

Women, Peace and Security

April 2022

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For April, in which the United Kingdom has the presidency of the UN Security Council, the MAP provides recommendations on the situations in Mali and Western Sahara, and on women, peace and security.

In the forthcoming Security Council open debate, all Member States should reflect the following recommendations in their statements:

- **Preventing and responding to gender-based violence (GBV) cannot be undertaken without simultaneously protecting and promoting the full spectrum of women's human rights, advancing gender equality, and ensuring women's full, equal and meaningful participation.** GBV is a direct result of, and contributes to, the deprivation of basic human rights, discrimination, and gender inequality. As a result, GBV must be addressed across all levels, from the immediate protection needs of survivors and at-risk communities, to development of systems of gender-responsive justice and accountability for violations of human rights, to ensuring women are able to meaningfully participate and lead across all levels of society, including in designing solutions to address protection concerns to prevent GBV. Preventing GBV also encompasses the implementation of relevant treaties and protocols to stop the transfer of weapons to situations in which they might be used to facilitate acts of GBV, including the Arms Trade Treaty, Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition (A/RES/55/255), and the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (UN PoA).
- **Survivor-centered approaches, in which the rights, needs and wishes of survivors are at the heart of the planning, decision-making and response to GBV, must be prioritized by all actors.** Survivor-centered approaches to GBV response should be holistic and designed in partnership with affected populations, prioritizing the rights of survivors, in all their diversity, to healthcare and comprehensive support that is of acceptable quality, accessible and delivered without discrimination, including sexual and reproductive healthcare, psychosocial support, legal services, access to justice, reparations, as well as support for livelihoods.
- **All actors have an obligation to ensure accountability for GBV by upholding international humanitarian, human rights and criminal law, including by ending impunity and prosecuting those responsible for all forms of GBV.** Equally, justice and accountability efforts, including reparations processes, must be human rights-based survivor-centered, victim-informed, inclusive, non-discriminatory, and designed, implemented and monitored in partnership with survivors and victims in order to avoid replicating or exacerbating harm, minimize risk, promote recovery and address the drivers of GBV.
- **Sexual and reproductive health and rights must be prioritized in all efforts to prevent and respond to GBV, particularly in crisis-affected contexts in which denial of these lifesaving and autonomy affirming services to women and girls can lead to higher mortality and morbidity than the crisis itself.** Access to sexual and reproductive health services is not a voluntary commitment; States have international legal obligations to respect, protect and fulfill these rights, and sexual and reproductive health services must be recognized for their obligatory and enforceable nature.
- **Local civil society groups, including women's rights organizations, play a critical role in GBV prevention and response – including in humanitarian settings, where they are often filling gaps in state-provided services.** In emergency situations, it is critical that local women-led and women's rights organizations receive direct, flexible and core funding to sustain their ability to provide the full suite of services; they are best placed to reach the most marginalised and at-risk groups, including in times of crisis.
- **Diverse women peacebuilders, civil society leaders, politicians and human rights defenders (WHRDs) play critical roles in addressing GBV and violations of human rights, advocating for sexual**

and reproductive health and rights, and promoting accountability, and as a result, are at risk of being targeted for violence. States have an obligation to ensure there is a safe and enabling environment for civil society in which WHRDs are protected, supported and their legitimacy is recognized, including by adopting and implementing legislation that recognizes and protects the rights, safety and participation of WHRDs, peace activists and humanitarian personnel, and eliminating laws that restrict and criminalize their work and lives.

Mali

The situation in Mali is [dire](#), with the population facing the [worst food insecurity](#) in over a decade. [30%](#) of the population is in need of humanitarian assistance, while humanitarian organizations face [severe access constraints](#) and challenges transporting lifesaving goods to people in need. Despite decreased hostilities in some areas, there is an [increase in frequency and seriousness](#) of violence targeting civilians in [central and southwestern](#) Mali. Women and girls living in conflict-affected areas are at particular risk for GBV, particularly [domestic violence](#), and overall, nearly 90% of the rural population, which comprises [more than half](#) of Mali's overall population, have either been directly affected by conflict or expressed concern that the conflict will spread to their community. The ongoing insecurity and heavy dependence on external assistance for basic social services, including the closure of schools affecting nearly [500,000 students](#), have disproportionately affected women and girls, resulting in an [increase](#) in early and forced marriages and sexual exploitation and abuse, and reduced access to sexual and reproductive health services. In forthcoming discussions on the situation in Mali and the Sahel, Security Council members must emphasize the centrality and applicability of international humanitarian and human rights law and reiterate that all armed groups must act in accordance with their obligations. Previous briefings by civil society to the Council have repeatedly highlighted stakeholders' failure to meaningfully address provisions of the Bamako Agreement related to women's meaningful participation and leadership. Over the last year, political outcomes of dialogues, such as the [agreement](#) signed in April 2021 in Niono, as well as the conclusions from regional and subregional meetings, have lacked any attention to women's rights or the importance of women's full, equal and meaningful participation. As a result, it is critical that briefings by senior UN officials, as well as statements delivered by Council members, provide specific information and analysis regarding the gender dimensions of the situation, particularly the critical role of women in all peace, political and security processes.

Western Sahara

There continue to be troubling signs of [escalation](#) of the conflict in Western Sahara. With the peace process stalled and the collapse of the ceasefire, the [humanitarian situation](#) remains dire and tensions are [intensifying](#). Journalists, activists and human rights defenders, including [women](#), continue to be targeted through arrests, detention, harassment and surveillance. In its discussion on the situation in Western Sahara, Council members should inquire about efforts of the Personal Envoy and his office to implement women, peace and security obligations, including through active, regular and ongoing [consultations](#) with civil society, including women's rights groups and women leaders. Specifically, the Personal Envoy should update on the ways in which he has taken concrete actions to ensure women's full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership in any future process, and articulate his commitment to protecting and promoting human rights, including women's rights, throughout all discussions.