

# The Women, Peace, and Security Agenda

*La agenda de mujeres,  
paz y seguridad*

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## **Abstract**

Given the priority that Mexico attaches to the promotion of gender equality, this article focuses on its role as co-chair of the Informal Expert Group of Women, Peace and Security in the Security Council. It highlights the efforts to ensure the impact of the Group throughout all actions of the Council, in a context of increasing backlash regarding women's and girls' rights. It also shares the results of the Trio Presidency, an unprecedented initiative by Ireland, Kenya, and Mexico, to prioritize the wps Agenda during their presidencies in the Council. This has been adopted by other permanent and elected members with encouraging results.

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## **Resumen**

Siendo la promoción de igualdad de género una prioridad de México, este artículo se centra en su papel como copresidente del Grupo Informal de Expertos de Mujeres Paz y Seguridad del Consejo de Seguridad. Destaca los esfuerzos por asegurar el impacto del Grupo en todas las acciones del Consejo, en un contexto de crecientes retrocesos sobre los derechos de mujeres y niñas. Comparte también los resultados de la Triada Presidencial, una iniciativa sin precedente de Irlanda, Kenia y México, para priorizar la agenda de mujeres, paz y seguridad durante sus presidencias en el Consejo. Con resultados alentadores, ésta ha sido adoptada por otros miembros permanentes y electos.

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## **Keywords**

Women, peace and security, wps, United Nations, Security Council, human rights, gender, peace

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## **Palabras clave**

Mujeres, paz y seguridad, MPS, Naciones Unidas, Consejo de Seguridad, derechos humanos, género, paz

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## **Mexico and the Women's Agenda in the United Nations System**

Mexico is a country that has made important contributions to the gender equality agenda at the multilateral level. It hosted the first World Conference on Women in 1975. It contributed decisively to the development of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), seen as the charter for women's international rights, adopted in 1979, and played a key role in the establishment of the Follow-up Mechanism of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará), an instrument that established, for the first time, the right of women to live a life free of violence. Together with U.N. Women, in 2018, Mexico established the Global Center of Excellence in Gender Statistics, the first of its kind in the world, and, more recently, as co-organizer with France of the Generation Equality Forum, in 2021, it was one of those responsible for the creation of the Women, Peace & Security and Humanitarian Action Compact (WPS-HA), whose objective is to follow up on the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda, strengthen accountability and financing to implement the commitments adopted in the regulatory framework.

Prior to assuming its position as an elected member of the Security Council, Mexico highlighted that the WPS agenda would be one of the

priorities of its mandate. This decision was consistent with the country's historic commitment to promoting gender equality, and aligned with its new feminist foreign policy, adopted in December 2020. It was clear that it was in Mexico's interest to co-chair the Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security (IEG-WPS), dedicated to including gender issues in debates on countries on the Security Council agenda. The negotiation to co-chair the Group was not easy, since other elected members also wanted to lead it. After several months of negotiation, Mexico and Ireland became co-chairs of the Group.

From the outset, Mexico took on the creative task of working on a mechanism for the wps agenda in all of the Council's actions. We decided to focus on defending the implementation of the 10 Security Council resolutions on the wps agenda, since an important objective was also to avoid any risk of regression, taking into account that China and Russia consider this a controversial and controversial agenda, promoted—in their view—by Western countries. This position, furthermore, emerges in a context of increasing setbacks around the world regarding the rights of women and girls, and the protection of women human rights defenders, who are essential elements in the wps agenda.

There was a logic behind the Mexican strategy. While the wps agenda was certainly one of the most visible, and widely supported by a solid legal framework, in reality, it continued to face resistance. Permanent members of the Security Council who do not support it have also increasingly used the concept of sovereignty to question the narrative, the inclusion of civil society, or accountability in the wps agenda. A clear example was the negotiation process of resolution 2242 (2015), which revealed the reluctance of China and Russia in relation to the idea that conflict prevention was part of the wps agenda.

