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# Looking Beyond Rape and War – The Need to Take Violence Prevention Seriously in Women, Peace and Security

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**Abstract:** In the two decades since its inception, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda has arguably had its greatest impact in terms of opening up discussions on women in conflict, in opening up security sector institutions for women and in setting up new mechanisms to try to counter conflict-related sexual violence. While this is in many ways commendable, this has also led to the militarisation of WPS, a narrow focus only on particular forms of gender-based violence, and led to a disengagement with the overarching goal of preventing armed violence in the first place. It has also led to a false perception that WPS only relates to armed conflict. Furthermore, where WPS-related consultation and participation mechanisms have been set up, these are often side-lined in times of crisis. Drawing on experience from working on WPS issues in various contexts, we argue for a fundamental re-think of the approach to ‘prevention’ in WPS, for a strengthening of the ‘peace’ element of WPS, and for a closer linking of WPS with other agendas such as climate change response, disarmament, social inequality, corruption, broader gender equality and gender transformation for the agenda to go beyond ‘making war safe for women.’ These shifts need to be properly reflected in national and local implementation of WPS but also based on a more intersectional and comprehensive approach to gender.

**Keywords:** women, peace, security, climate change, human security

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## Introduction

Two decades ago, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) passed Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), laying the foundations for the WPS Agenda, further elaborated by ten subsequent UNSCRs and over 140 National Action Plans (NAPs). The civil society coalition that pushed for UNSCR 1325 built on at least a century of women's mobilisation for gender equality and against war, a radical tradition that explicitly seeks to challenge and overthrow militarism and patriarchy.<sup>1</sup> This conceptual framing built on feminist understandings of the need to see women as full rights-bearers with their own agency rather than as 'the weaker sex' in need of male protection and/or objects of charity. Also, it drew on understanding of a continuum of violence to which women and girls are exposed, both in peacetime and in war.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the wording of the resolution explicitly frames participation as pertaining to all processes relevant to peace and security; prevention and protection refer to all forms of violence and abrogation of women's rights; and while relief and recovery is not spelled out, it is also referred to comprehensively.

Nonetheless and unsurprisingly given their own institutional ties to patriarchy and militarism, the state-led WPS Agenda has been slow and reluctant to engage with this radical potential. The approach of the ten WPS UNSC Resolutions to gender is often conflated with women only, and women and girls are still mostly cast as a homogenous group in need of paternalistic, masculinist protection – or essentialised as innate peacemakers.<sup>3</sup> Masculinities remain largely absent from the WPS Agenda, and therefore also any open discussion of patriarchy is also missing.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, LGBTIQ+ perspectives are also largely absent, normalising and invisibilising heteronormativity.<sup>5</sup> Although the United Nations has specific mandates on arms control and disarmament, these are largely absent from the WPS Agenda.<sup>6</sup> The same can be said for militarism more broadly, and there is often an uneasy and unspoken paradox inherent in WPS policy, in which some forms of militarism and violence are condemned as illegitimate, and others (mainly 'our' militarism, as opposed to 'their' militarism) is framed as legitimate and necessary.<sup>7</sup> The root causes of conflict and gender inequality remain therefore unquestioned, as are global power imbalances.

While the WPS Agenda has undoubtedly led to a shift towards paying more attention to the impacts of conflicts on women and girls, the framing of its pillars remains narrow, especially in WPS National Action Plans (NAPs). These seek to turn the principles of

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1 Confortini 2010.

