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Full, Equal, Meaningful, and Safe: Creating Enabling Environments for Women's Participation in Libya

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Cover Photo: Women sing the Libyan national anthem during an UN-sponsored event designed to encourage female candidates to participate more fully in the country's first free elections in nearly half a century, June 27, 2012. UN Photo/Iason Athanasiadis.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CRSV	conflict-related sexual violence
IEG	Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace, and Security
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNFPA	UN Population Fund
UNSMIL	UN Support Mission in Libya
WPS	women, peace, and security

Executive Summary

Historically, the women, peace, and security (WPS) agenda's four pillars—prevention, protection, participation, and relief and recovery—have largely developed along separate trajectories. This has started to change with the UN Security Council's recent progress in recognizing the link between women's participation in peace and security and their protection, as well as the need to create "enabling environments" for women's participation. Nonetheless, there is often a gap between international frameworks on participation and protection and the realities experienced by women, especially in conflict-affected contexts. This gap is evident in Libya, where UN efforts to promote women's participation have not always accounted for the full range of protection-related risks women can face.

The 2011 revolution in Libya led to important strides for women's groups, who were active in peacebuilding processes and the advancement of women's rights. However, during the increasing political insecurity of recent years, violent attacks, threats, and sociocultural stigmas have barred women from participating effectively and safely in political processes.

Under the WPS agenda, the protection of women is often addressed primarily through the lens of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). However, women in Libya experience protection risks related to participation at a number of levels. These can be understood as an "ecology" of intersecting and interrelated risks related to women's participation.

At the individual, interpersonal, and community levels, gendered norms discourage women from participating in public life due to cultural ideas of a woman's "place" in the home as a wife and mother. Women who take on public roles can be verbally or physically attacked, with some hostile parties threatening their honor and their families. Their own families and communities may discourage them from participating, either due to cultural stigma or fear for their safety.

At the national institutional level, laws intended to protect women and enable them to participate are not adequately implemented, creating barriers for women in public life. Recent laws and policies have attempted to curtail their rights and freedoms. State, state-affiliated, and non-state actors all engage in surveillance and harassment as a means of deterring women from participating. At the societal level, patriarchal and misogynistic social structures enable a culture hostile to women's participation, creating the conditions that expose women who are publicly visible to threats in both physical and digital spaces.

Finally, at the global institutional level, cultural backlash often makes the language of the WPS agenda unavailable to women's rights advocates in Libya, who are forced to work to advance women's rights without directly using the language of equal participation. Many women also face direct and indirect online violence in poorly regulated digital spaces.

Women are asked to participate in peace and security at every level in unsafe environments that expose them to intimidation, harassment, and violence. The case of Libya demonstrates that when promoting women's participation, it is crucial to ensure that participation is full, equal, meaningful, and safe. Protection-related risks cannot be ignored as soon as women are present in political processes.

To this end, the Security Council and member states should consider the following recommendations:

- Continue to build on progress on mainstreaming WPS in mission mandates;
- Prioritize the implementation of Resolution 2493's provision on creating "enabling environments" for women's participation; and
- Ensure gender advisers with context-specific expertise are mandated and properly resourced in all UN missions.

Additionally, UN missions, agencies, and partners should consider the following:

- Conduct context-specific participation and protection analyses;
- Strengthen coordination between the UN missions, UN agencies, and other international organizations working on related issues to address the full range of protection-related barriers to women's participation; and
- Ensure a gender-sensitive approach to the use of digital tools for participation to reflect the increased risks to women in online environments.

Introduction

The women, peace, and security (WPS) agenda is comprised of ten resolutions and organized around four broad areas of intervention that aim to advance gender mainstreaming across the work of the United Nations Security Council.[1] These four pillars are the *prevention* of armed conflict, the *protection* of women and girls, the *participation* of women in all aspects of international peace and security, and the delivery of *relief and recovery* in conflict-affected settings. Until recently, these pillars developed along largely separate trajectories, with the participation and protection pillars receiving the most attention and advancing the furthest in implementation.[2]

The WPS resolutions have established clear parameters for both the participation and protection pillars. Participation has largely focused on women's leadership and agency in processes of peacemaking, including Track One mediation, constitutional processes, and peacebuilding. Protection has primarily focused on protection from conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). While Security Council Resolution 2122 (2013) recognizes that "security threats and protection challenges" affect women, it does not clarify whether these threats extend beyond armed political violence.[3] The tying of protection to the narrow parameters of CRSV has been critiqued as it has eclipsed recognition of broad-ranging forms of gendered violence occurring across conflict and peacebuilding settings.[4] As such, the separate participation and protection pillars have cast women as either leaders in the field of peace and security or victims in need of protection from CRSV.[5]

In response to growing global recognition that women leaders face threats and reprisals in many conflict and peacebuilding settings,[6] the Security Council's two most recent WPS resolutions clarify the linkages between participation and protection.[7] In so doing, they also establish the need to create "enabling environments" for women's participation.[8] While these developments arguably reflect the emergence of normative recognition of the relationship between participation and protection, they also highlight the need for a better understanding of how protection risks arise for women in specific peacebuilding contexts. If the UN system is to advance women's participation as intended under the WPS agenda, it requires a more fulsome recognition of the context-specific protection-related barriers to participation that women face.

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Drawing on interviews with women in and from Libya, as well as extensive secondary sources, this report examines the relationship between participation and protection.[9] This report adopts an inclusive definition of participation that covers participation not only in high-level processes but also in local government and civil society. Importantly, the report provides evidence for how, in Libya, international frameworks of WPS

1 UN Security Council Resolution 1325, UN Security Council Resolution 1820, UN Security Council Resolution 1888, UN Security Council Resolution 1889, UN Security Council Resolution 1960, UN Security Council Resolution 2106, UN Security Council Resolution 2122, UN Security Council Resolution 2242, UN Security Council Resolution 2467, and UN Security Council Resolution 2493.

2 For detailed analysis of these pillars' development, see: Catherine Turner and Aisling Swaine, "Aligning Participation and Protection in the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda," *International & Comparative Law Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (April 2023); Karen Engle, "The Grip of Sexual Violence: Reading United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Human Security," in *Rethinking Peacekeeping, Gender Equality, and Collective Security*, Gina Heathcote and Dianne Otto, eds. (Palgrave Macmillan London, 2014).

3 UN Security Council Resolution 2122 (October 18, 2013), UN Doc. S/RES/2122.

4 Catherine Turner and Aisling Swaine, "At the Nexus of Participation and Protection: Protection-Related Barriers to Women's Participation in Northern Ireland," International Peace Institute, June 2021; Engle, "The Grip of Sexual Violence."

5 "Soumita Basu, Paul Kirby, and Laura J. Shepherd, eds., *New Directions in Women, Peace, and Security* (Bristol University Press, 2020); Laura J. Shepherd, "Victims of Violence or Agents of Change? Representations of Women in UN Peacebuilding Discourse, *Peacebuilding* 4, no. 2 (February 2016)."

6 See: UN Human Rights Council, *Visit to Colombia—Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders*, UN Doc. A/HRC/43/51, December 26, 2019; UN Human Rights Council, *Situation of Women Human Rights Defenders—Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders*, UN Doc. A/HRC/40/60, January 10, 2019.

7 UN Security Council Resolution 2467 (April 23, 2019), UN Doc. S/RES/2467; UN Security Council Resolution 2493 (October 29, 2019), UN Doc. S/RES/2493.

8 UN Security Council Resolution 2493 (October 29, 2019), UN Doc. S/RES/2493.

9 Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with twenty-five women. See Annex: Research Methodology and Research Ethics for details.

intersect with locally experienced realities, as well as priorities that women in the local context identify beyond those the Security Council defines. The report demonstrates a gulf between how the council positions issues like protection—framing threats as "conflict-related sexual violence"—and how women's civil society organizations identify protection-related barriers to participation as a broader spectrum of gendered violence and threats. It also shows that the drive to implement international frameworks like the WPS agenda can exacerbate risks for women if attention is not given to the local protection dynamics that enable or impede participation. The report deepens the evidence for and understanding of the critical relationship between protection and participation, broadens analysis of and provides pointers for the mainstreaming of WPS in UN mission mandates, and provides a new framework to advance the creation of safe and enabling environments for women's participation.

WPS Pillars: Bringing Participation and Protection Together

Resolution 1325 (2000), the first resolution under the WPS agenda, was adopted to redress gaps in gender mainstreaming in the Security Council. Its primary aim was to "incorporate a gender perspective" into Security Council–mandated work. It called for "field operations to include a gender component and incorporate a gender perspective" and for increased representation of women in all decision-making bodies.[10] More broadly, the WPS agenda aims to ensure that WPS commitments and relevant gender analysis and women's rights concerns are addressed in mission mandates adopted by the council.[11]

We look specifically at the pillars of participation and protection and whether and how the relationship between them is addressed in mission mandates—in this case, in the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL). We set out the basis for the Security Council's recent moves to recognize the relationship between participation and protection, highlight their significance by providing evidence from the Libya case, and demonstrate what that has looked like in UNSMIL's successive mandates.

