

MEETING REPORT

GENDER PERSPECTIVES AND CONFIDENCE BUILDING FOR INCLUSIVE PEACE:

GETTING PARTIES TO A SHARED NEGOTIATION TABLE THROUGH TRUST



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**PEACE, SECURITY AND
HUMANITARIAN ACTION SECTION**

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INTRODUCTION

With largely stalled high-level peace processes around the globe, violent conflicts persist, and communities continue to suffer in the absence of political settlements and sustainable peace. In many cases, the original actors and grievances informing the design of formal mediation processes feature patterns of evolution, complexity intensification, fragmentation and transformation as more actors and new generations become involved. While women are significantly affected by such conflicts and often play a leading role in local peacebuilding, their experiences and contributions continue to be generally unrecognized and their formal participation in peace processes limited. In this context, policy actors around the world are calling for inclusive peace processes, new approaches to conflict resolution and effective conflict prevention.¹ This call demands smarter design and the involvement of women, youth and others traditionally excluded from shaping pathways to peace.

Confidence building is one area that is receiving significant attention as formal, track I mediation processes are largely stalled. Fulsome feminist analysis of confidence building is nascent. With the outbreak of COVID-19, the urgency for confidence building and accompanying feminist analysis have only increased. The United Nations (UN) Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire in March 2020 highlights the issue, as ceasefires are considered a typical confidence building measure. Many women and civil society organizations were the first to call for a ceasefire, whether independently or jointly, to allow for a chance at peace and a chance for an effective COVID-19 response.²

Before the pandemic, in November 2019, UN Women convened a conference entitled 'Gender Perspectives and Confidence Building for Inclusive Peace: Getting Parties to a Shared Negotiation Table through Trust.' The aim was to explore good practices and strategies for women's meaningful participation in confidence building initiatives for peacemaking, including through an examination of the ways in which women are already shaping and proposing such initiatives across tracks I and II in various capacities. Discussions carried an emphasis on contributing toward new and existing peacemaking efforts, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), which remains the world's least peaceful region.³

The conference brought together approximately 60 participants, including women who have engaged in peace processes for Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen,

as well as from elsewhere around the world, such as Colombia, Kenya, Sri Lanka and Georgia. With technical inputs and facilitation from experts and thought leaders, discussions promoted a sharing of experiences and cross-fertilization of ideas among practitioners with deep knowledge across different country contexts. This summary conference report does not begin to do justice to the breadth or nuance of the discussions that took place; rather, it serves as an attempt to capture some preliminary gender perspectives on confidence building to kickstart further research and discussion.

The year 2020 brings with it the 20th anniversary of the first Security Council resolution on women, peace and security (WPS), and substantive and transformative implementation remains the central challenge. Women's meaningful participation in peace processes has proven particularly resistant to change, where the norm remains one of exclusion and gender perspectives tend to be an add-on in formal, high-level track I discussions instead of an integrated part of agenda design and discussion. According to conference participants, the time for urgent change is now.

1 [E.g. Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict](#) (World Bank, 2018).

2 [Press Release: Women's organizations in the Arab States region join UN Secretary-General António Guterres's call for ceasefire in the face of COVID-19](#) (UN Women Arab States, 2020).

3 [Global Peace Index 2020](#) (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2020).

I. ABOUT CONFIDENCE BUILDING—DEFINITIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

In brief, *confidence building initiatives* aim to build rapport and connection between conflict parties and between communities. As track I peace processes around the world in the MENA region are largely stalled, often without direct negotiations occurring, questions about effective confidence building between parties has become a priority for track I mediators and many others, including those operating at tracks II and III. For the purposes of this discussion, ‘confidence building’ or ‘confidence building initiatives’ include both confidence building ‘measures’ and confidence building ‘gestures’, each having several and often distinct dimensions.

