



# “DO NOT UNDERESTIMATE MY STRENGTH!”

From war to sustainable peace: a solidarity dialogue  
between Bosnian and Ukrainian women activists  
7–9 June 2016 Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

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“Do not underestimate my strength!”

From war to sustainable peace: a solidarity dialogue  
between Bosnian and Ukrainian women activists

7–9 June 2016 Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

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*“Until you travel somewhere and feel the atmosphere and see the people and the gestures, the image is not complete.”*  
– Ukrainian activist

In June 2016, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom and The Kvinna Till Kvinna Foundation convened a solidarity dialogue between women activists from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ukraine in Sarajevo to share experience and contribute to a better understanding of women’s contribution to conflict and post-conflict transition.

The Solidarity Dialogue was made possible through the generous support of the Swedish International Development Corporation and The OAK Foundation.

This is a report of the views and opinions expressed by the women activists at the Solidarity Dialogue.

## THE WOMEN’S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR PEACE AND FREEDOM

The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) is an international non-governmental organization (NGO) with national sections covering every continent, an international secretariat based in Geneva, and a New York office focused on the work of the United Nations (UN). Since its creation in 1915, WILPF has brought together women from around the world, united in working for peace, to promote political, economic and social justice for all.

WILPF’s approach is always through non-violent means. WILPF uses international legal and political frameworks to achieve fundamental change in the way states conceptualise and address issues of gender, militarism, peace and security.

WILPF’s strength lies in its ability to link the international and local levels. WILPF was one of the first NGOs to gain consultative status with the UN, and remains the only women’s anti-war NGO so recognised.

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## THE KVINNA TILL KVINNA FOUNDATION

The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation (Kvinna till Kvinna) is a women’s rights organization that supports women’s organizations in areas affected by war and conflict. Kvinna till Kvinna was founded during the 1990’s following the reports of mass rape taking place in the Balkans’ conflicts. Kvinna till Kvinna’s vision is a world of sustainable peace based on democracy and gender equality, in which conflict is managed through non-military means and all people feel safe and secure.

Kvinna till Kvinna supports women in conflict-affected regions by collaborating with women’s organizations and supporting their work to promote women’s rights and peace. The goal is for women’s power and influence to increase.

Kvinna till Kvinna supports networking between women’s or-

ganisations from different regions and conflict divides in order to enable the exchange of lessons learned from peacebuilding and women’s rights work. Kvinna till Kvinna also fosters studies and research on the effects of war on women.

Kvinna till Kvinna currently supports more than 100 women’s organizations in the Middle East, central and western Africa, the South Caucasus and the Balkans.

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Kvinna till Kvinna

## INTRODUCTION SPEECH<sup>1</sup> BY JASMINKA DRINO KIRLIĆ, BOSNIAN ACTIVIST

# “Do not talk to me about peace, love and reconciliation!”



My name is Jasminka, and I come from a small community that is ethnically divided.

I have been given a task to talk about peace and peace building. Let me tell you one thing, the word ‘reconciliation’ irritates me. To me it feels like you die, or you lie down silently and do nothing, like going to paradise where everything is peaceful and quiet. I do not understand that. Somebody tricked us into it. I would rather choose “peace building”.

But I do not want to make it too simple, so I ask questions all the time. How do we reconcile after such difficult wounds? Who is to reconcile? I, upon whom the harm has been inflicted, or me, who inflicted the harm? Is it enough to work individually? Or should we all work together - groups, civil society organizations, politicians, and the business world?

Do we share common ground when we say that we all want peace? Do they take us peace builders seriously when we say that we work on building a sustainable peace? Do they understand what we mean when we say that we are not asking but demanding to participate?

I want a peace in which I can realise all my rights. I want to participate in building the peace in my country, and in the region, and I want to be responsible for that peace, in all segments of the society. I do not want to be on the outside, because if I am outside then I do not have any responsibilities.

Peace is not a hoax; peace is not “as long as it is not shooting”.

Peace demands strategies, ideas, and thinking – with whom, against who and what? Peace will not wait. Somebody else will take it if we wait. Peace is not “please”; peace is “I demand”. And just to make sure I do not forget it – even when the peace agreement is signed - the war does not go away. It is in the heads, in the threats, in the fears, in the weapon, in voting ballots...

Peace is non-violent action, it is action against injustice, and peace is to open up the discussion about the most difficult parts of our lives and point to problems. Peace is prudence; peace is creativity in finding solutions. Peace is about building trust and restoring the sense of solidarity amongst us. Peace is when we constantly, and I mean constantly, ask ourselves “Do I live peace?”, “Am I in peace with myself?”, “What can I do?”, “What are my fears and dilemmas?”, and “With whom will I build peace and how?”

I believe in a peace from below. In a peace built with ordinary people, with neighbours. There are no recipes for peace activism. Each country is specific; the activism and its forms are sought in each country’s culture, tied to the specific needs of the people in that country, and everything we do must be done with peace in mind. We must set an example through our work and try to transfer our knowledge. We cannot satisfy ourselves with just talking about peace; peace is a learning process, it has its theory, and, in practice, it is brought forward by the immense experience of women and men who are peacemakers.

Building peace is a struggle and there are so many different choices of action. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, we have both

1. Edited by the authors of this report.

women and men that work on building the peace. We have achieved a lot, our actions have had an affect on those responsible.

The world is absurd. Whilst building peace, we negotiate and engage in dialogue with people, who are deeply involved in war and unrest, but we have to include everybody capable of contributing to ending violence; we have to take them seriously if we want to achieve our goals. No enemy must remain an enemy, because I deeply believe this is in everybody's interest to live a better life, no matter how naïve that sounds.

Peace is about building up a country after war; peace is about minimizing violence – the one we see and the one that is structural.

Working on peace can be done through different modalities. As one of my friends said, “We travel by different trains in one direction, we do not all have to take the same train, it is not even desirable, but at least once we should wave to each other.”

I am a peacemaker. And they have asked me, “What is that?” Let me tell you what that is: it is when I do not accept things that are forced upon us; that is when I am nobly radical. Being nobly radical means that I will tell you every time I disagree with you and at the same time I will not see you as my enemy.

I am a radical peacemaker because peace, for me, has no alternative. I want to share responsibility, I want to participate, and I want to be asked. And, just because I am a peacemaker, I will not turn the other cheek so that you can slap me in the face. Do not underestimate my strength!

So how do we avoid looking at each other across trenches? How willing are we women to avoid labelling in the process of building peace? How ready are we to build our future on things that connect us... and many things connect us – if nothing else then the right to life? We the women, we lose and suffer so terribly in wars.

Women of Bosnia and Herzegovina were caught by the war. We did not see that the peace was “built” in front of our eyes, by the hand of former warriors. Dayton came as a slap in the face. We said, “as long as they are not shooting”. I said it as well.

We missed out on the peace talks! But how can you build a country without women? Oh, it is possible; we in Bosnia know it all too well.

So we did not participate in peace negotiations. Where are we now, we must ask ourselves? What are we doing about that? It is up to us to answer that question and to try to share some of our experiences with the women of Ukraine.

Anti-fascist resistance is our heritage, our heritage is participa-

tion in partisan units, and our heritage is also academic and political careers, as well as suffering and working against the patriarchal matrix!

I cannot decide which period in my life was more difficult – the war or now. The warriors have become the stable pillars of our society “in peace”. So they try to trick us with reconciliation while they shoot at us with all available arms – educational, religious, and political, parliamentarian, and sexist.

To those warriors who have become the stable pillars of our society, to them we are ‘ladies’ on the 8th of March, International Women’s Day, and bitches when we demand they respect others and our rights.

Have women in Bosnia and Herzegovina developed a joint platform for action? Have we risen against all forms of rights violations? Have our female politicians in whose capacities we have invested, responded to our demands?

As much as you may think that everything in Bosnia is politicized, I will disagree.

Let’s politicise peace! In this country we have not seen a convergence of our interests and goals when it comes to peace and what kind of peace we want for this country. Have we, through our civil society and as individuals raised our voices against the segregation in schools, against the ‘historical facts’ about the war, against the religious teachings in schools that divide our children, against the so called ‘left wing’ parties that keep silent about social problems, and poverty? Have we?

Have we raised our voice and said no to the neo-fascist groups and individuals, against my hero and your villain? Have we spoken about that? Have we spoken about the fact that peace building here has become a project with life duration of only couple of months?

Let us politicise this. Let us introduce political action in the local communities. For me, political consciousness is the same as my consciousness about belonging to a local community, to the community where I live and where everyday problems are also my problems. That is what I want to share and discuss.

To me it is perfectly clear that I cannot accept the things that are delivered to us as unquestionable. To me it is unacceptable to accept the politics in which women and men must act within a predefined matrix – which are never questioned. We must take responsibility before they start putting the blame on us.

We need new strategies, new ideas. How to take it from here?

Until then do not talk to me about love and peace!



