HOW INCLUSIVE IS INCLUSIVE PEACEBUILDING?

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Summary by Lynn Jabra[1] and Audrey Azzo[2]

The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs in partnership with the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa organized a webinar on March 9, 2021 to commemorate International Women's Day entitled **"How Inclusive is Inclusive Peacebuilding?"**. The event, co-moderated by Ambassador Charlotta Sparre, Director of the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa; and Karma Ekmekji, Senior Policy Fellow and Lead Advisor on the Issam Fares Institute's Women, Peace and Security Initiative; aimed to **highlight the importance of diversifying peacebuilding processes through a multi-layered inclusive approach across various sectors to advance the Women, Peace, and Security agenda.** Speakers from various sectors including the media, public sector, academia, military/security sector, and private sector shared their experiences in relation to peacebuilding efforts and the roles they must play in promoting inclusion in decision-making processes. They also

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[1] Lynn Jabra is a Research Assistant at IFI.
[2] Audrey Azzo is a Communications Intern at IFI.

proposed practical recommendations and responded to pertaining questions sent by the audience.

In his opening words Joseph Bahout, Director of the Issam Fares Institute, highlighted the importance of International Women's Day and explained that this occasion "is a very good opportunity to reflect on the state of inclusivity and gender equality and to assess the progress made on this level." Invited speakers included, Ambassador Ann Dismorr, Ambassador of Sweden to Lebanon; Mohammad Naciri, UN Women's Regional Office Director for Asia and the Pacific; Ola Saleh, Program Development Specialist and Peacebuilding Advisor at Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation; Robert Egnell, Vice Chancellor of the Swedish Defense University; Rima Maktabi, UK Bureau Chief of Al Arabiya News Channel; and Soraya Bahgat, Social Entrepreneur and Gender Activist.

Highlights

The question put forward to the panelists within the context of this year's IWD theme, "Choose to Challenge", was **how inclusive is inclusive peacebuilding**? Empirical evidence, research, and successful precedents have clearly indicated that including women in peacebuilding create more just and equal societies, and that the peace attained is more sustainable and positive. But in reality**, are we really inclusive in advancing the women, peace, and security agenda? Are we including all sectors in peacebuilding? Are we tapping into all the available resources around us to attain peace?** Traditionally, peacebuilding actors have been governments, multilateral agencies and civil society organizations and networks that

continuously struggle to make their voices heard. But what about all the other actors? The media, the private sector, academia, the security and military sector, the practitioners and policy experts? How holistic is our approach to peacebuilding? How inclusive is it really?

Ambassador Ann Dismorr underlined the severity and complexity that govern today's conflicts urging for a need to work **on peacebuilding approaches that encompass multiple layers of society and reflect the multifaceted reality on the ground through enhanced inclusivity.**

Inclusive Peace, or no Peace at All?

Panelists answered one key question to start: "what does inclusive peace mean to you?". Drawing on her own experience covering the Arab Spring uprisings and the war in Syria and Iraq, Rima Maktabi, representing the media sector, disapproved of the typical portrayal of women as "victims of war".

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> *Women are at the heart of events. It is odd that they are absent from peace building.*
> *- Rima Maktabi*

Women in these contexts are the ones at the forefront of revolutions and at the heart of the uprisings and yet, they are completely absent from peacebuilding efforts. **Inclusive peace must involve a shift of focus towards these women on the ground fighting and**

struggling to sit at the negotiation tables. **Media can play a role** and portray these women as such. From a security perspective, Robert Egnell stressed **human security and "ownership of the problem" as particularly important.** In fact, inclusivity not only means defining the problem from the bottom up but also tackling the problem with that same approach, through the help of the people on the ground who are experiencing it first-hand. Inclusivity also happens when we **move beyond the "idea" of engaging all stakeholders to create peace, to essentially ensuring they actually have a meaningful participation and influence in the decision-making process.**

In order for that to have effect, Soraya Bahgat emphasized the importance of building capacities and fostering diversity.

This is where the support and patronage of the international community can be key. In Mohammad Naciri's words **"either there is peace or no peace at all" as peace is not merely the absence of war but a way of life.** Unless all hands are on deck, it will not be achieved.

By stating that everyone needs to be involved, he stressed the importance of not only including women and youth but also taking into consideration a broad sense of inclusivity, i.e. without neglecting any person who identifies as belonging to the large spectrum between the binaries of both genders. They are the ones paying the highest price in conflict and should therefore not be overlooked in the attempt to resolving them. Overall and following on the ideas proposed by the panelists, **inclusive peace is a process that should be locally owned and co-defined.**

Ola Saleh, in her remarks identified three qualities that she believes are needed for inclusive peacebuilding: (1) Intersectional feminism, (2) equitable solutions, (3) locally owned and codefined processes that produce peace: Does the process investigate the underlying power dynamics?

