



SUMMARY - E-DISCUSSION: Women's participation in politics in (post) conflict countries: Role of women in peace negotiations, open from October 10th to November 6th, 2013.

Prepared by the iKNOW Politics Team

iKNOW Politics organized an online discussion on the role of women in (post) conflict situations and in peace negotiations, in Arabic, English, French and Spanish . The discussion went on for a period of 3 weeks and received contributions from 18 members on various countries, including Afghanistan, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, the DRC, India, Iraq, Guatemala, Kenya, Kosovo, Morocco, Namibia, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Northern Ireland, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Sri Lanka, Syria and Uganda.

This E-Discussion ran from October 10th to November 6th, 2013.

LAUNCH MESSAGE:

“Wherever there is conflict, women must be part of the solution” – Michelle Bachelet

Women must be allowed to participate in peace negotiations as well as be a part of the transition process after a conflict. However, most often women are neglected and ignored and their opinions and voices are cast aside. Nevertheless, decisions made during these periods tangibly affect the lives of women and girls; it is, therefore, time to recognize the role and power of women in the peace-process and in shaping the future of post-conflict countries. Fortunately, throughout history, there have been women able to leave their political mark in their country's transition to peace that can serve as examples for women worldwide.

- What measures can/should be put in place to guarantee women's political participation in post-conflict countries?
- Do you have examples of where women's participation improved a peace process?

- What can women politicians do to guarantee their seat at the negotiating table? What do you believe women can offer in these situations?

Introduction

In the fourteen years following the end of the Cold War, from 1990-2004, there have been 60 conflicts around the world and women are the last to be called to the negotiating table and continue to have a minority stake in the negotiations on peace and security except in some cases such as Northern Ireland, Guatemala, Republic of Somalia ... etc. But regardless of the exceptions women continue to receive less attention than men in peace negotiations, disarmament and post-conflict reconstruction.

In 2000 the Security Council of the United Nations adopted the resolution 1325 on women and peace and security to reaffirm the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction. It also stresses the importance of women's equal participation and full involvement of their efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. This resolution urges all actors to increase the participation of women and incorporate gender perspectives in all United Nations peace and security efforts.¹

UN Resolution 1206, recently adopted 2013, draws attention to the importance of a comprehensive approach to transitional justice in armed conflict and post-conflict situations, encompassing the full range of judicial and non-judicial measures and expresses its intent to employ, as appropriate, all means at its disposal to ensure women's participation in all aspects of mediation, post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding², among other provisions. However, the implementation of these resolutions by its signatories is still slow if non-existent. Women are still mainly the victims of conflict; their voices still go unheard after the fact and their needs in post-conflict countries often ignored.

There are currently conflicts in the process of negotiating for peace and we can see the absence of women in the peace process in the Basque Country, the conflict between Morocco and the Western Sahara and the conflict in Syria³. Women's participation in politics and in peace negotiations is largely influenced by the nature of the post-conflict situation. In post-conflict contexts, such as Liberia and Rwanda, women who played key roles - informally and formally - in resolving the conflicts were able to get a formal role in the peace negotiations. While in a context like Iraq, the representation and participation of women continues to be challenged due to the security situation and an increase in sectarian violence and extreme religious views. Women who want to actively participate in formal peace negotiations have to get nominated by their political parties⁴.

¹ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/>

² [http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/SC_ResolutionWomen_SRES2106\(2013\)\(english\).pdf](http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/SC_ResolutionWomen_SRES2106(2013)(english).pdf)

³ <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8229#comment-8229>

⁴ <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8261#comment-8261>

Women should have the same opportunities as men to represent their countries in all international forums that address these issues and, in particular, in the meetings held within the United Nations system, including the Security Council, as well as in all peace conferences. Governments should also take steps to facilitate this participation through institutional means and education, with particular attention to the political framework that converts women into relevant participants in countries in conflict. Women need to have a strategic role throughout the peace process, from negotiations and peace agreements to the political and economic reconstruction of the state and social structure. The participation of women can ensure the implementation of a gender perspective in peace negotiation decisions⁵.

