

Missing in Action: Inclusive Conflict Prevention and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

Transcript

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Morning, everybody. My name is Sheila Daly. I work for Safer World, which is a conflict prevention and peacebuilding NGO. I'm our team lead for policy and advocacy. And I also, Safer World manages what's called the Women, Peace and Security Help Desk, which is a call down service for the UK government, funded by the Integrated Security Fund. And as part of that work, last year, the UK sort of asked myself and another consultant named Kate Buchanan to work on a bit of research on conflict prevention and WPS. So I'll be taking you through some of the findings of that research and generally giving a sense of sort of where conflict prevention sits within the Women, Peace and Security agenda at the moment. So the partners for the Women's Peace and Security Help Desk are Safer World Gaps, where you'll hear from later today. Durham University Conciliation Resources and previously the Women's International Peace Centre, but it's in its current iteration is REWIB, which is Researchers Without Borders based in Uganda, as well as DCAF based out of Geneva. So looking at conflict prevention and where it sits in the Women, Peace and Security agenda and just setting the scene. So many of us will probably be familiar with the four pillars of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. So protection, prevention, participation and relief and recovery. And I think what we found in our research, and I think most of us could also feel that even anecdotally, is that prevention is very much the weakest of the Ps within the WPS pillars, the weakest P. And I think one of the conclusions that can be made is that the transformative vision that sat at the core of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, you know, the sort of one of the primary ideas behind it, particularly 25 years ago, has been somewhat lost. So the key demands of the women's movement while advocating for the adoption of Resolution 1325, such as reducing military expenditures, controlling the availability of armaments, promoting non-violent forms of conflict resolution and fostering a culture of peace has been lost. And this quote is from the Global Study, which was done in 2015, and that was organized by UN Women. And this is sort of part of a broader situation that we find ourselves in, where conflict prevention in general has been somewhat deprioritized or never really prioritized more broadly. Most peace and security efforts are crisis driven and linked to what we would talk about in terms of negative peace. So the absence of conflict or the absence of violence or a peace agreement in place. but not necessarily positive peace, which we would say is more linked to the Women, Peace and Security agenda and that vision, because it

would include things like safety that is more inclusive visions of safety, access to certain social goods, access to education, healthcare and all of those types of goods that create a more stable vision of peace that sort of sits at the heart of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. And that feminist vision for peace is really about ending wars, not making war safe for women. So we kind of looked at this in the context of the Women, Peace and Security agenda as well. And I think what we found as well is that a lot of the focus of the Women, Peace and Security agenda since the original 1325 resolution has not really focused very much on prevention. We kind of found one or two resolutions that included the ideas around prevention. And obviously there are links between the other pillars and the idea of prevention, you know, particularly participation. But also there's a lot of conflation between the protection pillar and the prevention pillar when it comes to the subsequent Security Council resolutions. And I think that the sort of end result of that is that you have very marginalized feminist analysis and representation in peace and security decisions. So that's sort of linked to that participation element. And, you know, there hasn't been very much progress on that. Closed mail networks prevail, I think it's the overall finding. And, you know, the UN Secretary General puts out his annual report on women, peace and security. And year after year, it sort of notes with alarm the decline in women's participation in peace negotiations run by the UN. And as peace negotiations move outside of the UN space, that's sort of amplified as well. I think one of the other things that we sort of observed, and that comes out quickly in the literature and the interviews that we did around this research, is that there's this tendency to avoid discussion around masculinities, particularly in those higher level spaces like the UN Security Council. And generally looking at the gender drivers of conflict, there's this assumption, and I think this has been really escalated in the last year since we finished this research, is the idea that gender equals women and around this sort of broader backlash around gender equality, you have that really, really amping up. So governments are interested in looking at addressing women, violence against women, women's participation to an extent. but want to avoid the ideas around gender, gender inequality, and the power analysis that would inform thinking that sort of is a more feminist vision of how you would address conflict and promote peace. We also have this element of gender-based violence still seeing as separate from war-related violence. And I think that this is something that is a core feminist idea that challenges this concept is the continuum of violence, the idea that there's not really such a difference between public and private violence. And I think that we can see this as an example, and this is sort of relevant to conflict prevention in a more operational sense, in that increases in GBV, so gender-based violence, can be predictive of wider social and political insecurity. So including things like that as a more early morning indicator is quite important. And as I mentioned before, the protection elements of the Women, Peace and Security agenda have been conflated to conflict prevention. So you have a big focus on preventing sexual violence and conflict, but not necessarily such a focus on preventing conflict itself as part of the Women, Peace and

