



CHARTING OUR PATHWAYS: WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP FOR LASTING, INCLUSIVE AND GROUNDED PEACE AND SECURITY IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

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Women struggling for justice and human rights in the conflict-affected communities of Asia and the Pacific have come together to enhance their leadership and contribution towards lasting, inclusive and grounded peace and security in the region. Through the Asia Pacific Women's Alliance on Peace and Security (APWAPS), which was declared in June 2014 during the Asia Pacific Feminist Forum, women from diverse backgrounds have set up a common platform to speak to all the relevant actors and stakeholders of peace and security, including States, the United Nations, development aid agencies, and civil society organizations, on their distinct experiences and viewpoints, while building a movement with and among local women organizing for conflict transformation from the grassroots up.

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OUR DISTINCT CONTEXT

Our point of departure is the reality that violent and armed conflicts have been an integral part of everyday life in nearly all corners of Asia and the Pacific. Conflicts in this region are considered the longest running in the world and mostly occur within rather than across borders, often in the peripheries of nations.

According to a review of international datasets on conflicts around the world, this region, particularly in Asia, has among the longest running conflicts in the world, lasting an average of 45 years.² They often take the form of old, unresolved conflicts re-emerging again and again over an extended period of time. The impacts of these conflicts are felt in all aspects of life and, because of their long duration, affect multiple generations of women and men, girls and boys.

¹ This document is written as an outcome of exchanges among women activists during and following two APWAPS consultations in February and September 2014, in Bangkok.

² See Thomas Parks, Nat Colletta, Ben Oppenheim, "The Contested Corners of Asia: Subnational Conflict and International Development Assistance," The Asia Foundation, 2013.

Many, if not most, of the conflicts in this region occur within national borders rather than between states. According to the UN Peace Agreement Database, there have been 175 peace agreements signed in the Asia Pacific region since 1947,³ and almost 80% (138) fall under the category of 'intra-state' rather than 'inter-state' agreements. These conflicts have been described by the Asia Foundation as 'subnational conflicts' and are found to be as intricately linked with development processes both in their emergence and resolution.

APWAPS endorses the conclusion made by the Asia Foundation study that conflicts in this region are highly asymmetrical in terms of the balance of power between government forces on the one side and minority groups on the other; and, that such conflicts occur only rarely in relation to weak states, mostly emerging in the context of strong states and ambitious development agendas.

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The violence associated with subnational conflicts is often concentrated in communities far away from national centers, in the peripheries of nations, away from public attention and scrutiny, either at the national or international levels. They are low intensity in nature, with sporadic periods of high intensity, making it difficult for outsiders without access to the conflict-affected communities to gauge the degree of risk and insecurity faced by local women and men. In many cases, the violence is expressed along identity lines and takes the form of inter-religious, inter-ethnic and tribal conflicts. Subnational conflicts reportedly affect half of the countries in South and Southeast Asia in the past decade.⁴ Unfortunately, too often, the very existence of these subnational conflicts is officially denied.

Based on this reality, APWAPS embraces the scope of conflicts recognized by the CEDAW Committee through its General Recommendation No. 30 (2013), which includes:

... international and non-international armed conflicts, situations of foreign occupation, as well as other forms of occupation and the post-

³ UN Peacemaker, Peace Agreements Database Search, at http://peacemaker.un.org/document-search?keys=&field_padate_value%5Bvalue%5D%5Bdate%5D=&field_pacountry_tid=&field_paregion_tid%5B%5D=16

⁴ UN Peacemaker, Peace Agreements Database Search, at http://peacemaker.un.org/document-search?keys=&field_padate_value%5Bvalue%5D%5Bdate%5D=&field_pacountry_tid=&field_paregion_tid%5B%5D=16

conflict phase [and] other situations of concern, such as internal disturbances, protracted and low-intensity civil strife, political strife, ethnic and communal violence, states of emergency and suppression of mass uprisings, war against terrorism and organized crime, that may not necessarily be classified as armed conflict under international humanitarian law and which result in serious violations of women's rights (Paragraph 4).

The region's long-standing, subnational conflicts in the peripheries of countries require a strong and far-reaching web of peacebuilders who are located deep in the conflict-affected communities and actively connected to strategically placed peacebuilders at the national, regional and international levels. As stakeholders in communities and nations, and as actors in movements for social transformation, women have played critical roles in building and sustaining peace and security. Unfortunately, however, only 25 out of 175 peace agreements signed in the Asia-Pacific region have been known to address women's and gender issues, according to documentation by the UN Peacemaker.

