



Female Leadership in the Peace, Security, and Governance Environment

March 8th 2021



To mark International Women's Day and UN Women's 10-year milestone, UN Youth Impact and the Chair of UN Studies hosted a crucial event on female leadership in the international environment: [Female leadership in peacebuilding: What can we learn from women in the field?](#) Moderated by the Chair of UN Studies, Professor Alanna O'Malley, the event showcased the strengths and talents of female leaders in different sectors of the peace building environment. In a male dominated sector, Fleur Ravensbergen, Cristina Pectu, and Aya Chebbi emphasized the need for diversity in terms of representation and voices due to the insights and wisdom they bring to the negotiating table.

The speakers reflected on their careers while discussing the question: What have we learned in the last 20 years since the launch of the Women Peace and Security agenda, and what can young peace builders learn from women who have worked in the peace and security environment?

A highlight of the event was when **Cristina Pectu**, a Research Assistant in conflict and governance at STIMSON, spoke about growing up in Romania. She reflected on being surrounded by many who believed that women should continue to play traditional roles in society. However, feeling that her responsibility was to serve humanity, she did not let tradition stop her from striving towards her goals. She emphasized that, once you find a purpose in life, you can achieve your goals and make a change. In other words, commitment, resilience, and determination is key to meeting your objective. Ms. Pectu also discussed the challenges she faced while pursuing her dream to work at the UN as a youth representative. She explained, the level of real, genuine engagement with civil society and youth actors is not significantly high. Therefore, it is important to create spaces and work hard to change mindsets from the inside out. As advice for women who lack agency in a professional scenario, Ms. Pectu recommends adhering to a core set of values and principles. "If you feel those values and principles have been infringed, that is a red flag to speak up."

Aya Chebbi, an activist, diplomat, and peacebuilder, said she often found herself to be the only young female at the table. Referring to her experience at the African Union, Ms. Chebbi states that, as a woman, she was either perceived as not worthy of a leadership position or seen by men as an intimidating force of female leadership. To solve this problem, she stressed it is extremely important that we support youth platforms and include young women when addressing the aftermath of armed conflict or issues within a deeply divided society.

As an activist, Ms. Chebbi explained how she promotes the idea of intergenerational co-leadership, noting we need to dismantle the sharp divide between the spaces for youth and the decision-making processes traditionally occupied by older generations. She said, "for me, it has always been imperative that I pushed for inter-generational spaces and co-leadership. You are not just passing the torch to us, we have to do it together." The core message was that voices of young people need to be institutionalized in decision-making processes and youth spaces shouldn't be isolated. In her remarks, Ms. Chebbi emphasized it is important for generations to come together, especially in Africa, as the continent hosts the youngest population in the world. Before closing, Ms. Chebbi further stressed that the global health crisis has presented a moment to claim our rights as women and young people. The pandemic has exacerbated the existing injustices, demonstrating that we cannot continue to lead the world in its current format. As current leadership is failing, it is key for young people, especially young women, to challenge the current leadership and raise your voice: "Don't underestimate your power, get out there and mobilize. "Patriarchy is creative, so be creative in dismantling it".

Reflecting on times before the COVID pandemic, **Fleur Ravensbergen**, conflict mediator and Deputy Director and Co-founder of the Dialogue Advisory Group, spoke about the importance of including women peace and security operations. Ms. Ravensbergen highlighted that even in challenging times, many actors are not ready to provide space for others. To combat this trend, she suggested that advocacy is needed for the role of women and young people. The prevailing use of tokenism should be addressed, with the aim of stimulating substantial and real inclusive action. To close the event, Ms. Ravensbergen shared a message with the young people at the event: Stay strong and take care of yourself, we need you to still be standing when the world restarts after the pandemic.

The Chair and UNYI would like to thank the panelists for celebrating International Women's day with us and for sharing their insights and stories as leaders.