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**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

# Report

## Expert group meeting on women, peace and security: national women's machineries, conflict, occupation and transition in the Arab region
## Beirut, 4-5 december 2018

### Summary

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held an expert group meeting to discuss and review a draft study entitled "Women, peace and security: national women machineries, conflict, occupation and transition in the Arab region" at the United Nations House, Beirut, on 4 and 5 December 2018.

The meeting brought together experts from diverse backgrounds and institutions, from the region and beyond, to share expertise on institutional resilience in the contexts of conflict, occupation and transition with focus on the work of national women machineries in challenging operating environments. Participants held in-depth discussions on the first draft of the study which is being developed in partnership with the Lebanese American University and the London School of Economics.

The meeting concluded with a set of recommendations to support the finalization of the study along with a set of proposed policy recommendations addressed to governments and international and regional organizations.

# CONTENTS

**Introduction**

1.      The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held an expert group meeting to discuss and review a draft study entitled "Women, peace and security: national women machineries, conflict, occupation and transition in the Arab region" at the United Nations House, Beirut, on 4 and 5 December 2018. The study under review was developed following extensive research and data collection efforts at both the regional and national levels, led by ESCWA and in partnership with the Lebanese American University and the London School of Economics.

2.      The study aims to analyse the impact of conflict, occupation and political transition on the life cycle of national women machineries (NWMs) in the Arab region by examining their institutional resilience in conflict, occupation, post-conflict and transition contexts. The study also examines regional experiences from Jordan, the State of Palestine, Tunisia and Yemen and suggests a set of drivers, both internal and external, that contribute to building and reinforcing the institutional resilience of NWMs in regard to international standards and good practices.

## I.  CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

3.      Participants provided substantive inputs and comments, with the aim of improving the content of the study. The meeting concluded with a discussion that led to two sets of policy recommendations that were proposed for inclusion in the study: the first addressed to governments and the latter to international and regional organizations. The complete sets of recommendations can be found below in section E.

## II.  TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

### A.  THE CHANGING SITUATION IN THE ARAB REGION

4.      The session started with a presentation by Mr. Akram Khalifa, ESCWA Centre for Women (ECW) Regional Adviser on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, who gave a briefing on the introductory chapter of the publication. Its objective was to present the changing context in the Arab region following the events of the Arab uprisings of 2011. While some countries such as Egypt and Tunisia witnessed political transitions, others such as Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen experienced armed conflicts. He noted that the enduring weakness of State institutions, including NWMs, lay at the heart of the political debate. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Committee had repeatedly emphasized the importance of strengthening NWMs in the Arab region. He concluded that the current chapter was a still a work in progress and that the methodology and the structure still needed further elaboration. He asked participants to suggest additional arguments to strengthen the chapter, as well as to identify parts that were not of great importance.

5.      During the discussions that followed, participants suggested reflecting on the global political situation as well as on the issues of militarism. They also highlighted the need to show the importance of resilience. They also mentioned including that women's equality and women participation were State obligations, that women were part of the change currently underway in the region and clearly stating that the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda is for all women regardless whether the country is in conflict or not. Discussions also tackled the importance of not limiting the discussion of security to conflict situations since it was in fact much broader, including economic security, extremism, etc.

6.      Discussions also underscored the issue of centralized State institutions and stressed the need to consider country specificities when making reference to weak national institutions. Participants noted that the nature of NWMs differed from country to country and not all the NWMs were weak. They suggested highlighting the fact that the Arab region suffered from weak institutions generally and that exacerbated the situation for NWMs. It was also worth examining how the void left by weak institutions was usually filled by non-State actors.

7.	Participants also suggested showing the linkages between NWMs, civil society organizations (CSOs) and the outside world. Showing how the relationship between State institutions and CSOs differed from one country to another would enrich the study. While in some countries political decisions have limited the role of CSOs, usually constraining their freedom, in other countries the experience has been different. For example, in Tunisia, the recent violence against women (VAW) law was drafted in collaboration between CSOs and several ministries. In Iraq, the first National Action Plan (NAP) was also a collaboration between CSOs and ministries.