2 Cockburn 2004.

3 Santos *et al.* 2013.

4 Duriesmith 2019; Myrntinen 2019; Wright 2020.

5 Hagen 2016.

6 Myrntinen 2020.

7 Wright 2020.

the resolutions into concrete, national-level action. They have arguably been one of the success stories of the WPS Agenda over the past decade and a half, with at the time of writing 144 having been developed by 84 countries. These have often focused mainly on measures to increase women's participation in security sector institutions, and on responses to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). Especially in the case of donor countries' NAPs, these also tend to be solely focused on activities elsewhere rather than in the country itself, reinforcing a sense in donor countries that "problems occur 'elsewhere' but solutions can be found 'here'"<sup>8</sup>

All of these factors have contributed to the misconception that WPS relates mostly to war, and specifically to rape in war, rather than to the much broader issues of how women are affected by and influence both peace and (in)security. As a result, the WPS Agenda perpetuates "1) the notion of gender present in it (focusing on women and, more specifically, on women as victims or peace-makers); 2) the conception of instances of threat exclusively as instances of war or post-war, which generally considers only the short term and not the broader processes in which violence occurs; 3) the idea of security as something that centres provide to peripheries through paternalistic policies (such as the increased representation and participation of women at all levels of decision-making in conflict-resolution, post-war reconstruction and peace-building processes), gender mainstreaming, and even repressive policies."<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, even in those over 80 countries where WPS mechanisms are established in one way or another, these are regularly sidelined in decision-making when there is an actual security crisis, or even in planning for potential crises. This goes as much for peacekeeping and stabilisation missions of Global North countries as for countries directly affected by a conflict or natural disaster. Channels that allow women and women's rights organisations to participate are relegated to the 'nice-to-have' list and seen as talking shops but not as 'serious' mechanisms vital to crisis response itself. Not only does this go against the aims of the WPS agenda, it also constitutes a waste of effort and resources, and also means that crucial information and expertise that these organisations have is lost and important avenues for engagement disappear.

We see the current moment as a critical juncture for WPS: while it has been 'mainstreamed' into policies, action plans and the like, and embraced at least rhetorically by nation-states and security organisations such as NATO, it has not delivered on its promises, even in the narrow sense.<sup>10</sup> Its close embrace by security actors has however at times meant that civil society and non-security actors (such as Ministries of Women's Affairs) find it difficult to see themselves as part of WPS discussions.<sup>11</sup> The strong focus on engaging with security actors on technical issues has often meant that the engagement of civil

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8 Shepherd 2016, 325.

9 Santos *et al.* 2013, 6.

10 UN Women 2015.

11 Myrntinen *et al.* 2020.

society with WPS has also often been limited to specialised organisations and individuals specifically working on both gender and security. The WPS field thus comes to be seen as a field of expert knowledge only, and it is mainly an area for state security institutions. In relatively young democracies such as Argentina, Chile, or Brazil, but also in countries like Serbia, where there is a strong and often radical women's movement, and a historically militarised, patriarchal and autocratic security sector, more outspoken groups may reject engaging with these security actors, and there is little space for more radical feminist, de-colonial and anti-militarist critiques in the WPS space. At the same time, there is also a risk that the mainstreaming of WPS leads to complacency about the inevitable – if glacially slow – teleological progress of gender equality, blinding us to the backsliding and patriarchal rollback of women's rights that is occurring globally. Since the promulgation of 1325, political, social and religious movements of different faiths have become more united and vocal in opposing women's empowerment, sexual and reproductive rights and their inclusion into the political agenda. This mobilisation against progressive measures is not only against the feminist agenda but also includes a tacit opposition to the Strategic Development Goals (SDGs) and the role of the state as a promoter and guarantor of gender equality. Preventing and responding to this roll-back should fall firmly under the WPS Agenda's prevention and protection pillars yet have largely been ignored by it.

In this article, we look at the narrow understanding of the four pillars of the WPS Agenda and the consequences this has for the agenda's possibilities to live up to its promises. We then highlight how the narrow conceptualisation of WPS relating mainly to 'official' armed conflict (measured by battlefield deaths) as opposed to the multitude of existing forms of armed violence, and to CRSV, misses out many of the very real security challenges that affect women globally, and propose some new ways forward for the WPS Agenda. We do this by focusing on two key areas of heightened relevance to WPS but largely left outside of the Agenda – small arms violence and climate change. We then discuss the impacts of militarisation on WPS and conclude with a discussion about what we see as ways forward.

