

Women In International Security

Policy Brief

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The WPS Agenda Beyond 2025: Time for a WPS Treaty

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Over the first quarter of the 21st century, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda became established as the most important policy framework linking gender issues to peace and security problems. To understand what the WPS agenda entails, it is essential to recognize that WPS work has proceeded along two tracks: a nongovernmental track comprised of women's rights activists and gender scholars; and a policy track directed by national governments and intergovernmental organizations (Brown and de Jonge Oudraat 2025). Both tracks have been instrumental in advancing the WPS agenda, including the adoption by the UN Security Council of ten WPS resolutions—starting with Resolution 1325 in October 2000. The 25th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 is an appropriate occasion to assess WPS accomplishments to date and define WPS priorities for the years ahead.

The WPS agenda has faced growing challenges over the last decade or so, and it faces greater threats today than at any time in the past 25 years. The main threat comes from national governments, including three permanent members of the UN Security Council that voted in favor of UNSCR 1325—China, Russia, and the United States. The leaderships in all three of these major powers are now openly hostile to the WPS agenda, which they once formally supported. In addition, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 led many countries in Europe and elsewhere to place more emphasis on hard military power. Many governments consequently relegated their national WPS programs to the sidelines (if WPS wasn't on the fringe already), and they reallocated funds away from foreign assistance, which often supported WPS programs in

recipient countries. Many US allies do not trust Donald Trump to uphold longstanding US security commitments, and this has reinforced the shift toward budgetary investments in military firepower and away from WPS programming. In addition to these top-down developments, the backlash against women's rights and gender equality has surged on social media and in reactionary political groups in many countries.

The WPS movement has had to contend with apathy and active opposition from the beginning but now it is also the target of an all-out assault from the world's most powerful country. Trump's second-term administration has attacked WPS programs specifically. Funding and staffing cuts in 2025 have decimated the US government's WPS work, wiped out essential funding for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that work on WPS in the United States and around the world, and undercut WPS work at the United Nations. In a March 2025 survey of 411 women's rights organizations around the world, UN Women found that 47% of these organizations—more than 190—will have to shut down if these conditions persist (UN Women 2025). The WPS nongovernmental track grew tremendously over the past 25 years, but it is under siege financially and politically today.

The state of the WPS movement is grim but not hopeless. Many governments in the Global North and Global South continue to support the WPS agenda. Even if the WPS nongovernmental track is cut in half, it will still be massively larger than it was in the early 2000s. A great deal of important WPS work is carried out at

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The Women, Peace and Security Agenda

The UN Security Council adopted ten resolutions on Women, Peace and Security (WPS).

Together, these resolutions comprise the WPS agenda.

UNSCR 1325 October 31, 2000

Recognizes the disproportionate and unique impact of armed conflict on women.

Urges member states and the United Nations to increase the representation and participation of women at all decision-making levels in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, including in field-based operations.

Affirms the importance of integrating gender perspectives in all negotiations and operations.

Calls for measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence.

UNSCR 1820 June 19, 2008

Recognizes sexual violence as a tactic of war.

Declares that “rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity, or a constitutive act with respect to genocide.”

UNSCR 1888 September 30, 2009

Establishes a mandate for the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

Calls for the appointment of Women Protection Advisors (WPA) in all peacekeeping missions.

UNSCR 1889 October 5, 2009

Calls for the development of indicators to measure the implementation of UNSCR 1325.

UNSCR 1960 December 16, 2010

Calls for a monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangement (MARA) on conflict-related sexual violence.

Establishes a “naming and shaming” mechanism for perpetrators of sexual violence.

Recommends referral to UN Sanctions Committees.

UNSCR 2106 June 24, 2013

Focuses on the national responsibility of all states to protect civilians and preventing sexual violence in conflict.

Recognizes men and boys as victims of sexual violence

UNSCR 2122 October 18, 2013

Commits to focus attention on women’s leadership and participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

Asks the UN Secretary-General to undertake a global study on the implementation of UNSCR 1325.

