

## Expert Briefing: 'Promoting Inclusive Peace'

### Key Takeaways from a Parliamentary Roundtable Discussion, 13th November 2024

On 13th November 2024, the Foreign Policy Centre ([FPC](#)), in collaboration with the Department of Political Science and International Studies at the University of Birmingham ([POLSIS](#)) and the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Women, Peace and Security ([APPG-WPS](#)) convened a parliamentary roundtable to discuss how to negotiate, design and implement effective peace processes and how the UK can promote inclusive peace processes abroad.<sup>1</sup>

The discussion was chaired by **Baroness Fiona Hodgson**, Chair of the APPG-WPS and was led by a panel of experts who shared their insights from academic research, policy, parliament and practice. Speakers were: **Dr Giuditta Fontana**, Associate Professor in International Security at the University of Birmingham, **Dr Fatiha Serour**, Co-founder of Justice Impact Lab and Chair of the Africa Group of Justice & Accountability (AGJA); **Eva Tabbasam**, Director of Gender Action for Peace and Security UK (GAPS-UK); and **Fabian Hamilton**, Member of Parliament for Leeds North East. **Alice Copland**, FPC's Policy and Parliamentary Affairs Manager, also provided her insights.

This expert briefing provides an overview of the key insights, plus recommendations for the UK Government to take action and 'lead by example' to support the realisation of effective peace agreements.

#### Key Insights:

The discussion was prompted by a recently concluded research project led by the University of Birmingham - '*Learning from Failure: How to Prevent Civil War Recurrence*', which was funded by the United States Institute for Peace (USIP).<sup>2</sup> Previous research has found that 40% of civil wars and conflict relapse into large-scale violence after the signing of a Peace Accord. Furthermore, 90% of conflicts in the first decade of the 21st century occurred in countries that had previously experienced conflict.<sup>3</sup>

Research, evidence and experience has shown that peace processes are more likely to be stable and resilient when women are included in peace negotiations, and when peace agreements map socio-economic measures to include women in post-conflict society.<sup>4</sup> Despite this, there has been a backsliding of women's rights and the inclusion of women in peace negotiations remains low. The panel shared their insights from academic research, policy and practice to discuss what makes a peace process successful in ending violent conflict; the role of inclusion, particularly of women, in creating sustainable peace; and how the UK Government can, through its Foreign and Development policies, support the promotion of sustainable, inclusive peace processes globally.

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<sup>1</sup> This roundtable was organised as part of an ongoing partnership between the FPC and POLSIS, with the aim of convening academics, parliamentarians and policy experts to discuss how research relating to inclusive peace can be developed into actionable results.

<sup>2</sup> Preliminary findings are summarised at: University of Birmingham, *Learning from Failure: How to Prevent Civil War Recurrence*, <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/documents/college-social-sciences/policy-briefs/learning-from-failure-how-to-prevent-civil-war-recurrence.docx>

<sup>3</sup> World Development Report 2011, Conflict, Security and Development, World Bank, 2011. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/966731468161352341/pdf/World-development-report-2011-conflict-security-and-development.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, *Women's Participation in Peace Processes* <https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/>; and University of Birmingham, *Learning from Failure: How to Prevent Civil War Recurrence*, <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/documents/college-social-sciences/policy-briefs/learning-from-failure-how-to-prevent-civil-war-recurrence.docx>

**The following 4 key takeaways emerged from the roundtable discussion (expanded in more detail overleaf):**

1. The characteristics of peace settlements matter for preventing the recurrence of civil war;
2. The inclusion of women and civil society organisations at all stages of a peace process is essential for sustainable peace;
3. Key lessons for embedding the inclusion of women in peace negotiations and peace processes can be identified;
4. Distinct challenges to the inclusion of women in peace processes remain;

### **Recommendations for the UK Government**

As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, penholder for the Women, Peace and Security Agenda (WPS) at the UN, and with a strong WPS National Action Plan (NAP), the UK is in a strong position to support peace agreements that will end conflict and to influence positive change toward the inclusion of women in peace processes.

