



# Understanding the Journey: Past, Present and Future of the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network

by Irene Fellin

IAI, Istituto Affari Internazionali / Women In International Security (WIIS) Italy



## ACRONYMS

**ASEAN:** Association of South-East Asian Nations

**A/SRSG:** Acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General

**AU:** African Union

**AWN:** Arab Women Network

**CSO:** Civil Society Organisation

**EEAS:** European Union External Action Service

**FemWise:** African Network of Women in Conflict Prevention and Peace Mediation

**GA:** Global Alliance of Women Mediator Networks

**IAI:** Istituto Affari Internazionali

**ICAN:** International Civil Society Action Network

**LPDF:** Libyan Political Dialogue Forum

**MFA:** Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy

**MWMN:** Mediterranean Women Mediators Network

**NAP:** National Action Plan

**NGO:** Non-Governmental Organisation

**NWM:** Nordic Women Mediators

**OSCE:** Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

**SC:** Security Council

**ToR:** Terms of Reference

**UNDPPA:** Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs

**UNSC:** United nations Security Council

**UNSCR:** United Nations Security Council Resolution

**UNSMIL:** United Nations Support Mission in Libya

**UPR:** Universal Periodic Review

**UN Women:** United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

**WMC:** Women Mediators across the Commonwealth

**WIIS:** Women In International Security

**WPS:** Women, Peace and Security

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## ABSTRACT

This research stems from the development of Regional Women Mediator Networks that started in 2015 and the increased value these networks have acquired in the past few years. With a focus on the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network (MWMN), the paper aims at analysing on one hand, the significant contribution that this initiative can offer to the global agenda of Mediation for the 21st century, and on the other hand, its unique

added value for the next 20 years of the "Women, Peace and Security" (WPS) agenda. The "*Understanding the Journey: Past, Present and Future of the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network*" research project has been designed to investigate the history and development of the MWMN and the value that the initiative has brought both to its members and to the overall implementation of the WPS agenda in the region. In particular, the underlying question is to understand how to maximise the MWMN's operational work at the local level, and how to use the Network as an amplifier of women's efforts at the national, the regional and the global level.

This project is based on the work conducted by the MWMN, an ongoing multi-year project initiated in 2017 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MFA) of Italy in collaboration with Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and Women in International Security (WIIS) Italy. The research aims to complement the activities of the MWMN, tracing back the history of its establishment and analysing its development throughout the years. The research provides an overview of Network activities and achievements during the past years through a mixed analysis of external and internal sources, giving resonance to the insights of Network members. At the same time, it tries to contribute to outlining a way forward for the activities of the Network with regard to synergies with local and global stakeholders, in its attempt to become a key point of reference in the quest for peace and security within the Mediterranean region and beyond. The research strives at raising awareness about the MWMN, its members and its potential global impact in increasing the knowledge on the important role that women play in preventive diplomacy, conflict mediation and resolution, and in peacebuilding efforts. Within the framework of celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of adoption of United Nation Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325), the research aims to highlight the

potential of the MWMN (together with other regional networks of women mediators) as a transformative tool for achieving sustainable peace and thereby contributing to the global debate around the future of the WPS agenda and mediation processes for the next 20 years. *For more information about the Network, please see [www.womenmediators.net](http://www.womenmediators.net)*

## INTRODUCTION

In October 2020, the world celebrated the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the landmark United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in 2000. Twenty years and ten resolutions later, the rights of women in conflict-affected settings are far from being achieved<sup>1</sup>. Despite the efforts made by civil society organisations, international and regional organisations, member states, and especially women peacebuilders in the past two decades, women all around the world still struggle to get the recognition they deserve as peace actors and political leaders. Between 1992 and 2019, women constituted, on average, 13 per cent of negotiators, 6 per cent of mediators and 6 per cent of signatories in major peace processes around the world. While there has been some progress in women's participation, seven out of every ten peace processes still do not include women mediators or women signatories, the latter indicating that few women are participating in leadership roles as

negotiators, guarantors or witnesses<sup>2</sup>.

Looking at the situation in 2020, we see that ongoing peace efforts share similar struggles to include women in official delegations. For example, women represented only around 10 per cent of negotiators in the Afghan talks, just 20 per cent of negotiators in Libya's political discussions and 0 per cent of negotiators in Libya's military talks and Yemen's recent peace process. Stephanie Williams, acting Assistant Secretary-General Special Representative, was the head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) until early February 2021. She was the only woman chief mediator to lead a recent peace process, marking the first time in six years that woman held this role.<sup>3</sup>

The continued failure of the past years to include women in peace processes is a confirmation that societies and political leaders are still ignoring their demonstrated contributions and overlooking a potential strategy to respond more effectively to security threats around the world. Despite the fact that women continue to be excluded from peace talks, feminist scholars have shown that including women in peacemaking processes contributes to the likelihood of reaching a peace agreement, improves the success of achieving peace along with a better accord content, higher implementation rates, and the quality and durability of peace.<sup>4</sup> Research shows that peace processes that included women as witnesses, signatories, mediators and/or negotiators demonstrated a 20 per

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1 Ten resolutions make up the WPS agenda in the UN Security Council, beginning with Resolution 1325 (2000), which has framed the agenda for 20 years: Security Council Resolutions 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 (2008), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015), 2467 (2019), and 2493 (2019).

Together they form the international policy framework on WPS and were adopted in response to persistent advocacy from civil society. The obligations in the resolutions extend from the international to the national level. They guide work to promote and protect the rights of women in conflict and post-conflict situations. Additionally, as binding Security Council resolutions, they should be implemented by all Member States and relevant actors, including UN system entities and parties to conflict. <https://www.peacewomen.org/security-council/WPS-in-SC-Council> (accessed on 12/12/2020)

2 Council on Foreign Relations, 'Women's Participation in Peace Processes': <https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/> (accessed on 26 November 2020).

3 Ibid., Women have constituted, on average, 14 per cent of negotiators over the last five years (2015–19), and 13 per cent of negotiators between 1992 and 2019.

4 Jana Krause, Werner Krause and Piia Bränfors, "Women's participation in peace negotiations and the durability of peace", in *International Interactions* 44, no. 6 (2018): 985–1016; Marie O'Reilly, Andrea Ó Súilleabháin, and Thania Paffenholz, "Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes", New York, International Peace Institute, 2015.

cent increase in the probability of a peace agreement lasting at least two years. This increases over time, with a 35 per cent increase in the probability of a peace agreement lasting 15 years.<sup>5</sup>

Considering women as agents of change sheds light on the unique, multiple and diverse experiences of women who build peace. During conflict, women are affected differently than men, and therefore the inclusion of women in peace talks is critical to capture the vital and unique perspectives of women. However, it is not women's participation in peace negotiations *per se* that contributes to reaching a sustaining peace agreement, but rather women's influence and effectiveness.

The WPS agenda has been increasingly focused on the protection pillar, exacerbating stereotypical ideas of women as victims of conflict-related sexual violence and just a group with protection needs in armed conflicts. The initial focus on women's empowerment and the understanding that women's participation can build peace has been gradually lost within the UN Security Council's vision of the WPS agenda – considering also the phase of polarisation, political and cultural conservativism and fragmentation among the five Permanent Members of the UNSC.

Women mediators and women peacebuilders have been working for an inclusive society, addressing the root causes of war, reconciling different communities and negotiating local ceasefires. Women peacebuilders and mediators live every day in close contact with the communities and have both the capacity and the possibility to measure the temperature of tensions among communities and mitigate them. Unfortunately, research shows how too often the strategic role, women mediators play at an informal or community level remains without formal recognition at the political or official level. Women continue to appear on

the side-lines of high-level mediation peace processes, perpetuating stereotypical views of women as victims rather than agents of change in peace talks.

The MWMN initiative was created as a potential gamechanger. Inspired by the Nordic Women Mediators (NMW), a similar initiative developed in the northern European countries – whose high standards for gender equality are well known, and who have a tradition of peace conflict mediation and dialogue – Italy aimed with the establishment of the MWMN to actively contribute to the development of innovative peace strategies and building a new security paradigm in a region suffering from protracted conflicts and gender discrimination. Within this framework, the MWMN brings a unique added value to the WPS agenda, not only for its focus on the participation pillar and its transformative vision for a gender-just, sustainable and positive peace, but also for its operational work on the other pillars of the WPS agenda.<sup>6</sup> The Network's approach is double-sided: on the one side, it focuses on

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<sup>6</sup> UNSCR 1325 contains four pillars: participation, prevention, protection, and resolution and recovery. Under the first pillar – **protection** – UNSCR 1325 recognises the contribution of women in the peace building and conflict resolution processes. Thus, it calls for the increased participation of women in decision-making processes at national, regional, and international levels. The second pillar – **prevention** – urges organisations and countries to consider gender issues at the policymaking level in order to prevent attacks on women. The third pillar – **protection** – acknowledges that wars and armed conflicts have gendered aspects. The resolution also urges that warring parties need to protect women's rights, including guarding women and girls from gender-based violence. The fourth and final pillar – **resolution and recovery** – urges local actors, Member States, and the UN agencies to adopt a gender perspective in peace operations, negotiations and agreements, and to include women in the resolution and recovery phase (S/RES/1325). Women's contribution, according to a 2005 study by Noeleen Heyzer, at all levels is urged by UNSCR 1325, which rightfully argues that the inclusion of women will create more stable and inclusive policies: Heyzer, Noeleen. "Making the Links: Women's Rights and Empowerment Are Key to Achieving the Millennium Development Goals." *Gender and Development* 13, no. 1 (2005): 9-12. See also WILPF, 'UN Resolution 1325: Significant but Lacking': <http://peacewomen.org/resource/un-resolution-1325-significant-lacking> (accessed 21/12/2020)

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<sup>5</sup> O'Reilly, Ó Súilleabáin and Paffenholz, *Re-Imagining Peacemaking*; Thania Paffenholz, *What Works in Participation*, Oxford University Press, 2019.

high-level political mediation (track 1) with the objective of becoming a useful tool to increase the number of women appointed as political mediators. On the other side, it employs a grassroots approach that includes local women mediators and peacebuilders, and feminist civil society organisations. Furthermore, the MWMN's original and unique work has been crucial in building bridges between national institutions, women mediators and international organisations.

The MWMN's strategy and vision are driven by the willingness to show that women plus mediation is a successful combination and that female mediators do exist and work at all levels of contemporary peace processes.

This research paper seeks to contribute to the increasing body of research on women mediators, with a focus on the achievements and challenges of the MWMN since its foundation. The paper is divided into three main parts: the first part traces the history of the MWMN starting from the initial idea on paper and walks through the achievements and challenges of the first years of activities. The second part describes the organisation's current status, and the third presents an evaluation of members and key persons involved in the initiative, describing the main achievements, challenges and lessons learned. The research then concludes by developing recommendations on the way forward, including the need to develop more flexible working strategies for women mediators and peacebuilders and to address the role of women in developing an effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

### Research focus

The “*Understanding the journey: Past, Present and future of the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network*” research project has been designed to investigate the history and development of the MWMN and the value that the initiative

has brought both to its members and to the overall implementation of the WPS agenda in the region. In particular, the underlying question is to understand how to maximise the MWMN's operational work at the local level, and how to use the Network as an amplifier of women's effort at the national, the regional and the global level.

The research aims at capturing the development of the Network during the past three years and at describing how the members assess both the impact that the initiative has had externally, as well as on their individual professional life. It also intends to contribute to the development of a new and positive narrative about mediation and inclusive peace processes, recollecting stories and good practices of women peacebuilders and mediators where they are given the opportunity to show their transformative potential. To this end, this research is complemented by a series of podcasts about the lives and experiences of Network members.<sup>7</sup>

### Research structure

The research is divided into three main sections. The first section provides an excursus of the history of the Network, its aims and objectives, describing activities and working methodology in detail. It includes an analysis of the process, starting from the moment when the initiative arose as one of the priorities of Italy's mandate at the UN Security Council, to its quick development as one of the founding members of a global movement of women mediators that culminated in the establishment of a Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks (GA). In section two, the research captures key findings from the interviews and discussions with the members and identifies lessons learned, with a focus on the impact, the COVID-19 pandemic has

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<sup>7</sup> To know more about the podcast series, see: #HerStories from the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network by Magda Zenon, sponsored by UN Women: <https://womenmediators.net/herstories-from-the-mediterranean-women-mediators-network/>

# #HerStories

FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN  
WOMEN MEDIATORS NETWORK

Podcast series by

*Magda Zenon*



had on women peacebuilders in general and on the Network's activities. In section three, it concludes with concrete recommendations that could contribute to the development of a roadmap to be implemented by the MWMN with clear goals for the next years (2021–24) and that could strengthen the implementation of the WPS agenda over the next two decades.

## Methodology

For the purpose of this research, the author adopted a mixed methodological approach. The information presented is based on desk research and a literature review of academic publications and reports published by the United Nations (UN), international and national non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations

(CSOs). In addition, 30 oral and written interviews and informal conversations with Network members were conducted in order to analyse and assess the work done since the establishment of the MWMN in 2017. In particular, the research builds on the previous work and research done by the author on the topic and as MWMN project Coordinator and Head of the Secretariat.

The chosen research method was semi-structured interviews conducted in 2019/2020. The interviews were structured around thematic areas, with follow-up questions based on participants' responses. In addition to the interviews conducted with the members, findings are also based on the insights shared during informal conversation and email exchanges undertaken on a regular basis with the author. The interviews focused

on three main themes: the first was about the obstacles they identified as barriers for women to participate in conflict mediation and peacebuilding efforts, namely at the political level, and solutions to overcome them. The second was about assessing the main achievements and identifying missed opportunities of the MWMN in order to develop recommendations on how to translate the Network's principles into concrete actions related to existing conflicts or tensions in the region. The third related to their personal relationship with the Network: they were asked to describe the value of being a Network member and what skills and contributions they felt they brought to the network and to the realm of peace mediation. The research produced significant findings and recommendations that will be useful in designing the work of the MWMN in the years to come.

## 1. THE MEDITERRANEAN WOMEN MEDIATORS NETWORK

### 1.1 Background

In December 2016, Italy adopted its Third National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and related resolutions on Women, Peace and Security (2016–19).<sup>8</sup> For the first time, the NAP benefitted from a dedicated financial mechanism, whose coordination was put under the responsibility of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.<sup>9</sup> The first strategic goal of the NAP, focusing on “Strengthening the role of women in

<sup>8</sup> The Plan was later extended until 2020. Read the full text here:

[https://www.peacewives.org/sites/default/files/49123\\_f\\_PlanofAction132520162019%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.peacewives.org/sites/default/files/49123_f_PlanofAction132520162019%20(1).pdf)

<sup>9</sup> The Government of Italy allocated 4 million euro to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation for the development of initiatives aimed at implementation of the NAP objectives.

peace processes and in all decision-making processes”, included the establishment and promotion of a network of women mediators in the Mediterranean region. The initiative was conceived within the framework of the Italian mandate as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council that Italy joined in January 2017, with the aim of enhancing its contribution to the effort of “building peace for tomorrow”.<sup>10</sup> A key component of Italy’s commitment was to strengthen the role of women as drivers of change across the whole peace cycle. Acknowledging the need to foster women’s participation in a key region for global peace and stability, and inspired by the Nordic Women Mediators (NWM),<sup>11</sup> a similar initiative launched two years earlier in Oslo by the five Nordic countries, Italy decided to establish the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network (MWMN). Presented as one of the flagship initiatives of the Italian mandate at the Security Council, the MWMN combined Italy’s top priorities within the UNSC and its role in an area of such strategic salience as the Mediterranean: it keeps the focus on the stability of a key region, it supports preventive diplomacy and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, and it commits to bolstering the role of women, especially in conflict prevention and resolution processes with a focus on

<sup>10</sup> For more information about Italy’s mandate at the SC, read the manifesto:

<https://www.esteri.it/mae/resource/doc/2017/01/italyontheunsecuritycouncil-compressed.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> The NWM is a network of women from the five Nordic countries with professional expertise relevant to conflict mediation, peacebuilding and negotiations. They share a commitment to sustaining peace through the inclusive and meaningful participation of women in all phases of peace processes. The network members have expertise on a variety of issues relevant to all phases of peace processes, including mediation, ceasefire arrangements, constitutional reform, civil-military relations, international humanitarian law, human rights, communications and inclusive strategies. Promoting women in negotiations, mediation and all phases of peace-making is at the heart of the work of the NWM. For more information about the NWM see: <https://nordicwomenmediators.org/>

high-level political positions.<sup>12</sup>

Like the Nordic Women Mediators (NWM) network, the driving force behind the establishment of the MWMN was the necessity to develop a tool for increasing the number of women involved in peacemaking and mediation efforts at all levels, and for facilitating the appointment of high-level women mediators at the international level. Moreover, the establishment of the MWMN aimed at reducing a networking capacity gap in the Mediterranean area, and at raising awareness of the yet too often invisible work done by women mediators in the region.

The MWMN initiative was developed and launched by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in conjunction with two operational partners from civil society: the Rome-based think tank Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and Women in International Security (WIIS) Italy, the Italian antenna of a global network aimed at promoting the high-level participation of women in the field of peace and security.<sup>13</sup>

## 1.2 History and development

The MWMN was initiated in early 2017, at the same time as Italy began its mandate at the UN Security Council. Throughout the first year, the IAI and WIIS Italy worked in synergy with the Italian MFA on the establishment of the new network by conducting research on the tradition of local networks of women peacebuilders, and by gathering experiences from already established regional networks of women mediators such as the NWM network and the African Network of Women in Conflict Prevention and Peace Mediation

(better known as FemWise Africa),<sup>14</sup> which was launched in July 2017, and on the work conducted by international organisations in the field of the WPS agenda and mediation.<sup>15</sup> Consultations with gender and mediation experts were conducted in Oslo, at the European External Action Service (EEAS) in Brussels, and at the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) and UN Women in New York. An important part of the research focused on understanding how to operationalise the upcoming network, and on the relationship between civil society actors and governmental institutions. In fact, from the beginning it was made clear that the large geographical scope of the Network was going to require a dedicated secretariat that could guarantee the coordination of the relationship with members on one side and the implementation of the various activities on the other.

On 27 March 2017, the initiative was introduced to the SC, during an Arria-formula meeting<sup>16</sup> entitled “*Increasing the Participation*

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<sup>14</sup> The Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation, officially referred to as FemWise-Africa, is a subsidiary mechanism of the Panel of the Wise, one of the critical pillars of the Peace and Security Architecture of the African Union. The network aims to strengthen the role of women in conflict prevention and mediation efforts by providing a platform for strategic advocacy, capacity-building and networking. For more information about FemWise Africa see: <https://globalwomenmediators.org/femwise-africa/>

<sup>15</sup> For more information on inclusive and gendered mediation look at the Better Peace Initiative at: <https://icanpeacework.org/our-work/better-peace-initiative/>

<sup>16</sup> The formula takes its name from Ambassador Diego Arria of Venezuela. In 1992, during the crisis in the former Yugoslavia, a Bosnian priest came to New York and asked to meet with various Council members individually. Only Ambassador Arria agreed to meet him and he was so impressed with the priest's story that he felt all Council members should hear it too. Obviously, it was impossible to get the Council to agree to hear this testimony in its official sessions. So Arria simply invited Council members to gather over coffee in the Delegates' Lounge. Many attended; the meeting was a great success and gave birth to the Arria Formula.

To know more see: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-security-council-working-methods/arria-formula-meetings.php>

<sup>12</sup> Irene Fellin and Catherine Turner, “Women’s Mediator Networks: Reflections on an emerging global trend”, in C. Turner and M. Wählisch (eds), *Rethinking Peace Mediation: Challenges of Contemporary Peace Making Practice*, Bristol University Press, 2021, p. 297

<sup>13</sup> To learn more about Women In International Security (WIIS) Italy see: <https://wiisitaly.org/en/>

*of Women in Global Conflict Prevention and Mediation: Towards the Creation of a Mediterranean Women Mediator's Network"* convened by the Permanent Missions of Italy and the United Kingdom, as one of the highlights of the UK's Security Council Presidency.<sup>17</sup> The topic was not new at the SC, which at least once a year is called to discuss the advancement of the WPS agenda, in order to assess the progress done and highlight the weaknesses of an agenda that has historically reunited the interest and unanimous consensus of the Council. Nevertheless, the meeting, organised with the strategic support of UN Women, represented another important opportunity for member states to discuss ways of increasing the participation of women in global conflict prevention and mediation and strengthening the meaningful role of women in peace processes. In particular, the meeting was framed as an opportunity for member state and civil society representatives to generate progress towards the normative goal of building a robust network of women mediators that will mitigate and overcome persisting gaps in the Mediterranean region. Arria-formula meetings are not formal meetings of the SC. They are convened at the initiative of one or more members of the SC in order to hear the views of individuals, and organisations on matters within the competence of the SC. This practise enhances contact with civil society, non-governmental organisations and non-members of the security council. It promotes dialogue and inclusiveness, by introducing to the SC valuable information and first-hand experience provided by outsiders that otherwise would not be heard by SC members outside this forum. The simultaneous presence of governmental and civil society representatives among speakers and participants highlighted once again how the implementation of the WPS is shared

among multiple stakeholders. If it is true that the primary responsibility rests with member states, it is undeniable that women's civil society organisations played a vital role in initiating and promoting the agenda, and they still do when it comes to advancing it.

In his speech, Italian Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs Benedetto Della Vedova highlighted that making a larger use of women's capacity as change makers when it comes to conflict prevention, mediation and preventive diplomacy, would lead to higher peace dividends and dispute settlements. He added that the establishment of networks of women mediators across regions represents an important step to increase the number of women in peace negotiations led by the UN or other international or regional organisations. As he pointed out, the aim of these networks is twofold: they focus on prevention and mediation on the one hand, and on capacity building on the other. Women can play a pivotal role in helping countries to prevent possible conflicts and to strengthen the process of national reconciliation by ensuring a gendered and inclusive perspective on issues of security, justice and governance – often among the root causes of violent conflicts. On the other hand, such networks are a concrete way for women to acquire and develop further capacity and expertise to successfully contribute to mediation efforts as official UN mediators or mediation experts.

Briefers at the event highlighted best practices from the African context, implementation mechanisms such as 1325 NAPs, and barriers to women's participation such as inadequate funding and poor coordination among different initiatives. A representative from the NGO Working Group on Women Peace and Security provided key recommendations regarding the need to allocate enough resources for the sustainability of the initiative, stressing the importance of including local peacebuilders and women's organisations in the self-selection of potential network's members, and reiterating the need to build coalitions with already existing networks of

<sup>17</sup> MWMN, 'Increasing the participation of women in global conflict prevention and mediation: Towards the Creation of a Mediterranean Women Mediators Network', March 2017: <https://womennmediators.net/increasing-the-participation-of-women-in-global-conflict-prevention-and-mediation/>

*“I would be very happy if, during today’s meeting, we could shed light on the reasons that prevent women from being appointed as mediators. In order to maximize the effectiveness of these networks, we will need more collaboration and coordination among existing networks of women mediators.”*



*Italian Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs Benedetto Della Vedova, New York, 17 March 2017  
Increasing the Participation of Women in Global Conflict Prevention and Mediation: Towards the Creation of a Mediterranean Women Mediator’s Network*

women peacebuilders.<sup>18</sup>

Following the Arria meeting, Italy initiated a consultation process aimed at identifying the most suitable candidates. The process lasted several months and had a mixed nature: on one side it followed a more formal path benefitting from the support of member states, which had been invited to submit recommendations on possible candidates; whereas on the other side it was the result of research work conducted by the MWMN Secretariat at the local level in conjunction with civil society organisations and women peacebuilders. The process resulted in the identification of a first group of 44 women coming from 25

countries across the Mediterranean.<sup>19</sup>

As a follow-up to the Arria debate, in September of the same year, a month before the launch of the Network, Italy sponsored another meeting on the margins of the 72<sup>nd</sup> United Nations General Assembly in New York on women mediator networks, titled “*Towards the launch of the MWMN. From Paper to Practice. How to strengthen synergies and complementarities for greater efficiency and impact*”.<sup>20</sup> The high-level meeting,

<sup>18</sup> WILPF, ‘United Nations Security Council Open Arria formula meeting on women, peace, security, and mediation: increasing the participation of women in global conflict prevention and mediation: towards the creation of a Mediterranean women mediator’s network’, March 2017: <https://www.peacewomen.org/node/98261>

<sup>19</sup> At its initial stage, the scope of the membership of the MWMN included members coming from the following countries: Albania, Algeria, Andorra, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cyprus, Croatia, Egypt, France, Jordan, Greece, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Morocco, Monaco, Montenegro, Palestine, Portugal, San Marino, Slovenia, Spain, Tunisia and Turkey. In April 2020, the membership was extended to three women coming from Kosovo.

<sup>20</sup> UN Women, ‘Experts call for stronger support for networks of women mediators’, September 2017: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2017/9/news-experts-call-for-stronger-support-for-networks-of-women-mediators>



UN Women Deputy Executive Director Lakshmi Puri speaking at the side event, “*Towards the launch of the MWMN. From Paper to Practice. How to strengthen synergies and complementarities for greater efficiency and impact* at UNGA72

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organised in partnership with UN Women, the African Union and Albania, focused on opportunities, prospects and potential challenges that women mediator networks must face in order to contribute to inclusive and sustainable peacebuilding processes. Opening the meeting, Angelino Alfano, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy, stressed that “*peace cannot be achieved without the decisive contributions of half of our society*”. And he added that networks of women mediators can help women forge links to be more influential in formal and high-level mediation processes. In particular, the meeting discussed the contribution that women mediator networks can provide to member states, regional organisations and the UN in engaging in processes of conflict prevention, mediation and post-conflict reconciliation, enabling them to fulfil their commitments under UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions.

For the first time, women mediator networks affiliated with member states and regional organisations, working to advance women’s meaningful participation in conflict prevention and peace processes around the world, came together to share their experience.

One of the main recommendations that emerged from the meeting was encouraging already existing initiatives and the upcoming network of women mediators to collaborate, coordinate and avoid duplication of efforts, as UN Women Deputy Executive Director Lakshmi Puri stressed. The UN, regional organisations and member states will play a key role in showing concrete support to these women mediator networks. This support might be through the provision of resources, strategic appointments and training opportunities, since the continued success and sustainability of these networks will also rely on these strategic partnerships. Moreover, the UN plays a pivotal role in leading by example. The cultural change must start at the top of the UN system, where there is still a lack of women among high-level envoys and senior mediation teams.

Among other speakers, Catherine Samba-Panza, former President of the Transition of the Central African Republic, and member of both the AU Panel of the Wise and of FemWise, recalled the AU efforts to involve women in peace and security initiatives. She stressed the need for networks of women mediators to reflect in their composition the



MWMN Group Picture at the Foundational event in Rome

©Photo Credit Leonardo Puccini

diversity of women peace actors, and to build peace platforms beyond political affiliations. There must also be a concerted effort to identify and meet necessary conditions to effect greater influence for women, e.g., in process design, resourcing, coalition-building and combatting political resistance. She concluded by recommending the adoption of quotas for women's participation in mediation teams.

In conclusion, it was also highlighted how the MWMN was going to become a platform for developing strategic thinking on the measures to be taken for building bridges between the different parties involved in conflicts across the Mediterranean region, and at the same time to become a hub of opportunities for women to be engaged at high-level positions in negotiations and mediation processes.<sup>21</sup>

The preparatory work of the MWMN culminated with the official launch of the network on 25–26 October 2017 in Rome during a two-day event hosted by the Ministry

of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation with the participation of the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Angelino Alfano, the founding members, representatives from international and regional organisations, as well as representatives of other regional networks of women mediators and international experts in the field of mediation and peacebuilding. On the 17<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of UNSCR 1325 (2000), the event called together the large community of women mediators and peacebuilders and international stakeholders. Opening the event, Minister Alfano stated that *'We recognize that women must be key-players in the Mediterranean. To this end, we are launching the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network, an initiative that is part of our mandate at the Security Council. Italy is determined to keep the focus on gender equality and women's empowerment. Much is still to be done: there are too few women taking part in mediation processes. Every action matters and the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network can allow us to think in more strategic terms on how to build bridges between the different parties in conflict.'*

The event represented a new occasion to raise voice on the importance of creating more concrete opportunities for women to

<sup>21</sup> MWMN, 'Women Mediator Networks: From Paper to Practice. How to strengthen synergies and complementarities for greater efficiency and impact', September 2017: <https://womenmediators.net/from-paper-to-practice/>, accessed April 20, 2020



(the so-called track 1).<sup>23</sup> The establishment of the MWMN was the Italian government's response to the call of UN SG Guterres, seeking to provide a tool for women mediators and peacebuilders to exchange experience, strengthen their skills, build new competences and, last but not least, enhance their leadership and visibility. The Network aimed at becoming a pool of women peace and mediation experts at the disposal of the UN, especially UNDPPA and UN Women, as well as all other mediation support actors engaged in facilitating peace processes and dialogues within the Mediterranean region. In doing so, the MWMN wanted to ensure that more women would be able to effectively participate in peace processes, actively contributing to the stability of the Mediterranean region. The Mediterranean is a strategic area for Italy and its stability is a prerequisite for building peace within the region itself and beyond its borders. Within this context, women mediators can bring strategic knowledge and contribute to conflict resolution and sustainable peace, with a view

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23 Peace processes take place at different societal levels, known as tracks, and they are often supported by external third parties. The first level (track 1) is played at the political and/or military level and involves the leadership of the negotiating parties. The second level (track 2) covers leading figures in society such as religious leaders, academics, political parties and regional power figures. The third level (track 3) is played at the community and grassroots level by civil society figures. This initial three-level structure was later expanded to include a further component: the track 1.5 level, which refers to decision-makers meeting in informal, non-official settings. These track 1.5 mediation/dialogue processes often serve to sort out and prepare for track 1 talks; they help develop creative solutions and help bring about better comprehension and understanding between conflict parties. The potential offered by peace mediation can only be fully unlocked through coordinated interaction between these tracks. A lasting peace process thus often requires a multi-track approach, which not only means conducting activities on all tracks but also interlinking these activities in ways that increase their effectiveness.

Adapted from: Peace Mediation Germany, 'Basics of Mediation: Concepts and Definitions Fact Sheet Series: Peace Mediation and Mediation Support', January 2017: <https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/Basics%20of%20Mediation.pdf>

to fostering human security.

The MWMN intends to achieve its objectives mainly by developing capacity-building initiatives and strengthening networking opportunities at all levels. In the spirit of collaboration mentioned above, the activities of the Network were planned to be carried out in close synergy and coordination with other stakeholders and similar groups active in the field of mediation, peace and security, as well as in close cooperation with international and regional organisations.

#### 1.4 The members

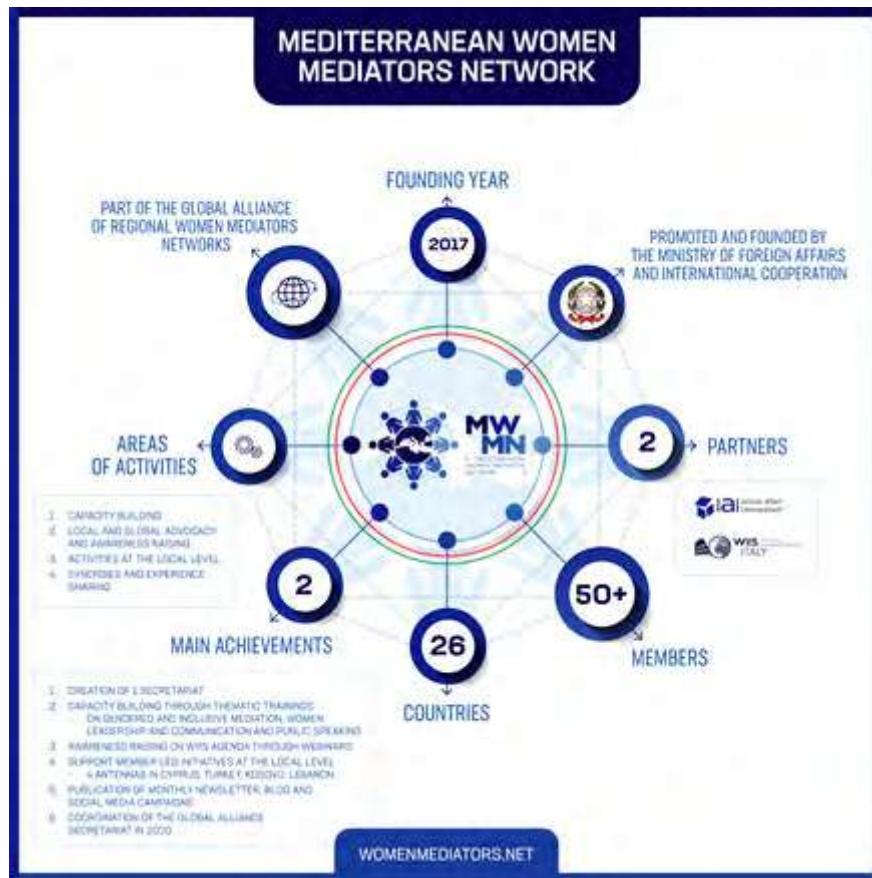
In its initial stage, the MWMN consisted of 44 qualified members across all countries from both shores of the Mediterranean.<sup>24</sup>

Members of the Network have been identified through a mixed procedure that included the support of the Permanent Representations to the UN of the various countries involved, as well as through civil society organisations to ensure the involvement of a diverse group of women. Indeed, the Network brings together a multigenerational group of women with different backgrounds and experiences of building peace, negotiating and mediating conflict. Members are diplomats, parliamentarians and former governmental officials; at the same time, the Network includes women peacebuilders, civil society representatives and academics. The diversity of the profiles involved represents one of the distinctive characters of the Network, and is much appreciated by its members.<sup>25</sup> Having civil servants and politicians involved with civil society representatives gives Network members the opportunity to exchange experiences and learn from each other, analysing conflict dynamics from different perspectives. Independently from their professional status, all members are part of the Network based on their individual capacities and they do not represent their

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24 MWMN, 'The Network': <https://womenmediators.net/the-network/>

25 Personal correspondence with members.



Picture 1 The MWMN in numbers

country of origin, nor their government. That said, the buy-in of governments and political stakeholders is essential when it comes to supporting women's engagement and official candidacies within the system of international and regional organisations.

Throughout the years, the number of members has increased, on the one hand due to the major interest in the initiative at the international level and on the other hand thanks to the consolidation of the Network locally, reaching the current total of 55 members.<sup>26</sup> Among others, in April 2020 the MWMN welcomed three new members from Kosovo, which was not part of the Network in its initial stages.<sup>27</sup> As the project is growing, the Network decided to hold periodic calls

for membership for women peacebuilders, welcoming women from diverse backgrounds and geographic locations across the Mediterranean, who play an active role in mediating conflicts at any level, with the aim to involve more and more women active in the field of peace mediation and peacebuilding, and to enhance the work done especially at the local level. The call is opened once a year and follows some specific criteria (see Box 1). In addition to the call, the Network accepts voluntary manifestation of interest that is evaluated periodically on a case-by-case basis.

Evidence has proven that for the Network to be more effective and have a meaningful impact on national and local dynamics, there is a need to involve more than one member for each country. This enables the development of subnetworks, which will act as antennas for identifying the most urgent needs and the best opportunities for the MWMN to operate on the ground. The joint efforts are carried out at the local level with the support of the embassies of Italy, and local organisations

26 As of November 2020. Irene Fellin, 2020, MWMN annual report, Internal report, Unpublished.

27 At its initial stages, the Network included only members coming from Mediterranean countries that are members of the UN or have a permanent non-member observer status, such as Palestine. This limitation was later overcome with the inclusion of members from Kosovo.

where relevant, but remain under the coordination of the MWMN Secretariat based in Rome. Endeavours at the national level will thus be reflected in the overall advancement of the initiative regionally, and consequently have an impact on the global dynamics of mediation.

**Box 1. Membership criteria**

The MWMN works to bring together women active in the field of mediation at the political, the academic and the grassroots level, across the Mediterranean region. The ultimate goal of the MWMN is to enhance opportunities and spaces for women's meaningful inclusion in peace processes and in conflict prevention. The Network works as a community of practice and provides opportunities for women mediators to strengthen their existing capacities through peer to-peer learning, mentoring and targeted training, connecting local realities to global issues.

Women interested in joining the MWMN are requested to:

- Be experienced in mediation, peacemaking and peacebuilding;
- Be keen to connect with other women to share their experiences of mediation and learn from each other; and
- Be passionate about expanding the space and opportunities for women in peace processes globally.
- Interested applicants should in particular meet the following criteria:
- Identify as a woman;
- Work on peacebuilding and diplomacy and/or have expertise in one of the following subjects: conflict studies, transitional justice, natural resources, violent extremism, climate change, disarmament, gender and security (UN SCR 1325) or hybrid mediation;
- Live or work in one of the Mediterranean countries;
- Be actively engaged in mediation at the community, national or global level;
- Have experience in mediation at large and the ability to creatively resolve problems in complex conflict-affected contexts;
- Have the ability to build trust between and within conflicting parties and create safe and inclusive spaces for dialogue;
- Be able to apply a gender-sensitive approach;
- Be willing to be an "Ambassador" of the MWMN and commit to its founding principles and mission; and
- Be willing to travel and attend workshops and meetings in other countries on behalf of the Network.

The Network's success relies on a genuine and concrete commitment of its members. Therefore, with the enlargement of the Network, a Terms of Reference (ToR) document for members was developed. The document explains the purpose of the initiative and the benefits for its members, and at the same time clarifies expectations from both sides. Members are guided and supported by the Secretariat, and correspondingly are expected to actively participate and contribute to the initiative, in a flexible way as requested in the various contexts.

## Box 2. Terms of reference

### **MWMN membership**

Being a member of the MWMN gives the opportunity to advocate for greater women's participation in peace processes globally and to become part of a wider community of practice, which includes a large network of women active in mediation and the possibility of being a member of the Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks. Members will have the opportunity to meet fellow experts in the field of mediation working at the local, the national or the global level, coming from different walks of life. Additionally, members will have a range of learning opportunities, including targeted training and peer-to-peer support and mentoring.

Members have been selected to become part of this community of practice, share their experience and expertise. Members of the MWMN will contribute to achieve women's effective and meaningful participation in conflict prevention and mediation efforts in the Mediterranean region and beyond.

### **General Commitments**

While MWMN members do not have governance responsibilities, they are essential and strategic elements of the growing network of women mediators across the globe.

Participation in the MWMN is more than meetings and email-writing. It means shared leadership with a group of committed peers to achieve a crucial mission through strategic engagement of personal resources: time, relationships and ideas. In that spirit, members are expected to actively engage and commit to the Network to contribute to the achievement of its objectives.

Therefore, members should:

- Believe in and share the mission and values of the Network.
- Be willing to share their expertise and experience among the group.
- Serve as Ambassadors and Spokespersons for the Network.
- Advocate on behalf of the Network in various fora at the local, the regional and the global level.
- Increase strategic visibility and engage others in MWMN work.
- Work collaboratively with the MWMN Secretariat to provide feedback, support, advice, and vision for the organisation.
- Commit to serving a renewable two-year term.

### **Time commitment**

The MWMN understands that membership in the Network is on a voluntary basis and that each member is busy and highly engaged in several activities. This is precisely what makes members such strong contributors. Given that, the organisation is committed to maximising its members' time. The Network holds numerous activities and is part of a larger community of practice. We therefore organise a variety of activities and initiatives in which members can participate.

Members are asked to:

- Attend briefs and update calls on Network activities (estimate 4 per year).
- Attend workshops, trainings and meetings on site or online (at least 3 per year).
- Contribute to the Network's online blog (at least twice per year).
- Actively participate in promoting and raising awareness of the Network.
- Respond in a timely manner to provide feedback, input or advice to the Secretariat.

### **What to expect from the MWMN Secretariat?**

To make the most out of this experience the MWMN Secretariat commits to:

- Within reason, provide a plan of activities in advance to enable participation and planning.
- Respond in a timely manner to your requests for information, materials and help.
- Regularly provide updates on the activities of the Network.
- Work towards reaching the objectives of the Network and making an incredible impact on lives of women throughout the Mediterranean region and beyond it.

## 1.5 The Secretariat



Picture 2 The MWMN Secretariat

©Photo Credit Lorenzo Burlando

When the idea of launching a network of women mediators originated, it was immediately clear that this initiative was ambitious, and alongside the strong political commitment of the MFA of Italy, many concrete and practical aspects were required to make the project sustainable. Due to its complexity, and the different realities across the Mediterranean, both at the institutional and the practitioner level, it became evident that a dedicated “control room” was necessary to better coordinate this semi-governmental initiative and the different parties engaged. Therefore, the MWMN Secretariat, hosted by WIIS Italy in collaboration with IAI, was established as an integral part of the project, with the primary responsibility of supporting the Network’s founding. After the launch, the Secretariat was in charge of developing a roadmap of activities and implementing them directly and with the support of external experts when relevant. The Secretariat works as hub for all its members and acts as point of contact for any inquiry related to the Network; being in charge of internal and external communication, it also represents the

Network during international conferences and symposia. At the same time, it is responsible for maintaining institutional relationships and for managing the funding allocated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy for the sustainability of the MWMN.

## 1.6 Activities and achievements

Since its founding event in October 2017, the MWMN has conducted numerous activities ranging from capacity development to training and peer-to-peer exchanges, advocacy and outreach campaigns. Furthermore, it has worked tirelessly to connect the local to the global, and the global to the local. Starting from the establishment of local antennas, it moved beyond its regional dimension, and working in synergy with other regional women mediator networks at the global level, it was involved in a global initiative that culminated with the official launch of the Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks in New York in September 2019.

### 1.6.1 Capacity building

With the increased professionalisation of mediation, it has become evident that to be a mediator it is necessary to have specific skills and competencies. Being a woman and believing in gender equality is not *per se* a requisite for being a professional mediator.

As part of its core activities, the MWMN offers capacity building and tailor-made training for its members. In 2019, two sessions on “*Training and Experience Sharing on Gendered Inclusive Mediation*” were organised in Rome. The trainings aimed at developing gender-sensitive conflict analysis competencies and at reinforcing mediation and negotiation skills. At the same time, this was an opportunity for the Network’s members to strengthen their ties and share experiences and knowledge from their respective countries. This confirmed the importance of being together for sharing common experiences and establishing strong bonds among members. This in turn helps the group develop a strong feeling of belonging and shapes a brand identity.

In 2020, the Secretariat decided to enrich the training curriculum, by including several proposals focused on personal skills development in addition to the thematic training. An online Masterclass (four sessions) focusing on women leadership aimed at providing participants with the knowledge and skills to lead authentically and effectively in high-pressure and crisis environments was organised in June<sup>28</sup>, followed by two virtual trainings on “*Leadership in Mediation: Visibility, Influence and Impact*”, organised in partnership with the Geneva Centre for Security Policy

(GCSP) and Durham University<sup>29</sup>.

The training activities have been combined with remote webinar sessions where experts and peacebuilders have shared their experience with women’s participation in the field of mediation and in peace processes, for the benefit of a broader public.

### 1.6.2 Advocacy and outreach campaigns

Since its establishment, the Network has been engaging in a steady consolidation and expansion process and has attained significant achievements. This process has been complemented by important outreach efforts and advocacy campaigns. Following the Network’s establishment, members and Secretariat representatives have regularly participated in conferences and meetings to share their experiences as mediators and peacebuilders. They have attended conferences in international fora hosted by regional and international organisations where, among other benefits, they could gain visibility, contributing to the development of a new positive narrative around women and mediation.

Based on the already mentioned assumption that women mediators are more invisible than absent, as stated by C. Turner<sup>30</sup>, providing visibility for women mediators and peacebuilders and for their important work has become one of the main objectives of the MWMN. Therefore, a strong emphasis has been placed on communication. As part of this larger effort, the MWMN initiated a monthly newsletter with the intent of promoting the activities organised by the

<sup>28</sup> To see the full report: MWMN, ‘Leading Effectively in high-pressure environments’: [https://womenmediators.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/mwmn\\_report\\_6.pdf](https://womenmediators.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/mwmn_report_6.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> Full reports available here: MWMN, ‘Leadership in mediation: visibility, influence and impact’: [https://womenmediators.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/mwmn\\_report\\_8.pdf](https://womenmediators.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/mwmn_report_8.pdf); and MWMN, ‘Leadership in mediation: visibility, influence and impact – II edition’: [https://womenmediators.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/mwmn\\_report\\_11.pdf](https://womenmediators.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/mwmn_report_11.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> Turner, Catherine. “Absent or Invisible? Women Mediators and the United Nations.” *Global Policy* 9, no. 2 (2018): 244-53.

Network itself and at the same time amplifying the work done by its members. The newsletter also represents a tool for informing about the most recent publications from the wider field of mediation and the WPS agenda, job opportunities and other news related to the world of gender and mediation. The MWMN is also active on all social media accounts – Twitter, Facebook and Instagram – where it shares its work and activities with the wider public and contributes to the development of a new and positive narrative of the MWMN members. In 2019, the Secretariat worked in synergy with UN Women on production of a documentary on the MWMN. The film tells a compelling story of women's critical contributions to mediation, showcasing achievements in Cyprus and Libya. It boosts the Network's visibility and makes a case for women's roles in peace.<sup>31</sup>

#### 1.6.3 The MWMN goes local

The Mediterranean is the cradle of different cultures and religions. It unifies countries divided by conflicts and tensions, and it is enriched by the diversity of its populations and various cultural identities. The Mediterranean encompasses countries that belong to the G7 and countries living in open or frozen conflict, together with others that are still living in a post-conflict reconstruction era. All Network members share common values and aim at achieving the same mid- and long-term objectives at the global level, while in the local dimension they are surrounded by different contexts. The Network was established with the understanding that such an initiative was going to require a differentiated approach. For this reason, part of the work conducted by the MWMN is tailor-made according to individual needs and the specific geopolitical context. The MWMN strives to become a recognised and valuable actor in the quest for peace and stability in the region. The security of the Mediterranean is a prerequisite for human security in the neighbouring regions as well.

*"Today's event may well be considered as a milestone of this ambitious journey, as it represents the first tangible sign of the consolidation of the Network at the local level. We hope it will promote the creation of such Antennas in the other Mediterranean countries".*



*Italian Ambassador to Cyprus, H.E. Andrea Cavallari, speaking at the launch of the Cyprus Antenna, 18 May 2019*

<sup>31</sup> UN Women, '2019-2020 Women, Peace and Security in action, Report of the activities', p.30: <https://www.unwomen.org//media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/women-peace-and-security-annual-report-2019-2020-en.pdf?la=en&vs=3910> (accessed 27/11/2020)

### Box 3. MWMN / Cyprus

MWMN / Cyprus is an island-wide intercommunal initiative launched in May 2019 in Nicosia with a view to strengthening the role of women both as drivers of peace in Cyprus through their inclusion at all stages of the peace process, and as active agents in all areas of life in a democratic society.

