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The strategic role of women in Mali's peacebuilding process

Abstract:

Mali, started in 2012, an armed rebellion in the North and it has evolved to become a multidimensional crisis whose end seems far from the horizon. In its resolution 2480 (2019) this past June, the Security Council called for the full, effective and meaningful participation of women in the peace process to be treated as a priority. This paper explains the reasoning behind such call, checks the extent to which inclusion requirements have been fulfilled in Mali and analyses how Malian women have contributed both formally and informally to the country's peace and conflict dynamics. It shows that, given the different roles they have played and still play in the crisis, and considering the root causes of the latter, the effective inclusion of women is not only a moral requirement but a strategic necessity in Mali's peacebuilding process.

Keywords:

Mali, crisis, peacebuilding, women, inclusion.

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Introduction

What started in 2012's Mali as an armed rebellion in the North followed by a coup d'état has evolved throughout the years to become a multidimensional crisis that encompasses distinct and intermeshed actors, regions and motives. It is even questionable whether a full implementation of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, signed in 2015, would do much to get the country out of its current state of instability – as the latter was aimed particularly at addressing the crisis in the North. Yet, there is widespread agreement on the need for its implementation as a crucial step within the peacebuilding process[1]. Simultaneously, there are growing demands among the international community, Malian society and think tanks to increase the involvement of members from civil society, and women, both in the implementation of the Agreement and the general peacebuilding process[2]. In fact, women themselves have been asking since the beginning of the crisis to be further represented at all levels and stages of the peace and crisis management process. Their "meaningful" participation is even one of the five priorities specified by the Security Council in resolution 2480 (2019) when it comes to the implementation of the peace agreement[3]. Why?

This paper seeks to explore the issue of women's role in Mali's peacebuilding, analyzing the record of their participation in the peace process thus far, the reasoning behind the demands to further include them, and why such inclusion is needed. To understand the

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[1] UN. "Step Up Implementation of the Peace Agreement, Security Council urges Mali, as Top Official Reports on Deadly Violence against Peacekeepers", UN Security Council Meetings Coverage, 8 October 2019, retrieved from: https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/sc13977.doc.htm ; "Mali security situation has reached critical threshold, warns UN human rights expert after visit", Relief Web, 2 December 2019, retrieved from: https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-security-situation-has-reached-critical-threshold-warns-un-human-rights-expert ; SODOGOGO, Aguibou. "Mise en œuvre de l'Accord pour la paix et la réconciliation au Mali: Le CSA constate la « persistance des difficultés et des lenteurs » '', News Abamako, 18 June 2019, retrieved from: http://news.abamako.com/h/214807.html

[2] UN. "With Peace Process in Mali at Critical Stage, Special Representative Recommends Extending Mandate of Integrated Stabilization Mission", UN Security Council Meetings Coverage, 12 June 2019, retrieved from: https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/sc13839.doc.htm; MECHOULAN, Delphine, CONNOLLY, Lesley & HØJLAND, Minna. Protecting Mali's Peace: The Role of Civil Society. IPI Global Observatory, 29 November 2016, retrieved from: https://theglobalobservatory.org/2016/11/mali-civil-society-women-minusma/ ; NYIRABIKALI, Gaudence. "Opportunities and Challenges for Civil Society contributions to Peacebuilding in Mali". SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security, p. 5, March 2016, retrieved from: https://sipri.org/sites/default/files/SIPRIInsight1601.pdf

[3] S/RES/2480, 28 June 2019, art. 4, par. 5.

role played by women in the peacebuilding process is relevant from a strategic point of view because understanding the elements that make peacebuilding effective, and thus sustainable peace possible, is crucial to avoid the resumption of war[4]. According to the 'peace-war cycle' concept, in strategic history, in the same way that wars influence the type of peace (and order) that is built, the way in which peace is built can lead to war to a greater or lesser extent[5]. The Treaty of Versailles is a textbook example. And Mali is clearly a case in practice, as the current peace agreement signed between the government and the armed rebel groups is the third one in less than 30 years; and almost five years after its signature it is still far from bringing positive peace to the country[6].

Some context: The History of Mali's Multidimensional Crisis and the Efforts to address it

Early 2012, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (known by its French acronym MNLA), initiated the fourth Tuareg-led armed rebellion in Northern Mali since the country became independent from France in 1960[7]. As in previous times, Tuareg rebels felt they had been marginalized by the Malian authorities governing from the south of the country and many of them sought the creation of an independent state —the state of Azawad— comprising the northern regions of Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu (Figure 1)[8].

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[4] Peacebuilding is the set of activities that help build the foundations of positive peace, one that moves beyond the mere absence of war and systemic violence and that is more sustainable. The concept of peacebuilding was introduced by UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in 1992. To learn more about it and related concepts check MOSEGAARD SØBJERG, Lene. "The UN's new Peacebuilding Commission", Global Policy Forum, December 2006, retrieved from: https://www.globalpolicy.org/un-reform/un-reform-initiatives/secretary-general-boutros-boutrosghalis-reform-agenda-1992-to-1996/48077.html

[5] GRAY, Colin S. "Chapter 1, Themes and Contexts in Strategic History". In *War, Peace and International Relations: An Introduction to Strategic History,* New York: Routledge, 2007, p. 7.

