

**US Senate Subcommittee on International Operations and Organizations, Human Rights,
Democracy, and Global Women's Issues**

HEARING:

**Combating Violence and Discrimination Against Women:
A Global Call to Action**

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**Testimony submitted by
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Chairman Boxer, you're known around the world for shining a spotlight on these issues. Thanks to you, Ranking Member Paul, Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Corker, and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you as well to all in civil society here and abroad who play such an important role in provoking change.

For the last 15 years, The Institute for Inclusive Security, led by Ambassador Swanee Hunt, has increased the inclusion of women in peace and security processes. We work on current conflicts, in countries affected by war, and with policymakers in the US, other governments, NATO, the UN, and beyond.

All that we do is driven by the over 3,000 members of our global Women Waging Peace Network.

The Network includes women like those recently displaced by war in South Sudan, who earlier this year, despite living in camps literally partitioned in half—with a line separating two tribes—began crossing the divide. At first to share stories over tea in each other's tents, and then to organize a joint march to the governor's house—most walking barefoot for hours under a blazing sun—to demand an end to the violence and a voice in the process.

The Network includes female police officers like some in Pakistan, who face harassment from their colleagues at work and isolation from their families at home, yet proudly button up their uniforms each morning because they feel a call to serve.

It also includes Zainab Bangura, whose father threw her out of their house in Sierra Leone at age 12 because she refused to marry. Zainab's mother left with her, and somehow provided her daughter with an education. Zainab went on to become her country's Foreign Minister and now travels the world as the top UN envoy on sexual violence in conflict. This near child bride from a once war-torn nation told me a few weeks ago, "I say to those men who kidnapped the girls in Nigeria what I say to all men who rape: Whoever you are, wherever you are, we will run after you. And we will find you."

Zainab and others will agree that if there is any good news in the fight against violence and discrimination, it's this: We have not yet fully engaged the single greatest resource available—women themselves.

To a dramatic and disgraceful extent, women continue to be excluded from essential areas of decision-making. They are not yet full and equal partners in developing and maintaining the elements of society that most directly impact their ability to live free from violence and discrimination.

Women's full security requires effective governance, where just laws are applied equally and there is equity in access to services and opportunities. It requires access to justice, which relies not only on a well-functioning judiciary and legal system, but also on effective and representative police and other security forces. Women's security requires their participation in defining the future of their state – as formal decisionmakers and as contributors to public discourse.¹ Fundamentally, it also requires widespread acceptance of the dignity and value of all persons.

We will see a significant shift in all forms of violence and discrimination when – and only when – we recognize women as fundamental actors in every one of those areas.

How do we do this? What can Congress do? The range of actions required is broad; let me call to your attention two priorities that are transformative, but under-attended.

PEACE NEGOTIATIONS

First, we absolutely must get more women to participate directly in more peace negotiations.

It's often at this stage that the most troubled countries lay the foundation for their future. As one woman said to me recently, "If we're not at the table, you can be sure we're on the menu."

About 92 percent of the people who have negotiated peace agreements in the last 40 years were men.² The result? Half of all peace agreements collapse within their first five years, and the vast majority fail to address the issue of sexual violence in conflict, the topic of the major global conference hosted last week in the UK.

Only 18 out of 300 peace accords signed since 1989, and only three ceasefire agreements in all of recorded history, have mentioned sexual violence.

Evidence shows that, when present, women raise this issue. But they often broaden the discussion even further, moving the conversation beyond who gets to run which ministry and where borders are set, to address the underlying drivers of conflict and reduce the structural barriers that contribute to violence and discrimination.

¹ Barsa, Michelle. "Progress or Peril: The Role for Women in Defining Afghanistan's Future." Presentation, Women's Foreign Policy Group, Washington, DC, June 5, 2014.

² UN Women (October 2012). *Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations: Connections between Presence and Influence*. (NY: UN Women), 3.

In Guatemala, for example, women ensured that talks addressed police power. In Darfur, women spoke about food security. In Northern Ireland, they raised integrated education.

Women's exclusion not only jeopardizes the sustainability of an agreement; it condemns women to struggle even harder for representation and justice later on.

The single most important policy tool the US government has to increase women's participation at peace talks is its National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security. Launched via Executive Order in 2011, it's a whole-of-government strategy whose goal is simple but profound: to ensure that women are equal partners in preventing conflict and building peace.