The five initiating members of the Cyprus Antenna come from across the island and have a long history and substantive expertise within peacebuilding and gender activism. The three members who had been invited to join the core group at the launch of the MWMN in October 2017 in Rome, immediately initiated a process that finalised in the involvement of the wider Cypriot community of peacebuilders. Only an inclusive and island-wide initiative would be able to promote an inclusive and sustainable peace process and a gender-sensitive peace agreement.

The seeds to establish the first MWMN local antenna were planted in a meeting held in Nicosia in July 2018, where 26 women peacebuilders from across the island gathered. Participants in the workshop (hosted by the Cyprus Women's Lobby with the support of the MWMN, WMC, WILPF and UNFCYP) discussed issues such as women's participation in the peace process and their role as key actors to ensure an inclusive and sustainable peace process. The discussion continued over the year, and in May 2019 the Network officially welcomed two new members from the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and celebrated the launch of the MWMN–Cyprus Antenna. The public launch of the Antenna was held at the Ledra Palace Hotel in the Nicosia demilitarised area set up by the United Nations, with the presence of the Ambassador of Italy to Cyprus Andrea Cavallari, and of the Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP). During two days, debates and interactive seminars focused on the participation of women in mediation and peacebuilding processes, hosting speakers who are major representatives of other regional mediation networks as the NWM, FemWise-Africa and WMC.

In 2020, MWMN–Cyprus welcomed two more members for a total of seven representatives. The antenna consists now in a multigenerational group of women of diverse talents and expertise actively building peace at the local level, and at the same time strongly engaged in advancing the WPS agenda at the global level.

During 2020, the core group of MWMN/Cyprus conducted the first activities at the local level, aimed at enlarging the membership of the Antenna to build an island-wide community of women mediators.

The Cyprus peace negotiations have been a male-led and directed process for decades, and the absence of women and a gender perspective from the negotiating table and the peace process has been noted by both Cypriot women's organisations and international bodies. The conflict has always been framed as an inter-ethnic and international conflict ignoring all other social divisions and inequalities, including gender diversity. By broadening the base of the MWMN /Cyprus, the objective is to mobilise more interest and have more women actively participating in the peacebuilding processes in Cyprus. The final objective is to ensure that a gender and inclusive perspective is applied throughout the entire process and included in every agreement signed at the political level.

The conversations allowed the participants to analyse the impact of the mainstream public discourses of the Cypriot conflict inter-generationally, through sharing personal experiences, and at the same time to understand the similarities shared by the two communities as well as across generations. The intention is to develop a sense of belonging of all participants of the antenna, and to identify together the main areas of concern on which the antenna will focus on the way forward.

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#### Box 4. MWMN / Turkey

As part of its core group of mediators, the MWMN includes five members from Turkey. Considering the vastness of the country, and the multiple identities that coexist in one single nation, the core members decided in collaboration with the Secretariat to enlarge the group of women involved in the initiative and move towards the establishment of the MWMN /Turkey Antenna.

The Antenna aims at strengthening the role of women in the processes of mediation, negotiation and peacebuilding, and utilising these mechanisms in creating a public discourse in this respect. The membership of the Turkey Antenna comprises 20 women coming from different regions with a wide range of affiliations, including members of civil society, academia, mediation and politics and having professional expertise in gender issues, conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

The mission of the Antenna is to enable women mediators in Turkey to meaningfully participate in all phases of peace and conflict resolution processes and to achieve gender-sensitive conflict resolution and peacebuilding outcomes. In this respect, the Antenna aims to undertake relevant research and disseminate its findings, organise seminars and training sessions to enhance women's mediation capabilities and skills, and develop applied conflict resolution activities, including fostering partnerships and cooperation with other mediation and peacebuilding networks nationally and globally.

In accordance with UNSCR 1325 on WPS, women's role in mediation and peacebuilding is well recognised and acknowledged by member states and international institutions. However, in Turkey, women's peace initiatives are not sufficiently visible even though, as emphasised by UNSCR 1325, women can make significant contributions to gender equality and sustainable peace.

On 19 January 2019, women mediators across Turkey came together to pave the way for the establishment of the MWMN–Turkey Antenna. A number of topics were addressed during this initial meeting, including the organisation of a workshop in Istanbul to formalise the launch of the local satellite and starting to shape a roadmap for action. In July of the same year, the Antenna was officially launched in Istanbul with the presence of the Ambassador of Italy to Turkey, Massimo Gaiani, and the 1325 National Focal Point for Italy, Min. Francesca Tardioli. The event was formatted as a conference on women's role in mediation and peacebuilding processes that brought together relevant stakeholders from Turkey, the broader Mediterranean region and Europe to share insights and debate issues concerning women's role in mediation and peacebuilding processes. Issues such as mediation tracks, preventive mediation and the significance of mediation from a gendered perspective were addressed. The seminar was followed by a closed-door meeting for Antenna members only.

Following the launch, the Antenna started implementation of its activities by organising the first local trainings on Conflict Resolution and Mediation for Women. The trainings took place in the cities of Diyarbakır and Gaziantep, in the south-eastern region, in October 2019. An additional workshop for a local NGO was also organised in Mardin. Trainings were welcomed with great interest by the locals and saw the participation of approximately 80 women.

Participants, who included civil society members, businesswomen, journalists and politicians, were exposed to the major concepts and theories of conflict resolution, mediation and gender. Trainings included hands-on applications (e.g., conflict mapping) and simulations of negotiation and mediation situations. Antenna members reported that the trainings achieved their objectives both in the number of participants and in the content development. The success of the initiatives was later confirmed by the many requests received from civil society representatives to replicate the trainings in other cities of the country.

In February 2020, the members of the MWMN / Turkey Antenna reconvened in Safranbolu for the annual meeting. The meeting represented an important occasion for them to discuss the conflict dynamics present in the country and share their experiences on the measures put in place to overcome the traumatic experiences. The discussion aimed at identifying ways in which the Antenna could engage with the local population through mediation and dialogue facilitation initiatives. The Antenna identified key themes: violence and non-violence, gender perspective, mediation, and the importance of including a gender perspective in the process design phase. Focus was given to the value of language and the importance of using non-violent, peaceful and gender-aware language as part of the peace process.

During the meeting, the members identified several activities to be pursued: actions include the development of a dedicated webpage to raise awareness on the role of women mediators and amplify the work done by the Antenna in Turkey, and the organisation of a two-day conference that would include sessions on training and information sharing, as well as discussions with international experts. Finally, a research group was established to conduct research on women's cooperatives from the "Eastern" and "Western" parts of the country. The aim of the research was two-fold: first, to benefit from the focus group discussions to bring women together for facilitating peace dialogue processes among them in the pursuit of a peaceful society; and secondly to organise gender-sensitive mediation and conflict resolution training for their benefit.

The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic forced the Antenna to change its plan of action, in the same way as happened for the entire MWMN. The in-person activities had to be replaced by online meetings and the research was postponed until further notice. Unfortunately, the limited diffusion of digital devices and the lack of IT competencies among women living in the remote areas of the country did not allow the Antenna to switch the research activity into a virtual exercise.

An online workshop was held on 29 October 2020 by the Antenna's members. Starting from the introductory concept of conflict resolution, issues such as third-party roles in the mediation process, and methodologies for developing dialogues were presented. It was illustrated how renewal of conflicts has increased since 2010, showing that decision makers and mediators do not develop solutions focused on the root causes of conflicts, thereby perpetuating a state of instability and disorder. It was also noted that the United Nations and the World Bank reports underline the importance of comprehensiveness and state that an approach based on human security is needed to find sustainable solutions.

Other speakers shared their experience with being a legal mediator, and how this practice can differ from one country to the other. They explained how women can be affected by the mediation process, highlighting the need to develop a better system. The security of mediators, women and men, should be ensured and platforms where women can freely express their needs and challenges should be created. The meeting closed with an overview on organised mediation activities in the field, with a reference to work being done by one Network member focused on creating a new social contract for granting women with different identities a safe place in society. This online workshop was then followed by a conference with the participant of international speakers that could share their experience and provide inputs based on a broader and different geographical context.

### Box 5. MWMN /Kosovo

In Spring 2020 the MWMN enlarged its boundaries by including Kosovo in its geographical scope. Three new members were identified with the support of the Italian Embassy in Pristina, and officially welcomed as part of the Network during a virtual meeting. The group immediately started a reflection on how to benefit from the Network for emphasising the need to involve more women in peace processes, particularly with the resumption of the EU-sponsored dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia.

In November 2020, the conference “Reclaiming Time: Women, Peace, Security and Justice Agenda in Kosovo and Beyond” was organised online to celebrate the launch of the MWMN–Kosovo Antenna.

Opening the conference, Vice Foreign Minister Marina Sereni reiterated that the MMWM reflects Italy's longstanding tradition in the promotion of women's rights and gender equality, and that promoting the participation of women in peace processes, mediation actions and the consolidation of peace in the Mediterranean area is fundamental for global peace and security. In particular, the creation of the Antenna in Kosovo represents a significant step forward in the close relationship built in recent years between Rome and Pristina. The Italian participation in the Kosovo Force - KFOR testifies to the continuity and level of the Italians commitment to the stability of the country. This commitment goes beyond the issue of security, extending to support for Kosovo's young democracy, engaged in a process of building institutions based on democratic values, that include women's rights and gender quality.



The event brought together women from diverse backgrounds to discuss and share views about their achievements in the past 20 years. This represented an opportunity to highlight key challenges and steps forward in reaching the overarching goals of the WPS agenda in Kosovo and in the region. Further discussion focused on how to strengthen the localisation of the 1325 NAP, the importance of allocating enough funding for implementation of the agenda, and youth engagement to ensure inclusive implementation which will be beneficial to the whole society. A specific focus was given to women's perspectives on peace processes, their meaningful participation in formal and informal tracks, and their mediation efforts in ensuring gender-inclusive peace agreements.

The MWMN's operational work at the local level has also been crucial in building bridges between national institutions, women mediators and international organisations. The Network has been following the development of the Libyan conflict since its establishment, and a first targeted activity was conducted on the occasion of the Palermo Conference in November 2018. In the context of the Libyan peace process, the MWMN provided advice and expertise to the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL). In April 2020, the MWMN Secretariat started an advocacy campaign targeting the Libyan conflict, especially the worrying situation of women within the country. As part of this campaign, a letter was sent to Stephanie Williams, Acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of Mission of UNSMIL, to share the Network's concerns about the situation of women due to the consequences of the protracted conflict. The push factor was to benefit from the presence of a woman as the Head of the UN mission, and highlight the need to do more to support women's participation in the peace process. Despite the efforts conducted in the last years by UNSMIL to foster women's inclusion in formal delegations participating in Libya's peace dialogue, and provide safe spaces for Libyan women CSOs and activists to make their voice heard in peace processes and work towards specific gender provisions, much more needs to be done. The efforts made by local communities with the support of international organisations have not been sufficient, and Libyan women continued to be excluded from peace talks, formal and informal consultations, and meetings. As the organisation Together We Build It<sup>32</sup> has

correctly pointed out, in excluding women from reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts, the international community and Libyan politicians are "missing the full picture".

#### Box 6. The Palermo Conference

In November 2018, Libyan members of the MWMN successfully lobbied to obtain the later inclusion of three women in the formal Libyan delegations at the Palermo Conference for Libya, promoted and organised by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The conference aimed at promoting Libya's stabilisation process within the framework of the UN Action Plan and in the full respect of Libya's ownership of the peace process. At the beginning, there were no women included in the delegations. Thanks to the relentless advocacy campaign done by the NGO Together We Build It, and the support of UN Women, WILPF, the MWMN and the Nordic Women Mediators, a group of women and mediation experts were also admitted to the conference, with the objective of providing support and facilitating the dialogue between the three official female delegates and the international representatives. The conference gave women an opportunity to gain visibility, and they were able to hold high-level meetings with five different international delegations and the World Bank representative. All these representatives mentioned the importance of facilitating the inclusion of Libyan women in the peace process. In the conference conclusions, participants urged Libyan representatives to support the principle of full inclusivity, including women's participation, for the upcoming National Conference, without reservations.

The success of this joint effort is also narrated in the video about the MWMN produced in 2019 by UN Women in collaboration with the MWMN<sup>33</sup>.

Recognising in A/SRSG Stephanie Williams a strong point of reference for Libyan women, a supporter of their effective and meaningful participation in all aspects of peace and security in line with UNSCR 1325 and its subsequent resolutions, the MWMN continued its engagement with UNSMIL with the organisation of a closed-door consultation on 28 October 2020. The meeting focused on the "Full and meaningful inclusion of women as the prerequisite for a sustainable peace in Libya". It was organised by the MWMN in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign

<sup>32</sup> Together We Build It is an intergenerational nonprofit organisation working to promote peace and security in Libya. It believes in the important role of an intergenerational gender approach to formal and non-formal peacebuilding. TWBI, based in Libya was founded in September 2011, and since then has been working on WPS and empowering young people to play an active role in building peace in Libya. TWBI was founded by Rida Al Tubuly and Hajar Al Sharief, members of the MWMN. To read more, see: <https://togetherwebuildit.org/about-us/>

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 30

Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy and UNSMIL. Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Marina Sereni, A/SRSG Stephanie Williams and the Ambassador of Italy to Libya Giuseppe Buccino participated in the meeting, alongside the Libyan members and the Secretariat of the MWMN. The discussion brought to light the challenges women face in Libya, not only related to their inclusion in the peace process, but also to their status. Libyan women have been deeply affected by the conflict and related gender-based discrimination that limits their enjoyment of their fundamental economic, political and social rights. According to the World Bank, the labour force participation rate among Libyan women aged 15 and above is 28 per cent, compared to 79 per cent among Libyan men.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, over half of employed women work in jobs “stereotypically” reserved for them, mostly in the education and health sectors. In the private sector, women are grossly underrepresented, and are far less likely to be entrepreneurs or have high-paying jobs. Women hold only 16 per cent of parliamentary seats, above the 10 per cent quota. Women’s freedom of movement is significantly lower than men’s and negative gender stereotypes continue to curtail women’s equality. Women cannot be the head of a household in the same way that men can, they cannot inherit property equally, and their testimony in court does not carry the same evidentiary weight. The Libyan legal system does not adequately protect women against domestic violence, honour crimes or rape. More than one in ten women have experienced intimate partner violence in the past year, and laws do not specifically prohibit domestic violence.<sup>35</sup> According to the UN Women report on “The Economic and social impact of conflict on Libyan women” released in 2020, they are twice as likely to rely on their family and family networks to resolve

violent crimes. This suggests that the current legal system does not allow women to pursue formal avenues of justice and forces victims of gender-based violence to resort to informal means of dispute resolution.<sup>36</sup> However, the report also highlighted the many ways and opportunities in which Libyan women could be included in this new crucial phase, as well as how the MWMN can fully support the work of UNSMIL, and the need to find common points that can be translated into tangible objectives and concrete results. Vice Minister Sereni highlighted the need for redoubling efforts to implement UNSCR 1325 – and to mainstream a gender perspective as an element of key relevance for a stable and long-lasting peace in the future of Libya – where women can play a formidable role in assisting UNSMIL. The VM emphasised Italy’s long-standing support to any initiative that will make women’s voices heard for the sake of peace.

*“Conditions for sustainable peace and lasting conflict prevention can be achieved only if peace negotiations and the monitoring process are inclusive. It is critical to join our efforts to sustain civil society organisations – starting from women and the youth – to shaping their own future.”*

*Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Marina Sereni*

MWMN members expressed their concerns about the current situation and made their recommendations: in particular, they shared their hope that international institutions and UNSMIL will serve as a role model for Libyans with respect to the inclusion of women in each sub-committee; and further, that they will include gender mainstreaming in all the outcomes of the peace agreement. They requested that advisory committees with local experience be established, to participate in the different peace stages, and that a committee of

<sup>34</sup> The World Bank, Gender Data Portal, 2020: <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/gender/count/ry/libya> (accessed 20/12/2020)

<sup>35</sup> Women Peace and Security Index 2019/20, PRIO and GWPS: <https://gps.prio.org/utility/DownloadFile.ashx?id=1173&type=publicationfile> (accessed 17/12/2020)

<sup>36</sup> UN Women, ‘The Economic and Social Impact of Conflict on Libyan Women’, 2020, p.83: <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/the-economic-and-social-impact-of-conflict-on-libyan-women#view> (accessed 8/12/2020)

women be formed to monitor the peace tracks. They stressed the importance of relying on local expertise to ensure national ownership of the process. Women's underrepresentation in political dialogues (where they account for less than 30 per cent), represents another important challenge that needs to be addressed. It was emphasised that until now women's rights have not been recognised and that Libyan women are suffering from abuse and discrimination in all life domains: women's participation in elections has been limited; they are victims of domestic violence, they suffer from inter-country marriage and sometimes they are abandoned by their families. Women do not have the same opportunity as men in sectors such as education, health, politics and international relations. It was highlighted that there are categories of women's rights that are still treated as grey zone such as women's rights in prison, unmarried women and women with legal problems. The presence of women in the economic sector of the country is indispensable – for instance in revenue management and distribution of oil resources in order to better allocate resources and the provision of public goods. The preparatory period preceding the elections scheduled for December 2021 is an opportunity not to be missed to ensure that gender equality and equal rights will be granted for the entire Libyan population.

VM Sereni concluded the meeting by summarising three key messages: 1) the involvement of women in various intra-Libyan Dialogue forums linked to the Berlin process will be crucial; 2) women's empowerment must be extended to the management of the country as a whole; and 3) involvement of the entire civil society is vital for the well-being of the country. She reiterated that the MWMN will stand ready to provide essential support to its members and to all Libyan women to support them in this crucial phase towards the establishment of a new democracy. The meeting represented a relevant and concrete example of how the MWMN can provide support at its best, and how it adds value to ongoing peace processes

mediated under the auspices of the United Nations. Following the first round of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) that took place in Tunis on 9–14 November 2020, and that saw the participation of a delegation of 17 women, the MWMN is planning more initiatives in support of its members and in coordination with UNSMIL.<sup>37</sup> Recognising the important work that is being conducted by UN Women in Libya, which among other initiatives supported the establishment of the Libyan Women Network for Peacebuilding in July 2019, the MWMN aims to work in synergy with the new network to leverage the vast potential of Libyan women at the community level, ensuring that they are prepared for all eventualities and encouraged to lead the transition towards new elections and the establishment of a democratic country. Building on the ongoing training initiatives on mediation and negotiation skills that UN Women developed in collaboration with the Dutch institute Clingendael,<sup>38</sup> and avoiding any duplication of efforts, the MWMN is looking at possibilities that will support Libyan women in the process leading towards the elections planned for December 2021. The plan is to develop training opportunities to enhance women's role in political participation, including the importance of monitoring electoral processes before, during and after the elections in order to avoid political violence, in particular vis-à-vis women. The political underrepresentation of women in Libya, as well as in other countries, is one of the main obstacles when it comes to appointing women in high-level positions. Once enough women are present in leading political roles, the appointment of other women as part of the peacebuilding

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<sup>37</sup> UNSMIL, 'Statement of the Libyan women participating in the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum: <https://unsmil.unmissions.org/statement-libyan-women-participating-libyan-political-dialogue-forum> (accessed 12/12/2020)

<sup>38</sup> Clingendael, 'Negotiation training for Libyan women Network for Peacebuilding': <https://www.clingendael.org/news/negotiation-training-libyan-women-network-peacebuilding> (accessed 15/12/2020)

process will be easier, and the trend of male-dominated negotiation parties will be finally challenged.

*“Women are vital agents of peace. In 2017, we launched the Mediterranean Women Mediators’ Network, one of the founding members of this Global Alliance [and] We will continue to support the Network and to promote a significant participation of women in all forums, both at national and international level.”*

*Italian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Emanuela Del Re, speaking at the launch of the Global Alliance on 26 September 2019, New York:*

#### 1.6.4 The global dimension: Synergies and experience sharing

Conceived with a core group of members and a system of satellites based in individual countries, the Network is designed specifically to connect local actors with the global reality of peace mediation. It aims to address the disconnect between the work that women do at the local level and the world of international mediation processes to which women do not enjoy access. At the policy level it works in close cooperation with the UN, the Organization for Security and Co-operation (OSCE) in Europe and more recently the EU to support their mediation activities. It also liaises with initiatives developed and promoted at the local level, for example in Libya, Turkey, Cyprus, Kosovo and most recently in Lebanon, where its effectiveness is bolstered through close cooperation with civil society. Since its foundation, the MWMN has constantly worked and built synergies with international and regional organisations such as UN Women, the OSCE and the EU

as well as academia (Durham University<sup>39</sup>), international foundations and civil society organisations such as the Geneva Centre for Security Policies and International Civil Society Actions – ICAN).

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<sup>39</sup> The MWMN was included as a case study in the research project “Mediation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”, funded in 2019 by the Institute of Advanced Studies, Durham University, coordinated by Catherine Turner and with the participation of Irene Fellin, Johanna Poutaten and May Darwich:  
<https://www.dur.ac.uk/ias/fellows/iasfellows/1920/fellin/>  
(accessed 26/11/2020)

Box 7. UN Women High-Level Seminar: “Strengthening Women’s Participation in Peace Processes: What Roles and Responsibilities for States?”<sup>40</sup>

On 3–4 December 2019, UN Women in collaboration with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation held a high-level seminar on “Strengthening Women’s Participation in Peace Processes: What Roles and Responsibilities for States?”. The event, funded within the framework of the 1325 Italian NAP (2016–20), built on Italy’s goal of strengthening the role of women in peace processes and indeed in all decision-making, and its ground-breaking initiative on women mediators (the MWMN), to examine the role of member states in advancing the full and effective participation of women in mediation and peace processes.

The meeting was hosted in Rome and brought together approximately 130 participants from 60 countries including members of the MWMN and representatives from other regional networks of women mediators, member state officials and representatives from regional and international organisations, as well as women peacebuilders, academics and think tank representatives.

The seminar was jointly opened by Italy’s Deputy Foreign Minister, H.E. Ms. Emanuela Claudia Del Re, and UN Women Deputy Executive Director and Assistant Secretary-General Ms. Asa Regnér, with the keynote address delivered by Ms. Leymah Gbowee, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate 2011 from Liberia and member of the UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Board on Mediation.

The meeting interrogated countries’ support in relation to regional networks of women mediators, as they strive to increase the inclusion of women and of gender perspectives in peace processes and related peace agreements. Political and technical aspects of member states’ involvement were considered, including the formulation of mediation mandates, the appointment of female Envoys, or the provision of incentives, including financial incentives, for women’s representation in negotiating parties’ delegations. The seminar assessed the role of international contact groups as well, or “friends of mediation” forums, in advocating and coordinating efforts to advance women’s meaningful participation in peace processes, including the implementation phase of peace agreements. The need for more synergy and coordination among different realities to avoid duplication of efforts was highlighted.

Throughout the two-day meeting, an assessment was made on the normative, political and funding opportunities, challenges and prospects that currently exist for member states to enhance their support for women’s participation in peace processes. Stemming from the experiences of the panellists, best practices and lessons learned were shared. Finally, the seminar discussed the existing and potential tools to strengthen the monitoring and reporting on members states’ efforts in enhancing women’s participation, and sought to identify and agree on concrete commitments member states could adopt and implement towards more gender-inclusive peace processes and peace agreements ahead of the 20-year anniversary of the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2020.

Members of MWMN benefitted from the event in several ways: they had the opportunity to hear about the political commitment of member states in supporting women’s participation in peace processes, and meeting with key political stakeholders. They could see the continued investment of Italy in providing political and financial support to the dialogue among regional women mediator networks, including through the collaboration with UN Women. Moreover, the event represented a unique occasion to support Network members and help to promote their expertise and competences with relevant stakeholders. In fact, member reported that international gatherings such as the Rome Seminar were among the most precious opportunities for them to establish personal connections with other women mediators coming from different parts of the globe, and at the same time gave them the chance to connect with key international stakeholders. The lack of mobility and the absence of in-person events due to the COVID-19 pandemic are having a very negative impact on women and on their ability to reinforce the personal network that is often at the basis of any professional success.



UN Women High-Level Seminar: “Strengthening Women’s Participation in Peace Processes: What Roles and Responsibilities for States?”, Rome 5 December 2019

*“There is plenty of evidence that when women are meaningfully involved, peace talks are more likely to address root causes and bring to more sustainable results, but we continue to make peace in a way that ignores women’s participation. So it is time to walk the talk. This Network is one way to speed up the progress towards our goals”*

*Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohamed  
opening remarks  
at the Launch of the Global Alliance on 26 September  
2019, New York*

In light of the MWMN’s perspectives to go global, the MWMN members and the Secretariat regularly attend international conferences and workshops to contribute to the development and discussions of new policies and practices on the role of women in mediation and on the implementation of the WPS agenda, and to share lessons learned based on their knowledge and experience. Working closely with other regional networks of women mediators, namely the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (FemWise-Africa), the Nordic Women Mediators, the Arab Women Mediators and the Women Mediators across the Commonwealth, the MWMN has been actively involved in the establishment of a Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks. The GA was launched in September 2019 in New York at the High-Level Opening Week of the United Nations General Assembly 74. The MWMN Secretariat, with the aim of reinforcing its global role, has undertaken the coordination of the GA Secretariat in the year 2020/2021, which is hosted by WIIS Italy. This responsibility is on a rotation basis among the operational partners of the regional women mediator networks, and it will last one year.

*“Amplifying voices for peace: Women peacebuilders and mediators at the peace table – the new norm.”*

The MWMN cooperates and coordinates regularly with other local and global stakeholders, aiming to boost partnerships, synergies, knowledge and experience sharing. The MWMN Secretariat, in coordinating

the activities of the GA, has participated as a co-host in a virtual conference on women peacebuilders organised in the context of the German Presidency of the Council of the EU. On 5 October 2020 the Permanent Representation of Germany to the European Union acted as co-host alongside the International Civil Society Action Network, the Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks, the European Union External Action Service and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom to present the virtual conference *“Amplifying voices for peace: Women peacebuilders and mediators at the peace table – the new norm”*. The event brought together women peacebuilders and mediators with governments and multilateral mediation units. It offered representatives from different women’s networks the space to discuss current challenges and barriers, identify synergies and avenues of cooperation including those related to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as strategies to ensure women’s full participation in peace mediation.

#### Box 8. The establishment of the Global Alliance<sup>41</sup>

The recent mushrooming of Regional Women Mediator Networks across the globe is a clear reflection of the need to ensure that women's common aspirations and commitment to participate in and lead peace processes is fulfilled. It reflects a belief that women are equal stakeholders in society and therefore should have a place at every table where peace is being discussed, negotiated or brokered, including as mediators. In the past few years, networks have emerged as key actors in the quest for fair and meaningful representation of women across the whole peace cycle, with a specific focus on the role of mediators, a need equally acknowledged by the UN through the WPS resolutions. Following several months of informal collaboration, the networks identified a need to embody a collective voice in order to amplify their common goals while maintaining their respective independence and characteristics.

Based on this common belief, since March 2018 the above-mentioned networks have worked together towards the launch of a Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks (Global Alliance or GA). The specific aims of the GA are to provide visibility to women mediators, organise networking and capacity-building opportunities and, most notably, to facilitate the deployment on the field for its members. The Global Alliance was launched in the Seventy Fourth Session of the UN General Assembly in September 2019. As part of the launch, a list of deployable women mediators was handed to the UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, in a direct challenge to the persistent myth that there are simply not enough qualified women mediators. The initial idea of formalising an already existing collaboration was developed within the framework of the NWM and in close dialogue with the UN, back in early 2018, when Norway invited representatives of all the established networks to an initial meeting. The meeting, which was held in Oslo in March of the same year, demonstrated the benefits of getting together, sharing experiences and learning from each other<sup>42</sup>. The event gathered together more than 80 women and men, including representatives from the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation as well as representatives of UN entities (including the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the Department of Political Affairs and UN Women). Other multilateral actors also attended the meeting: the AU, the EU, OSCE and the Association of Southeast Asian States (ASEAN), as well as delegates from several countries and representatives of civil society and academia. Considering that all networks were at the very initial stages of their activities (and, at that time, the WMC had not yet been launched), the networks agreed to postpone the establishment of a Global Alliance and take some more time to strengthen their respective individual capacities before engaging with a broader initiative at the global level. Nevertheless, participants benefitted from the joint meeting and the positive energy that arose from the event, and hence resolved to take steps towards the establishment of a Global Alliance of Regional Women Mediator Networks aimed at promoting women's participation in peace mediation and in reconciliation processes at all levels. The Oslo meeting was followed by a second event in New York at the margins of the General Assembly Open Debate on UNSCR 1325(2000) in October 2018, entitled "Enhancing Partnerships for Increased Women's Participation and Influence in Peace Processes: Towards an Alliance of Regional Women Mediators Networks". The open event, organised in collaboration with UN Women and the Permanent Mission of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the United Nations, was followed by an internal meeting of network members aimed at sharing experiences on mediation issues and as an opportunity for further strategizing the concept development of a future Global Alliance. As an output of the event, an advocacy letter was sent to the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on behalf of the four regional networks, stressing the importance of recognising the work done at many levels by women mediators and the urgency of appointing women mediators at the highest position<sup>43</sup>. The Global Alliance is a collective of voices demanding that policy and decision makers alike hasten the implementation of UNSCR 1325(2000) and consciously create spaces for more women to participate in and lead peace processes. During the launch, discussions went beyond the achievements and barriers to access, focusing more on opportunities and possible modalities through which women's participation can be facilitated and enhanced and what kind of support networks can provide to their members for engaging with key policy makers in the mediation field.

The GA seeks to achieve four main objectives. First, it aims at creating awareness of the respective networks, showcasing the work being done by them and by their members to promote and enhance women's participation in peace processes in pursuit of the broader WPS agenda. Second, it aims to engage with key policy makers in order to leverage support from the UN, the AU, the EU, the OSCE and UN member states, to build partnerships to advance the roles and participation of women in mediation processes at the global, regional and national levels. Third, it aims at identifying opportunities for collaboration with, among and between the respective networks comprised within the GA as well as other stakeholders. And finally, it aims to expand and reinforce the connections among the members and key stakeholders, including policymakers, identifying networking and relationship-building opportunities.

<sup>41</sup> Irene Fellin and Catherine Turner, "Women's Mediator Networks: Reflections on an emerging global trend", in C. Turner and M. Wählisch (eds), *Rethinking Peace Mediation: Challenges of Contemporary Peace Making Practice*, Bristol University Press, 2021, p. 297

<sup>42</sup> Norwegian Ministries, "The Norwegian Government's Action Plan: Women, Peace and Security (2019 – 2022): [https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/ud/dokumenter/planer/actionplan\\_wps2019.pdf](https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/ud/dokumenter/planer/actionplan_wps2019.pdf) (accessed 28 September 2019).

