

ADVANCING WOMEN IN HIGH-LEVEL MEDIATION



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATES, NETWORKS AND THE UN

*Outcomes from a policy symposium held
at Durham University in October 2017*

BACKGROUND

Recent years have seen the establishment of a number of Networks of Women Mediators, in regions including Africa, the Mediterranean and the Nordic Countries. One of the roles of these networks is to advance women mediators through increasing their visibility, consolidating lists of qualified women who are available for nomination to high-level positions, providing knowledge exchange opportunities, and supporting the career progression of younger women mediators. The creation of the Networks recognises that women are actively engaged in mediation at a number of levels. From the grass roots negotiation of humanitarian access with armed actors to the provision of mediation expertise to high level processes and the negotiation of international deals, women's expertise is invaluable but often overlooked. The representation of women mediators decreases significantly as processes become internationalised.

The symposium brought together women working with international peace agencies, nation states, women's mediation networks and NGOs to formulate recommendations for advancing women in high-level mediation. The conversation was held in the context of the commitment made by the Secretary General to increase the UN's emphasis on conflict prevention and mediation and to increase the number of women mediators globally.

The Secretary General's commitment to increasing the number of women mediators recognises the fundamental point that mediation teams can be strengthened by diversity. In a time when global conflicts are becoming increasingly complex, conflict prevention and peaceful resolution requires all of our resources. Ensuring gender sensitivity in mediation is a shared responsibility. Taking steps such as moving towards a model of co-mediation and increasing the diversity of mediation teams ensures that a broader range of skills, expertise, experience and perspective are represented on those teams. Increasing the breadth of experience on the team can only increase the depth of insight available. This is essential for dealing with complex conflicts.

This document presents a list of recommendations for advancing women in high-level mediation through enhanced collaboration between Networks, States and the UN.

IMAGES

Cover: Catherine Ashton, the European Union's High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in the Palais des Nations (UN) for a photo opportunity before the start of a second round of the E3 / EU+3 Iran talks. (Panos/M Henley)
Right: Policy symposium organisers and attendees.

HOW CAN STATES SUPPORT NETWORKS? RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

Under UNSCR 1325+ states have a responsibility to increase the number of women mediators. Networks should be seen as vital partners in fulfilling these obligations. A productive relationship between states and Networks is therefore a central aspect of advancing the work of both. There are a number of practical steps that can be taken to support the Networks.

(i) Gender parity – comply or explain

States are the link between Networks and international organisations. They can help advance the work of the Networks by pushing for transparency in the high-level appointments process. For example, National Action Plans in support of UNSCR 1325 should make explicit reference to this commitment. Parity in nomination should become the default position. Where states do not nominate on a 50/50 basis an explanation should be made public as to why it was not possible to meet this requirement.

Recommendation: States should make explicit commitments to equal nominations of men and women and ensure relevant policies and guidelines reflect this.

(ii) Resourcing

Efforts to increase the representation of women in high-level mediation have been ongoing since 2000. The work of the Networks will not be a short term undertaking, but rather requires long term and systemic investment that will enable them to develop depth and breadth of operational expertise in support of UNSCR 1325 obligations. Such investment includes financial contributions, in-kind support in the form of governance and secretariat support and a nominated official to act as liaison between the state and Networks.

Recommendation: States should support the work of the Networks by agreeing long term and sustainable resourcing.

(iii) Leading by example

It is crucial that states are visible in their backing for women who are nominated for mediation positions in order to give political legitimacy and engender public endorsement to enable them to carry out the roles to which they are appointed, whether as chief mediator, co-mediator or as members of the mediation team.

Recommendation: When nominations and appointments are made, states should release public statements of support from the highest possible political office.

HOW CAN NETWORKS SUPPORT STATES? RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NETWORKS

Networks can in turn support the work of states to fulfil their obligations under UNSCR 1325. Networks are potentially better placed to bring subject specific expertise to the table and to assist states to recruit the most highly qualified women mediators. They can also act as advocates for initiatives taken by states and international organisations to advance women mediators. There are a number of practical options;

(i) Establishing criteria

The adoption of skills based selection criteria for mediators would address the currently opaque nature of the appointments process and ensure the professionalization of the field. The Networks have a potentially central role in helping to define what skills are necessary to be a good mediator, and promoting a skills based approach to recruitment and progression. The establishment of broadly applicable criteria would help to redress the gendered nature of perceived mediator characteristics.

Recommendation: In the absence of clear agreed criteria for mediator recruitment, Networks should work with the relevant states and UN agencies to draft broadly applicable essential criteria for the recruitment of mediators, both women and men.

(ii) Identifying candidates

Networks can play a central role in the nomination process by maintaining rosters of suitably qualified women available for nomination by states. This can include searching more widely for candidates from non-diplomatic backgrounds, including those with experience of high level commercial or trade negotiations. This helps to ensure a strong pool of potential candidates drawn from a broad base of representation, including women from non-traditional career backgrounds and with expertise in complementary fields of practice.

Recommendation: Networks should liaise with states during the nomination process to advocate for Network members.

(iii) Facilitating Collaborative Practice

If properly resourced and supported, Networks have the potential capacity to promote a system wide focus on the advancement of women in mediation. Networks of women mediators have been created at both grass roots and quasi governmental levels. Effective co-ordination between these networks could significantly increase their potential impact and help to support the objective of supporting women in mediation more generally increasing the visibility of mediation work already being done by women in conflict affected areas.

Recommendation: Networks should develop links to civil society networks of women mediators and cultivate working relationships between grass roots initiatives and the international work of the Networks.

WHAT CAN THE UN DO? RECOMMENDATIONS FOR KEY UN AGENCIES.

Ultimately, work by states and Networks to promote women mediators needs to be supported by the UN in its own high-level appointments process. Without greater transparency in the process, the success of efforts to increase the number of women in high-level mediation teams cannot be guaranteed.

Recommendation: The Secretary General's Office should take steps to make the high-level appointments process more transparent.

The success of the work of the Networks and states also depends on a proactive approach being taken by the UN to advancing women mediators. The Networks are a key platform from which to advocate for the nomination of women mediators to high-level posts. Strong collaboration with key UN agencies could assist with this progression. Support for practical initiatives such as collaboration between Networks, joint field mission and knowledge exchange opportunities could all benefit the work of Networks, states and the UN in building up the expertise base for all mediation teams. In particular these knowledge exchange activities should focus on so-called 'hard' security issues that are currently dominated by men. Increasing the representation of women in high level mediation should not be equated with the empowerment of women to participate in mediation processes but should be seen as a necessary strategy to increase the diversity of UN led mediation teams.

Recommendation: United Nations bodies should liaise with Networks to support collaborative projects, for example joint field missions involving representatives from multiple networks.

The Secretary General has already taken a number of positive steps towards gender parity in the UN, including the appointment of equal numbers of women and men to his high level advisory panel on mediation. Seeing the work of the Networks, states and the UN as an integrated whole, in which the success of each depends on the other, helps to encourage a system wide approach to advancing women in high level mediation.



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