
GLOBAL WOMEN'S FORUM FOR PEACE & HUMANITARIAN ACTION (GWF 2023)

Berlin, 23-25 May 2023

REPORT

Executive Summary

Women civil society leaders and women's civil society organizations (CSOs) are at the forefront of addressing conflicts and humanitarian crises. Their work helps make their societies safer, more inclusive, and resilient, yet it often goes unrecognized and underfunded. As the crises addressed by women's civil society become increasingly complex and protracted, it is necessary to step up the support to their essential and life-saving work. It was in this spirit that the United Nations Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) together with the German Federal Foreign Office convened the Global Women's Forum for Peace and Humanitarian Action (GWF 2023) in Berlin on 23-25 May 2023. The Forum brought together 200 actors, including 87 women civil society representatives from 29 countries, as well as members from international organizations, I/NGO, academics, and government representatives. Building on the WPHF Global Women's Forum held in 2000 in Vienna, the GWF 2023 aimed to provide women's CSOs with a space to strategize and identify joint advocacy priorities; an opportunity to network and build coalitions; and greater visibility for their work and achievements.

The Forum met these expectations through a combination of high-level sessions, interactive panels, breakout groups and hands-on workshops to discuss and showcase women's CSOs' impacts, strategies, and challenges in the field of peace and humanitarian response (conflict prevention and peacebuilding, conflict resolution, humanitarian action, women's participation in economic recovery and protection against sexual and gender-based violence). After three energizing days, an outcome statement reflecting a wide range of women's civil society voices, named the Berlin Declaration 2023, was adopted¹. The declaration puts forth key priorities and calls peace and humanitarian stakeholders to invest in women civil society leaders' transformational work in conflict and crisis settings across the globe.

The Forum also provided a space for civil society leaders and high level decision makers, such as the German Minister of State for Europe and Climate and Germany's Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs, to exchange and dialogue on how governments can leverage their feminist foreign policies in support of local women's CSOs in fragile settings. Furthermore, civil society representatives identified ideas for joint regional actions (in Africa, Asia Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean and the Middle East) that could be implemented after the Forum to push forward the Berlin Declaration's recommendations,

¹ The Berlin Declaration 2023 can be found in several languages on: <https://wphfund.org/2023/05/26/global-women-peace-humanitarian-activists-convene-in-berlin-to-define-key-priorities-call-on-world-to-invest-in-their-work-on-the-front-lines/>

transforming the inspiration from the GWF 2023 into concrete actions to accelerate women's participation and influence in decision-making over regional and global policies for inclusive and lasting peace. Lastly, the Forum's participants reflected on the importance of providing care and mental health support to women working at the frontlines of peace and humanitarian work as a critical aspect to pay attention to, and identified approaches that can be taken by their organizations to prioritize women's CSOs staff's self-care, psychosocial support, and well-being.



Overview of the conference

Between 23 and 25 May 2023, 87 women activists and representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs) from 29 countries² came together at the Global Women's Forum for Peace and Humanitarian Action in Berlin (GWF 2023). The GWF was supported by the German Federal Foreign Office (GFFO) and held in its offices. It was organized by the United Nations Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) as part of its commitment to provide women peacebuilders, humanitarian first responders and human rights defenders not only with funds, but also with opportunities to enhance their capacities and to learn from each other through its Global Learning Hub (L-HUB)³. The civil society leaders who came together in Berlin

² Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burundi, Cameroon, Colombia, DRC, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Haiti, Iraq, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Mali, Moldova, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestine, PNG, Solomon Islands, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Tonga, Ukraine, Venezuela.

³ For more information on the WPHF L-HUB, see: <https://wphfund.org/wphfund-community/>

had the chance to exchange experiences, build partnerships, and devise joint strategies to advance their advocacy for more inclusive and gender equal peace processes and humanitarian action, including with donors, INGOs and government representatives⁴.

The GWF builds on the first WPHF Global Women's Forum, held in 2020 in Vienna⁵. After over three years of restricted mobility and travel due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it provided a much-needed space for building relationships, coalitions, and solidarity in person. The convening was all the more critical given the plethora of ongoing and deepening crises faced by women's CSOs and the diversity of voices and types of CSOs represented. For several of the grassroots activists who attended the GWF 2023, it was the first international gathering they have ever attended – providing them with an opportunity to share their work and methods and showcase their impact.

The GWF's key objectives were:

- (1) To strategize and define **joint advocacy priorities and entry points** to mobilize support for women CSOs' work on peace, security and humanitarian action (PSHA);
- (2) To promote **networking, solidarity and movement-building** among women civil society leaders working on peace and humanitarian response from around the world; and
- (3) To enable an in-person **exchange of knowledge and showcasing of good practices and learnings** from women CSOs' work on PSHA between the civil society leaders and with international donors, INGOs and UN entities (UN Women, UNHCR, Peacebuilding Support Office), and Germany's decision makers.

The GWF fulfilled and exceeded its expected results. Following two days of discussions on key impacts, strategies and challenges for women peacebuilders, humanitarian responders and human rights defenders in the field of PSHA, on the third day of the GWF, the participants officially adopted the Berlin Declaration 2023⁶ – a consensus-based document that sets out the key priorities of local women's organizations working in conflict and crisis settings, outlines urgent recommendations for government donors and a wide range of stakeholders, highlights women's CSOs' needs and acknowledges their unique contributions to building peace and responding to crisis. The document will serve to influence key policy processes in the run-up to the 25th Anniversary of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security.

