

## **RWLSEE'S DECLARATION ON BEIJING+25**

### **International Conference on reviewing the Beijing+25 achievements and challenges in gender equality, came up with recommendations for post-conflict region of Western Balkans**

**(Skopje, 26 November 2019)** - The International Conference organized by RWLSEE and UN Women reviewed achievements and gaps in gender equality in the post-conflict context of Western Balkans in almost 25 years since the adoption of the Beijing Platform.

Taking into consideration the Beijing Platform as a visionary response to the persistent and severe under-representation of women and gender inequality all over the world, the aim of this International Conference, supported by Swedish Government, was to review the progress and challenges, discuss key trends and provide recommendations for closing the gap in gender equality in our region and beyond. Focus was in the areas of decision-making, peacebuilding, security and justice in the Western Balkans, which are more specific to the region's post-conflict context and pose specific challenges to women's empowerment.

The Conference was opened by inspiring and forward-looking speeches of Dr. Edita Tahiri, the Chair of RWLSEE and Alia Yassir, Director of UN Women for Europe and Central Asia, who emphasized the need for a strengthened support for women and girls in post-conflict regions.

The brief analytical regional review on women's status within the frame of Beijing + 25 in post-conflict context of Western Balkans was presented by Dr. Natalia Andrea Peral. She presented the diagnosis of the situation of women in the 25 years' timeline, key challenges and, way forward to accelerating gender equality and meaningful empowerment of women. Dr. Peral, stated that women must be at forefront, in leadership and decision-making positions, because they have shown to be effective change makers and peace drivers.

Based on analytical findings presented and their own experience in the field, participants of the conference, prominent leaders from politics and civil society and international representatives discussed thoroughly the challenges, acknowledged mix progress and expressed concerns that decision making remains still as men domain. The discussions tackled important aspects for women's status and prospects for gender equality. The women's outstanding activism in helping to overcome the tragic times by involving in liberation and independence movements, conflict resolution processes, yet, they faced backlash and were pushed in side-lines in aftermath of conflicts. Insufficient empowerment limited mostly to participation national parliaments and local levels through quota, while underrepresented in government and other decision-making bodies of public sector. Participants asserted that quality in empowerment presumes equality in decision-making and government and, legitimization of women's contribution and capacities through voting them in elections. They said that It is disappointing to notice that women have been almost missing in the formal peace processes that ended wars and established peace in the Western Balkans region. Transitional justice and international justice were considered as delaying, especially the most painful issue of women raped during wars, which remains yet hidden while punishment of perpetrators

remains more as a resentment than a hope. In this context, it was also mentioned that the Balkan wars and tragedies are being forgotten despite the fragile peace and weak governance is ongoing while European integration is delaying. Participants concluded that gender equality and women's empowerment has marked more progress in legal terms than in practice. They emphasized that in spite of lack of real progress, they women remain involved and show an outstanding performance in helping peacebuilding, democratic governance, reconciliation and advancing women, peace and security agenda. The participants of the International Conference included: women leaders in politics and civil society, parliaments, governments, local governments, national and international experts on gender equality and women's empowerment, RWLSEE Steering Committee and all members from the RWLSEE focus countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, representatives of UN Women, Embassy of Sweden, other UN agencies and international organizations

After the discussions, participants worked on recommendation, through breaking in the three working groups, to then again gather in plenary session to discuss and approve recommendations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

**1. Ensuring equal participation of women in government and decision making, at both national and local levels, which leads to a sound and good governance free of corruption, for the interest of the citizens.**

Women must play a key role in the process of deciding for the future built on gender inclusive democratic governance and peacebuilding for the benefit of citizens. Ensuring gender equality in decision-making requires a political will and legal guarantees for the implementation. The contribution of women to make changes from war to peace in our countries and entire Balkans has to be fully recognized. These women, as leaders and activists, with their work demonstrated leadership for change. They were and are agents of change for a better future.

**2. Consolidating the meaningful participation of women in peacebuilding, negotiating tables, mediation and security processes which can result in more peace, stability and prosperity.**

Women must play a key role in the process of deciding on peace and implementing peace at national, local and international levels, because only gender inclusive peace can be sustainable. The dramatic underrepresentation in peace making, peace negotiations and in peacebuilding cannot be tolerated any longer. A striking statistic that 2% of women currently serve as mediators, so many years after the adoption of the resolution 1325, speaks for itself. The striking absence of women from formal peace negotiations reveals a troubling gap between the aspirations and the reality of peace processes.