Normative Alignment of Participation and Protection: Moves by the Security Council

There has been growing global acknowledgement—though only relatively recently in relation to conflict-affected settings—that women who participate in public leadership roles, whether in peacebuilding, media, or human rights, face risks of reprisal and violence.[12] As that acknowledgement has grown, so has the body of research and policies that attempt to expand our understanding of the diversity of women who experience these risks and the different aspects of political transitions across which they emerge.[13] Further, there is increasing evidence that the risks experienced by women are more wide-ranging than initially understood.[14] The realities of how risks shape women's leadership in peacebuilding settings directly challenge how women's participation has been promoted under the WPS agenda. The "add women and stir" approach, which assumes meaningful participation will automatically follow from women's presence in peace processes, has ignored the risks and reprisals that women in states characterized by conflict and insecurity have experienced as a result of the global push for women's participation. It has also largely failed to consider the ways in which the very fact of promoting high-profile participation in international processes can expose women to greater risk. This has led to critiques of the Security Council for failing to recognize that its protection pillar should

10 UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (October 31, 2000), UN Doc. S/RES/1325.

11 Lisa Sharland, "Women, Peace, and Security Mandates for UN Peacekeeping Operations: Assessing Influence and Impact," International Peace Institute, January 2021.

12 Melinda Holmes, "Protecting Women Peacebuilders: The Front Line of Sustainable Peace," International Civil Society Action Network, Women's Alliance for Security Leadership, and London School of Economics Centre for Women Peace and Security, 2020.

13 Turner and Swaine, "At the Nexus of Participation and Protection."

14 UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Libya*, UN Doc. A/HRC/52/83, March 3, 2023; Turner and Swaine, "At the Nexus of Participation and Protection."

encompass and address those risks and that its promotion of women's participation needs to take this broader context into account.

The Security Council's recent moves to recognize the link between participation and protection in its two 2019 WPS resolutions are therefore timely and significant. Resolution 2467 (2019) acknowledged that "the safety and empowerment of women and girls is important for their meaningful participation in peace processes, preventing conflicts and rebuilding societies, and that therefore women's protection and participation are inextricably linked and mutually-reinforcing."[15]

Further, in Resolution 2493 (2019), the Security Council recognized the need for states to create the conditions necessary for women's participation:

> *Strongly* encourages Member States to create safe and enabling environments for civil society, including formal and informal community women leaders, women peacebuilders, political actors, and those who protect and promote human rights, to carry out their work independently and without undue interference, including in situations of armed conflict, and to address threats, harassment, violence and hate speech against them.[16]

Implementation of the participation and protection pillars should create the "enabling environment" needed for women's full, equal, meaningful, and *safe* participation.

These normative provisions and language are important. They place responsibility on states and UN entities to advance women's participation in ways that not only respond to the risks they may face but also address the environments that generate those risks. The provisions underline that implementation of the participation and protection pillars should create the "enabling environment" needed for women's full, equal, meaningful, and *safe* participation.

Until the Security Council's adoption of these two resolutions, there had been little evidence of recognition in the WPS resolutions of how the participation and protection pillars relate to one another. These resolutions thereby fulfill two critical functions. First, they set the basis for the WPS agenda to address the nexus of women's participation and the related protection risks. Second, they recognize that achieving women's equal participation requires going beyond simply adding women to political processes. This establishes the basis for exploring and identifying protection-related barriers to participation, which any efforts to promote women's participation should take into account.

While this normative basis is significant, implementation is what matters. It is crucial to advance women's participation in ways that are *enabling* and *safe*. Implementation of these provisions is, however, subject to mediation and interpretation by a range of actors who lead national and international initiatives on women's participation. The conditions that enable or impede women's participation are complex and multifaceted, varying based on the local context and women's ethno-national identities, ages, and other social and identity-based characteristics.

Women's Rights in Post-Revolution Libya

In 2011, Libya experienced a revolution that removed the dictator Muammar al-Qaddafi, who had been in power since 1969 (see Table 1). Women, and young women in particular, were at the forefront of the revolution. They were also instrumental to what seemed at the time to be the birth of a new Libyan civil society that called for an inclusive and just transition to democracy and national reconciliation.[17] The revolution prompted political upheaval and civil war, beginning in 2014, which have determined Libya's political trajectory ever since. The conflict has resulted in human rights violations and international crimes by state and non-state actors and has allowed terrorist

15 UN Security Council Resolution 2467 (April 23, 2019), UN Doc. S/RES/2467.

16 UN Doc. S/RES/2493.

17 Zahra' Langhi, "Gender and State-Building in Libya: Towards a Politics of Inclusion," *The Journal of North African Studies* 19, no. 2 (March 2014).

Table 1. Timeline of women's participation in Libya since 2011

2011
Libyan revolution leads to removal of Qaddafi
National Transitional Council (NTC) is created
NTC publishes Constitutional Declaration
UN Security Council Resolution 2009 authorizes UNSMIL
2012
National elections for the General National Congress are held
2014
Second Libyan civil war breaks out
UNSMIL launches women's dialogue initiative
2015
UNSMIL convenes Libyan Political Dialogue Forum, leading to Libyan Political Agreement
UNSMIL and UN Women support a diverse group of women to present a Minimum Women's Agenda for Peace for Libya and present it to the UN in Geneva
2016
UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) is formed under the terms of the Libyan Political Agreement
2017
Constitution Drafting Assembly adopts draft constitution
2018
Paris Conference leads to agreement on finalizing constitution and holding elections
International Conference on Libya in Palermo is convened to discuss UN policy on Libya
UNSMIL and UN Women create two-year joint action plan to support women's participation
2019
Libyan National Conference is postponed due to renewed hostilities
UN Women convenes a conference to discuss mobilizing women for peacebuilding in Libya, resulting in an initiative to establish a joint network for Libyan women
2020
First Berlin International Conference on Libya leads to commitment to end civil war; Security Council endorses outcome in Resolution 2510
Libyan Political Dialogue Forum is convened, leading to adoption of road map "For the Preparatory Phase of a Comprehensive Solution"
Government of National Unity is created
2021
Elections planned under the road map do not occur
Evidence of and attention to attacks on women participating in public life increases

groups to gain a foothold.[18] Arbitrary detention, torture, rape, enforced disappearance, and sexual slavery have all been documented as affecting Libyans and particularly migrants. The militarization of Libya and the proliferation of arms and armed groups have also exacerbated insecurities for those living both in and outside of Libya, particularly in the Sahel.[19]

One of the most significant impacts of the conflict has been on women's rights and status in Libyan society. Women's organizations in Libya have thrived since 2011, developing innovative processes for peace and using local and religious traditions to increase community leadership and resilience to conflict. They have strived to advance women's rights, with some taking leadership roles in political and peacebuilding processes.[20]

However, over the past three years, the state of women's rights has markedly deteriorated alongside an increase in broader political insecurities. Libyan women face multiple challenges to the fulfillment of their rights, including a lack of adherence to international legal standards such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) that are enshrined in national laws and policies and a rise in fundamentalism and conservativism toward women's liberties and freedoms.[21] A series of "honor-related" murders of women in 2022, known as "the bloody week," illuminated the prevalence of femicide and gender-based violence and the risks posed by ideas around reputation and honor.[22] There has been growing political hostility toward any critique of patriarchy and sexism, as well as diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, all of which state, state-affiliated, and non-state actors use as a basis for targeting and detention.[23]

Protection risks have particularly increased for women who take on public roles. Women politicians, peacebuilders, activists, journalists, and leaders in government and nongovernmental organizations have faced intimidation, harassment, and attacks, sometimes sexual in nature.[24] A number of high-profile women have been killed for their political engagement.[25] The ongoing climate of impunity for these attacks has curtailed women's participation.[26] Overall, therefore, while women have had greater roles and visibility during the Libyan political transition, these gains have been accompanied by increased insecurity, violence, and risk.[27]

The WPS Agenda in Security Council Engagement on Libya

The risks outlined here frame the day-to-day lives of women in Libya and are part of what it means to take on publicly visible roles. It is against this backdrop that national and international actors have advanced efforts to promote women's participation in peace and security. While the Security Council was initially slow to recognize this broader protection context in its promotion of participation, it has recently made progress.

The Security Council has adopted a total of forty-five resolutions addressing the situation in Libya, mostly under Chapter VII of the UN Charter (pursuant to the council's responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security). Not all of these resolutions engage with WPS or related issues, such as women's rights or gender-

18 UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Libya*, UN Doc. A/HRC/49/4, March 23, 2022; UN Doc. A/HRC/52/83.

19 UN Doc. A/HRC/52/83.

20 Chiara Ayad, "Virtual Symposium Summary Report—Libya: Women at the Forefront," UN Women, 2021; Johanna Mannergren Selimovic and Disa Kammars Larsson, "Gender and Transition in Libya: Mapping Women's Participation in Post-conflict Reconstruction," Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 2014; Langhi, "Gender and State-Building in Libya."

