

The UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security: One Year On

In the lead up to the 25th anniversary of landmark [UN Security Council Resolution 1325](#) (UNSCR 1325), the UK launched its fifth [National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2023-2027](#) (NAP WPS). The fifth National Action Plan provides strategic direction for the UK's diplomatic, development, security and defence efforts and applies to our foreign and domestic policies and systems. The government remarked last year that they were committed to strengthening their own record on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) by increasing female recruitment in the British armed forces and working across government departments to end violence against women and girls. In a 'policy first', the plan addressed the impact of climate change on women and girls.

Now, one year on from the launch of the National Action Plan, women, and girls not just in the UK but across the world face increased threats: from the use of gender-based violence as a weapon of war in places like Ukraine, Somalia, Ethiopia and more recently in Gaza to women experiencing less peace and security than when UNSCR 1325 was first adopted. Worryingly, international support for gender equality and conflict prevention is beginning to wane. Gender issues are increasingly being absorbed into polarising anti-human rights agendas; openly misogynistic movements are gaining traction and blocking progress on WPS; and funding for peacebuilding falls year on year.

In delivering its new NAP, now entering a crucial second year, and as a pen-holder on WPS at the UN, the UK has a significant opportunity to lead WPS back to its radical core objective: to transform conflict by challenging militarism, promoting non-violent pathways to peace and advancing equal and fairer societies. This is possible only through a peacebuilding approach and greater use of legal processes, focused on addressing the root causes of conflict rather than the immediate symptoms, and promoting the leadership of those most affected by conflict.

Current progress

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Women, Peace and Security (APPG-WPS) in association with the Gender Action Peace and Security Network (GAPS) [met at the end of March](#) to discuss the UK government's progress on WPS. Eva Tabbasam, director of GAPS welcomed the UK government's recognition of civil society as a "vital policy and programme partner" but insisted that more can be done to ensure women's participation is prioritised and not tokenised. She further encouraged the UK government to leverage its diplomatic capabilities and ensure inclusion of women's rights organisations (WROs) as frontline experts.

The UK government has demonstrated a lack of joined up strategy, often with contradictions between the public messaging, internal approaches and funding committed. The transition of the Conflict Stability and Security Fund (CSSF), a significant funder of WPS programmes, into the Integrated Security Fund (ISF), has reduced the prioritisation of WPS from two of four thematic priorities to one of six, and there remains the need for clarity on how funding will be distributed, thus impacting WROs' abilities to achieve core targets in line with global WPS priorities.

Additionally, the UK government has struggled to ensure commitments made in one place do not clash with decisions made elsewhere. The UK's failure to fulfil its obligations as a signatory of the International Arms Trade Treaty by continuing to trade arms with Israel was highlighted as an example of this during the APPG-WPS meeting.

GAPS, however, did acknowledge the recognition of domestic and foreign policy coherence in the new NAP compared to the increase of draconian domestic policies which undermine the UK's credibility on its WPS commitments. As a cross-border and transnational

framework, the WPS agenda must be consistently applied across domestic and international policies.

Case Study: Women and Girls in Gaza

Between 2008 and 7 October 2023, the UN documented the killings of 6,542 Palestinian civilians in hostilities, with women and girls making up less than 14 % of that figure. However, since 7 October, women and children have constituted about 70 % of the region's deaths of over 33,000. Gaza's only two women's shelters, both in Gaza City, have now closed, and telecommunications and electricity blackouts severely restrict the ability to provide services remotely. Worse still, the only functional maternity hospital in northern Gaza has now run out of fuel and any future deliveries will be challenged due to the unfolding conflict.

Dire living conditions are exacerbating the risk of maternal and new-born mortality. Women are having to give birth in shelters, in their homes, in the streets amid rubble, or in overwhelmed health care facilities, where sanitation is worsening, and the risk of infection and medical complications is on the rise. The UN has [reported](#) that girls and women are having to resort to cutting out small pieces of tents to use as a substitute for period products, as well as using menstrual products for longer than recommended.

The Occupied Palestinian Territories were not named as a focus country within the most recent NAP and therefore commitments made in the NAP on focus countries to have a WPS focal point, gender strategies at posts in country and Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) analyses do not apply. However, the NAP makes clear non-focus countries can and should also be considered and the Occupied Palestinian Territories must not be an exception. The UK's failure to implement its NAP in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, specifically in Gaza, will further exacerbate the suffering of Palestinian women and girls.

For 2023/24, the [UK committed over £100 million in aid](#) to the Occupied Palestinian Territories. This includes [£60 million announced](#) in October/November 2023. However, nothing appears to be earmarked for women and girls, nor does there appear to be a plan on how to deliver the aid as Israel continues its offensive. It is vital that the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office provide clarity on its plan to deliver the aid allocated to the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including how it plans to support women and girls living in the region.

Through its NAP, the UK has an opportunity to be a world leader in implementing the WPS agenda. Despite reductions in overseas development assistance (ODA), the UK remains well-placed to leverage its considerable diplomatic and development assets to help reform the parts of the humanitarian system that still exclude women from leadership and decision-making, including as:

- a penholder to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. The UK leads the negotiation and drafting of resolutions and can champion women's leadership in emergency response at the UN Security Council.
- as leader of a task team of the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Emergencies; the UK can use its influence to improve the quantity and quality of GBV funding.

Act Now: Write to the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office

We encourage you to write to the [Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office](#) and to [your local MP](#) recommending that the UK government should:

1. Actively support and promote the participation and leadership of women and WROs in fragile and conflict-affected settings in all decision-making, including crisis response and peacebuilding.
2. Champion the role of local women's and girls' rights organisations and activists with UK partners to encourage the consultation of women in all contexts and fora. This will support the growth of a strong and independent civil society that represents the views of people affected by conflict and advocates for their rights and interests.
3. Ensure the integration and consultation of women and girls into peacekeeping processes through the Ministry of Defence's commitments as outlined in the fifth NAP.
4. Give more core, flexible and multi-year funding for feminist organisations to undertake their vital work. Funding allocations should meet the self-defined priorities of women's and girls' rights organisations, including core organisational costs and essential programme work to advance gender equality and WPS priorities strategically.
5. Prioritise the ending of all conflicts. In engaging with global conflict, the UK should:
 - a. Take immediate and decisive action to facilitate the cessation of hostilities where possible, including in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.
 - b. Fulfil its obligations under the [International Arms Trade Treaty](#) – to which the UK is a signatory – by implementing an immediate, comprehensive, two-way arms embargo on parties to conflict suspected of breaking international humanitarian law.

Useful Acronyms

APPG: All Party Parliamentary Group
CSSF: Conflict Stability and Security Fund
GAPS: Gender Action Peace and Security Network
GESI: Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
ISF: Integrated Security Fund
NAP: National Action Plan
UNSCR: United Nations Security Council Resolution
WPS: Women, Peace and Security
WRO: Women's' Rights Organisations