<sup>43</sup> On file with the author

In October 2020, to mark the first anniversary of the launch of the GA, representatives from the five networks convened virtually for the first annual meeting to discuss key themes related to the next 20 years of the WPS agenda. Reflecting the spirit of the GA, this event sought to invoke the principle of cooperation and develop synergies between the regional women mediator networks and other key actors to jointly address the challenges of the past 20 years and change the course of the next 20. Members of the networks jointly addressed thematic priorities through a series of virtual workshops, which resulted in a set of key insights and recommendations for the networks and policy makers to act upon. These suggestions reflect the need to systematically increase the participation and influence of women in peacebuilding and mediation efforts and further work for gender-sensitive peace agreements. External partners and colleagues of the GA additionally reflected upon these issues during the public opening and closing events of the Global Alliance annual meeting

to further address critical issues and develop relevant solutions to change the current modus operandi in peacemaking. Members of the networks jointly addressed thematic priorities through a series of virtual workshops, which resulted in a set of key insights and recommendations for the networks and policy makers to act upon. These suggestions reflect the need to systematically increase the participation and influence of women in peacebuilding and mediation efforts and further work for gender-sensitive peace agreements.<sup>44</sup>

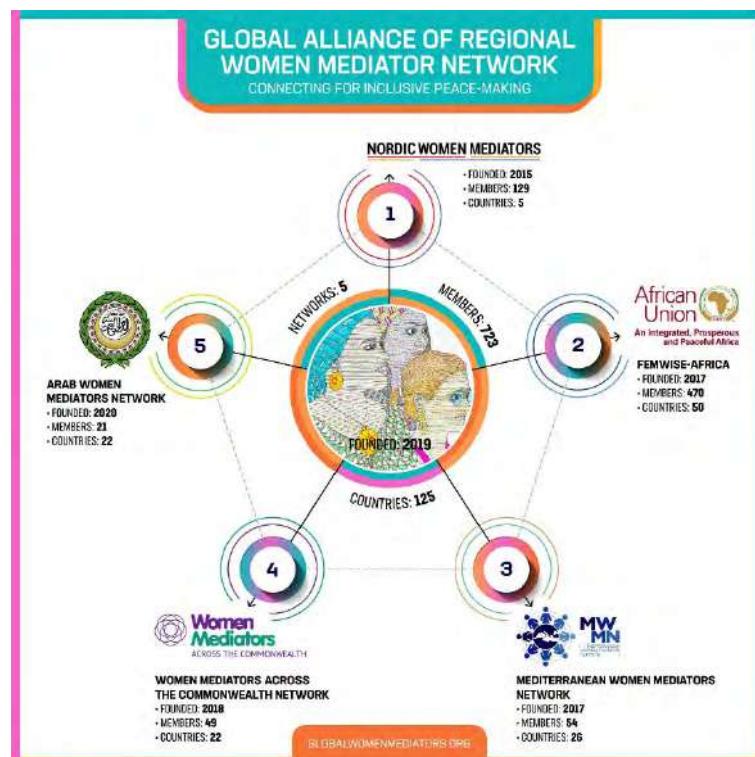


Figure 2. The GA in numbers

Over a period of two weeks (between 12 and 20 October 2020), more than 200 network members convened in five working groups

<sup>44</sup> For a complete overview of the Annual Event, see: 'Global Alliance Annual Meeting 2020 Report, Women, Peace and Security in the next 20 years. Moving beyond business as usual', CMI, November 2020, <http://cmi.fi/2020/11/10/global-alliance-annual-meeting-2020-report/> (accessed 26/11/2020)

Key recommendations include:

Protection mechanisms should be established at all levels, starting from the “bottom up” by addressing the needs of grassroots women mediators and peacebuilders and mobilising civil society groups, security actors and local governments within protection frameworks.
International support to local women peacebuilders must be strengthened and aligned with their needs, which necessitates an approach that is long-term, flexible, accompanying, process-oriented and based on trust in their ability to lead the way – also in the midst of COVID-19.
Leadership of multilateral/international organisations should give due recognition and clear direction for the consideration of local/traditional approaches to peacebuilding and conflict resolution and prevention within their institutions, with a strong human rights perspective and a gender lens clearly incorporated.
Promote the digital literacy of the peacebuilding organisations by making resources available, including funding and adaptive budgets, in order to provide the necessary tools, research, participatory processes, etc.
Establish and endow a global/regional trust to provide financial support and professional development resources to women mediators. Ensure that this trust can be geared towards women working at all levels, including by engaging local players and developing their management capacities and financial skills.

#### 1.6.5 Hybrid mediation models: Challenges and opportunities for the MWMN

Following the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic at the global level, the MWMN shifted its focus onto “Harnessing the Potential of Hybrid Mediation Models in Times of Uncertainty”. Several peacemaking initiatives, including those involving local women mediators, came to a halt while

conflict situations continued or even further deteriorated, due in part to the precarious conditions most people are living in. This phase brought about a partial rethink of the strategies and models of mediation due to the lack of access to traditional avenues, restrictions of movement and the unavailability of people-to-people contacts.<sup>45</sup> Within this context, the MWMN convened its members to exchange on the constraints the women mediators faced daily. The members pointed out the discovery of technological tools, highlighting how they had rethought and articulated their methods of working on the ground and made use of new, creative, hybrid mediation models. Accordingly, the MWMN decided to discuss the use of hybrid mediation models during the Global Alliance annual event, reflecting on and exchanging experiences and best practices on hybrid mediation models among women mediators from different parts of the world.

In particular, the focus of the Working Group sessions of the MWMN was to interactively discuss: a) the key challenges facing women mediators at different levels throughout the emergency situation caused by the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic; b) the impact this situation has had on the daily work, activities and lives of women mediators and peacebuilders from different countries; c) the current gaps and challenges at the core of women mediators’ work; d) the concrete changes and strategies women mediators have undertaken; e) whether there was a potential to overcome these gaps and challenges through the use of hybrid mediation models; and f) what creative models and tools women mediators found, experimented with and implemented to get around the challenges and turn the current precarious, uncertain and at times dangerous situation into an opportunity.

In this regard, the MWMN discussed some key questions that will inform its strategy around the use of hybrid mediation tools, with the aim of influencing key policymakers, local,

<sup>45</sup> Itonde Kakoma and Edward Marques, ‘The future of mediation in the post-COVID world?’, Geneva Centre for Security Policies, August 2020, No. 12: <https://www.gcsp.ch/publications/future-mediation-post-covid-world> (accessed 28/11/2020)

regional and international organisations, and national governments:

- a) How do we ensure that these hybrid mediation tools are inclusive?
- b) How do we compensate for the usual way of doing things and how we introduce these digital tools into grassroots-level mediation initiatives?
- c) As travel and interconnections are not possible, local women are taking spaces that they did not have before. How to empower these persons?

In terms of opportunities, the MWMN shed light on how these hybrid mediation models can innovate and enlighten new methods and approaches to mediation: a wider community outreach; the possibility to integrate other disciplines and different expertise; the opportunity to build neutral platforms; and the prospect of generating new forms of connections between people taking part in mediation processes. Various challenges were also highlighted, *inter alia*: Internet access; the question of representation; trust building and the human touch in a virtual context; and protection and security concerns.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, the MWMN issued specific policy recommendations targeting a) local women mediators; and b) high-level stakeholders and policy makers at the national and global levels, including private sector representatives, particularly in the communications sector, to harness the potential of hybrid mediation models in times of uncertainty.<sup>47</sup>

#### Recommendations for networks

**Develop network members' capacity** – Networks should develop the capacity of their mediators to adopt a hybrid approach to their work and enhance their capacity to integrate digital tools in their work when suitable.

**Enhance exchanges on women's experiences** – Networks should facilitate the exchange of experiences, lessons learned and success stories across the networks especially with regard to which tools to use, AI and quantitative research tools.

**Convene dialogues** – Networks are encouraged to convene dialogues to reflect on conflict sensitivity considerations and implications of hybrid approaches.

#### Recommendations for policymakers

**Facilitate a dialogue** between the peacebuilding field and IT industry with the aim of creating custom-made tools that respond to the needs of this field.

**Develop a systematic approach** to hybrid mediation work including modalities, objectives and rules of the game.

**Promote the digital literacy of the peacebuilding organisations** by making resources available, including funding and adaptive budgets, in order to provide the necessary tools, research, participatory processes, etc.

<sup>46</sup> See also: Florence Mandelik and Ayat Mohamed, 'Can you hear me? Taking mediation online: reflections from practice', NOREF, September 2020: <https://noref.no/Publications/Themes/Gender-and-inclusivity/Can-you-hear-me-Taking-mediation-online-reflections-from-practice> (accessed 15/11/2020)

<sup>47</sup> 'Global Alliance Annual Meeting 2020 Report, Women, Peace and Security in the next 20 years. Moving beyond business as usual', CMI, November 2020, <http://cmi.fi/2020/11/10/global-alliance-annual-meeting-2020-report/>

## 2. INSIGHTS FROM THE NETWORK: KEY FINDINGS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The adventure of the MWMN started in one room at “La Farnesina”<sup>48</sup> and, in a heartbeat, became a journey around the globe. During the last three years, the Network has focused on planning and implementing many activities, from the local to the global level, but more than anything else this period has represented an investment in its members. A network is made by people for people: if you do not invest in them and work with them every day, you will not move forward.

Bringing together a group of women from 25 extremely different countries, who are unified mainly by their gender identity and a commitment to build a more gender-equal world, does not automatically guarantee success. Individuals with different cultural backgrounds and experiences can share the same values and long-term objectives, but their own life experience will determine the way they will go about achieving these goals. Moreover, the different political contexts that are embedded in the MWMN can sometimes represent a barrier to its success. Therefore, to make the project sustainable, a lot of time and dedication were invested in getting to know each woman, in her social, cultural and political context, and developing a strong bond among all members.

Based on the interviews conducted with Network members in the framework

of this research, and on the internal periodic evaluation of the work done, several aspects have emerged regarding achievements, challenges and lessons learned.

### 2.1 Positive aspects and achievements

- Members of the Network share a common sense of gratitude and enthusiasm for being part of the initiative. They value the project, its aim and the high quality of the activities proposed. They praise the Italian MFA for the establishment of the initiative and they particularly appreciate the effort to involve CSO representatives among the core members.
- The mixed composition of the membership, which includes both institutional and civil society representatives, is perceived as the added value of the Network, compared to similar initiatives. It increases the range of expertise and adds different perspectives to the debate. Furthermore, it helps connect the different tracks of mediation (from track 1 to track 3), thereby reinforcing the assumption that a multitrack approach is preferable to develop more gender-inclusive and diverse approach to mediation.
- Collaboration with UN Women and UNDPPA is considered a must for the success of the initiative. Joint events organised previously in New York, Rome, and remotely, are considered other important achievements.
- All members identify the establishment of the Global Alliance as the main achievement of the past years. They consider it a keyway to amplify the work done

<sup>48</sup> Designed in 1935, the Palazzo della Farnesina is the building that has housed the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs since its completion in 1959. Its name comes from the land it stands on, which was called the Farnese Gardens (Orti della Farnesina) after its owner Pope Paul III, originally named Alessandro Farnese. A reference to “La Farnesina” is often intended as a metonym for the hosted institution, namely the Ministry itself. Information from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palazzo\\_della\\_Farnesina](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palazzo_della_Farnesina)

by the members at the local level. They feel that the global platform will offer more visibility at the international level, granting them more possibilities to be engaged in formal mediation processes.

- Another positive achievement is represented by the establishment of Antennas. Following the example of Cyprus, Turkey and Kosovo, more members expressed their interest in the localisation of the initiative. This reinforces the sense of ownership and helps create more connection with the local stakeholders.
- Members were generally enthusiastic about the capacity building and training programme offered in the past two years, both in person and online. The success of the online activities conducted during 2020 went beyond any expectations, providing a high-quality educational programme on female leadership and mediation, public speaking and communication skills that will enhance the capacity of MWMN members to play an even more strategic and meaningful role in crisis situations.
- Members appreciate the intense communication activity carried out by the Secretariat: they find the newsletter and the activities on social media rich in information and particularly useful in terms of visibility. A strong appreciation was demonstrated for all initiatives such as research, podcasts and videos that will enhance the knowledge of the MWMN and its members, thus contributing to the development of a new and positive narrative of women mediators.

## 2.2 Challenges and lessons learned

When UN SG Antonio Guterres took office in December 2016, he indicated conflict prevention as one of the priorities of his mandate.<sup>49</sup> He emphasised the need to take more creative approaches to prevent the escalation of conflict, including notably a much stronger emphasis on the use of mediation and creative diplomacy as non-military solutions to be privileged in conflict resolution.<sup>50</sup> At the same time, he underlined the persistent underrepresentation of women in mediation processes, in particular at the track 1 level. The MWMN initiative was consequently designed to respond to SG Guterres's call with the aim to increase the number of women involved in mediation and peacemaking initiatives. The plan was to promote the key role of women as agents of change, increasing their visibility and offering them enough opportunities to become part of the international pool of experts, including through the reinforcement of their capacities and the development of new specific mediation skills. The main objective was to create a tool that would support the UN in identifying more women who are suitable for high-level positions in the field of international mediation, leading to the appointment of more women as Special Envoys.

Four years after the design of the project, and several initiatives later, it is evident that the MWMN is much more complex than a training programme, and its success cannot be measured merely by the number of women appointed. Indeed, if this were the case, we would be

<sup>49</sup> United Nations Secretary-General, 'Secretary-General-Designate Antonio Guterres' Remarks to the General Assembly on Taking the Oath of Office', 12 December 2016: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2016-12-12/secretary-general-designate-ant%C3%B3nioguterres-oath-office-speech>

<sup>50</sup> Turner, Catherine. "Absent or Invisible? Women Mediators and the United Nations." *Global Policy* 9, no. 2 (2018): 244-53.

obliged to evaluate the initiative as a complete failure, since no woman has been appointed since the establishment of the Network. On the contrary, however, the initiative finds large consensus and appreciation not only among its members<sup>51</sup>, but also the larger community of women peacebuilders, and at the level of the UN and diverse regional organisations.

With time and based on the experience gained, the scope of the Network has expanded from its initial focus on high-level mediation to include a strong component of community-based mediation efforts, where women peacebuilders are more present than women in high-level international positions. Looking beyond numbers, we see how the MWMN falls into the category of peacebuilding initiatives aimed at promoting the full implementation of the WPS, with the development of a new paradigm of peace where women are key actors of change. In line with the core pillars of UNSCR 1325 (2000), it contributes to dismantling a culture of discrimination and social norms that reinforce the patriarchal structure of the society that prevents women's meaningful participation in decision-making processes.

Following the extraordinary nature of the year 2020, and considering the huge impact that the COVID-19 pandemic is having on women, especially on women living in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, it is now more than ever necessary to strengthen acceleration and support mechanisms developed by the UN and the international community in support of the WPS agenda implementation<sup>52</sup>. The MWMN, like the other regional networks of women mediators, has a key role to play in this regard. Unlocking its full potential, it can become an important tool for putting pressure

on local institutions and member states which, beyond their formal commitments, often lack the political will and leadership to ensure that women's interests are heard. Networks can play a strategic role in raising awareness and promoting the implementation of the WPS agenda at the local and regional level. They can advocate against the economic resistance to investing more in gender equality projects, and they can challenge gender stereotypes and the patriarchal culture that characterise our societies. The persistent exclusion of women from smoky rooms, where power games and international mediation are still perceived to take place, remains the main barrier to be challenged to see more women acting as mediators and lead negotiators. In order to succeed, it is therefore vital to dismantle the classic image of mediation as a political game played by charismatic, white and older men. The focus should rather be on professional skills and technical expertise, backed by the necessary political mandate and standing.<sup>53</sup> Redressing this unbalance and creating more opportunities for women was one of the factors behind the establishment of the MWMN. The network should constantly put pressure on institutions, including the UN, to institutionalise the presence of women in all mediation processes and dialogue facilitations, starting from the pre-talks and in all steps of the conflict resolution process, without accepting any compromise. Women networks such as the MWMN represent valid and concrete alternatives to identify skilled professional women and tap into their competencies. They are the concrete answers to the common assumptions that there are not enough qualified women to fill leadership positions. To challenge such assumptions, many additional initiatives in support of women's visibility have been created, such as targeted communication campaigns on MWMN on social media and the

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<sup>51</sup> Interviews with MWMN members, filed with the authors. Unpublished.

