



WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN PEACE AND SECURITY POLICIES: PARTICIPATION, REPRESENTATION AND IMPACT

**A multi-stakeholder dialogue among parliamentarians, national focal points and experts on
the evolution of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda**

*Side-event ahead of the Capital-Level Meeting of the WPS Focal Points Network
co-chaired by Italy and the Philippines*

Monday, 8 June 2026

14:30 – 17:30 Sala del Mappamondo – Camera dei Deputati

EVENT REPORT

Executive summary

Held on the eve of the Capital-Level Meeting of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Focal Points Network, co-chaired by Italy and the Philippines, the side event **"Women's Leadership in Peace and Security Policies: Participation, Representation and Impact"** brought together parliamentarians, National Focal Points, representatives of international organisations, women mediators, experts and civil society to reflect on the future of the WPS Agenda twenty-five years after the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325.

Organised by **Women in International Security (WIIS) Italy**, in cooperation with the **Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs**, the **Mediterranean Women Mediators Network (MWMN)** and the **International Development Law Organization (IDLO)** on 8 June 2026 at the Italian Parliament, the event was conceived as a multi-stakeholder dialogue to strengthen the exchange between policymakers and communities of practice, recognising that more effective peace and security policies require closer interaction between institutional decision-makers and those working directly in conflict-affected contexts.

Across the discussions, participants agreed that the WPS Agenda has entered a new phase. While women's participation remains a fundamental objective, the priority today is to ensure that women's leadership, expertise and lived experience translate into meaningful influence over political decisions, institutional reforms and peace processes.

Drawing on perspectives from Ukraine, the Mediterranean region and Afghanistan, the dialogue highlighted that women are already making essential contributions to conflict prevention, mediation, humanitarian response, recovery and peacebuilding. The challenge is therefore not simply to expand participation, but to recognise and support the leadership already exercised by women, ensuring that it is reflected in formal institutions and decision-making processes.

The discussions also reaffirmed that women's leadership should be understood not only as a matter of representation or equality, but as a strategic asset for more effective conflict prevention, stronger societal resilience and more sustainable peace. Achieving this objective requires stronger political leadership, institutional accountability, adequate resources and closer cooperation between governments, international organisations, parliaments, women mediators and civil society.

Ultimately, the event underscored the value of multi-stakeholder dialogue as both a methodology and a policy approach, demonstrating that connecting institutions with communities of practice can strengthen implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda while fostering partnerships

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capable of generating lasting impact. This approach builds on WIIS Italy's long-standing commitment to fostering dialogue and cooperation across institutions, practitioners and civil society.

A Multi-Stakeholder Approach

The event was deliberately conceived as a multi-stakeholder dialogue, reflecting WIIS Italy's long-standing approach to advancing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. It was based on the recognition that effective implementation depends not only on political commitment, but also on sustained dialogue between those who shape policies and those who work directly in conflict-affected contexts.

Building these connections has been a defining feature of WIIS Italy's work, particularly through the **Mediterranean Women Mediators Network**, launched by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and coordinated by WIIS Italy together with the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI). By bringing together women mediators, diplomats, parliamentarians, academics and civil society representatives from across the Mediterranean and neighbouring regions, the Network helps connect local experience with national, regional and international policymaking.

Against this background, the event sought to bring different actors into a shared space for dialogue, encouraging mutual learning, strengthening cooperation and contributing to a more informed and action-oriented implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

Overview of the Discussion

Opening Session with

- **Loredana Teodorescu**, President, Women in International Security (WIIS) Italy; Head of the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network
- **Hon. Lia Quartapelle**, Vice-President, Foreign Affairs Committee, Italian Chamber of Deputies
- **Hon. Lorenzo Cesa**, Head of the Italian Delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly
- **Anda Filip**, Secretary General, Inter-Parliamentary Union (video message)

The opening session framed the discussion around a central question: how should the Women, Peace and Security Agenda evolve twenty-five years after the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325?

