

Key Takeaways & Resources

Gender in Conflict: *For Sama* and the International Impact of the Syrian Conflict
WIIS Webinar | August 19th, 2020 | 11:00 AM EST

Panelists

- **Dr. Mary Bunn** - Research Scientist at the UIC Department of Psychiatry & Deputy Director of Global Mental Health in the Center for Global Health
- **Dr. Karam Shaar** - Senior Analyst with the New Zealand Treasury's Forecasting Modelling and Research Team & Non-Resident Scholar at the Middle East Institute
- **Ms. Dana Stroul** - Shelly & Michael Kassen Fellow in the Washington Institute's Beth & David Geduld Program on Arabic Politics
- **Ms. Lee Tucker** - Senior Program Officer for Middle East Programs at the United States Institute for Peace (USIP)

Key Takeaways

For Sama & Women in Conflict

- *For Sama* clearly demonstrates the importance of viewing conflict through the eyes of diverse people, and especially through the eyes of women. People in conflict are often made to be one group, and this simplification of their experience denies them their personhood and the opportunity to foster change in their communities and lives.
- Women are often falsely promoted to be apolitical, and are typically referred to as “women and children” or “victims” creating a lopsided portrayal of women in conflict.
 - *For Sama* forces you to hold these opposing ideas in your head at the same time, women as survivors of trauma and agents of change within conflict.
- Women make up 14% of the Syrian parliament, but the system itself is essentially ceremonial and doesn't ensure female representation. The very foundation of the Syrian parliamentary system did not include the voices of Syrians, much less Syrian women.
- Women's participation leads to longer lasting, more effective peace agreements. Not including women can lead to missed opportunities. While some Syrian women have been involved, they still face immense challenges to be present and meaningfully involved.
 - There should be more efforts to ensure women are appointed to positions where they are not typically included, for example in the security sector.
- Women bring new perspectives and creativity to the table, and have a tendency to focus less on power brokering and more on development, justice, and other long-term issues.
- Women's engagement is typically low on the priority list. There is a responsibility on the part of leaders to shift the paradigm.

Importance of Diverse Voices in Conflict

- We can look at the personal impacts of war, but we need to bring that understanding into broader social situations by addressing conflict drivers and understanding nuances and be deliberate.
 - For example, regarding refugees and displaced persons, there are large degrees of very pervasive xenophobia. Sometimes it's so bad that children are unable to attend school because of the constant bullying.

- The importance of listening to and accepting narratives on all sides - even when it is difficult and uncomfortable, is the only way to achieve a lasting resolution of conflict, otherwise there can be no peace.
- Most global citizens are not necessarily focused on what is going on around the world and there is an emerging consensus about the Middle East. For example, in the US, we have an overmilitarized engagement in the Middle East and we should be getting out. Unfortunately, that leaves little room for listening to people experiencing conflict and then asking questions such as “could we help” or “could we play a productive role.”

Syrian Conflict Dynamics & International Influences

- Even if the fighting ends, it doesn't mean the conflict is over. War and conflict are two different things. The Syrian Conflict has exposed and exacerbated numerous deep and underlying tensions and issues that need to be reconciled.
- The threat of terrorism was used as a way for the U.S. to become involved in the Syrian Conflict. While it was exaggerated in some ways, terrorism still poses extreme problems, and especially gender problems, in areas like Iraq today.
- Syria's economy is decimated because of the war. It's 1/3 of what it used to be and the economic outlook for the country is terrible - so much of the population lives below the poverty line.
- There is also the issue of International aid - it is still very difficult to get aid into Syria, with armed groups making it even more difficult to get aid in. This is especially true during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- During COVID-19, every person and every nation has turned inward - focusing on themselves. Due to that, healthcare is suffering in many ways, especially for Syrians impacted by displacement, poverty, and conflict.
- While there was a new round of sanctions on Syria from the US recently, there were also sanctions in place long before 2011, and the U.S. will continue economic pressure on Assad and others. Sanctions typically have a negative impact on civilians. For example, The Caesar Sanctions were supposed to be a deterrent against certain individuals in the Syrian government, but could instead further destabilize the region.
- The stalemate in Syria is political in nature. When you're powerful, your ability to commit crimes is bigger, such as with the current Assad regime in Syria.
- What happened in Syria was pretty typical (Tunisia and Egypt), but what differed was the role of the West.
 - When the conflict began, there was an expectation that the outside world would come and do something. What is the appropriate outside response for anyone with decision-making powers?

Resources

- [Syria Timeline: Since the Uprising Against Assad](#)
- [Current publications and projects regarding Syria](#) by the U.S. Institute of Peace
- The U.S. Institute of Peace [Gender Inclusive Framework and Theory](#) - A practical guide to application in conflict contexts.
- [Americans can Build Peace Better - if it Includes Women](#) - Three lessons for including women in peacebuilding and turning awareness into action.



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- [Restoring Social Bonds: Group-based Treatment and the Social Resources of Syrian Refugees in Jordan](#)
- [Investing in Syria: “Photo ops” outweigh real change](#) - the economic situation and history of investments in Syria
- [Syrians on the move](#) - an exploration of the whereabouts of Syrians after the war
- [The New Status Quo in Northeast Syria: Humanitarian and Security Implications](#)

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