



# ARE PEACE AND SECURITY POSSIBLE WITHOUT WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS?

AND WHY THIS QUESTION MATTERS  
TO THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

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## Executive summary

During and after a conflict, women human rights defenders (WHRDs) work to monitor inequalities, and provide services and redress to victims who might otherwise be overlooked. They shine a light on issues that States may not otherwise examine, and bring public attention to issues facing the most marginalised groups. Often, WHRDs take on the role of peacebuilders or peacemakers, or – even when systematically excluded – identify entry points to contribute to a sustainable peace by bringing the causes and concerns of disenfranchised and grassroots groups to the table. As a result of the work they do, and the role they play in peace and security, women activists hold valuable knowledge and insights into the systemic causes of conflict: the latent inequalities, the deep social, political or economic fractures, and the opportunities for mitigation. For this reason, the voices of WHRDs in peace and security contexts cannot be ignored or instrumentalised. Diminishing their role can increase the risks they face in their work *and* diminish prospects for a sustainable peace. It is imperative that women defenders are able to meaningfully participate in, contribute to, and are recognised and protected by, the Security Council's work and outcomes in order to achieve sustainable and inclusive peace and security.



# Introduction

Women human rights defenders (WHRDs) play a critical role in challenging inequalities, mobilising communities, demanding justice and holding those in power accountable. Often, their important work comes under threat or attack. WHRDs and their movements play an integral role in ensuring safe, secure, peaceful societies, yet the United Nations (UN) Security Council has not taken a clear, comprehensive approach to meaningfully include them in the women, peace and security agenda, and to promote their work. Instead, the inclusion of women defenders has been ad hoc and sometimes contested. This report makes the case for why this should change, summarises key recommendations for how WHRDs could be included more effectively and thoughtfully, and identifies critical questions for further research.

This report was commissioned by the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), an independent non-governmental human rights organisation that is dedicated to supporting human rights defenders and advocating for effective human rights systems. The main methodology employed a desk review of reports, academic publications and resolutions, as well as interviews with women human rights defenders and key organisations and individuals working in the women, peace and security space. Those reports and interviews can be found in Annex 2. The intended audience for this report is the UN Security Council, interested States, and civil society organisations who seek to transform the debate on civil society engagement within the UN's women, peace and security agenda.



## Who are women human rights defenders?

For the purpose of this report, women human rights defenders (WHRDs) are defined as women or non-binary individuals who engage in the defense of any and all human rights, and people of all genders who engage in the defense of women's rights and rights related to gender, sexuality and bodily autonomy.<sup>1</sup> To note, organisations have differing opinions about how to define WHRDs, partially because of the distinction and overlap between WHRDs and peacebuilders or peacemakers, and partially because there is some disagreement around whether men who defend women's human rights are counted in this category. The cited definition serves as a placeholder in order to help frame the position of WHRDs within the UN Security Council's agenda. In the longer term, this report identifies a need for relevant groups to coalesce around a common understanding and shared definition of the term.

It is also important to note that WHRDs are not a specific group. Rather, WHRDs work on cross-cutting human rights issues, ranging from economic, social and political rights, and across sectors; they include journalists, activists, civil society representatives, legal advocates, academics, and those involved in non-governmental rights-based work and service delivery.

## What is “peace and security”?

Whether peace and security can be achieved without women human rights defenders depends on how the concept of peace and security is defined.<sup>2</sup> “Peace and security” means different things to different people or groups. To some, it means the cessation of conflict and the disarmament and demobilisation of combatants.<sup>3</sup> For others, securing and maintaining peace and minimising security risks after a conflict means also ensuring that human rights and women's rights are secured or upheld.<sup>4</sup> To do that, the process by which peace and security are achieved matters: it must be inclusive of women and marginalised groups, and participatory in its evolution. A report published by Conciliation Resources titled “Women Building Peace,” defines inclusion as “ensuring that a wide range of perspectives is represented, including marginalised sections of the community,” rather than protecting only the interests and needs of the elite.<sup>5</sup>

There is a great deal of research and evidence to support the notion that inclusion and participation of women and marginalised groups make peace and security more sustainable.<sup>6</sup> A report from the United States Institute of Peace provides more insight into why that is: “to be effective, the [peace] process needs to give all groups in a society the opportunity to be heard and to have their concerns addressed. This in turn ensures that those most affected – in terms both of fighting on the front lines and of bearing the brunt of the consequences – are actively involved and have a stake in their country's transformation. An inclusive peace is likely to be a sustainable one.”<sup>7</sup> Peace and security that exclude women is neither desirable nor effective – not only from a women's rights and human rights perspective, but from the perspective of those with a sole interest in deterring future conflict. As detailed in this report, women defenders are uniquely positioned and critically important to inclusive, rights-based, participatory and sustainable peace and security.

- 1 This definition is adapted from that employed by the Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition. The definition has been adapted to include non-binary individuals, which mirrors the definition provided by the latest Human Rights Council report from Michel Forst, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders. United Nations, General Assembly. (January 10 2019) “Situation of women human rights defenders: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders.” A/HRC/40/60. <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/40/60>
- 2 Available research includes, Lewis, D., Heathershaw, J., & Megoran, N. (2018). Illiberal peace? Authoritarian modes of conflict management. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 53(4), 486–506. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836718765902>
- 3 Pospisil, J. and Bell, C. (2018). “Securing’ Peace: Women and Security Arrangements in Peace Processes.” UN Women. <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/inclusive-peace-processes-securing-peace-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1150>
- 4 “Leadership from the ground up- Executive Summary of the Report on Women's Civil Society Perspectives on Sustaining Peace.” *The Global Network for Women Peacebuilders*. <http://gnwp.org/sustaining-peace-exec-sum/>
- 5 Newton, D. (2013) “Accord Insight: Women Building Peace.” *Conciliation Resources*. <https://www.c-r.org/resources/accord-insight-women-building-peace>
- 6 One example comes from a report from the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva which reviewed 40 case studies of peace processes over 30+ years. Paffenholz, T. (2015) “Can Inclusive Peace Processes Even Work? New Evidence From a Multi-Year Research Project.” *Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative*. <https://www.inclusivepeace.org/sites/default/files/IPTI-CCDP-Can-Inclusive-Processes-Work.pdf>
- 7 Rausch, C. and Luu, T. (2017) “Inclusive Peace Processes Are Key to Ending Violent Conflict.” *United States Institute of Peace*. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2017/05/inclusive-peace-processes-are-key-ending-violent-conflict>

# What role do women defenders play during different phases of conflict?



*“At local level, I see my work as helping to avoid conflict, on a small scale. There was a water station in Taiz, which is in a mountainous region. People had to walk 8 hours to fetch water, because there is a big problem with fuel and diesel in Yemen. The water station was meant to sustain nine villages, but it was broken, and it would cost a lot of money to fix it. Only one area had water, and they were making people pay a lot of money – and walk a long way – to access it. This created a lot of tension between the nine villages, because everyone wanted to have control over the water. There was conflict in the area over water for two years. I heard about this area, because the initiative I started, Food for Humanity, was already working on water issues. I sent two engineers from my team. They traveled to the area and met with local residents and influential members of the community to figure out what could be done. Then we fundraised for it. I imposed a lot of conditions on them – they had to agree to let local women lead the project, to reduce child marriage. And they went along with it! So now they have water, and they aren’t fighting. There was nothing more to fight about. The water is there, and the water station is working perfectly now.”*

Muna Luqman, Woman Human Rights Defender from Yemen

Understanding conflict – how and when it happens, its impact on civilians and societies, and how peace and security can be facilitated and sustained – is not possible without understanding the role of women human rights defenders. In **the lead up to a conflict**, WHRDs maintain critical knowledge and awareness of the rights landscape. As community organisers, monitors of the State, or challengers of cultural norms, WHRDs hold key insights into slight shifts that may signal escalation towards violence in communities or destabilisation of the State.<sup>8</sup>

This is particularly true for women activists working with groups who are marginalised as a result of their gender

or sexuality, who are often more vulnerable to violence or discrimination in the context of a weakened State, or increasing fundamentalist, conservative or traditional cultural values.<sup>9</sup> When WHRDs’ knowledge and voices are ignored or disregarded, which can occur due to the nature of their work or gender, early warning signs for conflict or violence might be dismissed. This will be discussed in greater depth in the section on the risks and challenges that WHRDs face.

