Report Part Title: The Case for Women's Participation in Security

The Case for Women's Participation in Security

Despite the historical exclusion of women from negotiating tables and security apparatuses, the evidence of women's contributions to conflict prevention and resolution is growing. Several empirical analyses confirm that women offer unique, substantive, and measurable contributions to securing and keeping peace. Evidence shows that security efforts are more successful and sustainable when women contribute to prevention and early warning, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and post-conflict resolution and rebuilding. A qualitative evaluation of women's influence in recent peace processes—notably in Guatemala (1996), Northern Ireland (1998), Liberia (2003), and the Philippines (2014)—further illustrates the critical role that women can play in resolving conflict and promoting stability.

PREVENTION AND EARLY WARNING

Research suggests that women can improve the efficacy of conflict prevention and early warning strategies. Women's central roles in many families and communities afford them a unique vantage point to recognize unusual patterns of behavior and signs of impending conflict, such as arms mobilization and weapons caching. In Kosovo, for example, women were the first in their communities to voice concerns when young men were amassing weapons, heading into the local hills, and training. Although Kosovar women reported signs of impending conflict well before violence broke out, no adequate reporting systems were in place to capture and make use of their insights.[9]

Evidence also indicates that incorporating women in strategies to counter violent extremism can help to mitigate radicalization. Although traditional efforts by governments and nongovernmental organizations to combat radicalization typically focus on reaching out to political or

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religious leaders—who are predominantly male—recent research shows that antiterrorism messages are effectively disseminated throughout families and communities by women, who are well placed to challenge extremist narratives in homes, schools, and social environments, and have particular influence among youth populations.[10] In recognition of the critical role that women can play in countering terrorism in families and communities, several governing bodies have taken steps to integrate women into their antiterrorism strategies. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, for instance, has invested in the Sisters Against Violent Extremism global initiative, one of the first women-centered anti-extremism platforms and training programs.[11] The 2016 joint U.S. State Department-U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) strategy to counter violent extremism around the world explicitly recognized that women's groups can help to identify and address the drivers of violent extremism within their families, communities, and societies.[12] The United Kingdom (UK) applied this approach domestically in its 2011 national counterterrorism policy, in which it committed to partner with women to amplify prevention measures at the community and family levels.[13]

In many countries, women are well positioned to detect early signs of radicalization because their rights and physical integrity are often the first targets of fundamentalists.[14] A qualitative analysis of interviews with nearly three hundred people in thirty countries across the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia found that women were substantially more likely than men to be early victims of extremism.[15] Indeed, restrictions on women's rights have accompanied the rise of extremist groups—particularly those with fundamentalist religious ideologies—across the globe, as has been documented with the Taliban in Afghanistan, the self-proclaimed Islamic State group, and Boko Haram in Nigeria.

In addition, research shows that women's participation in early warning mechanisms can help mitigate instability during election cycles that are frequently marred by violence triggered by perceptions of flawed electoral processes or political and ethnic tensions. For example, Women's Situation Rooms (WSRs)—innovative, real-time groups convened around election cycles to anticipate and combat electoral violence—have been employed to provide a mechanism through which women in populations at risk of conflict contribute to prevention efforts by documenting grievances, resolving community-level disputes, and reporting electoral

offenses, thereby providing critical intelligence to national or regional early warning systems for electoral violence.[16] WSRs have been implemented successfully in Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, and Senegal. Ahead of Kenya's 2013 general election, for instance, women leaders from Liberia, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Uganda assisted Kenyan leaders in establishing a WSR. Trained election observers, dispatched across the country, addressed over five hundred registered complaints—including threats to candidates and voters—and relayed information to the electoral commission and the police. Women's involvement helped to de-escalate tensions that many had feared would fuel a replication of the violence that had followed Kenya's 2007 election, which resulted in 1,300 deaths and thousands displaced from their homes.[17]

PEACEMAKING

Women's participation in formal peace processes also contributes to the achievement and longevity of peace agreements. A qualitative review of forty peace and constitution-drafting negotiations since 1990 found that parties were significantly more likely to agree to talks and subsequently reach an agreement when women's groups exercised strong influence on the negotiation process, as compared to when they had little or no influence.[18] Another study, which analyzed 181 peace agreements signed since 1989, found that when women had participated in peace processes as witnesses, signatories, mediators, and/or negotiators, the resulting agreement was 35 percent more likely to last at least fifteen years.[19] Additional research examined all peace agreements in the post–Cold War period and found that participation of civil society groups, including women's organizations, made a peace agreement 64 percent less likely to fail.[20]

