



**operation  
1325**

# **Mediation Lab**

## **Women peacemakers as mediators**

# Mediation Lab

## Women peacemakers as mediators

Cover photo:  
Susan Himme  
Photo by the Swedish Institute  
in Alexandria

Published by Operation 1325  
January 2017, Stockholm  
Text: Alexandra Iriarte  
Editing: Caitlin McEvoy and  
Annika Schabbauer  
Layout: Saga Holmgren  
Print: JustNu Södermalm



Hammarby allé 93  
120 63 Stockholm, Sweden  
info@operation1325.se  
+46 8-676 05 09

# Power to Women in Peace Processes

The Mediation Lab is an Operation 1325 initiative aimed at strengthening and promoting women peacemakers as mediators. During 2016, Operation 1325 promoted the idea, established partnerships, and selected the participants together with our partners. In October, our organization held a conference in Egypt as a platform for the exchange of peacemaking experiences and provide information regarding the training of mediation and negotiation tactics. The Mediation Lab participants organized three local conferences in order to spread the initiative to women in their respective home countries.

## COMING TOGETHER

Operation 1325 in partnership with The Swedish Institute in Alexandria, Egypt organized The Mediation Lab from 4-7 October 2016 on women peace mediations and negotiations. The participants included women from Colombia, Palestine, Turkey, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen. The key note speaker was **Birgitta Holst-Alani**, member of the Nordic Women Mediator Network, who held her speech on Syrian negotiations and women.

The primary focus of the conference was the UN Resolution 1325 and strategies to increase women's influence of all levels of peacemaking and in-conflict resolution. Women's structural exclusion from peace initiatives and decision-making, including international negotiation initiatives and peacemaking, has had a negative effect on the outcomes of peace processes and peace building. We know that when women are excluded from the peace process, it has less of a chance of developing into a lasting peace.<sup>1</sup>

## BUILDING LEADERSHIP

During the discussions prior and during the Mediation Lab, the primary focus was to define women being mediators and its benefits. What do we want to achieve? According to O'Reilly and Ó Súilleabháin, researchers in peace and conflict studies, "traditional approaches to international conflict mediation—in which statesmen hammer out agreements between governments, or between governments and well-defined rebel move-

1. See Paffenholz et al., "Making Women Count: Assessing Women's Inclusion and Influence on the Quality and Sustainability of Peace Negotiations and Implementation" and Laurel Stone, "Quantitative Analysis of Women's Participation in Peace Processes", Annex II in "Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes"



ments—are falling short in the face of 21st century violence”.<sup>2</sup> The flaws of traditional approaches to international conflict mediation are apparent in several cases such as Syria and Myanmar/Burma amongst others. Our mission is summed up succinctly by Emma Leslie, who is the Executive Director for the Center of Peace and Conflict Studies in Cambodia and one of the resource representatives of mediation tactics held by Folke Bernadotte Academy. “We continue to argue for seats, rather than influence. If we expect women to step up and serve in international peace processes, we need to equip and prepare them properly. By thinking that they will become that one person [the mediator at the table], we are setting them up to fail, because this is not a relevant model. ...We need to talk more about leadership in peace processes.” It is clear that researchers know that women have been structurally excluded from mediation processes due to the lack of leadership roles held by women. Therefore the whole process can be influenced by the presence and the promotion of women within peacemaking processes.

## FACING RESISTANCE

- “Soldier mode”
- Representation
- Political decision making
- Patriarchy

Amongst the raised issues was the topic of representation, as one of the participants from Iraq stated : “Women now are just a covering gown; just a décor sitting in all these conferences but there is no real contribution.” Another participant from Yemen remarked that “it is not enough to have women at the table; they do not necessarily represent women’s interests or women’s movements.”

Other issues raised by several participants were the allegations thrown against civil society on supporting “the enemy side”, especially the discourse of “supporting terrorism.” Local activists and women peace builders can be accused by different smear and distortion campaigns “...as Iranian spies, westerners or devil’s women” (Yemen). “we are named the witches” (Libya).

