



Women, Peace, and Security

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome you all to the beautiful city of Tournai, and more particularly to this magnificent Salon de la Reine, where we have the honor of welcoming Her Majesty the Queen Mathilde. Your Majesty, I would like to thank you for honoring us with your presence, which testifies to your sincere interest in this subject. Your extremely enriching speech reminds us that, in the current unstable and volatile international geopolitical context, the conflicts and tensions we are facing are more than ever worthy of a plural perspective and analysis.

It is clear that women have a way of looking at the world, at humanity and what divides it, and at the ways in which we might be able to heal the wounds. In principle, the voice of women has every reason to find - and hold - its rightful place at the heart and highest levels of national and international institutions. It must be said that in the four corners of the world and beyond the achievements and courageous steps taken in many areas, there is, as the saying goes, "work to be done". Including in Belgium!

That's why, as a woman and as the first Defence Minister in the country's history, I felt it was vital to take advantage of this Presidency to take this message forward and organize a seminar dedicated exclusively to the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda.



This will serve as a reminder of the vital role played by women in conflict prevention and the urgent need to rethink our current approaches. The seminar will also provide an opportunity to formulate substantial conclusions and recommendations for the continued improvement of the implementation of this program within the framework of the CFSP and CSDP.

Before exploring the topics that will be addressed throughout the day, I would like to underline the parallel between our approach and the excellent results already achieved under the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The discussions of the European Ministers for Gender Equality have highlighted the need to keep gender policy at the heart of the European Union's future actions. Belgium, as a leading country in the field of gender equality, draws inspiration from these successes to guide our thinking today.

The temporal relevance of the Women, Peace and Security topic is all the greater as we approach the 25th anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which, on October 31, 2000, unanimously acknowledged the disproportionate and unique impact of armed conflict on girls and women.

The SEAE's current work on drafting a military concept linked to the female approach in CSDP missions is also a significant milestone. As are the many similar initiatives undertaken within NATO.



Now, allow me to give you a more detailed overview of the day's program, highlighting the priority points of attention for each of the 3 panels envisaged. To kick off our work, we will delve into the very essence of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda, emphasizing the crucial importance of taking women into account at every stage of a conflict.

The latest global report on women's peace and security is particularly symptomatic of the vulnerability of women in several countries, such as Afghanistan, where women's rights have been in constant decline since the Taliban came to power in 2021. This report is also a tragic reminder that women in direct or indirect proximity to conflict are the most vulnerable. In recent months, the situation has worsened with the escalation of violence linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, testifying to the disproportionate impact of the conflict on women and children. According to UN data, no fewer than two mothers are killed every hour, and seven women every two hours.

Furthermore, according to the latest available statistics, women and children make up almost 70% of the victims recorded to date in the Gaza Strip. Women are also the first victims of armed conflict, as the risk of gender-based violence increases. In Ukraine and the Democratic Republic of Congo, numerous accounts of sexual violence have been shared, revealing the use of rape as a weapon of war.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is essential to emphasize that behind these statistics and discussions, so many men and women embody the resilience and determination to build a better, more equitable future for all.



It is in this spirit that we would also like to salute today the hard work and resolute commitment of Dr. Denis Mukwege, "the Man who repairs women". His unfailing dedication to the care of young girls and women victims of sexual violence in times of conflict, particularly in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo, inspires the utmost respect. Mr. Mukwege, I would like to personally thank you for honoring us with your presence. We shall all be particularly attentive to your testimony and your message.

Finally, to close this first panel, experts will also enlighten us on ways to integrate women more systematically into mediation processes, peace negotiations and stabilization initiatives, in order to demonstrate that the inclusion of women is not only necessary but is the cornerstone of an inclusive process for a transversal, plural and sustainable approach.

In the afternoon, we will continue our discussions by pointing out the obstacles that tend to slow down the implementation of the WPS agenda in the field, almost 25 years after its creation. Speakers will share concrete experiences through case studies, notably in the Sahel, Afghanistan and Ukraine. They will highlight the importance of responding to the specific demands and needs of women in local communities, and of tailoring approaches for a real impact in line with local cultures and realities.

Emphasis will be placed on the need to adapt to specific contexts, and the crucial importance of working closely with civil society, notably within the framework of the 3D approach - for Defense, Diplomacy and Development. The Minister for Development Cooperation, Caroline Gennez, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Hadja Lahbib, will also be delivering a recorded message.



As I mentioned in my introduction, given the worrying changes in the security environment, we need to strengthen cooperation between our foreign relations departments. With this in mind, and subject to the sometimes-unexpected developments in the geopolitical context, we intend to keep resolutely in mind the need for this 360° approach and our concern to pursue our commitments to our partners. Particular attention is paid to Africa and the Middle East, in order to make the most appropriate contribution in the face of increasingly diverse and multidimensional crises. In all these countries, and for all the projects already underway, Belgian defense action is conceived as part of a whole.

Without security, police, and justice, without stable democratic institutions made up of men and women, there can be no development. And without development that is inclusive, respectful, and fair to all, there can be no economic prosperity for the benefit of the greatest number, and no real social cohesion.

We will conclude our discussions by putting forward proposals for the implementation of the WPS program within CSDP missions and operations. The central objective will be to improve the concrete operationalization of the program in the field.

We will explore the specific challenges faced by the European Union in its missions and operations, seeking to identify practical solutions for a better integration of gender perspectives. With this third panel, I sincerely hope that we can make a further contribution to the efforts made in the field through the experience of female personnel in European missions and operations.



Ladies and Gentlemen, dear guests, these panels, rich in exchanges and expertise, will enable us to define concrete guidelines to pursue our common quest for a better, more inclusive, and sustainable future. I encourage you to participate actively, to share your experiences and to contribute to the mutual enrichment of our perspectives.

Thank you for your attention and commitment.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ludivine Dedonder', with a stylized, flowing script.

Ludivine Dedonder