Analysis of prior peace processes suggests that women's participation increases the likelihood of an agreement because women often take a collaborative approach to peacemaking and organize across cultural and sectarian divides.[21] Research suggests that such an approach—which incorporates the concerns of diverse demographics (e.g., religious, ethnic, and cultural groups) affected by a conflict and with an interest in its resolution—increases the prospects of long-term stability and reduces the likelihood of state failure, conflict onset, and poverty.[22] Numerous case studies have documented instances where women

built coalitions across ethnic, political, religious, and sectarian divides, including in Afghanistan, Colombia, Guatemala, Iraq, Northern Ireland, Somalia, and South Africa.[23] In Afghanistan, for example, women, who made up only 20 percent of the delegates to the 2004 constitutional convention, successfully reached across ethnic lines to push for a commitment to equal rights for all Afghan citizens and to support efforts by the Uzbek minority to gain official recognition for its language.[24] Even in cases where women have limited or no access to formal governmental talks—known as track one negotiations—and instead are limited to track two nongovernmental talks, as in Guatemala (see Country Profiles), women's groups often use backroom roles to facilitate input to formal, track one negotiators and provide insight from marginalized groups that may otherwise not be heard.[25]

Including women at the peace table can also increase the likelihood of reaching an agreement because women are often viewed as honest brokers by negotiating parties. This perception is rooted in the reality of women's exclusion: because women often operate outside existing power structures and generally do not control fighting forces, they are more widely perceived to be politically impartial mediators in peace negotiations, compared with men.[26] The proposition that women are seen as trustworthy negotiators is empirically supported. For example, in-depth interviews with negotiators from the Burundi, Northern Ireland, and South Africa peace processes found that the ability of female representatives to build trust, communicate, involve all sides, and settle disputes encouraged parties to negotiate and compromise.[27] Recent history suggests that women are rightfully considered to be reliable peace brokers: a review of forty peace processes since 1990 found that no women's group sought to derail a peace process.[28]

Women often advance peacemaking by employing visible and high-profile tactics to pressure parties to begin or recommit to peace negotiations, as well as to sign accords. Women's groups have successfully staged mass actions and mobilized public opinion campaigns in many countries to encourage progress in peace talks, with notable examples in Burundi, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Liberia (see Country Profiles), and Somalia. In DRC, for instance, forty female delegates to the 2002 Sun City talks formed a human chain to block the exits from the committee room, insisting that delegates remain until the signing of a peace agreement.[29] In Somalia, women observers at the 1993 Conference of National Reconciliation staged a public fast until

an agreement was reached—a pressure tactic that produced a peace plan twenty-four hours later.[30] Moreover, where peace deals are put to public referendum, women's groups have frequently launched national campaigns to persuade voters to approve the negotiated agreement. For example, the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition was at the forefront of a civil society campaign that strengthened public support for the 1998 referendum of the Good Friday Peace Agreement (see Country Profiles). In recent times, women's groups have organized more mass action campaigns in support of peace deals than any other social group.[31]

Ensuring diversity at the negotiating table has also been shown to contribute a breadth of perspectives that can advance conflict resolution. Because women tend to have different social roles and responsibilities than men do, they have access to information and community networks that can inform negotiating positions and areas of agreement. In 2006, for example, when negotiations in Darfur deadlocked over control of a particular river, local women advised the male negotiators—who were rebel group leaders living in the diaspora—that the river in question had dried up several years prior.[32] Women had access to critical knowledge—in that case, borne of their disproportionate responsibility to fetch water—that helped to break an impasse.
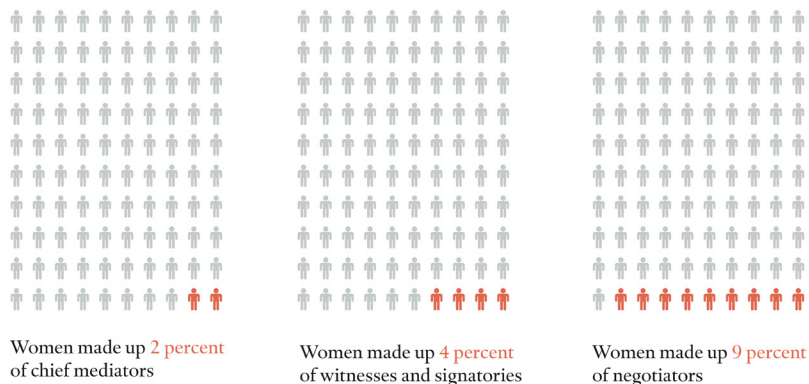
Women's inclusion in peace talks not only advances the likelihood of achieving a resolution but also contributes to the sustainability of an agreement, partly because women are more likely to raise social issues in negotiations that help societies reconcile and recover. Evidence suggests that women frequently raise issues in conflict resolution processes beyond military action, power-sharing arrangements, and territorial gains, instead introducing political and legal reforms, social and economic recovery priorities, and transitional justice concerns that can make agreements more durable.[33] The International Crisis Group's research in DRC, Sudan, and Uganda indicates that during peace talks, women often raise issues of human rights, security, justice, employment, education, and health care that are fundamental to conflict resolution and postconflict rebuilding.[34] In the Northern Ireland peace negotiations, for example, women pushed to include provisions on social and economic priorities, such as integrated housing and education; in Darfur, women delegates recommended the inclusion of provisions on food security, protection for internally displaced persons and refugees, and the prevention of gender-based violence, all of which advance long-term stability.[35] Women's inclusion in conflict resolution

