

## Update on Women, Peace and Security in Libya 25 June 2024

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The Security Council's Informal Expert Group (IEG) on Women, Peace and Security discussed the situation in Libya in April 2018 ([S/2018/881](#)), November 2018 ([S/2018/1139](#)), August 2019, and April 2021 ([S/2021/380](#)). This update summarizes relevant developments since then, but with a focus on the last year.

### Developments in the Security Council

Since the last IEG meeting, the Security Council has adopted 17 resolutions on Libya. The most recent resolution [2702 \(2023\)](#), adopted on 30 October 2023, extended the mandate of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) until 31 October 2024. The resolution included strong provisions on women, peace and security. For example, the resolution urged Libyan institutions and authorities to ensure the full, equal, effective, meaningful, and safe participation of women at all levels, including in leadership positions, and in all stages of activities and decision-making relating to inclusive political processes, democratic transition, reconciliation efforts, conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The resolution also recognized the need to protect women, women's rights organisations, and women peacebuilders from intimidation, threats reprisals and attacks, strongly encouraging all parties to create a safe and enabling environment for members of civil society. Further, the resolution urged all parties to implement the women, peace and security agenda and to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence and called on the Libyan authorities to end impunity for sexual and gender-based violence crimes, and recognized the importance of protecting children, including from sexual violence. Relevant excerpts are included in the annex below. The most recent resolutions on sanctions and authorizing Member States to inspect vessels on the high seas off Libya's coast had no references to women or gender-related issues.

In October 2021, the **Libya Sanctions Committee** added one individual, Osama Al Kuni Ibrahim, to its listing, and none since. According to the narrative summary, he is the de facto manager of the Al Nasr Detention Center in Zaqiyah and "has acted on behalf of or at the direction of two listed individuals intrinsically linked to the human trafficking activities of the Zawiyah network". In its 2023 final report, the Panel of Experts supporting the sanctions committee on Libya reported on 64 cases of human rights violations against migrants who were trafficked and deprived of liberty in illegal places of detention along routes and constantly subjected to rape, sexual slavery, and forced prostitution as part of organized criminal operations. They also reported rape and other forms of sexual violence of migrants in detention facilities and detention camps associated with the Zaqiyah Network, including in Bani Walid, Tazirbu and Shuwayrif desert and in Al-Maya. In Al-Maya Detention Camp, three eyewitnesses confirmed that rape and other forms of sexual violence against women detainees were systematic, and one eyewitness testified that he regularly heard cries of women being raped and tortured in the Detention Camp as a "normal practice", and that women were often "offered to guards and other men who worked there".

The Security Council has also adopted **multiple presidential statements and press statements** since the last IEG. The most recent press statement, issued in April 2024, stressed the importance of ensuring the full, equal, effective, meaningful and safe participation of women, and inclusion of youth and civil society representatives, in all activities and decision-making relating to democratic transition and reconciliation

efforts. They further emphasized the importance of providing a safe environment for civil society organizations to work freely and to protect them from threats and reprisals.

**Seven Libyan women from civil society briefed the Security Council** in country specific meetings since the last meeting of the IEG. In 2023, Ms. Noura Al Jerbi, women's rights activist, journalist and editor in chief of one of Libya's independent factchecking organizations, and Ms. Abeir Imneina, a professor at the University of Benghazi and Head of WASHM Center for Women's Studies, focused their briefings on the shrinking civic space for women's organizations, civil society's exclusion from all the committees deciding the future of Libya, the systematic hate speech and online violence against Libyan women in civil society, politics and media, and the government restrictions on women's movement. Very similar themes and issues were raised in 2022 and 2021 by Ms. Bushra Alhodiri, Ms. Jazia Jibril Mohammed Shuaiteh, Ms. Elham Saudi, Ms. Asma Khalifa, and Ms. Lamees Bensaad.

### **Women's participation in politics and peacebuilding**

The deadlock in Libya's political process continues. The parliamentary and presidential elections, which were scheduled for December 2021, are yet to take place. In January 2024, the **High National Elections Commission** declared its intention to hold elections in 97 municipalities across Libya in 2024. In February 2024, 76 members of the House of Representatives and 51 members of the High State Council called for the launch of a political process and formation of a new national government to organize and supervise the elections. In the elections that were supposed to take place in December 2021, 1 million of the 2.8 million registered voters were women, and women represented a mere 2 percent (2 women of the 98 individuals) of the registered candidates for the presidential elections and 14 percent (760 women of the 5366 individuals) of the registered candidates for the parliamentary elections.