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation (Kvinna till Kvinna) recognize the importance of the exchange of experience between women from different conflict contexts. These exchanges enable women activists to share experience and inspire ideas as to how women concretely contribute to positive change in society and to sustainable peace. These exchanges also help to reinforce solidarity within the global feminist movement.

WILPF has been working with Bosnian women activists since 2010 and with Ukrainian women activists since 2014. Kvinna till Kvinna has been working with Bosnian women activists since 1993 and began working with Ukrainian activists in 2016. Recognizing certain parallels between the situation in Ukraine with the earlier conflict and current situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, WILPF and Kvinna till Kvinna organized a solidarity dialogue between women activists from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ukraine in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, from 7-9 June 2016.

The purpose of the Solidarity Dialogue was to enable women activists to learn from women’s different experience of conflict and post-conflict transition in order to consider how women’s voices, perspectives and rights can be integrated into addressing the current situations facing both countries. It was hoped that the dialogue would assist Ukrainian activists to reflect upon current challenges they are facing, including as they relate to coalition building, peacemaking and peacebuilding, and to possibly identify key areas of agreement for future action. Given the current problematic situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and noting, in particular, concerns surrounding the ongoing Reform Agenda<sup>2</sup>, it was hoped that the dialogue would provide an opportunity for Bosnian activists to regroup, reflect and re-galvanize their strategic thinking.

This report sets out the views and opinions expressed by the women activists at the Solidarity Dialogue.

2. The Reform Agenda for Bosnia and Herzegovina, supported by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the European Union, was adopted by the various levels of government in Bosnia and Herzegovina and sets out the main plans for socio-economic reforms of all levels of government for the period 2015-2018.

## Context: Overview of the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ukraine

More than 20 years after the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed – the negotiations of which did not include any public participation or consultation and which enshrines ethnic divisions and makes ethnic identification the ‘party’ of post-war politics – Bosnia and Herzegovina is today facing a deeply problematic situation. The legacy of an intrinsically flawed peace agreement combined with the neoliberal policies introduced through various international intervention, the turning of the country into a ‘protectorate’ and the ethnic politics, economics and policies of many corrupt Bosnian politicians have contributed to the high levels of both political disenfranchisement experienced by the majority of the citizenry and of political and economic inequality.

Since the beginning of the conflict in eastern Ukraine in 2014, women activists, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and volunteer movements have played a major role in providing humanitarian assistance to those affected by the conflict. These actors have had to respond simultaneously to the multiple complex consequences of conflict, including the internal displacement of nearly 1.5 million people, entrenched political exclusion and economic crisis and austerity. Many individuals and organizations are thus overstretched and have little capacity to increase or broaden the scope of their work. At the same time, there has been virtually no civil society engagement in the ongoing Minsk peace process, due to overstretch and capacity constraints as well as the lack of opportunities for participation. Notwithstanding the lack of civil society inclusion in the formal peace process, a small number of women activists living close to the frontline and in the eastern regions continue to undertake local outreach and confidence building activities.

## Solidarity dialogue: Sharing women’s experience from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ukraine

Having introduced the current context of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ukraine, the activists began a comparative discussion on three areas of focus for women’s activists:

- Defining peace, peace making and peace building.
- Understanding and seeking justice during and after conflict.
- Preventing and responding to gender based violence.



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A Bosnian participant shared her reflections as a teacher fighting against segregated education in central Bosnia and Herzegovina, recalling, “Peace is about reasonableness, creativeness, trust building, and developing solidarity amongst us.” Other Bosnian participants noted the complete absence of women from the peace negotiations in 1995. The meaningful participation of women in peace negotiations is essential to making and sustaining peace.

Meaningful participation requires that women have the ability to exert influence and power and to bring about change in society. Meaningful participation means women’s perspectives, priorities, rights and needs are intentionally integrated into the peace negotiations process and into the substantive content of the peace agreement. The meaningful participation of women will enable women to make and sustain peace as full partners.

Bosnian activists also referred to their mistake in largely abstaining from formal politics since the end of the conflict. This absence had strengthened the dominance of ethno-national political parties in Bosnian politics. Bosnian activists were united in their understanding that patriotism and peace work do not go hand in hand because “patriotism sets me apart from the other person – the alleged other”.

A Bosnian activist spoke about what she had seen of ‘justice’

*“Peace is when we constantly, and I mean constantly, ask ourselves ‘Do I live peace?’, ‘Am I in peace with myself?’, ‘What can I do?’, ‘What are my fears and dilemmas?’, ‘With whom will I build peace and how?’”*

– Ukrainian activist

after the genocide of nearly 8,000 Bosniak men and boys in Srebrenica in July 1995. It was necessary to work together to fight for justice and not to give up, noting that even 21 years after the massacre some victims remain unaccounted for. Another Bosnian activist explained that many of the achievements in seeking justice in Bosnia and Herzegovina were due to the collaboration between women and their organizations. The concept of justice had evolved over time until it was understood as comprising both the criminal justice system and access to economic and social rights. The prospect of punishing perpetrators provided an incentive for victims to speak out against what was happening.

The early establishment of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia likewise encouraged feminists to continue their efforts to seek justice for the women of Bosnia and Herzegovina. As time passed, however, it became clear that the criminal justice route alone was insufficient to help Bosnian society heal, overcome its divisions, and deal with the fascist ideologies of ethno-national political parties.

In the post-conflict period, women’s organizations recognized that non-discriminatory and equal access to economic and social rights is imperative to building and sustaining peace. This understanding encouraged women’s organizations to play a critical role in collectively advocating for and commenting upon draft Bosnian legislation – including in response to wartime international crimes and massive human rights violations, to prevent domestic violence and to counter trafficking. For example, associations of families of missing persons (primarily women) were instrumental in developing and lobbying for the adoption of the state-level Law on Missing Persons. Other advocacy efforts led to adoption of the BiH Law on missing persons (2004), and the introduction of amendments to the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Law on the Basis of Social Protection, Protection of Civilian Victims of War and Families with Children (2006), which recognized women as victims of sexual violence as a distinct category of civilian victims of war.

A Bosnian activist spoke of the pioneering work of NGOs in developing psychological support for women victims of violence. Through this work, it became clear that women also needed to receive compensation for harms caused, and, in 2005, appropriate legislation was passed. Another Bosnian activist spoke of the fragmentation amongst women’s organizations, which, in turn, had limited the impact of the women’s movement on

the political situation in BiH – due in large part to the inability of women’s organizations to agree on a common political platform. Had Bosnian women not been “*too busy putting out fires*” and instead been able to agree on a core set of principles, they – Bosnian women – could have shaken up the country.

**Reflections**

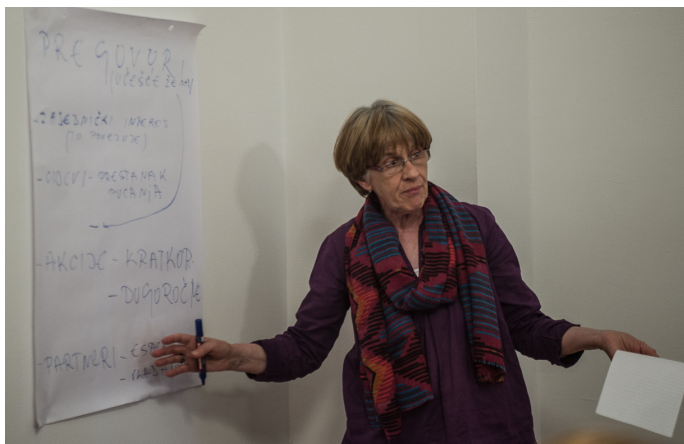
The Ukrainian activists agreed that much of what they had heard from Bosnian activists was extremely relevant to their own experience and provided much insight from which they could learn. They agreed that **women’s voices would only be as strong as the feminist movement**. They expressed their wish to **professionalize their organizations and build an authentic Ukrainian feminist movement based upon principles of solidarity, honesty, respect and understanding**.

The Ukrainian activists were clear that they did not want just “any kind of peace”. Instead, peace must be **sustainable** for the sake of future generations. To secure peace, women in Ukraine have to listen to each other, and recognize that **justice is not the same for everyone**. Educating women and **challenging gender stereotypes** are critical to countering gender-based discrimination within Ukrainian patriarchal society. These steps will help to demilitarize society. Women must work with the media to **create and disseminate alternate narratives** as to what is happening.

The Ukrainian participants recognized the **need to try to build peace at the local level whilst the conflict continues**. Small confidence-building measure could help to build local understanding, tolerance and respect, including dialogue between host communities and internally displaced persons. Other steps could include reaching out to women in the self-proclaimed ‘Donetsk People’s Republic’ and ‘Luhansk People’s Republic’. Acting together, these women could determine what peace means and how they can jointly build it. The Ukrainian activists also identified the need to learn about **local peace-building initiatives** from other conflict contexts.