21 Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, *Views Adopted Under Article 7(3) of the Optional Protocol, Concerning Communication 130/2018*, UN Doc. CEDAW/c/78/D/130/2018, April 12, 2021.

22 UN Doc. A/HRC/52/83.

23 Ibid.

24 UN Doc. A/HRC/49/4.

25 These include Sihem Sergiwa (MP, enforced disappeared/abducted 2019); Hanan al-Barassi (lawyer and outspoken critic/social media activist, shot on the street in 2020); Salwa Bugaighis (lawyer, outspoken about lack of women's representation in the transitional authority, shot in her home in 2014; her husband, Essam al-Ghariani, was abducted at the same time, and his whereabouts are still unknown); Fariha Al Berkawi (Derna congress member, shot in public in 2014); Naseeb Kernafa (TV journalist, killed in 2014); and Intissar Al Hasairi (cofounder of the Tanweer Movement, shot in 2015).

26 UN Doc. A/HRC/49/4.

27 Haala Hweio, "The Libyan Revolution and Women's Participation in Politics and Media," *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review* 8, no. 2 (2018).

based violence. However, a total of eighteen resolutions on Libya do include WPS commitments. These are primarily mandate renewals for the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL).

Promoting Participation in the UNSMIL Mandate Resolutions

Language on women's participation across the mandate resolutions is, for the most part, directed toward the Libyan authorities or UNSMIL. The WPS resolutions' division between participation and protection is mirrored in the resolutions on the mission mandate. The language on participation conforms to conventional Security Council language that "promotes," "urges," and "emphasizes" "women's full, equal and/or effective and meaningful participation."[28] The council directs UNSMIL to focus on enabling women's participation in electoral processes (when they occur) and UN-supported mediation efforts aimed at agreeing on elections, which have also been the focus of other UN entities. Table 2 maps the changing landscape of UN initiatives to support women's roles in the political process, as well as in peace and security more broadly, across four stages of the Libyan political process.

Table 2. UN support to women's participation in Libya

	2011: Post-Revolution	2012–2014: Elections and Renewed Violence	2015–2017: Libyan Political Dialogue Forum and Libyan Political Agreement	2018–2022: Renewed Mediation Efforts and Stalled Political Process
Security Council Resolutions	***Resolution 2040* (2012):** "*Emphasizing* the importance of promoting the equal and full participation of all sectors of Libyan society, including women, youth and minority communities in the political process in the post-conflict phase."	***Resolution 2095* (2013) mandates UNSMIL to:** "Promote the empowerment and political participation of all parts of Libyan society, in particular women and minorities, including in the constitutional drafting process, and support the further development of Libyan civil society."	***Resolution 2144* (2014) mandates UNSMIL to:** "Ensure the transition to democracy, including through promoting, facilitating and providing technical advice and assistance to a single, inclusive and transparent national dialogue, to Libyan electoral processes and to the process of preparing, drafting and adopting a new Libyan constitution, promoting the empowerment and political participation of all parts of Libyan society, in particular women, youth and minorities."	***Resolution 2376* (2017):** "*Requests* UNSMIL to take fully into account a gender perspective throughout its mandate." ***Resolution 2434* (2018):** "*Supporting* the efforts of the SRSG to facilitate wider engagement and participation of women from across the spectrum of Libyan society in the political process and public institutions." ***Resolution 2486* (2019):** "Requests UNSMIL to take fully into account a gender perspective throughout its mandate and to assist the GNA in ensuring

28 UN Security Council Resolution 2009 (September 16, 2011), UN Doc. S/RES/2009.

				the full, effective and meaningful participation of women in the democratic transition, reconciliation efforts, the security sector and in national institutions."
Initiatives: Track 1/1.5	UNSMIL meetings with women civil society groups	Formation of women's caucus in General National Congress with Joint Action Plan (2013) UNSMIL-led women's dialogue initiative on constitutional issues (2014)	Support from UNSMIL for inclusion of women's groups in Libyan Political Dialogue Process Facilitation by UNSMIL of Libyan women's discussion of gender provisions in the Libyan Political Agreement and development of an Agenda for Peace (2016) Convening by UNSMIL of Women's Advocacy Group to increase women's representation (2016) Technical training and support from UNSMIL to women participating in institutions emanating from Libyan Political Agreement (2016)	Establishment of Women's Empowerment and Support Network (2018) Consultation process with women's groups as part of UNSMIL's gender inclusion strategy for the intra-Libyan dialogue Addition of two women to the economic dialogue and suggestions for the inclusion of women in the 5+5 Joint Military Subcommittees and a gender perspective in the monitoring and implementation of the cease-fire UNSMIL-led women's forum to review draft constitutional proposals Convening of political parties by UNSMIL to discuss women's leadership in elections UNSMIL webinars to promote women's political participation (2022)

				UNSMIL's promotion of participation and inclusion of a 30 percent quota for women as a permanent provision of the electoral law Ongoing technical support from UNSMIL on including gender provisions in meetings, statements, etc. Technical assistance on gender provisions
Initiatives: Track 2		UNDP support for training on electoral elements of constitutional process (2013)	UNDP support for constitution-drafting process	UN Women initiatives on links between women's civil society organizations and policy initiatives (2020) UNDP training on mediation for women Coordination between UNDP, UN Women, UNFPA, and women's civil society organizations UN Women and UNFPA training for women's organizations to improve their organization and promote women's empowerment UN Women conference on mobilizing women for peacebuilding

Over time, the mandates demonstrate an increase in language on support for women's participation provided by UNSMIL and other international actors. While early resolutions were addressed primarily to the Libyan authorities, UNSMIL and other UN entities have taken a more proactive role in enabling women's participation in more recent years as part of broader efforts across the UN system to improve women's representation. This is evidenced by the mandate's increased emphasis on not only encouraging women's participation in the political process but also providing technical assistance to support a gender-sensitive approach.

This change in language has also been reflected in practice. Research participants noted that UNSMIL paid more attention to gender mainstreaming from 2018 onward. They highlighted efforts to ensure that women, including women from civil society, were included in talks.[29] One participant noted that "the mission tried to ensure the presence of many women activists, active civil society in [the] city and in the regions [outside of cities]."[30] Another participant noted how "during the dialogue sessions that took place under the auspices of UNSMIL, we were able to participate, and we had a voice, and our voice was heard. Stephanie [Williams, special adviser to the UN secretary-general on Libya] even gave us plenty of space to speak up and make our voice heard."[31] Participants noted that this stood in contrast to the 2015 political dialogue, in which women were not well represented.[32]

> While the Security Council was initially slow to recognize this broader protection context in its promotion of participation, it has recently made progress.

Despite the considerable efforts of UNSMIL and other UN entities to create mechanisms for women's participation, the Libyan political context did not prove conducive to substantial gains.[33] Only five women were appointed as ministers in the Government of National Unity in 2020 (15 percent of the total), falling short of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum's target of 30 percent.[34] Research participants commonly cited an overemphasis on descriptive representation with insufficient attention to gender sensitivity in the agenda of the talks or the implementation of policies and laws that advanced women's rights. This is a common critique of efforts to increase participation under the WPS agenda and is seen as limiting the potential for women to make substantive gains.[35]

Promoting Protection in the UNSMIL Mandate Resolutions

From its initial engagement with the situation in Libya in 2011, the Security Council has referred broadly to the need to protect civilians, outlining the responsibility of the Libyan transitional (and later governing) authorities, as well as state and non-state actors, to respect and uphold human rights and humanitarian law. This signifies the council's clear engagement on the protection of the rights of civilians through the mission mandate. These provisions should and do encompass and address violations affecting women and girls.

The Security Council has also specifically acknowledged gendered human rights violations, including by "strongly condemning sexual violence, particularly against women and girls," from the beginning of its engagement on Libya.[36] Acknowledging the extent of sexual violence in Libya, the council included this among the designation criteria within its sanctions regime for Libya. Resolution 2441 (2018) designates the "planning, directing or committing [of] acts involving sexual and gender-based violence" as subject to sanction.[37]

29 Interview 8; Interview 10.

30 Interview 8.

31 Interview 6.

32 Interview 8.

33 UN Doc. A/HRC/49/4.

34 UN Security Council, *Women and Peace and Security—Report of the Secretary-General*, UN Doc. S/2021/827, September 27, 2021.

35 See: Christine Bell and Catherine Turner, "Models for Women's Inclusion in Track One Mediation in Peace and Transition Processes," UN Women, 2020.

36 UN Security Council Resolution 2009 (September 16, 2011), UN Doc. S/RES/2009.

37 UN Security Council Resolution 2441 (November 5, 2018), UN Doc. S/RES/2441. Sanctions were first adopted under the first Security Council resolution on the situation in Libya (Resolution 1970, 2011). It took until Resolution 2441 for sexual violence in conflict to be included in that sanctions regime and for the council to request that expertise on sexual violence be added to the panel of experts. For a review of the broader trajectory, see: Sophie Huvé, "The Use of UN Sanctions to Address Conflict Related Sexual Violence," Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2018.

