

Sustaining Peace, Not Sustaining Patriarchy

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A Network of People
Building Peace

Next year the global women's and feminist movement will commemorate Beijing+25 – the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) by 189 UN Member States.

The Beijing Platform for Action includes women and armed as conflict as one of 12 critical areas of concern. It reaffirmed the historical role of women peacebuilders and women as powerful drivers of peace movements, and unequivocally stated that peace is inextricably linked to equality between men and women, and to development. The BPfA listed essential measures to advance peace and equality, including reductions in military spending and controls on the availability of armaments. It affirmed women needed "to be at the table" to participate in decision-making around conflict resolution and stressed that those who have fled conflict are entitled to fully participate in all aspects of programmes to help them recover and rebuild their lives. The Beijing Platform for Action also specifically addresses the struggle of women living in colonies and non-self-governing territories by calling on member states and civil society to support and promote the implementation of the right of self-determination of all peoples by providing special programmes in leadership and in training for decision-making.

No more commitments

This month the people of Bougainville will vote in a referendum on independence under the terms of the Bougainville Peace Agreement.

"Women have been sustaining the peace", says Agnes Titus from the Nissan Islands of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea. She and other women walked into the jungles and brokered peace with armed combatants, bringing an end to a 10-year armed conflict. For more than 30 years, Agnes, and women leaders like her—mothers of the Bougainville Women's Movement and leaders of the Women's Human Rights Defenders Network in whose name peace was brokered, weapons collected and political agreements adopted— have been sustaining peace, providing recommendations for a sustainable approach to development, and a shift from 'from gender based violence to gender justice.'

"A referendum about the political future is the ultimate realisation of our human rights to choose our political status", says Titus who is a gender expert with the GPPAC Pacific network. That network has established the Shifting the Power Coalition—forged

by diverse Pacific women and women's organisations from Fiji, Papua New Guinea including Bougainville, Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu, Australia, and the Pacific Disability Forum—which is demonstrating the power and potential of our collective leadership to achieve peaceful and gender-equal societies.

The coalition reflects recommendations that birthed the Pacific Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security – which reaffirmed that the protection of women's rights is central to all humanitarian efforts, must be integrated into early warning, response, recovery and resilience building, and that women's rights organisations must drive community-based responses. The high level adoption of the regional plan by Pacific Forum Leaders in 2011, was a major achievement for Pacific women peacebuilders.

The network has also been instrumental in ensuring our leaders understand and respond to climate change as a security issue, and the need for our governments and the United Nations to bring about a gender inclusive shift from reaction to prevention when meeting this challenge.

Fiji's recent statement at the recent UN Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) highlighted the region's recognition of climate change as the single greatest threat faced by our people and countries. Loss of land, even whole islands, increased hunger, more frequent droughts and persistent damage to infrastructure have an intense potential to fuel instability and conflict. The WPS framework will, increasingly need to be a climate crisis-informed one.

But while we welcome the recognition of the climate change crisis within recent UN security council and Pacific Forum meetings, we must ensure that this is about enhancing and ensuring the security of our most affected communities. It requires alignment of

the Pacific Resilience Framework and the 2018 Boe Declaration to enhancing the peace, development, humanitarian and human security nexus from an inclusive conflict-prevention approach that considers the root causes of violence and conflict.

It requires a new multi-actor consultative framework for regional peace and security that supports community representatives who can localise and operationalise women, youth and civil society peacebuilding, prevention and participation frameworks. We do not just need to be consulted, but supported to enhance our infrastructures for peace and security at local and national level.

Global Challenges

The UN Secretary General's 2019 report on Women, Peace and Security is a clear reminder that since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) in 1995 and the adoption of 10 security council resolutions dedicated to the women, peace and security agenda, there are record levels of political violence targeting women were demonstrated in new data published in May 2019.

There must be sustained resourcing for inclusive and innovative peacebuilding practice and leadership

Over 50 parties to conflict are credibly suspected of having committed or instigated patterns of rape and other forms of sexual violence in situations on the agenda of the Security Council and at least 1 in 5 refugee or displaced women experience sexual violence and 9 out of the 10 countries with the highest rates of child marriage are in fragile contexts. In 2019 alone, nearly 132 million people need humanitarian aid and protection, including an estimated 35 million women, young women and girls who require lifesaving sexual and reproductive health services, and interventions to prevent gender-based violence and respond to the needs of survivors. Findings by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders show that the rise of misogynistic, sexist and homophobic speech by political leaders in recent years has contributed to increased violence against women, against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex individuals, and against women human rights defenders. The Pacific is not immune to these issues.

Time to redesign the table

Serious consideration must be given to shifting the power to national and local women's rights actors, to strengthen agency, amplify voice, build on collaborative opportunities including women-led coalitions and feminist practices. We must support local innovation.

Committing to these two principles will enable a shift from funding of crisis-reaction financing to gender-responsive peacebuilding and preventative action. This will also enable women's leadership across the peace cycle, from the immediate response and assessment through to recovery measures.

Participation requires greater accountability to human rights treaty commitments including the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) when national action plans are being developed. It also means financing and applying special measures to operationalise the WPS and human rights agenda

It must pave the way for better protection for women's peace activists and prevention of all forms of violence. There must be sustained resourcing for inclusive and innovative peacebuilding practice and leadership, including the wider civil society and social movements including traditional systems and faith communities.

Instead of military spending and militarised solutions, there must be resources so young women can design peaceful and secure futures alongside other generations. 2020 is an opportunity to strengthen the way we plan and respond to peace and security issues, by ensuring women can lead, and so ensure the needs of our most vulnerable communities are being met.