The Ukrainian activists recognized the need to come together and develop a **national women’s platform for change** reflecting women’s priorities from all regions. They also proposed the establishment of an **alternative civil society-negotiating platform in Minsk**, and agreed to work closely with women politicians and nurture them as allies for peace and the advancement of women. It was clear from the Bosnian experience that **women must actively participate in the peace process to ensure inclusion of their voice, experience and perspective across all issues**.

The Ukrainian activists would benefit from technical assistance in **monitoring and documentation of human rights violations**. The **development of a reparations policy** for harms suffered during the conflict, including better understanding of the Bosnian experience, was also considered a priority, along with other relevant conflict and post-conflict experiences. Whilst the Ukrainian activists were keen to learn more







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from the **Bosnian experience** of provision of **psychosocial assistance** to survivors of sexual violence during the war, and running **safe houses for victims of trafficking and domestic violence**, they recognized prevention of gender-based violence as the most significant intervention.

The Bosnian experience highlighted the importance of women being able to access resources, and therefore power, during and after conflict. Many proposals were made to increase women’s access to resources, including through greater economic opportunities and ensuring equal influence over economic decision-making. This would require, inter alia:

- **Incorporation of economic and social rights and women’s rights into the peace process and agreement,**
- **Better understanding of the obstacles to women’s access to economic resources – including a gender impact assessment of the austerity package,**
- **Support to female entrepreneurs and decision-makers,**
- **The sharing of international practice on supporting women’s economic activities in conflict and post-conflict contexts, and**
- **Bringing together Ukrainian academics and practitioners to develop evidence-based policy and interventions.**

The activists also considered how to apply the gendered political economy analysis to the current situation. In applying this essentially human rights analysis, the strong link between economic and political power would emerge. This would enable policy and interventions to be determined in a way that **addresses the inequalities between those who have access to power and resources and those who do not as a way of building and sustaining peace.**

#### Next steps

Meeting and listening to Bosnian women activists who lived through indescribable horrors more than 20 years ago – and who have since struggled to build and live a positive peace – enabled Ukrainian women activists to understand that there is much work to be done and that this work must begin now. Building sustainable peace also requires Ukrainians to analyze the mistakes they have already made and to open up to painful problematic issues. The list of things that must be done is long. The road is long.

The Bosnian activists welcomed the opportunity to regroup and reflect provided by meeting the Ukrainian activists. Noting that the Bosnian government and its international partners had prepared the Reform Agenda without consulting civil society, the Bosnian activists recognized the urgency of greater civil society engagement on the Agenda. This engagement could include analyzing the impact of the Agenda on women and contributing to a reform process that empowers women. This would require civic engagement beyond formal civil society so that citizens at the local level across BiH are actively engaged.

The Solidarity Dialogue allowed participants to listen and learn from each other’s experience – successes and mistakes alike. Participants reminded each other not to give up. Instead, they must find new ways to achieve their goals. Criticism and advice should be heeded as openness encourages strength. Activists must remain united when obstacles appear. And solid arguments must be developed to engage others in dialogue. The bridge to understanding, tolerance and respect must be reinforced one brick at a time.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation (Kvinna till Kvinna) recognize the importance of the exchange of experience between women from different conflict contexts. These exchanges enable women activists to share experience and inspire ideas as to how women concretely contribute to positive change in society and to sustainable peace. These exchanges also help to reinforce solidarity within the global feminist movement.

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The purpose of the Solidarity Dialogue was to enable women activists to learn from women’s different experience of conflict and post-conflict transition in order to consider how women’s voices, perspectives and rights can be integrated into addressing the current situations facing both countries. It was hoped that the dialogue would assist Ukrainian activists to reflect upon current challenges they are facing, including as they relate to coalition building, peacemaking and peacebuilding, and possibly identify key areas of agreement for future

action. Given the current problematic situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and noting, in particular, concerns surrounding the ongoing Reform Agenda<sup>3</sup>, it was hoped that the dialogue would provide an opportunity for Bosnian activists to regroup, reflect and re-galvanize their strategic thinking.

The Solidarity Dialogue was accordingly structured in the following four parts:

- i. Contextual introduction to the current situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ukraine;
- ii. Discussion on comparative experience of women’s experience in defining peace, peace making and peace building, understanding and seeking justice during and after conflict, and preventing and responding to gender based violence;
- iii. Introductory analysis of what women activists need to know and do with respect to understanding, working with and changing the political economy of power; and
- iv. Final reflections of the activists on what they learned from the others’ experience and consideration of how to move forward in strengthening women’s participation across the women, peace and security spectrum.

This report sets out the views and opinions expressed by the women activists at the Solidarity Dialogue.

3. The Reform Agenda for Bosnia and Herzegovina, supported by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the European Union, was adopted by the various levels of government in Bosnia and Herzegovina and sets out the main plans for socio-economic reforms of all levels of government for the period 2015-2018.

*“After 20 years, I wouldn’t want our society to live like this.  
What suggestions do you have that can help us now?”*  
– Ukrainian activist to Bosnian activists

# 2. CONTEXT: OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT SITUATION IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA AND UKRAINE

*“Dayton came as a slap in the face.  
We said ‘as long as they are not shooting...’. I said it as well.”*  
– Bosnian activist

## OVERVIEW OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Gorana Mlinarević, a Bosnian activist, introduced the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The following section highlights events and aspects set out by Gorana regarding BiH that would particularly resonate with the Ukrainian context.

Over the past twenty years, peace in BiH has hinged upon the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) negotiated in 1995 essentially by men with weapons. After four years of brutal violence, war crimes, crimes against humanity, acts of ethnic cleansing and genocide, the DPA, to which the constitution of BiH is annexed, did bring ‘peace’ – meaning the absence of armed conflict – to BiH. However, the DPA has significantly complicated life in BiH in the post-war period.

The Bosnian peace negotiations took place in an air force base in Dayton, Ohio, far away from BiH. The DPA was negotiated and signed by those who had led and profited from war. The interests of ordinary citizens were not taken into consideration whilst making peace. At no point during the peace process, or indeed after, were Bosnians consulted, though they would be the ones essential to realizing and living peace. Exclusion from both the process and the content of the peace agreement ensured that the territorial – and therefore political – map of BiH was drawn up around the ethno-national gains of the war. Popular political exclusion was accompanied by the re-distribution of resources among the elite of ethno-political parties, making equitable socio-economic develop-

ment and creation of a sustainable and genuine peace impossible.

The DPA’s understanding of ‘justice’ was limited to the criminal prosecution of international crimes committed during the conflict, and initially, prosecutions took place at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague, and, later, at the national courts of BiH. Broader understanding of what justice means in the Bosnian context was not part of the negotiations or content of DPA. Indeed, apart from the right to return and the return of property, the DPA does not refer to any kind of reparative mechanism.

Nor was sufficient thought given to the kind of political and constitutional system that would best serve the particular interests of the Bosnian people. Instead, a post-war neo-liberal political and economic system was imposed upon the citizens of BiH through the imposition of ethnic identities, a process and outcome mediated and guaranteed by the international community.

The constitution, an integral part of the DPA, guaranteed the ethnic division of the country as the only way to conduct politics. Self-determination was indeed recognized, but only through ethnicity. As part of the DPA, the constitution was not subject to public consultation, either through a referendum or a parliamentary process. The ethno-national division

of the country is manifested, inter alia, in the territorial division of BiH; comprising a state, two entities – Republika Srpska and the Federation of BiH, with the Federation further divided into 10 Cantons – and Brcko District. Since the end of the war, governance at all levels across BiH has been determined through participation in ethno-nationally framed politics.

This system has, over the past 20 years, contributed to the depoliticization of a vast majority of Bosnia’s citizenry. While nominally living in a democratic state, many Bosnians experience an increasing sense of political impotence. This is largely due to a limited number of individuals – many of whom have subsequently been convicted of international crimes – envisioning and realizing an ethnically-based political and economic system aimed solely at furthering their own corrupt ends. Furthermore, the current structure of the state severely impedes access to economic and social rights leading to significant societal inequalities, including between men and women.

The DPA transformed BiH into a ‘protectorate’ in which the international community, together with local powerful figures, oversaw the development, implementation and oversight of legislation and exercise of executive power. The Dayton Peace Agreement has not led to a just peace in BiH. Instead, it has extended and deepened political, economic and societal fissures, leading to the *de facto* political disenfranchisement of a large majority of BiH’s citizenry.



## OVERVIEW OF UKRAINE

Tetiana Isaieva and Natalia Makukha, Ukrainian activists, introduced Bosnian activists to the situation in Ukraine. The following section highlights events and aspects set out by Tetiana and Natalia regarding Ukraine that seem particularly relevant to the Bosnian experience.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and Ukraine’s independence, Ukraine has experienced cyclical political and economic crises. These difficult times did not lead to violent conflict. In 2014, however, certain differences regarding language and other distinctions started being emphasized. Noting the diversity of positions and need to avoid over-simplification, some of these differences included, for instance, those who favour a pro-Western orientation of Ukraine’s foreign policy and those who favour closer relations with Russia. In 2014, some political parties brought these differences to the fore due to their own political-economic agendas.

