

MEETING REPORT

Fourth Meeting of the Women, Peace and Security Working Group for the Arab States/MENA Region

10–12 September 2025

Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

Hosted by

**Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy (AGDA) & the Emirates Centre for
Strategic Studies and Research (ECSSR)**

CONTENTS

Executive Summary	3
Overview of the Fourth Meeting	4
Identified Gaps, Challenges, and Priorities	5
External Meetings and Engagement with Stakeholders	7
Public Event: The WPS at 25	8
Key Insights	9
Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations	10

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report provides a summary of the key findings of the fourth meeting of the WPS Working Group for the Arab States/MENA Region. The views expressed in this publication emanate from the meeting discussions and do not necessarily represent the views of the convening organizations, including the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the United Nations or any of its affiliated organizations.

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Report Produced by:



Executive Summary

4th Meeting of the WPS Working Group	3 Days 10–12 September 2025, Abu Dhabi	13 Ambassadors at Closed Roundtable	25 Years of UNSCR 1325 Marked
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The fourth meeting of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Working Group for the Arab States/MENA Region took place in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, from 10 to 12 September, 2025. Hosted at the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy (AGDA) and the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research (ECSSR), the meeting convened WPS experts, including peacebuilders, policy specialists, researchers, and civil society representatives from across conflict-affected countries. The Working Group is led by the WPS Regional Hub at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI) and the UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States.

Strategically timed to coincide with the UN General Assembly and to precede the annual UN Security Council Open Debate on WPS in October, this dialogue served as both a substantive exchange and an operational planning session. The meeting focused on finalizing the "WPS White Policy Paper," with discussions centered on national dialogue processes and political transitions, inclusive reconstruction and reconciliation, humanitarian aid, and the design and implementation of National Action Plans (NAPs) on UNSCR 1325.

Alongside its internal deliberations, the meeting featured a closed-door roundtable with 13 ambassadors, including representatives of Security Council members and Arab countries, as well as a high-level public event, "The WPS at 25: Lessons Learned from the Arab World." These engagements provided important opportunities to advocate directly for the Working Group's outcomes and the white paper's recommendations to UAE-based and international stakeholders. The meeting reaffirmed the importance of regional collaboration and knowledge exchange in promoting women's leadership in peace and security efforts. By bringing together diverse voices and expertise, the Working Group continues to work towards a shared vision of inclusive and sustainable peace in the region.

Additionally, the group delved into the implications of the WPS agenda in the context of occupation, highlighting the need to address systemic barriers that hinder women's meaningful participation in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction. The conversation also examined the potential of WPS NAPs as strategic tools for advancing peacebuilding efforts, underscoring the need for stronger commitments from governments and regional actors to ensure their effective implementation. Finally, as the global community prepared to mark the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 25th anniversary of UNSCR 1325, the Working Group reflected on past achievements and ongoing challenges, reinforcing the urgency of sustained advocacy and concrete policy measures to advance the WPS agenda in the Arab States. The meeting culminated in organizing external meetings with Abu Dhabi-based Member State representatives, enabling the working group participants to advocate directly to Member States for the meeting's outcomes and the white paper's recommendations and findings.

Furthermore, a public panel discussion on the 25 years of implementation of the WPS agenda in the Arab States Region was organized on the final day of the working group meeting to elevate participants' voices and recommendations to Abu Dhabi-based stakeholders, including representatives of the international community. The meeting reaffirmed the importance of regional collaboration and knowledge exchange in promoting women's leadership in peace and security efforts. By bringing together diverse voices and expertise, the Working Group continues to work towards a shared vision of inclusive and sustainable peace in the region.

Women in the Arab region are not problems to be solved, but indispensable agents of healing, reconciliation, and transformation whose inclusion is essential for building lasting peace.

Overview of the Fourth Meeting of the WPS Working Group

The three-day dialogue combined plenary discussions, breakout sessions, and advocacy engagements, bringing together a diverse array of experts, including peacebuilders, policy analysts, academic researchers, and representatives from civil society.

The meeting opened with reflections on the journey of the Working Group from Amman, Geneva, and Doha to Abu Dhabi, tracing the evolution of the Group and of the White Policy Paper. Building on the outcomes of these prior meetings, this session concentrated on refining the paper's content and strategizing for coordinated advocacy around key global milestones, including the upcoming UNSC Open Debate.

Meeting Themes

1 National Dialogue & Political Transitions

The meeting examined how to ensure inclusivity, legitimacy, and survivor-centered participation in fragile political settlements and political transitions.

2 Inclusive Reconstruction & Reconciliation

Members identified the importance of context-specific approaches, community-driven solutions, and transitional justice mechanisms that address both the material and psychological dimensions of recovery, displacement, and refugee return.

3 National Action Plans on UNSCR 1325

Discussions revealed persistent financing gaps, highlighted the risks of overlooking arms proliferation and the gendered dimensions of climate-security, and stressed the importance of measurable indicators tailored to national contexts in the design and implementation of NAPs.

