



WOMEN ORGANISING FOR CHANGE IN SYRIA AND BOSNIA



AN INITIATIVE OF
WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR
PEACE & FREEDOM

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Since 2013, WILPF is spearheading a ground-breaking initiative “Women Organising for Change in Syria and Bosnia” that focuses on the importance of taking into consideration existing experiences and empirical knowledge of women who went through an armed conflict and struggled for women rights. This initiative combines WILPF’s work in the areas of Human Rights, and Women, Peace and Security trying to change the dominant narrative of women as victims. Through this initiative we advocate for women’s rights to be represented at all levels in the peace-building process, we put the spot light on the peace activism of women during war, we defend the human rights of women and promote social, economic and political justice.

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Introduction

The dominant narrative of war excludes women; or more precisely it presents them only as helpless victims and passive spectators of their own destiny decided for them by the men with the guns. That narrative is further played out in the post war structures of the affected society and despite all the rhetoric around the Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security, the patriarchal institutional barriers remain intact. The tasks ahead of us are how to recognize real and true experiences of women and organize for effective change of war-affected societies? Only those who have lived through war and post-war transition(s) have the real knowledge and first hand experience, and it was for that reason that WILPF International initiated a project in 2013 called "Women Organizing for Change in Syria and Bosnia" with the aim of facilitating the exchange of ideas and experiences between women who have gone through and are going through war.

As part of the initiative a conference was held from 10-14 February 2014 in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. 20 representatives and activists from women groups and human rights organizations in Syria attended the conference along with 42 activists and representatives of women's rights groups and civil society organizations from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The conference highlighted the importance of considering experiences and empirical knowledge of women who went through the armed conflict and struggled for women rights, in light of conflict

prevention and peace building initiatives in Syria. The primary focus was on the experiences of the Bosnian and Syrian women. The Bosnian experience highlights what happens when women are not represented during peace talks, or in strategic decisions during the post-conflict recovery period, and how inefficient and discriminatory power embodied in patriarchal political elite continues to deepen conflicts in the society instead of solving them. At the same time, the on-going conflict in Syria and the Syrian women's struggle to gain meaningful space at the negotiations during the Geneva II Conference shed light on the inability of ground-breaking international mechanisms such as UNSCR 1325 to create a space for women when geopolitical interests and the interests of the male political elites are prioritized over the needs of Syrian people.



Credit: Plemumsa Plenum Sarajevo/Flickr

People of Bosnia sending message to the European Union and other international actors that they should be talking to the civil society and not to the nationalist. Protests in Sarajevo, February 2014.

As Madeleine Rees, the Secretary General of WILPF pointed out during the introductory remarks "most often, women involvement in war and peace talks are neglected and ignored and their opinions and voices are cast aside, despite the international obligations. Nevertheless, decisions made during these periods tangibly affect the lives of women and girls, and it is time to recognize the role and power of women in the peace-process and in shaping the future of post-conflict countries".

The Conference was shaped around three main blocks:

- Block I: Peace negotiations and women's participation in peace-making and peace building
- Block II: Gender Based Violence
- Block III: Justice

The discussions within these three blocks focused on the ways women are organizing during a war; experiences of gender based violence (GBV) in war and after war, its prosecution, dimension, as well as raising the question of what is justice for those who suffered GBV during war time. The discussions involved post-war scenarios, the transitional period from war to 'peace' and raising the question of what transitional justice means for each particular society (dealing with the past, social, economical, cultural justice), and in particular for women.

The overall aim was to learn and draw lessons from each other, but also to put these different experiences together in a coherent picture on how women activism in war and post-war settings can contribute to change, and the different spaces that need to be created for their participation in peace-making and peace-building.

While the conference was taking place, Bosnia-Herzegovina was shaken by a wave of anti-government protests. People came out in the streets calling for the social justice and demanding resignation of the government(s). This gave an added meaning to the conference as it vividly illustrated how the absence of women's voices, and indeed that of non-militarized men, had led to a peace agreement which was antithetic to the realization of real peace and real security.



Credit: Barbro Svedberg

Background to the initiative

More than twenty years have passed since the outbreaks of armed conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. The consequences, particularly from a gender perspective, are yet to be effectively addressed. In Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) 19 years after the Dayton Peace Agreement, the transitional justice processes are largely stalled. Although prosecutions for war crimes, including for sexual violence, are taking place, the process for accessing justice is hazardous and the victims remain dissatisfied. They are dissatisfied with the pace of this process as well as with the fact that they as victims, despite prosecutions, are still waiting for recognition. Mechanisms for reparations remain inappropriate. In general terms the State is unable to fulfil its obligations on a range of human rights issues, particularly in regards to economic and social rights.

Many lessons can be drawn from the experiences of war and post-war reconstruction in BiH. Understanding the consequences and effects of approaches and decisions taken by both the international community and the BiH political elite in negotiating peace, can provide crucial knowledge to current conflict settings, in particular the effects that a non-inclusive peace process have had on civil engagement and the women's movement. These lessons can and should be used to pre-empt these mistakes in other societies in conflict or on the verge of it.

The on-going crisis in Syria and the reports coming from the Syrian activists point to similarities

with the BiH conflict at the beginning of the 90's. While the Syrian women activists and civil society organisations find themselves in a slightly better position in terms of organizing around the peace negotiations and local peace initiatives, there still has not been any real inclusion of Syrian women in the Geneva II Conference despite the existence of a whole framework of UN Security Council Resolutions addressing women's rights to participation. Bearing in mind the consequences of exclusion of Bosnian women from peace negotiations on the Bosnian society today, the urgency of correcting this approach chosen by international and domestic actors in Syria is more than pressing! Regardless of the outcome of the armed conflict, the crisis in Syria will certainly leave the State in a long period of transition and economic, political, judicial and social reconstructions. It is critical that the tragic mistakes of other post-conflict reconstructions are not repeated.

There are specific gender implications during war and post-war reconstructions, which make the inclusion of women in formal decision-making not only a legal imperative but also a very practical one. Without inclusion, access to justice and socio-economic development lacks strategic approach and vision. In addition, women's perspective of war and the specific needs emerging from the post-war reality find no place in the reconstructed society. The process of building a new State and its institutions will be unsustainable without consolidating and ensuring the participation of women in all processes. The first step is to make

sure women are ready and able to meaningfully participate in any peace negotiation process, and that they have a framework for a transitional model for justice and development that will help the State to move from conflict to sustainable peace. This specifically means addressing the trauma of war, including the trauma caused by sexualized violence, and gender based violence, a major feature of most post-war societies.



Credit: Freedom House/ Flickr

Young women with a placard reading "No" stuck on their forehead attending a demonstration against violence in Syria. Madrid, 2012.

Thus, during 2013 WILPF, together with activists from BiH and Syria, started developing a model that could facilitate an exchange of lessons and experiences between the Syrian and Bosnian women. The Government of Norway, Kvinna till Kvinna and OAK Foundation have supported the project, and the process.