The “soldier mode”<sup>3</sup> reinforces the assumptions that 1) if you speak a language resembling the enemy, you might be part of the enemy 2) if you are discouraging our actions,

2. “Women in Conflict Mediation: Why it matters”, International Peace Institute, Policy brief September 2013, Marie O’Reilly & Andrea Ó Súilleabháin

3 Anthropologist Ivana Macek coined the term “soldier mode” when researching the ways of reasoning, the ethics and the perceptions during an armed conflict: “Sarajevo under siege: Anthropology in war times”, University of Pennsylvania press 2009.





you might be part of the enemy. One concrete consequence of this line of thought is the recent imprisonment of two of the Mediation Lab participants from Turkey, Besime Konca and Ayla Akat, both accused of terrorism.

The participants have faced fierce resistance against the involvement of women organization in decision-making including participation in peace negotiation tables. Women are welcomed to mobilize and participate as activists, but the door slams at the point of decision-making. Women face exclusion in most public and professional spheres especially when patriarchy is a global norm and present in differing degrees in various societies and cultures. The Conference's participants found common ground within the field and shared similar experiences of the hindrances they faced in peace building actions as a consequence of the patriarchal structures and norms.

The patriarchal structures that affect the socioeconomic power of women, and that normalize violence against women, serve to limit women's participation within peacebuilding. It is necessary that socioeconomic empowerment of women is promoted to counteract the lack of participation.

"In the gender discussion, conservative elites argue that 'a gender ideology' will destroy the God-given roles of the family entity," a participant from Colombia told us.

## PUSHING CHANGE

One advantage of a large and global women's movement is the span and scale of outreach. The participants claimed that inspiring and broadening participation from civil society was possible due to lobbying and working between women's organizations and social movements. "National dialogue put pressure on the government [by] demonstrating in the streets, maintaining quality work and international lobby pressure to collaborate with local efforts". In several cases the women work within national alliances to bring up their issues to the level of government. A lesson from Colombia's previously failed negotiations<sup>4</sup> is the imperative need to focus on victims' experiences and rights. The referendum included within the recent peace deal in Colombia held the stipulation to listen and account for all different groups within society, even those working against peace talks. Current events in Turkey highlight the importance of timing. Although alliances and collaborative work for peace exist, a peace resolution is not in favor. Ultimately the participants from Turkey argue, "we succeeded in popularizing peace but there is a lack of recognition of the conflict."

<sup>4</sup> Another reason for failure was a disarmament agreement between the paramilitary leaders and the government in 2003. This attempt was organized two years after several members of the parliament signed an agreement with the same paramilitary leaders, for a political project of "refunding the country" by armed force.



Birgitta Holst Alani  
Photo by the Swedish Institute in Alexandria

## WHEN OUTSIDE FORCES INTERVENE

All of the participants have experience in their countries of the different international, national, and grassroots efforts of conflict resolution. The Colombian peace talks worked without both foreign and national mediators, but foreign accompaniment and guarantor countries.<sup>5</sup> Iraqi participants saw previous conflict resolution efforts as "a warning not to let others do the job." Mediators involved in the Palestine-Israel conflict are considered oftentimes biased.

"How can the UN be trusted when they send mediators that destroy more than they achieve and also interfere in matters of the country?" The clear question from a Libyan participant illustrates that external interference and involvement in peace talks is questionable in some cases. Despite trepidations of external involvement, some Turkish participants were positive towards the involvement of the international community aiding a stalled process.

<sup>5</sup> NOREF Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre (2016) Innovations in the Colombian peace process (Report June 2016), Oslo, Norway: Herzbolheimer, K. Retrieved from: <http://noref.no/Regions/Latin-America-and-the-Caribbean/Colombia/Publications2/Innovations-in-the-Colombian-peace-process>.



## WHAT CAN BE DONE?

A concrete proposal and plan of action to strengthen and promote women as legitimate mediators is promoting influence through executing the Mediation Lab. Women must gain influence in all different stages, especially political influence through the support of political parties.

*We want women everywhere in legislative, executive and judiciary.”*

Other plans of action include:

- Spreading shared experiences and knowledge in order to create proper models for negotiations in each specific case.
- Promoting women to influence the peacemaking process outside of mediation roles, through monitoring and observing.
- Promoting the idea of a women advisory group, specifically a non-governmental network that would contribute their knowledge to, for example, European politicians.
- Promoting a platform that would allow for a group of young women to train with professional mediators and negotiators from the UN and EU and promote a collaboration between women and the UN and EU.

