



## CONCEPT NOTE

### **Regional Local Women Conference on peacebuilding and ethnic Reconciliation**

“Women shaping a peaceful future and European future through promoting interethnic relations and reconciliation in Kosovo and entire post-conflict region of the Western Balkans”

*-Regional Conference to strengthen women's participation in local peacebuilding in the Western Balkans Prishtina, Kosovo, 5 September 2024*

### **Rationale**

The political and security situation in Kosovo has significantly deteriorated in recent period due to ongoing tensions, especially in the northern part of the country. The main factors that impacted the current fragile situation are failure of both parties, Kosovo and Serbia, in delivering what they agreed in the EU facilitated Dialogue (Brussels dialogue) on 27 February 2023 (known as Basic Agreement on the Road to Normalization of Neighbourly Relations between Kosovo and Serbia). Even though the implementation agreement (Ohrid agreement) was reached on 18 March 2023, unfortunately there has not been implementation and continues so. In meantime, for about year there is the stalemate in the Brussels Dialogue which has worsened the situation because of tensions raised between the two countries but especially in the northern part of Kosovo due to several inconvenient events such as non-participation of local Kosovo Serbs in the municipal elections four northern municipalities in Kosovo, mostly influenced negatively by Serbia's authorities and non-coordinated steps taken by Kosovo's authorities in implementing reached Brussels agreements from earlier period.

However, the most detrimental event is the attack in 'Banjska' in northern part of Kosovo in September 24, 2023, which has been thoroughly detrimental and threatening stability in Kosovo and beyond in the region. Moreover, it has harmed the interethnic relation thus significantly undermined achieved level of inter-ethnic cooperation reached thanks to the Brussels Dialogue in the period 2011-2017 when the Brussels Dialogue was productive with many relevant agreements reached and majority of them implemented.

The Brussels agreements made it possible dismantlement of Serb parallel structures in the northern part of Kosovo in areas such as police, justice, 'civil protection', municipal administration in four northern municipalities', customs etc. They also made it possible for Kosovo to re-establish its institutions of local level in northern part of the country as well the integration of Kosovo Serbs from that part into Kosovo institutions such as Serb judges, police, former members of 'civil protection', custom officers, who left parallel structures and got employed into the Kosovo institutions. At the same time the four northern municipalities participated in Kosovo local elections in 2013 for the first time after the Kosovo's independence declaration in 2008, resulting in legal functioning of those municipalities in accordance with the Kosovo law, given that prior to

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Brussels agreements those municipalities structures were operating illegally, under the Serbia's laws. The new reality of rule of law and stable and safe environment in northern part of Kosovo was established - all that was a difficult process but possible thanks to the political will and commitments by both parties, Kosovo and Serbia, in the Brussels Dialogue. Moreover, the security situation has been improved, hence interethnic cooperation has been advancing while interethnic incidents stopped happening.

Important to highlight that in the period 2011-2017, the Brussels dialogue has known occasional stalemates, however as to the date, the dialogue is in the deadlock and undermined interethnic relations. Despite this fragile situation, we the RWLSEE believe that there must be peace efforts in repairing damaged interethnic relations between Kosovo Albanian majority and Kosovo Serb minority and those peace efforts from practice are of the nature of track three peace process, such were our projects / interventions, which allowed for inter-ethnic dialogue among local women, resulting in incremental progress in relations between both ethnic communities.

In addition, The RWLSEE considers that the fragile situation in Kosovo and in the region of the Western Balkans is also a consequence of unfinished peace in the Balkans, larger geopolitical repercussions, unresolved bilateral issues, growing autocratic, nationalist, and populist tendencies and the delayed EU integration of all six Western Balkan countries as well as impact of the Russian war against Ukraine.

It is important to notice that the Basic agreement of 27 February 2023 on normalization of neighbourly relations between Kosovo and Serbia failed to include the concept of reconciliation, regardless the war tragedies between the two countries.

RWLSEE' believes that if there were women chief negotiators from both sides and not only men as it is now, but the peace agreement would also necessarily include 'reconciliation', this because that women's perspective on peace regards the people's need, among which is building trust among ethnic communities, majority and non-majority - through interethnic dialogue and cooperation, leading to reconciliation as a key component of peacebuilding in postwar countries. We consider that local peacebuilding is a key foundation of sustainable peacebuilding. Further, we consider that multi-ethnic coexistence comes through promoting interethnic cooperation, mutual understanding and mutual acceptance. We consider that women, especially local women must take role in this time when relations among Albanians and Serb communities in Kosovo are in difficult situation due to the reasons explained above, not to say that reconciliation process is stalled and must be restarting. Reconciliation in postwar times was never a simple process but is necessary for a better future of all.

### **Activity**

Against this background, the RWLSEE' intervention provides the platform of a track three peace process allowing for local women peace dialogue among women of Albanian majority and Serb

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minority in Kosovo with participation of women from the RWLSEE' seven focus countries of the region of Western Balkans to discuss on how can women help in shaping a peaceful future through promoting interethnic relations and reconciliation leading to sustainable peacebuilding.

