



NATO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

# COMMITTEE ON THE CIVIL DIMENSION OF SECURITY (CDS)

## ADVANCING THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA

### General Report

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## I. INTRODUCTION

1. 2020 marks the 20th anniversary of the unanimous adoption by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) of its Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). This historic milestone put women at the centre of the dialogue on peace and security for the first time. It recognised the specific impact of conflicts on women and girls and acknowledged women's essential role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts as well as in peacemaking and peacebuilding. Resolution 1325 marked the starting point of a series of resolutions (UNSC Resolutions 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122, 2242, 2467 and 2493), each addressing a particular concern about the protection of women and girls in conflict and their involvement in peace and security processes.

2. The WPS agenda includes four main pillars set out in Resolution 1325. The first pillar relates to the need to increase the participation of women at all levels of peace and security processes. The second pillar focuses on the protection and promotion of the rights of women and girls in conflict situations, including their protection from sexual violence. The third pillar concerns the prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations. Finally, the fourth pillar calls for the integration of gender perspectives in relief and recovery efforts, particularly in the design of refugee camps, repatriation and resettlement efforts, and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes.

3. Addressing gender inequality and integrating WPS priorities throughout NATO's three essential core tasks of collective defence, crisis management and cooperative security in line with the relevant resolutions, is at the top of the Alliance's agenda. At the 2016 Warsaw Summit, the Heads of State and Government of NATO member countries recognised that the "empowerment of women at NATO and in our militaries makes our Alliance stronger". NATO considers that the equal involvement of women and men in decision-making processes and the integration of gender perspectives in the analysis, planning, execution and evaluation of its operations and missions are paramount to adequately respond to crises.

4. NATO and its partners set ambitious goals with the adoption in 2018 of the NATO/EAPC Policy on Women, Peace and Security. The policy supports the advancement of the WPS agenda through three guiding principles. The first principle, integration, refers to the promotion of gender equality in and gender mainstreaming of all NATO operations, programmes, and trainings. The second principle, inclusiveness, focuses on advocating for equal participation of men and women across the organisation and in national forces, including in overseas operations. Finally, the third principle, integrity, acknowledges the urgency of ensuring fair and equal treatment of women and men throughout the Alliance and entails that all NATO civilian and military staff must observe the highest standards of behaviour and respect gender equality principles.

5. In the past two decades since the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, the international community has achieved substantial progress in advancing gender equality and women's rights. Gender equality is increasingly recognised not only as a core principle of the United Nations Charter and a fundamental human right, but also as a requirement to achieve sustainable peace and economic development. The process set in motion by the adoption of UNSCR 1325 is still guiding the international community today. In 2019, for instance, under the presidency of Germany, the UNSC adopted Resolution 2467 on sexual violence in conflict, a powerful new framework to protect women in conflict.

6. Despite the progress achieved, however, more efforts are needed to further the implementation of the WPS agenda and advance gender equality in the peace and security sphere. The importance of considering the interests and concerns of women and girls in the prevention and resolution of conflicts continues to be underappreciated. Furthermore, fully translating existing policy frameworks and mechanisms into further concrete actions remains

challenging. Empowering women and fully integrating a gender perspective in the peace and security sector, including at NATO, requires a change of mindset that can only be achieved by raising awareness about the positive operational impact of WPS agenda implementation. Young women and girls, in particular, are tomorrow's citizens and leaders and need to be further empowered through the parallel implementation of the youth, peace and security and WPS agendas. Their voices must be heard, so that they can meaningfully contribute to building sustainable peace. The international community's failure to adequately fund efforts to implement the resolution has also been a persistent challenge over the past 20 years. Finally, the significant progress achieved in strengthening women's role in peace and security in the framework of the implementation of the WPS agenda, if it is not defended and promoted, could easily be reversed. This threat is reinforced by the recent rise of populist forces within NATO member states and beyond that wish to turn back the clock on the advancement of women's rights and promote a return to a society structured around predefined gender-specific roles for men and women in which women are to remain at home and provide childcare even when that is not their personal choice.

7. The COVID-19 pandemic has created significant additional challenges for the implementation of the WPS agenda. Women's equal participation in the security sector (as in others) appears even further from reach as the crisis has reinforced pre-existing stereotypes and often forced women to bear the burden of caring for the elderly, children and the sick at the expense of their livelihood and career. Moreover, the prevention of sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict settings and the protection of women from this threat have been made more arduous by some of the measures taken to slow the spread of the coronavirus. The pandemic has also hampered the ability of survivors of sexual violence to seek protection from and redress against perpetrators. Lastly, the pandemic is likely to result in humanitarian assistance and funds being diverted away from WPS programmes and channelled instead towards projects focused on the ongoing health crisis, to the detriment of women and girls.

8. In the context of this report, it is important to define certain concepts. "Gender equality" refers to women, men, girls and boys enjoying equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities. It is widely recognised as a human right and a precondition for stability, peace, and development. In 1995 already, 25 years ago, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action acknowledged that peace is inextricably linked with equality between women and men. Gender equality is thus not a concern solely for women. Men should be fully engaged in its promotion as well. Another concept discussed in this report is "gender mainstreaming" which is defined by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) as "the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels", so as to ensure that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. "Conflict-related sexual violence" (CRSV) is defined by NATO as acts of sexual violence used or commissioned as a tactic of war, usually to gain political or military advantage. International law recognises eight different forms of CRSV: rape; sexual slavery; prostitution; forced pregnancy; forced abortion; enforced sterilisation; forced marriage; and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity. Finally, "gender-based violence" is defined by NATO as "any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between females and males". Examples of such violence include sexual exploitation/abuse and forced prostitution; domestic violence; trafficking; forced/early marriage; harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation; honour killings; and widow disinheritance (NATO, 2019b).

## **II. ACHIEVING WOMEN'S MEANINGFUL AND EQUAL PARTICIPATION IN THE PEACE AND SECURITY SPHERE**

### **A. A LONG WAY TO GO TO EQUAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AND MEN IN THE SECURITY SECTOR**

9. Diversity and gender balance in the security sector are widely acknowledged as enabling its actors to better meet the needs of the community they serve. The strong correlation between the equal participation of women and men in the peace and security sphere and international stability is also increasingly recognised. Indeed, recent studies indicate that female participation in peace agreements makes them 64% less likely to fail and 35% more likely to last more than 15 years (CFR, 2019). However, women remain under-represented in the peace and security sphere. The persistence of stereotypes about women in this field means that they are often perceived as passive agents in conflicts rather than drivers of change. Another major challenge lies in the necessity to engage men as partners in the process of increasing women's participation, rather than adversaries who stand to lose out from such a trend. Awareness raising and public communication efforts represent the most efficient tools to reach out to men and ensure their involvement and support for equal participation.

