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Rising Tides: Climate Risks for the Maldives and the WPS Prevention Pillar

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Abstract

At twenty-five years on, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda faces growing pressure to address forms of insecurity that extend beyond armed conflict. This article examines climate change in the Maldives through the lens of the WPS Prevention pillar, arguing that climate-related risks expose the limitations of conflict-centric interpretations of prevention. Using the Maldives as a critical case, it shows how climate change constitutes an existential and deeply gendered security threat, generating slow-onset harms that undermine livelihoods, health, social cohesion, and political stability in the absence of war. The analysis demonstrates that Maldivian women are not only disproportionately affected by environmental decline, but also act as key preventive agents through early warning, adaptation, care, and community governance. By examining climate diplomacy, local resilience practices, and gender-responsive climate finance, the article calls for closer convergence between WPS and climate policy and a reconceptualization of the prevention pillar.

Author Profile

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> "*Globally, the Maldives and other small islands are on the front lines of climate change; and locally, on our front lines are our women*." — Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid

Introduction: Climate, Culture and the Stakes of Prevention

The Maldives (or Dhivehi Raajje as it is known in the Maldivian language) is not merely a collection of low-lying islands exposed to rising seas. It is a civilisation that has endured for over two millennia. Scattered across the Indian Ocean, the archipelago is home to a distinct indigenous population with its own language (Dhivehi), written script, social institutions, and island-based ways of life that are not mutually intelligible with those of neighbouring states. Cultural practices, food systems, kinship structures, and community norms have evolved in close relationship with the sea, shaping what is often described locally as an "island mentality" rooted in interdependence and adaptation. Social arrangements often diverge from global norms. For example, it has the highest divorce rate in the world, reflecting the absence of strong social stigma rather than social breakdown. And this illustrates forms of resilience embedded in Maldivian society. Today, climate change threatens not only land and livelihoods but the continuity of this social and cultural world itself.

For the Maldivian people, climate change is not a distant prospect but a lived reality. It is something that places homes, livelihoods, and the social cohesion upon which peace depends under growing strain. As rising tides redraw the physical map of the nation, they simultaneously expose the gendered contours of insecurity: women's economic activities, caregiving responsibilities, and political participation are disproportionately affected by environmental decline, even as women's knowledge, labour, and leadership remain central to sustaining community resilience and adaptive capacity. In this context, climate change constitutes not only an environmental crisis. It is a profound challenge to prevention itself.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) established the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda around four interdependent pillars: Participation, Protection, Prevention, and Relief and Recovery. Over the past twenty-five years, scholarship and policy practice have expanded the scope of these pillars, yet their interpretations remain uneven. In particular, the Prevention pillar has often been narrowly interpreted as the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, effectively collapsing it into the Protection mandate. Yet Prevention was also intended to operate earlier in the security continuum, emphasising women's participation in conflict prevention and crisis mitigation. Central to this vision is the recognition of women as knowledge-holders whose everyday experiences position them as early warning actors capable of identifying emerging risks before they escalate into overt crisis.

Empirical work from Small Island Developing States illustrates this dynamic clearly. Research by Sharon Bhagwan-Rolls (Bhagwan-Rolls 2015; see also Rolls and Evans 2020) in Fiji, drawing on community-based adaptation and women-led environmental governance initiatives in Fiji, demonstrates how women's local environmental knowledge, particularly around water security, food systems, and household-level climate stress, functions as an early indicator of emerging social and ecological instability, often well before such risks are recognised by formal institutions. Such insights are directly relevant to climate-vulnerable contexts like the Maldives, where environmental degradation unfolds gradually but cumulatively, and where prevention depends on recognising, valuing, and acting upon women's situated knowledge in adaptation and mitigation processes.

This essay argues that at twenty-five years on, the WPS agenda must confront these limitations by rethinking what prevention means in an era of climate crisis. Climate change generates forms of insecurity that do not fit neatly within conventional Prevention or even Protection mandates: slow-onset disasters, sea-level rise, livelihood erosion, chronic displacement, and cumulative social stressors that intensify existing gender inequalities. In frontline climate-vulnerable states such as the Maldives, these dynamics are existential rather than military. The absence of armed conflict does not equate to security. Instead, Maldivian women navigate layered risks, from intensified care burdens and precarious labour to the erosion of land and freshwater resources and heightened exposure during extreme weather events, while simultaneously undertaking much of the often-unrecognised work that prevents social fragmentation and sustains community life.