<sup>52</sup> UN Women, 'The Impact of COVID-19 on Women', policy brief, April 2020: [www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/policy-brief-the-impact-ofcovid-19-on-women-en.pdf?la=en&vrs=1406](http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/policy-brief-the-impact-ofcovid-19-on-women-en.pdf?la=en&vrs=1406).

<sup>53</sup> CMI, 'Beyond 'women's issues' and smoky rooms: Debunking the myths about gender in peace mediation', September 2018:

<https://cmi.fi/2018/09/21/beyond-womens-issues-smoky-rooms-busting-myths-gender-peace-mediation/>

already mentioned podcast series #Herstories by MWMN Cypriot member Magda Zenon.<sup>54</sup> Other podcast series such as *Seeking Peace, Stories of Women Peacebuilders* featuring stories from within conflict areas and interviews with resilient women and male allies who are fighting for peace and justice in their communities, have been developed to contribute to building a new positive and successful narrative of women mediators and peacebuilders<sup>55</sup> and to help change the perception of mediation from elitist to participatory and inclusive.

As previously mentioned, training and capacity building are among the core components of the project, and they generate much appreciation by the participants. Trainings, webinars, peer to-peer support and mentoring programmes are extraordinary experiences for women (and men alike) to gain new knowledge, reinforce capacities and develop new skills. Moreover, training in person has represented unique opportunities for sharing experiences and strengthening the bond among Network members who were strangers at the beginning of this journey. Building new capacities not only helps women reinforce (or develop) their skills, it also helps them increase self-awareness and self-confidence. In fact, many members have shared in confidence that the lack of specific skills was not the only challenge they had to overcome, because one of the main barriers they felt was the lack of confidence in their own capacities. Being constantly excluded from decision-making processes, women often lack leadership skills and their potential as communicators is not unlocked. For this reason, in 2020, the focus of MWMN trainings was on leadership in mediation as well as on public speaking and communication. It is often said that we need to give women a voice.

<sup>54</sup> MWMN, HerStories: <https://womenmediators.net/herstories-from-the-mediterranean-women-mediators-network/>

<sup>55</sup> <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/seekingpeace/>

This is not exact, because women do have a voice, and a lot to say as well. What women need are enough opportunities to express their knowledge and show their competences (and some tips on the best way to do this).

Another important dimension that emerged during the training design process was the necessity to increase the women mediators' specific knowledge. When we talk about gender-sensitive mediation, this can be understood as i) ensuring women's participation; ii) bringing women's perspectives that contribute to different understandings of the causes and consequences of conflict; and iii) peace agreements that are responsive to the specific needs of women and girls, men and boys.<sup>56</sup>

The regional networks of women mediators have the potential to respond to all these needs. In creating a semi-institutional pool of competent women, networks give a concrete solution to all men and political stakeholders who insist on justifying the absence of women with the lack of competent candidates. At the same time, in developing trainings, it is essential to focus on the most critical areas that are tackled during mediation efforts, such as: 1) the design and conduct of mediation, facilitation and dialogue; 2) security arrangements (including ceasefires, DDR & SSR); 3) gender and inclusion; 4) constitution-making; 4) power-sharing; and 5) natural resources. These key areas also correspond to the specialisations required for the Standby Team of Senior Mediation Advisers by the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA). Offering Network members enough programmes on these subjects will enable them to apply for positions on the Team of Mediation Advisers, as well as for

<sup>56</sup> CMI, 'Beyond 'women's issues' and smoky rooms: Debunking the myths about gender in peace mediation', September 2018:  
<https://cmi.fi/2018/09/21/beyond-womens-issues-smoky-rooms-busting-myths-gender-peace-mediation/>

other mediation support positions. Although training and capacity building are a fundamental element of our project, it appears evident that the development of skills must always be accompanied by the creation of professional opportunities. When this concerns women, it seems to be a common practice to invest in training, building on the assumption that women do not have enough competencies. Though this might be sometimes the case, it cannot be considered the norm. Training new professionals, increasing knowledge and developing new skills is of no use if this process is not accompanied by a different distribution of power and responsibility within our societies. Therefore, it has become urgent for the MMWN to change its strategic approach and consider how to promote the development of concrete professional opportunities as part of its capacity-building programmes. One possibility could be to liaise with UN Women and other UN agencies, EU delegations or mediation support actors present on the territory, and to propose traineeships as part of the training. By helping to create such opportunities, more women will be given the opportunity to contribute in peacebuilding efforts and have a positive impact on the society.

When we look at the other strong component of the MWMN, namely the localisation of the work, we can identify additional challenges the Network has encountered in its first years, which will require further research and coordination efforts.

As previously underlined, the MWMN is by nature a complex reality. The Mediterranean is the cradle of many cultures, unified by common roots but divided by religious, ethnical and geopolitical factors. Women coming from these countries reflect the diversity of their origins, fragilities and conflicts encompassed within the region.

The Mediterranean has always been a priority

of the Italian foreign policy. This interest has become even greater in the last few years, in light of such political and security challenges as the management of migratory flows and the fight against terrorism and radicalisation. The MWMN was established with the intention of contributing to the stabilisation of this critical area. However, in the first three-year period, the focus of the Network was more on internal dynamics and on individual needs: getting to know the members, their strengths and their competences, and assess their needs. After this initial stage, members and the Secretariat started working on designing the first initiatives for the localisation of the network. The establishment of the first antennas in Cyprus, Turkey and more recently in Kosovo was the beginning of this process. However, the work done by the Network at the local level goes beyond the formal launch of an antenna, such as in the cases of Libya and Lebanon where initiatives are developed in different ways. In Lebanon, for example, the MWMN is funding full scholarships for the academic year 2020/2021 for five women from different communities, who will graduate in mediation and later join the Network as part of the MWMN / Lebanon Antenna. Another initiative is currently implemented in collaboration with the local NGO March on Lebanon and targets a group of ten young women coming from communities at risk of social instability, to offer training on mediation, dialogue and facilitation skills, mental health, anger management, and media communication. The training is conducted jointly by the four Lebanese core members of the MWMN using a variety of tools and techniques ranging from more formal sessions to theatre and the establishment of support groups. The programme will include remote sessions with the Secretariat and other international experts, and it aims at providing these women coming from communities at risk with sufficient skills to enable them to support the work done by mediators in their

peacebuilding work on the ground.

The experience of the antennas, although relatively short, shows some of the challenges that the Network is encountering at the local level. The antennas do not act in a vacuum; on the contrary, they are created in countries where many other peacebuilding initiatives are taking place and where it seems difficult to connect with already existing initiatives. The aim of the Network is to avoid the duplication of efforts at the local level, and to capitalise on what exists already on the ground, to provide a privileged platform for connecting the mediation efforts done locally with the global dynamics of international mediation. This effort might appear particularly difficult in Libya, where the territory is characterised by a strong UN presence and several women's networks and peacebuilding initiatives that are already supported by UN Women and several international stakeholders. In order to avoid a situation where the MWMN becomes an additional interlocutor, it is urgent to map the existing mediation and peacebuilding initiatives on the ground, in order to identify gaps and develop strategies tailor-made to the different contexts. In doing this, the MWMN aims to build partnerships with local women peacebuilders and support their efforts. On their side, local members will be able to provide the Network with the most relevant information about the current status of the crisis and the impact on women, and thereby support the development of specific response measures.

Given the infancy of the MWMN, it remains difficult to evaluate its overall impact, and members were not supportive of the idea to include targets and objectives as part of their action plan. However, the inclusion of a theory of change and of a monitoring and evaluation strategy could help assess the success of the initiative and evaluate its impact on society.

When asked to identify what they are bringing

to the Network as members, the women mediators all agreed in saying that being part of the MWMN has offered them many more opportunities compared to what they had been able to bring to the initiative. The Network has proved to be a vital tool to bridge the gap between the professional field of mediation and the WPS agenda. The work of the network so far is considered to be a success, and expectations are high on the part of members to see the MWMN become a mediation support actor officially recognised in the region in the near future.

### 2.3 Key findings:

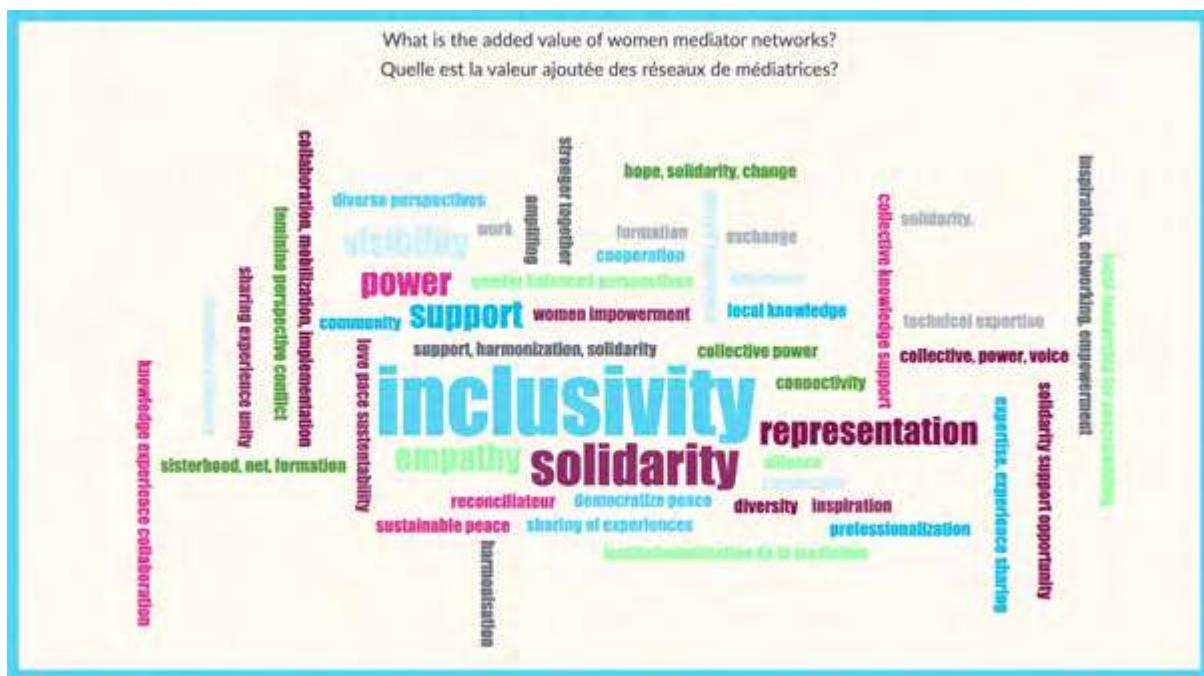
- The role played by the MFA of Italy is of utmost importance for the sustainability of the initiative. The political support within the UN and at the local level, in synergy with the Embassies of Italy located in the Mediterranean region, provides the necessary backup support to make the initiative a trailblazer project. Without this, and without the leverage wielded by the GA, the MWMN would not be able to play a significant role on the chessboard of the international relations and mediation efforts.
- Collaboration with UN Women and other UN agencies' regional offices has often been important for supporting the implementation of Networks' activities. Working in synergy with UN Women is a prerequisite for ensuring effective coordination among numerous initiatives at the local level and provide access to the right stakeholders.
- The project was ambitious, though at the beginning it was little more than an idea that needed to be

nurtured and developed. The parallel experience of the other regional networks of women mediators demonstrated that transforming the initiative into an operational platform would be one of the most challenging aspects, and that this would require time. Such a project needs a vision, and a clear plan of action. Even though aims and objectives were immediately identified in synergy with members, the coordination and operationalisation of the Network remains the most challenging aspect and requires constant efforts.

- The GA is meant as an overarching structure acting as amplifier of the work promoted by the founding networks. It is essential that the participation of each network, including the MWMN, in the global framework does not place an excessive burden on the network itself, overwhelming its own respective goals.
- Experience has demonstrated the importance of localising the work of the MWMN through the establishment of local antennas. This approach gives international resonance, reinforces the ownership of local members and increases institutional accountability. At the same time, it requires a clear vision and organised plans by the local members for the development and implementation of activities. Networks of women mediators help to amplify women's voices in mediating peace efforts at all levels, but the launch of an antenna goes beyond the political event, to calls for organised and coordinated work in support of the initiative.
- Although different personal and professional backgrounds enrich the Network with multiple perspectives, diversity also brings different methodologies and can determine imbalances in identifying priorities and areas of action.
- Members contribute in different ways to the sustainability and success of the MWMN, where some of them are proactive, and others participate in a more passive way. At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that the regional networks of women mediators are based on voluntary participation of their members. This means that a member is not paid for her time, energy and expertise. That said, the Network represents an important investment in terms of money, energy and political engagement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy and the MWMN Secretariat, and its success relies on the joint collaboration with members and their active participation in the initiative. This is why the development of a ToR for the members was deemed necessary to clarify expectations from both sides.
- Training and capacity building are extraordinary opportunities for enrichment of MWMN members. However, there is risk of focusing too much on the process of building capacities at the expense of efforts in developing concrete solutions and deployment opportunities for benefitting from these competences.

- COVID-19 represents a big challenge for an initiative such as the MWMN that is supposed to mobilise people from different places and support networking initiatives. During the course of 2020, in-person activities were cancelled and the plan to resume them has yet to come. The already existing bond among MWMN members helped them to overcome the difficult situation, however there is a shared feeling of fatigue with the virtual modality of doing business, and an excessive prolongation of this situation risks to jeopardise the success of the initiative.

During the opening event of the GA annual meeting, the participants were asked to describe the added value of women mediator networks, with results depicted below:



## Recommendations on the way ahead

- The sustainability of the initiative must be underpinned by both political commitment and economical support. At the beginning of December 2020, Italy adopted its Fourth NAP for the

implementation of UNSCR 1325 (for the period 2020–24), which includes among its objectives “the further consolidation of the MWMN”. On December 20, the 1325 financial mechanism in support of the NAP was confirmed for a three-year period for a total amount of three million euros. It is important that enough resources be allocated to ensure the sustainability of the Network and its initiatives in the years to come. A further reflection on the needs of the local antennas is needed, to ensure their mid-term sustainability.

- The Secretariat represents a core element of the initiative. It not only plans and coordinates implementation of activities daily, it also plays the role of unifier among over 50 members. The Secretariat is the focal point between the Italian MFA and MWMN members; it ensures, the coordination of the work done by the antennas at the local level. As such, it needs to be reinforced, alongside the expansion and consolidation of the MWMN. The Secretariat requires a sufficiently flexible structure to adapt and respond to the emerging security challenges.
- The Network requires an outreach strategy to engage with key stakeholders in every country included in its geographical scope. This could be translated into the organisation of an “MWMN tour” to promote the Network, its aims and objectives in the different capitals. It could consist in an event organised by the MWMN Secretariat with the support of the Embassies of Italy – and in synergy with other initiatives promoted by international organisations, government, CSOs, etc. – to present the initiative and its achievements. The event would offer the opportunity to introduce the local “MWMN Ambassadors” to the political and key stakeholders present in each country, thereby starting the localisation of the initiative. To make the Network more sustainable at the local level, each country requires the presence of more than one member. Members who do not share the responsibility of being an MWMN Ambassador with other women in their own country have in fact found it particularly difficult to promote the Network and start the localisation of the initiative.
- To make the antennas more sustainable, access to resources and opportunities should be facilitated and cooperation between the networks and the broader policymaking community should be promoted. The work at the local level would benefit from more synergies with other similar initiatives, including with UN Women regional and local offices.
- Members strongly encouraged the development of more tailor-made trainings and the continuation of exchange of experiences and peer-to-peer learning, both among MWMN members and within the extended framework of the GA.
- The literature on women mediators is growing, showing the interest in this issue, and at the same time there is a need to understand the complexity of the dynamics underpinning the still-limited participation of women in peacebuilding processes in the region. The complexity of the Mediterranean region and its constant instability require therefore more research focused on the individual countries, on the barriers that prevent women mediators to gain greater access to peace processes within the region, and addressing potential applications of the Network at the local level.

