

PRESS RELEASE

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Council conclusions on women, peace and security

1. Gender equality and human rights are at the core of universal values and constitute stand-alone priorities mainstreamed across all European Union policies. The Council recalls its Conclusions on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) of 10 December 2018, reaffirms the validity of the EU Strategic Approach to WPS, and commits to the full implementation of the EU's Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2019-2024. There is a need to address new issues and challenges which have arisen. The full implementation of the WPS agenda commitments is as relevant as ever in the current geopolitical context and changing security environment at the heart of peace and security, as established by resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions.
2. The Council supports the UN Secretary General's proposal in his Our Common Agenda report of a New Agenda for Peace which would include building on the existing WPS agenda in order to place women and gender equality at the heart of peace and security.
3. The Council underlines the political importance of the WPS agenda and welcomes its incorporation into different EU policies and action plans since the adoption of the 2018 Council Conclusions. In this regard, the European Commission has adopted an EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 and an EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III "An Ambitious Agenda for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in EU External Action" 2021-2025, welcomed through Presidency Conclusions of 16 December 2020. The Council invites the High Representative and the Commission to report on actions taken and lessons learned in implementing the WPS commitments into reporting regarding the different policies and action plans and will draw operational conclusions to accelerate action in this regard.
4. The Council is concerned about the disproportionate effect that armed conflicts continue to have on women and girls worldwide, as well as the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence including conflict-related sexual violence, offline and online. The Council will enhance its efforts to prevent and counter sexual and gender-based violence in order to ensure full accountability and to combat impunity, and will encourage all stakeholders to join this collective endeavour. The Council underlines that the EU will apply a coordinated approach to risk mitigation and prevention of all forms of sexual and gender-based violence, and will ensure that responses are victim- and survivor-centered and trauma-sensitive, including by access to sexual and reproductive health care services, as well as mental health and psychological support. The Council reiterates its steadfast commitment to uphold international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and to end impunity for international crimes, not least when rape is used as a weapon of war.
5. The EU remains committed to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the outcomes of their review conferences and remains committed to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), in this context. Having that in mind, the EU reaffirms its commitment to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of the right of every individual to have full control over, and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality and sexual and reproductive health, free from discrimination, coercion and violence. The EU further stresses the need for universal access to quality and affordable comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information, education, including comprehensive sexuality education, and health-care services.
6. The Council expresses its concern about the worldwide backlash against women and girls' full and equal enjoyment of human rights and the declining security and safety for women and girls. The Council condemns the increasing reprisals, violence, threats and attacks against women and girls, both offline and online, in particular targeting women human rights defenders, women journalists, women peacebuilders, women-led organisations, politically active women, women trade unionists, women forced into displacement and migration, and all other women and girls in conflict and crisis affected settings, not least in Afghanistan, Colombia, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. It encourages the High Representative, the EEAS Ambassador for Gender and Diversity and Member States to intensify collaboration with other international, regional and local organisations as well as with civil society, including women's rights organisations, women human rights defenders and peacebuilders to address these trends.
7. The Council reiterates its call for strengthening the full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership of women and girls in conflict prevention and resolution throughout the conflict cycle, including in formal and informal mediation, crisis management, peacebuilding and peacekeeping, peace negotiations, demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration, security sector reform and other recovery and reconstruction processes. The Council recalls its commitment to support women's and youth's equal, full, effective and meaningful participation, in all their diversity, including in all spheres of public and political life, as per the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024. A substantial increase in women's leadership and participation in all aspects of peace and security is necessary not only for the sake of human rights and gender equality, inclusive governance and social cohesion, but also for the sustainable resolution of conflicts and crises.
8. Civil society organisations, women-led organisations, women human rights defenders and women peacebuilders play a vital role in realising change and commitments of the WPS agenda. They often face specific security threats, intimidation and harassment and deserve our recognition, support and protection. The Council underlines the importance of strong cooperation with civil society organisations in implementing gender equality and WPS commitments and in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It values the critical role of civil society, grassroots women's organisations, peacebuilders and human rights defenders through active engagement, consultation and participation, including in

humanitarian and crisis context. In this regard, the Council invites the Commission, the High Representative, the Member States, EU Special Representatives, EU Special Envoys and other EU representatives to further strengthen their cooperation and consultation with civil society organisations, including women-led organisations, to ensure gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The Council encourages Member States to include women-led and women-focused civil society organisations in policy and project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the WPS agenda.