By situating the Maldives as a critical case, this essay asks two interrelated questions. First, how must the Prevention pillar of the WPS framework evolve to address climate-induced and ecological risks, rather than focusing narrowly on armed conflict? Second, what does the Maldivian experience reveal about gendered prevention in contexts where peace and security are shaped less by militarised threats than by environmental fragility and structural vulnerability? It looks at this issue both at the individual/community level and the state level.
The essay first examines climate insecurity in the Maldives, framing environmental degradation as a form of existential and gendered insecurity. It then turns to feminist critiques of the Prevention pillar within the WPS framework, exploring how climate change exposes the limitations of conflict-centric security paradigms. The analysis subsequently considers the Maldives' engagement in climate diplomacy and local adaptation as forms of preventive action, before concluding with a call to reconceptualise prevention around ecological peace, structural resilience, and gendered justice.

Climate Insecurity in the Maldives: Environmental Decline as an Existential and Gendered Threat

The Maldives stands among the most climate-vulnerable nations in the world. Over 80 per cent of its islands lie less than one metre above sea level, and 97 per cent of inhabited islands are

affected by coastal erosion, often severely. (Behsudi 2021) Despite contributing only approximately 0.003 per cent of global greenhouse-gas emissions, the country shoulders a disproportionate share of climate risk. (Muizzu 2024) Rising sea levels, saltwater intrusion, salinisation, and intensifying storm surges threaten not only land and infrastructure, but also freshwater supplies, agriculture, housing, tourism and basic services. Recent analysis by the World Bank Group highlights that degradation of marine ecosystems, coral reefs, and fish stocks, central to livelihoods, is already visible and projected to worsen sharply by mid-century under both moderate and high-emissions scenarios. (Open Knowledge Repository, World Bank 2024) Without urgent adaptation, the Country Climate and Development Report (CCDR) warns that the consequences for island ecosystems and economies could be devastating.

Historically, fisheries and tourism have underpinned the Maldivian economy and sustained island communities. Both sectors are now acutely exposed to climate impacts. The CCDR estimates that coastal flooding alone, expected to intensify with sea-level rise, could damage up to 3.3 per cent of the Maldives' total assets by 2050 under typical ten-year flood events, translating into potential GDP losses of US$0.7–1.1 billion.(International Finance Corporation 2024) If global emissions remain unchecked, falling fish stocks and coral-reef collapse threaten the long-term viability of fisheries, while coastal inundation, beach erosion, freshwater scarcity, and infrastructure damage place the tourism sector at growing risk. Adaptation costs are correspondingly high: estimates for addressing sea-level rise and related flooding alone range between US$2–4 billion. (World Bank 2024)

The economic fallout of climate change has profound social consequences. Income loss, rising costs of basic goods, internal displacement, and widening inequality place significant strain on households and communities. For Small Island Developing States such as the Maldives, where economic and ecological margins are already narrow, these pressures risk cascading into structural breakdown. These disruptions are neither abstract nor gender-neutral. Climate insecurity in the Maldives is deeply gendered: women are disproportionately affected due to their concentration in climate-sensitive sectors, including informal retail, small-scale agriculture, fish processing, and tourism-related services and because they bear primary responsibility for caregiving and domestic labour. Under conditions of environmental stress, water scarcity, flooding, salinisation, livelihood loss, and relocation intensify these burdens, limiting women's economic mobility and political agency while amplifying existing inequalities.

