



This transcript accompanies the summary recording of the webinar “Unyielding Voices” held on 4 December 2025, addressing digital violence as a contemporary peace and security challenge. It is aligned with the Women, Peace and Security framework and the UN Women 2025 theme “UNiTE to End Digital Violence Against All Women and Girls”.

As digital spaces increasingly replicate and intensify offline harm, they are being used to silence women mediators and peacebuilders; reinforcing a persistent gap between policy commitments and lived realities. Yet across regions, women continue to lead. This webinar captures their experiences, elevates their voices, and translates them into actionable insights for advancing digital safety, accountability, and inclusion.

Bringing together grassroots perspectives and high-level policy voices, the webinar bridges lived experience and systemic response. Positioned midway through KAICIID’s 16 Days of Activism campaign aligned with the UN Women “UNiTE” campaign, it integrates three curated clips from the campaign to anchor and connect the dialogue.

Four priorities emerge clearly: close the gap between policy and lived realities; strengthen protection for women leaders through security and support systems; confront patriarchy and gender-blind governance, including in technology; and mobilize collective action across communities, faith actors, and institutions to build safer, more inclusive digital and public spaces. These are essential to ensuring that women’s voices are not only heard, but protected and empowered to shape the future of peace and security.

**“MOVING FORWARD, LET US ENSURE
THAT EVERY ONLINE ENVIRONMENT,
EVERY DIALOGUE PLATFORM, AND
EVERY PEACEBUILDING SPACE REFLECT
THAT WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION,
SAFETY, AND LEADERSHIP ARE THE
FOUNDATION OF LASTING PEACE.”**

Ambassador António de Almeida Ribeiro, Acting
Secretary General of KAICIID, Closing Remarks

Speakers

(in order of appearance in the live webinar)

Dimitra Missira, KAICIID External Relations and Partnerships Officer - Welcome speaker

Joseph Atang, KAICIID's Country Expert in Nigeria - Moderator

Mohammad Naciri, UN Women Chief of Staff - Keynote speaker

Mariateresa Garrido Villareal, KAICIID Fellow, UPEACE Costa Rica

Raghad Mohammed Jabar, KAICIID Fellow, President Al-Weyam Organization for Human Rights

Ambassador Dr Alya'a Samir Borhan, Deputy Assistant Minister for International Cultural Relations at the Cultural Department of the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Melinda Holmes, Program Director at the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) for the Women's Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL)

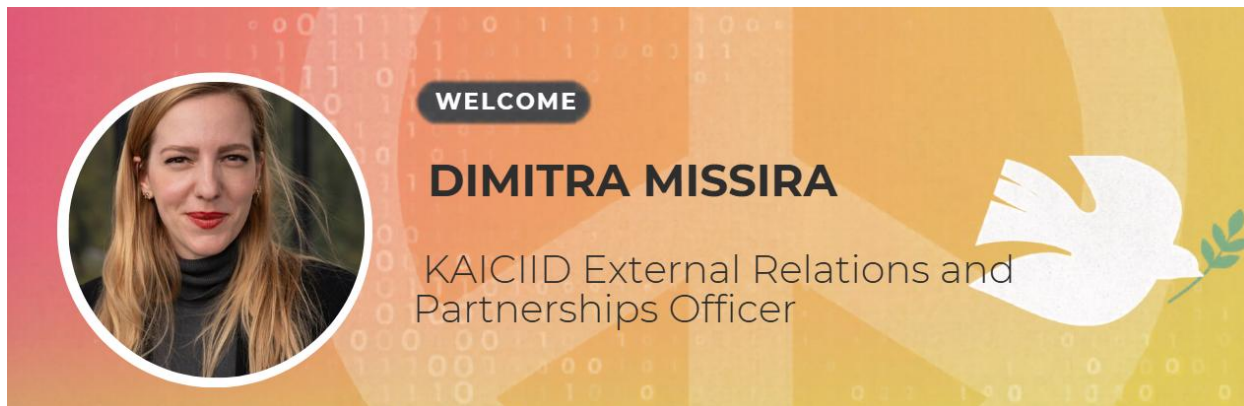
Jessica Roland, Senior Specialist for Inclusive Peace, Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers

Ambassador António de Almeida Ribeiro, Acting Secretary General of KAICIID – Closing remarks

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Setting the Scene: *Women's Voices in a Changing Digital Landscape*



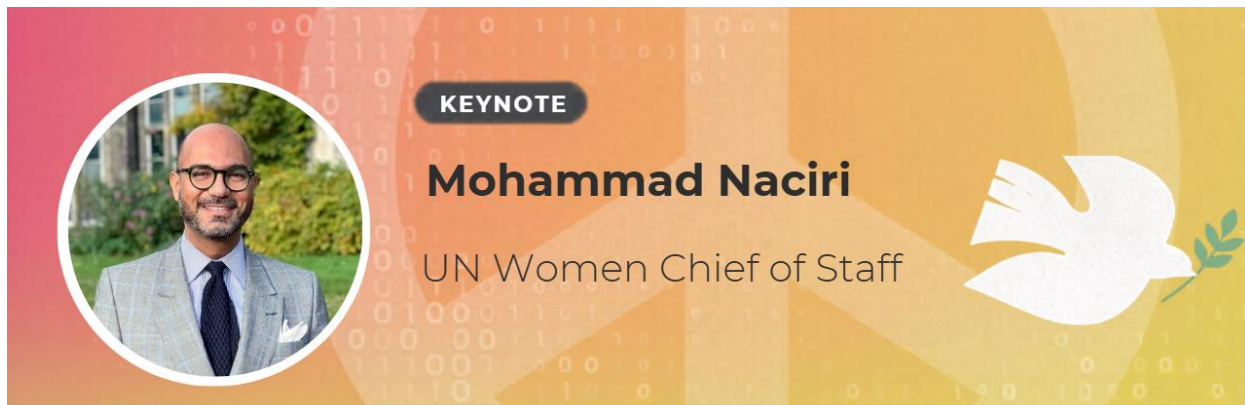
Across many contexts, women and girls continue to face barriers that limit their participation in public life and in peacebuilding processes. Some of these challenges are highly visible, while others remain subtle and less recognized, particularly in digital spaces. By coming together in this conversation, we reaffirm a simple but essential principle: every voice deserves to be heard, valued, and protected.