The initiative had two main aims:

- To empower women activists of Bosnia and Herzegovina to, based on their experiences and knowledge, share valuable lessons with Syrian counterparts, and engage with international experts in developing their own strategies for demanding and accessing their rights in the context of post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- To strengthen the capacities of Syrian women's organizations to develop approaches to constitutional change, transitional justice, human rights and to engage in peace negotiations benefiting from Bosnian experience.

The process

A major outcome of the first phase of this initiative was the joint conference "Women organizing for change in Syria and Bosnia." As part of the process, several activities took place prior to the conference.

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina** approximately 40 women that were active in different time, regions and fields during the last 20 years gathered to discuss aspects of their experiences of war and its aftermath. The discussions focused on seven subjects - **1) peace negotiations and women in post-war BiH; 2) access to justice; 3) transitional justice; 4) sexual violence in war; 5) refugees and the return process; 6) GBV in post-war BiH; and 7) economic and social rights.** Divided in thematic groups as per the described topics, the women addressed how they organized, what they did, how they did it and what were the results and implications of their actions. This was a retrospective process¹ for the women in Bosnia and Herzegovina that aimed to provide support and solidarity to the Syrian women activists (through lessons learned that were captured during these thematic group meetings). At the same time this provided space for the Bosnian women

organizations to jointly analyse the past experiences and visualize their future work. The main outcome of approximately 10 meetings during the fall and winter of 2013 is a set of reports on each of the thematic areas including an analysis of the general situation, identification of the problems and the response of women organizations to these challenges. The reports also captured the strategies used, both those that were successful and those that were not.

At the same time, on **Syria**, WILPF organized two workshops with approximately 20 Syrian women organizations in Beirut, Lebanon.² The workshops focused on how to support and consolidate women civil society activists and organisations to participate in and to devise processes necessary to achieve democratic change, transitional justice and peaceful transition in Syria. The discussions included analysis of major challenges for women and civil society participation in peace and conflict resolution in Syria today, possible strategies to gain access to peace negotiations, the use of the international human rights mechanisms, while at the same time some of the early findings of the Bosnian process were presented.

WILPF organized an open application process for Syrian organizations to participate in the conference. The result was a diverse delegation, both in terms of the geographical spread of the participants as well as age and the type of work they are engaged in. The Bosnian participants did not undergo the same selection process, as the 20 years of their work was an actual selection processes. All who participated in the work of thematic groups were invited.

The Conference was a culmination of these events enabling the Syrian and Bosnian women to meet each other, to talk and discuss, to share experiences grounded in their personal experiences of destruction, loss and grief, as well as in their work to overcome the consequences of war.

One of the international experts present at the conference, Ms. Bronagh Hinds from DemocraShe, also gave a brief overview of the experiences of Northern Irish women, in order to highlight a different approach towards peace negotiations than we have seen in both Bosnia and Syria.



Credit: Foreign and Commonwealth Office/ Flickr

Aleppo, Karm al Jabal. Syria's infrastructure is destroyed beyond repair, so are the lives of many Syrian women, children and men. The infrastructure in the country is destroyed, the country is indebted, and most of the national and international resources are going to the armament.

Women Organizing for Change in Syria and Bosnia – report from the conference

The conference was organized on 10-14 February 2014, in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Twenty participants from Syria attended the conference from thirteen different organizations spread around Syria and neighbouring countries. The number of Bosnian participants amounted to 40 from nearly as many organizations. Apart from the Syrian and Bosnian participants, several international experts³ attended the conference and shared their expertise and knowledge on the subject.

The organizers⁴ had taken a decision to keep the conference closed to additional participation from other parties such as donors, UN agencies, international organizations, governments or journalists. This decision was taken with respect to the need to create a safe and open environment for Syrian and Bosnian activists to freely discuss and exchange thoughts and ideas and giving priority to the protection of Syrian participants.

Discussions were held in Bosnian, English and Arabic, with translation provided throughout.

A specific element of the conference were time slots dedicated for separate meetings of the two "delegations" allowing them to reflect on what has been said during the discussions the day before, to prepare for the upcoming discussion but first and foremost to discuss issues within the delegations as to the current situation in their respective countries and how to organize in response. These time slots turned out to be very valuable for both delegations, opening up discussions that otherwise would have been left out from the conference.

The Conference was shaped around three main blocks:

- Block I: Peace negotiations and women's participation in peace-making and peace building
- Block II: Gender Based Violence
- Block III: Justice

These three blocks were thought to be broad enough to encompass all crucial experiences that needed to be shared, but were also backed by additional optional thematic workshops on **Responding to sexual violence** with **Monika Hauser**, founder of

Medica Zenica and Medica Mondiale; **Working with refugees** with Lepa Mladjenovic, Women in Black, and Nela Pamukovic, Centre for women victims of war ROSA; **Relationship between international community and domestic NGOs** with Samir Krehic, International Commission for Missing Persons; **Documenting human rights abuses** with Lisa Davis, MADRE; and **Using IT and Social networks in everyday activism** with Valentina Pellizzer, OneWorldSee.

A facilitator led each block and women from respective countries gave a brief introduction to the situations in Syria and Bosnia. The organizers had intentionally left out lengthy introductions to themes careful not to shape the course of the discussion too much. For help and guidance during the discussions a set of guiding questions⁵ were developed for each of the blocks but participants were told that they can direct the discussion in anyway they see fit, in order to gain as much from the interaction as possible.

At the very beginning of the conference a brief introduction of the BiH context and background of the Syrian conflict and information on the current situation were given by Gorana Mlinarevic and Majed Sharabaj respectively.

Short overview of the BiH context

Until early 20th century, Bosnia and Herzegovina was a colony and should be viewed as such. The process of nation building has therefore not followed the same pattern as in Western Europe. The colonial rulers imposed their rules via religious identities that later determined the creation of ethnic identities.

After the Second World War, Bosnia and Herzegovina became one of the six federal republics of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). On one side, socialist ideology anticipated the ultimate dissolution of nation state, as a capitalist construction, and thus never insisted on building the Yugoslav nation. On the other hand it never properly addressed the nationalist tendencies of parts of the ruling elite, primarily from Belgrade and Zagreb. The 'unresolved' ethno-national issues later became the place of contestations.

While the causes of dissolution of SFRY and the war(s) of 1990s are more complex, and have unfortunately not yet been properly analysed, the war that raged in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1992 – 1995 has been predominantly defined as an ethnic war and this narrative has worked for domestic political elites and has been supported by the international community.

With regards to women's rights, socialist ideology was in theory egalitarian, but in practice equality was not achieved in any segment of the society. Following the end of the World War II (WWII) the Anti-fascist Front of Women was a strong political

organization but confronted with patriarchy this movement was weakened. Its focus shifted to the question of services instead of political participation and representation of women.

Very few feminist political voices were present in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The feminist voices from late 1970s (early 1980s), which were mainly academic in nature, came largely from the academic centres of Belgrade, Serbia and Zagreb, Croatia, (and partially Ljubljana, Slovenia). The feminists from Bosnia and Herzegovina acted mainly in Zagreb or Belgrade. Yugoslavian feminist movement that was formed around 1980s had a strong agenda with regards to the gender-based violence.

