

Women, Peace and Security

April 2021

For April, in which Viet Nam has the presidency of the UN Security Council, the MAP provides recommendations on the situations in Ethiopia, Syria and Yemen and on conflict-related sexual violence.

Conflict-related sexual violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a direct result of, and contributes to, systematic discrimination and inequality and cannot be addressed without prioritizing women's participation both in identifying trends, as well as envisioning solutions at all levels. In any outcomes adopted by the Council, and in any statements delivered by Member States, the following recommendations should be reflected:

- Prevention and response to GBV must be holistic, survivor-centered and human rights-based, designed in partnership with affected populations, in particular by ensuring the right of survivors, in all their diversity, to health care 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, as well as support for livelihoods.
- 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 harm, minimize risk, promote recovery and address the drivers of GBV. Effective prosecution of gender-based violence can best take place through strengthening national legal frameworks and judicial processes; GBV should not be addressed through separate court systems or processes, such as military courts or counter-terrorism systems.
- Lack of accountability for sexual and reproductive rights (SRHR) violations, in particular, is a key feature of global conflict settings. Affected people do not have adequate access to meaningful and effective accountability mechanisms to protect and promote their SRHR rights; and mechanisms that do exist often do not make meaningful links with community-led collection of complaints or monitoring of actions and remedies. Human rights-based approaches are essential to access to quality SRH services for survivors of GBV.
- Local civil society groups, including women's rights organizations, play a critical role in GBV prevention and response, including in humanitarian settings, often filling gaps in state-provided services, and should be allowed to operate freely and fully supported via technical and financial means, as well as with access to humanitarian coordination structures and affected populations.
- Women peacebuilders, civil society leaders, politicians and human rights defenders (WHRDs) play critical roles in advancing peace and security and are often at particular risk of or targeted for violence for who they are and the work they do. Women peacebuilders and WHRDs must be allowed to carry out their work in an enabling environment, including by protecting the full scope of their rights, ensuring accountability for perpetrators and providing urgent support, including rapidly disbursable protection funds, to women who face threats or reprisals.

Ethiopia

As the conflict in the northern region of Tigray nears five months, compounded by [climate-fueled](#) locust infestations and the COVID-19 pandemic, 4.5 million people in Tigray need urgent [humanitarian assistance](#), and an estimated 2.2 million people are now displaced within Ethiopia or neighboring countries. There is [evidence](#) of widespread and systematic violations of human rights and [international humanitarian law](#), including indiscriminate bombings, preventing access to humanitarian aid, which could lead to the [starvation of civilians](#), [ethnic profiling](#), extrajudicial killings, killings, abductions and forcible returns of refugees, [forced displacement](#), [looting](#), property destruction and [sexual violence](#), some of which may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity ([UN OSAPG](#), [UN OSRSG SVC](#), [OCHA](#), [UNHCR](#), [HRW](#), [Amnesty](#)). In its discussion of the situation, Council members should demand that all parties to the conflict uphold international humanitarian and human rights law and exercise due diligence in their obligations to protect all civilians from violence, including from GBV, in line with Ethiopia's domestic laws, including its Constitution, Amended Criminal Code (2005), and revised Family Law. Further, the Council should call on the government to uphold its agreement with the UN to ensure free and unhindered humanitarian [access](#) to all people in need, and further call on any humanitarian response to be [gender-responsive](#), [inclusive](#) of diverse women and girls, and ensure provision of the [full ranges of services for survivors of GBV](#) ([IASC](#)). Finally, there should be recognition of the active

role of women's groups in providing frontline support, and the inclusion of women, including young women, as leaders and participants in any efforts to bring an end to the crisis.