In October 2023, the House of Representatives **adopted revised constitutional and electoral laws**, which the High State Council continues to reject. While the adopted electoral laws addressed several technical shortcomings, most of the politically contentious issues remained unresolved, including women's participation. The parliamentary law maintained an allocation of **only six seats for women in the Senate, representing 6.6 percent of total 90 seats**, far below the 20 percent envisaged for the parliamentary elections in article 30 of amendment No. 13 to the Constitutional Declaration and the 30 percent requested in the roadmap produced by the UN-facilitated Libyan Political Dialogue Forum. The **"6+6" committee**, which was established in February 2023 to finalize the constitutional and legislative framework for holding elections, includes no women members. UNSMIL continues to provide gender expertise to the members of the committee and has continuously called on Libyan leaders to resolve outstanding issues and proceed on holding national elections.

Libyan women and youth have repeatedly expressed their wish for a **more inclusive political and reconciliation process** and emphasized the need to address obstacles to women's political participation, such as cultural norms and religious denominations, the activities of armed groups, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, legislative gaps in the protection of women candidates, and the role of the media in propagating hate speech against women. They have highlighted the need to advocate for the adoption of gender-sensitive legislation, the inclusion of women in legislative drafting committees and establishment of a women's support unit in all electoral management processes. Libyan women and youth have also requested advocacy from UNSMIL for their greater inclusion in the national reconciliation process, highlighting poor representation in preparatory meetings launched in January 2023 for the national reconciliation conference despite commitments to ensuring gender balance.

Libyan women who exercise their rights face **risks of reprisal, abduction, and arbitrary arrest and detention**, aimed at penalizing women for expressing their opinions and silencing their voices. According to UN Women, 60 percent of women in politics reported having experienced some form of violence during

their candidacy or term in the office. As of March 2024, at least 60 individuals were known to have been detained for their actual or perceived political affiliation, and a number of active women have been subjected to enforced disappearance and arbitrary detention. The High National Elections Commission developed an “**eMonitor plus**” platform, with the support of the United Nations, to track online violence against women, including hate speech, in particular during electoral periods.

Women’s representation in the Government of National Unity, formed in March 2021, is low. Only **16 percent of parliamentary seats** (30 of 188 seats) are currently held by women and **4 of 33 ministers** (12 percent) are women. The Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Ms. Najla El Mangoush – who was the fifth woman minister – was suspended from her position in August 2023.

The 2020 permanent ceasefire agreement signed by members of the 5+5 Joint Military Commission continues to hold. **No women are included in the 5+5 Commission.** The United Nations continues its support to the work of the 5+5 Commission and implementation of the ceasefire agreement.

In September 2022, the administrative appeal court in Tripoli upheld the decision to annul a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Minister of State for Women’s Affairs and UN Women on developing a **national action plan on women, peace and security**, signed in October 2021. The MoU sparked a backlash from religious leaders and community members that the agreement and the Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security contravene the religious principles, norms, and habits of the community.

### **Human rights issues, including sexual and gender-based violence, pushback against term “gender” and arbitrary detention**

In Libya, sporadic clashes between armed groups, illicit arms proliferation, persistent divisions among political actors and governance deficits create an environment in which conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) is perpetrated with impunity. Sexual violence is used by Libyan State and non-state actors as a tactic to silence journalists, detainees, migrants, and women. UNSMIL observed a spike in killings of women in 2023 which continued into 2024 along with other instances of gender-based violence. Several cases of gender-based hate-speech and online threats, including of sexual violence, were recorded in 2023, with one woman politician targeted with death threats and sexualized defamation. Human rights defenders expressed concern for their safety, noting continued threats of sexual violence, including online. In some cases, sexual assaults were filmed and posted online, in one instance reportedly following social media posts by the victim denouncing an armed group. LGBTQI persons were targeted with sexual violence including in detention. Fear of reprisals, stigma, and social norms related to honor and shame contribute to severe underreporting of CRSV. In 2023, UNSMIL verified five cases of CRSV perpetrated against three women and two boys. Victims who decided to lodge formal complaints have been targeted with harassment and reprisals. For instance, in one case, a victim was targeted by prosecutors and members of the police, after which the victim fled the country.

