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Gender References in Peace Agreements in 2023

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Laura Wise is a Research Fellow with the Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Programme (PeaceRep), based at the University of Edinburgh. Laura's research explores the margins of peace processes and their intersections with the politics of inclusion, with a particular focus on gender. She has worked on multiple peace analytics data tools, including the PA-X Peace Agreement Database, the PeaceFem mediation smartphone app, and the 'Ceasefires in a Time of Covid-19' tracker. Laura regularly supports governmental stakeholders on understanding peace process data, and analysing gender perspectives and women's inclusion in peace processes. She holds an MA in Comparative Ethnic Conflict from Queen's University Belfast and a BSc Econ in International Politics from Aberystwyth University.

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Peace agreements in 2023

In May 2023, PeaceRep launched Version 8 (V8) of the PA-X Peace Agreement Database, which comprises 31 agreements (excluding local)[1] 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. No comprehensive agreements were signed in 2023, which has only previously occurred in 2008, but this is consistent with the low average percentage of peace agreements that are comprehensive (6%, 1990-2023).[2] 42% of agreements (excluding local) listed on PA-X in 2023 were ceasefires, which is double the average percentage from 1990-2023 (19%).

Peace agreements listed on PA-X for 2023 (excluding local) 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 Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF);[3] 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.

Peace agreements with women, girls and gender references

In 2023, 8 peace agreements – 26% of agreements – 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, 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.

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 Intra-state/local (other) [IntraLocal]. The analysis in this data report excludes local agreements, which is consistent with previous data submissions to UN Women.

2 Excluding a spike to 23%, 11%, and 16% of peace agreements that were comprehensive in 2005, 2006, and 2007, the annual % of comprehensive peace agreements is consistently under 10%.

3 Although categorised on PA-X as the 'Sudan Transition Process', arguably the outbreak of conflict between the Sudan Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces in April 2023 points to the collapse of the Sudanese transition process.

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'.[4]

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',[5]. 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.'[6] None of the agreements refer to gender quotas, but do explicitly take a gender-sensitive approach to women's participation in the peace process.[7]

In Sudan, the Jeddah agreements contained commitments to 'Refrain from any form of torture or other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment, including sexual violence of all kinds' and 'sexual, gender-based, and discriminatory violence of all kinds'.[8] This is supported elsewhere in the agreements by non-gender specific commitments to respecting International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and international human rights law, 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,[9] whilst in

4 https://pax.peaceagreements.org/agreements/wgg/2559/

5 https://pax.peaceagreements.org/agreements/wgg/2584/

6 https://pax.peaceagreements.org/agreements/wgg/2593/

7 https://pax.peaceagreements.org/agreements/wgg/2582/

8 https://pax.peaceagreements.org/agreements/wgg/2543/

9 https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/08/un-experts-alarmed-reported-widespread-use-rape-and-sexual-violence-against

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.[10]

Women as peace agreement signatories

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.[11]

Although PA-X does not code for individual women as signatories, it is possible to identify women as having signed peace agreements in 2023 by using secondary sources in which they self-identify as women – for example, through publicly reported membership of professional women's networks, in interviews where they have reflected on their involvement as women in a peace process, or official reporting of their organisation, which is highly likely to be correct.[12] 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.

In Colombia, multiple peace agreements were signed by individual women on behalf of the Government, the ELN, and representing third parties. These signatories were: Olga Lilia Silva López,[13] Dayana Paola Urzola Domicó,[14] Rosmary Quintero,[15] Adelaida Jiménez Cortés,[16] and María José Pizarro Rodríguez,[17] Nigeria Rentería Lozano,[18] as part of the Colombian government delegations; María

10 https://insecurityinsight.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Conflict-Related-Sexual-Violence-in-Sudan-October-2023.pdf

11 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

12 This method of identifying women signatories can also be triangulated with gendered titles or pronouns where possible, but avoids the limitation of gender-neutral titles (such as Professor or Brigadier), or signatories without titles in agreement texts, or pronouns in secondary reports. The recent proliferation of public networks of women in professions related to peace processes, such as diplomats, mediators, and parliamentarians, makes this method more robust than it would have been previously. See further, Wise, L. (2024). Women in Peace Processes Data Review. Internal report, full publication forthcoming.