Below you will find our members' contributions to this debate divided by the questions that were raised in regards to women's political participation in post-conflict countries and their role in peace negotiations.

Q1. What measures can/should be put in place to guarantee women's political participation in post-conflict countries?

In this section we have recorded our users' suggestions on the topic of measures to guarantee women's political participation in post-conflict countries:

"Measures needed would be the implementation of relevant legislation and supporting the participation of women in local governments⁶."

"Affirmative action measures should be established, as part of state policies, in favor of women's development in each country, thereby reducing interference with and control of the state and citizens to comply. Gender quotas should also be established, with the non-recognition of institutions that do not meet the quota, promoting leadership and financial support, which are considered essential, among others⁷."

"In order to secure women's inclusion in the overall process of peace building in a post-conflict setting and their participation in the political processes it is important to design the parameters of inclusion first hand, and to comply with the regulations and rules that allows for women's inclusion. The UN has a historical responsibility in making the post-conflict setting responsive to peace building processes and

⁵ <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8229#comment-8229>

⁶ <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8265#comment-8265>

⁷ <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8280#comment-8280>

regulations. It is evident that women were failed in many attempts of inclusion in different post conflict states, such as **Sudan**, **Congo**, and, to a less extent, **Somalia**, etc. Accountability is much needed to include women, and affirmative actions are as well needed to help women participate in building states. The international actors, specifically the UN, should not support a peace agreement that excludes women, and should apply firm mechanisms and regulations to secure women's participation...⁸ and I would like to add one point that I believe is crucial in making women's inclusion effective and possible, which is the issue of finance. Women politicians need to be empowered economically in order to compete with equal footing as men. Lack of funding and women's poverty reduce the capacity that can bring more women in. We know that poverty has a feminine face and without addressing issues of economic disparities we cannot efficiently utilize women's style and structure in politics or peace processes.

We should adopt or adapt to specific strategies that can secure funding and support for women's inclusion. Without sound economic support women cannot compete in an uneven environment where the wealth is basically monopolized by the few who are in fact predominantly men.

Apart from the will and affirmative action needed, secured sources of finance should be guaranteed for women.

We hope that financing could be considered the corner stone in including women in the overall political processes and given the utmost attention by the UN and other international actors.⁹

“Guaranteeing women's political participation in post-conflict countries implies a new beginning. Many conflict-ridden countries already have either low political participation of women or the role of women in politics is insignificant. What is important is the pre-conflict stronghold of women and their organization, because that can act as a springboard to a more active political engagement after conflicts. After all, 'Post-conflict' can be symbolic to 'new' and 'revolutionary'. It can create new opportunities for women to assert their rightful place in the political field. However, if we leave the gear in male hands, women's political participation, despite their great contributions to bring stability, cannot be guaranteed. It is after all, a historical phenomenon that after peace has been achieved women will be re-routed back to the kitchen. Women should create opportunities and use existing post-conflict opportunities to establish their political strongholds; They should pitch from women's networks and organizations; They should use the opportunities to challenge gender biased legal systems and review laws and policies; They should use the momentum to be ready with their package of demands and assure that strong women leaders are there to take those forward.¹⁰”

⁸ <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8241#comment-8241>

⁹ <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8258#comment-8258>

¹⁰ <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8260#comment-8260>

“UN Security Council Resolution No. 1325 of 2000 asserts the importance of women's contribution to peace and security and the importance of their full participation in all spheres of life, including the political, social and legal. Among the most important areas for women's presence to effectively contribute to the decision making process is within party leadership (and by not less than 25%). Providing opportunities for women in the process of political decision-making through the promotion of political participation enhances their ability to develop the overall objectives of the community. The proposed law gives more space for women within political parties, which are the basic building block for democracy in **Iraq**. In this regard the following is proposed:

- Need for women quota in the leadership of political parties;
- It should not be less than the existing 25% quota for women;
- Parties must be required to work on the empowerment of the feminist cadres;
- Develop the capacities of women cadres to create women leaders within parties;
- The law of parties is a main guarantor of the partnership of women in political life;
- Learning from experiences of other parliaments that have worked on gender mainstreaming including the amendment of party laws;
- Political parties should play a key role in supporting the political representation of women through the adoption of decisive and effective strategies to raise the representation of women in party work.¹¹”

“While women's space at the decision-making tables during the post-conflict reconstruction efforts has historically been absent or marginal, today increasing numbers of women and women's groups are realizing the significance of their active participation and contribution to the peace process. One important measure which women use to guarantee their presence is campaigning for the adoption of gender quotas, both during transitional governments, as well as the newly developed governments, in particular the legislative bodies. Such quotas have assisted women to voice their demands and interests during the reconstruction process in countries such as **Afghanistan, Rwanda, and Uganda**, among others.

However, such gender quota adoptions are often credited more to the efforts of the UN and other international and regional bodies, rather than the pressuring and campaigning efforts of domestic women's movements and groups. While the international community does play a key role in the adoption of such measures in post-conflict countries, it is important to also recognize women's own efforts, and the extent that such demands were supported by the grassroots and civil society organizations, rather than mere top-down measures as recommended by the UN and other bodies.

¹¹ <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8286#comment-8286>

Indeed, it has been due to the domestic support for women in peace-processes that women's shares in most places have increased following the quota adoption.

For an analysis of the actors and factors that deserve our attention in gender quota adoption in post-conflict contexts, I recommend the newly published article: "Gender Quota Adoption in Postconflict Contexts: An Analysis of Actors and Factors Involved" by Mona Tajali, in the Journal of Women, Politics and Policy: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1554477X.2013.820115#.UngD4HBwpQI>.¹²

“The **Colombian** Constitutional Framework promotes peace as a fundamental right and a mandatory duty and endorses the incorporation of the principles derived from the protection of human rights. In this context, those instruments relating to the participation of women in the processes of negotiation, consolidation and peacekeeping, post-conflict reconstruction and its contribution to development, are essential for achieving a compromise, followed by real action, by the State and civil society.

In developing the latter, Colombia has a comprehensive policy framework and public policy, which makes explicit the state's duty to protect the rights of women in armed conflict as well as ensuring effective women's participation in the construction of peace, despite the persistence of significant gaps in its implementation, as well as expressions of discrimination and structural violence against women in public and private spaces.

Based on the above, in accordance with its mandate to support the participation of women in conflict resolution and peace building, in accordance with the Resolutions 1325, 1820, 1888 and 2106, the United Nations System in Colombia, in response to requests made by the peace talks and the Peace Commissions of the Congress of Colombia, has been supporting public consultation processes on the axes of the agreement to end the conflict, and to that end, has promoted and ensured a broad participation and representation of women's voices in such spaces.¹³

“It's only been 16 years since [**Guatemala**] signed a peace agreement, or better said a war truce, and the measures to establish or ensure [women's] participation are being created but await the approval from the Congress of the Republic of Guatemala of an agreement ensuring quotas for women's political participation. In Guatemala, as in many parts of the world, women occupy incipient participation levels that do not allow for real opportunities in political participation... the women of [Guatemala] contribute socially, but we still do not have effective measures to have our voices heard. UN Women in Guatemala is seeking to have the government uphold the UN resolutions, such as 1325 and the latest, 2106, which emphasizes the political participation of women, peace and security which, I believe, should come into effect in real terms.¹⁴