Calls for humanitarian aid to include the full range of medical, legal, psychosocial and livelihood services to women affected by armed conflict.

UNSCR 2242 October 13, 2015

Recognizes terrorism as part of the WPS agenda and gender as a crosscutting issue within the counter-terrorism and counter-violent extremism agendas.

Recognizes, climate change as an important factor within the WPS agenda.

Recognizes the importance of integrating WPS across all country situations.

Establishes an Informal Experts Group (IEG) on WPS.

UNSCR 2467 April 23, 2019

Calls for a survivor-centered approach in the prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence.

Recognizes the importance of civil society organizations in addressing conflict related sexual violence and the need to pay special attention to children born of sexual violence in armed conflict.

UNSCR 2493 October 29, 2019

Requests the UN Secretary-General to provide further information on progress and remaining challenges in the WPS agenda.

Source: Chantal de Jonge Oudraat and Michael E. Brown, “Gender and Security: Framing the Agenda,” in: Chantal de Jonge Oudraat and Michael E. Brown, eds., *The Gender and Security Agenda: Strategies for the 21st Century* (London: Routledge, 2020), p. 13.

the community level—not the national or international levels. The WPS movement has generated many important accomplishments, and these achievements will not be negated even if they are significantly rolled back.

While reflecting on their successes over the past 25 years, WPS activists will have to pivot and mobilize in 2025 and the years ahead to withstand the gravest crisis the WPS movement has faced. WPS advocates will have to play defense and offense at the same time. The single most important thing they can do is launch a campaign to have a *Women, Peace and Security Treaty* adopted by UN member-states via the UN General Assembly.

This would take formal WPS action out of the Security Council, which has become a lost cause for WPS (and many other issues) for the foreseeable future. This would take WPS leadership at the United Nations away from the fifteen members of the Council and place it in the hands of a much larger, representative coalition of willing UN member-states. A WPS Treaty would draw on the main elements of the ten WPS resolutions, perhaps incorporating other good ideas the Security Council could not act on, and incorporate these provisions into a legal instrument. This would turn Security Council exhortations into legal obligations for state parties to the treaty. This would also formalize, re-legitimize, re-validate, and elevate the WPS agenda at a precarious juncture. It would help to defend the WPS agenda from its detractors. It would give the many supporters of the WPS agenda—governmental and nongovernmental—a focal point and framework for action, a place to convene, and a platform to build on.

The WPS Record

Women's activism for equal rights has generated important advances in the post-Cold War era. An early milestone was the 4th UN World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. The conference generated the landmark Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, which called on UN member states to support gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. It emphasized the importance of expanding the participation of women in governmental policymaking, including conflict resolution efforts. It also called for steps to protect women from the effects of armed conflicts.

The horrors of ethnic conflicts and genocides in the 1990s—including extensive use of rape and sexual violence as weapons of war—led some women's rights activists to build on the steps taken at Beijing and focus specifically on the participation of women in conflict resolution processes and the gendered dangers of armed conflicts. They recognized that UN Security Council engagement was essential for launching these peace and security policy actions.

In the late 1990s, these nongovernmental activists played an absolutely critical role in initiating, shaping, and advancing what eventually became known as the WPS agenda. First, they engaged in profile-raising to draw attention to the importance of these problems. Second, they understood the need for coalition-building with national governments, to get these issues on the policy track. Namibia and Bangladesh were critical allies in getting the WPS resolution on the docket of the UN Security Council and adopted as UNSCR 1325 in October 2000. Third, nongovernmental activists engaged in agenda-setting through this process: Defining the policy goals and actions that needed to be advanced, helping to draft text, and lobbying Security Council members to support the resolution.

This basic pattern continued in the first two decades of the 21st century. Nongovernmental WPS activists and organizations have been the driving forces behind the WPS agenda on the policy track. Allied governments and the UN Secretariat have also been key. Scholars have made important contributions in analyzing the complexities and consequences of gender-conflict connections.

