



RESEARCH PAPER

TOWARDS MEANINGFUL INCLUSION: HOW TO BUILD CONSTITUENCIES DURING PEACE PROCESSES

GLOBAL CONVENING, 7-27 JULY 2021

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**WOMEN, PEACE AND
SECURITY SECTION
UN WOMEN**

New York, July 2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION	6
II. KEY TERMS	6
2.1. Inclusion	6
2.2. Participation and Representation	6
2.3. Constituencies	6
III. CONSTITUENCY BUILDING	7
3.1. Key Strategies for Constituency Building	7
3.2. Case Studies	9
3.3. Challenges to Constituency Building	11
IV. CONCLUSION	11
V. REFERENCES	12

I. Introduction

This brief paper will consider a number of strategies through which representatives included within a peace process can build and nurture constituencies. This paper will also highlight the challenges actors may face in building constituencies during peace processes. Fundamentally, we will suggest that identifying, cohering, expanding and maintaining a constituency could allow those who are included in peace processes to participate in a more meaningful way. Deliberation between representatives and constituents during a peace process may encourage accountability, may contribute to the legitimisation of peace processes, may generate broader-based support for peace settlements, and may also result in a more gender-sensitive peace process and agreement.

II. Key Terms

The idea of constituency building is linked to a number of intertwined concepts. These will be briefly defined in this section after which we will turn to strategies for constituency building.

2.1 Inclusion

Broadly defined, **an inclusive peace process will 'give all groups in a society the opportunity to be heard and to have their concerns addressed'.**¹ The concept of inclusion has risen to prominence within peacemaking and peacebuilding policy, research and practice and is now embedded in an international normative framework, from United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution 1325 (2000), to resolution 2535 (2020), to the UN *Guidance for Effective Mediation*.² Actors can be included in peace processes in a wide variety of ways: for example, they can join negotiation delegations, they can serve as advisers or observers, or they can join informal, consultative mechanisms.³ However, the definition of inclusion is contested,⁴ its application remains confused, and research into inclusion has been sharply appraised for its limitations and normative bias.⁵ Furthermore, the practice of inclusion within peace processes has been criticised for its frequently superficial nature.⁶

2.2 Participation and Representation

Inclusion within peace processes can refer to both participation and representation. **Participation can be thought of as 'individual engagement' in the 'name of oneself'.**⁷ Representation, however, is a more complex and disputed concept, and brings with it the idea of constituencies. Representation can be understood in numerous ways; Hanna Pitkin, for instance, identifies four different views of representation.⁸ Nevertheless, in the context of peace processes, we can argue that **a representative will make 'present' the 'voices, opinions, and perspectives' of a segment of society.**⁹ Therefore, effectively fulfilling the role of a representative requires identifying the segment of society, or constituency, to be represented. This constituency's shared (and possibly fluctuating) priorities must also be established. However, what exactly do we mean by the term 'constituency'?

2.3 Constituencies

Within 'almost every democracy in the world', a constituency tends to be thought of as a territorially bound group in which citizens' votes are 'counted for the purpose of electing a political representative'. However, a constituency does not need to be defined geographically. For example, in a proportional representation system, 'voters choose the constituency to which they belong based on the party (or candidate) for which they voted'. Each party is awarded the same proportion of seats as the proportion of votes it receives.¹⁰ Prior to peace processes, representatives are rarely elected to participate in negotiations although there is precedent for this (see the Northern Ireland case study later in this paper as an example). This lack of formality surrounding the selection of representatives of constituencies included in peace processes often provokes criticism.¹¹ Nevertheless, in relation to peace processes, it is more fruitful to **think of a constituency as a group of people whose interests are safeguarded and pursued by a representative** regardless of whether the individuals comprising this group elected their representative. Even more broadly, **a constituency could also simply be thought of as a support base.**¹²

III. Constituency Building

In this section, we will present a number of strategies through which an actor might be able to build and nurture a constituency prior to, during, and following a peace process. These strategies are drawn from three case studies, Northern Ireland, Yemen, and Sierra Leone, which will be examined in greater detail later in this section. We will conclude by considering constraints on constituency building.

