Women's Participation in the Middle East Peace Processes

Bezen BALAMİR COŞKUN*

Necmettin Erbakan Üniversitesi, Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi, Siyaset Bilimi ve Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü, Konya, Türkiye

Article Info	ABSTRACT
	The exclusion of women from the negotiation of peace agreements and implementing bodies is one of the key reasons why so many peace agreements often fail and parties return to conflict. UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security Agenda and nine subsequent Resolutions provided a global framework for states to encourage women's participation at all decision-making levels, including management and resolution of conflict, peace negotiations, and peace operations. As a region overwhelmed with protracted conflicts, conflict resolution and peace are rare occurrences in the Middle East. This study will discuss women's potential role in peace processes in the Middle East and the contribution of the UN's Women, Peace & Security (WPS) Agenda. In this context, the prospects and problems regarding women's participation in peace processes are discussed based on the review of the Middle East peace processes with the WPS agenda (Israel-Palestine & Yemen). To do this, the content of Palestine and Yemen's National Action Plans (NAPs), the process used to develop the NAPs, and the commitments made to implement the WPS agenda are examined. Particular attention is given to the "participation" pillar of the WPS agenda. The findings from the review of the NAPs and two peace processes give insights to promote peace in the region.

Orta Doğu Barış Yapımı Süreçlerine Kadınların Katılımı

Makale Bilgisi	ÖZET
	Kadınların barış anlaşmalarının müzakerelerinden ve uygulayıcı organlardan dışlanması, birçok barış anlaşmasının sıklıkla başarısız olmasının ve tarafların çatışmaya geri dönmesinin temel nedenlerinden biridir. BM Güvenlik Konseyi'nin 1325 sayılı Kadın, Barış ve Güvenlik Gündemi ve bunu izleyen dokuz Karar, devletlere çatışma yönetimi ve çözümü, barış müzakereleri ve barış operasyonları dahil olmak üzere tüm karar alma düzeylerinde kadınların katılımını teşvik etmeleri için küresel bir çerçeve sağlamıştır. Uzun süren çatışmalar ve savaşlarla boğuşan bir bölge olarak, Orta Doğu'da çatışma çözümü ve barış nadir görülen olaylardır. Bu çalışma, Orta Doğu'da sürdürülebilir barışta kadınların potansiyel rolünü ve BM'nin Kadın, Barış ve Güvenlik (KBG) Gündemi'nin katkısını tartışacaktır. Bu bağlamda, Orta Doğu barış süreçlerinin (İsrail-Filistin ve Yemen) incelenmesine dayanarak kadınların barış süreçlerine katılımıyla ilgili beklentiler ve sorunlar tartışılacaktır. Bunu yapmak için, Filistin ve Yemen'in Ulusal Eylem Planlarının (UEP) içeriği, UEP'leri geliştirmek için kullanılan süreç ve KBG gündemini uygulamak için yapılan taahhütler incelenmektedir. KBG gündeminin "katılım" ayağına özellikle dikkat edilmektedir. UEP'lerin ve iki barış sürecinin incelenmesinden elde edilen bulgular, bölgede sürdürülebilir barışı teşvik etmeye dair fikir vermektedir.

INTRODUCTION

The Middle East has been a region where armed conflicts and wars have become the rule rather than the exception. In the region, nearly all conflicts are interconnected, involving regional and international powers, as well as non-state actors. According to Stockholm Peace Research Institute's 2022 Yearbook, in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), there were nine states with active armed conflicts (the number remained the same in 2023): Egypt, Iraq, Israel-Palestine, Lebanon, Libya, Syria, Türkiye, and Yemen (Pfeifer Cruz & van der Lijn, 2024; Sayın & Aksoy, 2023; Gonzalez Fernandez, 2022).