¹² <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8256#comment-8256>

¹³ <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8231#comment-8231>

¹⁴ <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8250#comment-8250>

“Women groups should be strengthened; groups, such as the Umu Ada group [in **Nigeria**]. This group is made up of all the women born in the village or town. Some are married outside the village and some are married within the village. Some women are unmarried, divorced or single mothers and retain their place in their father's household. The ages range from 25 years to the oldest woman alive and born of that village. The older women above 60 years are most respected in their judgment when there is a deadlock among men. This is more obvious in situations where the woman has an outstanding character in the village or town as not being morally corrupt and has been a mother figure to many. My late ex-husband's grandmother was one of such. She hailed from a town called Olokoro in Old Umuahia but was married in a village called Umuobutu. Even though she was not from her husband's place, she was highly respected. Her advice on intertribal conflict was received as the final decision to follow. She gave accounts of matters that her husband, who was the chief, had done and it was believed. 'Da' as she was fondly called was loved and respected for her wisdom, knowledge and peace making. Sadly she died at the age of 130 years. I believe that such women still exist and their roles in peace making should be highlighted. Although the Umu Ada groups have been corrupted to a certain degree, with a bit of counseling and education on basic tenets of justice, I believe that the groups working with the August meeting women groups for wives will ensure peace reigns. After all, the men in question are their husbands, sons, brothers, fathers, relatives etc.¹⁵”

“In **Peru** we lived through an extreme armed conflict between 1980 and 2000. The institutionalism and organization of the people and leaders who did not identify with the group Sendero Luminoso or the army representatives were annihilated. The Commission of Truth and Reconciliation was created post-conflict, charged with investigating and documenting what had happened to make it known to the population and compensate its victims as well as guarantee that history does not repeat itself. The commission involved a well-known policy. Although initially the organized participation of women, especially the victims, was almost nonexistent, following the deep suffering that this war had left in the affected areas, a leadership to rebuild emerged. The support from NGOs and others has been important in the formation and development of women's organizations to development in this new stage, which no doubt have improved and each day affect the improvement of the peace process. It is gratifying to see that women, half the population, are taking increasingly more participatory decisions that affect their lives. Also hundreds of major social conflicts are linked in recent years to mining and the interests of the affected people of my country. Lately negotiating tables have been formed for their settlement but these have not explicitly included women's organizations, which is a serious shortcoming.¹⁶”

¹⁵ <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8226#comment-8226>

¹⁶ <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8280#comment-8280>

“In societies where human rights abuses come in the form of political persecution or oppression certain practices can constitute an abuse. This is especially the case regarding abuses against women, whether domestic or public. To create change and build the foundations of understanding and respect for human rights, a long and comprehensive process is required. It also requires political leadership, strong legislation and effective mechanisms to force compliance, along with extensive education and awareness-raising in the community and in religious institutions, schools and workplaces, and in the media. The post-conflict challenges are many; in the period after the war, societies and political leaders often have the opportunity not only to reflect on the devastation of war and human rights violations, but can also engage to find policies and values to prevent recurring atrocities. Often civil society groups are more easily mobilized and committed to the task of correcting past mistakes, therefore, the role of women is critical since we are the most vulnerable actors. Policies and international legal mechanisms continue to move in favor of the inclusion of women. National governments, multilateral organizations, financial institutions and regional organizations recognize the importance of the participation of women at all levels of peace processes. These policies ensure accountability by governments in the inclusion of women in peace processes.¹⁷”

“- The use of quotas will guarantee women's representation in political processes;
- Pre-negotiation agreements should include the condition that women need to be included in the discussions in order to legitimize the political process and the resultant agreement as women represent a large proportion of the population;
- Sustained advocacy efforts from CSOs and other supportive groups to include women...
- The UN should set an example and include women in their mediation teams, i.e. lead by example; providing technical and financial support to women would definitely facilitate their participation in peace negotiations...
- Financial support is important especially where the venues of the peace negotiations are far and costly and thus may be too expensive for women to attend;
- Provision of security for women, e.g. in a context like Iraq, where there are reports of assassinations, killings of politicians, one needs to hire personal security for themselves and sometimes for their family members;
- Lastly, from discussions with women politicians, networking is important as well as keeping one abreast of the latest information, a lot of peace negotiations are concluded before stakeholders sit at the table. Decisions are taken "in the corridors" and endorsed and formalized at the table. Women need to understand the rules of the game, which unfortunately are based on male connotations, and need to identify male allies who are supportive of women's empowerment. With time, these rules will change as more women get involved in politics and are able to influence processes to result in decisions that support women's empowerment and gender equality¹⁸.”