Since its independence from the Soviet Union, though the colours of revolution in Ukraine have changed, the bottom line has remained constant; the country continues to be ruled by an oligarchy where politicians and businessmen assume power with one goal in mind – to expand their own access to public resources. In November 2013, students took to the streets of Kyiv to protest against the decision of the Ukrainian President not to proceed with the government’s earlier decision to sign an association agreement with the European Union. After the students were cleared from the streets, a broader group of Kyiv’s citizenry, comprised of both established civil society organizations as well as groups and communities that sprouted spontaneously, went onto the streets to protest, known as the *Maidan* – the people’s uprising. This uprising was comprised largely of women, many of whom had previously not been activists. These initially peaceful protests turned violent. By mid-February 2014, more than 100 people were killed, with more than 800 injured.

A few weeks later, President Yanukovich fled Kyiv, and Russia annexed Crimea. Following the flight of President Yanukovich and the subsequent installation of a new government in Kyiv, armed groups seized control of towns in the eastern Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. This led to armed confrontations between the armed groups and the Ukrainian Armed Forces, which very quickly turned into major military offensives. The armed groups subsequently self-proclaimed the ‘Donetsk People’s Republic’ and the ‘Luhansk People’s Republic’. In September 2014, Ukrainian and Russian leaders signed the Minsk Protocol as a declaration of support for

peace to stabilize the situation in the eastern regions. Fighting remains ongoing today, at times more intensely than others, and the situation escalates with the continuing impact on civilians.

Since the beginning of the conflict, women activists, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and volunteer movements have played a major role in providing humanitarian assistance to those affected by the conflict. These actors have had to respond simultaneously to the multiple complex consequences of conflict, including the internal displacement of nearly 1.5 million people, entrenched political exclusion and economic crisis and austerity. Many individuals and organizations are overstretched, with little capacity to increase or broaden the scope of their work. At the same time, there has been virtually no civil society engagement in the ongoing Minsk peace process, due to these capacity constraints as well as lack of opportunities for participation.

Notwithstanding the lack of civil society inclusion in the formal peace process, a small number of women activists living close to the frontline and in the eastern regions are undertaking local outreach and confidence building activities. These experiences are encouraging women volunteers to become more civically and politically active. A number of women politicians are also currently working with women’s organizations on specific issues. The Ministry of Education is devising a gender strategy to introduce gender into higher education. Other recent and ongoing positive developments in the realm of gender equality include proposed constitutional provisions protecting the rights of women, and proposed legislation on equal rights of men and women and protection from domestic violence. In early 2016, the Ukrainian government adopted a national action plan to implement United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

These positive developments contrast with the generally low level of women’s participation in political and public life, where 11.1% of deputies in the national parliament and 11% of cabinet ministers are women. Ukrainian women also routinely experience significant obstacles to economic opportunities, are often confined to employment in traditional ‘female areas’ and experience a gender pay gap of some 26%. Austerity measures adopted by the government in 2015 in order to comply with the terms of an International Monetary Fund \$17.5 billion bailout package have further impacted the economic situation facing women, in particular through a major retrenchment in public expenditure, targeting public sector workers and pension payments.

# 3. SOLIDARITY DIALOGUE: SHARING WOMEN’S EXPE- RIENCE FROM BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA AND UKRAINE

## I. DEFINING PEACE, PEACEMAKING AND PEACEBUILDING

*“Even when the peace agreement is signed, the war does not go away. It is in the heads, in the threats, in the fears, in the weapons, in voting ballots... Peace is deconstruction of this matrix within which we build relationships with one another, in all spheres of life.”*

– Bosnian activist

Jasminka Drino Kirlić, a schoolteacher from Gornji Vakuf/Uskoplje, introduced the discussions on the role and contribution of women in defining peace, peacemaking and peacebuilding, sharing her reflections as a teacher challenging ethnically segregated education in a ‘divided’ town in central Bosnia and Herzegovina. After this introduction, the activists engaged in plenary discussion. The following section from the discussions illustrates how the experience of Bosnian women could help Ukrainian women think through entry points, approaches, challenges and potential spoilers to engaging more effectively in peacemaking and peacebuilding processes.

*“We women missed out on the peace talks. Bosnia and Herzegovina is an example of the quiet woman who took the blows and fixed the wounds”.*

– Bosnian activist

Bosnian women were absent from the peace negotiations at Dayton. Their absence is due to many factors, including because many women activists were focused on providing humanitarian and other assistance. The Bosnian activists considered their absence from the peace process a mistake for BiH. The activists reflected that they should have been politically active from the outset of the conflict, engaged in trying to resolve the conflict. This engagement – and the active presence of women in political life – may have facilitated

participation of women in the peace negotiations at Dayton and post-conflict transition.

Another factor lying behind women’s exclusion from the Dayton peace negotiations that took place in 1995 was the lack of international consensus on the need and right of women to participate in peacemaking and the absence of relevant mechanisms and processes to mandate, support and deliver women’s participation. These elements – international agreement and the mechanisms to facilitate women’s participation – were agreed, in principle, through adoption of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 in 2000, and subsequent related Security Council resolutions.

It is clear from empirical research and anecdotal evidence on implementation of these international norms at the local, national, regional and international level that the meaningful participation of women in peace negotiations is essential to making and sustaining peace. Meaningful participation requires that women have the ability to exert influence and power and bring about change in society. Meaningful participation means women’s perspectives, priorities, rights and needs are intentionally integrated into the process of negotiating peace and into the substantive content of the peace agreement. Meaningful participation of women will enable women to make and sustain peace as full partners.

Likewise, failure to include women and their perspectives into the process and content of peace further disempowers women and destabilizes communities. If people do not ‘own’ the peace – if it does not reflect who they are and their needs – it is not theirs to live.

*"There are no recipes for peace activism; peace activism is not cooking with pre-defined measures. Each country is specific; the activism and its forms are sought in the country's culture, tied to the specific needs of the people in that country".*

– Bosnian activist

Peace demands strategies, ideas, and thinking – with whom, how and what? It is important to remember that peace will not wait. If women wait to define the main principles of peace, someone else will define it according to their needs. It is important that women organizations and feminists claim peace and ensure there is a broad understanding that peace is more than 'not shooting'. Peace is, instead, about realizing economic and social rights, peace is about living with equality and in justice. Living peace requires opening up the discussion to the most difficult parts of people's lives and pointing to problems and addressing them. Working on peace can be done through different paths; it is not necessary that everyone travels the same path, but it is important that they meet along the way.

*"We have to include everybody capable of contribution to ending violence. No enemy remains an enemy, because I deeply believe that it is in everybody's interest to live a better life, no matter how naïve that sounds."*

– Bosnian activist

Whilst building peace, it is necessary to negotiate and dialogue with people who have been deeply involved in war and unrest. These people have to be taken seriously and included if genuine peace is sought.

*"Everyone has the right to return to their home and gather and talk with whomever they want. In Prijedor, a great number of open-hearted women tried to break the stereotype of non-communication and the impossibility of returning to one's previous place of residence."*

– Bosnian activist

A key element of peacebuilding in BiH was ensuring that internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees were able to return home in conditions of sustainability. This required that jobs, education and other services were in place at the point of return. After the conflict, women's organizations played a key role in local peacebuilding efforts to support the return of IDPs and returnees, often funded by international donors, particularly when local officials were not enthusiastic about the return. Women in Prijedor and Bratunac, for instance, played a key role in reaching out and communicating with different communities to overcome the obstacles to returning to returnees' previous places of residence. The return process takes time and requires active engagement of women from different communities to reach out, understand and re-build tolerance and understanding. It can be done.

*"Patriotism and peacebuilding do not go hand in hand. Patriotism sets me apart from the other person – the alleged other. We are told that 'patriotism' means to love my country. But they use our patriotic sense of belonging and give it a false meaning. We must remember that 'Patriotism' equals 'fatherland', which equals 'patriarchy'."*

– Bosnian activist

The Bosnian activists encouraged the Ukrainian activists to take a step back from the patriotism they may be experiencing and to consider how patriotism can be used to manipulate people. The Bosnian activists recognized the difficulties and pain of seeing territory annexed by others and the fighting taking place in Ukraine. Yet they highlighted the manner in which some actors, including the media, exploit 'love of country' to stir up resentment and fuel further grievances. They encouraged the Ukrainian activists to discard patriotism as a platform – because it is divisive – and instead reaching out 'to the other side' and build confidence.