8.	In conclusion, participants flagged that the introduction should clearly spell out the aim of the study and its main arguments. The introductory chapter should also briefly present the normative framework and set the scene for the other chapters. Conceptual links, specifically, the link between security and VAW, should be clear in the introduction. Moreover, participants discussed the importance of maintaining the momentum created by the past publications on this topic. Given the knowledge available, this chapter should refer to existing literature to avoid repetition.

## B.	NWMs: BACKGROUND, ROLES AND RELATION TO WPS

9.	Ms. Mervat Rishmawi, lead consultant and author, presented the first chapter of the study. She gave a brief background on NWMs and how they were established following the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995. She addressed the mandate, form, roles and responsibilities, capacities and resourcing of NWMs and provided examples from the Arab region. As a final point, she presented the WPS Agenda and specified that it was not limited to the United Nations Security Council resolutions adopted under the specific title "Women, Peace and Security Agenda". Issues related to WPS existed as obligations even before the adoption of the Security Council resolution 1325. She introduced the four pillars of the WPS Agenda, namely participation, prevention, protection and relief and recovery; and explained how the three pillars of prevention, protection and participation run through the three phases of peace pre-conflict; conflict; and peacemaking and post-conflict mechanisms.

10.	In the subsequent discussions, participants noted that this chapter provided a sweeping look at NWMs. Participants discussed cases where a country had established more than one NWM, for example in Lebanon where a state ministry for Women's Affairs was recently established in addition to the already existing National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW). As such, NCLW was trying to determine how to work with an entity with overlapping functions, while avoiding duplication. Participants suggested highlighting Lebanon as a case study and to analytically address the ambiguity that was created. Participants noted that the more tools were made available, the more women's rights would benefit, as long as good mandates and clear distribution of work were specified for each tool.

11.	Discussions also tackled the need for truly independent and strong NWMs, with clear mandates, missions, powers and resources. It was noted that NWMs budgets were usually the least resourced component of State budgets, a common trait in the Arab region. Participants suggested including examples of country experiences beyond the Arab region. They also agreed that the importance of this chapter lay disseminating recommendations on the form of NWMs. As such, the report could propose an ideal set-up for NWM that can be adopted by States as a recommendation.

12.	Moreover, participants suggested making the link between resolution 1325 and NWMs more apparent as it currently was not clear. It was noted that resolution 1325 was the result of a coalition between southern and northern countries, the Arab countries were also involved in the process, which is worth stating in the study. Participants also suggested noting that the NAP was not simply about writing a plan but rather a tool to put people together. Cross-sectoral taskforces should be developed particularly so NAPs were based in different ministries and had different power and funding sources. As such, NWMs were not the only actors in the NAP.

13.     The need to document the success stories of countries that have developed NAPs was stated. In Tunisia. for example, the NAP was developed by all sectors and considered the many strategies implemented in relation to women's empowerment. The NAP did not have a separate budget as it was deemed that all line ministries should participate in developing and funding it. The NAP of Iraq was also pointed out as an example of a unique experience as its development started with the Iraqi Ministry of Women Affairs and ultimately involved 23 national entities. The situation in Iraq was intricate: despite the adoption in 2010 of the national strategy to combat VAW and the passing of a law on VAW in Kurdistan in 2011, the Ministry for Women's Affairs was excluded in the formation of a new government in 2012, creating an institutional vacuum regarding the NAP. An attempt to remedy the situation was made by having a participatory, cross-cutting approach to the NAP implementation.

14.     Participants specified that there was a misunderstanding of who was responsible for establishing a NAP. It was, in fact, the role of the government which was expected to consult with CSOs during this process as the involvement of women movements is crucial. Moreover, there was a need to differentiate between establishing a NAP and implementing it. Participants agreed on the importance of including different experiences and good practices from around the world.