Language across the eighteen resolutions treats WPS-related protection issues as a distinct concern, frequently framed as a violation of international legal norms. Protection related to WPS is, for the most part, presented as "sexual violence in conflict"—a discrete violation or crime tied to the contravention of international legal norms by state or non-state actors.[38] There are some references to broader forms of gendered and sexual violence, but these remain tied to abuses by state authorities or violations by organized non-state actors rather than arising from social environments and relationships. For example, resolutions refer to torture and sexual violence in the context of prisons and detention centers, as well as migration and human trafficking.[39]

Civil society's inputs to the Security Council, in addition to reports from the Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security (IEG), also highlighted risks presented by the broader social and political context in Libya.[40] These inputs identified protection risks relevant to participation, such as the "sharp increase of domestic violence, including femicide due to the widespread availability of weapons in Libyan households."[41] They also mentioned the "rigid patriarchal norms, amplified by the presence of armed groups and the widespread availability of weapons, [which] are the central cause of gender-based violence and lack of security for women."[42]

Protection concerns are therefore multifaceted and multilayered and have a significant effect on women's engagement in political processes, which the Security Council and UNSMIL are pushing for in other sections of the mandate resolutions. These prompts from the IEG and civil society are a critical basis for the council to broaden its understanding of how protection impacts participation.

While the scope of mission mandates is inherently limited and negotiations that determine their content and reach are based on consensus, the Security Council can frame and steer efforts to advance participation. Focusing solely on violations like CRSV in the early stages of mandate resolutions excludes broader protection concerns related to participation. These concerns cannot be neglected, especially given UNSMIL's promotion of women's participation and the Security Council's commitment to contributing to the creation of "safe and enabling environments" for women's participation. Progress on this front in recent UNSMIL resolutions provides a precedent for how mission mandates and the UN system can integrate participation and protection and foster environments that enable women's safe participation.

Aligning Participation and Protection in the UNSMIL Mandate Resolutions

Resolution 2542 (2020) was the first UNSMIL mandate resolution to include a specific preambular reference to the relationship between participation and protection:

> *Urging* parties to ensure the full, equal, effective and meaningful participation of women in all activities and decision making relating to democratic transition, conflict resolution and peacebuilding, recognising the need to protect women's rights organisations, and women peacebuilders from threats and reprisals and supporting the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary General and UNSMIL to facilitate wider engagement and participation of women from across the spectrum of Libyan society in the political process and public institutions, recognising that the political process should be inclusive of all Libyans.[43]

However, while subsequent resolutions have continued to recognize the connection between participation and protection in their preambular paragraphs, the operational paragraphs revert to

38 UN Security Council Resolution 2376 (September 14, 2017), UN Doc. S/RES/2376.

39 UN Security Council Resolution 2144 (March 14, 2014), UN Doc. S/RES/2144; UN Security Council Resolution 2647 (July 28, 2022), UN Doc. S/RES/2647.

40 Note that there have been four meetings of the IEG focused on the situation in Libya (April 2018, November 2018, August 2019, and April 2021) where Security Council members have received updates on the situation of women and have asked questions of UNSMIL regarding women's participation and protection. UN Security Council, *Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security—Summary of the Meeting on the Situation in Libya, 13 April 2018*, UN Doc. S/2018/881, October 1, 2018.

41 Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security, *Summary of the Meeting on Libya Held on August 29th, 2019.*

42 NGO Working Group on Women, Peace, and Security, "Statement by Ms. Inas Miloud at UN Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict," April 23, 2019, available at https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/resource/statement-unsc-sexual-violence-open-debate-april-2019/ .

43 UN Security Council Resolution 2542 (September 15, 2020), UN Doc. S/RES/2542.

the more traditional pillar approach, with a greater emphasis on participation than protection. Resolution 2656 (2022) offers the most advanced language to date in its preambular reference to the relationship between participation and protection:

> *Urging* the Libyan institutions and authorities to [check] the full, equal, effective and meaningful participation of women at all levels, including in leadership positions, and in all activities and decision making relating to inclusive political processes, democratic transition, conflict resolution and peacebuilding, recognising the need to protect women, women's rights organisations and women peacebuilders from threats and reprisals.

The resolution further

> *strongly encourages* all parties to create a safe and enabling environment for members of civil society, including those who promote and protect human rights, to carry out their work independently and without undue influence, including in situations of armed conflict, and to address threats, harassment and violence, to counter hate speech against them, and to protect and promote human rights in accordance with obligations under international law.[44]

This language reflects Resolution 2493's provision on creating enabling environments for women's participation. It also highlights the need to respond to harassment and hate speech. This is important given the degree to which women leaders in Libya are experiencing risk and harm arising from hate speech, harassment from political actors, and online abuse, including online incitement of violence against women. Understanding the different layers of risk is essential to creating enabling environments.

The Realities of Participation and Protection in the Libyan Political Process

It is critical to consider the relationship between how participation is defined in the Security Council resolutions on UNSMIL's mandate and how women experience participation in peacebuilding settings. If participation is to be both *meaningful* and *safe*, context-specific protection-related barriers to participation must be taken into account.

Women's Experiences of Participation

> Considering these shortcomings, some women are critical of what they see as a technical approach to participation that values visible representation and quotas over meaningful participation that can bring change to local constituencies.

Prior to 2019, the text of the Security Council resolutions on Libya reflected the range of peace and security initiatives in which women were expected to participate (see Table 2). These included conflict resolution processes, national reconciliation efforts, security sector reform, and the drafting of a new constitution as envisaged by the 2015 Libyan Political Agreement. The breadth of such initiatives increased the scope for women's participation at various levels, particularly in UN-led peace processes, which were the focus of the 2015 agreement.

However, since 2020, with the signing of a ceasefire agreement and a return to the political track, the emphasis in Security Council resolutions has shifted back toward the participation of women in elections and political institutions.[45] Participation in broader processes of peace and security, such as peacebuilding efforts, has remained on the informal track.[46] Despite efforts to increase and support women's participation, the number of women participating in formal processes has

44 UN Security Council Resolution 2656 (October 28, 2022), UN Doc. S/RES/2656.

45 Stephanie T. Williams, "Two Years on from the Ceasefire Agreement, Libya Still Matters," Brookings Institution, November 2022.

46 Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security, *Summary of the Meeting on Libya Held on August 29th 2019.*

remained low. For example, in March 2022, the House of Representatives swore in a rival government to the government backed by the UN. This body includes only two women among thirty-eight members.[47] As the security situation has deteriorated, women who do try to participate in political and mediation processes face growing risks.

Considering these shortcomings, some women are critical of what they see as a technical approach to participation that values visible representation and quotas over meaningful participation that can bring change to local constituencies. Research participants expressed three critiques of existing approaches to participation.

The first is that highly visible forms of participation, primarily in electoral politics or political talks, are designed to satisfy calls for inclusion but not to bring about real change. Some research participants saw this as a deliberate tactic on the part of elites and international actors. As one participant noted, "They still use women as decoration to show that they are democratic and supportive of women. But when we reached the point that makes women a real partner in the political process, we started to face big problems."[48] Another participant expressed skepticism about the extent to which women's participation was anything more than window dressing. She noted, "The United Nations, or the international parties in general, insist that women must be present in certain number[s]. They want to see women present and nothing more."[49] This was described by another participant as "an obsession with having a certain number of women and a certain quota."[50]

There was a strong sense among participants that "institutional discrimination on the basis of gender prevents actual changes in the representation of women. They do not put women in decision-making positions."[51] Others spoke of being excluded from decision-making spaces even though they had been elected and of the absence of women in positions of leadership.[52]

Even when women manage to enter political positions, they remain disadvantaged by the political and social structures within which they operate. One participant highlighted the limitations of representation, noting that "when the process is national, the role of women is restricted to the extreme, no matter how powerful they are."[53]

The second viewpoint is that representation is necessary and valued, but it often fails to lead to improved gender outcomes due to structural and cultural barriers. One participant noted how "as long as the woman follows the imposed policy, everything is fine, but she is not allowed to think about anything else or go outside the frame set for her."[54] There is also a notable feeling that women in politics are too closely aligned with the state or party, rather than representing a women's constituency. For some the focus on politics is insufficient to properly address women's rights more holistically.[55] As one participant noted, "The women representatives in the electoral process were called the women's quota, but they did not represent the needs of women, but rather the parties. Each women's quota represented its party and its political point of view, and it entered to fill women's share without taking into account the needs of women at the time."[56]

Women who had participated in high-level processes rejected the charge that they were not interested in promoting women's rights more broadly. One noted that "all of us, as women participants, talked about real common problems and advocated for 30 percent representation of women in government."[57] These views expose divisions

47 UN Doc. A/HRC/49/4.
48 Interview 9.
49 Interview 1; Interview 11.
50 Interview 4.
51 Interview 13.
52 Interview 24; Interview 3.
53 Interview 20.
54 Interview 1.
55 Interview 3; Interview 4.
56 Interview 4.
57 Interview 6.

