

CHALLENGES

Advancing the WPS agenda necessarily requires working with numerous partners, on challenging issues, in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. The challenges of working in these contexts are not unknown to the government, but they remain pernicious. In some cases, for example, local governments may be implicated in a given conflict, be unreliable as partners, or even be the cause of the instability that Canada is trying to address. Challenges to engagement are compounded when discriminatory gender norms are exacerbated by conflict, and when men and women alike put gender equality behind the security concerns they view as more pressing. In conflict-affected societies that are also deeply patriarchal, barriers to women's engagement can be extremely high. Women exercising their rights can be perceived as a threat, leading to backlash in the form of exclusion or even abuse by their families and communities.

Canada's support for the collection of evidence of Daesh and Syrian regime violations of international criminal and humanitarian law, including instances of SGBV, has encountered a number of context-specific challenges. A lack of security, delayed access to the areas that were liberated from Daesh, and witness

"One recurring challenge is the sense among implementing partners that women's inclusion in peace and security is impossible in culturally and socially conservative Iraq. Gender equality is not a priority because 'we have a war to fight.' Following Canada's contribution for a gender advisor, the United Nations Funding Facility for Stabilization now specifically reports on women's participation in stabilization activities, particularly in the area of livelihoods and housing rehabilitation. Performance tracking includes some gender-disaggregated data. Cultural and social norms, which until now seemed insurmountable, are being overcome through creative interventions in certain instances."

– Canadian diplomat in Iraq

fatigue were among the chief obstacles. Survivors and witnesses have expressed growing frustration about the delay in obtaining justice, as well as a sense of psychological fatigue due to the numerous media and NGOs with whom they shared their experiences. This could also be true of Rohingya refugees, who may find themselves inadvertently doubly victimized.

The Syrian context encapsulates several of the challenges described above. While Canada was successful in advocating for an increased number of women in the Syrian Negotiation Commission (SNC), Canada's financial support to the Women's Advisory Board, created by the UN in 2016 to represent women's views at the Geneva peace

² The SNC responded by increasing the number of women among its members from two to six (representing 17% of the overall membership). An SNC delegation of women negotiators visited Canada in May 2018, a first "women's only" visit to a like-minded capital, which provided a boost to morale and credibility to women representatives in the Syrian opposition and civil society circles.