

# Report from a meeting on WPS - Discussion on coalition building

Online meeting, 18 April 2024



**Swedish Dialogue Institute**  
for the Middle East and North Africa

## Report

*On April 18<sup>th</sup>, the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa hosted an online meeting on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS). The discussions focused on movement and coalition building with over 20 stakeholders from diverse sectors, including civil society, academia, international organizations, and both the private and public sectors from the MENA region and Europe.*

*The need to continue to foster dialogue and networking amongst different actors working on local, national, regional, and global levels, and to seek synergies and coordination on overlapping agendas, was stressed. The participants welcomed the meetings hosted by the Dialogue Institute and expressed a wish for further exchanges through regular meetings, with a focus on various issues related to the women, peace, and security agenda.*

*Other key issues raised included: a) the importance of dialogue between civil society, government agencies and academic institutions/think tanks, including for collaboration for evidence-based research; b) the need for legal and media reforms to protect women and promote gender-sensitive communication; c) a stress on the need for funding of peace and women's organizations and networks; d) a suggestion to do a global ecosystem mapping for better stakeholder integration. The participants also discussed overcoming colonial legacies "without guilt".*

### **Presentation of organizations working on movement and coalition building**

The discussion commenced with five brief presentations by organizations dedicated to coalition and movement building in the MENA region. The presenters included Laila Alodat from Syria, representing the [Women's International League for Peace and Freedom \(WILPF\)](#), Mozn Hassan from Egypt representing [Nazra for Feminist Studies](#), Hend Omairan from Yemen representing [Peace Track Initiative \(PTI\)](#), Loredana Teodorescu from Italy representing the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network hosted by [Istituto Affari Internazionali \(IAI\)](#), and Suzan Aref from Iraq representing the [Women Empowerment Foundation \(WEO\)](#).

Laila Alodat from WILPF discussed their support to women's inclusion in both Track I and II initiatives, aiming at empowering women peacebuilders and peace practitioners by creating opportunities for them to advance their agendas in dialogue with decision-makers. She emphasized the importance of peace and women's organizations operating independently and without interference (including from donors) and she advocated for equal partnerships and for funding that supports transformative change rather than imposing specific objectives.

Mozn Hassan from Nazra highlighted strategies that maintain female leaders' visibility in the public sphere post-revolutions and in large movements. She underscored the importance of engaging with both state and non-state actors and recognized the diverse nature of operations of peace and women's organizations in the MENA region, which includes both Arabic and non-Arabic speaking entities.

Hend Omairan from PTI outlined their support for women's inclusion in Yemen's peace process across three diplomatic tracks. In Track I, PTI advocates for women's inclusion in formal delegations. In Track II, they consult with various women's groups within and outside of Yemen. In Track III, PTI serves as the technical secretariat for the Women's Solidarity Network, supporting 300 Yemeni women leaders both domestically and abroad to contribute to peace-building efforts.

Loredana Teodorescu who coordinates the work of the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network (MWMN) discussed the significance of regional and cross-regional networks such as the MVMN. She emphasized the importance of leveraging existing efforts by women and of prioritizing impact over quantity. Additionally, she highlighted the necessity for a multilayered approach in alliance building and the crucial need for institutional and financial support to create more synergies.

Suzan Aref from WEO shared experiences from the coordination of Alliance 1325 in Iraq. She emphasized the importance of movement building to direct and engage public opinion in favor of women and sustainable peace. The Alliance 1325 in Iraq has established a cross-sectoral task force, including parliamentarians, civil society representatives, and both public and private sectors. These collective efforts have led Iraq to become the first country in the MENA region to adopt a national action plan (NAP) for Resolution 1325 and the women, peace, and security agenda. Ms. Aref also stressed the necessity of maintaining sustainable financing for such alliances and networks to avoid negative competitiveness and enhance their impact and foster regional and global synergies.

## **Discussion**

The brief presentations were followed by a discussion amongst over 20 stakeholders from various sectors, including academia, civil society, international organizations, and both the private and public sectors. Participants were from the MENA region as well as Sweden and other parts of Europe. Below is a summary of main points raised:

### **Engagement with Governmental Actors**

Several participants emphasized the need for dialogues that influence key actors with executive powers, particularly governmental bodies. There was a recommendation to develop mechanisms for cross-sectoral collaborations that support evidence-based conflict analyses. Such collaborations are essential for formulating policies that effectively address the root causes of conflicts and promote sustainable peace.

### Legal and Media Reforms

The need for legal reforms to ensure women's protection featured prominently throughout the discussion. This would involve revising existing laws to better protect women. There was also a stress on the need to promote gender-sensitive practices in media communications, ensuring that media outlets portray gender issues accurately and sensitively.

### Funding

Throughout the conversation participants stressed the crucial need for support for peace and women's organizations and networks. Several participants expressed concerns over defunding and of cuts in funding. They also pointed to the need for more flexible funding mechanisms to allow for funding of networks. This was seen as particularly important considering the shrinking civic space and the challenges that many organizations face challenges to register, due to restrictive regulations and policies.

### Global Ecosystem Mapping

One participant presented a suggestion to conduct a global ecosystem mapping to better understand the roles and functions of different stakeholders. This approach was inspired by successful international examples, such as the Colombian peace process, where civil society played a pivotal role. By learning from other global experiences, stakeholders could better identify potential partners and tailor their strategies to become more effective.

### Deconstructing and Evaluating Terms

Some participants pointed to a need to deconstruct commonly used terms like "ecosystem" and "peacebuilding". They encouraged a critical evaluation of past movements, identifying successful strategies and acknowledging failures. Such reflections would allow for a better understanding that different parties within alliances may differ in focus and do not need to converge on identical goals on all issues.

### Addressing Colonial Legacies

The conversation also covered the question of colonial legacies and there was a suggestion to open for honest and frank discussions on this topic, while avoiding falling into common "traps" of denial and/or guilt. Instead, there was a call for a genuinely collaborative North-South effort to approach future interactions differently, "sitting with the discomfort that comes with challenging historical narratives".

### Regular Follow-up Meetings

The meeting concluded with a wish to continue these conversations in regular meetings. A next meeting is scheduled for the end of May and with a focus on the dialogue between peace and women's organizations and policy makers. Another meeting is planned for the end of June, with a focus on the role of media in advancing the WPS agenda.

After the summer further meetings will be planned. The future sessions aim to focus on issues suggested by participants, including in a survey conducted by the Dialogue Institute in April.

Topics suggested in the survey included:

- Intersections between the WPS and YPS agendas in MENA.
- Gaps in the WPS agenda.
- How to keep participation at the core of the agenda while there is a growing need for protection.
- Economic empowerment and awareness raising on women's rights as crucial components of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda.