



Background Paper for Civil Society Roundtables

This Background Paper:

1. Provides information on how Australian based civil society organisations are engaging with the Australian Government on women, peace and security related issues, in particular the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security ('the NAP');
2. Outlines the strengths, weakness and opportunities in civil society engagement with the Australian Government on women, peace and security related issues, in particular the NAP, that have been identified by independent reviews and Annual Civil Society Dialogues; and
3. Proposes key issues to be discussed at the 2018 Civil Society Roundtables.

Australian Civil Society's Engagement with the Australian Government on Women, Peace and Security

Australia's current National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security (2012-2018, extended to June 2019) recognises the importance of engaging with civil society as both experts on peace and security issues and as advocates for gender inclusive peace, security and sustainable development:

There are a number of non-government organisations in Australia that have substantial expertise in Women, Peace and Security. These organisations have played a key role in advocating for and developing this National Action Plan.¹

Strategy 3 of the NAP (pg. 22) focusses on engagement with civil society organisations (both domestic and international). The National Action Plan on Women

¹ Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2012–2018, p.16, <https://ofwengage.pmc.gov.au/35731/documents/77828>

Peace and Security also encourages the non-government sector to develop publicly available shadow progress reports (pg. 27).

When the NAP was launched, there was no existing common platform for non-government or civil society organisations to engage with the Australian Government on women, peace and security issues, other than as individual organisations. To support implementing the actions aligned with Strategy 3, a few non-government organisations in 2013 came together to create the Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women, Peace and Security (the WPS Coalition).

The WPS Coalition is a voluntary, non-partisan, independent coalition of civil society organisations, networks and individuals working to advance gender inclusive approaches to peace and security in Australia, Asia and the Pacific region and globally. The WPS Coalition is managed by a voluntary self-nominated Steering Group.²

One representative from the WPS Coalition sits on the Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC) of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security and two representatives from the WPS Coalition sit on the IDC's Subcommittee. To support the work of these representatives, the Steering Group canvasses views from members (and non-members) and runs quarterly teleconferences with members.

Strengths, Weaknesses and Opportunities in Civil Society Engagement

The following is a summary of strengths, weakness and opportunities in civil society engagement with the Australian Government on women, peace and security related issues, in particular the NAP, that have been identified in (a) the 2015 Independent Interim Review of the Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security³ and (b) five Annual Civil Society Dialogues (2013-2017).⁴

Strengths

- Well-documented evidence to suggest that government agencies value the expertise that civil society organisations bring to advancing the women, peace and security agenda.
- Mutually strong commitment on the part of government agencies and civil society to increase engagement on women, peace and security issues.

² 'About us', The Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women Peace and Security, 2018, www.wpscoalition.org.

³ 'Independent Interim Review of the Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2012-2018', Department of the Prime Minister & Cabinet, 2016, <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resource-centre/office-women/independent-interim-review-australian-national-action-plan-women-peace-and-security-2012-2018>.

⁴ 'Annual Women, Peace and Security Dialogues', The Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women Peace and Security, 2018, <https://wpscoalition.org/annual-civil-society-dialogue-on-women-peace-and-security/>.

- Good foundation of civil society engagement (Annual Civil Society Dialogue) with government agencies that can be built upon.
- Robust, professional and individual relationships between government staff and civil society.
- Government and civil society organisations agree that the independence of civil society is fundamental to a constructive relationship.

Weaknesses: Between civil society and government

- Engagement with civil society lacks a partnership approach: there is limited information sharing, concerns with being kept at arm's length, perceived lack of trust, limited access to decision-making roles, lack of engagement with the findings/recommendations in the Annual Civil Society Report Cards.
- Extent to which there is a willingness to engage with civil society depends a great deal on the extent to which Ministers with portfolio responsibilities are committed to promoting consultation and ongoing engagement with civil society.
- Mode of engagement is exclusionary and doesn't lend itself to effective consultation and collaboration: calls for civil society participation are often made at short notice, with inadequate turnaround times to provide inputs, Canberra-based meetings with participation at personal cost.
- Lack of a clearly articulated role for civil society in the National Action Plan.
- Government engagement with civil society often fails to recognise the diversity within civil society, calling for a single representative.
- Lack of formal monitoring arrangements, such as shadow reporting.

Weaknesses: Within civil society

- Civil society platforms need to encourage greater participation from the diversity of groups working on women, peace and security (even though they may not use the official UN language).
- Sustained engagement is hampered by limited information sharing within civil society.
- Civil society lacks a strategic approach to engaging with government on women peace and security issues and the National Action Plan in particular.
- Need for civil society to ensure more open communication amongst itself.
- Lack of resources is a limiting factor – makes it challenging to undertake broad coordination, consultation and advocacy; with self-funding to attend consultations, and meetings resulting in ad hoc and reduced engagement.

Opportunities

- Support civil society to undertake a mapping exercise, with increased inclusion of different civil society actors, to enhance coordination with the government.
- Identify entry points for engagement between civil society and the government in the specific areas of National Action Plan implementation.
- The increasing profile and visibility of the WPS Coalition presents an opportunity to develop a formalised and structured engagement with Government. The WPS Coalition can:
 - ✓ Co-develop (civil society and government agencies) a resourced Civil Society Engagement Strategy.
 - ✓ Co-design a clear mechanism for structured and regular consultation between Government and civil society.
 - ✓ Develop and support a community of practice/WPS Cohort which individual agencies can access to identify highly qualified WPS scholars and practitioners to offer training, workshops, consultation, networks and advice.
 - ✓ Support continued development of the WPS Coalition website to serve as an information hub to promote and publicise Australia's WPS activities in ways that encourage an open exchange of ideas and information.
 - ✓ With financial support for a secretariat for the Australian Civil Society Coalition for Women, Peace and Security, the Coalition can enable more effective outreach and coordination across the diversity of civil society working on women, peace and security.

The 2018 Roundtables in Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra are an opportunity for honest discussions and the generation of new ideas about civil society engagement by and for anyone representing a civil society organisation, or any individuals who care about peace and security in practice. The focus of the Roundtables will be on generating ideas for ongoing dialogue between civil society and between civil society and Government on peace and security.

The aim of the 2018 Civil Society Roundtable is to *discuss* the role of civil society in the development, implementation and monitoring of Australia's second National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security; and generate ideas for ongoing dialogue processes/mechanisms within civil society and between civil society and government on women, peace and security.