

The Daily Cost of an Over armed World as of March 2025. © Carole Theobald

Earth for All: How Gender-Equal Climate Justice Could Stop Wars and Conflicts

Intercontinental Think Tank Africa-Europe, November 09,
10:00 am until 11:30 am UTC



Housekeeping



Use the chat line to ask questions and make comments

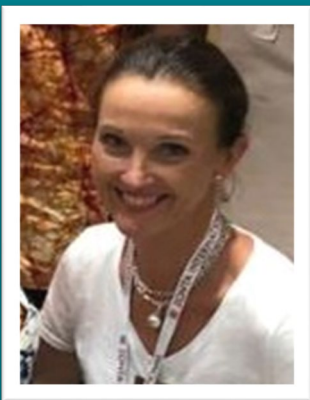
Use welcoming and inclusive language

Ask short, succinct questions

Answer questions or comment respectfully



Our Think Tank Team Today



Pia Hultgren
Zonta Club of Lidingo
Sweden



Joan Kabayambi
Zonta Club of Kampala
Uganda



Karin Lange
Zonta Club of Berlin 1989
Germany



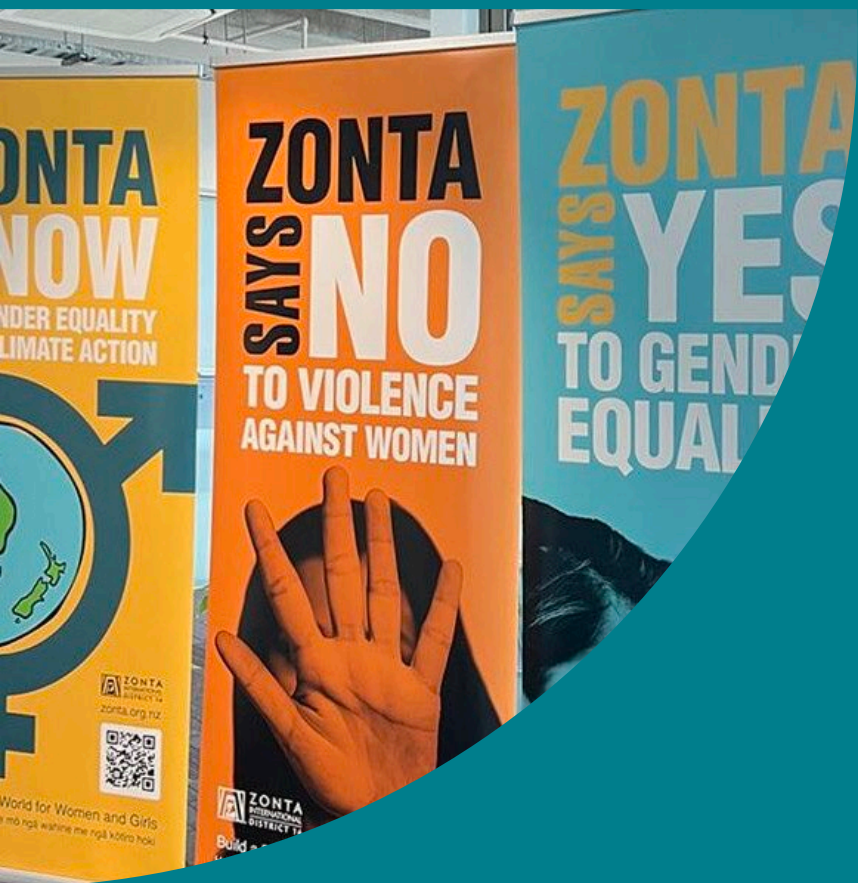
Carole Theobald
Zonta Club of
Perth,
Australia



