



PeaceRep
Peace and Conflict
Resolution Evidence
Platform

Gender, Peace Agreements, and Fragmentation

Laura Wise explores the challenges of incorporating gender perspectives in peace processes during an era of fragmented conflict and mediation efforts.

Drawing on data from the [PA-X Peace Agreements Database](#), this blog highlights the limited and often superficial inclusion of women's rights and gender-related issues in peace agreements signed in 2023, and discusses the growing role of third parties in peace negotiations.

[Explore PA-X Gender](#)



Photo by @KSAmofaEN / Twitter

In May 2023, representatives of the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF), the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), governments, regional organisations, and the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan (UNITAMS) assembled in Saudi Arabia. Their deliberations resulted in the '[Jeddah Declaration of Commitment to Protect the Civilians of Sudan](#)', which contained a series of commitments to act in accordance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL). The agreement included an affirmation of parties' responsibility to 'Refrain from any form of torture or other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment, including sexual violence of all kinds.'

A year later, Human Rights Watch published [a report](#) which evidenced what many other human rights defenders and women's organisations had previously reported: that 'neither warring party has taken meaningful steps to prevent its forces from committing rape or attacking health care, nor to independently and transparently investigate crimes committed by their forces'. Despite [multiple attempts](#) from diverse actors to mediate, efforts to bring the parties into some form of sustained ceasefire have repeatedly stalled, and the human rights of civilians of all genders in Sudan continue to be violated across the country, with the [alleged involvement](#) of some of those same third-parties.

This shorthand of events in Sudan from 2023 serves as an [illustration of fragmentation](#) – both of conflict dynamics and multi-mediation – in which diffuse constellations of influential actors struggle to bring parties into substantive negotiations. But this example of an agreement from Sudan also offers a snapshot into the challenges gender equality advocates are facing in peace and mediation processes in this 'age' of fragmentation: brief commitments to women's rights in limited agreements that are almost immediately violated, have little to no accountability mechanisms, and only appear in a minority of peace agreements.

Peace agreements are just one piece of what is an increasingly complex puzzle of peacemaking. However, these agreements help us to explore implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, the ability of gender equality advocates to influence peacemaking processes, and the extent to which [peace agreements are still a space](#) to push for gendered perspectives on peace and conflict, in the age of fragmentation.

Women, girls and gender references in 2023 peace agreements

In May 2024, PeaceRep launched [Version 8 \(V8\) of the PA-X Peace Agreement Database](#), which comprises 31 (excluding local)[1] agreements reached in 2023. This is an increase in the number of peace agreements, up from 25 agreements in 2022, likely due to multiple agreements being signed between the government of Colombia and the National Liberation Army (ELN) throughout 2023. Despite this annual increase, the general trend from 1990 is that [the number of peace agreements per year is decreasing](#).

Peace agreements listed on PA-X for 2023 (excluding local agreements) come from peace processes addressing conflict in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Colombia, Kosovo-Serbia, the Philippines, and Sudan. These processes include: the post-2015 Colombia VI process between the Government and the ELN; the Jeddah agreements between the SAF and the RSF in Sudan; the EU-facilitated 'Belgrade-Pristina' dialogue; regional processes for the eastern DRC, and the Norwegian facilitated process between the Government of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front (NDF). Additionally, Iran and Saudi Arabia reached a normalization agreement brokered by China, relating implicitly to their support of their support of parties to conflicts across the Middle East, for example, in Yemen.

Eight peace agreements – 26% of agreements – in 2023 include explicit references to women, girls, gender or sexual violence (WGG) (excluding local). This is a slight drop from 28% of peace agreements in 2022, and is consistent with annual percentages of WGG references in peace agreements since 2018, which have ranged from 21 to 32%. It is also consistent with the total proportion of peace agreements with women, girls, and gender references from 1990-2023 (21%).

Peace agreements with references to women, girls, or gender occurred in only two of these processes in 2023: the Colombia-ELN process, and the Jeddah agreements between the SAF and RSF in Sudan. The types of WGG references differ across the processes in Colombia and Sudan, with the agreements between the SAF and RSF dealing with sexual violence in Sudan, whilst the agreements from Colombia predominantly address women's meaningful participation in the peace process. The [PA-X Gender](#) sub-categories that are covered by peace agreements in 2023 are: Participation; Equality; International Law; Violence Against Women; Institutional Reform; and Implementation. However, it is worth noting that none of the agreements which explicitly reference WGG contain substantive or detailed provisions, and only the *Acuerdo de Mexico* in Colombia referenced more than one WGG issue (participation, implementation, and equality; all short references).

Throughout 2023, the Government of Colombia and the ELN signed a series of agreements addressing ceasefires, monitoring and verification, and process mechanisms for establishing peace tables, such as the operational rules for National Committee on Participation. The gender references in these agreements primarily affirmed the role of women in peace, with the [Acuerdo de Mexico](#) committing to the 'establishment of a method for strengthening the active and effective participation of women...in building democracy for peace.' The parties also committed to 'incorporate into our work perspectives informed by gender, women's rights, the LGBTIQ+ community, ethnic peoples and the protection of Mother Earth, taking into consideration the initiatives and experiences of society, as well as the recommendations and instruments of national and international entities aimed at increasing women's participation in peacebuilding and peacekeeping'.

Other Colombia agreements included references to framing actions '[in terms of international humanitarian law to create the conditions for civilians, especially the most vulnerable communities, including...women](#)'. They also build on the differential approach used in other Colombian peace processes in reference to the Police Unit for Peacebuilding and the National Protection Unit, which the

parties agree '[shall take a differential and gender-sensitive approach to the provision of security and protection for members of the Mechanism](#).' None of the agreements refer to gender quotas, but do explicitly take a [gender-sensitive approach](#) to women's participation in the peace process.