While there is no universally accepted definition, *confidence building measures* (CBMs) can be defined as “actions or processes undertaken in all phases of a conflict cycle . . . with aim of increasing transparency and the level of trust and confidence between two or more conflict parties.”⁴ The most common and often exclusive focus is on the actions negotiated between official conflict parties. CBMs do not usually address drivers and root causes of conflict, but they can support short to medium-term efforts towards peace, such as humanitarian access agreements, ceasefires or local violence reduction arrangements. They are usually formal and span a myriad of possibilities covering political, military, diplomatic, cultural and economic initiatives. Examples might include joint infrastructure repair, forms of demilitarization, demining, prisoner exchange and preservation of heritage sites, amongst other possibilities. Informal CBMs might include study tours, seminars and other efforts to promote human interactions and build rapport across conflict lines. CBMs can be brought into a process that has stalled, or where trust is lacking from the outset, or diminished over time.

Gestures, on the other hand, can be understood as the symbolic, often intangible positive signals that parties and communities in conflict send to one another through a public handshake, the recognition of

commemorative days or events and the turning of an eye to transit through technically restricted or off-limit areas, among other examples. These are inherently more informal in many aspects and an area where women bring considerable insight and influence precisely because women are excluded from formal processes and are most active in less formal tracks.⁵

Confidence building initiatives, particularly formal CBMs, should not replace or supersede peace negotiations; nor are they designed to address the fundamental drivers of violent conflict, which is needed to achieve sustainable peace. Confidence building, however, when carefully designed or opportunities well-seized upon, can “improve relationships, humanize the other, signal positive intentions and commitment, and avoid escalation.”⁶ The effect may be to have transparency around the use of armaments, compliance with rules of engagement and more to build a sense of minimal security during ongoing conflict.⁷ In an ideal scenario, they will infuse fresh momentum, revitalize perspectives or help develop a shared purpose. However, confidence building initiatives can be fraught to negotiate, agree upon and further challenging to implement. They can also be manipulated and misused to buy time, strengthen the status quo or undermine more substantive negotiations.

Some examples of confidence building initiatives are presented below, each with a dimension related to women’s participation. Many of these examples occur

4 [Guide on Non-Military Confidence-Building Measures](#) (OSCE, 2012).

5 For recent data on women’s roles in tracks two and three, see: Anjali Dayal and Agathe Christien, [Reframing Women’s Roles in Peace Processes: Beyond the Negotiating Table](#) (Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, April 2020).

6 [Guide on Non-Military Confidence-Building Measures](#) (OSCE, 2012).

7 [Confidence Building Measures: Beyond Intractability](#) (Michelle Maiese, 2003).

at the less formal track II level, where women's participation appears in greater numbers.⁸ The examples cited here and elsewhere in the report demonstrate

that women's participation can occur in different levels, phases and roles, whether outside formal processes or through direct participation within them.

Yemen	<p>Yemeni women have long been identifying and advocating for confidence building options. For example, women's groups made a recommendation that maps of areas affected by landmines should be jointly created as a confidence building measure for peace talks.⁹ Yemeni women have also raised awareness around, and strongly advocated against, the military recruitment of child soldiers, calling on all parties to the conflict in Yemen to put such recruitment to an end in keeping with international law and as something that all parties to the conflict should be able to agree upon.</p> <p>WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION: advocacy; technical suggestions for confidence building.</p>
Cyprus	<p>In 2003, Cypriot women from a civil society group called 'Hands Across the Divide' protested peacefully while dressed as 'Cinderellas', urging military authorities to allow crossings after midnight through the Ledra Palace checkpoint. The checkpoint is located on the green line dividing the Turkish North and Greek South. The protesters were responding to limitations on freedom of movement between the two territories, which hindered efforts towards reconciliation and direct communication. The restriction was successfully lifted within days.</p> <p>WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION: advocacy (physical mobilization); informal, direct interactions across conflict lines.</p>
Kenya	<p>'Women situation rooms' are another example of women's engagement in confidence building. For example, in the context of anticipated election violence on the basis of ethnicity and gender as well, a women's situation room was established in Kenya for the 2013 elections. It was established to be neutral and independent, with a diversity of Kenyans participating in its work as real-time election monitors on the ground. The election monitors sometimes resolved threats of violence on-the-spot, otherwise the information was channelled to secretariat members, who would in turn channel news of violence to support early warning and response. A team of eminent persons coordinated with the Women's Situation Room and intervened as appropriate to prevent outbreaks and escalations of violence.</p> <p>WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION: direct monitoring, reporting and mediating of conflict; interactions across conflict lines; emphasis on conflict prevention.</p>
Colombia	<p>After the signing of a comprehensive peace agreement between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (<i>Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia</i>, FARC), the UN Security Council established the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia. The Mission is jointly comprised of international observers, the Government of Colombia and FARC, which provides opportunity for interaction, regular communication and confidence building in the implementation of the peace agreement. With a mandate to verify aspects of peace agreement implementation, including the reintegration of former FARC members, it has a critical role in ensuring that the longer-term work of confidence building continues into the implementation phase. Last reported, women's participation in the Mission was only about 20 percent,¹⁰ but their role has been essential even so in enabling the Mission to gain access to women, some of whom are former combatants. The mission's work is also supported by gender advisors, who contribute to the mainstreaming of gender perspectives across efforts. The work of the UN Mission continues today amidst many challenges and threats to peace in Colombia.</p> <p>WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION: members of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia to verify peace agreement implementation; gender experts; interactions across conflict lines.</p>