Errick Elavia
Zonta Club of
Bombay I
India



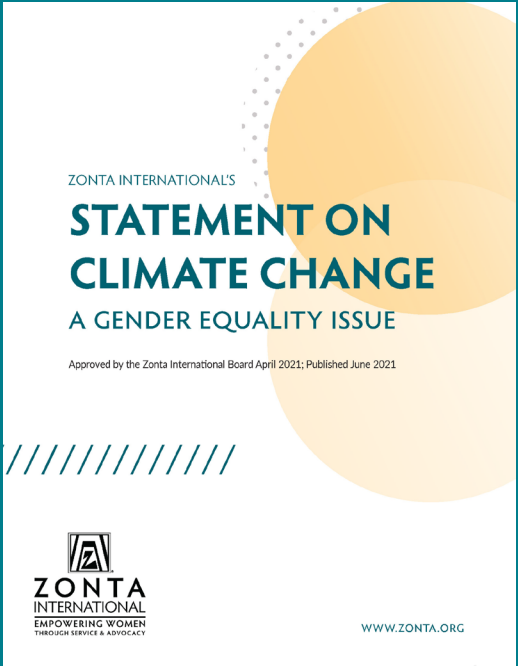
Our Purpose



Through Zonta Says NOW, Zonta International advocates for climate justice.

So women and girls can prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from the impacts of climate change on the same basis as men.

We do this by advocating from the heart and by taking gender-equal climate action – locally, nationally and internationally.





Today's Journey



Setting the Scene

Welcome &
Housekeeping



Voices from the Ground – Women's Perspectives

Lyubov Maksymovych
& Hadise Jafari:
Risks of War and
Displacement



Women's Health, Military Service, and Climate Change

Keynote Elizabeth
Kostas-Polston



Is Sustainability a Pathway to Peace?

Panel Talk & Poll



Lessons Learned and how to move on

Summary &
Closing

“the WORLD
is OVER-ARMED
and PEACE
is UNDERFUNDED”

SAN KI-moon,
United Nations Secretary-General

DAILY
MILITARY EXPENDITURE
WORLDWIDE
How much has been spent today starting at midnight?

In 2023, military
expenditure reached
6.6 billion dollars per
day – a significant
economical factor
and a key driver of
GDP.

Global military
production and
supply chains are
major contributors
to greenhouse gas
emissions.

ANNUAL EXPENDITURES
\$2.4
TRILLION
Military
Expenditures
Worldwide

ANNUAL EXPENDITURES
\$224
BILLION
Official Development Assistance
to Least Developed Countries

ANNUAL EXPENDITURES
\$3.4
BILLION
Budget for Peace and Security,
Development and Humanitarian
Operations

ANNUAL EXPENDITURES
\$669
MILLION
International
Arms and
Non-proliferation
Organizations

Every dollar spent in
military production,
use of arms and
reconstruction is a
dollar not *directly*
invested in
sustainability or
climate resilience.



THE BLIND SPOT

The entire military sector is responsible for an estimated 5.5 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions.

Conflict and Environment Observatory (CEOBS)

This is roughly equivalent to the annual emissions of all the world's cars.

The world is on course to breach 1.5 °C within the next 10 years — putting the Paris goals in jeopardy and deepening the climate crisis.

UNEP Emissions Gap Report 2025

A woman in a purple patterned dress and headscarf stands in a refugee camp with many tents in the background.

THE FEMALE FACE OF THE POLYCRISIS

In 2024, approximately 676 million women and girls lived within 50km of deadly conflict - the highest figure in decades.

Source: UN Women.
<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/press-release/2025/10/wars-on-women-escalate-as-global-conflicts-reach-record-highs>

In humanitarian crisis and conflict about 70 % of women and girls face gender-based violence. In emergency shelters or camps, the risk increases.