The civil war in Yemen, which began in 2014, paving the way for one of the world's worst humanitarian crises with annual fatalities greater than 10.000 (Davis, 2023). SIPRI Yearbook 2022 on Armaments, Disarmaments, International Security classified the conflicts in Yemen, Iraq, and Syria as high-intensity, other conflicts as low-intensity. The situation in Syria was volatile after the regime change in 2024. Iraq, on the other hand, has continued to be a fragile state, with a growing rift between the government and some militia groups. Another recent high-intensity armed conflict in the region with the potential for high-intensity armed conflict is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the region, which is the war in Gaza. After the Palestinian militant group Hamas launched an unprecedented assault on Israel on 7 October 2024, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has intensified dramatically. Regarding the low-intensity conflicts in the region, Egypt's low-level Sinai insurgency has continued. Despite the internationally backed ceasefire agreed upon in October 2020, tensions and uncertainty remain in Libya's peacebuilding roadmap. Lastly, the protracted conflict between the Turkish Armed Forces and Kurdish rebels in the southeast of Türkiye is also considered a low-intensity conflict in the region (Davis, 2023; Sayın & Aksoy, 2023).

By 2024, there were 14 multilateral peace operations (Pfeifer Cruz & van der Lijn, 2024) and four ongoing peace processes: Israel-Palestine, Libya, Syria, and Yemen. As indicated by Ahram (2024), in the Middle East, the peace system operates at different levels that deal with multiple kinds of violent conflict. The formal or informal nature of the institutional channels (bilateral, multilateral, regional, or international) produces different forms of peace (i.e. positive or negative peace). Thus, peace in the region is uneven and unstable (Ahram, 2024). Regarding their involvement in peace processes, regional and sub/extra-regional organizations in the Middle East, such as the European Union (EU), League of Arab States (LAS), Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), cause further divisions and competition. Due to the structural shortcomings of these regional organizations and interstate competition to achieve international recognition, bilateralism continues to be the region's primary mode of peacemaking/peacebuilding (Freer, 2022; Kaya & Sarıkamış-Kaya, 2024). Beyond these structural and regional factors fettering the resolution of conflicts, women's exclusion appears to be a significant factor that may hinder the peace process. In the region, women have rarely been included in peace processes, mainly because of the cultural attitudes toward women and their minor representation in decision-making.

This article focuses on women's meaningful participation in peace processes, as proposed by the global Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. In addition to structural and regional factors that block conflict resolution, the systematic exclusion of women remains a critical barrier to peace in the Middle East. In the region, women are rarely included in formal peace processes due to prevailing cultural attitudes and their limited representation in decision-making institutions (Krause et al., 2018). This article conceptualizes peace processes from Galtung's positive peace perspective, encompassing negotiation, peacemaking, and peacebuilding phases (Galtung, 1969). Recognizing the adverse effects of women's exclusion, international and local actors have increasingly advocated for women's inclusion in peace processes across the Middle East (Krause et al., 2018).

Aware of the detrimental effects of the lack of women in peace processes at the local and international levels, female inclusion in the Middle Eastern peace processes has become an agenda item for peace advocates. While progress has been made to bring women to the peace negotiation tables, significant development is still needed to ensure their full and equal participation in all levels of peace processes. Thus, discussing prospects and problems regarding women's participation in peace processes in the region is crucial for achieving peace. By investigating how women's participation in Middle East peace processes is practiced across WPS policy documents and real-world negotiations, this study analyzes the extent to which WPS NAPs in the Middle East promote inclusive peace processes and ensure women's participation in line with international standards. The study helps us to answer the following questions: "What is the extent of women's meaningful participation in formal and informal peace processes in the region?" and "How do the content and implementation of WPS NAPs in the region promote women's participation in the Middle East peace processes?"

The study is designed as a qualitative interpretive case study research to gain a deeper understanding of the role of women's participation in peace processes in the Middle East. The research is centered on the UN's WPS agenda in Yemen and Palestine, using case study data to draw policy implications for the prospects and problems for peace in the Middle East region. The primary data sources for the analysis are the Yemeni NAP (2020-2022) and Palestinian NAPs (2017-2019 & 2020-2024). The contents of the WPS NAPs are evaluated to understand the processes to develop the NAPs, and the commitments that have made to implement the WPS agenda. In the review of the NAPs, three questions from Hamilton, Naam, and Shepherd's analysis (2020) are used: (1) Which pillar(s) of the NAPs are dominant? (2) Who is leading the process? (3) To what extent does civil society participate in NAPs production and implementation? To reveal the inconsistencies between the content and implementation of NAPs, secondary data such as publicly available sources, including statements, reports, articles, government websites, and shadow reports, are used.