*"Just after the war, we weren't organized. We were just brave women willing to cross lines and support all our people".*

– Bosnian activist

After the conflict, many women across BiH continued to work, including as volunteers, with civil society organizations to deliver services in the absence of state capacity and interest to do so. Since the end of the conflict, the non-governmental sector has delivered considerable support to many across BiH. The continued focus of Bosnian women on providing humanitarian assistance and delivering services, however, has largely distracted women from participating in the formal business of politics, thereby further disempowering the voice, role and contribution of Bosnian women to rebuilding BiH.

*"As women activists, how much engagement do you have with politics? Women need to be directly involved in politics all the time."*

– Bosnian activist

Women's networks spent years working on the issue of violence and collaborating with each other, but there was not a lot of talk about politics and the state. Being politically active is not limited to holding political office or being part of a political party. Rather, being 'political' requires going beyond what can be done through political parties. While being 'political' does require constant communication with politicians to question rules and policies and demand accountability, politics is also about caring for your neighbour. Politics is about being political in the local communities, caring about everyday problems. Politics begins at home and without the support of your neighbour, there can be no survival. Politics requires questioning the predefined matrix in which women and men are expected to act and interact. Engaging in politics for peace requires taking responsibility and being on the

inside. It is about building a peace in which all people can realize all their rights. In time, women who participate in formal and informal politics will set an example to others and the circle can enlarge.

*“How do we avoid looking at each other across trenches? How ready are we to build our future on things that connect us?”*  
– Bosnian activist

The post-conflict experience of the continued marginalization of Bosnian women from politics demonstrated the need for women of different backgrounds, regions and ‘across trenches’ to come together to develop a joint political platform. The platform could set out the many issues that connect women and propose a series of actions to progress these issues. It is important that in the process of building peace, women avoid negatively labeling each other and instead focus on identifying the issues that connect them. Women’s networks spent years working on the issue of violence and collaborating with each other, but there was not a lot of talk about politics and the state





## II. UNDERSTANDING AND SEEKING JUSTICE DURING AND AFTER CONFLICT

*“Whenever we meet with the international community, the first things we tell them is don’t let Srebrenica happen in Syria, in Ukraine.”*

– Bosnian activist

Nura Begović, a Bosnian activist, spoke of what she had seen of ‘justice’ after the genocide of nearly 8,000 Bosniak men and boys in Srebrenica in July 1995. The following section sets out key elements of Nura’s experience.

Nura encouraged participants to never give up the fight for justice – no matter the obstacles – recalling that today, 21 years after the genocide, the bodies of some victims of the massacre still remain unaccounted for. After the genocide, a number of local associations were set up to demand justice and truth – not revenge. As local politicians were seen as ineffectual at best and obstructive at worse, the local associations worked closely with the international community to follow up on their demands for justice. Navigating the relationship with the international community, however, required careful patient scrutiny as the international community often had its own agenda that did not necessarily overlap with the survivors’ quest for justice. Children who had survived the conflict received psychological support from women’s organizations, whilst newly single women struggled to maintain their health and sanity and to combat injustice. Whilst it was crucial for each victim of the genocide to be accounted for and memorialized, the ability to return to one’s birthplace and to live with the other side was paramount.

*“Many of the achievements in seeking justice are due to the collaboration of women and their organizations”.*

– Bosnian activist

Selma Korjenić, a Bosnian activist, explained how women and women’s organizations had sought justice and tackled impunity for international crimes and other serious human rights violations. The following section sets out key elements of Selma’s intervention.

During the conflict, faced with the loss of human life and serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, women were forced to focus on justice because the state was not doing so. At the height of the conflict, ‘justice’ for many meant meeting the basic needs arising from ongoing abuses and violations. This was the situation in Zenica and Tuzla where many women survivors of sexual violence arrived. Women – largely volunteers – provided support to these internally displaced persons, including through sharing information on missing persons, raising awareness of violations, keeping records, and providing health services and other psycho-social support.

Over time, the concept of justice evolved and became linked to

criminal justice and the prosecution of war crimes. In 1993, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia was set up in The Hague. The tribunal was important for victims as it provided an incentive to speak out against what was happening on all sides. Its establishment encouraged women activists to continue their efforts to seek justice. Over time, the tribunal recognized crimes of sexual violence committed during the conflict as war crimes and crimes against humanity. Bosnian women’s organizations played a pivotal role through supporting raped women to testify before the tribunal.

When the conflict ended, women’s organizations evolved and they played an important role in raising awareness of human rights in BiH. Women’s organizations also played a critical role in collectively advocating for and commenting upon draft Bosnian legislation, including in response to wartime international crimes and massive human rights violations, to prevent domestic violence and to counter trafficking. For example, associations of families of missing persons (primarily women) were instrumental in developing and lobbying for the adoption of the state-level Law on Missing Persons. Other advocacy efforts led to adoption of the BiH Law on missing persons (2004), and the introduction of amendments to the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Law on the Basis of Social Protection, Protection of Civilian Victims of War and Families with Children (2006), which recognized women as victims of sexual violence as a distinct category of civilian victims of war. In recent years, however, progress on these issues has stagnated because of the lack of political support.

Following Nura and Selma’s introduction to understanding and seeking justice, plenary discussion among the activists took place. The following section from the discussions highlights how the experience of Bosnian women could help Ukrainian women think through entry points, approaches, challenges and potential spoilers to engage more effectively in understanding and seeking justice.

*“We thought courts would deliver justice, truth and human rights to us.”*

– Bosnian activist

The DPA’s vision of justice was framed within a strict understanding of justice being delivered through the prosecution of war crime cases, either at the tribunal, or, later on, at the domestic courts of BiH. This framing led many Bosnians to expect the courts – through the process of establishing facts and sentencing war criminals to prison – to help Bosnian society heal, overcome its divisions, and deal with the fascist ideologies of ethno-national political parties. Yet this did not happen, mainly because convicted war criminals were celebrated as war heroes by the ethnic group they presumably belonged to and because many of the facts established by the

courts were dismissed by the political establishment. This was possible because the ethno-national political parties that led the country into war were allowed to remain in power after the war, furthering ethno-national divisions and fermenting fear. Additionally, the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina did not recognize responsibility or accountability towards addressing the needs of victims and their families, either through the delivery of comprehensive reparations programmes or through ensuring non-discriminatory and equal access to economic and social rights. Instead, interactions with civilian victims of war are undertaken at the entity level. This approach means, in practice, that each ethno-national political elite “deals with its own people”. This effectively ties civilian victims of war to ‘their’ political party, and reduces their space to make de-

mands based on their needs that go against the interest of the ruling ethno-national elite.

*“If facts are recorded and documented, progress can be achieved and justice can be served.”*

– Bosnian activist

The Bosnian activists spoke of the need to establish a state fact-finding mechanism as soon as possible based on transparency, effective rules, established evidentiary protocols and information gathering and monitoring procedures in accordance with international standards and staffed by qualified trained personnel. Civil society can play a key role in identifying witnesses and providing psychosocial support to them.

## PROSECUTING SEXUAL CRIMES AND RAPE

Comparing with other post-war situations Bosnia and Herzegovina has made significant progress with respect to prosecuting war crimes. However, courts were given a prominent place in the attempts to deal with past abuses without a proper understanding that the courts on their own cannot deliver full justice, and that they are only one segment of the dealing with the past-process. The achievements made by the courts resonated poorly within the broader society incapable of understanding the limits of the prosecution (e.g. given the scale of the crimes courts are overwhelmed with cases and it is impossible to expect that all responsible for war crimes – apart from the high in the rank – are going to be prosecuted). With respect to the prosecution of wartime rape and sexual violence, ICTY (along with ICTR) and national courts in Bosnia and Herzegovina finally made wartime rape and other forms of sexual violence prosecutable. The significant advancements were made with respect to way how to define and prove the wartime rape and sexual violence in courts, as well as with respect to how to facilitate women’s testimonies before the courts and how to make them less traumatic for women testifying. Nevertheless, lots of things still need improvement given that the courts are extremely rigid patriarchal institutions. Also important to mention are the issues concerning the safety of the witnesses given the fact that the awarded sentences are really short and that there is no process of reintegration of war criminals in the society after serving the sentence.

*“The issues of punishing criminals and compensating victims remain unsolved.”*

– Bosnian activist

The civilian victims of war in Bosnia and Herzegovina are still struggling to access adequate and meaningful reparation for the violations suffered during the war. Reparations come in

various forms usually framed within five main categories – restitution, rehabilitation, compensations, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition. The Dayton Peace Agreement for BiH only partially dealt with restitution of property and the right to return while reparations as a concept was never a part of the agreement. This meant that the demands from the civilian victims of war to address violations from the war never gained support from the governing structures. The discussions on reparations have largely been taking place within and between different CSO, sometimes supported and facilitated by UN or through projects financed by bilateral donors. By and large these discussions were not gender sensitive and often approached development of a reparations programme through perspective of one category of civilian victims of war e.g. survivors of war time rape or victims of torture. However, civilian victims of war are rarely victims of one crime only. For example, a survivor of wartime rape has many times also been a member of family of missing persons, internally displaced and maybe even victim of illegal detention. With respect to claiming compensations within criminal proceedings for victim-witnesses, legal possibilities do exist in BiH but to this date only two decisions have been reached thus far, in two separate cases related to survivors of wartime rape. A major problem with accessing compensations through criminal proceedings in BiH has also proven to be the actual implementation of those decisions as it is unclear how payments from perpetrators are to be enforced. The practical and legal difficulties in accessing compensations has made a strong case for the need to develop gender sensitive reparations programme for all civilian victims of war, conceptualized and implemented at the state level. When devising a reparations program the discussions must be informed of the types of violations taking place, the gendered harms of these violations, who would be the beneficiaries of such a program, and what reparative measures are best suited to repair the identified harms taking into the consideration the needs of the beneficiaries.