### **Understanding the Four Pillars Comprehensively**

The WPS Agenda is commonly seen as consisting of four pillars – participation, prevention, protection and relief and recovery. These pillars are not explicitly defined in the UNSCRs, and to a degree their scope remains a matter of debate and interpretation by different actors. While the understandings have differed, the original intent of 1325 and the women's rights movement driving it was one that goes beyond a narrow 'making war safe for women.'<sup>12</sup> This is clear from the way the terms participation, prevention, protection are used in the resolutions and from the references to relief and recovery, as discussed below.

The 'participation' pillar of the WPS agenda seeks to achieve the effective participation of women across the whole spectrum of peacebuilding and conflict prevention efforts.

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<sup>12</sup> Shepherd 2016.

While ‘participation’ itself is not clearly defined in the WPS UNSCRs, it is, for the most part, used in conjunction with terms such as ‘full and equal’ or ‘meaningful’ participation. These qualifiers underscore that women’s participation should not be tokenistic – it is not enough to have women in the room for peace negotiations or being able to join a security sector institution. They have to be able to make meaningful contributions in their own right and participate in decision-making as much as men. The pillar has sometimes been taken to refer narrowly to increasing women’s participation in direct peace-making and conflict resolution efforts only (e.g., in peace negotiations or peacekeeping forces). However, starting with UNSCR 1325, the resolutions take a broad approach, stressing women’s “equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security” across the spectrum of political, social and economic activities.

As in the case of participation, there are narrow and broad readings of the prevention and protection pillars as well. Narrow interpretations focus on gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and protection only, and in particular on CRSV, while broader ones interpret the pillars as pertaining to the prevention of/protection from violence more generally as well as the protection of women’s and girls’ human rights. As with participation, the original intent of the prevention and protection pillars is explicitly not a narrow focus. In UNSCR 1325, prevention is mentioned thrice – and always as in the context of the prevention of conflict more broadly. Protection is mentioned seven times, four times in the context of the protection of women and girls in general, once with a specific mention of protection from all forms GBV and in particular sexual violence, and twice as protection of women’s human rights.

The political moment of UNSCR 1325, passed in the UN Security Council in 2000, was one overshadowed by the then-recent gendered atrocities of the Yugoslav Wars, the Rwandan Genocide, and the wars in DR Congo, Liberia and Sierra Leone. This explains in part the highlighting of particular themes such as the reintegration of women ex-combatants and of conflict-related sexual violence. A further reason for why a narrow focus on a particular form of sexual violence only, has become the dominant lay in part with the dynamics of the WPS Agenda itself. UNSCRs 1888, 1960 and 2106 especially stress the issue of CRSV, given the lack of progress on this and a push at the time from both civil society and particular member states for concrete action. As important as the work on the prevention of CRSV is, this narrow focus has led to a side-lining of broader discussions on the prevention and protection from all forms of violence which affect women and girls as well as the abrogation of their rights. This latter point has become increasingly important with the global rollback of women’s rights. The narrow focus on CRSV by armed actors has also meant that other forms of GBV which exist in peacetime as much as during armed conflict, such as domestic violence (DV), intimate partner violence (IPV), hate crimes, femicide or so-called ‘honour killings,’ are often absent in WPS discussions.