Climate change is also producing acute and multifaceted health insecurities that compound environmental and socioeconomic pressures. Rising temperatures have increased exposure to extreme heat, with average exposures approximately 0.5°C above historical baselines, contributing to heat-related illness and rising demand on health services, particularly among children, older adults, pregnant women, and individuals with pre-existing conditions. Heat exposure also undermines labour productivity, broadening the social determinants of health. Climatic conditions in urban and densely populated islands have become increasingly favourable to vector-borne diseases such as dengue and malaria. Between 2012 and 2021,

vulnerability to Aedes-transmitted diseases was estimated to be 17 per cent higher than in the 1990s, largely due to rising urban populations. (Lancet Countdown 2023) Sea-level rise, flooding, and saltwater intrusion further threaten water and sanitation systems, increasing the risk of water-borne disease and contamination of freshwater sources. These changes also heighten the incidence of respiratory illness and food insecurity as food systems are disrupted by heat, flooding, and ecosystem degradation, placing sustained pressure on public health infrastructure across dispersed islands.

These health impacts are experienced unevenly along gendered lines. Women, who are predominantly the primary caregivers within households, absorb the greatest burden of climate-related illness. When family members fall ill due to heat stress, infectious disease, or water and food insecurity, it is most often wives and mothers who remain at home to provide care, take leave from paid employment, or withdraw from income-generating activities altogether. This unpaid care labour deepens economic precarity, reinforces gendered labour divisions, and constrains women's participation in public and political life, reproducing structural inequalities that intersect with broader patterns of climate insecurity.

Although large-scale climate-induced displacement has not yet been empirically documented in the Maldives, qualitative research and policy analysis indicate that climate change is already shaping mobility in indirect but gendered ways. Slow-onset environmental degradation, including erosion, flooding, and declining livelihoods, intersects with economic and social pressures to influence internal movement between islands, often framed locally as a search for better services, employment, or stability rather than as "climate migration" per se. From a gendered perspective, even incremental mobility can have significant consequences. Women's movement is frequently constrained by caregiving responsibilities, limited access to resources, and social norms, while women on host islands absorb additional pressures as populations increase. These dynamics intensify unpaid care burdens, disrupt informal livelihoods, and strain social networks that are central to everyday resilience.

The gendered consequences of climate-linked mobility become particularly visible in contexts of competition over finite natural resources. One illustrative example is the Maldivian tradition of harvesting wild sea almonds (*kanamadhu*) from Midhili trees, an activity closely associated with women's subsistence practices, small-scale trade, and communal exchange. (UNDP n.d.) As new arrivals settle on host islands, often driven by environmental or economic pressures, competition over access to these trees can intensify, generating tensions among women's groups over harvesting rights, timing, and use. What was previously governed through informal norms and relationships can become a source of friction, revealing how climate-induced mobility, even at small scales, can unsettle gendered resource governance and undermine social cohesion.

Viewed through the Women, Peace and Security framework, these dynamics underscore that climate insecurity in the Maldives constitutes an existential threat rather than a peripheral or future risk. Environmental decline erodes not only territory but the ecological, economic, and

social foundations upon which peace depends. The Maldives is not confronting the likelihood of armed conflict, but the possibility of systemic collapse: loss of land, disappearance of livelihoods, forced displacement, degradation of natural capital, and irreparable damage to social infrastructure. Under such conditions, prevention cannot be limited to averting violence; it must encompass the anticipation and mitigation of slow-moving crises that erode community stability. Women's everyday experiences of environmental stress, health burden, resource competition, and mobility pressures function as early warning signals of emerging insecurity, highlighting the need to reconceptualise Prevention within the WPS agenda as the protection of social cohesion, ecological resilience, and gendered justice.

Rethinking the Prevention Pillar

The Prevention pillar of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda has evolved unevenly and across different sites. Within formal United Nations frameworks, Prevention has largely remained oriented toward averting armed conflict through early warning and crisis response, with environmental and structural threats treated as peripheral or as background "risk multipliers." Although later WPS resolutions acknowledge broader drivers of insecurity, they have not fundamentally displaced militarised assumptions about what prevention is intended to address. As a result, slow-onset and cumulative harms associated with climate change continue to sit uneasily within dominant interpretations of the Prevention mandate.