[6] CHAUZAL, Gregory & VAN DAMME, Thibault. "The roots of Mali's Conflict. Moving beyond the 2012 crisis". CRU Report, Clingendael Institute's Conflict Research Unit, March 2015, retrieved from*:* https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2015/the_roots_of_malis_conflict/executive_summary/; "Mali security situation has reached critical threshold, warns UN human rights expert after visit", Relief Web, 2 December 2019, retrieved from: https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mali-security-situation-has-reached-critical-threshold-warns-un-human-rights-expert

[7] THURSTON, Alexander & LEBOVICH, Andrew. "A Handbook on Mali's 2012-2013 Crisis", Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa (ISITA), Working Paper Series No. 13-001, 2013, pp. 1-3, retrieved from: https://buffett.northwestern.edu/documents/working-papers/ISITA-13-001-Thurston-Lebovich.pdf
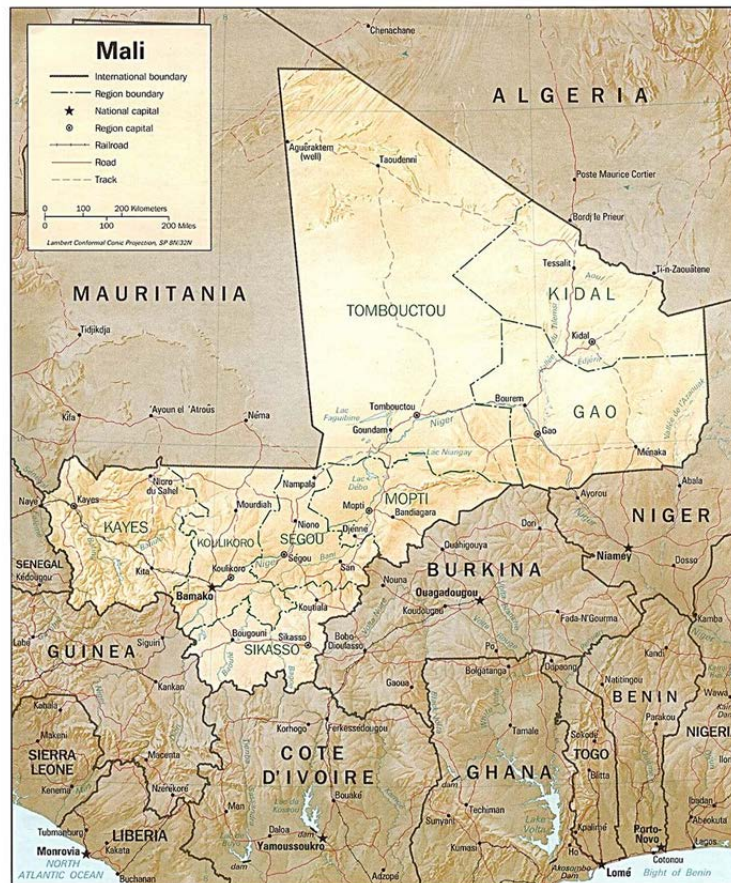
[8] ibid

Figure 1. Political and physical map of Mali.

Source. CIA (1994), Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection.

This time however, many of the rebels had just come back from fighting for Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, bringing with them training and weapons that allowed them to take control of several northern key towns and expel the army from the region[9]. Besides, the MNLA and other separatist groups were not alone in their efforts but formed a coalition with Iyad Ag Ghaly's Ansar Dine, a local jihadist group whose goal was to impose the sharia, Islamic law, across all of Mali[10]. On March 22nd that year, Malian soldiers, frustrated with the way the rebellion was being handled, led a coup d'état that overthrew President Amadou Toumani Touré from power[11].

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[9] FESSY, Thomas. "Gaddafi's influence in Mali's coup", *BBC World*, 22 March 2012, retrieved from: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-17481114

[10] "Mali Tuareg leaders call off Islamic pact", *Reuters*, 1 June 2012, retrieved from: https://www.reuters.com/article/mali-rebels-idUSL5E8H13W320120601

[11] NOSSITER, Adam. "Soldiers Overthrow Mali Government in Setback for Democracy in Africa", The New

In the following months, separatists and jihadists parted ways due to disagreements and the latter took full control over the whole northern territory, moving south until they were ousted from major cities by a French-led international coalition in early 2013[12]. That year, MINUSMA, the UN Peacekeeping Mission for Mali, was established; a Preliminary Agreement and a ceasefire between the interim government and the separatist groups was signed at Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso); and presidential elections were held leading to current President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (IBK)'s victory[13]. However, the ceasefire did not last long and the Malian government had to ask Algeria in January 2014 to lead the international mediation of the conflict as it had done in previous occasions[14]. Following long months of negotiations in Algiers, the final version of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali (hereafter 'the Agreement') was signed on June 20th 2015 between the Malian government and the two coalitions of armed groups that were fighting in the North: the CMA and the Platform[15].

York Times, 22 March 2012, retrieved from: https://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/23/world/africa/mali-coup-france-calls-for-elections.html

[12] IBRAHIM, Ibrahim Yahaya & ZAPATA, Mollie. "Early Warning Report. Regions at Risk: Preventing Mass Atrocities in Mali", Simon Skjodt-Center for the Prevention of Genocide, 2018, pp. 6, 33 footnotes 1 & 3, retrieved from: https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/Mali_Report_English_FINAL_April_2018.pdf

[13] DÍEZ ALCALDE, J. Mali: Si no avanza el diálogo político, gana la violencia. Documento de Opinión IEEE 75/2016, pp. 5-6, retrieved from: http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2016/DIEEEO75-2016_Mali_JDA.pdf; "Mali and Tuareg rebels sign peace deal", BBC, 18 June 2013, disponible en: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-22961519

[14] DÍEZ ALCALDE, supra nota 13, p. 6.

