

Armed conflict in Sudan

Women as a driving force for peace



An armed conflict is currently losing the battle for the global public’s attention: in Sudan, a bloody conflict between the Sudanese army and the Rapid Support Forces militia has been raging since April 2023. According to the United Nations, the power struggle has triggered the world’s largest humanitarian crisis, with “catastrophic” consequences for women and girls. A group of Sudanese women is resolutely tackling this lack of attention: they want nothing less than peace.

“This time it has to be done right,” said Sudanese gender and peace activist Rabab Baldo in an interview with swissinfo in August, referring to the participation of women in processes leading to peace in Sudan, “as prescribed by the UN.” Rabab is a long-standing activist who has played a prominent role in the struggle for peace and gender justice in Sudan since the 1990s, including in various international organisations. This year she became a member of Feminists Connecting for Peace, our global network.

When she gave the swissinfo interview at the beginning of August, Rabab had just arrived in Geneva with a delegation of 14 Sudanese women to ensure that women have a say in the planned talks

between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the RSF militia for a ceasefire and access for humanitarian aid. The SAF representatives did not come, so the talks did not take place as planned. The talks were initiated by the United States and co-sponsored by the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the African Union, the UN and Switzerland – they have joined forces as the ALPS Group (Aligned for Advancing Lifesaving and Peace in Sudan). In a statement at the end of August, the group claimed to have received guarantees from both parties to the conflict for safe access for humanitarian aid via two corridors. “In the face of ongoing violence and atrocities, including serious violations against women”, it reminded the parties to the conflict of the commitment they made in Jeddah in May 2023 to protect civilians.

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Event in Bern

How women sustain peace

For years, we have been working closely with three partner organisations in Colombia, Nepal and the Philippines. Armed conflicts have formally ended there, yet there is still no genuine peace. We invited representatives of these organisations to Bern to further develop with us the programmes in these countries. We also took the opportunity to hold an event in Bern. The peace activists talked about the successes and challenges of feminist peacebuilding in their countries, how women there are helping to prevent a relapse into armed conflict, about the importance of safe spaces for people affected by conflict in patriarchal societies and about what it takes for activists not to lose heart.

You can find an article about the event on the homepage of our website. Information about the event can be found under News.



Karen Tañada (GZO Peace Institute, Philippines), Trishna Thapa (Nagarik Aawaz, Nepal) and Jully Meneses (Comunitar, Colombia) after the event on 16 October 2024 (pictured from left to right).

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Yet sexual violence against women and girls continues and the humanitarian crisis is growing. At the end of September 2024, UN Women issued a “Gender Alert” to draw attention to the “catastrophic” scale of the crisis. “As of December 2023, more than 6.7 million women, girls, boys and men had already relied on services related to gender-based violence, double the number than before the beginning of the conflict,” UN Women wrote, adding, “This number is now likely to be much higher.”

Women are committed to reconciliation

And yet, as Rabab explained in an interview with us, women are not consulted in peace processes. “Over the years, I have reached women in all corners and regions of Sudan. Women have the skills and knowledge to get involved. They lead the peace initiatives in their communities, working for reconciliation and against division,” she said. In this war, too, they are “the driving force behind humanitarian aid – and for that they are being targeted.”

Rabab launched the Shuttle Diplomacy Initiative to send groups of Sudanese women to countries that have exerted or could exert influence on the armed conflict, including Switzerland. On the basis of UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, the women developed a “shadow peace agreement” that takes into account the needs and aspirations of Sudanese women.

“We have already presented it to the US government, but no one is interested in listening to us and involving us,” Rabab said. Ceasefire talks are considered a male preserve. “Women are always told to wait; women and civilian issues always come later. That has to change now.”

First steps in Geneva

The women’s delegation in Geneva took an important step towards change. “One of our most important achievements was to bring the much-needed female perspective to the ceasefire talks and to remind the mediation team and the special envoy of their responsibility under UN Resolution 1325 to ensure women’s participation in peace processes.” The delegation also highlighted local efforts to establish a ceasefire, supported by women and Sufi leaders, particularly in agricultural areas to address the famine. The women are currently developing a roadmap to implement the priorities they have shared with the special envoy and the mediation team.

To give the women and their peace efforts more visibility, we arranged media interviews with Rabab and, using our communication channels, drew attention to the women’s initiative. In addition to swissinfo, Rabab gave an interview to NADJA, an international news platform, in October. There she mentioned how women persuade warring parties to deposit their weapons outside the markets so that the population can get food. “Although they come from warring tribes, the women are working together to maintain community cohesion. They bring added value to the peace process, not only because they are victims of the war, but because they are active in bringing an end to it.”

In particular, she calls on the countries “that really have influence over the parties to the conflict” to use diplomatic means to persuade the parties to end the war. And she adds: “If there was real interest from the international community to influence those countries fueling the war, the war would stop today.”

Read the mentioned interviews with Rabab Baldo on our website under News and Press Review.

Cover photo: Rabab Baldo, seen here at the African Dialogue on Peace and Security in South Africa in October, works tirelessly for the participation of women in peace processes in Sudan.



Feminist Peace Initiative Capacity building for women in South Kordofan, Sudan

With a contribution from our Feminist Peace Initiatives, we are funding a project implemented by the Badya Centre for Integrated Development Services in Dilling, South Kordofan. The aim of the initiative is to build the capacity of up to 40 women in advocacy, trauma counselling and trust building. These women play an important role in efforts to achieve a ceasefire and to disarm their male relatives who are soldiers or fighters in the SAF, RSF and other armed groups.

The Badya Centre will also conduct two workshops and provide training materials to raise awareness among women about the Geneva talks and the peace process in general, and to strengthen the knowledge of local women-led organisations so that they can effectively participate in peace and security efforts.