UN's WOMEN PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA (WPS)

The issue of women's absence in peace processes was brought to international attention with the UNSCR 1325, which underlines that women's participation is crucial in peace processes. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) also underlined the essential roles that women may play in peace processes. The WPS agenda and the CEDAW brought international attention to the problem of women's absence in peace processes. The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda was introduced in the UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325. UNSCR 1325 is considered a milestone for the international system by putting women at the center of peace and security for the first time. UNSCR 1325 was the international level recognition of the impact of conflicts on women and girls and the acknowledgment of women's essential role in preventing and resolving conflicts. It was the starting point of a series of resolutions. In total, ten resolutions (S/RES/1325, S/RES/1820, S/RES/1888, S/RES/1889, S/RES/1960, S/RES/2106, SE/RES/2122, S/RES/2242, S/RES/2467 and S/RES/2493) were adopted to address concerns about the protection of women and girls in conflict and their involvement in peace and security processes. All these resolutions provided a global framework for states and regional organizations to encourage the participation of women in all phases of conflict resolution and peace.

The WPS Agenda's framework is based on four pillars: participation, protection, prevention, relief, and recovery. In the current global context, with increasing threats of violent extremism, climate change, prolonged violent conflicts, human trafficking, and humanitarian crises, implementing the WPS agenda is becoming more critical. Regarding the states' commitments to implement the WPS agenda, in 2005, the UNSC called upon states to develop National Action Plans (NAPs).

To monitor national-level progress in implementing the NAPs, the Global Indicators were introduced in the UNSCR 1889 (2009). The Global Indicators, twenty-six indicators organized into 4 Pillars of the WPS, aim to track and monitor the implementation of the WPS agenda (Peace Women, n.d.). Countries' performances on the implementation of the WPS are ranked in the WPS Index, which ranks countries on women's status based on the indicators of women's inclusion, justice, and security. The WPS Index helps us track trends, guide policymaking, and hold governments accountable for their promises to advance women's rights and opportunities, particularly in conflict situations and peace processes.

The 2023/24 WPS Index indicates that most of the bottom ten countries are Fragile States. Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen have been among the worst-performing countries since the first edition of the WPS Index, dated 2018. The bottom 20 countries have also experienced conflicts or wars in 2021 and 2022. In the Fragile States, 60% of women live close to conflict (the global average is 19%) (Rustad et al., 2023). The WPS Index results prove that societies where women feel secure and included are more peaceful, democratic, and prosperous. According to the 2023/2024 WPS Index, the outcomes of global indices such as the Human Development Index, Global Adaptation Index, and Fragile States Index are strongly correlated with women's status, which underlines the importance of investing in women for sustainable peace (GIWPS, 2023).

WHERE ARE WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS?

> "There is a lack of trust and confidence in the capabilities of women in the political realm…In the rare case where women are included in peace processes, they are often taken in to merely tick the box of women participation, and are still not given an equal opportunity in participation." —Maryam Dajani, program and communication officer at Libyan Women's Platform for Peace.

As a result of the continuous history of conflict, peace processes have become part of the political routine of the Middle East since the Camp David Accords, which were signed in 1978 between Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin. Besides the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, there are ongoing peace processes in Syria, Yemen, and Libya. Negotiating hostility through peace processes has become a common practice in the region. Even though the improvement is minimal in resolving the conflicts, the number and frequency of peace processes have been increasing (Swindle, 2021).