The WPS Policy Track

UNSCR 1325 emphasized women's participation in all aspects of conflict resolution, the importance of integrating gender perspectives in peacebuilding efforts, and the protection of women and girls from violence, including sexual violence—in that order of priority. The adoption of UNSCR 1325 marked the beginning of the WPS policy track.

The UN Security Council adopted nine additional WPS resolutions in the 2000s and 2010s. UNSCR 1820 (2008) was especially important because it was the first time the Security Council explicitly recognized that sexual violence has been used as “a tactic of war in order to deliberately target civilians.” It also stated that “rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute

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UN Security Council meets on WPS, October 6, 2025
Credit : UN Photo Manuel Elias

a war crime, a crime against humanity, or a constitutive act with respect to genocide” (UNSCR 1820 (2008)).

In 2010, the UN Secretariat organized the priorities of the WPS agenda into four pillars: participation; protection; prevention; relief and recovery. Since then, the four-pillar framework has been widely adopted by national governments in their work on the WPS agenda, including in their National Action Plans (NAPs). Three of the four pillars—prevention, protection, relief and recovery—were closely related, and they framed women in traditional, masculinist ways: women were portrayed as passive victims who needed male protection. Conversely, the participation pillar—which called for increasing the participation of women in peace and policy processes—challenged traditional, masculinist conceptions and practices. It is not a coincidence that the “passive pillars” of the WPS agenda—most notably the protection pillar—came to be prioritized by male-dominated national security establishments and their representatives at the UN Security Council. This made it possible for national governments and the Security Council to claim that they supported the WPS agenda—at least the parts of it that were consistent with traditional, masculinist conceptions and their gendered self-interests. This also made it easier for these national bodies to sideline the participation pillar. Preserving the male-dominated status quo was also in their gendered self-interests, of course. Unfortunately, as the WPS agenda became part of the political lexicon, it lost some of its transformational character, “rooted in the concept of feminist peace and a desire to reshape the traditional security architecture” (Baldwin and Berteau, 2024).

In 2025, 115 countries had adopted National Action Plans (NAPs) to implement the WPS agenda. Some of these efforts were far more serious than others, to be sure. Some NAPs were genuinely supported by national leaders and backed financially. Others were token gestures and not backed by dedicated resources. Even so, it is significant that almost 60 percent of the UN’s member states adopted WPS NAPs in the quarter-century after the adoption of UNSCR 1325.

In the 2010s, a backlash against the WPS agenda, women’s rights, and gender equality began to intensify in many parts of the world. Vladimir Putin returned to the Russian presidency in 2012, and he launched the first phase of his invasion of Ukraine in 2014. He has championed a traditional, patriarchal vision of Russian society, even reviving a Soviet-era “Mother Heroine Award” for women who have 10 or more children (Suliman 2022). Xi Jinping was elected General Secretary of China’s communist party in 2012 and president of the country in 2013. He later broke a two-decade tradition and did not include a woman on the party’s 24-member Politburo (Stevenson 2022). His government has also been aggressive in pushing women to have more children (Wang 2024). In Russia and China, patriarchal leaders prefer to see women engaged in baby-making, not decisionmaking and policymaking. In 2019, Russia and China became the first and only Security Council members to not vote in favor of a WPS resolution (abstaining on UNSCR 2467).

In the United States, President Barack Obama was succeeded by Donald Trump in 2017, and the WPS agenda lost an important ally. Although Trump had been accused of sexual assault by many women, he signed the WPS Act of 2017, making the United States the first country to adopt a comprehensive national law on WPS implementation. The WPS Act places particular emphasis on the participation of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Trump's embrace of conservative anti-abortion positions complicated talks at the UN Security Council in 2019 over what turned out to be the final two WPS resolutions—UNSCR 2467 and 2493. In 2020, WPS activists concluded that it would be too risky to work with the United States, China, and Russia on a 20th anniversary resolution (de Jonge Oudraat and Brown 2020).

