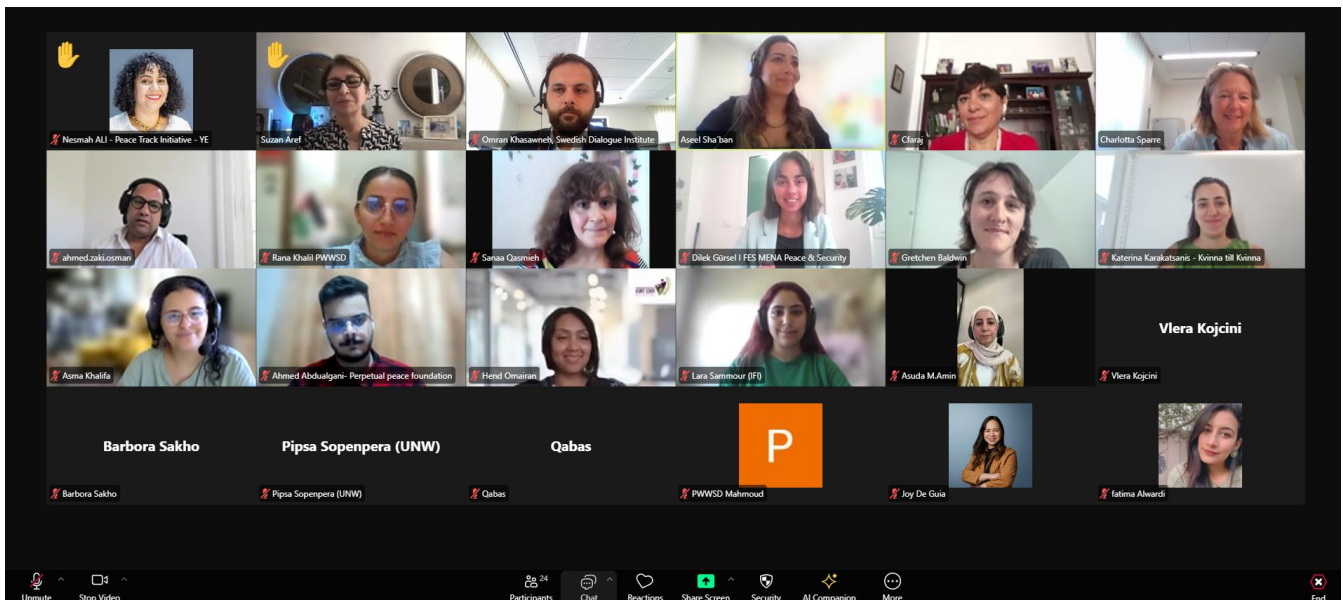


# Report from a meeting on WPS

## Discussion on the role of media in addressing issues related to women, peace and security

Online meeting, 27 June 2024



**Swedish Dialogue Institute**  
for the Middle East and North Africa

## Report

*On June 26<sup>th</sup>, the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa hosted an online meeting on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS). The discussions focused on the role of media in addressing issues related to women, peace, and security.*

*Key issues raised included the crucial role of media outlets in raising awareness about issues related to women, peace, and security, the importance of portraying women as agents of change (not only as victims), and the need to use clear and relevant language. The necessity for smart messaging to inspire other actors to adopt WPS principles was underlined. Participants also reminded of the need to support protection of peace and women's organizations and activists on social media. Increasing the visibility in the media, of the important role women play in society and in conflict settings, can help inspire younger generations and enhance their representation. Furthermore, the importance of training for hostile media environments was also highlighted, with a call for donor to prioritize funding for media training.*

### Presentations on media's role in raising awareness on WPS

The discussion commenced with two brief presentations by Caroline Farraj, Vice President and Editor-in-Chief at CNN Arabic, and Dilek Gürsel, Senior Programme Manager at Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

**Caroline Farraj**, who has a long media experience from the region including in covering several of its conflicts, stressed the need to bring trustworthy information to people in a region plagued by wars. She highlighted the increasingly significant role of citizen media<sup>1</sup>, and social media, in situations when journalists are not able to be in conflict zones, such as in Gaza. In this it is important of also equipping women with the tools to tell their own stories, becoming the storytellers of their own truth. As example Farraj mentioned the *Her Story* (Hikayatoha) launched by CNN Arabic a couple of years ago, as a multi-platform editorial and training initiative focused on the many Arab women who are creating an impact in their local communities.