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> *One practical step to start with is uprooting patriarchal and colonial hangover from our multilateral systems, accelerating and achieving gender parity in peacemaking instruments, and promoting intersectional feminist leadership in the multilateral system.*
> *- Ola Saleh*

Emerging Actors Building Peace

According to Rima Maktabi, at the moment nothing about peacebuilding is inclusive. Women perceive war and peacebuilding differently and are therefore, able to push for agendas and raise issues that men often do not pursue. The media scene tend to see women journalists, reporters, and producers accomplish groundbreaking work, however, it is a rare sight to have women calling the shots, running shows, and making decisions. In order for that to happen, Rima strongly believes in the **need for women to support and push each other in such industries.**

On the security sector level, Robert Egnell raised an important issue to consider moving forward by touching on the **application of the notions of human security and gender**

perspectives in the fields of military and defense. While military organizations have exerted efforts with the aim to be more inclusive and better adapt to gender and human security, there is an overall major concern that steps are actually moving into the wrong direction. Moving from the sector of security and militarization which aim to maintain, prevent, and end conflict and war, it is noteworthy to look into the private sector and its role when it comes to peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction.

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> ## *Human security forces us to think about inclusivity.*
> *- Robert Egnell*

Soraya Bahgat, sitting at the crossroad between the private sector and activism, sheds light on the **importance of encouraging the private sector to contribute and be active in peacebuilding processes as that would allow for the participation of a diversified, richer, and skilled segment of society leading to more sustainable and effective solutions.**

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> ## *Inclusivity is about ensuring that women have an impactful participation in peace building.*
> *-Soraya Bahgat*

With this in mind and looking more broadly into other actors such as the international community comprised of multilateral agencies, **there is still a long way to go especially in the fight against what we call "toxic masculinity"** or what Mohammad Naciri referred to as instilled "patriarchy". In the discussion and as a representative of the UN, he details the challenges faced by the organization when working in patriarchal societies as it being pressured to behave and act in ways that do not fall in line with equality. In spite of that, significant work is being done to modify the ways the institution acts in such environments not only through internal reconstruction with new sets of rules and regulations but also through normative, cultural and behavioral changes, and policy adjustments.

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> ## *Patriarchy still governs our spaces as men and women.*
> *-Mohammad Naciri*

In line with that and on a more practical note, often times there tends to be a mismatch between the policy and grassroot levels of peacemaking especially because the process of building peace is believed to be designed in ways that are inaccessible to those emerging actors in society. This only means that all these different actors must unite and combine efforts to achieve sustainable peace on all fronts.

Policy Recommendations

The audience evoked the issue that peacebuilding is considered "elitist" and questioned how peacebuilding could become more mainstream and democratized. Egnell insisted on the need to **move away from**

traditional approaches of peace negotiations, agreements, and high-level diplomacy which are in their very nature exclusive processes towards thinking more about human security which tends to force us to be more inclusive and make the voices of those marginalized heard. Ola Saleh underlined the **importance of representing and portraying women negotiators with "a face and a name"** because more often than not they are considered replaceable when in reality they are indispensable. Other recommendations included the need to **ensure that the women and youth who are present at the negotiation table are actually representative of society at large** and the **urgency to work for a collaborative and cooperative environment between the different women's groups**.

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Next Steps: Holistic Approach to Peacebuilding

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Sustainable peacebuilding consists of finding a common ground that connects all the different actors in society to establish and guarantee a holistic, inclusive, and comprehensive approach. In the media, it is important to keep on pushing for women to be hired, for stories about women to be published, for reporting to apply a gender lens, for media teams to be gender sensitized, and to always remind society of the crucial and impactful role that women play in sustaining and binding communities. In the private and public sectors, each and every one of us must act as a gender champion to support and help women find their confidence and to capitalize on their talents. Gender equality is not a competition between men and women, **gender equality is about shared responsibilities and uprooting the**

patriarchal system is key to accelerating gender parity and promoting intersectional feminist leadership. To collectively improve our work and push for peaceful climates, it is important, as Egnell advised, "to clean and sweep in front of our doorsteps first".

As a conclusion, **peacebuilding should not be seen only as a way to put an end to conflict but as a way to create sustainable peace and prevent future conflicts**. There is an absolute need for creativity in peacebuilding, of highlighting not only successes but also challenges and how they are overcome, and to establish a mentality of always practicing what we preach.

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Key Notions and Ideas

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- ➡ Peace building needs to be recognized at all levels, from high-level negotiations to grass root work and stronger links are needed between them. How can peace building be better "democratized"?

- ➡ Human Security should lie in the heart of peacebuilding efforts and could contribute to higher degree of inclusivity.

- ➡ Negotiating and mediating teams in peace processes must stress three key elements: (1) Empathy; (2) curiosity; and (3) listening; all could be provided if processes are more inclusive.

➡ Peace should be a way of life. This calls for peaceful economies. In other words, how can we move away from economies that feed on war and blood?

➡ State to state relations is no longer enough to ensure peace and high-level diplomacy is exclusive by nature: Either there is inclusive peace bringing in all marginalized groups and all sectors, or there is no peace.

➡ The power of attribution: Peace processes would benefit from more inclusive ideas, for example through a "quota of women's ideas".

➡ Move away from the thinking that conflict actors are themselves peacebuilding actors.

For More Information

You can watch the full session again click here.