

Women In International Security

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1325 And Beyond – Essay Contest

THIRD PRIZE

The Women, Peace and Security Agenda in ASEAN: Progress, Gaps and Way Forward

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The women, peace and security agenda has gained notable standing in global politics over the last two decades. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) is a remarkable breakthrough in international peace and security agenda, as it recognizes that women and children are the most adversely affected by armed conflict and reaffirms the importance of women's role in conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding. At the regional level, the implementation of the WPS agenda is marked through regional action plans (RAPs). In Southeast Asia, efforts to advance the WPS agenda have occurred only recently, after the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) adopted a Joint Statement on Promoting Women, Peace and Security in ASEAN in 2017.¹ As UNSCR 1325 celebrates 20 years since its inception, it is important to identify and evaluate its achievements, including what steps must be taken to ensure full implementation. To contribute to this global effort, this essay discusses the promotion, though not necessarily the implementation, of the WPS agenda in ASEAN, including progress and gaps. I then make recommendations for ensuring that the WPS agenda is fully realized in the member states of ASEAN.

ASEAN has been progressive in advancing human rights and women's rights in the region, including through its creation of the ASEAN Community. The ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) and ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights

of Women and Children (ACWC) were each established under the ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC) and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) in 2009 and 2010, respectively. Despite this organizational progress, the WPS agenda did not reach ASEAN until 2017. Until recently, ASEAN tended to frame women's issues only in the context of its sociocultural and economic sectors.² Consequently, ASEAN has made no specific commitment to address the impacts of armed conflict on sexual violence against women.³ More broadly, women's issues and gender mainstreaming remain neglected as part of regional politics and security policies due to elite mind-sets that position women as apolitical.⁴

Progress on the WPS agenda in ASEAN began with the adoption of the joint statement in 2017. Since then, numerous remarkable efforts have advanced the WPS agenda in the region. In April 2018, the first ASEAN-Australia Women, Peace and Security Dialogue was conducted.⁵ Under the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (AIPR), ASEAN established on December 13 the same year the ASEAN Women for Peace Registry (AWPR), a pool of experts who provide capacity building for women as peacebuilders and support the integration of gender perspectives in conflict prevention and peacebuilding strategies.⁶ The following year, three important agendas emerged, including the adoption of a Joint Statement on Promoting Women, Peace and Security Agenda at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF);⁷ the first AWPR Meeting as part of the first Regional Symposium on

Implementing Women, Peace and Security Agenda, held in Phnom Penh;⁸ and ASEAN Women Interfaith Dialogue, held in Jakarta.⁹ Each of these efforts demonstrate the consistent advance of the WPS agenda in ASEAN.

What this progress does tell us and what does it not? And more crucially, what can be done next to ensure the full implementation of the WPS agenda in ASEAN? Certainly, the joint statement represents an important milestone. It indicates stronger political will among ASEAN elites to make women, peace and security part of an ASEAN agenda. This statement suggests a change in elites' understanding of women's role in maintaining peace and security.

In late 2017, during the peak of the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar, President Joko Widodo sent Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi on a peaceful mission to Rakhine State for the purpose of providing humanitarian assistance to the victims and to prevent further escalation of the crisis.¹⁰ This prominent presence of a woman leader from an ASEAN member government expanded opportunities for women to be involved in peacekeeping missions, including by increasing the number of female peacekeepers in Blue Helmet units.¹¹ This change of ASEAN leaders' mind-set in turn leverages new opportunities for the empowerment of women and the advancement of gender equality in all three pillars of the ASEAN Community, including the ASEAN Political-Security Community. For example, during the 7th ASEAN Peacekeeping Centre Network (APCN) meeting in 2019, ASEAN defense ministers discussed the WPS agenda alongside the ASEAN regional security architecture and the importance of building standard centres on gender-equality training in security activities.¹² Furthermore, through ASEAN-led mechanisms such as ARF, ASEAN can take a lead in promoting the WPS agenda across the Indo-Pacific region.

Despite the vibrant progress of the WPS agenda in ASEAN, countless actions are needed to ensure the full participation of women in peace and security. As of January 2020, there were only two ASEAN countries with National Action Plans (NAPs) for implementing UNSCR 1325: the Philippines and Indonesia.¹³ Also, a huge gap remains between the effort of ASEAN to promote the WPS agenda and policies of ASEAN member nations. Regrettably, the joint statement fails to explicitly encourage member states to establish a NAP. Without cohesion between regional and national policies, the WPS agenda will only be a mirage in ASEAN.

Although the joint statement is important for ASEAN, it is premature to consider it to be an ASEAN regional action plan. The statement's use of word "promotion" instead of "implementation" is problematic. These words convey different meanings that signify different courses of action. While "promotion" is understood as an activity that

encourages people to believe in the value or importance of something, "implementation" is defined as the act of making something that has been officially decided start to happen or be used.¹⁴ The use of the word "promotion" is not common in the context of the WPS agenda, especially when compared with the other RAPs. Thus, by using "promotion," the statement can be portrayed as demonstrating negligence on the part of ASEAN and a failure to commit to fully implementing the WPS agenda. Yet ASEAN's statement can be understood as an initial move toward the WPS agenda, and thus the word "promotion" is perhaps more palatable in this context.

