

POLICY BRIEF | SPRING 2018

# WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY ACT OF 2017

By Sahana Dharmapuri, Jolynn Shoemaker, and Sarah Williamson

## I. BACKGROUND

The Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017 is a major milestone for US law. It recognizes that women are on the frontlines of international security challenges as powerful agents of change to create stability and peace. The law mandates women's meaningful participation in international peace and security.

### *Why is Women, Peace and Security important?\**

- **Women's status in a country is a major predictor of peace.** Where women have few rights or opportunities to participate in decision-making, there are higher levels of violence and conflict. Several quantitative studies show that [higher levels of gender equality](#) are associated with a lower propensity for conflict, both within and among states. Worsening treatment of women is among the first indications of [instability in a society](#).
- **Women's participation in decision-making leads to longer lasting peace agreements.** A study that analyzed 181 peace agreements signed since 1989 found that when women had participated in the peace process, the resulting agreement was [35 percent more likely to last at least fifteen years](#).
- **A gender perspective in conflict operations increases effectiveness and is a force multiplier.** Studies from NATO, the UN, and others show that [a gender perspective increases operational effectiveness](#) by expanding the amount of nuanced and comprehensive information a mission can gather.

## II. WHO INITIATED THE WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY (WPS) ACT IN THE UNITED STATES?

The WPS Act was initiated by a coalition of civil society organizations working together as the US Civil Society Working Group (CSWG) in Washington, DC. A small subset of CSWG members championed the WPS agenda by working closely with congressional members and staffers from both parties. Additional stakeholders from think tanks and universities weighed in from outside of Washington.

The concept of WPS originates from UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) passed in 2000. It recognizes that violent conflict affects women, men, girls, and boys differently and calls for women's full and meaningful participation at all stages of international peace and security decision-making. UNSCR 1325 was drafted and championed by women in civil society and passed unanimously. Many countries have directed the implementation of UNSCR 1325 through [National Action Plans \(NAPs\)](#). By November 2017, [more than seventy countries had adopted NAPs](#) to ensure the meaningful participation of women in international peace and security decision-making. In December 2011, President Barack Obama established the first US NAP on Women, Peace, and Security with [Executive Order 13595](#), detailing the commitments of the Department of State, Department of Defense, US Agency for International Development (USAID), and other relevant federal agencies. These agencies developed specific implementation plans and began to integrate WPS.

### III. LEGISLATIVE HISTORY OF THE WPS ACT

In July 2012, the first iteration of the WPS Act was introduced by the 112th Congress with bipartisan support in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. The Act was then revised and reintroduced in both the House and the Senate during the 113th Congress (2013–2014) and reintroduced again in the Senate during the 114th Congress (2015–2016). The bill was [sponsored in the House](#) by Representatives Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), Kristi Noem (R-SD), Eliot Engel (D-NY), and Ed Royce (R-CA). [In the Senate, the bill was sponsored by](#) Senators Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), Marco Rubio (R-FL), Christopher A. Coons (D-DE), and Benjamin L. Cardin (D-MD).

S. 1141, “Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017,” passed in October 2017 and [became Public Law No. 115-68](#). The Act passed with bipartisan support, including from Senators Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Mark Kirk (R-IL), and Ben Cardin (D-MD) and Representatives Niki Tsongas (R-NY) and Mike Honda (D-CA), in addition to those listed above.

Besides the United States, [Israel](#) is the only other country with a domestic law that focuses on [Women, Peace and Security Amendment 6C of Israel’s Women’s Equal Rights Law](#) (1951) includes language about implementing UNSCR 1325.

---

The Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017 recognizes that women are on the front lines of international security challenges as powerful agents of change to create stability and peace.

---

### IV. WHAT WILL THE WPS ACT DO?

The spirit and intent of the law is to express:

*the sense of Congress that: (1) the United States should be a **global leader in promoting the participation of women** in conflict prevention, management, and resolution and post-conflict relief and recovery efforts; and (2) **the political participation and leadership of women in fragile environments, particularly during democratic transitions, is critical to sustaining democratic institutions.***

The WPS Act requires training, accountability, and coordination across multiple US government agencies. Unlike Canada, [which in 2017 committed \\$150 million to WPS policies and programs](#) as part of its NAP, the United States has not attached a budget to its WPS Act. However, the Act does call for the following:

#### ***The President is required to submit a Women, Peace and Security Strategy to the US Congress.***

The law requires the President to submit, by the end of 2018, a government-wide Women, Peace and Security Strategy, which must be updated four years later in 2022. Two years after each strategy is submitted, the administration must provide reports summarizing and evaluating its progress. This requirement is significant, not only because it provides an accountability mechanism for the law but because it allows for learning and improvement across the US government. The strategy proposed must align with similar plans in other countries and include metrics that ensure accountability and effectiveness. This requirement goes beyond the previous [US National Action Plan](#) created by Executive Order 13595, which did not include mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of the NAP.