among women themselves about the nature and purpose of participation. A perennial tension within the WPS agenda is the expectation that women who participate in peace processes will do so in a way that advances a feminist or women's rights agenda. Participants disagreed about the extent to which women should be expected to represent their own political agendas or a "women's agenda." This tension can undermine the effectiveness of women's participation. This points to a common problem for the WPS agenda whereby women are sometimes assumed to be apolitical actors with a common "women's platform" rather than actors who bring their own politics to their roles.[58]

The third viewpoint is that representation is insufficient because it enables some women who are already well connected to access political processes, while others remain excluded, particularly at the local level. An emphasis on representation at the national level and the risks faced by high-profile women overlooks factors at the local level that prevent women from entering politics in the first place. One participant noted a need to "go to the local level and assess the… indicators that prevent women's representation in specific regions."[59] Participation is not just about leadership, representative roles, or running for elected office. In Libya, the barriers to participation also include inhibitions to the right to vote and choose representatives; the inability to participate safely in public affairs, including as candidates in electoral processes; and threats against election officials and candidates' supporters.[60]

Overall, Libyan women's experiences point to the need to contextualize our understanding of participation, which is strongly shaped by local social and political factors. A central theme to emerge from the research was the gap between the way participation is imagined and mandated at the global level and the realities for women on the ground. While the WPS agenda can be an instrument for protection and women's rights, promoting participation in a way that does not take local contexts into account could put women at greater risk. A more contextualized understanding of risk is required to promote participation that is meaningful and safe, a fact that is increasingly recognized by the Security Council.

Women's Experience of Protection

As outlined above, the Security Council resolutions on UNSMIL have continually mandated the mission to promote women's participation as part of its engagement in building peace and the implementation of the WPS agenda. While the mission mandate's protection-related language initially focused on CRSV, subsequent mandate resolutions have increasingly recognized broader protection concerns that directly relate to participation. Research participants stressed the need to extend that recognition further and improve understanding of how women's participation is conditioned by an even broader range of protection risks.

Research participants stressed that protection risks emerge not only from direct attacks by state and non-state actors but also from the broader social context.

The main kind of protection risk that is usually understood (or assumed) to impact women's participation is direct attacks on women in public roles. For example, the annual reports on WPS by the UN secretary-general, the reports of the Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Libya, and recommendations made by the IEG have all recognized the hostile environment for women's rights in Libya and the physical targeting of women human rights defenders.

However, research participants stressed that protection-related barriers to participation emerge not only from direct attacks by state and non-state actors but also from the broader social context. While the Security Council and UNSMIL do and

58 Johanna Poutanen and Catherine Turner, "Overcoming Essentialisation: Understanding and Supporting Women's Diverse Roles in Peace Processes," CMI – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation, November 2021.

59 Interview 12.

60 UN Doc. A/HRC/49/4.

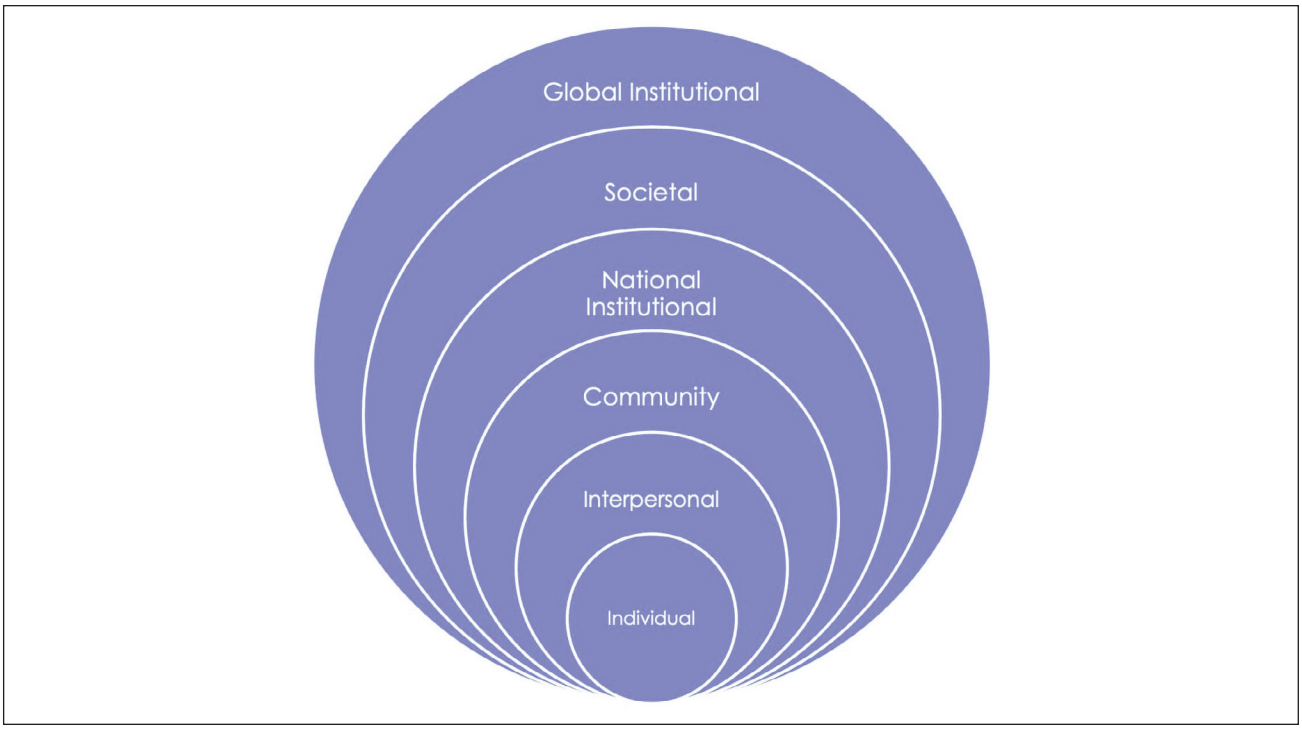
should advance women's participation, participants signaled that they also need to recognize the layers of gendered risks and barriers to women's participation, from the individual to the political level.

The layers of protection risk that women identified through this research are set out here using a tool known as an "ecological framework." An ecological framework is an onion-shaped diagrammatic tool organized around layers that depict micro/individual levels of society up to macro/structural levels. Ecological frameworks are ordinarily used to identify where factors contributing to gender-based violence arise at each layer of the "onion," from the individual to the societal level. Here, Figure 1 captures the layers, or ecology, of protection risks related to women's participation.

This ecology of risk is broad, and it is not within the mandate or capacity of one actor or a UN special political mission to address the full range of risks women experience. The aim of depicting the protection risks shared by research participants in this way is twofold: first, to capture the ecology or range of risks women face when participating and where and how these arise; and second, to present a tool that international actors can use across different contexts to deepen their understanding of how they can work toward creating an enabling environment for women's participation in each context.

Research participants identified six levels where risks related to women's participation arise: (1) the individual level, (2) the interpersonal level, and (3) the community level, where everyday gendered violence, restrictions on freedoms, and community and familial risks related to reputation and honor arise; (4) the national institutional level, where laws and policies fail to prevent risks and violations affecting women (whether by commission or omission) and where institutions led by state and non-state actors in the context of armed conflict create risk; (5) the societal level, where social and structural gender norms and inequalities influence gendered risks and rights violations at all levels across the framework; and (6) the global institutional level, where some of the approaches taken by global actors may inadvertently cause risks that impinge on women's participation by commission or omission, including when social media companies fail to regulate the use of online spaces

Figure 1: Ecological framework for participation and protection: understanding the relationship between women's participation and related protection risks in Libya



that enable threats and risks.

This framework does not cover all risks related to participation. Rather, it represents the ecology and layers of threats, risks, and harm that were identified by this research that prevent the emergence of an enabling environment for women's participation. Each of these layers should be taken into account to inform how women's participation can be *safely* promoted.

Individual Level

At the individual level, gendered sociocultural norms give rise to discriminatory beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that create risks for women, including violence. Participants felt that they individually and collectively experienced gendered risks because they were women who took on public roles. Many described feeling that risks were different for women than for men, because participation is an act that transgresses normative expectations for women but not for men. They acknowledged that political participation can pose risks for men (for example, journalists who are critical of authorities), and they perceived that men are more likely to be murdered, kidnapped, or tortured. However, while women experience some of the same kinds of risk as men, participants also felt targeted in distinctly gendered ways, such as through attacks on their reputations rooted in normative ideas of a woman's "place" within the family and society. One participant underlined this by stating that while men are "threatened with death, kidnapping, or other things… [a] woman [is] threatened with kidnapping, [harm to] her children, her honor…. They can't threaten a man's honor, can they?"[61]

> Families "prevent their daughters from applying for candidacy for any leadership position for fear that the woman will be defamed, even if it is a lie."