**3. Ensuring equal access to justice and transitional justice for women leads to sustainable peace and reconciliation, much needed in the post-conflict settings.**

The issue of equal access to justice for women as most vulnerable category remains worrisome. There is a necessity to establish accountable and gender inclusive justice institutions and gain

confidence in them, consolidate transitional justice to redressing the victims that recognizes their dignity as citizens and as human beings, establish international justice for women victims of conflict related sexual violence and, applying facilitation/mediation as a tool to enhance women's equal access to justice. National authorities must do much more in this direction while being committed to bring to an end discrimination and domestic and other violence against women. Access to justice is a basic human right prescribed by numerous UN and EU human rights instruments. It leads to a just and inclusive society.

## RECOMMENDATIONS BY WORKING GROUPS

**Group 1**, comprised of women MPs, mayors and women representatives from civil society, while discussing about "**Women Equal Participation in decision-making**", came out with the following conclusions:

1. While presenting the current situation and conditions related to women's participation in decision-making, participants highlighted a general not satisfactory situation. Majority of countries in the region have good legislation, yet there are issues of sluggish implementation. There is also a lack in mechanisms that would guarantee the implementation of legislation. For this, a need to review the legislative reforms, and evidence the missing part was emphasized. There is also lack of accurate statistical data and pointers that could give a clearer picture of women participation in decision-making at all levels of government.
2. Identifying of points where the process has stopped and slowed down, and where it would continue is a priority. As either women's civil society, organizations, political parties, current governments, media or religious Communities are mentioned for not performing well enough in their work towards identifying of points in this cycle. In order to have results, the engagement of the wide range of actors and change in the way of action is needed.
3. In regards to lack of Analysis, participants called for more work in this field as it will provide better statistical data as well as other kinds of good practice.
4. Finally they called for 50% of participation of women in organizations, all levels of government and other institutions is recommended. Since 50% is something that belongs to women and for a long time is not achieved. This process includes not increasing of numbers in a quantitative way but also increase quality. For this women's education is of considerable need and it has to be coordinated both at national and regional level.
5. The cooperation of women between local and central levels of government is necessary for providing support and fulfilling a joint aim that is contributing with quality in politics of the region and wider.
6. Women participants called for a joint public political campaign 50-50%, so to promote and initiate the achievement of women percentage in representation.
7. Women proposed to launch a new media portal, where 50% of women making every decision, and participating in every decision-making as part of this aim. In order to promote this, they proposed additional useful mechanisms through social networks groups and call it "**Lobby for 50%**"

**Group 2**, comprised of women MPs, former politicians, representatives of local level and civil society, developed conclusion on topic "**Women equal participation in peace building, reconciliation and security processes**", as follow:

1. Women have to ultimately require women's participation, which is giving different approach, different view and hence different solution. They called all women from every political party to

- give added value when developing and establishing dialogue that deal with the past, since some actors in so far had or had not some kind of dialogue. Even if they are not partners in the dialogue, they could contribute significantly.
2. When discussing about the current legislation and current integration of policies, with all the gaps inside, women concluded that they need to insist whether the adequate implementation both horizontally and vertically is taking place and infiltrate society to be inclusive and united in all sides.
  3. Delivering education and in terms of civic education that will be facing with the past as there are yet problems with the culture of memories. Instead of producing new identities and creating new histories.
  4. Speeding up reforms for EU integration processes, despite the fact that some of the European leaders have shown that these processes are not irreversible, as the case with North Macedonia and Albania. Participants urge to insist at implementation at all levels, in order to strengthen judiciary systems and better up societies in the Western Balkans and reach some civic values.
  5. Implementation of resolutions starting from Istanbul Convention, to UN Resolutions 1325 and other local agreements such as Ohrid and Prespa are extremely important for peace, security and justice in the region.
  6. Lastly they highlighted the need to work in the success of judiciary, good governance and increase of enhancement of the society.