Lastly, the relief and recovery pillar has also been interpreted in both broad and narrow ways. Among the four pillars, it is the most ambiguous and under-researched, with

no direct definition in the UNSCRs.<sup>13</sup> The narrow understanding focuses on direct post-conflict/-disaster humanitarian aid only, with again a particular focus on GBV. Broader approaches, on the other hand, look at using post-conflict moments for sustainable change in terms of increasing gender equality and bringing about fundamental socio-economic changes. The resolutions include, amongst others, the following activities which fall under this pillar: repatriation, resettlement, rehabilitation, reintegration, and post-conflict reconstruction; support for women in the implementation of peace agreements, improving services for survivors of sexual violence; ensuring women and girls' livelihoods, land, and property rights; enhancing women's socioeconomic conditions through education, income-generating activities, employment, and women's participation in decision-making and post-conflict planning throughout the recovery process; women's empowerment, and women's participation in Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR), electoral processes, Security Sector Reform (SSR) and judicial reform processes. With the increasing impacts of climate and environmental change, and attendant escalating land and resource conflicts, the importance of this neglected pillar will grow in the future. However, as important as it is, it is a reactive, retroactive one, which looks at the aftermath of disaster and conflict rather than its prevention in the first place.

The cumulative result of a focus on narrow understandings of the pillars and a focus of most donor countries' NAPs on activities in conflict-affected societies elsewhere has been a mischaracterisation of WPS only being relevant to armed conflict. However, issues of women, peace and security need to be seen as relevant in all societies, regardless of whether they are deemed 'at peace' or as being 'conflict-affected' based on conventional measures such as battlefield deaths. As has been argued by feminists for decades, many women, as well as persons of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, face various forms and continuums of violence in times of peace as well as conflict.<sup>14</sup> Work on all four pillars is as relevant in peacetime as in conflict, and there are no stipulations in the UNSCRs that would state that they only apply in conflict-affected situations. Indeed, many of the activities especially under the prevention pillar, but also relief and recovery, are by definition, peacetime activities. However, a large part of the NAPs that have been developed tend to focus on peacekeeping and stabilisation operations overseas, the inclusion of women in security forces and gender considerations in peace negotiations, disregarding other WPS-relevant issues that impact the lives of women, persons of diverse gender identities, but also men globally. This trend is especially true for Global North countries whose NAPs are often purely externally focused but is also reflected in many Latin American NAPs, none of which, for example, even mention small arms and light weapons (SALW) despite the epidemic levels of armed violence.<sup>15</sup>

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13 True and Hewitt 2019.

14 Cockburn 2004; Cohn 2013; Daigle and Myrtilinen 2018.

15 Myrtilinen 2020.

## Missing Engagement – WPS and SALW and WPS and Climate Change

The narrow reading of the WPS Agenda pillars, the focus on ‘war’ and ‘war-time rape’ has meant that it misses out on the gendered violence in non-war contexts.<sup>16</sup> For instance, Mexico sees ten times more people killed through armed violence a year than Afghanistan, and in 2019 alone, seven times more people were killed in South Africa than in eight years of war in Mali. Across the globe, politically and socially outspoken women are facing violence and death, whether or not their societies are seen as officially ‘conflict-affected.’ The 2019 Human Development Report<sup>17</sup> highlights that social inequality is a major conflict trigger. In regions such as Latin America, where inequality has grown for decades despite efforts to reduce poverty and establish working democracies, this has led to new, highly gendered security threats that are not covered by the focus on ‘regular’ armed conflict. The WPS Agenda also has had little to say on the gendered impacts of decades-long ‘frozen conflicts’ such as in Eastern Europe and South Caucasus or occupations such as in Palestine or Western Sahara. Despite their ongoing impacts on women’s lives and women’s rights, these are often bracketed out as being too politically sensitive for the sake of focusing on technocratic and administrative reforms, such as increasing women’s enrolment in local police forces. While the latter is important as well, the more radical and comprehensive promise of WPS remains unfulfilled.

Similarly, the risks to peace of an absence of a fundamental engagement with the gendered, racialised and economic drivers of conflict can be seen in Colombia and Myanmar. Over the past few years, these two faltering peace processes had been seen as relative success stories, especially in terms of integrating gender perspectives, at least rhetorically.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, the settlements have brought with them a patriarchal ‘ceasefire capitalism’<sup>19</sup> and ‘militaristic neoliberalism’<sup>20</sup> that created new opportunities for primitive accumulation for elites but have exacerbated gendered and racialised inequalities and ultimately undermined the peace processes.<sup>21</sup> While neither country has a WPS NAP, the rhetoric of WPS has been prominent in both countries but has remained superficial and sidelined despite local women’s rights movements’ ceaseless activism, with little space for a fundamental questioning of societal and economic conflict drivers and inequalities.