Opening remarks highlighted that, while international commitments have significantly expanded opportunities for women's participation, substantial gaps remain between policy commitments and implementation. Speakers emphasised that meaningful participation should no longer be understood solely in terms of representation, but increasingly as the ability to influence strategic decision-making in foreign policy, peace and security.

The discussion also highlighted the importance of strengthening cooperation across institutions, international organisations, parliamentarians and civil society. Particular attention was devoted to the role of parliamentary diplomacy, legislative oversight and political leadership in advancing the implementation of the WPS Agenda and ensuring that gender equality remains embedded within broader peace and security policies.



Session I - Women, Peace and Security at a Turning Point? Leadership, Representation and the Case of Ukraine

- **Irene Fellin**, NATO Secretary General's Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security
- **Lara Scarpitta**, Senior Advisor on Gender Issues and Head of the Gender Issues Programme, OSCE
- **Liliana De Marco**, Director of External Relations and Partnerships, International Development Law Organization (IDLO)
- **Anatolii Dosych**, Consultant of the Apparatus of the Government Commissioner for Gender Equality, Secretariat of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine
- **Nicoletta Pirozzi**, Vice-President, WIIS Italy; Head of Institutional Relations, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) - moderator

The first panel examined Ukraine as one of the most significant contemporary case studies for the future evolution of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. While recognising the devastating impact of the war, participants highlighted how the Ukrainian experience has also demonstrated women's leadership across multiple domains, including diplomacy, governance, humanitarian response, civil protection and national resilience.

The discussion explored the relationship between women's participation, resilience and security, arguing that resilient societies depend not only on military capabilities but also on inclusive institutions, democratic governance and active civic participation. In this perspective, women's leadership was presented not as a complementary dimension of security policy but as one of its strategic components.

Participants also reflected on the transition from conflict response to recovery and reconstruction. A recurring theme was that women should not only be recognised for the leadership demonstrated during the conflict but should also be fully involved in shaping post-war institutions, recovery policies and future political settlements. Several interventions further highlighted the importance of translating international commitments into concrete implementation through National Action Plans, legal reforms, adequate funding and sustained political leadership.

Session II - Acting at the Edge of Peace and Security: Women Mediators and Peacebuilders across the Mediterranean and Beyond

- **Emanuela Del Re**, former EU Special Representative for the Sahel and former Italian Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
- **Liberata Mulamula**, Ambassador and Special Envoy on WPS for the African Union
- **Justine Abi Saad**, Advisor at Civil Peace Program and member of the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network, Lebanon
- **Eva Ziedan**, expert on peace mediation, cultural heritage, and community development; member of the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network (Syria)
- **Frozan Nawabi**, Former Director General and WPS National Focal Point for Afghanistan
- **Laura Lamberti**, WIIS Italy Fellow and Editorial Coordinator – moderator

Building on the reflections emerging from Ukraine, the second session shifted the focus towards women's leadership in mediation, dialogue and peacebuilding across the Mediterranean and



neighbouring regions. Drawing on experiences from Lebanon, Syria, Afghanistan and the African continent, participants reflected on both the opportunities and the persistent barriers facing women engaged in conflict prevention, mediation and political transitions.

A common thread throughout the discussion was the disconnect between the leadership exercised by women within communities and their continued exclusion from formal peace negotiations and political institutions. Participants described how women often sustain dialogue, facilitate humanitarian access, preserve social cohesion and rebuild trust in contexts affected by conflict, while remaining largely absent from the spaces where political settlements and institutional reforms are negotiated.

The discussion also highlighted the importance of supporting locally-led mediation efforts and recognising women mediators as strategic actors rather than symbolic participants. Experiences from Syria and Lebanon demonstrated the value of sustained dialogue across divided societies, while reflections on Afghanistan underlined the urgency of preserving spaces for women's leadership and agency despite the severe restrictions imposed in recent years. More broadly, participants stressed that investing in women mediators contributes not only to more inclusive peace processes but also to stronger social resilience and more sustainable recovery.