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OUR COMMON CONCERNS

Through APWAPS, women's rights activists from the conflict-affected communities of Asia and the Pacific have come together to share their concerns in building lasting, inclusive and grounded peace and security. We have identified five key areas of common concern.

1. Accountability and combating impunity

Despite truth commissions, human rights trials and ratifications of the Rome Statute on the International Criminal Court by States in the region, impunity on gender-based crimes against humanity persists. Where truth and justice mechanisms were established, rape and other forms of gender-based crimes have often been excluded.

Where such crimes have been addressed, follow up on reparations for women have been ineffective or non-existent. We have heard from victims who participated in these mechanisms and expressed their disappointments, having thought they were finally found and recognized by their governments, only to be forgotten again at the end of the high-profile proceedings. APWAPS underscores the leadership role played by civil society in promoting implementation, in our national contexts, of the UN Updated Set of Principles to Combat Impunity, upholding the rights to truth, justice, reparations and the guarantee of non-recurrence.

APWAPS emphasizes standards set by the CEDAW Committee regarding the human rights obligation of States in conflict and post-conflict situations, which applies when States exercise territorial or extraterritorial jurisdiction, whether individually in unilateral military action, or as members of international or intergovernmental organizations and coalitions as part of an international peacekeeping force. It also applies to bilateral or multilateral donor assistance for conflict prevention and humanitarian aid, mitigation or post-conflict reconstruction; in involvement as third parties in peace or negotiation processes; and in the formation of trade agreements with conflict-affected countries. Further, States are required to regulate the activities of domestic non-State actors, within their effective control, including acts of national corporations operating extraterritorially, such as cases in which national corporations extend loans to projects in conflict-affected areas that lead to forced evictions and which call for the establishment of accountability and oversight mechanisms for private security and other contractors operating in conflict zones.

2. Militarization, small arms and the continuum of violence in everyday life

Military presence remains prevalent in many aspects of community life even long after open conflicts have ended. On-going and widespread availability of and trade in small arms have resulted in continuing insecurity for women, in the community and in their own homes. As violence is normalized in everyday life, a culture of violence builds up among young boys and into the next generation, perpetuating a climate of fear. Soldiers entrench themselves in the name of peacekeeping, taking control over local resources (e.g., land, forest, minerals) in collaboration with corporate interest and raising the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse for women in the community.

APWAPS brings to attention the strategic objective identified 20 years ago in the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) to reduce excessive military expenditure and control the availability of armaments, as part of the critical area of concern on 'Women and Armed Conflict'. The BPfA also identifies, as a strategic objective, promoting women's contribution to fostering a culture of peace. This year's global commitment by States to accelerate implementation of the BPfA beyond 2015 – supported by effective accountability mechanisms – should cover the achievement of this area of concern directly relevant to these specific strategic objectives.

APWAPS further calls for the universal ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty adopted by the UN in 2013 which promotes the establishment of national control systems in order to prevent the use of arms in the commission of genocide, crimes against humanity, and other forms of attacks against civilians, including serious acts of gender-based violence and violence against women.

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3. Structural inequalities and their links to development policies and practices

Inequality is multi-faceted and deep-rooted in the region, including between the rich and poor, women and men, majority and minority communities. Inequalities within states are exacerbated by inequality between states, including and particularly between those in Asia and the Pacific. Decades of national development programs and international development aid have not been able to overcome these structural inequalities. In fact, inequality has increased worldwide and remains a persistent source of conflicts. Where multiple forms of inequality co-exist, such as in under-developed and conflict-ridden tribal communities dominated by large-scale extractive industries, patriarchy finds its worst forms in a deadly combination of arms, alcohol and abuse. Twenty years ago, the BPfA rightly underscored the inextricable link between equality, peace and development (see paragraph 131).

APWAPS is concerned that the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) be gender responsive in a comprehensive way and in line with human rights standards and norms. In particular, the stand-alone gender equality goal (Goal 5) should inform the implementation of all other goals, including the goal on peaceful and inclusive

societies (Goal 16). APWAPS supports the call made by civil society organizations in the region for a new, transformative agenda of ‘development justice’, which requires five foundational shifts in the post-2015 global development model: social justice (including gender justice), redistributive justice, economic justice, environmental justice and accountability to people.

4. Rising cultural and religious fundamentalisms

While the roots of conflicts lie in political and economic realities, their modes of expression are often played out along ethnic, racial and religious lines. When such identities are utilized as tools for political mobilization and violent attacks, women are the first victims as their image and bodies are treated as symbols of whole communities defending themselves against ‘the other’. This, in turn, generates fertile ground for the rise of cultural and religious fundamentalisms, even after open conflicts have ended. Post-conflict political settlements have often not only excluded women but also pushed them further out of public life and back into traditionalist roles, using culture and religion as sources of legitimacy for blatant acts of exclusion and discrimination.

