

Prioritizing the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda in the First Hundred Days

Since the adoption of [United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325](#) (2000) recognizing the vital role of women in peacebuilding, peacekeeping, and post-conflict recovery, the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda¹ has gained global recognition. In the two decades since, the United States (U.S.) has taken steps to elevate WPS in its foreign and national security policies. In particular, in 2011, President Obama launched the first U.S. National Action Plan on WPS via [executive order](#), which was subsequently [updated in 2016](#). In 2018, Congress enacted the landmark [WPS Act](#). In 2019, pursuant to the WPS Act, the Trump Administration released the [U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security](#) (WPS Strategy). In 2020, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), as well as the Departments of Defense, State, and Homeland Security,² as required by the WPS Act, rolled-out agency-specific implementation plans to operationalize the WPS Strategy.³

Despite these important measures, the WPS Agenda requires further prioritization by the next Administration in order to substantively achieve women's meaningful leadership in political and civic life, ensure their active participation in efforts to establish and maintain peace, and facilitate their contributions to post-conflict and disaster reconstruction in the U.S. and around the world. These outcomes cannot be attained without the elevation, socialization, and integration of WPS throughout the U.S. foreign and security policies and implementing agencies, as well as reinvigorated U.S. stewardship of the WPS Agenda through multilateral institutions and bilateral partnerships. A cross-government mobilization to mainstream gender equity, and WPS principles specifically, is imperative to achieving U.S. foreign policy and national security objectives. The existing foreign policy and security apparatus operates in silos, disaggregating gender, peace, and security issues. A coordinated approach would eradicate duplicative efforts, elevate expertise, eliminate existing gaps, and create bridges between agencies' competencies.

The undersigned organizations urge the U.S. to pursue a comprehensive, cross-government effort to protect and empower women and girls, promote peace and stability, and ensure international and national security through the establishment of the WPS Agenda as a foreign policy and national security strategic priority. To this end, we recommend the following executive actions within the first 100 days of the next Administration:

1. Review and update the WPS Strategy and its implementation plans to create a more detailed and comprehensive framework to advance the WPS Agenda;
2. Prioritize WPS in the new National Security Strategy and other relevant strategies and policies to break down the siloed approach to gender and foreign policy and security issues;
3. Provide robust financial and human resources for the advancement of the WPS Agenda;
4. Prioritize the attainment of gender parity throughout the U.S. Government, particularly within the implementing agencies of the WPS Act; and
5. Commit to regular consultations on WPS implementation with civil society, particularly the [U.S. Civil Society Working Group on Women, Peace, and Security](#), and institute timely and transparent public reporting procedures.

¹ The WPS Agenda addresses the disproportionate impacts of conflict and violence on women and consists of a four-pillared framework: participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery. It seeks to ensure women's meaningful participation at all levels of decision-making in national, regional, and institutional institutions and mechanisms in efforts to prevent, manage, resolve conflict, and create and maintain sustainable peace.

² Hereinafter, "the implementing agencies."

³ U.S. Department of Defense, [Women, Peace, and Security Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan](#), June 2020; U.S. Department of State, [The Department of State's Plan to Implement the U.S. National Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security](#), June 2020; USAID, [USAID's Women, Peace, and Security Implementation Plan](#), June 2020; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, [Department and Agency Implementation Plans for the U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security](#), June 2020.

A cross-government approach, articulated through an executive order or policy pronouncement in the first days of the next administration, to advance WPS Agenda and entrench gender equity through U.S. foreign and security policy, in tandem to a recommitment to multilateral engagement, will allow the U.S. to reclaim its global leadership role.

1. Review and update the 2019 WPS Strategy and its implementation plans to create a more detailed and comprehensive framework to advance the WPS Agenda.

The WPS Strategy and its accompanying implementation plans of the Department of State, Department of Defense, Department of Homeland Security, and USAID lack a sufficient level of detail to guide agencies in the prioritization and integration of WPS principles and fail to identify accountability mechanisms. An updated Strategy should clarify and emphasize the U.S. Government's commitment to the WPS Agenda in all facets of the U.S. engagement in conflict and disaster prevention, response, and resolution. To ensure a cross-government approach in an updated Strategy, drafters should draw upon the previous National Action Plans and agency implementation plans (2011 and 2016) to identify critical omissions and areas for improvement in the 2019 WPS Strategy.