The adoption of the Berlin Declaration was not the only highlight of the conference. Throughout the three days, inspiring stories were shared, valuable lessons exchanged, and new partnerships forged. Regional coalitions to advance joint advocacy were drawn up, and concrete actions and resources needed to continue women's CSOs' work to advance inclusive peace and humanitarian action after the end of the GWF mapped out. Critical commitments were expressed by the representatives of Germany and the

⁴ 68 donors, INGOs and government representatives attended the GWF from 23 to 25 May. In addition, around 45 GFFO's partners – members of Germany's Parliament, Foreign missions in Berlin, think tanks, research centers, NGOs and press representatives - attended several sessions of Day 1 (23 May) and 431 participants attended the Forum's Opening on Day 1 which was streamed online: <https://youtu.be/Re-uxX7Rrbw>

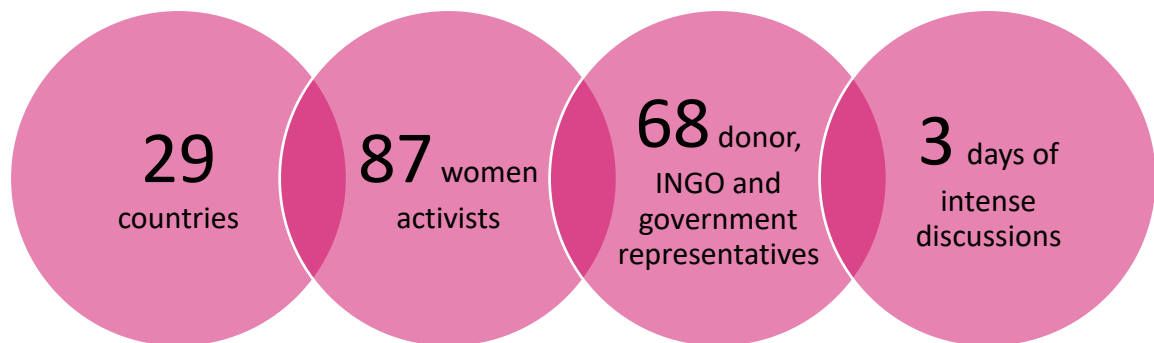
⁵ For more information about the GWF 2020 in Vienna, see: <https://wphfund.org/2020/02/20/global-women-peacebuilders-unite-at-global-forum-to-set-priorities-call-for-action/>

⁶ To read the Berlin Declaration 2023 in several languages, see: <https://wphfund.org/2023/05/26/global-women-peace-humanitarian-activists-convene-in-berlin-to-define-key-priorities-call-on-world-to-invest-in-their-work-on-the-front-lines/>

United Nations to support the implementation of the recommendations included in the Berlin Declaration 2023 and continue to support the work and advocacy of the women gathered at the GWF 2023.

This report aims to capture the key lessons, impacts and priorities that emerged from the GWF 2023 focusing on key highlights from each day. Throughout the report, “impact stories” shared by the participants are highlighted. They do not capture all of the results shared by the participants but serve as a snapshot of the wealth of collective expertise and innovative thinking represented by the GWF participants.

Snapshot: GWF 2023 in numbers



Methodology and approach

The GWF 2023 took a strong participatory approach, with inclusivity, intersectionality, safety, learning and respect for diversity as key guiding principles. These principles were operationalized through the following methodological approaches:

1. Interactive civil society led discussions

To enable greater inclusion, the Forum was structured in a way that **maximized the use of breakout groups**, creating a safe and interactive space for participants to discuss specific issues in small groups. Each breakout group included around 20 participants, allowing for engaged discussions. Breakout groups were followed by a plenary discussion, where the key takeaways were shared and discussed by all participants.

Throughout the three days, four breakout group discussions were organized, with a focus on:

- (1) Impacts and strategies of local women's CSOs on the front lines of PSHA;
- (2) Challenges faced by women in their peace and humanitarian work;
- (3) Building regional coalitions to enhance the recognition and support for women's CSOs' work in PSHA; and
- (4) The text of the Forum's draft declaration.

In each breakout group, one of the women activists served as a moderator and one as a rapporteur. The moderators and rapporteurs worked closely with the WPHF team in preparation for the Forum. They helped guide the discussion to ensure that the key guiding questions are answered, while allowing diverse participants to share their experience.

To make the discussions more effective, the breakout groups on impacts and strategies and on the challenges were divided based on thematic areas: **conflict prevention and peacebuilding, conflict resolution, humanitarian action, women's participation in economic recovery and protection against sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)**. One breakout group focused on each of the themes. Participants were assigned to the breakout groups that were most relevant to their particular area of work. The working groups on regional coalitions and on the final declaration were organized based on the region and linguistic preference of each participant respectively, to help a free flow of the conversation and provide opportunities to each participant to exchange with more participants.

2. Linguistic inclusion

To enable full and meaningful participation of diverse participants, the GWF provided **simultaneous interpretation** in Arabic, Dari, English, French and Spanish throughout the plenary sessions and different language combinations in the breakout groups. Similarly, the draft of the final declaration was provided and discussed in Arabic, English, French and Spanish and language-specific notes for the final version were noted down by the organizers to ensure that translation nuances were reflected in the final document's versions⁷.

3. Diversity of formats

To ensure a high level of engagement, the event **wove together different sessions formats**, including panel discussions, interactive plenary discussions, breakout group discussions, “talk show” style dialogue between women activists and Germany's Foreign Minister, participatory self-care workshops, and a “marketplace”, where women could showcase their work and products.

The inclusive methodology was appreciated by the participants. One of them noted in the evaluation survey: “The event **fostered an environment where all participants felt valued, respected, and encouraged to actively participate**. The emphasis on diversity and the inclusion of different perspectives contributed to rich discussions and a vibrant exchange of ideas”.

[Day 1: Sharing impacts and strategies of local women's CSOs on the front lines of peace, security, and humanitarian action](#)

The first day of the GWF 2023 focused on documenting the impacts and innovative strategies adopted by the Forum participants to advance their field, policy and advocacy work, often under extremely challenging circumstances.

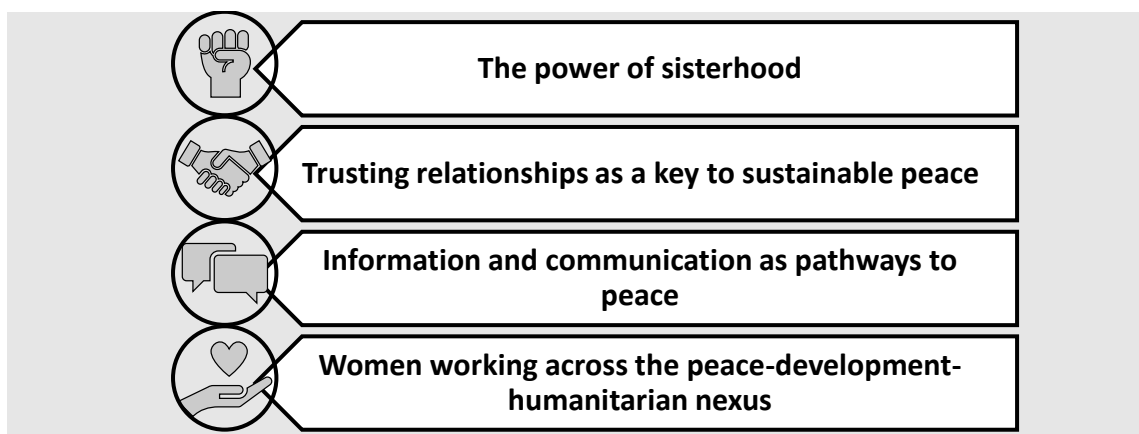
⁷ The Berlin Declaration can be found in Arabic, English, French and Spanish in <https://wphfund.org/2023/05/26/global-women-peace-humanitarian-activists-convene-in-berlin-to-define-key-priorities-call-on-world-to-invest-in-their-work-on-the-front-lines/>

