



## AkiDwA welcome the opportunity to make a submission on **Ireland's 2<sup>nd</sup> National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security**

The developments of Ireland's 1st National Action Plan on resolution 1325, its implementation and the consultation process for the 2nd National Action Plan clearly demonstrate the commitment that Ireland has in addressing the matters contained within the resolution. AkiDwA acknowledges progress made but also remains optimistic in achieving gaps identified during the evaluation of the 1<sup>st</sup> plan as this is an on-going process. AkiDwA highly recommends participation of women to be prioritised; women at grassroots level are left out most of the times yet their participation in peace building and reconciliation remains vital.

### **Women's participation in peace processes**

Women's participation in peace negotiations remains one of most unfulfilled aspects of the women, peace and security agenda<sup>i</sup>. Ireland established the National Action Plan 2011-2014 to implement UNSCR 1325 and other UN obligations on women, peace and security, the National Action Plan covers all four pillars of UNSCR 1325, namely, prevention, protection, participation, and relief and recovery, as well as adding one more pillar, promotion. However, **a need to focus and improve on participation and representation of women in decision making of peace processes should be prioritised in the second National Action Plan.** Voices of the women at grassroots level must be heard and supported.

It is perceived that women are helpless victims of wars and conflicts. Women's voices should not only be heard because they are the victims of the war; women should participate actively in conflict management and resolution, and peace-building. In fact, women have always contributed in peace processes at the grass-root level within their communities although not often recognized and their engagement has often been informal.

In an armed conflict, it is necessary for the equal involvement of men and women in order to rebuild a Nation. Without the equal participation of women in formal negotiation, the peace process cannot be seen democratic and responsive to all citizens, and the legitimacy of the process would also remain questionable. Furthermore, women have a different experience of war from men. They bring different perspectives to the substance and process of negotiation, producing qualitative and positive outcomes. For example, women's participation improves access and support for local women and women represent different constituencies: those in need of education, of health care and of jobs. Therefore, women's participation in peace process is not only fair but also beneficial for a nation.

While increasing women's participation in the peace processes, discrimination should be avoided. All women must be equally represented despite their political structure or social rank. Women bring a different perspective that can be more powerful because it suggests the possibility of transformation in peace, political and social relations. In order to transform peace, political and social relations, more progress is needed to improve the position of women at strategic and policy levels at the national level and to increase women's engagement in mediation of conflict and peace processes at the international level.

#### **4. Women from armed conflicts living in Ireland**

The growing number of armed conflicts means that there is an increase in forced internal and external displacement and refugee flows. It has been estimated that there are approximately 43.7 million refugees and people displaced within their country by events such as wars and natural disasters. More importantly, over 75% of displaced people are generally women and girls, in some cases even 90%. In Ireland, there are about 10,000 refugees and 4,571-asylum seekers and Ireland has one of the lowest rates (4%) of granting protection status for asylum seekers in EU. In addition, Galway Rape Crisis Centre reported that the majority of clients came from DRC, followed by Somalia and Nigeria. Sixty two per cent of the perpetrators were armed forces in the country of origin and 79% of clients were victims of rape. In order to promote women's participation and representation in peace processes, protection and participation should be understood as inter-linked. Women need to be safe and healthy first so that they can participate. Therefore, it is critical to protect refugee and asylum seeking women from armed conflicts living in Ireland.

Advanced technology such as mobile phone, the Internet and low-cost flights have eased diaspora communities to build and sustain strong links with their homeland communities. It is said that diaspora communities are increasingly involved in conflicts of their home countries, either as peace-builders or vice versa. Promoting diaspora women's communities' engagement in the peace process of their origin countries can increase women's participation. Furthermore, it can provide a useful opportunity to infuse realistic idea and recommendations in the peace process. In order to encourage participation and representation of migrant women in Ireland, who are from armed conflicts, women need to be economically and politically empowered through offering opportunities for education, employment and training. AkiDwA is in a position to facilitate the engagement of migrant women from armed conflict however funding support is essential for this. Thus, women from armed conflicts living in Ireland are in a position to participate and represent in the peace process.

Ireland has its own experience in relation to women and armed conflict. Women in Northern Ireland organised a women's cross-party political grouping and won some seats in the election. This further resulted in securing a seat at the peace table in 1997. The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition bridged the divide between the Protestants and the Catholics, and promoted reconciliation and reintegration of political prisoners. Ireland's National Action Plan outlines how Ireland will promote and implement the objectives of UNSCR 1325 in its programme support activities, diplomatic advocacy and policy-making across the interrelated area of peace, security and development.

All in all, women's participation is a key focus for the future of peace negotiations. Women offer a unique and different point of view from men that should be heard. It is evident that peaceful negotiations can take place and be successful with the involvement of women, just like it is the case with the conflict management in the Northern Ireland.

## Recommendations

- The Defence Forces and An Garda Síochána to promote targeted recruitment on women. Work environment should accommodate women's special needs and migrant women should have an equal opportunity.
- Provide cultural competence training to everyone (both male and female) involved in peace missions and on gender awareness and equality, GBV as ways of engaging with women and women's civil society groups for peace processes.
- Irish Aid, together with other government departments, to promote gender-balanced decision on humanitarian programmes and international development. Also, targeted programmes and projects should be supported on greater participation and representation of women in peace processes and political institutions, which focuses on peace negotiations and conflict resolution, mediation and elections.
- Support programmes and women's civil society networks in armed conflict zones , that comprise training in transformative leadership, movement building, etc. as well as empowerment projects (e.g. literacy, education). Provide technical expertise where needed.
- Promote and deliver political pressure on governments involved in armed conflicts to have a significant percentage of women's quota in political institutions, especially at the decision making level.
- Provide increased funding for programmes that helps networking diaspora women from armed conflict zones living in Ireland, particularly those programmes that aim to increase participation and representation of women. 'Training of trainers' projects can be promoted, with an ultimate goal of training those in their home countries (armed conflicts).

- Provide sensitive protection for refugee and asylum seeking women from armed conflicts and offer them opportunities to be empowered, e.g. education, language, literacy, business training.
  - For support, recovery and empowerment of women from armed conflicts living in Ireland, **Inter-departmental coordination and commitment** from all the departments and units is crucial if Ireland is to seriously achieve its commitment to resolution 1325 and hence uphold human rights for all.
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