### III. PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

*“Women’s non-governmental organizations are laboratories from which examples of good practices can be drawn.”*

– Bosnian activist

Working in one of the first therapy centers in Bosnia and Herzegovina to provide shelter, gynecological, psychological and legal support to women survivors of wartime rape, Marijana Sanjak, an activist, talked about how they pioneered development of a model of psychological support for women victims of violence, that has since been applied globally. A multidisciplinary team provided individual and group counseling to survivors and in time, mobile gynecological units were set up to reach vulnerable women in rural areas.

Through delivery of assistance to survivors, it became clear that a more systematic response was required as survivors faced a long-term trauma and recovery process. An important step in systematizing support to survivors was to advocate for easier access to disability benefits by survivors of sexual violence. In their advocacy campaign, many NGOs worked closely with the Federal and cantonal ministries of social welfare and civilian victims of war to draft amendments to the Federal Law on Basis of Social Protection, Protection of Civilian Victims of War and Families with Children. The amendments were passed in 2006 and recognized victims of wartime rape (women and men alike) as a special category within the category of civilian victims of war. This made it possible for them to access disability allowances without proving 60% bodily damage, which is a requirement for other categories of civilian victims of law.

Duška Andrić, a Bosnian activist, also spoke of the work undertaken by NGOs to prevent and respond to conflict-related gender based violence. The following section sets out key elements of Duška’s experience. Duška spoke of the risk of fragmentation and divisions facing the large number of non-governmental organizations in BiH, including many women’s groups. Fragmentation amongst women’s organizations has limited the impact of the women’s movement on the political situation in BiH, due in large part to the inability of women’s organizations to agree on a common political platform. Disagreement has covered a range of issues from tackling homophobia and promoting LGBT rights, to demands for a secular state, and protection of women survivors of violence. Duška maintained that had Bosnian women not been “too busy putting out fires” and instead been able to agree on a core set of principles, they, Bosnian women, would have shaken up the country. There remains a great need for women activists in BiH to build a strong movement in order to collectively and effectively respond to the many challenges the country is confronting.

Following Marijana and Duška’s introduction to the theme of

preventing and responding to conflict-related gender-based violence, plenary discussion among the activists took place. The following section from the discussions highlights how the experience of Bosnian women could help Ukrainian women think through entry points, approaches, challenges and potential spoilers to engage more effectively in preventing and responding to gender based violence.

*“All human beings are equal and we have to show solidarity and help, regardless of affiliation.”*

– Bosnian activist

Participants emphasized that there is no such thing as the ‘right’ victim or the ‘good’ victim: all victims should be professionally supported. Where survivors do not wish to talk, it is necessary to develop creative ways to reach out to them. Other approaches include fieldwork in isolated areas to reach out as ‘first responders’ to survivors of violence. In addition, violence prevention education should begin in kindergarten and continue through universities as well as in society more generally, with media playing a key role in reinforcing the message.

*“If you are fighting for human rights, then you are fighting for all humans’ rights, such as the rights of the LGBT population”.*

– Bosnian activist

You cannot fight selectively – for some human rights. Instead, a Bosnian participant asserted, that you have to fight for all rights for all. The domination of the ethno-nationalist political parties in BiH also ensures that great influence being exercised by the three major religious institutions over the Bosnian society as the two are closely tied together. This influence has been disruptive and caused difficulties as not all NGOs are prepared to go against religious institutions, for example with respect to the LGBT community or religious education in the school. There must be a clear understanding that the principles to which human rights NGOs should abide are non-discrimination for all, regardless of their sexual, political, religious or any other affiliation. Furthermore, fighting for human rights does not mean refusing to cooperate with other organizations that do not share the same opinions. Instead, fighting for human rights requires cooperation based on mutual honesty.

*“Donors’ agendas were not in sync with the agendas of organizations.”*

– Bosnian activist

During and after the war, international donors spent a lot of money in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Often, donors paid no heed to the needs on the ground and did not sufficiently

involve BiH citizens in identifying and/or prioritizing needs. Instead, BiH organizations often adjusted their priorities to meet donors’ agendas and interests. This led to money being poorly distributed and ineffectively spent. The projectization of Bosnian civil society also led to unhealthy competition. Over time, this competition destroyed solidarity within civil society, reducing the overall impact and effectiveness of civil society organizations, and damaging their credibility with local populations. Recognizing the many different interests and pressures at play on civil society, as well as the often divergent interests of donors, it is important that Ukrainian activists seek to collectively identify their priorities and develop coherent, complementary, sustainable strategies that they communicate in unity to donors.



# 4. THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF POWER: WHAT WOMEN ACTIVISTS NEEDS TO KNOW

Professor Jacqui True introduced activists to the political economy of power. The purpose of this session was to equip activists with a new tool analyzing the relationship between politics and economy and to provide women activists living in countries in and after conflict with ideas of what they could do about it. The following section provides an overview of what women activists need to know as introduced by Professor True.

The international Women, Peace and Security framework is often described as having four pillars: the prevention of conflict, protection of human rights, participation, and relief and recovery. Recovery and reconstruction, the pillar least emphasized in public discourse as well as resultant action on the ground, clearly evidences the link between economic assets and political power.

Many international financial institutions, international organizations and bilateral donors provide financial and technical assistance to the reconstruction of societies and infrastructure after conflict. However, they do not commonly integrate an understanding of the roots and drivers of conflict into their recovery and reconstruction support. As such, these interventions are generally not conflict-sensitive, and they are not gender-sensitive. For instance, in 2012 and 2013, only 2% of aid to fragile states targeted gender equality as a principal objective and only US\$130m out of US\$32bn of total aid spent in 2013 was directed to women’s organizations. Post-conflict economic recovery programmes, in which women play a vital role and which aim at promoting gender equality, can have a transformative social function.

Understanding the strong link between economic and political power is essential to designing interventions that can help create and sustain peace. Simply put, those who control resources in a society control the society itself. Many politicians seize power in order to monopolize resources. Against this background, women comprise 11.1% of MPs in Ukraine, and 23.8% in BiH. It therefore follows that where women have greater access to resources, their voices are raised, heard, included and they can contribute to realizing grounding in peace.

Women are excluded from accessing resources and therefore

power essentially due to the maintenance and evolution of the many forms of patriarchal hierarchies. These hierarchies are connected to power relations and the asymmetric sex binary system where women are essentially seen as inferior to men. The processes maintaining conflict and the impacts of conflict on society heighten these patriarchal hierarchies.

Wealth is concentrated in the hands of capitalists. Nowadays, however, ideologies that condition the economic approach are being disputed. This is relevant to conflict and post conflict texts particularly because post-conflict recovery can provide an opportunity to shape power in a different way. However, many people in and after conflict are too focused on trying to survive. When this occurs, as in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ukraine alike, the elites take advantage of the absence of people engagement to create a monopoly over power and resources that goes against the interest of the general population, including women.

In BiH, ongoing reforms encourage marketization, privatization, deregularization, flexibilization, yet overlook the root causes of the conflict, lack resources and have failed to acknowledge past injustices. The combined effect of this means that power cannot be structured around the principle of social and gender equality. Instead, the post-conflict reforms in BiH have freed up space in the market, enabled the influx of foreign markets into BiH, and created new jobs though foreign investments. But this is only the position at the surface. Underneath, every time a budget suffers cuts, it results in a loss of jobs. Women who are disproportionately employed in public institutions lose their jobs and have to look for employment in the private sector.

There are a number of strategic issues that should be subject to public discussion when embarking on the process of economic recovery after conflict. Such a discussion could lead to the development of nationally determined alternative gendered approaches to policy that actually support the whole of society and not elites. Annex B set out the sets out key questions relevant to the articulation of rights-based approaches, which include a gender perspective, as an alternative to the neo-liberalist approach routinely carried out in countries emerging from conflict.