Attacks on an individual woman's honor were a common experience for research participants. One noted how "people are quick to defame women's reputation and honor and use bad words that I am ashamed to mention despite the women being chaste."[62] She also commented how some families "prevent their daughters from applying for candidacy for any leadership position for fear that the woman will be defamed, even if it is a lie."[63]

This can impact the reputation not only of the woman herself but also of her daughters. One participant noted how "some people say that a certain woman works in civil society and gets money and travels, and they challenge her lineage and say that her daughters would not be polite."[64] While at first glance this might not seem like a "risk," sullying a woman or girl's reputation can cause her to lose familial support; be stigmatized by or ostracized from her family and community; or lose social capital, security, income, or independence. The perceived transgression of social norms can also be used as a rationale for physical targeting. One participant termed this "moral violence."[65]

Reputational sullying and the targeting of women's honor directly impinge on women's right to safely participate. These individual-level risks arise due to women's place in society and are therefore related to a broader ecology of risks that impact women's individual and collective participation.

Interpersonal and Community Level

At the interpersonal and community levels, which are discussed together as they are closely intertwined, there are risks associated with transgressing gendered familial and community norms to participate in peace and security initiatives. While these layers of risk are related, there are distinct harms and challenges when women are navigating interpersonal protection risks from their own families and friends, in addition to protection risks from their wider communities. Research participants outlined how attacks on women's reputation and honor were effective because of the nature of community and society in

61 Interview 23.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
64 Interview 19.
65 Interview 23.

Libya, specifically, as noted, the idea of a woman's "place" within the family. One commented how "the woman still lives in a conservative society and… has not reached complete freedom as she is always afraid for her reputation and for the words of the people and for the reaction of the men who live with her in the house, whether her father, husband, or brother."[66]

Participants described how threats arise from the perception that women's participation challenges established and accepted gender roles—that a woman "can have a voice in our society as long as she is not very different, and as long as she expresses her opinion in a manner that takes into account their ideology and the stereotypical image of women in society."[67] When women start to challenge those ideologies, they experience threats "not because they are civil activists or demand human rights; rather, [because] the person is a woman, and she speaks and expresses her opinion in front of people and represents other women."[68] Women's participation is seen as a threat to gender norms that in turn prompts threats against individual women to keep them in line with those norms. An individual woman becomes associated with a threat to the social order as a whole. As one participant put it,

> The threat directed at women is always based on the person's belief that he is protecting the moral system…. The threat directed at a woman aims to prevent her from opening the door to other women. Protecting the ecosystem from the point of view of the person making the threat is represented in the idea that the participation of women threatens the ecosystem and its stability.

"The threat directed at women is always based on the person's belief that he is protecting the moral system…. The threat directed at a woman aims to prevent her from opening the door to other women."

This participant pointed to the significance of the broader ecosystem of gender norms and gendered risks, which is why risks and threats facing individual women are accepted at the familial and community levels. "They always consider themselves protecting the value system [and] that the threat is appropriate."[69]

Women are often pressured not to participate by threats and exposure to shame from the wider community (society, tribe, or ethnic group), as well as by their own families.[70] Women may opt out of participating because of external threats against them, their families, and their families' reputations. Research participants described the "withdrawal of some women candidates, whether at the level of local or national elections, because they received threats or were forced to withdraw their candidacy by some family members, or by other members close to them."[71]

As a result, there is a knock-on effect on wider participation, where "just hearing about defamation campaigns or seeing them on Facebook pages, we start to protect ourselves and our families because we are not alone, but we belong to families."[72] In addition to threats against themselves, many participants reported the risk of threats to their family as preventing them from participating in public life. One woman described how "we fear for ourselves of being raped, and we fear for our daughters of being raped."[73]

National Institutional Level

There are risks that arise from institutional actors and frameworks at the national level in the push for women's participation. These include risks arising from national-level actors and authorities (state and non-state) and from laws and policy

66 Interview 24.
67 Interview 2.
68 Interview 17.
69 Ibid.
70 Interview 11; Interview 12.
71 Interview 12.
72 Interview 19.
73 Interview 20.

frameworks.

Laws and Policies

The legislative landscape in Libya is characterized by legal gaps and legal norms that undermine the creation of an enabling environment for women's participation. Some legal provisions, by commission or omission, contribute to broader structural risks that are integral to the nexus between protection and participation.

In line with the dynamics of risk at the interpersonal level, Libya's constitution centers "the family" as the basis for Libyan society. This contributes to the legal norm that women are primarily associated with motherhood, marriage, the family, and reproduction. This legal norm in turn contributes to the perception that women are transgressing social norms when they opt to take on publicly visible roles.[74]

> Women need to walk the line between advocating for better legal standards and working within national norms and laws.

The adverse legal context is deepened by laws that curtail women's mobility and ability to participate in public meetings, do not regulate gendered violence in line with international standards, and do not incorporate legal norms that support women's right to participate in public life.[75] In the aftermath of the revolution, the Libyan parliament was resistant to references to sexual violence when debating bills proposed by the Ministry of Justice to address CRSV. Public debate or reference to sexual violence was considered contrary to social, moral, and religious values.[76] This dynamic creates a challenging environment for disclosing sexual harm of any kind, including the kinds of threats women receive as a backlash to their participation. Libya has not adopted any specific laws to address gender-based violence.[77] While the government operates social rehabilitation centers for women and girls who have been raped or abandoned by their families, these services employ a mandatory detention approach ill-suited to gender justice and protection.[78]

It is important to note that there is a broader policy architecture that could contribute to creating a national legal context conducive to women's participation. The Libyan Political Agreement contains gender equality provisions related to women's rights that draw from international commitments.[79] A Women's Support and Empowerment Unit has been established within the Presidential Council, and a Ministry of State for Women's Affairs and Community Development has been established within the Government of National Accord.[80] However, many political actors shun international standards for women's rights, impinging the development of legal and political frameworks that would support women's participation.[81] This means that while international organizations and women's civil society groups might advocate for international women's rights norms, the government often moves to counter their efforts.

This political context presents significant risks for women leading institutions or organizations that advocate for women's rights and are seen as contra-

74 "The family is the basis of society and shall be entitled to protection by the State. The State shall also protect and encourage marriage. The State shall guarantee the protection of motherhood, childhood and the elderly." Constitutional Declaration of 2011, February 2011. See also: Robert Forster, "A Gender Analysis of Peace Agreements and Transitional Documents in Libya, 2011–2018," Political Settlements Research Programme, August 2019.

75 Lawyers for Justice in Libya, "Crushing Liberty: Relentless Restrictions on Libyan Women and Enforced Male Guardianship," June 1, 2023; Human Rights Watch, "Libya: Discriminatory Restriction on Women," February 23, 2017; UN Doc. S/2018/881; UN Doc. A/HRC/52/83.

76 "Comprehensive National Review of the Progress Made Towards the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action +25," Women's Support and Empowerment Unit of the Presidential Council, 2019.

77 While rape is criminalized under Libya's penal code, it is categorized as an offense against honor and morals, which is not in line with international standards categorizing rape as a rights violation. Men who agree to marry women or girls they have raped are exonerated of any crime. In line with national legislation, women are arbitrarily detained for consensual sexual relations categorized as "adultery" or "zina" (sexual intercourse between a man and a woman who are not married). See: Article 424 of the Penal Code and Law No. 70 of 1973. For more information, see: UN Development Programme, UN Women, UN Population Fund, and UN Economic and Social Commission for West Asia, "Gender Justice & The Law," December 2018; UN Doc. A/HRC/52/83.

78 The UN has supported the Supreme Judicial Council in Libya to establish two courts in Tripoli and Benghazi, overseen by five female judges and one male judge, that is dedicated to violence against women and children. See: Forster, "A Gender Analysis of Peace Agreements and Transitional Documents in Libya."

79 For example, under Article 2, the Government of National Accord is expected to adopt the principle of equitable representation of women. See: Forster, "A Gender Analysis of Peace Agreements and Transitional Documents in Libya"; Women's Support and Empowerment Unit, "Comprehensive National Review."

80 Article 11 of the Libyan Political Agreement.

81 UN Doc. A/HRC/52/83.

vening the positions of those in power. Women are forced to walk the line between advocating for better legal standards (and aligning with the work of entities like the UN mission and related UN agencies) and working within national norms and laws—a line that the UN mission and other UN entities also have to navigate. This makes for a complex context for working on women's rights and for women's participation, and one that places women at risk of reprisal. For example, some conservative political leaders attacked a memorandum of understanding between UN Women and the Ministry of State for Women's Affairs to develop a national action plan on women, peace, and security. They also accused the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women of being anti-Islamic.[82] An investigation against the minister of state for women's affairs "discouraged women's political participation" more broadly and contributed to a risky environment for work on women's rights.[83]

Violence and Control by State, State-Affiliated, and Non-state Actors

Political contestation between the various state, state-affiliated, and non-state armed groups in Libya adds a pernicious layer to the ways that national-level dynamics create risk for women. Political and military hostility toward civil society, the media across regions of Libya, and some who work for international organizations results in the repression of civic freedoms, making it more difficult to express views that support women's rights, gender equality, and the rights of sexual and gender minorities. Advocates have been subjected to arbitrary detention, torture, rape, and forced disappearance.

