across the UN's Peace and Security Architecture (operational)

- **Humanitarian Action:** Set clear time bound targets for gender-responsive humanitarian aid that includes women-led organizations in its design, delivery, and

review**,** in line with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Humanitarian Gender Standards.

- **Convene a summit of humanitarian aid donors**, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and major INGO implementing partners to systematize delivery of the IASC standards within 12 months.
- **Effective Funding:** Call on the UN Peacebuilding Fund to formulate new policies and means to **partner with women's peace funds** to deliver timely and flexible funding to frontline women's organizations.

5. Commit to Meeting with Us

We invite you to meet representatives of our women-led peacebuilding organizations active across war zones, to discuss these recommendations and how we can cooperate for better peace.

A Commitment to Better Peace

These are difficult times, but our lived experiences show that with political will and vision, there are many pathways to preventing and ending wars. As our Sri Lankan colleague told the Security Council in 2010:

"The task of sustaining world peace will be easier in partnership with 'We the peoples of the United Nations'."

In your first 100 days, we stand ready to work with you. Are you willing to work with us?

Sincerely,

The International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) and the Women's Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL), including:

Afghan Women's Network International, Afghanistan

FARAGEER, Afghanistan

Women and Peace Studies Organization – Canada

Allamin Foundation for Peace and Development, Nigeria

Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process (AGIPP), Myanmar

Myanmar – Women, Peace and Security (M-WPS), Myanmar

Wi'am: The Palestinian Conflict Transformation Center, Palestine

Women Education and Development Organization of Liberia – WEDOL, Liberia

Bernedette Muthien, She Builds Peace Collective, South Africa

Visaka Dharmadasa, Association of War Affected Women (AWAW), Sri Lanka

Amina Rasul, Philippine Center for Islam and Democracy (PCID), Philippines

Fatimah Al-Bahadly, Iraqi Al-Firdaws Society, Iraq

Magda Zenon, Human and Women's Rights Activist, Cyprus

Ruby Kholifah, Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN Indonesia), Indonesia

Kawther Alkholy, Women for Justice, Canada

Muna Luqman, Food4Humanity, Yemen

Cherifa Kheddar, Association Djazairouna des familles victimes du terrorisme, Algeria

Cerue Konah Garlo, Independent Women's Rights Consultant, Liberia

Nicoline Wazeh, Pathways for Women's Empowerment and Development/ Integrated Agricultural Training Center (PaWED-IATC), Cameroon

Halima Mohamed, Coast Education Centre (COEC), Kenya

Zarqa Yaftali, Women and Children Research and Advocacy Network (WCRAN), Afghanistan

Lilian Ngige, Advocacy for Women in Peace and Security Africa (AWAPSA), Kenya

Dr. Esther Omam, Reach Out, Cameroon

Mossarat Qadeem, PAIMAN Alumni Trust, Pakistan

Sarah Arumugam, Sri Lanka

Dr. Khedija Arfaoui, Feminist Researcher and Activist, Tunisia

Add your name or organization.

See an updated list of signatories here.