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Towards peace in Libya? A gender-responsive analysis of the Libyan conflict and some pathways towards gender-inclusive resolution

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Abstract

The past few months have seen a string of important developments to the Libyan crisis, which started in 2011 when popular revolution, with women at its forefront, and overthrew long-time dictator Colonel Gaddafi. After the failure of multiple ceasefires in recent years, a national ceasefire agreement was signed in October 2020 and political dialogue between key stakeholders was resumed, opening up potential avenues to lasting peace in the country after nearly a decade of violent conflict and humanitarian crisis, which women have been highly vulnerable to. This moment represents a key opportunity for a truly gender-inclusive way forward in the political resolution of the crisis and in the rebuilding of the Libyan nation, addressing some of the key vulnerabilities faced by the population that are shaped by gender and fostering gender equality in post-conflict Libya.

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List of acronyms

CSO – civil society organisation

DDR – disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration

GNA – Government of National Accord

HoR – House of Representatives

IDP – internally displaced person

LGBTQI – lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex

LNA – Libyan National Army

LPDF – Libyan Political Dialogue Forum

NAP – National Action Plan

NGO – nongovernmental organisation

NTC – National Transitional Council

SGBV – sexual and gender-based violence

SOGI – sexual orientation and gender identity

SSR – security sector reform

UN – United Nations

UNSCR – United Nations Security Council Resolution

UNSMIL – United Nations Support Mission in Libya

VEO – violent extremist organisation

WILPF – Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

WPS – Women, Peace and Security

Introduction

Ten years on from the popular uprising in Libya, known as the 17th of February Revolution, which sparked a civil war and eventually overthrew long-time dictator Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, there seem to be few reasons for optimism regarding prospects for peace and stability in the country. Indeed, until 2020, different factions were still engaged in a protracted civil war (with only a short break between 2011 and 2014), stymieing efforts to rebuild the democratic and more egalitarian society that the popular uprising had called for. One of the areas in which this lack of progress has been most visible is gender equality, as this report will demonstrate. A recent national ceasefire, agreed upon in October 2020, has reopened the door to building sustainable peace in Libya. However, there can be no sustainable peace without a peace process that is gender-inclusive and transformative, placing gender equality at the centre in order to address the specific challenges and insecurities the Libyan conflict has brought onto women, men, and people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities (SOGI). Unfortunately, the current peace process falls short in this regard; therefore, this report aims to provide a gendered analysis of the conflict and put forward some pathways toward gender-inclusive conflict resolution.

This report will first provide an **overview of the history of the Libyan conflict**, as well as the recent ceasefire negotiations and moves towards peace. This overview will also map out the role of various actors in the conflict, both national and international, and outline some initial gender challenges in existing policy. In the second part, a **gender-responsive analysis of the conflict** will be undertaken, highlighting a range of specific challenges from a gendered perspective: increased insecurity for women and people with diverse SOGI; lack of women's meaningful formal participation and leadership in the peace process; persistent discriminatory legislation; and lack of accountability for sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in transitional justice mechanisms. Having highlighted the limitations from a gender perspective of the existing approach to peace in Libya, a **theoretical framework for gender-inclusive conflict resolution** in the country will be presented in the third part. This framework is grounded in the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, and focuses on two core principles: a locally-driven and locally-owned peace process, and transformative and participatory gender mainstreaming throughout. Finally, the report will conclude with some suggestions of what this **gender-inclusive approach** could concretely entail in the case of the Libyan conflict.

I.   Context: The Libyan conflict and the peace process so far

In early 2011, spurred on by a wave of popular uprisings across the Arab world, the people of Libya took to the streets to protest the dictator's 42-year long rule. Women's groups demanding truth and accountability regarding the deadly repression of a prison uprising in Abu Salim in 1996 led some of the protests that ignited the revolution[1]. As protestors were met with violent state repression, the clashes escalated into a civil war, opposing the rebel National Transitional Council (NTC) to Gaddafi loyalists. Following UN-backed international military intervention, Gaddafi was captured and killed in October 2011, marking the victory of the rebels. The NTC formed an interim government but struggled to exert its authority due to the continued proliferation of armed militias and its fragile control of over the 1,700,000 square kilometres of Libyan territory[2]. Eventually, two rival administrations emerged: the Western-based, UN-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA), and the Eastern-based administration led by General Haftar of the Libyan National Army (LNA) and backed by the House of Representatives (HoR).

A new civil war broke out in 2014. The weakness of the Libyan state also made the country a fertile breeding ground for militant groups affiliated with Al Qaeda, the Islamic State or Ansar al-Sharia, which are especially present in the South of the country[3]. Furthermore, the Libyan conflict was transformed into a proxy war by some major global players who have sought to protect and advance their strategic and economic interests, including fighting violent extremism, containing migration towards Europe and access to oil revenues[4]. While the UN, Turkey, and most Western governments (officially) back the GNA, the LNA enjoys support from Russia and certain Middle Eastern governments such as the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

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[1] Johanna Mannergren Selimovic and Disa Kammars Larsson, "Gender and Transition in Libya: Mapping women's participation in post-conflict resolution", *UIpaper*, no.8 (2014): 33, p. 6. https://www.ui.se/globalassets/butiken/ui-paper/2014/gender-and-transition-in-libya.pdf (accessed 11.12.2020).

[2] "Libya Revolt of 2011", *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* https://www.britannica.com.acces-distant.sciencespo.fr/event/Libya-Revolt-of-2011 (accessed 19.05.2021).

[3] Kali Robinson, "Who's Who in Libya's War?", *Council on Foreign Relations*, June 18, 2020, https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/whos-who-libyas-war (accessed 19.05.2021).

[4] Zia Weise, "The Libyan Conflict Explained", *Politico*, January 17, 2020, https://www.politico.eu/article/the-libyan-conflict-explained/ (accessed 19.05.2021).

Many of these governments (including Russia, Turkey, Egypt, and the UAE) have violated the UN arms embargo, sending weapons, mercenaries and drones to Libya and thus fuelling the conflict and general insecurity[5]. The proxy war has been especially salient between Russia and Turkey, with both countries sending either their own troops or mercenaries to support the LNA and GNA, respectively, and mobilising foreign fighters from countries such as Sudan and Syria[6], whose continued presence despite a recent ceasefire agreement presents a substantial threat to sustainable peace[7].
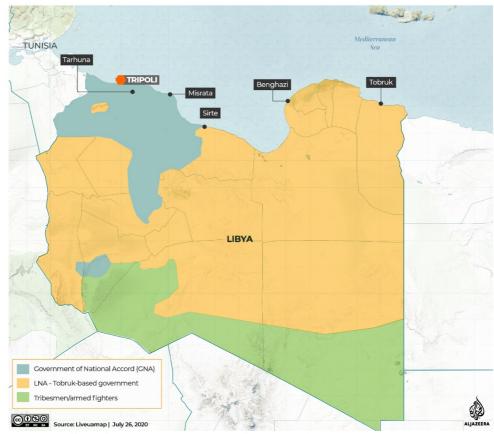

[8]
Figure 1. Different factions' territorial control of Libya, in July 2020. Source: Al Jazeera

[5] Missy Ryan, "U.N. slams 'extensive, blatant' violations of Libya arms embargo", *The Washington Post*, March 16, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/libya-arms-embargo-un-report/2021/03/16/8ff1fca4-8678-11eb-8a67-f314e5fcf88d_story.html (accessed 27.11.2021).

