

Statement delivered at the High-Level Meeting on Feminist Financing by Olha Zaiarna, Regional Coordinator for the Eastern European Network of GPPAC

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Excellencies, ladies, and gentlemen,

My name is Olha Zaiarna. I am the Regional Coordinator for the Eastern European Network of GPPAC, based in Ukraine. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today!

Our Eastern European network works on *long-term* strategies rooted in principles of *conflict prevention* and *human security* that also lie in the foundation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. Our work aims at developing *a culture of peace in the region* that minimizes the potential of societal conflict and prevents conflicts from escalation. One example of this work is the development of peace education programs in Ukraine and Moldova. Our work has shown that children who have been involved in peace education better recognize and prevent the development of harmful gender norms and are more willing to engage in dialogue, negotiate and resolve conflict situations.

Yet over the many years, we have experienced a number of challenges to maintain financial support for peacebuilding efforts in the region. **The two critical and persistent barriers include** 1) the lack of the understanding by the donors of the context in which we operate; and 2) the general lack of investment in long-term prevention and peacebuilding. In other words, what is possible in terms of prevention or peacebuilding opportunities and impact *largely depends on the donor's priorities*. I will give you one example: We worked to create a Belarus School of Negotiation led by expats based in Ukraine. However, the donor did not understand why this center should be based in Ukraine and our proposal has been rejected. Donors often misunderstand context and do not show willingness to engage in dialogue.

Currently, our network in Eastern Europe only benefits from GPPAC regional grants made possible through the support of SIDA. Other types of support are for specific short-term projects that are not enough to even start a meaningful dialogue. *When there are no resources for long-term peacebuilding, there would be no capacities for peacebuilding*. When conflict hits, the international community cannot count on independent civil society track to support de-escalation, dialogue and mediation.

Therefore, *donors should support peacebuilding networks and coalitions* because such groups are representative of broader society, facilitate long-term foundation for peace, and encourage a more coordinated and sustainable peacebuilding action on the ground. Even further, the donors *should hear and reflect* on the needs of local actors beyond their own fiduciary obligations. The relationships need to be reciprocal, where civil society is an *equal partner* in designing strategies that support our lives. We need funding that not only responds to the situations we are facing in some way, but also is accessible and useable for us.

Currently, we see an additional challenge: **All peacebuilding resources and infrastructures in Ukraine and in support of the situation in Ukraine are being transformed to support humanitarian action**. This is important; however, to some extent, it is like putting a bandage on a finger when you have a broken arm. Without investing in prevention, culture of peace and security, we will see more conflict, historical memory of pain, more divides, more militarization

of communities and relationships. I speak not only about Ukraine, I speak about the whole region. The peacebuilding community requires support in the time of war too. Foundation needs to be saved because it is cost-effective and supports conflict-sensitivity across the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding funding. This is the case not only in Ukraine. We have seen it in Myanmar, Sudan, Syria, and other contexts.

The GPPAC global networks of local peacebuilders has been particularly useful to mitigate these challenges. We are not simply an INGO that works as an intermediary for the donors, we combine our powers in a collective effort to build peace. Peaceboat, for example, supported PATRIR in Romania to support emergency response in Ukraine. Together, with the Women's Mediation Network in South Caucasus and members in Central Asia, we **work to set up a women's regional platform for dialogue**. This network seeks to create a safe space for dialogue in Eastern Europe to stop the war, prevent the spread of war in Southern Caucasus and Central Asia, and address the long-term impact of conflict and violence. This work is rooted in clear peacebuilding methodologies. However, what we hear from the donors is that it is too early for peacebuilding. *The question emerges: What time is good for peacebuilding?*

The donors should *provide sustainable and flexible support for peacebuilding*. Peacebuilding resources should be available across the peace cycle to allow for local actors to continuously pursue and evolve their activities in response to the situation on the ground. This could be done by 1) ensuring that in addition to increasing financing for peacebuilding, humanitarian and development support are conflict-sensitive, and 2) testing innovative funding models (micro and small grants) that facilitate flexible access to funding for community-based organisations and networks.

In conclusion, we hope that these recommendations could be considered for a concrete outcome document, such as a resolution that could provide some guidance for Member States to meaningfully strengthen the position of local women peacebuilders by encouraging financing mechanisms that support long-term peacebuilding and respond to the needs of local actors across the peace and conflict cycle. And we as GPPAC and as a broader group of civil society partners organising the meeting today, stand ready to support the next steps in making women peacebuilders more powerful than conflict, more compelling than war.

Thank You! Дякую!