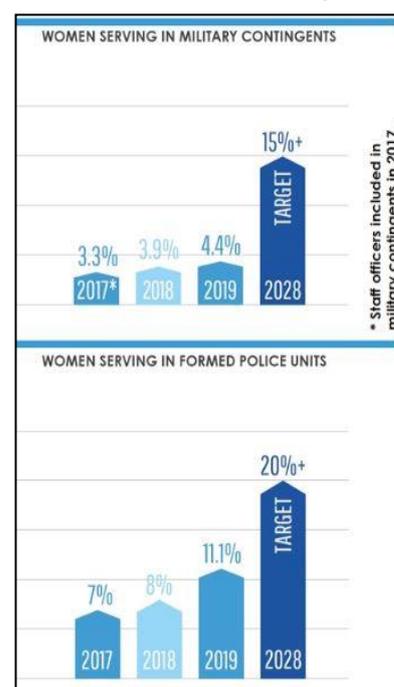
10. As a result of these challenges, women remain too often excluded from negotiating tables and decision-making processes. A recent study showed that in major peace processes between 1992 and 2018, women only represented 3% of mediators, 4% of signatories and 13% of negotiators. As a result, 81% of peace agreements between 1990 and 2017 did not make any reference to women and failed to consider their interests and address their concerns (CFR, 2019). Similarly, in many countries around the world, women are prevented from enrolling in the armed forces or serving in combat roles. According to a recent report, 45 countries out of 60 studied currently limit the conscription to men (Desilver/Pew Research Centre, 2019). Only a small number of countries around the world allow women to serve in some or all military combat roles. However, the majority of NATO nations allow them to serve in such roles. In addition, in 2017, 42.9% of NATO member countries had specific policies in place to promote the recruitment of women in their armed forces, a 16% increase compared to the previous year (NATO, 2017).

11. The COVID-19 pandemic is creating additional obstacles to achieving equal participation of women and men in the security sector. The crisis is exacerbating gender stereotypes, with women increasingly expected to take care of other household members. As authorities have closed schools to slow the spread of the coronavirus, women have had to sideline their careers to care for children. Similarly, the responsibility to care for sick family members often falls onto them. These reinforced stereotypes, in turn, have a detrimental impact over women's ability to access the job market, including in the security sector. Moreover, in times of crisis, women are more at risk than men of becoming unemployed, particularly in countries with large gender gaps. For example, in the Arab region -the region with the world's largest gender gap according to the UN-, the UN estimates that up to 700, 000 women are at risk of losing their job as a result of the pandemic, particularly in the informal sector (UN News, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic is thus aggravating already existing gender inequalities in all sectors of society, including in the security field.

## B. THE ROLE OF AND CHALLENGES FACED BY THE UNITED NATIONS IN SUPPORTING THE EQUAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AND MEN IN THE PEACE AND SECURITY SECTOR

12. The unanimous adoption of Resolution 1325 explicitly placed women at the centre of the UN's peace and security agenda for the first time by calling for increasing their participation in conflict prevention and resolution and mainstreaming gender perspectives into UN conflict resolution activities. As part of its WPS agenda, the UN also pledged to dedicate at least 15% of its peacebuilding-related funds to projects contributing to advancing gender equality and addressing women's specific needs. Building up on institutional progress achieved since 2000, in 2010 the UN General Assembly voted unanimously to create the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) to support member states in their efforts to achieve gender equality. The same year, the UN adopted the Strategic Results Framework on Women, Peace and Security for 2011-2020, along with a mechanism to track progress in the implementation of Resolution 1325. The Sustainable Development Goals, adopted in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, include for the first time a dedicated goal on gender equality and another on peaceful and inclusive societies.

13. However, the 2015 Global Study on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 carried out by UN Women, as well as subsequent annual UN Secretary General reports on WPS, highlighted that women's meaningful participation in UN-supported peace processes remains low and that the abovementioned objective to dedicate at least 15% of peacebuilding-related funds to projects supporting the WPS agenda and women's equal participation is yet to be met. Similarly, in 2019, women only represented 4.4% of military personnel and 11.1% of police personnel in UN peacekeeping missions (UN Peacekeeping, 2020). In light of these persistent shortcomings, in 2015, the UNSC adopted Resolution 2242 on improving the implementation of Resolution 1325. Resolution 2242 called for the development of an overarching strategy and a monitoring and accountability framework involving all UN agencies as well as other international organisations and clarifying the role of each to avoid overlaps in activities aimed at furthering gender equality. It also advocated for financial resources, particularly for WPS-related projects in peacebuilding contexts, to reflect the ambitions of Resolution 1325. Finally, the UNSC emphasised the need for evidence-based advocacy and awareness-raising efforts outside the organisation, and the importance of internal trainings focused on the benefits of inclusivity and gender equality in the peace and security sphere. Nationally led initiatives have played a positive role in increasing the participation of women in UN peacekeeping missions. For instance, in 2017, Canada launched the Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations, an innovative and multilateral pilot project supported by some other NATO Allies (France, the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom). It aims to develop, apply and test a combination of approaches to help overcome barriers to increasing women's meaningful participation in peace operations.



## C. PROGRESS ACHIEVED AND REMAINING CHALLENGES FOR NATO, ALLIES AND PARTNERS IN PROMOTING EQUAL PARTICIPATION AND GENDER EQUALITY

14. Gender equality is not only critical to preserve peace and stability but is also intrinsic to NATO's values of individual liberty, democracy, human rights, and rule of law. The Alliance has developed concrete policies, frameworks, and operational measures to promote the equal

participation of women and men in all its structures and activities, in line with the principles set out in Resolution 1325. In 2010, NATO adopted an Action Plan on Mainstreaming UNSCR 1325 into NATO-led Operations and Missions. In 2012, the Alliance established the position of Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security as a high-level representative to coordinate all aspects of its WPS-related work. In 2018, NATO and its partners adopted the abovementioned NATO/EAPC Policy on WPS to support the implementation of the resolution. Other institutional mechanisms include a WPS task force bringing together military and civilian staff across the Alliance's headquarters, and a NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives – which replaced, in 2009, the Committee on Women in the NATO Forces originally formed in 1973 – promoting gender mainstreaming in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, programmes and military operations. The Alliance has also undertaken efforts to integrate gender perspectives in its operations. It has deployed a network of gender advisers and focal points in the International Military Staff, in operational headquarters, as well as in NATO-led operations and missions. Gender advisers are responsible for providing military commanders with operational support on the implementation of WPS and guidance on ensuring that gender perspectives are incorporated into the planning and conduct of operations (NATO, 2019a).