Beyond UN doctrine, however, Prevention has been more substantially reimagined through feminist scholarship, civil society advocacy as well as practitioner communities. Feminist critiques have long challenged the conflation of Prevention with Protection and the narrow focus on sexual and gender-based violence, emphasising instead women's participation as a preventive strategy in its own right. From this perspective, insecurity is produced through structural and everyday processes, economic precarity, environmental degradation, health crises, and unpaid care labour that erode social cohesion well before violence occurs. Prevention, therefore, is not a moment of intervention but an ongoing effort to sustain the conditions necessary for peace.

Climate change exposes the limitations of conflict-centric Prevention most starkly in climate-vulnerable contexts. In Small Island Developing States such as the Maldives, environmental degradation threatens territory, livelihoods, and governance without triggering conventional markers of conflict. Yet these states have functioned as preventive actors, issuing early warnings about climate risks and mobilising diplomacy around existential security. Feminist political ecology further illuminates how women's everyday engagement with land, water, food systems, and care positions them as early-warning actors whose knowledge remains marginalised in formal decision-making. Taken together, these insights point toward a reconceptualisation of Prevention that extends beyond conflict avoidance to encompass ecological sustainability, social resilience, and gendered justice.

In the Maldives, prevention is not absent; it is misrecognised. Climate diplomacy, adaptation efforts, and women's everyday labour already function as preventive practices aimed at sustaining social cohesion and averting systemic collapse. It is also important to note that the Maldives does not currently have a standalone National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, nor a formalised WPS framework embedded within its national security architecture. References to gender, participation, and resilience instead appear across a range of policy domains, including climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and development planning, without being explicitly articulated through the language or logic of WPS. As a result, prevention-related practices, particularly those grounded in women's everyday experiences of environmental stress remain institutionally diffuse rather than consolidated within a recognisable WPS framework. This absence is analytically significant, as it shapes how women's knowledge is rendered visible, legible, or marginal to dominant understandings of security and prevention.

Preventive Diplomacy and Climate Advocacy in the Maldives

Long before climate change entered mainstream security discourse, the Maldives framed environmental degradation as an existential threat requiring preventive action at the global level. As early as 1987, President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom used the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) to warn that sea-level rise posed a direct threat to the country's survival, marking one of the first instances in which a state articulated climate change as a matter of national security rather than environmental management. This early advocacy culminated in the 1989 Malé Declaration on Global Warming and Sea Level Rise, which called for international cooperation to address the impacts of climate change on low-lying island states. These interventions positioned the Maldives not as a passive victim of climate impacts, but as a preventive actor seeking to avert irreversible harm through early warning and diplomatic mobilisation.

This form of climate diplomacy reflects a preventive logic distinct from conflict-centric security paradigms. Rather than responding to violence or instability after it occurs, the Maldives' advocacy has sought to prevent political erasure, territorial loss, and delayed international response by elevating climate change as an urgent global concern. In doing so, the country has drawn on the moral authority of Small Island Developing States, whose disproportionate vulnerability to climate impacts lends credibility to claims that climate change constitutes an existential security threat. This moral positioning has enabled the Maldives to act as an early warning voice within international fora, signalling risks that extend beyond its borders while grounding them in the lived realities of island communities.

Subsequent acts of climate diplomacy have reinforced this preventive stance. President Mohamed Nasheed's 2009 underwater cabinet meeting, staged to highlight the threat of sea-level rise, exemplified the use of symbolic diplomacy to communicate urgency and irreversibility. While often interpreted as a media spectacle, such actions can be understood as preventive interventions aimed at accelerating global attention before thresholds of adaptation

and survival are crossed. By framing climate change as a present danger rather than a future risk, the Maldives has consistently sought to counter the temporal delays that characterise international climate governance.

Viewed through the WPS Prevention pillar, Maldivian climate diplomacy illustrates how prevention operates at the macro level in climate-vulnerable contexts. The objective is not to avert armed conflict, but to prevent the slow unfolding of existential harm, loss of territory, displacement of populations, collapse of livelihoods, and the erosion of political agency. This form of preventive diplomacy challenges the narrow temporal and conceptual boundaries of Prevention within the WPS agenda, demonstrating that warning the world, mobilising moral authority, and demanding early action are themselves preventive acts. In this sense, the Maldives' climate advocacy exemplifies how prevention begins not with conflict, but with the recognition and articulation of threats that, if left unaddressed, will make peace unsustainable.