The process of constituency building within peace processes is a neglected topic. Therefore, the following list should not be considered to be exhaustive. Furthermore, the cases examined all feature actors often marginalised within peace processes. However, it should not be assumed that it is only traditionally excluded groups which face the challenge of building constituencies within peace processes. Members of the political elite and armed actors may also lack constituencies. Furthermore, the constituency representatives considered in these three cases were included in peace processes in a variety of different ways. It may be the case that particular constituency building strategies are more appropriate for particular modalities of inclusion, and this is a topic which merits further consideration.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that it is possible for actors included within the delegations of political parties or armed groups (and who therefore may already enjoy a support base) to engage in further constituency building. A politician included through a quota system to increase the participation of women could, for instance, *in addition* to representing the interests of supporters of her party, also cohere a constituency of women and advocate for their needs within a peace process. Doing so may elevate her profile within the delegation due to her possession of two (possibly intersecting) bases of support.¹³ However, representatives of political parties, for a variety of reasons, may not wish to be seen to also represent an identity group or issue-based constituency alongside their political party, and this subject undoubtedly requires reflection and debate.

3.1 Key Strategies for Constituency Building

The following table will list several strategies for building and nurturing constituencies. In relation to each, we will indicate whether the strategy could be pursued online, a crucial consideration in the era of COVID-19. We will also indicate whether the strategy should be pursued preceding a peace process (1), during a peace process (2), or following the negotiation of an accord (3). However, it should of course be noted that peace processes rarely follow a linear path and, instead, are often complex, convoluted, and cyclical.¹⁴



TABLE A

Strategies for building and nurturing constituencies employed in Northern Ireland, Yemen and Sierra Leone

Strategy	Could this strategy be digitised?	Peace process stage?
Open offices in a wide variety of locations across the conflict-affected state and use these offices to distribute information, coordinate activities (see below) and 'recruit' further constituents.	No	1, 2, 3
Connect with (potential) constituents through cultural, religious and educational institutions and activities.	Yes	1, 2, 3
<p>Hold comprehensive, inclusive meetings in which all participants have the right to contribute.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior to a peace process, these meetings could be used to collectively create a clear and concise vision. • During the peace process, these meetings could be held regularly to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - consider and agree upon shared positions relating to the agenda for the negotiations; - provide information to constituents regarding the process of the talks; - allow constituents to share their perspectives on the talks and provide guidance on positions which would be acceptable to their wider communities. <p>It is crucial to attentively listen to the views of constituents in such meetings.</p>	Yes	1, 2, 3
<p>Personally contact (for example through a letter or an email) potential constituents (individuals and groups), possibly appealing to a pre-conceived shared interest.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It may prove important to try to involve a diversity of actors within a constituency (for instance, regarding religion, ethnicity and class). • It may also prove useful to involve seasoned community organisers: in other words, those who have experience in finding solutions to local challenges. 	Yes	1, 2, 3
Organise marches or continue to participate in and/or lead ongoing protests.	Possibly (e.g., through a social media campaign)	1, 2, 3
Conduct (participatory) research to better understand the experiences and needs of (potential) constituents.	Yes	1, 2, 3
Use data and research generated by or about constituents for advocacy.	Yes	1, 2, 3
In partnership with (potential) constituents, produce policy or position papers.	Yes	1, 2
Build alliances with other movements and/or political parties.	Yes	1, 2
Communicate to your constituency, in accessible language and formats, the outcome of a peace process.	Yes	3
Participate in public debates regarding the outcome of a peace process.	Yes	3
Model and demonstrate the benefits of a fresh approach to politics.	Yes	1, 2, 3

3.2 Case Studies

In this sub-section we will explore in greater detail the experiences of three movements in attempting to build and nurture a constituency prior to, during and following a peace process.

3.2.1 Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition

The three-decade conflict waged between nationalists and unionists in Northern Ireland was largely halted by the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) signed in April 1998. This case study will consider the role played by the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC) within the process which led to the GFA, arguing that the coalition built a constituency in order to secure the representation of women at the negotiations. The NIWC then nurtured their constituency, reflecting their perspectives within the peace process before promoting the GFA to their support base. The experiences of the NIWC reveal a number of strategies by which constituencies may be constructed and maintained and, in turn, by which women's participation in peace processes can become more meaningful.