The day began with a high-level opening ceremony, attended by the German Minister of State for Europe and Climate, Ms. Anna Luhrmann, the UN Deputy Secretary General, Amina Mohammed (via a video message), the Chief of the Peace, Security and Resilience section at UN Women, Paivi Kannisto, and Sofia Burtak, the Founder and President of the Rural Women Business Network in Ukraine. The opening plenary was a critical space during which the policymakers had an opportunity to express their commitment to support the women's CSOs gathered in the GWF. Ms. Luhrmann expressed Germany's commitment to continue supporting the work of local women's CSOs – including through WPHF. Ms. Mohammed also made a strong statement of commitment, stating that she and her staff will ensure to carefully read and implement the declaration which will result from the GWF 2023.

The opening was followed by a panel discussion highlighting impact stories from Cameroon, Colombia, Lebanon, and Bangladesh. This discussion was moderated by Heike Thiele, Director for Crisis Prevention and Stabilization of the GFFO, and served as an evidence of the unique value that the work of women's CSOs, especially the local ones, bring to humanitarian response, peace, and recovery, as well as of the distinctive strategies that drive such impact. The session featured Esther Omam, Executive Director of Reach Out Cameroon (Cameroon), Dayna Ash, Founder and Executive Director of Haven for artists (Lebanon), Catalina Maria Jaramillo, Co-founder, Corporación Humanizarte Rural (Colombia) and Nasreen Awal, Founder and President of the Women Entrepreneur Association of Bangladesh (Bangladesh).

After the panel discussion, the participants were divided in smaller groups, according to their themes of interest, to share and discuss the impacts of their work, as well as the key strategies they adopt to achieve them. The results of the discussions were shared in the plenary. Finally, the day closed with a candid conversation between Germany's Minister of Foreign Affairs, and two women activists: Anny Modi, from DRC and Horia Mosadiq, from Afghanistan about how feminist foreign policies can effectively support local women's CSOs in fragile settings.

The key themes and priorities that emerged from the first day's discussions are summarized below and discussed in more depth in the remainder of this section.



Highlight: The power of sisterhood

The **importance of solidarity and sisterhood** was highlighted throughout the forum's first day. In her opening remarks, Sofia Burtak, from the Rural Women Business Network in Ukraine, shared her experience of responding to the effects of the Russian invasion in Ukraine, and stated: "I believe in sisterhood. I believe that even in times of crisis, we can stand and work together". This statement set the tone for the remainder of the day, which was rich in expressions of solidarity and stories of sisterhood and resilience from around the world.

Participants also reflected on the importance of networking and building coalitions with other women to advance their work and amplify each other's voice, including at international level. They called for **recognizing, strengthening and supporting women's networking** on issues of peace and humanitarian actions. As a participant noted "We cannot leave it only to the women in one country. For example, women are excluded from peace negotiations in Liberia or Sudan. All women around the world should lobby for their inclusion in these specific negotiations". Dayna Ash Founder and Executive Director of Haven for artists in Lebanon shared how after the Beirut's port explosion left people isolated and hopeless, including LGBTQI people living in the neighborhoods affected by the blast, Haven for artists was able to create a space that is supportive of people's dreams, ideas, and feminist values. "**Women have the unique ability to create spaces of care that don't exist in the capitalism and heteronormative patriarchy**", she reflected.

Several participants also noted that women's CSOs are **often well-placed to forge coalitions that can help them lobby lawmakers, influence policies and build a culture of peace** amongst community in different spaces (family, schools, religious places, business). However, women's networking and coalition-building is often not appreciated and under-financed, which makes it difficult to carry out alongside other critical work.

Participants also highlighted the importance of **building intersectional networks – including intergenerational networks, and networks that include women with disabilities**. They highlighted that certain groups – such as young women and women with disabilities – are often excluded from coalitions, in particular at the national level. Women with disabilities are often not able to join the coalitions because of access barriers, such as lack of relevant documents in Braille.

STORIES OF IMPACT

Thanks to WPHF's support, Cauce Civil Organization in **Venezuela** was able to bring together women from opposing political sides and create a space for discussion, finding a common ground and defining some joint priorities, despite different political alignments. This is a critical achievement given the political crisis in Venezuela and the rift between those supporting President Maduro and those opposing him, which can often become a source of insecurity. Creating a space of dialogue is a first step towards building a joint advocacy and mobilizing collective action to make Venezuela a better place for all of its citizens.

Participants from **Colombia** shared examples of women's organizing, in particular during the negotiations between the government and *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) in Havana, which

led to the 2016 peace process. They emphasized that women were able to reconcile beyond their differences (Religious, political, ethnicity, social, age, etc.) and build a common advocacy. This enabled the women who are often marginalized – in particular indigenous and rural women – to have their say and influence the negotiations process, as well as other discussions to advocate for inclusive peace processes and integrate intersectionality and ecofeminism in peace agreements in Colombia. The participants also shared that modern technologies and online spaces have often been useful to them in influencing the public debate and remaining in touch.

In **Iraq**, in the Diyala province, several women's and youth CSOs came together to form an alliance called "Participation", which promotes women's rights and challenges patriarchal norms. They have organized public awareness campaigns and conducted research on gender equality issues. As a result, they were able to begin to shape the public discourse and challenge traditional gender roles within their communities. This, in turn, contributed to reduce school dropout rates among girls, and a reduction in the number of early and forced marriage.