[15] Although the MNLA initiated the rebellion in 2012, by the time the Algiers Agreement was signed, the conflict had evolved to include different armed groups with different political agendas, reflecting the internal divisions among Tuaregs themselves and other ethnic groups in the North such as the Fulani and the Songhai. The distinct armed groups had reunited by 2015 into two coalitions: The Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA), pursuing claims of self-determination, and the Platform, which aims to address northern political and socio-economic grievances while defending the unitary state of Mali. To learn more about it check: NYIRABIKALI, Gaudence. "Mali Peace Accord: Actors, Issues and their Representation", Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 27 August 2015, retrieved from: https://www.sipri.org/node/385 ; CHAUZAL, Gregory & VAN DAMME, Thibault. "Chapter 2. Rebellion and Fragmentation in northern Mali", CRU Report, Clingendael Institute's Conflict Research Unit, March 2015, retrieved from: https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2015/the_roots_of_malis_conflict/2_rebellion_and_fragmentation_in_northern_mali/#origins_and_allegiances_of_the_northern_communities

Yet, jumping several years forward, only a few provisions of the Agreement have been fully implemented[16] and the crisis in Mali has evolved to include more actors, issues and regions that the former does not cover. The epicentre of violence has progressively moved in recent years from the north to the centre of the country, where there has been an upsurge in intercommunal conflict, particularly between Fulani pastoralist communities and Dogon farmer communities[17]. This conflict is often fueled by jihadist groups, who have proved resilient despite territorial loses in 2013 and moved to the center, from which they have also perpetrated an increasing number of attacks against UN, French and Malian forces on the ground[18]. Climate drought, endemic poverty, absence of basic state services in both Central and Northern Mali, transnational criminal networks, foreign presence, protests, and political instability are all additional elements that interact with the former —as both causes and consequences— to create a multidimensional crisis whose end seems far from the horizon.

Nonetheless, efforts are still underway to deal with the challenges Mali faces and build sustainable peace in the country. Local and civil society-led efforts at inter-communal dialogue and reconciliation are relatively widespread[19]. A Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (CVJR) was established in 2014 to contribute to peace through transitional justice and this past December, it organized its first public hearing in

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[16] *The Carter Centre*, tasked since 2017 with the role of being the Independent Observer of the implementation of the Agreement, argued in its third report that only 20 of the 78 commitments had been completed, most of which were only preliminary implementation steps: The Carter Centre. "Report of the Independent Observer. Evaluation of Implementation in 2018", 18 February 2019. Retrieved from: https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/conflict_resolution/mali-3e-rapport-eng.pdf

[17] "Mali in crisis: The fight between the Dogon and Fulani". *Talk to Aljazeera in the Field*, 24 August 2019, retrieved from: https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/talktojazeera/inthefield/2019/08/mali-crisis-fight-dogon-fulani-190822125317990.html

[18] "In Focus: Conflict in Mali", Congressional Research Service, August 2019, retrieved from: https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IF10116.pdf ; Security Council Report. "January 2020 Monthly Forecast. Mali", 23 December 2019, retrieved from: https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2020-01/mali-7.php

[19] An example of this is the movement "Malians Tout Court" which has organized throughout the year several forums and ceremonies to ease tensions between different Malian communities and discuss peace: AG IBRAHIM, Youssouf. ''Mali : la paix par les Maliens, une initiative du mouvement ''Maliens tout court''', *NordSudJournal, 16 abril 2019,* retrieved from: https://www.nordsudjournal.com/mali-la-paix-par-les-maliens-une-initiative-du-mouvement-maliens-tout-court/

Bamako[20]. In October, an 'Inclusive National Dialogue' (DNI) was launched by the government to pave the way in a consensual way to institutional and constitutional reforms and an acceleration of the implementation of the Agreement[21]. Furthermore, despite being critical with the deteriorating security situation and the slow implementation of the Agreement, last June the UN Security Council recognized the progress made in the first months of 2019 and renewed the mandate of MINUSMA for one more year through Resolution 2480[22]. Importantly, one of the demands the resolution made to all the parties in Mali was to "ensure full, effective and meaningful participation of women" in the peacebuilding process[23].

What is the reasoning behind such call? How would a stronger inclusion of women in the peacebuilding process help solve the complex crisis Mali is currently facing? The remaining sections of this paper aim to address these questions.

Women, Peace and Security

Women have for a long time been perceived as passive victims of conflict and war. Over the last decades however, scholars and practitioners alike have come to increasingly recognize the complexity and diversity of roles women play in conflict. The pioneering work of Elise Boulding, one of the matriarchs of the academic discipline of Peace and Conflict Studies in the 20th century, significantly contributed to make women visible as radical agents of change in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Her work and the one of others that followed, together with intense lobbying to the UN Security Council (UNSC), led to the landmark publication by the latter of resolution 1325 (2000)[24]. The resolution was the first of its kind to link women to the Peace and Security Agenda, addressing the particular way in which conflict affects them and their crucial role in conflict resolution and

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[20] CVJR. ''La Commission Vérité, Justice et Réconciliation a organisée sa première audience publique ce 08 Décembre 2019 au CICB'', 11 December 2019, retrieved from http://cvjrmali.com/home/la-commission-verite-justice-et-reconciliation-organisee-sa-premiere-audience-publique-ce-08-decembre-2019-au-cicb/

[21] DIALLO, Aissatou. ''Un « dialogue nationale inclusif » au Mali. Comment, avec qui et pourquoi faire ?'' Jeune Afrique, 10 October 2019, retrieved from : https://www.jeuneafrique.com/840846/politique/un-dialogue-national-inclusif-au-mali-comment-avec-qui-et-pour-quoi-faire/

[22] S/RES/2480, 28 June 2019, art. 5.

[23] Ibid

[24] RAMSBOTHAM, Oliver, WOODHOUSE, Tom y MIALL, Hugh. "Chapter Thirteen: Gender and Conflict Resolution". *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, Cambridge: Polity, 2012, p. 306.

sustainable peace, and calling for their increasing representation and participation at all levels of decision-making[25]. It was followed by SCR 1889 (2009), SCR 2122 (2013) and SCR 2242 (2015) – in addition to other four addressing conflict-related sexual violence – and a large number of researches, papers, sourcebooks, conferences and workshops on the topic[26].

Although the demand to include women in processes of peacebuilding is partially explained by a moral requirement of inclusivity and gender equality, it is also explained by an increasing amount of research and data that proofs the efficacy of such inclusion. Research has shown that the participation of civil society actors in peace agreements makes the latter 65% less likely to fail; and that the presence of women as negotiators, mediators, witnesses and signatories makes agreements a 35% more likely to last for fifteen years[27]. Furthermore, a significant number of studies have shown that, partially as a result of constructed gender roles, women "are more likely to be perceived by fellow citizens as members that can be trusted" and to "place more emphasis on social and civic responsibilities" which would allow them to take leadership roles in peace processes[28].

