

Connecting Informal and Formal Peace Talks:

From Movements To Mediators

By Anjali Dayal | October 2018



Women have been historically absent in formal negotiations and peace processes. However, their participation in informal, or Track II processes, is significant and well documented. Increasing women's representation in formal peace negotiations is imperative to fulfilling United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325's call for women's full participation at all levels of peacemaking efforts and to promoting sustainable peace. One way to do so would be a concerted effort to link Track I and Track II efforts. A renewed focus from the UN Secretary General on the role of mediators in peace negotiations motivates this policy brief, which calls on the UN to nominate more women mediators, and to create a 1325 directive for all mediators to strengthen connections with civil society and women's organizations, in order to increase women's meaningful involvement at all levels of peace processes. Additionally, it points to the need for mediators to better link Track I and II processes.

Introduction

It has been nearly 20 years since the United Nations (UN) Security Council passed Resolution 1325, urging all actors to increase the participation of women and incorporate gender perspectives in UN peace and security efforts, including peace negotiations. Yet women remain dramatically absent from formal peace processes. As of 2015, women made up only 2 percent of mediators, 5 percent of witnesses and signatories, and 8 percent of negotiators in peace processes,¹ reflecting the often exclusive nature of formal peace processes.² However, as has been noted in works on peace processes,³ women are not simply passive while men attempt to forge a peace. Instead, they are active in the informal, or Track II, processes that accompany the formal, or Track I, negotiations. Given high levels of women's participation in informal processes, connecting these two tracks in peace negotiations is critical to ensuring inclusion of women's voices in the process. The responsibility of connecting the two tracks rests ultimately with the mediator.

As of 2015, women made up only



This brief looks at current practices and advances in mediation, including the role of women mediators and emerging women’s mediation networks, and offers recommendations for better incorporating the informal roles that women play in the formal peace processes. It draws on a Chatham House rules convening hosted by the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security in July 2018 to bring together expert mediators, policymakers, peace-process participants, and academics. The meeting was part of the Institute’s ongoing Bridging Theory and Practice series and strove to build connections across expert constituencies in the service of examining women’s involvement in informal peace processes.

This is a vital topic. Women deserve a seat at the formal negotiating table because women deserve representation, and because evidence suggests that more inclusive peace processes with more extensive female engagement are more likely to be durable over time.⁴

Connecting the Tracks: Women’s Participation in Track I and II Peace Processes

The Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security recently undertook the first systematic effort to identify women’s involvement in Track II peace processes. We found that 38 out of 63 post-Cold War peace processes have identifiable informal initiatives, of which almost three-fourths (27) have clear evidence of involvement from identifiable women’s groups.⁵ More than half of all peace processes are therefore accompanied by informal efforts, and the majority of informal peace processes involve concerted efforts by women’s groups to forge a peace. In stark contrast to formal negotiating tables, women are a significant presence in the informal peacemaking world.

Mediators can change the dynamic of peace negotiations. In some cases, mediators have forged connections between formal peace processes and civil society groups that are concurrently pushing for peace, thereby ensuring that the warring parties are not the sole architects of agreements. In Guatemala, for example, civil society famously had a formal mechanism for collective participation in the peace process.⁶ Similarly, mediators in the most recent rounds of Colombian negotiations arranged for the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Colombian government to meet regularly with women’s groups and civil society groups. In both cases, the groups worked to center human rights within the peace process. The Colombian agreement includes provisions that deal extensively with gender, victims’ rights, and reparations, in part because of the mediators’ commitment to ensuring that civil society had a formal opportunity to bring their concerns to bear on the formal negotiating process.⁷

The ongoing Geneva consultations to end the Syrian civil war include formal meetings between Staffan de Mistura, the UN’s special envoy, and 39 political and civil society groups, including the Women’s Advisory Committee of the

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High Negotiations Committee. That process has continued even when the warring parties have stepped away from the negotiations. Women’s civil society groups have produced consensus documents about what they want from the peace, while belligerents have not.⁸

Track I and Track II processes are both essential to peace negotiations. They serve different purposes, and making sure that the tracks are connected is essential to peacebuilding. Connections between tracks can be organic—led and organized by civil society—with parties channelling information between civil society groups and the formal negotiating table. The connections can also be formally organized under the auspices of Track I, with the same actors overseeing both processes and speaking to all