In June 1996, it was determined that representatives to the peace process would be publicly elected. 18 territorial constituencies would each elect five representatives; these representatives would also be joined by two representatives from each of the ten most successful parties across Northern Ireland.¹⁵ Women community leaders lobbied Northern Ireland's political parties, demanding the inclusion of women in their candidate lists, but their requests were ignored.¹⁶ In response, these community leaders drafted a letter addressed to more than 200 individual women and women's groups, inviting them to an organisational meeting. This first meeting, held in April 1996, saw the founding of the NIWC and the decision was taken to contest the peace process elections.¹⁷

In the period preceding the election, the NIWC held weekly meetings to deliberate a shared platform. Ultimately, the coalition developed three core principles: equality, human rights, and inclusion. These three principles then guided the formation of the movement's platform, and featured within 14 policy papers produced by the NIWC during this period. During the campaign, the NIWC opened offices in Belfast, Derry and Enniskillen and weekly meetings rotated between these locations. The coalition also capitalised upon the diverse networks of their members, canvassing extensively.¹⁸

The NIWC managed to secure two seats at the negotiations and, at an open meeting, selected one nationalist and one unionist to represent their constituency.¹⁹ During the negotiations, the two NIWC delegates faced unrelenting, verbal assaults.²⁰ Nevertheless, the NIWC persisted in holding monthly meetings involving the entire spectrum of their support base. The two delegates would provide their constituency with details regarding the talks while members would debate the forthcoming agenda, share their perspectives on the process, and offer guidance on which stances would be acceptable to their communities.²¹ The NIWC also initiated an alliance with three other parties, and succeeded in broadening the negotiating agenda to include issues such as conflict victims' rights.²² Following the conclusion of the process, the coalition continued to connect with its constituency. Members drafted and distributed an accessible version of the GFA, spoke in public in favour of the accord, and organised debates between their members on its substance.²³

3.2.2 Yemen and the Independent Youth Delegates to the National Dialogue Conference

In 2011, Yemen was swept up in the protests which erupted across the Middle East and North Africa. Tens of thousands took to the streets, driven by years of dissatisfaction with the ruling regime. The protests were, initially, overwhelmingly composed of youth, women and civil society. In late 2011, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) brokered an initiative which saw President Saleh relinquish power and paved the way towards a National Dialogue Conference (NDC). 40 seats at the NDC were allocated to 'independent youth' delegates; these positions were advertised throughout the country²⁴ before participants were selected through an opaque process. Indeed, it has been suggested that many were not truly 'independent'. The political factions invited to attend the conference were also mandated to ensure 20% of their delegations were composed of Yemeni youth.²⁵ The experiences of these Yemeni youth delegates in connecting with the constituency created through the 2011 demonstrations reveal further strategies. However, this case also reveals challenges which traditionally excluded groups face in remaining responsive to their newly defined constituents.

Prior to the NDC, al-Watan, a youth movement, created a shared youth plan. Al-Watan organised daily meetings over the course of a month, inviting an array of youth groups to debate Yemen's future. Their vision was articulated within 13 concise demands.²⁶ Al-Watan thus began the process of building a youth constituency by holding open meetings and through finding a collective platform. During the NDC, many of the independent youth delegates, a number of whom were members of al-Watan or the groups which participated in the movement's meetings, continued to meet informally with their counterparts outside the conference. These meetings took place face-to-face and through social media, and the independent youth delegates requested inputs to the conference. Furthermore, several youth delegates continued to be engaged in protest and reportedly referenced the ongoing protests within the NDC, thereby transporting the concerns of their constituency into the formal peace process.²⁷

Nevertheless, the youth delegates, both independents and those affiliated with political parties, faced substantial criticism regarding 'their lack of interaction with the youth outside the dialogue, who[m] they [were] supposed to represent'. Several constraints may serve to explain their disconnect. Firstly, the youth movement was weakly structured. Secondly, the youth lacked experience in political organising, and were fatigued following months of protests and debates. Furthermore, it has been argued that the criticism the youth delegates faced caused a number to distance themselves from their constituency. It has also been suggested that the independent youth delegates were co-opted, or had been placed in the NDC, by the traditional political parties and that, in turn, the youth began to adopt a less transparent style of politics. This reinforced their separation from their constituency.²⁸ Finally, the independent youth delegates and the youth within the political party delegations struggled to cohere as a coalition within the NDC, further impacting their ability to collectively connect with a constituency outside.

