
Security Council Open Debate

Protecting Participation: Addressing violence targeting women in peace and security processes

New York, 18 January 2022

Joint Statement by the Human Rights / Conflict Prevention Caucus New York

Madam President,

I am delivering these remarks on behalf of the Human rights/Conflict Prevention Caucus New York, co-chaired by Germany and Switzerland, and its members Albania, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Gabon, Guatemala, Japan, Mauritius, Mexico, the Republic of Korea, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sweden, the United Kingdom and Uruguay.

We thank Norway for organizing this important debate and the briefers for their contributions. We commend Norway – together with Albania, Niger and the United Arab Emirates – for their shared commitments on Women, Peace and Security, including a zero-tolerance approach to reprisals against briefers.

The Caucus recognizes the essential and meaningful contribution of women human rights defenders, women peacebuilders and gender equality advocates to defend and advance peace and human rights across the globe. They provide the UN system in general, and the Human Rights and Security Councils in particular, with crucial insights for informed decision-making. Reprisals against them undermine the Security Council's work and the principles of the UN Charter. We strongly condemn all threats, intimidations, violence and reprisals against any representatives of civil society, including while engaging with the UN. It is of utmost importance to create a safe and enabling environment – online and offline – for women to lead and contribute in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, without fear of any kind of intimidation or violence.

We propose the following areas of action in order to close the protection gap:

First we urge all Member States to prevent and ensure adequate protection against any acts of intimidation and reprisals, and to strengthen their response if they occur.

We must engage in preventive measures and awareness raising as well as ensuring accountability through robust investigations. We call for the full implementation of all Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security, as well as all resolutions on human rights defenders and resolutions addressing intimidation and reprisals against those who cooperate with the UN. We encourage the presentation by the Secretary-General of his annual report on reprisals to the General Assembly from its 77th Session onward.

Second, the wider UN system has a duty to prevent and respond to alleged cases of intimidation and reprisals against those who provide information or seek to engage with it, and to ensure accountability when these acts occur. Coordination and collaboration between different bodies and mechanisms are crucial. The UN, including OHCHR and treaty bodies, should hold regular and systematic exchanges with civil society on identifying specific protection needs. We encourage the Peacebuilding Commission to make use of its advisory, bridging and convening roles in order to strengthen system-wide responses and preventive measures to this effect. We further commend the Secretary-General's focus on putting human rights and gender equality at the core of the UN's work, as most recently expressed in "Our Common Agenda".

Third, the Caucus calls upon the Security Council to publicly condemn intimidation, threats and reprisals against those who engage with it, in particular women. Civil society must be able to carry out its work independently and without interference. A resolute position of the Council on the need to create safe and enabling environments will send an important message: Reprisals are unacceptable and cannot be tolerated. Such a clear stance will also help prevent the growing self-censorship by actors who decide not to engage with the UN out of fear.

Fourth, the Caucus welcomes the work of the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights as the focal point for reprisals within the UN system and will support her in this endeavor. The work of the focal point is underfunded and we request all Member States to support it.

As a cross-regional group of Member States, the Caucus stands ready to work with all member states, civil society, and the entire UN system to protect the invaluable contribution of women to peace and security processes and to prevent them from becoming targets of all forms of violence and intimidation.

Madam President,

"Those who defend our rights in turn need our defense". These are the words of Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka on the Women Human Rights Defenders Day some years ago. In this regard, allow me to add, in my national capacity, that Switzerland works for greater inclusion and protection of women and civil society in all our peacebuilding efforts and human rights policy. As this year's co-chair of the WPS Focal Points

Network, we will stand for women's full, equal and meaningful participation in peace and security processes.

I thank you.