It is important to note that there are many and distinct ways women can participate in conflict resolution and peace-building process, as they are a heterogeneous group and the context in which they operate varies on a case per case basis. The International Peace Institute (IPI) has identified seven, going from 'direct participation at the negotiation table' as mediators or part of the negotiating delegations, to exerting influence on the peace processes through 'mass action', or participating in 'inclusive commissions' in charge of implementing major provisions of agreements[29]. The Council on Foreign

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[25] S/RES/1325, 31 October 2000.

[26] DPPA. "Women, Peace and Security", retrieved from: https://dppa.un.org/en/women-peace-and-security; UN Women. "UN Women Sourcebook on Women, Peace and Security: Overview of contents", October 2012, retrieved from: http://iknowpolitics.org/sites/default/files/un_women_sourcebook_on_women_peace_and_security.pdf

[27] NILSSON, Desirée. "Anchoring the peace: Civil society actors in peace accords and durable peace", International Interactions, 38(2), 243-266, 2012, retrieved from: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03050629.2012.659139 ; O'REILLY, Marie, O SÚILLEABHÁIN, Andrea y & PACFENHOLZ, Thania. "Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's role in Peace Processes". *International Peace Institute*, June 2015, p. 12, retrieved from: https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/IPI-E-pub-Reimagining-Peacemaking.pdf

[28] Ibid, p. 10.

[29] Ibid pp. 13-18. The whole list comprises (1) Direct participation at the negotiation table; (2) Observer status in peace negotiations; (3) Consultations; (4) Inclusive commissions; (5) (High-level) Problem-solving

Relations (CFR) in its turn has alluded to the ways in which women make a difference in peace efforts based on qualitative evidence from distinct peace processes: for instance, women have proven capable of 'working across cultural and sectarian divides' in places such as Israel and Palestine or Syria; have been perceived and 'acted as honest brokers' at the peace table in both Northern Ireland and the Philippines; have 'broadened the agenda' in negotiations such as Colombia's, introducing issues and priorities that make agreements more durable; and have 'made post-conflict recovery more effective' in places such as Guatemala[30]. Finally, the advantages of having more female peacekeepers have also been emphasized, particularly by the UN itself[31].

Women in conflict-torn, traditional societies are often believed to have a collaborative attitude, a deeper knowledge of the dynamics on the ground and root causes of grievances, and a status within their families and communities that allows them to contribute to peace in ways that men can't. Nonetheless, one must note that the efficacy of their inclusion and participation depends upon certain conditions. During peace negotiations for instance, women are more likely to influence the outcome of deliberations when these are based on consensus rather than majority rule. And the roles associated to them at the local level also play a role at facilitating or hindering their effective participation[32]. On a different note, it is worth recalling that women can play many roles, and in the same way they can promote peace they can instigate conflict: in intercommunal conflicts in the Darfur region or Eastern Ethiopia for instance, some women reproduced gender roles and incited men from their communities to be 'real men' and fight, making fun of those who didn't[33]. However, this should not be a justification for their exclusion but

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workshops; (6) Public decision-making; (7) Mass action.

[30] Council on Foreign Relations. "Why it matters", CFR: Women's Participation in Peace Processes, January 2019, Retrieved from: https://www.cfr.org/interactive/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/why-it-matters

[31] United Nations Peacekeeping. "Women in Peacekeeping". Retrieved from:
https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/women-peacekeeping

[32] O'REILLY, SÚILLEABHÁIN y PACFENHOLZ, *supra* note 27, pp. 28-31.

[33] TADESSE, Bamlaku, TESFAYE, Yeneneh, y BEYENE, Fekadu. "Women in conflict and indigenous conflict resolution among the Issa and Gurgura clans of Somali in Eastern Ethiopia", African Journal on Conflict Resolution, 10(1), 2010, p. 93; MOHAMED, Adam Azzain. "From instigating violence to building peace: the changing role of women in Darfur region of Western Sudan", African Journal on Conflict Resolution, 4(1), 11-26, 2004, pp. 15-17.

a further argument in favor of incorporating a gender perspective in analyses of conflict and peacebuilding as well as the policies adopted in response[34].

In fact, scholars increasingly acknowledge the importance of these gendered analyses, further arguing that "if third parties interpret the conflict through the definitions of its leading actors, conflict resolution may merely reproduce the exclusionist, violent discourses and practices which perpetuate it"[35]. Nevertheless, despite all the evidence and policy discourse in favor of considering other actors from civil society, and particularly women, progress in their inclusion remains slow. In an analysis of all the major peace processes from 1992 to 2018, data revealed that women only made up 3% of mediators, 4% of signatories and 13% of negotiators.[36] Their formal inclusion in the formal peace process of Mali also remains limited despite the normative requirements and commitments on the issue. The following section particularly looks at some of the most important requirements that apply to the context of the crisis and its resolution and how Mali has fared in fulfilling them so far.

Women in Mali's (formal) Peace Process: Requirements and Fulfillments

In terms of requirements, UN SCR 1325 (2000) and successive Security Council resolutions and other policy frameworks have called since the beginning for a major representation and participation of women "at all" decision-making levels, mechanisms of conflict resolution and peacebuilding, as well as UN field-based operations[37].They have also emphasized the importance of adopting a gendered perspective throughout the distinct peace efforts and of including gender related-provisions in peace agreements. Mali has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Maputo Protocol, and its 1992 constitution guarantees equal

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[34] For information about the importance of integrating gender approaches in conflict and post-conflict settings and advice on how to go about it check for instance UNDP. "Gender Approaches in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations", retrieved from:
https://www.undp.org/content/dam/aplaws/publication/en/publications/womens-empowerment/gender-approaches-in-conflict-and-post-conflict-situations-/gendermanualfinalBCPR.pdf

[35] RAMSBOTHAM, WOODHOUSE y MIALL, *supra* note 24, pp. 312-313.