15.     In conclusion, participants suggested that this chapter needed to be considerably shortened, particularly regarding the amount of information about the normative pillars of the Security Council resolutions, which could be summarized. Participants also noted that the content of the chapter was overly descriptive. The chapter would be improved if the content mixed normative, analytical and case studies. In conclusion, the lead consultant clarified that the present study was mainly about NWMs. As such, the NAP discussion would be dealt with specifically from the NWM angle as the primary interlocutors engaging in the NAP process. The section could include a paragraph about other mechanisms.

## C. NWMs in Arab countries and the WPS Agenda

16.     Mr. Akram Khalifa introduced the next chapter, which aimed at presenting the changing situation in the Arab region and its impact on some countries' NWMs while focusing on their resilience mechanisms. Case studies to be presented in the chapter were highlighted as follows: Yemen, as a case of conflict, Jordan, as a case of a country affected by a conflict in a neighbouring one (Syrian Arab Republic); State of Palestine, as case of occupation; and Tunisia as a case of political transition. Mr. Khalifa gave the floor to the representatives of each of the countries to present their case studies, noting that the presentations would focus on the legal framework, mandate, and mission of the NWM and how it contributed to its resilience; the impact of the national context on the resilience of the NWM; and the challenges for conducting its work.

17.     Ms. Sumaia Al Qarmi, from the Yemen Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, introduced the Yemeni case study. She stated that Yemen was among the first countries to implement the spirit of resolution 1325 with its four pillars. Yemen also implemented subsequent Security Council resolutions namely 1889, 2242 and 2122. Yemeni women had been suffering from the current war since 2015. Nevertheless, the Government had taken measures to include women in peace processes and women were consulted prior to the adoption of numerous legislations and during Yemen's National Dialogue Conference. More generally, Yemen suffered from economic and political instability which particularly affected women as evidenced in the cases of abuse, rape and torture.

18.     Ms. Al Qarmi stated that while several institutions such as the National Women's Committee, the Human Rights Committee, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour were all working on women's rights, on the other hand, Yemeni women were still being denied many of the economic and social rights. She also stated that the limited access to conflict zones hindered the ability to intervene to help women in need. She concluded by saying that the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour was working tirelessly on women's empowerment despite the numerous challenges. As a result of a series of workshops that were recently held, a plan of action for the participation of women in decision-making was prepared. Finally, she called for the support of the international community to set development programmes and income-generating projects for women.

19.     Ms. Nuha Zaidah, Deputy Secretary General of the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW), presented the Jordan case study. She gave a briefing on the mission and establishment of JNCW in 1992 following a resolution issued by the Council of Ministers in Jordan. She noted that the development of a law which would allow JNCW to have more sustainability and more resources was underway. The direct reporting line of the JNCW to the Council of Ministers would not change. In 2016, JNCW had a large budget increase, a great achievement which reflected the State's willingness to support women's issues. She added that JNCW had a complementary relationship with local NGOs and that the real challenge lay in translating political will into practical work.

20.     The representative from Jordan added that her country was affected by the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, which led to a shift of national priorities due to the influx of Syrian refugees into Jordan. She cited child marriage as an example of how the national rates had increased. Jordan had witnessed an increase in child marriage rates caused by the increase in child marriage among Syrian refugees, occurring both inside and outside camps. She noted the importance of Jordan's NAP, gave an overview on its process and concluded by briefly showing how work to implement it was underway.

21.     The floor was then given to Mr. Sami Sehwail, Director of Planning at the Ministry of Women's Affairs in the State of Palestine to present its case study. He gave an overview of all legal measures and actions that had been taken to protect women in Palestine, such as the establishment in 2012 of a high-level committee to implement resolution 1325 and the ratification of CEDAW without reservations in 2017. He also referred to the cabinet decision to adopt a national framework to implement resolution 1325, adding that governmental departments were requested to include this national framework among their sectoral plans and programmes. He also stated that all counterparts, including CSOs, national committees and United Nations agencies, worked together to implement it. He presented steps that need to be taken to protect women from violence.