In **Liberia**, concerted advocacy of women's CSOs was a key factor that contributed to the criminalization of rape. Thanks to the CSOs' collective work, rape is considered a serious offence and punished with jailtime.

Highlight: From trusting relationships to sustainable peace

Building relationships and gaining trust of community members was highlighted as a key strategy women's CSOs' use to **change people's minds and attitudes** towards women's leadership in conflict resolution and gender equality. Participants highlighted that changing attitudes is often the most challenging part of their work – but it is also necessary, as patriarchal mindsets are often an underlying driver of exclusion and violence against women.

Participants provided a plethora of examples of how they were able to influence attitudes in their communities by building partnerships and trusting relationships with **key allies such as traditional and religious leaders and other influential men**.

A key strategy shared by a participant from Afghanistan was to **use progressive interpretations of Shari'a law** to build an understanding with religious leaders and encourage them to support women's rights. This strategy resonated with participants from other countries, who agreed that it was important to speak the language of the male allies, in order to explain the importance of women's rights and inclusion to them. For example, a participant from the Philippines shared that when local indigenous leaders were questioning women's leadership in their communities, a CSO brought up their oral traditions and asked if they said anything about forbidding women's leadership. This helped convince the male leaders to welcome their female counterparts.

Esther Omam, the Executive Director of Reach Out Cameroon, emphasized in the Impacts and Strategies' plenary, "People trust us because of the achievements that we've had." She stressed that while most

conflicts start at community or local levels, women have the knowledge of their local realities and the ability to listen and identify appropriate responses which are culturally sensitive and context-specific. Having the credibility and trust within the communities helps not only advance the work and mobilize grassroots support, but also keep women activists and CSOs safe, since the community knows them and supports them when they are under attack.

STORIES OF IMPACT

In **Cameroon**, thanks to capacity building and financial support, women were able to leverage their relationships and knowledge of local communities to make impact. With the help of WPHF, Reach Out Cameroon established the Bakassi Women for Peace Task Force. It consisted of women from the community, who knew their context and community members well, but had no voice or capacity to leverage these relationships. Thanks to the training they received, they were able to use their experience and expertise and many of them have become mayors, senators, and entrepreneurs.

Highlight: Information and communication as pathways to peace

Raising awareness and countering misinformation in their communities through creativity, innovation or education, was another key strategy recognized by the participants during their discussions on the first day of GWF 2023.

Several participants highlighted the importance of **raising awareness about the gendered impact of conflict and humanitarian crises** among the communities, to help them understand the specific needs of women, as well as to build a foundation for inclusion and gender equality. **Art and sports are powerful tools to do so**, in particular among illiterate members of communities. Art mediums such as theatre skits, storytelling or puppet shows not only allow to reach wider audiences but can also have a **cathartic effect** on those involved in creating them and are often a **more accessible and easier way to talk about traumatic events and SGBV**.

Other participants emphasized the value of **integrating issues of peace and gender equality into school curricula**. This was done, for example, in Papua New Guinea, thanks to the relentless advocacy of women's CSOs.

Participants also stressed the role of **digital media and technologies** in spreading awareness and information. They noted that local women often do not have access to life-saving information, in particular in humanitarian settings, because they do not have technological gadgets, such as smartphone or tablets, or do not know how to use them. Participants also highlighted that information – including humanitarian – **must be available and circulated in local languages**. In South Sudan, to ensure that SGBV laws are disseminated as widely as possible and understood at the local level, women's CSOs have raised funds and contracted telecommunications companies to distribute information using simplified messaging in multiple local languages.

Other women's CSOs recur to **data collection and research to generate evidence** from a women's perspective, be a force of proposition and inform the political actors and international actors.

Finally, the participants stressed the importance of **elevating and emphasizing the “success stories” of women’s participation and leadership** to serve as a reference for young women and encourage them to participate in processes related to peace and humanitarian action. To this end, some of the participants mentioned **working with the media and training journalists** as a strategy to change the dominant narratives and disseminate positive role models.

STORIES OF IMPACT

In **Syria**, women’s CSOs have used puppet theatre to counter violent extremism. This was an effective strategy in a very conservative society, where talking about the issues of extremism and recruitment of youth in armed groups is often very sensitive. Using the puppet show allowed the women to address the issue and target young people with messages of peace and non-violence.

In Eastern **DRC**, women’s CSOs countered the misinformation spread by some political parties following the transition of the UN peacekeeping mission. The misinformation bred mistrust in the community and led to instances of community members attacking the peacekeepers. By talking to the communities and providing them with accurate information about the mission’s role, women were able to reduce the tensions.

In **Liberia**, the Disabled Children and Female Empowerment Network translated the peace agreement into Braille, to enable blind women and men to read it and participate in its implementation.

in **South Sudan**, women’s CSOs advocated for mobile courts to be taken to bring the justice system to remote and rural communities, reducing the logistics challenge and burden on SGBV survivors to seek out recourse to justice in urban centres.

Highlight: Working across the peace-development-humanitarian nexus

Sofia Burtak from the Rural Women Business Network in Ukraine explained how women have been addressing the diverse impacts of the Russian invasion in Ukraine – from **delivering humanitarian aid, to advocating for rural women’s access to decision-making, to supporting their families through businesses and entrepreneurship**.

The versatility of women’s responses was repeatedly highlighted by several participants. They emphasized that **it is impossible to put women’s work in silos**, since they often work **across the peace-development and humanitarian nexus**, bringing the different types of responses together.

In particular, the importance of **livelihoods and economic empowerment** as a driver of peace was recognized in numerous discussions. The participants emphasized that financial dependence makes women more vulnerable to violence, and stressed **food insecurity as a main challenge** faced by their communities, and often fueled by climate change, which – in turn – is made worse by armed conflict. This is why many of the participants shared examples of **economic empowerment initiatives** as a key strategy

they utilize to build peace and ensure gender equality. Providing **loans and access to financial entities and opportunities for women** was viewed by them as a matter of security. The participants also explained that when they implement economic empowerment initiatives they do so in a holistic manner – they do not just provide women with seed funds to establish their business: **women's CSOs create safe spaces for women entrepreneurs to come together, talk about their challenges and support each other to find solutions, and connect them to markets where they can sell their products.**

CSO leaders also underlined the significance of **involving women in decision-making about issues that influence their livelihoods.** For example, rural women should be included in discussions about mining, since it is a practice that directly impacts their food security. Similarly, Catalina Maria Jaramillo, Co-founder of the Corporación Humanizarte Rural in Colombia pointed out the value of including women – and a feminist perspective – in the processes to substitute the illicit crops with other types of agricultural livelihoods. Many participants called for a **better participation of women in decision-making about humanitarian action** – to build on their expertise and ensure that their priorities are taken into account.