## **Outlook of the wps agenda upon Mexico's arrival to the Security Council**

By January 2021, the wps agenda had already suffered several setbacks, raising doubts not only about the implementation of its resolutions, but also the Council's ability to preserve its regulatory framework. In October 2020,

Russia had presented under its presidency a draft resolution commemorating the 20th anniversary of resolution 1325 (2000), which was not adopted, as the Security Council considered that the draft did not provide new elements, and fell short of the previously agreed language, so it was more important to preserve what we already had. The truth is that the dynamics within this body have gradually changed since the adoption of the first resolution 1325 in the year 2000. In 2019, the Security Council had approved, without consensus, resolution 2467 on sexual violence in conflicts, presented by Germany. At the time, China and Russia argued that it exceeded the mandate of the Security Council and abstained.<sup>1</sup> The U.S. delegation, under the administration of President Donald Trump, also threatened to use their veto if language on sexual and reproductive health was included.

## The legal framework of the wps agenda in the Security Council

For the purpose of this article, it is appropriate to briefly review the legal framework of the wps agenda, as it constitutes the basis for the work of the IEG-WPS.

The first time that the Security Council addressed the issue of wps on its agenda was in October 2000, under the presidency of Namibia, when resolution 1325 was adopted. This is a historic resolution, because it was the first to link women to peace and security processes, analyzing the consequences of conflicts on women, and highlighting the role that they can play in conflict resolution and the construction of sustainable peace. The resolution was born out of a historical context of enormous aggression and violence against women. The conflicts in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Liberia, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone had revealed previously unknown or unrecorded levels of sexual violence. The resolution had the support

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<sup>1</sup> The resolution was adopted on April 23, 2019, with 13 votes in favor (Belgium, Cote d'Ivoire, Dominican Republic, Equatorial Guinea, France, Germany, Indonesia, Kuwait, Peru, Poland, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States) and two abstentions.

of a geographically representative group of countries, and was decisively promoted by women's civil society organizations, who have since been the driving force in the implementation of this agenda.

Resolution 1325 (2000) is also characterized by its broad scope and focuses on four points: a) the role of women in conflict prevention; b) their full, equal and meaningful participation in the construction of peace; c) the protection of their rights and those of girls during and after a conflict, and d) the needs that arise in the post-conflict stage and the participation of women in it. The resolution also represents a watershed because of its normative weight, no longer viewing women only as victims and recognizing them as agents of change and essential actors in the maintenance of international peace and security. The resolution also calls on the Secretary-General of the United Nations to appoint more women as representatives and special envoys. In summary, this resolution incorporates the gender dimension into all aspects of a peace process.

Resolution 1325 (2000) also became the starting point for the adoption of other resolutions: 1888 (2009), 1889 (2010), 1960 (2011), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015) and 2493 (2019), which reiterate the importance of the active participation of women in the construction and peacebuilding. Likewise, more specific resolutions were adopted that focus on the prevention of sexual violence in the context of an armed conflict. In 2009, the Security Council voted in favor of resolution 1820, the first on the issue of sexual violence and its use as a weapon of war and threat to international peace and security, and subsequently resolution 2467 (2019), alluded to earlier.

## **Birth of the WPS Informal Expert Group**

In 2015, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2242, as mentioned above. This is an important resolution for the WPS agenda, because it calls for the participation and leadership of women, in a new international context characterized by violent extremism, a greater number of refugees and internally displaced people, in addition to the global impact of climate change and health pandemics. In this sense, the resolution mandates "the creation of an Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security" to support the Council in the implementation of its commitments.

## **The Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security of the Security Council and the work of Mexico and Ireland**

With this robust regulatory framework, Mexico worked to ensure the transversal impact of the IEG-WPS in the actions of the Security Council. With the aim of multiplying the reach of WPS language in Council deliberations and resolutions, the entire team of diplomats with responsibility for Council issues was familiarized with the WPS agenda. In this regard, we ensured that the issues of prevention of sexual violence, protection of women human rights defenders and their participation in electoral, negotiation and peace restoration processes maintained high visibility.

The Mexican team, as co-chair with Ireland, also had the power to undertake various actions, in order to ensure a better flow of information between actors at the headquarters in New York and U.N. bodies on the ground. The objectives were to incorporate gender language into resolutions on the renewal of peace operations mandates, include gender analysis by the speakers to the Council, and implement greater mainstreaming of the gender perspective in the work of the Security Council, in addition to making specific statements to the press (stake-outs), and considering field visits at the expert level.