[36] Council on Foreign Relations. "Introduction" , CFR: Women's Participation in Peace Processes, January 2019, retrieved from: https://www.cfr.org/interactive/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/

[37] S/RES/1325 (2000), S/RES/1889 (2009), S/RES/2122 (2013) and S/RES/2242 (2015)

rights to all citizens regardless of sex. Just at the time the conflict in the North exploded, in March 2012, it issued its first National Action Plan for the implementation of the SCR 1325, and in 2015 it passed a law establishing a 30% gender quota in appointments to political offices and decision-making institutions[38].

However, women were almost completely marginalized at the beginning of the formal peace process and the extent of their reduced participation was generally the result of their own efforts at being included. Even if not invited, they managed to participate in the initial peace negotiations at Ouagadougou in 2012 and include some of their concerns in the Preliminary Agreement thanks to 4 Malian women – Saran Keïta Diakité, Soyata Maiga, Diarra Afoussatou Thiero and Traouré Omou Touré (Figure 2) —who went to the city and fought for a seat at the table—[39]. Later, during the negotiations leading to the Bamako Agreement, women made only 5% of the negotiators and 15% of the signatories[40]. Other women were only given the opportunity to express their opinions through representatives invited by the parties to one week of civil society 'hearings' during the second phase of the negotiations[41]. According to Mme. Omou Touré, during the negotiations and in general in Mali, women were and remain "insufficiently taken into account"[42].

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[38] Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children and Families. "National Action Plan for the Implementation of Resolution 1325 of the Security Council of the United Nations on Women, Peace and Security 2012-2014", March 2012, retrieved from:
https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/Mali%20NAP%20(2012-2014)%20-%20English.pdf ;
LORENTZEN, Jenny. "Women and the Peace Process in Mali", GPS Policy Brief 2. Oslo: PRIO, February 2017 p.2, retrieved from: https://www.prio.org/utility/DownloadFile.ashx?id=1531&type=publicationfile

[39] Ibid. UN Women. "In the words of Saran Keïta Diakité: Girls receive a visit from a different man every night, a 'new husband'", 14 May 2013, retrieved from:
https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2013/5/girls-receive-a-visit-from-a-different-man-every-night-a-new-husband

[40] While the government and the CMA brought no more than three women each in their delegations, women were completely absent within the Platform´s delegation. The largest number of female negotiators and signatories of a peace agreement so far is 33% and 25% respectively, in the case of the Philippines. : Council on Foreign Relations. "Explore the Data", CFR: Women's Role in Peace Processes, January 2019, retrieved from: https://www.cfr.org/interactive/interactive/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/explore-the-data ; BOUTELLIS, Arthur y ZAHAR, Marie-Joelle. "A Process in Search of Peace: Lessons from the Inter-Malian Agreement", International Peace Institute, June 2017, p. 13, retrieved from: https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/IPI-Rpt-Inter-Malian-AgreementFinalRev.pdf

[41] BOUTELLIS y ZAHAR, *supra* note 40, p. 14

[42] MISAHEL. ''Implication des femmes dans le suivi des accords de paix au Mali : Entretien avec Mme Toure Oumou'', 15 Julio 2015, pp. 2-3, retrieved from: http://www.peaceau.org/uploads/misahel-interview-mme-oumou-toure-2016-cafo-def-nat.pdf

The resulting Bamako Agreement contained 11 references to women, including one of no amnesty to that perpetrating violence against them and three concerning them within the pillar of economic and social development of the northern regions[43]. Yet, no explicit reference to their direct participation in the implementation mechanisms was made and their formal participation in these mechanisms remains indeed insufficient today. As mentioned at the beginning of the paper, this is precisely one of the main criticisms and demands the Security Council repeated in its resolution 2480 (2019) this past June, calling:

"5… upon all parties in Mali to ensure full, effective and meaningful participation of women in the mechanisms established by the Agreement to support and monitor its implementation, including through greater representation of women in the CSA, meeting the 30 per cent quota for women in all political functions and offices as defined in Mali's legislation…"[44]

The promotion of women's meaningful participation and the organization of a workshop to elaborate recommendations on the issue are in fact among the priority measures the Security Council has established for the Malian parties and MINUSMA before the end of the latter's mandate. Furthermore, the resolution requests the Secretary General "to increase the number of women in MINUSMA as well as…in all aspects of operations"[45].

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[43] Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali Resulting from the Algiers Process, 15 May 2015, retrieved from: https://www.un.org/en/pdfs/EN-ML_150620_Accord-pour-la-paix-et-la-reconciliation-au-Mali_Issu-du-Processus-d'Alger.pdf

[44] S/RES/2480, 28 June 2019, art. 5. Italics are my own.

[45] S/RES/2480, 28 June 2019, arts. 4, (par. 5), 28 (d) & 46.

Figure 2. From right to left: Soyata Maiga, lawyer, Saran Keïta Diakité, President REPSFECO/Mali, and Diarra Afoussatou Thiero. Source. REPSFECO/Mali; UN Women. Available at: https://www.unwomen.org/es/news/stories/2012/5/q-a-with-saran-keïta-diakite-and-traore-oumou-toure-from-mali-on-their-participation-in-mali-s-peace

Yet, this past December, six months after SCR 2480 was issued, the report by the UN Secretary General on the situation in Mali did not show much progress. It revealed that within the mechanisms established by the Agreement: (1) women make up 4% of the subcommittees of the Agreement Monitoring Committee (CSA), with no representation at the highest level of the mechanism; (2) 3% of members at the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Commission; (3) 6% at the National Council on Security Sector Reform (SSR); (4) 1 and 5% of the appointees at the regional and district levels of the interim administration respectively; and more positively, (5) 20% of commissioners at the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission and a gender perspective in its mandate and methods[46].