15. Historically excluded from direct combat roles and high-level positions, women are now more present in the armed forces of NATO member nations and across NATO's civilian personnel, including at senior levels. However, much remains to be done. Women only represent 40% and 17% respectively of the International Staff's and International Military Staff's workforce and hold 25% of senior leadership positions (NATO Secretary General's Annual Report, 2020). A recent study has shown that the presence of more women in military operations improves their effectiveness and credibility and contributes to a more effective engagement with the local population (Horst et al., 2018). NATO must therefore continue its efforts to ensure a more balanced representation of women and men across the Alliance in view of strengthening its operational effectiveness.

16. Individual member states have a role to play as well in ensuring the equal involvement and participation of women and men in the Alliance. In July 2019, only five women were serving as Ministers of Defence in NATO nations, and eight were Permanent Representatives to the Alliance. Similarly, in 2019, women only accounted on average for 12% of the armed forces of NATO member states, compared with 6% in 1999 (NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, October 2020). The appointment in January 2020 by Norway of the first female Military Representative on the NATO Military Committee is a positive example. NATO encourages all Allies to make WPS an integral part of their national defence and security policies and programmes. It particularly supports the efforts of its member nations to achieve active and meaningful participation of women at all levels of their security sector. However, it is important to note that member states bear the primary responsibility for ensuring the implementation of Resolution 1325. Achieving better gender balance in NATO-led armed forces depends first and foremost on national choices and strategic national initiatives, such as the adoption of National Action Plans on the implementation of Resolution 1325. To ensure that the goals set out in these plans are reached, member states should establish permanent and continuous oversight mechanisms, in which parliamentarians would inevitably have to play a role.

17. NATO is working closely with its partner countries to promote women's participation in their peace and security sector. Through their cooperation with the Alliance, partner countries are encouraged to promote women's participation in their armed forces and in decision-making and defence institutions. For instance, Georgia developed its first National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in 2011 and most recently developed its third NAP in 2018 (Peacewomen, 2020). As a result of the efforts undertaken in this area, the country reported an increase in the percentage of women in its armed forces, from 4.8% in 2017 to 6% in 2020 (NATO, 2017; Georgian delegation to the NATO PA, 2020). In addition, 2,7% of Georgian troops participating in the NATO Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan are women. In 2017, through

its Science for Peace and Security (SPS) Programme, NATO supported a two-year project to carry out an assessment of gender equality, harassment and abuse in Georgia's armed forces with a view to improve the conditions of women in the military. As a result, the Ministry of Defence of Georgia established an internal sexual harassment report mechanism. In addition, a permanent module on "Gender in the Security Sector" is taught in all courses at the Defence Institution Building School (DIBS) established in 2016 as part of the Substantial NATO Georgia Package (SNGP).

18. Similarly, with the support of the Alliance, Ukraine achieved some progress with regard to the participation of women in the security sector. In 2016, Ukraine adopted its first National Action Plan for the implementation of Resolution 1325. In September 2018, the Ukrainian parliament passed legislation that lifted most restrictions on women holding specific positions in the military. According to 2019 figures from the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, more than 27,000 women currently serve in the country's armed forces, about 950 of them as senior officers. Women account for more than 10% of the total number of personnel, a 15-fold increase compared to 2008 (Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, 2019). In October 2020, the Ukrainian government adopted a new National Action Plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 for the period 2021-2025.

#### **D. NATO'S COOPERATION WITH OTHER INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN SUPPORT OF GENDER EQUALITY AND EQUAL PARTICIPATION**

19. Gender equality is an important element of NATO's cooperation with other international institutions and civil society organisations. At the multinational level, NATO co-founded the Regional Acceleration for Resolution 1325 (RAR) and communicates with the other partners in RAR including the European Union, the United Nations, and the African Union, as well as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) as an observer. The Alliance also participates in the WPS Focal Points Network, a platform including representatives from UN Member States, regional and international organisations, and civil society. Finally, NATO is a member of the European Union task force on Women, Peace and Security, a forum for exchange and partnership between EU institutions, other international and regional organisations, individual countries, and civil society representatives. Through these fora, NATO contributes to the international community's efforts to support the principles of WPS and participates in the exchange of best practices and lessons learned in achieving gender equality.

20. With the European Union in particular, the Alliance maintains close contact at all levels to ensure common understanding and avoid duplication in the implementation of Resolution 1325. NATO recognises the incremental role that the EU plays in advancing gender equality in the security sector. The EU's efforts are based on two main instruments: the Strategic Approach and the Action Plan on WPS 2019-2024. The Strategic Approach supports governments' actions and civil society activities to promote gender equality and women's participation and empowerment. Simultaneously, the Action Plan on WPS lays out specific objectives to increase women's participation and leadership in all areas of policy and programming related to peace and security, as well as ensure women's full, equal and meaningful participation. Additionally, in March 2020, the European Commission presented a new EU Gender Equality Strategy for 2020-2025 which, among other measures, calls for integrating a gender perspective in all EU policies and establishing legal measures to criminalise violence against women (EU, 2020).

21. NATO also attaches great importance to its cooperation with civil society organisations in the promotion of gender equality and women's participation. Such organisations play a central role in advocating for the participation of women and substantially contribute to the implementation of the WPS agenda in member states and partner countries. Recognising this contribution, NATO has institutionalised since 2016 its dialogue with civil society representatives through the establishment of the Civil Society Advisory Panel on WPS. Meeting monthly through teleconferences, the Panel

provides recommendations and advice on the implementation of the WPS agenda by the Alliance. This has included, for instance, advice on NATO's Policy on Preventing and Responding to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse adopted in December 2019. It functions as a dialogue forum between civil society and the Alliance on the WPS agenda and helps foster awareness and understanding of NATO's activities, policies, and values among civil society.