22.     The representative from the State of Palestine then presented the NAP to implement resolution 1325, noting that its three strategic goals were to develop protection mechanisms for Palestinian women and girls from the Israeli occupation; to hold the Israeli occupation accountable according to international and regional standards; and to promote the participation of Palestinian women and their integration into national and international decision-making processes. He concluded by noting some of the challenges they were facing, such as the lack of financial resources and support, lack of gender-sensitive budgets, and the Israeli economic, social and political violations.

23.     In the absence of an official representative from the Tunisian Ministry of Women, Family, Children and Elderly, Ms. Hedia Belhaj Youssef, Head of Knowledge Management Department and GBV Programme Coordinator at the Centre for Arab Women Training and Research (CAWTAR) gave a presentation on the situation of Tunisia from the perspective of CAWTAR. The presentation was not a reflection of the official Tunisian position. She gave a brief overview of the mandate and history of the NWM in Tunisia, which started out as the Ministry of Women and Family in 1989 and became the Ministry of Women, Family, Children and Elderly in 2004. She referred to the strong relationship between the Ministry and CSOs, particularly in working together since 2011 on issues such as the prevention of VAW, law amendments and advocacy.

24.     Ms. Youssef also explained the characteristics of the Tunisian situation, highlighting the different mechanisms, such as a special committee on women and development that contributed to the elaboration of development strategies; the national strategies to promote women's situation in Tunisia, most recently covering the 2016-2020 period; and the special national programme to promote gender equality. She concluded by mentioning some of the challenges, such as the lack of funding and human resources, that were hindering the advancement of gender equality.

25.     The ensuing discussion covered the best structure and criteria for the NWMs. Participants agreed that the issue was not the structure, shape or form of the NWMs; but rather the tools, the power and the legal authority the machinery must have to hold the rest of governmental entities accountable for gender mainstreaming and gender equality. Participants also discussed the limited financial resources, which reflected

lack of political will. It was noted that when a government provides funding to the NWM, it is no longer in competition with CSOs for external funding, which positively impacts the relationship between the NWM and CSOs.

## D. DRIVERS OF RESILIENT NWMS

26. Ms. Lisa Gormley, consultant and contributor to the study, gave a brief overview of the third chapter. She noted that institutions were challenged during conflict, occupation, political transition periods when they needed to go beyond their normal mandate. She raised the following questions: What conditions created a sense of hope despite challenging situations? How was it possible to ensure that women's rights were taken seriously? NWMs play an important role in safeguarding women's rights. In support of this argument, she introduced a set of suggested internal and external drivers that contributed to reinforcing and mainstreaming the institutional resilience of NWMs allowing them to continue operating effectively and conduct their institutional work within difficult conditions and in harsh environments.

27. The study consultant explained the five key aspects of resilience as laid out by Judith Rodin in her book, *The Resilience Dividend,* which were being aware, diverse, integrated, self-regulated and adaptive. Awareness was the knowledge the entity has of its situation and the situation of women in the country and what needed be done to address threats and risks. Diversity was working with a variety of stakeholders including CSOs, ministries and the general population. Integration was the ability to work collaboratively across elements and coordinate actions. Self-regulation was when the entity has economic and political power over its work and could control its workplan. Adaptability was the capacity and flexibility of the entity to respond to change.

28. In the subsequent discussions, participants suggested to use the term "principles" instead of "aspects" of resilience. They noted the importance of adapting those principles to the region. They also recommended introducing the framework of resilience in the second chapter on the normative framework and to focus the third chapter on the resilience of NWMs. Participants proposed first introducing the reasons behind the growing prominence of resilience in the international discourse and how this related to the region. They also advised discussing the strategies and perspectives on resilience and how to assess them. Additionally, they recommended showing a stronger link between this chapter and the WPS framework and reflecting the concept of resilience in the title of the study.

29. Finally, participants suggested linking the principles with the best NWM model and examining the legal mandate and structure; staffing and resources; areas of work; linkages for collaboration and coordination; and monitoring and evaluation. It was suggested to write a paragraph to explain the linkages and how these steps were not stand-alone, supported by a simple diagram.