**Group 3** comprised of women MPs, representatives from local level and women representatives from civil society, discussed about ***“Equal Access to Justice, Transitional Justice and international Justice for women ”*** and came out with the following conclusions:

1. Since justice is sensitive, participants used general terminology for access to justice in the form of solidarity and cooperation from local level, to national and regional levels.
2. Second, participants concluded that good practices should be presented in all social media and networks, so the media can refer it generally for the situation in the region. In so far media's focus was at presenting conflicts, therefore women demand media to be close to them and to present a fair and equal access to justice.
3. Third, supporting of women's group that work in communities is necessary either from civil society or institutions. Also a regional collaboration project that break barriers between women, is recommended to be developed.
4. Using of international mechanisms to achieve justice and raise awareness, with an emphasize on asking countries to be cooperative with International mechanisms that address issues of justice, security and cooperation in the region. It will also help countries of the region to prevent major issues such as trafficking, migration, foreign wars, and things that disrupted the general peace.
5. As there are problems with missing people, victims of traffic, migrants, asylum seekers and victims of rape, torture and war-born children, access to justice is more than needed. There is another issue involving women of conflict countries and that is selective abortion, as an indirect violence to stop natural birthrate.
6. In regards to access to justice and women's right, every country requires safer funding.
7. The creation of Feminist Court as a good platform for raising awareness that would include different advocating groups such as women's lawyer association could help a lot. We have lot of case where 15 years go by until problem is solved. As women are harmed in different aspects, either from domestic violence or transitional justice and takes too long until their voice is heard.

**Participants:** Alia El-Yassir, UN Women Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia; Rossana Dudziak, UN Resident Coordinator (UNRC), Macedonia; Edita Tahiri, RWLSEE Chair, Former Minister for Dialogue, Kosovo and Peace Negotiator; Luljeta Vuniqi, RWLSEE Member, Kosovo, Former Ambassador of the Republic of Kosovo in Budapest, Sonja Biserko, RWLSEE Steering Committee Member, Serbia, Director of Helsinki Committee for Human Rights; Nataša Mičić, RWLSEE Member, Serbia, Member of Parliament, Vice President of the Liberal Democratic Party, Former President of the National Assembly of Serbia; Irina Pockova, RWLSEE Steering Committee Member, Macedonia, Member (Former President) of Women's Chapter of SDA political party of Sv. Nikola; Teuta Arifi, RWL SEE Member, Mayor, Municipality of Tetovo; Savka Todorovska, RWLSEE Member, North Macedonia, President "National Council of Women", North Macedonia; Gordana Sobol, RWLSEE Steering Committee Member, Croatia, Former MP / Chairwoman of the Mandate and Immunity Committee, Parliament of Croatia; Morana Paliković-Gruden, RWL SEE Member, Vice President of the Croatian Olympic Committee and President of the Scatting Federation, Chairwoman in Women in Sport Commission, Croatia; Lovorka Marinović, RWL SEE Member, President of Center for New Initiatives, International Independent Consultant; Melita Mulić, RWLSEE Member, Croatia, Expert on Strategic Communication – EC TAIEX WB Project, Diplomat; Former MP, Croatia; Memnuna Zvizdić, RWLSEE Steering Committee Member, Former Executive Director "Žene Ženama" BiH; Nada Tešanović, RWLSEE Member, BiH, Presiding of Council of the Republika Srpska, Former Minister of Family, Youth and Sports, Government of Republika Srpska; BiH; Jo-Anne Bishop, UN Kosovo; Natalia A. Peral, Negotiation, Conflict Resolution & Policy Expert; Independent Consultant for RWLSEE, Italy; Snežana Kaleska-Vančeva, MP, North Macedonia; Blagica Lasovska, MP, North Macedonia; Daniela Rangelova, MP, Macedonia; Gordana Čomić, Deputy Speaker of the Assembly, Serbia; Snežana Paunović, MP, Serbia; Olena Papuga, MP, Serbia; Nataša Mihajlović, MP, Serbia; Hykmete Bajrami, MP, Kosovo; Lirije Kajtazi, MP, Kosovo; Time Kadrijaj, MP, Kosovo; Xhevahire Izmaku, Former MP, Kosovo, RWLSEE Member, Kosovo; Jasenka Augustan-Petek, Mayor, City of Zlatar; Croatia; Hadixha Gjoni, Deputy Mayor, City of Ulcinj; Montenegro; Nada Golubović, President of the Management Board "Foundation United Women" Banja Luka; Daniela Dimitrievska, Executive Director, Macedonian Women's Lobby; Zylfije Gjoni-Duraku, Maternity Executive Director; Executive Head "Anima" first women association in Montenegro; Rajna Radosavljević, Project Coordinator, Helsinki Citizens' Assembly, NGO, Banja Luka; Diana Çekaj-Berisha, RWLSEE Project Coordinator; Arberesha Dedinja, RWLSEE Project Assistant; Nita Bakalli-Istrefi, Independent Consultant.

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*Regional Women's Lobby in Southeast Europe (RWLSEE) continuously advocates for enhanced collaboration among women from the Western Balkans and increased empowerment of women in democratic governance and peace-building processes.*

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