



## ICAN`s 2019 Women, Peace and Security Forum

This year the Brussels International Center attended the 8th annual Women, Peace and Security forum, hosted by the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN), with the support of the Norwegian Foreign Ministry. The forum, which is taking place in Oslo, is bringing together a variety of civil society representatives from over 38 countries and other international actors, such as EU policy-makers and UN experts. Discussions on this 4-days event ranged from trends analysis regarding the threat of violent

extremism and conflict, as well as sharing lessons from women peace-builders on how to mitigate violence and promote peace and security at the local level.

On the third day of the event, more specifically, the panelists and participants presented compelling examples on how parliamentarians can serve as partners in supporting the women, peace and security agenda by representing wide geographic and disciplinary ranges in their presentations.

The event has allowed for an exciting mixture of ideas that were focused on connecting the role of policy-makers in sustaining women peace-builders' activities on the ground as vital to the maintenance of peace. Over the course of the first day, participants were also given the opportunity to explore the tools and techniques that are being used in different contexts.

Ms. Mobina Jaffer, MP, Parliament of Canada, related how women can change social conceptions of their roles as care-givers by gaining strong mandates as leaders. She further detailed her own experience on gaining access to talk to armed groups thanks to the support she received from the Canadian government. "It is not about being a women. Its about gaing the support, power and resources" MP Jaffer stated. Participants further expanded on Ms. Jaffer's experience to speak about women's representation at the political sphere. Participants argued that in order for a parliament to maintain its legitimacy, it is critical that citizens are provided with meaningful opportunities to provide feedback and input into the work of MPs on what matters to them. To these ends, parliamentarians can use their powers in the legislature to promote laws, budgets, policies and programmes.

Other concrete actions were also suggested, such as capacity-building and technical support for MPs and political parties on the role and needs of women peace-builders. Secondly, there is a strong need to improve the security situation of these women at the legislative and institutional level, while also taking into consideration their different needs and priorities in a variety of contexts. In addition, participants suggested that the creation of strong platforms for exchange between MPs and women peace-builders, with consensus on WPS and priority areas, can enhance communication, mutual understanding and turn ideas into concrete actions, while also enhancing MPs commitments on WPS.

The panel followed by a group discussion took stock of how parliaments, through collaboration and dialogue with civil society can promote the WPS in their countries through legislation, advocacy and outreach. The session featured experiences from UNDP's Global Project on Parliaments piloted in Kyrgystan, Sierra Leone, and Sri Lanka.

During the proceedings, a few main themes were highly prevalent, those being understanding challenges, opportunities and a road ahead for boosting parliamentary involvement with stakeholders, including women's advocates and organizations to progress the WPS agenda. Through discussion, participants identified challenges to gender balance and gender mainstreaming, including the lack of funding, resources and difficulty in measuring implementation. Ms. Marita Sorheim-Rensvik, Special Envoy for WPS at the Norwegian MFA, pointed out to issues both women's organizations and donors face. Ms. Sorheim-Rensvik stated that one of the main problems within these fields is that there is a great difficulty to link the thinking and strategy that women peace-builders have with the formal and administrative requirements of donors.

There were many innovative recommendations made throughout the day. Participants left with an understanding of the need for a whole community and grassroots approach to connect policy to actions. This concept applies to the localization of definitions of the role of women peace-builders, their challenges and priorities, as well as the need for personalized and regionally grounded initiatives that promote women`s leadership, their substantial inclusion and representation.

