

**Follow/Mention
@HouseForeign**

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Ed Royce (R-CA), Chairman
House Foreign Affairs Committee Hearing:
Women Fighting for Peace: Lessons for Today's Conflicts
March 22, 2016**

(As prepared for delivery)

Our thoughts and prayers are with those in Brussels in the aftermath of this morning's attack.

This hearing will come to order. This is the third in our series of hearings to examine challenges facing women worldwide.

This hearing will examine the effect of women's participation on peace negotiations, and other efforts to reduce violence and extremism.

In the midst of Women's History Month, it is fitting that we are joined today by a truly historic panel. We are honored to have two courageous leaders testifying – Betty Bigombe of Uganda and Monica McWilliams of Northern Ireland. These two risked much to end conflicts, and blazed a trail for women peacemakers to come.

This is a critically important discussion. From Syria, to Afghanistan, to Sudan, armed conflicts are becoming increasingly deadly and disruptive. Efforts to negotiate their end are more important than ever.

And simply put, when women are at the negotiating table, success is more likely. Research shows that a peace agreement is more likely to be reached – and is 35 percent more likely to last at least 15 years, when women are involved.

When you consider that historically, over half of all peace agreements fail within the first five years – women's involvement becomes imperative. Think about the lives saved and economies maintained by a 35 percent decrease in repeated conflicts.

Moreover, the way in which peace agreements are negotiated is changing. Instead of a traditional cease-fire and division of territory, talks now lay the groundwork for future governance structures and social institutions.

Not surprisingly, when women are excluded from these essential discussions, their rights and interests are overlooked – and often undermined. Out of nearly 600 peace agreements signed between 1990 and 2009, only 1 percent referenced violence against women.

This has major implications, not just for a country's women and girls, but also for its broader governance and stability. In societies where violence against women goes unpunished, we see more violence, crime and conflict on the whole. Men who abuse women to get what they want tend to take the same violent, uncompromising approach towards others, too. What follows is a lack of law and order – an absence of stability.

Nations also benefit from women's participation in law enforcement and security institutions, realizing better crime reporting and higher levels of trust within the communities they serve.

And women are essential to confronting one of the greatest national security threats of our time: the spread of violent extremism. Extremist groups are obsessed with suppressing and controlling women. No one understands this better than women themselves.

Yes, some women embrace extremist ideologies, but the vast majority vehemently oppose such severe limits on their education, work, movement and public life. Yet in places where we are most concerned about the spread of extremism – such as Pakistan – women are largely absent from the tables of power. This seriously limits access to, and information from, what is arguably the most motivated half of the population: a nation's women. They are a huge bulwark against extremism if empowered.

U.S. foreign policy has recognized the benefits of women's inclusion in working towards sustainable peace. While Iraq and Afghanistan have been challenging, our efforts to push for women's participation have been helpful. And current work by the State Department and USAID to train and assist women's groups should be supported.

Of course, the struggle for women's participation is certainly not just a foreign concept, and we as a nation are still making progress. One of the most important things men can do is to stand with, and be deserving partners to women in their fight for representation and equality around the globe.

And of course, listen! Women on my staff made the point that we need to do a better job of recruiting female experts for our hearing panels. And I look forward to the day when we have more women serving on this Committee.

Because as I hope today's hearing will demonstrate, the benefits of women's participation – and the risks of their exclusion – in all aspects of governance and peacemaking are too great to ignore.