While the frequency of peace processes has increased, the participation of women in these processes still needs to grow. Women have been underrepresented in the Middle East peace process. For example, in Syria, the UN-led talks began in 2012. However, women were included in the process in 2016 by establishing a fifteen-member Syrian Women's Advisory Board by Staffan de Mistura, the UN special envoy for Syria. Syrian Women's Advisory Board participated as a third-party observer in the Geneva peace talks, bringing Syrian women's experience and expertise to the negotiation table (CFR, 2019d). Women comprised 15 percent of the opposition and government delegations at the December 2017 talks in Geneva, despite the Syrian Women's Political Movement setting a goal for a 30% quota for women's participation in the conflict-resolution process. This goal was primarily reached in 2019 when the UN established the Syrian Constitutional Committee. Furthermore, the constitutional committee comprises thirteen women out of forty-five members (CFR, 2019d).

In Libya, women were included in official peace talks in 2020. Seventeen of the seventy-five negotiators (23%) in the UN-facilitated Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) were women. It was a significant improvement in women's representation in the official peace processes in the region. In addition to the LPDF, the UN facilitated a digital dialogue for women with the participation of more

than one thousand Libyans. In February 2023, Abdoulaye Bathily, the secretary-general's special representative for Libya, announced his plans for a High-Level Steering Panel comprised of a diverse group of Libyan stakeholders, including women and youth (CFR, 2019c). Libyan women involved in the Dialogue had extensive experience in civil society. Their civil society experience helped them to work effectively with other negotiators in the official Libyan peace process. They helped negotiators find common agreement areas (CFR, 2019c).

One of the reasons behind the absence of women in peace processes is the prevalence of unequal views on gender. The Middle East remains one of the most unequal regions for women in the world. As shown in the Gender Inequality Index (GII), which ranks countries on gendered levels of achievement for reproductive health, empowerment, and labor markets, Arab States are among the regional clusters that produced the highest gender inequality globally. In the Middle East, it is difficult for women to participate in peace processes as leading actors (Swindle, 2021). Furthermore, restrictive attitudes often cause low expectations and disrespect for women in the political and economic spheres. Even though each country in the region has different political systems, most women are left out of political processes. Negative views about women's ability to participate in governmental processes have held women back from being elected. As women's voices are not being represented, policies addressing issues that affect women are rarely incorporated into national and regional politics. Thus, women have been rarely invited to critical political processes such as peace negotiations.

Women's absence is missing from the negotiating tables of peace talks and the content of the peace agreements. Women's needs must be addressed in post-conflict peace-building situations for the relief and recovery of women victims of violence and rape during conflicts. Although women have been deeply affected by conflicts and wars, they are rarely mentioned in the peace talks. Women's absence at the negotiation tables causes the lack of relevant provisions in the peace accords (Swindle, 2021). When there are women negotiators at the peace negotiations, they advocate for the victims of sexual and physical violence during the war. This may lead to the inclusion of provisions protecting disadvantaged and minority women in the peace agreements (Krause et al., 2018). In the cases of peace processes in the Middle East, even the presence of women negotiators did not help to include provisions referring to women, girls, and violence against women. Only in the case of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum, there are references to women, girls, and gender (CFR, 2019c)

WPS Agenda, National Action Plans (NAPs) & Women's Participation in Middle East Peace Processes

According to the findings of the 2023/24 WPS Index, the Middle East has the broadest range in performance, with the United Arab Emirates ranking 22nd while Yemen is 176th in the Index. Three of the ten worst-performing states are from the Middle East: Yemen (176th), Iraq (168th), and Syria (171st). Furthermore, the Middle East has the highest levels of legal discrimination against women. The regional states also perform the lowest on women's access to justice. These measures indicate the existence of substantial barriers to women's participation in peace processes (GIWPS, 2023). Despite the low scores of the Arab states in the WPS Index, in the region, quite several states have NAPs for the national-level implementation of the WPS agenda -Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, Yemen, and the UAE. Each NAP shows how particular states prioritize different aspects of the WPS agenda and provides information on how the WPS activities are governed, funded, and monitored (Bidolph, Shepherd, 2024). Among the ongoing peace processes in the region, only Palestine and Yemen have adopted NAPs to implement the WPS Agenda.