## EXPLORING THE DIALOGUE PROCESS

Training was conducted by Judith van den Boogert from the Clingendael Institute. The training gave participants more awareness of the different parts and steps of the dialogue process. Some of the participant requested additional training in order to contextualize experiences in their own countries in comparison to other contexts.

## PEACEMAKERS BECOME MEDIATORS

The participating women are all involved in implementing resolution 1325 in their own countries by integrating women’s issues into peace agreements and promoting women as political subjects in conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes. Some of them are currently or have been involved in constitution building, government negotiations, and mediation between insurgents and governments.



## Colombia

Angela Cerón is the Director of IMP, Iniciativa de Mujeres Colombianas por la Paz, The Initiative for Women for Peace, founded in 2001. She has participated in negotiations between government authorities and paramilitary forces.

Olga Sanchez is one of Colombia’s most important feminists with more than 20 years of experience in different international forums. She is the founder of Casa de la Mujer, a national organization working towards the improvement of women’s life conditions and sustainable peace. Sanchez has mediated between communities, the government, and insurgency groups in cases of kidnappings.

Marina Gallego is the National Coordinator of the feminist and antimilitarist Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres, an organization that worked for the past 20 years to enable peace negotiations. She coordinated the “Colombian Women’s Truth and Memory Commission” and brought women’s testimonies from the conflict onto the public agenda, influencing peace dialogues.

Together with Angela Cerón, Olga Sanchez and other women activists she has advocated for the creation of the gender sub-commission within the Colombian peace process and has given feedback on the commission’s work. The commission ensured that a gender-perspective was integrated into the peace process.

## Turkey

Besime Konca represents the parliament’s women’s group for HDP, Peoples’ Democratic



Party, as deputy member of the Turkish parliament. She has previous experience in working within KJA , Women's Free Congress, a large umbrella organization in the area. She is experienced in conflict resolution and political negotiations.

**Ayla Akat Ata** is a lawyer and a former member of parliament in Turkey and represented BDP, Peace and Democracy Party. She is one of the spokespersons for the organization KJA, Women's Free Congress. Ayla Akat served as defense lawyer for Abdullah Öcalan, the former leader of PKK, Kurdistan Workers' Party.

Ayla Akat has mediated between communities, the government, and insurgency groups in cases of kidnappings.

**Nazan Ustundag** is a Doctor in Sociology at Bönaziği University, where she specializes on modernity and post-colonialism theory, feminist theory, the ethnography of state and violence, and conflict studies. Her research also includes gender aspects in mediation and negotiations. Nazan Ustundag is one of the founders of the Turkish organization Women's Peace Initiative within the umbrella organization KÖM.

## Palestine

**Hilda Issa** is Head of Secretariat at PCPD, Palestinian Centre for Peace and Democracy. The organization works for a just peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis, for democracy, and gender equality within the Palestinian state. Hilda Issa is well-experienced in leadership training and is trained in advocacy, political participation, conflict resolution, and mediation.

**Hebah Amin** is an activist at PCPD. She has been trained in mediation and political negotiations between authorities and official stakeholders. Hebah Amin is engaged in community work and is a leader of various organized youth movements in Palestine.

**Amal Khreishe** is a feminist and political leader, as well as the General Director of PW-WSD, Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development, and a board member of National Women Coalition for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Palestine.

Amal Khreishe has experience in educating and training regarding gender equality and advocacy. She has been involved in strategizing around women's rights and the transition to democracy in the Arab world from a feminist perspective, participating in various regional forums. Together with Hilda Issa and Hebah Amin she plans to mediate between the two main political forces in Palestine.

## Yemen



Amal El Basha  
Photo by the Swedish Institute in Alexandria

**Amal El Basha**, a prominent advocate for women's rights, has a background in the public sector in Yemen as well as in the UN system. She is the chair-person of Sisters' Arab Forum for Human Rights, an advisor for the International Coalition for the Criminal Court, and a former advisor for the Ministry of Human Rights in Yemen. Amal El Basha has conducted trainings and evaluations on gender and human rights. She has received training from the International Criminal Court. She lives in Egypt right now due to the conflict in Yemen.

**Hala El Olaki** is an activist from Yemen, living in diaspora in Egypt. She has received capacity building trainings.

## Libya

**Omima Bawi** is a lawyer with a background within security forces and expertise in constitutional and human rights. She was involved in the drafting of the constitution, the fact-finding and reconciliation commission, and is a member of committees for the human rights of displaced persons and political prisoners. Omima Bawi trained a disarmament body within the DDR program.