While rape was already recognized as a serious crime in 1954, violence against women in the domestic sphere was not recognized at all. However, the fact that rape was considered a serious crime and that the feminist movement had mobilized around gender based violence, played a significant role in securing the recognition of wartime sexual violence as war crime in 1990s.

Regarding the issue of women organizing and founding organizations during the war(s) in the 1990s the dynamics were similar in many parts of former Yugoslavia (excluding Kosovo to some extent). In Bosnia and Herzegovina in particular, women started organizing around service provision (for raped women for example), but political engagement with peace was rare and individual.

The Peace negotiations happened without the participation of women. Women asked for peace but no organized actions took place. Instead the nationalist parties (which are patriarchal by definition) were those participating in and leading the peace negotiations that ended with the adoption of the Dayton Peace Agreement. The analyses of the war, prior to the agreement, were simplified to just one interpretation of the war, the one that went along with the nationalist rhetoric, which determined the content of the agreement. In this way women's voices and citizen's voices remained excluded and ignored and have remained so to date.

Since the signing of Dayton Peace Agreement the citizens have been struggling against the same people that have been in power for last 20 years.

» Nawal Yazeji from Syria Women's League commented:
"Thank you for your warnings. We see the same things coming up now in Syria, they are desperately trying to divide the country and they are succeeding to do so in some instances. They are also trying, as it was the case in Bosnia, to align the peace agreement only with the interests of people in power. We will struggle hard not to let them succeed in marginalizing women and citizens." «

Nawal Yazeji from Syria Women's League talking at the Conference about the current situation in Syria and the attempts of the armed men to divide the country.



Credit: Nela Porobic Isakovic

Background to the Syrian conflict and information on the current situation

Credit: Alex Rondu/Flickr



Women of Syria have actively participated in the Revolution since the very beginning, revolting against autocracy and demanding a right in dignity. During the conflict women and children have been killed, subjected to torture and arbitrary detentions, killings and sexualized violence.

The Syrian revolution started with peaceful protests in 2011, as a revolt against autocracy. The regime reacted with violence, using arbitrary detention, forced disappearance, torture and extrajudicial killing to silence the peaceful protesters, all under a total media blackout. The Assad regime violence escalated supported by his strategic partners, and two vetoes by Russia and China left the UN Security Council unable to oppose the mass

extermination that was taking place. Unable to receive protection or support by the international community, the opposition forces started militarizing and shortly after, extremist groups started emerging in various areas out of the regime control and foreign jihadist soldiers were coming into Syria to fight for their own cause. In August 2013, the Assad regime used chemical weapons in the outskirts of Damascus, killing over a thousand civilians. States

remained unable to fulfil their international legal obligations to protect civilians and the UN Security Council was still blocked by an irresponsible use of the veto prerogative. The militarization on both sides of the conflict was growing fast and reciprocally the role of civil society was marginalised. Internally, Assad used the threat of jihadists within the opposition to build support for the regime among the Alawite and Christian communities. The Islamist threat was also used to gather support from uninformed communities out of Syria.

All kinds of weapons are used against the civil population in Syria, including biological and chemical. Horrifying pictures from the Syrian war are shown around the world. More than 140,000 people, over 7,000 of them children and over 5,000 women, have been killed. There are around 7 million displaced persons; among them more than 2 millions are refugees.⁶

Prior the revolution, most women's lives remained centred around their traditional roles. But women have been involved in the uprising in Syria since its very beginning. Women from all parts of society and confessions were involved. They were demanding freedom against an oppressive regime, and battling just as hard to ensure that their individual rights do not perish in the process. Many Syrian women have opposed the militarization and radicalization of the

conflict in Syria from the beginning and lot of them were arrested and tortured for peacefully protesting.

Syrian women have suffered the consequences of the oppressive regime and the armed conflict disproportionately. Like men, they were targeted, arbitrary detained, abused, tortured and killed during the uprising, and in addition, the escalation of militarization and violence paralleled by a complete failure of the rule of law are posing a serious threat to their hard-earned gains as they gradually lose their rights to freedom of movement, work and education. Moreover, sexual violence has been escalating inside Syria and in the refugee camps in neighbouring countries.

Block I:

Peace negotiations and women's participation in peace making and peace building

This block was facilitated by Ms. Lena Ag from Kvinna till Kvinna who accentuated that when talking about women in war, it is important to always highlight the active role of women during and after the war, and in peace building, in order to deconstruct the dominate understanding of women as the eternal female victim. Women groups at the peace-negotiating table can give a unique and different perspective and increase the chances for sustainable peace. During and immediately after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina the international women's movement, together with local women's groups, wanted to portray and support that role, to show what women were actually doing on the ground.

» We saw something other than victims, we saw women leading the way in reconciliation efforts, in humanitarian efforts, in dealing with the past, and at the same time we saw marginalization of these efforts, of these voices, and we wanted to question the fact that the only ones that could sit at peace tables were the men with guns, and not the real peace makers «

Lena Ag,
General Secretary, Kvinna till Kvinna

During the discussion **Bosnian women** highlighted that the Syrian women are in a better position compared to them in terms of the possibility to demand their right to participate in designing the peace in Syria, using the international mechanisms such as UNSCR 1325 that came into existence five years after the end of the Bosnian war. However, they were warned not to support solutions similar to those of the Dayton Peace Agreement. The Dayton Peace Agreement, adopted without any participation of women, put in place a Constitution that is highly discriminatory towards the groups and individuals who do not identify themselves with the three dominant ethnic communities. The country was divided in 2 entities – Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and Republika Srpska (RS) each with its own constitution, government, judiciary, police, laws and so forth. FBiH is further divided into 10 cantons and each canton, again, has its own government, school system, laws, police etc. In addition, the part of the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina that was not decided upon in Dayton, was later awarded by international arbitration decision its own, separate from entities, administrative jurisdiction as a Brko

District of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Besides being non-functional and discriminatory this political and administrative division of the country entrenches the conflicts in the society, separates people and is enormously expensive.

» Experiences around the world have shown that women can make peace, that women can achieve peace, we want our women to participate in building democratic, civil state. Yes, our country maybe destroyed but we will go back to our country, to rebuild it, so that Syria once again becomes a country for everybody, and a country for democracy «

Sabah Alhallak,
Syrian League for Citizenship

December 1995 - Slobodan Milosevic, Alija Izetbegovic, and Franjo Tudjman sign the Balkan Peace Agreement. Bosnia and Herzegovina is still dealing with poor solutions determined by the peace agreement that was agreed upon and signed without a single woman present.

Credit: Central Intelligence Agency/ Flickr



The Bosnian women also talked about how women peace activism, in the absence of the space during formal peace negotiations, was focused at local and community level. Women organisations were mainly searching for ways to counteract the nationalistic discourse, create cooperation across the lines of division, work on trauma of women and men, reconstruct the houses and work with marginalized groups. The number of women in civil society organizations was much higher than the number of men, while the situation was reverse in the political sphere.