None achieves the 30% target set by the national gender quota law adopted in 2015, nor is this target reached in national institutions and legislative bodies: as of today, women hold 14 seats out of 146 at the National Assembly; 7 ministerial positions out of 38 in the national government; and not even one position as regional governors[47]. In MINUSMA,

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[46] MINUSMA. "Report of the Secretary General on the Situation in Mali", S/2019/983, 30 December 2019, par. 37, retrieved from: https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/s_2019_983_e.pdf

[47] Assemblée Nationale République du Mali."Liste des Députés Femmes de la Veme Législature 2014-2018", retrieved from: http://assemblee-nationale.ml/liste-des-deputes-femmes/; Primature République du Mali. Les Ministres, retrieved from: http://primature.ml/les-ministres/

women account for 3.58% of the military personnel, 10.87% of the police personnel, 24% of the international civilian personnel and 15% of the national civilian personnel[48]. Nevertheless, gender is mainstreamed across the mandate of the mission which must support women's participation in the peace and security process[49].

Thus, even if Mali's officials and international partners seem to recognize the importance of women in peacebuilding process, their words and commitments do not translate enough into deeds. The lack or limited participation in the formal peace process of Malian women specifically, is explained to a great extent by Mali's highly stratified and hierarchical society, emphasized by different studies[50]. The stratification runs across all dimensions (geography, ethnicity, age, gender and class) and tends to confine women's participation to the private sphere, limiting their representation also in traditional and local mechanisms of conflict resolution[51]. This is important since, as stated previously, the role traditionally attributed to women at the local level has been identified as a factor hindering or facilitating their participation in formal peace processes.

Yet, many women in Mali do want to participate. They want peace, they are working for peace, and they want to see their inclusion in the process augmented to further contribute to it[52]. More informally, they have already contributed to the dynamics of peace – and conflict – and still do, making of their inclusion in the formal process a strategic need. The next and final section shows why.

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[48] MINUSMA, *supra* note 46, par. 82, 83 & 84

[49] NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security. "Mapping Women, Peace and Security in the UN Security Council 2018", 2018, p. 61, retrieved from: https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/files/NGOWG-Mapping-WPS-in-UNSC-2018.pdf

[50] LORENTZEN, Jenny, TOURE, Nana Alassane & GAYE, Bassirou. "Women's Participation in Peace and Reconciliation Processes in Mali", PRIO Paper. Oslo: PRIO, 2019, p. 9; LACKENBAUER, H., THAN LINDELL, M., & INGERSTAD, G. "If our men won't fight we will": A Gendered Analysis of the Armed Conflict in Northern Mali. *FOI-R--4121—SE*, November 2015, p. 69.

[51] Ibid; DAKOUO, Ambroise. "Les Pratiques du Dialogue Intercommunautaire pour la Paix et la Réconciliation au Mali. Expériences et Analyses", *ONG ORFED*, April 2016, p. 54, retrieved from: http://base.afrique-gouvernance.net/docs/manuel_edit_orfed_vers_finale.pdf

[52] LORENTZEN, *supra* note 38, p.3; UN Women Africa. "Malian women call for urgent action to sustain peace and ensure women's participation", 17 September 2018, retrieved from: https://africa.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2018/09/mali-women-call-for-peace

Women in Mali's (informal) Peace and Conflict dynamics. Why further Inclusion is needed

Before addressing the informal ways through which women in Mali have and do contribute to the dynamics of peace and conflict, it is important to recapitulate and deepen on the ways they contributed to the formal process. Using the typology developed by *the International Peace Institute* previously mentioned, it can be said that Malian women had a limited albeit 'direct participation at the negotiating table' in Ouagadougou and Algiers. There, they raised the concerns of Malian women, including those in refugee camps and from Kidal they visited purposefully[53]. In Algiers, in addition to the 4 negotiators, other 14 women attended as 'observers' and "when you open the peace agreement, you can identify the exact language from the 18 women that were present"[54].

Women seem to have 'broadened the agenda' of the negotiations, also through the 'consultations' where they emphasized issues of pillars IV and V of the accord[55]. Besides, it appears that during the negotiations in Algiers, the CMA consulted regularly with women and youth from Kidal[56]. In general, according to Mme. Toure Omou, —even if barely represented in the final negotiations— they were the most dynamic group from civil society at the beginning of the crisis, mobilizing individually and collectively through demonstrations, the publication of statements and initiatives with different authorities (Figure 3)[57].

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[53] MISAHEL, *supra* note 43, p. 2; UN Women, *supra* note 40.

[54] Words of Fatoumata Maiga, President of the Women's Organization for Peace Initiatives: DPO Gender Unit. "Women Transforming Peace" retrieved from: https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/women-transforming-peace.pdf

[55] That was the case at least according to Mme. Toure Oumou (one of the participants in both instances and President of CAFO): MISAHEL, *supra* note 43, pp. 2-4. Pillars IV and V of the Agreement are concerned with socio-economic and cultural development, and reconciliation, justice and humanitarian issues respectively. As the Council on Foreign Relations explains, these are issues that go beyond the power-sharing arrangements and territorial gains that tend to be prioritized when they do not participate.

[56] LACKENBAUER, THAN LINDELL & INGERSTAD, *supra* note 51, p. 40.

[57] MISAHEL, *supra* note 51, pp. 2-4.

Figure 3. Demonstration of women at Bamako in support of the Agreement. Source. RF1.