Traffickers, smugglers, armed men and state actors also continue to perpetrate CRSV against migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers and displaced persons. In 2023, UNSMIL continued to receive reports that migrants were subjected to sexual violence and extortion in trafficking camps and detention facilities. Members of the Directorate for Combating Illegal Migration, as well as elements of non-State armed groups, have been accused of sexual violence against migrants and refugees. In 2021 and 2022, the United Nations verified a total of 12 cases of sexual violence against girls by armed groups affiliated to the Ministry of Interior, Abu Issa Brigade, Masked Men and Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade in control of detention facilities of DCIM.

Humanitarian access to detention centers remains severely restricted, making it difficult to verify violations or provide support, including to those who experience sexual violence. In the Mitiga prison, under the control of the Deterrence Apparatus for Combating Organized Crime and Terrorism, reports indicate that forced prostitution of detainees is managed by the head of the detention facility. In the detention center in Misrata, displaced women and girls experience sexual abuse, including forced prostitution, in exchange for food. At least 25 women and 45 children allegedly associated with ISIL (Da'esh), including through coercion into marriage to Da'esh fighters, remain in arbitrary detention. During a visit to the Judaydah women's detention center in Tripoli, UNSMIL and Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) observed that women detained for their alleged association with ISIL (Da'esh) were being held with no judicial process, in dire conditions, and reportedly subjected to torture. The United Nations has urged the Libyan authorities to ensure due process, release those arbitrarily detained and facilitate repatriation processes.

Most survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), including those who become pregnant, have very limited, if any, access to services. The few existing services for survivors remain reliant on the support of humanitarian agencies rather than being institutionalized within government services. UNFPA continues to support the national hotline and four safe spaces across Libya providing social and vocational services for women and UNICEF provides support to women and girls in six safe spaces, gender-based violence awareness and life skills to girls and boys, and gender-based violence case management to vulnerable women and girls.

A draft law on combating violence against women, which was submitted to the Committee on Women's and Children's Affairs in February 2023, is yet to be adopted. The draft law criminalizes all forms of violence against women, including online violence and online hate speech, identifies protection and prevention mechanisms, and provides for the establishment of a national commission to combat violence against women and a dedicated trust fund to support victims of violence.

In December 2023, the Libyan Government published an explanatory note forbidding the use of the term "gender" (decision no. 2, issued on 2 October 2023). In the note, the term is described as a threat to Libyan society and Islamic values, and the relevant authorities are called on to implement applicable laws to punish those who advocate for and use the term. This represents a significant legislative and societal backlash against gender equality, affecting the full implementation of UN support, and restricting civil society in gender advocacy. In April 2023, the Internal Security Agency introduced a procedure that restricts women's freedom of movement by requiring women departing alone from Libyan airports in the western region to complete a form on their reason for travelling abroad without a male companion or *mahram*. The eastern government of National Stability imposed restrictions a month later, requiring security approvals for travels. The names of 119 human rights defenders, including WHRDs who had contested the regulation, were disseminated on social media and several human rights defenders were reportedly called in for interrogation.

In May 2023, the Government of National Unity issued a decision establishing a committee to regulate civil society organizations on the basis of a restrictive law providing for State control over civil society activities (Law No. 19 of 2001). The General Authority of Endowments and Islamic Affairs also issued a decree establishing a programme entitled "Guardians of Virtue" and creating national and local commissions to monitor and track what were described as "destructive beliefs and intellectual and moral deviations" and to "rehabilitate and reintegrate victims of moral deviations".

In 2023, the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls revealed that anyone deemed to be a "feminist" can be identified for investigation and arrest, including by the Tripoli-based Internal Security Agency. In one case highlighted by the Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Libya, a young activist was abducted and disappeared for more than two years and subjected to ill-treatment and

torture in detention; the victim explained that part of his interrogators' focus was on his perceived efforts to "liberate women."

Several women human rights defenders and women activists were subjected to intimidation and assaults, both online and offline in 2023, including after 17 February 2023, when authorities began to apply the 2022 anti-cybercrime law. The law has been used to silence women and hinder freedom of expression. In December 2024, UNSMIL and UN Women trained 20 Libyan women on the protection of women human rights defenders in Libya. UNSMIL is also developing a protection strategy for Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) to effectively operate in a safe environment.