[6] Bethan McKernan, "War in Libya: How did it start, who is involved and what happens next?", *The Guardian*, May 18, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/18/war-in-libya-how-did-it-start-what-happens-next (accessed 19.05.2021).

[7] "Special Envoy Kubis discusses political and security situation in Libya, elections with House of Representatives Speaker Saleh in Al-Qubba," *UNSMIL*, May 5, 2021, https://unsmil.unmissions.org/special-envoy-kubis-discusses-political-and-security-situation-libya-elections-house-representatives (accessed 19.05.2021).

[8] Alia Chughtai and Ramy Allahoum, "Libya: Mapping areas of military control," *Al Jazeera*, July 27, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/7/27/libya-mapping-areas-of-military-control (accessed 19.05.2021).

Despite several international attempts at peace negotiations, the second Libyan civil war continued until late 2020, when a national ceasefire was reached on the 23rd of October, under the auspices of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL)[9]. After the failures of previous transition attempts around 2014 and of the ceasefire brokered by Russia and Turkey in January 2020, there are high hopes that the latest ceasefire will present an opportunity to move forward with the political transition process in Libya, eventually resulting in free and fair elections of a legitimate national government and the return of stability to the country.

This transition process was re-started in November 2020, with the convening of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF), supported by UNSMIL[10]. The first round of the Forum resulted in a roadmap for the peace process. Since then, the LPDF has elected a transitional executive body (approved by the HoR) to steer the country towards a general election in December 2021, start a national reconciliation process and implement the national ceasefire[11]. The participation of Libyan women in this process was emphasised in the first round of the Forum, with UNSMIL publishing a statement by women participants as part of the session's formal outcome documents.

The inclusion of women in the transition process is an important first step for gender-inclusive peacebuilding in Libya. This is especially true as UNSMIL and the international community have been criticised in the past for their inaction in this regard, as they failed to accompany their rhetorical support of Libyan women peace activists with concrete action. For example, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) pointed out that a high-level meeting that took place in Paris in 2013 did not include a single Libyan woman[12]. However, the international

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[9] UNSMIL, *Agreement for a Complete and Permanent Ceasefire in Libya*, October 23, 2020, https://unsmil.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/ceasefire_agreement_between_libyan_parties_english.pdf (accessed 11/12/2020).

[10] "Statement by Acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Libya Stephanie Williams on the First Round of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum", *UNSMIL*, November 16, 2020, https://unsmil.unmissions.org/statement-acting-special-representative-secretary-general-libya-stephanie-williams-first-round (accessed 11/12/2020).

[11] "Acting Special Representative for the Secretary General for Libya Stephanie Williams Remarks Following the Closing of the Vote on the New Executive Authority – LPDF," *UNSMIL,* February 5, 2021, https://unsmil.unmissions.org/acting-special-representative-secretary-general-libya-stephanie-williams-remarks-following-closing (accessed 19.05.2021).

[12] Scheherazade Khan, "Libyan Women Break the Silence", *Women's International League for Peace and Freedom*, October 10, 2018, https://www.wilpf.org/libyan-women-break-the-silence/ (accessed 11/12/2020).

community seems to be strengthening its stance on the importance of a gender-inclusive peace process, as indicated by the UN Special Envoy's more recent meetings with female civil society representatives[13] as well as the statement by the Netherlands, Switzerland and UNSMIL on International Women's Day in 2021, underlining that Libyan women are "a force for change in Libya's political process[14]".

Yet, as shown by the politically motivated murder of the outspoken lawyer Hanan al-Barassi on the 11th of November 2020[15], while the first meeting of the LPDF was in full swing, there are significant barriers to a gender-inclusive process (and therefore greater gender equality in Libyan society) that go beyond the international community's lack of encouragement for women's formal and meaningful participation. So far, the Libyan peace process has been characterised by an astonishing lack of attention to issues surrounding gender and a near absence of gender-responsive analysis on behalf of formal actors, despite the flourishing of women's civil society organisations in Libya since the revolution.

One of the most recent initiatives to have emerged is the Libyan Women's Network for Peacebuilding, created in July 2019. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and in anticipation of the latest peace talks, the network's members met and strategized in order to enter "male-dominated decision-making and negotiation spaces[16]", worked with women parliamentary representatives on the issue of violence against women in politics, and advocated for the release of imprisoned political activists. Furthermore, thanks to their socially, geographically and politically diverse backgrounds, they were able to support humanitarian actors to adequately fulfil the needs of vulnerable populations, including by providing a gender-sensitive lens.

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[13] "Special Envoy Kubis meets with women, civil society groups and the 24 December Movement," *UNSMIL,* March 27, 2021, https://unsmil.unmissions.org/special-envoy-kubi%C5%9D-meets-women-civil-society-groups-and-24-december-movement (accessed 19.05.2021).

[14] "Statement of the Co-Chairs (Netherlands, Switzerland and UNSMIL) of the International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Working Group of the International Follow-Up Committee on Libya on International Women's Day," *UNSMIL,* March 8, 2021, https://unsmil.unmissions.org/statement-co-chairs-netherlands-switzerland-and-unsmil-international-humanitarian-law-and-human-0 (accessed 19.05.2021).

[15] "Libya: Outspoken Benghazi Lawyer Murdered", *Human Rights Watch*, November 11, 2020, https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/11/11/libya-outspoken-benghazi-lawyer-murdered (accessed 11.12.2020).

[16] "Connected by their phones, women peacebuilders lead COVID-19 prevention efforts across Libya", *UN Women*, June 19, 2020, https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/6/feature-women-peacebuilders-lead-covid-19-prevention-efforts-across-libya (accessed 19.05.2021).

However, despite some positive evolutions recently[17], efforts to foster real progress towards greater gender equality in Libya remain insufficient. This means that the multitude of vulnerabilities faced by women and people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities (SOGI), as well as the impact of gendered power relations on certain dynamics (and potential solutions) of the crisis, have not been adequately addressed. Furthermore, it impedes the achievement of truly sustainable peace[18].

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[17] Working Group in International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, *Key Principles for a Rights-Based Roadmap Towards Sustainable Peace in Libya,* November 6, 2020, UNSMIL, https://unsmil.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/civil_society_principles_doc_for_lpdf_eng_-_7_nov_2020.pdf (accessed 11.12.2020).

[18] See Theodora-Ismene Gizelis, "Gender Empowerment and United Nations Peacebuilding", *Journal of Peace Research*, volume 46, no.4 (2009): 505-523.

II.   Gender-responsive conflict analysis

1.   Key issues

A number of gender-related issues currently pose a threat not only to the peace process but also to women's security and rights in Libya, thus impeding a truly gender-inclusive peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction process.

a)   Insecurity

The period following the 2011 revolution has been characterised by increased insecurity for all civilians, but especially for Libyan women and people with diverse SOGI. The backlash against women's rights in Libya – which was considered to be fairly progressive under Gaddafi, especially compared to other countries in the region[19] – started immediately after the revolution. Women in public life, especially activists and politicians, have faced threats, harassment, slander, and, tragically, many have been murdered or abducted. These very tangible threats slowed down women's important revolutionary mobilisation, as they feared for their safety and came under increased pressure from their families to reduce their public activities[20]. Furthermore, the Grand Mufti of Libya issued *fatwas* (nonbinding legal opinions on points of Islamic law) which imposed a dress code on women and limited their right to travel, and the chair of the NTC announced in his October 2011 liberation speech that he would push to reinstate polygamy[21]. This demonstrates the rise of religious fundamentalism (such as Salafi doctrine) that occurred during and in the aftermath of the revolution[22]. Violent extremist organisations (VEOs) also profited from the vacuum left after Gaddafi's destitution[23], and many women report feeling unsafe going out alone, which restricts their freedom of movement[24].