When it comes to political parties in BiH after the war the parties did not have women, or had very few of them and there were no women in power. Over the last couple of years women NGOs have through their work on political participation of women managed to ensure increased participation of women in politics and today there are about 25% of women in politics at various levels.

However, despite the fact that women NGOs have worked with and supported the women in politics, empowering them and raising their capacities, they have not received sufficient feedback from the women in politics. "I don't know if it is out of fear or out of their strong wish to remain in power but women in politics rarely make any contacts with us. They are very supportive in seminars and workshops but after that - nothing" said Gordana Vidovic from BiH. One of the main reasons for such situation is the fact that the Dayton Peace Agreement, negotiated by the militarized male elites recognizes only ethnic identity as political. Consequently the political parties are being mainly organized along the lines of ethnic belonging leaving no other political space but the one representing interests of ethnic groups, and this in essence is just reinforcing patriarchal order. The result of this is

that women who enter the political parties are only given space to represent the interests defined as interests of certain ethnic group, and very rarely the political interests of women.

The Syrian women shared their experiences of the on-going peace negotiations. They argued that the foundation for a process towards transition to a civil, democratic and pluralistic and united state in Syria is the implementation of the Geneva I Communiqué, and the necessity of inclusion of a women's rights agenda. They explained that Syrian women organisations have organized and engaged on issues related to peaceful resolution of the conflict since the outbreak of the violence in the country. Despite strong mobilization they had been excluded from any official participation of the negotiation processes, including the Geneva II Conference in January.

However, within the joint initiative "Syrian Women's Initiative for Peace and Democracy", almost 50 participants from Syrian women and civil society organisations were in Geneva for a two-days meeting, one week before the Geneva II Conference, to discuss and define demands and priorities for the Syrian peace process. The Outcome Statement calls for support of the political process, urging all parties to transcend their differences to reach an agreement for a free, pluralistic and democratic Syria that respects human rights, including the rights and equality between men and women; and for decision-makers to respect Syrian women's right to full political participation in all matters related to shaping the future of their country. They made a link between the importance of integrating state building and peace building and pointed that the solution is not to have

peace without having a state, as it was the case in Bosnian.

Bronagh Hinds from DemocraShe shared her experience from the peace negotiations in Northern Ireland saying that war and the use of violence, cannot on its own deliver the kind of peace, stability and future organization of a state that is necessary, so negotiations, no matter how difficult they are, are an essential part of the peace-building process. What is also important is understanding that peace making is not a one time thing, but should rather be seen as continuum starting with the work done on the ground by the civil society actors, the entry or influence on the negotiations by women, and then the long process of building a long and sustainable peace and reconstruction of the society.

Women in Northern Ireland secured an entry into the negotiations before any UN Security Council resolution was adopted so the women of Syria have more tools and moral authority to demand their inclusion from the international community. Over the years, political parties and military groups in Northern Ireland ignored women and their role holding the fabric of families and communities together.

Many women of Northern Ireland believed that important issues for citizens would be overlooked because they were not issues of the main protagonists, the central agenda for them was “who gets the power” and not who delivers to the citizens. Previous male-only negotiations had not been successful in making peace, and women of Northern Ireland thought that they had to take that responsibility and challenge the male approach

to politics that was all about whipping up hatred. Because women are marginalized, and because women are the largest group in society, women are the champions of understanding marginalization and exclusion and therefore women have the right, and in a sense give themselves the duty, to represent and to bring up all those underrepresented and marginalized groups, so women are more than women and have the right to be so.

» Do not underestimate the absolute experience and expertise that you have. We outside can help you, and will help you in whatever way we can, but you have the experience. People here have talked about not having the negotiating experience, let me say this, it is common sense, and no one has more common sense than women. Politicians would like you to believe that it is rocket science and it is not. You in your work on the ground have considerable experience in conflict mediation, and sharing across differences and being inclusive and developing and leading work across political and religious divides «

**Bronagh Hinds,
DemocraShe**

The subject opened up a very important discussion among the Syrian delegation about the legitimacy of women participating in side-events to Geneva II, and whether women of Syria support their quests for peace and negotiations, or would some women of Syria rather see a military victory to the conflict. One of the questions raised was "why should women be at the negotiating table with Bashar al Assad's regime"? There was also a discussion on how to ensure inclusion of all women, particularly those marginalized, in the initiative to bring women to the negotiating table.

The Bosnian experience was very relevant for this discussion. It showed how, once the space for women was lost during the early phases of peace negotiations, that space was never regained throughout the war recovery period. After twenty years of activism, women are still struggling to be a recognized partner in building the peace. "The progress we are making is not seen, and politicians are devaluing any attempt of positive changes in relation to women, their roles and rights"

– participants stressed.



During the discussion the following lessons were highlighted:

- The importance of women claiming their right to peace negotiating table from the very beginning and throughout the entire process of resolution of conflict;
- Peace negotiations are more than just about negotiating ceasefire, they are about creating a democratic society, inclusive for all and women's active participation in creating that society is an imperative;
- Prior to the adoption of any law or agreement, especially prior to the adoption of a peace agreement it is very important to analyse all possible implications its implementation might have on all walks of society, especially women, since it is very difficult to make any change afterwards.
- It is important to define the minimum of rights of women that should be integrated in Peace Agreement regardless of political, ethnical, national and other differences of women organizations or groups. These minimum of rights should ensure that women rights and needs are integrated across humanitarian, political, and socio-economic sectors.
- Networking and working across divisions is the key for establishing peace in everyday life;
- Peace agreement should under no circumstances contain a country's Constitution; the country's Constitution has to be reached, once the conditions are secured for democratic discussions, through inclusive process of all its citizens respecting all the internationally recognized human rights.
- Delivery of justice in war crimes cases is crucial to sustainable peace.
- The donor community should listen more carefully to the needs, perspectives and concerns of local women organizations and support channels for dialogue and networking among them.

Block II:

Gender Based Violence

The facilitator of this block, Ms. Nela Porobic Isakovic from WILPF, briefly introduced the subject. Gender Based Violence (GBV) has been addressed by the international law in different areas, from different angles and in different ways. The international conventions, resolutions and declarations deal with both GBV in general and wartime sexual violence in particular, looking at consequences of the violence on the lives of women as well as at the obligations of the state.

The UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)⁷ states that "violence against women means any act of gender based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life". General recommendation 19⁸, an authoritative interpretation of CEDAW issued in 1992, states that "gender-based violence is a form of discrimination which gravely affects women's enjoyment of their human rights" (paragraph 1). States are obliged under international law to make rights of women a reality – but that rarely happens, particularly in situations of violence, these rights tend, if not to disappear, but to be on the bottom of the priority list.