# 5. REFLECTIONS

The Ukrainian activists agreed that much of what they had heard from Bosnian activists was extremely important to understanding and contextualizing their own experience and provided much insight from which they could learn. The Ukrainian activists highlighted many areas that resonated with the daily challenges they were experiencing. These challenges related to, inter alia:

- Networking and organizing.
- Providing humanitarian aid.
- Working with women politicians.
- Building a common political platform.
- Participating in the peace process.
- Documenting violations and seeking justice.
- Reaching out, building tolerance and encouraging reconciliation.
- Supporting survivors of gender-based violence.
- Accessing economic and social rights.

*“The experience of Bosnian women points the way forward in Ukraine.”*  
– Ukrainian activist

How could the Bosnian experience directly help Ukraine? The following sets out some of the reflections of Ukrainian activists which build upon and take into account the Bosnian experience.



## MOVEMENT BUILDING

The Ukrainian activists admired the **solidarity of Bosnian women during the conflict**. The Ukrainian activists recognized that **women’s voices would only be as strong as the feminist movement**. They expressed their wish to **professionalize their organizations** and to **build an authentic Ukrainian feminist movement based upon principles of solidarity, honesty, respect and understanding**.

Various ideas were proposed aimed at developing a national feminist movement, including the creation of a **Ukrainian national women’s league**. Women’s organizations could comprise such an umbrella organization, which would help to identify national priorities and coordinate nation-wide action. The league could have **regional branches**, which could loosely coordinate activities. **Annual national meetings** – a festival of civil society organizations – could take place to review

progress and identify priorities for the year ahead. Organizations could meet more often at the regional level too in order to ensure response to local priorities.

As a corollary to national movement building, the **sustainable development of women’s civil society organizations and their leaders, across the country** was key to strengthening civil society’s role in both delivering services and monitoring state action. Capacity development should be ongoing. This could include exposure to **other comparative experience, including from Georgia and Moldova**.

*“We have to meet together as Ukrainian women and gather everyone’s opinion.”*

– Ukrainian activist

## DEFINING PEACE

*“Should we do a book of memory? This is huge. Is the other side – whoever they are – ready to read our book?”*

– Ukrainian activist

The Ukrainian activists considered the **price of peace in BiH** and what peace might mean in Ukraine. They were clear that they did not want any kind of peace. Instead, peace must be **sustainable** for the sake of future generations. This meant that the **journey to peace for Ukraine would be long**. To secure peace, women in Ukraine have to listen to each other and recognize that **peace and justice** is not the same for everyone. **Education of children** is an important component in building and sustaining peace. **Rehabilitation of survivors and perpe-**

**trators** is also important in order to avoid the creation of new trauma and to rebuild the psychological health of society at large. These goals will be hard to achieve without **revealing the truth** of what has happened. The **education of women** and the **dismantling of gender stereotypes** are critical to countering the gender-based discrimination within Ukrainian patriarchal society. These efforts will also help to counter the current dangerous militarization of society. In fact, in Ukraine, **women’s activism is already helping to direct the attention of people** to issues they previously did not think about. The **media** must also play a critical role in building peace and create and disseminate **alternate narratives** as to what is happening.

## FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL: GRASSROOTS OUTREACH AND UNDERSTANDING

*“The strength of all the small civil society organizations will determine the overall strength of Ukraine”.*

– Ukrainian activist

The experience of Bosnia and Herzegovina since the ‘end’ of the conflict in 1995 highlighted the **need to build peace in Ukraine at the local level even whilst the conflict continues**.

*“If we network through others, we can be heard at a higher level. We must work at grass roots level in our communities and then build up a powerful national and global movement.”*

– Ukrainian activist

A grass roots approach is required in many communities in Ukraine, particularly in those communities hosting the more than 1.5 million IDPs. Local understanding, tolerance and respect, encouraged through small confidence-building measures, are required. A first step would be to **establish dialogue between host communities and IDPs**. A second step is reaching out to women in the self-proclaimed ‘Donetsk People’s Republic’ and the ‘Luhansk People’s Republic’. Together, women could determine what peace means to them and how they can build it together and avoid the damaging impact of nationalist politicians. Women’s organizations could play a pivotal role in building local peace through **identifying local peacebuilders and creating secure spaces** in which open dialogue can take place, which can then **link with national, regional and international initiatives for peace**.

## WOMEN AND POLITICS

*“We need to speak in our names and politicize our activities”.*

– Ukrainian activist

Many Ukrainian activists were **struck by the description that Bosnian women had been busy “too busy putting out fires” to come together and form a women’s platform for change.**

They also reflected upon the sense that had the Bosnian women been able to come together, the trajectory of BiH – and all her citizens – would have been significantly different. It was clear from the Bosnian experience that **women must meaningfully participate in the peace process to ensure inclusion of their voice, experience and perspective across all issues.**

The Ukrainian activists spoke of the **urgency of fusing gender theory, hands on voluntary experience and political activity,** underlining the need for women to collectively formulate and articulate their demands. They recognized that saying “we are for peace and justice” doesn’t actually say much. Instead, the Ukrainian activists agreed on the need to develop a **national feminist political platform.** Such a platform would also serve as a barrier against further expansion of nationalist ideol-

ogy and militarism. Once politically active, the government would necessarily have to be more accountable to the needs, demands and rights of Ukrainian women.

The Ukrainian activists expressed their need for further **knowledge and training** to build such a platform. Assistance is also required to help activists develop an **alternative civil society-negotiating platform in Minsk.** Women from the self-proclaimed ‘Donetsk People’s Republic’ and the ‘Luhansk People’s Republic’ and Russia as well as other Ukrainian women could be invited to form a **women’s contact group** where principles for peace are elaborated, agreed and actioned. The women’s contract group could become part of the formal Minsk peace negotiations. The women’s contact group could also seek to dialogue and influence key international actors.

The Ukrainian activists recognized the need to **identify women politicians with whom they could work, support and nurture** so that these politicians understand what gender means in practice and become allies in empowering women. At the same time, it is necessary to immediately begin the **political education of young women** so that they are interested and capable of winning and holding political office effectively.

## ENSURING JUSTICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

*“There is a need for abuses to be documented but we have to be very precise about it. Can women’s organizations do this? Are we competent?”*

– Ukrainian activist

The Ukrainian activists **praised the efforts and achievements of Bosnian women in relation to the investigation and prosecution of international crimes and serious human rights violations** committed during the conflict. There was much to be learned technically, operationally and politically from the Bosnian experience. The Ukrainian activists expressed interest in benefitting from technical assistance in **monitoring and documentation of violations.** Other related proposals included **creation of a judicial commission on gender-based violence, supported by women’s organizations and experts,** to document and disseminate the phenomena and propose policy developments.

The Ukrainian activists were particularly impressed by the Bosnian activists’ efforts to develop a national policy on **reparations** for harms suffered during the conflict and noted that reparations should be incorporated into the peace process. Ukraine is in the process of developing legislation on compensation for destroyed property and activists requested **further exposure to the Bosnian experience and related advice, together with experience from other conflict and post-conflict contexts.**

The Ukrainians also recognized the important **role of the judiciary** in ensuring justice and accountability and therefore in taking a step forward to realizing peace, noting that nationalism and radicalism are often promoted by those who make decisions purportedly on behalf of everyone. **Access to justice** for all citizens was critical, requiring the reform of certain procedures and processes. The judiciary likewise required expertise in integrating gender into its work.

*“Addressing the past will take many lifetimes”.*

– Ukrainian activist

The Bosnian experience of dealing with multiple levels of war-related consequences is indicative of how lengthy and difficult the process of dealing with the past can be. Addressing the past takes time. It requires an understanding for the different processes that take place. These processes may be the transition from war to peace, from one political and economic system to another, and from militarization of the society in the post-war period. It requires a clear vision as to the desired outcome of the process of dealing with the past. This requires broad discussions, including across lines of division, and these consultations should reflect international experience at the same time as they are grounded in the specificities of Ukraine’s context. Some areas to be explored are reparation, access to economic social and cultural rights, and the place of judicial and non-judicial processes and mechanisms in building a sustainable peace.





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## PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

*“We must solve the root of the problem:  
we are running out of time.”*

– Ukrainian activist

The Ukrainian activists considered that there was much to learn from the **Bosnian experience of safe houses** and the provision of psychosocial assistance to survivors of gender-based violence. Ukrainian activists noted the need for ad-

ditional shelters as well **integrated services for both female and male survivors of trauma**. They recognized, however, that simply building more safe houses would not solve the root cause of the problem. Instead, it is necessary to analyze the broader issues and ensure that violence becomes unacceptable. This could be undertaken, inter alia, through a mass information campaign on the **prevention of gender-based violence**.

## ACCESS TO ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

*“Money helps women feel independent and empowered.  
It gives them a sense of certainty and security.”*

– Ukrainian activist

The Bosnian experience highlighted the importance of women being able to access resources, and therefore power, during and after conflict. Many proposals were made to increase women’s access to resources, including through greater economic opportunities and ensuring equal influence over economic decision-making. This would require, inter alia,

incorporation of economic and social rights and women’s rights into the peace process and agreement, better understanding of the obstacles to women’s access to economic resources – including a **gender impact assessment of the austerity package**, support to female entrepreneurs and decision-makers, the sharing of international practice on **supporting women’s economic activities in conflict and post-conflict contexts**, and bringing together **Ukrainian academics and practitioners to develop evidence-based policy and interventions**.