Key messages

1. From Participation to Influence: Shaping the Next Phase of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

"The challenge today is no longer demonstrating that women contribute to peace. The challenge is ensuring that their experience, expertise and leadership are reflected in policies, institutions and decision-making processes." - Loredana Teodorescu

Twenty-five years after the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, the discussion highlighted a shared understanding that the Women, Peace and Security Agenda has entered a new phase. While increasing women's participation remains essential, participants agreed that the debate should increasingly focus on influence, representation and impact.

The discussion recognised that women are already contributing to peace and security in multiple capacities - as mediators, diplomats, parliamentarians, humanitarian actors and community leaders. The challenge today is to ensure that this expertise is recognised and translated into meaningful participation in political and strategic decision-making. Representation therefore cannot be measured solely in quantitative terms, but must increasingly be assessed through women's ability to shape policies, influence institutions and contribute to strategic choices.

Participants also stressed that this transition requires structural change. Political commitment should be accompanied by stronger institutional mechanisms, sustained investment in women's leadership and greater efforts to mainstream gender perspectives across foreign policy, peace, security and defence, rather than treating the WPS Agenda as a stand-alone policy framework.

2. Ukraine Demonstrates that Women's Leadership is a Strategic Dimension of Security

"Resilience is the strongest form of deterrence." - Irene Fellin

Ukraine emerged throughout the dialogue as one of the most relevant contemporary examples of the evolution of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. Participants reflected on how the conflict has



demonstrated women's leadership across multiple sectors, including diplomacy, governance, humanitarian action, civil protection and community resilience.

The discussion challenged traditional understandings of security by emphasising that resilience depends not only on military capabilities but also on inclusive institutions, democratic governance and the capacity of societies to mobilise all available human capital. In this perspective, women's leadership was consistently presented as a strategic component of national preparedness and long-term security.

Looking ahead, participants highlighted the importance of ensuring that the leadership demonstrated by women during the conflict is fully reflected in recovery, reconstruction and institutional reform processes. National Action Plans, legal reforms and recovery strategies should therefore provide concrete opportunities for women to shape post-conflict governance rather than limiting their contribution to the emergency response.

3. Recognising Women Mediators as Strategic Actors in Peace Processes

"Women's participation is not a decorative addition. It is a condition for any peace that can actually survive." - Eva Ziedan

Experiences shared from Lebanon, Syria, Afghanistan and other conflict-affected contexts demonstrated that women are already playing essential roles in conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding. Across different settings, they facilitate dialogue, sustain local peace initiatives, rebuild trust and preserve social cohesion, often under extremely challenging circumstances.

A recurring message throughout the discussion was that the principal challenge is no longer creating opportunities for women's engagement, but ensuring that the leadership already exercised by women at community level is adequately recognised, supported and connected to formal political and mediation processes. Participants noted that too often women remain active where peace is built every day, while being absent from the spaces where political settlements, ceasefires and institutional arrangements are negotiated.

In this regard, the discussion called for a broader understanding of mediation and peacebuilding, one that values both formal and informal processes and recognises community-based mediators, civil society leaders and women's networks as essential contributors to sustainable peace. The experience of the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network illustrated how regional networks can help bridge this gap by connecting local expertise with national, regional and international decision-making.

As one participant from Lebanon observed through the image of the "empty chair," women's exclusion from formal decision-making does not reflect a lack of leadership or expertise, but rather the persistence of institutional barriers that continue to prevent their meaningful participation in peace negotiations. This disconnect remains one of the principal challenges for the future implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

4. Building Bridges Between Institutions and Communities of Practice

"Women are already leading, mediating, negotiating and building peace in many different contexts. Our responsibility is to ensure that institutions are ready to recognise this leadership, support it and give it the space it deserves." – Luca Fratini

The event highlighted the importance of creating stronger and more systematic connections between policymaking and practice. While governments, parliaments and international organisations define



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priorities, strategies and institutional frameworks, women mediators, civil society organisations and local practitioners bring first-hand knowledge of conflict dynamics, community needs and opportunities for dialogue. Bridging these different perspectives was identified as an essential condition for improving both the quality and the implementation of peace and security policies.