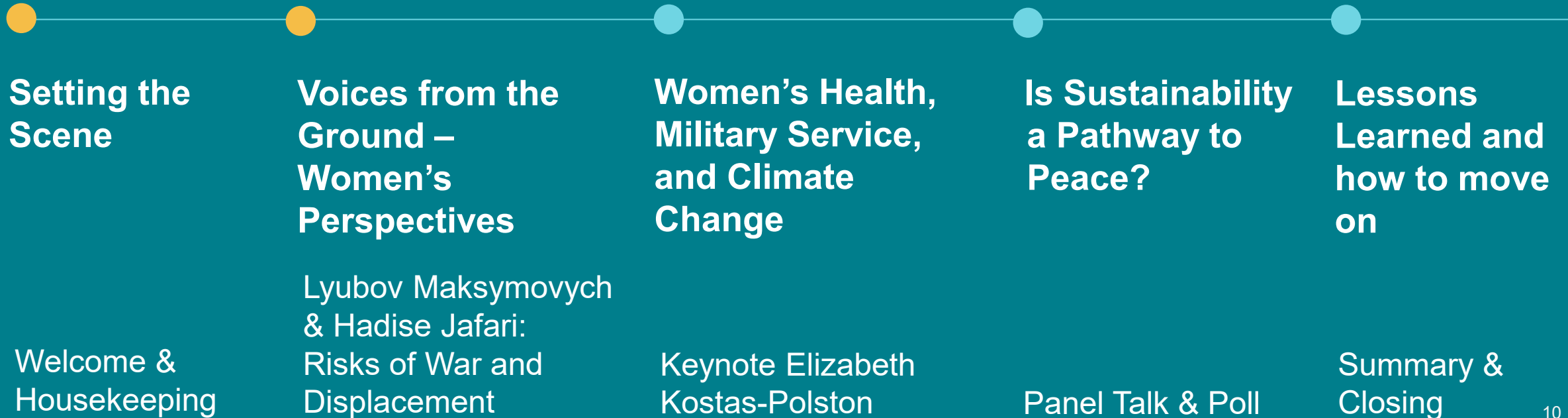
PEACE WITHOUT WOMEN?

Resolution 1325





Today's Journey





Lyubov Maksymovych Zonta Club Lviv, CEO Women's Perspectives

Lyubov Maksymovych heads the organisation Women's Perspectives and is described by many as one of the leaders of the women's movement in Ukraine.

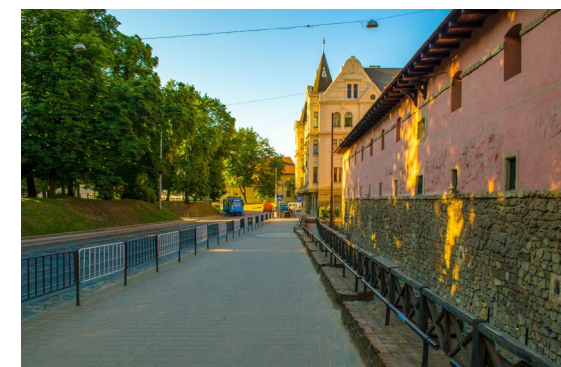
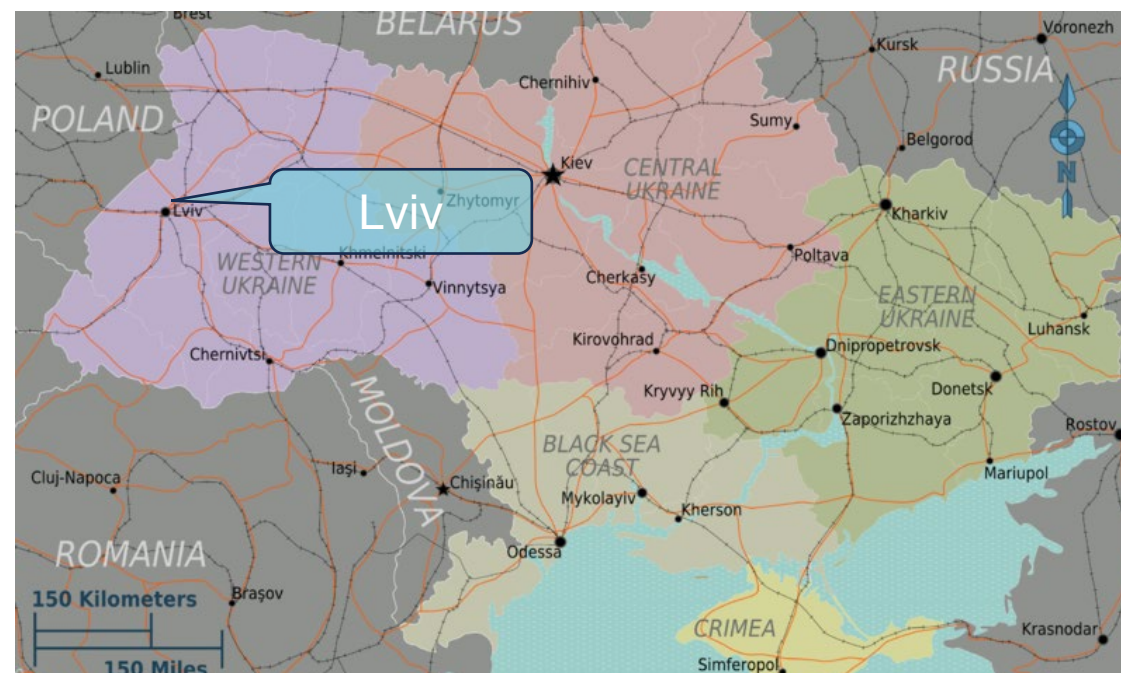