processes also increases the chance that peace agreements will address the particular needs of vulnerable groups in postconflict situations, thus promoting reconciliation; for example, women are more likely to advocate for accountability and services for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.[36]

Despite the evidence of women's critical contributions to peace processes, in the last twenty-five years, women represented only 4 percent of signatories to peace agreements and 9 percent of negotiators (see figure 1).[37] Signatories to peace agreements are typically heads of state or party, or represent the top echelons of armed groups, and are, therefore, disproportionately male. Continued failure to include women and civil society actors in peace processes ignores their demonstrated effectiveness and overlooks a critical strategy to advance peace and stability.
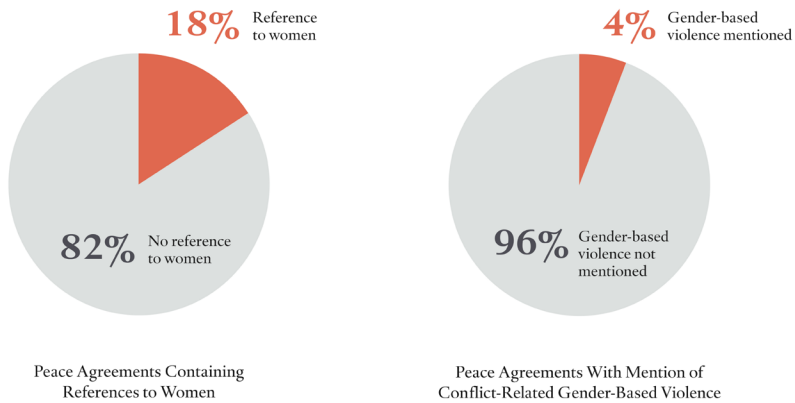
The vast majority of peace agreements reached in the last three decades failed to refer to women or their conflict experiences, including conflict-related sexual violence (see figure 2).[38] This trend has slightly improved since the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000, which committed to support women's participation in peace negotiations. Between 1990 and 2000, 11 percent of peace agreements referenced women; the proportion rose to 27 percent for agreements signed between 2000 and 2014.[39] However, only a handful of those agreements include more than one provision addressing the concerns and priorities of women, and few of these have been implemented.

FIGURE 1. WOMEN'S ROLES IN MAJOR PEACE PROCESSES, 1992–2011

Women made up 2 percent of chief mediators

Women made up 4 percent of witnesses and signatories

Women made up 9 percent of negotiators

Source: Pablo Castillo Diaz and Simon Tordjman with Samina Anwar et al., "Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations: Connections Between Presence and Influence," UN Women, October 2012.

FIGURE 2. REFERENCES TO WOMEN AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN PEACE AGREEMENTS

Peace Agreements Containing
References to Women

18% Reference to women

82% No reference to women

Peace Agreements With Mention of
Conflict-Related Gender-Based Violence

4% Gender-based violence mentioned

96% Gender-based violence not mentioned

Analysis of 1,168 peace agreements 1990–2014

Source: Christine Bell, "Text and Context: Evaluating Peace Agreements for Their 'Gender Perspective,'" University of Edinburgh, Global Justice Academy, UN Women, March 2015.

