Ensuring the Inclusion of Young Women in Conflict and Atrocity Prevention

As the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda marks its 20th anniversary in 2020, the progress made in implementing the WPS Agenda where it is most relevant: at the local level. As indicated in the UN Secretary-General’s 2018 report on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace, the Seven-Point Action Plan on Gender-Responsive Peacebuilding to increase the participation of women in prevention is being revised. In order to ensure its effectiveness, the accountability framework on WPS needs to draw from and strengthen the work of women of all ages. This is particularly crucial for young women who often have less access to prevention spaces at national, regional, and institutional levels.

Women drive the WPS Agenda on the ground. They engage in prevention, humanitarian, and human rights work and address root causes of conflict and atrocities, including structural discrimination and harmful gender norms. They are also at the forefront of providing practical insights into the implementation of National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security. They empower traditional and non-traditional including faith leaders to participate in peace talks and engage men to amplify and support their work.

However, international action to include women’s perspectives, needs, and work in prevention efforts remains limited. Current prevention initiatives, such as the Joint UNDP-DPPA Program on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention, have yet to develop their gender analysis capabilities. In addition, the UNSC still needs a proper understanding and integration of gender-based indicators and the specific harms women face when it considers potential crises. Indicators of gender inequality, such as limits on women’s participation in public life, restrictions on educational opportunities, violations of sexual and reproductive health and rights, and (other) forms of sexual and gender-based violence, are warning signs of atrocities. Since these gender-based indicators are not considered, many crises remain off the UNSC agenda.

The UN cannot ground its prevention in the work of specific bodies; it needs a system-wide commitment to redesign security approaches and advance effective prevention across the peace cycle. This type of strong, cohesive, and coherent international preventative action requires engaging and supporting women of all ages to drive community-led prevention efforts. In turn, this necessitates dismantling the roadblocks to women’s access to prevention spaces. These obstacles include educational inequalities, discriminatory laws and policies, and harmful gender socio-cultural norms. The integration of women into
decision-making dialogues in different agendas, such as national budgeting, democratization, and security sector reform, plays a key role in the removal of such barriers. Local women’s meaningful, long-term participation in designing and leading these processes is essential: when the UN and other international institutions transition out, local women continue their work to build and sustain peace within their communities.

In October 2019, on the margins of the annual UNSC Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) The International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP), the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), Cordaid, WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform, and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung New York, along with the Permanent Mission of Germany to the UN. Our goal is to amplify the experiences of young women working on gender-responsive conflict and atrocity prevention. In addition, we aim to assess opportunities for strengthening young women’s role in prevention. The event will do so by mapping the UN-driven conflict and atrocity prevention spaces, assessing the current role that women play, and identifying opportunities for Member States, UN actors, and donors to enable young women to engage and create operational strategies and accountability frameworks on Gender-Responsive Peacebuilding.

The event will provide an open space for Member States, the UN, and civil society to share practical experiences, including successes, key challenges, and recommendations on sustained leadership of young women in conflict and atrocity prevention at the local level. Ultimately, the event will facilitate a dialogue between different actors on how the presented initiatives can be further strengthened nationally, regionally and internationally through building on the work of women of all ages in communities.

**Questions**

The discussion seeks to generate, discuss, and address the following key questions:

- **What are some promising initiatives employed by state, regional, and UN actors to prevent conflict and build peace in a gender-responsive manner?** How can such initiatives be adapted to different contexts? What are the gaps in current international efforts and how can they be addressed?

- **How do locally- and community-driven initiatives help advance prevention?** What are the gaps and how can they be addressed?

- What are the key elements that allow for the creation of enabling environment for young women to engage in conflict prevention?

- **What are some of the main upcoming opportunities for strengthening the engagement of young women in prevention?**