4 Humanitarian Aid & Conflict Prevention

The Working Group addressed the weaponization of aid and its implications for civilian protection, and emphasized that preventive measures rooted in education and local knowledge are critical to advancing the WPS agenda.

The meeting concluded with the consolidation of the White Policy Paper recommendations and the endorsement of developing "25 Recommendations for 25 Years" as a strategic advocacy tool for the anniversary of UNSCR 1325. Participants also mapped advocacy opportunities at UNGA, the UN Security Council Open Debate in October, and future milestones such as the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 70) in 2026.

KEY CHALLENGES & PRIORITIES

Identified Gaps, Challenges, and Priorities for the WPS Agenda

1 Inclusion and Representation

Despite progress through the WPS agenda, survivors of conflict-related violence and grassroots women's groups remain largely excluded from decision-making processes. Centralized funding approaches and insufficient localization continue to undermine local ownership, limiting the ability of grassroots actors to shape priorities and strategies.

2 Justice and Legal Frameworks

Serious gaps persist in ensuring accountability, justice, and protection against conflict-related sexual violence across the region. Fragmentation between national legal systems and obligations under UNSCR 1325 further constrains progress. In states without National Action Plans, women's access to justice mechanisms is particularly limited.

3 Policy and Implementation

The WPS agenda has not sufficiently addressed the specific contexts and needs of the Arab region. Accountability gaps remain evident at the UN level, preventive approaches to conflict are underdeveloped, and reliance on international terminology has limited the localization and effectiveness of WPS initiatives.

4 Discourse and Awareness

Narratives, memory, and identity in conflict-affected contexts remain insufficiently documented, risking the erasure of critical experiences and perspectives. Women's roles in media, advocacy, and leadership continue to be undervalued, while coordination across organizations and contexts remains fragmented.

5 Education

Education systems across the region fall short of preparing youth to engage meaningfully in peacebuilding and policymaking. Gender, peace, and conflict studies are rarely integrated into national curricula, and civic education promoting equality, tolerance, and resilience remains limited, hindering the development of a generation equipped to advance inclusive peace.

6 Emerging Issues

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW), without gender perspectives in arms control, exacerbates insecurity and remains critically overlooked, particularly as women continue to be marginalized in DDR processes. Climate change increasingly acts as a conflict multiplier, yet its interlinkages with conflict and gender remain understudied. Artificial intelligence is rapidly reshaping narratives and policy spaces, while its gendered impacts remain poorly understood.

EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT

External Meetings and Engagement with Abu Dhabi-Based Stakeholders: Meeting with Ambassadors on Advancing the WPS Agenda in the Arab States Region

As part of the fourth meeting, a closed briefing and policy discussion with ambassadors and representatives of diplomatic missions was held on September 11, 2025, at the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy (AGDA) in Abu Dhabi. Co-hosted by AGDA and the ECSSR, the meeting aimed to foster dialogue between Working Group members and the diplomatic community on regional priorities and policy recommendations in the lead-up to the 25th anniversary of the WPS agenda in October 2025.

The meeting brought together representatives from **thirteen embassies and international missions** based in the UAE, alongside members of the WPS Working Group. The exchange provided a platform for an in-depth discussion on findings from the Group's white paper, addressing key thematic priorities for the region.

Key Discussion Themes

Women and Non-State Armed Actors

Participants highlighted the importance of integrating a gender perspective into DDR programs and underscored that women play a pivotal role in preventing radicalization and fostering sustainable post-conflict transitions.

Reconstruction and Reconciliation

Physical rebuilding must go hand in hand with social healing and community cohesion. The human dimension of reconstruction — ensuring infrastructure efforts are linked to inclusive reconciliation — was identified as essential for long-term stability.

Funding and Financing

Participants raised concerns about accountability gaps and limited resources for reconstruction and peacebuilding. The Working Group emphasized the need for localization and decentralization of funds.

Documentation and Human Rights

The importance of documenting and archiving conflict-related crimes to prevent impunity, and the protection of human rights defenders and women in media, were identified as key priorities.

The meeting concluded with a shared commitment among ambassadors and Working Group members to continue policy dialogue, support collaborative research, and champion the localization of the WPS agenda. Participants reaffirmed that meaningful progress requires coordinated regional action, adequate resourcing, and sustained diplomatic engagement to ensure women's full participation in peacebuilding and recovery across the Arab region.

PUBLIC EVENT

The WPS at 25: Lessons Learned from the Arab World

The fourth meeting culminated in a public panel discussion on September 10, 2025, providing members with the opportunity to address national stakeholders and the international community based in Abu Dhabi. The panel discussion, "The WPS at 25: Lessons Learned from the Arab World," brought together leading experts and practitioners to reflect on twenty-five years of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and to shape a forward-looking vision for its future in the Arab region. The event assessed both progress and challenges in advancing women's roles in peace and security.

