



IRELAND'S THIRD NATIONAL ACTION PLAN: WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY, OPEN INVITATIONS FOR SUBMISSIONS

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the above named consultation document; TWN always welcomes the opportunity to contribute to policy development as a constituent part of participative democracy. This consultation response has been compiled on behalf of the TWN Membership as well as other organisations within the community voluntary sector namely, Co-operation Ireland, Foyle Women's Information Network, and Intercomm.

The Training for Women Network (TWN) was formally established in 1996 and since then has provided resources within the community to empower women across the public and voluntary sectors, the trade unions, education and training in taking a more active and informed part in their lives within a changing Northern Ireland requiring new capacity, knowledge, skills and experience. TWN is now the leading regional network in Northern Ireland for the engagement and promotion of training and development for women through its activity in policy development, training, networking and education. TWN is a first stop shop for women in Northern Ireland seeking information on training, development and entrepreneurship. TWN is one of the largest networks in Northern Ireland with a membership that exceeds 300 members and affiliates. TWN currently holds Special Consultative Status with the UN's Economic and Social Council.

Co-operation Ireland has been a leading peace building charity for almost 40 years. It creates opportunities for communities in Northern Ireland and from both sides of the border to come together to build a society based on tolerance and acceptance of diversity. A continuing focus of our work is on the most disadvantaged communities in Northern Ireland and those at greatest risk from conflict, division and marginalisation. Our programmes aim to bring peace to these communities, building confidence, respect and self-esteem between individuals and groups through interventions that address their needs. We also deliver programmes for women and young people, promoting inclusion by connecting them to the supports and services available to others and encouraging them to take their full role within their communities and wider society.

Foyle Women's Information Network (FWIN) was established in January 1994 at a meeting in the Verbal Arts Centre during which, women affirmed the idea for a Women's Network. There was a recognition of the need to support women and women's groups throughout the North West, both urban and rural, to develop their own skills and maximise their input to social, educational and political development within local areas as well as at a strategic level within Northern Ireland. In addition, there is a recognised need to support all women to address their educational, leisure, emotional, physical, health and well-being and their cultural development.

Intercomm was founded in 1995 as a direct response to grassroots community concerns about inter-community conflict and social deprivation. Using its knowledge and expertise, the organization has also broadened its initiatives to assist in other conflict transformation processes worldwide. They are a solution-focused peace building organisation that has developed an organic peace building practice and model over 20 years of experience and delivery.

Please find below the above consortium's response to the above named consultation document.

Women remain under-represented in the Northern Ireland Assembly and elsewhere in the political realm. Women comprise only 27.7% of Members of the Legislative Assembly (30 of 108), 27.7% of Members of Parliament (5 of 18), two of the three Members of the European Parliament and 24% of local councillors. Under UNSCR 1325, women should have equal representation in political structures. Women are often dissatisfied with politics and need reassurance that politics can work for them and enhance their lives. There are unsocial hours to be worked, and women in politics with children would have childcare issues. The political culture is aggressive and 'masculine'. Certain issues, such as violence against women, are viewed as 'women's issues'. More women politicians would address the imbalance of what is considered important and change the culture of politics.

In the 2013 CEDAW Report it states, "The Committee further recalls its previous concluding observations (A/63/38, paras. 284 and 285) and remains concerned at the low representation of women in the post-conflict process in Northern Ireland and the failure to fully implement Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000)"¹. However officials within The Executive Office for Northern Ireland still operate within the assumption that UNSCR 1325 is inapplicable to Northern Ireland on the grounds that the conflict did not qualify as an 'armed conflict' within the definitions expressed in the Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols. This assumption should be removed and the acknowledgement of the 2013 CEDAW report findings (as well as previous reports) should be accepted.

In order to counter the marginalisation that women experience in conflict, it is essential to empower and resource them at community level. While women have traditionally organised to provide services and support mechanisms to sustain families and communities through crises, the post-conflict context requires the substantial support of assistance to the settings and spaces that women inhabit and interact in order to generate the social capital that is needed for women to take their places in the economy, in politics, in social development processes and in peacebuilding activities.

Through community-based support, training, personal development, encouragement and empowerment women's organisations have the structures and experience to empower women to take their rightful place in fair, equal, peaceful societies crafted after conflict. Only by addressing systemic inequalities at all these levels and by dealing with the different legacies of conflict for women and men can a successful transition be achieved.

The 'Peace by Piece' conference hosted by TWN staged at the Waterfront Hall, Belfast, over three days (24-26 June 2008), attracted over 200 participants, with speakers from Northern Ireland, Burma, South Africa, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Ireland, United States of America, Nepal, Burundi, Sri Lanka and Norway. It provided opportunities for women to share, learn about and develop the necessary processes for making peace a reality. Having explored these dimensions of peacebuilding, it was realized that the initial connections and sharing needed to be maintained and extended so that groups of women from widely differing experiences and contexts could continue to develop, advocate and benefit from effective measures for their own empowerment.

The Partners named in this consultation response also form the consortium that runs the Women Involved in Community Transformation Project (2017-2019), recommendation B5 as part of the

¹ *Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women*, 2013, paragraph 42.

Northern Ireland Executive's Fresh Start Agreement². This has been a highly successful project exceeded all of its targets and outcomes and plays an incredibly prominent role within the Tackling Paramilitarism Programme³. The Project used the approach that if you teach a woman, you teach a family and a community due to women often occupying the role of primary teachers within families and communities, allowing learning to cascade outwards. The independent evaluation of Phase 1 of this project conducted by Community Evaluation Northern Ireland has highlighted a number of areas of good practice that could be incorporated into Ireland's 3rd National Action Plan and the Consortium would be happy to furnish the Department for their information and planning.

