

On Friday 30 October 2015, WILPF facilitated an event with the Men Engage network on “Transforming Violent Masculinities to Move the Women, Peace and Security Agenda forward” in the Church Center of the United Nations. WILPF PeaceWomen’s Abigail Ruane facilitated the event, and participants included: Anthony Keedi (ABAAD Resource Centre for Gender Equality), Dean Peacock (Sonke Gender Justice), Isabelle Geuskens, (Women Peacemakers Program), and Natko Geres (Promundo). The event provided an interactive discussion that brought attention to the need to recognise and transform gendered power structures, transform violent masculinities through non-violence, and engage men as allies with women for effective implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

Panelists started their discussion by exploring why engaging men and addressing masculinity is important for the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. Women Peacemakers Programme’s Isabelle Gueskens and Promundo’s Natko Geres brought attention to how gendered power hurts men as well as women. According to Geres, “We need to also see the impact that there is in masculinity in conflict zones and that men are victims of violence.” According to Gueskens, “You cannot address patriarchal peace without including men.” ABAAD’s Anthony Keedi noted that men have been socialized to behave in a masculine way without fully understanding patriarchy norms and movement of patriarchal norms. Because men do not have knowledge about gender, they do not understand and can have a negative attitude towards the feminist agenda. Keedi argued that it is important to engage men on a deeper level so that they can contribute and become feminist. Sonke Gender Justice’s Dean Peacock and other panelists shared their experience in working with men to reduce violence against women and militarised violence more generally. According to Dean Peacock, masculinity is used to socialise men to use force and impose hierarchy on gender issues. Changing this requires building men’s understanding and awareness of how patriarchal men act.

The conversation then moved to explore how it is possible to transform violent masculinities in the work by panelists. Geres highlighted Promundo’s work with engaging with men around healing trauma, addressing police brutality, creating campaigns and social norms around positive models of masculinity. Gueskens, Keedi, and Peacock shared experiences around trainings they have conducted or partnered on. Such trainings build gendered lenses among men and build capacity for women and men alliances on Women, Peace and Security, not only on gender based violence, but also on political issues of militarised masculinity, nonviolence, and peace. Keedi noted that building gender awareness takes time, and highlighted the importance of noting the problems of men’s role in protection through even benevolent sexism. It is not enough to be a “master who treats his pet well.” Peacock noted the importance of soliciting conflict as an opportunity for bringing attention and action for change, as well as the importance of diverse community outreach including community radio on issues such as hate speech and child abuse to engage in national and international legal advocacy, research, and awareness-raising on these issues.

Panelists explored key challenges to engaging men and transforming violent masculinities including lack of awareness, patriarchal religious and military institutions, lack of financing. They also highlighted tensions within coalitions working on this issue, including depoliticised approaches and ongoing issues of male privilege. Gueskens and Keedi brought attention to the difficulty for activists in engaging with military institutions: while the military may be able to

take strides in strengthening women's participation within it, it is designed for violent conflict resolution, and therefore is structurally opposed to transformative change toward gender equitable and nonviolent peace. Peacock brought attention to the the importance of an intersectional perspective that addresses all forms of inequality and violence, including gender but also race, class, economic systems, and sexual orientation and gender identity.

Finally, panelists discussed recommendations for the way forward on the WPS agenda. They affirmed that transforming violent masculinities for peace requires going beyond stereotypical assumptions about women being more peaceful than men and men being more violent than women. As Keedi noted: "We can all be strong and peaceful. We are not here to end manhood." Instead, "we need to focus on structural, policy and cultural issues." Panelists agreed that it is critical to start with sensitising men, but then move beyond that to address political issues of militarised and masculinised violence from the local to global levels. This means engaging deeply at a local level to build men's gender awareness and create equal partnerships among women and men for sustainable and equitable action and peace. It means recognising that gender is always deprioritised, even among nonviolent activists such as Martin Luther King Jr, and that moving forward requires not making these same mistakes, but building spaces for dialogue with women and marginalised communities and advocating against country and gender violence.