

# Global WPS Policy Workshop Brief

Walking the talk: Promoting women's rights in areas controlled by armed and political movements

On **13-14 September 2023**, Berghof Foundation and Fight for Humanity hosted as part of the **Observe and Act Project** a policy workshop (facilitated by Policy Lab) to discuss the role of armed and political movements (APMs) as 'duty bearers' and implementers of UNSCR 1325 during conflict and peace processes. The main objective of the event was to jointly explore the following question:



*How can we enable the international policy community to consider ways to support the integration/adaptation of WPS principles in conflict-affected areas where APMs often hold large territories or political power, in order to support peacebuilding?*

During the workshop, more than 20 experts representing or advising state governments and international organizations from 16 different countries in Southeast Asia, the MENA region, Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe and Latin America engaged in the following activities:

**Day 1:** Participants introduced themselves and shared their hopes and fears for the workshop, before taking part in a “de-mechanisation” game designed to encourage participants to step outside of their traditional ways of thinking. The Berghof Foundation and Fight for Humanity teams concluded the day by showcasing their research in Yemen and Myanmar.

**Day 2:** Participants further explored and discussed the research findings through an evidence discovery walk, before discussing in table groups the challenges of engaging APMs on the WPS agenda in their own institutions and contexts. The groups identified common concerns and drafted a set of challenge questions. In the afternoon, participants generated ‘ideas canvases’ to identify concrete steps to tackle some of these challenges, and completed pledge cards to consider how they might follow up and implement ideas from the workshop in their own work.

The participatory approach facilitated critical reflections on this sensitive topic, and joint identification of key challenges in policy-making from a government perspective, resulting in the following key takeaways.

## Key Takeaways:

- 1. National Action Plans:** NAPs of state governments are the main instrument to operationalise the WPS Agenda. They need to find ways to integrate APMs in effort towards upholding the protection and participation rights of women and girls. This applies to NAPs of both donor countries and conflict-affected countries. If the political context does not allow for addressing APMs explicitly, due to legal restrictions or political sensitivities (i.e. concern for legitimising illegal/violent actors), they can be engaged indirectly through civil society actors such as women's organisations, religious or traditional leaders who can influence APMs or are active in areas under their control.
- 2. Action Plans with APMs:** APMs can be incentivised to create own action plans for the implementation of WPS principles, in order to increase their normative commitment and policy regulations to support women's participation and protection (while also paying attention to other WPS pillars such as prevention and reintegration). Civil society actors and media can advocate for, support and/or monitor the drafting and implementation of such action plans.
- 3. Spaces for dialogues on WPS:** Multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms with government actors, civil societies and actors linked to APMs (if they cannot participate directly) on the implementation of the WPS agenda are needed. Women (and women's organisations) often receive a lot of training but lack opportunities for exchange, joint strategizing and peer learning with other groups or movements, nationally or internationally. Those convening such spaces should avoid favouring those movements and interlocutors who are most accessible – such as those who speak English or are most familiar with the WPS agenda – and look for creative ways to include 'hard to reach' actors.
- 4. Localised approaches:** Approaches to engaging APM on WPS need to be tailored to each context, based on a thorough assessment (integrating local stakeholders, such as women's organizations) of the needs and priorities of women and girls living in areas governed by those actors. Foreign donors and governments need to consider the added value of, and concrete avenues for, considering APMs as target groups of technical support or policy engagement. Given the volatility of conflicts and peace processes, WPS programming and project funding should allow flexibility and adaptation to evolving needs on the ground.
- 5. Knowledge generation and transfer:** Despite the acute need to increase efforts to improve women's rights in areas controlled or influenced by APMs, they are not yet seen as relevant stakeholders in WPS frameworks and spaces. Many of them have developed their own approaches, policies and practices to strengthen the participation and protection of women and girls, even though they are not framed through WPS terminology. Comparative learning and participatory research can showcase evidence for effective engagement with those actors, and collect good practices in order to support them in developing their own gender inclusion agenda.