APWAPS underscores the CEDAW Committee’s call for States to “reject all forms of rollbacks in women’s rights protection in order to appease non-State actors such as terrorists, private individuals or armed groups” (paragraph 17a, General Recommendation 30). Fulfillment of state obligation to modify social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women in order to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW Article 5) requires women’s active participation, including the equal right to participate in cultural life. According to the UN Special Rapporteur on cultural rights, in her 2012 report, equal cultural rights for women means:

... the freedom to create new communities of shared cultural values around any markers of identity they want to privilege, new cultural meanings and practices without fear of punitive actions, including any form of violence. This means that

women must be able to embrace or reject particular cultural practices and identities as well as to revise and (re)negotiate existing traditions, values or practices, regardless of their provenance. (Paragraph 28)

5. Women's full and meaningful participation in building peace and security

The under-representation of women in peace processes is well established. But women's role in building peace and security goes beyond (and mostly lies outside of) formal negotiating tables, and continues long after the peace agreements have been signed and sealed. Women's primary modality of engagement is through activism in social movements for transformative change. Formal peace has benefitted some but not others and contributed to new inequalities, including among ex-combatants, rich and poor, male and female. Women who are ex-combatants face discrimination in the community at large and in DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration) programs, and they are disconnected from the women's movement.

APWAPS sees as imperative a reframing of our understanding of peace and security based on realities experienced on the ground, particularly by women in all their diversities. For this, new knowledge needs to be created, built and shared through participatory, empowering and women-centered processes.

With regards to UN Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security, APWAPS highlights the position taken by the CEDAW Committee that implementation be premised on a model of substantive equality and cover all rights enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

OUR COLLECTIVE MESSAGE

As an alliance, we have the following messages to convey:

No lasting peace without justice as an integral part of social transformation. End impunity for all forms of gender-based crimes against humanity and violence against women.

Ensure women's full and meaningful participation in building lasting, inclusive and grounded peace and security. Nothing about us without us.

Protect women human rights defenders, in all their diversity, working in conflict and post-conflict situations. They face violence, criminalization, intimidation and stigmatization.

Financing peace means reducing excessive military expenditure. Increase effective funding for women working for lasting, inclusive and grounded peace and security.

Implement in a coherent and integral way in conflict and post-conflict situations: the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, the Beijing Platform for Action, CEDAW and other international human rights law, along with gender-responsive post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals.

OUR GROWING LEADERSHIP

Our capacity to build peace is growing based on these sources of strength:

- Our grounded and unending work with communities and community-based processes
- Our values of peace, justice and human dignity
- Our feminist politics and ethics
- Our ever-growing networks of solidarity
- Our rootedness in democratic institutions and democratization processes
- Our capacity to effectively access and use relevant mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels

We face serious challenges from many sides: patriarchy; fundamentalisms and extremisms; discrimination in law and in practice; the culture of violence and cultural violence; undemocratic politics and dysfunctional states; a resource deficit for women's activism; fragmentation in social movements. In addressing these challenges, we are committed to strengthening our movement by building bridges among a diversity of women in conflict-affected communities, including with female ex-combatants, and by conducting inter-generational exchanges among women's rights activists and peacebuilders.

OUR PATHWAYS AS A MOVEMENT



Knowledge building from our own lived realities

We are creating a space for the development of innovative and empowering methodologies to build our knowledge about conflict, peace and security and what it means for women to transform conflicts and build peace based on our own experiences on the ground. We are developing a peer-to-peer knowledge building initiative among women in conflict and post-conflict situations. We consider this a political act that would lead to change the terms of our engagement as women on these issues.

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Capacity sharing across diverse contexts

Our alliance is comprised of a diversity of women who are located in different contexts. We consider this diversity a collective asset and are developing ways and means to share our experiences, analysis and expertise. We are conducting a survey to capture and understand our diversity and commonalities, and have taken part in training on the CEDAW Committee's General Recommendation 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations.



Our voices together in strategic spaces

We are keenly aware that the global community is at an historic moment of reflection and consensus building. The 20-year review of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the 15-year review of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, and the negotiations on the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals all converge within the first year of APWAPS' establishment. This is not a coincidence. We are actively engaging in all the strategic forums influencing the above review and negotiation processes to ensure that the views and contributions of women in Asia and the Pacific are meaningfully integrated in the global roadmap to the future.



ASIA-PACIFIC WOMEN'S ALLIANCE FOR PEACE AND SECURITY

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