3.2.3 Sierra Leone and the Sierra Leone Women's Movement for Peace

The conflict in Sierra Leone was sparked in 1991, leading to sustained violence between the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and the Sierra Leonean army. Local armed groups also joined the fray and various peace-making efforts were unable to secure a settlement. This final case study will consider the attempts made by a women's movement in Sierra Leone to develop a constituency during the 1990s. This case study will highlight further strategies together with additional barriers.

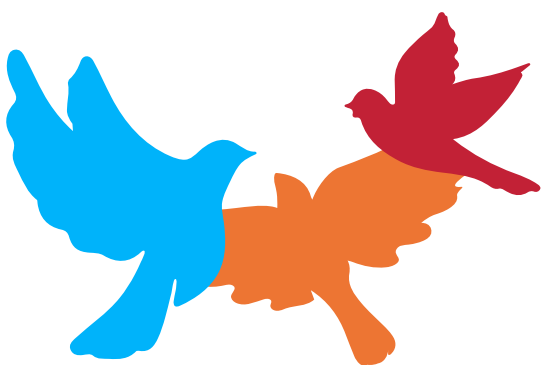
The Sierra Leone Women's Movement for Peace (SLWM) formed in the early 1990s and launched their process of constituency building by initiating an open debate on peace in 1995.²⁹ The movement then opened branches in all accessible regions of the country. Initially, the SLWM used these offices to share information and coordinate marches; later, these branches were used to identify and contact participants for Bintumani I, a 'national consultative conference' held in August 1995 and intended as a precursor to formal negotiations.³⁰ More broadly, the movement sustained and expanded its constituency by organising marches, discussions, and Muslim and Christian prayer meetings. The discussions held were 'long and lively' and were attended by as many as 80 women at a time, 'all of whom had a right to speak'. The SLWM succeeded in connecting with, and mobilising, women from a wide variety of backgrounds throughout the country.³¹

While the various women's groups subsumed within the SLWM participated in Bintumani I and II, and therefore representatives of its emerging constituency contributed to setting the agenda for elections and the ensuing peace process, the SLWM was unsuccessful in securing direct talks and was also not included in the formal peace process.³² It has been suggested that Sierra Leone's traditional power-holders 'recognised that the ideas and attitudes thrown up by the women's movement had the potential of destabilising traditional politics'; the movement thus faced resistance from members of the political elite.³³ Nevertheless, it has also been argued that SLWM's failure to develop a clear ideological framework also 'blunted the movement's effectiveness'.³⁴

3.3 Challenges to Constituency Building

The previous sub-section considered the experiences of three movements in building and nurturing constituencies during peace processes. These case studies reveal the challenges actors may face in constructing constituencies. These obstacles include:

1. Resistance by and attacks from members of the political elite and/or armed actors
2. Informally structured organisations or coalitions leading the constituency building process
3. A lack of experience in political organising on the part of those seeking to build constituencies, and a lack of strategy options drawn from comparative research
4. The damaging of relationships and the denting of confidence following criticism from constituents (possibly due to a lack of formal mechanisms for accountability)
5. The co-optation of representatives by established political parties
6. Insufficient communication between those within and outside the negotiations (possibly due to the adoption by representatives of a less transparent approach to politics following inclusion within a peace process)
7. A failure to develop, with (potential) constituents, a clear, concise platform and a vision for the future, and the holding of insufficiently focused and strategic meetings with (potential) constituents



IV. Conclusion

This paper has considered several strategies which have been used by representatives in a variety of peace processes to build and nurture a support base. It has explored how representatives in a peace process may enter into deliberations with their newly defined constituents, may remain accountable to these constituents and reflect their interests within peace negotiations, and may generate support within their constituency for the peace settlement negotiated. This paper has also revealed constraints on actors' capacity to build constituencies. However, a number of themes demand further reflection:

1. How might international actors most effectively support the various strategies highlighted here?
2. Are there further, innovative strategies particularly suitable for the digital sphere?
3. If a member of a traditionally excluded group is included within the delegation of a government, political party or armed group (for example, through a quota), what additional opportunities and constraints might they face in building, expanding and/or nurturing a constituency?
4. Are different strategies more appropriate depending on the way in which an actor is included?
5. Are there particular strategies best suited to building a constituency which unites a specific identity group (for example, women or youth)? If so, do these differ from the strategies suited to building a constituency which unites numerous identity groups around a particular issue?
6. By focusing on the language of representation and constituencies, might this serve to democratise peace processes and societies in the longer term? What are the broader implications of this?
7. If constituencies are built during peace processes, what might be the impact on the broader societal dynamics of a conflict-affected state particularly regarding gender equality?