**During a conflict**, women defenders play a number of crucial roles. They provide emergency services, document attacks and human rights violations including with a mind

<sup>8</sup> Asoka, K. (2012) “Global Report on the Situation of Women Human Rights Defenders.” Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition. [https://defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/WHRD\\_IC\\_Global-Report\\_2012.pdf](https://defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/WHRD_IC_Global-Report_2012.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, Page 27.



to providing the evidentiary basis for future prosecutions, support victims of sexual and gender-based violence, identify the needs of women or marginalised groups, and much more. For example, the Kachin Women's Association in Thailand (KWAT), collects data on violations against women in Kachin and Shan States where there are ongoing conflicts. The data they collect include those related to human trafficking, health, and sexual violence.<sup>10</sup> A report from civil society organisation Madre found that "when policymakers and researchers have bothered to document the impacts of local women's mobilisation, the data confirms what people in Kenya, Colombia, Nepal, Iraq and other humanitarian crises could already attest to: grassroots women's work in war and disaster is life-saving and its impact is felt globally."<sup>11</sup>

*"Women's rights activists make up the bulk of the frontline human rights and humanitarian response to armed conflict. They are there long before international actors arrive – and they will be there long after they leave. Their work is fundamental in every phase of a conflict. Any externally-driven conflict intervention that does not acknowledge and support this response fails in its mission to serve conflict-affected populations."*

Jane Barry, "Rising in Response: Women's Rights Activism in Conflict"

In the **aftermath of conflict**, women activists continue to operate in vital ways.<sup>12</sup> In Uganda, for example, they "have contributed to post-conflict recovery through offering psychosocial support and trauma management; documenting women's experiences of war; addressing women's war-related health needs; and monitoring post-conflict programming to ensure accountability and efficient provision of social services such as health and education."<sup>13</sup>

WHRDs are critical to many aspects of post-conflict rebuilding.<sup>14</sup> According to the UN Women Global Study on the implementation of the Security Council resolution 1325, it is necessary to include WHRDs in security sector reform in the aftermath or rebuilding phase post-conflict. WHRDs "can help shape security institutions that are responsive and representative of the population at large,"<sup>15</sup>

which makes them more functional; according to a World Bank blog, an "effective and robust security sector reform process is an important tool for preventing conflict."<sup>16</sup>

*"Women human rights defenders are pivotal in promoting sustainable peace... women human rights defenders promote international human rights law; mobilise society in identifying human rights violations; and contribute to developing solutions with a gender perspective... They often challenge social and cultural norms that limit women's human rights, taking the necessary but often unpopular route of passionate activism for their cause."*

UN News (28 November, 2018). "Increasingly Under Attack, Women Human Rights Defenders Need Better Back Up."

Women activists also play a vital role in peace making and peace building. There has already been a great deal written about women's critical role in and exclusion from peace negotiations and decision making, and that research has demonstrated that women's participation is a requirement for sustainable peace.<sup>17</sup> An April 2018 report from Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS) noted that "political rhetoric on women and girls seen in statements, resolutions and policy documents rarely translates into action and does not seriously acknowledge that women's rights are a cornerstone of sustainable and genuine peace."<sup>18</sup> This is true for women human rights defenders as well: when those who have been actively involved in monitoring, organising, and providing redress in the lead up and during a conflict are left out of peace processes, the peace processes and the sustainability of peace suffer as a result.<sup>19</sup>

In Yemen, for example, according to an article by Rachel Vincent of the Nobel Women's Initiative and Beth Woroniuk of the Match International Women's fund, "women human rights defenders have demonstrated that they not only understand the root causes of the war; they also have concrete solutions that bypass roadblocks to peace. Yet while international diplomats and Yemeni men representing armed groups hold closed-door talks, women human rights defenders are largely ignored. Impediments to aid reaching

10 "Kachin Women's Association Thailand." <https://kachinwomen.com/>

11 Susskind, Y. (2016). "Myth-Busting in Defense of Grassroots Women Crisis Responders." MADRE. <https://www.madre.org/press-publications/article/myth-busting-defense-grassroots-women-crisis-responders>

12 "WHRDs continue to contribute after the ending of hostilities, and play valuable roles in peace-building, strengthening the rule of law, demanding accountability for past and on-going violations, establishing and implementing reconciliation and reconstruction processes, advocating for legal reform, and establishing stable democracies and economies." Asoka, K. (2012) "Global Report on the Situation of Women Human Rights Defenders." Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition. [https://defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/WHRD\\_IC\\_Global-Report\\_2012.pdf](https://defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/WHRD_IC_Global-Report_2012.pdf), Page 27.

13 "Marking International Women Human Rights Defenders Day." National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders Uganda, Isis-Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange, African Great Lakes Human Rights Defenders Protection Fund. <http://isis.orug/marking-international-women-human-rights-defenders-day/>

14 "WHRDs may [also] be engaged in post-conflict rebuilding in a number of ways—as human rights advocates or agents of social change, as participants in peace and reconciliation movements, or even as political candidates" Asoka, K. (2012) "Global Report on the Situation of Women Human Rights Defenders." Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition. [https://defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/WHRD\\_IC\\_Global-Report\\_2012.pdf](https://defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/WHRD_IC_Global-Report_2012.pdf), Page 29

15 Coomaraswamy, R. (2015). "Preventing Conflict Transforming Justice Securing Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1325." UN Women. [https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/UNW-GLOBAL-STUDY-1325-2015%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/UNW-GLOBAL-STUDY-1325-2015%20(1).pdf), Page 180.

16 Burian, A. (April 25, 2018). "Security Sector Reform and Conflict Prevention." The World Bank, Development for Peace. <http://blogs.worldbank.org/dev4peace/security-sector-reform-and-conflict-prevention>

17 Coomaraswamy, R. (2015). "Preventing Conflict Transforming Justice Securing Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1325." UN Women. [https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/UNW-GLOBAL-STUDY-1325-2015%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/UNW-GLOBAL-STUDY-1325-2015%20(1).pdf), Page 15.

18 "Prioritise Peace: Challenging Approaches to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism from a Woman, Peace and Security Perspective." (April 2018) Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS). [http://gaps-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/GAPS-report\\_Prioritise-Peace-Challenging-Approaches-to-P-CVE-from-a-WPS-perspective.pdf](http://gaps-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/GAPS-report_Prioritise-Peace-Challenging-Approaches-to-P-CVE-from-a-WPS-perspective.pdf)

19 "The exclusion of WHRDs from decision-making roles and political processes following the cessation of conflict is an additional concern, especially given that many WHRDs play a significant role in peace-building and democratisation." Asoka, K. (2012) "Global Report on the Situation of Women Human Rights Defenders." Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition. [https://defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/WHRD\\_IC\\_Global-Report\\_2012.pdf](https://defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/WHRD_IC_Global-Report_2012.pdf), Page 29.

civilians – including the prevalence of landmines – is just one of many issues being raised by women activists that are not being addressed by the warring parties, nor by the international community. In the meantime, women continue their work and take great risks.”<sup>20</sup>

Despite restrictions on their access and participation, women human rights defenders have found ways to impact peace. According to a 2015 International Peace Institute (IPI) report, “at the grassroots level, examples abound of women’s leadership in community-based peacebuilding. And even when women are excluded from official peace processes, they have succeeded in linking grassroots peacemaking to national political processes in some cases.”<sup>21</sup> The IPI report also found that when women’s groups influenced peace negotiations, they were able

to raise specific issues and concerns, including women’s rights and gender equality provisions (Burundi’s freedom of marriage provision is cited as an example).<sup>22</sup> Further, the likelihood that agreements would be implemented increased when women’s groups were engaged and able to exert influence.<sup>23</sup>

*“We have seen women leading efforts on sustaining education in Syria. It has become clear that if we don’t ensure that youth get an education now, we will lose a generation and they will join armed groups. Women have been leading the efforts to prevent youth from joining armed groups. They have done this through vocational training, summer camps, education, leadership programs. But these efforts have been underfunded.”*

Maria Al Abdeh, *Women Now for Development*, from Syria

## What obstacles do WHRDs face as they contribute to the attainment of peace and security?



*“Working with organisations in Chechnya, we face a lot of pressure from the government. I can’t express all my feelings in words. The head of our government stated that human rights defenders are worse than terrorists, because we report things and exaggerate them. A lot of human rights defenders get threatened, and get stopped at checkpoints. The government tries to cause problems for their family members. Every week we hear about some activists who are treated badly by the government. Recently, several times during our project, I had to bring my colleagues to the neighboring provinces because the threats were so severe.”*

Woman Human Rights Defender from Chechnya, Name Withheld

20 Vincent, R. and Woroniuk, B. (10 December 2018). “Female human rights defenders need Canada’s unwavering support.” iPolitics. <https://ipolitics.ca/2018/12/10/women-human-rights-defenders-need-canadas-unwavering-support/>

21 O’Reilly, M., Suilleabhain, A., Paffenholz, T. (16 June 2015). “Reimagining Peacemaking: Women’s Roles in Peace Processes.” International Peace Institute. <https://www.ipinst.org/2015/06/reimagining-peacemaking-womens-roles-in-peace-processes>