As a result, lawyers, human rights defenders, women's rights activists, journalists, and civil society actors work in "an atmosphere of fear" that prompts "self-censorship, hiding, or exile."[84] One participant described a new sense of caution that arose from the ongoing climate of insecurity: "I am very careful in my personal life. I am now more cautious than before because the influence of the security agencies and their ideological whims are justifying what they want, and there are no laws that deter them from doing so."[85]

> State-affiliated, and non-state actors use harassment and abuse of power to create an environment of threat for women engaged in public life.

Participants also described harassment from state agencies and militias. This sometimes took the form of physical intimidation of women at meetings, as well as more subtle forms of surveillance.[86] Armed and political power were also used to exert pressure on women. This includes interrogation, arrest, or prosecution for civil society work.[87] Surveillance is also a constant feature of women's participation. One participant described an interrogation where women's laptops and phones were taken and examined.[88]

In each of the cases described, intimidation did not reach the level of physical harm, but it was clear to the women that the purpose of such tactics was to disrupt the work being done. Participants described direct pressure from government officials,[89] disruption of their professional activities by armed extremists,[90] and direct threats of murder and kidnapping relayed publicly through media outlets[91] or by intelligence agencies.[92] The prevalence of weapons in Libyan society adds credibility to these threats. As one participant noted, "There is chaos, spread of weapons in the country, and there is a great tendency of violence

82 UN Doc. A/HRC/49/4.
83 UN Doc. A/HRC/52/83.
84 Ibid.
85 Interview 2.
86 Interview 10.
87 Interview 10; Interview 14.
88 Interview 13.
89 Interview 1; Interview 13.
90 Interview 25.
91 Interview 23.
92 Interview 20.

present, which represents a danger to women.… The existing chaos of weapons makes it possible to kill, kidnap, torture, or hide anyone."[93] Further, a wider context of sexual harassment and sexual violence targeting women and girls, including on the basis of sexual orientation, has also been documented. This occurs on the street and at checkpoints and can prompt families to discourage women from taking part in public life "with the ostensible aim of protecting them."[94] From the above, it is clear that state, state-affiliated, and non-state actors use harassment and abuse of power to create an environment of threat for women engaged in public life. While many participants did have physical encounters with what are considered state actors and non-state militia, many more were also targeted in online spaces and using digital tools, as discussed below.

Societal Level

At the societal level, research participants pointed to patriarchy, cultural conservativism, and related sexism and misogyny as drivers of everyday gendered violence and risk, which they experience online, in their homes and workplaces, and in public spaces.[95] Reductive stereotypes and conservative religious ideologies are used to justify restrictions on women's mobility and provide a normative basis for gendered threats and violence directed at women who take up political roles.[96] This systemic gendered discrimination informs and characterizes the formal and informal systems of governance in which women participate, including national political institutions. The UN secretary-general's report on WPS in 2016 noted that in many contexts (including Libya), sexual harassment and violence is used "as a tool of social and moral control to relegate women to the private sphere and to punish perceived 'countercultural' behaviour."[97]

> Participants clearly articulated the tension between the support global frameworks are intended to offer and the risks to which they expose women.

Further, the broader context of political violence (some of which was outlined in the national institutional level above) melds with and is informed by gender inequalities, discrimination, and violence, resulting in a complex ecology of gendered harm. Women's own knowledge and experience of living with that ecology informs their understanding of the level of threat and fear they live with, and that informs their decisions about whether and how to participate in public roles.

Global Institutional Level

As articulated by participants in the research, at the global level, policies and interventions undertaken by UNSMIL and other UN entities under the WPS resolutions have positive and negative impacts that can give rise to risk. Unregulated online harassment also creates threats for women who participate.

Global Actors and Frameworks

A central theme of the research has been the gap between the way participation and protection are mandated at the global level and women's reality on the ground. There is a need to acknowledge not only the mismatch in expectations about what can be achieved but also how the reductive implementation of global frameworks can place women at greater risk.[98] As one participant noted, there is a "misunderstanding of the terms used in this context, such as gender equality, [which is understood as] opposing Sharia or contrary to society's values… [which] is the common justification for any threat to a woman."[99] Because of this, women have to navigate how to advance women's rights without incurring pushback that could put both themselves and the women's equality agenda at risk. They become lightning rods for conservatives seeking to control

93 Interview 25.
94 UN Doc. A/HRC/49/4.
95 Ibid.
96 Women's Support and Empowerment Unit, "Comprehensive National Review."
97 UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence*, UN Doc. S/2016/361, April 20, 2016.
98 Interview 14.
99 Interview 17.

women's rights entitlements, adding another layer of risk.

Participants clearly articulated this tension between the support global frameworks are intended to offer and the risks to which they expose women. Research respondents rely on the WPS agenda as a form of protection and an instrument for their work, but they also experience how it can prompt conflict among actors and insecurity for them and their work. This prompts them to find ways of engaging with women's rights outside of international frameworks. One participant noted how "we protected ourselves by covering the topics [related to WPS] and choosing unclear titles that do not contain the name of Resolution 1325."[100] Women deliberately circumvent the language of Resolution 1325 to avoid being exposed to unnecessary risk in their work. This highlights the paradoxical position women find themselves in, whereby they must try to implement the content of the WPS agenda without using its language and tools.[101]

For some women, working within international organizations also presents risks. One participant described how she was interrogated by security services because of her work with international organizations:

> When I was working on research, and in my position as a woman who meets with international entities or even with the United Nations, I was exposed to interrogation after every event immediately. This took place repeatedly, and it was reported again and again. After each meeting or event, they held a session, after which one of the security entities or an armed group invited women to interrogate one way or another. Either you go by your will or by force.[102]

It is crucial to recognize how the work and agendas of international actors can put their partners and team members at risk. Individual, interpersonal, community, and societal discrimination all need to be taken into account in the promotion of women's participation under the WPS resolutions.

Social Media and Online Risk

Research respondents cited online violence against women as a significant problem. The digital space enables women's organizations to overcome practical and material barriers to engaging in advocacy and campaigning. However, digital tools have also opened up new spaces for threats and harassment. They "represent the long pre-existing forms of violence against women, but instead taking place in a new (online) environment."[103]

Online violence against women takes both direct and indirect forms. In terms of *direct* forms of targeting and risk, for some women, digital spaces are the primary site where such risk arises. The roles of Facebook and WhatsApp were particularly notable in facilitating threats and harassment, and digital platforms were often used to post information inciting others to commit violence against women. One participant described how she is "subjected to personal threats and risks through social networking sites, where [she] receive[s] messages via WhatsApp or Messenger that contain a direct threat."[104] Another added, "I think this is one of the areas where women are most threatened, either through hurtful comments, direct threats, or blackmail.... Everything starts from cyberspace, and then things escalate until they reach physical space."[105]

Participants reported different ways in which they had been exposed to cyber trolling and bullying. These included "people campaigning against me, tweeting against me, and trying to harass me"[106] and receiving "threats on my phone number… that they will look for us and find us."[107] Online harassment also included the sharing of images of women

100 Interview 19.

101 Interview 25.

102 Interview 13.

103 Olga Jurasz, "'We Will Not Be Silenced': Online Violence Against Women in Libya," Lawyers for Justice in Libya, March 2021; UN Women, "Violence against Women in the Online Space: Insights from a Multi-Country Study in the Arab States," 2021.

104 Interview 6.

105 Interview 12.

106 Interview 4.

107 Interview 11.

as a means of intimidation.[108]

It was clear to participants that the purpose of these activities was not only to intimidate the women themselves but also to incite others to target them. As one participant described, "In the past, the images… [were] related to our person [as threats] via social media, sending screenshots of the posts we publish, inciting others to target us, and [threatening] that we should not express our opinion or not attend as feminists."[109] These tactics are deliberately used to create fear, to incite or imply the risk of physical reprisal or violence, and to intimidate and derail women from continuing their work on women's rights.

This abuse occurred both when women spoke about political or security issues and when they tried to advocate for women's interests more broadly. For example, one participant noted that "abuse via the Internet through hurtful speech has unfortunately become a normal thing in our culture, and it is always present, even if we carry out a very neutral campaign such as campaigns to detect breast cancer."[110] A woman running for a political position noted that "the abuse was through some posts [on] Facebook [to] weaken my electoral program and so that people would not vote for me."[111]

"Abuse via the Internet through hurtful speech has unfortunately become a normal thing in our culture, and it is always present, even if we carry out a very neutral campaign such as campaigns to detect breast cancer."

Threats of an *indirect* nature relied on subtle forms of communication and the spreading of disinformation about women. Online attacks on reputation can be divided broadly into those that contain a political element and those that pertain to women's personal characteristics and honor. Both have been used effectively to threaten women. Women particularly noted the role of political influencers who tried to shape public perceptions of them by using online media to spread false information.[112] Some women were accused of working as agents of foreign nations. For example, one participant explained that a particular influencer accused her of being a spy for Britain, which resulted in her receiving phone calls from people threatening to search for and find her.[113] In a context where association with international or foreign organizations is known to expose a person to violence, these words were understood as threats.

