

Reclaiming the WPS Agenda at 25 - A Regional and Collective Response

Background and Purpose

In light of the upcoming Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Week and the 25th anniversary of UNSCR 1325, **a collective reflection call**, coordinated by GAPS, was held with members of the WPS community globally to assess the current context and explore possible ways forward to mark the 25th anniversary and the annual WPS week in October, held in NY.

There was clear consensus: while WPS Week has historically served as a critical moment for global advocacy, visibility, and movement building, the current political and logistical landscape poses profound challenges to meaningful participation, especially for the most affected communities.

This concept note outlines the core reflections from the call and proposes a collective, regionally grounded alternative to mark the 25th anniversary - one that reclaims the agenda from exclusionary dynamics and re-centers it in the realities of those on the frontlines.

Key Reflections from the Call

- **Barriers to Participation:**
Visa access has always been a constraint, particularly for colleagues from conflict-affected and Global South/Global Majority contexts. This year, however, the situation has worsened with an extended U.S. travel ban- more countries. Many are reluctant to even apply for visas, fearing rejection that could impact their travel histories.
- **Security and Hostility Concerns:**
Those with visas - and even some U.S. citizens - have expressed fear of being detained, deported, or subjected to hostile treatment. There are documented instances of these actions already taking place. The broader political climate, with increased surveillance and backlash against gender/wps work, raises serious concerns about visibility and risk for those participating in person.
- **Visibility with Consequences:**
Participation in WPS Week in New York could bring unintended harm, particularly for women human rights defenders and feminist activists whose advocacy is being framed as part of the so-called “woke agenda.” This raises critical questions about safety, legitimacy, and political optics.
- **Need for Presence, but Not at Any Cost:**
While concerns are high, participants also underscored the importance of maintaining a presence at the UN during WPS Week - particularly given Russia's presidency of the Security Council in October, backlash, self-censorship and the broader risks to multilateralism and the UN system.

Proposed Way Forward: Reclaiming the WPS Agenda - Regionally and Collectively

In light of these concerns and reflections, we propose a globally coordinated but regionally rooted mobilisation throughout the month of October under the theme:

“Reclaiming the WPS Agenda at 25: Centering Global Majority, Resisting Backlash, Advancing Peace and Security”

This would involve:

- 1. Regional WPS convenings**
- 2. A Collective Civil Society Statement**
- 3. Coordinated Engagement in New York**
- 4. Communique post October**

1. Regional WPS convenings

The structure for regional WPS convenings is not pre-determined. In effect, through a range of outputs they would constitute a ‘mini WPS week’. Depending on context and resources, this could involve a cluster of meetings, larger events, receptions and roundtables. Above all, the primary intention is that they are decentralised regional events, hosted and supported by both civil society (INGOs, NGOs, WROs/CSOs) and Member States and UN agencies, to reflect, celebrate, and advance the WPS agenda in contextually grounded ways. Each WPS convening would:

- Create space for civil society, grassroots actors, and local decision-makers
- Allow for advocacy on WPS
- Spotlight regional and localised priorities, challenges and opps to the WPS agenda
- Offer an inclusive platform for those unable to access New York
- Celebrate 25th anniversary of the agenda

To maximise resources and time, we will aim to build on pre-existing events and initiatives. Proposed locations include:

- **Amman, Jordan** (MENA region)- PAX, together with partners ABAAD, SIPRI and WILPF, GAPS & WFWI, **Dates; 5th - 9th October**
- **Nairobi, Kenya** (East & Horn of Africa) - Conciliation Resources with partners in the region are also hosting an event in October, Peace Direct via Peace Connect conference **13th - 17th October, Dates: 20th - 22nd October**
- **Geneva** (non-EU Europe/global policy center), HD, PAX, GAPS, WPS events will be in **Geneva Peace Week 13th - 17th October,**
- **Brussels** (Europe/global policy center) - w/c 29th Sep - 3rd October
- **ASEAN** - WPS conference, **w/c 27th October - 31st October**
- **New York** - WPS Week TBC

If you have interest in supporting the hosting, organising and coordination of these convenings then please do get in touch with me directly: eva.tabbasam@gaps-uk.org

If you are interested in possibly have a side location in any of these locations please let me know on here [Indicate Interest - Regional WPS convening](#)

2. A Collective Civil Society Statement

A unified statement that:

- Acknowledges, and names the barriers and political context
- Frames the regional events as an intentional act of reclaiming and re-rooting the WPS agenda
- Calls on Member States and donors to support these convenings
- Reaffirms the role of civil society- in particular women rights organisations, in driving the agenda forward
- International decisionmakers at these events is important for visibility and international solidarity but also ensuring that these messages are heard

3. Coordinated Engagement in New York

While the regional approach is central, a small, representative presence (those who are able to and willing to travel, as well as be based in the US) in New York would:

- Ensure accountability and presence at the Security Council, so that non-participation by some is not seen as tacit approval or leaves a vacuum for decision making that is counter to the WPS agenda
- Connect and amplify the regional voices and message
- Deliver the collective statement to key stakeholders

Stakeholders

We invite Member States, UN entities, and WPS community to support this reimagined WPS@25 process by:

- Hosting or co-hosting regional convenings
- Providing political and financial support
- Engaging with the civil society statement
- Ensuring their participation in regional dialogues and events

Next Steps

- Formation of a coordination group for regional convening planning
- Drafting process for the collective statement and the final communique post WPS month
- Outreach to governments and institutions for hosting and support