The WPS agenda has faced even greater challenges in the 2020s. The COVID-19 pandemic and the global economic recession that followed reversed many gains in women's rights, educational and economic opportunities, and personal security. Russia's all-out invasion of Ukraine in 2022 directly challenged the UN Charter's prohibition of the use of force for aggression. This sent shock waves across Europe, in particular. Russia's invasion pushed many countries to invest more in national military forces, which pulled money away from foreign assistance and WPS programs. More generally, it reinforced traditional, masculinist, state-centric conceptions of security. In many national policymaking communities, WPS and gender equality issues became more peripheral in the first half of the 2020s, if they had made it onto the policy agenda at all (Trojanowska 2022).

The return of Trump to the White House in January 2025 has sent tectonic tidal waves around the world. Many US allies have concluded that they can no longer rely on US commitments to come to their defense. Leaders in at least two allied countries, South Korea and Poland, have openly talked about acquiring nuclear deterrent capabilities of their own. Many countries have increased their defense spending, drawing funds from foreign assistance and other programs. This has had a massive, negative impact on government funding of NGO programming, including WPS programming.

Trump and his administration have also launched a systematic attack on women's rights, WPS programs, and what they call "gender ideology." This started with Executive Orders signed

in his first days in office. Trump shut down USAID, which funded vital development projects, including many WPS-related projects, in approximately 130 countries. Trump's Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, eliminated the State Department's Office for Global Women's Issues, which had been the department's primary bureau dedicated to the empowerment of women and girls. In April, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth posted on social media:

"This morning, I proudly ENDED the "Women, Peace & Security" (WPS) program inside the @DeptofDefense. WPS is yet another woke divisive/social justice/Biden initiative that overburdens our commanders and troops — distracting from our core task: WAR-FIGHTING. WPS is a UNITED NATIONS program pushed by feminists and left-wing activists. Politicians fawn over it; troops HATE it.... GOOD RIDDANCE WPS!"

Fact-checkers would point out that it was the UN Security Council, which is run by member states and the veto-wielding permanent members of the Council, that adopted the WPS agenda. And it was woke justice-warrior Donald Trump, not Joe Biden, who signed the WPS Act of 2017.

In the first months of his return to office, Trump has already inflicted massive damage on WPS programs in the United States and globally. He has obliterated US federal programs on WPS. Trump has also taken away essential funding for US and international NGOs that work on WPS issues. Many of these organizations will shrivel or go bankrupt. The United States had been one of the most important supporters of WPS for decades. Trump's policy reversal is therefore inflicting catastrophic damage. To put this in context: Donald Trump is more openly hostile to the WPS agenda than Vladimir Putin.

At the United Nations, Secretary General António Guterres has proposed a set of organizational reforms in 2025 that would merge UN Women—the UN's office focused on women's issues and gender equality—and the UN Population Fund (United Nations 2025). This would weaken and lower the institutional profile of the UN's policy work on WPS issues. In addition, the UN Secretariat is facing overall staffing cuts of 20 percent. Many experts worry that gender work at the UN Secretariat is on the chopping block (Banjo 2025).

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The WPS agenda was never embraced universally by national governments, but it had built up a great deal of government support and it had made substantial policy progress in the 2000s and 2010s. The backlash against women's rights and gender equality in general intensified in the 2010s and 2020s, and WPS was collateral damage. Trump's return to power in 2025 was not just another incremental step in this process: It was a nuclear escalation. Even so, it is important to remember that the world is not run by the White House or even by the UN Security Council. There are many national governments that genuinely support women's rights and the WPS agenda, and they, too, are part of the WPS policy track. Some leaders have opted out of WPS, but others are still on board.

The WPS Nongovernmental Track

The WPS policy track has been more prominent globally than the nongovernmental track because the former has featured UN Security Council resolutions, National Action Plans, governmental levels of funding, and, of course, periodic grandstanding from politicians. The policy track is tremendously important, but it is not the entire story. As discussed above, nongovernmental activists and organizations were the initiators of the WPS agenda in the 1990s, and they have been driving forces behind the agenda ever since. They have helped to propel and shape WPS actions for decades. They will continue to be important in the years ahead.