#### ***The President should promote women’s participation in conflict prevention.***

Although women are disproportionately affected by conflict, they are also almost always on the frontlines of peace movements in their countries. From Rwanda to Colombia and Bosnia to Liberia, women have mobilized assistance in humanitarian emergencies, mediated warring factions, and repaired communities torn apart by conflict. The WPS Act promotes women’s agency as peace actors rather than focusing solely on their victimization during violent conflict. This Act recognizes women’s full participation, leadership, and agency as essential to the success of peace and security worldwide. According to a recent report by the [Council on Foreign Relations](#), evidence shows that women’s participation in conflict prevention and resolution advances security interests. For example, as noted above, peace agreements are [35 percent more likely to last at least fifteen years when women participate](#). It is also documented that higher levels of [gender equality are associated with a lower propensity for conflict both between and within states](#).

#### ***The US Department of State and the US Department of Defense must provide gender analysis training for conflict prevention, mitigation, and resolution.***

The WPS Act mandates that US agencies carry out trainings specifically on gender analysis. Gender analysis means considering the different experiences, priorities, and needs of women, men, boys, and girls in a given situation. The information from a gender analysis can provide nuanced and

comprehensive information to improve the effectiveness of peace and security operations.

The Department of State and USAID are required to provide training on women’s engagement in conflict prevention and resolution, protection of civilians from violence and exploitation, and international human rights and humanitarian law. The Department of Defense is additionally mandated to emphasize training on gender considerations as well as effective strategies for ensuring women’s full participation.

---

**The WPS Act requires training, accountability, and coordination across multiple US government agencies.**

---

***The Department of State and USAID will also establish guidelines for use by overseas US personnel when consulting with stakeholders to ensure the meaningful participation of women in the prevention, mitigation, and resolution of violent conflict.***

In mandating that US overseas personnel engage in dialogue with a broader range of stakeholders, the law enables and prioritizes the meaningful participation of women and marginalized communities and makes consultation with underrepresented groups a priority in US foreign policy. This directly allows for greater US support of women peacebuilders.

## V. HOW WILL THE WPS ACT BE FUNDED?

Despite not having monetary commitments attached to the WPS law, government agencies including the State and Defense Departments and USAID have already committed some resources to WPS programming according to priorities laid out in the first and second US NAPs.

Congress has also allocated funding to several WPS priorities, such as the training of women police in Afghanistan. For example, the FY2017 National Defense Authorization Act included a provision to make \$25 million available for programs and activities to support the recruitment and retention of women in the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces.

In addition, vital funding for gender programming is set aside in the [FY 2018 State and Foreign Operations Bill \(SFOPS\)](#). Section 7059 on Gender Equality explicitly states that:

*funds appropriated by this Act shall be made available to promote gender equality in United States Government diplomatic and development efforts by raising the status, increasing the participation, and protecting the rights of women and girls worldwide.*

Furthermore, the SFOPS mandates that not less than \$50 million of funds appropriated under Title III be allocated to support women’s leadership and not less than \$150 million of funds appropriated under Title III be allocated to address gender-based violence.

All funds appropriated under the headings “Development Assistance, Economic Support Fund, Assistance for Europe, Eurasia, and Central Asia” and “International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement” shall also be directed to [supporting US efforts to meaningfully engage women](#) as “equal partners” in peacebuilding, conflict prevention and response, and reconstruction efforts.

Congress and the administration can work together to identify lessons learned from these early commitments to help set future goals for the WPS agenda. As the field moves forward, the WPS law provides a strong policy framework to address international security and peace matters more effectively.

