

# Inviting us to the table is not enough

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October 22, 2017

The goal to show a committed image to gender equality internationally, is the main reason why Spanish civil society organisations (CSOs) working on gender and peace issues, were invited to negotiate the drafting of the II National Action Plan (NAP) on Women Peace and Security (WPS) with the Spanish government. Nonetheless, the government's lack of political will to bring about commitments into action was made clear when most of CSOs inputs were ignored in the final document.

By the end of July 2017, Spain approved its II National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. During the 15th Anniversary of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) in October 2015, Spain was presiding the Security Council at that time and committed to maximise the WPS agenda through different actions, including the adoption of a new NAP and to update the one adopted eight years before, in 2007. As of July 28, 2017, in the press release that announced the approval of the Spanish new NAP, the Spanish Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Ministry (MAEC for its Spanish acronym) claimed that the document was the “result of a dialogue between Ministries and the participation of civil society organizations”.

As part of the Spanish civil society organisations (CSOs) who work for the implementation of the WPS agenda, I supported my colleagues in the dialogue that the MAEC is referring to. Nonetheless, the existence of such dialogue is only one part of the story. What this press release does not include is: 1) how challenging it was for some CSOs members to physically attend the meetings, 2) how tough it was to meet the deadlines set by the MAEC, and 3) how the MAEC mostly omitted civil society's suggestions and recommendations that they said they were looking for. Thus, we might have participated as civil society in the drafting process of the II Spanish NAP, but we were only used by the MAEC so that they could claim the process was inclusive.

In May 2016, as stakeholders, CSOs we were called for a workshop to strategise on the NAP drafting. Nonetheless, some of us could not attend the workshop because there was no financial support offered by the MAEC to those who had to travel from all around Spain to Madrid. If the government really wanted to be inclusive, it would have offered these resources to facilitate our attendance.

After the workshop, communication from government stopped for some months. We later learned the government drafted a first draft without consulting us. After months of waiting for news, we were called for a meeting on July 4th, and were asked to submit our recommendations to the second draft by the 14th of that month. Not only this was not enough time for us to read the document mindfully, make suggestions and use our expertise to improve it, but it was also not enough time for the MAEC to finalise the document and include our inputs by July 28th, the day the II Spanish NAP was approved.

In fact, when we reviewed the document, we noticed that there were so many of our meaningful recommendations that were not included such as the inclusion of a budget. An absence of an allocated budget makes the document weak and likely to remain as it is: a document. By ignoring our inputs and not making it easy for us to participate in the process, the MAEC did not hold an inclusive process in which civil society had a meaningful participation. This only served the purpose of the Spanish government: to be able to tell the international community that there was an inclusive process in Spain to draft the II NAP.

I could not highlight more the importance of political will for the real and effective implementation of the II NAP on WPS. As part of the Spanish CSO, it is extremely important that we keep communicating with the government regarding the NAP, and that we keep advocating and demanding effective actions to implement the WPS agenda. Also, it is key for us to exchange views with other women from other countries working in their communities around the WPS agenda and share good practices. This can help us build new strategies that allow us to make real impact in Spanish domestic and foreign policies.

As Jane Addams once said, “Nothing could be worse than the fear that one had given up too soon, and left one unexpended effort that might have saved the world”. The Spanish civil society will continue working for the implementation of the WPS agenda in Spain. We will keep fighting with perseverance and we will make the Spanish government understand the importance of listening to our voices and to transform words into action.