Two issues that have a clear, pressing, and direct impact on women, peace and security, namely the gendered dynamics of small arms violence<sup>22</sup> and gender and security in the

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16 See also: Chabikwa 2021 and Santos *et al.* 2013.

17 UNDP 2019.

18 In the case of Myanmar, however, the military coup d’état of 1 February, 2021, has put an end to the peace process.

19 Woods 2016.

20 Meger and Sachseder 2011.

21 Brenner 2019; Johnston and Lingham 2020; Meger and Sachseder 2020; Sachseder 2020; South 2018.

22 Farr *et al.* 2009; Le Brun *et al.* 2019; Myrtilinen 2020.

context of climate change.<sup>23</sup> Both have immense, direct and highly gendered impacts on the lives of billions of people, both in officially designated conflict zones and those considered to be at peace, but the WPS policy sphere has been slow to engage with them, and vice versa.<sup>24</sup>

SALW-related violence, in particular gun violence, is one of the main causes of death globally both in countries in conflict and 'at peace', and is highly gendered.<sup>25</sup> Gun ownership, use and abuse are often highly masculinised, but gun violence also is often a leading cause of deaths for young, socio-economically marginalised men.<sup>26</sup> Women and persons of diverse Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC), on the other hand, are often disproportionately affected by various forms of gun-related gender-based violence, including DV and IPV involving weapons, femicide and so-called honour killings.<sup>27</sup> In such a sense, carrying weapons and holding the power to use them, both as part of a 'job' and their personal lives, are a key aspect when addressing 'militarised masculinities' and their linkages with peace and security. Private use of small arms can increase protection against perceived external violence, as well as constitute a controlling tool at the household /community level.<sup>28</sup> Hence, looking at the access and use of small arms and light weapons bridges both private and public spheres of security.

Discussions about gun control and disarmament more broadly are at the intersection of economic, political and security interests, and shaped by often unspoken gendered subtexts and assumptions. Countries with important armament industries and strong gun lobbies such as Israel, Brazil, USA, do not want to intervene in a business that is understood as the private decision of their citizens, and that also represents an important export asset. Meanwhile, other major arms exporters such as China and Russia control guns effectively internally but are opposed to export controls and are on principle opposed to international frameworks impinging on what they see as internal affairs. However, even states rhetorically sympathetic to WPS often compartmentalise their policy approaches, placing WPS at a lower priority than other policies. For example, Canada, France, Germany, Sweden, and the UK often highlight their WPS credentials, feminist foreign policy or support for peacebuilding and peacekeeping operations, but do not go so far as to apply these principles to arms exports, patriarchal norms within their own militaries and indeed even going so far as to actively resist the integration of gender perspectives into matters of 'hard security'.<sup>29</sup>

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23 UN Women 2020.

24 Chinkin 2019; Dwan 2020.

25 Farr *et al.* 2009; Hideg and Alvazzi del Frate 2019; LeBrun *et al.* 2019.

26 Baird 2015; LeBrun 2019; Myrtilinen 2003; Theidon 2009.

27 Farr *et al.* 2019; LeBrun 2019; Moestue and Lazarevic 2014.

28 Baird 2015; Moestue and Lazarevic 2014; Puechguirbal *et al.* 2009; Theidon 2009.

29 See: Acheson and Butler 2019; Wright 2020.



Climate change is the greatest security threat at the moment, and ecofeminists, as well as critical political ecologists, have pointed out how heteropatriarchal capitalism is a transforming force that exploits natural resources and gains largely from unpaid, feminised domestic work as well as environmental degradation.<sup>30</sup> The global demand for climate justice has its core demands in the regulatory actions from states, private sector and to civil society as well. Currently, the most pressing security matters claim for decisive and committed actions from states that are expected to react and oppose the anti-regulatory neoliberal mantra. The development initiatives, including well-meaning WPS ones, which ‘just added women’ ended up reinforcing gender stereotypes and creating extra burdens for women attempting to participate in actions designed to improve their lives. Hence, the current feminist critiques aim for a radical shift that not only looks at gender inequality but rather explores how to deconstruct structures that perpetuate interconnected inequalities.

