

OSCE roundtable on women's leadership in peacebuilding and conflict prevention: UK contribution

Why is it important to have more women in leadership positions in conflict prevention and peacebuilding?

Five main reasons:

(a) The starting point is very low – between 1990 and 2017, in all major peace processes – women made up only 2% of mediators; 8% of negotiators and 5% of witnesses and signatures. Barriers include assumptions that, as women are often not direct combatants, their role in cessation of hostilities is limited. But there are serious myths which need puncturing – chief amongst them that: there are not enough qualified women to participate in peace processes (which is wrong); and that peace processes should not take into account informal power structures in communities (which is also wrong).

(b) Peace processes set the blueprint for the future – without women at the peace-table (who make up around 50% of the population), we are missing valuable expertise and experience in shaping that future. Although women are often not direct combatants, women's role in informal power structures in communities can be used to promote both conflict and peace.

There are good examples here. In Colombia, the comprehensive peace agreement in 2016 set an international example for women's involvement: women rallied public opinion for the talks and were significantly represented as delegates in the inclusive peace talks, mediating local cease-fires that led to passage of people, food and medicine and negotiating release of hostages. During the Northern Ireland negotiations, female signatories representing the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition acted as channels for bi-communal civil society involvement in the official peace-making process and were able to broaden the negotiations to include victim's rights and reconciliation.

(c) Backed up by facts – when women meaningfully participate in peace processes, the resulting agreement is 64% less likely to fail and 35% more likely to last at least 15 years (UN Women). So without the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in these processes, we are all exposed to a much less stable world. Diversity, and diversity of leadership, leads to more informed decision making and better policies.

(d) Women and girls can also ensure broader societal issues are included in peace and security mechanisms – According to the UN, women and girls may face increased vulnerabilities during or after a crisis. Some 60% of all preventable maternal deaths in the world take place in conflict, displacement or disaster settings. Girls in conflict settings are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school than boys. And the rise and resurgence of conflict and violent extremism, triggers patterns of sexual violence, including rape,

sexual slavery and forced marriage. Evidence from GAPS, Women's International Peace Centre and LSE also suggested women and girls are disproportionately affected by climate change. And over the last year we have seen women on the front line of the global pandemic, providing vital humanitarian relief and services.

(e) Essential step towards ensuring the equal rights of women and girls – Women's rights are human rights. And it is therefore fitting that this discussion is taking place on International Women's Day.

What can the OSCE and participating States do to promote women's leadership in peacebuilding and conflict prevention?

(i) Ensure there is an inclusive culture in OSCE's peacebuilding and conflict prevention forums and mechanisms – like any workplace. Women need to be included in the format and substance of discussions from the onset. Need a positive working culture that is free from any form of discrimination, bullying or harassment, including sexual harassment. For those of us in these structures – we need to challenge ourselves about any implicit bias we have. And we listen – to obstacles and roadblocks which others have. We call out bad behaviour which may limit certain individuals wanting to take up leadership positions.

(ii) Actively seeks ways to ensure women's full participation in OSCE's conflict prevention and peacebuilding structures – building on the OSCE's toolkit – Inclusion of Women and Effective Peace Processes. This includes consultations with and listening to civil society groups on aspects of the conflicts which affect peoples' lives – freedom of movement, jobs, schooling, health care, access to pensions, electricity, water, gas or roads. Need to challenge ourselves – with the conflict mediation and resolution structures the OSCE has, is there more we can do, consistent with the OSCE's toolkit.

(iii) Provide tangible support and protection for women peacebuilders, through:

- supporting Women Mediator networks – so women can learn from other role models, get access to support, and there are identifiable individuals who are ready to be deployed to support peace processes around the globe
- Women Peacebuilders often work at great personal risk and face threats, violence and abuse on a regular basis. The International Civil Action Network has developed a [Protection Framework for women peacebuilders](#) which the UK supports and which was developed through conversations with women peacebuilders about their experiences and needs. The framework lists a series of 19 recommendations including establishing protection guidelines and protocols, supporting the capacity of law enforcement officers to respond to threats, and establishing and implementing rules of engagement to ensure respectful communication and treatment during peace processes, amongst others. By the OSCE and its participating States supporting and implementing the recommendations of the Framework,

we can help protect women peacebuilders and facilitate greater involvement of women in peace processes at all levels of leadership.

(iv) Support also starts earlier. Ensure women and girls are able to reach their true potential (1) – through being free of sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and abuse, domestic violence or sexual violence in conflict. So:

- a focus by the OSCE, its structures, its field missions and vitally the participating States to prevent domestic violence (which has increased shockingly under COVID-19) is essential
- ensure a zero tolerance approach for sexual exploitation and abuse is vital for the OSCE as an organisation and us as contributing participating States
- ensure women and girls who have experienced sexual violence in conflict are prevented from re-traumatisation (putting the needs of survivors at the heart of a response – through initiatives such as the [Murad Code](#))

(v) And ensure women and girls are able to reach their true potential (2) – through access to quality education, training and positive role models:

- ensuring access for all girls to quality education – and over a decade of quality education
- that girls' experience is built around positive role models, and is free of discrimination or gender stereotypes
- ensure gender is mainstreamed into all activities, including talent pipelines and recruitment processes

What role can men play to promote women's leadership? How to engage men actively to support such efforts?

- we need to help in implementing all the above. Because it is obviously in interests of men as well to ensure more sustainable peace processes and ensure we account for all elements to enable a comprehensive approach to security. All these above tangible steps need men, as well as everyone, to help bring to fruition
- ensuring women and girls reach their full potential, through access to quality and training is vital and needs all of us, including men
- we need to enable a positive working culture and environment – that is free from any form of discrimination, bullying or harassment. That needs us all – including (or particularly men). We all need to challenge ourselves and educate ourselves about the implicit bias we have and listen to others – about obstacles and roadblocks, and do something about them. Reverse mentor schemes are good in this regard
- men need to call out bad behaviour. And – in a privileged position as a male leader I am in – we need to listen to obstacles and roadblocks. And

do something about it

- as men often perpetrators, there needs to be essential focus on stopping domestic violence, sexual violence in conflicts and sexual exploitation and abuse
- and a key role for us in standing up to others. Bystander and ally training is an important initiative
- and there needs to be more men in senior positions and leadership positions to stand up and communicate and advocate for women's leadership. Get over any myths of this being a zero sum game and being in everyone's interest