### **Humanitarian issues and women's socio-economic situation**

The complex and protracted humanitarian and protection crisis in Libya disproportionately impacts vulnerable groups such as migrants, refugees, and people with disabilities, particularly women. In September 2023, Libya was impacted by Storm Daniel, which hit the Eastern part of the country and resulted in a large humanitarian crisis in the Derna region. The massive flooding killed over 4,300 people while an additional 8,540 people are still missing, and the death toll continues to rise. An estimated 884,000 people, including 440,000 women, have been directly affected by the storm and floods. Women were more vulnerable to the storm in terms of disaster preparedness, evacuation, response, health needs and recovery. Those who survived the flooding have been struggling disproportionately to access life-saving care as well as water, hygiene and sanitation, including menstrual products. In addition, tens of thousands of refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants have arrived in Libya since the war in Sudan began in April 2023, or been intercepted at the borders with Tunisia and Algeria.

The United Nations has provided humanitarian assistance to over 247,000 individuals, highlighting the broad reach of these efforts amidst challenging circumstances. While partners have scaled up humanitarian response to critical needs, focusing particularly on WASH, food, health, and winterization assistance, ongoing access barriers and challenges in the coordination with authorities in the field hinder some partners and Thematic Working Groups from delivering at full capacity. Hence, there remains an urgent need to prioritize support for the most vulnerable groups, including internally displaced women and girls, especially through cash-based assistance, protection, and education assistance.

**Sexual and reproductive health and protection:** It is estimated that up to 230,000 of the people in need of humanitarian assistance are women and girls of reproductive age (15-49 years old) among whom an estimated 24,000 women are pregnant and in need of essential sexual and reproductive health services, including basic and comprehensive emergency obstetric and neonatal care services. At the end of September 2023, around 2,625 pregnant women among those in need of humanitarian assistance were expected to give birth in the next month. An increased number of displaced women and girls in temporary shelters and deprived of basic needs have also been in critical need of protection services.

**Gender-based violence:** Despite an increase in service availability and awareness, gaps in mitigating and responding to GBV in Libya persist, exacerbated by the disruption of community support networks and stigma surrounding formal help-seeking behaviors. GBV risks are notably high among vulnerable groups such as single mothers, widows, and female household heads, yet the full extent is difficult to ascertain due to underreporting. To improve referrals in the field, the violence against women (VAW) working group is updating the service mapping. In spite of access constraints, including the requirement for multiple approvals from various government bodies, most humanitarian partners have secured the necessary approvals to initiate protection activities. This has enabled the establishment of safe spaces, staff recruitment and training, distribution of non-food items (NFIs), and community mobilization efforts. Currently, access to women and girls in many areas is primarily through health facilities, underscoring the critical role of healthcare in reaching vulnerable populations.

Food security: The Food Security Outcome Monitoring that WFP conducted in December 2022 indicates that 15.6 percent of female-headed formerly assisted households were food insecure in comparison of 11.9 percent among male-headed households. In 2023, WFP conducted the Fezzan Agricultural Assessment in five Governorates in the Fezzan region in Libya and gathered data from over 4,000 farmers and found that 99 percent of surveyed farm owners were men.

Women's participation and leadership in humanitarian response: Crisis-affected women and girls in Libya continue to struggle to participate in humanitarian coordination and decision-making. In response, partnerships with local women's organizations are being strengthened to actively involve them in humanitarian decision-making and coordination activities and to ensure that their insights are utilized to shape humanitarian interventions. Both in the East (Benghazi) and South (Sabha), engagement with national organizations, including women-led organizations, is ongoing and several dedicated forums with local women's organizations have taken place.

Socio-economic situation: Women face high rates of unemployment in Libya in comparison to men. Persistent stigmas and stereotypical beliefs have increased their unpaid care work and economic vulnerability. In 2023, women's participation in the workforce stood at 34.8 percent, in comparison to 61.4 percent for men. Based on more than 43,000 interviews with migrants conducted by DTM Libya in 2023 and 2024, 50 percent of women migrants were unemployed and actively seeking work, more than twice the percentage of men (19 percent). A greater percentage of women migrants than men highlighted withheld wages, hunger, insecurity, and lack of information.