In terms of environmental and food insecurities, the unequal impacts on livelihoods caused by the deterioration of biophysical conditions due to climate change, the commodification of food production and a shift in the value of land and natural resources, have impacted the most vulnerable populations the hardest. According to the FAO, “regardless of the type of indicator used, evidence shows that women are significantly disadvantaged relative to men with regard to their land rights. This is true for all dimensions of land rights associated with agricultural land: ownership, management, transfer and economic rights. As of 2018, women globally made up less than 15 per cent of all landholders and their geographical distribution ranged from 5 per cent in the Middle East and North Africa to 18 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean.”<sup>31</sup> Today, access to land is a global demand linked with food security and economic autonomy for rural women, which is reinforced by inequalities in access to credits, markets, training and negotiation venues. In addition, other economic activities play an important role in the shift in land use. The overall and combined pressure from mineral exploitation, agribusiness, energetic infrastructure development and tourism have prompted the mobilisation of women environmental leaders against extractivism, its links with GBV, and women’s inequality.<sup>32</sup> In addition, international trade treaties have heavily impacted small food producers in developing countries, which has greatly affected women that spend long hours of unpaid work on sustainable but not tradable agricultural production.<sup>33</sup>

In the context of in-conflict countries, peacebuilding initiatives and peacekeeping operations falling under the protection pillar of WPS tend to focus on the safe return and reincorporation of population into their territories, in order to restore economic, social and political life. However, such efforts need to consider the variations in both the land ownership systems and legal frameworks, as well as the impacts of environmental dete-

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30 Jolly *et al.* 2012; Berman-Arevalo and Ojeda 2020.

31 FAO CGIAR 2018.

32 Castañeda *et al.* 2020

33 FAO CGIAR 2018.

rioration and climate change. A broader and expansive analysis of WPS needs to consider to what extent environmental degradation and access to land constitute key matters on human security. For instance, the war on drugs has imposed a wide range of strategies that include the destruction of illicit crops (such as coca, poppy, marijuana). However, those policies not only affect such illicit crops but the whole ecosystem that surrounds them. In Colombia, women's organisations and environmental activists have momentarily created a moratorium to suspend the use of Roundup™ (broad-spectrum glyphosate-based herbicide), which is used to eliminate coca plantations, but greatly affects human and animal lives as well as crops.

Environmental matters linked to protection and prevention in non-conflict countries must look at the impacts of deforestation, wildfires and expansion of agribusiness against primary forests in addition to fossil fuel economies' demand. These issues constitute the main driver of climate change, which disproportionately affects women in rural areas, due to the combined effects on temperature, water scarcity and the damage to regulatory ecosystem functions.

Climate change, together with numerous territorial, economic, social and political tensions have propelled massive movements of people, both within its national borders as well as internationally. The current migration crisis is largely created by aligned regional policies for closing borders, reducing the chances for asylum seekers, securitisation of migration management and outsourcing migratory control.<sup>34</sup> Women and persons of diverse SOGIESC tend to experience a different set of threats along their migratory journey as well as either in their receiving places or when facing forced return. Although trafficking in persons as well as smuggling immigrants are considered transnational crimes (as per the Palermo Protocol) the protection and respect of human rights and migrants lives need to be seen under the human security framework, which is a treatment that considers the humanitarian side behind migration trends.