STORIES OF IMPACT

In **Bangladesh**, the Women's Entrepreneurs Association of Bangladesh travelled to remote villages to talk to women about entrepreneurship and other issues affecting their livelihoods. Over time, they reached 7,000 women who received training and support to run their own businesses. Now, the organization has created a showroom for women to present and sell their products at no charge to them.

In **Pakistan**, both Global Educational, Economic and Social Empowerment and PAIMAN Alumni trust highlighted the importance of amplifying stories of successful women entrepreneurs to create role models and motivators for other women. With WPHF's support, the two organizations provide women with skills and technical support to produce items that are unusual, innovative, and sustainable, and support them to sell those products both in their local markets and internationally.

In **Liberia and Myanmar**, women-led CSOs advocated for the inclusion of women in coordination committees in refugee and internally displaced persons camps. They also trained women so that they are ready to meaningfully participate in those committees. As a result, the committees have become more gender-inclusive and are better prepared to respond to gendered impacts of future crises.

Spotlight on: Conversation with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Germany

The final session of Day 1 allowed two WPHF partners, namely Anny Modi, Executive Director and Co-founder of Afia mama and Member of the Strategic Committee of the African Women Leaders' Network (AWLN) from DRC, and Horia Mosadiq, Founder of the Safety and Risk Mitigation Organization in Afghanistan, to engage in an open conversation with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Germany, Annalena Baerbock.

The conversation revolved around the Feminist Foreign Policy which Germany adopted earlier this year. The policy aims to provide rights, resources and representation for women and ensure that a gender perspective is integrated throughout the different areas of Germany's foreign policy. Amongst other things, it recognizes the importance of the work of women human rights defenders, referring to them as "exceptional multipliers" for feminist foreign policy. It also highlights the importance of locally-led and inclusive conflict prevention and resolution strategies. The policy recognizes the gendered impacts of climate change and the importance of including diverse women in climate diplomacy and negotiations. Reflecting on the Feminist Foreign Policy and its importance, Ms. Baerbock said that to her "it is a spirit, an emotion, it is the power in this room [at GWF 2023]" and that "if you exclude women from your country, you do not have any future".

Ms. Modi and Ms. Mosadiq also provided their reflections on Germany's Feminist Foreign Policy and its importance to their own work. Ms. Modi presented the experience of Congolese women in the Nairobi 3 process and advocated for Germany to support the implementation of the action plan of the Synergy of Women for Peace and Security, an initiative coordinated by AWLN-DRC and the Technical Secretariat of the Fund for Congolese women. She spoke about the plethora of challenges women face – including their systematic exclusion from political spaces and participation, as well as sexual violence and the lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services including abortion, both also identified as barriers to women's leadership in political and decision-making spaces relating to peace. She suggested that as part of operationalizing the Feminist Foreign Policy, Germany could support more intersectional and diverse women's participation in politics, the transitional justice process in DRC to ensure accountability for conflict-related sexual violence and fund training programs and mentoring of young girls.

Ms. Mosadiq made an urgent plea for Germany and other international actors not to accept the "status quo" in Afghanistan and not to turn their backs on Afghan women. She described the gender apartheid women have faced since the Taliban takeover in 2021. Women lost access to opportunities, they are banned from leaving their own homes and face increased rates of violence. "On 14 August [2021] we were heads of civil society and media organizations, teachers, students, politicians. Suddenly, on 15 August we woke up being no one", she said.

[Day 2: Discussing challenges to peace and humanitarian work of women's CSOs and building coalitions for joint action](#)

Building on the momentum of the first day, on Day 2 participants dove straight into discussions about the key challenges they face in their work in a general context of backlash against women's rights and shrinking space for women human rights' defenders, and which they hope to address through the final declaration and concerted avenues of action that will result from the GWF.

The day started with a brief presentation by Agnieszka Fal-Dutra Santos, the consultant in charge of drafting the Berlin Declaration 2023 based on the participants' discussions. Ms. Fal-Dutra Santos

explained to the participants the purpose of the declaration and the participatory process of putting it together. Following this presentation, the CSO leaders worked in thematically divided breakout groups to identify key challenges and key priorities related to their work in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, humanitarian action, economic recovery, and protecting women from SGBV. The results of the breakout groups were discussed in the plenary, and the participants reflected on the similarities of the challenges they face, even though they come from very different contexts. As one of the participants put it in their evaluation form: “[the GWF] made me realize that despite various differences, women’s CSOs around the world have the same needs, priorities and challenges – this is a result of the patriarchal culture which does not have any borders.”