The agency-specific implementation plans should be revised following the release of the updated Strategy to streamline WPS best practices into agency policies, programs, procurement, training, curricula, measurement, and oversight. The interagency and agency-specific metrics stemming from the WPS Strategy and included in the plans should also be updated to better reflect a comprehensive, coordinated, and intersectional approach to WPS, evaluate program effectiveness, determine timelines for implementation and measurement, and ensure transparency and oversight in monitoring and evaluation processes. These metrics should include quantitative and qualitative indicators and outcomes, specific to each line of effort.

Furthermore, the drafters should consult with civil society, academics, and local stakeholders, particularly women leaders and organizations addressing gender issues and serving women and girls, to ensure that all relevant lessons learned, best practices, and advancements in the WPS Agenda are accounted for within the updated Strategy. These steps will ensure the U.S. Government is implementing a comprehensive, yet measurable approach.

2. Prioritize WPS in the new National Security Strategy and other relevant strategies and policies to break down the siloed approach to gender and foreign policy and security issues.

Too often, WPS and broader gender issues are dissected from foreign policy and national security priorities and policies, which leads to a lack of coordination amongst implementing agencies and an omission of gender perspectives and analyses in programming. The resulting exclusion of key components of the WPS Agenda in the global-facing strategies and policies disproportionately impacts women and girls and undermines national and international security.

An interagency task force, potentially housed within the National Security Council, should be formed to coordinate the linkages amongst all agencies whose work intersects with WPS issues in order streamline the implementation of the updated WPS Strategy. The task force should aim to integrate the objectives of the WPS Strategy, the Strategy to Support Women and Girls at Risk from Violent Extremism, the Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence, the Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking, the Importation of Goods Produced with Forced Labor, and Child Sexual Exploitation, and other relevant strategies and policies into the

U.S. National Security Strategy to elevate and compliment U.S. Government efforts to promote gender equity and actualize the “Do No Harm” principle, particularly as related to gender issues. Once constituted, this task force should review all WPS-relevant strategies, plans, and policies, in regular consultation with civil society, to identify opportunities for coordination, as well as existing gaps that lead to the siloing of issues related to women and girls. The task force should then present its recommendations to the relevant agencies.

To achieve a more streamlined approach, the Administration should establish a Cross-Agency Priority (CAP) Goal to address women’s global security, health, and empowerment challenges with substantial funding to ensure effective coordination across programs implemented pursuant to the aforementioned gender-related strategies and policies. Realization of this CAP Goal is critical because of the inextricable linkages between U.S. national and international peace and security and women’s political participation, economic empowerment, and human rights around the world.

3. Provide robust financial, human, and other resources for the advancement of the WPS Agenda.

The WPS Agenda must receive full and robust resourcing, with no **less than \$130 million** included in the Presidential Budget Request and accompanying Congressional Budget Justifications for the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs budget. This request should support the implementation of the WPS Act and the WPS Strategy to expand and improve coordination of U.S. Government efforts to empower women as equal partners in conflict prevention, management, and resolution, as well as peacebuilding, transitional processes, and relief and reconstruction efforts in conflict- and crisis-affected countries. These funds should ensure the equitable provision of relief and recovery assistance to women and girls. This funding should support both internally- and externally-facing initiatives and address the onboarding of gender advisors and technical experts, research, training, and programming—replete with transparent financial tracking and accountability mechanisms. As the WPS Agenda is now enshrined in U.S. law and policy, and linked to the broader National Security Strategy, appropriate budget support is vital to the achievement of U.S. foreign policy and national security objectives.

Gender Advisors

The Administration should provide for the allocation of funding, hiring, and deployment of full-time gender advisors and WPS technical experts in all implementing agencies of the WPS Strategy. Specifically within the Department of Defense, deploy gender advisors to the six geographic Combatant Commands, Special Operations Command, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Joint Staff, Defense Security Cooperation Agency, Cyber Command, Transportation Command, and Strategic Command. Within the Department of State, employ full-time gender advisors and WPS technical experts within every bureau and all relevant offices, as well as on every negotiation and mediation delegation. Within USAID, employ full-time gender advisors and WPS technical experts within every mission, bureau, and all relevant offices. Within the Department of Homeland Security, employ full-time gender advisors throughout all agencies and offices with competencies addressing international issues and foreign nationals. The establishment of senior-level gender advisors will improve conflict prevention, management, and resolution efforts by promoting women’s contributions to security at both the policy and operational levels, and strengthen the U.S. Government’s ability to effectively and holistically counter adversaries, promote stability, and provide relief in conflict- and crisis-affected areas.