### **Recommendations:<sup>1</sup>**

In upcoming decisions on Libya, the Security Council should retain all existing gender-related language from resolution 2702 (2023). In addition, the Security Council could:

- Recall the authorities' international commitments and reiterate that women's rights and women's empowerment are universal values that do not conflict with culture, religion, or tradition.
- Call on women's full, equal, meaningful, and safe participation in the presidential and parliamentary elections and at all levels of the process leading up to them, as well as in national dialogues on reconciliation, and in the economic, political, security and human rights and humanitarian law tracks of the Berlin process.
- Recall the 30 percent quota for women agreed to in the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum.
- Condemn threats, attacks and killings of women participating in the public space, including women human rights defenders, and call on Libyan authorities to undertake investigations and hold those responsible for these acts accountable and review measures that may restrict the work of civil society organizations.
- Request UNSMIL to prioritize all activities related to the protection and promotion of women's rights, and to monitor and report on threats and reprisals against women human rights defenders and strengthen the coordination of its response in cases of reprisals, in close cooperation with civil society.
- Call for the ceasefire monitoring arrangements to include a significant representation of women monitors, address conflict-related sexual violence, regularly consult women's civil society organizations, including women's organizations, and fully integrate a gender perspective, expertise, and training.

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<sup>1</sup> These recommendations are prepared by UN Women as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group, in consultation with other UN entities, including the Office of the SRSG on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

- Call on the authorities to enact pending legislation to address violence against women.
- Call on the authorities and international partners to scale up protection and assistance to women and girls, from access to livelihoods to urgently needed access to sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence prevention and response services.
- Call on the authorities to improve humanitarian access, including to detention centers, and enable humanitarian stakeholders to reach those in need, with particular attention to women and girls.
- Urge authorities to uphold human rights and international standards in the treatment of refugees, migrants, and people in detention, and putting in place measures to end arbitrary detention and protect and assist detainees who have suffered or are at risk of sexual abuse, and transfer women and children detained for illegal entry, exit, and stay to alternative solutions that would benefit from best interest assessment, tailored support, and rehabilitation.

In addition, the IEG co-chairs and other Council Members could:

- Propose that the sanctions committee dedicate a meeting to gender-related human rights violations in Libya and the issues raised in this regard by the Panel of Experts.
- Request information on the UN's capacity and resources to deliver on women, peace and security commitments and gender-responsive humanitarian action.
- Engage bilaterally with the Libyan government about the repercussions of new regulations on the work of the UN and civil society on gender equality.

## **ANNEX: Relevant language in resolution 2702 (2023)**

*Urging Libyan institutions and authorities to ensure the full, equal, effective, meaningful and safe participation of women at all levels, including in leadership positions, and in all stages of activities and decision-making relating to inclusive political processes, democratic transition, reconciliation efforts, conflict resolution and peacebuilding, recognising the need to protect women, women's rights organisations, and women peacebuilders from intimidation, threats reprisals and attacks, strongly encouraging all parties to create a safe and enabling environment for members of civil society, including those who promote and protect human rights, to carry out their work independently and without undue interference, including in situations of armed conflict, and to address threats, harassment and violence, to counter hate speech against them, and to protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, in accordance with obligations under international law, to help enable free, fair, transparent and inclusive elections and national reconciliation, supporting the efforts of UNSMIL to facilitate wider engagement and participation of women from across the spectrum of Libyan society in the political process and public institutions, including meaningful representation of women in Libya's legislative bodies, and recognising that the political process should be inclusive of all Libyans, including youth and civil society,*

*Urging all parties to implement the relevant resolutions on Women, Peace and Security Agenda and to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence, and calling on the Libyan authorities to end impunity for sexual and gender-based violence crimes in line with relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 1325 (2000),*

*Recalling the importance of the protection of children (...) expressing concern about reported violations and abuses against children in Libya despite the 23 October 2020 ceasefire agreement, in particular (...) sexual violence committed against children (...),*

*Expressing concern at the inadequate living standards and insufficient provision of basic services and the situation of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Libya (...), further expressing grave concern about the smuggling of migrants and refugees and human trafficking through Libya, and at the situation faced by migrants, and refugees, including arbitrary detention, ill-treatment, and their exposure to sexual and gender-based violence (...),*

*7. Calls upon the relevant Libyan institutions and authorities to implement confidence-building measures to create an environment conducive for successful national presidential and parliamentary elections, including by ensuring the full, equal, effective meaningful and safe participation of women (...),*