**Ebtesam Al Gusbi** is a member of the Women Participation in Decision Making Committee. She has vast experience in community level mediation and has received training on UNSCR 1325.



**Zahra' Langhi** is a co-founder of the Libyan Women's Platform for Peace. She is a scholar specializing in gender studies as well as a civil society strategist advocating for peace and women's leadership. Within UN Women, she coordinated the Libyan Women's Political Empowerment Program, aimed at empowering women to become leaders of political, economic, and social reforms. Zahra' Langhi led the initiative for quotas in the election law.

**Susan Himme** is the executive manager of the Libyan Dialogue Forum and advocates for UNSCR 1325. Susan Himme has a degree in law and has contributed to advocacy of women's rights being part of the constitutional building process. She also has experience in community-level mediation.

## Iraq

**Liza Hido** is co-founder and president of the Baghdad Women Association, founded in 2004 with the mission to advance women's leadership in Iraq. She serves as the only woman representing civil society in the central government's reconciliation committee where she advises the Ministries of Defense and Interior on women's priorities for peace and women's inclusion in the processes of countering violent extremism. She is also an expert in bringing diverse ethnic and religious groups into dialogue and the reconciliation process.

**Sahira Ahmed Abdul Kareem** is a prominent lawyer and member of the Baghdad Women Association. She is trained in leadership.

## BUILDING A GLOBAL COMMUNITY

The Mediation Lab promoted the comradery that arose from sharing experiences and stories from one's own home country. The Mediation Lab created a space for women to listen and also be listened to. "As a part of the world women movement, is there anything we can do to ensure that the peace process continues" one participant asked. She expressed her will to support and promote each other's movements as her own.

"As a part of the world women movement, is there anything we can do to ensure that the peace process continues?"



Ayla Akat Ata, Nazan Ustundag and Besime Konca  
Photo by Swedish Institute of Alexandria



## Bibliography

Herzbolheimer, Kristian. Innovations in the Colombian peace process. Oslo, Norway: NOREF Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, June 2016. Retrieved from: <http://noref.no/Regions/Latin-America-and-the-Caribbean/Colombia/Publications2/Innovations-in-the-Colombian-peace-process>

Macek, Ivana. Sarajevo under siege: Anthropology in war times. University of Pennsylvania press, 2009.

O'Reilly, Marie and Ó Súilleabháin, Andrea. "Women in Conflict Mediation: Why it matters", International Peace Institute, Policy brief September 2013.

Paffenholz, Thania, et al. "Making Women Count: Assessing Women's Inclusion and Influence on the Quality and Sustainability of Peace Negotiations and Implementation", in A global study on the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325, UN Women, 2015.

Stone, Laurel. "Quantitative Analysis of Women's Participation in Peace Processes", Annex II in "Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes" in O'Reilly, M, Ó Súilleabháin, A and Paffenholz, T. Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes. New York: International Peace Institute, June 2015.

---

Operation 1325 is an umbrella organization initiated by several Swedish women's and peace organizations. Through advocacy and training, in Sweden and internationally, the organizations objective is to increase women's influence at all levels of peace processes and in conflict resolution. Operation 1325 creates platforms for debate and dialogue to influence decision makers, civil society and the general public with the aim of implementing UN's Resolution 1325.

## Partner Organizations

### Colombia

Iniciativa de Mujeres Colombianas por la Paz  
<http://www.mujeresporlapaz.org>

Casa de la Mujer  
<http://www.casmujer.com>

Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres  
[www.rutapacifica.org](http://www.rutapacifica.org)

### Palestine

PCPD, Palestinian Centre for Peace and Democracy  
<http://www.pcpd.ps>

PWWSD, Palestinian Working Women Society for Development  
<http://www.pwwsd.org>

### Turkey

Women's Initiative for Peace  
<http://barisicinkadinlar.com>

TJA/KJA, Women's Free Congress  
<http://www.tevgerajinenazad.com/>

Operation 1325  
Hammarby allé 93 4 tr  
120 63 Stockholm  
[info@operation1325.se](mailto:info@operation1325.se)  
+468-676 05 09





“Women working with peace and human rights, who could be a better mediator than that? We who know the parties AND the implications of their actions?”

Hilda Issa, Palestine.

