

Elevating the WPS Agenda:

Challenging the Backlash Against Women's Rights and Growing Social Division

This statement is issued on behalf of the Australian Civil Society Coalition on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), a non-partisan, independent coalition of civil society organisations, networks, and individuals dedicated to advancing the WPS agenda in Australia, the region, and globally. It sets out a collective agenda for advocacy and ongoing engagement with allies in the region.

Date: 21-22 September 2026

More than 60 people representing over 40 organisations and 18 countries across Australia, Asia and the Pacific came together in Sydney, Australia on 21-22 September 2026 to examine the backlash and regression against women's rights and growing social division in our communities and countries. We have identified that women's rights have regressed, and that this regression is driven by patriarchy, colonisation and neoliberal economic forces. We recognise that a feminist WPS agenda is an important vehicle for challenging this regression. Our collective analysis has identified that:

- Women in all our diversity - race, ethnicity, age, ability, sexual orientation, gender identity and socio-economic background - are disproportionately impacted by conflict and crisis, but we are also central to peacebuilding, resistance and crisis response in communities.
- We recognise that Australian First Nations and Indigenous women were the first women peacebuilders, and there is much we can learn from centuries of caring for country and communities.
- Peace is not possible without the full participation of women. We must change whose voices and priorities count, and challenge the backlash that continues to keep women out of decision-making.
- The WPS agenda needs to be integrated into the national and regional machinery that governs security. Women's participation, protection, conflict prevention and inclusive relief are a foundation for peace and security in our countries and region.
- Peace is more than the absence of war and armed conflict. Sustainable peace and security is grounded in equality, dignity, rights, healing from trauma, and the full participation of women and gender diverse people in all aspects of society.
- We need feminist alternatives that expose the human impacts of war, promote human security, armed conflict and crisis prevention, and challenge the narrow national security agenda driving increased investment in militarisation.
- We commit to an inclusive feminist WPS agenda that leaves no one behind and brings diverse perspectives and voices to the table: trans and queer women, LGBTQIA+, First Nations and Indigenous women, migrant and refugee women, women from conflict-affected communities, women with disabilities, stateless women, rural women, and women at risk of exclusion.

- Young people are already leading change in our communities and movements, and their perspectives and priorities must be part of shaping the WPS agenda. Intergenerational mentoring and elevating young women's leadership and agency is central to advancing the WPS agenda and sustaining feminist movements over time.
- Accountability of governments is essential to protect international norms and obligations and to prevent further backsliding of rights. There can also be no peace without justice and actively dismantling racism, exclusion, occupation and the root causes of conflict.
- Human rights defenders must be protected, and robust safeguarding measures put in place for those who are at risk in their efforts to advance peace and rights.
- Our struggles are interconnected, and we need cross-sector and cross-national coalitions to build the world we want and provide solidarity to those under attack.
- Sustained funding is needed to support women-led and youth-led movements in Australia and the region to go beyond survival and resist attacks on our rights and freedoms.
- We need to grow alternative spaces and mechanisms to advance our rights when traditional spaces become unsafe or exclusionary. This includes building safe and inclusive online spaces for collaboration and mobilisation.
- We will persist, resist, and practise self-care and collective care in our spaces and movements, and promote an ethic of care in governance.

Recommendations:

Building on this collective analysis, our recommendations draw on the five themes discussed at the Collaborative Roundtables, where participants rotated between tables to contribute to more than one. The WPS Coalition will use them as the basis for a collective agenda for advocacy, and will report back on progress to participants and partners.

Gender Disinformation and Protecting Civic Space

1. Governments and policy makers need to set the tone and agenda for the prevention of gender disparity and pushback, including by developing and implementing clear, gender-responsive standards for online safety and information integrity, drawing on existing WPS, human rights and gender equality frameworks, and by strengthening the accountability of technology companies to prevent and respond to disinformation.
2. Civil society needs to build capacity and support champions to strengthen people's ability to recognise and counter gendered disinformation, and to use creative and diverse communications methods to communicate WPS messages to different audiences.
3. Cross sectoral coalitions are needed to address gendered disinformation collectively across governments, civil society, women's rights organisations, researchers, journalists, technology companies and regional actors. Governments, technology companies and civil society organisations need to protect women human rights defenders, journalists, politicians and activists

from online harassment, threats and gendered abuse, including through safeguarding measures, digital security support and safe reporting pathways.