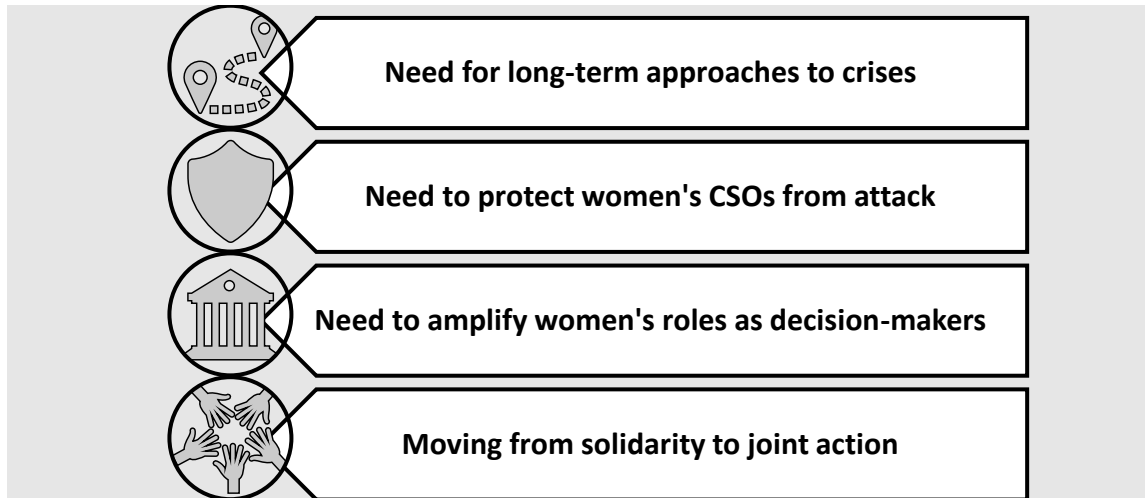
In the second part of the day, a plenary panel discussion was devoted to a reflection on building coalitions and joint actions to enhance the recognition and support for women’s CSOs’ work in PSHA. The session was moderated by Rahel Beigel, UN representative at the Women’s Refugee Commission’s and member of WPHF Board. The discussion, featuring Bleh Sorley Gbeintor, Executive Director, Community Sustainable Development Organization (Liberia), Iman Sultan, Project Manager, Ajyal Association for the Development of Intelligence and Creativity (Iraq) and Mossarat Qadeem, Co-founder, PAIMAN Alumni Trust (Pakistan), highlighted the value of coalitions in advancing gender equality in WPSHA, presented examples illustrating the power of unified voices and advocacy strategies; and served as an introduction for the following breakout groups on coalition building.

During the plenary, Ms. Sultan noted that women’s CSOs can benefit from international platforms provided, for example, by the United Nations, regional organizations and global civil society networks working on peace and security. This was echoed by many participants who underscored the importance of a **careful mapping of existing actors and coalitions and called for the continued provision of safe spaces for women’s CSOs to meet and exchange experiences** – such as the GWF 2023.

While consolidating their work and advocacy at the regional and global level, women’s CSOs cannot compromise their connection to their local communities. This was one of the key points conveyed by Ms. Sorley, who shared that her organization organizes community dialogues to craft advocacy messages based on their first-hand knowledge of the challenges before bringing these to regional and global coalitions.

The following breakout groups on coalition building identified joint priorities and opportunities for action at regional level (in Africa, Asia Pacific, Middle East, Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean) in response to the challenges for PSHA work identified earlier. Finally, the day ended with a “marketplace” during which women’s CSOs have showcased their work.

The key themes and priorities that emerged from the second day’s discussions are summarized below and discussed in more depth in the remainder of this section.



Highlight: Long term approaches to address pervasive crises

One of the key messages emerging throughout the discussions was that **violence and humanitarian crises are intensifying and becoming increasingly complex, forcing women's CSOs into the state of constant emergency**. Participants noted that this has led to a normalization of the state of crisis and emergency, and is perpetuating a culture of violence, already dominant in patriarchal societies.

The normalization of violence and of the state of emergency has several serious implications for women's CSOs – including growing prevalence of attacks on women activists, mental burden and burnout.

The participants stressed that **addressing the impacts of the protracted and increasingly complex crises requires long-term and holistic approaches**. Once again, the strategy of working across the peace-development-humanitarian nexus (see highlight above) was emphasized as a key contribution of women's CSOs. Participants also noted that the current funding system is ill-suited to supporting this kind of work.

CSO representatives called attention to the significance of **investing in capacity strengthening as a way to ensure sustainable action and results and for women to become agents of change and peacebuilding**. This could include enhancing capacities on issues ranging from entrepreneurship and innovative initiatives to address food insecurity, through leadership and political acumen, to technical training on project management for women's CSOs and prevention of sexual harassment, abuse, and exploitation. For example, women from political parties are not necessarily skilled in conflict prevention and resolution.

Lastly, the participants underscored the strategic value of **addressing root causes of conflict and humanitarian crises** – identifying **climate change** in particular as a challenge that requires more attention and should be more explicitly and systematically built into the women, peace and security agenda.

CALL TO ACTION

To address the growing number and complexity of crises, the participants included the following recommendation in the **Berlin Declaration 2023**:

Make radical changes to the existing financing structures and mechanisms by providing long-term, flexible and core funding available to grassroots and local organizations, including those led by women and young women in all their diversity.

While recognizing the need for some rapidly accessible short-term funds, most participants highlighted that the current project-based, short-term funding makes it difficult for them to implement their work. Some emphasized that because of the lack of core funding, they are not able to pay their staff properly, and often rely on volunteer work. They also called for dedicated funding for **organizing, monitoring their work, and showcasing impacts**.

Participants felt that there is a **deficit of trust** towards women's CSOs from the donors. While women's CSOs enjoy high levels of trust within their communities, they are regarded with suspicion by donors, and therefore required to undergo burdensome processes to access funds. This is **particularly true for certain groups of women** – including Black women, displaced women, young women, and women with disabilities.

Highlight: Women's CSOs under attack

Participants highlighted that women civil society leaders are increasingly under attack. Several of the participants have shared experiences of receiving death threats, having their family members or staff kidnapped or harassed, or being harassed, attacked, and even tortured themselves.

Women's CSOs shared that their work is often very sensitive – speaking to people on both sides of the conflict and working on issues that contradict the traditional norms and belief systems puts them under an increased risk of attack. Yet, there are **very few, if any, resources and opportunities for women civil society leaders to protect themselves**. One of the participants reflected that they provide shelters and safe spaces for violence survivors, but no one provides similar spaces for them: “Who is taking care of women leaders to protect them?”, she asked.

CALL TO ACTION

To address this challenge, the participants included the following recommendation in the **Berlin Declaration 2023**:

Take a firm, decisive and uncompromising stance against attacks on our safety, wellbeing, lives, and work and against the patriarchal norms that lead to the normalization of violence, gender apartheid and gender persecution.

The participants called for decisive action to protect women civil society leaders. This includes both **political action** – publicly condemning any violations of women’s rights and imposing targeted political and economic sanctions for them – but also **programmatic and financial commitments**. For example, they asked for the creation of safe spaces for grassroots humanitarian responders, as well as the inclusion of specific budget allocations for protection equipment and training for women civil society leaders.