This webinar forms part of a broader effort to highlight emerging challenges and support actions that strengthen safety, inclusion, and meaningful participation. It also draws attention to a form of violence that is rapidly growing, yet still insufficiently addressed. Marking the 25th anniversary of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, it reminds us that sustainable peace cannot be achieved if half of society is excluded from shaping it.

Aligned with UN Women's campaign, *Unite to End Digital Violence Against All Women and Girls*, this discussion situates digital violence as a pressing peace and security concern. As digital environments increasingly shape our daily lives, they have also become spaces where offline risks are mirrored and, at times, amplified. Women peacebuilders, journalists, mediators, youth, and community leaders navigate these pressures daily, yet continue to demonstrate remarkable dedication, creativity, and resilience.

The discussion is guided by three core aims: to honour and elevate the voices of women who lead, often at personal cost; to deepen understanding of how online and offline violence intersect and shape women's participation in peacebuilding; and to share practical, creative, and hopeful responses emerging from communities worldwide. Bringing together speakers with both lived experience and policy insight, the conversation offers a space for reflection, learning, and forward-looking action.

Keynote: *Rethinking Peace and Security in the Digital Age*



Before I make a couple of points about women, peace, and security in the digital age, I want to say something about gender equality and the foundational purpose of this centre that hosts us all online today. In 2023, the United Nations Security Council adopted a resolution condemning hate speech and promoting tolerance and intercultural and interreligious dialogue as tools for peace. The same resolution condemned gender discrimination and identified it as a root cause of conflict. It recognized that the marginalization of women can delay or undermine the achievement of durable peace, security, and reconciliation, and expressed deep concern about the rise of extremist views on women as one of the main obstacles to their full, equal, meaningful, and safe participation in conflict prevention, resolution, and post-conflict public life. The resolution was adopted unanimously.

Unfortunately, since then, these have not been good years for either women or peace. Too many actors in power continue to ignore both Security Council resolutions. It is fashionable in discussions about new technologies to describe them as a double-edged sword, capable of both positive transformation and serious risks. However, while I hope to be proven wrong and gain some optimism in this discussion, I cannot present a balanced view of positives and negatives. For women, peace, and security, as far as we can see, the digital age has been a net negative, and I will explain why.

It was hoped that digital tools could remove some of the logistical barriers to women's participation, but this has not materialized. In recent years, conflict resolution efforts have adopted even more restrictive and closed formats, often sidelining the United Nations. In 2024, 87% of peace talks included no women among the negotiators, and we are now facing the highest number of active conflicts since 1946. Despite overwhelming evidence that women's participation leads to more inclusive and durable peace agreements, women accounted for just 7% of negotiators and 14% of mediators last year. At the same time, as nearly half the world participated in elections, progress in women's political representation stalled.

Digital tools are increasingly used to connect women to forums, but not to decision-making spaces. While they have enabled access to education for tens of thousands of Afghan girls under Taliban restrictions, this progress remains limited when compared to the millions who previously attended school. Similarly, millions of girls in Gaza are unable to attend school, including those who have survived ongoing violence.

At the same time, digital platforms are being used to spread misogyny and to create new avenues for harassment and harm against women who enter public life. The same misogyny that poisons domestic politics is also fueling global conflict, with women and girls bearing the consequences of wars driven by men. Civilian casualties have quadrupled in just two years. Sexual violence in conflict has increased by 87% over the same period, and 58% of global maternal deaths now occur in crisis-affected countries.

Digital tools have been used to produce fake images of Yemeni women activists to justify their detention, to ostracize them from their communities, and to dox women dissidents in Myanmar. They are frequently used to harass, threaten, and smear women human rights defenders, peacebuilders, journalists, and politicians, often to a much greater extent than men in similar roles.

If the digital revolution does not close the gap between men and women, if new technologies continue to be built and regulated predominantly by men, and if artificial intelligence reproduces and amplifies the worst aspects of human bias, these trends will only worsen. If we do not address the persistent offline barriers to women's equal participation in public life, we risk further limiting their ability to shape our collective future.

By undermining women's participation, we are weakening the world's largest constituency for peace. UN Women is one of many actors working to change this trajectory. I hope we can count on this centre, and everyone associated with its mission, to stand together in that effort. Thank you.

Lived Realities: *Navigating Digital and Structural Violence*

Media and Faith: A Voice from Latin America

A graphic banner for a speaker. On the left is a circular portrait of Mariateresa Garrido Villareal, a woman with dark curly hair and a blue shirt. To the right of the portrait is a dark grey rounded rectangle with the word "SPEAKER" in white. Below that, her name "Mariateresa Garrido Villareal" is written in a large, bold, black font. Underneath her name, her title "Assistant Professor, University for Peace, Costa Rica" and "KAICIID Fellow" are listed in a smaller black font. On the right side of the banner is a white dove icon with a green olive branch, set against a background of orange and yellow with faint binary code patterns.

Women, media, and digital visibility

I am originally from Venezuela, as you saw in the chat, and this is a complicated country to be living in. The political turmoil has been affecting society at many different levels, and I left the country 12 years ago, at a time when the online sphere and social media were already quite complex. This background has shaped the type of research I pursue and the interests I have.