*“Everyone’s suffering in war is the same.  
When we see that a country like Bosnia and Herzegovina  
is finding its way out of a difficult situation it  
gives us hope that Ukraine can do the same.”*  
– Ukrainian activist

## 6. NEXT STEPS

Meeting and listening to Bosnian women activists who lived through indescribable horrors more than 20 years ago and who have since struggled to build and live a positive peace provided Ukrainian women activists the opportunity to think about the challenges they currently face in new, and sometimes, inspiring ways. The Ukrainian activists concluded that they were generally unprepared for the range of tasks demanded of them by the conflict. Ukrainian activists recognized that the Bosnian women activists had helped them understand what is demanded of them to build and sustain peace in Ukraine.

The Ukrainian activists understood from the Bosnian experience that much work is to be done and that this work must begin now. This work includes:

- Developing strong women’s organizations and networks across Ukraine.
- Coordinating and communicating amongst organizations.
- Monitoring, record-keeping and documenting human rights abuses.
- Providing psycho-social support to individuals, families and communities.
- Educating young people and the public more broadly on their human rights.
- Building new homes and welcoming returnees home.
- Talking to all sides and building peace from the ground up.
- Finding support amongst politicians, particularly women politicians, and making allies with the aim of empowering women.
- Participating in the peace negotiations.
- Sharing women’s perspectives through mobilizing the media and developing alternate narratives.
- Fighting for all human rights for all.
- Ensuring access to economic resources and assets.

Building sustainable peace also requires that Ukrainians analyze the mistakes they have already made and that they open up to painful problematic issues. Widening the circle of dialogue is critical to building inclusive peace where all feel valued. The list of work to be done is long. The road is long.

The Bosnian activists welcomed the opportunity to regroup and reflect provided by meeting the Ukrainian activists. Noting that the Bosnian government and its international partners had prepared the Reform Agenda without consulting civil society, the Bosnian activists recognized the urgency of greater civil society engagement on the Agenda. This engagement could include analyzing the impact of the Agenda on women and contributing to a reform process that empowers women. This would require civic engagement beyond formal civil society so that citizens at the local level across BiH are actively engaged.

The Solidarity Dialogue allowed participants to listen and learn from each other’s experience – successes and mistakes alike. Participants reminded each other not to give up, but to find new ways to achieve goals. Criticism and advice should be heeded as openness breeds strength. Activists must remain united when obstacles appear. And solid arguments must be developed to engage others in dialogue. The bridge to understanding, tolerance and respect must be reinforced one brick at a time.

*“Peace is when we constantly, and I mean constantly, ask ourselves ‘Do I live peace?’, ‘Am I in peace with myself?’, ‘What can I do?’, ‘What are my fears and dilemmas?’, ‘With whom will I build peace and how?’”*  
– Bosnian activist

## ANNEX A

### LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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## ANNEX B

# THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF POWER – DESIGNING POST-CONFLICT RECOVERY TO DELIVER SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Professor Jacqui True explained what activists could do to challenge the current distribution of power and resources.

The analysis of the relationship between economics and political power renders the requirement for women activists to participate in all economic-political issues as an urgent imperative. Women's movements and the capacity of women to represent their own interests can evolve only if women are economically independent. Yet politics is the principal means through which markets or economic reform – which either empower women or not – are established and/or confirmed. As such women must be politically active and engaged in the process of political and economic recovery after conflict.

There are a number of strategic issues that should be subject to public discussion when embarking on the process of economic recovery after conflict. Such a discussion could lead to the development of nationally determined alternative gendered approaches to policy that actually support the whole of society and not elites. The following sets out key questions relevant to the articulation of rights-based approaches, which include a gender perspective, as an alternative to the neo-liberalist approach routinely carried out in countries emerging from conflict.

### Role of the state:

After conflict, should economic efficiency (health and the public sector in particular) and a good global investment climate be the overarching goal of the state or should the state take the opportunity to reproduce the next generation of workers and citizens with skills, knowledge, and culture?

### Macro-economy:

Economics has a generally one-sided view of macro-economy privileging investors over citizens for instance. However, surely it would be better for all if economics policy considered both monetary aggregates of the productive economy as well as the human resource aggregates of the reproductive economy e.g. indicators of population, health, nutrition, education, skills?

### Public finance:

Rather than reducing government spending and the public sector to approximately 30% GDP, would it not be more equitable to conduct budget trade offs through comparing the impact of reducing budget deficits with the impact of strengthening investments in human capacities and needs on economic growth, poverty reduction and gender equality?

### Government/public service:

As Ukraine has witnessed, the government has reduced

the public service to make efficiency gains. This has led to women losing their jobs, the worsening of employment conditions, the equalization of pensions, loss of services and rise in prices. This in turn has increased women's unpaid work in the household/community as well as growth of women's participation in the informal economy, including the industry. Instead, the state could reinvest in public service and value, which increase people's capacities and opportunities, such as good roads, schools, health care systems which in turn lead to economic growth. For instance, in western countries, the focus is on investing in human resources and public goods. If you invest 200 000 euros in a five-year-old child, you might end up saving money since a poor child can get an education and break the cycle of crime. When pre-school education is transferred over to the market it can be professionalized and considered as an investment on behalf of the entire society, equal pay can be introduced for jobs that are considered exclusively female. Additionally, pay equity can be assured for disproportionately female occupations in public spaces e.g. often nurses, teachers.

### Business environment:

Reforms also need to create a suitable environment. Often, reforms make it easier to start businesses by introducing competition and anti-corruption law but women cannot always capitalize on this because they have limited access to asset/collateral, credit and networks. As such, what can the state and other actors consciously do to facilitate the participation of women in such opportunities? For instance, how can loans be tailored for female start-ups and supported by targeted training programmes and establishment of women's business network?

### Infrastructure sector:

Investments are often made in reconstruction sections, which benefit men, such as in law, construction and industry. As such, investments should also take place in social infrastructure, such as hospitals, schools, community projects, all of which will create new jobs for women.

### Labour/employment system:

The focus is often on lowering labour costs and reducing labour protections to attract foreign investors and transnational business so that they can find cheap labour. Reducing the cost of labour, however, does not necessarily mean more jobs. Plans need to be made to address vulnerable groups, such as young people including young women, and retraining schemes for women affected by structural change and unemployment.

### Health system:

The privatization of social insurance leads to an increase in

costs, which do not necessarily lead to increased access or quality of care absorbed by women's increased labour in the household and care-giving sector. An alternative would be to revalue care work in the health sector with professional qualifications, pay equity and improved working conditions.

#### Education system:

Often reform of the education system is seen as too politically toxic and so is left until after the process of structural reform has been completed. Instead of leaving this to fester, investment in early childhood education – quality training and employment for women – would enable women's employment in general and create new businesses and economic growth. This would create long-term structural benefits for society.

What can women's rights activists do about it?

In searching for alternatives to the prevailing conflict and gender-insensitive approach to recovery and reconstruction, it is important to keep in mind structural gender inequalities; a preferred alternative cannot be based on a male standard. The gap between men and women must be bridged. Equating genders will eliminate gender inequality.

Specifically in BiH, laws are transparently adopted without substantive and meaningful participation of citizens and rights are being irreversibly revoked. It is critical that civil society stimulate a discussion with the state and other international actors on these issues. In Ukraine in particular, there is no analysis of the political economy. As such, analysis and political space is required in which to debate issues and experience based on best evidence.

It is advisable to take a pragmatic approach and assume critical positions ideologically and understand sources of power. The ideology of neoliberal economy and its consequences must be disentangled. It is necessary to try and approach the issues from a feminist perspective in order to criticize and challenge the existing ideology. In BiH, political forces have misappropriated the word 'patriarchy' and the word is therefore seldom used in politics. Public officials take advantage of this absence. As such, women must take back these words – both feminism and patriarchy – and redefine what they mean.

Gendered political economy analysis is not liberal or socialist. Rather, it is about social, political, economic, legal rights. It is about adopting a human rights based analysis to the issues which should include a gender dimension, for instance, what is the impact of privatization of health on women and men's health or challenging the assumption that minimal state and social conditions will lead to growth. It is useful to link up movements for post-conflict social and economic justice because the interface between labour, human, women's rights and environmental justice.

It is also useful to conduct ex ante and post impact assessments, for instance, impact of reform on diverse groups of men and women? It is also critical that the state and its international partners are continually monitored to assess the impact of their policies. In BiH, many international organizations that implemented projects and microcredit organizations were not monitored. Instead, the focus was on whether the project had been implemented or whether the loan had been paid back. No attention was paid to keeping track of the outcome.





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