#### **E. THE NATO PA AND THE FIRST PILLAR OF RESOLUTION 1325**

22. The NATO Parliamentary Assembly (NATO PA) and its members are committed to strengthening women's role and participation in peace and security. The Assembly constitutes a valuable forum for parliamentarians to exchange information and best practices on monitoring and contributing to the implementation of Resolution 1325. Since 2007, it has pursued an innovative approach to WPS by mapping the distinctive contributions of national parliaments to advancing the WPS agenda. The latest survey on this topic, published in 2018, revealed that, although no NATO member country has achieved absolute gender balance in its parliament, women are increasingly holding prominent parliamentary functions relevant to peace and security. Women had, at the time, recently acted as chair or deputy chair of national delegations to the parliamentary assemblies of NATO and/or the OSCE in 11 countries. Similarly, four parliaments reported having adopted new legislation or resolutions recognising or advancing the role of women in national security institutions. The increase in women's accession to high-level positions in the field of peace and security coincided with an intensification of the involvement of parliaments in the oversight and monitoring of NATO member countries' implementation of the WPS agenda (NATO PA, 2018).

23. The latest review of the NATO PA's consideration of gender in 2019, published in March 2020, concludes that women remain under-represented in national delegations, accounting for only 15% of all members (a slight decrease from 16.7% in 2016). Over the past four years, the number of all-male delegations increased from six in 2016 to nine in 2019. However, four delegations out of the eight whose country have held elections since the previous review was released in March 2019 now include a higher proportion of women. A similarly positive trend can be observed with respect to heads of delegation, with five delegations having a woman as their leader as of February 2020, compared with only two in March 2016. The review also noted that women were better represented among the Assembly's elected officers – Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons and Rapporteurs of Committees and Sub-Committees – in February 2020, where they accounted for 19%, than in the overall membership (a decrease, however, from 25% a year earlier) (NATO PA, 2020).

24. It should be pointed out that, despite limited progress in certain areas, parliaments and their delegations need to make substantial additional efforts to translate the May 2017 revision by the Standing Committee of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure to "strongly encourage [delegations] to seek gender diversity" into concrete results. In addition, the Rapporteur acknowledges that, at the time, no agreement was found among members to include in the Rules of Procedure a more constraining provision similar to that adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe – which requires "national delegations to include members of the under-represented sex at least in the same percentage as in their parliaments and, at a very minimum, one member of the under-represented sex appointed as a representative". The Rapporteur suggests that this issue be put to a discussion again in the future.

### III. THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST AND PROTECTION OF WOMEN IN CONFLICTS

#### A. WHEN BODIES BECOME BATTLEFIELDS: AN OVERVIEW OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICTS

25. The protection of women and prevention of violence against them in conflict, including sexual violence, constitute the second and third pillars of Resolution 1325. Sexual violence in conflict is often used by both non-state armed groups and state security forces in conflict settings as a tactic and weapon of war. Recognised under certain circumstances as a crime against humanity and a war crime, it constitutes a violation of international humanitarian law, human rights law, and criminal law. Such violence is often compounded by the widespread lack of judicial accountability for perpetrators and the frequent lack of enforcement and protection of women's and girls' rights in conflict settings. Although women and girls constitute the primary victims of CRSV, men and boys are also exposed to it.

26. Putting a figure on the number of CRSV victims around the world remains challenging, in part due to underreporting resulting from the frequent intimidation and stigmatisation of survivors. Such estimates can vary widely. According to the UN, between 100,000 and 250,000 women were raped in Rwanda during the genocide in the country in 1994 and between 10,000 and 60,000 during the war in the former Yugoslavia (1992-1995) (UN, 2014). With their lives uprooted, social networks disrupted, and livelihoods affected, refugees and internally displaced persons fleeing conflicts are particularly at risk of being subjected to CRSV at various stages of their displacement. The UN estimates that one in five female internally displaced persons or refugees living in a humanitarian crisis or armed conflict setting has experienced sexual violence (OCHA, 2019). This is particularly alarming as the nexus between the adverse effects of climate change, conflict and migration has become increasingly visible in recent years, particularly in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and Southeast Asia (Podesta, 2019; and Weerasinghe, 2018). Additionally, it is worth noting that sexual violence in conflict also constitutes a driver of migration and a factor preventing the return of refugees and displaced persons to their places of origin.

27. In the past decades, the nature of conflicts has evolved, with armed groups increasingly using sexual violence against civilians as an instrument of terror and as an asymmetric war tactic. Militarisation, violence, and the resulting humanitarian crises have a particularly harmful impact on the safety and security of women and girls. Daesh, for instance, widely used sexual violence across the territories in which it was fighting, primarily against ethnic and religious minority groups. Thousands of women were reportedly captured, enslaved, and raped by Daesh members, particularly as part of the terrorist group's violent attacks on Mosul, Sinjar, Tall'Afar and the Ninewa plains. Moreover, Daesh uses human trafficking, including the sale and trade of women and girls, to raise funds for terrorist purposes (FIDH, 2018). Violence against women and girls, including sexual violence, plays a central role in Boko Haram's ideology and actions as well. It should not be forgotten that many of the 276 girls kidnapped from their school in Chibok by members of the group in 2014 are still missing. Many more women and girls have been abducted in north-eastern Nigeria since then. Many of those released or freed said that they had been subjected to rape, torture, as well as forced marriage, labour, and religious conversion. Sexual violence is also widespread in many post-conflict countries, where it can prevent successful community reconciliation from occurring and impede peacebuilding and recovery efforts.

28. CRSV poses a significant threat to international peace and stability, due to the long-term destructive effects it has on entire communities already affected by war. In 2008, UNSCR 1820 on WPS recognised that CRSV may jeopardise international security and stability when used or commissioned as a tactic of war to deliberately target or attack civilian populations. It is therefore essential that the international community responds to this menace by ensuring that perpetrators face justice and that the needs of survivors, such as access to sexual and reproductive health

services, psychological support, judicial redress and financial reparations, are met. However, less than 1% of global humanitarian funding is currently spent on supporting sexual and gender-based violence prevention and response work and more financial resources are needed (OCHA, 2019). Adopting a holistic approach to the threat posed by CRSV is equally crucial as gender inequality and discrimination form the root causes and drivers of the phenomenon. The prevention and protection of women and girls against violence thus cannot be isolated from their economic empowerment and political and social participation. Preventing CRSV necessitates advancing gender equality and promoting women's and girls' rights before, during and after conflicts, in particular by ensuring that they have sustainable livelihoods and access to education.