A key moment in my decision-making process was the 2014 protests in Venezuela. At that time, I was studying for a master's degree at the University for Peace in Costa Rica. During those protests, internet access was blocked, and many people died, including activists and social media users. This marked a peak in both violence and digital violence, as people were using platforms, particularly Twitter, which at that time was the most popular social network in Venezuela. It became a tool for persecution, allowing the identification and targeting of activists and individuals.

I was in Costa Rica while this was happening, and my family would call me asking what I knew about the protests, what was going on, and how I understood the situation. It felt strange that I had more access to information than they did, even though they were in the country, familiar with the media, and directly experiencing events. This raised an important point about understanding what digital violence is.

In Venezuela, digital violence appeared as direct persecution against individuals using available platforms to express their opinions and ideas. It also included cutting off internet access and limiting people's ability to obtain information, which they needed to decide whether to go out, stay at home, or understand the situation in the country. In this context, digital violence was very clear, direct, and visible.

Over the past ten years of research, not only in Venezuela but also in the Central American region, I have observed that these patterns continue to repeat. During electoral processes, there are clear peaks in attacks and verbal discrimination, particularly against women.

When we look at how this affects journalists and communication professionals, one form is the delegitimization of the person. This includes attacks on how they are perceived, their intelligence, and their credibility in the eyes of the audience. Another form is targeting relatives. Women, especially those who are married and have children, are often attacked through their families. These threats may appear in comments, emails, or messages on digital platforms, for example: “We know where your child goes to school,” or “We know where you work; maybe you should stop investigating this topic.” This creates fear and often leads to self-censorship to avoid those threats becoming reality.

In Costa Rica, for instance, these forms of violence are more subtle and less explicit than in countries such as Venezuela or Honduras, where women receive direct threats and attacks. However, these patterns continue to appear across different contexts..

Blurring lines: from online abuse to real-world impact

One of the points I would like to connect to from the previous speaker, Mr. Nasiri, is how we understand the digital environment. Ten or fifteen years ago, the types of violence we were experiencing were quite distinct, with one form and manifestation online and another offline.

Today, however, what happens offline has an online replication, with repercussions and consequences, and vice versa. For example, when a person in a position of power publishes the phone number, email, or address of a specific journalist, this can lead to direct personal attacks. If an address is shared, people may go there and demonstrate against that person.

The lines that once clearly separated online and offline threats and attacks are now blurring and affecting all spaces. This makes the problem more complex and more difficult to address from different perspectives.

Faith-based support and collective protection for women journalists

So how do we deal with this? We know that all of these situations exist, and this is where the idea of faith becomes relevant in helping us understand what we can do as leaders and as people engaging in these environments. One important aspect is community support. In many cases, particularly in the Latin American region, women journalists are part of Christian communities, whether evangelical or Catholic, and they have support systems that are extremely important when people are under attack.

First, for mental health purposes, simply having someone who can listen without judgement, who knows you not only as a journalist but as a person, and who is connected to you through close

relationships, is essential. I cannot stress how important this is for people who are experiencing these attacks, especially for women. We know, and research shows, that women often process experiences by talking and being listened to. Faith communities, and the groups within them, can create these support networks, which are extremely important, particularly because they are culturally relatable in the context of Latin America, and likely in other parts of the world as well.

Then, the other thing that is quite important is the idea of dialogue between these different religious institutions, there are communities, and the people who are affected by the violence. So, one of the things that we have seen and I have experienced in the local church is that once that the person has a problem that manifests a bigger trend of violence, then it becomes a motive or an idea to get together, to pray about that, to get that support system around a person, but also around a situation. So people will be, like participating, like, actively engaging in the support, and then, like, maybe sometimes looks like flagging content online. Sometimes it looks like defending somebody offline. Sometimes it looks like bringing food and just creating a space where people can feel safe. Sometimes it's even offering shelter for those who are persecuted and need a space to actually relocate and move out from that very risky situation or that threat that they are receiving.

So, for instance, a female journalist in exile from Nicaragua in Costa Rica found those different spaces of support for them and their families in their faith communities. So then, when it comes to actors, in many cases, we think that it will be the priest, it will be the pastor, it will be the teachers, it will be, like, these main leaders in the traditional forms of religious hierarchy, but what we see in practice is that the actors sometimes are the fellows, the people who are with them creating this community. So it creates these different layers of support when it comes to faith actors that are not fully dependent on the structure of the church, but more on the close-friend relations that people can have.

So one of the things that it's actually quite important when it comes to freedom of expression, safety of journalists in these environments is first to recognize that violence doesn't happen in a very specific context, it's just this between the Digital and non-digital environments. Second, that when a female journalist receives an attack and receives some kind of threats, it's usually not only addressed against her, but against her family, the relatives, the co-workers, so the impact of these type of attacks is beyond one person and Faith communities have a major role to play in these different levels of offering support in mental health, in relocation, in sometimes even economic support. So, in all of these, we can see how women, or... we can find a different space to support women in this quite particular field of journalism and communication studies.

Building a Culture of Dialogue: A Voice from Iraq



Women, Public Spaces and Values

My name is Raghad Mohammad Jabbar. I am from Iraq. I live and work in a deeply patriarchal environment. I am a social activist and human rights defender, and the President of Al-Weyam Organization for Human Rights. I would like to share my experience from a very practical point of view, not only regarding dialogue between religions and cultures, but also in relation to peacebuilding.

In Iraq, our work is not only professional, but also deeply personal. Many women working in the public space are exposed to violence, which we have had to confront and navigate.