Ukraine

Capital City: Kyiv

Population: 28,7 million

Area: 603.628 sq km





Hadise Jafari High School Student & 2025 Zonta Young Women in Leadership Awardee

Having grown up witnessing and experiencing gender inequality, war and displacement, **Hadise Jafari**, living today in Luxembourg, has been engaged in volunteering and advocacy, with a strong focus on women's rights.

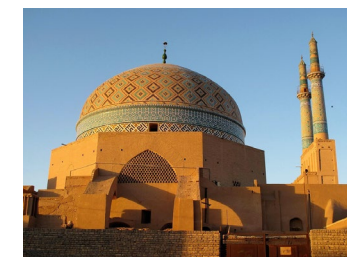


Afghanistan

Capital City: Kabul

Population: 42.6 million

Area: 652.864 sq km





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Dr. Elizabeth Polston, PhD, FNP-BC, FAANP, FAAN

Professor and Nurse Scientist at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences

Dr. Kostas-Polston is a leading nurse scientist and Women's Health Nurse Practitioner whose research and practice focus on military women's health, HPV-related cancer prevention, and women's reproductive health.



USA

Capital City: Washington

Population: 340 million

Area: 9.525.067sq km



Washington





Elizabeth A. Kostas-Polston, PhD, APRN, WHNP-BC, FAANP, FAAN

Associate Professor of Nursing (Tenured)

Acting Chair, Ph.D. in Nursing Science Program

United States Air Force Veteran

Women's Health Nurse Practitioner

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Nurse Faculty Scholar Alumna

Daniel K. Inouye Graduate School of Nursing at Uniformed Services University
of the Health Sciences

Bethesda, Maryland USA

African - European Intercontinental Think Tank: Women & Conflict
Sunday, 9 November 2025

Disclaimer: The opinions and assertions expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Uniformed Services University or the Department of War.

Conflict of Interest: Dr. Kostas-Polston nor her family members have a financial interest in any commercial product, service, or organization providing financial support for this research.

Sex as a Biological Variable (SABV)

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ZONTA
INTERNATIONAL

“Learning to Care for Those in Harm’s Way”



*The Ecology of Peace:
Female Warfighter Health, Environmental Resilience, and
Implications for Women and Girls*

Women's Health • Science Diplomacy • Climate Justice

OUTLINE

1. Female Warfighter & Women's Health
2. The Ecology of Peace Conceptual Model
3. IBM-WASH & Female Warfighters: A Model of WASH Austerity
4. WASH Insecurities: Global Parallels to Military to Communities
5. Pathways for Peace through Science Diplomacy
6. Policy Levers & Call to Action
7. Conclusion

1. Female Warfighter & Women's Health

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) insecurity represents hidden sex-specific health burdens

- Female warfighters offer a controlled model of life under WASH austerity.
- Women and girls in climate-stressed communities face parallel vulnerabilities.

(Every Woman Every Child, 2015; Kostas-Polston et al., 2020, 2022, 2023a, 2023b; United Nations, 2015a, 2015b)

2. The Ecology of Peace Conceptual Model



Kostas-Polston, E. A., (2025)

3. IBM-WASH & Female Warfighters: A Model of WASH Austerity

- IBM-WASH links contextual, psychosocial, and technological factors across five levels (interpersonal, individual, habitual)
- Shows how structural gaps (e.g., male-centered systems, limited WASH design) combine with behaviors to increase infection risk
- Female warfighters operate in planned WASH-limited environments, offering a controlled model of global WASH austerity
- Their experiences mirror civilian vulnerabilities in fragile and conflict-affected settings