22 Ibid., Page 11.

23 Ibid., Page 11.



As with all human rights defenders, WHRDs operate in the face of a range of risks and threats. They also face specific violations as a result of their gender or sexual orientation, and are targeted due to the nature of their work.<sup>24</sup> Women defenders come up against violations from their families and communities, who may see their activism as a violation of a traditional or conventionally feminine role. When the State fails to protect WHRDs, or when violators are treated with impunity, the situation for WHRDs can be even more challenging and dire.<sup>25</sup>

For example, in Mesoamerica, according to the IM-Defensoras, there were 3,886 attacks on women human rights defenders, and 53 assassinations of women human rights defenders between 2012 and 2016.<sup>26</sup> During the conflict in Colombia, activists fighting for human rights for the LGBT community have been met with abuse and violence and in some cases, assassination.<sup>27</sup> Codhes, an organisation in Colombia that focuses on displacement, documented that between March 2002 and January 2011, 44 leaders involved in the land restitution process were killed.<sup>28</sup>

In 2018, the United Nations Human Rights Council mandated investigations in Syria, Burundi and Yemen, which reported attacks on women human rights defenders. The Commission of Inquiry on Syria documented that “thousands of women and girls were also apprehended [and detained], including female lawyers, journalists, and activists expressing anti-Government sentiments.”<sup>29</sup> The Commission of Inquiry on Burundi reported that during a 2014 visit, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders observed that “certain categories of defenders [human rights] [were] particularly vulnerable, including journalists, lawyers, advocates working on political and economic issues, and women advocates and advocates working on the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons.”<sup>30</sup> The Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen reported that “women human rights defenders, journalists and activists have faced specific repression on the basis of gender. The Group has documented at least 20 such cases committed by parties to the conflict. Many women faced threats from all sides, suggesting that discrimination against women is endemic.”<sup>31</sup>

Threats to women activists' safety and security is one of the main obstacles they face, and is threaded throughout other specific challenges to their work. (See Annex I for the 8 main barriers WHRDs face in carrying out their work.)

### Connecting women defenders' experience with attaining peace:

Is there a link between the operational context for WHRDs and the risks and threats they face, and the potential for escalation of violence, destabilisation, and insecurity? Research shows that gender inequality is one of the “underlying structural drivers of conflict,” along with “poverty and poor governance.”<sup>32</sup> We also know that “gender

24 Asoka, K. (2012) “Global Report on the Situation of Women Human Rights Defenders.” Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition. [https://defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/WHRD\\_IC\\_Global-Report\\_2012.pdf](https://defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/WHRD_IC_Global-Report_2012.pdf). Page 27.

25 “Human Rights Defenders: Protecting the Right to Defend Human Rights. Fact Sheet No. 29.” Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FactSheet29en.pdf>. Page 14.

26 JASS & Fund for Global Human Rights. (2019) “Power and Protection: Defending Rights in Hostile Contexts.” Just Associates and The Fund for Global Human Rights. <https://www.jass-fghr.org/power-and-protection>

27 “39 murders of LGBT people were recorded in the first 9 months of 2010.” ABColombia, Oficina Internacional de Derechos Humanos-Accion Colombia (Oidhac), US Office on Colombia. “Women Human Rights Defenders and the Struggle for Justice in Colombia.” Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition. [http://defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/columbia\\_report2011.pdf](http://defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/columbia_report2011.pdf). Page 3.

28 Ibid.

29 United Nations, Human Rights Council. (8 March 2018) “‘I lost my dignity’: sexual and gender based violence in the Syrian Arab Republic.” A/HRC/37/CRP.3 <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/ColSyria/A-HRC-37-CRP-3.pdf>.

30 Translated from French. United Nations, Human Rights Council. (12 September 2018) “Rapport final detaille de la Commission d’enquete sur le Burundi.” HRC/39/CRP.1. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session39/Pages/ListReports.aspx>. 86.

31 United Nations, Human Rights Council. (17 August 2018) “Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014.” A/HRC/39/43. <http://undocs.org/A/HRC/39/43>. 82.

32 “Prioritise Peace: Challenging Approaches to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism from a Woman, Peace and Security Perspective.” (April 2018) Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS). [http://gaps-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/GAPS-report\\_Prioritise-Peace-Challenging-Approaches-to-P-CVE-from-a-WPS-perspective.pdf](http://gaps-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/GAPS-report_Prioritise-Peace-Challenging-Approaches-to-P-CVE-from-a-WPS-perspective.pdf)

inequalities of 'everyday' life are exacerbated during situations of conflict,"<sup>33</sup> and that in conflict contexts, "marginalised members of the community tend to become even more vulnerable."<sup>34</sup> Due to increased militarisation, weakened governance or State mechanisms, and normalisation of violence (among other factors) there is evidence to suggest that "situations of conflict may lead to violence against women becoming more intensive and pervasive."<sup>35</sup> WHRDs, vulnerable to threat as a result of their work and gender or sexual identity, may face increased threats for the same reasons.

*"The members of the Women Solidarity Network [in Yemen] maintain peace at the community level. [One member, Sumaia Al-hussam] was able to end a conflict over land in Ha'jaa. This conflict had been ongoing since 2010. She was a member of the national dialogue. When the war happened, she went to her governate, and she tried to create peace. She was able to bring together actors and create a ceasefire and lift barricades."*

Rasha Jarhum, Director of Peace Track Initiative, Yemen

A 2015 Global Report Civil Society Organisation Survey identified anecdotal evidence for the claim that increased targeting of WHRDs goes hand in hand with the escalation of conflict.<sup>36</sup> An organisation in Pakistan reported that "increased militarisation has increased insecurity for civil society, especially women. It has become difficult to gather women for training and other activities. In such situations we also see an increase in violence against women and girls;" a Libyan organisation "highlighted cases of kidnappings and assassinations of women's rights activists in the country;" in Colombia, a civil society organisation "noted that as the visibility of local women's rights defenders increases, so do instances of death threats, rape, etc. Yet, "there is no protection for these leaders from the State or community."<sup>37</sup>

*"Three or four years ago, we started a programme on oral history, along with another organisation, to document women's narratives in the conflict. We found that what women wanted to talk about was the disappeared, as this has been a huge issue in Syria. We organised a workshop, and from this, a group formed: Families for Freedom. This is a powerful example of grassroots women coming together and asking for the truth about detainees. They have been successful in bringing the issue of detention to the peace talks. They have been good at advocating what the international community."*

Maria Al Abdeh, Women Now for Development, from Syria

More research – and better tracking of violations against WHRDs and the response to these violations – needs to be done to determine whether increased attacks and restrictions on the work of WHRDs are an indicator or potential warning sign of conflict. It is also important to ensure that the data collected in this research does not become instrumentalised; that is, attacks against women human rights defenders should not be used as an excuse to justify increased militarisation or limits on human or civil rights in the name of protection.

As a result of the work they do, and the role they play in peace and security, women human rights defenders hold valuable knowledge and insights into the systemic causes of conflict: the latent inequalities, the deep social, political or economic fractures, and the opportunities for mitigation. During and after a conflict, they identify entry points to contribute to a sustainable peace.

33 Asoka, K. (2012) "Global Report on the Situation of Women Human Rights Defenders." Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition. [https://defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/WHRD\\_IC\\_Global-Report\\_2012.pdf](https://defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/WHRD_IC_Global-Report_2012.pdf)

34 Ibid.

35 "All HRDs are made vulnerable in situations of conflict because of the work that they do in addressing violations of human rights and humanitarian law, and exposing the responsibility of State agents or other armed actors. Given the differential effects of conflict on women in general, WHRDs experience distinct challenges and violations when working in militarised environments." Ibid., Page 26.

36 Goldberg, D., et al. (2015) "Global Report Civil Society Organisation (CSO) Survey for the Global Study on Women, Peace and Security." The Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, Cordaid, NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, International Civil Society Action Network. <https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/CSO%20Survey%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>

37 Ibid., Page 52.

For these reasons, the voices of WHRDs in peace and security contexts cannot be ignored or instrumentalised. Diminishing their role can increase the risks they face in their work and diminish prospects for a sustainable peace.