This experience was a turning point for me, particularly through an experience with my children. When they came home, they would describe other pupils in their classes who came from different backgrounds. I noticed that they were repeating prejudices about these children and their lives, which had nothing to do with reality. These ideas did not come from schoolbooks. This was a moment of realization for me: I understood that I needed to address these prejudices directly. I needed to work on promoting equality between men and women, respect for others, and the importance of values. Values are not only something we believe in; they must be practiced and lived.

I was supported by many women in this process. At the same time, digital violence began to spread more widely in Iraq and across the region. Women were increasingly subjected to hate speech and sexualized abuse in digital spaces, as well as within society more broadly. Activists had to respond not only to the visible forms of digital violence, but also to the less obvious ones. We needed to examine how digital tools and mechanisms were being used to subject and objectify women in online spaces.

From challenges to action: building dialogue, peace and security

During my practical work, I noticed that we face many complex challenges, not only in digital spaces, but also in real life. When we try to connect with one another, or even when we want to present a complaint, we often do not find any institution to turn to. Although there are official decrees, such as Decree 1512 and the resolution mentioned by my colleague from the United Nations, these remain largely theoretical in relation to women in Iraq and the digital reality we face.

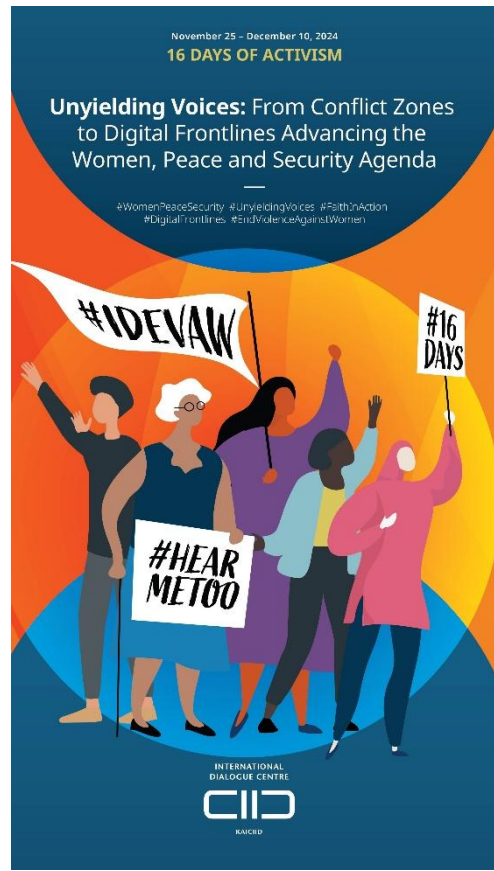
Nevertheless, as Iraqi women and through the work of Al-Weyam Organization, particularly in training women on the secure use of digital tools and media, I believe that we can begin to change this reality.

By working with and believing in the values of respect, we can help provide security for Iraqi women and create safer spaces that contribute to reducing violence, not only in digital environments. We can also confront hate speech and build a culture of dialogue, a culture of safe and respectful dialogue, while promoting messages that call for respect for women and support for female activists, both within society and within organizations, in order to build more peaceful communities.

When our organization works together with religious and cultural organizations, we can stand up against hate speech, address the misuse of digital tools, and contribute to greater peace, especially for women.

Unyielding Voices: Stories of Courage and Resilience

As part of KAICIID's 16 Days of Activism campaign in 2025, "Unyielding Voices" shared eight short clips from Fellows and partner networks across social media during the campaign period (25 November to 10 December). The clips are thought-provoking and inspiring, and the messengers are brave; speaking from lived realities across conflict settings and digital frontlines. While digital spaces expose women peacemakers to abuse and harassment, their voices remain unyielding; continuing to lead with resilience, commitment, and impact.



Women's voices at the heart of peacebuilding

Peace and Human Rights Activist Magda Zenon

Member of the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network



Without women's voices, without their stories, peacebuilding has no value. To build peace, you need to have inclusive voices, and women's voices are very important.

Women are usually the first responders. They are usually there when the bomb goes off, when there is a crash in the street, when someone is attacked. They are usually the ones who handle the victim, and often the family. So, to me, their voices have got to be there.

Gender-based violence costs a lot of money; shelters, time away from work, long-term psychological treatment, and the effect on the family.

I think governments have got to start looking at the big picture of what gender-based violence means and the effect it has on the community. It is sad to say, but they have got to look at the financial aspect of it.

To me, a gender-free world is a world in which governments take gender-based violence seriously, and they look at it because it does not just affect you and me as women. It does not just affect you on the day it happens. It has long-term effects and ripple effects.

It affects your home, your community, your work, and your health.

Let's also look at it across the board, because a lot of the time people assume it only happens to the vulnerable, the poor, and the less educated. It can happen from the First Lady to the cleaner.

It sees no age limit, no economic status, no educational status. It can affect every single woman within the community.

From gender equity to women's leadership

Palestinian Activist Lucy Talgieh

Wi'am: The Palestinian Conflict Transformation Centre



We are calling for gender equity. This is what we want; equal chances for gender, women's participation in decision-making.

Basically, we are not calling for things that need that much, but what is needed is a shift in our patriarchal society.

Gender-based violence has to end through legal frameworks; creating laws that can protect women.

It is really important to work both horizontally and vertically; working with the grassroots to raise awareness about their rights and also working with decision-makers to change laws that are against women.

If we focus our vision on changing laws and raising awareness, in the end we will reach a point where there is no gender-based violence.

What we are seeing right now, especially in Gaza, is that the violence is increasing a lot.

Those women are not victims of violence; they are leaders. They are teaching children, mediating conflict, trying to feed others with whatever they have.

They are taking the lead within their communities to make them more stable and livable.

