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30<sup>th</sup> September 2014

A Chara,

Relatives for Justice welcome this opportunity to contribute to the consultation on the Irish Government's second Action Plan on UNSCR 1325.

Relatives for Justice is a victim support NGO working with persons bereaved and injured as a result of the recent conflict in Ireland. We work with persons affected by violations by all actors to the conflict and from all backgrounds in our community.

Relatives for Justice provide a wide range of support interventions including advocacy and advice provision and therapeutic programmes.

At this critical time of debate on dealing with the past it is of upmost importance that the Irish Government is actively engaged in these matters and that the interests of women affected by conflict are promoted.

Please find attached general commentary and recommendations.

If your committee would find it useful to meet to discuss these issues we would be very happy to facilitate such a meeting.

Is Mise le Meas

Andrée Murphy  
Deputy Director



**An tAontas Eorpach**

Ciste Forbraíochta  
Réigiúnaí na hEorpa

Ag infheistiú i do dhán

Relatives for Justice is recognised by the Inland Revenue as a Registered Charity XR41538;  
And a Company Limited by Guarantee NI44611

## **RFJ Mission Statement**

To provide appropriate therapeutic and developmental based support for the bereaved and injured of the conflict within a safe environment.

To examine and develop transitional justice and truth recovery mechanisms assisting with individual healing, contributing to positive societal change, ensuring the effective promotion and protection of human rights, social justice, and reconciliation in the context of an emerging participative democracy post conflict.

Relatives for Justice provide services which categorise under these 5 titles:

- Family Advice
- Family Support
- Legal and Advocacy Work
- Complimentary Therapy
- Transitional Legacies

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disappointment, pessimism, anxiety and rage. This needs to be addressed within a gender framework and women need to be at the fore of a process that examines such matters.

### **Poverty of Victims and Survivors**

A recent poverty study in the north of Ireland shows for those who had a close relative injured the deprivation rate is 38 per cent, if someone witnessed an assault, the deprivation rate is 43 per cent or if a close relative had spent time in prison, the deprivation rate is 45 per cent.

Professor Tomlinson said: "Experience of violent events in the past increased the chances of suffering from 'multiple deprivation' in the present. Research in many parts of the world has shown that violent conflicts can result in long term problems of poverty and deprivation. This is what has happened in Northern Ireland. The evidence is clear.

'Dealing with the past' needs to include tackling the deprivation of those whose lives are most blighted by the years of conflict."<sup>2</sup> This report did not examine the economic impact of violent conflict related bereavement. Relatives for Justice submit that the anecdotal evidence points to disproportionate dependency on benefits and bereavement pensions that this is multi-generational and that economic disadvantage of those violently bereaved by conflict has never been repaired.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Mike Tomlinson, "Poverty and Social Exclusion in N.Ireland, Legacies of Conflict", 2014, 28 Aug.2014 <http://www.qub.ac.uk/home/ceao/News/Title,458964,en.html>.

<sup>3</sup> See Andrée Murphy 'Living with Poverty' <http://eamonnmallie.com/2014/09/living-poverty-andree-murphy/>

To date no transitional justice mechanism either in place or proposed<sup>4</sup> has applied any real form of gender lens to the matters under consideration.

Article 2 of the ECHR has taken centre stage, and the question of how to investigate conflict deaths is the primary focus of all talks. While this has happened for many understandable reasons, the harms and violations that women experienced during the conflict have not been examined and considered. It is well established that women experience conflict differently and that a different approach is required to ensure that women's experience of conflict is considered and redressed.

This is a significant gap in dealing with the past for our society and is also a disappointing approach from the parties and the governments in light of UNSCR 1325 and CEDAW Gen Rec 30.

The experience of women during our conflict, the violations they suffered and their needs post conflict can only be recovered by any process applying a gender lens to investigations and any framework that is built.

Equally individualised investigations into deaths will miss trends, and systemic patterns of violations.

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<sup>4</sup> Report of the Consultative Group on the Past January 2009  
Proposed Agreement *'An Agreement Among The Parties Of The Northern Ireland Executive On Parades, Select Commemorations, And Related Protests; Flags And Emblems; And Contending With The Past'* 31 December 2013



## **Process Is Key to Reparation**

Providing a safe, non-judgemental environment is essential in tending to women's needs. Trust is a major factor due to the harms experienced by women in our conflict. These women need to be provided with a place of safety which begins with understanding the needs of all victims and survivors.

Due to gendered impact of the conflict, women need help both physically and emotionally. Trauma reacts in many ways and many of these women suffer from depression, panic attacks and nightmares, poor concentration and emotional outbursts; all conflict related problems.

Many victims of conflict use complementary therapies as treatment to work towards physical and emotional well-being. It relieves anxiety and insomnia and alleviates depression. Many women go on to participating in classes as the therapies can help improve self-confidence and self-awareness and create a space for a person to enjoy some much needed time out.

Throughout the conflict, there were no counselling services for these women. They feel whenever bad experiences happened there was no one there to say what path to take, who to talk to, where to go, what they could do. These women are still bereaved, they are still trying to cope. They feel if there was support for them throughout the conflict, they may not be as raw and would have begun the healing process a

address the needs of women affected by conflict in terms of the mental health and well-being and provide therapeutic and developmental based support in a safe environment.

In April 2013 the Memorial Fund was replaced by the Victims and Survivors Service. The Service has been charged with funding victims and survivors groups as well as delivering individual packages of support. This Service has been marked by significant issues regarding its policy and operative practice.<sup>7</sup> In particular the practice of individual therapeutic assessment for victims and survivors has found significant criticism.

From our experience of the Victims and Survivors Service, there is a demonstrable reduction in participation by women accessing individual support programmes. Assessments carried out by the Service are not gender sensitive and have resulted in women relying on group support and avoiding individual support packages as delivered by the Victims and Survivors Service.

The promotion of individualised therapy over community models of recovery also acted to ignore many women's chosen model of recovery which is community based, process driven and recovery focussed.<sup>8</sup>

### **Recommendation**

Any reparations programme – whether statutory or community based - requires a gender sensitive approach to ensure equal participation of

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<sup>7</sup> See report by the Commission for Victims and Survivors at <[http://www.cvsni.org/images/policy-research/Quarterly%20Reports/VSS%20Review%20Report%20\(April-September%202013\).pdf](http://www.cvsni.org/images/policy-research/Quarterly%20Reports/VSS%20Review%20Report%20(April-September%202013).pdf)>

<sup>8</sup> Judith Herman 'Trauma and Recovery' Basic Books 1992

“When making women a priority, we make families and communities a priority also.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Alice McIntyre, “Gendered Violence within the Context of Violence and War, (2014) 16.