



Response by Northern Ireland Women's European Platform to the Consultation on Ireland's Third National Action Plan Women, Peace and Security Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

December 2018

Introduction

Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (NIWEP) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation.

NIWEP is a membership organisation of women's NGOs in Northern Ireland. Established as the Northern Ireland link to the European Women's Lobby, the EU's expert body on women's rights and gender equality, NIWEP's core role is to ensure the voice of women in Northern Ireland is heard at the national and international level. NIWEP represents the Northern Ireland women's sector at the UN, as an NGO with special consultative status with ECOSOC.

NIWEP's core objectives involve raising awareness and promoting implementation of key international human rights treaties and initiatives, including UNSCR 1325 as well as the Convention on the Elimination of All Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). NIWEP was among the organisations instrumental in bringing UNSCR 1325 to Northern Ireland and currently provides the secretariat for an All Party Group on UNSCR 1325, Women, Peace and Security at the Northern Ireland Assembly. A key role for NIWEP is ensuring women and girls are engaged in policy and decision making, as well as promoting gender responsive policy and decision making at local, regional and national level taking account of the state's international obligations. NIWEP believes that women play a central role in sustainable peace building, and holds that comprehensive and genuine engagement of women at all levels is core to developing a sustainable future for everyone on this island. The comments in this response are made in this context.

NIWEP is developing a shadow report for the CEDAW Committee, for the examination of the UK under CEDAW in February 2019. The issues raised in the consultation will also be raised in the shadow report, and NIWEP would be pleased to submit further evidence once this is completed, by the end of January.

Strategic priorities and structuring the NAP

NIWEP believes it is important that the principles of United National Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) are implemented across the island of Ireland. In particular, NIWEP would like to emphasise the importance of effective institutional arrangements that protect women and enable their full participation in public life, and would welcome to see these issues given strong priority. The principles of UNSCR

1325 also stress the need for a gender perspective and the central role of women's participation in peace processes as key elements of sustainable peace building, and NIWEP believes this is particularly important in the context of post conflict in Northern Ireland. The gender perspective is essential for post-conflict reconstruction to ensure that the specific impact of conflict on women is identified, their contribution to peace building is recognised and their needs are met. This applies to all women, including migrants and refugees, but a gendered approach is particularly critical in relation to Northern Ireland in light of the strongly traditional view of women which impacts all areas of women's life.

The four pillars remain an effective way to structure the NAP, as they incorporate the core issues and also provide a benchmark internationally. In addition, NIWEP believes this structure is helpful in relation to the Reconciliation Fund, which has contributed significantly to funding work on women, peace and security in Northern Ireland. NIWEP views the Reconciliation Fund as a very helpful vehicle, and would welcome continuation of the fund, as previously in line with the principles on UNSCR 1325.

The NAP and the Northern Ireland context

NIWEP welcomes the inclusion of Northern Ireland in the scope of the consultation and believes that the NAP can provide a potentially very helpful model framework on women, peace and security for Northern Ireland. In particular, by reflecting the issues specific to women in Northern Ireland it can serve to promote and support action in Northern Ireland. In the context of Brexit, it can also play a significant role by taking an all island approach, thus supporting calls from women in Northern Ireland to protect current cross border arrangements and implement the Good Friday Agreement. This is particularly important for women, as women's rights in Northern Ireland are largely underpinned by EU legislation, and there are also concerns that Brexit may impact on post conflict development in line with the Good Friday Agreement.

The impending exit of the UK from the European Union, in itself, highlights the importance of a strong women, peace and security agenda across the island. A key concern for women in Northern Ireland is the potential impact on peace and stability following Brexit, due to uncertainty across society. Women are also concerned about the long term impact on equality provisions and human rights, including employment rights, which in Northern Ireland rely heavily on EU legislation. In addition, there is concern about cross border arrangements, significantly including protection for victims of domestic violence. Under EU legislation, for example the European Protection Order has enabled extension of non molestation orders between member states, which has in particular had an impact on this island. Shared membership of the EU also underpins the Good Friday Agreement, while it has served to facilitate cooperation between the PSNI and An Garda Síochána on domestic violence cases, among other areas. There is significant concern that Brexit will impact on this, while hard border in particular would serve to set back the security of women across the island.

NIWEP would welcome a recognition in the Third NAP of the issues specific to women in Northern Ireland. NIWEP would also welcome a commitment to promoting the implementation of the principles of UNSCR 1325 on an all island basis. Specifically, it would be helpful to refer to institutional mechanisms to engage women in public life, and action to enable women from all backgrounds to participate in public life at levels from local communities to political life.

