

U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs

HEARING:
“Women Fighting for Peace: Lessons for Today's Conflicts”
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Testimony submitted by
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Chairman Royce, you’ve put a crucial topic squarely on the agenda of one of the most prominent committees in Congress. Thanks to you, Ranking Member Engel, and all committee members for your commitment.

For more than 15 years, the Institute for Inclusive Security, led by Ambassador Swanee Hunt, has increased the inclusion of women in peace and security processes around the world. All that we do is driven by the thousands of members of our global Women Waging Peace Network. Together, we work on current conflicts, in countries affected by war, and with policymakers in the US, other governments, NATO, the UN, and beyond.

Vivid Realities

“Women Fighting for Peace.” This topic has always been rich with anecdotes.

We hear about centuries-long traditions of women mediating between warring clans in Somalia and Afghanistan.

We listen to pioneers like Betty Bigombe of Uganda, Monica McWilliams of Northern Ireland, and so many others, who fought resistance at every step of their path to the peace tables where decisions affecting *their* lives were made.

We’re told tales of Liberian women physically blocking the doors until the negotiating parties agreed to stop the violence, and stories of Arab women mobilizing hundreds of thousands to rise up against repressive regimes, only to be told that it’s just not their place to reshape the country afterward.

A few months ago, Afghan women witnessed the subtle recruitment of young men into violent extremist groups *at weddings*. When they reported it to a government minister, he laughed condescendingly, saying, “The militants we’re fighting are much too sophisticated to recruit at a wedding!” A month later, those same young men killed 32 civilians on a bus.

The Evidence

There are thousands of stories just like these—yet, for decades, as we’ve asserted that women play vital roles in ending war and building peace, we’ve been told, “Prove it.” Now we can.

There’s a compelling, robust body of quantitative data to make the case. Here are a few things we now know.

1. **Women get warring parties to negotiations, help reach agreements, and contribute to sustainability of those agreements.**

A new study by the renowned Graduate Institute of Geneva looked at 40 processes in 35 countries and found that when women's groups were able to influence a peace process, an agreement was reached almost 98% of the time. The same research shows that more often than any other participating group, women urged parties to sign peace deals.¹

Analysis of an even larger data set showed that a peace agreement is 35% more likely to last at least 15 years if women participate in its creation.²

Why is that? The data tells us.

Women expand the conversation beyond a narrow discussion of where borders are drawn and who gets to control minerals and oil. They introduce priorities that lay a foundation for a stronger state in the long term—for instance, addressing the abuse of police power or political exclusion. Ensuring food security. Reintegrating those who took up arms and now need jobs. Forgiving neighbors who killed neighbors.

Women are also uniquely connected to their communities. A round of peace talks for Darfur once ground to a halt because the parties (many of whose leaders were living in exile) couldn't agree about who would control a certain river. Then women, who were serving as technical advisers, walked in and said, "That river? That river dried up years ago!"

Women are also key to gaining public support for negotiated settlements. Agreements are typically reached by the very parties that drove the conflict in the first place and, as such, they're often rejected by the people. Data shows that women's meaningful inclusion increases the perception of legitimacy of the process and improves the likelihood that otherwise disaffected communities will accept the agreement.³

One of the few women who participated in the negotiations that led to Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005 told me, "Our leaders knew they needed us [women] to sell the agreements back at home. We took it to villages and explained what self-determination meant and how eventually we would be able to vote on whether or not to separate. Women later made up the majority of voters (52%) in the referendum."⁴

¹ Based on the multi-year research initiative led by Dr. Thania Paffenholz, "Broadening Participation in Political Negotiations and Implementation" conducted at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies' Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding. See also "Beyond the Normative: Can Women's Inclusion Really Make for Better Peace Processes?" by Dr. Paffenholz, April 2015.

² Statistical analysis by Laurel Stone, as featured by Marie O'Reilly, Andrea Ó Súilleabháin, and Thania Paffenholz in "Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes," International Peace Institute, 2015.

³ Theresa de Langis, "Across Conflict Lines: Women Mediating for Peace; 12th Annual Colloquium Findings," Washington, DC: The Institute for Inclusive Security, 2010.

⁴ Statements by Dr. Priscilla Nyanyang Joseph Kuch, Deputy Minister of Gender, Child and Social Welfare for South Sudan, interviewed by Jacqueline O'Neill, April 19, 2013, Washington, DC. Voter turnout data by the European Union Election Observation Mission to the South Sudan Referendum, released January 17, 2011.

2. **The ways war is waged and peace is built are changing fast.**

In many ways the peace table itself is disappearing. With the rise of non-state actors, splintered opposition movements, and terrorist groups, getting parties to the negotiating table is ever more challenging. Fortunately, women are already improving security in innovative ways that don't rely on formal processes.

They're urging party leaders to talk to each other. Colombian women are largely credited with laying the foundation that led to the country's current, and so far largely successful, peace talks.

