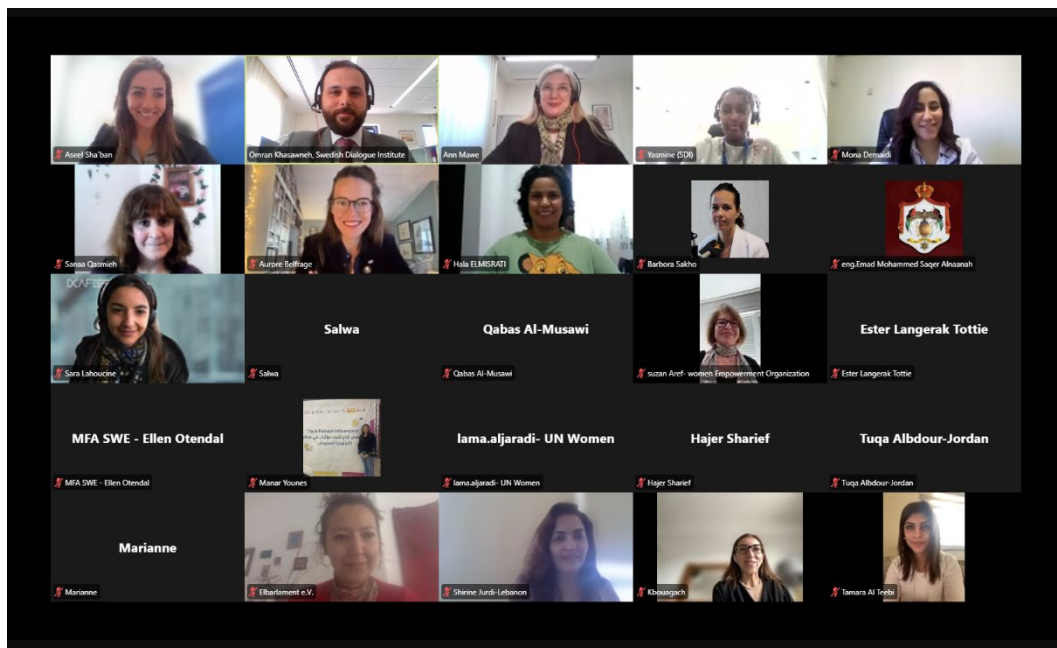


Report from the 7th online meeting with the WPS Informal Network

The role of the private sector in advancing the Women, Peace, and Security agenda with a focus on Artificial Intelligence (AI)

2024, November 14th



Summary

On November 14th, the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa hosted an online session within its Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) informal network¹. This meeting highlighted the role of the private sector in advancing the WPS agenda, focusing specifically on how Artificial Intelligence (AI) can drive progress in gender equality within the peace and security domain. The session brought together two AI expert speakers and over 30 WPS practitioners from the MENA region, Europe including Sweden, who shared insights and experiences from their work in WPS initiatives.

The meeting brought to light the dual nature of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda sphere, emphasizing both its transformative potential and its inherent challenges. **Opportunities were raised**, including the use of AI-driven platforms for skill development for women in conflict zones, enhancing their capacity to contribute meaningfully to peacebuilding efforts. Participants also highlighted how AI can empower women by enabling their active involvement in post-conflict reconstruction, providing innovative tools to monitor the implementation of WPS National Action Plans (NAPs), and facilitating the documentation of gender-based violence and war crimes.

However, **significant challenges were also raised**, particularly systemic biases stemming from the lack of diversity in AI development teams, which often lead to tools that reinforce existing gender stereotypes. The misuse of AI in militarized contexts, such as surveillance technologies that disproportionately harm women in conflict zones, was flagged as a pressing concern. Additionally, the failure of global AI solutions to address local cultural and social contexts undermines their effectiveness in tackling issues like online harassment and abuse.

