

Joint Statement

Women and Men Working as Partners for Peace in the Middle East and North Africa

From 27-29 May, 20 representatives of civil society organizations from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, working on Women, Peace & Security, came together for the MENA Consultation, organized by the Women Peacemakers Program (WPP) and ABAAD-Resource Center for Gender Equality. After 2,5 days of informed discussion, creative thinking and joint strategizing on advancing the Women, Peace & Security agenda (WPS), the participants developed the following statement to inform future initiatives on the subject in the MENA region.

The Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) has a long history of courageous women and men dedicated to establishing peace and just societies in the region. For them, but also for the men and women working to establishing peace today, sharing experiences, creative cooperation and joint strategizing are cornerstones for ending violence and creating peace.

Violence is a cornerstone of the patriarchal system. Among other, forms of discrimination, injustice, and power control degrade the human rights of peoples within it, encourages gender inequalities, legitimizes armed conflict and occupation and halts development in our societies. The use of active nonviolence is therefore essential to demonstrating not only that change can occur without violence, but also that these changes can lead the MENA region successfully away from patriarchy. Alternative systems can exist in the region, and in the world, that respects the rights of all and where development is sustainable.

There are many examples in the Middle East and North Africa of men and women working together to address conflict and injustice in a peaceful, nonviolent manner. Their work and activism illustrate that solving conflict without the use of violence, taking up arms, or dehumanizing, is possible. However, in order for opportunities and success of nonviolent conflict resolution, in line with the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and accompanying Women, Peace & Security resolutions, to flourish in the region, the following issues need to be addressed:

- Acknowledging the invaluable input and perspectives women provide in societal developments, including conflict resolution processes. This calls for opening spaces for women to effectively advocate for gender equality with accompanying rights – crucial is the inclusion of women’s rights in the constitution and in supporting local laws - to voice their security needs and to participate in all decision-making processes on local, regional and international level. The current absence or inadequate participation of women in legislation and decision-making processes fuels discrimination and violence against women and undermines the process of institutional and legal accountability.
- Address the roots of violence by adopting a comprehensive and integrated approach for the elimination of human rights violations, gender-based violence and violence against women, in accordance with relevant international conventions, international humanitarian and human rights laws and taking into account the context of the

region. Such an approach includes engaging men and boys in gender equality work and supporting positive forms of masculinities, disconnecting them from the use of violence.

- Ensure that all initiatives on Women, Peace & Security are bottom-up driven and rooted in the local context. Effectiveness of such initiatives can be increased when linkages with regional and international activities and forums are made, but throughout this process local embeddedness must continue. Despite certain commonalities in the region, the particularities of the different countries have to be taken into account.
- Develop adequate accountability mechanisms for state, non-state actors and foreign political actors for the implementation of international human rights legislation, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and following WPS resolutions. This means utilizing all the international and national instruments to hold the duty bearer accountable. Such accountability mechanisms have to enable critical civil society to voice concerns on implementation gaps and violations by state, non-state and foreign political actors. In addition, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 implementation has to address the persistent victimization of uprooted and displaced populations throughout the region. All initiatives must take into account the intraregional hostilities and disparities that generate a culture of violence and impunity.
- Improve coordination between all stakeholders on national, regional and international levels for UNSCR 1325 implementation. Joint action among civil society organizations in the MENA region, using international mechanisms such as UN Security Council Resolution 1325, and coordinate with international organizations, can help in advancing gender equality and set up a legislative and judicial framework capable of protecting women from violence. International actors should be aware of their effect on local civil society and need to better coordinate amongst them to avoid unnecessary duplications and competition. A strong voice from civil society can only be achieved if efforts from all levels are coordinated.

An important part of men and women working together for nonviolent actions is decreasing the polarization within communities. This can be done by building bridges, which means seeking shared values and views, in order to jointly address the conflict at hand. Civil society in the Middle East and North Africa can be a role model in this regard, by approaching each other with respect and coming together for a shared peace vision. Solidarity is key, both between activists and organizations working on defending human rights, as well as between parliamentarians, women in decision-making processes and civil society for effectively advancing gender equality and peaceful conflict resolution.

Nonviolent actions start with a common voice of people, finding each other to work together for change. Any transformative change in the Middle East and North Africa, whether it is for gender justice, peace, or both, has to come from the local people themselves.

Working together with committed and creative activists from the MENA region to champion Women, Peace & Security is key to advance future peace and stability in the region. The hope and belief is that as these activists inspire others within their countries a culture of peace, respect, and collaboration, based on human rights and gender equality, will replace patriarchy and violence in the MENA region.

Endorsed by:

ABAAD – Resource Center for Gender Equality

Arab Women Organization of Jordan (AWO)

Baghdad Women Association

Horiyat Group For Development and Human Rights

MIFTAH

Nuon Organization for Peace Building

Palestinian Counseling Center

Palestinian Working Women Society for Development

Permanent Peace Movement

Syrian Women Forum for Peace

WADI - Association for Crisis Assistance and Solidarity Development Cooperation

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Women's International League for Peace & Freedom (WILPF)

Women Peacemakers Program (WPP)

Yemen Organization For Defending Rights & Democratic Freedoms

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