It is recognized that GBV takes place at all stages, before, during and after the conflict, and that women are particularly at risk of violence due to forced

displacement, separation from their families, lack of basic structural and social protections, or generally worsened security situation and limited availability to services. Even when services are available survivors are reluctant to report due to fear of stigma, social exclusion, retaliation from the perpetrators and so on. Most of the GBV happen to women because they are women – sometimes that violence is placed in ethical or religious frame – but most often the violence is a result of the patriarchal order we live in. Women tend to be viewed as passive "victims" only, taking away their active agency, their ability and capacity to be equal members of a society.

Bosnian and Syrian delegation members gave a detailed overview of the situation regarding the GBV in both countries. They both agreed that in order to address GBV in war and post-war situations the focus now has to shift toward the effective implementation of legal instruments that exist to combat violence against women. A range of measures, both legal and non-legal, are essential to ensuring that the ideals set forth in international standard-setting instruments become a reality for women. Lisa Davis, from MADRE spoke about how difficult it is to work on GBV but yet that there were different ways and solutions. "There is difficulty in gaining accurate statistics and providing services, and there is apathy from the international community to work on these issues. But there are ways to work around these obstacles by thinking about how you want to work on the issue in terms of short term, mid-term and long-term."

Short-term mechanisms are provision of services to women and thinking about how to address the GBV. In some places provision of peer to peer counselling has turned out to be successful short-term mechanism, or being able to identify women in displacement camps or neighbourhoods that have signs of this trauma and thus being able to reach out and provide services to them can be another. Training doctors to respect confidentially, to provide the victims with a copy of their medical record, to think about how women's centre can play a roll (and without stigmatizing them by calling them rape centres) etc. With respect to the mid-term actions, it is about looking at how to raise this issue with the international community, to keep it alive. The international community is looking at very specific issues such as war crimes, but they are not looking specifically into women's issues, and history has taught us that if we don't raise the issues and while violations are taking places they will be left out of the transitional justice process, from a tailored humanitarian response and so on. These issues have to be raised because there is apathy around issues of sexual violence but "boys will be boys in war" is not what the international law says. The international law clearly stipulates that rape is a crime, so mechanisms need to be found in order to raise this issue. One such mechanism is CEDAW-report. In the long term, it is about looking how to get the vision of the GBV-free society in the constitutional reform process, in coalition building, in movement building.

The **account of the Bosnian experience** was focused on the use of sexual violence during war, as it is well known that women of BiH suffered mass rapes and other forms of sexual violence.

Accurate statistics on the number of women subjected to sexual violence do not exist and

reasons are many – some of the women and girls who survived sexual violence were later killed, many of them have not even been found yet; many women who survived rape did not have suitable social protection or health care and got ill later on and died; and many women today have decided not to speak about their trauma for fear of stigma, retaliation or a like. However, a number of BiH women did speak up about the sexual violence they suffered during the war.

» Often the question is raised how many women in BiH were rape, there are different reports and statistics from 20 000 to 50 000. Activists often point out that one woman is one too many «

Sabiha Husic,
Medica Zenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Few civil society organizations in the country attempted to respond to the needs of victims of sexual based violence. In the beginning women were primarily asking for shelter, health care, food and other immediate needs. Counselling and psychosocial assistance came with growing capacities of the civil society organisations which was possible to achieve thanks to international feminists that came to Bosnia and encouraged Bosnian women to organize and offer comprehensive assistance.

Due to the testimonies of women from BiH, for the first time in history, rape and other forms of sexual violence are perceived as war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide. The first cases of

war-time rape were prosecuted at International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY), and it was during the prosecution of these cases that a specific approach at the ICTY in regards to provision of support to women who are witnessing was created, and later on passed on to the domestic courts.

Since the end of the war, women survivors of sexual violence in BiH continue to face many obstacles. Although for the first time in history a law was adopted in one part of Bosnia (in the Federation of BiH) that guarantees something similar to compensations for victims of war-time rape⁹, the law is still not satisfactory and does not fully correspond to the needs of the women and the rights entitled by the law are not being fully implemented in practice. Women living in the other part of the country, the entity of Republika Srpska, do not enjoy any protection under the law.¹⁰

The Bosnian women also spoke about the other aspects of GBV and how difficult it was to be an activist after the war, being seen as a traitor of your own community. The activists were many times afraid for their lives but had a strong desire to change the current situation. Networking and cooperation across entity lines required great strength, as there were borders and checkpoints, and campaigns against them.

After the war domestic violence was wide spread, with men returning from battlefields into economic marginalization, they had no jobs, while women's position in the society had somewhat changed during the war. While men were fighting women had to take care of their families and communities, earn

money and support their children. This new situation caused tensions in many families. Faced by these emerging problems women NGOs and feminists started responding and have gained several successes such as new laws against domestic violence, new law on Gender Equality and gender mechanisms.

Other issues were covered in the introduction as well, such as trafficking and the impact of microcredits on the lives of the Bosnian women. It was said that while microcredits were in the beginning seen as a good mechanism for economic empowerment high interest rates became traps for many women and their families leaving women in financial slavery.

The **Syrian account of the current situation** was seen to be somewhat different than the situation explained in BiH due to the fact that the Syrian women were part of the Revolution; they participated in the demonstrations along side with men. With the militarization of the Revolution the Syrian women have been subjected to more violence and gender based violence. The more complicated the conflict became the more women have to suffer.

The Syrian regime has taken an advantage of the dominant view in the Syrian society that women are responsible for the family honour to seek revenge or blackmail men who were part of the uprising. The violence used against women spans from harassment to rape, detention, kidnapping, enforced disappearances, and displacement. Conditions in displacement camps are also very bad leaving women vulnerable. There are reports

of women refugees being subjected to sexual violence, being married off by their families and communities and sexually exploited. Documentation of these violations has been very challenging. The international community has stopped counting the number of deaths and has no accurate record of the violations against women. Documentation is now being done only by Syrian civil society organisations but there are many difficulties in reaching victims and getting accurate information.

Women have suffered a lot in detention and prisons. They have been detained by both regime and opposition militias, as well as kidnapped or forcibly disappeared, the number of detainees is still not confirmed; the Syrian human rights League said that there are over 250,000 detainees, among which over 30,000 are women. Many families will not say that their female members had been detained because of the stigma since the assumption is that women detained are being raped, even if they are not. After the detention, some of the girls and women committed suicide.

Some of the Syrian participants shared information about the increase of women being kidnapped. Women are being kidnapped for many reasons, and today there are even local offices where you can exchange women for five men. Some of the women were kidnapped to blackmail their male relatives. The number of kidnapped women is not known but there are also 3,000 women missing.

» Take all evidences you can, as detailed as you can, and as soon as you can. If a victim speaks now, this does not mean that she will (be able to) speak again «

Said a Bosnian woman

The Syrian regime has used siege as a strategy to apply pressure on opposition dominated areas. Entire cities and neighbourhoods have been suffering a complete block of food, medical supplies and resources for long periods of time, amounting to years in some of the cases. This has a disproportionate impact on women, as they are the first to lose their basic rights, including the right to movement, food and education. The escalation of violence and the lack of rule of law associated power and empowerment with arms that are not available to women. Moreover, women bear a new role, heading households in addition to their traditional tasks.