They're mediating conflicts at local levels. It may sound hard to believe, but some women in ISIS-controlled territories in Syria have negotiated to re-open schools.

They're also on the front lines of violent extremism. This is an area where, often, we hear only about women's roles as mothers and their ability to identify early signs of radicalization in their sons.

The reality is that women play a complex range of roles—from fighters who join groups, to community leaders who provide alternatives to extremist propaganda, to women in security forces who put their lives on the line to reduce corruption, rebuild deep-seated mistrust, and develop genuine relationships between police and communities.

Beyond impacts on violent extremism, research tells us that women's inclusion in the security sector, particularly in law enforcement, plays a major role in the stabilization of communities and reduction of human rights abuses committed by security forces.⁵

3. **Engaging women in decision making is not something we do for them, but for all of us.**

Harvard researchers found that the single biggest predictor of whether or not a country would go to war with itself or its neighbors is not its GDP, its level of democratization, or its ethnic or religious affiliation—it's how well its women are treated.⁶

A former U.S. ambassador and senior administration official points out that states that respect and engage women are less likely to traffic in drugs, weapons, and people. To create or harbor terrorists. To enable criminal networks. To generate refugees. Even to suffer pandemics. Ultimately, these countries are also less likely to need U.S. boots on the ground.⁷

⁵ Lonsway et al., "A Tale of Two Genders: A Content Analysis of Civil Liability Cases, Sustained Allegations and Citizen Complaints," The National Center for Women and Policing, April, 2002.

⁶ Valerie Hudson, Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill, Mary Caprioli, and Chad F. Emmett, *Sex and World Peace*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

⁷ "Building on Success: A New Agenda on Women, Peace, and Security," presentation by Donald Steinberg, President, World Learning, at the Bush School of Government and Public Service, Texas A&M, September 11, 2015.

Smart Policy, Inconsistent Practice

It's clear that women's inclusion is both a rights agenda *and* a national security imperative.

The U.S. devotes tremendous resources—precious lives and limited treasure—to ending war, promoting democracy, and countering terrorism. The impact of those investments can be enhanced by focusing them on women's inclusion in peace and security processes.

In short, it's about making the money we spend abroad more effective, and ultimately needing to spend less of it to achieve our goals.

Perplexingly, we also know that despite all of this evidence, the practice of meaningfully including women in decision making related to peace and security is wildly inconsistent. It's still far too dependent on the will of individuals.

Presidents, high-level officials, lead negotiators, and others can largely choose to ignore the imperative, or frighteningly, even take steps backward. What's more, they face absolutely no negative consequences for doing so.

I heard a story last week that illustrates this point precisely. U.S. Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power recalled a briefing at the Security Council. The UN's then newly-appointed Special Envoy to Yemen was describing the objectives for his first deployment, and indicated the meetings he planned, including some with civil society and women's groups. Ambassador Power recounts that one Council member said: "Meeting with women? But you have so little time. Maybe if there weren't a war on...." At home and around the world, there's still a prevailing perception that women's inclusion is a "nice to have," not a "need to have."

Only four percent of people who have signed peace agreements since 1992 have been women.⁸ The numbers are even worse when it comes to women in security forces. In the Middle East and North Africa, women make up two percent of police forces.⁹ In some places, they're less than one percent. Even in the United States, women make up only about 12 percent of law enforcement.¹⁰

Consider every foreign delegation trip by members of this committee. You've no doubt met with national security directorates, ministries of defense, cabinets, and foreign affairs specialists. How many were women in leadership roles?

A False Choice

There's more rhetoric on this topic than meaningful change. Well-meaning people explain that they believe it's important, but simply can't make it one of their top priorities when a war is raging.

⁸ UN Women, "Facts and Figures: Peace and Security," March 2016. <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/facts-and-figures#notes>

⁹ "Gender Sensitive Police Reform in Post-Conflict Societies", Policy brief by UN Women, revised October 2012.

¹⁰ Kevin Johnson, "Women move into law enforcement's highest ranks," *USA Today*, December 2, 2015. <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/08/13/women-law-enforcement-police-dea-secret-service/2635407/>

That’s a fundamental misunderstanding – and a false choice. Engaging women is essential to achieving each of the top priorities, and to ensuring long-term progress, not just short-term gains.

At the U.S. Institute of Peace, Vice President Carla Koppell uses a business analogy, saying that it’s time to take this concept from “retail” to “wholesale,” making it part and parcel of the way we do business.

How can Congress make that so?

First, pass the bipartisan Women, Peace, and Security Act to codify the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security.

The National Action Plan is a whole-of-government strategy to integrate women’s inclusion in all aspects of U.S. diplomacy, defense, and development.