The activity is the Regional local Women Conference on Peacebuilding and Reconciliation titled **“Women shaping a peaceful future through promoting interethnic relations and reconciliation in Kosovo and entire post-conflict region of the Western Balkans”**

The Conference will bring participants from ten (10) multi-ethnic municipalities of Kosovo and from the RWLSEE's seven focus countries of the region of the Western Balkans to discuss and explore ways towards shaping a peaceful and European future with special focus on importance of advancing interethnic relations and reconciliation process in Kosovo and wider region with leading role of women, of which local peacebuilding is a key pillar of sustainable peacebuilding. This regional platform is a helpful framework given that all women from region have experiences of postwar context. Hence, experiences and ideas sharing provides for learning from good lessons and avoiding mistakes that stand in the way of interethnic cooperation and interethnic reconciliation but also it serves as encouragement for women to equally participating in peace processes regardless how difficult they might be.

The Conference will address the problem of harmed inter-ethnic relations and consequently stalled reconciliation process in Kosovo, as identified in the section of rational. It will look at challenges of improving interethnic relations which at this time are seriously hampered and, at prospects of advancing the process of reconciliation in Kosovo but also in wider region, both important for peacebuilding and development through multiethnic coexistence. It will look at these issues through the women's vision and views as key peace drivers and dialogue drivers.

Conference also will look at as how women at the local level can play a greater role in local peacebuilding, while placing importance on necessity of women's equal participation in politics, peace, security and decision making at all levels as the only way to having women shape and decide on peace and security issues affecting them and entire population.

Conference provides the opportunity for local women dialogue between Albanian Majority and Serb minority in Kosovo in efforts of bringing both community closer to each other for together peacefully resolving the issues that concerns them opting for improved interethnic relations as well as jointly work on strengthening local women's participation in peace, security, decision making and reconciliation processes while leveraging from regional cooperation, hence empowering regional Voice of Women and Girls for Gender Inclusive Local Peacebuilding. Conference will also discuss on the impacts of the Brussels Dialogue and EU Integration on interethnic relations and Reconciliation in Kosovo and the Western Balkans with leading role of women, as well as to their role to incentivize and stimulate the will of citizens of different ethnic background for multiethnic peaceful coexistence, leading to brighter future.

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It gives also an opportunity to women's voices from local and regional level to be heard by public and local authorities and international representatives.

It is important to highlight that this Regional local women conference gained inspiration and support from the Regional Peace Dialogue Conference held in Tirana on 17 June 2024 "Women Building Lasting Peace in the Western Balkans" where women parliamentarians of Kosovo and Serbia dialogued with participation of women from region, and their calls on resuming of dialogue gave results as dialogue restarted afterwards.

### **Objectives**

Overall objective of the conference is to promote interethnic cooperation and reconciliation in Kosovo, by providing space to dialogue for local women of majority and minority ethnic communities for discussions, interactions, mutual trust-building, so to be able to jointly address issues of mutual concern, challenges, and ways leading to solution solutions for community development, peaceful interethnic coexistence and reconciliation interethnic with support and participation of women from region as a way forward to a peaceful and European future with women having leading role, as well as strengthening full and equal participation of women in decision making at all levels in peace, security and reconciliation processes, hence promoting WPS agenda at all levels.

To having local women of Kosovo making breakthrough in the lately hampered interethnic relations between Albanian majority and Serb minority due to identified several factors and for jointly promote stability and sustainable peacebuilding through interethnic cooperation and reconciliation with critical role of women, leading to gender inclusive peaceful future, as well as strengthening equal participation of women in peace, security processes at local and national level, with emphasize that local governance and mayorships cannot be only at the hands of men, but rather power must be shared between men and women.

Promoting mutual understanding, trust-building and open dialogue on removing impediments towards interethnic harmony and reconciliation.

Preventing the deterioration of interethnic relations.

Transforming interethnic relations into peaceful cooperation relations for a better of future for all.

Mobilizing and empowering women and community level to promote cooperation between majority and non-majority ethnic groups in Kosovo, while calling on implementing European values allowing for European integration that we all aspire.

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## Outcome

1. Women's peacebuilding efforts for inter-ethnic dialogue and reconciliation, building mutual trust among ethnic communities in sensitive contexts are demonstrated.
2. Women showed their openness, courage and capacities to dialogue in difficult issues across ethnic lines, even when it looks impossible.
3. Public and decision makers' awareness is raised on the importance of the role of local women for local peacebuilding for stability and development, and that gender equality is a key for overall peacebuilding, good governance, democracy and European integration.
4. Women demonstrated their critical role in helping breakthrough in a stalled inter-ethnic dialogue and reconciliation process, while local peacebuilding is promoted in support of sustainable peacebuilding.
5. Putting the finger as a harsh critic on how men chief negotiators of both parties failed in including reconciliation concepts in the basic agreement between Kosovo and Serbia reached in the end of February 2023.
6. Set of actionable recommendations in support of the Conference's aim are put forward.

## Methodology:

The discussions will take place as per the topics of the agenda through plenary sessions and panels and breakout sessions. There will also be an open interactive debate with all participants to allow for them to share their views and ideas and specific recommendations on advancing the objectives of the conference and WPS agenda.

## Participants:

Participants: Local women from ten multiethnic municipalities of Kosovo, RWLSEE's Steering Committee Members from seven focus countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia), representatives of international partners Cordaid and WPHF (Women in Peace Humanitarian Fund), and of UN Women, other international organizations and agencies, experts, scholars, practitioners.

## Location and Time:

The Conference will take place on 5 September 2024, in Hotel Prishtina International, Prishtina, Kosovo

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*The Regional Conference is organized by the Regional Women's Lobby for Peace, Security and Justice in South East Europe (RWLSEE) and Cordaid, supported by Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF)*

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