Box 9. The impact of COVID-19 on women peacebuilders and on MWMN activities

The international community of human rights defenders and women peacebuilders entered the year 2020 full of enthusiasm and motivation in view of the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action – the most progressive global blueprint for advancing women's rights – and the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UNSCR 1325. All around the world NGOs, grassroots communities of women peacebuilders, member states, and international and regional organisations were planning events and projects to highlight the achievements of the WPS agenda and plan future actions. Economic investment for accelerating the process of the WPS agenda implementation was expected by the community of experts and major stakeholders. The COVID-19 pandemic came unexpectedly and changed all plans, life standards and way of working, representing a shifting point for the entire world. History teaches us that pandemics are never totally defeated (with the sole exception of smallpox) and that finally societies find ways to coexist with them. This happened with plague and with cholera, and will it hopefully happen soon with COVID-19 too. While the entire world was occupied in flattening the pandemic curve, injecting time, energy and economic resources in the development of containment measures, conflicts around the world did not stop. On the contrary, in such places as Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya and in the Sahel, an escalation of violence occurred and we witnessed the resumption of frozen tensions in several areas: between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh, and between the Polisario Front and Morocco in Western Sahara in Autumn 2020. A resurgence of tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean was also observed. In many conflict situations, women's civil society organisations played a vital role in mobilising support for an urgent cessation of hostilities, inclusive ceasefire processes and comprehensive peace talks.<sup>57</sup>

As of November 2020, there were more than 15.7 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP) countries, and 518,000 deaths. This represents more than 31 per cent of global cases and more than 41 per cent of global deaths. The number of reported cases and deaths has thankfully been lower than originally feared in many of the countries with humanitarian needs, but it is the secondary impacts that have been – and will continue to be – devastating for many of the people living in these countries.<sup>58</sup> The impact of COVID-19 on women is of concern all around the globe, with a particular concern for women living in conflict-affected countries. The global health pandemic has exacerbated existing gender gaps and gender-based violence, which has further accentuated the need for a global coordinated response to prevent any reversals in the progress made to further the WPS agenda. SG Guterres expressed his concern that the pandemic might have an impact on conflict prevention. Potential impacts include further erosion of trust in public institutions, a rise in community tensions associated with response measures and, in some contexts, an amplification of existing drivers and root causes of conflict.<sup>59</sup>

The MWMN's activities have been heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The project is supposed to develop initiatives that facilitate networking, training and in-person exchange. The 2020 activity plan was based on interactions among members, to ensure peer-to-peer exchanges, the organisation of high-level events at the UN and in other international fora, and exchanges with members of the various regional networks. All these initiatives had to be cancelled and later transformed into virtual events. The virtual format had some positive aspects, for example a broader membership participation in the different events. While in some cases IT limitations (both in terms of limited IT skills and poor connections) required additional efforts by the participants, at the same time, the more regular appointments facilitated the creation of a strong bond among the members and the development of a MWMN brand identity.

Within this context, the Network is working on a partial rethinking of the strategies and models of mediation due to the lack of access to traditional avenues. Hybrid tools for mediation and peacebuilding provide both opportunities and challenges for the Network. In terms of opportunities, hybrid mediation techniques can be applied as an added value both in the context of mediation and peacebuilding at the high level, and in daily mediation activities by local peacebuilders.<sup>60</sup> Digital tools are very useful for specific tasks in terms of preparation of meetings and their follow-up, and for maintaining regular contacts and relations with relevant stakeholders. For instance, via these tools, the MWMN was able to meet more regularly using online platforms with its members living in conflict-affected areas, and it engaged with UNSMIL officials in Libya.

Nonetheless, security and protection concerns, Internet access and trust-building in virtual spheres represent key challenges that need to be adequately addressed. Put differently, digitalisation cannot substitute for traditional models of mediation and the personal sphere of interactions. Therefore, the MWMN considers that the two sides should not be understood in a mutually exclusive way, but rather as different methodologies for mediation. Virtual mediation cannot stand alone but can usefully complement face-to-face mediation.

In many ways, all around the world, COVID-19 has represented an opportunity to reset our lives and ways of working, and to embrace the deepest sense of who we are and what we are doing. It was immediately clear that the pandemic would have a greater impact on women, as they are already discriminated against and marginalised in many societies. The pandemic has exacerbated the differences, especially in conflict-torn countries, where the consequences of COVID-19 have hit women harder than in the other countries. The role of women mediators is now more important than ever, and they need full and unconditional support to challenge the gender stereotypes that locked many girls and women down, confining their dreams, ambitions and future life projects, long before COVID-19 locked them down.<sup>61</sup>

57 UN Women, DPPA, 'Covid-19 and conflict: Advancing women's meaningful participation in ceasefire and peace process', Policy brief 19, August 2020, p. 1: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/08/policy-brief-covid-19-and-conflict> (accessed 27/11/2020)

58 UN OCHA, 'Global Humanitarian Response Plan COVID-19, Progress Report', Fourth edition, November 2020: [https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/GHRP\\_ProgressReport\\_17NOV.pdf](https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/GHRP_ProgressReport_17NOV.pdf) (accessed 27/11/2020)

59 UN Women, DPPA, 'Covid-19 and conflict: Advancing women's meaningful participation in ceasefire and peace process', Policy brief 19, August 2020, p. 2: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/08/policy-brief-covid-19-and-conflict> (accessed 27/11/2020)

60 Ibid.

61 UNICEF, 'Teen. Girl. Activist?': <https://features.unicef.org/teen-girl-activist/> (accessed 27/11/2020)

### 3. #WPSat20: THE MWMN AS A STRATEGIC TOOL FOR ADVANCING THE WPS AGENDA

October 2020 marked the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of UNSCR 1325. Despite the robust legal and normative frameworks that have been put in place during the past two decades to advance the WPS agenda, the implementation of this resolution is far from reaching its full potential. The political commitments to increase women's meaningful participation and influence in peacebuilding, conflict prevention, crisis management and resolution, as well as in building recovery solutions too often remain lofty words and are not reflected in the current realities: globally, exclusion and underrepresentation of women in peace processes and post-conflict is still the norm.

In peacemaking processes, women are expected to negotiate favourable terms for the consolidation and enhancement of peace in conflict situations: 1) they constitute half of the population in post-conflict communities, and 2) they play diverse and multiple roles, from community leaders to diplomats, survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, humanitarian workers, peacekeepers and heads of household.<sup>62</sup> However, since the adoption of UNSCR 1325 in 2000, women continue to be excluded and marginalised from high-level peace talks. To date, all peace processes remain male dominated and continue to ignore women, thus discounting their demonstrated contributions and overlooking a potential strategy to respond more effectively to security threats around the world.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Maxwell Adjei, "Women's participation in peace processes: A review of literature", *Journal of Peace Education* 16, no. 2 (2019).

<sup>63</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, "Women's role in peace processes" (Data from UN Women and the Council on Foreign Relations, updated November 2020), <https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/> (accessed 26/11/2020)

For women's networks, civil society and grassroots organisations, the nature of contemporary complex conflicts requires extensive efforts and lobbying for inclusion at various stages.<sup>64</sup> Peace processes have been protracted and non-linear, requiring long-term investment and resources for women and civil society organisations.<sup>65</sup> The exclusion of women from pre-negotiations talks negatively impacts their inclusion and reduces their ability to meaningfully influence the outcomes throughout the peace process.<sup>66</sup> The MWMN, together with the other networks of women mediators, represents a possible solution to redress this negative trend and challenge the traditional system of mediation based on a patriarchal power-sharing structure that reproduces gender inequalities and discrimination. What steps can be taken in the near future to challenge the *status quo* and create a suitable framework for the networks to operate in high-level decision-making opportunities? Considering the low number of women present in high-level mediation and peacemaking positions, the model of co-mediation could be a specific, measurable, accountable and time effective (SMART) approach to gender representation in mediation.<sup>67</sup>

#### Recommendations

1) Policymakers, national governments, international and regional organisations

##### a) Increase overall support to the Regional

<sup>64</sup> Jana Krause and Louise Olsson, "Women's participation in peace processes", in Roger MacGinty and Anthony Wanis-St.John (eds), *Contemporary Peacemaking: Conflict, Violence and Peace Processes*, Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming 2020.

<sup>65</sup> Sanam Naraghi Anderlini, "Recognizing women peacebuilders: Critical actors in effective peacemaking", ICAN, 2020.

<sup>66</sup> Christine Bell, *Women, Peace Negotiations, and Peace Agreements: Opportunities and Challenges* (Oxford University Press, 2018); Paffenholz, "What Works in Participation".

<sup>67</sup> Catherine Turner and Christine Bell, "Draft discussion paper: The model of co-mediation", 2020 (unpublished)

**Networks of Women Mediators, whose voices must be amplified in decision-making opportunities.** The work of the networks deserves recognition at all levels, including in track I processes. Local women peacebuilders are playing an extensive role at the community level, risking their lives and being exposed to threats and verbal and physical attacks. Therefore, international organisations should focus on specific measures to promote women's meaningful participation in formal negotiations and/or track I (specific measures proposed in particular by ICAN include: support independent women delegations to participate in peace talks; and shape inclusive processes where every marginalised group has equal and fair representation).<sup>68</sup>

**b) Emphasise the importance of understanding how gender intersects with other root causes of conflict in the implementation of the WPS agenda, taking into consideration the socio-political and cultural specificities of the local context.** In this regard, it is critical to focus on cross-cutting issues and multi-layered challenges that interact with the WPS agenda pertaining to security, economic, justice and political spheres, but also militarism, militarisation, violent extremism and patriarchy. Peacebuilding involves a transformation toward more manageable, peaceful relationships and governance structures – the long-term process of addressing root causes and effects, reconciling differences, normalising relations, and building institutions that can manage conflict without resorting to violence.<sup>69</sup> According to Johan Galtung, by peace we mean the capacity to transform conflicts with empathy, without violence and creatively – a never-ending

process.<sup>70</sup> Understanding what went wrong and right in previous experiences of the same country is important for the success of future peace processes.

**c) Ensure sustainable long-term financial resources for the initiatives run by the network, but also allow short-term/rapid response targeted funding and support to ensure the sustainability of the work undertaken.** While financing for the implementation of the WPS agenda has increased, and notably so over the past five years, inadequate and unpredictable financing remains a major roadblock<sup>71</sup>. NAPs and other commitments are not supported by adequate budget; planning is not informed by a gender analysis and recommendations by women leaders and organizations are regularly left aside in final decisions. As SG Guterres highlighted in his 2020 annual report on WPS, “bigger and bolder steps are needed to translate into reality the feminist vision for peace, grounded in positive peace and human security, that women peacebuilders laid out when crafting the building blocks for the women and peace and security agenda 20 years ago”. More financial mechanisms are needed to ensure the sustainability of the Network and its related initiatives. The Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund launched in 2019<sup>72</sup>, galvanizes funding from across the globe to support women who prevent conflict, respond to crises, and accelerate peace in their communities. The mechanism aims at increasing women's participation in peace processes, including through funding for travel, visa, childcare, and logistical and technical support. In doing so, the Fund

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<sup>68</sup> Sanam Naraghi Anderlini, “Recognizing women peacebuilders: Critical actors in effective peacemaking”, ICAN, 2020, p. 25.

<sup>69</sup> United States Institute for Peace, Peace Terms: Glossary of Terms for Conflict Management and Peacebuilding, 2011: <https://www.usip.org/publications/usip-peace-terms-glossary> (accessed 10/11/2020)

<sup>70</sup> Galtung, “Three approaches to peace”, 1976.

<sup>71</sup> UN Security Council, Women and peace and security Report of the Secretary-General, S/2020/946, p.30: [file:///C:/Users/Irene/Dropbox/Network%20mediatrici%202020%20MWMN%20III/Letture/S\\_2020\\_946\\_E%20SG%20report%202020.pdf](file:///C:/Users/Irene/Dropbox/Network%20mediatrici%202020%20MWMN%20III/Letture/S_2020_946_E%20SG%20report%202020.pdf) (accessed 14/12/2020)

<sup>72</sup> More information about the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund are available here: <https://wphfund.org/>

is a useful mechanism that can enhance the participation of Networks members in national and international peacemaking efforts as well.

## 2) The Mediterranean Women Mediators Network

**d) Build strong, steady and formal partnerships with international, regional and local organisations to increase the sustainability of interventions.** The example of Libya can be a catalyst for other peace processes (in convening preparatory meetings, building systematic interactions from the outset of the dialogue and reflecting on collective solutions with other key stakeholders involved in the peace process).

**e) Share policy papers on the work of the MWMN with relevant stakeholders, civil society organisations, international organisations and national governments.**

**f) Engage in monitoring, follow-up and accountability on the peace negotiation agenda.** The complex nature of conflict resolutions calls for an in-depth and holistic analysis. When advocating and working with major stakeholders involved in the peace process, the focus should be on exerting pressure on the negotiating delegations; the negotiation agenda itself; and whether gender-sensitive provisions are discussed.

**g) Take into consideration an intersectional approach and how race, class, disability, religion and ethnicity interact with gendered forms of discrimination, the structural gendered inequalities, and the different local specificities of the country.** In this regard, engaging men and boys to various degrees through awareness raising in achieving the goals of the Network is critical to help mitigate violence both during conflict and post-conflict.

**h) Make connections with other UN mechanisms and organs.** For instance, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) at the

Human Rights Council is a unique process which involves a review of the human rights records of all UN member states. The UPR accepts reports from NGOs and civil society organisations to be reviewed every four/five years.

## CONCLUSION

*“Women stand ready to write a new chapter of the Mediterranean region’s history and they want to do it together. The way towards peace and stabilisation is a journey, and as women part of the MWMN we are walking together hand in hand, across the divides, the political and ethnical diversities, for building together sustainable peace for all.”*

*Irene Fellin, Head of the Secretariat and MWMN project Coordinator, at the launch of the MWMN–Kosovo Antenna, 18 November 2020*

When the concept note of the MWMN was developed, nobody could have imagined how far this project would travel in only three years. In this short time the Network has become more than an idea on paper. It has come alive, requiring every day more energy, time, economic investment and political support. Nourished by the energy and the power of all women involved in the initiative, the MWMN has a strong transformative potential that still needs to be fully exploited. MWMN members recognise in this initiative a potential tool for shifting from a patriarchal system and developing a new peace paradigm based on the unique experience and perspective of women.

The semi-informal context in which the Network operates, between governmental institutions and civil society organisations, provides women with a privileged space to act with more flexibility and outside the restrictions represented by official organisations. However, at the same time, a

lack of formal recognition risks producing bubbles for women mediators where they will end up operating separately from the official tracks. Political commitment and a continued economic support for the MWMN are necessary instruments for demonstrating that the initial investment was not just a political token, but rather a sincere act for ensuring a full and meaningful participation of women in peace and security in the Mediterranean region (and beyond its borders). This is particularly relevant in the time of the pandemic, since the global spread of the COVID-19 virus has further underlined the importance of the

WPS agenda, as women took to the frontlines to fulfil the role of first responders and were the first to call for ceasefires in many conflicts. Women's participation is central for developing inclusive and sustainable solutions, and many countries are again failing in recognising the leadership of women in these difficult times. The MWMN must take advantage of these exceptional circumstances and use COVID-19 as an opportunity to highlight once more the instrumental roles played by women in preventing violence, in managing crisis and in rebuilding societies in post-conflict settings.

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United Nations Entity for Gender Equality  
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