Finally, the session emphasized the critical need for strengthened collaboration between the private sector, civil society, and governments to ensure AI is developed and applied ethically and inclusively. Gender-sensitive approaches and ethical guidelines were identified as essential to harness AI's potential while mitigating its risks, creating pathways for technology to promote gender equality and support sustainable peace and security efforts.

Presentations and Insights from the Speakers

“Technology and warfare have been intrinsically linked throughout human history. From sharpened stones to atom splitting, technologies to advance human existence have also been repurposed for destruction. Our era is no exception. Rapidly advancing and converging technologies have the potential to revolutionize conflict dynamics in the not-too-distant future.”

– Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary General

The Director of the Dialogue Institute, Ann Måwe, welcomed participants to the session and framed the discussion by highlighting the private sector's potential important role in advancing Women, Peace, and Security (WPS), particularly through innovation and AI. She emphasized AI's

¹ **The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) informal network:** a network facilitated by the Swedish Dialogue Institute, serves as a regional platform connecting a diverse range of stakeholders from the Middle East, North Africa, Sweden, and Europe. Participants include academics, policymakers, civil society representatives, media professionals, private sector actors, and think tanks. **The network aims** to bring together individuals and organizations dedicated to advancing the WPS agenda in the MENA region through regular online meetings, fostering collaboration, dialogue, and knowledge exchange across sectors and regions.

dual potential as a tool for empowerment—such as enhancing conflict prediction and women's cybersecurity—while also posing risks due to embedded gender biases, which underscore the need for inclusive development. Drawing on the UN Secretary-General's recent policy brief, [A New Agenda for Peace](#), Ann also highlighted Sweden's advanced role in digital transformation and AI in general and mentioned specifically taking a lead in the UN context through co-facilitating the negotiations for the [Global Digital Compact \(GDC\)](#) with Zambia, which sets global principles on digital issues, including gender equality and AI governance.

Speakers **Aurore Belfrage**, *Swedish Entrepreneur, Geopolitical Advisor and AI Expert* and Dr. **Mona Demaidi**, *Palestinian entrepreneur, AI Expert and Women's Right Advocate* were then introduced, setting the stage for an exploratory discussion on the impact of AI on peace and security.

Presentation 1): Artificial Intelligence's Power, Potential, and Global Stakes

The first presentation was delivered by Aurore Belfrage. She provided a geopolitical perspective on AI, highlighting its implications for peace, security, and societal structures. While AI holds immense potential for innovation and efficiency, Belfrage provided a geopolitical perspective on AI, highlighting its implications for peace, security, and societal structures, particularly in how global superpowers may leverage AI to reshape international competition and power dynamics. While AI holds immense potential for innovation and efficiency, Aurore emphasized that it is not a panacea for global challenges.

Aurore encouraged everyone to embrace AI rather than fear it. Moreover, she emphasized that AI holds significant potential as a powerful tool for peace and security, economic development and resource management, identifying and solving problems quicker. Also, Aurore underscored AI's misuse—particularly through militarization—poses substantial threats. She urged academics and private companies to collaborate in leveraging AI responsibly to promote stability without exacerbating systemic risks.

“AI is not a silver bullet but a powerful tool with the potential for both use and misuse”
– *Aurore Belfrage*

Shifting to economic, environmental, and gender perspectives, Aurore highlighted AI's transformative potential in sectors like healthcare and energy. However, she cautioned against its role in deepening global inequalities, with power concentrated in a few wealthy countries in the global north, which risks marginalizing women and other vulnerable groups in the global south. She emphasized AI's ability to drive advancements in energy storage, recycling, and resource management, while reshaping societal roles and workforce dynamics. Aurore stressed the need for global governance to ensure AI promotes equity, sustainability, and peace.

Presentation 2) Artificial Intelligence and Empowering Women in Conflict Zones

The second presentation was delivered by Dr. Mona Demaidi, see presentation attached! She emphasized the transformative potential of artificial intelligence (AI) within the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, underscoring the critical need for inclusive and ethical AI strategies. **She highlighted that while over 60 countries have adopted AI national strategies, only 13% prioritize gender inclusivity.** In the MENA region, 8 out of 19 countries have developed strategies focused primarily on economic growth and digital transformation, with limited attention to addressing gender equality and social impacts.

