

# SPOTLIGHT ON R2P



## Asia Pacific Partnership for Atrocity Prevention (APPAP) Working Group for Gender and Atrocity Prevention

### Introduction

On 01 December, 2022, the members of the Asia Pacific Partnership for Atrocity Prevention – Working Group on Gender and Atrocity Prevention (APPAP-WGGAP) held its 3rd General Assembly Meeting – the Group’s first face-to-face meeting of since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The General Assembly aimed to not only provide an update on the past and present activities of the WGGAP, but to plan for future activities.

APPAP is a network of over 30 organisations, ranging from local civil society organizations (CSOs) to larger non-government organizations (NGOs) and academic institutions. Since its launch in November 2016, it has and contin-

ues to contribute to the prevention of atrocities and their incitement, and the protection of vulnerable communities in the Asia-Pacific region. APPAP implements this agenda through its various working groups—including but not limited to the APPAP-WGGAP. The WGGAP is convened by Ateneo de Manila University and the Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (APR2P) and aims to highlight the gendered aspects of atrocity crime and entrench gender-aware approaches in atrocity prevention work. The Group comprises of experts who have been working in the field of Women, Peace and Security and women’s rights protection in the context of humanitarian emergencies and conflict in the Asia Pacific.

### Report on GBAC: The Results of the RTDs in Fiji, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Thailand

After a review of SST-SGBAC 2020 in preparation for SST-SGBAC 2022, Nikki Marczak of the APR2P Center gave an overview of the 2021 GBAC Prevention Report and the country specific roundtable discussions that followed. The Report mapped the capacity of capacity of thirteen (13) countries in the Asia Pacific to prevent GBAC. Results of the study found that the capacity of these countries is low due to: (1) high rates of gender-based violence, (2) gender discrimination, (3) shrinking civic space, (4) limited accountability for grave human rights violations (including SGBV by security sector personnel), and (5)

the continued exclusion of women in the development of prevention strategies.

The Report highlighted five (5) common atrocity crime risk factors in the region: (1) the presence of conflict and instability, (2) entrenched gender discrimination and inequality, combined with weak protections for women's rights and against SGBV, (3) the presence of identity based discrimination, extremist, nationalist or ethnic based supremacist ideologies, (4) a track record of impunity for grave human rights violations (e.g. SGBV), and (5) the marginalization or exclusion of women from atrocity prevention efforts. To address the need prevent further cases of SGBV, the Report gave a list of ten (10) recommendations, including the meaningful participation of women in prevention strategies, the use of gender-responsive early warning indicators, and the institution of comprehensive survivor-centered services to survivors of gender-based crime, among others.

Five (5) roundtables were conducted in the following countries: Myanmar, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Fiji, where experts from the academe and civil society and (in Indonesia and Thailand) government representatives, were brought together to discuss the findings of the Report and ways to best advance its recommendations at the country level. These roundtables not only validated the Report's recommendations, but also highlighted the need to conduct local analysis and to identify context-specific risk factors of GBAC and strategies.

Six (6) key takeaways can be found from the roundtables: (1) that civil spaces are shrinking and the increased targeting of women's rights organizations and women peacebuilders, (2) that it is important to involve women, including those from ethnic, religious and cultural minorities in the design, implementation and monitoring or prevention efforts, (3) that there is an urgent need to strengthen the gender responsive capacity of security sector and accountability, (4) that there is a need for advocacy and monitoring on the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda and the National Action Plans at the national and local levels, (5) that there is a need to address the existing gaps in services to

survivors of gender-based violence, and (6) that there is a need to place the promotion of gender equality at the center of all preventative efforts, including efforts related to working with local religious and community leaders and engaging with men and boys.