As previously mentioned, the Jeddah agreements for Sudan contained short commitments to refraining from 'sexual violence of all kinds' and '[sexual, gender-based, and discriminatory violence of all kinds](#)'. This is supported elsewhere in the agreements by non-gender specific commitments to respecting IHL and International Human Rights law (IHRL), and ensuring that all obligations of IHL are fully disseminated within both forces ranks. It is clear from accounts of women and humanitarian workers in Sudan that these commitments have not been upheld by either side. In August 2023 the [UN Human Rights Council reported](#) widespread use of rape and sexual violence against women and girls by the RSF, whilst in October there were [reports of conflict-related sexual violence](#) also perpetrated by SAF soldiers, with an understanding that across the conflict there is underreporting of sexual violence events.

None of the 2023 peace agreements (excluding local) included a women's group or representative as a signatory (labelled as [WggImpSign] on PA-X). This is consistent with previous years, where the highest number of peace agreements in a given year signed by a women's representative is three (1998). This does not mean that women's groups did not participate in any of the peace processes included on PA-X, but that they did not sign resultant agreements.[2] Although PA-X does not code for individual women as signatories, it is possible to identify women as having signed peace agreements in 2023 in Colombia and the Philippines by using secondary sources in which they self-identify as women – for example, through publicly reported membership of professional women's networks or, in interviews where they have reflected on their involvement as women in a peace process. However, it is important not to make any assumptions about relationships between the presence of these individual women to the gender references in the agreements that they signed, without secondary research that explores the conduct of the negotiations.

Global peace agreement trends and Women, Peace and Security

PA-X Version 8 adds to our comparative knowledge of global peace agreement practice, and helps us to identify and contextualise contemporary peace process trends, building on historical data since 1990. Despite an uptick in the number of peace agreements reached in 2023, the general trend from 1990 is that the number of peace agreements is decreasing. At the same time, conflict events are increasing: according to the [Armed Conflict Location Event Data](#) project, 'conflict event rates have increased by over 40% from 2020 through 2023; and increased 12% in 2023 from 2022 rates'.

This is concerning from a gender perspective, as conflict causes complex, intersectional gendered harms, and peace agreements are an opportunity both to disrupt or manage conflict, and to integrate a gender perspective to address those harms. Multiple active conflicts in 2023 did not reach written, publicly available agreements – such as Myanmar, Syria, and Ukraine – and the lack of a sustained ceasefire in Gaza has contributed to the devastating harms experienced by civilians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including women and girls. Furthermore, as only 26% of the agreements which were reached included explicit references to women, girls, and gender, those opportunities to reach gendered commitments by conflict parties were absent from some of the world's most intense and protracted conflicts.

The concentration of peace agreements from the Colombia-ELN process in 2023 makes it difficult to make any quantitative assessment of what these agreements tell us about the role of emergent third parties in peace agreements. However, some of the 2023 peace agreements illustrate characteristics of broader peace agreement trends.

For example, [the 2023 deal](#) mediated by China between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran to resume diplomatic relations between the two countries, continuing China’s development as a mediator. Analysis from Sanja Badanjak [using PA-X Version 7 and the Third Parties in Peace Agreements Dataset](#), shows that countries such as Qatar, Kenya, Russia, China, and Turkey are emergent or non-Western third parties to peace agreements whose involvement as signatories is either remaining stable or growing, whilst so-called Western countries signing peace agreements as individual states is decreasing. Similarly, Badanjak suggests that regional and sub-regional organisations such as the African Union (AU), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the European Union (EU) are signing peace agreements more often. The 2023 peace agreements in the DRC resulted from a process led by the East African Community (EAC), with an additional supporting communique from the AU, whilst the Brussels Dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina was facilitated by the EU (as it has since 2011).

Both of these trends – the intensification of non-Western states and the rise of regional organisations, both acting in the mediation space as peace agreement third parties – suggest that women’s rights and gender equality advocates in peace processes increasingly need to engage with emergent third-party states and regional organisations, and to understand these actors’ positions on Women, Peace and Security, in order to identify opportunities for gender interventions. Existing research on how emergent third-parties understand themselves as WPS norm entrepreneurs – for example, from [Toni Hastrup](#), [Liu Tiewa](#), [Yeonju Jung](#), and [Ma. Lourdes Veneracion-Rallonza](#) – is a starting point for exploring the prospects of advancing gendered perspectives in peace processes in this new age of fragmented mediation.

About the Author:

Laura Wise is a Research Fellow with PeaceRep at the University of Edinburgh School of Law.

[1] PA-X includes agreements from a wider variety of negotiation practices – including some local agreements that are not associated with conflicts in which there have been more than 25 battle-related deaths (UCDP conflict threshold). These types of local agreements can be excluded from the search if all Agreement/Conflict levels are selected, except for Intrastate/local (other) [IntraLocal]. The analysis in this blogpost excludes local agreements.

[2] PA-X codes for ‘Signing or Witnessing agreement [WggImplSign]: The situation of signing or witnessing of agreement ‘as women’ – but NOT including any signature by a woman or women – rather just women signing as part of a specific women’s group, or women’s delegation is accounted for in this variable.’ https://pax.peaceagreements.org/media/documents/PA_X_codebook_wgg_v8.pdf



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
Edinburgh Law School

✉ peacerep@ed.ac.uk
✕ @Peace_Rep_
in PeaceRep

www.peacerep.org | pax.peaceagreements.org

PeaceRep is funded by UK International Development from the UK government, building on the work of the Political Settlements Research Programme led by the University of Edinburgh Law School from 2015 – 2020.