During the first two decades of the 21st century, the WPS nongovernmental track thrived. WPS activists developed impressive networks of national and international civil society organizations. These activists have pressured national governments to adopt NAPs and integrate the WPS agenda into defense and security policies. In many countries, activists have organized themselves as governmental watchdogs and monitored WPS progress. NGOs have also partnered with governments to implement WPS programs in conflict-affected states. A vast amount of WPS work has been carried out by NGOs at the local and community level.

In addition, a growing wave of scholars generated important insights on the many connections between conflict and gender. They established that gender inequalities are strongly connected to the onset of armed conflict—both within and between states (Caprioli 2005; Melander 2005; Hudson 2020). They challenged misguided beliefs about conflict-related sexual violence, including

the widely held view that conflict-related sexual violence is inevitable in war or that it is due to the actions of a few “bad apples” (Davies and True 2015; Wood 2006; Cohen 2016). Scholars have also established that the inclusion of women in peace negotiations and peace operations leads to better and longer-lasting peacebuilding outcomes (UN Women 2015). A small but growing sub-field of scholars is examining the impact of men, masculinities, and patriarchal ideologies and institutions on a range of conflict issues (Duriesmith 2017b; Myrntinnen 2019b; Wright 2014).

The nongovernment track has made indispensable contributions to the WPS agenda from the beginning. As of 2025, it faces internal ideological and operational challenges as well as external economic hazards and direct political threats.

The nongovernmental track's ideological challenges are the differences that are inherent in diverse groups, especially in a sprawling, multinational, multidisciplinary community. Diverse groups of people inevitably have different interests and perspectives. They prioritize and analyze problems differently. In the WPS community, some see patriarchal ideologies and institutions as the root causes of violence and war, and they believe structural societal transformations are therefore needed; others want to work within existing systems to expand women's participation and protect women and girls from violence. Some believe that the WPS agenda should focus on the participation of women (W); others prioritize the fortification of peace and security (PS). Some reject all forms of militarization and all military organizations; others expect that military organizations will be powerful features of national and international politics for the foreseeable future, and that the WPS community should engage on military policy and inter-state security concerns that preoccupy many national leaders. The latter would say that it is better to be engaged than on the sidelines of important discussions. Finally, some WPS activists are pacifists; others believe that military force can be used in self-defense and to protect those who cannot protect themselves. The debate between pacifists and “just war” advocates has intensified due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the West's delivery of military assistance to Ukraine.

Additionally, many WPS organizations in the Global North have focused mainly on WPS problems in conflict-affected countries in the Global South. These are life-and-death problems that must

not be ignored, but this focus has generated the impression that the WPS agenda focuses on conflict problems “over there.” WPS organizations in the Global North have done an inadequate job of explaining why these WPS issues are critically important for national security in every country. As scholars have established, if you care about the causes of political instability and war—including internal turmoil and external aggression—you should pay attention to gender inequality. These findings should be relevant to leaders in Washington as well as Windhoek, Tokyo as well as Tripoli. The WPS agenda isn’t all about altruism; it’s also about self-interest. This message has not been conveyed effectively to policymakers and publics.

The external political threats to the WPS community and women’s rights activists in general are both top-down and bottom-up in origin. The top-down attacks are coming from neo-patriarchal leaders and governments in Russia, China, the United States, and many other countries. They are the vanguard of the patriarchal backlash against women’s empowerment, women’s participation in politics and government, and WPS policy priorities. The bottom-up assaults are the surges in mass-level misogyny that are manifested in the online manosphere and incel movements, in right-wing political parties and extremist movements, and in conservative religious crusades. Their common goal is preservation and revitalization of patriarchal ideologies and institutions—perpetuation of “the first political order” in human societies and “the ultimate balance of power” (Hudson 2020; de Jonge Oudraat and Brown 2020).