The UK Government should use its influence to 'lead by example' as a donor, diplomat and advocate for the WPS agenda, with inclusion as a core principle of a new Foreign and Development policy. Monitoring, adaptation, reform and resources are essential in the long term for conflict transitions, therefore the UK should carefully select in which contexts it will involve itself and be prepared for long-term commitment.

In particular, the UK Government should:

1. Use influence in multilateral institutions, including the UN Security Council, to advocate for gender-responsive peacebuilding mechanisms and close the gap in financing for women's organisations. Given the current lack of funding opportunities, commit at least 15% of overseas development aid to gender organisations who are doing frontline work in different contexts and expand the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund.<sup>5</sup>
2. Leverage instruments included in the UK's Women Peace and Security (WPS) National Action Plan (NAP) to create coalitions of local, state-level and international actors invested in implementing and monitoring individual peace processes.
3. Identify and empower existing civil society networks and context-specific mechanisms through dedicated technical, diplomatic and financial resources. Where the UK is engaged in a conflict-affected context, nurture and/or build grassroots coalitions to detect discontent or potential spoilers to a peace process and devise context-appropriate action so they can be addressed. This may occur through the UK Peace Builders Framework.<sup>6</sup>
4. Link networks and actors with other third parties and multilateral actors. This could include further implementation of work carried out through the Network of Women Mediators across the Commonwealth which is mentioned in the WPS NAP.
5. Institutionalise and promote women's participation and inclusion to support the creation of gender-focused sub-commissions and formal roles for women at all stages of peace processes. To inform this work, fund monitoring bodies with clear gender metrics to track progress, similar to those used in Mindanao and Colombia.

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<sup>5</sup> Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, United Nations, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/966731468161352341/pdf/World-development-report-2011-conflict-security-and-development.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Dr Alexander Ramsbotham and Dr Teresa Dumasy, 'A 'Force for Peace'? UK peacebuilding and peacemaking and FCAC', Foreign Policy Centre, 06 December 2021, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/966731468161352341/pdf/World-development-report-2011-conflict-security-and-development.pdf>

## Four Key Takeaways for 'Inclusive Peace': Summary of the Discussion

### 1. The characteristics of peace settlements matter for preventing the recurrence of civil war

- Research conducted by the 'Learning from Failure: How to Prevent Civil War Recurrence' project demonstrated that carefully designed and managed peace processes can help prevent civil war recurrence. Two factors are particularly helpful in preventing relapses into violent conflict: United Nations (UN) leadership of peace processes, and peace agreement provisions that map the inclusion of women in post-conflict society.
- UN leadership of mediation and peace processes can help prevent civil war recurrence because of the nature of the UN as a multilateral institution that will involve a number of powers in decision-making about a conflict-affected contexts (including the P5 but also regional and emerging powers). It can also deliver mediation that is perceived as legitimate and impartial; to deploy technical support and know-how; and to mobilise resources in support of a peace process, including if needed to appease potential spoilers in the long and short term. As an example, during the transition from conflict in Sierra Leone, a broad international consensus for conflict settlement was embodied and catalysed by UN mediation of the process, which also legitimised direct military intervention by the UK.<sup>7</sup>

### 2. The inclusion of women and civil society organisations at all stages of a peace process is essential for sustainable peace;

- The inclusion of women in post-conflict societies, through a range of socio-economic measures and efforts to empower individuals and civil society organisations, is also linked with sustainability of peace. These measures enable the needs and experiences of previously marginalised groups to be heard, acknowledged and addressed in war to peace processes, fostering local ownership of peace processes and the dissemination of information and the benefits of peace.
- The research shows that together, UN leadership and the inclusion of women in post-conflict societies, can create and nurture multi-level coalitions invested in maintaining and implementing a peace accord ('coalitions for peace'). This is crucial for enabling the design of peace accords and their implementation by creating space for formal and informal engagement between conflict parties and with other parties in a conflict-affected society.
- The inclusion of women and civil society organisations at all stages of a peace process is essential for sustainable peace
- The inclusion of women in peace negotiations is also essential not only for peace to be more equitable but for it to be sustainable; evidence has shown that a peace agreement is 35% more likely to last at least 15 years when women are included in the process.<sup>8</sup>
- This might be because their inclusion, along with the involvement of civil society leaders, allows for the negotiations to consider the needs of society as a whole and the often-forgotten root-causes of conflict (including education, healthcare, justice and reconciliation).
- The inclusion of women and civil society also increases trust around a peace process because women and civil society connect grassroots and community voices to a peace process to ensure their priorities are considered in high-level negotiations. By bridging this gap, public trust is fostered and peace agreements reflect the lived realities of those affected by conflict.