29. Preventing sexual violence against women and implementing effective measures to ensure their protection from such violence takes on additional challenges with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in conflict settings. Due to the restrictions put in place to slow the spread of the coronavirus, women have been less able to report the abuses they face. Moreover, in many countries and particularly in conflict settings, the presence of military forces deployed to enforce COVID-19-related measures increases the risk of violence being perpetrated against women. It also generates a sense of fear and insecurity amongst them, which in turn can further dissuade them from reporting abuses and cases of sexual violence. In addition, combating impunity for perpetrators of sexual violence has become more challenging as regular law enforcement measures and judicial activities have been disrupted by the pandemic. For instance, prosecutors in the Democratic Republic of Congo have ceased investigations into a mass rape incident due to concerns relating to COVID-19. Moreover, programmes focused on the prevention of CRSV, the protection of women from such violence and the delivery of medical, psychosocial and legal services to survivors are at risk of being suspended or scaled down as the funds that support them are often diverted to programmes that strictly tackle the pandemic and its direct consequences. For example, UN training programmes for the security sector in South Sudan aimed to combat CRSV have been suspended. Even where these programmes are still being implemented, COVID-19-related movement restrictions and fear of contracting COVID-19 reduce the ability of survivors to access them (United Nations, 2020). The COVID-19 crisis is thus further exposing women to sexual violence, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected countries. Preventing sexual violence and protecting women from such violence should be considered essential and be prioritised by all actors in their response to the pandemic.

## **B. UNITED NATIONS EFFORTS IN PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND ENSURING THEIR PROTECTION IN CONFLICT**

30. The United Nations has made significant progress in the past two decades in establishing wide-ranging international frameworks and norms to address CRSV. Following the adoption of UNSCR 1325, additional resolutions have been adopted by the UNSC that call on member states to take measures to prevent sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations and mitigate its impact. The adoption, in 2009, of Resolution 1888 on tackling CRSV as a peace and security issue led to the establishment of the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (SRSG-SVC) with the aim to coordinate all UN mechanisms and engage in broad advocacy efforts. More recently, in October 2019, under Germany's presidency, the UNSC adopted Resolution 2467 which highlights the importance of offering a multi-dimensional response to the needs of CRSV survivors, including the provision of reproductive health services. It also recommends adopting a survivor-centred approach in all UN initiatives addressing CRSV, particularly in peace negotiations and security and justice sector reform efforts. Finally, it calls for the provision of reparations and livelihood support for survivors, thus giving them an opportunity to rebuild their lives and allowing communities to repair their frayed social fabric after the conflict.

31. These resolutions all point out that acts of sexual violence in conflict settings not only take a heavy toll on women's physical and mental security and health, but also jeopardise the restoration

of sustainable peace and stability. As United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres told UNSC members during the 2019 annual high-level debate on CRSV, “sexual violence continues to fuel conflict and severely impacts the prospects for lasting peace”. It is thus essential for the commitments made by UN member states in these resolutions to be translated into tangible actions. However, success in implementing these commendable undertakings is very often impeded by insufficient financial support.

32. In addition to the adoption of resolutions, the UN launched a system-wide initiative, Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict “STOP RAPE NOW”, aimed at improving coordination between various UN agencies and fighting the impunity frequently enjoyed by perpetrators as well as supporting the efforts of member states to prevent CRSV and adequately respond to the needs of survivors. Moreover, the UN has developed additional initiatives addressing CRSV including training modules for peacekeepers on war crimes in conflict environments to better recognise instances of sexual violence in missions and respond to them.

### **C. NATO’S EXPERIENCE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

33. Preventing violence and protecting those most in need is deeply rooted in NATO’s core values of respect for human rights and rule of law. Combatting CRSV is therefore an imperative element of any NATO operation. The protection of civilians, including from CRSV, fits into the Alliance’s three core tasks of collective defence, crisis management, and cooperative security.

34. NATO has developed a robust normative framework to prevent CRSV and protect civilians from such violence. In 2015, NATO adopted Military Guidelines on the Prevention of, and Response to, Conflict-Related Sexual and Gender-Based Violence that guide the actions of its forces in operations. The guidelines specify that commanders must undertake measures to prevent and respond to CRSV, that NATO-led forces must collect information and establish early warning mechanisms on the level of CRSV risk; and that the Alliance must cooperate with the UN at the local level on countering CRSV.

35. NATO also supports Allies and key partners in their efforts to combat CRSV. It works closely with local authorities in member states and partner nations that deliver education and training to their national armed forces personnel on gender equality. These trainings help increase awareness among national forces on the importance of integrating gender perspectives in military operations, including on topics related to sexual violence.

### **D. INITIATIVES UNDERTAKEN BY PARLIAMENTS OF NATO MEMBER COUNTRIES IN ADDRESSING CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

36. Parliamentarians have a critical role to play in advancing the fight against CRSV by adopting relevant domestic laws, resolutions, budgets, policies, and programmes. The number of legislative initiatives related to the support to survivors of CRSV in NATO member states has increased from only two in 2013-2015, to six in 2015-2018 (NATO PA, 2018). Among those, in 2015 Croatia became a European leader with regard to legislation on sexual violence in wartime as it adopted the Homeland War Act, which prescribes support measures for women who were victims of sexual violence during the wars of 1991-95.

37. Refugees and internally displaced persons in conflict-affected areas are particularly exposed to rape or other forms of sexual violence. In that context, in the same survey, six parliaments reported the introduction in 2015-2018 of new legislation or motions related to gender-sensitive support for refugees and asylum seekers (NATO PA, 2018). This is an area in which parliaments can show governments the lead and substantially improve the safety and security of people affected by conflict.

## **E. CASE STUDY: AFGHANISTAN AND SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**

38. The Afghan authorities have achieved considerable progress with respect to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), but significant challenges remain unaddressed. In 2015, the Government adopted a seven-year National Action Plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 setting out concrete objectives relating to the protection of women from all types of violence and discrimination. In particular, the plan calls for the elimination of the prevailing culture of impunity surrounding sexual violence, the involvement of men in the fight against SGBV and increased awareness in the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) on how to protect civilians from sexual violence. In 2017, the Afghan authorities enacted a new law on human trafficking, criminalising the practice of *bacha bazi*, referring to the sexual abuse of children often bought or kidnapped from impoverished families (UNICEF, 2018). However, the practice remains reportedly widespread and largely unpunished in the country, including amongst the ANDSF (SIGAR, 2018). In a worrying development, in 2018, as part of a reform of the country's penal code meant to bring it in line with international treaty obligations in the area of criminal justice, the code's chapter penalising violence against women was removed (UNAMA, 2018).