The Action Plan is being rolled out, but progress is much too slow. **Congress can speed up its implementation.**

First, by passing the bipartisan Women, Peace, and Security Act which Senators Boxer, Kirk, and others in both chambers and on both sides of the aisle have championed. This bill would strengthen the ability of Congress to oversee implementation of the National Action Plan and coordinate the funding that has already been employed to resource it.

Second, by holding a hearing about the National Action Plan. Members could invite the Secretaries of Defense and State and the Administrator of USAID to speak about how far their organizations have come, how far they still need to go, and how they're working together.

Third, by keeping the Nation Action Plan foremost in the minds of the nation's leaders. Imagine if every potential appointee to a position of influence in diplomacy, defense, or development was asked at a confirmation hearing how the principles of the Plan are reflected in his or her priorities. Even the fear simply of being caught without an answer would prompt meaningful reflection and preparation by candidates and agencies that support them.

Fourth, by ensuring that every congressional delegation, particularly those to regions most affected by war and violence against women, make a point of meeting with local women leaders from civil society and government to signal their importance and hear from them directly.

SECURITY FORCES

The second priority to which I want to draw your attention relates to women's roles in security forces.

The numbers here are dismal. In Pakistan, women make up less than one percent of the police force. In Afghanistan, they're less than a third of one percent of the National Army. Worldwide, women are only about ten percent of police. In the Middle East and North Africa, that average is two percent. At the UN, only three percent of military and ten percent of police personnel are women. Even in the US, women make up only about 20 percent of today's military.

While policies and practices are shifting slowly, in the US and around the world there is absurd foot dragging when it comes to recognizing that women's full and meaningful involvement in police, military, and other services fundamentally increases the effectiveness of those forces and their ability to serve and protect men, women, boys, and girls.

Without a doubt, access to protection and justice for survivors of sexual violence increases when women are meaningfully integrated into security forces. Females are simply far more likely to report cases of assault to other women. Data from 39 countries show that when women police officers are present, there are significantly higher rates of reporting.³

But the value of women in security forces is much broader. They contribute to all aspects of mission success and, when present in large enough numbers, can transform institutions and the public's perception of power, force, and legitimacy.

Women's recruitment, retention, and safety in security forces are woefully under-resourced. **Congress can change this.**

It's time to redefine the purpose for which the US spends billions of dollars on security assistance. US support should, in large part, be dedicated to the development of inclusive, representative, and professional forces—ones that reflect the makeup of the populations they're tasked to serve.

Being explicit about goals also means being explicit about money. Policy priorities need to be resourced with specific appropriations for the recruitment, retention, and safety of women in police and militaries. Last year, Congress did this for the first time ever, appropriating \$25 million for this purpose in Afghanistan.⁴

A week ago, thanks to support from many on this Subcommittee, the Senate Appropriations Committee passed its Foreign Operations Appropriations bill, which included provisions prioritizing the same for women in Pakistan's police force. The bill even recognized the importance of recruiting more women into security forces to combat gender-based violence. Again, for the first time ever.

Members of this Subcommittee can continue to demonstrate leadership by ensuring the final bill retains these provisions and by at least maintaining funding this year for women in the Afghan National Security Forces in any defense spending and authorization bills.

³ UN Women (2011). *2011-2012 Progress of the World's Women: In Pursuit of Justice*. (NY: UN Women), 59.

⁴ The Fiscal Year 2014 National Defense Authorization Act and Consolidated Appropriations Act reserved no less than \$25 million of the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund for the recruitment, retention, and security of women in the Afghan National Security Forces.

CONCLUSION

It's beyond time to recognize that not only are violence and discrimination against women an affront to our collective humanity; they're also a threat to our collective security.

Harvard researcher Valerie Hudson recently analyzed 174 countries and found that the best predictor of a state's peacefulness is not its level of wealth, its level of democracy, or its ethno-religious identity; it's how well its women are treated. The larger the gender gap, the more likely a state is to be involved in violent conflict—inside *and* outside of its borders.⁵

In London last week, the Chief of the Australian Army spoke about sexual violence in conflict and the choice to be a protector or a perpetrator. He said there is no third option, no bystanders, explaining, “The standard you walk past is the standard you accept.”

Thank you for trying to stop us in our tracks.

⁵ Hudson, V.; Ballif-Spanvill, B.; Caprioli, M.; & Emmett, C. (2012). *Sex and World Peace*. (NY: Columbia University Press), 205.