¹⁷ <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8282#comment-8282>

¹⁸ <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8261#comment-8261>

“To achieve a greater role for women and effectively implement [UNSCR 1325 in Iraq] there is a need for:

- Pressure on the [Iraqi] House of Representatives for effective laws to protect women, peace and security;
- Increased awareness among workers in the security, military institutions and police about violence against women in times of conflict;
- Monitoring mechanisms for the protection of and respect for women;
- Pressure on the state to involve women in peace negotiations, conflict resolution, national reconciliation and post-conflict efforts for reconstruction;
- Recruiting women in the military and security corps for effective participation in maintaining security and stability;
- Sharing information and experiences on women, peace and security through networking and cooperation with women's groups and women's organizations, regional and international organizations that operate in the field of resolution 1325;
- Encourage studies and research on the importance of the resolution for global peace;
- Emphasize the importance of the media's role in uniting the efforts of women activists and women's organizations that are involved in peace-building and security;
- The government and civil society organizations should work on capacity building for women, providing them with new skills in conflict resolution in order to encourage them to work within the negotiating teams;
- Creating strategic partners for [the Iraqi] feminist movements working on activating the resolution 1325 and to create channels of communication with decision-makers in the United Nations...for advocacy and support to achieve the goals of those movements;
- Activating the participation of women's organizations in the formulation of policies, plans and strategies for the [Iraqi] government for the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325, and to identify obstacles to the implementation of the resolution;
- The government should set up a national action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 with the help of local and international institutions, taking into account the special needs of women in hot spots;
- Raise awareness among the judiciary and the police on women's rights;
- The government and civil society should work on awareness campaigns about Resolution 1325;
- Review curriculum to ensure the teaching of the concept of equality between the sexes is applied in all educational institutions.¹⁹”

Q2. Do you have examples of where women's participation improved a peace process?

¹⁹<http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8285#comment-8285>

“Women are by nature conflict mediators; we set the pace and we are always in search of peace and harmony. As more and more women get into politics, the history of conflict will be different. In **Nicaragua** we are blessed to still have alive a great woman who became president of this country by ending a very bloody 10 year-long war. As a woman, she brought about a peace dialogue and allowed a hurt people the opportunity to be reborn, to dream again. This woman returned the faith and hopes to an entire country and sent a message to the world that peace was attainable. I know that perhaps there were many factors that helped make this possible, but I am convinced that it was the fact that she was a woman, a wife and mother that moved the people to fight with faith and with the hope to attain peace in our country and to stop killing each other. For this, Nicaragua is proud to have had Violeta Chamorro as president.²⁰”

“In **Liberia**, due to the presence of women in the peace negotiations, a peace agreement was concluded and language on gender balance in government institutions was included in the peace agreement.²¹”

“In a few countries women have taken daring steps to contribute to peace negotiations, such as **Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Namibia, Somalia**, and so forth. Historically women have also played prominent roles in peace negotiations among different clans, families and communities. There are numerous studies on the subject and a few organizations have been established recently to entertain this subject (for instance: Global Network of women Peacebuilders).²²”

“Experience definitely teaches that women were deeply involved in the actual disarmament. There are many examples among these:

In **India**, in the northeastern state of Manipur, more than 10,000 people have died as a result of armed violence. The Women's Network of Manipur, survivors of the armed conflict, was created by women to heal the wounds caused by armed violence in their community. The Network sponsors education and supports the children of survivors and raises awareness about the effects of gun violence in the community.