V. References

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- 2 Alexander de Waal, 'Inclusion in Peacemaking: From Moral Claim to Political Fact' in Pamela Aall and Chester Crocker, *The Fabric of Peace in Africa* (Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2017), p. 165; Catherine Turner, 'Mapping a Norm of Inclusion in the Jus Post Bellum' in Carsten Stahn et al. (eds.), *Just Peace After Conflict: Jus Post Bellum and the Justice of Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 130-46; UN, *United Nations Guidance for Effective Mediation* (New York: United Nations, 2012) [online], available from: <https://peacemaker.un.org/guidance-effective-mediation> [last accessed: 6 February 2021], p. 11. This is due, in part, to the claims made that inclusion will legitimise a peace process, encouraging a more durable peace (see, for instance: Desirée Nilsson, 'Anchoring the Peace: Civil Society Actors in Peace Accords and Durable Peace' *International Interactions* 38:2 (2012), pp. 243-66; and Anthony Wanis-St. John and Darren Kew, 'Civil Society and Peace Negotiations: Confronting Exclusion' *International Negotiation* 13 (2008), pp. 11-36). Inclusion has also been framed as a moral imperative (De Waal, 'Inclusion in Peacemaking: From Moral Claim to Political Fact', p. 165).
- 3 Indeed, Thania Paffenholz has identified nine different 'modalities of inclusion' (Thania Paffenholz, 'Civil Society and Peace Negotiations: Beyond the Inclusion-Exclusion Dichotomy' *Negotiation Journal* 30:1 (2014), pp. 69-91)
- 4 Ibid
- 5 Comparative investigations into the influence of inclusive peacemaking have faced criticism for their failures to establish a causal link between inclusion and sustainable peace (Jan Pospisil, *Peace in Political Unsettlement: Beyond Solving Conflict* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019), pp. 99-100; De Waal, 'Inclusion in Peacemaking: From Moral Claim to Political Fact', p. 180). Furthermore, the inclusion project has also been condemned for its 'failure to distinguish between process and outcomes': it has been suggested that 'it is not yet clear whether, and if so how, inclusive peacemaking and peacebuilding set communities on pathways toward more inclusive societies' (Anastassia Obydenkova and Thania Paffenholz, 'Editorial: The Grand Challenges in the Quest for Peace and Democracy' *Frontiers in Political Science* (2021) [online first], p. 2)
- 6 Pospisil, *Peace in Political Unsettlement: Beyond Solving Conflict*, p. 92; Thania Paffenholz, 'Perpetual Peacebuilding: A New Paradigm to Move Beyond the Linearity of Liberal Peacebuilding' *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* (2021) [online first]
- 7 Isa Mendes, 'Inclusion and Political Representation in Peace Negotiations: The Case of the Colombian Victims' Delegations' *Journal of Politics in Latin America* 11:3 (2019), p. 279
- 8 Hanna Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 11-12
- 9 Suzanne Dovi, 'Political Representation' in Zalta, E. N. (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition) [online], available from: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/political-representation/#PitFouVieRep> [last accessed: 20 June 2021]
- 10 Andrew Rehfeld, *The Concept of Constituency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 3-4, 37
- 11 The Women's Advisory Board (WAB) in Syria, for instance, was often criticised by Syrian civil society actors for being unrepresentative of Syria women (see: Zedoun Alzoubi, 'Syrian Civil Society During the Peace Talks in Geneva: Role and Challenges', *New England Journal of Public Policy* 29:1 (2017), p. 4; Mouna Ghanem, 'If Governments Want to Achieve Peace in Syria, They Need to Stop Excluding Women From Their Negotiations', *The Independent* (2019) [online], available from: <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/syria-conflict-resolution-women-sexism-war-a8792271.html> [last accessed: 21 June 2021])
- 12 Ibid, p. 35
- 13 Luz Mendez, for example, during the peace negotiations in Guatemala between 1991 and 1996, was a member of the Guatemalan National