Yet when viewed through a Women, Peace and Security Prevention lens, Maldivian preventive policies also reveal important silences. While the state has been an early and vocal articulator of climate change as an existential security threat at the international level, it has been less consistent in recognising women's lived experiences as sources of early warning within its own climate governance frameworks. This distinction matters, as the WPS Prevention pillar is not only concerned with acting early, but with whose knowledge is recognised as signalling insecurity in the first place.

In the Maldivian context, women often encounter the impacts of climate change earlier and more acutely than men, particularly through water scarcity caused by salinisation, disruptions to household food security, increased care burdens during flooding and storms, and the erosion of informal and home-based livelihoods. These everyday pressures constitute slow-onset warning signs of insecurity that precede displacement, economic collapse, or social instability. Yet such experiences are rarely framed as security indicators within state-led climate or disaster-risk policy, remaining instead categorised as development or welfare concerns.

Civil-society and non-governmental organisations have played a critical role in foregrounding these gendered impacts and translating them into evidence of emerging risk. Community-based climate adaptation projects, women-led resilience initiatives, and NGO research have documented how women's local knowledge functions as an early warning system for environmental stress, social strain, and declining adaptive capacity. Alongside state-led climate diplomacy, a number of Maldivian civil-society organisations have worked to surface gendered experiences of climate stress that function as early warning signals at the community level. Organisations such as Maldivian Youth Climate Network have documented localized impacts of sea-level rise, water scarcity, and coastal erosion through youth- and community-based advocacy, drawing attention to how environmental change is felt first in everyday life. Local women-focused civil society actors, such as the Maldives Women's Association**,** operate in a context where gender intersects with climate vulnerability and inequality, including disparities in labour force participation, unpaid care work, and access to resources, even if they do not yet

feature prominently in formal climate-security discourse. (Maldives Women's Association 2019) At the humanitarian and disaster-risk interface, the Maldivian Red Crescent has engaged women as community volunteers in preparedness and response initiatives, implicitly recognising their role as first observers of emerging risks during floods, storms, and slow-onset climate impacts. (Maldivian Red Crescent 2019) While these initiatives demonstrate that women's experiences are already operating as informal early warning systems, their translation into formal state prevention and security frameworks remains uneven, underscoring a gap between grassroots gender–climate knowledge and institutionalised WPS prevention.

However, engagement between the Maldivian state and such initiatives remains uneven, with consultation often occurring on a project basis rather than through institutionalised mechanisms that embed women's knowledge into preventive decision-making. This gap highlights a key tension within Maldivian climate governance. Internationally, the Maldives has been a pioneer of preventive climate diplomacy, warning of existential risks long before they became widely acknowledged. Domestically, however, prevention has been less explicitly gender-responsive, with limited formal recognition of women's experiences as strategic early warning signals. From a WPS perspective, this suggests that prevention is operating at different scales and with different epistemic hierarchies: robust at the level of global advocacy, but partial at the level of everyday climate insecurity.

Recognising women's experiences as early warning would not merely strengthen inclusivity; it would enhance the preventive capacity of the state itself. Integrating gendered climate knowledge into national adaptation planning, disaster-risk reduction, and security discourse would align Maldivian practice more closely with the transformative intent of the WPS agenda, where prevention begins not with conflict, but with listening to those who experience insecurity first.

Gendered Climate Prevention in Practice

While Maldivian climate diplomacy illustrates prevention at the macro level, gendered climate prevention remains uneven and it is structurally constrained in practice. Women are still underrepresented in formal climate and foreign policy decision-making, and leadership positions remain disproportionately occupied by men. The visibility of women in senior climate roles, therefore, should not be read as evidence of gender parity, but as notable exceptions that illuminate both the possibilities and limits of women's participation in preventive governance. These exceptions matter precisely because they coexist with persistent barriers to women's access to power, including entrenched gender norms, unequal access to political networks, and the undervaluation of women's expertise in technical and security-oriented domains.