## E. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

30. During the last session, participants discussed the policy recommendations stemming from the case studies and the shared experiences and good practices that the study addressed. The discussion resulted in the following two sets of proposed policy recommendations, the first addressed to governments and the latter to international and regional organizations:

### 1. *Governments*

- Governance structures of NWMs should enable the participation and inclusion of civil society and women human rights defenders and organizations representing diverse segments of society in the decision-making processes;

- NWMs should be established by law with a clear mandate and authority to influence decision-making in relation to women's rights, gender equality, gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment across the government;

- Government institutions should be accountable to respond to NWMs mandates according to each country's specific legal context;

- Government institutions and NWMs should establish and enhance independent and gender-sensitive monitoring, evaluation and reporting mechanisms of the institutional performance of NWMs and the response of government institutions;

- Governments should allocate required sustainable financial resources and budgets for NWMs to be able to fully implement their mandate;

- NWMs should ensure a transparent recruitment of staff based on competence, inclusion and commitment to gender equality;

- Governments should ensure the development, adoption, resourcing and implementation of NAP with rigorous monitoring and evaluation frameworks according to principles of inclusiveness and participation in a process that is led by NWMs;

- Governments should ensure that the mandate and work of different stakeholders do not overlap in relation to gender equality and women's empowerment;

- Governments should institutionalize gender mainstreaming in their planning and guarantee and sex-disaggregated data.

### 2. *International and Regional Organizations*

- Organizations should support efforts to build the capacity of NWMs on international standards and best practices of monitoring and evaluation of performance and impact as well as the related benchmarks and indicators;

-  Organizations should support in the provision of technical assistance and capacity-building for NWMs staff and members on pertinent areas of work and enhancing their knowledge of relevant international norms and standards;

- Organizations should coordinate their support to gender equality and women's empowerment efforts to avoid duplication and overlap;

- Organizations should provide support to NAP processes on WPS and facilitate the exchange of resources and documentation of good practices and experiences of member States.

## III.  ORGANIZATION OF WORK

### A.  DATE AND VENUE OF THE MEETING

31.    The meeting was held on 4 and 5 December 2018 at the United Nations House in Beirut.

### B.  OPENING

32.    Ms. Mehrinaz El Awady, Director, ECW, welcomed the experts to the meeting and noted that ECW had produced several publications on the topic of institutions and how they are affected by conflict. She indicated there was an increasing interest by member States in adopting NAPs on WPS and the timeliness of this the proposed study would build on this momentum. While Iraq is working on the second NAP, Jordan, the State of Palestine and Tunisia were implementing their first NAPs; Lebanon and Sudan had reached advanced stages in developing theirs.

33. Ms. El Awady explained that the meeting was dedicated to the validation of the study and would highlight four regional experiences including Yemen, as a an example of country in conflict; Jordan as a country affected by conflict in a neighbouring country (Syrian Arab Republic); the State of Palestine as an example of a country under occupation; and Tunisia as a country going through a political transition. She thanked ESCWA partners, namely the London School of Economics (LSE) and the Lebanese American University (LAU), for their precious contribution to the study. She expressed her wish that the meeting would be a success and that discussions would be fruitful.

C. ATTENDANCE

34. The meeting brought together 19 experts (14 women and 5 men) from diverse backgrounds and institutions, from the region and beyond, to share expertise in institutional resilience in the contexts of conflict, occupation and transition with focus on the work of NWMs in challenging operating environments. The annex to this report contains the list of participants and organizers.

D. AGENDA

35. Experts covered the items of the agenda as presented below:

1. Opening remarks.

2. Why a study on NWMs, conflict, occupation and transition in the Arab region? – Putting the study in its context.

3. The changing situation in the Arab region.

4. NWMs: background, roles and relation to WPS.

5. NWMs in Arab countries and the WPS Agenda.

6. Drivers of resilient NWMs.

7. Conclusion and policy recommendations.

8. Evaluation, wrap-up and closure.

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