9. The impact of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine on all women and girls is of grave concern, and the growing evidence of sexual and gender-based violence, including as a tactic of war by Russian armed forces as well as paramilitary entities controlled by Russian armed forces, is immensely alarming. In this context the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine has held that war crimes were committed in Ukraine. The Council underscores the need to ensure full accountability for sexual and gender-based crimes. It is of critical importance to guarantee a gender-responsive, survivor-centered and trauma-sensitive approach in all efforts to respond to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, namely in the humanitarian response, the crisis response, and longer-term peace, security and reconstruction efforts. The Council welcomes and supports Ukraine's efforts to implement its second National Action Plan on WPS 2021-2025.
10. The ongoing violent crackdown in Iran against protesters, including women and children further highlights the urgency of the WPS agenda and calls for our support. The rights of women and girls in Iran must be respected and safeguarded, and their full, equal and meaningful participation in public life, including in decision-making, ensured. The Council expects the Iranian authorities to abide by the principles enshrined in the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a party, notably by respecting the right to non-discrimination and the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of civil and political rights guaranteed under the ICCPR. Furthermore the Council calls on the Iranian authorities to release all non-violent protesters, provide due process to all detainees and provide clarity on the number of deaths and arrests.
11. The deteriorating situation for women and girls in Afghanistan continues to be of grave concern. The Council condemns the systematic rollback by the Taliban of women's and girls' human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Council calls for targeted and substantial efforts by the High Representative, the Commission and the Member States to address the situation and to ensure participation of Afghan women in policy dialogues concerning Afghanistan. The Council recognises the importance of initiatives to further the WPS agenda such as the establishment of the EU-facilitated Afghan Women Leaders' Forum in this regard.
12. The WPS-agenda is central to contemporary global peace and security challenges. In this regard, the Council highlights that armed conflict as well as new, emerging and increasingly complex security challenges, such as climate change, food insecurity, scarcity of water and other natural resources, pandemics, including the impact of COVID-19, energy challenges, terrorism, organized crime, forced migration and displacement, human trafficking, risks associated with emerging and disruptive technologies and hybrid threats, including cyber attacks and disinformation, disproportionately impact women and girls and have resulted in an overall deterioration of women's position with detrimental consequences for the full enjoyment of the human rights of women and girls globally. The EU and its Member States commit to seek understanding of and to act on the gender dimensions of the security risks to avoid exacerbating vulnerabilities, but also to uncover new entry points for advancing gender equality, improving resilience and sustaining peace. It is crucial to ensure that any response is based on:
 - A gender analysis of the causes, consequences and policy implications, using gender statistics based on sex-, age- and disability- disaggregated data, to ensure a more effective, inclusive and sustainable response;
 - Women's full, equal and meaningful participation in all phases of the conflict cycle;
 - The prevention of and protection from gender-based violence;
 - Overall inclusive and gender-responsive leadership in politics and security related decision-making in general.
13. The Council underlines the need to follow-up on commitments made in relation to the integration of WPS into the Strategic Compass and the 2020 Concept on EU Peace Mediation and EU Mediation Guidelines, as well as efforts undertaken to promote and ensure a gender perspective and WPS commitments in the development of the EU Stabilisation Concept and the Civilian CSDP Compact 2.0. The Council underlines its commitment to increase the number of women in all functions, including leadership positions. Further, the Council recognises the need to integrate WPS fully into both pillars of the European Peace Facility. EU external action should actively contribute to the realization of the human rights of women and girls including the prevention of conflict related sexual and gender-based violence.
14. The Council recalls the need to ensure gender mainstreaming, expertise and the implementation of the WPS agenda in CSDP missions and operations, to enhance situational awareness and improve preventive and protective measures, and the overall planning, conduct, follow-up, monitoring and evaluation of the missions and operations. This is in line with the Strategy and Action Plan to Enhance Women's Participation in Civilian CSDP Missions 2021-2024. The Council invites the EU institutions and the Member States to ensure that CSDP missions and operations further promote gender equality, focusing also on the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in all civilian and military CSDP functions, including in leadership positions. A gender-responsive leadership should be fostered by strengthening the gender expertise within the CSDP management structure of the EEAS, including the Union's military structures. The Council calls on the EU and its Member States to strengthen the network of human rights and gender advisors in CSDP missions and operations, in accordance with the commitment in the EU Strategic Compass set for 2023. The Council calls for continued implementation of a prevention-based zero-tolerance policy for all forms of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment committed by EU staff or staff deployed in CSDP missions and operations, as well as by commanders/managers, contractors and partners. It encourages the EU and its Member States to further address these issues in the next civilian CSDP Compact.
15. The Council also notes that the implementation of the full WPS agenda remains a key priority for the EU-UN strategic partnership on peace operations and crisis management, as endorsed in its Conclusions of 24 January 2022, as well as for partnerships with other international and regional organisations such as the OSCE, NATO and the African Union. It calls for an increased effort to accelerate the operationalisation of the joint EU-UN commitment on WPS, with special attention paid to the protection of women human rights defenders and peacebuilders against reprisals, threats and violence. The Council encourages the EU and its Member States to systematically adopt a gender-responsive approach, and to integrate a gender perspective and analysis, and women's participation in all EU external actions, including all CFSP/CSDP actions, civilian and military, as well as in political dialogues, human rights dialogues and international partnerships.
16. The Council expresses appreciation for the mandate and the work of the EEAS Ambassador for Gender and Diversity towards the further integration of WPS commitments into EU action. To this end, the Council emphasizes the need for the EU and its Member States to apply gender-responsive approaches in all efforts aimed at the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, security, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response as well as the relief, recovery

and reconstruction of conflict-affected states, including transitional justice processes, and to ensure full, equal and meaningful participation of women in these processes. The Council invites the Political and Security Committee (PSC) to consider how WPS can be systematically integrated and mainstreamed into all political and security dialogues.

17. The Council underlines the importance of the EEAS, including the EU Military Staff, Commission services and Member States developing and exchanging good practices regarding gender-responsive indicators for accountability, sex- and age-disaggregated data and gender analysis in all peace and security related programming, financing and CSDP action, in order to be able to track and monitor progress and uphold the human rights of women and advance the WPS agenda. It recalls in this connection the role of the EU Task Force on WPS as an important forum for exchange and partnership between EU institutions, Member States and civil society and invites the EU and its Member States to make use of synergies of international frameworks of monitoring and impact measuring, as appropriate.
18. The Council remains completely committed to ensuring the implementation of the full WPS agenda and remains engaged on this issue.

Press office - General Secretariat of the Council

Rue de la Loi 175 - B-1048 BRUSSELS - Tel.: +32 (0)2 281 6319

press@consilium.europa.eu - www.consilium.europa.eu/press