

United States of America

U.S. Civil Society Working Group on Women, Peace and Security

(July 2016)

Overview

In October 2010, then U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that the United States would develop a National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). One year later, on December 19, 2011, President Obama signed the executive order making the U.S. NAP official policy. Executive Order 13959 makes the Women, Peace and Security agenda a part of U.S. national security policy and states that the following actions will be taken:

- Promote women's participation in conflict prevention, management and resolution, as well as in post-conflict relief and recovery, advance peace, national security, economic and social development and international cooperation;
- Recognize that sexual violence, when used or commissioned as a tactic of war or as a part of a widespread or systematic attack against civilians, can exacerbate and prolong armed conflict and can impede the restoration of peace and security;
- The U.S. Government will have a National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.

The original U.S. NAP (2011 – 2015) and the revised 2016 action plan call for women to be included in five major areas of U.S. engagement, these are: national integration and institutionalization, participation in peace processes and decision-making, protection from violence, conflict prevention and access to relief and recovery. Each of these high-level objectives is expected to be advanced specifically in conflicted-affected environments. The outcomes specified under each objective further reiterate the focus on fragile environments resulting from violent extremism, climate change, disaster or conflict.

The main implementing agencies are the U.S. Department of State, (DOS) U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD). The National Action Plan also established the Women, Peace and Security Interagency Policy Committee (WPS IPC), which is chaired by the National Security Council (NSC). It was tasked with monitoring and reviewing actions taken in support of the U.S. NAP objectives.

In October 2015, the Secretary of State announced commitments totaling \$31.3 million toward its continued support of women as equal partners in all aspects of peace and security.

The U.S. NAP continues to recognize that the WPS agenda cannot be advanced solely through the efforts of government agencies and recognizes the importance of civil society. That said, it did not formally create a mechanism for consultations with civil society. Nor does the U.S. Government allow for a formal role of non-government actors in the policy decisions of the government.

Involvement of Civil Society in Adoption and Design

In response to the ineligibility of civil society to play a formal role in the U.S. NAP, a group of civil society actors began developing a coalition. In 2009, a small group began a dialogue with members of the U.S. Government and other NAP countries, and began a coordinated approach in promoting the concept of the U.S. government adopting a national action plan. As a part of this effort, in July 2010 a number of civil society organizations along with the convening power of the U.S. Institute of Peace, an independent, non-partisan institution created by the U.S. Congress, created the U.S. Civil Society Working Group on Women, Peace and Security (U.S. CSWG). The U.S. CSWG is a network of experts, NGOs, and academics with years of experience working on issues involving women, war and peace. Some of the first members of the working group, included some of whom had been actively involved in the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in 2000.

What began as a small group of concerned NGOs and individuals quickly evolved into a go-to source for information and feedback throughout the development of the U.S. NAP. Once the U.S. NAP was adopted, the nascent working group began to engage in observing and offering feedback on the implementation of the NAP. In February 2011, the working group published a memorandum that invited further 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. Over the last six years, the U.S. CSWG has hosted conferences and consultations with the public and with those in the U.S. government working closely on the implementation of the U.S. NAP. As of June 2016, this unique voluntary working group dedicated to the women, peace and security agenda of the U.S. NAP has over 35-member organizations. From the outset, the working group has operated on the basis of five core principles that have been consistently applied.

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.

2. Broadening its Base: Diversity and Inclusiveness

The U.S. CSWG acknowledged early on 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 U.S. CSWG.

3. Organizations rather than Individuals

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

4. Consensus and Collaboration on Operational Guidelines

The U.S. 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, while at the same time, respecting and recognizing the limited capacities that members may have at different times.

5. Non-Partisan Convener – U.S. Institute of Peace

The U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) has acted as the non-partisan, independent Secretariat of the working group since its inception in July 2009. Because the U.S. CSWG's members are primarily non-governmental and academic institutions, the non-partisan nature 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, independent government organization dedicated to peacebuilding and public outreach has also allowed the creation of a safe space for bringing together government agencies and civil society. In sum, USIP as the working group's Secretariat—trusted by all sides—has contributed to the working group's credibility and legitimacy.

Implementation

Throughout its six-year history, the U.S. CSWG has created space for learning and exchanging of experiences – within U.S. government agencies, across government and civil society, with Congress and with international actors. Many of these consultations focused on awareness building, as early on, the U.S. CSWG recognized that the lack of knowledge and understanding among policy makers and practitioners on UNSCR 1325, which was a critical impediment to progress of the women, peace and security agenda. Through a series of workshops and publications, the U.S. CSWG has explained the history, rationale, provisions, relevance and utility of the UNSCR 1325 framework to the U.S. Government's foreign policy priorities.

