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ANGER IN KOSOVO AS UN “MUZZLES” CIVIL SOCIETY LEADER AT DEMOCRACY CONFERENCE



Prishtina, Kosovo: The largest women’s network in Kosovo has suspended cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), after the agency prevented the group’s leader from publicly criticizing a controversial UN plan to grant Serbia control of Serb enclaves in Kosovo.

The incident occurred last week as Igballe Rogova, Executive Director of the Kosova Women’s Network (KWN), was preparing to speak at a UN conference on women and governance in Istanbul. UNDP organizers told her that her speech was “too political” and that she could only speak if she removed all references to the plan from her remarks.

In an angry statement sent to UNDP headquarters, KWN accuses the agency of suppressing freedom of speech and undermining democracy. “Evidently the UNDP organizers believed that women are allowed to participate in politics only so long as they are not too political or they avoid serious political issues,” it reads.

The controversy has strained relations between womens’ civil society in Kosovo and the UN, which administered Kosovo following the withdrawal of Serbian forces in 1999. KWN has requested an official, public apology from UNDP.

The UN plan was proposed recently by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, and caused anger in Kosovo because it appeared to undermine Kosovo’s declaration independence from Serbia on

February 18. Thousands of Kosovars marched through the streets of Prishtina last month in protest, as reported by *AdvocacyNet*.

The KWN, a network of more than 85 women's organizations and partner of [The Advocacy Project \(AP\)](#), has been at the forefront of the protests, and Ms Rogova planned to use her speech in Istanbul to urge respect for the country's national sovereignty. Ironically, Ms Rogova was due to speak at a discussion about women's political participation in democracy building.

The KWN statement has been sent to the UNDP in Prishtina and New York. It accuses the agency of violating the UN's own resolutions on women's rights and notes that according to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, women have the right to make their voices heard. The Resolution urged governments to "ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions."

The KWN statement adds that women can also help to break the stalemate that so often occurs when men negotiate peace agreements. "Women bring new perspectives to war, peace and security," said the statement. "By silencing our voices, UNDP may even be contributing to the prolongation of conflict."

- Learn more about [KWN](#)