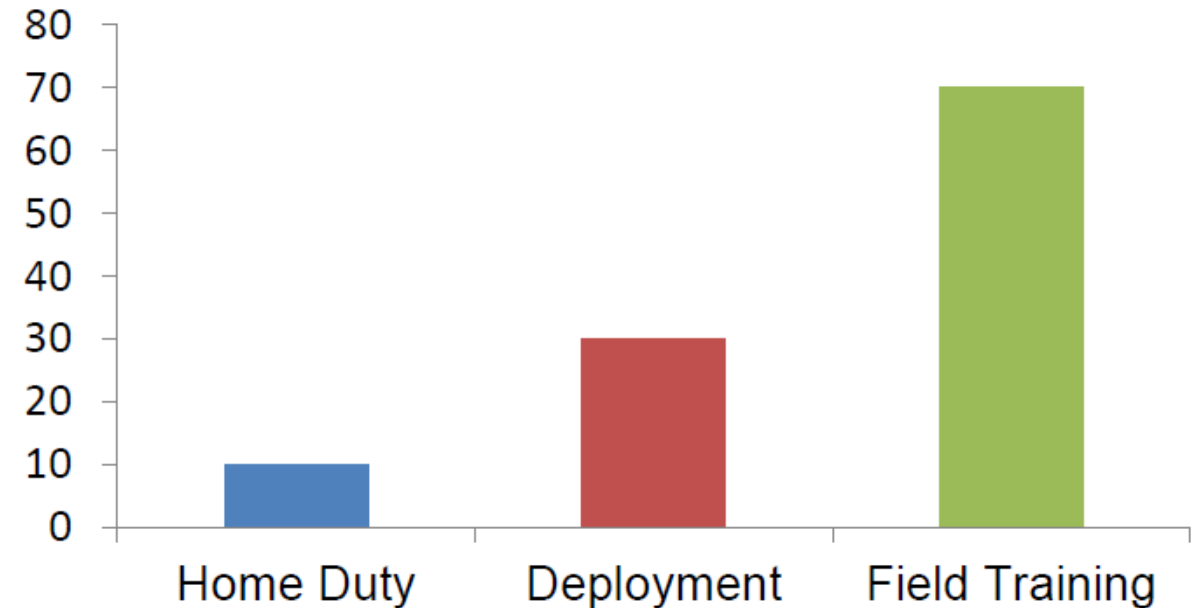
(Dreibelbis et al., 2013; Kostas-Polston et al., 2020, 2022, 2023a, 2023b)

The Hidden Costs of WASH Insecurity in the Ranks

Sample: 751 U.S. Female Warfighters

- Field Training: Highest WASH austerity
- ~70% reported clean water 'rarely/never available'
- Common adaptations: Wipe baths, delayed urination, reusing undergarments

Water Rarely/Never Available (%)



(Kostas-Polston et al., 2022, 2023a, 2023b)

U.S. Female Warfighters Health Outcomes

1. **Common coping behaviors:** Delayed urination, “wipe baths”, improvised sanitation, limited undergarment changes
2. **Health impacts:** Increased urinary tract infections, bacterial vaginosis, and candidiasis
3. **Operational impact:** Recurrent infections threaten readiness and can lead to non-deployable status
4. **Key insight:** WASH insecurity is systemic — not an issue of “poor personal hygiene”— and directly undermines health and mission effectiveness

Coping & Qualitative Insights

- Perceived invisibility within male-centered systems and infrastructure
- Coping: Wipe baths, delayed urination, reuse of undergarments despite discomfort and risk
- Expressed needs: Self-care kits, female urination devices

“We need tools designed for us, not workarounds.”

– Survey Respondent

(Kostas-Polston et al., 2020, 2022, 2023a, 2023b)

4. WASH Insecurities: Global Parallels to Military to Communities

Military Context	Global Civilian Context
WASH austerity in deployments—limited water, sanitation, and hygiene access by design.	Women and girls in climate-stressed or conflict-affected settings face chronic WASH insecurity.
Restricted WASH access increases infection risk, limits mobility, and affects participation.	Similar barriers reduce access to education, healthcare, and safety in low-resource areas.
Controlled environments allow researchers to isolate WASH effects on women's health and readiness.	Civilian contexts reveal how systemic inequities and weak governance perpetuate WASH vulnerability.
Findings from female warfighters offer an analytical lens—not a direct comparison—for understanding global WASH inequities.	Insights inform inclusive data systems, co-produced solutions, and equitable leadership pathways.