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Freedom from fear and violence: a collective responsibility

Jenny Eugenia Canau

Cofounder of Mindfulness Africa and Peace & Healing Circle South Africa



We all have to ask ourselves, what are we all doing to stop this? In this patriarchal society, where women and children are still considered as property, are still objectified, are still experiencing abuse physically and sexually, we all have to ask ourselves.

What are we all doing to stop this?

What are we doing within our own homes?

What are our attitudes?

What are our actions at home, at school, in our places of worship, in our community? When we have these heartfelt dialogues and exchanges, then there's a way forward to eradicate violence and end gender-based violence. As a peacebuilder working online to support women in areas where there's extreme violence and war, I have come to know firsthand the need for safety and security on online and digital spaces. We all have a collective responsibility to help create regulated spaces, digital spaces, that are free from fear and violence. We all have the basic universal right to freedom of expression, to freedom of speech. May we all take collective responsibility to ensure that this happens in our digital age.

Bridging Grassroots Voices and Policy Action

Raghad Mohammed Jabar, KAICIID Fellow - President Al-Weyam Organization for Human Rights

Women suffer all around the globe from not being part of decision-making, so we should not only provide security and safety in digital spaces, but we should also try to implement the UN resolution. Also, we need more activities from government, from governmental bodies, for instance, to have and pass and agree on a strategy going along and agreeing with the UN resolution and what the UN resolution calls for. So we need to provide security. We need to foster and strengthen dialogue and to provide safe spaces for women. But dialogue, we need dialogue to start with grassroots organizations and then be followed up upon till the highest levels of government.

High Level Panel: From lived realities to systemic responses in addressing digital violence against women



Understanding the challenge: *impact, escalation and the evolving nature of digital violence*

Women's participation and community response

Ambassador Dr Alya'a Samir Borhan, Deputy Assistant Minister for International Cultural Relations at the Cultural Department of the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Digital violence impacts women's ability to participate. When women are not able to participate in the public domain, it affects their contribution to society, to public life, and to work life as well. Sometimes they refrain from entering certain jobs because they are afraid of being persecuted or harassed. It affects their ability to be public figures.

This is a peace and security issue, because if women do not play a role in society, then half of society is muted and muzzled. As we heard in the videos, women are often the first responders in many situations, whether during natural disasters or when problems affect the community.

In many developing regions, faith-based organizations, such as mosques and churches, play an important role in society. They have the ability to reach large parts of the community and are an integral part of civil society. They should coordinate and help fill the gaps that governments are not able to address on their own.

Governments often turn to civil society, including faith-based organizations such as churches, mosques, and religious schools, to help reach communities and engage with women. There are also specific classes and spaces for women and girls.

In these spaces, women and girls listen to messages delivered by religious leaders. It is important that these leaders are not only male, but also female. When messages are delivered only by male religious leaders, women may not fully relate to or understand them. However, when a woman explains religious teachings, participation in society, and related issues, the message becomes

more effective, and women are better able to engage and participate as active members of society.

Digital Harm is a security issue

Melinda Holmes, Program Director at the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) for the Women's Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL)

This topic is a women, peace, and security issue, because women, peace, and security is not just about Track One peace negotiations. It is not just about national security. The perspective that women peacebuilders bring to the table is one of holistic security that looks at all dimensions.

From our experience, especially since COVID, but even before, it is clear to me now that there is no boundary between online and offline spaces anymore. What happens online is regularly leading to very real physical violence.

I also want to say that I am sorry that this happened to you, Dr. Borhan, and to my other colleagues who have experienced such targeting. We have many friends and partners who have experienced this. It is the plight of women leaders now, and it is actually an existential threat to women's leadership, both in politics and in civil society, because there are not enough protections.

We have also experienced the benefits. As I would counter Mr. Nasiri's position from the beginning, that the balance is all the way in favour of the threats, the connectivity that we experience has brought us closer. We met weekly from the start of COVID online for four years, and now we meet bi-weekly as we return to travel. It has brought us much closer as a network, and the access to each other, to learning, and to resources that can be accessed online is significant. But I would never want to understate the risks and threats. Our partners have experienced them, as my colleagues have shared.

What was relayed about what happens in Venezuela, in Costa Rica, in Iraq, this happens everywhere around the world.

We work very closely with colleagues in Afghanistan, and while their work and learning are enabled through digital and online platforms, two months ago there was a complete shutdown of the country for 24 to 48 hours. Everything stopped, including banking. This was not the kind of shutdown that happens during elections in some countries, which are bad enough. This was an absolute shutdown, and satellite was not even a solution, because homes are being raided if they have a satellite on top. There is literally no way around it, unless you live in a border town.

In this age, even the denial of digital connectivity, I would argue, is a form of structural violence, because it is terrifying to be completely cut off from the world. We are in an age now where it should not be a privilege to be connected digitally.

While I agree there is a certain privilege in having access to online spaces, the reality is that this is an everyday women's issue. Especially for younger generations, smartphone penetration is high, even in developing countries. These younger generations are on platforms like TikTok, where sextortion and other gender attacks occur.

These attacks also affect men, but for women the impact is greater. The use of gender, as well as faith and religious norms, intersect to target people. I would challenge anyone to find an online attack that does not have some element of a gender dimension.

Escalation and impact of digital violence

Jessica Roland, Senior Specialist for Inclusive Peace, Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers

I wanted to first reflect on some of the things I was hearing from the other speakers, including something Melinda just said. This conversation goes even beyond a deeper intersectional discussion of how women are targeted.

We know that globally, 38% of women have reported experiencing digital violence, but 58% of young women have experienced online harassment. You see that number increase, and it increases further when we are talking about women with disabilities or LGBTQ communities.