To develop and expand this capacity, there is a necessity for women to be equipped to engage at all levels of reconciliation and peacebuilding in the post-conflict context. Training and development opportunities for women at community level place key peace enablers at the critical points of social transformation that challenge prejudice and intolerance and promote understanding and engagement. Women as the key components of social capital development provide the cohesive element for the new society beyond conflict, equipped with the knowledge and understanding of conflict and reconciliation skills and confidence for leadership in politics and the community to maintain a stable, fair and equal society⁴.

Northern Ireland is the only part of Ireland to have seen conflict in its recent past, therefore it is vital that these experiences are used in the development of Ireland's Third National Action Plan for Women, Peace and Security. To this extent Northern Ireland must serve this same purpose in any UK UNSCR 1325 National Action Plans.

It is vital that in implementing UNSCR 1325 in Northern Ireland it is recognised that women suffered more in the conflict here, either directly or indirectly through the loss of sons, husbands, lovers, brothers and fathers than men⁵. In addition, Moser and McIlwaine assert that women and girls are more likely to suffer trauma during and after conflict⁶. This is borne out by the fact that twice as many women as men have been reported to use tranquilizers in Northern Ireland⁷. Besides experiencing physical and psychological victimhood differently to men, women have suffered in other ways. Conflict is generally reported to sideline other social issues, such as gender equality, and masculine values are deemed to predominate in such circumstances, stifling women's participation in politics, society and the economy. Women have been marginalised due to the extremes of politics in Northern Ireland, leading to what Monica McWilliams has been

² <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/publications/fresh-start-panel-report-disbandment-paramilitary-groups-northern-ireland>

³ <https://www.ircommission.org/publications/irc-first-report>

⁴ TWN's Extending Positive Relations project under the PEACE III Programme in Northern Ireland provided training in peace and reconciliation and leadership skills, as well as linking women across the region and across the border.

⁵ Alonso, H (1993), *Peace as a Women's Issue: A History of the US Movement for World Peace and Women's Rights*, New York: Syracuse University Press, p. 5.

⁶ Mosser, C and McIlwaine, C (2001), 'Gender and social capital in contexts of political violence' in Mosser, C and Clark, F (eds), *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict and political Violence*, London: Zed. P.81.

⁷ McWilliams, M (1991), 'Women in Northern Ireland: An Overview' in Hughes, E (ed), *Culture and politics in Northern Ireland 1960-90*, Milton Keynes: Oxford University Press, p. 99.

quoted as describing as an 'armed patriarchy'⁸. Therefore both the Irish and UK Governments need to appreciate that firstly, the Northern Ireland conflict was a war and secondly that during the conflict women suffered disproportionately and this must be addressed during the post-conflict transition.

Also related to the above point, it has been identified that women are one of the main sources of building relationships at local level, it is their knowledge, experience and understanding of peace and reconciliation issues that is passed on to their own families and then emanates out through their wider community. This is why it is so important that women are involved in the peacebuilding process in Northern Ireland and not pushed out to the margins as they were during the conflict.

UN Resolution 1325 is a useful tool to examine regions in or in transition from conflict from a gender perspective. There are certain benchmarks that can be measured and set against the level of women's participation and the degree to which gender is taken into account in processes and mechanisms for moving beyond conflict. These are as follows:

- Is there equal representation of women at decision-making levels in national and international processes for conflict management in transition?
- Is there equal representation of women in peacebuilding mechanisms and processes?
- Is there equal representation of women among external intervention and peacebuilding personnel and have all personnel received gender awareness training?
- Is there a gender perspective and gender component to every programme dealing with post-conflict transition?
- Are the specific needs of women and girls taken into account in all programmes, mechanisms and initiatives for post-conflict transition and are their rights protected?
- Are local women's groups' resources to run peace initiatives in their communities and are they being consulted on all points of post-conflict initiatives and processes?
- Is gender-based violence being effectively addressed and perpetrators being dealt with?
- Is there specific reporting on the impacts of the conflict upon women and the development and involvement of women in post-conflict arrangements?

If the answer to any of these questions is no, then the state or states concerned are not living up to their commitments at the international level. According to the above checklist, the Irish and UK governments fall short of their obligations as signatories to UN Resolution 1325. One mechanism to ensure women's participation and gender perspective is to establish structures that are designed to empower women. While Norway is not emerging from conflict, representatives from the country have been involved in several areas of post-conflict transition, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Norway also has specific models that can be copied to encourage gender equality⁹.

Women are underrepresented on the structures that form the intersection between society and the government, for example around a third of the membership of public bodies in Northern Ireland and only 35% of directors of voluntary organisations. Therefore while women appear to predominate in 'horizontal' civil social structures, they are not necessarily prominent in positions

⁸ Miller, R, Wilford, R and Donoghue, F (1996), *Women and Political Participation in Northern Ireland*, Aldershot: Avebury, pp. 12, 217.

⁹ A point of information, research and guidance for gender equality is at www.gender.no

of influence either in executive roles in civil society structures, public bodies or the more formal political structures, such as political parties or government institutions ('vertical' networks)¹⁰

¹⁰ Potter, M (2005) *Women, Civil Society and Peacebuilding*, Belfast: TWN, p. 11.