4. Civil society needs to document and monitor gendered disinformation and its impact on women's participation and civic space across Australia and the region, so that this evidence can inform our advocacy.
5. Governments and donors need to protect and expand civic space for women-led and youth-led organisations, including sustained funding and safe spaces, online and offline, to organise and mobilise.

Preventing Conflict Related Sexual Violence

Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) refers to rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilisation, forced marriage and other forms of sexual violence of comparable gravity, committed against women, girls, men, boys and trans and gender-diverse people and linked directly or indirectly to conflict or crisis.¹

1. Governments need to prioritise CRSV prevention and early warning, and to be accountable for addressing CRSV in their diplomacy.
2. Governments need to invest in legislation that supports prevention, early warning, accountability and access to justice, including survivor access to services (e.g. health care, psychosocial support, legal aid, and safe housing or shelter) as part of access to justice.
3. Donors and governments need to prioritise CRSV prevention and response in humanitarian and post-conflict programming.
4. Stronger linkages between regional work on CRSV and domestic efforts to address violence against women, so that learning, policy and advocacy inform each other should be developed across civil society organisations, academia, governments and regional bodies.
5. An intersectional feminist approach to CRSV and gender-based violence (GBV), in solidarity with men and trans and gender-diverse people who are also survivors, and that addresses the stigma and discrimination that arise from rape should be funded and strongly supported by governments, regional bodies and civil society organisations.
6. Public awareness and campaigning in Australia and the wider region to address stigma and discrimination within communities around CRSV should be funded and strongly supported by governments, regional bodies and civil society organisations.

Strengthening Intersectional Feminist Movement Building

1. The WPS Coalition should be a platform for sharing resources, opportunities, mentoring and learning among WPS actors, in solidarity across feminist movements.
2. Donors, governments and civil society need to integrate young people into the WPS agenda by giving them the structures and resources to help drive their own priorities, not just a seat at the table. This includes convening young people to come together and discuss the WPS agenda and

¹ <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020.08-UN-CRSV-Handbook.pdf>

how they want to address the rise of the far right and violent extremism, and supporting and funding their work, building on existing youth-led initiatives.

3. Civil society and feminist movement actors need to address the current lack of diversity among women in our movements, including women with disability, trans women and LGBTQIA+ women, and build solidarity across our differences.
4. Feminist organisations and networks need to share power with one another rather than concentrating it.
5. Civil society and donors need to work together to pursue untied funding and strengthen the capacity of women-led organisations to access resources.
6. Donors and governments need to fund and support women's participation in convenings, politics and movement spaces such as this convening, including childcare, financial support, and education and skills resourcing.

WPS in Countering the Far Right and Attacks on Democracy

1. Governments, education providers and civil society need to educate early. Peace education, including WPS, should be introduced early in education systems and beyond formal schooling, through creative approaches such as community workshops, arts and storytelling, peer-to-peer learning and youth-led programs. Education is also where we shift the narrative: we need a shared Coalition and regional narrative that offers feminist, peace-based alternatives to the far right's story.
2. Civil society, including the WPS Coalition and regional networks, needs to document and monitor how the far right, militarisation and attacks on democracy are being felt and experienced across our different communities, in Australia and across the region, so that this evidence can inform our advocacy, help us map trends, track emerging threats and respond together.
3. Civil society needs to be creative and strategic in how it communicates and engages online, meeting people where they are at, including gaming platforms, TikTok and other channels. Narrative is key: if we do not tell our own story, the far right will tell theirs. Donors and governments need to fund feminist counter-narratives, and technology companies need to prevent online extremism and be held accountable for the spread of extremist content and harm on their platforms, in line with the gender disinformation recommendations above.
4. Civil society needs to build cross-movement alliances and spaces to convene, discuss and address the variety of injustices, using the WPS framework to talk about colonisation, racism, militarisation, climate and other injustices.

Supporting Locally-led Peacebuilding and Social Inclusion

1. Donors need to provide flexible funding defined by the priorities of locally-led women's groups and organisations, and be accountable to those groups for how funding is designed and directed, so that women survivors, migrant women, First Nations and Indigenous women can organise and mobilise around their own agendas.

2. Governments, education providers and civil society need to support people before we lose them to the far right, including young people, through education that helps them understand how the rights and freedoms we have today were won, and how to carry that work forward.
3. Governments, donors and civil society need to create spaces for frontline women to share the reality of their experiences directly with the government.
4. Civil society needs to learn from practice and intersectional data, and collaborate and broaden partnerships across diverse sectors and stakeholders, including donors, unions and other movements.