The Group then discussed possible next steps to promote the Reports overall findings and recommendations. Members suggested that more roundtables in different countries or even a regional summit could be held, although the latter would be a time consuming and costly exercise. To address the issue of shrinking civic space and attacks against women human rights defenders, members also suggested the adaptation of the SST-SGBV into other countries, taking into account the country's unique context. Another member also suggested that GBAC training could be placed within the regular police training in Fiji.

#### **Updates on Wellspring Early Warning, Early Response (EWER) Work**

Dr. Meghna Guhathakurta of Research Initiatives Bangladesh (RIB) gave updates on the implementation of the EWER system to counter gendered violence against Rohingya in host communities in the Cox' Bazar region. System implementation involved field surveys, research, and the development of an app that would gather field level data, the goal of which was to get a monitoring system that would enable the continuous delivery of services by NGOs.

RIB also found that the UN actors and international NGOs were focused on mitigating risk factors and prevention, rather than protection or identifying different kinds of violence that take place and the deep-rooted causes of SGBV. The EWER team (consisting of Dr. Guhathakurta, Kirril Shilelds and Louise Allen of APR2P) then translated this research into a survey questionnaire.

In 2020-2021, RIB conducted field surveys and roundtable discussions in both the local host Bengali communities and the Rohingya refugee camps. Of the 200-person sample size, split between the local communities and refugee camps, Seventy-five percent (75%) were women and twenty-five percent were men (25%). It was found, among others, that domestic violence was on the rise in both communities

and that there was increased policing of women and girls' behavior and anti-female messaging, especially in the refugee community. This includes statements that women should not be outside their homes or that girls should not be educated. Policing actors are often men from the women's own households and communities and it was also found that although some families were more liberal than others (e.g. they wanted their girls to be educated), they were prevented by the community. That said, the survey also found that educational opportunities for girls and girls education increased, however this could also be due to the gradual lifting of COVID-19 restrictions. Through the roundtable discussions with local NGOs, it was found that service sector NGOs were only allowed to work in the camps during the day. During the night, internal forces go door-to-door to promote anti-female messaging, among others.

However, there were a few system. First, the 200-person sample size (which was fixed by the Australian app development company) was far too small. Second, quantitative data needs to be backed up with qualitative data. For example, while quantitatively, more Rohingya responded that there was "no increase" in gender-based violence over the last six (6) months than respondents from the host community, it is likely that this number is due to the taboo nature of the topic, especially among the conservative Rohingya. Third, some open-ended questions did not achieve intended results. For example, one question of "who are the actors in trafficking" yielded little meaningful findings as most of the women respondents (who stayed home for most of their days) did not know. Finally, there were multiple issues with the original software developer, who kept increasing costs. This led to a change developers, but the issue of where to house the app is still under discussion.

That said, the study was still useful in comparing the issues between the camp and host communities. As for the application, consultations will be undergone to find indicators.

#### **Workshop on Engendering the UN Framework for Atrocity Prevention**

To address the issue of the lack of gender lens in the UN Framework for Atrocity Prevention, a workshop was

led by Nikki Marczak on the ways this existing Framework could be gendered and more engaged in relation to women.

Although gender could be read into the framework, it is neither explicit nor does it acknowledge that sexual and gender-based violence could constitute a mass atrocity crime (MAC). It also does not acknowledge the correlation between gender and the likelihood of atrocity crimes or the underlying gender risk factors such as entrenched gender inequality or weak anti-domestic violence laws. However, a 2019 Report on Centralizing Gender in Mass Atrocity Prevention by Sarah Teitt detailed how integrating gender into atrocity prevention could help identify some risk factors. According to this report, there are three (3) stages of atrocity prevention: (1) upstream or structural prevention (which are measures that identify risks and address underlying root causes of atrocities such as legislation), (2) early direct prevention (which refer to measures that monitor and assess emerging crises or 'triggering events' and signs of preparation to commit atrocities as well as measures that tackle emerging patterns of abuse such as developing EWER systems), and (3) late-stage prevention or protection (which refer to measures that mobilize emergency action to stop or deter perpetrators from continuing or escalating attacks such as ICC referrals or survivor support).

