



Statement to the 39th session of the UN Human Rights Council

“You are missing the full picture”: the international community’s role in strengthening Libyan women’s meaningful participation in decision-making and peace processes

The start of this year marked the launch of the United Nations (UN) Action Plan for Libya, which has helped revive the peace process, re-establish UNSMIL in Tripoli and hold long-awaited elections in Zawiya.¹ The consultative phase of the Libyan National Conference Process, which is part of this Action Plan, ended in July 2018. The outreach of this consultative phase was one of a kind, with more than 75 meetings, over 2000 online submissions, more than half a million comments on social media, and, most importantly, over 7000 Libyans participating in it. Regrettably, however, only a quarter of them were women.² This low level of women’s participation is the consequence of a process that did not prioritise women’s meaningful participation. It is also likely to result in the overlook of the realities and interests of women in the community.

Participants in this consultative phase made recommendations that tackled key issues for Libya today: defence and security, institution building and governance.³ The drafting of the final report of this process is still under way; however, it is already possible to conclude, based on what has been reported so far, that no emphasis was put on the role of women in peacebuilding, nor did this process address their specific struggles. While a deeper assessment of how gender-sensitive the consultation process was will be possible only once

1 Remarks by Ghassan Salamé: <https://unsmil.unmissions.org/remarks-srsg-ghassan-salamé-united-nations-security-council-situation-libya-16-july-2018>

2 *Ibid.*

3 Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue:
<https://www.hdcentre.org/updates/consultations-for-the-libyan-national-conference-come-to-an-end/>



the final report is made public, the lack of outreach efforts to be gender inclusive is obvious from the limited participation of women.

This is yet another example of the limited efforts being made to include women in community peacebuilding efforts in Libya that have been reported by national⁴ and international organisations.⁵ Many Libyan women's rights activists criticize the lack of formal recognition and real political will from the international community to support Libyan women's meaningful participation in formal political and peace processes.⁶ Women are often not given platforms or opportunities to utilize their capacities and expertise to build the future of their country. Many of the meetings mediated and facilitated by the UN or by Member States have not included women; a stark example was the Paris Summit on Libya held last May at which no women were in attendance. This sends an explicit message to Libyan decision-makers that women's participation in decision making and the peace process is not necessary.

Furthermore, the international community when designing the political processes in Libya has put the emphasis on a regional/tribal quota system, whereby political representation and participation are based on tribal, geographical or ethnic affiliation. In the absence of a gender quota, this system negatively affects women, as male regional and tribal leaders do not nominate women to take part in these processes.⁷

The reality is that women in Libya have been working for so long on initiatives to promote and support peace and security, with no formal recognition or political support by national and international actors alike. Women activists are able to mobilize, reach out to local communities and play a very active role to address the constraints imposed by the security situation. Briefing the Security Council on 21 May 2018, Ghassan Salamé, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Libya (the Special Representative), shared his continued assessment that "parties are unwilling to make the necessary concessions" in

4 WILPF, *Feminism at the Frontline: Addressing Women's Multidimensional Insecurity in Yemen and Libya*: <https://wilpf.org/report-release-feminism-at-the-frontline-addressing-womens-multidimensional-insecurity-in-yemen-and-libya/>

5 <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/03AWomenPeaceNeg.pdf>

6 TWBI's conclusion based on their experience.

7 WILPF, *Feminism at the Frontline*, *op. cit.*



order to agree on Amendments to the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA).⁸ Yet, in sharing this assessment he failed to criticize the parties' exclusion of women.

At the same time, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Libya, especially women, continue to face human rights violations and abuses, including arbitrary detention and forced labour, reportedly inflicted by armed groups, smugglers, traffickers and criminal gangs.⁹ Women and girls are gravely and disproportionately impacted, including by gender-based violence. Yet, there are significant limitations with the data collection relating to gender-based violence in Libya. Survivors face stigma and risks to their safety in reporting, and those who are prepared to take those risks are not offered meaningful services.¹⁰ Women also experience restrictions in their freedom of movement under the excuse of the security situation, restrictions which, in turn, limit their access to education and economic opportunities.¹¹

In the context of the 'war on ISIS', the international community's focus on militarised strategies to defeat ISIS has formed a serious threat to the continuation of the arms embargo on Libya. This threat has resulted in calls from the Special Representative for UN Member States to prevent the sale or supply of arms and related materials to Libya.¹² Women activists strongly support these calls, pointing out that any breaches to the arms embargo will do little to create security and that instead, it risks escalating the existing crises in the country. The risk of increased militarisation is exacerbated by the emerging online markets that are already facilitating the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons among various non-state armed groups.¹³ Moreover, the efforts for stabilisation and security must be combined with serious and immediate plans for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR).¹⁴

8 Remarks by Ghassan Salamé: <https://unsmil.unmissions.org/remarks-srsg-ghassan-salamé-united-nations-security-council-situation-libya-16-july-2018>

9 See, for example, EuroMedWomen, The Situation of Women in Libya: <https://www.euromedwomen.foundation/pg/en/documents/view/7126/the-situation-of-women-in-libya>

10 Human Rights Watch: <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/09/19/libya-transitional-government-should-support-victims>

11 WILPF, *Feminism at the Frontline*, *op. cit.*

12 <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180118-un-calls-for-libya-arms-embargo-to-continue/>

13 Dispatch No. 6, Small Arms Survey, April 2016: <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/R-SANA/SANA-Dispatch6-Online-trade.pdf>

14 Brookings Institute: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/04/20/all-politics-is-local-in-libya-that-could-be-an-opportunity/>



RECOMMENDATIONS

We urge the Human Rights Council Members and observer States to:

Create an inclusive grassroots foundation for peace, including by:

- Ensuring equal inclusion of women in the consultative process and all subsequent stages of peacebuilding efforts.
- Ensuring the implementation of the calls in UN Security Council resolution 2323 (2016) for a “full, equal and effective participation of women in all activities related to the democratic transition, conflict resolution and peacebuilding.”
- Consulting women civil society activists in Libya and in the Libyan diaspora on all matters related to peace and security, in order to send a clear message to Libyan decision-makers that women have an important role to play in formal peace processes.
- Mainstreaming gender in all layers of conflict resolution efforts, in consultation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, as well as in humanitarian response and recovery.

Strengthen women’s role and presence in the political sphere, including by:

- Urging the Libyan government and international actors to reaffirm their commitment to ensure full inclusion of women in the peace process under the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA).
- Supporting women’s rights activists in Libya in their demands for stakeholders to implement a gender quota in every political process to attain greater women’s representation in the Libyan government and to ensure that more women are considered for leadership positions on both local and national and international levels.
- Working with Libyan authorities to build up the capacity of public institutions in gender-sensitive programming and inclusion of women in decision-making.



Protect civilians, migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, including by:

- Laying the foundation for an effective and coordinated gender-sensitive strategic approach for Security Sector Reform and Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration to support long-term stabilization.
- Stopping directing financial aid, vitally needed for humanitarian actions, to military and operations intended to 'end terror' and that only leads to an increased militarized environment.
- Continuing the UN embargo on all weapons sales to Libya and investigating illicit arms online markets.
- Addressing the human rights crisis faced by migrants, asylum seekers and refugees by addressing and preventing human rights violations and abuses they face, including gender-based violence, restrictions on women's freedom of movement and access to economic and educational opportunities.