- Revolutionary Unity (URNG), a coalition of four revolutionary organisations. She was only the woman in the Diplomatic Team and, in addition to representing her movement, the Communist Party, she also took a keen interest in the perspectives and needs of women's civil society organisations and the rights of indigenous people. She thus increased the number of constituencies on whose behalf she advocated and succeeded in persuading her colleagues and adversaries to include a series of progressive provisions (Gaby Vermot, 'Guatemala – Interview with Luz Mendez, Guatemala PeaceWoman and Peace Negotiator During the Civil War', *Women's UN Report Network* (2015) [online], available from: <https://wunrn.com/2015/01/guatemala-interview-with-luz-mendez-guatemala-peacewoman-peace-negotiator-during-the-civil-war/> [last accessed: 21 June 2021])
- 14 Paffenholz, 'Perpetual Peacebuilding: A New Paradigm to Move Beyond the Linearity of Liberal Peacebuilding'
 - 15 Kate Fearon, 'Northern Ireland Women's Coalition: Institutionalising a Political Voice and Ensuring Representation' in *Women Building Peace Accord Insight, Conciliation Resources* (2013) [online], available from: <https://www.c-r.org/accord/women-and-peacebuilding-insight/women-building-peace> [last accessed: 20 June 2021], p. 31
 - 16 Ibid; Constance B. Rynder, 'The Origins and Early Years of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition' *New Hibernia Review* 6:1 (2002), p. 45
 - 17 Rynder, 'The Origins and Early Years of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition', p. 46
 - 18 Alexander Bramble, 'Northern Ireland (1996-1998)', *Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative* (2018) [online], available from: <https://www.inclusivepeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/case-study-women-northern-ireland-1996-1998-en.pdf> [last accessed: 20 June 2021], p. 11; Fearon, 'Northern Ireland Women's Coalition: Institutionalising a Political Voice and Ensuring Representation', pp. 31-32; Rynder, 'The Origins and Early Years of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition', pp. 46-47
 - 19 Fearon, 'Northern Ireland Women's Coalition: Institutionalising a Political Voice and Ensuring Representation', p. 32
 - 20 Rynder, 'The Origins and Early Years of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition', p. 48
 - 21 Fearon, 'Northern Ireland Women's Coalition: Institutionalising a Political Voice and Ensuring Representation', p. 32
 - 22 Ibid; Rynder, 'The Origins and Early Years of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition', p. 49
 - 23 Fearon, 'Northern Ireland Women's Coalition: Institutionalising a Political Voice and Ensuring Representation', p. 33
 - 24 Thania Paffenholz and Nick Ross, 'Inclusive Political Settlements: New Insights from Yemen's National Dialogue', *PRISM* 6:1 (2016), pp. 203-4
 - 25 Ibid
 - 26 Atiaf Zaid Alwazir, 'Yemen's Independent Youth and Their Role in the National Dialogue Conference', *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik Comments* 23 (2013), p. 2
 - 27 Ibid, p. 7
 - 28 Ibid, pp. 7-8
 - 29 Un p 3
 - 30 Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff, 'Sierra Leonean Women and the Peace Process' in *Women Building Peace Accord Insight, Conciliation Resources* (2013) [online], available from: <https://www.c-r.org/accord/women-and-peacebuilding-insight/women-building-peace> [last accessed: 20 June 2021], pp. 21-22
 - 31 Ibid; Isha Dyfan, 'Peace Agreements as a Means for Promoting Gender Equality and Ensuring Participation of Women' *United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women Expert Group Meeting* (2003) [online], available from: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/peace2003/reports/EP5Dyfan.PDF> [last accessed: 20 June 2021]. p. 3
 - 32 Jusu-Sheriff, 'Sierra Leonean Women and the Peace Process', p. 22; Isha Dyfan, 'Peace Agreements as a Means for Promoting Gender Equality and Ensuring Participation of Women', p. 4
 - 33 Jusu-Sheriff, 'Sierra Leonean Women and the Peace Process', p. 22
 - 34 Ibid

