



## Call for Abstracts

### ***Women's involvement in peace, security and transition processes in the Arab world***

Conference, Beirut, 16 -18 Nov 2017

Six years after women and men across the Arab world took to the streets during the Arab spring uprisings to call for political reforms, justice and political participation, hopes for a better future are largely destroyed. Instead of democratic change taking root, increasing violence, instability and a rise in authoritarianism are affecting the majority of the countries in the Arab world. Syria is witnessing the sixth year of a brutal conflict to which no end is in sight. Libya, Yemen and Iraq are in the midst of multileveled conflicts leading to militarization and fragmentation of their societies. Other countries in the region are experiencing new levels of authoritarianism which narrow spaces for participation dramatically.

These narrowing spaces are particularly felt by women. Six years after hopes were high for more equal participation of women in the public sphere, the status of women in the Arab world is more at risk than ever. In the context of conflict and crisis, violence against women and girls is heightened and women's participation in decision making processes remains strikingly low. Their concerns are continuously being sidelined.

This is especially true for formal peace and security processes from which women are largely excluded or in which women play marginal roles at best. In peace talks across the region, women constitute the missing force and are thus being denied the right to take part in decisions that will shape the future of their societies.

Since the adoption of UNSCR 1325 which calls for the active participation of women in achieving peace and security, there has been very little increase in women's participation in peace talks. Women continue being sidelined during official peace negotiations. The Iraq and Yemen agreements in 2010 and 2011 did not include any women in mediation, signatures or witnessing. In both cases, the peace agreements were shaky and only led to an increase in political instability, exclusion and marginalization.

This exclusion persists despite a growing body of research suggesting that women's involvement in peace, security and transition processes is more likely to address issues of justice, reconciliation and accountability and therefore making peace deals more sustainable.

Women's exclusion from peace talks does not pay justice to the often constructive role women assume in their local communities in order to address and mitigate the effects of conflict; neither does it take into account the social transformations that conflict and uprisings may initiate in many countries when women start claiming a more active role in the public sphere.

To encourage research on women, peace and security and enhance women's involvement in these processes, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and Musawa/Women's Study Center are inviting academics, especially from the field of political science, sociology and anthropology, political activists as well as practitioners from the field of civil society/ women's rights movements to participate in a conference in Beirut from 16 to 18 Nov 2017.

Interested participants are invited to submit abstracts on the following questions:

- What effect has conflict had on women's political participation in the region?
- What effect does women's participation in political negotiation processes have on the gender norms of the region? How does it furthermore safeguard the inclusion of women's rights and active political participation in the future?
- How does women's political and social engagement in conflict influence social norms in the region?
- What are the options for women to engage in formal and informal peace building processes? What are the strategies used in order to achieve tangible results?
- To what extent does a heightened representation of women in political decision-making positions lead to more sustainable peace and the strengthening of a non-violent culture?
- How can civil society contribute to strengthening women's involvement in peace and security processes?

The above-mentioned questions will be presented in the following three panels:

#### Uprisings and Conflicts in the Arab World as a catalyst for social transformation?

This panel focuses on the gender dimension of conflicts and popular uprisings, especially on how conflict changes gender roles. While the discussion on gender and conflict mostly concentrates on the role of women as victims, it fails to take into account critical roles women play in conflict and post-conflict at the local level, such as combatants, heads of household, community leaders and peace-builders. In times of conflict, women often push back the boundaries, enter the public sphere and thus challenge restrictive norms and traditions. While examining the new spaces that conflicts open for women, the panel asks whether conflict has the potential to empower women through effecting social transformations. Furthermore, it asks about the societal obstacles for a deep-rooted social transformation.

### Women in peace processes

Although women's roles in society are often greatly enhanced during conflict and uprisings at a local level, compared to men, relatively few women become involved in formal peace processes, from negotiations that begin in the midst of the conflict through all the phases of the transition to peace. This is a particularly big draw-back for women "because it is precisely at the peace accords where the foundations for a future society are often set, where important gender issues should be addressed and where a gender perspective on peace should be incorporated." This panel examines possible explanations for this absence and explores counter strategies. Through case studies from countries that underwent conflicts and popular uprisings, the panel examines post-conflict phases and asks whether there is a return to the (patriarchal) pre-conflict status quo? It furthermore sheds light on the strategies used by women in order to achieve greater representation in political decision making processes and inclusion in peace and security processes. Related to that it poses the question to what extent women in decision-making positions defend women rights and establish processes that lead to a greater representation of women in the political sphere. It also critically assesses the international community's role in advocating for equal participation of women and men and asks whether external pressure to open political spaces for women has proven effective in supporting women's aspirations for greater participation.

### Conflict as an opportunity to change existing power structure. How can civil society contribute?

While it is commonly acknowledged that women can play significant roles in conflict management, reconciliation and reconstruction, due to their limited access to formal politics and access to peace talks, women tend to engage in informal peace processes. This panel aims to critically assess perceptions on women's engagement in informal peace processes as an opportunity for more visibility or an extension of her "natural" role in society? Does capitalizing on women's strength in informal peace processes become tantamount to perpetuating traditional gender stereotypes in the sense that women are only active in informal processes and men in formal processes? What are the strategies used by women civil society organizations for broadening the spaces for women's participation? How can links between women's organizations and actors in formal peace processes be strengthened?

### **Application procedures and additional information**

Deadline for submission of abstracts to ***wps.conference.beirut@gmail.com***, which should be 300-500 words (in English or Arabic), will be 15 July 2017. FES and Musawa will select participants by the end of July, for whom all travel and accommodation expenses are covered.

Selected participants will be asked to present their papers/ contributions at the conference, and actively participate in the discussions. FES and Musawa are planning to publish the most relevant contributions of the conference in subsequent months.

For any further questions, please don't hesitate to contact ***wps.conference.beirut@gmail.com***.