



Summary symposium

"Strong Women: Enabling Action through Protection"

On Thursday the 3rd of March 2016 in Utrecht, a symposium organized by Peace Brigades International and Women for Peace took place, called: "Strong Women: Enabling Action through Protection".

The event was centred around the work that women human rights defenders (WHRDs) from the Arab region do in their countries for justice and peace. The occasion for this was the Joint Initiative project of the two organizations, in which a research was conducted on the security risks and protection mechanisms of these women by an online survey and a consult to Egypt and Sudan. You can find the report on www.strong-women.org.

Attention was also given on how Dutch civil society and governmental institutions can support the actions of these WHRDs by providing them with better protection. Aiming at spreading, deepening and sharing knowledge and expertise among the participants, the symposium also had a goal to raise awareness about the importance of the dangerous work of these women, and the necessity to protect them.

We have realized this by holding three case sessions, on Egypt, Sudan and Yemen. This way the audience was split in smaller groups to speak to each other about the issues of those conflicts, to engage in a discussion and to formulate recommendations.

The recommendations of the Egypt group focused on finding solutions for dealing with the challenging and unsafe circumstances Egyptian human rights organizations work in, in terms of applying for funds from INGO's, travel restrictions, organizing trainings and cyber security. The key words were 'flexibility' and 'coordination'.

The recommendations of the Sudan group focused on creating a global network which should connect international and Sudanese (W)HRDs, organizations and journalists, so that international support to their work could be given, but also to put pressure on the Sudanese government and UNAMID. A follow-up meeting was organized and facilitated by PBI to make this idea a reality.

The recommendations of the Yemen group focused on increasing the publicity of the conflict in the Netherlands and the need for support for Yemeni (diaspora) youth and WHRDs by the Dutch government and civil society in order to ensure their voices are heard in the peace process.

After the group sessions a panel discussion followed and the formulated recommendations were presented to the plenary. The panel consisted of Mekka Abdelgabar (director Foundation VOND), Annemieke Burmeister (country director Egypt of Oxfam Novib), Rana Noman (Yemeni freelance journalist) and Frank Huisingsh (policy officer on human rights defenders of Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

Manon Olsthoorn, cluster coordinator on human rights of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, held a speech to conclude this symposium.

"Real change can only be realized from the inside. We really need to support the local HRDs within the communities to achieve sustainable progress."

The symposium ended with drinks, live music by the band "Calamity Jazz" and the exhibition "Women of Syria" with drawings and stories of Syrian women (<http://womenofsyria.com/>).