39. Women and girls remain exposed to violence in the country. Eighty-seven per cent of the over fifteen million Afghan women have experienced some form of violence in their lives (Oxfam, 2019). Violence continues to force civilians to leave their hometowns, putting women and girls in particular at greater risk of SGBV. Even when they have not been forced to relocate, women and girls remain especially affected by gender inequality, persistent instability, chronic discrimination, and inadequate access to services. These challenges, in turn, create a fertile ground for SGBV. In 2018, the United Nations Mission in Afghanistan registered 37 verified cases of sexual violence against women and girls. However, the stigmatisation of survivors, the complexity of the sexual harassment complaint mechanism and low numbers of policewomen fuel the underreporting of sexual violence incidents across the country, and the actual numbers are believed to be much higher. Although the agreement found in February 2020 between the United States and the Taliban marks a positive development towards sustainable peace in the country, it should not come at the cost of relinquishing the fundamental rights of women and girls. It should be noted that, according to the UN, in areas where the Taliban have reclaimed control, there are reports of honour killings, stonings and other attacks on women and their rights. In order to protect women against such violence during and after conflict, they should be heard in the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan. Women's rights cannot be sacrificed. Civil society organisations should therefore be included in these conflict resolution efforts to ensure that the rights of women are protected and their concerns and needs integrated in any peace agreement.

40. To help eradicate sexual violence from the country and pave the way for reconciliation and sustainable peace, NATO supports the efforts of the Ministries of Interior and Defence and the Afghan security forces to develop effective prevention strategies and trainings to identify acts of sexual violence, investigate and report them and bring perpetrators to justice.

## **IV. NO DURABLE PEACE WITHOUT WOMEN: RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS AND PRIORITIES OF WOMEN IN RELIEF, RECOVERY AND RECONSTRUCTION EFFORTS**

### **A. CHALLENGES AND GOOD PRACTICES IN SUPPORT OF WOMEN IN POST-CONFLICT SITUATIONS**

41. Relief and recovery constitute the fourth pillar of the WPS agenda and refer to post-conflict peacebuilding. This pillar focuses on incorporating a gender dimension in post-conflict resettlement, reintegration, and governance. It also calls for addressing the specific needs of women and girls in post-conflict situations and supporting their active participation in relief and

recovery efforts. Compared to the other three, the fourth pillar has received less attention by the international community.

42. The fragility and instability that often characterises post-conflict settings most negatively affects the poorest and most vulnerable groups in society, including women and girls. As a result of the disruption and upheavals of conflict, women are frequently affected by displacement, limited access to public services, insecure livelihoods, and domestic violence. As entrenched inequalities are amplified, social relations strained and community support mechanisms weakened, they disproportionately suffer in post-conflict situations, thus making them more vulnerable to violence and exploitation. When conflict halts, women indeed remain at a heightened risk of falling victims to sexual violence, exploitation, and human trafficking, particularly if they have been forced to migrate due to the conflict. They often face a lack of access to adequate accommodation facilities, education and health care, in particular reproductive and maternal health services, and judicial redress.

43. Adopting a gender perspective that incorporates the specific needs of women and girls at all stages of post-conflict reconstruction efforts is therefore critical to repair the social fabric of fractured societies. Socioeconomic development and poverty reduction go hand in hand with higher levels of women participation and empowerment. In Rwanda, for instance, initiatives to develop women farmers' leadership and entrepreneurship skills as well as their participation in land commissions led to an increase in the country's production yield and in the proportion of land jointly owned by married couples or exclusively by women, thus contributing to improving national food security while empowering women within their community (UN Women, 2018). In addition, after Rwanda adopted a new constitution in 2003 which includes a quota of at least 30% of women in elected positions, the proportion of women in Parliament significantly increased. In 2020, women account for 61.3% of members in the lower house and 38.5% in the upper house in the country, compared with an average of 23.8% at the global level. This makes Rwanda the country with the highest ratio of women in parliament in the world (UN Women/Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2020).

44. However, although the critical role played by women in post-conflict environments is widely acknowledged, in practice, the mainstreaming of gender and the inclusion of women at all stages and levels of the reconstruction process remain some of the most significant challenges of the implementation of the WPS agenda. As of January 2019, only 19% of members of parliaments in conflict and post-conflict countries around the world were women (IPU, 2019). This low level of inclusion in post-conflict political processes, compounded by a lack of political will and a general perception of gender issues as being secondary, often mean that the perspectives of women are generally overlooked and their needs inadequately addressed in relief and recovery processes.

45. The COVID-19 pandemic is creating additional burdens on women and girls in post-conflict settings. Female internally displaced persons and refugees are particularly affected. COVID-19-related restrictions and fear of contracting the disease make it difficult for them to access essential services. Moreover, the impact on their livelihood of the social distancing measures adopted to prevent the spread of the coronavirus puts women at increased risk of being exposed to sexual violence, trafficking, forced prostitution and sexual exploitation (United Nations, 2020). For instance, in Cox's Bazaar (Bangladesh), where about 850,000 Rohingya refugees live, UN agencies have raised the alarm about the risk that the pandemic may result in an increase in sexual exploitation, trafficking and other abuses (UNICEF, 2020).

## **B. THE UNITED NATIONS' ROLE IN PILLAR 4 IMPLEMENTATION: THE DIFFICULT TRANSLATION OF BROAD COMMITMENTS INTO TANGIBLE RESULTS**

46. The UNSC has adopted resolutions urging member states to recognise the indispensable role played by women in post-conflict recovery efforts. Resolutions 1889 (2009), 2122 (2013) and

2242 (2015) all stress the need for greater participation of women at all stages of peace processes, including post-conflict peacebuilding. The UN supports its member states to improve the situation of women in post-conflict countries and develop their access to health and legal services and judicial redress, education, and skills development training as well as psychological counselling where needed.