Research, Programming, and Training

In addition to the provision of gender advisors, the Administration should request substantial funding each year for the WPS implementing agencies for programming and research to effectively implement the WPS Strategy.

All programming must include gender analyses and qualitative and quantitative reporting requirements, such as indicators, outcomes, analysis, and the collection of sex-disaggregated data,⁴ which will serve to identify and address barriers to women’s meaningful participation in the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict, as well as peacebuilding efforts, training, and programs.

The President should also request robust funding to train U.S. military, diplomatic, development, and other staff, contractors, and grantees on WPS principles and approaches broadly, and specifically, how the inclusion of women increases the effectiveness of security-related policies, programs, and outcomes. Training should also provide an overview on the existing laws, policies, and programming that serve to enhance women’s participation in all spheres of life.

In order to promote inclusivity, each implementing agency should undertake research, support programming, and create training curricula, in consultation with civil society, that addresses the disproportionate impact violence, conflict, and crisis has on marginalized groups, including, but not limited to women and girls, ethnic, racial, and religious minorities, indigenous groups, and LGBTQI+ individuals.

Financial Tracking and Accountability

The Administration should require agency-level costed action plans and focal points to mainstream WPS principles and approaches throughout the U.S. Government. Additionally, to improve accountability for WPS funds, the implementing agencies and the Office of Management and Budget, should develop WPS sector treasury codes to track WPS spending. Without an accurate understanding of current expenditures to implement the WPS Strategy, monitoring and evaluating progress will be extremely difficult. Financial tracking is an imperative step in ensuring the effective mainstreaming of WPS.

4. Prioritize the attainment of gender parity throughout the U.S. Government, particularly within the implementing agencies of the Women, Peace, and Security Act.

Investing in gender equity can strengthen national security, create economic opportunities at home and abroad, and advance the U.S. Government’s standing as a global leader. The WPS Act notably codified the importance of empowering women and girls, which cannot be achieved on a global scale if the U.S. Government does not realize gender equity throughout its ranks.

Across the U.S. Government, and especially within WPS implementing agencies, the Administration should strive for gender parity in nominations, appointments, and positions of leadership and decision-making. Parity should be realized in the highest positions of power, including at the National Security Council, cabinet level, and ambassadorships. Furthermore, policies must be created—or to the extent they exist, updated—surrounding efforts to increase the recruitment, retention, and promotion of women into leadership positions throughout the U.S. Government, and address barriers they face within institutional cultures.

The Office of Global Women’s Issues (GWI), led by the Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women’s Issues, spearheads the State Department’s work to include women and girls in U.S. diplomacy, partnerships, and programs and to promote their empowerment through U.S. foreign policy. Candidates for this particularly important post for the advancement of WPS must be carefully considered throughout the nomination and

⁴ Sex-disaggregated data, however, should be the baseline. Data disaggregated by gender identity, sexual orientation, age, geographic location, ethnicity, ability, education, religion, indigeneity, class, and caste is required for appropriate, evidence-based responses, programs, and policies that reflect the lived realities and needs of all individuals and program participants.

confirmation process, demonstrate a substantial history of championing the equality, rights, and empowerment of women and girls, and possess the qualifications noted in Appendix I.

5. Commit to regular consultations with civil society generally, and the U.S. Civil Society Working Group on WPS particularly, and institute timely and transparent public reporting procedures.