Three Pillars: Inclusive Data • Co-produced Solutions • Equitable Leadership

5. Pathways for Peace through Science Diplomacy

Science diplomacy can connect evidence from female warfighters and global communities to concrete policy change

- Bridge defense, health, climate, and humanitarian sectors
- Share WASH and sexual reproductive health (SRH) evidence across borders and agencies
- Promote sex-responsive design standards in military and civilian WASH systems

6. PEACE POLICY LEVERS & CALL TO ACTION

Policy Lever	Key Action
Align Obligations	Link climate, human rights, and security commitments to gender-responsive WASH access. Integrate these priorities into defense, humanitarian, and climate adaptation frameworks.
Measure What Matters	Mandate sex- and age-disaggregated WASH and health indicators in all reporting systems. Ensure accountability and comparability across national and international frameworks.
Invest in Women & Girls	Expand funding for locally led initiatives and strengthen women's leadership in water, energy, and food governance. Empower community-based resilience and innovation.
Institutionalize Evidence	Support transdisciplinary research–policy partnerships to update doctrine, training, and infrastructure. Embed gendered health and WASH data into policy and operational systems.

7. CONCLUSION

- We must align global and local systems so that women's health and leadership drive sustainable peace
- Military WASH austerity offers a controlled model to understand systemic risks
- Evidence from female warfighters reveals design, policy, and cultural gaps that also affect women and girls globally
- Science diplomacy and sex-responsive policy can embed equity at the heart of climate and security strategies

“If we can safeguard female health under the harshest military conditions, we can—and must—do so in every community facing environmental stress and conflict.”