The tremendous growth in the nongovernmental WPS community since 2000 has been supported to a large degree to sizeable growth in available government funding. Many NGOs (at all levels) have become dependent on governmental funding. NGOs engaged in project management have often become dependent on just one or two funding sources. These vulnerabilities have been obvious for a long time, and now they are generating organizational crises and existential dangers. Many governments are cutting funding for WPS and development programs because they want to increase defense spending. The Trump administration is cutting the US government’s massive support of WPS and development programs for ideological and openly destructive reasons.

The impact of these cuts has already been devastating. As noted above, UN Women’s survey of 411 women’s rights organizations

around the world revealed that almost half will be forced to shut down if current conditions persist. These NGOs reported that 90 percent have already been financially impacted by governmental funding cuts, 72 percent have already laid off staff, and 51 percent have already suspended some programming (UN Women 2025).

Now that some governments are shifting attention and resources away from the WPS agenda, nongovernmental activists and organizations will be more important than ever in keeping the WPS agenda intact and in position to advance in the future.

New Priorities: From WPS Resolutions to a WPS Treaty

The WPS community had undoubtedly hoped to celebrate its accomplishments in 2025 and reflect unhurriedly on the movement’s prospects and priorities for the future. Instead, it finds itself in a crisis. The gradual buildup of opposition to WPS suddenly escalated and entered a new phase. The US government, which had been one of the WPS agenda’s strongest supporters, switched sides and became the leader of the opposition. This has massive financial and political implications.

Many WPS organizations will face a grim financial picture in the years ahead, and many will go out of existence. To survive, most will have to find new sources of funding. They should of course try to diversify their financial bases to guard against future shocks. Many organizations will have to think about pooling and sharing resources—money, staff, programs—and perhaps forming partnerships or even merging. Some WPS activists and organizations might have to set aside differences over policy approaches and focus on the crisis at hand. Everyone in the WPS nongovernmental community should work to expand NGO networks at the local, national, and international levels. This is a relatively inexpensive and indispensable force-multiplier.

Every WPS organization should redouble their efforts to build connections with allies at other NGOs and in national and local governments. WPS activists and organizations should launch a new campaign to explain to governments in the Global North and the Global South why WPS issues are important for national security and national interests everywhere. National governments and foundations should step up immediately to offset the Trump

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administration's defection and enable the WPS nongovernmental community weather the storm. Governments and foundations should form WPS alliances of their own and create new, durable WPS funding sources.

Beyond these tactical, operational basics, the WPS community must think about playing defense and offense at the same time and developing a new, compelling strategy for the future.

The centerpiece of this effort should be a worldwide campaign to have a *Women, Peace and Security Treaty* adopted by UN member-states via the General Assembly. This would provide a legal, institutional bulwark against the assault coming from the Trump administration, other patriarchal powers, and other misogynist militants. A WPS Treaty would also be a powerful offensive platform for consolidating and expanding the WPS community. It would help to bring WPS supporters together, it would provide institutional mechanisms for WPS engagement, and it would create a framework for bringing new members into the WPS community.

A WPS Treaty — Why?

In the late 1990s, WPS activists steered the agenda toward the UN Security Council because the Council is the body within the UN system with primary responsibility for maintaining and restoring international peace and security. WPS activists wanted immediate action to deal with conflict problems in many countries. They also sought to advance new principles that would guide policymaking in peace and security matters. The Security Council functioned relatively well at that time: The Cold War was over, and great-power vetoes were comparatively rare.

Today, the Security Council is a lost cause for WPS issues, and this is likely to be the case for the foreseeable future. China, Russia, and the United States all have vetoes over Council resolutions, and none of these powers supports the WPS agenda.

The Security Council has other limitations. Its focus is on specific problems and actions, not the codification of broader principles. Its resolutions carry political weight, but they are not legally binding on UN member-states unless they are adopted under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. None of the WPS resolutions were adopted under Chapter VII. The Security Council, therefore, could

encourage member-states to follow its WPS resolutions, but these efforts lacked the added heft and authority of legal instruments.