The following sections examine Palestine and Yemen's NAPs, the process used to develop the NAPs, and the commitments made to implement the WPS agenda. In the review of the Palestinian and Yemeni NAPs, three questions from Hamilton, Naam, and Shepherd's (2020) analysis of NAPs are used:

(1) Which pillar(s) of the NAPs are dominant? (2) Who is leading the process? (3) To what extent does civil society participate in NAPs production and implementation?

Palestinian National Action Plans (2015, 2017, 2020)

The adoption of the UNSCR 1325 coincided with the beginning of the Second Intifada in Palestine. From the very beginning, Palestinian female activists have consistently indicated the shortcoming of UNSCR 1325 in failing to refer to occupation as one of the cases of armed conflict. Thus, Palestinian women have continued their efforts to become part of the peace process regardless of Resolution 1325. As a result of the efforts of Palestinian women, the Palestinian Authority (PA) guaranteed the representation of women in the presidential, legislative, and local council elections. Furthermore, Presidential Decree No. 24 (2005) reaffirmed the PA's support for women's participation in enhancing and achieving peace and security (MIFTAH, 2017). Finally, in 2015, PA formulated its first WPS National Strategic Framework 2015 to guide the implementation of UNSCR 1325. Two years after the National Strategic Framework, the first NAP was formulated for 2017-2019, and the latest one was published in 2020 when the PA renewed their "commitment … to advance the Women, Peace and Security agenda in Palestine" (MoWA, 2020).

The central authority that leads to the formulation and implementation of Palestinian NAPs is the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA). A Higher National Committee (HNC) was established in 2012 to monitor the progress in implementing the WPS. Besides the official members from different governmental agencies, many representatives of civil society organizations from the West Bank and Gaza were included, such as the General Union of Palestinian Women, Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC), Al Haq, The Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy (MIFTAH) and Palestinian Working Women's Association (MoWA 2020). A Women's Coalition on Resolution 1325 was established, and they initiated a community action under the leadership of the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW). The coalition was very active on the community level to formulate a strategic plan and to implement it on the ground (MIFTAH, 2017).

The WPS National Strategic Framework pillars were identified as Prevention and Protection, Accountability, and Participation with the objective of "Providing protection for Palestinian women and empowering them, nationally and internationally, to effectively participate in all levels of decision making" (MoWA, 2015, p. 27). The National Strategy's main focus was "Protection". In this context, PA declared its commitment to design "common action strategies … to provide protection and improve the mechanisms of accountability, such as documenting and exposing the Israeli violations, and prosecuting the responsible party on the international level" (MoWA, 2015, p. 11). However, the report published by the MIFTAH indicates that many challenges are linked to the effects of the occupation on Palestinian women, and the National Strategy did not improve the conditions of Palestinian women (MIFTAH, 2017).

Despite the initial focus on protection in the National Strategic Framework (2015), the focus of NAPs has gradually moved to the "Participation" pillar. The content analysis of the Palestinian NAPs shows that the dominant focus of both Palestinian NAPs is "Participation" (Bidolph, Shepherd, 2024), particularly "participation in formal and informal peace processes" (MoWA, 2017, 2020)

One of the strategic objectives of the Second National Action Plan for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 (2017-2019) was to "enhance the participation of Palestinian women in local and international decision-making processes" (MoWA, 2017, p. 44). To achieve this objective, the following policies were adopted: (1) Develop and increase the representation of Palestinian women at the leadership level in governmental and non-governmental institutions and support their participation in global institutions, and (2) Enhancement of the role of Palestinian women in maintaining civil peace

and supporting national unity (MoWA, 2017, p. 48, 52).