This conversation has many layers, and we are only touching the surface. There is so much work that needs to be done, and I really appreciate that we started from the point that not everyone has all the answers. We definitely do not have all the answers. This is a fast-moving area, and we are all trying to adapt and keep up.

Thinking about COVID, we first started seeing issues like Zoom bombing, where events were openly promoted and people would join through shared links and disrupt them. Then we moved to registration systems, but now, five years later, we are again seeing many gender-focused events being targeted, especially with the backlash we are seeing this year. People are becoming bolder, feeling enabled to carry out these attacks, registering with real or fake emails and then disrupting events. You can see this evolution, and all of us are trying to adapt.

Today, I will share a few solutions that we have been implementing with our members to further protect our events and initiatives.

Reflecting again on what was said, Mariateresa spoke about how the internet was blocked and how female journalists have been attacked, and how this is often coming from the top. There is a sense that permission is being given from those in power.

I think this is the elephant in the room. I think of our own U.S. president, President Trump, who is opening the doors and giving permission for many of these behaviours. He has referred to

female journalists using terms such as “piggy”, “stupid”, and “incapable”. This links directly to what Mariateresa said about attacks targeting women’s credibility and intelligence.

She also spoke about how this leads to self-censorship, but I would add that it also leads to institutional censorship. When I think about what has happened this year, we see that even member states and civil society actors are censoring themselves. We are questioning whether we should say “gender”, “women”, or “women and young women”, adjusting our language out of fear of backlash or funding cuts. This shows that the backlash is also happening within our own community.

From gaps to action: responses, responsibilities, and pathways forward

Policy gaps and lived realities

Ambassador Dr Alya'a Samir Borhan

In my country, a law was issued in 2018 to address digital violence, but it did not tackle gender-based violence. So there is a policy gap. We need to admit that this gap exists, and that it does not address the concerns of people on the ground.

I think the government needs to conduct surveys or polls to understand what people need, and specifically what women need, and how they are facing the challenges of everyday life. For example, in Egypt, when women move from A to B, they rely on public transportation, where they face harassment. This makes it very difficult for them to reach their workplace. They encounter many problems, in addition to existing challenges such as overcrowding and the lack of space, whether standing or sitting. All of these issues must be taken into account.

The government needs to listen to the concerns of people on the ground, take them into consideration, and formulate laws that are passed through parliament so that they properly reflect what is happening in reality.

An educated woman is an active woman who is able to protect her rights in the public sphere. In the Middle East, I conducted research and discovered that women do not usually seek public positions. They refrain from running for office, sitting in parliament, or participating in elections.

We need to encourage women to be educated and to speak their voices, to express their concerns and identify their priorities. If women remain silent, policies cannot change. Policymakers will listen to women who are educated, who know their rights, and who are not afraid, but courageous.

We must also provide women with protection, so they feel safe to express their concerns and opinions. Because if women are muzzled, they are afraid. Muzzled women are afraid.

Supporting women leaders and strengthening response

Melinda Holmes

We have seen how this affects activists. As I mentioned, in Afghanistan and Cameroon, we have partners who have experienced social media attacks that have forced them to relocate temporarily. This is one way institutions can provide support, by offering emergency funding and avenues when situations become that critical. In Syria, we have partners who have been attacked simply for speaking about unity on social media.

Zoom bombing, as you know, has become a real risk in spaces like this for those of us organising, and we have seen it happen. The targeting of women leaders, as in Yemen, is enabled by digital footprints, and by how difficult it is for leaders to remain anonymous or to remove their personal information from the internet, including details about where they are and when.

I will try to respond to some of the questions and requests for concrete recommendations from the audience. I think we need more support for women leaders, because managing digital security takes a great deal of time and energy. We know, if you work in digital security or have received a briefing, much of it comes down to individual practice. Not that I would ever blame the user, but a lot depends on how we manage security on our own devices.

This creates a difficult balance between being open and able to connect easily, and maintaining the protocols required for real digital security. For example, our network moved from WhatsApp to Signal. While Signal has many benefits, it is not as widely used and does not function in the same way for group interaction. As a result, engagement and connectivity for some members have been more limited. However, we made this decision for security reasons, and those reasons carry different weight depending on the context, even though the protocols themselves are quite similar.

In terms of further recommendations, we need to address and undermine algorithms. In places like Indonesia, women's rights activists and progressive religious institutions are competing in the online public sphere with conservative and extremist narratives. It has taken time to reach this point, and this competition requires support. Both companies and institutions, like KAICIID, including multilateral organizations and governments, can help create structures to counter harmful online speech, while also enabling law enforcement and equipping them with the tools to act quickly.

At present, even in the best-case scenario, responses are not fast enough, and in some cases there is no response at all to interrupt the targeting of women leaders when it occurs.

Practical responses and protection mechanisms

Jessica Roland

To give a couple of ways that the Peacemakers Network is addressing digital violence, from our members and through a Women, Peace and Security lens, we focus on ensuring that women and young women are able to participate, how we offer protection, how we include digital violence as an early warning indicator, and how we provide holistic, survivor-centred services. This is to make sure that anyone who is targeted has the option to follow up with support services.

Reflecting on this, these are some of the standards that we are following. We have our own institutional policies that address zero tolerance for online violence, and we have our own online safety protocols.

This also connects to what Raghad said earlier: in some contexts there may be decrees, but no mechanisms to implement them. So we ensure that we have a reprisal mechanism and policy in place, including a clear reporting process. This is linked to being very clear about the consequences if someone engages in bullying, stalking, or inappropriate behaviour.

Our institutional response includes committing to solidarity statements for any member who is attacked, and having referral systems in place to provide psychosocial support. We also conduct gender-responsive digital risk assessments to ensure that we offer as much protection as possible.

One important aspect is giving people different options to engage. For example, offering anonymity for those who need it. Having these different options in place is very helpful.