It can be noted that this is a call repeatedly made by the CEDAW Committee in Concluding Observations from examinations of the UK. In 2013, the Committee repeated its call, originally made in 2008, for the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, stating that it: “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.”¹ The List of Issues for the examination of the UK in February 2019 again raises this issue.²

Women and post conflict development in Northern Ireland

There is little evidence in general of ensuring women’s participation in securing peace or in post conflict reconstruction in Northern Ireland. The Report³ (2016) of the Fresh Start Panel on the Disbandment of Paramilitary Groups in Northern Ireland drew attention to UNSCR 1325; however, it concluded that there is a real gap between policy and practice and noted that concerns had been expressed to the panel that women’s role in community development and public decision making is being undermined due to paramilitary influence⁴. Extensive consultation with women⁵, shows that women hold strong feelings of disempowerment, find difficulties in circumnavigating community gate-keepers and fear harm if they were to speak out⁶.

These concerns were also highlighted by several groups whom NIWEP engaged with over autumn 2018, in relation to the upcoming examination of the UK under CEDAW. A general feeling was that women have a significantly lesser role in their communities now, compared to their role during the conflict. Reference was also made to the impact of gender based and sexual violence during the conflict, which continues to affect women and their willingness to speak out, particularly where paramilitary influence remains significant. However, recent research does highlight that the transformation of policing has improved women’s safety specifically in relation to intimate partner violence, while the impact of paramilitarism on intimate partner violence has reduced in particular following decommissioning of illegal firearms.⁷

In 2014, NIWEP published findings from an inquiry⁸ undertaken by the Westminster Associate Party Parliamentary Group on UNSCR 1325, Women, Peace and Security and the All Party Group on Women, Peace and Security at the Northern Ireland

¹ CEDAW Committee (2013) Concluding Observations on the seventh periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Available at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/GBR/CO/7&Lang=En.

² CEDAW Committee (2018). List of issues and questions in relation to the eighth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Available at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fGBR%2fQ%2f8&Lang=en.

³ [The Fresh Start Panel report on the disbandment of paramilitary groups](#) (2016)

⁴ Ibid, para 3.20

⁵ Women and Peacebuilding: Sharing the Learning

⁶ Hinds, B and Donnelly D (2014) [Women, Peace and Security: Women's Rights and Gender Equality - Strategic Guide and Toolkit](#) CFNI

⁷ Doyle, J & McWilliams, M (2018). *Intimate partner violence in conflict and post conflict societies*. Transitional Justice Institute, Ulster University as part of the Political Settlements Programme Consortium.

⁸ [The Westminster Associate Party Parliamentary Group on UNSCR 1325 – Women, Peace and Security and The Northern Ireland Assembly All Party Group Women, Peace and Security \(2014\). An Inquiry into the position of women in Northern Ireland since the Peace Agreement: Summary Report](#). Belfast: Northern Ireland Women’s European Platform.

Assembly. This report gathered evidence from women's groups and networks, as well as a range of statutory bodies, on how the principles of UNSCR 1325 are being implemented in Northern Ireland. An overarching recommendation was that mechanisms for engaging women need to be strengthened, in order to both ensure an effective peace process and promote gender equality over the long term. Issues raised in the report include safety, fear of crime, sexual violence and domestic violence, while the report also highlights areas for action in relation to health, in particular the specific mental health impact on women from raising children alone and caring for families through the conflict.

A UNSCR Toolkit⁹ (2014) was developed by civil society, based on the Inquiry project, to assist public authorities to enhance women's rights and advance gender equality. It highlights tools and illustrative practice examples as well as indicators. However, the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition¹⁰ appointed in June 2016 has only one woman amongst its 15 members and co-chairs. The recent consultation on the legacy of Northern Ireland's past¹¹ acknowledged that a 'disproportionate number of survivors and family members are women', but made limited reference to women's experience in relation to proposals. Resources also continue to focus on young men as a group at risk of becoming engaged in violence, while there is limited work supporting young men to explore masculinities and identity more generally.

This highlights that while the Inquiry report is now some years old, the issues remain relevant and there has been limited action on any of the areas highlighted in the report. It is from this basis NIWEP's recommendation above is drawn, and NIWEP would welcome reference to these issues in the NAP to highlight the urgent need for action to protect and empower women in Northern Ireland, in order to promote sustainable peace.

General comments

NIWEP welcomes the emphasis on monitoring an evaluation in the Second NAP and in the consultation document. Clear data is important for understanding how interventions and mechanisms are working, and provide a valuable basis for refining policy and practice. To strengthen the existing mechanism, it would be helpful to incorporate specific quantitative indicators, and also strengthen qualitative data collection with key participant groups. In particular, it would be helpful to ensure data collected enable gender disaggregation, to establish a clear evidence base.

A clear communication strategy could also be developed alongside the NAP, to promote knowledge of the WPS agenda. This could assist in engaging suggested stakeholder groups such as victims of trafficking, men and boys, by highlighting different experiences and aspects of violence and its impact on women. A key message should be emphasising how including women strengthens society, and demonstrating how protecting and empowering women contributes to an inclusive society for everyone.

⁹ Hinds, B and Donnelly D (2014) [Women, Peace and Security: Women's Rights and Gender Equality - Strategic Guide and Toolkit](#) CFNI

¹⁰ www.fictcommission.org

¹¹ Northern Ireland Office (2018). [Addressing the legacy of Northern Ireland's past.](#)