



## **Economic and Social Council**

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### **Commission on the Status of Women**

**Sixty-ninth session**

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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”**

### **Statement submitted by Servas International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

## Statement

We need to create a just and sustainable peace in order to fulfill the Beijing Declaration.

### About Servas International

As a non-governmental organization with a mission since 1949 of promoting peace and with a presence on all continents, Servas International believes that peace in our world is a prerequisite for gender equality and all other forms of social and economic justice. Servas promotes a culture of peace and inclusion. We reject racial, gender and religious discrimination and xenophobia in all of their manifestations.

### The Undermining of Peace

Progress toward peace relies on states, private enterprise, the UN and other international institutions addressing the challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of all people. We see peace—the basis for any advancement—being impeded by increased militarization and the readiness to choose violence instead of diplomacy in resolving conflicts. Modern war technology is destroying the environment and exacerbating climate change in many regions of the world.

### Since the Beijing Declaration

In its stated intent to advance the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere in the interest of humanity, the Beijing Declaration marked a turning point for people of all genders. It has set the stage for various other UN initiatives, including the Sustainable Development Goals for 2015 to 2030 and the Pact for the Future adopted by the UN member states in September 2024.

However, the effective implementation of these declarations and commitments has been disappointingly limited. The Global Peace Index cites 56 armed conflicts in the world at the present time; this is the highest number since World War II. 92 countries are currently involved in armed conflicts outside their own territories, and 108 countries have become more militarized. The number of displaced persons is currently estimated at 110 million, with the majority being women and children. The natural environment has been destroyed by military activities to such an extent that the United Nations Environment Programme has declared some locations as unlivable.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, global military spending increased to \$2.44 trillion in 2023, marking the highest level ever recorded. This 6.8% increase in military spending from the previous year is the sharpest year-on-year rise since 2009. We suggest that public money could be better invested in climate action and in quality of life for all.

According to estimates by Scientists for Global Responsibility and the Conflict and Environment Observatory, militaries are responsible for 5.5% of global emissions, greater than other sectors such as civilian aviation (2%) and civilian shipping (3%) and nearly equal to all 27 European Union states combined (6.4 % in 2023). States are obliged to publish their carbon emissions annually, but the reporting of military emissions is voluntary.

### Women Negatively Affected

When money is spent on military purposes rather than food and water supply, health, education and social services, women are affected disproportionately. Women are impacted severely by wars in many ways. Sexual violence is often used as a weapon of war. Women are frequently displaced while having to take on the burden

of additional family care that results from armed conflict. This reinforces their traditional role as caretakers, thus depriving them of the ability to pursue opportunities to improve their economic and social position. Pregnant women who give birth while bombs are falling on the hospital often suffer trauma. When water supply is cut or contaminated by military activities, it jeopardizes the hygiene of women during menstruation. In the course of armed conflict, the soil often becomes contaminated, adversely affecting the health of women who must grow and prepare food there for their families. That women are victimized by armed conflict in numerous ways is indisputable.

### Women as Agents of Change

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000 was a significant step forward in implementing the Beijing Declaration in regard to women and peace. Resolution 1325 reaffirmed the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace negotiations, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and post-conflict reconstruction. The Resolution also emphasized the importance of women's full involvement and equal participation in all efforts to promote and maintain peace and security.

The implementation of the provisions of Resolution 1325 has had some successes. Sweden, Canada, France, Mexico, Spain, Libya, Germany, Luxembourg, Chile, Colombia, The Netherlands, Argentina and Slovenia have developed plans for a national feminist foreign policy. In South Africa since 1994, all but one of the foreign ministers have been female. In Colombia and South Sudan, attempts were made to include women in the peace negotiations.

At the same time, there are clear indicators suggesting that much more work needs to be done to include women in decision-making. Women hold only 25% of the Foreign Affairs portfolios in national governments. Of 79 UN General Assemblies and 10 emergency sessions, the Presidency has been in the hands of women only four times. The UN Secretaries-General have always been men.

The Pact for the Future (2024) explicitly asserts that UN member states will accelerate the implementation of their commitments on women, peace and security. The Pact recognizes the role of women as agents of peace at all levels, and reaffirms their full, equal, safe and meaningful participation in decision-making towards a just and sustainable peace. However, the Pact does not specify if this refers only to women diplomats or to all women in civil society, whether organized or not.

The Pact for the Future also lacks an inclusive definition of security as women would describe it—a definition that encompasses survival, safe livelihood, health, education, employment opportunities for their children, and freedom from fear.

### Much Remains to Be Done

The present armed conflict in the Middle East provides a clear illustration that much remains to be done. Since October 7, 2023, the world has witnessed many horrific forms of violence in the region, from a brutal initial attack and the taking of Israeli hostages, to an ongoing conflict creating enormous suffering among civilians in Gaza and neighboring countries. Most casualties have been women and children. Certain areas have been declared unlivable. Humanitarian aid has repeatedly been delayed or derailed completely. Reconstruction will take decades and cost billions. Amid these horrific circumstances, Women Wage Peace (Israel) and Women of the Sun (Palestine) have joined hands to collaborate on the implementation of their Mother's Call, and have been jointly nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2024. These dedicated women are seeking a just peace for all, and a seat at the negotiation table to work toward that goal. We in Servas International respect their unwavering commitment to this aim. We share the principles they uphold, and we furthermore identify the following peacebuilding actions that can apply to all situations of armed conflict:

1. Immediate ceasefires.

2. A redefinition of security. The adherence by many states to a policy of deterrence has led only to further military expansion. On the other hand, adopting a policy of common security would help prevent conflict by prioritizing the security needs of people of all nationalities, beliefs and genders. This redefinition of security must be guided by a vision of renewed responsibility in the spirit of care and commons reflected in non-violent practice and peacebuilding strategies. In particular, states must uphold International Law and Human Rights and comply with the decisions of the International Court and with the resolutions of the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council.

3. A shift of money from war to peace. Military expenditures should be directed toward health, education and social services and toward climate crisis loss and damage, mitigation and adaptation.

4. A refocusing of efforts and money toward preventing armed conflicts. In particular, civil society engaged in peacebuilding must be supported and included in all state and UN frameworks of decision-making.

5. A rededication to implement Resolution 1325. Women must be included—as diplomats and as civil society members—in peace negotiations and in decision-making related both to reconciliation after a conflict and to prevention of future conflict.

Servas International firmly believes that these actions are essential in creating a peaceful, equal world.