Factually, since the signature of the Agreement, women have remained one of the most mobilized groups through 'consultations', 'mass action' and other informal initiatives led by a large number of national women's associations and the determined support of UN Women and MINUSMA[58]. Very recently for instance, many of these associations helped prepare the 'Inclusive National Dialogue' (DNI), in which they took part; while a network of female parliamentarians led an initiative aimed at convincing those who had decided to boycott it to join the last phase of the dialogue[59]. This demonstrates the determination and collaborative attitude of many of them, further exemplified by their 'ability to work across lines' —as suggested by the CFR[60]— at the Peace Hut in Gao. There, women from different opinions and ethnic groups, including Tuareg and Fulani, meet regularly to talk about issues related to social cohesion and living together or women's rights but also to grow their so much needed businesses (Figure 4)[61]. In a similar vein, since 2017

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[58] A few of these women's organizations and associations are CAFO Mali, WILDAF Mali, the Réseau Paix et Securité des Femmes de l'Espace CEDEAO, Association des Femmes pour les Initiatives de Paix (AFIP), le Réseau des Jeunes Femmes Leaders du Mali.They have approached distinct authorities to negotiate, organized demonstrations as well as activities to raise awareness among the populations, organized trainings and promoted dialogue, as their websites of Facebook pages can attest.

[59] MINUSMA, *supra* nota 46, par. 39; SIDIBÉ, Massa. "Dialogue National Inclusif: Les femmes parlementaires s'impliquent", Mali-Web, 5 November 2019, retrieved from: http://mali-web.org/politique/dialogue-national-inclusif-les-femmes-parlementaires-simpliquent ; Dailymotion. "Rencontre entre le Réseau des Femmes Parlementaires du Mali et les Familles Fondatrices de Bamako [VIDEO]", 8 November 2019, retrieved from: https://binged.it/376bk5f

[60] Go back to second section

[61] The Peace Hut in Gao is one among the 28 built since 2013 by UN Women with the financial support of different governments and the Peacebuilding Fund. Women in Gao now fully manage the hut of which women from more than 60 women associations are members: UN Women Africa. "A place of peace, reconciliation and growth", 7 May 2019: https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2019/5/feature-mali-peace-huts-a-place-of-peace-and-reconciliation ; MINUSMA. ''Les contributeurs au fonds de consolidation

women from different parts of Mali reunite in gatherings ('*assises des femmes pour la paix*') to show they can promote social dialogue and the implementation of the Bamako Agreement[62].

Although it is hard to measure the impact of such initiatives, their determination to contribute to Mali's peacebuilding, properly supported, would be an asset. And following intense lobbying and recommendations by the *Plateforme of Femmes Leaders*[63], this seems to have been recognized by the main stakeholders to the Agreement who approved the creation of an independent Women's Observatory to monitor its implementation —and compensate for their lack of representation at the CSA—[64].

Figure 4. Women outside Gao's Peace Hut. Source. Sandra Kreutzer; UN Women. Available at: https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2019/5/feature-mali-peace-huts-a-place-of-peace-and-reconciliation

de la paix reçus dans la case de la paix de Gao'', 5 October 2017, retrieved from: https://minusma.unmissions.org/les-contributeurs-au-fonds-de-consolidation-de-la-paix-reçus-dans-la-case-de-la-paix-de-gao ; DPO Gender Unit, *supra* nota 54, p. 5.

[62] 'Mali: Premieres assises des femmes pour la paix : a l'heure de l'engagement'', MaliActu. 27 November 2017, retrieved from: https://maliactu.net/mali-premieres-assises-des-femmes-pour-la-paix-a-lheure-de-lengagement/

[63] The Plateforme des Femmes Leaders is a networking forum created by MINUSMA in 2014, that reunites different women's organizations working to influence the peace process and allows them to organize and agree on their position so they can speak with one voice. It has been very active since its inception, publishing press statements with demands and recommendations, organizing workshops and disseminating information about the Agreement: LORENTZEN, TOURE & GAYE, *supra* note 50, p. 10.

[64] Created in July 2018, the Observatory was not operational yet but in his last report on the situation in Mali, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres announced that the status and structure of such observatory were to be agreed in January 2020 at a high-level workshop organized by MINUSMA. Yet, there are still no news about it: MINUSMA, *supra* note 46, p. 7; LORENTZEN, TOURE & GAYE, *supra* note 50, p. 10; DPO Gender Unit, *supra* note 54, p 4

If their activism in the dynamics of peace is not convincing enough, then one cannot deny the strategic necessity of including them in the peace process when looking —ironically— at their indirect involvement in the dynamics of conflict. Even if marginalized from the public sphere, Malian women usually influence what their husbands and particularly their sons do through consultations at the household: studies have shown that their influence and orders appear to have been crucial in the decision of many young Malians to join or not armed and Islamist groups[65]. In words of the President of the Peace Hut in Gao, "it is us who send our men, brothers and sons to war or keep them from leaving homes"[66]. Another study found that women in the North, particularly those from Tuareg communities, mobilized young men to take up arms against one or another force and were important recruiters of new combatants[67].

This is partially explained by the fact that, in the highly stratified and hierarchical nature of Mali's society previously mentioned, age is more important than gender, which gives older women power over young men[68]. Gender roles complement the explanation, as Malian women are said to influence men to steal or to kill by humiliating them and telling them they are "not man enough", while men believe they are supposed to provide for and protect their family[69]. It is also worth noting that some women have made use of these gender roles to commit terrorist attacks as part of jihadist groups, while others have broken down tradition by joining armed groups as combatants themselves[70]

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[65] LACKENBAUER, THAN LINDELL & INGERSTAD, supra nota 50, p. 30, p. 70; IBRAHIM y ZAPATA, *supra* nota 12, p. 13; RODRIGUEZ GONZALEZ, María. *El papel de las mujeres en la resolución del conflicto de Mali*. Documento de Opinión IEEE 37/2017. http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2017/DIEEEO37-2017_Mujeres_Conflicto_Mali_MariaRguezGlez.pdf ; INKS, Lisa, VELDMEIJER, Annalies & FOMBA, Abdoul Kassim Ibrahim. " 'We hope and we fight': Youth, Communities and Violence in Mali", Mercy Corps, September 2017, p. 13, retrieved from: https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/we-hope-and-we-fight

[66] UN Women, supra note 61

[67] LACKENBAUER, THAN LINDELL y INGERSTAD, *supra* note 50, pp. 43, 60, 68

[68] This is important as Mali is a country where 65% of the population is younger than 25 years old: LACKENBAUER, THAN LINDELL & INGERSTAD, supra note 50, p.70; INKS, VELDMEIJER & FOMBA, supra note 65, p. 13.