The Peacemakers Network is also a network of networks, and many members run programmes and campaigns, such as the World Council of Churches 16 Days campaign and the Thursdays in Black campaign. We also run our own campaign each year. This year, linking back to the discussion on faith, we have partnered with the Multifaith Advisory Council on a campaign that looks at how digital violence intersects with religion and takes different forms.

This includes harassment and abuse that uses religious language to shame, threaten, or discredit women; doxing and public humiliation justified through religious reasoning; and spiritual gaslighting, where women and girls are told that their advocacy goes against God's will, or that they should be excluded from online faith spaces.

This year's campaign is called *Faith in Action: Reclaiming Sacred Text for Equality*.

We know that anti-gender movements are highly coordinated and communicate effectively with each other, and we wanted to push back against that. This campaign seeks to reclaim texts that are often used harmfully against women and girls, and instead offer positive, faith-based responses.

So rather than avoiding or not addressing these issues, we are actively responding. This is why it is so important to have networks of networks, to stand in solidarity with one another, and to reclaim these spaces.

Final Reflections: *confronting structural inequality and shaping inclusive responses*

Ambassador Dr Alya'a Samir Borhan

I just want to stress an important point: the issue of patriarchy. Patriarchal culture plays a very negative role in our part of the world, especially in the developing world.

There are many double standards, and women are affected by male misogyny and double standards. Another issue raised by previous speakers, particularly around religious gaslighting, really resonated with me. I feel that there is a problem of false religious zealotry, where it is promoted that women are subservient to men and inferior to men. This makes women question whether they have a role to play in society, whether they have a real voice in the community. It leads women to isolate themselves and to resort to self-censorship, as happened to me when I stopped going online and posting on Facebook because I was harassed and my photos were manipulated.

We need to fight this patriarchal misogyny. This is very important. I cannot stress it enough, because if we do not address it, then everything we are doing is in vain. This is the crucial issue.

Another important point is that victims need to be trained, and people more broadly need to be trained. We spoke earlier about the role of teachers. Teachers need to be trained, they need to know the messages they should convey in schools, especially when speaking to young girls. They need to communicate the right messages, because they hold a very influential position over young minds.

Another issue is how society responds, and how women can feel that their voices are heard. This happens when they feel they are being listened to, and when their voices are amplified through the media, through online groups, and through broader platforms.

I feel that governments need to listen to the grassroots. They need to engage with community leaders, church leaders, mosque leaders, and people working on the ground, to portray their points of view. Governments cannot operate in isolation from the people.

It is easy to formulate policies and issue laws, but the real question is how they are applied, how effective they are, how they are implemented, and whether they are respected. For example, in Egypt, there are many laws, including those related to traffic violations. But do people actually follow them? Do they implement them in practice?

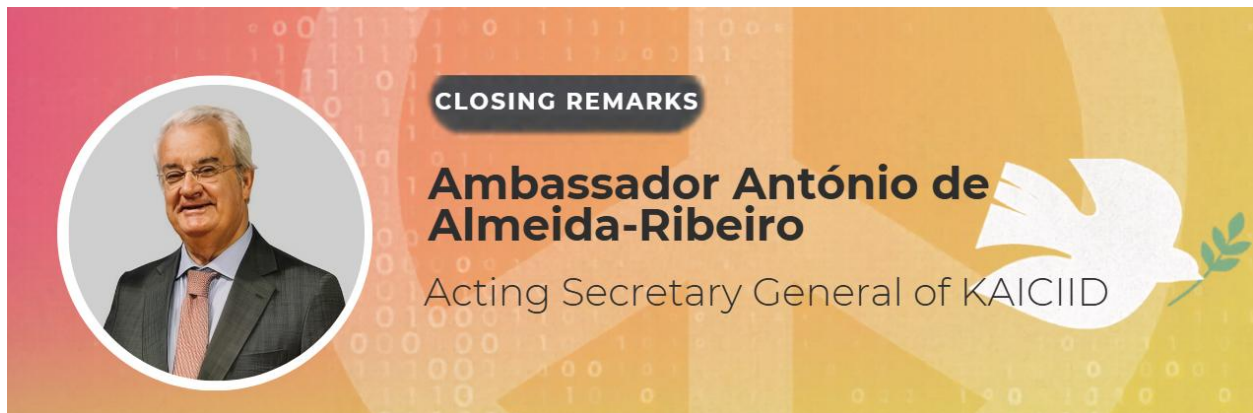
There is a significant gap between policy and implementation, and we need to address this gap and reduce it.

Jessica Roland

While there are new initiatives taking place to combat issues such as online violence, recruitment of terrorists, and hate speech, they remain very gender-blind. For example, there is an initiative called Tech Against Terrorism, which promotes networks of private companies and civil society organizations, but it still remains very gender-blind.

So, going back to the first point, if we continue to allow only men to design and implement these initiatives, we will not address the problem effectively. We need to start flooding and shaping these spaces and initiatives that are being developed now.

Closing Remarks



Excellencies, distinguished speakers, dear colleagues and friends,

Thank you for the powerful reflections shared today. This discussion reconfirmed that digital violence against women is a peace and security issue.

The UN General Assembly reaffirmed this in its 2024 Resolution on Violence against Women in Digital Environments, which recognizes online abuse, harassment, deepfakes, and misinformation as forms of gender-based violence that require coordinated institutional responses.

Digital harm is not separate from physical harm; it is now one of the primary tools used to discredit, intimidate, and exclude women from leadership and decision-making.

Yet, today's discussion has also reminded us that hope and resilience are still compasses for many interlocutors in their efforts to bring positive change. Faith actors and interreligious dialogue offer essential pathways to transform online spaces. In a world where technology can amplify hate, the values embedded in our religious and ethical traditions, empathy, dignity, and shared responsibility, can create environments of accountability, safety, and inclusion.