Women were also accused of being "infidels,"[114] "atheist,"[115] or associated with ISIS.[116] These allegations threaten women's reputations and expose them to danger. However, because online threats are mostly anonymous, there is little women can do to bring action against perpetrators. These threats can add further layers of risk for women as they take on public roles, influencing their feeling of safety, inhibiting their ability to perform their roles, and discouraging them from participation. Women's participation is thereby infused with insidious direct and indirect online threats from unknown actors online, and women experience these as threats that could erupt into direct violence at any time.

What the Ecological Framework Tells Us

By mapping the range of risks that women face and where and how these risks arise, we see the fuller picture that must be understood when formulating responses to threats against women under the protection pillar of the WPS agenda. This is particularly important in understanding the relationship between protection and participation and the need to move beyond a purely securitized approach.

108 Interview 11; Interview 17.
109 Interview 17.
100 Interview 5.
111 Interview 24.
112 Interview 11.
113 Ibid.
114 Interview 13.
115 Interview 25.
116 Interview 11.

Research participants drew a distinction between the "security" provided by the state and "risks" or "threats" arising from social and cultural factors. This complicates the dominant narrative of protection in the WPS agenda. The protection of women requires not just addressing securitized risks from armed or institutional actors; it also requires accounting for the broader context of gender norms and inequalities and their interaction with the political climate. Protection risks related to participation cannot be understood or depicted as isolated incidents or acts that are solely related to a "moment" of threat or risk. Many research participants stated that they lived in a constant state of fear of attack. In addition to examples of direct threats, they spoke of the constant state of insecurity they experience because of their work—of living in anticipation of violence. Understanding fear as an ongoing state is important for addressing the indirect impact this can have on their participation, such as women self-silencing and withdrawing from public roles.[117]

Understanding the broader ecology of risks allows for a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which participation can expose women to harm if not addressed in a gender-sensitive manner.

Understanding the broader ecology of risks allows for a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which participation can expose women to harm if not addressed in a gender-sensitive manner. While targeted attacks should be recognized as specific incidents that need a response, this framework demonstrates that risks arise from a broader ecology of gendered harm and discrimination. A solely securitized response to the participation-protection nexus fails to address the root causes of risk. This multilevel ecology of sources of risk must be addressed to achieve women's full, equal, meaningful, and safe participation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The views and experiences research participants shared point to a disconnect between how the global frameworks of WPS are advanced and the reality of local political and cultural norms. While the Security Council has continued to promote women's participation in all aspects of peace and security in Libya, this participation has put women at risk, and there is a sense that it is not leading to meaningful change for women.

These experiences are important when considering how to navigate the connections between participation and protection, as well as the relationship between local and global approaches to WPS. The ecological framework used here visualizes the broader range of risks that shape women's participation. Addressing these risks can serve as the basis for creating an environment that enables women's participation rather than systemically impeding it. The mapping of risks within the framework evidences how systemic gendered insecurities are part of the broader ecology of political security. It also evidences how forms of risk and harm are related, from the individual to the global levels. While all of these issues cannot be addressed by one actor, they should collectively guide any interventions that promote women's participation.

International frameworks sit alongside deeper social and political values within Libya. Research participants made clear that the framing of the WPS resolutions at the global level must be adapted to these local realities. One participant noted how "in my opinion, the decision requires sitting down and putting the resolution within the national context so that we can act on it and not remain confined to the global context. What we need is to formulate the resolution within the national context so that it is acceptable and achieves what we aim at."[118]

Working within religious and cultural values is key to communicating the requirements of the WPS agenda and addressing the social structures, of which women are a part, that enable violence against women. Security Council Resolution 2493 calls on the UN system to "develop context-specific approaches for women's participation in all UN

117 This was described by one participant as not simply physical violence but also "intellectual violence and oppression." Interview 4.
118 Interview 19.

supported peace talks." As a tool, the ecological framework enables a comprehensive gender analysis of the nexus between participation and protection in peacebuilding settings. Because each conflict and peacebuilding setting has its own set of histories, political dynamics, and sociocultural norms and practices, there is a need to ensure that this analysis is tailored to each context in order to enable women's participation. In-country expertise is necessary to mediate this local-global relationship, and the ecological framework proves a tool for supporting such thinking.

Additionally, if the Security Council is to fulfill its WPS commitments, it must pay more sustained attention to the realities of protection-related barriers to participation. It can no longer pay attention to some aspects of protection while ignoring others. Participation-related security and protection concerns underline the need for UN missions to acknowledge the wider structural and systemic ecology of gender inequalities and violence.

In line with the views of women consulted in this research and the ecology of risk related to participation captured in this report, the report provides six recommendations for better integrating protection and participation into the implementation of the WPS agenda and more broadly in UN peace operations.

For the Security Council and member states:

- **Continue to build on progress on mainstreaming WPS in mission mandates:** All mission mandates should include specific language addressing the nexus between participation and protection. This language should promote women's full, equal, meaningful, and *safe* participation. Toward this end, Security Council members should engage with local civil society actors through the IEG, mission reporting, and civil society briefing mechanisms to ensure that mission mandates are informed by local women's experiences. Language in mission resolutions should promote women's safe participation and ensure that related initiatives take into account and, where feasible, respond to protection-related barriers to participation that arise.
- **Prioritize the implementation of Resolution 2493's provision on creating "enabling environments" for women's participation:** This includes support to UN mission–led initiatives that promote women's inclusion in multi-level peace tracks facilitated by the UN and programming by donors, UN agencies, and partners that promotes women's leadership in politics and peacebuilding.
- **Ensure gender advisers with context-specific expertise are mandated and properly resourced in all UN missions:** Gender advisers should be fully resourced to advise UN missions on initiatives that promote women's participation. The work undertaken by gender advisers to engage with civil society should be recognized and supported as a critical component of mission-led initiatives on women's participation. That engagement should ensure that these initiatives are informed by and undertaken in ways that respond to the reality of protection-related barriers to participation that women face.

For UN missions, agencies, and partners:

- **Conduct context-specific participation and protection analyses:** Context-specific participation and protection analyses (using tools such as an ecological framework) should be used to inform the implementation of Resolution 2493 and wider initiatives that promote women's participation. The impact of gendered forms of harm, such as threats to reputation and honor, and how they relate to women's participation should be included in such analyses and in initiatives designed to address protection-related barriers to participation.
- **Strengthen coordination between UN missions, UN agencies, and other international organizations working on related issues to address the full range of protection-related barriers to women's participation:** In Libya, UNSMIL, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), UN Women, the UN

121 UN Doc. S/RES/2493, para. 9(a).

Population Fund (UNFPA), and other UN entities should continue collaborating to support women's safe participation and address context-specific protection needs such as the impact of small arms on women's safe participation. Initiatives in this area could include the creation of mechanisms that enable staff, partner organizations, and activists to safely report threats and provide avenues for redress and action. These mechanisms need to recognize the risks posed by state and non-state actors, as well as the lack of confidence in formal institutions. UN entities could also collaborate in the provision of psychological support services to women participating in UN-led initiatives that recognize the realities of participation in a context of permanent risk. Throughout this work, they should pay particular attention to the risks associated with working for international organizations or using international frameworks and tools to promote participation in local communities.

- **Ensure a gender-sensitive approach to the use of digital tools for participation to reflect the increased risks to women in online environments:** Further research and evidence are needed to understand the balance between the benefits and risks of online engagement for the promotion of women's rights and participation.

Annex: Research Methodology and Research Ethics

Conducting qualitative research on WPS in a conflict-affected environment brings significant methodological and ethical challenges. We have sought to ensure that the research design underpinning this report upholds the highest ethical standards in terms of participant selection and protection.

The research centered on identifying the protection-related risks and barriers faced by women who participated in peace and security–related affairs or political life in Libya. Participants were recruited from three sectors to reflect the diversity of women's leadership:

- International organizations supporting political processes like the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum;
- Government, including elected members of national and local government; and
- Civil society organizations, including participants in Track Two processes and consultations.

The majority of interviewees were in Libya, but some members of the Libyan diaspora were also included to ensure a diverse and inclusive sample. To reflect the nature of Libyan politics and society, we took particular care to ensure that participants were recruited from a diverse range of geographic and ethnic backgrounds. Participants included women from all three regions of Libya: the East (Cyrenaica), the West (Tripolitania), and the South (Fezzan). We made a particular effort to ensure that women from underrepresented regions were included in the research.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with twenty-five women between November 2022 and January 2023. The interviews were conducted in either Arabic or English, depending on the preference of the participants. All interview data was anonymized to ensure confidentiality. All interviews were transcribed and translated into both Arabic and English. Analysis is based on the English translations of the transcripts.

In addition to standard research practices, we have endeavored to ensure the security and safety of the interviewees. For example, direct quotes have been checked to ensure they cannot be used to identify participants. The research is grounded as much as possible in the realities and voices of women from the Libyan context. Given those realities, and to protect our Libyan co-researchers and interviewees, no names or identifying factors are used in the paper. We have endeavored to present an analytical overview of the experiences, views, and opinions shared with us for the research.

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