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[19] Haala Hweio, "The Libyan Revolution and Women's Participation in Politics and Media", *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review*, volume 8, no.2 (2018): 63-92.

[20] Ibid., 84.

[21] Mannergren Selimovic & Kammars Larsson, "Gender Transition in Libya", 13.

[22] Hweio, "The Libyan Revolution," 84.

[23] WILPF, *A Roadmap to Sustainable Peace in Libya* (2018): 12p., 3. https://www.wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/WILPF_Libya_Policy_Brief_Web.pdf (accessed 11.12.2020).

[24] Mannergren Selimovic & Kammars Larsson, "Gender Transition in Libya", 13.

Moreover, insecurity is not only a problem on the streets; the proliferation of small weapons due to the lack of border security and foreign meddling in the conflict (especially through violations of the UN arms embargo) has also substantially increased the risk that women may become victims of domestic violence [25]. Furthermore, women are inadequately protected from violence under current legislation[26]. It is also important to note that, although information is very scarce, there have been reports of several armed groups harassing, arresting, abducting, and torturing men suspected of homosexuality since 2011. The lack of information on this question in itself demonstrates the extent of insecurity faced by people with diverse SOGI in Libya, as many may fear violent backlash for reporting violent attacks[27]. This insecurity extends to issues of access to critical services and resources, which can be made more difficult for people with diverse SOGI, who are more likely to lose the support networks which facilitate access to such resources in conflict situations[28].

The absence of rule of law due to the conflict and political vacuum has also led to a culture of impunity, and there are widespread reports of SGBV, although strong stigma means the phenomenon is largely underreported and there is a lack of precise data[29]. The culture of impunity has also meant that women in detention have reported suffering from abuse[30], and female and LGBTQI migrants, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in camps across the country have also lacked adequate shelter conditions to feel safe[31]. The issue of SGBV in Libyan migrant detention centres is especially pervasive, and several NGO and international organisation reports have noted the systematic nature of the issue[32]. Both men and

[25] Ibid., 9.

[26] "Libyan women launch Libya's first minimum peace agenda," *UNSMIL,* November 10, 2015, https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/11/libyan-women-launch (accessed 19.05.2021).

[27] "Libya", *Human Dignity Trust*, 2020, https://www.humandignitytrust.org/country-profile/libya/ (accessed 11.12.2020).

[28] Megan Daigle and Henry Myrttinen, "Bringing diverse sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) into peacebuilding policy and practice", *Gender and Development,* volume 12, no.1 (2018): 103-120, 105.

[29] Emily Burchfield, "How the exclusion of women has cost Libya", *Atlantic Council*, November 26, 2019, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/how-the-exclusion-of-women-has-cost-libya/ (accessed 11.12.2020).

[30] Mannergren Selimovic & Kammars Larsson, "Gender Transition in Libya", 19.

[31] Burchfield, "How the exclusion of women has cost Libya".

[32] "No Escape From Hell: EU Policies Contribute to Abuse of Migrants in Libya," *Human Rights Watch,* January 21, 2019, https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/01/21/no-escape-hell/eu-policies-

women are targeted, and SGBV is perceived as being completely normalised in the context of migrant detention, both in official detention centres run by the Libyan Directorate for Combatting Illegal Migration and in unofficial detention centres that are run by smugglers, gangs, and militias. One expert on the ground estimated that all female migrants in Libya experience sexual violence, and "98 percent of men and boys … are exposed to sexual violence[33]". SGBV against migrants is frequently used as a means of extortion, with militias and smugglers sending videos of the violations to family members in order to demand money[34].

It is important to note that the European Union and its member states, many of whom (such as France and Germany) have their own interests at stake in the Libyan conflict and/or have in parallel attempted to encourage a peace process, play an important role in the climate of insecurity against migrants in Libya. Since 2017, the EU has heavily supported the Libyan Coast Guard to intercept migrant dinghies that were headed towards Europe, while simultaneously restricting its own and NGOs' search and rescue missions in the Mediterranean. This has resulted in a marked decrease of arrivals on Italian shores via the so-called Central Mediterranean migration route, but such "pullbacks" have been condemned by experts as being a violation of the principle of *non-refoulement* in international law, which "prohibits the return of anyone to a place where the individual is at risk of death, torture and other

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contribute-abuse-migrants-libya (accessed 19.05.2021); Izza Leghtas, "*Hell on Earth": Abuses Against Refugees and Migrants Trying to Reach Europe From Libya*, (Washington, D.C: Refugees International¸ June 2017), 20p., https://static1.squarespace.com/static/506c8ea1e4b01d9450dd53f5/t/592f37468419c2ac554b4c9f/1496266580341/2017.6.1+Libya.pdf (accessed 19.05.2021); "*Between Life and Death": Refugees and Migrants Trapped in Libya's Cycle of Abuse,* (London: Amnesty International, September 2020), 58p., https://www.amnesty.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Libya-report-Between-life-and-death.pdf (accessed 19.05.2021); "*Detained and dehumanised": Report on Human Rights Abuses against Migrants in Libya,* (Geneva: UNSMIL & UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, December 2016), 32p., https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/LY/DetainedAndDehumanised_en.pdf (accessed 19.05.2021); *Desperate and dangerous: Report on the human rights situation of migrants and refugees in Libya,* (Geneva: UNSMIL & UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, December 2018), 61p., https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/LY/LibyaMigrationReport.pdf (accessed 19.05.2021).

[33] Sarah Chynoweth, "*More Than One Million Pains": Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys on the Central Mediterranean Route to Italy,* (New York: Women's Refugee Commission, 2019), 76p., 20, http://s33660.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Libya-Italy-Report-03-2019.pdf (accessed 19.05.2021).

[34] Ibid., 21.

cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, or other irreparable harm[35]".
The issue of SGBV against migrants thus demonstrates how women (and men's)
insecurity in Libya is also linked to the actions of international powers and the internal
conflict between various militias.

      b)   Women's lack of meaningful formal participation

Women remain drastically under-represented in formal mediation,
negotiation and reconciliation fora, despite thriving women's civil society
organisations (CSOs) and some undeniable success in preventing and decreasing
violence at the local level (especially in more informal settings[36])[37]. Unfortunately, it is
precisely because women's contributions to peace have taken more unconventional
(and innovative) forms that they have been overlooked in formal fora[38]. In 2018, the
WILPF issued a scathing critique of the UN for excluding women's voices due to its
simplified and unilateral approach to peacebuilding which reflects traditional and
hegemonic attitudes to gender, seeing the solution to the conflict in the economic
and political roles of men[39]

As pointed out by Emily Burchfield, it is important to note that it is misguided
and reductive to imagine that the majority of Libyans are opposed to women's
inclusion in the peace process. Women's inclusion is not just a feminist issue, it is an
issue of reflecting Libya's national culture and traditions in the peace process[40].
Notwithstanding the influence of certain conservative patriarchal notions about the
role of women in Libyan society, especially in light of the above-mentioned post-
revolutionary backlash, the lack of commitment for the Women, Peace and Security

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[35] *Desperate and dangerous,* 18-23.

[36] Palwasha L. Kakar, "To Help End a War, Call Libya's Women Negotiators", *United States Institute of Peace*, October 17, 2019, https://www.usip.org/publications/2019/10/help-end-war-call-libyas-women-negotiators (accessed 11.12.2020).