PEACEKEEPING

Evidence suggests that women make unique and substantive contributions that improve the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations. UN assessments have found that women peacekeepers are fully able to perform the same roles to the same standards as their male counterparts, even in hardship posts. When women do participate, research shows that they gain access to information that male counterparts often cannot obtain: particularly in traditional cultures, female security sector officials frequently have access to populations and venues that are closed to men, which allows them to gather intelligence about potential security risks.[40] Female officers are also better able to respond to concerns about women's physical safety. Data from thirty-nine countries demonstrates that women are more likely to report instances of gender-based violence to female officers—a finding anecdotally supported for police, military, and peacekeeping personnel.[41]

Women's participation in the security sector also measurably improves dispute resolution. Research indicates that women in police forces are less likely than male counterparts to use excessive force and are more likely to de-escalate tensions.[42] Female security sector officials

also help institutions build trust with the communities they serve, thereby advancing stability and the rule of law: women's participation in the security sector is associated with fewer misconduct complaints and improved citizen perceptions of force integrity.[43]

A visible presence of female peacekeepers has been shown to empower women and girls in host communities and can raise women's participation rates in local police and military forces.[44] In Liberia, observers attributed an increase in women's participation in the national security sector—from 6 percent to 17 percent in nine years—to the example set by the UN peacekeeping mission's all-female police unit deployed there in 2007.[45]

Despite evidence that women's inclusion in peacekeeping and security sector roles offers considerable benefits, women are routinely underrepresented. In 1993, women made up just 1 percent of the United Nations' deployed uniformed personnel, and in 2015, only 4 percent of military peacekeepers and 10 percent of police personnel were women—far short of the UN target of 20 percent.[46]

POSTCONFLICT RECOVERY AND REBUILDING

Recent analysis also suggests that ensuring diversity—including through women's participation—in postconflict recovery and rebuilding processes advances stability. One study found that commissions charged with delivering on specific aspects of a peace agreement—such as monitoring disarmament, establishing a truth and reconciliation process, or drafting a constitution—were more effective when women participated.[47] Women's inclusion in disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) efforts after the Liberian conflict offers a concrete example: when initial DDR activities led by the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) resulted in unrest, women's groups went to the cantonments to ease tensions, open dialogue with former combatants, and protect children, ultimately providing recommendations that strengthened UNMIL's future efforts.[48] In Sierra Leone, 55 percent of ex-combatants interviewed in one study identified women in the community as central figures in aiding reintegration, compared with 32 percent citing international aid workers and 20 percent citing community leaders.[49]

Evidence also indicates that women are more likely to direct postconflict resources to the reconstruction of public institutions and provision of services critical to stability. High levels of women's participation

in public sector positions—as police officers, judges, agricultural extension agents, teachers, or medical attendants—can improve the quality of service delivery for entire communities. One study in India found that women-led villages invested more in drinking water and infrastructure; immunized more children; and had lower gender gaps in school attendance, lower levels of corruption, and greater levels of women's political participation as compared with communities led by men.[50] Another study, in Kenya, found that women's participation in water and infrastructure committees significantly improved community access to water: female representation in these communities resulted in a 44 percent decrease in the likelihood that access to drinking water would require more than a sixty-minute walk.[51]

Research supports the notion that strengthening women's political and social participation after conflict diminishes the chance of conflict relapse. An analysis of fifty-eight postconflict states between 1980 and 2003 found that the risk of conflict relapse was near zero when women made up at least 35 percent of the legislature; when women were unrepresented in parliaments, however, the risk of relapse increased over time.[52] Higher levels of women's political participation are also associated with a lower risk of civil war onset and a reduced likelihood of state-perpetrated political violence—fewer killings, forced disappearances, instances of torture, and political imprisonments.[53] Furthermore, countries are more prosperous and stable as the gender gap closes across a range of areas, including access to education and health care, political participation, and economic participation: in one cross-cutting study of conflict-affected communities, the most rapid postconflict reduction in poverty was observed in areas where women reported higher levels of empowerment.[54] Failure to invest in women in postconflict situations, therefore, undermines the potential for prosperity and stability.

POTENTIAL CRITIQUES

Skeptical foreign policy and national security experts caution that involving new actors—including women's groups—in a negotiation could threaten already fragile deliberations.[55] Evidence shows otherwise: women's participation as negotiators, experts, or representatives of civil society in fact decreases the threat of spoilers to negotiations, increases public perception of legitimacy, and improves the likelihood of reaching and sustaining a peace agreement.[56] While designing and

structuring any peace process presents significant challenges, setting preconditions—including with respect to the composition of negotiating delegations and the scope of talks—is common practice. Adding a requirement for women's representation fits within this preexisting set of considerations.