⁸ Perspectives on women's participation should be considered even where there is little reporting or analysis of women's participation in a given example of confidence building, especially in cases that are led from tracks II or III where women's participation is higher and their roles more visible.

⁹ [Changes Ahead: Yemeni Women Map the Road to Peace](#) (WILPF, 2018).

¹⁰ [Colombia Peace Still Being Consolidated, But Progress Serves as Beacon for Others Trying to Exit Conflict](#) (UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, 2018).

II. (RE-)CONCEPTUALIZING CONFIDENCE BUILDING

The starting point for discussions on confidence building was one of critical interrogation. First, participants raised concerns around a broader lack of trust in official peace processes. While confidence building is typically about confidence between conflict parties or communities, questions about broader societal trust in formal processes were said to form a critical part of the landscape. A basic level of trust between actors involved in and impacted by peace processes is necessary to sustain attention and engagement with any given peace process. This includes women; they should have trust in the process that their rights, needs and interests will be taken into account for them to want to fully invest in supporting a given peace process.

**“Trust is the currency of peace;
if you don't have trust, you can't have peace.”**

Experts and practitioners alike also pointed to the need for a re-thinking of the traditional linear model of conflict and peacemaking, questioning the idea that peace processes have defined beginnings and endings. Peace processes should be imagined more as perpetual journeys; including multiple starts, stops and turns, and periods of winding backwards or in circles. Once this is how they are imagined, then confidence building initiatives become important not only for kickstarting stalled processes in the so-called ‘early’ phases of peacemaking, but also for continued trust building and

conflict prevention efforts into implementation phases. A Colombian participant commented that: “Successful implementation demands a constant process of not just building trust but validating that trust—we must confirm the contributions of the parties to peacemaking. They must be as satisfied with the outcome as they were with the settlement.” She further added that regular and meaningful consultation with women’s movements in the process of implementation will increase accountability and trust in the outcome.

Some participants also questioned the terminology of peace ‘tracks’, suggesting that it may be reductive and unhelpful in some cases, especially when the concept is employed as a tool to falsely justify siloed approaches and exclusionary practices. Indeed, elite and exclusionary ideas around what is required for track I inclusion are often precisely what prevents a more inclusive approach. The changing nature of conflict, with shifting catalysts (a contemporary example being climate change), is another reason to think critically and re-visit many traditional notions about peacemaking writ large and core elements and ‘techniques’ such as confidence building.

Going beyond these conceptual interrogations that carry practical consequences in defining the practice of confidence building, women participants strongly re-iterated that they have a right to participate in formal peace discussions, including on confidence building. The message is not a new one; indeed, it is repeated time and time again and with rising levels of frustration. Despite over 20 years of dedicated research,

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