Shared Burdens, Shared Realities



Photo courtesy of C. Trotter, used with permission

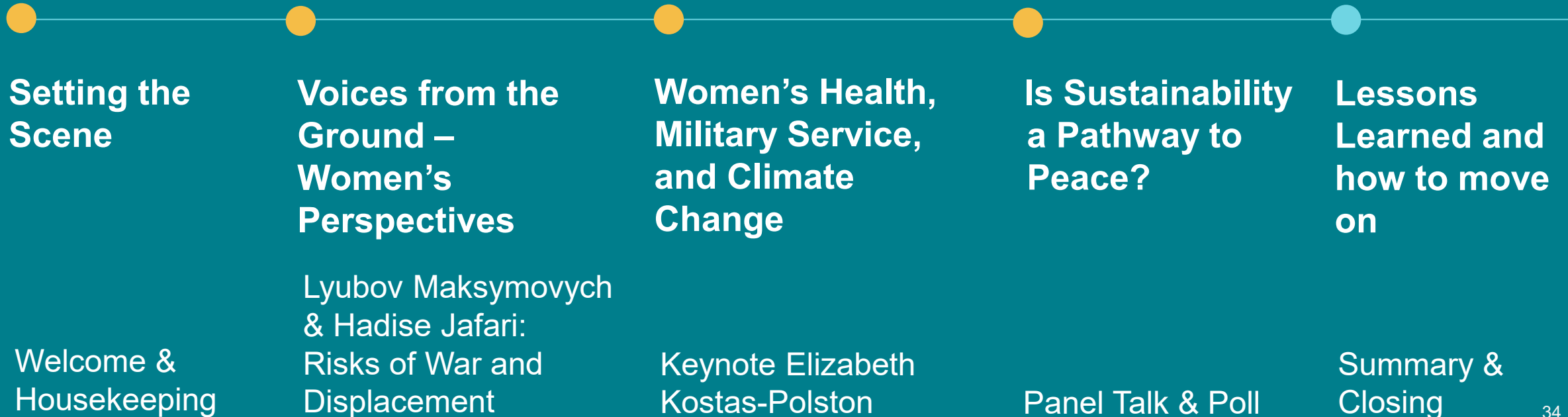


Women & the Water Crisis: Berbere, Ethiopia — Project Waterfall

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Today's Journey





POLL 1

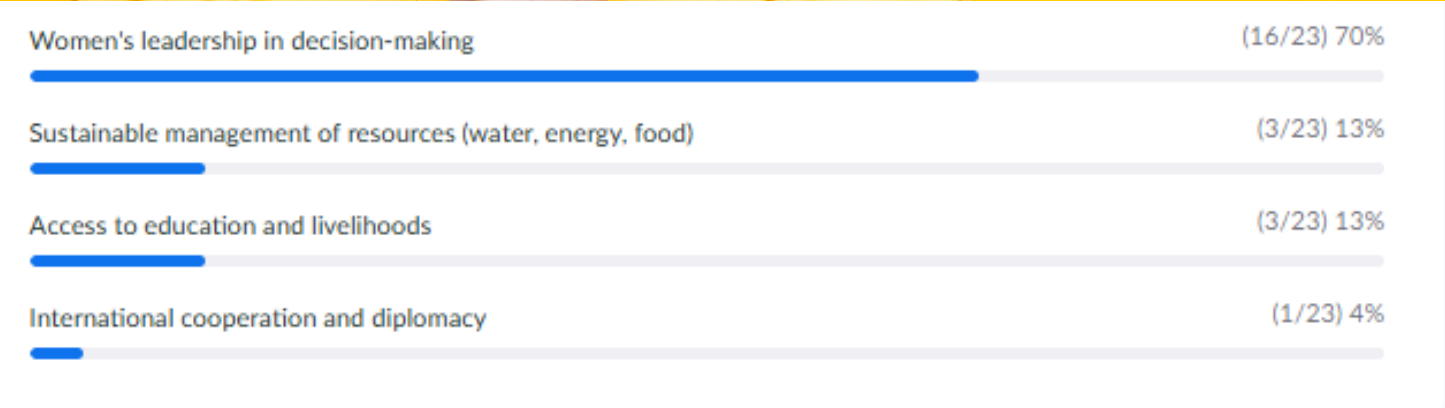
Which factor do you think is most critical for building peace in conflict-affected regions?

1. Women's leadership in decision-making
2. Sustainable management of resources (water, energy, food)
3. Access to education and livelihoods
4. International cooperation and diplomacy



Which factor do you think is most critical for building peace in conflict-affected regions?

POLL 1



1. Women's leadership in decision-making
2. Sustainable management of resources (water, energy, food)
3. Access to education and livelihoods
4. International cooperation and diplomacy

THERE ARE SOLUTIONS.



**Wellbeing for all on a
stable planet is possible.**

**It's time to transform our economic
system.**



**With “Earth for All” the Club of
Rome calls for five decisive
turnarounds:**

- 1. ending poverty**
- 2. addressing gross inequality**
- 3. empowering women**
- 4. making our food system healthy
for people and ecosystems**
- 5. transitioning to clean energy**

FROM VISION TO COMMITMENT.



Reinforces: global commitment to the Paris Agreement and the SDGs as interlinked roadmaps for a stable and livable planet.

Calls for: a reform of the global financial architecture to unlock resources beyond GDP and redirect investments toward people and planet.





PANEL-DISCUSSION

Is Sustainability
a Pathway to
Peace?

How could
this work?



PANEL-DISCUSSION

Is Sustainability
a Pathway to
Peace?

How could
this work?

Here is the quote by Madeleine Albright, former U.S. Secretary of State, that Luba tried to share during our meeting.

“There is a special place in hell for women who don’t help other women.”



Key Take Aways

Setting the Scene & Voices from the Ground – Women's Perspectives

Excessive militarization can divert resources, increase emissions, and slow progress on climate and development goals.

War, conflict and climate change are deeply interconnected – and women are on the frontlines of their impact.

Women's Health, Military service, and Climate Change

Empowering women in leadership, health, and peacebuilding is essential for sustainable recovery.

Sustainable security links defence preparedness with resilience, health, and environmental sustainability.

Is Sustainability a Pathway to Peace?

The UN Pact for the Future offers a shared framework to connect gender equality, climate justice and peace.

Gender-equal climate justice is not a separate goal — it is the pathway to peace.



Find out more about
Zonta Says NOW at
zonta.org/zontasaysnow
or email:

info@zontasaysnow.org.au

Thank you.

Save the date

Next Think Tank
11 January 2026
at 3 am UTC

Hosted by our Australia/Oceania Team
Theme: Sustainable Cities