### Are peace and security possible without women human rights defenders?

In 2005, the then Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the situation of human rights defenders, Hina Jilani, drew a specific link between human rights defenders and peace and security. “Human rights defenders fulfil a fundamental role in the preservation and restoration of peace and security,” she stated, and “to be effective, international peace and security strategies must give particular attention to protecting the role and situation of human rights defenders.”<sup>38</sup> In October 2018, the Secretary-General noted that “increasing threats against women’s human rights defenders fundamentally undermine global efforts to prevent conflict and sustain peace.”<sup>39</sup>

Inclusive peace and security cannot be achieved alongside the suppression of women defenders and their work. If the perspectives of WHRDs are ignored, the systemic causes of conflict are ignored; if WHRDs are excluded from peace processes and post-conflict rebuilding, the peace that is created will be less likely to incorporate and speak to the full spectrum of human rights. Given that the Security Council’s role is to ensure peace and security, and WHRDs are a critical piece of that puzzle, it follows that the Council should recognise WHRDs as natural partners. The next section of the report details the ways – both in terms of responsibility and tactics – that the Security Council must use to promote and protect the work of WHRDs.



38 United Nations, General Assembly. (7 September 2005) “Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individual Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.” A/60/339. <https://undocs.org/A/60/339>

39 United Nations, Security Council. (9 October 2018) “Report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security.” S/2018/900. <https://undocs.org/S/2018/900>





# Locating WHRDs in the UN Security Council Agenda

The first part of this report detailed how sustainable peace and security require the meaningful participation and protection of women defenders, and how peace and security are adversely affected when the work and rights of WHRDs are hindered. It follows that the UN Security Council would – and should – have a vested interest in supporting and protecting the work of women activists, and would seek to contribute to an environment where they can effectively operate, during and after a conflict. Beyond a utilitarian argument for promoting the work of WHRDs, the UN Security Council bears a responsibility to protect their rights which cannot be sidestepped.

## Human Rights and the UN Security Council

The Charter of the United Nations makes clear that “universal respect for, and observance of, human rights” is integral to the “creation of conditions of stability and well-being which are necessary for peaceful and friendly relations among nations.”<sup>40</sup> Despite the importance of human rights to the Security Council’s mission, attempts to promote a greater prominence have met some resistance from Member States who argue that human rights are not part of their remit. However, all UN entities, including the Security Council, have a duty to uphold the UN Charter and its commitments to human rights: human rights and peace and security are intertwined.

Given that it is a human right to defend human rights, it is reasonable to state that the Security Council has not only an interest but a responsibility to promote and protect the work of human rights defenders. This relates not only to those WHRDs the UN Security Council (in its various forms) engages with directly, but also to the work

of WHRDs more broadly, in that they are key players in creating and sustaining ‘conditions of stability and wellbeing’ and alerting to the collapse of such conditions.

One of the concerns of the UN Security Council is to prevent conflicts from occurring or expanding. The Council has acknowledged that serious abuses and violations of human rights “can be an early indication of a descent into conflict or escalation of conflict.”<sup>41</sup> As noted previously, more research is needed to determine whether women defenders are disproportionately targeted in these cases. Nevertheless, early warning mechanisms are necessary to alert the Council to emerging peace, security and related human rights problems, and as noted, WHRDs often hold that knowledge. In 2005, the Special Representative of the Secretary General on the situation of human rights defenders was unambiguous: “an effective early warning system already exists in the form of the work of human rights defenders.”<sup>42</sup>

However, such an early warning system has not been put into practice. Despite the value of WHRDs alerting the UN Security Council to impending conflict, the Council has sometimes devalued and rejected that expertise. While the number of times the Security Council has been briefed by WHRDs has increased over the past two years (see below), when human rights defender Carine Kaneza, spokesperson for the Women and Girls Movement for Peace and Security in Burundi, was due to brief the Council on the human rights crisis in her country, Russia objected to her participation as – it was reported – did other States.<sup>43</sup> Kaneza, who had come to inform and warn the Security Council, was denied the right to speak.<sup>44</sup>

40 “Chapter IX: International Economic and Social Cooperation.” (26 June 1945) Charter of the United Nations. <http://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-ix/index.html>. Article 55.

41 United Nations, Security Council. (21 August 2014) “Maintenance of International Peace and Security- Conflict Prevention. S/RES/2171. <http://unsct.com/en/resolutions/2171>

42 United Nations, General Assembly. (7 September 2005) “Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individual Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.” A/60/339. <https://undocs.org/A/60/339>

43 Le Masurier, J. “Burundian Peace Activist Barred from UN Meeting” (3 October 2017). France 24. <https://www.france24.com/en/20170310-burundian-peace-activist-barred-un-meeting>

44 “The Backlash Against Civil Society Access and Participation at the UN.” (2018) International Service for Human Rights. [https://www.ishr.ch/sites/default/files/documents/mappingreport\\_web\\_0.pdf](https://www.ishr.ch/sites/default/files/documents/mappingreport_web_0.pdf). Page 9.

## WHRDs in the Security Council's women, peace and security agenda

When the Security Council adopted Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1325 in the year 2000, women were positioned as central to the agenda of peace and security. The resolution was groundbreaking<sup>45</sup> in that it put forward the notion that peace and security are more sustainable when women are equally and meaningfully included in conflict prevention, relief and recovery, and peace negotiations and processes.<sup>46</sup> Subsequent resolutions, however, narrowed the agenda and focused on protection of women from violence, rather than inclusive peace.<sup>47</sup> Civil society organisations have worked to maintain the broader inclusion of women in the peace and security agenda, so that women's active roles and agency are recognised and meaningfully included, and that women's roles are not diminished.<sup>48</sup> Today, the UN Security Council's women, peace and security agenda includes twice annual open debates; it is also the responsibility of the Council to integrate women, peace and security into discussions when it is considering any specific country situation.

*“Women’s human rights defenders; women political leaders, journalists, justice actors and security sector personnel; young women activists; and civil society leaders continue to be targeted at alarming rates, often for challenging the root causes of conflict, such as corruption, governance deficits, access to land or resources and traditional notions of family and gender roles in their societies. This includes those who are or are perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex, or those who advocate for their rights... I continue to call for dedicated protection mechanisms informed by those under threat, including women who face intersecting discrimination based on race, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation and gender identity, economic status and other factors.”*

Report of the Secretary General on women and peace and security S/2018/900

In resolutions subsequent to SCR 1325, there is an overt focus on the participation of *individual* women (as victims, or as peacebuilders) in the women, peace and security agenda, but a lack of focus on women's grassroots or activist *movements*.<sup>49</sup> In 2015, Security Council Resolution 2242 expanded the inclusion of civil society in its reiteration of the women, peace and security agenda.<sup>50</sup> The resolution recognises “the important contribution of civil society, including women's organisations,” and includes a commitment from the UN Security Council to “invite civil society, including women's organisations, to brief the Council in country-specific considerations and relevant thematic areas.”<sup>51</sup> In 2017, “seven women from civil society organisations and one woman from a national human rights institution provided briefings at region- or country-specific meetings.”<sup>52</sup> That was a dramatic increase from 2016, when only one woman from a civil society organisation was included in a country-specific briefing.<sup>53</sup> However, the valued role, requirement to protect, and inclusion of women activists and their movements in all aspects of peace and security have not been explicitly – nor consistently – enshrined in the existing resolutions that make up the women, peace and security agenda.

## The broader framework for the recognition & protection of WHRDs

The rights and fundamental freedoms enjoyed by WHRDs are codified in the international bill of rights and other human rights treaties including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). They are also detailed in the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and a range of UN Human Rights Council and General Assembly resolutions, most specifically the 2013 resolution A/RES/68/181.<sup>54</sup>