Currently, immigrants and their descendants are subjects of insecurities and threats due to the rise of xenophobic discourses, nationalist ideals and conservative tendencies, which tend to mobilise anti-immigration feelings that prompt symbolic, economic, physical and psychological violence. Events like the COVID-19 pandemic, the shortage of employment and the increasing demand for flexible work, ignite racial and social tensions that affect the immigrant population and their descent.

## Discussion

Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic and its after-effects, the 20th anniversary of WPS was very different from what had been expected. The gendered impacts of the pandemic, along with the rising dangers of climate change, highlight just how necessary it is to take a

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<sup>34</sup> Estupiñán Serrano 2013.

much more forceful approach to realising the WPS Agenda, not just through resolutions and action plans, but through concrete action. This also means taking the ambitious and transformative goals of UNSCR 1325 of true gender equality and prevention of all forms of violence as a starting point, rather than just settling for the far less ambitious goals of ‘adding women’ or ‘making war safe for women.’ It also requires seeing that ‘prevention’ includes pushing back against the global anti-gender backlash.

Achieving the goals of the WPS Agenda requires a fundamental re-thinking of security. This is also one of the key lessons we need to learn from the Covid-19 pandemic, and as we move to face the ever-increasing impacts of climate change. Old-fashioned militarised, patriarchal approaches to security are not able to resolve the real human security challenges we are all currently facing. In fact, they are a financial drain on the systems that we should be investing in support to gender equality and the most vulnerable members of our society. During the past 20 years, feminism has evolved into a myriad of critical approaches towards gender inequality that have transcended monolithic and essentialist views based on women’s subordinated position. Instead, feminism has both become more mainstream and complex. Their complexities are the result of the third wave of feminism that embraced different types of diversity and understood the structural links between root causes of inequalities. In turn, security issues have also become more complex, and their definitions have broader their reach. Therefore, a feminist critique of the WPS agenda starts with the recognition of its principles and goals but moves toward a feminist revision of the concept of security.<sup>35</sup> Thus, feminist security and human security are conceptual tools that society, in general, can uphold and use to transform its gendered relation with markets, governments and nature.

One great challenge that feminist and women activists have to constantly fight against is the ever-present neoliberal attempt to instrumentalise their causes, solidify individual solutions and compartmentalise political action. Women’s movements and different fractions of feminism are the spearheads against corporate capitalism, neoliberal policies and political conservatism. Newer generations have not only embraced such fights but also include climate justice, speciesism and the right to a future. By following this line of action some sectors of feminists, women, girls and persons of diverse SOGIESC have contested the neoliberal agenda while showing that both the right and the left largely neglect reproductive work and the pervasive damage to the environments and ecosystems. These activists are actually contesting patriarchy as a hierarchy that orders the world, the relations between humans, as well as the relation between humans and nature; therefore, their approach towards security follows a different paradigm: the need to address the sustainability of life.

When looking at the more comprehensive views regarding women, peace and security, there are numerous instruments at the local, national and regional level that touch upon different aspects of the agenda. Multilateral global action is represented by two major

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<sup>35</sup> See also: Sjöberg 2016.

instruments, the UNSCR 1325 and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW). Each one has its strengths and shortcomings, but well implemented both can draw a whole framework of orientation and action. CEDAW demands that countries present occasional reports to the committee that monitors advances, requests implementation efforts and brings advice on further actions to reduce discriminations against women. Moreover, CEDAW receives shadow reports from civil society which complement and emphasise relevant discrimination issues. In addition, CEDAW has developed a strong set of general recommendations (GR), which contain detailed considerations regarding specific issues like violence against women (GR 12,19, 35), conflict-related matters (GR 30), migration (GR 26, 32) and environmental issues (GR 37). Although both instruments are unknown to the majority of the population, CEDAW is more recognised among civil society and institutions and remains a common source of information regarding women's situation in the world. The combined use of such instruments might transform the limited knowledge and awareness about women, peace and security issues.