CSOs emphasized that the **protection systems for women civil society leaders should be systematized and institutionalized**. Security guarantees for CSOs’ staff should be implemented by Member States, the UN and other international organizations to ensure their sustainability, and protection should also be systematically supported by donors – for example, by including dedicated lines for urgent protection and mitigation needs in all budgets.

Highlight: Amplifying women’s roles in decision-making

Participants noted that **women’s expertise both in peacebuilding and in humanitarian action is often not recognized**, and as a result, they are excluded from decision-making spaces. The importance of including women in spaces where decisions are made – both at the highest political level and at the grassroots level, for example, in refugee camp committees – was stressed throughout the discussions.

During their breakout group discussion, participants from Moldova and Ukraine noted that **even when women are included in decision making, they are treated “like decorations”** rather than like real participants. Their opinions are not listened to nor taken into account. This aggravates the protection issues within their communities, since women are often the ones who bring human security and protection needs to the table, yet their perspectives are dismissed.

Anny Modi from the African Women Leaders’ Network from DRC emphasized that **women’s participation in politics** is a pre-requisite for their effective participation in peace negotiations – providing the DRC case as an example. However, she noted that it is difficult to receive funding to support women’s political participation from donors working on peace and security, since the two are often regarded as separate.

CALL TO ACTION

To address the barriers hindering women’s participation in conflict resolution and humanitarian assistance and the challenge of the recognition of women’s efforts and work in these fields, the participants included the following recommendations in the **Berlin Declaration 2023**:

Ensure that we can participate in and use our peacebuilding experience and expertise to influence all electoral, political decision-making and peace processes

and

Recognize that our expertise is fundamental to prevent and address global humanitarian crises, foster climate justice

The participants called for donors to **increase funding aimed at women's participation in elections and politics**, as well as to **prioritize their participation and leadership in decision-making structures in humanitarian crises**. They highlighted that mere participation is not enough – women should be recognized and supported as leaders of peacebuilding and humanitarian processes.

They also stressed that meaningful participation has to take place at all stages of any process – from context analysis and design, throughout the implementation, to the monitoring and follow-up after an initiative.

Highlight: From solidarity to joint action

A key highlight of the second day of the GWF 2023 was the drawing up of **regional coalitions for action** through breakout groups organized by region (Africa, Asia Pacific, Middle East, Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean) where participants discussed shared priorities and outlined collective actions they could undertake following the Forum.

CSO leaders highlighted the value in **conducting cross-border research** to better understand certain phenomena. For example, a better understanding of the gendered dynamics of migration and violence along the Colombia-Venezuela border could be useful. Similarly, **exchanging experiences on women's access to justice in the face of gang violence** in Colombia and Haiti was also identified as a key issue.

The participants from Ukraine and Moldova noted that there is a need for a regional coalition of organizations led by and working with Ukrainian women across Europe. They stressed there is a need for the diverse actors who began involved in the work following the Russian invasion to better understand each other.

As a result of the breakout groups, **possible follow-up actions** were identified, including: establishing WhatsApp groups and using social media to exchange information and good practices on current peace processes, women's rights and SGBV; creating a "resource hub" on topics such as peace education in schools rural women's empowerment in rural contexts or tactics to better support refugee women; and appointing regional task forces to consolidate the discussions and finalize the advocacy priorities for each region.

CALL TO ACTION

To amplify their reflections around the value and impact of coalitions, the participants included the following recommendation in the **Berlin Declaration 2023**:

Foster and amplify organizing, movement-building and solidarity among grassroots, local and national women civil society leaders and activists at national, regional and global levels.

The participants recognized that **movement-building is an activity that requires time and resources** and called for the donors to provide them. They also called on **international partners** to organize regular

convenings to facilitate the coming-together of diverse women, in particular those who might have limited access to experience-sharing and networking opportunities – including women with disabilities, young women, forcibly displaced women and informal women’s groups.

The participants also discussed the **potential benefits of including men and boys in coalitions**. However, they highlighted that this must be context-specific and should be based on the men’s commitment to challenge patriarchal values both in their personal lives and in their communities.

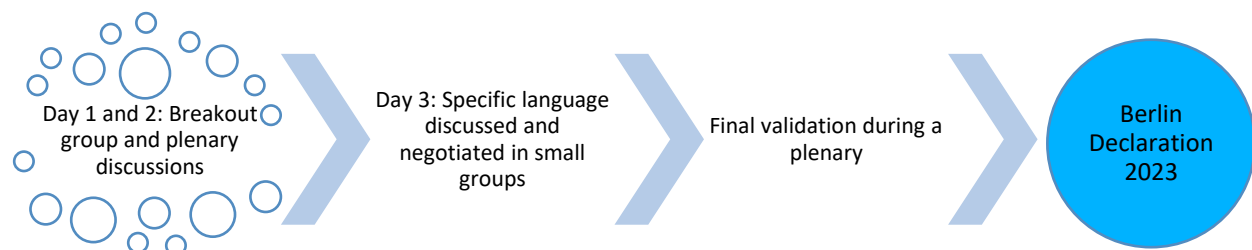


Day 3: Consolidating the discussions into action

The focus of the third day of the GWF 2023 was the review and validation of the draft Berlin Declaration 2023. Participants worked in breakout groups and in the plenary to provide their inputs into the declaration and ensure that it reflects their priorities. The day culminated with the official adoption and validation of the Declaration 2023.

Another key highlight was a series of hands-on self-care workshops led by the INGO members of the WPHF Board. The workshops provided a much-needed space for the participants to reflect on their self-awareness and protection needs and practices. Participants were invited to engage in interactive exercises that helped them find some inner well-being in the midst of their relentless women's rights activism.

Lastly, Yasmine Cordes, Graphic recorder, presented her drawings summarizing the visual highlights of the GWF before the high level closing of the GWF 2023 which featured Heike Thiele, Director for Civilian Crisis Prevention and Stabilization at the GFFO; Mimidoo Achakpa, Steering Committee Member of the Feminist Humanitarian Network and WPHF Board Member; Fawzia Koofi, First Woman Deputy Speaker of the Afghan Parliament, Founder of Women for Afghanistan and Woman Human Rights Defender (Afghanistan), Natalia Brandler, Founder and President of Cauce civil association (Venezuela) and Ghita El Khyari, Head of the WPHF Secretariat.