- 45 “Possibly one of the greatest achievements of SCR 1325 has been changing the discourse in global governance circles to frame gender equality and women's rights as issues relevant, if not central to, issues of international peace and security.” Hudson, N. “The Social Practice of Securitizing Women's Rights and Gender Equality: 1325 Fifteen Years On.” (June 2016) ISA Human Rights Conference. <http://web.isanet.org/Web/Conferences/HR2016-NYC/Archive/bafb0af9-7b58-4119-88e3-8b4e85f49ee3.pdf>. Page 2.
- 46 United Nations, Security Council. (31 October 2000) “Resolution 1325 (2000).” S/RES/1325 (2000) [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325\(2000\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325(2000))
- 47 “In 2008, the SC passed its second resolution, 1820, focused on women as victims of sexual violence and in need of special protection. This was quickly followed by two more resolutions, 1888 and 1889 in 2009. For many activists, SCR 1820 and 1888 reflected a narrowing of the WPS agenda as they focused specifically on the protection needs of women in situations of primarily sexual-based violence.” Hudson, N. “The Social Practice of Securitizing Women's Rights and Gender Equality: 1325 Fifteen Years On.” (June 2016) ISA Human Rights Conference. <http://web.isanet.org/Web/Conferences/HR2016-NYC/Archive/bafb0af9-7b58-4119-88e3-8b4e85f49ee3.pdf>. Page 5.
- 48 “Prioritise Peace: Challenging Approaches to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism from a Woman, Peace and Security Perspective.” (April 2018) Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS). [http://gaps-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/GAPS-report\\_Prioritise-Peace-Challenging-Approaches-to-P-CVE-from-a-WPS-perspective.pdf](http://gaps-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/GAPS-report_Prioritise-Peace-Challenging-Approaches-to-P-CVE-from-a-WPS-perspective.pdf)
- 49 Protection International's publication titled “Collective Protection of Human Rights Defenders” outlines the need for structural changes and policies that protect individuals and collectives who defend human rights, acknowledging that human rights defenders often work in network, communities, and groups. “Collective Protection of Human Rights Defenders: A collective approach to the right to defend human rights.” Protection International. <https://adobeindd.com/view/publications/13d2cddb-fb92-4648-ac56-2f73e7df19ac/1/publication-web-resources/pdf/Collective-protection.pdf>
- 50 According to a report from the International Peace Institute, Resolution 2242: “provided a welcome boost to the prevention dimension and expanded the space for civil society voices, the coopting of women by the resolution as natural allies in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism was a bitter pill to swallow for those calling for the de-securitization and de-militarization of the agenda, and for seeking women's perspectives on how to build peace rather than just countering violence.” Mahmoud, Y. (25 October 2018) “Without Prioritization of Peace and Women's Leadership, WPS in Peril.” International Peace Institute. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/without-prioritization-peace-and-women-s-leadership-wps-peril>
- 51 United Nations, Security Council. (13 October 2015) “Resolution 2242 (2015).” S/RES/2242 (2015) [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_res\\_2242.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2242.pdf). 5(c).
- 52 United Nations, Security Council. (9 October 2018) “Report of the Secretary-General on women, peace and security.” S/2018/900. <https://undocs.org/S/2018/900>. 100.
- 53 United Nations, Security Council. (16 October 2017) “Report of the Secretary-General on women, peace and security.” S/2017/861. <https://undocs.org/S/2017/861>. 87.
- 54 United Nations, General Assembly. (30 January 2014) “Promotion of the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms: protecting women human rights defenders.” A/RES/68/181. [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/68/181](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/68/181)

The UN General Assembly has explicitly recognised the particular risks faced by women human rights defenders, and has urged States to take steps to prevent, mitigate, investigate and address attacks online and off, including cases of gender-based violence.<sup>55</sup> The UN Human Rights Council has adopted at least 30 resolutions with specific reference to women human rights defenders (or more specifically, in some cases, women journalists), which range in focus from protection and security and the need to address structural violence, to calling on States to “integrate a gender perspective in their efforts to create a safe and enabling environment for the defence of human rights.”<sup>56</sup> In 2018, the UN Human Rights Council referenced the critical role that women play in “preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism,”<sup>57</sup> which recognises the role that women play in sustainable peace; this resolution signals that WHRDs are a critical part of a healthy civil society, but that they also play a role in sustaining peace and security. This echoes the UN Human Rights Council’s Resolution from 2016, which acknowledged that women play an important role “in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding,” and made a strong link between the human rights agenda and the peace and security agenda.<sup>58</sup>

The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders has also reported on the role of WHRDs. In his March 2019 report, UN Special Rapporteur Michel Forst “calls on the international community to recognise the specific issues, challenges and risks that women defenders face in diverse circumstances and to ensure that such defenders are recognised and supported and enabled to participate equally, meaningfully and powerfully in the promotion and protection of human rights.”<sup>59</sup>

The resolutions, legal framework, and necessity for a broad, holistic approach provide a strong precedent for the UN Security Council to concretise the ways that women defenders are meaningfully supported, protected, included and recognised. As described, there is a range of initiatives and mechanisms that already exists at the UN which both urge the Security Council into action, and provide an agenda into which the Council can add value. The existing ‘WHRD agenda’ in other parts of the UN system does not detract from the Security Council’s responsibility to set commitments, and its duty to protect and promote WHRDs. Those commitments should be

acted upon by the Security Council as a whole, and by Security Council members individually, in their respective spheres of influence.

## What are the barriers when it comes to including WHRDs in the UN Security Council’s agenda?

Many civil society organisations have drawn attention to the exclusion of women activists from the UN Security Council agenda. Representatives from ICAN noted in a personal interview that “It’s hard to answer the question of ‘where are WHRDs in the peace and security agenda’ because you have to ask ‘where are women in the peace and security agenda.’”<sup>60</sup> In 2017, nearly 400 civil society organisations signed on to an Open Letter to the UN with recommendations to the Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). The letter noted that despite commitments, “implementation of the agenda remains fragmented and regularly loses out to other political considerations.” The letter called out the Security Council on its inadequate funding and weak accountability for commitments made to women’s meaningful inclusion in all aspects of peace and security, and explicitly noted that “it is not enough to express support for the WPS agenda and then remain silent in the face of brutal crackdowns and attacks on women civil society and women human rights defenders.”<sup>61</sup>

*“Women have been instrumentalised by the UN. They are seen as peace makers, as naturally peaceful, willing to accept violence for the sake of peace. But women don’t want just any peace. Syrian women want a sustainable peace, they want a democracy for their children, they want a future for their country. We don’t need more resolutions – the UN needs to hold governments and countries accountable for existing resolutions. They need to know: your resolutions are not really helping us.”*

Maria Al Abdeh, *Women Now for Development, from Syria*

Desk analysis and interviews conducted for this report identified three main barriers to the meaningful inclusion of WHRDs in the UN Security Council’s agenda:

### A focus on protection over participation – without actual protection for those in need

The women peace and security agenda has, over time, become more narrowly focused on protection of women (which is sometimes used as a justification for increased militarisation or denial of rights). This has shifted the focus away from meaningfully including women as actors in the

55 United Nations, General Assembly (17 March 2010) “Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.” A/RES/64/1163 [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/64/1163](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/64/1163)

56 United Nations, Human Rights Council. (15 March 2013) “Protecting human rights defenders.” A/HRC/22/L.13 <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/LTD/G131120126/PDF/G1312026.pdf?OpenElement>

57 United Nations, Human Rights Council. (21 March 2018) “Terrorism and human rights.” A/HRC/37/L.50/Rev.1 <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/NTD/G18/074/84/PDF/G1807484.pdf?OpenElement>

58 United Nations, General Assembly. (5 October 2016) “Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 30 September 2016.” A/HRC/RES/33/19. <http://www.globalr2p.org/media/files/human-rights-and-transitional-justice-ares3319.pdf>

59 United Nations, General Assembly. (10 January 2019) “Situation of women human rights defenders: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders.” A/HRC/40/L.60. <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/40/L.60>

60 Bogan, France and Schamber, Stacy. (4 February 2019) Personal Interview.

61 “Open Letter to Permanent Representatives to the UN: Recommendations on the Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security (WPS)” (16 October 2017) NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security. <http://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/files/CSO-Open-Letter-to-UN-Member-States-on-WPS-16-October-2017-English.pdf>



three other pillars of the women, peace and security agenda: prevention, peacebuilding, participation. When it comes to WHRDs, the UN Security Council has largely focused on protecting women who come to speak at the UN and who, as a result, may face reprisals. This is an important issue: logistical issues like travel bans, visa restrictions, access to entry and restrictions on women activists' freedom of movement does limit their voice in UN fora. But, as noted in the challenges section of this report, reprisals for speaking at the UN is not the only protection issue that WHRDs face. Furthermore, focusing only on their protection does a disservice to women human rights defenders. As noted in an interview with a representative from WILPF: "One obstacle is that there is a general focus on protection, not participation. Which is a problem for WHRDs because they are centrally defined by their agency – they're not just looking for protection, they're demanding systemic change."<sup>62</sup>

For all the calls for protection, women defenders aren't actually experiencing improved safety: according to a statement from Amnesty International on behalf of the Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition delivered by Maryam al-Khawaja at the 61st Commission on the Status of Women, "Despite the growing focus on violations of women human rights defenders' rights in the international arena, including in the agreed conclusions of the 60th session of the Commission in 2016, General Assembly Resolution 68/181 on women human rights defenders, and increased attention to protection mechanisms, violence against defenders and civil society has continued to increase globally."<sup>63</sup>

**"Women are treated badly for being activists. In our culture, people say women should stay home. It was hard for us to survive in these kinds of conditions."**

Woman Human Rights Defender from Chechnya, Name Withheld

### Lack of space for meaningful participation

Effective participation for non-state actors in UN processes is always a challenge. The opportunities for WHRDs participation are limited: the Council invites representatives from civil society to brief it, and while the number of briefings has dramatically increased in recent years (the number has gone from two a year in previous years to several a month), the State holding the presidency of the UN Security Council is responsible for selecting the civil society organisation (CSO) that speaks at meetings, and is therefore able to choose a CSO representative with 'less controversial' perspectives, if it so chooses. These briefings are the primary way that women defenders are able to have a voice at the Security Council at headquarters level.<sup>64</sup>

At country level, there are sometimes opportunities for WHRDs to engage with the Security Council during their mandated missions in country; WILPF is one organisation that pushes for this engagement. This lack of space, coupled with the threat of reprisal and logistical barriers to access that WHRDs face when they speak at the UN (discussed in greater depth below), presents a barrier to meaningful participation.