Security Sector Reforms:

In the Liberian conflict, India's first all-women paramilitary unit has been a success, which is why their initial six months of deployment was extended to a full year of service. Women are part of the central reserve policy of India and gained expertise in conflicts, such as in Kashmir and northeastern India. The unit has offered tents to the Liberian police cadets and has also executed raids against narcotics. The

²⁰ <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8233#comment-8233>

²¹ <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8261#comment-8261>

²² <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8260#comment-8260>

head of the unit, Deputy Inspector General, Seema Dhundia, indicated that her presence has resulted in an increase in the number of volunteers for the Liberian national security forces.²³

“Even if women don’t qualify as direct actors in peace dialogues, history shows that they have managed to participate creatively and with initiatives that have improved the process. For example, in **Sri Lanka, Uganda, Kosovo, Chile and Argentina** there were the Truth Commissions and women did not stop until they were heard and made part of these commissions. This is also happening in my country, Colombia.²⁴”

“Society must have a photographic memory of women’s participation throughout history, as in **Colombia**, where there have been great women in our history, Manuela Beltran and Policarpa Salvarrieta. I hope the new policies include us in their peace processes; at least that is what we hope for in the peace process in Colombia, for women’s participation.²⁵”

“[In **Somalia**] over 1,000 youth aged between 18-25 years have been salvaged from the notorious Al Shabbab militia by SWA members after they expressed their interest in leaving the group. In the Somali civil war women find themselves at the center of conflicts fought between their sons, husbands and relatives. Peacebuilding conferences in Somaliland, in Borama and Sanaag (1993) and Hargeisa (1996), would not have taken place without the collective lobbying of women pressuring the elders to intervene to end the conflicts.

The IIDA Women Development Organization of Merca initiated in 2007 the Somali Women’s Agenda (SWA), linking Somali women in the diaspora with those in the country. The network Women Pioneers for Peace and Life, known as HINNA, became ‘peace pioneers’, organizing peace campaigns and using the respect they earned as fighters to intervene with militia and warlords to diffuse tensions at critical times in Mogadishu. In the Arta conference in Djibouti and the Mbgathi conference in Kenya, women made inroads with their participation and representation.²⁶”

Q3. What can women politicians do to guarantee their seat at the negotiating table? What do you believe women can offer in these situations?

²³ <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8282#comment-8282>

²⁴ <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8231#comment-8231>

²⁵ <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8275#comment-8275>

²⁶ <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8220#comment-8220>

“Women must be empowered and must participate...We need to be involved in the process, as it is based on the importance that we can convey perspectives from the point of view of gender, equality and local agendas. Women's participation is a prerequisite for the empowerment of the construction of this democratic society, based on the processes of equality, justice and rights, when it comes to a peace process.²⁷”

“In politics women have to go the extra mile to prove themselves capable politicians to their own political parties and to the public.

- There is strength in numbers so a lot of lobbying and advocacy is needed by women politicians and supported by women activists and male allies;
- Networking and understanding of the dynamics of the political context to take advantage of opportunities in a timely manner, i.e. speaking up on issues relating to the peace process. This brings visibility to women politicians;
- Presenting and advocating issues that address the needs of the different segments of the population and not just women's issues;
- Use the media. Women should have media contacts and work with them to ensure that they get coverage for their efforts at peace-building.

Women have a lot to offer substantively in the issues that are discussed and included in the peace agreement; which will drive the processes of peace-building and state-building. The inclusion of women is therefore critical.²⁸”

“Guaranteeing a seat for women on the negotiation table implies first of all having that seat. And we are aware that very few women occupy that seat. Occupation of that seat again does not mean that it will be sustainable and that future women will keep on occupying that seat. It remains a battle, a struggle to gain the right for that seat. Quotas can offer sometimes a solution: a fragile solution. Because quotas can, on one hand help women to get that seat, but on the other hand, be used as a gift, token to exert loyalty. So, what is the solution for women to get their seat and stay on it?