The past twenty years have seen important advances in terms of implementing the WPS Agenda, in particular in increasing women's participation in security sector institutions and peacebuilding processes, making conflict-related sexual violence a global security issue and the development of normative and implementation frameworks. While there is still much work to be done, especially in terms of tangible, positive changes in women's lives on the ground, these are important achievements, nonetheless. One of the 'success stories' of the WPS Agenda has been that the security sector in many states has taken it on board and been open to engaging with civil society. However, this has also led to a militarisation of the WPS space. Important actors who work on gender equality have, as a result, struggled to find their place in WPS discussions. This has been the case for both civil society organisations as well as for key ministries that are not defence, the interior or foreign affairs. Grassroots women's organisations and movements that are not based in capital cities and not focused on 'hard' security issues are often excluded from WPS discussions at the national level, even though they are working directly on everyday security threats faced by populations.

For the WPS Agenda to have a real impact, it needs to be approached in a radically different way. This requires taking the following steps, which have been raised by many feminists in the past but are now more pertinent than ever. A fundamental next step based on these reconfigurations of gendered peace and security is to take the prevention pillar seriously. It needs to be understood broadly, in other words, as aiming to prevent all forms of armed violence and threats to women's and girls' rights – not merely in the current narrow sense of preventing conflict-related sexual violence only, as important as that is. Taking prevention seriously also means that NAPs should not only be outward-looking, as is the case in most donor countries. Ensuring women's rights, including those of migrant and refugee women, preventing all forms of gender-based violence, and countering violent misogyny require urgent action in all societies. Prevention also means that western countries who are championing WPS and human rights need to end their arms sales to

conflict parties and repressive governments. Prevention includes changing how Global North police and justice systems treat non-white citizens and migrant populations. It includes integrating gender perspectives into the ways security threats are responded to and expanding our definitions of what is a security threat, such as natural disasters that will only increase with climate change. Prevention work is needed in peacetime as much as in times of conflict and must tackle fundamental drivers of conflict, such as increasing socio-economic inequalities.

The protection and prevention pillar of WPS can be better understood under the Human Security approach, which contemplates a broader understanding of security that “identifies and addresses cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of people.”<sup>36</sup> Such a comprehensive approach aims to bring together agendas of security, development, and human rights; thus, it includes a wide set of insecurities like those produced by economic, political, health and environmental threats, among others. Human Security is a matter of attention for both in-conflict and non-conflict countries, considering that insecurities are not only related to violent conflict.

We see a need for better integration of the WPS Agenda with other national, regional and international policy frameworks and action plans to ensure that limited resources are used to their full potential. National and local administrations often work on multiple partially overlapping action plans and strategies, which leads to a dispersal of resources, the duplication of efforts in some areas and gaps in others, as well as having to track progress against multiple reporting mechanisms. For example, efforts to prevent and respond to intimate partner violence might be simultaneously covered by the WPS NAP, the national gender equality strategy, an action to counter gender-based violence and an action plan on gender and police reform. While resources and efforts on the state side may be scattered across multiple actors and institutions, on the civil society side, the issue is often the opposite, with women’s rights organisations using their limited resources to simultaneously work on a wide range of issues from WPS to disaster relief.

Lastly, but fundamentally, the WPS Agenda needs to think differently about gender. Still too often, gender is equated in debates with women only. Women are seen as a homogenous group, and instead of being seen as full rights-bearers with an agency, they are cast as hapless victims and objects of charity. This fundamental re-think, which feminists have demanded for decades, needs to be one that both recognises differences and embraces diversity, using an intersectional, gendered approach that allows us to see the different possibilities and needs, challenges and opportunities faced by women, men, and persons of other gender identities of different ages, social classes, ethnic backgrounds and with different abilities. It also requires calling out and tackling patriarchy and men’s positions of privilege, both as being factors that produce and perpetuate insecurity, as well as being obstacles to fulfilling the aims of the WPS Agenda.

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36 UN 2012.

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