### Challenges to women defenders' work

Because of the nature of the work that WHRDs do to hold those in power accountable, their role is sometimes challenged by States or regimes – some of whom sit on the Security Council. There are many ways in which States attempt to discredit or exclude WHRDs. Some States have resisted incorporating language around women defenders into the UN Security Council resolutions, arguing that WHRDs fall under the category of 'human rights' rather than 'peace and security,' and therefore their work and safety are not pertinent to the work of the UN Security Council. This should be challenged, however. The UN Security Council does have an interest and a responsibility to protect human rights, and the legitimate work of WHRDs has been acknowledged within the UN.

**"Women are doing very sensitive, important work. It's because they know the local norms and the social norms. But people like us aren't even invited to the cluster meetings. You would imagine that we would be the first people called on to attend these meetings, because we are working on the ground."**

Muna Luqman, Woman's Human Rights Defender from Yemen

Given the existing research around the role that women activists play in the attainment of peace and security, and the available information about the challenges they face, it is in the interest of the Security Council to meaningfully include WHRDs in the peace and security agenda. The Security Council must also ensure that its work does not have an adverse effect on WHRDs, or expose them to greater risks. This can happen, for example, in promoting counter-terrorism measures that restrict the space for civil society.<sup>65</sup> Practically speaking, this would mean ensuring women human rights defenders can live and work without fear or obstruction, as well as establishing concrete protection measures defined with their input. In addition, it would mean providing opportunities for WHRDs to bring their analysis and recommendations for change safely to the heart of Security Council missions and debates. The following section puts forward recommendations for how that could be done.

62 Ruane, Abigail. (6 February 2019). Personal Interview.

63 "WHRDIC and Amnesty International Statement at CSW61 2017." (29 March 2017) Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition. <http://www.defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/2017/03/29/whrdic-and-amnesty-international-statement-at-csw61-2017/>

64 Briefings are available on the website of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, accessible at: <http://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/>

65 The Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism has addressed these concerns in a March 2018 report to the Human Rights Council. United Nations, Human Rights Council. (18 February 2019) "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism on the role of measures to address terrorism and violent extremism on closing civic space and violating the rights of civil society actors and human rights defenders." A/HRC/40/52. [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Terrorism/SRIA\\_HRC\\_40\\_52\\_EN.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Terrorism/SRIA_HRC_40_52_EN.pdf)

# How can the UN Security Council more effectively protect and support WHRDs?



Civil society organisations, women's groups and networks have already made a number of recommendations for how the UN Security Council could more effectively and meaningfully include women human rights defenders in the peace and security agenda.<sup>66</sup> Those recommendations are compiled, summarised and expanded upon as follows:

## Improve participation of WHRDs in formal Security Council processes – and make sure it's safe to participate

The Security Council needs to create more opportunities to hear the voices of women activists, in order to understand their challenges and perspectives firsthand. This engagement must be meaningful and collaborative, and it must happen at country, regional and global levels. WILPF, for example, is already working to encourage the Security Council to engage with civil society and WHRDs while on missions and in other fora.<sup>67</sup> As noted above, there are currently few opportunities for women defenders to be heard by the UN Security Council outside of civil society briefers.

*“A civil society organisation (CSO) in Egypt and a CSO in Australia, working in the Asia Pacific region, urged Member States and UN agencies to include human rights defender organisations and networks in all their planning and decision making meetings.”*

2015 Civil Society Survey

The biggest obstacles to women activists' participation are logistical access, funding and safety. In terms of logistics, WHRDs need to be able to acquire visas, access the UN, and get to New York (which is especially difficult with a travel ban in place). When it comes to safety, WHRDs can face intimidation and reprisals when engaging and seeking to engage with the Security Council. All relevant stakeholders – including the State concerned, the Security Council, individual Member States on the Security Council, and the Assistant Secretary General for Human Rights who leads UN efforts to address intimidation and reprisals against those cooperating with the UN – must bear this in mind by adopting a do-no-harm approach to civil society engagement with the Security Council and taking steps to prevent and address reprisals.<sup>68</sup>

66 Recommendations reviewed for this report include those from: NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security (<http://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/>); Women's Human Rights Defenders International Coalition (<http://www.defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/>); and UN Women ([www.unwomen.org](http://www.unwomen.org/)).

67 “Women's Meaningful Participation in the UN System.” Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. <https://wilpf.org/womens-meaningful-participation-in-the-un-system/>

68 “We've Had Enough: A Call to Action to Protect Women Human Rights Defenders & Their Communities.” (29 November 2018). Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition. <http://www.defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/2018/11/29/weve-had-enough-a-call-to-action-to-protect-women-human-rights-defenders-their-communities/>

## Ensure space for – and recognition of – the critical work of WHRDs in UN Security Council resolutions, decisions and recommendations

The inclusion of women defenders in the UN Security Council's peace and security agenda has been ad hoc. The Security Council must unequivocally commit to protect and promote WHRDs and their movements, highlight their meaningful role in the attainment of peace and security, and encourage other UN members to do so as well.

Accordingly, in future resolutions, recommendations, decisions or statements the Security Council should:

### **On the role of WHRDs:**

- 1 Articulate the ways in which the role and activities of WHRDs are essential to sustainable and inclusive peace and security, and iterate that the UN Security Council considers WHRDs to be partners in that objective.<sup>69</sup>
- 2 Explicitly state that listening to WHRDs and respecting their voice and agency is necessary at every stage of conflict and peacebuilding.<sup>70</sup>
- 3 Ensure alignment with existing human rights frameworks that already articulate the rights and requisite protections of WHRDs (as outlined in the previous section).

*“In Egypt, a civil society organisation working throughout the MENA region said: “There needs to be international pressure and support for women’s security and access to justice to protect women human rights defenders promoting gender equality and women’s equal role in peace and reconciliation.””*

2015 Civil Society Survey

### **On holistic safety (that protects the physical, emotional and psychological well-being and autonomy of women human rights defenders, individually and collectively):**

- 4 Engage with States to prevent and end impunity for violations against WHRDs, including through the establishment of strong security sectors and judicial institutions that prevent and respond to threats and violence against WHRDs. Hold States to account for implementation by working with relevant WHRDs and other parts of the UN system to monitor progress.<sup>71</sup>
- 5 Recognise that women human rights defenders often work in groups, associations and movements, and that the collective dimension of their work (and resulting threats) must be recognised in any security policy relating to WHRDs.<sup>72</sup> Urge States to create and uphold policies that provide protections for individual WHRDs, as well as their families, communities and networks.<sup>73</sup>
- 6 State categorically that, given the essential role of WHRDs in attaining peace and security amongst other UN objectives, UN members should hold public officials, private sector companies and other non-State actors accountable for violations against women human rights defenders.
- 7 Recommend that the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders further explore and unpack what participatory protection mechanisms for WHRD would look like in conflict situations.
- 8 Denounce reprisals, threats or acts of violence against WHRDs, their families, movements and networks.

### **On creating a safe and enabling environment for WHRDs’ work:**

- 9 Call upon UN bodies and States to support WHRDs by supporting programmes and funds that enable them to access resources, share best practice, build movements, build capacity, and share knowledge (such as the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund).

69 “Women human rights defenders must be protected, say UN experts.” (29 November, 2018) United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23943&LangID=E>

70 “We’ve Had Enough: A Call to Action to Protect Women Human Rights Defenders & Their Communities.” (29 November 2018). Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition. <http://www.defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/2018/11/29/weve-had-enough-a-call-to-action-to-protect-women-human-rights-defenders-their-communities/>

71 Goldberg, D., et al. (2015) “Global Report Civil Society Organization (CSO) Survey for the Global Study on Women, Peace and Security.” The Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, Cordaid, NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, International Civil Society Action Network. <https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/CSO%20Survey%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>, Page 13.

72 “Collective Protection of Human Rights Defenders: A collective approach to the right to defend human rights.” Protection International. <https://adobeindd.com/view/publications/13d2cddb-fb92-4648-ac56-2f73e7df19ac/1/publication-web-resources/pdf/Collective-protection.pdf>

73 “Recommendations to Enhance the Protection and Security of Women Human Rights Defenders.” (2013) Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID). <https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/Recommendations%20To%20Enhance%20The%20Protection%20And%20Security%20Of%20WHRDs.pdf>



10 Invite WHRDs to brief the Security Council directly on how they are often marginalised on the basis of gender and sexual identity, race, class, ability, etc., and how this should inform the design of any proposed programmes, policy or activity related to women human rights defenders.