Bosnian women listen to the accounts of the Syrian activists and share their own experiences in working with gender based violence in the aftermath of war.
Sarajevo, February 2014.

During the discussion the following lessons were highlighted:

- Timely documentation of evidence of GBV is very important as sometimes it is easier for victims to speak immediately after it happened than later on;
- People working with victims and traumatized people need adequate education – their professional capacities to help the victims with their trauma can be very important for the victim's ability to seek justice for the crime committed against her, or gain access to the rights entitled by domestic or international law;
- Utilization of international mechanisms in highlighting the on-going GBV in the country and participation of women organizations in writing shadow reports are of crucial importance;
- Wartime rape should not be seen only through the

ethnic or religious lenses, or only understood as weapon of war, or during prosecution be merged with other crimes. There must also be an understanding that sexual violence and other types of GBV happen to women because they are women; this is necessary for better understanding and more adequate understanding of power relations in the militarized society.

- War-time survivors of sexual violence must not be abandoned by the society; they need to have adequate access to social justice mechanisms: in addition to welfare provisions (adequate pensions if needed, adequate access to health care, especially reproductive health care and psychological support, access to adequate housing, employment, education, trainings or prequalification) survivors need to be allowed to actively participate in the society;
- It is very important to address second generation trauma which very often is actually caused by the stigma surrounding women survivors of GBV; also it is important to secure adequate conditions for education of children of survivors of GBV (both in order to prevent the second generation trauma but also to prevent new traumatisation of the survivors due to worry about the future of their children).
- In the aftermath of armed conflicts, both genders have to redefine their roles within the society. The post-war environment often results in the re-traditionalization of society and increases the domestic violence. Thus, proper and effective programs to address the needs of women in these settings, including medical treatment, mental health services and education about legal rights, become one of the priorities of civil society organizations;
- Bosnian experience shows that it is essential to include men in programmes of prevention of GBV and domestic violence;
- Sometimes inclusion of religious communities in the programs is a good strategy in preventing domestic violence;
- Staff in schools, at all levels should also be educated about what to do in case of domestic violence and how to recognize it;
- Different actors dealing with domestic violence need to be coordinated and particular attention should be brought to the establishment of proper coordination mechanism.



Credit: Nela Porobic Isakovic

Block III:

Justice

Ms. Madeleine Rees, Secretary General of WILPF, facilitated the third block. Justice is not just about laws and policies, although those are the obvious manifestation of the justice. If law is to work then it must be able to explain, describe and react to what has happened to people. Too often laws are written by men and for men and do not reflect women's roles and experiences when structuring the society. Unfortunately, the Bosnian case is a good example of that, but women's organizations managed to reform it in multiple ways.

Justice and accountability require an enabling environment inter alia: access to healthcare, access to information on missing family members and friends, means to support and educate your children, resolved housing situations, employment and so forth. Then the prospect of accessing formal justice mechanisms is highly prejudiced. There needs to be in place elements of social, cultural and economic justice mechanisms so as to access formal justice mechanisms and the right to participate in government structures and other public offices. Transitional justice, another concept within the domain of justice is often understood as something complex, but it is simply a way of moving from conflict into the peace. Transitional justice, however, is contextual and must be driven by the experiences of people who have gone through the conflict. Hence the design of transitional justice mechanisms for any given society must take into account what the people want, and the form must reflect the social and cultural context.

The view on **justice in Bosnia** was presented from the aspect of families of missing persons and the survivors of the Srebrenica genocide. It was said that for women reconciliation is a word that they find difficult to accept as the question is "who are we reconciling with"? It is justice and human rights that survivors from Srebrenica are seeking. For many years they have fought for the right to find the bodies of their missing ones without knowing who to seek the support from but they endured as they considered that testifying and giving their own accounts over what happened was imperative in their struggle for justice.



Credit: Nela Porobic Isakovic
Srebrenica memorial centre. In July 1995 more than 8,000 men and boys were killed in and around the town of Srebrenica. The women of Srebrenica have since then demanded justice for their killed family members. The Srebrenica memorial is a result of their struggle to achieve justice.

Ms. Nura Begic, the survivor of Srebrenica genocide, spoke about how women supported each other when preparing for testimonies in courts, encouraging each other to open up and tell the truth, and the lack of government support, as

many in the local governments were perpetrators themselves. When it comes to criminal justice, Nura said, although putting the perpetrators behind bars is a priority, it will not restore the lives of the women; it will not bring their dead ones back. As part of their struggle for justice the women of Srebrenica pushed for and eventually managed to build a memorial over genocide in Srebrenica whose purpose is not to allow the crimes be forgotten. The memorial is part of the non-repetition element of transitional justice. "Justice for victims must be administered – through criminal justice, through memorials, the right to return, repossession of the property, right to education, freedom of movement – all that is justice", Nura said.

The Bosnian women also shared what has been done in terms of transitional justice in BiH, from other aspects. They talked about attempts to form truth-telling commission that were not very successful, and never got full support from the victims or civil society organizations. The right to reparations was also highlighted as an important part of transitional justice processes, and it was said that the women must insist on it and be involved in its design from the very beginning. The Bosnian case also showed the importance of overall institutional reforms and particularly vetting if enabling environment for justice is to be created. The lack of vetting in the BiH society has slowed down the transition from war to sustainable peace, and made it very difficult for the survivors to obtain justice.

Talking about Transitional Justice in Syria was difficult having in mind that the war is still raging so transitional justice is something yet to come. "Syria today is in need of justice more than any other

day before" – said Oula Ramadan. It was stressed that although recognizing that transitional justice is something yet to come, the Syrians were preparing for these mechanisms by increasing their overall understanding of transitional justice and discussing possible outcomes and the role of the civil society in those processes. It was also said that some Syrian people, at the local levels, already do practice transitional justice, but do not know to define it as such. For example memorialization is already taking places.

In terms of criminal justice and impunity the message from the Syrian delegation was clear – no impunity to sexual and gender based violence no matter who commits the crimes!

