



## The U.S. Civil Society Working Group on Women, Peace & Security

The U.S. Civil Society Working group on Women, Peace and Security (CSWG) was created in July 2010 to encourage and support the U.S. government's efforts in the adoption of a National Action Plan (NAP) focused on women's participation in peace and security processes, and protection in times of war. NAP's are a governmental tool to advance implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) and assist in monitoring its impact. The U.S. has joined 42 other countries in developing a NAP.

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Adopted in 2000, UNSCR 1325 is an international framework for more effective conflict resolution and peacebuilding by recognizing women's inclusion as necessary to these processes. The resolution was the result of active mobilization by civil society groups, particularly women's peace groups who, caught on the frontlines of conflict and post-conflict situations, advocated for more inclusive international peacebuilding efforts and stressed the importance of including women in such efforts. While the resolution was remarkably forward-thinking and reflective of the changed nature of 21<sup>st</sup> century warfare, progress on its implementation suffered when U.S. and international attention became consumed by military responses to counter terrorism in Afghanistan and Iraq in the aftermath of the attacks on September 11, 2001.

#### **Mission Statement:**

*The U.S. Civil Society Working Group on Women, Peace, and Security (CSWG) is a network of experts, NGOs, and academics with years of experience working on issues involving women, war, and peace. Inspired by and building upon the international Women, Peace, and Security agenda, the CSWG informs, promotes, facilitates, and monitors the meaningful implementation of the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security.*

Over the next decade, women's civil society organizations in the U.S. and abroad continued to remind policymakers of their commitments made in 2000. While UNSCR 1325 remained politically sidelined, in 2008 one critical aspect of the agenda – the issue of sexual violence in conflict—rose to the forefront. In the latter days of President George W. Bush's administration, U.S. leadership at the UN resulted in the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1820 (UNSCR 1820), which highlighted sexual violence in conflict as a threat to peace and security and reiterated the call for increased participation of women's civil society groups in peace making. Though an unequivocally positive step, it took another two years and the tenth anniversary of UNSCR 1325 for the U.S. to make the commitment to incorporate the issue of women, peace, and security comprehensively into its foreign policies. In October 2010, then U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that the U.S. would be developing a NAP on Women, Peace, and Security and on December 19, 2011, President Obama signed the executive

order making the U.S. NAP official policy. In doing so, the U.S. joined 42 countries that have developed such plans. Currently, the U.S. government is working to implement the executive order in the work of government entities. On July 31, 2013, the Women, Peace, and Security Act (WPS Act) was introduced to the U.S. House of Representatives. This bill builds off of the implementation taking place within U.S. government agencies by ensuring congressional oversight in regards to the funding and evaluation of the U.S. NAP.

Members of the CSWG on Women, Peace, and Security, some of whom had been actively involved in the adoption of UNSCR 1325 in 2000, were early advocates for a U.S. NAP on Women, Peace, and Security. They understood the need for a coordinated strategy to create the space, raise awareness, and build the political support necessary for the development and adoption of a NAP. Reflecting on the development and progress of the CSWG, this brief highlights key features that have characterized the working group's internal workings and core principles, as well as the key activities and contributions it has made to shaping U.S. policy and programming.

## **Guiding Principles of the U.S. Civil Society Working Group on Women, Peace & Security (CSWG)**

What started as a small group of concerned individuals and organizations, the CSWG has, in less than three years, become a go-to source of information and feedback for the U.S. government. As of August 2013, the working group had 25 full member organizations and 5 supporting organizations. From the outset, the CSWG has operated on the basis of five core principles.

### **1. A Clear Focus on UNSCR 1325.**

The UNSCR 1325 agenda is broad as it relates to issues of peace, security, crisis, and conflict-affected settings. It calls for gender sensitivity in all areas, in particular, the effective participation of women as decision makers in mediation, peacemaking and post-war processes. Given this breadth and complexity, the CSWG has resisted attempts to broaden the discussions to gender equality in general and to sensitive issues such as reproductive rights and domestic violence. Similarly, the CSWG has resisted efforts to broaden the debate to development practices more generally.

### **2. Broadening the Constituency: Diversity and Inclusiveness.**

The CSWG early on acknowledged that diversity and inclusiveness of its membership was not only an asset, but in line with the spirit of the resolution itself. It has welcomed a broad array of organizations with different backgrounds and experiences, provided they were committed to the principles of UNSCR 1325. Non-profit organizations that bring relevant experience in the field of programming, policy development, constituency building, and research continue to be welcomed to the CSWG. In addition, the CSWG consistently sought to engage with the U.S. government and multilateral organizations in a constructive manner, in line with how the pioneers of UNSCR 1325 had worked to build support for the issues across sectors.