[69] LACKENBAUER, THAN LINDELL & INGERSTAD, supra note 50, p. 63 ; LORENTZEN, TOURE & GAYE, *supra* note 50, pp. 18-19.

[70] TAPDOBA, Alida. ''Au Mali, des femmes s'engagent dans le djihadisme'', DW, 22 October 2019,

Women support for armed groups —whether by recruiting and encouraging men to fight, providing logistical assistance or fighting themselves— is due to a myriad of reasons that need to be considered. In many cases, support among women to the MNLA or Islamist groups during their control of Kidal, Gao or Timbuktu was attributed in interviews to the fact that these groups provided basic services that the government didn't[71]. Ethnicity and general feelings of marginalization have also motivated them to encourage fighting or fight themselves[72]. Some female combatants of the Platform have reported, on the other hand, that they joined the group with the hope of being integrated one day within the Malian Army[73]. Women that work for peace do it because they are also among the main victims of the conflict and the crisis and want stability and prosperity for their communities[74].

Women in Mali are a heterogeneous group, just like men. They have different experiences according to their age, their ethnicity, their location, their religion and their literacy level; but they all need to be heard as they all make the state and have a direct or indirect influence upon each other. In the case of Mali, the inclusion of all civil society actors becomes even more important when considering that marginalization and the perception of state absence are two of the main drivers of the crisis[75]. Women in Mali are among the most marginalized groups while simultaneously having a deeper knowledge of their community needs. Their inclusion in the processes of peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery is thus key.

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retrieved from: https://www.dw.com/fr/au-mali-des-femmes-sengagent-dans-le-djihadisme/a-50928826 ; LACKENBAUER, THAN LINDELL & INGERSTAD, *supra* note 50, p. 42; INKS, VELDMEIJER & FOMBA, *supra* note 65, p. 21.

[71] This is without doubts one of the primary and most important drivers of the crisis and widespread violence, both for men and women in North and Central Mali. The crisis won't be solved if this is not addressed: LACKENBAUER, THAN LINDELL & INGERSTAD, *supra* note 50, p. 57.

[72] Ibid, pp. 56 & 66

[73] INKS, VELDMEIJER & FOMBA, *supra* note 65, p. 21.

[74] This paper has not discussed the quantity of crimes committed against women in Mali and how they are the primary victims because that has been discussed elsewhere and it can make them look as passive and fragile actors instead of the strong and active actors they are, but to learn more about it see for instance UN Women. "Malian women make their voices heard: emergency aid, participation in the peace process and, and justice for all", 25 January 2013, retrieved from: https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2013/1/malian-women-make-their-voices-heard

[75] LACKENBAUER, THAN LINDELL & INGERSTAD, *supra* note 50, p. 2.

Conclusion

Despite the signature in 2015 of the *Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali*, the crisis triggered by the armed rebellion in the North of the country in 2012 has not only not improved but become more complex in nature. Part of the explanation for such phenomenon has probably much to do with the lack of formal inclusion and representation in the Agreement and its implementation and monitoring mechanisms of the different communities and civil society groups that make up the country, as the former has been mainly an affair between the two coalitions of Northern armed groups (the CMA and the Platform), the Malian government and the international community. Women, who made more than half of the population of Mali, have been particularly marginalized from most of the formal process, representing significantly less than the 30% of members that the national law requires at the Agreement negotiations, signature, and implementation and monitoring mechanisms alike. This is so despite all the rhetoric and commitments made both at national and international levels —particularly in relation to SCR 1325 (2000)— and the accumulative body of evidence demonstrating that their full and effective inclusion in peace processes has a positive impact upon the latter.

Furthermore, this paper has shown that many women in Mali want to have a say in and further contribute to the country's peacebuilding process; and that in fact they have already been active participants of the peace dynamics. Sometimes through consultations, sometimes through mass action and in a few cases through a direct seat at the negotiating table or implementing commissions, women in Mali have particularly broadened the agenda of the peace process. They have done so by directing attention to some of the socio-economic and justice issues now present in pillars IV and V of the accord —much needed to address some of the root causes of the crisis and facilitate national reconciliation— as well as to their own experiences, needs and demands of inclusion. They have also shown their ability to work across lines and ethnic divides through their meetings at the Women's Peace Huts and the '*assisses pour la paix'*, something which is crucial for a country where more than ten ethnic groups coexist. On a different note, women in Mali have also contributed to the conflict dynamics, some of them being the direct source of their sons or neighbors' decision to join armed groups and others being combatants themselves.

It is important to recall at this point, as one of the main takeaways of this paper, that women in Mali and elsewhere are a heterogeneous group and so are their contributions to the peace and conflict dynamics. They are some of the main victims of war, but they are way more than that, ranging from instigators of conflict to leaders of peace efforts. Nonetheless, in Mali, regardless of which role they have adopted, they all have done it out of their grievances and their desire to build a better place for them and their communities. In a country where one of the main drivers of the crisis is the feeling of marginalization, they all —like the rest of members from civil society— must be heard. Of course, assuring their 'full, effective and meaningful participation' will be difficult, as the role of women in Mali's society has traditionally tended to be confined to the private sphere. And their inclusion in the peace process will not, by itself, lead to positive peace; as research has shown the multiplicity of factors fuelling the crisis that need to be addressed to achieve it (such as the absence of basic state services or even climate change). Yet, their inclusion is a key element of the multidimensional response needed to address Mali's current crisis, could avoid repetition of the practices that perpetuate conflict and short-lived peace agreements, and in sum, will make sustainable peace more likely.

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