Traditional culture is also cited as a threat to the feasibility of women's participation in peace and security processes. The concern that promoting women's participation might be culturally inappropriate overlooks the fact that, from Afghanistan to Yemen, local actors in conservative societies have led calls for gender quotas and for other decision-making processes to include women's perspectives. Furthermore, women's participation in a peace or transition process can present an opportunity to lay the groundwork for a more equitable and prosperous future for a postconflict nation, given strong evidence that advances in women's participation across economic, political, and social lives are correlated with prosperity and growth.[57]

Others claim that women's inclusion in peace and security processes is not possible because of a dearth of women with the necessary technical expertise. Indeed, in most regions of the world, women have limited experience in national politics and the armed forces because they are dramatically underrepresented. However, this gap is closing due to training and capacity-building; in many cases, local civil society organizations and international mediators have identified a pool of highly qualified female negotiators and experts to offer to delegations prior to negotiations. Despite these efforts to train and identify women to participate in peace and security processes, studies find that women in peace processes face greater scrutiny of their credibility and qualifications than their male counterparts do, and parties to armed conflict consistently fail to work with women's groups or seek qualified women.[58]

Some scholars and policymakers dispute the notion that women's participation in peace and security processes will garner better results, arguing that women are not universally peaceful. Indeed, leaders from Golda Meir to Margaret Thatcher have taken their countries to war, and women around the world serve in combat roles and encourage their husbands, brothers, and sons to participate in conflict. Recent analysis shows that extremist organizations, including the Islamic State, recruit women for logistical activities, operational leadership, and suicide bombing.[59] In fact, these examples demonstrate that women are influential in whatever capacity they serve—whether as moderating

and peaceful forces in a community or as armed combatants or military leaders—and, therefore, it is critical to involve them in both the prevention and resolution of conflict.

Critics also maintain that there is not enough evidence establishing women's contributions to peace and security efforts to justify spending critical resources or time promoting their integration. Indeed, given the historical exclusion of women from security apparatuses and peace processes, there are fewer examples of women's positive influence in this arena than in others. However, as detailed above, empirical analyses strongly suggest that women's participation in early warning and prevention, peace-building, peacekeeping, and postconflict recovery processes is associated with improved outcomes. Qualitative analyses of country case studies further demonstrate how women's meaningful participation can strengthen peace or transition processes. While the evidence of the effect of women's participation in peace and security processes will grow as women's representation increases, even current knowledge suggests that overlooking the contributions of 50 percent of the world's population is a strategic handicap.

COUNTRY PROFILES

A qualitative evaluation of women's influence in peace processes of the past twenty years—notably in Guatemala (1996), Northern Ireland (1998), Liberia (2003), and the Philippines (2014)—further demonstrates the critical role that women can play in resolving conflict and promoting stability. Women in Guatemala raised critical priorities through a formal civil society forum, and women in Northern Ireland furthered peace talks by establishing a new political party. In Liberia, women lobbied negotiators to resolve an impasse by waging a grassroots mass action campaign, and in the Philippines, women helped to lead negotiating teams to an interim resolution of the conflict. In each case, women shaped the negotiation agenda and strengthened the content of a peace agreement.

GUATEMALA

Guatemala's 1996 peace accords concluded a bloody thirty-six-year civil war. The negotiated cease-fire reached between government forces and

leftist insurgent groups ended a conflict that inflicted on civilians atrocities such as sexual violence, torture, campaigns of terror, and forced disappearances. In the decade-long process that led to the 1996 cease-fire, civil society organizations—including women's groups—were active in the Civil Society Assembly (ASC), a forum through which they identified issues that otherwise would not have been heard. Public participation in the process resulted in the inclusion of nearly two hundred distinct and substantive commitments on social, economic, and political reforms in the final accords.[60]

Many of these reforms were introduced and championed by women in the ASC's women's sector with members from different sections of Guatemala's population that had been affected by the conflict, including ethnic Mayan and rural communities, students, human rights activists, and trade unions.[61] This group promoted a broad agenda that included land tenure reform, social justice, and the establishment of the Office for the Defense of Indigenous Women—proposals that addressed the core grievances of rural Guatemalans that had ignited the conflict, thereby increasing the likelihood of a sustainable agreement.