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<sup>7</sup> 'Sierra Leone', Political and Peace Building Affairs, *United Nations*, <https://dppa.un.org/en/sierra-leone>. 'Sierra Leone, Common Country Analysis: 2020 Updated', United Nations Country Team in Sierra Leone, [https://sierraleone.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/FINAL%202020%20CCA%20Update\\_UNCT%20SL\\_0.pdf](https://sierraleone.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/FINAL%202020%20CCA%20Update_UNCT%20SL_0.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> 'We need more women leaders to sustain peace and development', Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/fr/desa/we-need-more-women-leaders-sustain-peace-and-development>.

### 3. Key lessons for embedding the inclusion of women in peace negotiations and peace processes can be identified

- The experience from worldwide peace processes underlines four key factors that should be considered when promoting inclusive peace agreements (with respect to women, youth and other marginalised constituencies).
- Intent: External actors in a peace process must firstly consider whether inclusion is the real goal they want to achieve. They also need to build a genuine understanding of the situation on the ground. This requires third parties like the UK to engage beyond those in positions of power and leadership, and reach out to grassroots organisations, including women and young people. It also requires a consensus that peacebuilding needs to serve the local community and include them in peace processes. A previous peace mission to Libya is an example of a failure to genuinely include civil society groups and young people.<sup>9</sup>
- Pathway: Those involved in a peace process must identify a clear pathway for how an inclusive peace process will be developed, delivered, and who will be involved. All conflict participants and drivers should be brought together to devise a shared purpose in building peace. Every social group and representation should also be involved. Working on these multiple levels will create a meeting point in which a peace process can be developed. Processes can often fail when external actors seek to move quickly and use pre-existing established structures from the past, whilst failing to listen to local voices. In other instances, a lack of knowledge or expertise can be a barrier in creating sustainable peace processes. Finally, peace processes fail when actors do not have a desire to change the status quo.
- Sustained effort: Peace is a process and not a one-off event. Long-term commitment, time, and consistency are therefore key. Often external actors will enter a peace process and work hard to promote inclusion; however, when progress does not occur as quickly as hoped, enthusiasm for inclusion wanes and less efforts are made. Sustaining effort, as well as political and financial support for an inclusive process is therefore critical.
- Accountability: Peace processes must be monitored to ensure their successful implementation. Accountable implementation is also crucial for engendering trust in the process. Organisations that deliver monitoring should be supported to track progress and highlight where attention is needed.
- Where these four factors align, the inclusion of women in peace processes can offer a contribution to the sustainability and resilience of peace, but also contribute to more just societies. For example, in the peace process in Mindanao (the Philippines), women played a key role at both the grassroots and formal levels of dialogue, making up part of the Philippines and Moro Islamic Liberation Front negotiating teams - which resulted in a women-led negotiating panel for the first time globally.<sup>10</sup> Women's engagement at the leadership level ensured the inclusion of gender responsive provisions such as protections against gender-based violence (GBV) and economic support for women in the Bangsamoro Basic Law. Women's organisations also monitored ceasefires and advocated for gender equality in the final peace agreement. For example, local women worked as mediators to resolve conflicts within communities and strengthen trust between different parties. Women were also included in implementation processes, for example in the Bangsamoro Transition Authority which institutionalised women's roles in governance and peace implementation. The Mindanao Process underlines that the inclusion of women in peace processes can foster resilience in a peace agreement whilst also ensuring that root causes are addressed.