47. Such endeavours go hand in hand with efforts to ensure women's economic empowerment and inclusion in political processes and institutions. In 2010, the then-UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon approved the "Seven-Point Action Plan on Gender-Responsive Peacebuilding" which sets out measures ranging from the institutionalisation of women's participation in post-conflict-planning processes to post-conflict financing and economic recovery. The action plan also commits the UN to allocating at least 15% of all peacebuilding funding to gender equality and women's empowerment. However, in 2015, five years after the adoption of the action plan, the UNSC's high-level review of the implementation of Resolution 1325 concluded that "while some progress has been made in the area of processes, not enough impact has yet been felt in the daily lives of women in post-conflict contexts" (UN Women, 2015).

### **C. INDIVIDUAL ALLIES AND THE RECOGNITION OF WOMEN'S INTERESTS AND CONCERNS IN POST-CONFLICT CONTEXTS**

48. NATO as an organisation does not carry out relief and recovery efforts. However, it recognises that the participation of women and the integration of gender perspectives in post-conflict relief and recovery efforts constitute essential prerequisites for the establishment of durable peace. Through their National Action Plans, most member countries assess and monitor the implementation of UNSCR 1325, support women's full participation in post-conflict situations, and incorporate the perspectives of women and girls in their efforts. In addition, individual Allies advance the WPS agenda by contributing to various funds set up by international organisations and supporting the work of civil society organisations.

### **D. PARLIAMENTARY CONTRIBUTION TO THE INCLUSION OF A GENDER DIMENSION IN POST-CONFLICT RESETTLEMENT AND RECOVERY EFFORTS**

49. Parliaments should ensure that gender perspectives are properly considered in relief and recovery efforts through the adoption of relevant national legislation. In the most recent NATO PA survey, two NATO member countries (7% of respondents), Belgium and Canada, reported taking new steps to support the relief and recovery pillar of the WPS agenda since 2015. In 2018, the Belgian Chamber of Deputies adopted a resolution calling on the Belgian Development Agency to collect gender-disaggregated statistics when conducting impact evaluations of projects in order to assess their gender-differentiated effects. Such data is of crucial importance to meet the specific needs of women and girls in development programmes in post-conflict countries. In the same year, the Canadian Parliament adopted a bill modifying the export and import control regime ahead of the country's ratification of the UN's Arms Trade Treaty and obliging Canadian authorities to consider, when reviewing applications for an arms trading permit, whether traded arms and ammunition could be used to commit or facilitate "serious acts of gender-based violence or serious acts of violence against women and children", including in post-conflict settings (NATO PA, 2018).

50. The NATO PA constitutes a platform for the exchange of information and best practices between national parliaments across the Alliance on the inclusion in national legislations of a gender dimension in post-conflict recovery and reconstruction efforts. The Assembly also plays a role in the diffusion of lessons learnt regarding mechanisms to hold national governments accountable for the implementation of commitments related to the fourth pillar of UNSCR 1325.

## **E. THE MULTIFACETED LINK BETWEEN WOMEN AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM**

51. Women have a unique potential to participate in countering and preventing violent extremism, including in fragile, conflict-ridden and post-conflict states. They play a role in countering radicalisation within and beyond their family and community circles. Their emotional support and transmission of beliefs and values to young children is critical to combatting violent extremism and radicalisation. As former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan pointed out when addressing the role of women in conflict situations: “for generations, women have served as peace educators, both in their families and in their societies. They have proved instrumental in building bridges rather than walls”. On the battlefield, women are also involved in direct combat in the fight against violent extremist groups. In Syria and Iraq, for example, women are among the leading forces fighting Daesh.

52. On the other hand, women sometimes actively take part in violent extremism, either indirectly by inciting other individuals to commit acts of violence or by enabling it through fundraising, or directly as combatants. For instance, women have played central and wide-ranging roles in Afghanistan as sympathisers, radicalisation agents, informants, and logistic providers of violent groups (USIP, 2016). Similarly, while it is impossible to quantify the number of women who fought for Daesh, their presence among the terrorist organisation’s fighters increased as the group lost control over territories in Syria and Iraq and started shifting its rhetoric from one of strict gender hierarchy to encouraging the inclusion of women in combat roles (Mironova, 2019). Consequently, the role that women can play in supporting violent extremist groups should not be underestimated, rendering it all the more essential for counterterrorism efforts to integrate gender perspectives and include women as specific target groups.

## **V. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

53. Twenty years ago, in October 2000, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1325 on Women and Peace and Security, in which it recognised that women disproportionately suffer during conflicts, emphasised that durable peace is inextricably linked with gender equality, and reasserted the crucial role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts as well as in post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Since then, additional WPS-related resolutions have been adopted, each reinforcing and widening the principles set out in Resolution 1325 and restating the call for countries to take action.

54. In response, the international community has taken steps to ensure the increased participation of women in the mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts, better protect women in conflict situations, and integrate a gender perspective in post-conflict relief and recovery efforts. Nevertheless, a wide gap remains between the ambitions set out in the resolution and the results achieved thus far. In that sense, the Rapporteur applauds the initiative of Germany and the United Kingdom -launched in April 2019- to invite United Nations member states, entities, and regional organisations to commit publicly to undertaking specific WPS-related actions by October 2020 ahead of the 20th anniversary of the adoption of UNSCR 1325. Such actions included funding pledges, institutional arrangements, and announcements to host, chair, or join existing global initiatives.

55. NATO recognises the principles of WPS as forming an integral part of the Alliance’s common values of individual liberty, democracy, and human rights. NATO, Allies and partner nations identify the inclusion of women and the integration of gender perspectives throughout the Alliance’s three core tasks of collective defence, crisis management and cooperative security as indispensable to ensure sustainable peace and security both at home and beyond our borders. The Alliance has thus taken decisive steps to consistently streamline gender into its policies, programmes and

projects, encouraged increased representation of women at NATO and in national forces, and has adopted reinforced accountability measures to ensure the fair and equal treatment of women and men in the Alliance. A robust institutional framework has been established to support the implementation of the resolution throughout the Alliance's entire structure.

56. The challenge faced today by NATO, member states, the NATO PA and parliaments is to continue to translate existing policies and mechanisms into further concrete actions. First, as mentioned earlier, the participation of women in the peace and security sector is essential to ensuring peace and stability. NATO and Allies should continue to promote the inclusion of women across NATO and national forces and strive for gender balance throughout the Alliance's entire structure, including in leadership positions. Although the 2018 NATO PA survey on WPS showed an increase in the number of women holding prominent parliamentary functions related to peace and security in parliaments of NATO member countries, women remain in minority in such positions in their parliaments and at the NATO PA. A more balanced participation of women and men combined with women's equal access to leadership positions at NATO and the NATO PA, as well as throughout the security sector, should be ensured.