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parties. Connecting the tracks benefits the peace process in many ways, including, importantly, by enabling women’s inclusion. Mediators are able to convey the concerns and ideas of women peacemakers who are excluded from the formal peace process to the warring parties, thereby amplifying women’s voices.⁹ At the same time, passing information down to women excluded from the formal peace process can enable civil

society groups to sharpen their ideas, ground their positions in reality, and develop the relationships necessary to have their vision of peace better represented in final agreements.¹⁰ Civil society leaders can also help disseminate information about the peace process to the broader population. Internal UN guidance for mediators notes that it will often be up to the mediator to raise issues of human rights and verification, as warring parties will not.¹¹ Consultations with women peacemakers are a way to widen participation in peace processes and ensure these issues are raised by local stakeholders. Formally connected negotiating tracks may also help women peacemakers who are excluded from formal processes to capitalize on training they have received previously and validate them as important political actors in the post-conflict period.¹²

Regardless of the level and formality of the connection between the tracks, women must be better included in formal processes, even as we continue to validate and take advantage of Track II efforts involving and lead by women.

The Call for Women Mediators

In addition to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security, a number of concurrent resolutions have specifically reinforced the call for more women mediators and for ensuring that women are present at the highest levels of decision-making in peace processes.¹³ In September 2017, as part of his “surge in diplomacy for peace,”¹⁴ the UN Secretary General focused the UN Secretariat’s attention on mediation. This included issuing new reports and the creation of a high advisory board on mediation, with a specific focus on increasing the involvement of women mediators.¹⁵

Over the last few years, women’s mediation networks have developed to address the gaps in formal inclusion and the heavily gendered nature of peace processes. A web of new women’s mediation

networks has emerged since 2015: Nordic Women Mediators, FemWise-Africa, the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network, and, most recently, the Commonwealth Women's Network. These networks strive to actively increase and support the number of women involved in peacemaking efforts; to share lessons, best practices, and contacts; to assist in the adoption of peace agreements that address women's concerns alongside men's; and to come up with new ways to break through the



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and operational support for peace processes, provides coaching and training for mediators, and strengthens the mediation capacity of partners by developing guidance and best practices. Gender has become an important dimension of the guidance that MSU issues, and it appears among the core themes that MSU addresses, alongside security arrangements, constitution making, power sharing, and natural resource (wealth-sharing) concerns. Mediators are called on to encourage conflict parties



While having more women mediators is an important goal, it will not necessarily result in more broadly inclusive processes or more consultation and inclusion of women among negotiating parties. Formally training mediators on inclusive processes and empowering local women's civil society groups are also vital tasks.

to include women in their delegations, and the UN's internal guides for mediators note that "the gender dimension of all issues should be clearly articulated, as agreements that are gender neutral have often proven detrimental to the well-being, security and needs of women."¹⁶ The manuals include clear modalities for implementation, monitoring, and dispute resolution. However, manuals often lack concrete benchmarks for inclusion of women in formal processes and do not emphasize women's groups as distinct from civil society.

Policy Recommendations

The following recommendations offer concrete suggestions to parties directly involved in mediation support. These parties have the power to make changes that can increase women's representation in formal peace negotiations and connect Track I and Track II processes.

The UN and other international organizations

- **Nominate more women mediators:** Require any organization that nominates or appoints mediators to include more women among the slate of candidates. A simple change in the selection criteria to prioritize experience and skills over prestige would open doors for more women to participate.
- **Leverage women mediator networks:** Work with regional mediator networks—such as the Nordic Women Mediators, FemWise-Africa, the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network, and the Commonwealth Women's Network—to identify and train potential women mediators.

The UN Department of Political Affairs and Mediation Support Unit

- **Create a 1325 directive for mediators:** Specifically require that mediators include civil society and women at the table and in conversations and that Track I and Track II are formally linked wherever possible. Explore various strategies, including establishing consultative processes for setting the agenda for negotiations, publicly announcing a schedule for civil society consultations during talks, and scheduling briefings of formal negotiating parties by civil society groups and representatives of Track II processes.
- **Be mindful of language:** Ensure that women's organizations are seen as a key constituency and not lumped into other groups or categories in training materials, instructions, and basic organizational literature.
- **Look for cooperation and connection in networks:** Connect grassroots mediator networks with regional or international networks to increase their visibility, extract best practices, and enable greater access to resources.

Policymakers

- **Measure what matters:** Create specific benchmarks for UN Security Council missions to measure the quantity and quality of women's inclusion in Track I and Track II peace processes.
- **Leverage access of partners in data collection:** Work with academic institutions and local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to efficiently gather data that can inform benchmarking.
- **Prioritize research funding:** Include specific funding for data collection on inclusion benchmarks in budget requests to all funders.