Dear speakers,

Your testimonies highlighted a truth that the Human Rights Council recognized in Resolution 38/5, precisely that women's lived experiences are indispensable evidence. The realities and stories shared here today need to shape our policies, our prevention strategies, and our protection frameworks.

What also emerged clearly is the need for stronger, cross-sector partnerships. This echoes UN Women's 2025 UNiTE Campaign to End Digital Violence Against All Women and Girls, which calls for collaborative action between governments, civil society, tech platforms, faith institutions, and international organizations. Only by working together can we build digitally safe environments where women can participate without fear, both online and offline.

Let me reaffirm that KAICIID is fully committed to advancing the pillars of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. We do this through our Women's Voices Series, our global and regional dialogue initiatives, and our partnerships with organizations such as ICAN. We will continue amplifying women's leadership through the Fellows Programme and SheforDalogue in the Arab region confronting the digital and structural barriers that hinder their meaningful participation. I invite you to follow our 16 Days of Activism Campaign that includes more testimonies and stories from women peacebuilders from countries such as Afghanistan, Cyprus, Indonesia, Nigeria, Palestine, South Africa, Ukraine.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we close, I want to acknowledge the courage of all speakers and particularly of those brave role models who shared their experiences today. Your voices unyielding in the face of both physical threats and digital aggression remind us why the WPS agenda remains as vital today as it was in 2000 when Security Council Resolution 1325 was adopted.

I also want to celebrate the inspiring women of faith in KAICIID's global networks, our Fellows that marked their 10th anniversary, dialogue leaders, and partners, whose courage, innovation, and commitment demonstrate how faith-based leadership can counter digital violence and foster inclusive, peaceful communities.

I invite each of you to take forward the lessons, the testimonies, and the commitments expressed. Moving forward, let us ensure that every online environment, every dialogue platform, and every peacebuilding space reflect that women's participation, safety, and leadership are the foundation of lasting peace.

Thank you for your commitment, your solidarity, and for ensuring that these voices continue to shape the future of peace and security.

And thank you all for your participation. Thank you very much.

The International Dialogue Centre – KAICIID extends its heartfelt thanks to all the speakers and attendees who participated in this Women's Voices Webinar.

ANNEX 1: Resources shared

Protection, Digital Safety and Support Services

Protection of Peacebuilders

<https://icanpeacework.org/protection-of-peacebuilders/>

Shared by Melinda Holmes

Provides tools and strategies to protect peacebuilders from risks, including digital threats.

Relevant sections: Protection mechanisms; Women's leadership

Digital Shelter

<https://digitalshelter.org/>

Shared by Melinda Holmes

Offers digital security support and safe infrastructure for at-risk civil society actors.

Relevant sections: Digital safety; Protection mechanisms

SMEX

<https://smex.org/>

Shared by Melinda Holmes

Advocates for digital rights and safety in the Arab region and beyond.

Relevant sections: Policy frameworks; Digital rights

IWMF – Online Violence Response Hub

<https://www.iwmf.org/programs/online-harassment/>

Shared by Jessica Roland

Provides training, support, and emergency assistance for women facing online harassment.

Relevant sections: Support services; Protection mechanisms

Access Now – Digital Security Helpline

<https://www.accessnow.org/>

Shared by Jessica Roland

24/7 digital security support for activists, journalists, and civil society.

Relevant sections: Digital safety; Immediate support

NO MORE Global Directory

<https://nomoredirectory.org/>

Shared by Jessica Roland

Global directory of services addressing domestic and sexual violence.

Relevant sections: Support services; Survivor-centred responses

Policy, Research and Advocacy

UPEACE – Freedom of Expression in Costa Rica

<https://upeace.org/universidad-para-la-paz-publica-su-informe-libertad-de-expresion-en-costarica-2024/>

Shared by Mariateresa Garrido

Research on freedom of expression and violence, including gendered dimensions.

Relevant sections: Policy gaps; Research evidence

NDI – Interventions to End Online Violence Against Women in Politics

<https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Interventions%20to%20End%20OVAV-P.pdf>

Shared by Jessica Roland

Guidance on addressing online violence targeting women in political life.

Relevant sections: Policy solutions; Women's participation

OHCHR – Special Rapporteur Report

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc3847-report-special-rapporteur-violence-against-women-its-causes-and>

Shared by Jessica Roland

International human rights framework addressing online violence against women.

Relevant sections: Policy frameworks; International standards

MFAC Advocacy Brief

<https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/final-2-%E2%80%93-Side-by-Side-Connecting-Sacred-Dialogue-and-Responses-in-Promoting-Gender-Equality-and-Human-Rights.pdf>

Shared by Jessica Roland

Explores faith-based narratives supporting gender equality and human rights.

Relevant sections: Faith engagement; Advocacy

Awareness, Campaigns and Practical Guidance

UN Women – Online Safety 101

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/explainer/online-safety-101-what-every-woman-and-girl-should-know>

Shared by Jessica Roland

Practical guidance for women and girls on staying safe online.

Relevant sections: Awareness; Capacity building

16 Days Campaign (MFAC Trello)

<https://trello.com/b/p55XWcK8/16-days-of-activism-campaign-2025>

Shared by Jessica Roland

Coordination platform for campaign activities addressing violence against women.

Relevant sections: Campaigns; Advocacy

UN Women 16 Days Campaign Board

<https://trello.com/b/anjwVwvO/16-days-of-activism-2025>

Shared by Jessica Roland

Organises global campaign actions and messaging for the 16 Days initiative.

Relevant sections: Campaigns; Awareness raising