Similarly, in the Participation pillar of the 2nd NAP (2020-2024), the PA reconfirmed its commitment to women's participation in peace processes by identifying five outcomes (MoWA, 2020, p. 23): (1) Palestinian women participate in the peace process and decision-making bodies by (a) strengthening national capacity to develop frameworks for women's leadership and participation, (b) encouraging women leaders who are capable of participating in both Track 1 and Track 2 peace negotiations. (2) The security sector institutions mainstream gender and promote women's meaningful leadership and participation at all levels by (a) strengthening security sector institutions 'capacity to make them gender-sensitive and promote the leadership and participation of women and (b) strengthening the security sector's capacity on gender equality. (3) Community awareness about the importance of women's participation in the decision-making processes increases. (4) Political parties ' support for Palestinian women's political participation increases. (5) Palestinian women's capacity to represent Palestine in the United Nations and international missions is strengthened.

The Republic of Yemen National Plan to Implement UNSCR 1325 (2020 – 2022)

Yemen has a long history of civil wars. The most recent civil war was begun in 2014 when Houthi insurgents gained control of Yemen's capital. Since then, there has been a war between Houthi rebels and President Hadi, which was fueled by international actors and the influx of arms from abroad. It has been estimated that over 100,000 people have died, and over 4 million displaced since the beginning of the war. The current situation in Yemen is described as the "world's worst humanitarian crisis." According to the UNFPA, by August 2024, more than half of the country's population require some form of humanitarian assistance, and the country experiences the worst hunger crises in the world. In 2024, an estimated 2.7 million pregnant and breastfeeding women needed treatment for acute malnutrition (UNFPA, 2024).

Furthermore, Yemeni women and girls do not have access to reproductive health and protection services. The protracted conflict caused a dramatic increase in violence against women and girls, displaced women and girls, female-headed households, and those with disabilities are particularly at risk. Poverty and hunger further reinforce their vulnerability (UNFPA, 2024).

Yemen recognizes the effect of wars on women and children, who have been disproportionately affected by displacement and gender-based violence. Yemen has all sorts of legal and constitutional frameworks to eliminate discrimination against women and guarantee equality (See The Yemeni Unity Constitution Articles 24, 31, and 41). Article 42 of the Constitution recognized that "Every citizen has a right to contribute in political, economic and social life." Based on the constitutional guarantees, Yemen affirmed its commitment and respect to the UNSCR 1325 and the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). In this context, the Yemeni government formulated an action plan to respond to the UNSCR 1325.

Yemen adopted its first National Action Plan (NAP) in 2019 for the period 2020-2022 "to protect women during conflict and post-conflict, to enhance their participation in peacekeeping operations, and in economic and social development" (Republic of Yemen Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, 2020, 2). However, there is no indication of an interest/political will to renew the NAP.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor was responsible for preparing the NAP in partnership with all relevant government agencies and NGOs. The NAP was developed by several government ministries, with the involvement of civil society and international organizations, including the Yemeni Women's Union, the International Organization for Migration, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Care, Organization Leaders for Development, Be Human Foundation, Wogood for Human Security, Rasil Foundation for

Development & Media To Be Foundation for Rights and Freedom, Hand by Band Foundation. The consultative process started with an initial three-day workshop in August 2018 to formulate the goals and framework of the NAP. After the workshop, a technical team consisting of representatives of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, Yemeni Women Union, and Women National Committee finalized the action plan based on the results of the analysis that was discussed in the workshop and the priorities agreed upon (Republic of Yemen Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, 2020).

The NAP's four objectives reflect the pillars of UNSCR 1325, but the dominant focus of Yemen's NAP is on "Participation" (Biddolph & Shepherd, 2024), which indicated as the first strategic goal of the NAPs with the following outputs (the Republic of Yemen Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, 2020, 18-19): (1) Increasing women's presence in decision-making positions, (2) Ensuring women are represented in peace negotiations, (3) Ensuring women are represented in relevant committees, (4) Training women in the fields of negotiation transitional justice, (5) Increasing the representation of women in conflict resolution mechanisms and at the security forces.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

Despite the particular emphasis on the participation pillar in both Yemeni and Palestinian WPS NAPs, in practice, women's involvement in peace processes was minimal. To facilitate women's participation in peace processes International Peace Institute (IPI) proposes seven modes to be adapted to different settings: (1) Direct participation at the negotiation table, (2) Observer status, (3) Consultations, (4) Inclusive commissions, (5) Problem-solving workshops, (6) Public decision making, and (7) Mass action (O'Reilly et al., 2015, p. 1). As shown in Table 1, except for the Israel in Israeli-Palestinian peace processes, women's participation in both peace processes was limited to observer status and consultancy.