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<sup>9</sup> Fatiha Serour, "African women have shown leadership ability, but institutions and cultural practices hamper their visibility", Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, 18 March 2021, <https://www.uoc.edu/en/news/2021/010-fatiha-serour>

<sup>10</sup> 'The Philippines: Keeping the Bangsamoro Peace Process on Track', International Crisis Group, 30 January 2024, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/philippines/philippines-keeping-the-bangsamoro-peace-process-on-track>.

- Similarly, the 2016 peace agreement between the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) was one of the most gender inclusive in history and is seen as a global benchmark for gender inclusion.<sup>11</sup> In this process there was a deliberate involvement of women, including a gender sub-commission which ensured that over 100 gender-specific provisions were included in the agreement. This included provisions to address sexual violence, economic rights for women and rural development. Women’s rights organisations (WROs) also documented the gendered impacts of conflict and brought the voices of victims to the front of negotiations through mechanisms for dialogue such as truth commissions. The Special Jurisdictions for Peace which was Colombia’s transitional justice mechanism also investigated and addressed sexual violence and gender-based crimes. The Colombian context is key in highlighting the importance of not just symbolic but structural inclusion of women’s civil society groups for achieving legitimacy, accountability and comprehensive outcomes that address root causes of conflict.

#### 4. Distinct challenges to the inclusion of women in peace processes remain

- Building an inclusive peace process and post-conflict context is challenging and often elusive as it takes both time and resources, and deeply challenges the status quo. International actors including the UK generally want to move with speed when they intervene abroad, however there is no ‘quick fix’ and consistent support is needed for a genuinely inclusive process.
- As a result, despite the clear evidence highlighting the important role women and civil society organisations can play in securing sustainable and representative peace-processes, their inclusion is still missing in the majority of processes. New evidence from UN Women found that in 2023, women made up just 9.6% of negotiators, 13.7% of mediators, and 26.6% of signatories to peace agreements.<sup>12</sup> This proportion of women signatories drops to 1.5% if the Colombian agreement is excluded.<sup>13</sup> Of the 31 peace agreements reached in 2023, only 8 had explicit references to women, girls or gender-based violence which was a drop from statistics in 2022. Furthermore, women’s civil society groups are often relegated to so-called ‘soft issues’ such as humanitarian aid, and excluded from discussions about security and power-sharing.
- Women also face fundamental threats in the current global context, making it more challenging to promote inclusion. In Sudan, women face rampant sexual violence and over 260,000 pregnant women lack access to critical care due to the conflict.<sup>14</sup> In Afghanistan, women and girls have been denied a vast number of their rights - including the right to education - since the Taliban’s return to power in 2021. Globally, the proportion of women killed in conflict doubled in 2023 and conflict-related sexual violence increased by 50%.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, women’s rights organisations and human rights defenders are routinely targeted and harassed. When women are excluded from peace processes, there is a greater risk that agreements will perpetuate these inequalities.

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<sup>11</sup> ‘The Philippines: Keeping the Bangsamoro Peace Process on Track’, International Crisis Group, 30 January 2024,

<https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/philippines/philippines-keeping-the-bangsamoro-peace-process-on-track>.

Gaining Traction, Special Representative Tells Security Council, as It Prepares to Discuss Expanding Verification Mission’, SC/15353, United Nations, 12 July 2023, <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15353.doc.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Why we need more women mediators’, Peace and Security, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/peace-and-security/why-we-need-more-women-mediators>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Lives of pregnant women and newborns at risk in Sudan as hospitals run out of fuel’, United Nations Population Fund, 02 June 2023, <https://www.unfpa.org/news/lives-pregnant-women-and-newborns-risk-sudan-hospitals-run-out-fuel>. ‘Sudan Emergency Situation Report No.2’, United Nations Population Fund, 22 May 2023, <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/sudan-emergency-situation-report-2-22-may-2023>.

<sup>15</sup> Philip Loft & Timothy Robinson, ‘Research Briefing: Prevention of sexual violence in conflict’, House of Commons Library, 13 May 2024, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2024-0102/>.