**3. Organizations Rather than Individuals.**

The CSWG has welcomed individuals with expertise in the UNSCR 1325 agenda, recognizing that because the issues are still new, much of the expertise sits outside of formal institutions. Nonetheless, from the outset it was agreed that organizational membership is preferred. Indeed, institutional membership would ensure the sustainability of the working group and avoid a personality-driven process.

**4. Consensus and Collaboration on Operational Guidelines.**

The CSWG's working practices are based on consensus and collaboration. Documents that are drafted are shared systematically allowing everyone to contribute to the content. No materials are published without the working group's full consensus. There is an effective division of labor among members across areas of work through the use of task teams and subcommittees. At the same time there is respect for and recognition of the limited capacities that members may have at different times. As a result, organizations have the ability to limit or extend their responsibilities in the CSWG depending on their resources and the nature of activities.

**5. Neutral Convener – U.S. Institute of Peace.**

The U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) has been the *de facto* (and eventually *de jure*) convener of the Working group from its earliest days. Since the CSWG's members are primarily non-governmental and academic institutions, the neutrality of USIP has been vital to the group's success and allowed organizations across the political spectrum to join and participate in the working group. USIP's unique status as a congressionally funded but independent government organization dedicated to public outreach has also allowed the creation of a neutral space for bringing together congress, government agencies, and civil society. In sum, USIP as the CSWG's convener—trusted by all sides—has contributed to the working group's credibility and legitimacy.

**Operational Principles and Approaches of the U.S. Civil Society Working Group**

In the fall of 2012, the CSWG met for their first strategic planning session. At this meeting, the working group solidified a number of core operational principles in its approach to the U.S. government.

**1. Education and Advocacy: Facts Rather than Sentiments**

The CSWG recognized that the lack of knowledge and understanding among policy makers and practitioners about UNSCR 1325 was a critical impediment to progress of the women, peace, and security agenda. Throughout its brief history, the working group has created space for learning and exchange of experiences – within U.S. government agencies, across government and civil society, with Congress, and with international actors. Through a series of workshops and publications, the CSWG has explained the history, rationale, provisions, relevance and utility of the UNSCR 1325 framework to the U.S. government's foreign policy priorities. The CSWG has also highlighted the experiences of other governments in the development and implementation of NAP's.

More specifically, the working group has organized a number of small roundtable discussions; briefings; larger, multi-party consultations; panel discussions; and a knowledge and resource fair highlighting 22 CSWG member organizations and their work regarding UNSCR 1325. In sum, the CSWG's advocacy efforts have been rooted in sharing facts, offering solutions, and working collaboratively with the U.S. executive and legislative branches.

## 2. Standards and Concrete Suggestions

The CSWG actively sought to shape and influence the discourse about UNSCR 1325 and the U.S. NAP by proposing standards and providing concrete, specific examples and language. The working group brought its vast experience and expertise to bear in its interactions with the U.S. government. Through its solution oriented, education, and awareness raising approaches, the CSWG has been able to expand the range of issues to be addressed in the U.S. NAP and helped define standards and core principles guiding work as outlined in the U.S. NAP. In February 2011, the working group published a memorandum that invited engagement with the U.S. government and defined four benchmarks against which actions by the U.S. government should be evaluated—gender analysis, inclusion, resources, and accountability.<sup>1</sup> In November 2011, while the U.S. government was undergoing its internal negotiations and discussions on the U.S. NAP, the CSWG published the *U.S. Civil Society Working Group Expert Statement for the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security*,<sup>2</sup> a document recalling the rationale and relevance of the UNSCR 1325 agenda and countering persistent myths surrounding UNSCR 1325. Working group members contributed significantly to the U.S. government's call for evidence of the importance of UNSCR 1325 and helped the government reach out to women's organizations in conflict-affected settings. When the U.S. NAP was launched (in December 2011), the CSWG issued *10 Action Points in the First 150 Days*,<sup>3</sup> a brief detailing specific recommendations to be taken in the first hundred days of the U.S. NAP.