In the case of Palestine, few women have participated in leading roles in the decades of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. As a notable case, Tzipi Livni served as Israel's chief negotiator in multiple rounds between 2007 and 2014, while Hanan Ashrawi was one of the negotiators of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in the 1990s. From time to time, both the Israeli government and the PA have included women ministers, but women often remain underrepresented. As part of the WPS efforts, the PA established a Ministry of Women's Affairs in 2003 (CFR, 2019b). Despite the efforts, only a small number of women participated in the official meetings held in Cairo in 2011. Not a single woman participated in the talks that led to the signing of the reconciliation agreements between Fatah and Hamas in October 2017. Furthermore, there were no female representatives in the technical committees that were established to work on the details of the reconciliation arrangements that directly impact their lives (van Lelyveld & Al Kafarna, 2018).

According to CFR data, during peace talks between Israel and the PA in 2013, 25% of the negotiators were women. Although Israeli and Palestinian women have been absent from formal negotiations, they played critical roles as advising negotiators. They also work to build grassroots support for the peace process and advocate for the inclusion of more women in negotiation teams (CFR, 2019b). As underlined in MIFTAH's report, Palestinian women's continuous struggle to recognize women's rights at the internal Palestinian level requires the promotion of women's participation in negotiations and their contribution to ending the internal division.

Regarding women's political participation, the Yemeni Constitution outlines a 30% quota for female participation in government to achieve the target recommended by the ECOSOC Resolution No. 15 (1990). The 2013–2014 National Dialogue Conference (NDC) in Yemen guaranteed almost 30% women's representation. At the NDC, women occupied 152 out of the 565 seats (Chugtai & Paul, 2015).

In 2022, Yemen's former president, Mansour Hadi, transferred his powers to an all-male presidential council (CFR, 2019e).

Regarding women's participation in peace processes, women were at the forefront of the 2011 uprisings, and they played vital roles throughout the war in delivering humanitarian response and contributing to the mediation and peace-building efforts. In the negotiations that paved the way for the 2018 Stockholm agreement, women made up 4% of delegates, compared to 12% in the 2016 talks in Kuwait. The Houthi delegations did not include women at all. Despite their critical roles in the mediation and peace-building in 2016 and 2018, women's official participation in the peace process has been minimal in Yemen. Women did not participate in negotiations for the 2019 Riyadh agreement (CFR, 2019e).

In Houthi-controlled areas, women are not allowed to be involved in peace-building. In these areas of Yemen, any public engagement of women as peacebuilders is stigmatized. Thus, local feminist organizations and women peacebuilders primarily need protection to participate in peace processes (al-Gawfi et al., 2020). Despite their inability to officially participate in peace-building efforts, in Yemen, women serve as grassroots-level (Track III) peacebuilders and mediators thanks to the protective effect of tribal law. Yemeni women have played roles in mediating conflicts within families and between tribes and local communities. Women mediators convey messages between conflicting parties, and they have engaged in cross-line negotiations at the local level for ceasefires and agreements on resource management (Tabbara & Rubin, 2018). Yemeni women have also played roles in mediating conflicts between the government and tribes. As the International Crisis Group (2021) documented, women negotiated the release of political detainees and mediated the reopening of blocked roads. Furthermore, the wives of local administrators (aqils) and religious leaders have helped their husbands by conducting initial investigations for cases involving women.