We often speak of gender but fail to comprehend a gender approach to situations. The focus remains too much on women that solutions often fail to be sympathetic to male needs and involvement. In other words: to assure that women occupy a seat in peace committees, it is crucial that men should be more actively engaged than women in promoting women's involvement. It is not only the misperception of gender being equal to 'women' that has created far too many backlashes, it is also the monopolization of women in that field that creates resistance among men to accept it as a genuine tool of equality.

²⁷ <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8265#comment-8265>

²⁸ <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8261#comment-8261>

To guarantee women's emancipation and equal representation, **male emancipation** is in fact the key; otherwise we keep on running in circles. Changing times requires changing perceptions. Initiatives for and by women are not the solution.

In short: to guarantee success and sustainability of women's position at the negotiation table, the main goal should be to assure that it comes from men, men who understand, are open and aim to work together in a gender balanced manner. What women can do is to steer the gender agenda towards a new approach, an approach where men will also find their place. Focus on how to get men on board.

And of course women can continue advancing capable women at the negotiation table, provide training and consultancy and use their network and organization to get the best candidate for the job.²⁹

“Under the above context and in regards to the development of the Peace Talks surrounding the "General Agreement to end the conflict and build stable and sustainable peace", signed between the Government of **Colombia** and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC - EP), the peace and transition process in Colombia is a unique opportunity to address the structural causes of inequality and discrimination emergent through violent conflict, and consequently, an opportunity to position the women's agenda into the peace process as not only central due to the impact that armed conflict has had on their human rights, but also, without the involvement of the women, given their historical contribution to the peace building, both the legitimacy of the process itself as well as the sustainability of the agreements is put at risk.

The participation of women in these areas of public consultation, based on their historical experience in building peace and reconciliation throughout the country, demonstrates the ability of women to provide concrete peaceful solutions to conflict, however, this capacity contrast with the fact that addressing gender issues and women's rights were not part of the agenda of the Peace Talks and therefore have not been a priority within the partial agreements achieved to date.

Therefore, and after the active role of the UN in the national forums that have taken place in Colombia in consultation with civil society to ensure the representation and participation of women, women's organizations, after raising queries with the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, proposed that UN Women support the organization of a summit in which women from diverse regional, political views and experiences in peace building and active neutrality measures in relation to conflict, have the opportunity to dialogue and build proposals to deal with the challenges that must be addressed in a possible post-agreement scenario to end the conflict.

UN Women, in coordination with the Office of the Resident Humanitarian Coordinator, shared this request with all agencies of the United Nations System in Colombia and pledged to support the implementation of the Summit as an initiative of women's organizations, under the criteria governing

²⁹ <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8260#comment-8260>

their work accompanying the process of peace building and post-conflict proposals relating to the respect for the principles of fairness, diversity and pluralism.

The Women's Summit will use the women's contributions to the 5 points on the agenda of the peace talks between the Colombian Government and the FARC, in both the National Forums (agricultural, participation, illicit drugs) and at the regional talks convened by the Congress's Peace Commissions, under proposals surrounding the challenges and countersignature mechanisms, implementation and verification of agreements reached on comprehensive agricultural development, political participation, ending the conflict and a solution to the drug problem and its victims. In this regard, we, women, hope to contribute not only to the current process, but to provide proactive input to possible peace talks with the ELN (another guerrilla organization).