The main mission of the Badya Centre is to strengthen the culture of peace in Sudan by building local capacity for peacebuilding and conflict resolution, strengthening the social fabric and promoting peaceful coexistence.

Find out more about Feminist Peace Initiatives on our website under Network.



Representatives of over 20 organisations took part in consultations on the 5th National Action Plan on “Women, Peace and Security”.



Implementation of the “Women, Peace and Security” agenda

A safer world for all

In view of the many armed conflicts, the question of measures for a more peaceful world is more relevant than ever. However, opinions on what is needed to achieve this goal differ widely. For us, one thing is clear: rearmament is not the answer. In the report on the implementation of the “Women, Peace and Security” agenda, we and other actors from Swiss civil society advocate a feminist understanding of security that is geared to the needs of people.

Switzerland is currently preparing its 5th National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, the landmark resolution on Women, Peace and Security that will soon be 25 years old. Switzerland has clearly committed itself to the “Women, Peace and Security” or WPS agenda. Among other things, it was a focus of the Swiss presidency of the UN Security Council in October 2024. But what does this commitment mean in terms of concrete implementation, especially in view of national debates on cybersecurity and army budgets?

With the aim of setting the priorities and recommendations of Swiss civil society for the 5th NAP, consultations were held with representatives of over 20 civil society organisations (photos above). Together with Frieda, the feminist peace organisation, and KOFF swisspeace, we have been responsible for civil society monitoring of the NAPs for a good eight years. The priorities and recommendations set out in the report aim to make Switzerland – and the world – safer and more peaceful for all people, especially for women, girls and queer people. The recommendations are based on the four pillars of Resolution 1325: prevention, protection, participation, and relief and reconstruction.

Link between foreign and domestic policy

The report, published in 2024, includes a number of key recommendations, including a shift from traditional state-centred security concepts to people-centred security principles and consistent demilitarisation.

The cornerstone of the recommendations is a comprehensive understanding of peace and security which, among other things, requires true gender equality and the elimination of the social structures that foster gender-based violence and insecurity.

For this reason, Switzerland should implement the recommended measures not only abroad but also at home. It is implausible to advocate for the resolution in foreign policy “but not to take the appropriate steps in domestic policy,” the report states. Swiss civil society sees the NAP 1325 as a “link between foreign and domestic policy” and as an opportunity for more coherence.

Find out how Switzerland is implementing the “Women, Peace and Security” agenda in the report “UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Civil society priorities for the 5th Swiss National Action Plan”. It is available in German, French and English. Download the report using the QR code:



Initiative to Ban Nuclear Weapons

For a world without nuclear weapons

As our supporters know, rearmament and militarisation bring neither security nor peace. In the last three years, the nuclear powers have increased investment in their nuclear arsenals. The danger of using nuclear weapons is higher than it has been for a long time. And yet Switzerland is still refusing to join the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. We need 100,000 signatures to make the Swiss government take action – as a Swiss voter you can send a signal by signing the Initiative to Ban Nuclear Weapons (“Atomwaffenverbotsinitiative”).

Switzerland actively participated in the UN negotiations on the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) and voted in favour of its adoption. Since it came into force in 2021, 94 states have signed it (as of 1 October 2024) – including Switzerland. For Switzerland to join the TPNW, the Federal Council must ratify it. In 2024, however, the Federal Council reiterated its position that “the reasons against accession outweigh the potential opportunities.” In its response to a postulate, the Federal Council wrote that the effects on “the future security architecture of Europe and Switzerland” would have to be considered. “In addition, the consequences of Switzerland’s accession for potentially closer cooperation with NATO in the future must be clarified.” Switzerland will continue its participation as an observer in the conferences of the signatory states.

This position contradicts Switzerland’s humanitarian tradition and the wishes of parliament. It also goes against Switzerland’s commitment to the “Women, Peace and Security” agenda, which it explicitly highlighted in its candidacy for the UN Security Council. A centrepiece of this agenda is the equal participation of women in conflict prevention and in efforts to achieve security and sustainable peace. Peace activists around the world cite disarmament and arms control as key objectives of the agenda, as this is the only way to achieve sustainable peace and comprehensive security.



The Initiative to Ban Nuclear Weapons was launched in July in front of the Swiss Parliament in Bern.

What you can do

The initiative to ban nuclear weapons was launched on 2 July 2024. We participated as a member of the Alliance for a Nuclear Weapons Ban. By the end of September, more than 21,000 signatures have been collected. We need 100,000. This is why we are calling on you to help.

- **Send a signal.** By adding your signature, you are supporting a ban on nuclear weapons and letting the Federal Council know that it must join the TPNW. Sign the attached signature form and share this link to the initiative’s website with your friends and acquaintances: via the QR code or on atomwaffenverbot.ch (German, French or Italian).



Get involved in peace work!

By becoming a member of PeaceWomen Across the Globe, you will gain a deeper insight into our projects and our future plans. We’ll invite you to events with our project partners and to joint activities with the team.

We have restructured the membership fees. You can find out more and register now on our website (directly accessible via the QR code).

Your regular contribution allows us and our partners both to plan our peace work for the long term and to organise it sustainably.



- **Help us.** The Alliance for a Nuclear Weapons Ban would like to reach 85,000 subscribers with an advertisement and signature forms in the Tages Anzeiger. Support this campaign with a donation: jetzt.atomwaffenverbot.ch.

Thank you for your support of this important initiative and for your commitment to a sustainable, peaceful world!

We are moving!

Our growing team needs more space for new colleagues and room for feminist peace work. From 1 November 2024 you will find us at Weissensteinstrasse 87, 3007 Bern, Switzerland.

Imprint

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