Figures such as Aminath Shauna, former Minister of Environment, Climate Change and Technology, and Sabra Noordeen, appointed as Climate Envoy under President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, are therefore best understood not as representative cases but as illustrative ones. Their prominence demonstrates that women are capable of shaping climate policy,

diplomacy, and preventive agendas at the highest levels when institutional openings exist. At the same time, their exceptionality underscores how gendered access to decision-making remains limited, reinforcing feminist critiques of tokenism and selective inclusion within both climate governance and the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

At the institutional level, climate has become a core component of Maldivian foreign policy, and women have been visibly involved in its diplomatic articulation, including through female ambassadors and a Ministry of Foreign Affairs workforce in which women constitute a numerical majority. Yet numerical representation has not consistently translated into agenda-setting power or leadership across climate and security portfolios. This gap between presence and influence highlights a central tension within gendered climate prevention: women may be visible in diplomatic labour and representational roles while remaining marginalised in strategic decision-making.

Beyond elite and diplomatic spaces, women's leadership in the Maldives is most visible and most consequential at the local level, where adaptation and everyday governance intersect. Women play active roles within island councils, Island Women's Committees, and community-based organisations, contributing to decision-making on resource management, disaster preparedness, food security, and social welfare. In informal market networks, women are central to processing, distributing, and sustaining food systems, particularly during periods of environmental stress or economic disruption. Through NGOs and community groups, women also facilitate awareness-raising, mutual support, and coordination during climate-related shocks, often acting as intermediaries between households and local authorities. Much of this labour remains unpaid, informal, and politically marginalised, yet it is precisely these practices that maintain community cohesion and prevent social breakdown. Recognising women's local leadership and adaptive labour as forms of preventive action reframes climate resilience not as a technical exercise, but as a gendered process of sustaining everyday peace.

Read through the lens of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, these practices reveal that women's involvement in preventative work in the Maldives is not absent, but systematically misrecognised. Women's leadership in adaptation, local governance, food systems, and care work constitutes a form of preventive action that anticipates and mitigates insecurity long before it manifests as an overt crisis or conflict. This resonates closely with Sharon Rolls' work in Fiji, which demonstrates how women's everyday environmental knowledge and community engagement function as early warning systems, signalling social and ecological stress well before formal institutions respond. Yet, as in the Maldivian case, such knowledge remains marginal within dominant security and policy frameworks because it does not conform to militarised or event-driven understandings of threat. The Maldives thus exposes a critical disconnect at WPS at 25: prevention continues to be imagined as a response to imminent violence, rather than as the ongoing work of sustaining social cohesion, ecological stability, and dignified life under conditions of structural stress. Re-centering women's climate leadership and adaptive labour within the Prevention pillar therefore requires recognising

women not only as beneficiaries of protection, but as primary agents of early warning and preventive peace.

Alongside women's leadership and everyday adaptive labour, emerging approaches to gender-responsive climate finance in the Maldives further illustrate how prevention is already being operationalised in practice. The development of gender-responsive climate financing strategies demonstrates pathways for integrating gender into climate prevention, pointing toward models that can inform both WPS frameworks and climate finance architectures. Recent initiatives supported by international mechanisms such as the Climate Investment Funds (CIF) have sought to embed gender equality within climate resilience and adaptation programming, recognising that climate interventions are more effective when women are meaningfully included as decision-makers, leaders, and beneficiaries.[1] CIF's gender action initiatives emphasise women's participation in climate governance, improved access to climate finance, and leadership in adaptation efforts, reflecting a growing recognition that gender inequality itself constitutes a structural barrier to sustainable climate resilience. Viewed through the WPS Prevention pillar, such approaches move beyond narrow notions of risk management toward addressing the underlying social and economic conditions that produce insecurity. In this sense, gender-responsive climate finance represents a practical articulation of preventive peacebuilding, aligning climate policy with feminist principles of justice, inclusion, and participation, and reorienting prevention toward sustaining the ecological and social foundations upon which peace depends. ("Gender Action in Haiti and the Maldives.." 2022)