11 Call upon States to review or repeal laws that unduly restrict the work of women activists and/or criminalise them, e.g. non-governmental organisation (NGO) laws, laws of assembly, freedom of speech, etc.

12 Call upon States to end the misapplication of counter-terror laws and measures to restrict freedom of assembly, association, and expression of women defenders.<sup>74</sup>

13 Call upon States to ensure that emergency and national security legislations are applied and used in line with international human rights standards, and that any derivation from rights to assembly, association and expression under states of emergencies do not undermine non-derogable rights: the right to life, the right to live free from torture, etc.

14 Call upon States to commit to repealing laws, retracting policies and reversing practices that inhibit the work of women human rights defenders and urge and engage with States to do the same. Ensure that legal, policy, and administrative frameworks and institutions contribute to ensuring women defenders can work without fear or hindrance. Ensure relevant public officials are appropriately trained.<sup>75</sup>

15 Take steps to prevent and address intimidation and reprisals against those seeking to engage or engaging with the Security Council and its missions.<sup>76</sup>

#### **On coherence and coordination:**

16 Ensure that mandates for peacekeeping and political missions monitor violations and threats against WHRDs, include strategies to address threats.<sup>77</sup>

17 Call upon States to ensure that consultations on UN Human Rights frameworks and treaties include consultations with WHRDs.<sup>78</sup>

18 Mandate that missions falling under the Security Council's sphere of influence integrate WHRD protection measures into their programming, and that efforts to support, protect and include WHRDs are coordinated across UN bodies.

***“When the UN issues a resolution, it needs to protect women human rights defenders. The fact-finding missions or sanction committees need to have a gender and woman human rights defender perspective when they look into violations and abuses.”***

Rasha Jarhum, *Director of Peace Track Initiative, Yemen*

19 Hold regular conversations with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, including in regard to the promotion of the rights of WHRDs.

20 Forge stronger connections between UN Human Rights bodies and the UN Security Council by (for example) inviting the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders to speak, or by taking note of and acting on the reports related to WHRDs, human rights defenders and peace and security.<sup>79</sup>

#### **On funding:**

21 Ensure that a lack of funding does not serve as a barrier to WHRD engagement at the Security Council.

Finally, as many civil society organisations have pointed out, accountability and delivery of existing recommendations and resolutions related to women, peace and security have been minimal. As with all matters related to this work, the UN Security Council must hold States, UN agencies, and itself accountable to deliver on what it has – and will – promise to women defenders. And the Council must bring WHRDs – who hold the knowledge and expertise of their context – into the process of shaping mandates, recommendations, reports and missions.

74 “Governments in both the global North and South are not only failing in upholding those commitments, but in many cases, are themselves closing down the much-needed space for civic participation, dissent, and freedom of expression. Many are also engaging in direct attacks against women defenders such as illegal arrests and detention, trumped up charges, torture, threat and harassment, surveillance, murder, extra judicial killing, among others.” “We’ve Had Enough: A Call to Action to Protect Women Human Rights Defenders & Their Communities.” (29 November 2018). Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition. <http://www.defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/2018/11/29/weve-had-enough-a-call-to-action-to-protect-women-human-rights-defenders-their-communities/>

75 “Women human rights defenders must be protected, say UN experts.” (29 November, 2018) United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23943&LangID=E>

76 See: ‘Policy Brief: Preventing and addressing intimidation and reprisals related to engagement with the UN Security Council’, ISHR, 2019.

77 Mader, Kristina. (6 February 2019) Personal Interview.

78 Ibid.

79 “Annual Reports.” United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/SRHRDefenders/Pages/AnnualReports.aspx>

## Considerations for civil society organisations engaged with the peace and security agenda

In 2018, women human rights defenders from 19 countries issued a Call to Action; in which they say to their “our own movements and international human rights community” that “we must strengthen our commitment and efforts to end discrimination and violence against women defenders, even within our own ranks; prioritise alignment and support for locally-led strategies and more coordination at regional and international levels; recognise the voice and collective power of women human rights defenders and feminist perspectives; strengthen our self-protection strategies and networks; promote community-based and collective strategies that enable organisations and communities to be stronger, more resilient, more cohesive and inclusive.”<sup>80</sup> This serves an important reminder that as NGOs and civil society organisations urge the UN Security Council to take more substantive action to support and protect WHRDs, there are also some areas where civil society organisations and NGOs can continue to grow and ask questions. These include in regard to:

### 1/ Using a common definition of WHRDs across all actors and UN agencies

In the interviews conducted for this report, that came up repeatedly as an area for further exploration, conversation and consensus.

### 2/ Tracking threats, violations and violence directed towards WHRDs

Currently, attacks against women human rights defenders are not tracked in the women, peace and security indicators.<sup>81</sup> There are some organisations that track attacks regionally (such as IM-Defensoras and FORUM-ASIA) or sectorally, such as the Committee to Protect Journalists, and Reporters Without Borders. Under the UN Sustainable Development Goals, indicator 16.10.1 will track the “number of verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates in the previous 12 months.” This data will be disaggregated by sex, however, due to the fact that it is not regularly produced by countries, tracking is inconsistent.<sup>82</sup> Tracking this data consistently and transparently would enable a deeper inquiry into a potential causal or correlative link between increased threats against WHRDs and destabilisation or conflict escalation. It would also enable civil society organisations to better advocate for WHRDs rights and protections.

Given funding constraints, it would likely be difficult for an individual NGO or civil society organisation to track this data globally. However, advocating at the Security Council to mandate tracking this data has drawbacks, as progress may be slow and/or States could submit incomplete or politicised data. This warrants a discussion amongst civil society groups: how should threats and attacks against women human rights defenders be tracked, and who should do the tracking?

### 3/ Carrying out further research on the gap between women, peace and security and financing

Women – and women human rights defenders – are largely excluded from economic restructuring conversations. Further research is needed to explore how women can be part of these conversations, and whether lobbying the Security Council might be effective in this regard.

The year 2020 will be an important one for advancing the agenda of women, peace and security, and advocating for the meaningful inclusion of women activists within that agenda. 2020 marks the 20th Anniversary of Security Council Resolution 1325, and the 25th Anniversary of the Beijing Conference. Additionally, women human rights defenders are one of six priority areas for UN Women’s work on women, peace and security in 2020, and the agency is developing a corporate strategy with practical and strategic options available to UN Women teams to operationalise the organisation’s responsibility to support WHRDs. This context presents a unique opportunity to influence the UN Security Council over the coming two years, and to ensure that upcoming UN Security Council outcomes meaningfully integrate, contextualise and socialise the rights and safety of women defenders.



80 “We’ve Had Enough: A Call to Action to Protect Women Human Rights Defenders & Their Communities.” (29 November 2018). Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition. <http://www.defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/2018/11/29/weve-had-enough-a-call-to-action-to-protect-women-human-rights-defenders-their-communities/>

81 “Indicators & Monitoring: Women, Peace and Security.” PeaceWomen. <https://www.peacewomen.org/security-council/WPS-indicators-and-monitoring>

82 This indicator is considered Tier II, which means it is “is conceptually clear, has an internationally established methodology and standards are available, but data are not regularly produced by countries.” The custodian agency for this indicator is OHCHR, with UNESCO and ILO contributing. “SDG Indicators Metadata Repository.” United Nations Statistics Division. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/>

# Annex I: Eight main barriers WHRDS face in carrying out their work

## Lack of recognition and exclusion from spaces where decisions are made

Due to structural and systemic discrimination, the work of women human rights defenders is often not recognised in conflict and post-conflict contexts, at the local or global level. Frequently, their contributions are not valued, often due to normative gender roles, which relegate women to specific social roles that serve to limit their engagement in the spaces where decisions are made about their rights and participation.<sup>83</sup> The ways in which WHRDs operate and contribute to peace and security, which are sometimes outside the boundaries of formal processes, often go un-noticed.<sup>84</sup> Instead, women are often depicted as victims rather than actors actively working for stability and rehabilitation of communities. The lack of recognition of the work that WHRDs do can also limit the opportunities they have to access funding and protections.<sup>85</sup> Alternatively, international recognition can also mean protection: Muna Luqman, a woman's human rights defender from Yemen, said in a personal interview: "The more visibility I got – internationally – the more protection I needed. But also: the more international visibility I got, the more I feel protected. If my work is recognised internationally, it sends a strong message to the local political groups: if I am harmed there will be an issue. We need collective international support, and we need those international groups to listen to us. We are facing a lot of problems because we aren't getting protection."<sup>86</sup>

## Isolation and burnout

The 2012 WHRD Global Report identified isolation as "single most significant security risk for women activists."<sup>87</sup> When women defenders are ostracised by their communities and families as a result of their work or political positions,<sup>88</sup> and when they are forced to be disconnected from solidarity networks due to restrictions or safety issues that result from exposure, their physical safety and their holistic well-being is at stake. This is particularly true in conflict or post-conflict contexts, when social fabric is disrupted and communities and networks are disbursed. Isolation, as well as physical threats to security and challenging operational contexts, can easily lead to burnout for WHRDs.