Syria

As 11 million people are still in dire need of humanitarian assistance due to Syria's 10-year conflict, and testing equipment and vaccines must be adequately available to minimize the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country ([HRW](#), [ERC/USG](#)), the Council is urged to reauthorize the Bab al-Salam crossing in the north-west and to call upon the Syrian government to distribute medicine and COVID-19 vaccines to civilians without discrimination ([HRW](#)). The Council should also call on its members and parties in Syria to uphold the ceasefire in the north-west and call for a complete and nationwide ceasefire, in line with [resolution 2532 \(2020\)](#), to allow the country to address its ongoing health and humanitarian crises, including growing food insecurity, which has affected at least 60% of the population ([ERC/USG](#), [Security Council Report](#)). The Security Council should reinforce that the Secretary-General should include gender, age and disability-sensitive conflict analysis regarding the situation of displaced women ([CEDAW/C/SYR/CO/2](#), [OCHA](#), [UNFPA](#), [HNAP](#)). The Council must call for rights-based, survivor-centered humanitarian action that is age and gender-responsive, disability-inclusive and provides immediate and non-discriminatory aid and quality health care, including sexual and reproductive health services and GBV prevention, mitigation and response services. The Office of the Special Envoy (OSE) should prioritize the meaningful participation, dialogue and inclusion of women activists, peacebuilders and WHRDs in its work, and further ensure that gender equality and international human rights law are priorities in the outcomes of any processes ([CEDAW/C/SYR/CO/2](#)). Further, the Council should reinforce and support the OSE's call for the release of all those detained unlawfully or forcibly disappeared. Finally, the outcomes of the February 2020 meeting of the [Security Council Informal Expert Group \(IEG\) on WPS](#) should be reflected throughout all future meetings on Syria.

Yemen

The Security Council's discussions on the situation in Yemen have historically failed to reflect critical gender dimensions, despite multiple meetings of the [Security Council IEG on WPS \(S/2019/253, S/2021/264\)](#) and [briefings by civil society \(2017, 2018, 2019, 2020\)](#). The Council should consider the recommendations brought forward by the [report of the Group of Eminent Experts \(GEE\)](#) and by the [Panel of Experts](#), adding a list of sanctioned individuals and calling on states, including some Council members and their allies, to cease arms transfers and other support to the conflict parties, and to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). Additionally, Council members are encouraged to consider adopting targeted sanctions in line with [resolution 2564 \(2021\)](#), specifically for violations targeting "politically active women." Further, there should be enhanced reporting on GBV in the context of reporting on the implementation of sanctions. Ongoing [violence](#), including the [missile](#) attack at the airport in Aden, [recent escalation](#) in Ma'rib, Hudaydah, Taiz and Aldhale'e Governorates, and [restrictions](#) imposed by authorities, humanitarian diversion, donors' failure to meet aid obligations, and [ongoing blockages](#) of oil, food and other vital supplies, have undermined humanitarian actors' ability to provide necessary assistance. A new surge of COVID-19 cases has appeared, which is spreading largely unchecked due to the existing fragile health system and limited testing, surveillance and reporting. Imposition of response measures without adequate provision of food assistance risks widespread starvation. In its discussion, the Council should focus on supporting a sustainable and nationwide ceasefire, in line with [resolution 2532 \(2020\)](#), that would support viable conditions for protecting civilians, including women, and lead to a resumption of peace negotiations. The Council must address the recent violations against women by all parties to the conflict, including the Houthis ban on [contraceptives](#), the recent alleged accusation of the Houthis preventing women from working in public spaces, and ad-hoc and arbitrary enforcement of requirements for [national female staff within humanitarian organizations to travel with a mahram \(a male family member\)](#). Finally, Council members should support the [#NoWomenNoGovernment campaign](#) and denounce the [full exclusion of women from the new government](#) formed last December 2020, which marks the first complete exclusion of women in the last two decades and is counter to the national dialogue outcomes. It is important for Council members to continue to emphasize the necessity of women's full, equal and meaningful participation in peace and political processes, ensuring a minimum 30% quota of women in all processes [as a matter of urgency](#). The international community must support Yemen's National Action Plan (NAP) on WPS and ensure full funding for its implementation, including by supporting diverse women's groups, while taking into consideration [recommendations brought forward by civil society organizations](#) to strengthen the NAP.

NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security members are: Amnesty International; CARE International; Center for Reproductive Rights; Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights; Cordaid; Global Justice Center; Global Network of Women Peacebuilders; Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict; Human Rights Watch; International Alert; MADRE; Nobel Women's Initiative; OutRight Action International; Oxfam; Refugees International; Women Enabled International; Women's Refugee Commission; and Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. The NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security is a project of Tides Center.