

WOMEN AND ARMED CONFLICT – 20 YEARS AFTER BEIJING

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Last week, it got really busy at the United Nations, when the NGO Committee on the Status of Women in Geneva organised a [NGO Forum](#) before the official Beijing+20 review process in Geneva.

During the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, UN Member States adopted the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#) (BPFA) and committed to a decisive agenda for advancing women's rights and empowerment.

WILPF was one of more than 300 NGOs taking part in the NGO Forum. The forum was organised to provide critical input to this important review process. We hosted a panel discussion about the BPFA critical area of concern 'women and armed conflict' to see where we were 20 years ago and where we stand now.

Madeleine Rees, General Secretary of WILPF, Kateryna Levchenko, Director of the European network against human trafficking, [La Strada](#) in Ukraine, Rehana Hashmi, a refugees expert from Pakistan and Mia Gandenberger of WILPF's disarmament programme, [Reaching Critical Will](#), discussed different strategic objectives addressed under critical area 'women and armed conflict'.

They focused on the subjects of women's participation in peace processes, military expenditure and its effects on international peace and security, and the situation of refugee and internally displaced women in conflict regions like the Ukraine and Pakistan.

WE NEED WOMEN AT THE TABLE

Over the past years, more conflicts emerged than ever before. When examining the role of women during and after armed conflict, we see a comprehensive set of laws enacted, but a huge lack of effective implementation thereof. As Madeleine Rees highlighted, out of 40 peace agreements, only one bears the signature of a woman.

[Security Council Resolution 1325](#) reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction. It also stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.

Madeleine Rees stressed that the UN itself needs to set an example and take gender perspectives into account in their work at all levels and in all programmes. The only way to achieve sustainable peace is to include women in political decisions and peace negotiations.

WORRYING INCREASE IN MILITARY SPENDING

This year's total figure of military spending, [1.747 trillion USD](#), as SIPRI Military Expenditure Database indicates, shows an approximate increase of 40%, instead of a decrease, as demanded in the 1995 BPFA document.

Military expenditure has grown globally by roughly 2% each year, often due to arising conflicts, which causes States to increase the budget for national security, rather than increasing human security to achieve sustainable peace.

We suggest a minimum reduction of 2% per annum to redress this trend. Mia Gandenberger stressed that we need a progressive realisation of social and economic rights with budgetary allocations taking into account a gender perspective and away from military development.

INTERNALLY DISPLACED WOMEN

As a result of conflicts, internally displaced persons (IDPs) find themselves in difficult circumstances. This is especially true for women who are already vulnerable to all forms of violence i.e. domestic, social, physical, mental and in particular sexual violence and exploitation, torture, rape, forced pregnancy, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, and trafficking.

Women are often considered “invisible” and are therefore left behind in conflict zones, not being able to seek help or assistance, as they lack the most basic identity documents.

Displaced women face physical, psychological, health, and hygiene problems. In that context, Rehana Hashmi reminded participants that the fundamental rights of IDPs include long term safety and security assurance, the right to dignity, basic human rights, economic, social and cultural rights and rights related to civil and political protection.

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE?

20 years ago, a concrete action plan for the inclusion of women in political decisions as well as in peace negotiations was worked out in Beijing. Today, we actually have International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law in place to ensure women’s participation. WILPF encourages the international community to fully implement and respect these rights.

In fact, sustainable and lasting peace is only possible once women’s rights are realised. Military resources have to be redirected to in order to be able to achieve the overall goal of reducing the world’s military expenditure.

For nearly 100 years we have been working to end and prevent war, ensuring that women are represented at all levels in a peace-building process. In 2015, we will bring together women peacemakers from all over the world in The Hague, with the aim to build on the movement [Women’s Power to Stop War](#) and continue the work to achieve long-term peace.

Come [join us](#) in The Hague and participate in the debate!

<http://www.wilpfinternational.org/women-and-armed-conflict-20-years-after-beijing/>