The multi-stakeholder format of the event reflected this approach. Participants recognised that sustainable implementation of the WPS Agenda requires continuous dialogue between institutions and communities of practice, rather than occasional consultation.

The experience of the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network was discussed as one example of how regional networks can facilitate this exchange by connecting women working in conflict settings with national, regional and international decision-making processes. Beyond supporting women's participation, such networks contribute to knowledge-sharing, peer learning and the development of practical policy recommendations grounded in operational experience.

5.Strengthening Political Leadership and Institutional Accountability

“Representation cannot be merely a matter of numbers. It must translate into real influence over agendas, budgets, missions and security policy.” - Hon. Lorenzo Cesa

Throughout the discussion, participants emphasised that the future of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda depends not only on political commitments but also on the ability of institutions to translate those commitments into concrete action. National Action Plans, legal reforms and international frameworks provide important foundations, but their effectiveness ultimately relies on implementation, adequate resources and sustained political leadership.

Particular attention was devoted to the role of parliaments and parliamentary diplomacy in advancing the WPS Agenda. Beyond their legislative function, parliaments were recognised as key actors in ensuring oversight, monitoring implementation, allocating resources and promoting accountability. Their engagement can also help maintain political attention on the WPS Agenda during periods of shifting international priorities and increasing geopolitical instability. Participants further stressed that implementation should be understood as a shared responsibility involving governments, international organisations, parliaments and civil society. Strengthening cooperation among these actors was identified as essential to ensure that commitments adopted at the international level produce tangible changes at national and local levels.

Participants finally stressed that, even in contexts where women are systematically excluded from public life, such as Afghanistan, the international community has a responsibility to preserve opportunities for dialogue, networking and capacity-building, ensuring that women remain engaged in international discussions and are equipped to contribute to their country's future when conditions allow.

6.Investing in Women's Leadership as an Investment in Sustainable Peace

"Which table is recognised, whose table is supported and whose future plan for peace and security gets invested in?" - Paivi Kannisto

Across all sessions, a common message emerged: investing in women's leadership should not be understood as a matter of inclusion alone, but as a strategic investment in more effective peacebuilding, stronger institutions and more resilient societies.



Experiences shared from Ukraine, the Mediterranean and Afghanistan demonstrated that women consistently contribute to conflict prevention, dialogue, humanitarian response, governance and social cohesion. However, participants cautioned against assuming that resilience alone can compensate for the absence of political support, institutional recognition and international engagement. Women's leadership cannot continue to rely exclusively on individual commitment or community initiatives; it requires enabling political environments, sustained investment and long-term partnerships.

Looking ahead, participants agreed that the next phase of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda should focus on strengthening implementation while building stronger links between local, national and international levels. Greater recognition of women's expertise, more inclusive decision-making processes and stronger cooperation across institutions and communities of practice were identified as essential priorities for ensuring that the Agenda continues to evolve in response to today's increasingly complex peace and security challenges.

Concluding Reflections

The discussions confirmed that advancing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda requires moving beyond commitments towards more effective implementation, stronger partnerships and greater institutional accountability. Achieving meaningful and lasting impact will depend not only on political leadership and adequate resources, but also on the ability to recognise women's expertise, connect different communities of practice and ensure that diverse experiences inform decision-making at all levels.

The dialogue also demonstrated the value of bringing together policymakers, parliamentarians, international organisations, women mediators and civil society in a shared space for reflection and exchange. By fostering collaboration across institutional and operational perspectives, the event contributed to identifying common priorities and strengthening mutual understanding on some of the most pressing peace and security challenges facing the international community today.

Conceived as a platform for dialogue rather than an end in itself, the initiative sought to reinforce cooperation between institutions and practitioners and to contribute to a more connected and action-oriented implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. It is hoped that the reflections, partnerships and practical recommendations emerging from this exchange will continue to inform future policy discussions and strengthen women's participation, representation and impact in peace and security policies.