



NORWAY  
Security Council President  
January 2022

## Open Debate

# Protecting Participation: Addressing violence targeting women in peace and security processes

Tuesday, 18 January 2022

Draft Concept Note



### 1. Introduction and objective

While President of the Security Council in January 2022, Norway will hold an open debate to address how violence, intimidation, and reprisals against women – because of their engagement in peace and security processes – threaten our shared goal of ensuring women’s full, equal, and meaningful participation in all stages of peace processes.

This kind of targeted violence is at an unprecedentedly high level<sup>1</sup> and it is against this backdrop that the open debate will have a twofold aim:

- Firstly, to shine a light on persistent shortfalls in creating a safe and enabling environment for women peacebuilders, human rights defenders, and civil society representatives to carry out their work.
- Secondly, to gather and share recommendations on ways we can strengthen and develop our prevention and response strategies.

### 2. Background

The 2021 Report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security lists 35 OHCHR verified cases of killings of women human rights defenders, journalists, and trade unionists in seven conflict-affected countries in 2020 – surpassing the reported numbers for 2019 and 2018.<sup>2</sup> While already alarming, these reported statistics remain comparatively low due to underreporting and self-censorship. Many more are threatened and harassed, including for their engagement with the United Nations, in order to silence their voices and deter participation.

Intimidation and reprisals have also taken on new forms as lockdown measures during the pandemic have forced many women activists to move to online platforms, exposing them to new forms of threats.

Women’s right to participate fully in all aspects of public and political life, both now and in the future, depends on their ability to do so in a safe and enabling environment. The UN and its

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<sup>1</sup> [S/2021/827](#)

<sup>2</sup> [S/2021/827](#)

member states must all contribute to addressing violence targeting women in peace and security processes, in order to meet the globally agreed objectives on women's full, equal, and meaningful participation in peace and security, as enshrined in the Security Council's ten resolutions on women, peace and security.

As the Secretary-General noted in his report, Afghanistan is perhaps this year's most glaring example of "the juxtaposition of violence targeting women and their rights, on one hand, and their extreme marginalization and exclusion, on the other, [which] still encapsulates the women, peace and security agenda in 2021"<sup>3</sup>. OHCHR has also documented that this is part of a broader trend experienced in many other regions. In the past year, several women who had previously briefed the Security Council had to flee their countries after experiencing threats and reprisals for speaking out.

### **3. Interlinkages**

Women have a right to participate in decisions about their future and their participation in all aspects and phases of a peace process leads to more sustainable peace. Women's direct participation and influence in peace and security processes and decision-making mechanisms also increases the likelihood that resulting protection measures will be more gender-sensitive, community needs will be better reflected, and gender concerns will be included in prevention mechanisms in post-conflict situations to a greater extent.

Normalising the participation of women in peace and security processes and elevating their important role, together with raising the cost of attacks against them through robust accountability measures, is critical to open the space for participation. Conversely, attacks against women who are active in peacebuilding and protecting and promoting human rights can have a detrimental effect on civic space as a whole, and even deter others from engaging and speaking up for fear of retaliation. This is why the interlinkage between participation and protection is consistently highlighted by women themselves.

UNSCR 2493 (2019) strongly encourages Member States to create safe and enabling environments for civil society, including in situations of armed conflict, and to address threats, harassment, violence and hate speech against them. However today, few practical resources are available in urgent, life-threatening cases where women peacebuilders and human rights defenders find themselves at risk. The responsibility of supporting them falls largely on the civil society organizations themselves. This is a critical protection gap that both Member States and the UN must work with civil society to urgently address, including through consultations with the individual women themselves to develop tailored, gender-responsive support to prevent and address these risks.

Ensuring an enabling environment, preventing threats, intimidation, and attacks, and developing robust and well-resourced responses when such attacks do occur is necessary to reach our shared goal of women's full, equal, and meaningful participation in all aspects and phases of international peace and security.

### **4. Guiding questions**

1. How can UN Member States help create a safe and enabling environment and ensure protection for women who engage in peacebuilding and protection and promotion of

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<sup>3</sup> [S/2021/827](#)

human rights in peace and security processes to carry out their work independently and safely?

2. How can the Security Council prevent and respond to intimidation, violence, and attacks, (including online) against women who actively engaging in peace and security processes?
3. How can the UN and Member States prevent and respond to violence and reprisals against women for their engagement with the UN?

## **5. Participation and format**

The Open Debate will be held in the format of a Foreign Minister level meeting. To be chaired by H.E. Anniken Huitfeldt, Foreign Minister of Norway. Should the health and safety situation remain stable, in-person participation is encouraged with details on how to inscribe on the list of speakers to be announced in the UN Journal. COVID-19 health and safety measures will be strictly followed.

The following speakers are invited to brief the Council:

- **Michelle Bachelet**, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (TBC)
- **Women civil society representatives**