Table 1

Women's Participation in the Middle East Peace Processes[1]

Models for increasing women's participation in peace processes	Palestine	Israel		Yemen (Government)	Yemen (Houtis)
Direct participation at the negotiation table	No	Yes		No	No
Observer status	Yes	Yes		Yes	No
Consultations	Yes	Yes		Yes	No
Inclusive commissions	No	Yes		No	No
Problem-solving workshops	Not known	Not known		Yes	No
Public decision making	Limited	Yes		No	No
Mass action	Yes	Yes		No	No

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[1] The data for Table 1 was compiled based on the following reports: van Lelyveld and Al Kafarna's report (2018) entitled "Women's participation in the reconciliation process: perspectives from Gaza", CFR's "Women's Participation in Peace Processes" reports (2019b, 2019e) for Palestine and Yemen, and l-Gawfi et. al's report (20209 entitled "The Role of Women in Peacebuilding in Yemen"

CONCLUSION: IMPLEMENTATION OF WPS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

2025 marks the 25th anniversary of the UNSCR1325. In the Middle East, with the efforts of UN agencies, regional states adopted the resolutions. In the region, eight countries and the Arab League adopted their NAPs. This interpretive case study of the peace process in the Yemeni Civil War and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was an attempt to provide insights into the role of women's participation in the Middle East peace processes. Women's participation was examined in the context of the UNSCR 1325 WPS agenda. Table 1 presents the level of women's involvement in peace processes, compiled from publicly available NAPs, reports, government websites, and shadow reports. The discussions based on the women's participation in the Middle East Peace Processes highlighted the challenges and complexities of women's participation in peace processes in protracted conflicts.

Despite the adoption of the NAPs, the WPS agenda has faced severe criticisms regarding its legitimacy in the region. Particularly in Palestine, the WPS agenda was criticized as omitting the realities of occupation for Palestinian women. The protracted conflicts and wars in Palestine and Yemen have indicated the disconnect between the WPS agenda and the region's structural and cultural realities that bar women from participating peace processes. The challenges and problems in implementing the WPS in the region highlight the need to reevaluate the WPS agenda to respond to the regional states' specific conditions and the realities of women in the region. "To establish an effective regional mechanism to influence and inform WPS policy spaces," the WPS Working for Arab States was established in 2024. However, the group is comprised of representatives from Western Europe and Scandinavia. It is suggested that high-level peace initiatives must be firmly grounded in regional conditions. In some cases, the essence of the conflicts requires different approaches than a mere focus on increasing the number of women mediators and negotiators.

Women's participation in peace processes requires rights-based approaches since it is women's right to be represented in decision-making processes that would affect their lives. The UN has acknowledged the significance of increasing women's participation in resolving conflicts and building peace. In addition to Resolution 1325 (WPS), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), - along with Targets 5.1 (End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere), 5.5 (Enhance the use of enabling technology to promote the empowerment of women), and 16.7 (Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels) – all encourage governments to take actions to increase women's participation in peace processes. Nevertheless, revisiting peace processes is needed to include the multiplicity of actors more effectively to build peace.

However, in the implementation of Resolution 1325, the Resolution should ensure that it is relevant to regional/local realities. Furthermore, recognizing local day-to-day issues often undermined by the Track I negotiators is essential to sustainable peace. International actors can support women's involvement in resolving these issues.

Examining the WPS agenda and its implementation in the region highlighted that women's direct participation in the negotiation table (Track I & Track II) and high-level decision-making is minimal, if possible. Instead, as in the case of Yemen, women can be active in grassroots mediation and conflict resolution (Track III) to address local conflicts. Even under restricted cultural and religious contexts, women can engage in peace processes at the community level. In this context, women from all sections of society, including conservative, rural, and marginalized communities, in mediation efforts should be prioritized. Then, Track III activities of local women need to be connected with Track II or Track I bodies. In the context of the Middle East, the WPS efforts focus on grassroots mediation and conflict resolution outputs to produce more sustainable results in resolving intra-communal conflicts. In the

medium term, the efforts could focus on merging local women's mediation work into official negotiations.

Regarding the second and third modes of women's participation in peace processes, women who have already engaged in mediation activities by gathering information before negotiations may serve as part of the consultation teams or observers during the official negotiation talks. Thus, they may play complementary roles as observers and civil consultants and become instrumental in confidence-building measures to facilitate trust between conflicting parties.

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