In Latin America and the Caribbean there is some progress in the inclusion of women in peace processes, but there is a general lack of awareness of the Security Council's resolution in promoting women's participation in conflict prevention and resolution.³⁰

The **Democratic Republic of Congo** "is categorized as a post-conflict country, but armed conflict continues to this day in the East, conflict that the DRC is determined to end, with the assistance of SADC and the United Nations. The political participation of women in my country seemed very far because the war created a great obstacle to the reconstruction of our country, but the women did not cross their arms and do nothing; although absent in the political negotiations, they continued to lobby, and talk to end the atrocities in the East, they imposed their voice and presence in the management of the country. Many of the strategies and actions were taken to achieve political power. Congolese women won their place with massive representation during the national peace negotiations organized by the President of the Republic, who stated, in clear terms, for at least 30% participation of women in all institutions as well as reserving one seat out of three for women in parliament. It was a great victory over the long struggle led for years by the Congolese women."³¹

"Women must learn to work together...get a consensus among themselves before approaching the men. The men will not always dictate the tune by their financial capabilities. We must work on our numbers and that way get the men to come to us. We must empower each other so we can all have some level of economic independence when the men come with their money to sway us. Our energy must come from our commitment to what is right for the common man, our passion as mothers and daughters to ensure that justice prevails and our strength and unity in numbers. Only then can we speak at the negotiating table. More importantly, we must put our best foot forward. The women we send must be intelligent and if possible more intelligent than the men. They must be able to hold their own."³²

³⁰ <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8231#comment-8231>

³¹ <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8271#comment-8271>

³² <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8227#comment-8227>

“Women politicians must take leadership roles and be representatives of women's rights and / or mediators through women’s support, especially if they hold public office, where they face obstacles (e.g. macho intimidation, lack of funding, political harassment...) ...even when women politicians are mediating and seek to make the conflicting parties (state, company, town) come together to help better understand and solve problems, they must insist on their involvement of the mediation of conflict in the interests of women and their participation as guarantors of compliance with the agreements.³³”

“... The question should really be how the international community, such as the UN and other bodies, can help women find spaces in peace negotiations and in the politics of the post conflict states. Accountability and affirmative action are crucial. When the CPA of **Sudan** started there were promises of including women, and when the negotiations took place women were left out and were not allowed to participate; this took place almost in all peace negotiations around the globe. Women said that the UN failed them by not standing and advocating their rights to be there....All these are just products of our masculine mentality that the international organization are bearing as well, so it is imperative to highlight the importance of women’s inclusion to push forward towards better representation and women’s participation. Women, as well as being active in the struggle against exclusion, their struggle should also include bringing in new strategies and approaches to the table that can help secure proper representation.³⁴”

“Gender equality in political participation is a path for development as well as for good governance and democracy. The role of women is essential, as it includes their empowerment for the protection of women’s human rights and their work for the prevention of sexual violence... through economic programs, among others.³⁵”

Conclusion

It was mostly agreed that while certain legislative measures, such as quotas, state policies and UN resolutions, are necessary to guarantee women a seat at the negotiating table, it was also agreed that women living in male-dominated societies cannot expect these measures to be handed to them on a silver platter. Women need to impose themselves, not only as mediators but as providers of solutions to conflicts; they need to make their voices heard and become actors in the process of reconciliation. They must insist on their involvement in the mediation of conflict to guarantee the interests of women and other vulnerable and misrepresented groups.

³³ <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8280#comment-8280>

³⁴ <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8243#comment-8243>

³⁵ <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/comment/8282#comment-8282>

Regardless, women also need help from the international community through accountability and affirmative action. There needs to be a strong international commitment to involve women in peace negotiations. Women's participation must be mandatory as a guarantee of the equality of the peace process.

One of our users mentioned that in order to guarantee women's emancipation and equal representation, male emancipation is in fact the key; that changing times requires changing perspectives and in order to guarantee the success and sustainability of women's position at the negotiating table it is necessary that this change come from men, those who understand and aim to work together and alongside women in a gender balanced manner. It is a question of changing minds not just imposing legislation.

Throughout history there have been many women who have improved or even lead the peace process in their countries. Their role has been invaluable and an inspiration for women everywhere. Knowing this, women must work together, provide training and consultancy and use their networks and organizations to get the best candidate for the job, to groom women to lead. They must also change the minds of men, proving that women are just as capable and that their voices need to be heard.

Finally we would like to thank all our members who contributed to this rich discussion!