[37] WILPF, *A Roadmap to Sustainable Peace in Libya,* 1.

[38] Mannergren Selimovic & Kammars Larsson, "Gender Transition in Libya", 6.

[39] Ibid., 5.

[40] Burchfield, "How the exclusion of women has cost Libya".

(WPS) agenda in Libya on behalf of the international community played an important role in women's marginalisation[41].

Indeed, some have argued that women's rights tend to be treated as a "hot potato" by the international community, which shies away from frictional encounters between globally driven projects for gender equality and conservative, patriarchal values at the local level. There are fears that raising issues of gender equality will destabilize the delicate balance of power in the post-conflict phase between conservative and liberal forces[42]. Unfortunately, this proves Burchfield's point about the UN and other global actors' fundamental misunderstanding of Libyan society's attitudes towards women and equality in the peace process, indicating an urgent need for a shift in approach if it is to be truly gender inclusive.

When it comes to women's participation in politics, early promises quickly faded. Women were extremely poorly represented in the NTC and initial post-revolutionary executive cabinet[43]. Despite some initial wins during the 2012 elections, where the so-called "zipper model" (whereby parties had to alternate men and women on their lists of candidates) led women to make up 45% of the candidates and win 16.5% of parliamentary seats (with a very strong female turnout[44]), the quota was reduced to 15% by 2014. Only six seats on the Constitutional Drafting Assembly were attributed to women in the same year[45]. In this regard, it is encouraging to see women's organisations' call for 30% of women in governmental leadership positions reflected in the LPDF's most recent roadmap for the transition[46]. This echoes a long-standing demand of women activists[47]. Yet, this commitment was immediately violated, as the interim executive cabinet that was subsequently sworn in was only composed of 15% of women. Furthermore, there are some fears that the new UN Special Envoy for Libya is not as committed to women's inclusion and gender issues

[41] Zahra' Langhi, "Gender and state-building in Libya: towards a politics of inclusion", *The Journal of North African Studies*, volume 19, no.2 (2014): 200-210, 205.

[42] Mannergren Selimovic & Kammars Larssen, "Gender Transition in Libya", 22.

[43] Hweio, "The Libyan Revolution", 77.

[44] Langhi, "Gender and state-building in Libya", 203.

[45] Mannergren Selimovic & Kammars Larssen, "Gender Transition in Libya", 10.

[46] Libyan Political Dialogue Forum, "Roadmap 'For the Preparatory Phase of a Comprehensive Solution'", *UNSMIL*, November 2020, https://unsmil.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/lpdf_-_roadmap_final_eng.pdf (accessed 11.1.2020): Art 5(6).

[47] "Libyan women forge agenda for peace," *UN Women,* November 23, 2015, https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/11/libyan-women-forge-agenda-for-peace (accessed 19.05.2021).

as his predecessor[48], and UNSMIL appears to have had no WPS strategy since 2018[49]. There is, therefore, a real risk that gender issues will continue to be side-lined in the peace process. Moreover, beyond political opposition stemming from conservative patriarchal attitudes on behalf of political elites, the above-mentioned insecurity also impedes women's full participation in the public sphere, leading to their structural exclusion[50]. In 2013, almost a third of Libyan women felt totally or somewhat restricted in their movements in public places, which inevitably reduces space for their participation[51].

Women are also underrepresented in the justice and security sectors. They have very limited representation in armed forces, the police and other security sectors. This is partly linked to the ambiguous history of women in the security sector under Gaddafi, as part of his all-female "Amazonian" guards, whom it is widely acknowledged he used as sex slaves[52]. However, this underrepresentation has implications for women's security, especially for those detained under male supervision[53]. A 2013 Saferworld report underlined Libyan women's deep "distrust of state security providers" and "concerns over abuse of power" (including corruption, mistreatment, and harassment) and found that women "view poor and abusive security provision as a central driver of insecurity[54]", especially since 2011. Regarding the justice sector, the foundations are stronger, as women have been appointed as judges since 1975 in Libya[55]. The recent creation of two specialised courts dedicated

[48] Patrick Wintour, "Female Libyan activists demand politicians stick to election timetable," *The Guardian,* April 5, 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/05/female-libyan-activists-demand-politicians-stick-to-election-timetable (accessed 19.05.2021).

[49] "Women's Empowerment Section", *UNSMIL,* https://unsmil.unmissions.org/women%E2%80%99s-empowerment-section (accessed 19.05.2021).

[50] WILPF, *A Roadmap to Sustainable Peace in Libya,* 2.

[51] Mannergren Selimovic & Kammars Larssen, "Gender Transition in Libya", 8.

[52] Iffat Idris, *Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in Libya* (Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, 2017), 15p., https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/20.500.12413/13048/K4D_HDR_%20Implementation%20of%20UNSCR%201325%20in%20Libya.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y, (accessed 11.12.2020); Hweio, "The Libyan Revolution," 71.

[53] Mannergren Selimovic & Kammars Larssen, "Gender Transition in Libya", 9.

[54] *"It's dangerous to be the first": Security barriers to women's public participation in Egypt, Libya and Yemen,* (London: Saferworld, 2013), 54p., https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publica-tions/768-its-dangerous-to-be-the-first (accessed 19.05.2021).

[55] Langhi, "Gender and state-building in Libya", 201.

to hearing cases of violence against women and children with five appointed female judges marks an encouraging step towards more positive change[56].

c) Discrimination and legislation

Despite the "window of opportunity[57]" provided by the revolution, there lacks legislative guarantees against gender-based discrimination in the post-revolutionary environment. Langhi points out that by 2014, neither the Constitutional Declaration nor any laws referred to the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, to which Libya is a party. She also deplores that the first women's block within the General National Congress never pushed for an end to discriminatory laws or for the adoption of more gender-inclusive policies, pointing to the danger of assuming that women's representation automatically leads to progress for gender equality[58]. Libyan women's organisations have called for the inclusion of a commitment to gender equality in the new constitution, as well as the creation of national gender machinery that would "advocate for women's rights[59]" and steer gender mainstreaming initiatives. Furthermore, homosexuality is banned under the Libyan penal code[60], presenting a clear case of legally entrenched discrimination against people with diverse SOGI.

d) Accountability, transitional justice, and reconciliation

A core issue with regards to transitional justice and post-conflict reconciliation concerns the adequate prosecution of SGBV. The current lack of accountability surrounding SGBV is not only a violation of human rights which further contributes to the stigma surrounding SGBV[61], it is also a great obstacle to any kind of truly inclusive reconciliation in Libya. On top of genuine efforts to prosecute perpetrators of SGBV

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[56] "UNSMIL welcomes appointment of five women judges", *UNSMIL*, October 13, 2020, https://unsmil.unmissions.org/unsmil-welcomes-appointment-five-women-judges (accessed 11.12.2020).
[57] Mannergren Selimovic & Kammars Larssen, "Gender Transition in Libya", 14.
[58] Langhi, "Gender and state-building in Libya", 205.
[59] "Libyan women launch Libya's first minimum peace agenda," *UNSMIL.*
[60] "LGBT Rights in Libya," *Equaldex,* https://www.equaldex.com/region/libya (accessed 19.05.2021).
[61] Mannergren Selimovic & Kammars Larssen, "Gender Transition in Libya", 14.