Highlight: Caring for the carers

Three concurrent protection workshops were led by the following WPHF Board Members: Eva Zillén, Senior Advisor at Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, Grace G. Ileri, Local Humanitarian Partnerships Advisor at Action Aid, and Mimidoo Achakpa, National Coordinator at Women in Humanitarian Action in Nigeria and Steering Committee Member of the Feminist Humanitarian Network.

A recurrent theme across all three workshops was the **importance of providing care and mental health support to women working at the frontlines of peace and security and humanitarian work**. This built on the discussions from the previous days. As a participant from Ukraine highlighted: “We have been providing psychological assistance for displaced people, but we need psychological assistance ourselves”.

The interactive self-care workshops did not pretend to substitute for the professional and systematic mental health and psychosocial support women civil society leaders need. However, they provided a space for the GWF participants to identify approaches they can employ on their own and institutional changes that organizations can take. The workshops' facilitators emphasized that it is crucial to move from one thing the individual is responsible for, to organizations that support their staff to prioritize self-care and invest for their staff to engage in care and protection routines. CSOs should recognize that **self-care is a condition to enable women peacebuilders and humanitarian responders to continue doing their work in the long term.**

The workshops stressed that **self-care is rooted in the values of love, care and support, which form the backbone of feminist leadership.** They provided participants with some practical self-care assessment tools, breathing exercises and resources to combat feelings of stress or burnout such as setting boundaries and seeking support. As one participant put it, a question that women leaders often struggle with is: "How can we take a break without disappointing others?"

The workshops provided a much-needed opportunity to reflecting on how to establish a culture of care in their organizations and sharing relaxation techniques and emotional and physical well-being strategies with each other. The participants recognized that by normalizing over-working and underestimating the need to take care of oneself, women civil society leaders are "reproducing another kind of violence", which can become a threat to the women's rights movement itself and affect women leaders' resilience.

At the same time, the workshops **recognized that the rhetoric of self-care often does not align with the reality faced by women civil society leaders.** The persistent and deepening crises, short-term and insufficient funding, and increasing attacks on women's CSOs make it extraordinarily difficult to engage in self-care. As one of the participants noted in the session evaluation: "The reflection was valuable but I think it needs to be accompanied with the reflection on financial institutions – donors demand more results and activities, but at the same time provide less funding for staff time, which goes against the concept of self-care. Project budget lines for activities related to selfcare should be permitted by donors".

Highlight: The Berlin Declaration, a participatory drafting process

The adoption of the 'Berlin Declaration 2023: Women Peacebuilders, Humanitarian Responders and Human Rights Defenders Call on the World to Invest in their Work on the Frontlines' was an uplifting moment and the culmination of the efforts and discussions that took place over the three days.

The declaration, which was drafted and translated by the WPHF team and consultant in the evening of the Forum's second day, was distributed to the participants, who then worked in language-specific breakout groups to discuss the text and identify any gaps, as well as any red lines, which would make it impossible for them to support the declaration. Participants' feedback was captured in detail by sessions' rapporteurs and integrated into the declaration's final text. Following this, the declaration was read out

during a plenary session, and the participants had another opportunity to make comments, corrections, and suggestions.

The participatory discussions ensured that the document reflected the important nuances from the work of women's CSOs and guaranteed a joint ownership of the declaration.⁸

Spotlight on: Closing ceremony and the way forward

The closing ceremony of the GWF 2023 provided a final space for reflection and mobilization. On the one hand, the speakers reflected on the many challenges that still persist and women peacebuilders face, and on the other, they celebrated the achievements of the women gathered in Berlin, the spirit of hope and sisterhood that it generated.

The closing session was also an opportunity to **look forward towards the actions beyond the Forum**. The WPHF's Secretariat reiterated its commitment to leveraging the Berlin Declaration 2023 and feeding its recommendations into advocacy and policy entry points to accelerate support for local women's CSOs in key international forums and global policy spaces. Some of the upcoming opportunities include the Annual Open Debate on WPS in October 2023, and the WPHF Invest-In-Women High Level Summit and Replenishment Conference that will take place on its sidelines.

The WPHF will build a momentum around the Declarations' recommendations in the lead-up to the 25th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 in 2025, including through providing funding to the women's CSOs to build regional joint actions to take the Berlin Declaration's recommendations forward building on the work initiated during the GWF coalition building breakout groups. The participants have also committed to disseminating the Declaration and using it as an advocacy tool in their specific local and national contexts.

Participants' feedback and lessons learned for the future

The GWF 2023 provided a space for women civil society leaders to (re)connect, collectively strategize, and showcase their work and impacts to international partners and donors.

Participants' feedback on the GWF 2023 was overwhelmingly positive: 81% of the participants who completed the evaluation survey "strongly agreed" that the conference was a success (with 17% "quite agreeing" –and 2% "partially agreeing"). Moreover, 49 % of the participants "strongly agreed" that the event will support their efforts to respond to crises (with 41% "quite agreeing" and 10% "partially agreeing" with this statement).

⁸ The full text of the final declaration can be found in English, Arabic, French and Spanish in <https://wphfund.org/2023/05/26/global-women-peace-humanitarian-activists-convene-in-berlin-to-define-key-priorities-call-on-world-to-invest-in-their-work-on-the-front-lines/>

There was also an overwhelming sense that there is a need for more regular organizing of such convening spaces.

Some lessons learned to adopt when organizing future global forums include:

- Several participants noted that **the days were long and tiring** – something that could perhaps be resolved by **adding an additional day to the agenda**. The GWF 2023 was already longer than the previous GWF, held in 2020 in Vienna. However, the participants felt that the agenda was still too loaded.
- Participants also suggested that **one day could be dedicated to more informal activities**, such as sightseeing and relaxing outside the event's venue, to provide an opportunity to interact with their fellow civil society leaders in a different context.
- Some participants also requested **interpretation in additional languages** – in particular **Ukrainian** (since multiple Ukrainian participants attended the GWF).
- Even though most documents were provided in Braille, one participant **requested that the draft of the Berlin Declaration 2023 be made available in Braille**, to make it more accessible.
- The participants also requested **follow-up actions, including the creation of thematic WhatsApp groups** to make it easier for them to remain in touch and take the commitments made during the GWF 2023 forward.