She noted that when social and citizen media has become main sources of information during conflicts, it is necessity for media outlets to do proper fact-checking to prevent the spread of inaccurate information, particularly content generated by AI. In addition, she mentioned that not only women's voices needed features in media (including as TV anchors) but also making sure to have a good representation of diversity in every aspect.

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<sup>1</sup> Citizen media refers to media content created and shared by ordinary individuals, rather than professional journalists or media organizations.

Dilek Gürsel presented a guidebook on "[Mainstreaming the WPS Agenda in the MENA Region through Media](#)" developed by the Issam Fares Institute in Beirut, in cooperation and supported by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. This guidebook provides guidelines to enhance women's representation in conflict news. Created through workshops, these guidelines include a training program for journalists on integrating the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda into news practices. Gürsel also emphasized the need to avoid victimizing women, to be self-reflexive, and to refrain from imposing stereotypical portrayals. Such portrayals, she said, often stem from patriarchal or Orientalist discourses that depict women as inferior or needing protection, which can justify military interventions, perpetuate discriminatory practices, and increase violence against women, ultimately failing to improve the lives of vulnerable populations.

## Discussion

The presentations were followed by a discussion amongst participants, during which the following main points were raised:

### *Awareness and Representation*

Participants stated that media outlets can play a crucial role in raising awareness on issues related to women, peace, and security. It was stressed that in this work it is important to present women as agents of change, not only as victims. The significance of adapting language was also noted, and participants stressed the importance of clear (not over bureaucratic) language, especially when communicating with local communities.

### *Visibility and Inspiration*

Increasing the visibility of women and the role they play in society, plays a crucial role in breaking stereotypes, normalizing diversity, as well as in presenting role models, who collectively can inspire others, including the younger generation. Such visibility encourages aspiration, boosts confidence, and broadens career choices for young women and can also change perspectives of how young men look at women. The human aspect of storytelling enhances relatability, fosters empathy, and builds an emotional connection, making these representations more impactful and inspiring. Thus, quality and depth in media representation of women are essential for fostering a more inclusive and dynamic society.

### *Messaging*

Participants highlighted that spreading "WPS messages" smartly can persuade other actors to adopt the principles of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda even for those who may not work directly with the agenda.

### Protection

The increasing need of protection of actors within the women's movements actors, on social media, was raised by several participants. They underscored the seriousness of the situation and pointed to many women being targeted, facing bullying, and threats for their activism, often without any accountability for the perpetrators.

The misinformation about women in social media also risks undermining the trust for these women among community members. This is yet another reason to focus on positive imaging of women, to rebuild trust between WPS actors and society.

### Training and Prevention

The importance of media environment training courses was mentioned, both as regards gender sensitive reporting and holding courses for journalists working in hostile environments. It was underlined that donors should prioritize funding for media trainings in general, and including training in storytelling as a preventative measure, contributing to breaking stereotype based tension before it turns into conflict.

### **The way forward**

The meeting concluded with suggestions for topics to address in future online WPS meetings, which the Dialogue Institute plans to conduct after the summer. These meetings are part of the informal WPS network, with which the institute has held regular sessions throughout the spring and intends to continue after the summer.

In addition to previously suggested topics such as engagement with traditional and religious leaders and engagement with private sector actors, the following suggestions were made, a) discussing how to enhance implementation mechanisms, and b) exploring strategies for engaging and building alliances with female decision-makers in positions of power (e.g. senior politicians).