13 https://www.elcolombiano.com/mincultura-critico-baja-participacion-de-mujeres-en-dialogos-con-eln-en-caracas-CN19361434

14 https://www.altocomisionadoparalapaz.gov.co/dialogos-eln/Paginas/Delegacion-de-Paz-del-Gobierno-Nacional.aspx

15 https://www.altocomisionadoparalapaz.gov.co/dialogos-eln/Paginas/Delegacion-de-Paz-del-Gobierno-Nacional.aspx

16 https://www.altocomisionadoparalapaz.gov.co/dialogos-eln/Paginas/Delegacion-de-Paz-del-Gobierno-Nacional.aspx

17 https://www.altocomisionadoparalapaz.gov.co/dialogos-eln/Paginas/Delegacion-de-Paz-del-Gobierno-Nacional.aspx

18 https://www.lasillavacia.com/quien-es-quien/nigeria-renteria-lozano/

Consuelo Tapias,[19] Isabel Torres,[20] and Silvana Guerrero[21] as part of the ELN delegations; Laura Berdine Santos Delamonica[22] and Glivânia Maria de Oliveira[23] (Brazil), Patricia Esquenazi Marín (Chile),[24] Claudia Helietta González Hernández (Mexico),[25] and Angela Bargellini (United Nations).[26]

In the Philippines, the Joint Statement between the Government and the NDF was witnessed by Julieta de Lima[27] and Coni K. Ledesma,[28] long-time members of the NDF negotiating panel, and by Kristina Lie Revheim,[29] Special Representative to the Philippines for the Norwegian Government.

Other 2023 peace agreements (excluding local) did not have any individuals who could be identified as women through the use of secondary sources, or were not signed by individuals, and therefore this is not a marker of whether or not individual women were part of the negotiations. However, the agreements that were signed by individuals can give us an insight as to processes where individual women did participate as signatories, and their affiliations.

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 ACLED, 'conflict event rates have increased by over 40% from 2020 through 2023; and increased 12% in 2023 from 2022 rates'.[30]

19 https://www.elespectador.com/colombia-20/paz-y-memoria/paz-con-el-eln-isabel-torres-y-consuelo-tapias-la-historia-de-las-mujeres-negociadoras/

20 https://www.elespectador.com/colombia-20/paz-y-memoria/paz-con-el-eln-isabel-torres-y-consuelo-tapias-la-historia-de-las-mujeres-negociadoras/

21 https://www.elespectador.com/colombia-20/conflicto/silvana-guerrero-la-mujer-guerrillera-que-integra-la-delegacion-de-paz-del-ejercito-de-liberacion-nacional/

22 https://www.24dejuniomx.com/blog/blog-post-three-4p5bx

23 https://mulheresdiplomatas.org/pioneiras-e-embaixadoras

24 https://www.bcn.cl/leychile/navegar?idNorma=1190587

25 Only gendered information available is through an online reference to this individual using female pronouns on an official social media account for the Government of Barbados. https://www.linkedin.com/posts/embbarven_hoy-se-comandante-aquinas-j-clarke-embajador-activity-7132483304796155905-Kyg5?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop

26 https://colombia.unmissions.org/pnud-y-misi%C3%B3n-de-verificaci%C3%B3n-de-la-onu-lideran-jornadas-de-sensibilizaci%C3%B3n-para-fortalecer

27 Commonly referred to as 'Julie' https://aaww.org/tlp-fighting-to-liberate-a-homeland-they-cannot-set-foot-on/

28 https://kites-journal.org/2022/05/02/it-is-only-in-participating-in-the-revolution-that-women-can-work-for-their-liberation/

29 https://www.nordicwomenmediators.org/norway

30 https://acleddata.com/conflict-index/ Updated January 2024.

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 negotiated 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 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, a notable agreement in 2023 is the 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.[31] Analysis published in 2023 using PA-X Version 7 and the Third Parties in Peace Agreements Dataset, found 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.[32]

Similarly, regional organisations such as the African Union, IGAD, and the European Union are signing peace agreements more often.[33] 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 African Union, whilst the Brussels Dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina was facilitated by the European Union (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.

31 https://pax.peaceagreements.org/agreements/2558/

32 Badanjak, S. (2023). Third Parties in Peace Agreements: First Look at New Data and Key Trends (Global Transitions Report). https://peacerep.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Badanjak-2023-Third-Parties-in-Peace-Agreements-Data-and-Trends.pdf

33 Badanjak, S. (2023). Third Parties in Peace Agreements.



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About PeaceRep

PeaceRep: The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform is a research consortium based at Edinburgh Law School. Our research is rethinking peace and transition processes in the light of changing conflict dynamics, changing demands of inclusion, and changes in patterns of global intervention in conflict and peace/mediation/transition management processes.

Consortium members include: Conciliation Resources, Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations (CTPSR) at Coventry University, Dialectiq, Edinburgh Law School, International IDEA, LSE Conflict and Civicness Research Group, LSE Middle East Centre, Queens University Belfast, University of St Andrews, University of Stirling, and the World Peace Foundation at Tufts University.

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