## 3. Multisectoral Complementarity and Connectivity

In 2000, the architects of UNSCR 1325 recognized the need for multisectoral collaboration. Momentum and support for the resolution would not have developed if the issue had remained solely in the hands of the UN and its member states. Civil society was a key actor and continues to be a key engine for this agenda. In the U.S. context too, a tri-partite alliance of the executive branch, civil society, and Congress is necessary. The CSWG has consistently reached out to the key branches of government—executive and legislative—to generate awareness and support for the NAP. USIP as a convener for government and civil society has played a pivotal role in facilitating the discussions and continues to connect all relevant actors to help implement and monitor the U.S. NAP

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Gender/CSO%20working%20group%20NAP%20Memorandum.pdf>

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Gender/U\\_S\\_%20Civil%20Society%20Working%20Group%20Expert%20Statement\\_MASTER\\_COPY.pdf](http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Gender/U_S_%20Civil%20Society%20Working%20Group%20Expert%20Statement_MASTER_COPY.pdf)

<sup>3</sup><http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Gender/Recommended%2010%20Action%20Points%20for%20First%20150%20Days.pdf>

## Moving Forward and Tasks Ahead

As the number of working group members and the rate of consultations between working group members and the U.S. government increased, members of the CSWG realized the need to institutionalize and formalize the working group's existence. At the strategic planning session held in 2012, the CSWG decided on a mission statement (see box) and a functioning structure composed of standing subcommittees, including a Legislative Branch subcommittee, an Executive Branch Subcommittee, and a Membership Subcommittee. It also decided to allow for the establishment of ad-hoc task teams to respond to situations as they arise in a flexible manner.

While the CSWG continues to abide by the Guiding and Operational Principles, it was also agreed that the working group would have three main foci of attention for 2013 and 2014: (1) continuing education about the U.S. NAP through targeted outreach and public events; (2) monitoring implementation of the U.S. NAP and continuing consultations with the U.S. government about implementation; and (3) providing input for specific actions in particular conflict situations. The CSWG is working toward these goals in several ways.

### 1. Educational Activities

The CSWG will continue its series of meetings and workshops that will allow members of U.S. government agencies to familiarize themselves not only with UNSCR 1325 and the U.S. NAP, but also with the experiences of other governments in developing and implementing NAP's. Increasingly, the working group has become a source of information and exchange for governments and civil society actors abroad. As such, the CSWG is rapidly becoming a global platform where experiences and lessons learned can be exchanged, and remains a key source of reference to which agencies of the U.S. government can turn for information and feedback.

### 2. Monitoring of the Implementation of the U.S. NAP

Robust civil society involvement and increased transparency have been recognized as key factors in government accountability. Through formal and informal consultations and meetings, the CSWG will continue to advise government officials on NAP implementation. The working group continues to confer with key points of contact within U.S. government agencies in order to share information regarding specific aspects of U.S. NAP implementation as well as to keep abreast of progress that has been made.

### 3. On the Ground Action

Conflict situations are often complex and unpredictable. Indeed, parameters of a conflict situation may change rapidly. This presents challenges for international actors, including the U.S., who often have neither the expertise nor the nimbleness to respond to changing situations quickly. This often leads to missed opportunities in terms of conflict prevention. The CSWG, due to its breadth of outreach, partnership, and deep knowledge of many regions in the world, often has better understandings of local

dynamics and is well postured to provide advice in terms of interventions. In 2013 and 2014, the CSWG will pay particular attention to what is happening in Afghanistan and in the Middle East.

## Conclusion

The CSWG has provided a unique platform to promote cooperation, information sharing, and unity of vision and purpose between the different actors when it comes to the elaboration and implementation of the U.S. NAP.

The UNSCR 1325 agenda is complex and, if implemented fully, will profoundly transform foreign policy and our approaches to international peace and security. Bringing about such change will take time, concerted effort, and consistent attention and focus. In the years ahead, the CSWG will continue to welcome new members, solidify its institutional structures and increase its focus on regional and thematic issues. The CSWG has demonstrated its capacity to influence policy in an important and constructive manner. The working group looks forward to continued work with the U.S. government in making UNSCR 1325 a reality at home and abroad. The U.S. Civil Society Working Group on Women, Peace, and Security will continue to be a critical player in ensuring the effective implementation of the UNSCR 1325 agenda in the years to come.

### Full Member Organizations\*

- 4Girls GLocal Leadership
- Amnesty International USA
- Baha'is of the United States
- Consensus Building Institute, Inc.
- Equality Now
- Futures Without Violence
- Foreign Policy Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL)
- Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace & Security
- Inclusive Security
- International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)
- International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN)
- International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)
- International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX)
- Institute for State Effectiveness (ISE)
- Peace X Peace
- Promundo – U.S.
- Protect the People
- Stockholm International Peace Research Institute North America (SIPRI North America)
- Strategy for Humanity
- United Nations Association of the National Capitol Area
- U.S. National Committee of UN Women
- Vital Voices Global Partnership
- Women Enabled, Inc.
- Women in International Security (WIIS)
- Women, Peace & Security Resources
- Women's Action for New Directions (WAND)
- Women's Refugee Commission

### Supporting Organizations\*

- Creative Associates International
- National Democratic Institute (NDI)
- Refugees International
- Women's Democracy Network
- Women Thrive Worldwide

\*As of February 7, 2014