57. Second, as detailed above, substantial efforts have been made in the past decade by the UN and NATO to reinforce their capacity to implement the WPS agenda. In particular, NATO established a WPS Task Force, created the position of Special Representative for WPS, adopted the first ever policy on sexual exploitation and abuse, and integrated gender advisers at different levels of its military command structure. Similarly, in NATO-led operations and missions, commanders benefit from the experience and expertise of gender advisers and an established network of gender focal points. Nevertheless, more emphasis should be placed on monitoring and evaluating the concrete operational impact on all activities of such changes to the institutional framework, so as to ensure that gender perspectives are consistently mainstreamed into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all NATO-related policies and programmes. In this respect, the Rapporteur calls on the group of ten experts appointed by the NATO Secretary General to lead the "NATO 2030" reflection process on strengthening the Alliance's political dimension to fully integrate the need to implement the WPS agenda and, more broadly, to advance gender equality in their recommendations. At the national level, most NATO member states have adopted a National Action Plan on the implementation of UNSCR 1325. However, some have still not developed such a document and should urgently do so, in line with UNSC guidance. Parliamentarians have a pivotal role to play in ensuring that such documents are adopted and implemented and in setting the policy direction for their national governments. Parliamentary oversight, in the form of debates, questions to government officials and the production of reports, is furthermore crucial to guide the implementation of the WPS agenda.

58. Third, effectively incorporating gender perspectives in the functioning of national forces of NATO member states and partner countries requires the active and meaningful involvement of all personnel, both female and male. This, in turn, highlights the need to engage with and mobilise men as invested partners and actors of positive change through outreach and communication. Such efforts should convey the benefits for both men and women of the implementation of the WPS agenda and the mainstreaming of gender perspectives into all activities and operations. Similarly, it is essential to provide all personnel with training dedicated to gender mainstreaming and ensure that the principles underpinning the WPS agenda form an integral part of all trainings and education activities in NATO member states and partner nations.

59. Fourth, member states should provide financial contributions that meet the level of their commitments and permit the implementation of the WPS agenda, both within and outside the Alliance. Internally, additional resources are needed to promote the effective integration of gender into NATO's core tasks, in particular by expanding the network of gender advisers and further reinforcing the monitoring and evaluation of the operational impact of the policies adopted by NATO and individual Allies in this area. Externally, individual member states should, where

possible, provide additional funding for the implementation of the resolution, in particular to support projects and initiatives reinforcing the prevention of and response to sexual violence during and after conflicts and strengthening the inclusion of gender perspectives in post-conflict reconstruction efforts.

60. Fifth, as noted above, the implementation of the WPS agenda and the inclusion of gender perspectives more broadly are often seen as low-ranking priorities by policymakers. Only 39% of respondents in the 2018 NATO PA survey on WPS indicated that their parliament contributed to the implementation of the resolution by adopting WPS-related laws and resolutions. Parliaments of NATO member states should make greater use of their legislative power to support the implementation of the WPS agenda, for instance, by adopting specific legislative acts with precise deadlines, measurable outcomes and necessary budgetary means, and holding governments accountable for their implementation. The implementation of Resolution 1325 – and more broadly the WPS agenda – should not be only at the top of the international community's agenda when the anniversary of its adoption is celebrated, but rather be a constant preoccupation for policymakers in all aspects of their work.

61. Sixth, communicating on and explaining the relevance for and positive impact on both men and women of the efforts undertaken to advance the WPS agenda is crucial to ensure buy-in from all stakeholders. NATO, member states, the NATO PA and individual parliamentarians alike need to play their part in stressing the intrinsic link between, on the one hand, the participation of women in the peace and security sphere, the prevention of violence against women and their protection in conflicts and their role in post-conflict reconstruction processes and, on the other hand, sustainable and durable peace for all, men and women alike.

62. Seventh, civil society organisations have a key role to play in the implementation of the WPS agenda and policymakers can further benefit from their grassroots-level expertise and experience by increasing their engagement with them. At NATO, the creation in 2016 of the Civil Society Advisory Panel (CSAP) on WPS gave representatives of such organisations an opportunity to share their insight with the organisation. NATO should continue to develop the dialogue it initiated with women's organisations, particularly in countries in which operations are deployed, through CSAP to enhance its ability to better protect and involve women. Collaboration between parliamentarians and civil society organisations should also be promoted as it constitutes an opportunity to exchange best practices and knowledge in the WPS area.

63. Eighth, cooperation between international organisations and institutions on the implementation of the WPS agenda represents a unique chance for practitioners to exchange information, experiences, lessons learnt and best practices. Building up on the establishment in 2016 of the Regional Acceleration of Resolution 1325 framework, NATO should continue strengthening its relations with other international organisations, including the UN, the European Union, the OSCE and the African Union. Such fora provide an opportunity for the Alliance to engage, cooperate and coordinate its efforts with other organisations and design joint initiatives and training activities. Similarly, NATO should further promote the sharing of information and exchanging of best practices relevant to the implementation of the WPS resolution between its member states.

64. Finally, all relevant actors should account for the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the effective implementation of the WPS agenda and, more generally, the disproportionate impact this crisis is having on women. As mentioned in 2015 already by the UNSC in its Resolution 2242, the principles of prevention, protection and equal participation of women must form an integral part of the response of all stakeholders to any threat to peace and security, including pandemics. Despite the grave economic losses ensuing from the pandemic, member states and international organisations should therefore refrain from cutting funds allocated to WPS-related projects or diverting them away from such initiatives. In addition, they should ensure that the needs, interests

and concerns of women are consistently integrated into the measures that they adopt in response to the pandemic. Moreover, where these measures have had a negative impact on women, the relevant lessons should be learnt to guarantee that all actors are ready to better respond to any potential future crisis. In this regard, member states and international organisations should strengthen their engagement with civil society organisations focused on WPS and women's rights to benefit from their specific expertise and experience in the COVID-19 context. The Rapporteur emphasises that the ongoing pandemic cannot be used as an excuse to lower our ambitions with regard to the implementation of Resolution 1325. Instead, advancing the WPS agenda should be one of the guiding principles of our short- and long-term response to the COVID-19 crisis and its consequences.

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