She further illustrated how AI supports the WPS agenda by enhancing women's **participation** through initiatives like boot camps, **protecting** women via AI tools that track threats online, **preventing** violence by monitoring ceasefires, and aiding **recovery** efforts with programs like IBM's Digital Nation Africa, which trains women in digital skills in post-conflict areas.

Demaidi also raised concerns about the ethical risks associated with AI, cautioning against the use of autonomous drones, facial recognition systems, and AI-driven surveillance technologies that can mark individuals for assassination or contribute to systemic oppression, including in contexts of occupation. She also highlighted the issue of shadow banning on social media, which disproportionately silences marginalized groups by restricting their visibility without their knowledge. Demaidi underscored the urgent need for robust governance to ensure that AI is utilized to foster peace, equality, and inclusivity, while avoiding the exacerbation of violence or injustice.

Highlights from the Discussions

The discussion revealed that the intersection of WPS and AI was a new topic, making the meeting feel exploratory and thought-provoking. Participants engaged with the speakers, raising concerns about the rise of online abuse targeting women and the lack of cultural sensitivity in tech platforms' moderation policies.

Successful partnerships between the private sector and civil society were highlighted, such as UNFPA-supported safe spaces offering vocational training, like mobile phone repair, to help women protect their privacy and counter cyber extortion. Another participant emphasized the importance of promoting digital literacy and entrepreneurship training to enhance women's skills, resilience against online risks, and economic empowerment.

However, a **Yemeni participant** highlighted that many Yemenis, particularly women in rural areas, lack access to the internet or even phones, making discussions about AI challenging. Despite this, there are partnerships between the private sector and civil society that have yielded progress. She mentioned partnerships, where the Chamber of Commerce and private sector have trained businesswomen in digital marketing and online safety while empowering women as mediators in humanitarian efforts like reopening roads in Taiz. However, societal norms, conflict, economic fragility, and poor internet remain major challenges for women in Yemen.

A **Lebanese** participant highlighted the role of AI in militarization, emphasizing how algorithms reinforce control and silence women, further marginalizing them in conflict zones, and stressed the need for inclusive, ethical AI development. The idea of a more inclusive development of AI was confirmed by a **Palestinian participant** who underscored the need to equip the Global South with AI tools to prevent such powerful technologies from being monopolized by wealthy nations, further exacerbating existing power imbalances between the Global South and North.

The increasing use of AI in conflicts was noted by a **Swedish participant**, such as the Russia-Ukraine war and the Palestine-Israel conflict, stressing the urgent need for responsible governance to prevent these technologies from escalating violence, violating human rights, or deepening tensions, while exploring their potential to promote peace and security.

Finally, a **Libyan participant** highlighted the rise of online violence against women on social media, noting the inadequacy of platforms like META in addressing reports due to their reliance on "universal" or "regional" standards that overlook local contexts, dialects, and cultural nuances. They asked Dr. Demaidi and Belfrage whether AI could effectively address such challenges and requested examples of tools designed to combat online violence against women.

Dr. Demaidi and **Belfrage** answered that AI can address online violence against women by improving content moderation through localized training on dialects, cultural nuances, and context-specific behaviors. Proactive detection systems can flag harmful content and accounts early, while enhanced reporting mechanisms streamline victim support. AI tools designed for real-time content filtering and detecting harmful activities demonstrate its potential to mitigate harm when aligned with local contexts.

Ann Måwe concluded the meeting by acknowledging that the intersection of AI and WPS is still a new territory. She noted the clear interest in the topic and emphasized the need for a deeper understanding of how AI can be leveraged to advance the WPS agenda. Additionally, she highlighted the encouragement to explore and experiment with AI and new techniques in our daily work.