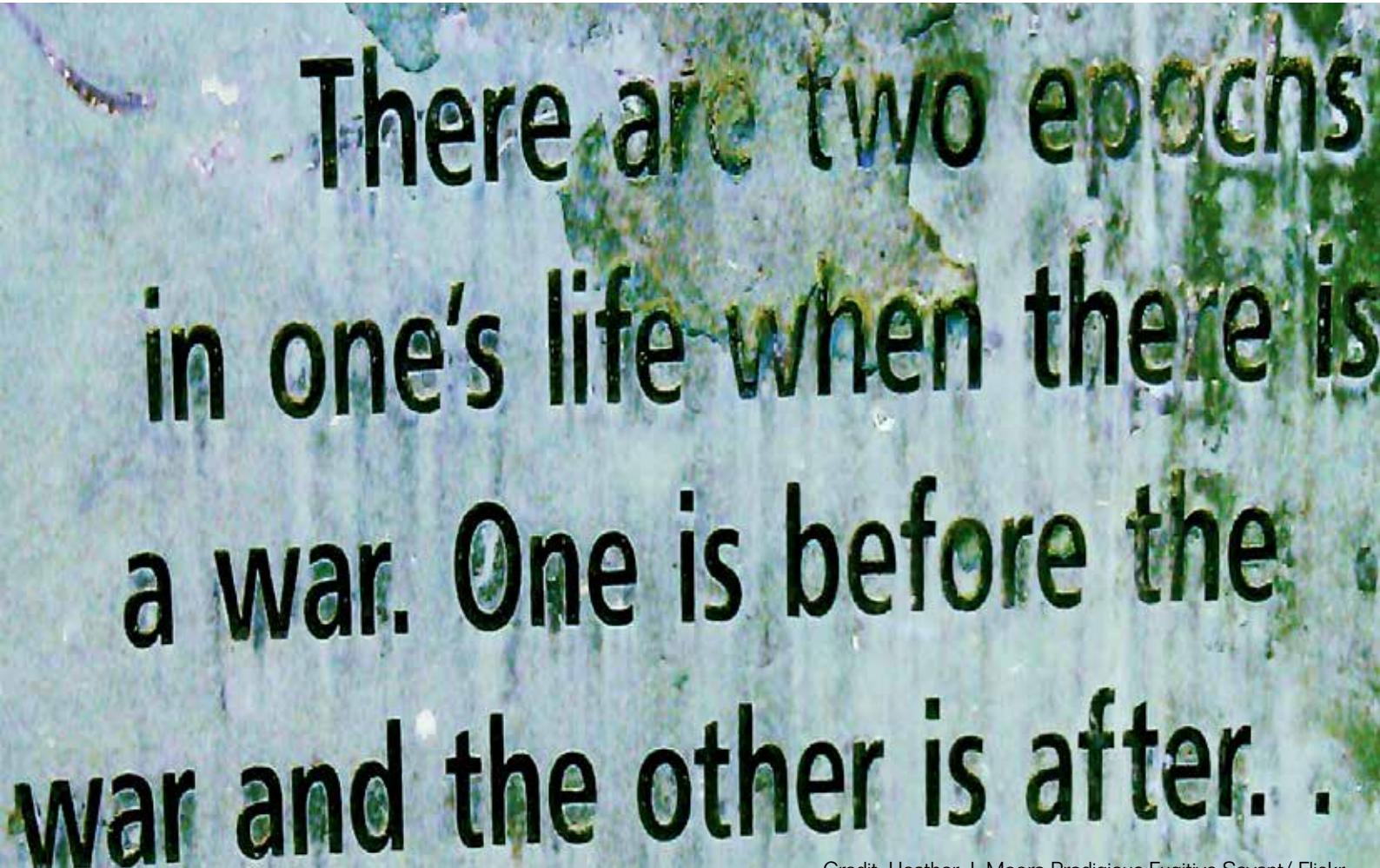
In regards to challenges faced by the Syrian's today it was said that the most difficult challenge is to identify who is the criminal and who is the victim. When is it self-defence, and when is it a crime? There are many divisions in the Syrian society today, on all levels, and these divisions will pose a serious challenge in the future requiring the civil society to already start thinking about how to address them in order to be prepared when the time comes. The second major challenge is disarmament process. Both rebels and the regime will need to lay down their weapons and the expectation is that none of them would want to do this voluntarily. The third challenge is the economic challenge, as justice will demand financial resources. The infrastructure in the country is destroyed, the country is indebted, and most of the national and international resources are going to the armament. How can fair trials be guaranteed, who will pay for the reparations and other transitional justice mechanisms?

» No peace will happen without justice «.

Oula Ramadan,
Programme Manager, Civil Conflict Transformation
at Friedrich Ebert Foundation

» The answer to what is justice is different for different categories of survivors. But overall there are three principles that need to be discussed when thinking about justice. The first principle is the definition of harm. Once we define harm we can articulate how that harm needs to be answered – sometimes it will be through criminal justice only, sometimes criminal justice is not enough and we have to broaden our answer. The second principle is the definition of what is punishment and what is impunity. Looking at the example of BiH we see that impunity is not just about finding the perpetrators guilty, because sentences that are given out are disproportionate to the harms suffered by the victims. The convicted war criminals serve only 2/3 of their sentences and upon their release they are again eligible for elections and other public offices. Even while serving prison sentences some receive far better living conditions than in which their victims live, plus they don't have to worry each day to secure food for their families or to worry about how to pay for the doctors or medicine. The third principle relates to the general question of what does concept of justice as such means for survivors. And again here we can see from the Bosnian case that mechanisms for social and economic justices are needed if the survivors are to feel that the justice is being served «

Gorana Mlinarevic,
Feminist researcher and activist from Bosnia, Goldsmiths College, University London,
"Gender of Justice"-project.



There are two epochs in one's life when there is a war. One is before the war and the other is after.

Credit: Heather J. Moore Prodigious Fugitive Savant/ Flickr

During the discussion the following lessons were highlighted:

- Justice is not only about prosecution; it is also about the whole environment of justice that needs to be created. In order to achieve peace for everyone, truth, justice and accountability for gender-based and human rights violations also need to be achieved through mechanisms of social, economic, and cultural justice;
- Transitional justice mechanisms must be inclusive and offer women opportunities to participate in and influence peace-building processes from the beginning, and the first step for that is enabling women to take part in negotiations;
- Overall institutional reforms, and in particular vetting is a must if justice is to be served.

Reflections

“What have we learnt? We have learnt the absolute necessity of holding on to our values and having a vision of where we want to be, and then having a strategy to get there. We have to understand the use of law, the use of policy, the use of ourselves in order to be able to achieve that vision, and never to give up... To move from war into peace, and to have ordinary people having ordinary lives, it sometimes takes ordinary people becoming extraordinary, and to do all those extraordinary things, to hold on to their dignity and humanity. By holding on to those essential values you will reach peace, you will make it happen and you will help us to understand our decency and our humanity”

Madeleine Rees, WILPF.

“Welcome to our lives! And you will remain in our lives forever. The retrospective process that we the Bosnian women did in the past four or five months, was indeed a continuation of what we have been doing for past 20 years, but this time we were more mature, we were able to articulate our needs and demands, and I am very grateful to you. I have learnt what I want to do in the future. I am deeply impressed by you women from Syria, impressed by your revolution, and I am happy that we have our own revolution today, in which I am going to take part in. The on-going revolution is something that I have been looking for throughout my life and I want to make my personal contribution to it, together with you, shoulder to shoulder”

Memnuna Zvizdic, BiH.

“I feel very emotional today. It was really nice to have a snapshot of what can happen in the future. 20 years from now we dream of being as strong as you. We have learnt a lot from you. One thing that I will take back with me to Syria is that we in Syria always say ‘Nobody cares about what is happening in Syria’ - maybe when you were going through the same suffering 20 years ago we did not do anything for you. So we owe you for caring now, and in the coming days I hope we, as Syrians, can identify with other people suffering”

Marcelle Shehwara, Syria.