Panel Speakers

- **Heba Zayyan**

Regional Advisor on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action, UN Women

- **Anoud Yousef Abdulmohsen**

Acting Director, Fatima Bint Mubarak Center for WPS

- **Lea Baroudi**

Founder and Director, MARCH Lebanon

- **Samira Rashwan**

Senior Gender Expert on WPS, Egypt

- **Dr. Sara Chehab**

Senior Research Fellow, AGDA (Moderator)

- **HE Dr. Mohammed Al Dhaheri**

Deputy Director General, AGDA (Opening Remarks)

Panel Highlights

■ **Heba Zayyan** highlighted the strong institutional infrastructure, national action plans, and political will that have emerged across several Arab countries since UNSCR 1325. While the foundations are in place, the challenge now lies in translating commitments into tangible outcomes that ensure women's effective participation at all levels of peace and security decision-making.

■ **Anoud Yousef Abdulmohsen** presented the UAE's experience in advancing the WPS agenda, including the adoption of the country's first National Action Plan in 2021, which prioritizes women's participation in decision-making and peacebuilding. She underlined the role of the General Women's Union in positioning women at the heart of peace, security, and sustainable development.

■ **Lea Baroudi** stressed that localization is central to the agenda's success — imported concepts or terminology may alienate communities if not rooted in local realities. She called for redefining how we approach conflict and radicalization, recognizing them as emotional processes that require trust-building, empathy, and pride to counter fear and division.

■ **Samira Rashwan** called for a paradigm shift in the next 25 years of the WPS agenda, arguing that gender parity — rather than participation — should become the new global standard. She urged governments to embed parity within their legal and institutional systems, and to prioritize accountability and implementation over norm creation.

Panelists agreed that the WPS agenda must be localized, context-specific, and co-created with women themselves. The event concluded with a unified message: women in the Arab region are not problems to be solved, but indispensable agents of healing, reconciliation, and transformation whose inclusion is essential for building lasting peace.

KEY INSIGHTS

Key Insights: Towards Localization, Education, and Accountability

■ National Dialogues Must Be Inclusive

Inclusivity and credibility of dialogues remain critical, with survivors and grassroots actors often sidelined. Political settlements must go beyond elite bargains to reflect diverse voices.

■ Reconstruction is Incomplete Without Reconciliation

Transitional justice, dignified return of refugees/IDPs, and psychosocial support are vital. Reconstruction must be context-sensitive, community-driven, and linked to reconciliation.

■ Localization is Non-Negotiable

The WPS agenda must be owned and led by local actors. This requires decentralizing funding, adapting frameworks to local contexts, and building policy ownership within regional institutions.

■ Education is a Foundational Pillar

Integrating gender, peace, and conflict studies into national curricula and strengthening civic education are key for fostering resilience, equality, and stability.

■ Preventive Approaches are Key

Early warning and preparedness must be prioritized over reactive measures, with women supported as frontline actors for conflict and crisis prevention.

■ Accountability Must Be Strengthened

Stronger monitoring mechanisms for NAPs and accountability of international, regional and national actors are required, particularly for the weaponization of aid.

■ NAPs Require Sustainable Implementation

Sustainable financing, SALW integration, and rigorous monitoring are central to making National Action Plans more effective.

■ Innovation Can Drive Impact

Social entrepreneurship, AI monitoring tools, and private sector partnerships emerged as promising avenues for enhancing the WPS agenda's impact.

■ Media & Narratives are Critical

Amplifying local voices and ensuring women shape narratives from the region is essential to challenging negative gendered stereotypes.

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations

01 Strengthen Survivor-Centered Participation

Ensure survivors and grassroots women's groups are meaningfully represented in peace processes, political transitions, and WPS implementation. Support community-driven solutions and reconciliation mechanisms that reflect local realities.

02 Advance Legal and Justice Frameworks

Harmonize national legislation with UNSCR 1325 obligations and expand legal provisions addressing sexual and gender-based violence in conflict. Improve women's access to justice mechanisms, particularly in states without NAPs.

03 Promote Localization and Decentralization

Decentralize funding, decision-making, and implementation mechanisms to strengthen local ownership. Adapt WPS terminology and frameworks to national and cultural contexts, and establish regional coordination platforms.

04 Develop Innovative Funding and Education Systems

Explore private sector engagement, social entrepreneurship, and non-traditional funding channels while increasing donor transparency. Integrate gender, peace, and conflict studies into educational curricula at all levels.

05 Address Emerging Threats and Amplify Voices

Incorporate SALW control and disarmament strategies into NAPs while developing frameworks to address climate change as a conflict multiplier. Monitor AI's impact on security and narratives, and leverage media to document local narratives and amplify women's voices.

06 Reinforce Regional Advocacy and Prevention

Strengthen South-South cooperation and engage regional blocs (Arab League, GCC, AU) to amplify a unified voice. Prioritize early conflict prevention over reactive measures, ensuring women play central roles in disaster risk reduction and mediation.