(the above-mentioned new courts signal some reason to hope in this regard), the truth-seeking processes that are core to reconciliation should also use a gender lens. Unfortunately, Libya's draft Transitional Justice Law does not mention women as a specific category for the fact-finding commission[62], and the absence of women in fact-finding roles makes it more likely that gender issues remain unaddressed [63]. Furthermore, a key prerequisite to genuine reconciliation in Libya, especially for it to be the basis of stable state-building, is a bottom-up process of nation-building that leads to a collective notion of nationhood, which is lacking in contemporary Libya[64]. Women's current widespread exclusion from mediation and reconciliation mechanisms and fora therefore excludes them from new collective senses of nationhood and impedes the success of such nation-building.

2. Room for improvement

In light of these challenges as well as the actions taken so far aiming for gender-inclusive peacebuilding in Libya, it is clear that a lot of room for improvement remains in terms of the actions of the international community. Firstly, the community's approach so far has been too top-down, unilateral and patriarchal: the "systemic exclusion[65]" of Libyan women from the peace process is a symptom of gender-traditional peacebuilding strategies which centre the role of men, echoing hegemonic gender norms. The inclusion of a group of women in the most recent LPDF is promising – but broader inclusion at different levels and regarding a variety of policy areas (including security sector reform[66]), as well as a much stronger focus on rights-based discourses, will be needed for the international community to

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[62] Ibid., 17.
[63] Robert Forster, *A Gender Analysis of Peace Agreements and Transitional Documents in Libya, 2011-2018* (Edinburgh: Political Settlements Research Programme, 2019), 44p., 18, https://www.politicalsettlements.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/PA-X-Spotlight-Libya-Digital.pdf (accessed 19.05.2021).
[64] Zahra' Langhi, *Libya After Seven Years of Impasse: Prospects for the Transitional Period and the Roadmap* (Libya: Libyan Women's Platform for Peace, 2018), 120p., https://docs.google.com/gview?url=https://lwpp.org/files/852f3-lwpp_survey_eng_may2018.pdf&embedded=true (accessed 11.12.2020), 7.
[65] WILPF, *A Roadmap to Sustainable Peace in Libya*, 3.
[66] Langhi, "Gender and state-building in Libya", 206.

demonstrate its genuine commitment. This introduces the second issue with the UN's approach to the peace process so far: it has been far too focused on an "add-women-and-stir" approach when it comes to addressing the gender dimensions of peacebuilding, focusing on the number of women in decision-making processes and assuming that women's descriptive representation will automatically lead to more gender-responsive policies. Yet, as Langhi pointed out women's representation in policymaking, Libya has not guaranteed more gender-equal policies, indicating a need for a shift in the peacebuilding paradigm in the country[67].

Moreover, the UN's vision for peace in Libya is too short-term, focused on reaching a ceasefire and implementing a standardised "democratic toolkit[68]" (elections, political parties, new constitution). This was once again echoed in the roadmap produced by the LPDF in November 2020. The short-termism of the international community's strategy impedes any kind of holistic, integrated, inter-sectoral approach that would enable genuine efforts at transformative gender-responsive peacebuilding. This would entail analysing and addressing the underlying gendered power dynamics within the conflict and its effects as well as fostering true opportunities for gender equality in Libya, which in turn would feed sustainable peace[69].

Finally, the international community's approach distinctly lacks any attention to intersectional issues. For example, little attention is paid to the socioeconomic marginalisation of women due to the conflict, many of whom, suddenly becoming sole breadwinners for the family, have faced considerable economic hardship compounded by the pre-existing inequalities in access to the labour market[70]. Another example of insufficient attention to intersectional issues concerns the recent ceasefire: it could have included gender-aware measures, especially regarding the provision of humanitarian assistance, thus addressing the specific needs of internally displaced women in camps[71]. More generally, there is a lack of attention paid to the specific plight of migrant women in detention centres, despite the issue being

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[67] Ibid., 205.
[68] Langhi, *Libya After Seven Years of Impasse*, 7.
[69] WILPF, *A Roadmap to Sustainable Peace in Libya.*
[70] "Libyan women launch Libya's first minimum peace agenda," *UNSMIL.*
[71] Robert Forster and Christine Bell, *Gender Mainstreaming in Ceasefires: Comparative Data and Examples* (Edinburgh: Political Settlements Research Programme, 2019), 24p., https://psrpdev.law.ed.ac.uk/psrpx/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/PA-X-Spotlight-Ceasefires-Digital.pdf (accessed 11.12.2020).

mentioned in the latest Universal Periodic Review at the UN Human Rights Council[72]. The specific knowledge and solutions that can be found at the intersection of gender and ethnicity in Libya are also side-lined when some gendered components of tribal identity act as barriers to recruitment by VEOs. For example, in Toubou and Tuareg tribes, norms around masculinities are associated with "social connectivity" and less with "dominance" and "aggression [73] "thus strengthening resilience to VEO recruitment among these communities, despite the important vulnerabilities and marginalisation they otherwise face. The matrilinear nature of some of these communities, whereby lineage is passed on via mothers, has led to higher levels of gender equality within certain tribes, stemming directly from cultural norms and increasing community stability, security and resilience.

Therefore, identifying, understanding, respecting and supporting such cultural institutions at the intersection of gender and tribal identity can encourage more sustainable peace processes[74]. Furthermore, some women's tribal identity can have important implications for local mediation. Certain elder women, known as *sheikhas*, have had a traditional role as mediators in Libya, especially in the South, but because this role and tradition are orally transmitted, it is poorly understood by outsiders and thus insufficiently mobilised in conflict resolution in Libya, reflecting a lack of national and local ownership of the peace process[75].

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[72] Office for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Summary of stakeholders' submissions on Libya: A/HRC/WG.6/36/LBY/3* (Geneva: United Nations Human Rights Council, 2020), 13p., https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G20/054/01/PDF/G2005401.pdf?OpenElement (accessed 11.12.2020): §77.

[73] Manal Taha, *Matriarchal and Tribal Identity, Community Resilience, and Vulnerability in South Libya* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2017), 20p., https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2017-12/sr416-matriarchal-and-tribal-identity-community-resilience-and-vulnerability-in-south-libya.pdf (accessed 11.12.2020).

[74] Ibid.

[75] Palwasha, "To Help End a War, Call Libya's Women Negotiators".

III.   Towards gender-inclusive conflict resolution

This gender-responsive analysis of the conflict in Libya, as well as the peace process so far, demonstrates that there is a need to press the reset button on the existing conflict resolution strategy so as to make it truly gender-responsive. A new approach, which embodies the transformative potential of the Women, Peace and Security agenda should be implemented. Such an approach could be guided by two interrelated principles in order to ensure that the peace process is truly gender-inclusive: peacebuilding in Libya should be locally-owned and bottom-up, and it should implement transformative, participatory gender mainstreaming.

1.   The Women, Peace and Security agenda

The WPS agenda advocates for better recognition of the specific and disproportionate impact of violent conflict on women, as well as guarantees of recognition and encouragement of their participation in peacebuilding processes, acknowledging that women's inclusion in conflict resolution is more likely to lead to lasting peace. It was formalised in 2000 by the UN Security Council in its Resolution 1325, after intense lobbying from civil society. According to this resolution, the WPS agenda articulates itself around four pillars: participation (in peacebuilding), protection (especially from SGBV in conflict), prevention (especially of SGBV, gender-based discrimination and women's rights violations), and relief and recovery (implementing a gendered lens, especially in humanitarian aid).

A number of related UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) were subsequently adopted, dealing with sexual violence as a war strategy (including questions of transitional justice), women's participation in decision-making and peace processes, strengthening the WPS agenda at the UN level. The WPS agenda is to be implemented through National Action Plans (NAPs) developed by individual

governments[76]. To this date, Libya has neither developed a NAP nor a national strategy to implement the WPS agenda[77].