Over the course of the two years, the IEG-WPS generated a space for dialogue for systematic and transparent consultations between the members of the Council and the representatives of the U.N. Secretary-General, as well as the teams of the U.N. agencies, funds and programs on the ground. The evaluation of the progress and challenges of the WPS agenda in countries in conflict was complemented with meetings of women representatives of civil society from the countries under study, who explained the reality of the situation of women and girls on the ground.

Between January 1, 2021 and December 2022, the IEG-WPS met on 18 occasions to analyze the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, South Sudan, Sudan and Yemen. For the first time, the cases of Haiti, Lebanon, Palestine and Somalia were discussed. Also for the first time, the Group met with the 15 members of the Security Council, including Russia and China, which had not participated since its creation in 2015.

Considering the seriousness of the issue of sexual violence and the challenges in addressing this problem on the ground, Mexico and Ireland worked with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (OSRSG-SVC) to convene thematic meetings each year with the participation of women's protection advisors (WPAs) deployed in various peace missions.

We also carried out a number of advocacy and lobbying actions with national authorities for the implementation of the Group's recommendations. This was the case of Colombia and Lebanon. Likewise, letters were sent to the parties to the conflict in Yemen, highlighting concern about the lack of representation of women in peace negotiations and conflict resolution. The Government of Somalia was urged to provide assurances to women who would take part in the parliamentary elections and to avoid acts of aggression against the candidates.

Due to the scale of the events, the arrival of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan in August 2021 warranted a series of additional actions. On August 19, the IEG-WPS held a meeting with the participation of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which allowed the members of the Security Council to hear for the first time from the ground the implications for women and children of the return of the Taliban. Likewise, Mexico and Ireland sent a note to the president of the Council urging it to give the highest priority to the rights of Afghan women and girls to express their rejection of abuses, and to facilitate the emergency evacuation of women leaders and defenders of human rights who decided to leave Afghanistan. Mexico and Ireland also made statements to the media, insisting that the Council must speak with one voice and urge all Afghan parties on the need to achieve the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in any new government.

In June 2022, the first field visit of the IEG-WPS was held, in accordance with the guidelines in place since its creation. The visit to Lebanon, organized with the support of the United Nations Special Coordination (UNSCOL), prior to the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force (UNIFIL), allowed the members of the Security Council to verify the implications of WPS language on the ground, particularly on the renewal of mission mandates.

It was also possible to have a positive impact with strong WPS language in some resolutions such as 2594 (2021), concerning peace operations

and transitions. In this resolution, the Secretary-General is asked to include gender analysis and guarantee the participation of women in all stages of mission planning and transition processes.

To give an idea of the importance of the work of the IEG-WPS in recent years, specifically on WPS language in the various Council resolutions and declarations, it is enough to note that in 2020, 61.4% of the resolutions included WPS language, and in 2021 this figure reached 63.1%. In terms of presidential statements, in 2020, 77% incorporated WPS language, while in 2021 this figure increased to 83.3%.

## The Presidency Trio Initiative

As co-chairs of the IEG-WPS, Mexico and Ireland met in early 2021 to discuss their work priorities. Ireland highlighted its interest in jointly organizing an Arria Formula<sup>2</sup> with Mexico on March 8, coinciding with International Women's Day, aimed at reiterating the call to the U.N. to ensure the participation of women in the peace processes led by the Organization. At this meeting, the idea arose of giving priority to the WPS agenda during the presidencies of both countries in the Council, and inviting Kenya to have quarterly continuity.

Thus, for the first time in the history of the Security Council, the three elected members committed to making the WPS issue a priority during their presidencies, with the aim of making visible and intensifying efforts to mainstream the women's agenda in the work of the Council.

Gender experts developed a catalog of shared commitments, taking into account the spirit of the WPS resolutions and other innovative proposals. The list included to ensure broad participation of women speakers from civil society; strengthen gender analysis in adopted products and in Council deliberations; provide a gender focus to one of the meetings mandated by the Council; give greater visibility to the WPS agenda through meetings

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<sup>2</sup> The Arria Formula meetings, initiated in 1992 by Ambassador Diego Arria of Venezuela (then President of the Security Council) are informal meetings convened at the initiative of one or more members of the Council to hear opinions from various actors, such as representatives of civil society and international organizations, on issues of concern related to the agenda of the Security Council.



with the media; ensure that all Council resolutions, especially resolutions and presidential statements, included language from the WPS agenda, and prepare a summary at the conclusion of the presidencies, with recommendations for the future.

