

PRESS RELEASE November 11, 2014

Contact: madeline.koch@icanpeacework.org



The World at a Crossroads: Women Have the Solutions

We, sixty women representing thirteen countries spanning the Middle East, North Africa and Asia, together with our colleagues from Europe and North America, gathered together in Turkey at the Third Annual Forum on Women's Rights, Peace and Security, convened by the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN), have one word to share with the world: Enough.

Enough of the violence; enough of the importation of extremist ideologies that have no roots in our cultures, religions or history; and enough of the weapons and bombs that are forcing us to bury our people, especially our children, at an age when they should be going to school and building their futures. Across our regions, within the borders of our nations, our people are suffering at the frontlines of the most horrendous wars and forms of violence in recent history.

The vast majority of our peace loving people are being held hostage by a small minority of extremists, occupation forces and authoritarian powers. We women, as activists for peace, rights and pluralism, are in the crosshairs of these forces. On one side, we find ourselves on the kill lists of ISIS/Daesh and other extremist militias for simply daring to speak out for freedom. On the other, we are being harassed, threatened and arrested by state and occupation forces for daring to demand simple services ranging from clean water to decent governance, basic rights, equality and leadership.

The policies of international actors are contributing to the suffering of our people including through sanctions, arms sales, human trafficking and the drug trade. Our girls are being coerced into militias or kidnapped, raped and sold. Meanwhile, extremist and regressive forces are directly benefitting from these policies.

We reach across the world for support and solidarity from the international community, but it is not forthcoming, except from some sources. You claim to support women and say you uphold international norms and policies such as United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security that clearly calls for women's effective participation in decision making related to the prevention and resolution of conflict. Yet, you do not heed our advice or our warnings. You spend millions on bombs and drones, knowing that they, alone, provide no solution. But when we seek your support for schools, economic development and humanitarian assistance, you claim that you cannot afford it.

The challenges we face are profound. They are not of our creation. Yet we are forced to deal with the consequences. You may think that nothing positive is possible under the circumstances. But you are wrong. We are powerful and continue to work because we refuse to give up our values and our hope for a better future. We are mobilizing young people to challenge ideologies that say we should hate each other. We reject any understanding of religion that condones or promotes violence and the oppression of women. We are spreading the message of peace and pluralism that has, for centuries, allowed this region to live together peacefully despite differences.

We work with women to build their knowledge of universal rights and inclusive interpretations of religion, to strengthen their voices, to respect their dignity and to give them jobs. We work with men to counter the culture of violence that has permeated our region. Against the odds, we struggle to hold our governments accountable to their own commitments.

Today we stand at a crossroads. The international community can continue its failed policies and strategies that foment more violent extremism and radicalization. Or they can follow our lead. One thing is guaranteed: our version of the region, our vision for the future, is about peace, freedom, dignity, rights, pluralism, and prosperity for all. Listen to us. Join us.

This statement was issued on November 11, 2014 at 'Challenging Extremism and Militarism', ICAN's 3rd Annual MENA/Asia Forum on Women's Rights, Peace and Security held in Şile, Turkey.