However, the WPS agenda does not come without its criticisms. Research points to the asymmetrical implementation of UNSCR 1325, which is disproportionately implemented in the context of conflicts with high levels of sexual violence[78]. This indicates that the WPS agenda may be misunderstood by the international community and reduced to the issue of SGBV. Although this is a high priority in conflict situations, this selective approach risks limiting the WPS agenda's transformative potential for conflict resolution and gender equality in post-conflict societies. Furthermore, some academics have also explored the links between the implementation of the WPS agenda and politics of feminist knowledge production, arguing that UNSCR 1325, like many other gender mainstreaming initiatives, leads to a de-politicisation of the concept of gender. Borrowing from Foucault's concept of "governmentality", they argue that implementing a "gender" perspective to post-conflict situations becomes associated with narrow, "neoliberal" and "neo-colonial" agendas, "instrumentalis[ing] a particular type of feminism to enforce liberal peacebuilding[79]". This highlights the strongly normative nature of the WPS agenda, which is often perceived as coming from "outside," linking foreign conceptions of gender to a civilizing mission[80].

The WPS agenda's cultural blindness can also hinder its transformative potential, and Barrow has pointed to the challenges of making UNSCR 1325 "relevant in local and national contexts[81]". Some important shortcomings relate to the difficulties in implementing the WPS agenda in post-conflict contexts where multiple and intersecting identities are often salient[82]. Moreover, civil society organisations

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[76] "What is UNSCR 1325? An Explanation of the Landmark Resolution on Women, Peace and Security," *United States Institute of Peace,*
https://www.usip.org/gender_peacebuilding/about_UNSCR_1325 (accessed 19.05.2021).
[77] "Libya," *NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security,*
https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/region/africa/northern-africa/libya/ (accessed 19.05.2021).
[78] Anne-Kathrin Kreft, "The gender mainstreaming gap: Security Council 1325 and UN peacekeeping mandates," *International Peacekeeping,* volume 24, no.1 (2017): 132-158.
[79] Rahel Kunz, "Messy feminist knowledge politics: a double reading of post-conflict gender mainstreaming in Liberia," *International Feminist Journal of Politics,* volume 22, no.1 (2020): 63-85, 69.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Amy Barrow, "'[It's] like a rubber band': Assessing UNSCR 1325 as a gender mainstreaming process," *International Journal of Law in Context,* volume 5, no.1 (2009): 51-68, 60.
[82] Ibid., 63.

tend to view that there is little macro-level, UN leadership on the issue, further undermining the local implementation of UNSCR 1325[83]. As demonstrated above, this lack of UN impetus on the question also appears to be an issue in the Libyan context. Ultimately, the WPS agenda's transformative potential is most likely to be fulfilled if actors at all levels commit to holistic, "agenda-setting" approaches to women in peacebuilding, rather than a limited, "add-women-and-stir" approach[84], which appears to be the dominant approach in the Libyan context so far. In order to address some shortcomings regarding the gender-inclusiveness of the Libyan peace process and the implementation of the WPS agenda, this report suggests that conflict resolution should be articulated around two core principles: it should be locally-owned and locally-driven, and implement transformative and participatory gender mainstreaming.

2.   Locally-owned and locally-driven

Focusing on the local level has the potential to create a number of positive repercussions on gender equality. Inclusive local reconciliation processes which involve local councils, municipalities, and civil society actors such as women's organisations (but also informal civil society), attempting to heal schisms not just at the political but also at the social, economic, religious and cultural level as part of a necessary process of nation-building, are more likely to lead to meaningful participation of women[85]. This is especially the case in Libya, where women "have long played a key role in negotiating or mediating conflicts[86]" at the local level. Recently, for example, women have participated in local peace councils or committees that monitor, verify and implement local and/or national peace agreements[87]. As pointed out by Mannergren Selimovic & Kammars Larssen, [an] investigation into the micro-practices of power in post-conflict spaces reveals local

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[83] Ibid., 66.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Langhi, *Libya After Seven Years of Impasse,* 26-27.
[86] Palwasha, "To Help End a War, Call Libya's Women Negotiators".
[87] Laura Wise, Robert Forster and Christine Bell, *Local Peace Processes: Opportunities and Challenges for Women's Engagement* (Edinburgh: Political Settlements Research Programme, 2019), 24p., https://www.politicalsettlements.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/PA-X-Spotlight-Local-Peace-Processes-Digital.pdf (accessed 11.12.2020): 11.

agency and engagement beyond the established institutions and formal civil society. There is a need to move beyond elite, urban environments to listen to the as yet unheard voices that can add complexity to the analysis of the Libyan path to peace[88].

Furthermore, such processes are more likely to directly address the gendered consequences of conflict in people's daily lives, such as SGBV[89]. Genuine bottom-up processes focusing on local agency, including for women, are understood to be much more emancipatory than top-down approaches, and also enable communities to build resilience[90]. However, it should not be assumed that just because the peace process is localised, women's participation automatically flows; discrimination and gatekeeping are still obstacles[91]. As at the national level, women's leadership should be actively encouraged in the design of local peace processes.

Locally-owned approaches are also crucial. This means that peacebuilding efforts should strive to understand local perceptions of peace and people's "views about the basic preconditions for bringing sustainable peace into their communities[92]", rather than presuming liberal notions of peace, such as those implied by the "democratic toolkit." Locally-owned approaches thus necessarily entail a radical shift away from universal models of transformation in post-conflict settings. Local and national ownership of the transitional period is also crucial for the legitimacy of any constitution that may emerge from it, and it is thus crucial that peace processes and transitions are not captured by international and national elites, as has often been the case in Libya[93].

Locally-owned processes would place local, bottom-up knowledge at their core, thus also providing opportunities for women's specific knowledge and gendered experiences of conflict to take centre stage in the formulation of peacebuilding strategies. Traditional, cultural and religious values can be emphasised (rather than alienated) in this process of fostering local ownership. Women activists have a crucial role to play in mobilising modernist and reformist religious discourse and upholding Islamic ethical values so as to locally contextualise rights-based

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[88] Mannergren Selimovic & Kammars Larssen, "Gender Transition in Libya", 22.
[89] Wise, Forster & Bell, *Local Peace Processes*, 6.
[90] Hanna Leonardsson and Gustav Rudd, "The 'local turn' in peacebuilding: a literature review of effective and emancipatory peacebuilding", *Third World Quarterly*, volume 36, no.5 (2015): 825-839, 832.
[91] Wise, Forster & Bell, *Local Peace Processes*, 6.
[92] Leonardsson & Rudd, "The 'local turn' in peacebuilding, 832.
[93] Langhi, *Libya After Seven Years of Impasse,* 105.

references to gender[94]. As shown by Taha, using a gender perspective to analyse cultural traditions and institutions can unveil their important role in fostering community resilience in certain Libyan tribes[95].

Finally, gender-inclusive approaches at the local level are crucial, as they provide legitimacy to such approaches at the national level, thus reducing the risk of backlash due to "Western imposition" of gender issues (as was for example the case in Iraq[96])[97]. Importantly, however, locally-owned peace processes demand a critical reflection on what (and who) the "local" represents, remaining wary of presuming an inherent authenticity through localness which could enable the international community to "circumvent responsibility and accountability[98]" for peacebuilding failures thanks to a purportedly "local" stamp.