The UN General Assembly has several important advantages as a sponsor for WPS action. The General Assembly is comprised of all UN member-states whereas the Security Council is a small, unrepresentative body. The General Assembly is also the main deliberative and policymaking organ of the United Nations. Its functions and powers include the consideration of general principles to enhance international peace and security, the development of international law, and the advancement of human rights.

Transforming the Security Council's WPS resolutions into a General Assembly treaty would have multiple advantages.

For starters, a WPS Treaty would be shaped by a broader, more representative group of states. The treaty would be adopted by states on a voluntary basis. A WPS Treaty would be more likely to have true champions. A treaty would also be a singular, integrated, comprehensive framework that would bring together the main elements of the ten WPS resolutions along with other good ideas the Security Council could not act on. States often fail to live up to their treaty obligations, of course, but they are more likely to do the right thing when they themselves have made formal pledges to specific norms and rules. International treaties are not panaceas, but they set standards to which states can be held accountable. A WPS Treaty would not prevent the UN Security Council from voicing opinions and taking actions on WPS matters in the future, but it would recenter UN actions on WPS matters from the Council to the General Assembly.

A WPS Treaty would formalize, re-legitimize, re-validate, and elevate the WPS agenda at a precarious juncture. It would help to defend the WPS agenda from its attackers and detractors. It would give the many supporters of the WPS agenda—governmental and nongovernmental—a framework for action and a platform to build on. It would create mechanisms for convening the WPS community and assessing the behavior of state parties and others.

At a political and psychological level, it would provide the WPS community with a goal and a cause. It would be a focal point for rallying the WPS community at a difficult and demoralizing time. It would mobilize the WPS community for a new campaign and

new efforts. A WPS Treaty would enable the WPS community to go on the offense at a time when many might be tempted to crawl into a defensive shell.

A WPS Treaty — What?

Fortunately, the WPS community would not have to start from scratch in crafting a WPS Treaty. The ten UN Security Council resolutions identified many gender and conflict problems, they defined important goals and principles, and they specified policy priorities and needed actions. They helped to normalize the idea that gender and conflict issues should be on the UN's agenda for discussion and action. The WPS agenda is much more advanced and much more widely understood today than in the late 1990s.

This is not the place to outline the content of a WPS Treaty in detail. The treaty's focus, framework, and text would have to be developed over the course of a collaborative, interactive process involving WPS activists and governmental allies. This would probably be a multi-year process.

That said, some of the main elements of a WPS Treaty are clear.

The treaty's **preamble** should begin with a strong statement of the relationship between gender and armed conflict and the problems it seeks to address, noting that these problems materialize before, during, and after armed conflicts—not just during open warfare. The preamble should include a strong commitment to the promotion of the rights of women, girls, and other gender-marginalized groups before, during and after armed conflicts. It would connect the WPS agenda to foundational legal instruments such as the UN Charter, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

The treaty's preamble should also emphasize the importance of gender perspectives in the analyses of pre-conflict situations, the conduct of armed conflicts, and the challenges of post-conflict reconstruction and conflict resolution.

The treaty's main articles and operational sections should draw on the four WPS pillars developed by the UN Secretariat: participation; protection; prevention; and relief and recovery. Remarkably, the establishment of WPS “pillars” was not mentioned in any of the

ten WPS resolutions. Yet, this framework has been widely adopted by UN member states and civil society organizations, and they will be able to suggest enhancements to the original formulations.

The treaty should formalize, elevate, and expand on this framework by emphasizing the importance of the four WPS pillars and by defining objectives and expectations.