Within their communities, women promoted stability by organizing campaigns for disarmament and successfully pressuring neighbors to give up their weapons, as well as developing strategies to help former fighters move into productive work.[62]

NORTHERN IRELAND

Following the Troubles, which had left over 3,600 dead and thousands more injured, the 1997 peace talks offered Northern Ireland a chance to resolve the intractable conflict between Irish Catholic nationalists and British Protestant unionists. The 1996 electoral system had allotted two seats to negotiators from any valid political party—an unusual design that provided women's groups an opportunity to gain formal access to the talks.[63]

Monica McWilliams, an Irish Catholic, and May Blood, a British Protestant, successfully gathered signatures to incorporate as a political party so that they could participate in the formal peace process. Their Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC) garnered support from women across religious lines, drew on a strong network of grassroots women's peace organizations, and brought a unique perspective to the negotiations. Helen Jackson, a member of the British Parliament and an

observer at the negotiations, later noted that this group "gave a human face to the conflict, and highlighted the personal consequences of war." NIWC developed a reputation as an honest broker that could facilitate dialogue between parties and secured language in the Good Friday Agreement that specifically referenced victims' rights and provided for reintegration of political prisoners, education, and mixed housing.[64] These were issues that the main parties to the conflict had never before brought forward but that ultimately proved to be fundamental to promoting social cohesion after the conflict and to sustaining peace.[65]

LIBERIA

After the 1989 coup, in which Charles Taylor assumed the presidency, Liberia spiraled into two successive waves of armed violence, the second of which killed over two hundred thousand people and displaced one-third of the country's population. Although the combatants were mostly men, women and girls across the country were subjected to widespread sexual violence, abductions, forced labor, and forced marriages.

In April 2003, a group of Liberian women led by activist and future Nobel Peace Laureate Leymah Gbowee launched Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace. The national nonviolent campaign brought together Muslim and Christian women from different ethnic and class backgrounds to demand an end to war.[66] Gbowee reflected that "in the past we were silent, but after being killed, raped, dehumanized, and infected with diseases . . . war has taught us that the future lies in saying no to violence and yes to peace."[67]

The group became instrumental in forcing formal talks, holding belligerents accountable to negotiation timetables, and mobilizing national support for the process. The group met Taylor and successfully pressured him to participate in peace talks in Accra, Ghana. In Accra, women staged a sit-in and refused to let any party leave the premises before they reached a negotiated resolution; the talks culminated in the signing of the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

After the cessation of hostilities, women led a nationwide voter and civic education campaign that reinvigorated public trust and participation in the political process. Subsequent elections brought into power the country's first female head of state, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and resulted in higher female representation in the security sector. In recognition of women's contributions to peacekeeping, the Liberian

National Police ultimately adopted an ambitious 20 percent quota for women in the police and armed forces, and established recruiting and training programs to expand the pool of women qualified for service.[68]

THE PHILIPPINES

For forty years, armed conflict simmered between the government of the Philippines and various Moro rebel factions that sought to establish an independent Muslim-majority Mindanao Island, resulting in over 6,000 deaths between 1989 and 2012.

Women played active roles in both formal and informal negotiations in the Mindanao peace process that ended open hostilities in 2014. Miriam Coronel-Ferrer, who led the Philippine government's team in peace negotiations with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, was the first woman chief negotiator in history to sign a major peace accord. Women held meaningful positions on the negotiating teams of both parties to the conflict, in part because of the Philippine government's support for international frameworks for women's rights, including UN Security Council Resolution 1325.[69]

Throughout the peace process, women fostered a feedback loop between diverse groups and different negotiation tracks. Civil society organizations, including women's groups, provided recommendations to the track one process, drawing on information gathered in their parallel nongovernmental talks. Women's groups also were active in grassroots campaigns to gather input for the formal peace process and relay updates to the public, leading extensive national consultations with a cross section of religious and indigenous people, youth, and other groups.[70] A subsequent evaluation found that Moro women were better able than men to preserve interethnic alliances as tensions in the Filipino-Mindanao conflict escalated; this ability fostered channels of communication and provided information about threats of violence that could derail the peace process.[71]

The resulting agreement recognized women's contributions to transitional governance: for example, the agreement guaranteed women's inclusion in new institutional bodies and promoted women's economic participation as a critical pillar of a broader national strategy for growth.