

Christine Vincent presented CANADEM, which is a Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade-sponsored roster of Canadian experts skilled in the human rights, peacebuilding, and democratization fields, whom it refers to the UN and other international organizations, the Canadian government and NGOs for short-term field missions. It currently includes about 3,000 professionals, a third of whom are women, of which only about 35 have gender advisory capacity. CANADEM is actively looking for more gender experts, particularly for Afghanistan. On behalf of the joint NGO, government Women, Peace & Security Committee, it has conducted a survey of barriers to female participation in UN field missions and found that these barriers consist of persistent sexism and bias in the recruitment and promotion practices, cultural attitudes towards women both among non-Western UN staff and nationals of mission countries, age restrictions, the inability to bring dependents along on many missions, safety concerns, and the urgency and length of overseas missions.

Pamela Scholey of IDRC presented on the issues women face in post-conflict situations, referring particularly to the Middle East. She emphasized that the Arab feminist movement is the most promising avenue for social and political transformation in the region as this movement is challenging the core values and structures currently shaping Arab society. Scholey stated that while women face many of these issues whether conflict is occurring or not, in post-conflict scenarios women have enhanced opportunities to effect social change. For example, as witnessed in Palestine during the first intifada, conflict situations provide an impetus for women to organize which is bolstered by the fact that women's liberation is often promoted as part of the political program in revolutionary wars. Despite the fact that women's participation in formal peace negotiations is limited, they are often highly active in 'track 2' or informal peace processes. In Palestine, the women's movement has succeeded in defeating some discriminatory regulations and has also been active in numerous other ways, including launching educational campaigns regarding political rights, among other issues, and contributing to the dialogue regarding gender and citizenship and various areas of lawmaking.

Scholey noted that in conflict and post-conflict scenarios women frequently provide economically for the household undermining men's sense of masculinity, which when combined with high levels of unemployment may be contributing to men joining Islamist groups in order to assert their masculine identity. It is also important to note that women's ability to absorb economic shocks is limited and severely compromised by the fact that their unpaid work is not included in the formal accounting used in planning reconstruction, resulting in women being further marginalized from economic reconstruction programs.

Concerning social reconstruction, Scholey emphasized that at their most effective community and state solutions to the physical and sexual violence perpetrated against women could result in the notions of femininity and masculinity being transformed, pointing to the potential of the feminist movement in the Arab world to bring about reconstruction, especially the cultural reconstruction of gender identities. Community and state solutions to sexual violence are imperative as individual counseling is not enough; social reintegration and resolution of these issues often does not occur at the community level. Western donors should be aware of the sensitive nature of these issues and the potentially negative effects of their visible participation in this process and partner with indigenous feminist groups already active in the region. Scholey concluded by stating that 'reconstruction' is a misnomer, as it is actually new construction that is