Additionally, the working group actively sought to shape and influence the discourse about UNSCR 1325 and the NAP by proposing standards and providing concrete, specific examples and language. When the NAP was launched, the U.S. CSWG issued "10 Action Points in the First 150 Days," a briefing paper providing specific recommendations to be taken in the first 150 days of the NAP. The working group has been able to expand the range of issues to be addressed in the NAP and helped define standards and core principles guiding its associated work.

The working group 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. In sum, the U.S. CSWG's advocacy efforts have been rooted in sharing facts, offering solutions and working collaboratively with the U.S. executive and legislative branches.

Review

In addition to the annual report requirements, the U.S. NAP called for a review and revision process by 2015. The U.S. NAP did not include a monitoring and evaluation framework, but rather tasked three government agencies – DOS, USAID and DOD – to produce individual implementation plans for the U.S. NAP. Each plan lists specific indicators against time-bound outputs to measure overall progress. DOS and USAID both published their implementation plans in 2012, while DOD circulated an internal document detailing implementation in 2013. Agencies individually evaluate their implementation efforts of the NAP, which are then submitted for review to NSC. Thus far, the working group has not yet independently evaluated the NAP in its entirety, however, members of the working group and other civil society organizations have evaluated specific aspects of the action plan. For example, Women in International Security (WIIS), a U.S. CSWG member, developed a methodology how to evaluate the integration of UNSCR 1325 principles in military operations and undertook an independent evaluation of DOD efforts.

In 2015, the U.S. CSWG hosted briefings and consultations with officials from NSC, DOS, USAID and DOD. Officials provided status updates on the NAP revision process. Dialogue sessions were held in order to elicit feedback on key issues identified by the U.S. Government. Government officials additionally held their own day-long consultation sessions, inviting members of the U.S. CSWG and other civil society organizations.

The US Government published an updated NAP on 19 June 2016. The 2016 U.S. NAP retains much of the same structure as the 2011 U.S. NAP and overall has the same action commitments. That said, it does take into account the newest UN Security Council Resolutions, including UNSCR 2242 (2015), and contains revised language and updates on issues such as climate change and violent extremism, a reflection on conversations had with U.S. CSWG members. Various members of the working group has been engaged in the development of legislation on a women, peace and security act.

While considerable work is yet to be done, the United States has made progress in advancing the WPS agenda. For example, USAID adopted a comprehensive Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy (2012), which sets clear requirements and responsibilities for gender mainstreaming. The Policy approaches gender integration from both the programmatic and personnel level, requiring mandatory gender analysis for country-level strategies and project design, and basic gender training for all staff involved in programming. The revised NAP cites that in USAID alone, more than 9,000 technical and program staff have been trained in gender integration techniques, not including civil society-organized workshops. However, there has not yet been an assessment of the extent to which USAID programming in conflict and crisis affected contexts is fully gendered. Similarly in terms of women's effective participation in peace processes – particularly in contexts where the US has significant influence –there is still a gap between the WPS NAP and implementation in such settings.

DOD has integrated WPS objectives into policy, strategy and planning documents as well as Theatre Campaign Plans. Departments within DOD have made varying strides. For example, U.S. Africa Command's Newcomers' Orientation course now includes a WPS briefing that details the importance of the WPS agenda and its origins in UNSCR 1325.

Concluding Remarks

The United States' commitment to the Women, Peace and Security agenda is laudable. The largest agencies have developed thoughtful, detailed and cogent plans to ensure that the overarching agenda is met. However, challenges persist, especially when it comes to the continuity of planning between the government agencies as well as communication among the agencies. As the upcoming U.S. administration transition will take place in January 2017, there is a critical need for good continuity of communication from those staff who are political appointments and exiting the government and for the onboarding of new staff. In addition, the upcoming review processes will benefit from a whole of impact approach versus a process that is singularly focused on output- and outcome-level indicators.

The U.S. Civil Society Working Group will continue its series of meetings and workshops that engage its membership identifying and communicating their global experiences and lessons learned on women, peace and security agenda in order to more fully inform, support and move forward the U.S. Government's National Action Plan.

Post Script

In March 2016, the U.S. CSWG received a grant from the Compton Foundation to help with the institutionalization of the working group and to ensure that the Women, Peace and Security agenda and the U.S. NAP would remain front and center in a new U.S. Administration. The U.S. CSWG is preparing a number of policy briefs for the incoming Administration as well as a document outlining 10 actions for the first 100 days of the new administration. In preparation for the transition, the working group is also organizing a series of roundtables with government officials prior to the elections. The U.S. CSWG will continue to inform, promote, facilitate and monitor the meaningful implementation of the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.