3.   Transformative and participatory gender mainstreaming

Bottom-up, inclusive peacebuilding processes are inherently participatory, and Chaney's "Transformative Model for Participative Mainstreaming in Post-Conflict States" shows how important it is for civil society and policymakers to be aligned in terms of their priority issues for gender mainstreaming in peacebuilding to work. This presupposes a continuous dialogue between the two[99]. Civil society in Libya is clearly pushing for a "rights-based roadmap towards sustainable peace[100]", but the LPDF's timid mention of rights in its own roadmap shows that progress in terms of alignment with civil society can still be made[101]. Such transformative approaches also require inter-sectoral coordination, for example recognising the impact that gendered

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[94] Langhi, "Gender and state-building in Libya", 208-209.
[95] Taha, *Matriarchal and Tribal Identity, Community Resilience, and Vulnerability in South Libya,* 17.
[96] Jenna Breslin, "Iraqi Women as Legally Vulnerable Subjects: Applying Gender Mainstreaming and Vulnerability Theory in the Post-Conflict Iraqi State", *Emory International Law Review*, volume 33, no.2 (2019), 259-286.
[97] Wise, Forster & Bell, *Local Peace Processes,* 5.
[98] Leonardsson & Rudd, "The 'local turn' in peacebuilding", 830; see also Vivienne Jabri, "Peacebuilding, the local and the international: a colonial or postcolonial rationality?," *Peacebuilding,* volume 1, no.1 (2013), 3-16.
[99] Paul Chaney, "Civil Society and Gender Mainstreaming: Empirical Evidence and Theory-Building from Twelve Post-Conflict Countries", *World Development*, volume 83 (2016), 280-294.
[100] Working Group in International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, *Key Principles for a Rights-Based Roadmap Towards Sustainable Peace in Libya.*
[101] Libyan Political Dialogue Forum, "Roadmap".

insecurity has on women's socio-economic conditions, and gender-sensitive analysis of all issues, considering the gendered power dynamics at play [102] . Finally, transformative approaches imply a push for true inclusion of women, not merely through descriptive representation and quotas, but through a norm-based re-evaluation of fundamental values of governance[103].

4.   Some suggestions for a gender-inclusive approach to conflict resolution in Libya

The current impetus towards peace in Libya opens a crucial window to finally move towards a gender-responsive approach to peacebuilding, in line with the WPS agenda and fostering truly sustainable peace. Below are some suggestions in order to formulate and implement such an approach in the Libyan context, in line with the principles outlined above. Most of them address multiple of the challenges outlined in the second section simultaneously, thus using the inter-sectoral lens needed for transformative action. They broadly cover the three key dimensions of the current context: implementing the national ceasefire, reviving political dialogue, and moving towards post-conflict reconciliation.

The international community has a key responsibility to respect the arms embargo towards Libya. This would limit the proliferation of small arms which presents a key threat to women's security. Foreign powers' current two-faced behaviour, calling for peace via the UN whilst fuelling conflict and violence on the ground and foregrounding its own oil, migratory and security interests, undermines sustainable peace in Libya and well as women's security[104]. Relatedly, the EU is partly responsible for systematic SGBV against migrants in Libya. Its continued blind eye to abuse and its refusal of strong human rights monitoring and conditionality on the use of its funds in Libya further undermines peace and women's security.

[102] WILPF, *A Roadmap to Sustainable Peace in Libya*, 3.
[103] Langhi, "Gender and state-building in Libya", 209.
[104] "Several countries violated Libya arms embargo since Berlin Summit: UN", *Deutsche Welle*, January 26, 2019, https://www.dw.com/en/several-countries-violated-libya-arms-embargo-since-berlin-summit-un/a-52152283 (accessed 11.12.2020).

Peacebuilding efforts could focus on building community resilience so as to combat religious fundamentalism and its impact on women's rights and (in)security. Identifying tribes with matrilineal features and understanding gender norms and power relations in local communities, as well as supporting positive cultural norms and traditions, can provide innovative ways to do so in a gender-responsive and locally-owned manner. Indeed, conceptions of masculinity within a culture are linked to the propensity for violence/vulnerability to VEO recruitment[105].

Where local ceasefires are negotiated in support of the recent national one, there is an opportunity to address the permanent ceasefire's gendered shortfalls, leading to greater security and participation for women. Ceasefires present a valuable and under-exploited way to address the gender dimensions of conflict; only 5 out of 40 ceasefires/peace agreements in Libya since 2011 contain references to gender[106]. The inclusion of women in local ceasefire negotiations not only legitimises the talks but also sets a precedent for inclusion in future negotiations. A gender perspective is essential as such agreements can provide the basis for ensuing peace frameworks. Gender-responsive ceasefires can include: the prohibition of SGBV as part of the ceasefire terms (which triggers increased data collection on the issue as part of implementation monitoring); provisions for gender-responsive distribution of humanitarian relief; priorities for the return of IDP women and children; a mandate for gender-responsive demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) policies; and provisions for women's meaningful participation in ceasefire implementation monitoring commissions[107].

DDR policies are central to the success of a ceasefire and can provide opportunities to address underlying gender power dynamics. Therefore, it is important that gender-responsive, people-centred DDR is encouraged at all stages of the process. Such policies would acknowledge the implications that botched disarmament may have for the post-conflict insecurity of women and people with diverse SOGI, and address the specific issues faced by female and LGBTQI combatants when reintegrating into society, especially as they may face limited

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[105] Taha, *Matriarchal and Tribal Identity, Community Resilience, and Vulnerability in South Libya.*

[106] Christine Bell, Sanja Badanjak, Juline Beujouan, Robert Forster, Tim Epple, Astrid Jamar, Kevin McNicholl, Sean Molloy, Kathryn Nash, Jan Pospisil, Robert Wilson, Laura Wise, *PA-X Codebook, Version 4* (Edinburgh: Political Settlements Research Programme, 2020), www.peaceagreements.org (accessed 11.12.2020).

[107] Forster & Bell, *Gender Mainstreaming in Ceasefires.*

opportunities on the Libyan labour market (due to discriminatory legislation). They should also consider that the end of conflict may trigger a crisis in masculinities and violence, thus threatening the DDR process (even more so where there is vulnerability to VEO recruitment) and potentially leading to further backlash against women's empowerment[108]. Libya's thriving environment of women's rights CSOs could be key partners in this process, as they have already undertaken "transformative work[109]" on the issue.

Humanitarian activities undertaken by the international community should be gender-inclusive in order to ensure women's safety and participation. This includes comprehensive gender training (including on diverse SOGI-related needs) for all staff involved in the delivery of humanitarian relief. One other way of making humanitarian relief more gender-inclusive is to organise camps for migrants and IDPs in a manner that is responsive to populations' needs and design and manage them through an inclusive consultation process. This would for example provide flexibility for alternative organisation models than the nuclear family, so as not to alienate people with diverse SOGI[110], without isolating women who may feel safer in family units and providing as much privacy as possible.

Strengthening Libyan women's CSOs' capacities at all levels, including local organisations, would encourage women's meaningful participation in a range of processes, from peace and reconciliation projects to political decision-making. Such capacity-strengthening action could focus especially on reinforcing monitoring and lobbying activities and support women's involvement in all phases of local peace processes[111]. However, without a genuine commitment on behalf of the international community to lead by example and provide women opportunities to be included in all levels of the peace and transition process, these actions will not be as impactful as they could. Libyan women have throughout the conflict developed an extremely rich and unparalleled expertise of the situation as well as the specific gendered needs (as shown in the innovative instruments they have developed, such as the Charter of

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[108] Inter-Agency Working Group on Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration, *How-to Guide: Gender-responsive Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration* (New York: United Nations, 2012), 86p. https://www.sv.undp.org/content/dam/geneva/docs/How-to-Guide-Gender-Responsive-DDR.pdf (accessed 28.11.2021): 10f.