Within the first 100 days, the implementing agencies of the WPS Strategy and interagency task force should schedule a series of consultations with civil society, particularly the U.S. Civil Society Working Group on WPS. To build on this dialogue, these entities should commit to quarterly meetings, at a minimum, to discuss best practices and lessons learned to update the 2019 WPS Strategy, as well the progress and efficacy of the implementation of the Strategy once it is revised. During these consultations, the Administration should provide transparent, detailed reports on the achievement of the interagency and agency-specific metrics, as well as on funding of programs related to the implementation of the WPS Strategy. In addition to regular meetings, the implementing agencies and the interagency task force should consult with civil society prior to the release of major WPS Strategy updates, policies, plans, reports, and other relevant publications.

Conclusion: Undertake a cross-government approach to gender in U.S. foreign and security policy and assistance to achieve gender equity and advance the WPS Agenda.

Within the first 100 days of the next Administration, a cross-government approach should be deployed via executive order or policy pronouncement regarding gender and the prioritization of the WPS Agenda as it relates to foreign and security policy and assistance. The Administration should immediately identify the advancement of gender equity and the WPS Agenda as a foreign and national security policy priority.

Once the Administration articulates plans to facilitate the update of the WPS Strategy and streamline WPS-relevant and gender policies, it must ensure that the requisite agencies will have adequate financial and human resources, and all programs will be gender inclusive and require gender analysis. The U.S. Government must institute internally- and externally-facing efforts to enhance women's participation, meet regularly with civil society, and commit to financial and programmatic accountability mechanisms.

In addition, all foreign and security assistance should include consultations on program design, implementation, and oversight with civil society and local stakeholders, particularly women on-the-ground. Women, women-led organizations, and organizations serving women should always be incorporated into decision-making processes related to peacebuilding and conflict prevention and resolution, as well as in the planning and response to humanitarian interventions. The U.S. should consistently support women's political participation around the world and provide funding for capacity-building to ensure their meaningful incorporation into decision-making throughout society.

By (1) reviewing and updating the WPS Strategy and its implementation plans; (2) prioritizing WPS in all security and internationally-focused strategies and policies; (3) providing robust financial, human, and other resources to the WPS Agenda; (4) attaining gender parity throughout the U.S. Government; and (5) committing to transparency and regular consultations with civil society, the U.S. can enhance national and international security, and serve as the world leader in advancing gender equity and the WPS Agenda.

APPENDIX I

Qualifications for the Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues⁵

Commitment to gender equality and advancing the rights and opportunities of women and girls

- Commitment to and experience working with a broad range of governments, civil society, private sector, grassroots and community-based gender equality organizations that represent various backgrounds and perspectives;
- Experience working in international affairs;
- An established track record advancing women's and girls' empowerment; and
- Commitment to opposing all forms of discrimination and violence and to empowering vulnerable populations, including religious, racial, and ethnic minorities; indigenous peoples; people with disabilities; LGBTQI; people living with HIV or AIDS; migrants, refugees, and internally-displaced people; older persons; married or unmarried adolescents and youth; widows; or people who are economically disadvantaged.

Understanding of U.S. foreign policy and mechanisms used to implement commitments to gender equality

- Knowledge of the Office of Global Women's Issues and a commitment to the Office's overarching mission and its role within the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Government
- Understanding of the suite of current U.S. Government strategies for women's and girls' empowerment, such as the U.S. Strategy on WPS, WPS implementations plans, National Action Plan on WPS, the U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence, U.S. Department of State's Strategy for Women's Economic Empowerment, the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls, and a willingness to implement and leverage those strategies within U.S. foreign policy;
- Commitment to U.S. leadership in the global community and its role in leveraging multinational institutions, such as the United Nations, as a positive force for change and progress towards gender equality;
- Experience in applying non-partisan research, evidence, and data as the basis of setting priorities and making decisions;
- Commitment to holistic and human rights-based programming approaches that advance the policy imperative of gender equality and female empowerment; and
- Commitment to supporting and promoting women's autonomous decision-making over their bodies and their lives; and
- Ability to bring about consensus to advance shared values and interests.

⁵ [Qualifications for the Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues](#), U.S. Department of State, (Mar. 6, 2018). These recommendations, when combined with above-suggested personnel recommendations, will ensure the individual confirmed into the position will have the requisite skills and experiences to achieve the objectives outlined in the WPS Act, WPS Strategy, and other relevant gender strategies and policies. The aforementioned qualifications can be modified and adopted for other high-level positions throughout the implementing agencies of the WPS Strategy.