The previously discussed 2021 GBAC Prevention Report specifically recommends that development of gender-responsive early warning indicators in consultation with women's organizations. These early warning indicators should monitor the following: (1) the changing attitudes to gender equality, (2) gender-based violence in all of its forms, and (3) increased restrictions on women's freedoms. Another 2021 Report on Gender Responsive Early Warning Systems found that early warning systems tend to lack gender or characterize it inconsistently and in narrow definitions with no recognition of international legal definitions of SGBACs. The report recommended that gender-responsive indicators should be context specific and informed by local women from diverse backgrounds (although some indicators may be applicable across contexts). The report also identified multiple suggested gen-

der-responsive early warning indicators. These indicators include, among others: the increase in sexist, homophobic, or misogynistic hate speech and propaganda, sudden changes in women's mobility and participation in common place, or the targeting of women by state and non-state actors (especially those in public roles).

The Group discussed their thoughts on these indicators. Dr. Guhathakurta highlighted the issue that gender services (which include legal and psychosocial support) are not considered emergency services. Debbie Stothard raised that the absence of women from traditional justice mechanisms is problematic. In situations of conflict where authority is disputed, local communities rely on traditional justice mechanisms, which are typically composed of elderly men. There is also the issue of the exclusion of persons with disabilities (both visible and invisible). Dr. Ma. Lourdes Veneracion-Rallonza emphasized that a broadening of the idea of gender and needed. While women are more vulnerable to SGBV based on studies and statistics, this does not erase the fact that other genders may also be equally vulnerable. Integrating intersectionality into the atrocity prevention framework is also necessary.

The members also discussed the role of the WGGAP in the process of developing early warning indicators and reviewing atrocity prevention efforts. Stothard suggested consultation and to expose atrocity prevention to the LGBTQIA+ and the broader SOGIE compass. Diversifying the WGGAP by including those from the LGBTQIA+ should be considered, as the present composition does not have a strong context in that field. Further diversifying the WGGAP by having members from the Pacific region, from indigenous cultural communities, and persons with disabilities should also be considered. Fatima Allian also raised the issue of development aggression and climate change as intersectional issues. Although all these lenses go beyond gender, they should not be left behind. It was suggested that a new APPAP working group could be created and to look strategically into how the groups intersect.

### Ways Forward and Closing

As the COVID-19 pandemic wanes, 2023 and the upcoming years will see

an increase in the Group's activity.

With Indonesia chairing the ASEAN in 2023, the Group also discussed the opportunities that could arise. It was suggested that the Group "feed into" the process of the ASEAN People's Forum, which is usually held in parallel with other meetings (either the Ministerial meeting in or the ASEAN Summit). The Group also made particular note of the 2022 Regional Plan of Action on WPS which not only highlights women peacebuilders, but emphasizes the use of gender-responsive early warning mechanisms, among others. However, reliance on the document should be cautioned as the possibility that it was uploaded without adoption exists.

With these in mind, the Group came up with the following list of plans for 2023:

1. To engage with the 5-point consensus implementation plan using the WPS lens and the 2022 Regional Plan of Action on WPS.
2. To engage with AICHR-Indonesia on gender and atrocity prevention,
3. To discuss the specifics of a Human Rights Defenders' Training on Preventing Sexual and Gender-based Atrocity Crimes and explore venues such as Thailand or the Pacific Islands,
4. To conduct the 2022 Security Sector Training on Preventing Sexual and Gender-based Atrocity Crimes and to discuss the possibility of the expansion of its curriculum and its adaptation to other countries such as Indonesia or Fiji,
5. To map existing training programs in the Asia Pacific region, especially programs of the UN Peacekeeping Force, and
6. To discuss the possibility of a workshop on frameworks that would demystify the link between the existing frameworks on WPS and atrocity prevention.

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