In August 2021, Ireland, Kenya and Mexico met with the Secretary-General in order to involve him in the launch of the Presidency Trio, which was to commence in September, and to present the commitments of this initiative. The commitment to the initiative was subsequently circulated as an official document of the Security Council.

Throughout the three presidencies (September to November 2021), a notable improvement was achieved in gender parity among the speakers at the Council, who not only presented a perspectives from the field on the issue of women and girls, but also shared their experience on the implications for peace and security in their respective contexts. Likewise, language on WPS was incorporated into presidential statements on the United Nations-African Union alliance<sup>3</sup> and in Mexico's declaration concerning exclusion and inequality.<sup>4</sup> The gender perspective was also preeminently incorporated in the flagship events of the three countries.

During the presidency of Mexico, in November 2021, all invited civil society speakers were women. An indigenous woman was the keynote speaker at the flagship event on corruption, exclusion, inequality and conflict; a disarmament activist was the speaker on small arms and light weapons, and two women police commissioners spoke at the annual debate that Mexico presided over on the participation of police in peace missions.

At the end of the three presidencies, a summary of the achievements was presented, which was also circulated as an official document of the Security Council.<sup>5</sup> During this period, a total of 35 women representatives of civil society participated as speakers in the Council's deliberations, representing 49% of the total number of women invited speakers in 2021,

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<sup>3</sup> S/PRST/2021/21, October 28, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> S/PRST/2021/22, November 9, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> "A Security Council Presidency Trio for Women, Peace and Security Ireland, Kenya and Mexico September, October and November 2021. Handover and Summary", S/2022/91, February 3, 2022

and representing an increase of 26% compared to the previous year. Meanwhile, 2022 saw the largest number of open debates on WPS since this agenda reached the Security Council.

## Challenges and setbacks

Despite the efforts made, the Taliban's takeover of Kabul represented one of the biggest setbacks for the WPS agenda in the Security Council. Beyond the condemnation or statements to the press, the fact is that the rights of Afghan women and girls were pushed back by 20 years, starting with the right to education.

On September 17, 2021, the Security Council, through resolution 2596, renewed the extension of UNAMA's mandate for six months. The drafts of this resolution called on the Secretary-General to present operational and strategic recommendations, including the situation of women and girls. China and Russia, however, insisted on removing the reference to women and girls.

Despite resolution 1325 (2000) and others that have been mentioned here, women and girls continue to be victims of gender-based violence and, above all, sexual violence, which continues to be used as a weapon of war in the context of conflicts and post-conflict situations. Likewise, women politicians, human rights defenders, and peacebuilders face multiple threats, reprisals, and violence, including on digital platforms, that seek to silence their voices and inhibit their participation in public life. Survivors have poor access to justice systems, comprehensive sexual and reproductive health or mental health services, as well as reparation measures, and the impunity enjoyed by perpetrators encourages them to continue committing these crimes.

The Secretary-General's 2022 report on WPS is not encouraging. Although it emphasizes that women participate in all peace processes chaired or co-chaired by the U.N., their representation has in fact fallen from 23% in 2020 to 19% in 2021. It is clear that the road ahead to achieve effective implementation of the WPS agenda in the Security Council is still long.

Despite this, it is encouraging to see the sustained commitment of other members of the Security Council to continue moving forward in a creative

and innovative way in the implementation of the WPS agenda. Altogether, 15 States have adopted the shared commitments, including permanent and elected members (outgoing in 2021 and 2022, and incoming in 2023), that is, the seed sown by the Presidency Trio has contributed to strengthening the support of the non-elected members of the Security Council for this important agenda. In fact, for the first time the Security Council Report<sup>6</sup> dedicates a special issue to analyzing the scope of the Presidency Trio, which also raises suggestions regarding the implementation of the WPS agenda on the ground, based on this initiative.

There are increasing numbers of cases that confirm that the full, equal and significant participation of women in peace negotiations not only improves the quality of the agreements and the possibilities of their fulfillment, but also ensures their greater sustainability in the long term. This is why Mexico must continue promoting this agenda as a pillar of its foreign policy in the years to come.

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<sup>6</sup> Security Council Report, *Golden Threads and Persisting Challenges: The Security Council Women, Peace and Security Presidencies Initiative*, New York, Security Council Report (Research Report, 3), December 30, 2022.