

Advancing WPS in the Indo-Pacific Conference

1 & 2 September (HST)

Key Findings

The *Advancing Women, Peace and Security* Conference, hosted by Pacific Forum with support from the US Indo-Pacific Command's Office of Women, Peace and Security, took place in a hybrid virtual-online format on Sept. 1-2, 2021 in Honolulu, Hawaii. Affirming the importance of the global Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, which calls for women's full and equal participation in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security, the conference featured a total of seven information-packed sessions showcasing 30 exceptional speakers and moderators from the Indo-Pacific region and beyond, including the distinguished keynote speaker, Dr. Valerie Hudson. In total, on Day 1 the conference was attended by 56 panelists and 70 attendees, and on Day 2, 45 panelists and 43 attendees joined in.

Session Highlights and Recommendations

The conference was opened by Lt. Gen. Stephen Sklenka (Deputy Commander, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command - USINDOPACOM), who in Session 1 set a tone of determination and optimism by framing the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda as a smart power capability crucial for realizing a free and open Indo-Pacific. Though the defense and security sectors are admittedly behind in advancing the global WPS agenda, it is a national security imperative that a gender lens is employed in all military planning and operations. Implementing the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security requires the full, equal and meaningful engagement of women in spaces where security decisions are being made, and accounting for gender in mission planning. USINDOPACOM is committed to acting on the importance of WPS by institutionalizing its principles through strategies, plans, and assessments; engagements with partners and allies; research innovation and information sharing; and growing a trained gender advisor network to advance WPS implementation.

Professor Valerie Hudson (George H.W. Bush Chair in the Bush School of Government & Public Service, Texas A&M University) delivered the keynote address of the conference entitled, "**WPS Post-Kabul.**" In a timely address, Prof. Hudson highlighted the initial progress made for women in Afghanistan in the past two decades, but importantly drew attention to the significant localized failures of WPS agenda implementation, including insufficient WPS investment and ineffective programming.

Prof. Hudson highlighted, however, the West's inability to excise the root of the Taliban problem: male-bonded kin groups which underpin Taliban ideology as well as the former Afghan government. The corruption, greed, poor economy and health outcomes, and violence engendered by such patriarchal systems are ultimately to blame for the fall of Kabul. Fundamentally, the fate of the country must rest in the hands of the capable women of Afghanistan, though there is much the international community can do to help Afghan women achieve national peace and stability, and the promises of the WPS agenda.

Session 1 key policy recommendations: The US and its partners must increase WPS funding and invest in Afghan diasporic communities, especially women; the WPS community should hold governments and the

security sector accountable for more effective WPS programming and post-deterrence planning, especially in East Asia.

Session 2, entitled, “**Cultivating a Culture of Allyship in Security,**” emphasized the impossibility of achieving human development goals without women’s involvement, highlighted the need for developing a gendered perspective for effective implementation of all security sector operations, activities, and investments, and stressed the importance of male allyship for a more thorough and equitable inclusion of women in all levels of society.

Session 2 key policy recommendations: Encourage males in leadership to act as allies for the WPS agenda; ensure gender analyses are conducted for both small and large organizational programs; Encourage partner nations to see that no country that excludes women can achieve its full potential.

Session 3, entitled, “**Building Bridges: CSOs and Local Governance,**” featured a discussion on the benefits of including civil society organizations (CSOs) in security planning and policymaking at all levels of government, as well as some of the barriers to achieving WPS collaboration, including a lack of funding for WPS organizations and the discomfort of many women’s groups with the securitization of development and peacemaking processes.

Session 3 key policy recommendations: Militaries and governments must localize development plans and peacemaking processes through bottom-up approaches that highlight inclusion, ownership, and full participation, especially of women and women’s groups both regionally and globally; CSOs should engage officials from across the political spectrum at all levels in order to amplify women’s messages and contribute to local governance.

Session 4, entitled, “**WPS and the Defense Sector: Working with Allies & Partners**” focused on the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the defense sectors of New Zealand, Australia, and the United States, including through humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations. Panelists responded to key questions including: What are successful examples or models of cooperation between civilian and military sectors on WPS? What are future priorities of the defense sector in promoting WPS in the Indo-Pacific region?

Session 4 key policy recommendations: Expand WPS programs across Indo-Pacific states’ defense sectors through training, the involvement of multinational partners, and the institutionalization of trained gender advisors; Strengthen the defense sector’s application of gender perspectives in responses to climate change and HADR.

Section 5, entitled, “**Gender and Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism**” featured a discussion of the nexus between gender and preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE), including women’s roles in extremist organizations, the intersection of gender with drivers of extremism, the instrumentalization of notions of femininity and masculinity in recruitment messaging by extremist organizations, and the importance of adopting a gender lens in the repatriation and rehabilitation of radicalized individuals.

Session 5 key policy recommendations: Design gender-sensitive P/CVE programs that recognize the multi-faceted roles women play in extremist organizations; include women in designing P/CVE strategies, especially representatives from grassroots women's organizations.

Session 6, entitled, **“Impacts of COVID-19 on Gender Equality”** involved a discussion of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on gender equality across the Indo-Pacific region, the level of gender-responsiveness in pandemic mitigation policies, how gender inequality itself further exacerbates insecurity and instability, and how future responses to health crises can be strengthened through greater gender-sensitivity and inclusion.

Session 6 key policy recommendations: Sex and gender-disaggregated health data needs to be collected at all levels and across all sectors, and leveraged to inform policy-making and planning; Women must be equally included in leadership and public health policy planning roles, and gender perspectives and WPS principles must inform crisis preparedness and response planning.

Session 7, entitled, **“Gender and Climate Security in the Indo-Pacific”** focused on the growing threat of climate change to human security in the Indo-Pacific region, emphasizing the importance of centering solutions around gender equality, human rights, justice, peace, and community resilience.

Session 7 key policy recommendations: Further integrate the WPS agenda and language within national and regional policies addressing climate change; purposefully include young women in decision making on climate change adaptation and mitigation to encourage generational changes in gender norms and rights, especially within indigenous communities.

Dr. John Wood, Director of US INDOPACOM J9, Pacific Outreach Directorate, delivered the closing remarks of the conference, and stressed the importance of engaging the existing agency, experience, and leadership that women bring to the workplace every day, to integrate and leverage gender perspectives in security at all levels and in all sectors. By listening to and learning from diverse perspectives, such as those showcased across the seven diverse sessions of the *Advancing Women, Peace, and Security in the Indo-Pacific* conference, our shared global goals of sustainable security and peace will be more readily attainable.

This document was prepared by Maryruth Belsey Priebe and Tevvi Bullock, as well as Lily Schlieman, Bailey Brya. For more information, please contact Dr. Crystal Pryor (crystal@pacforum.org). These preliminary findings provide a general summary of the discussion. This is not a consensus document. The views expressed are those of the speakers and do not necessarily reflect the views of all participants. The speakers have approved this summation of their presentation. This event was funded [in part] by the United States Department of Defense. The opinions, findings and conclusions stated herein are those of the author[s] and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Department of Defense.