

Women, peace and security workshop in Sudan

Report

Background

As in many countries, victims of sexual and gender-based violence in Sudan often continue to suffer after the initial attack, facing stigma, shame, absence of social support, and obstacles in reporting and accessing medical care and justice.

There are a wide variety of contexts within which women suffer sexual and gender-based violence, particularly in conflict areas. As elsewhere in the world, the stigma suffered by victims of sexual and gender-based violence in Sudan is driven by social norms and attitudes.

Efforts to change attitudes towards women and survivors of sexual violence should be closely linked with conflict resolution in conflict regions. As part of its support to the UK's PSVI agenda, the British Embassy hosted a workshop in Khartoum on 16-17 August 2017 which gave women from conflict areas an opportunity to talk about their experiences and present their recommendations for those involved in the peace building process at a national level.

Purpose of workshop

The aims of the workshop were:

- To acquaint the participants with the high-level peace processes in Sudan, particularly National Dialogue and Addis negotiations
- To discuss the impact of war on communities, particularly the impact on women
- For participants to share their experiences and those of their communities, including around sexual violence in conflict and stigma surrounding it
- To discuss the link between formal peace building processes such as National Dialogue and the peace initiatives at a grassroots level
- To develop the participants' shared message for high-level policy makers

Format

The workshop was facilitated by Sudanese women involved in work to ensure that women's voices are included in the peace process. The group holds regular community consultations, bringing views from a grassroots level to high-level decision-makers and they are well connected in terms of political and geographical reach.

Thirteen participants travelled to the workshop in Khartoum. All attendees were female and were selected for their peace building roles within their communities.

The workshop took place over two days. Methods used during the workshop included whole group brainstorming and consultations in smaller groups. Throughout the discussions, participants appeared to be engaged, eager to participate and share stories.

Towards the end of the workshop, participants were asked to decide on their recommendations for high level policymakers. A panel of policy representatives were invited from a range of political parties at the end of the second day. The participants then presented their findings and recommendations to the panel.

Points of discussion

The facilitators began the workshop by discussing the peace process in Sudan: the National Dialogue and its outcomes, AUHIP road map, and Addis negotiations on Darfur and the Two Areas. The facilitators then summarised the roles of different actors within the peace process and the political context in which it is being negotiated. Progress on implementing the process was also discussed as well as suggestions on how this could be improved.

The participants were invited to raise key issues of concern, share reports from any working groups in their local communities and bring stories of women's experiences on the ground.

Personal stories shared during the workshop were particularly memorable. Participants came to the conclusion that women are at risk of sexual violence regardless of their age or marital status.

Participants also spoke about local peace building initiatives in their areas. Much of the discussion was focused on the need for high quality education in order to achieve peace and end violence against women and girls locally. Participants agreed on the importance of implementing fully UN Security Council Resolution 1325 for women's protection and participation in conflict areas.

The latter part of the workshop was spent brainstorming ways of including women in the peace process and minimising the risk of sexual violence for those living in conflict areas.

Recommendations

At the end of the second day the participants had the opportunity to present recommendations to a panel of policy makers. Key recommendations were:

- Creation of policies and legislation to protect women in conflict areas
- Enforcement of laws relating to protection of women
- Women from conflict areas to participate in upcoming formal or informal negotiations, in order to tell their stories and represent views from their local communities
- Promotion of economic empowerment for women through income generating activities
- Infrastructure such as schools and fully stocked mobile hospitals in conflict areas to address urgent need. This includes basics such as reliable water supplies
- Full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security
- Monitoring of the peace process closely and continuing with the agreed outcomes.

Overall, panel members were grateful to the participants for raising these concerns. They responded positively and made commitments to contribute to meeting the recommendations. The Embassy is very grateful for their input.

Conclusion

Before the workshop, there were concerns that these issues were too sensitive to discuss, but participants were keen to share their experiences and make recommendations for change.

Issues discussed during the workshop went beyond policies; participants spoke about a culture of stigma and shame that will take more than legislation to fix.

Looking ahead, it is crucial to link the working groups from local communities with policy makers at a national level. This would enable women in conflict areas to voice their issues, secure commitments and establish a mechanism that links communities with decision-making bodies. They would then be able to follow up on actions and ensure that commitments are implemented effectively. It is essential to make women from conflict areas a part of the peace process.