It sets out “the course the U.S. Government will take to accelerate, institutionalize, and better coordinate our efforts to advance women’s inclusion in peace negotiations, peacebuilding activities, and conflict prevention; to protect women from sexual and gender-based violence; and to ensure equal access to relief and recovery assistance, in areas of conflict and insecurity.”¹¹

While there remains much to be done, since the plan was created in 2011, we’ve seen positive impacts.

The National Action Plan has provided guidance for diplomats around the world, changes in reporting obligations for foreign assistance programs, and improved coordination of funding for women, peace, and security efforts and operations in many parts of State, USAID, and DoD.

There have even been unexpected positive impacts on the ground. In Sierra Leone, the State Department supported for a local women’s leadership network. When Ebola broke out, women used the network to gather community leaders and health care workers. They made vital recommendations that became standard operating procedures, such as increasing women’s roles in burial management (a common form of transmission); empowering local community members to trace contacts and provide psychosocial services; and elevating community leaders to bridge deadly communication gaps between districts and the national government.¹²

Codifying the Plan into law will help ensure that women’s inclusion will be a focus no matter who sits in the White House.

¹¹ United States National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, December 2011.

¹² U.S. Department of State, “Implementation of the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security,” FY2014.

It will enable Congress to have more information to exercise its oversight role. Last year's Omnibus Appropriations Bill included a new requirement that the Administration report to Congress on the implementation of the National Action Plan. These reports shouldn't be a one-off. The Women, Peace, and Security Act includes a provision for regular reporting, which would enable Congress to hold agencies accountable for the actions they committed to undertake, and to see early signs of deviation.

And, it would be a clear statement from Congress that women's inclusion is a foreign policy imperative.

Second, appropriate funding.

Many of the needed changes won't cost money, but some require more. In several cases, we're talking about more responsibly spending the money we're already dedicating. For example, last year, for the first time, Congress appropriated dedicated funding for the recruitment, retention, and professionalization of women in the Pakistani police forces.

Women constitute about one percent of those forces, and their absence has a tremendous negative impact on the ability to stabilize communities and counter violent extremism. It's important that support continue and that more specificity is provided in funding language to ensure at least \$5 million to support training programs, recruitment campaigns, infrastructure projects, promotion reforms, and more.

Our team has had the opportunity to work Pakistani women leaders for the past six years, including most recently with uniformed police officers. These tiny investments are badly needed to increase the numbers, rank, and overall impact of women police. This \$5 million represents approximately 10% of the total budget request for law enforcement and narcotics programs in Pakistan this year, and is part of the funding we are already spending there. And, an even tinier—actually miniscule—fraction of overall U.S. spending on counterterrorism.

From support for women's inclusion in the Syria negotiations to the recruitment of women in the Afghan National Security Forces, Congress should ensure its appropriations bills provide needed financial support in places where women's inclusion is severely lacking. This is about smart spending and big dividends.

Third, insist that members of every congressional delegation trip meet with female community and government leaders.

Members will gain valuable insights as well as signal women's importance to national and U.S. governments alike. In the same vein, members should prioritize meeting with the many delegations of women who, each year, travel from conflict-affected countries to Washington, DC, to share insights and recommendations.

Fourth, when holding hearings related to international crises, peace, stability, and security assistance, be sure to invite female experts.

They will contribute unique knowledge and expertise, yet are now grossly represented. A recent study by Brookings looked at 45 congressional hearings on the Iran deal over the past year. Out of 140 named witnesses, only six were female. As one analyst noted, this demographic breakdown is strikingly similar to that of Iran’s parliament.¹³

Organizations like ours stand ready to assist Congress in identifying leaders at home and abroad. There’s simply no substitute for hearing directly from women living in areas affected by conflict, yet their voices are seldom sought.

Fifth, ask targeted questions at hearings, particularly of nominees.

Imagine if every potential appointee to a position of influence in diplomacy, defense, or development was asked at a confirmation hearing how the principles of the National Action Plan are reflected in his or her priorities. Even the fear simply of being caught without an answer would prompt meaningful reflection and preparation by candidates and agencies that support them.

Opportunities Ahead

The evidence could not be clearer: when women are included, peace lasts and societies are more stable. Particularly as the nature of war continues to change, we can’t afford to think of women’s meaningful inclusion as an afterthought. As a member of our Network from Afghanistan said recently: “The world talks about including women; extremists are already doing it.”¹⁴

By convening this hearing, Congress sent a signal of bipartisan support to the millions of women around the world seeking a voice and a role. The legislative action that I hope will follow would be a meaningful declaration that their work is valued, and that the United States Congress stands behind them.

¹³ Suzanne Maloney, “Talking about Tehran on Capitol Hill should not be a boys’ club,” Brookings Institution, *Markaz* blog, January 29, 2016. <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/markaz/posts/2016/01/29-iran-hill-testimony-women-maloney?cid=00900015020089101US0001-01301>

¹⁴ Remarks by Wazhma Frogh at “Collaborative Approaches to Global Security”, Washington, DC, October 15, 2015.