Security agenda. And I think one of the things that is most glaring as well in the last year, and it's been really, really, really escalating in a very severe way, is the inadequate funding around prevention, and particularly just for women's rights organizations. And I'll talk about that a little bit in terms of the contribution that they would make or have been making to the prevention pillar. So this sort of most recent findings from UN Women state that nearly half of all women-led organizations in crisis settings are at risk of closure. And that was sort of information that they had released last year around March, and in October have reconfirmed that, and saying that almost one in four have stopped prevention activities. So it's a real sort of funding shortfall that we're facing here. When we actually looked at what conflict prevention looks like in practice from a feminist perspective, we identified quite a few interesting and good practices. Like conflict prevention itself, it can be slightly slippery, a little bit hard to pin down. And once you take that into the space of women-led organizations which are fairly limited in terms of their resourcing, the documentation of that can be quite limited. But I think where you find the most amount of evidence of how conflict prevention works in practice to promote women, peace and security, is at the sub-national level. So conflict prevention and peace building activities. And there's a whole host of that, a lot of evidence that sort of demonstrates how local women's rights organizations, women's led organizations or organizations that prioritized sort of feminist leadership make an impact day-to-day on their communities and the prospects for peace within their communities. So there is quite a lot of evidence there. And I think then, if we're looking at what works, this works. So providing those organizations with the sort of space, the political support, the core funding to be able to do that work has very clear outcomes. I mean, linking that up into the broader outcomes around peace and security is where more of the challenge lies. We also found some positive examples around inclusive peace promotion and mediation. Women-led mediation networks is something that has come up a lot. There's sort of slight questions about whether those are being almost kept out of the main game of mediation. But at least there is sort of some focus on this. and the networks are at least a, significant investment in prevention. And also, I think my colleague Kate, who wrote this with me, sort of is more invested in those spaces and more engaged in those spaces. But she was saying, you know, there's this real shift towards peace mediation. So looking at what are those longer term views of how you can negotiate towards a structure that sets up for a longer term vision for peace, that sort of more positive peace vision. So taking it outside of just, you know, the peace agreement that stops the violence. We also did find good examples of flexible and long-term quality funding, which is a really important and core mechanism for promoting conflict prevention under the Women, Peace and Security agenda. One or two from the UK, some multilateral, France has a feminist fund for reaching sort of individual organizations and also networks of feminist organizations. The UK government has one that Safer World has been implementing with partners, Women for Women and Wealth, called Resourcing Change. And that was very much about providing for direct funding to

women's rights organizations in three countries. And you can see, you know, those types of outcomes coming from a relatively small level of investment. I think one of the other things we flagged were feminist foreign policies. We have feminist in quotes because some are feminist in words, but not necessarily feminist in practice. But what they do represent is governments sort of stating an intention towards promoting gender equality as part of their foreign policy. And then you also have these high level individuals like the UN Secretary General trying to promote global norms that promote women, peace and security, talk about patriarchal structures. So the new agenda for peace was really quite open about that and didn't necessarily receive much support from all of the mother states at the UN, but at least it sets out this stake for addressing the patriarchal norms which perpetuate inequality, militarization and violence. We also found some useful examples around early warning and data, which is so crucial in terms of understanding where individual contacts sit. but those aren't always connected to the high level relationships that would result in response. So there's early warning, which is great. You know, we found really interesting examples of data being collected by local organizations with a gender perspective. So you start to see more broadly sort of what's happening in the context. We have gender sensitive indicators, which can help sort of figure out where where society, where some of the gendered aspects of peace and conflict might indicate broader societal violence. For example, Safer World was running one called the Violence Observatory System in Somalia, working with women's activists and volunteers, and they were able to gather all this data, and that really helped them advocate for the changes they wanted to see at a sub-national level. But it's those connections, I think, between these sort of interesting, impactful projects at the sub-national level and those the broader environment in which we find ourselves. So I'll just talk briefly then about some of the selected opportunities for action that we found. We have a much more detailed list of these, both in the, we did sort of two versions of the research, one which is very focused on the UK government and, with very policy oriented recommendations specific to them. And then a more broad piece that's a bit shorter, which you might find sort of easier to digest. which talks in detail about, I guess, what the global sort of international community can focus on. I'm just going to pick out a few of these because I think they're sort of 8 to 10 recommendations in terms of sort of where there might be opportunities this year. I think going into 2025 hopes were, I wouldn't say high, but something like that. Hopeful that that the 25th anniversary of 1325 would be this sort of moment to reassert a focus on things, on these lost agendas like conflict prevention. I think what has happened in reality is more of a focus on just preventing the whole thing from falling apart. A really significant and organized backlash against gender equality is taking place. So these recommendations sit within that space, but I guess what I would say is that we wouldn't want to overpromise in that area. So one of the areas we thought about was reinvigorating gender and conflict prevention connections and championing the multilateral sustaining peace agenda. So what we mean by that is looking at, you

know, where networks exist as part of the conversations around 1325, around the Beijing Platform for Action, looking at how those, the prevention elements of those agendas can be more operationalized. And also looking at policy opportunities linked to some of the UN processes this year. And, the sustaining peace agenda, the sustainable development goals has really been sort of falling off in terms of implementation. But that was one of the first agendas that, well, not the first agenda, but, you know, it was one of the important agendas that really brought together the centrality of gender equality in terms of promoting peace. One of the other things, and obviously as a practitioner, I'll be banging on about this, but investing in subnational conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The evidence shows us that works. And also supporting feminist funds that reach women's rights organizations directly. I think we're seeing a real trend towards sort of these implementing consortiums or implementing agencies that are absorbing a lot of funds and not as many funds getting directly to women's rights organizations. So just looking at how to readjust that. And then challenging the state of play, backing inclusive peace promotion, and disrupting the male-dominated business of early warning data and analysis of conflict and peace. And I think that's sort of where I'll end just in terms of like the sense making, the conversations we're having right now are very male dominated and very militarized. Very much that sort of lost agenda feels very lost in the conversations we're having now. So I think it's that fee to include more feminist voices in those conversations, challenging the militarized masculinities in which we sort of find ourselves being directed in terms of analysis. and taking it back to more of that original vision of the 1325 agenda. And I'll stop there. Thank you.