



Position paper on militarisation

Security through weapons and feminist peacebuilding: navigating the dilemma

More than 2,700 billion US Dollars. That is the global military expenditure in 2024. It marks the steepest rise in such spending since 1988. This stark figure underscores a world increasingly reliant on military solutions to achieve security. In sharp contrast: PeaceWomen Across the Globe firmly stands for non-violent conflict transformation. We believe that lasting security can only be achieved through inclusive dialogue and not through weapons or military deterrence.

Peacebuilding organisations like ours are often accused of being naïve in the face of the current global challenges. Our position on militarisation is neither detached from reality nor is it naïve. On the contrary, our position is rooted in the decades-long experience and first-hand knowledge of women building peace in the most difficult of conditions.

For two decades we have walked side by side with our partners who are forced to navigate the complex realities in countries and regions impacted by armed conflict. There, the decision between weapons or dialogue is not clear-cut: it remains an impossible choice.

This paper is a transparent attempt to:

First, unpack the tensions between security through weapons (militarisation) and security through dialogue (peacebuilding), acknowledging the polarity within which we operate.

Second, use concrete examples to illustrate how PeaceWomen Across the Globe is navigating this dilemma while remaining committed to our values and objectives as a feminist peacebuilding organisation.

Beyond militarised security: building sustainable peace

Increased defence spending does not make the world safer – more arms fuel more conflict. Militarisation stokes cycles of violence and hardens political positions. In addition, increased military spending typically means smaller budgets for conflict prevention and vital investments in health care, education and international cooperation.¹ While militarised deterrence seemingly creates a balance of power, more weapons invariably lead to the militarisation of societies, resulting in greater violence, more suffering and heightened insecurity.

History has repeatedly shown that while weapons can sometimes end wars in the short term, they are incapable of creating just and sustainable peace. Experts note: “Ending the fighting in the short term may not be conducive to keeping it ended in the long term.”²

In our day-to-day work with proximate³ peacebuilders, we see and recognise the complex tensions between security through weapons and security through dialogue. They are two poles of the same dilemma. It’s not simply a choice between one or the other: they co-exist.

As human beings, we are constantly torn between our values, the complex realities we live in, numerous options and our own personal circumstances. In facing these dilemmas, feminist peacebuilders must navigate multiple tensions.

They have the desire to remain committed to dialogue as the preferred means of conflict transformation. Yet some feel compelled by circumstances to use armed force to defend their families and communities from attack.

An example: Ukraine.⁴ Some Western feminists may criticise NATO and advocate for what others consider “abstract” pacifism: Ukrainian feminists regard this stance as a failure to acknowledge their right to self-defence (sometimes described as “Westspaining”).

Women may also regard the act of taking up arms as part of a wider struggle for women’s rights.

¹ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), “[Unprecedented rise in global military expenditure as European and Middle East spending surges](#)”, Yearbook 2025.

² Tetiana Kyselova and Dana M. Landau (eds), “[Special Issue: Rethinking Peace and Victory in Light of Russian Aggression in Ukraine](#)”, *International Negotiations* 30(1), 2025.

³ Proximate peacebuilders refers to “those who are closest to and most impacted by conflict extending beyond professional and institutional actors to everyday individuals across industries, experiences, and contexts who exert agency over conflicts in their own lives and communities” and is used instead of “local peacebuilders” ([Humanity United](#)).

⁴ Philosophical Salon, “The Antinomies of the Russia-Ukraine War and its Challenges to Feminist Theory”, 2025, available at: <https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/the-antinomies-of-the-russia-ukraine-war-and-its-challenges-to-feminist-theory/>

An example: Kurdistan. The Kurdish women fighters' decision to take up arms was not only part of their fight for Kurdish autonomy. It also was part of their struggle for women's rights and an attempt to break patriarchal traditions by taking on roles in combat and leadership.

Living in armed conflict requires feminist peacebuilders to navigate environments that are, by definition, heavily weaponised. Negotiating with or calling on the support of combatants is part of this reality.

Examples: In Colombia, Myanmar and Sudan our partners have gained access to occupied territories, ensured that civilians reach fields and markets, have negotiated ceasefires – and have even crafted peace agreements – by negotiating and interacting with combatants.

In striving for lasting peace, feminist peacebuilding movements have little choice but to navigate between these complex realities. Their work demonstrates how women negotiate the persistent tensions between militarisation and dialogue while remaining rooted in their communities and values.

Feminist peacebuilding: a realistic path to lasting security

Peace is more than the absence of war. It flourishes where social justice, political participation and economic security are guaranteed alongside physical and psychological safety. The feminist peace movement offers a vision that challenges rearmament and militarised deterrence. It advocates for the inclusion of diverse perspectives in decision-making processes – particularly those of women – and for non-violent approaches that address the root causes of conflict rather than just its symptoms.

As the global security landscape shifts and militarisation is on the rise, it is critical to join efforts for the peaceful transformation of conflicts. By providing strategic support to feminist peacebuilders and amplifying their demands and visions, PeaceWomen Across the Globe makes a concrete contribution to inclusive peace processes.

The responsibility of privilege: respectful support

When providing this support, we are obliged to acknowledge our privilege as an organisation based in Switzerland, a country that does not face an imminent threat of armed conflict. We remain steadfast in our conviction that peace is achieved when inclusive dialogue prevails over militarised responses.

But: in our commitment to respectful and supportive engagement, we follow our partners' lead and respect their positions.

We consider it the prerogative of each society and community to build security collectively and inclusively, according to their own needs, beliefs and values. It is not our role to judge or question positions anchored in lived realities, but to support peacebuilders in their efforts to transform societies and ensure lasting peace.

Our commitment: inclusive peace, shared security

Security is inseparable from peace, and peace cannot thrive without inclusive dialogue and non-violent conflict transformation. The UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, passed unanimously by all 15 members of the Council in 2000, is based on the fundamental principle that women's equal and full participation in peacebuilding, conflict prevention and conflict resolution is essential for effective and sustainable peace.

Our work, in line with Resolution 1325 and based on existing research⁵, shows that peace processes are sustainable in the long term when they are built on inclusion, dialogue, justice and trust – not on military force.

While hailed as a landmark achievement of the international community, the Resolution 1325 and the principles it is founded on are at a critical juncture today as governments increase military spending at the cost of investing in peace.

Unrestrained rearmament, paired with narratives that uncritically support it, is not only ineffective but also causes lasting harm – especially when not matched by equal or greater investments in conflict prevention and inclusive peace work. We are already witnessing the dire consequences of rearmament: it undermines gender equality⁶, diverts funds from vital social investments and causes severe damage to the environment, which in turn fuels further conflicts.

War and armed conflict are not inevitable. Peace is not static. Both are actively created and sustained through human effort. Decision-makers have a choice: heed their responsibility to build safer communities and a peaceful world – or precipitate devastation.

As governments rush to acquire arms, decision-makers must face a simple truth: more weapons do not make the world safer. They must be reminded that peace needs civic space, political will and transformative investment.

Bern, November 2025

⁵ https://wps.unwomen.org/pdf/en/GlobalStudy_EN_Web.pdf

⁶ UN Women. (2022). The Impact of Militarization on Gender Inequality. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/Impact-of-militarization-on-gender-inequality-en.pdf>