- **Participation** of women in peace and security policymaking at all levels, including conflict prevention, management, and resolution efforts, negotiation and mediation processes, peace operations, and other field-based operations.
- **Protection** of women and girls, as well as other gender-marginalized groups, from the effects of armed conflict, including sexual violence. The WPS Treaty should be explicit in discussing the horrors and the magnitude of conflict-related sexual violence and the use of sexual violence and rape as tactics of war.
- **Prevention** of armed conflicts and the prevention of gender-based harms preceding and resulting from armed conflicts. In 2015, the Global Study on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 noted that “when women took their demands for a women, peace and security (WPS) agenda to the Security Council in 2000, they were demanding that prevention of war be a key aspect of the Security Council's agenda (...) Their objective was, at its core, the prevention of armed conflict.” (UN Women 2015).
- **Relief and recovery.** The treaty should prioritize access for women, girls, and other gender-marginalized groups to humanitarian aid during and after conflict, as well as the recognition of the importance of gender-responsive approaches to humanitarian assistance and post-conflict rebuilding efforts.

The treaty text should be explicit about the commitments state parties will make and the actions they will (and will not) take to adhere to the treaty's core provisions. For example, the treaty could introduce quotas for UN-led or UN-supported peace processes and introduce mechanisms for the involvement of civil society actors. It should strengthen legal recourse for victims and survivors of conflict-related sexual violence and institutionalize

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survivor-centered approaches. It should set up early warning mechanisms and recognize the regional women mediators networks.¹

It is essential that the treaty provide detailed guidance for implementation of the agreement at national and international levels. It should include commitments to adopt, report on, fund, and implement WPS NAPS. For example, the treaty should include the establishment of and commitments to fund a WPS Treaty secretariat and monitoring organization. The latter will be one of the keys to strengthening state accountability. Provisions for regular meetings of the state parties should be spelled out. Monitoring and reporting processes should be developed.

Ideally, the WPS Treaty would not allow for national “reservations” or opt-outs with respect to select treaty provisions: UN member-states should be all-in or all-out.

A WPS Treaty — How?

The starting point, as in the late 1990s, will be WPS nongovernmental activists and organizations. Once again, they will have to launch the campaign and engage in rounds of profile-raising, coalition-building, and agenda-setting. This formula worked then, when gender and conflict issues were barely recognized; it is even more likely to work now, when the WPS agenda is established and widely supported. Similar campaigns, using the same basic formula, have succeeded in instituting treaties in other peace and security areas, including the *Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty* (which entered into force in 1999) and the *Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons* (2021).

It is essential to remember that the WPS agenda has an enormous amount of support worldwide in both governmental and nongovernmental circles. As noted earlier, 115 countries have adopted WPS NAPS—almost 60 percent of the UN’s member-states. Some of these efforts were half-hearted and the United States is now leading the opposition, but this is still a substantial base of support. This is reinforced by the political weight of approximately four billion women and girls, along with their allies. Many leaders and governments will want to be seen supporting a campaign that resonates with half or more of the country’s citizenry. Many leaders will be keen to support a cause that is opposed by Donald Trump, who has alienated almost every US ally and imposed punitive economic tariffs on most of the countries on the planet. This is an opportune moment to mobilize the world to support a WPS Treaty that Trump would surely hate.

A New Hope

It might seem strange to be proposing a WPS Treaty at a time when many WPS communities and the WPS agenda itself are under attack. The old adage—*the best defense is a good offense*—applies here. A WPS Treaty would be the best way to defend the WPS agenda, mobilize support for WPS goals, and establish a new platform for WPS action in the future. The key is to frame and launch a WPS Treaty campaign that can tap into the extensive but often latent support that exists worldwide for the WPS agenda and women’s rights in general.

A WPS Treaty campaign would give WPS activists an important, prominent project to focus on. It would help to mobilize the WPS community at a time when it has been battered and fragmented. It would give the WPS community a concrete, global goal. A WPS Treaty campaign would provide a focal point for hope at a time when hope is in short supply.

¹ Since 2015, several women mediator networks have been established to promote implementation to the WPS agenda. They include: the Nordic Women Mediators (2015); the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network (2017); the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (FemWise Afrca-2017); the Women Mediators across the Commonwealth (2018); the Southeast Asian Network of Women Peace Negotiators and Mediators (2019); the Arab Women Mediators Network (2020); the Pacific Women Mediators network (2023); and the Ibero-American network of Women Mediators (2023).

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