[109] Mannergren Selimovic & Kammars Larssen, "Gender Transition in Libya", 18.

[110] Daigle & Myrttinen, "Bringing diverse sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) into peacebuilding policy and practice", 116.

[111] Wise, Forster & Bell, *Local Peace Processes,* 13.

Libyan Women's Constitutional Rights[112]). They have a right to demonstrate their expertise and have a tangible impact. To the extent that it is possible without putting them in danger and putting additional burden on their already difficult existences, it is important that people with diverse SOGI be sought out, in order to determine in full co-decision with them how best they can be supported through the peace process whilst protecting their safety at all times.

Furthermore, fostering linkages between formal female political representatives and women's CSOs would ensure that descriptive representation translates into substantive legal and policy change towards gender equality and reinforces the sustainability of peace[113]. This could, for example, be done by facilitating regular exchange fora between both sets of actors.

Combating hate speech in the media is also essential to increasing women's safety and, therefore, their participation[114]. This could be done via workshops with Libyan media professionals which not only include women, but also explicitly acknowledge the specific gendered effects of hate speech, slander, and harassment on Libyan women in the public sphere and the concrete security threats they lead to.

Parallel and integral to current state-building efforts are nation-building efforts, as has been underlined by Libyan women's rights activists[115]. Such nation-building efforts could occur through a multi-level, multidimensional and inclusive national dialogue on Libyan national identity. This could be in part modelled on the extensive consultation process coordinated by UNSMIL in 2018 for the Libyan National Conference Process, where 77 meetings were held in 43 locations, involving 7,000 participants (of which nearly a quarter were women)[116]. Such a dialogue would

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[112] Libyan Women's Platform for Peace, *Charter of Libyan Women's Constitutional Rights* (Libya: Libyan Women's Platform for Peace, n.d.), 28p. http://docs.google.com/gview?url=https://lwpp.org/files/ea008-lwpp_charter_20.04.2016.pdf&embedded=true (accessed 11.12.2020).

[113] Jana Krause, Werner Krause and Piia Bränfors, "Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations and the Durability of Peace", *International Interactions,* volume 44, no.6 (2018): 985-1016 ; Chaney, "Civil Society and Gender Mainstreaming".

[114] "Libyan journalists, activists and social media influencers meet in Cairo and agree to combat hate speech", *UNSMIL,* November 13, 2019, https://unsmil.unmissions.org/libyan-journalists-activists-and-social-media-influencers-meet-cairo-and-agree-combat-hate-speech (accessed 11.12.2020).

[115] Langhi, "Gender and state-building in Libya".

[116] UNSMIL, *The Libyan National Conference Process: Final Report,* (2019), 72p., https://unsmil.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/ncp_report_jan_2019_en.pdf (accessed 11.12.2020): 8.

enable to address the multiple dimensions (not only political) of the conflict, a better understanding of the specific cultural and multitribal context in which the Libyan state arises and the delicate interaction this implies between state and society. This could be the first step towards the re-establishment of a truly inclusive social contract, after decades of constitutional interruption under Gaddafi. Indeed, Langhi has pointed to the profound implications that constitutional interruptions have on the "sense of belonging to a nation," and the negative effect on state-building processes, as "removing the moral and material foundations of long autocratic rule is not an easy task[117]".

A national dialogue on Libyan identity could provide a strong platform for women's meaningful participation and a discussion of issues and solutions related to women's rights and empowerment in Libya, and for women activists to introduce a "politics of inclusion in state-building[118]". It would also enable a number of priorities, which are fundamentally intersectional in nature, to be discussed, such as the plight of women refugees and IDPs or specific challenges and needs relating to women's tribal belonging. Such a process of dialogue has inherent value in the context of conflict resolution, and its value could also be enhanced through disseminating its outcomes at multiple levels of the peace process.

Finally, gender-responsive security sector reform (SSR) aims to include more women in the security and justice sectors and, especially, to address the specific gender-related issues in accessing security and justice. The first step to ensuring true gender responsiveness is for women (including CSOs) to be able to participate in decision-making surrounding SSR reform, thus harnessing their expertise and analysis of the topic. Gendered SSR could include recruitment drives and quotas for women at all levels of the security and justice sectors, removing any legal restrictions on their participation. In order to ensure that this representation translates into action (for example on women's detention conditions), training all staff to gendered analysis and issues would be crucial. This could be done with Libyan women activists, CSOs and experts, as they are uniquely positioned to translate these issues into specific local contexts.

One key challenge for gendered SSR reform in Libya is the controversial past of women in the security sector under Gaddafi, as they were mainly visible as the

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[117] Langhi, *Libya After Seven Years of Impasse*, 102-104.
[118] Langhi, "Gender and state-building in Libya", 208.

former dictator's personal guard of "Amazonians". There is no "one size fits all" approach to reform, and it is important that is accompanied by bottom-up processes of dialogue and national reconciliation to ensure the broad acceptance and effectiveness of these policies.

Finally, gendered SSR is central to ending the culture of impunity, especially for SGBV, and bringing justice to victims. The inclusion of the category of gender in transitional justice programmes and of gender representation in fact-finding missions has been demanded by Libyan women activists[119], as it would encourage the rebuilding of trust between the population and the institutions supposed to protect them. Indeed, for women, people with diverse SOGI, and migrants, security is not a given despite the end of conflict. Publicly acknowledging the issue of SGBV and encouraging women, men, and people with diverse SOGI to come forward through anonymous mechanisms and specialised courts could help lift the silence surrounding SGBV in Libya, and therefore open the door to confronting the issue.

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[119] Ibid., 204.

Conclusion

Women's political and civic engagement in Libya has far-reaching historical roots, and they played a key role in the February 17th revolution. Since 2011, women have undertaken important grassroots conflict resolution work and brave advocacy in an extremely hostile political climate in order to bring about lasting peace. Yet, they have been nearly systematically side-lined by international and national actors involved in peacebuilding in Libya, in complete defiance of the principles enounced in UNSCR 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, which focus on addressing the gendered impact of conflict and increasing women's participation in peacebuilding. In Libya, women and people with diverse SOGI face extremely high levels of physical and economic insecurity, very few opportunities for genuine participation in public life, discriminatory laws and a lack of accountability for SGBV. Therefore, as concrete steps towards peace have been taken in the past few months, with a national ceasefire in place since October 2020 and the prospect of a new constitution and new national elections at the end of 2021, the opportunity to foster women's meaningful participation and to address conflict and post-conflict issues through a gender lens should not be missed.

For the existing peace process to become truly gender-responsive, international and national actors would do well to shift their strategy towards locally-driven, locally-owned, transformative and longer-term approaches to peacebuilding, which fully embrace the transformative potential of the WPS agenda. Women's organisations in Libya have thrived since 2011, against all odds and at great risk. They have developed a wide range of tools and initiated various innovative processes for peace, harnessing local and religious traditions and customs to increase community resilience to conflict while defending and advancing women's rights, thus contributing to a truly local understanding of sustainable peace. It is high time all those involved in formal peace processes recognised that without a credible commitment to Libyan women's leadership in conflict resolution and the transition process, genuine accountability and local ownership of the peace process, and the elimination of SGBV and discrimination; there will be no lasting peace in Libya, and the ideals of the 17th February Revolution will not be realised.

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