

Network meeting

“I can feel the energy.
We all want peace.”

Networks are central to feminist peace work. However, they need to be promoted, nurtured and strengthened. To this end, we invited peace activists from our Feminists Connecting for Peace network to a roundtable in Bern in February. There they shared their experiences, their extensive knowledge and developed strategies to realise common goals.



Twelve women from Cameroon to Ukraine, from Brazil to Guam took part in this roundtable. Together, we reflected with them, exchanged and developed ideas and plans – and thus strengthened the network. We used various methods to promote dialogue, including a storytelling exercise that took place on Bern’s local mountain, the Gurten.

“It is not easy, in our countries not everyone wants peace,” said Olga Karatch, a Belarusian activist at the conclusion of the roundtable. “But I am very impressed with how many women from the whole world want the same thing. I feel the energy. We all want to have peace.”

Find out more about this meeting on our website under [Network](#) | [Insights into the network](#).

In a group work session, participants discuss advocacy strategies in the network (photo left). On the Gurten, the focus was on networks as an instrument in feminist peacebuilding (photo above).

Peace processes: where women exert influence

We took an in-depth look at the common image of peace processes. The central question was: “How do women influence peace processes?” We illustrated the results of this work in a graphic representation of the different stages of peace processes.

With this tool, we want to focus on the role that women play and where they exert influence in driving peace processes and preventing setbacks. It does not claim to be a universally applicable model. We want to raise questions and stimulate discussion.

In this special edition of our newsletter, you can find out more – and receive the graphic directly into your hands.



Two generations at the Women's Peace Table

Shared pain – shared demands

Eighteen years on, since the signing of the peace agreement, there can still be no talk of peace in Nepal. The lack of political will, patriarchal social norms as well as political instability are hindering its implementation, leading to intergenerational consequences for those affected by the conflict. They want to be recognised as victims of the violence of war and demand the truth. Above all, they want to be heard. Our colleagues Camille Bernheim and Karin Widmer listened to them at a Women's Peace Table.

A young woman stands in front of the assembled group and tells her story. When her sister became seriously ill, she and her brother took the girl to hospital. "Where is your father?" they were asked. He was killed in the war, they explained. As a result, treatment was refused. Who pays for treatment when the father is dead?

This story is one of 24 personal testimonies from participants at the Women's Peace Table (WPT), which took place in Nawalpur in February. They illustrate how people affected by the civil war "are constantly reminded of what happened during the war", says Camille. The often tragic stories of the participants made her realise how drastic the 10 years of war had been – and remain – for the people. "It's as if the war never really ended." Formally, the war ended in 2006 with the signing of the peace agreement between the Nepalese government and the Maoist party at the time. The wounds remain.

Discrimination and marginalisation

At the WPT, some spoke for the first time about what they had experienced during and since the war. Others heard for the first time how women had been raped, imprisoned and tortured during the war. The stories show the far-reaching experiences of those affected. Today, they still face discrimination and marginalisation by authorities and relatives: the women who experienced sexualised violence but are not considered official victims of war and therefore receive no reparations from the government; the widow whose house was confiscated by her husband's family; the son who only learnt about his father's



One participant talks about how her parents' war experiences impacted her.

killing when his mother took part in another WPT and was willing to tell him about it. Some do not know whether their family members are still alive. They are among the estimated 1,500 people who are still considered disappeared today. These experiences are shared by families of all parties to the conflict.

Our partner organisation Nagarik Aawaz intentionally tries to bring those affected from all sides to the WPT. One woman's story shows just how important this work is: "I was always full of resentment towards the Maoists. That's why I was initially irritated when Nagarik Aawaz invited me to an event with participants from all sides of the conflict. But my view changed. After the event, I called my friend, with whom I no longer had contact because her father was a Maoist, and we visited each other."

War wounds

The wounds of war are passed on to the next generation. One young man said that everything he learnt at the intergenerational meeting was "historic". This is because the civil war is not part of the curriculum in schools and many parents do not talk about their experiences in order to protect their children. Another said that he had never realised what his mother had gone through.

The importance of these meetings is reflected in the testimonies. "This was the first time I had a safe space to cry with my mum," said one woman. One man said: "When I was little, I wanted to kill those who killed my father. But today I no longer want revenge. Even though our experiences here are different, the pain we share is similar." Like him, others emphasised that with events like these, Nagarik Aawaz is doing the work that the government should be doing.

But there is a lack of political will. There have been 13 changes of government since 2008. This political instability harbours the potential for further outbreaks of violence, says Karin, even though the current government is a coalition of former opponents during the war. Nagarik Aawaz seeks a positive peace, with comprehensive social justice, not just the absence of armed conflict. To achieve this peace, the structural violence in the deeply patriarchal Nepalese society must be overcome. Karin says that many institutions are denying the war.



At the end of the Peace Table, the participants remember the deceased and the missing.

Non-governmental organisations have to write “social harmony” instead of “peace” in their proposals. After the peace agreement was signed, 600 peace organisations were registered. Today, twelve remain.

—
“This was the first time
I had a safe space
to cry with my mum.”
—



A moment of lightness while a participant tells her story.

Reconciliation and change

The official reconciliation process only took place at the highest institutional level, not in the communities. Four local politicians were invited to the second day of the WPT to drive this process forward. Some participants presented the group’s demands to them: recognition, truth and accountability. One politician said afterwards that she had not realised conflict-affected people are living in her community. She invited those affected to continue working together.

With events like these, Nagarik Aawaz is initiating change that shakes up discriminatory structures in families and neighbourhoods. Being listened to and taken seriously also builds the women’s self-confidence. The young woman at the beginning of this article confronted the hospital employee who refused to treat her sister. Thanks to her increased self-confidence, her sister finally received the medical treatment she needed.



The participants of the Peace Table with employees of Nagarik Aawaz, including the director Susan Risal (2nd row, right) and our team members Camille Bernheim (front, 3rd from left) and Karin Widmer (back, 3rd from right).

International Board

Welcome and farewell

In March, we welcomed three new members to our International Board – and at the same time said goodbye to two women.

Three committed women have joined our International Board, bringing their wealth of experience in various areas (photo, from left to right):

- **Laila Sheikh Rüttimann** worked for more than 20 years in the Swiss Foreign Service, including in leading positions in Switzerland's development cooperation in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Africa. Her focus is on combining diplomacy with humanitarian, cooperation and peace-building instruments. She is now Head of Programmes and Partnerships at the House of Religions - Dialogue of Cultures in Bern.
- Freelance humanitarian expert **Louisa Seferis** has been working in crisis regions since 2006. Her thematic focus is on conflict resolution, participation and accountability. She works with local and international actors to promote solidarity networks and participatory solutions in crises.
- **Verena Flück** has over 20 years of experience as an independent consultant and coach, with a focus on strategic planning, organisational development, financing and capacity development. Her consulting work focuses on non-profit organisations and socially oriented networks and initiatives.

In March, we said goodbye to two members of the International Board. Anna Hess Sargsyan is embarking on a new path, but will continue to be available to us with her expertise as a peace mediator, particularly in protracted conflicts. She joined the board in 2020.

Significant contributor

We also said goodbye to a woman who has actively supported us for many years and played a key role in shaping our organisation. Margo Okazawa-Rey was an important co-sponsor of the "1000 Women for the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize" initiative, including as coordinator for the USA and Japan. As a widely networked and recognised activist and co-founder of the International Women's Network Against Militarism, she played an important role in our subsequent reorientation as a feminist peace organisation. Our president Ruth-Gaby Vermot pays tribute to Margo on our website (under News).

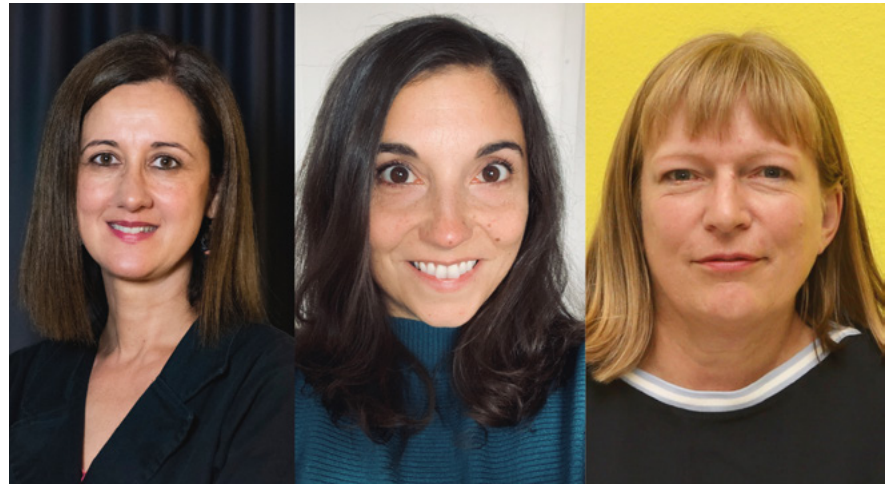
Find out more about our International Board members on our website under About us | Organisation.

Get involved in peace work!

By becoming a member of Peace-Women 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.



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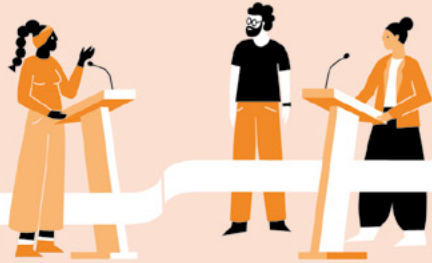
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Understanding peace processes

1 Peace, no armed conflict

Peace, based on democracy and respect for human rights, prevails. Conflicts exist on different levels and are resolved without resorting to violence or repression.



2 Tensions

Tangible tensions manifest in violent clashes or state repression. At all societal levels, people increasingly revert to violence to resolve conflicts or disputes.



3 Armed conflict without peace intent

Violent conflict has broken out. The parties to the conflict have no intentions to resolve the conflict without violence but focus on military victory.



4 Armed conflict with peace intent

Despite the ongoing armed conflict, the parties show willingness to negotiate, and a critical mass of the population is actively calling for a non-violent solution to the conflict.



5 Beginning talks

Preparations are underway for official peace negotiations. The circumstances and conditions for these to be held are being negotiated.



6 Peace negotiations
Formal peace negotiations based on specific agendas are taking place. Humanitarian or ceasefire agreements may be reached to create trust between the negotiating parties.

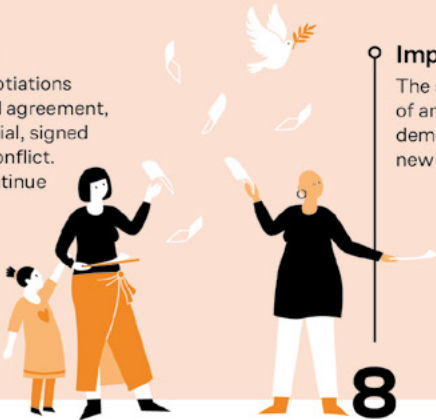


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7 Peace agreement

Successful peace negotiations conclude with a formal agreement, comprehensive or partial, signed by the parties to the conflict. Sub-groups might continue violent action.



7

8 Implementation of a peace agreement

The short- to medium-term implementation of an agreement focuses on disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, establishes new structures and addresses truth-finding.



8

9 Post-conflict reconciliation

The long-term quest for structural transformation allows for truth, transitional justice, reconciliation, reparation, finding missing persons and guarantees of non-repetition.



9



What are peace processes?

What images do the words “peace processes” evoke in your mind? Do you imagine years of negotiations culminating in a ceremony where the parties to the conflict sign an agreement, followed by a photo of the handshake that goes around the world? We have scrutinised and deconstructed this common image and taken an in-depth look at peace processes, as well as the question: “How do women influence peace processes?” The result of this work is a graphic representation of the different stages of peace processes. With this tool, we want to focus on the role women play and where they exert influence to drive peace processes and prevent setbacks.

A puzzle made up of several steps

Peace processes are never linear but take place in stages or phases that often overlap, without a clear timetable. A peace process is more of a puzzle made up of several successive small steps than a large, meticulously planned attempt to end a conflict based on a manual. At any stage it can go off track – even after a peace agreement has been signed – and suffer setbacks.

Adding feminist visions to the narratives

This graphic illustration shows this complexity without claiming to present a universally applicable model. Rather, it is intended to raise questions, facilitate analytical debate and encourage the addition of feminist visions to conventional narratives.

In all phases and in different contexts, we accompany women’s diverse peace work, taking into account the specific needs and risks. We are convinced that if we walk the paths to peace together with partners and affected women, the paths may not be easier, but will perhaps be shorter.

Instrument for feminist peacebuilding

How women influence peace processes

The influence of women and their roles in a peace process – they take centre stage in the illustration – are just as diverse as the women themselves. They are not only negotiators, mediators, signatories and facilitators in peace negotiations. From our many years of experience and from working with our partners and peace activists in different contexts, we know that women play diverse roles in all nine stages of the process:

In peace time or in contexts where tensions exist (stages 1-2) – using Brazil and Indonesia as examples – they influence political debate and agendas, recognise potential for conflict and actively prevent the emergence of tensions and clashes or outbreaks of violence.

During an armed conflict (stages 3-4) – using Ukraine as an example – they advocate non-violent conflict transformation and call for peace negotiations and the renunciation of enemy stereotypes. They run contact centres for victims, create trust between the parties to the conflict and promote peace intentions that are acceptable to the majority.

During formal negotiations (stages 5-7) – using the example of Colombia – they demand the inclusion of diverse visions and the participation of women in the talks and formulate gender-equitable provisions.

After the end of a conflict (stages 8-9) – using Nepal and the Philippines as examples – they play a key role in monitoring implementation, winning majorities in favour of peace and taking an active role in truth-finding processes. They lead initiatives for reconciliation and initiate structural change by calling for a critical examination of taboo subjects and non-repetition.