Although the joint statement has generally addressed the four pillars of the WPS agenda—participation, conflict prevention, protection, relief and recovery—it does not take into account all WPS-related UNSC resolutions.¹⁵ It recognizes only four: UNSCR 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009) and 1889 (2009), though now there are 10 resolutions in total.¹⁶ Additionally, ASEAN's joint statement does not recognize the role of civil society in the WPS agenda, meaning ASEAN does not fully translate the UNSCR 1325 into its regional policy. UNSCR 1325 is noted as the first international law to recognize the inclusion of nonstate actors in the peace process by supporting local women's peace initiatives.¹⁷ At this point in time, the joint statement should be considered a starting point for ASEAN's transformative pathway to further implementing the WPS agenda across the region.

Ultimately, ASEAN can implement the WPS agenda in this new decade by taking three actions.

First, ASEAN needs to develop a feasible regional action plan. There are several points that ASEAN leaders should take into account in formulating such a plan. First, the plan should encompass all WPS resolutions to ensure that all pillars of the WPS agenda are addressed. To keep the RAP updated and compliant with the WPS resolutions is crucial in building and strengthening the capacity of ASEAN to effectively implement the WPS agenda. Because the majority of ASEAN countries do not have a NAP, the RAP should support all member states in establishing national policies, with the RAP itself providing a legal basis for each member's national plan. The Philippines and Indonesia could lead the process and share lessons learned and best practices based on their own plans. Such an approach will ensure coherence between national and regional policies. The RAP should include civil society in its implementation. In ASEAN, civil society has played an important role in regional development, including in peace processes. For example, the Women's League of Burma (WLB), which consists of 13 women's ethnic organizations and is based in Myanmar, has committed to promote women's participation in the national peace and reconciliation process.¹⁸ WLB has also significantly

contributed toward increasing women's representation in Myanmar's parliament, including by conducting political training for women and lending support to women candidates.¹⁹

Second, ASEAN should make use of existing institutions within the ASEAN Community framework to implement the WPS agenda. The ASEAN Secretariat should play a key role in mainstreaming the WPS agenda across the three pillars of the ASEAN Community through dialogues and workshops. The AICHR and ACWC are also central to the WPS agenda, as these commissions monitor and evaluate the promotion and protection of women's rights as well as engaging with the public to increase the awareness of the WPS agenda. In collaboration with AWPR and with support from AIPR, APCN should provide more training for women peacekeepers in the region. Since ASEAN peacekeepers—except for Lao PDR and Singapore—made up nearly 5 percent of total UN Peacekeeping Operations, ASEAN can also contribute to advancing the WPS agenda as it helps maintain international peace and security.²⁰

Third, ASEAN should intensify cooperation with its partners, the United Nations, and other multilateral organizations to support implementation of the WPS agenda. The first ASEAN-Australia dialogue on WPS in 2018 and the first Regional Symposium on WPS in 2019 (which was supported by the United States) are noteworthy initiatives that ASEAN should continue to pursue. Through such initiatives, ASEAN and its partners are able to share lessons learned and best practices for WPS implementation. Such initiatives may provide constructive input for development of an ASEAN RAP. ASEAN-led mechanisms such as ARF are also an important asset for ASEAN to become a norm entrepreneur of the WPS agenda in the Indo-Pacific region. Moreover, ASEAN, in cooperation with the United Nations, should build and strengthen the capacity of ASEAN women peacekeepers to integrate gender perspectives into peace processes.

To conclude, ASEAN has challenged its traditional approach on women's role in its peace and security agenda, as indicated by the adoption of its joint statement in 2017. While the joint statement is relatively recent, the WPS agenda in ASEAN has progressed vigorously. However, ASEAN needs to constantly strive to close the gaps on the implementation. A failure to recognize all WPS resolutions and the exclusion of civil society from the peace process are among the limitations of the existing statement. This essay offers three recommendations for ASEAN to move the WPS agenda forward in this new decade: developing a regional action plan that encourages member states to establish national plans and recognizes the role of civil society in the peace process; leveraging existing ASEAN in implementing the WPS agenda; and strengthening its relationships with its partners and international organizations. The implementation of these recommendations will ensure that the WPS agenda continues to advance across the region.

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In the run up to the 20th anniversary of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325 (2000)) Women In International Security (WIIS) and the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung Washington, DC launched an international essay competition *1325AndBeyond*.

WIIS and the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung Washington, DC are proud to announce and publish the winning essays. The essays highlight innovative and imaginative ideas and strategies to achieve the objectives of UNSCR 1325 in the 2020s.

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WIIS and the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung Washington, DC would like to thank the members of the jury: Fauziya Abdi Ali; Joanna Barelkowska; Chantel Cole; Jessie Evans; Chantal de Jonge Oudraat; Karma Ekmekji; Jessica Grün; Layla Hashemi; Karin L. Johnston; Miriam Laux; Maxinne Rhea Leighton; Kayla McGill; Hannah Neumann; Chiedo Nwankor; Hannah Proctor; Liane Schalatek; Donald Steinberg; Dominik Tolksdorf; Anna Von Gall; Rokšana Verahrami; Karin Warner; Ursula Knudsen Latta. Special thanks to Kayla McGill and the members of the WIIS team for organizing the competition and to the Mobilizing Men as Partners for WPS (Our Secure Future) for contributing to the Honorable Mention awards.

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