Funders and aid-granting governments

- **Create civil society-specific grants:** Earmark funds for smaller women's organizations and civil society organizations in order to meaningfully advance the work of grassroots groups.
- **Link funding to women, peace, and security priorities:** Include UNSCR 1325 requirements in grant applications for facilitating peacebuilding. If an applicant does not include gender-related activities and outcomes, there must be a clear and concrete justification for excluding women's participation.
- **Look beyond the highest levels:** Financially support programs that strengthen the capacity of women at both grassroots and national leadership levels to effectively participate in negotiation proceedings.

NGOs and civil society

- **Unite local voices:** Coordinate between organizations to create a clear and targeted message so mediators can effectively raise civil society and women organizations' concerns in mediation proceedings.
- **Become partners with research institutions:** Work with academics to assist in gathering data on local participation in a way that is safe, systematic, and nonintrusive.

¹ Council on Foreign Relations, "Women's participation in peace processes," updated July 31, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/interactive/womens-participation-in-peace-processes>.

² Karin Aggestam and Ann E. Towns, eds., *Gendering diplomacy and international negotiation* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), 157.

³ Patty Chang et al., *Women leading peace* (Washington, DC: Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2015), 13.

⁴ Thania Paffenholz et al., *Making women count – Not just counting women: Assessing women's inclusion and influence on peace negotiations* (Geneva, Switzerland: Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative and UN Women), <https://www.inclusivepeace.org/sites/default/files/IPTI-UN-Women-Report-Making-Women-Count-60-Pages.pdf>.

⁵ Anjali Dayal and Agathe Christien, *Women's Participation in Informal Peace Processes* (Washington, DC: Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2018). It is likely that this underestimates the number of actual processes and groups, given the evidentiary barriers to acquiring this information. We found some unclear evidence of women's involvement in seven out of the 38 cases, likely due to the lack of evidence on peace processes in Somalia, Côte d'Ivoire, East Timor, and Afghanistan; these cases do not count toward the 27 in which we can clearly identify women's involvement. Only four out of 38 cases lacked any evidence of women's involvement as part of the Track II process. These four cases are heterogeneous in terms of period and region: the 1992 Chapultepec agreement, the 1997 Tajikistan peace agreement, the 2005 Sudanese Comprehensive Peace Agreement, and 2004 Comprehensive Settlement of the Cyprus Problem.

⁶ Patty Chang et al., *Women leading peace*, 51.

⁷ Susanne Jonas, *Of centaurs and doves: Guatemala's peace process* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2000); Virginia M. Bouvier, *Gender and the role of women in Colombia's peace process* (New York: UN Women, 2016), 17-18.

⁸ "Intra-Syrian talks - Key dates of the peace process," website of the UN Office at Geneva, [https://www.unog.ch/unog/website/news_media.nsf/\(httpPages\)/E409A03F0D7CFB4AC1257F480045876E?OpenDocument](https://www.unog.ch/unog/website/news_media.nsf/(httpPages)/E409A03F0D7CFB4AC1257F480045876E?OpenDocument).

⁹ For example in Kenya, women led an already-robust civil society network and organized in response to the post-election violence. They received external support, most notably from one member of the mediation team, Graça Machel.

¹⁰ Expert commentary from Bridging Theory & Practice symposium on women in informal peace processes on July 12, 2018, convened by the Georgetown Institute of Women Peace and Security in Washington, DC.

¹¹ Connie Peck, ed., *A Manual for UN mediators: Advice from UN representatives and envoys* (Geneva, Switzerland: UN Institute for Training and Research, 2010), 29.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ UN Security Council, Resolution 1889, S/RES/1889 (October 5, 2009), <http://undocs.org/en/S/RES/1889%282009%29>; UN Security Council, Resolution 2122, S/RES/2122, (October 18 2013), <http://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2122%282013%29>.

¹⁴ Secretary-General's High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation (September 13, 20017), <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/personnel-appointments/2017-09-13/secretary-general%E2%80%99s-high-level-advisory-board-mediation>.

¹⁵ Opening Remarks at the Women Mediators' Networks: Connecting for Inclusive Peacemaking (March 22, 2018), <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/remarks-sg-team/2018-03-22/opening-remarks-women-mediators%E2%80%99-networks-connecting-inclusive>.

¹⁶ United Nations Guidance for Effective Mediation, annex to the report of the Secretary-General on Strengthening the role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and resolution (A/66/811, 25 June 2012), 21.

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