Conclusion: Expanding the Prevention Pillar

At twenty-five years on, the Women, Peace and Security agenda must confront a persistent misreading of its Prevention mandate. Prevention was never intended to be limited to the avoidance of armed conflict, nor solely to the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence. Rather, UNSCR 1325 envisioned prevention as an upstream practice centred on women's participation in identifying and mitigating emerging risks before they escalate into crisis. This included recognising women not only as beneficiaries of protection, but as *producers of early warning knowledge* whose everyday social positioning enables them to perceive insecurity in its formative stages. The narrowing of Prevention into a conflict- or violence-centric mandate has therefore obscured both the temporal depth and the epistemic breadth of its original purpose.

The Maldivian case demonstrates why this broader understanding of Prevention is urgently needed in an era of climate crisis. Climate change produces slow-onset, cumulative, and structural forms of insecurity that rarely trigger conventional markers of conflict, yet nevertheless threaten peace, stability, and survival. In this context, the limits of a conflict-centric WPS framework become visible: prevention operates not through crisis response alone,

[1] The Climate Investment Funds (CIF) are a multilateral climate finance mechanism administered by multilateral development banks, supporting country-led climate mitigation and adaptation programmes

but through early warning, adaptation, and resilience-building embedded in everyday life. As this essay has shown, Maldivian women's experiences of environmental stress, health burdens, resource competition, and mobility pressures function as precisely the kinds of early warning signals that the Prevention pillar was designed to capture, even though they are rarely recognised as such within formal security or climate governance. This resonates with Sharon Rolls' work in Fiji, which similarly demonstrates how women's environmental knowledge identifies emerging risks well before they are acknowledged by state or international institutions.

Prevention in the Maldives thus unfolds across interconnected scales, revealing a further limitation in how the WPS agenda has been operationalised. At the global level, preventive diplomacy has been used to warn the international community of existential climate risks and to press for early action. At the national and local levels, prevention is enacted through adaptation strategies, informal governance, care work, and the maintenance of social cohesion, much of which is carried out by women. The challenge is not an absence of preventive practice on the ground, but a persistent failure to recognise these practices as prevention within dominant security frameworks. This produces a disconnect not between local realities and global climate diplomacy per se, but between women's everyday preventive labour and the scales at which security knowledge is deemed legible.

Recognising these dynamics requires a recalibration of the WPS agenda. Expanding the Prevention pillar to encompass ecological and existential threats does not dilute its focus; it restores its original emphasis on participation, early warning, and structural risk mitigation. The Maldives thus offers more than a case of climate vulnerability. It provides a model for gendered climate prevention that demonstrates how peace is sustained not only through the absence of violence, but through the continual work of anticipating harm, maintaining social and ecological systems, and acting before crisis becomes irreversible.

For the Maldives, climate change is not only a question of rising seas or adaptive capacity, but of cultural survival. What is at stake is the potential loss of a civilisation that has endured for over two thousand years, shaped by distinct languages, social practices, island-based governance, and ways of living with the sea. This existential threat is experienced most acutely through everyday life, where women shoulder the responsibility of sustaining households, transmitting cultural knowledge, and maintaining social cohesion under increasing environmental stress. The erosion of land thus parallels the erosion of the social and cultural worlds that have historically anchored Maldivian identity, underscoring why prevention cannot be narrowly defined or indefinitely deferred.

Perhaps the lesson from the Maldives is that women's involvement in crisis prevention has been hiding in plain sight. Long before climate change was framed as a security issue, women were already responding to its effects, adjusting livelihoods, managing care, mediating tensions, and noticing risks as they emerged. Prevention did not begin with crisis meetings or mandates, but in kitchens, island councils, Women's Development Committees, and

conversations about eroding shorelines. As the Women, Peace and Security agenda turns twenty-five, it need not invent a new understanding of prevention for a warming world. It may simply need to recognise and value the forms of prevention already being practised by those who experience insecurity first.

Author's note: Parts of the analysis draw on the author's prior research, professional experience, speeches delivered, and long-term engagement with climate and gender issues in the Maldives. Some observations are therefore based on practitioner knowledge rather than directly cited sources.

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