\* *The United Nations founding documents and subsequent publications relating to UNSCR 1325, use the phrase, “Women, Peace and Security” without an oxford comma. This is because “Women, Peace and Security” emphasizes the importance of women’s participation and decision-making in international peace and security. However, the US National Action Plan on WPS and the US WPS ACT of 2017 use the phrase, “Women, Peace, and Security” with an oxford comma. Both versions are used within this document depending on whether they are referring to the UN or to the US context.*

# SUMMARY OF THE WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY ACT OF 2017

## PUBLIC LAW NO: 115-68

*Reprinted from [www.congress.gov](http://www.congress.gov)*

(Sec. 3) This bill expresses the sense of Congress that: (1) the United States should be a global leader in promoting the participation of women in conflict prevention, management, and resolution and post-conflict relief and recovery efforts; (2) the political participation and leadership of women in fragile environments, particularly during democratic transitions, is critical to sustaining democratic institutions; and (3) the participation of women in conflict prevention and conflict resolution helps promote more inclusive and democratic societies and is critical to country and regional stability.

(Sec. 5) The President, within one year after enactment of this bill and again four years later, shall submit to the appropriate congressional committees and make public a Women, Peace, and Security Strategy, which shall:

- be aligned with other nations' plans to improve the participation of women in peace and security processes, conflict prevention, peace building, and decision-making institutions; and
- include goals and evaluation plans to ensure strategy effectiveness.

Such a strategy shall include a specific implementation plan from each relevant federal agency.

The President is urged to promote women's participation in conflict prevention.

It is the sense of Congress that the President should: (1) provide technical assistance and training to female negotiators, peace builders, and stakeholders (non-governmental and private sector entities engaged in or affected by conflict prevention and stabilization, peace building, security, or related efforts); (2) address security-related barriers to women's participation; (3) encourage increased women's participation in U.S.-funded programs that provide foreign nationals with law enforcement, rule of law, or military education training; (4) support appropriate local organizations, especially women's peace building organizations; and (5) expand gender analysis to improve program design.

(Sec. 6) The Department of State shall ensure that personnel responsible for, or deploying to, countries or regions considered to be at risk of undergoing, or emerging from, violent conflict obtain training in the following areas, each of which shall include a focus on ensuring participation by women:

- conflict prevention, mitigation, and resolution;
- protecting civilians from violence, exploitation, and trafficking in persons; and
- international human rights law.

The Department of Defense shall ensure that relevant personnel receive training in:

- conflict prevention, peace processes, mitigation, resolution, and security initiatives that addresses [sic] the importance of participation by women; and
- gender considerations and participation by women, including training regarding international human rights law and protecting civilians from violence, exploitation, and trafficking in persons.

(Sec. 7) The State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development shall establish guidelines for overseas U.S. personnel to consult with stakeholders regarding U.S. efforts to:

- prevent, mitigate, or resolve violent conflict; and
- enhance the success of mediation and negotiation processes by ensuring the meaningful participation of women.

The State Department is urged to work with international, regional, national, and local organizations to increase the participation of women in international peacekeeping operations.

(Sec. 8) The State Department, within one year after the first strategy's submission, shall brief the appropriate congressional committees on training regarding the participation of women in conflict resolution.

The President, within two years after each strategy's submission, shall submit to the appropriate congressional committees a report that evaluates the implementation of such strategy and the impact of U.S. diplomatic efforts and foreign assistance programs to promote the participation of women.

## ONE EARTH FUTURE

[oneearthfuture.org](http://oneearthfuture.org)     

One Earth Future (OEF) is a self-funded, private operating foundation seeking to create a more peaceful world through collaborative, data-driven initiatives. OEF focuses on enhancing maritime cooperation, creating sustainable jobs in fragile economies, and research which actively contributes to thought leadership on global issues. As an operating foundation, OEF provides strategic, financial, and administrative support allowing its programs to focus deeply on complex problems and to create constructive alternatives to violent conflict.

## OUR SECURE FUTURE

[oursecurefuture.org](http://oursecurefuture.org) 

Our Secure Future: Women Make the Difference (OSF) is a program of the Colorado-based One Earth Future Foundation. OSF works to strengthen the Women, Peace and Security movement to enable effective policy decision-making for a more peaceful world.

---

## CONTACT US

 303.533.1715     [oursecurefuture@oneearthfuture.org](mailto:oursecurefuture@oneearthfuture.org)     525 Zang St. Broomfield, CO 80021

---



OUR **SECURE** FUTURE

Women Make the Difference

*a program of One Earth Future*

one earth  
FUTURE

*Peace Through Governance*