“Thank you, we have learned a lot of important things here. Had it not been for this visit we would not have been able to learn the same things through reading. Maybe your country is now going through a revolution, you have maybe reached a point when you know what you are doing, and you don't need anybody to tell you, but let me tell you from our modest 3 year experience – nothing is worth it, nothing is worth losing your life over it. The right to life is the most important thing. I hope we can through our work help preserve our right to life, and others right to life”

Salma Jalkhi, Syria.

“For the first time in three years I am open about my experiences, and I feel that people that are listening can relate to my experiences. Whenever we have talked about Syria, about our experiences of violence, it has always felt like the listeners are sympathizing with us, or trying to understand, but this is the fist time I feel you can really relate to my feelings. Thank you so much”.

Sarah, Syria.

Annex I

– international experts present at the conference

Ms. Madeleine Rees, Secretary General of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom; **Ms. Barbro Svedberg**, Project Manager for MENA Agenda 1325 at WILPF; **Ms. Bronagh Hinds** from DemocraShe, an NGO founded to advance women's leadership in politics, civil society and peace-building in Northern Ireland and abroad; **Ms. Lena Ag**, Secretary General of Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation and a feminist activist. Kvinna till Kvinna was founded as the result of the war in Bosnia and aims at supporting women organization to develop and mobilize for change; **Ms. Ristin Thomasson**, Regional Manager for the Balkans at Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation; **Ms. Cynthia Cockburn**, feminist researcher and writer working on the intersection of gender studies and peace/conflict studies; **Ms. Monika Hauser**, feminist gynaecologist, founder of Medica Mondiale and Medica Zenica, she has been working with female victims of violence in conflict zones in different countries; **Ms. Nela Pamukovic**, activist from the Centre for Women Victims of War ROSA in Zagreb, Croatia; **Ms. Lepa Mladjenovic**, a member of Women in Black and a feminist activist from

Belgrade who focused on fighting against violence and militarism and for freedom, human rights, and sexual self-determination and who has been working in the field of emotional literacy; **Ms. Lisa Davis**, from MADRE, an organization that provides litigation and advocacy services for women's human rights organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East, Africa and Asia. She has worked as an advocate and has written extensively on international women's human rights issues, including in disaster and post-conflict settings.

Annex II

– guide questions

» Block I:

Peace negotiations and women's participation in peace making and peace building

- How do we build feminist/women and civil society platforms in the midst of war? How can we organize and ensure communication and coordination between different organizations and movements?
- What are the main obstacles to women participating in peace processes and what needs to be done to overcome them?
- How can women civil society organizations and movement at the local level feed into and engage in formal peace negotiations?
- How can women civil society organizations engage in peace-building initiatives at the local level? How can this experience be brought into the formal peace process?
- What role can the international women's movement play in providing support and assistance?
- What are the obligations on international actors (states, UN agencies,) to ensure women's participation and a gender perspective in formal and informal peace processes? How to ensure compliance?
- How can international instruments and mechanisms be used to improve our advocacy towards the international community to open up space for women's participation (UNSCR 1325, 1889, 2122...)?
- How can we ensure a human rights and women's rights perspective in peace agreements?
- How to ensure women's demands and a gender perspective are maintained throughout the transition phase once the peace agreement is signed?
- What are the experiences of women in mobilizing against ethno-nationalism, political extremism, and religious fundamentalism? Do women have a specific role in the struggle against these categories? If yes, why? If no, why not?
- Women are underrepresented in peace negotiations. However, women do have a crucial role to play in actually building peace after an agreement is reached. How can women better capitalize on experiences from conflict prevention, reconciliation after conflict and peace building in general?

Annex II

– guide questions

» Block II:

Gender Based Violence

- How do we build response mechanisms for victims of sexual violence that are effective and focused on the needs of survivors?
- What are the essential elements of support and rehabilitation?
- How do we work against stigma related to gender based violence?
- How do we safeguard against turning civil society organizations (particularly women CSOs) into mere service providers?
- From the Bosnian experience - should peace agreements specifically deal with gender based violence, and if so in what way?
- What are the different harms women experiences during the war and post-war?
- What measures need to be taken to address the various forms of GBV in the aftermath of conflict? What approaches/mechanisms work best?
- What role does the international community play in shaping the discourse/agenda on gender-based violence through projects/funds etc.?
- How do we ensure that the interests of women are adequately represented and not lost in different agendas of the international community and local government?

» Block III:

Justice

- How do we build response mechanisms for victims of sexual violence that are effective and focused on the needs of survivors?
- What is justice from the perspective of women?
- How to recognize the different harms that occur during war and what are the different forms of addressing them? (Taking into consideration discrimination before and during the conflict, the need for accountability and how to achieve that, transitional justice mechanisms, structural reform etc.). How can this be reflected in peace agreements?
- Looking at the different mechanisms, from prosecution, vetting and lustration, to reconciliation approaches, what needs to be included to ensure participation and outcomes, which address the harm?
- How do we address obstacles to participation in Justice mechanisms?
- How can civil society support/contribute to formal and informal justice mechanisms?
- How do we create capacities to demand justice remedies?
- How do we translate the “universal model of transitional justice” exported to the countries coming out of the conflict into context sensitive, viable, and meaningful mechanisms?

Endnotes:

- 1 Kvinna till Kvinna and OAK Foundation financially supported the process.
- 2 October and August 2013
- 3 Please see annex I for the list of names.
- 4 Women's International League for Peace and Freedom organized the conference with substantive and technical support from Kvinna till Kvinna and OAK Foundation. The conference was fully financed by NORAD – Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation.
- 5 Please see annex III for the guiding questions.
- 6 <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486a76.html>
- 7 <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/recomm.htm>
- 8 <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/recomm.htm>
- 9 For example, the law recognizes special status to the women victims of wartime rape without requiring proof of physical disability. Having been recognized the special status the women are entitled to monthly reimbursements, access to free health care, and priority in housing, employment and so forth. However, due to lack of financial means the laws is rarely fully implemented.
- 10 The law in Republika Srpska does not recognize special status to the women victims of wartime rape and they are thus required to prove 60% bodily disability, which seriously impedes their possibility to gain access to any of the rights entitled by the law.



Credit: Plemumsa Plenum Sarajevo/ Flickr





AN INITIATIVE OF
WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR
PEACE & FREEDOM

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) is an international non-governmental organisation (NGO) with National Sections covering every continent, an International Secretariat based in Geneva, and a New York office focused on the work of the United Nations.

Since our establishment in 1915, we have brought together women from around the world who are united in working for peace by non-violent means and promoting political, economic and social justice for all.

Our approach is always non-violent, and we use existing international legal and political frameworks to achieve fundamental change in the way states conceptualise and address issues of gender, militarism, peace and security.

Our strength lies in our ability to link the international and local levels. We are very proud to be one of the first organisations to gain consultative status (category B) with the United Nations (UN), and the only women's anti-war organisation so recognised.



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