## Restrictive or abusive legal systems and weak or non-existent security sectors, resulting in impunity for violators

Even in times of peace, legal and security systems can perpetuate gender-based discrimination, and justice systems maintain impunity for sex and gender-based violations. In conflict and post-conflict contexts, where legal systems are disrupted and security sectors can be non-existent (or in some cases, over-zealous and unchecked), discrimination and structural violence are exacerbated.<sup>89</sup> In some contexts, legal provisions will include gender-based limitations on dissemination of information, or gender-based restrictions on advocacy and registration.<sup>90</sup>

## Closing space for civil society

The global trend towards closing space for civil society has been well documented by CIVICUS and others;<sup>91</sup> this has meant restrictive and bureaucratic reporting and registration procedures, as well as legal and funding restrictions on civil society organisations. A recent report from Kvinna till Kvinna identified the ways in which the shrinking space for civil society is uniquely gendered: according to their survey, 60% of respondents (123 women in 32 countries) said "space to act as an activist has shrunk" over the past years, and "85 percent believe that women human rights defenders are affected

83 "Human Rights Defenders: Protecting the Right to Defend Human Rights. Fact Sheet No. 29." Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FactSheet29en.pdf>. Page 14.

84 [https://defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/WHRD\\_IC\\_Global-Report\\_2012.pdf](https://defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/WHRD_IC_Global-Report_2012.pdf) Page 27

85 According to the 2012 WHRD Global Report, "the invisibility or non-recognition of the roles and capacities of WHRDs in conflict or post-conflict situations can result not only in the inhibition of the human rights work that they are trying to do, but can also result in lack of access to or support from solidarity networks, international agencies and donors, and other stakeholders involved in addressing or alleviating conflict situations." Asoka, K. (2012) "Global Report on the Situation of Women Human Rights Defenders." Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition. [https://defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/WHRD\\_IC\\_Global-Report\\_2012.pdf](https://defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/WHRD_IC_Global-Report_2012.pdf). Page 27.

86 Luqman, M. (4 March, 2019) Personal Interview.

87 Asoka, K. (2012) "Global Report on the Situation of Women Human Rights Defenders." Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition. [https://defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/WHRD\\_IC\\_Global-Report\\_2012.pdf](https://defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/WHRD_IC_Global-Report_2012.pdf).

88 "UN Women Commits to supporting and protecting women human rights defenders." (12 Oct 2018) International Service for Human Rights. <https://www.ishr.ch/news/whrd-1-un-women-commits-supporting-and-protecting-women-human-rights-defenders>

89 Asoka, K. (2012) "Global Report on the Situation of Women Human Rights Defenders." Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition. [https://defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/WHRD\\_IC\\_Global-Report\\_2012.pdf](https://defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/WHRD_IC_Global-Report_2012.pdf). Page 28

90 "Information Series on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: Women Human Rights Defenders." United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights. [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/SexualHealth/INFO\\_WHRD\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/SexualHealth/INFO_WHRD_WEB.pdf)

91 "CIVICUS Monitor: Tracking Civic Space." CIVICUS. <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/what-we-do/innovate/civicus-monitor>



differently especially through decreasing possibilities for women's organisations to receive funding and an increasing emphasis on women's traditional role as caretakers rather than political actors."<sup>92</sup>

### Restrictive social norms

Even in times of peace, women are expected to fulfill certain social roles, as a result of deeply rooted patriarchal beliefs, traditions, values and stereotypes.<sup>93</sup> Human rights work itself can cut against the rigid boundaries of these norms, which can put women activists at risk of losing their jobs, communities, families, or homes.<sup>94</sup> Restrictive social norms are also responsible for generating impunity for perpetrators, who may not be thoroughly investigated (or alternately, WHRDs may not be believed) as a result of the long-held gendered power imbalances built into societies and legal or security systems.<sup>95</sup>

### Limited funding

Funding for women's human rights work is limited globally.<sup>96</sup> In conflict contexts, the challenge for resources is exacerbated: a 2015 global survey of civil society organisations working on women, peace and security identified 'lack of resources for this specific work' as the largest barrier (39% of respondents).<sup>97</sup> While not all WHRDs focus on women, peace and security issues, that statistic does give a sense of the funding context that WHRDs are facing. A focus group from the same survey found that "while protection and promotion of the rights of women and girls is an area that receives a good deal of funding from international donors, it is often perceived within a limiting framework that does not include the protection (and empowerment) of human rights activists – many of whom, at the grassroots level, are community members themselves."<sup>98</sup>

### Rising fundamentalisms or traditional/conservative social values

Hand in hand with the increasingly limited space for civil society, the global trend of rising fundamentalisms and/or traditional or conservative social values, often accompanied by extreme nationalism, has a detrimental effect on WHRDs' ability to operate safely and consistently.<sup>99</sup> Fundamentalist or conservative ideologies require strict and rigid performance of gender roles, and can provide cover for those who wish to use violence to enforce others to adhere to those roles.<sup>100</sup> As noted, the very nature of activism, which falls outside the boundaries of conventionally feminised behaviour, puts WHRDs at risk. Additionally, the UN Women Global Study on I325 found that "when women's advocacy becomes too closely associated with a government's counter-terrorism agenda, the risk of backlash against women's rights defenders and women's rights issues, in often already volatile environments, increases."<sup>101</sup>

### Violence, gender-based or sexual violence, harassment, intimidation and threats of violence, often on the basis of gender or sexuality

Interlinked with each of these barriers is the violence and threats that women human rights defenders face as a result of their work and identities. According to a statement made by Maryam al-Khawaja at the 61st Commission on the Status of Women, "women human rights defenders are being threatened and killed, face repression, arrest and detention, physical and sexual violence, gender-based threats and smear attacks both physically and in online spaces."<sup>102</sup>

In militarised or conflict contexts, threats against WHRDs are compounded: their work poses a challenge to those who wish to maintain an unjust status quo, and their refusal to conform to

92. Wassholm, C. (2018) "Suffocating the Movement- Shrinking Space for Women's Rights." *The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation*. <https://kvinna.tillkvinna.se/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/kvinna-till-kvinna-suffocating-the-movement-report-eng-2018.pdf> Page 9.
93. "Strengthening Protection Networks for Women Human Rights Defenders to Combat Discrimination: Challenges and Opportunities in the Current Context." (18 May, 2017). *United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights*. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WGWomen/Pages/WomenHumanRightsDefendersGender.aspx>
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98. Ibid.
99. "Women Human Rights Defenders." (September 2014). *United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights*. <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Events/WHRD/OnePagerWHRD.pdf>; Fletcher, L. (2017) "Rights Eroded: A Briefing on the Effects of Closing Space on Women Human Rights Defenders." *International Human Rights Law Clinic, Berkeley Law and Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights*. [https://urgentactionfund.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2017/11/2/UAF\\_UCB\\_REPORT.WEB-FINAL.pdf](https://urgentactionfund.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2017/11/2/UAF_UCB_REPORT.WEB-FINAL.pdf)
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101. Coomaraswamy, R. (2015). "Preventing Conflict Transforming Justice Securing Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1325." *UN Women*. [https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/UNW-GLOBAL-STUDY-1325-2015%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/UNW-GLOBAL-STUDY-1325-2015%20(1).pdf) Page 222.
102. "WHRDIC and Amnesty International Statement at CSW61 2017." (29 March 2017). *Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition*. <http://www.defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/2017/03/29/whrdic-and-amnesty-international-statement-at-csw61-2017/>

restrictive, patriarchal gender norms (by taking up activist roles) puts them at further risk.<sup>103</sup> The exact forms of violence that WHRDs face are myriad, and range from online and offline verbal abuse to physical attacks that can be gendered or sexual in nature. The work that WHRDs do often raises their profile, which – by virtue of their name recognition and sidestepping conventional gender roles – can make them more subject to increased public scrutiny and sometimes, violence (or alternately, can provide protection, as noted above). An example of the violence and threats that WHRDs face is evident in the data of organisations like International Women’s Media Foundation,<sup>104</sup> Reporters without Borders<sup>105</sup> and the Committee to Protect Journalists, who have documented attacks on women journalists.<sup>106</sup>

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