



National Women's Council of Ireland & Amnesty International

**Report on the Consultation for Ireland's National Action Plan on
UNSCR 1325, Women, Peace & Security**

Funded by the Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence

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January 2011



REPORT ON WOMEN PEACE AND SECURITY: A CONSULTANCY WITH WOMEN ACROSS IRELAND WHO HAVE BEEN AFFECTED BY VIOLENT CONFLICT FOR IRELAND'S NATIONAL ACTION PLAN ON UNSCR 1325

Background:

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) which focuses on Women, Peace and Security was adopted in 2000 after the Security Council heard the experiences and perspectives of women from conflict zones for the first time in a Security Council Open Session, after months of lobbying by women's groups from around the world. The women outlined their needs under the following thematic headings: the prevention of conflict; the protection of women and girls from gender based violence (GBV); the participation of women in leadership and decision-making roles, in particular women's involvement in peace negotiations and agreements; and gender perspectives to be included in peace support operations and the implementation of programmes by the United Nations, CSOs and other peace building institutions.

This ground breaking resolution represents the first time the United Nations Security Council has officially endorsed the inclusion and active participation of civil society groups, notably women, in peace processes and peace talks. It calls for an end to impunity for conflict-related violence against women. Since the adoption of UNSCR 1325 in 2000, three further resolutions on women, peace and security have been passed, namely UNSCR 1820 (2008), UNSCR 1888 (2009) and UNSCR 1889 (2009). Resolution 1325 is rooted in the premise that women's inclusion – their presence and participation in peace processes, their perspectives, and their contribution to the substance of talks – will improve the chance of attaining viable and sustainable peace.

In October 2010 a consultant, Shirley Graham, was recruited by the National Women's Council of Ireland and Amnesty International to work with the 1325 Consultative Group, to devise, organise and facilitate three workshops to consult with women across Ireland who had been affected by conflict. Assisted by an intern, Sharon Curran, Shirley worked from the NWCI offices and the NWCI offices provided administrative and financial management support. She reported directly to Inez McCormack, Chair of the 1325 Consultative Group. Day to day support was also provided by the NWCI CEO, Susan McKay.

Objectives:

1. To consult with a diverse group of women residing in Ireland who have been affected by conflict about their needs, views and ideas to help create a more secure and inclusive society for women in Ireland and in countries overseas.
2. To create an opportunity for women to talk about their experiences in a safe, non-judgmental environment with an aim to elucidating new learning and understanding about the needs of women and girl children during and after conflict.
3. To begin a process of truth recovery and storytelling about the impact of conflict on the lives of women and girls in Ireland and to reveal the creative solutions women devised to overcome obstacles.
4. To draw from these consultations new insights; deeper understanding; and innovative strategies to support women's increased access to decision-making and leadership roles; the prevention of conflict; their protection and security; and their recovery, relief and rehabilitation needs after a conflict.
5. To gather all of this information and report back to the Irish Government, led by the Department of Foreign Affairs and the civil society consultative group on what women have experienced; and what they want included in Ireland's National Action Plan.

Methodology:

The primary concern was to create space and time for women from across Ireland to engage in a consultation process to discuss the real and specific needs of women affected by conflict. The process was grounded in the experiences and perspectives of women whose lives have been impacted by violent conflict; and was also an imaginative and hopeful process envisioning an alternative future for women, that is inclusive, participative, just, equal and non-violent.

Whilst Resolution 1325 originally focused on the 3 P's (protection, participation and gender perspectives) we were aiming to reflect current best practice internationally in National Action Plan (NAP) frameworks which also include the thematic pillar of 'Rehabilitation, Relief and Recovery' after conflict. This consultation with civil society through a workshop format, aimed to push the boundaries of what has previously been explored in conversations with women in civil society by incorporating this new thematic pillar.

Audience/Participants:

The primary groups in civil society which we wanted to communicate with on Ireland's NAP on 1325 were:

- Women affected by the conflict on this island particularly in the North of Ireland (NI) and living along the border counties.
- Women living in direct provision/asylum seeking women from conflict regions of the world.
- Women who have experienced GBV in the context of the NI conflict and its aftermath or in the context of other conflicts and wars.

The secondary target group of civil society participants are service providers to women affected by conflict, such as:

- Representatives from CSOs around Ireland (such as: Women's Aid, Well Woman Centres, Women's Centres, Immigrant Council, and Rape Crisis Network Ireland).
- Academics with expertise in the subject of women, gender, peace and conflict.

Process:

The process by which we gathered this information was paramount to it being inclusive, rich, diverse, and meaningful. All communication with the women reflected the ethos of the resolution. This means that the process in which the women became engaged was as important as the outcomes.

One major problem was that due to earlier delays in the process time was short and we could therefore give very little notice of the consultancy workshops to the women's groups. This had a serious impact on the numbers of women who were able to attend at such short notice. We offered childcare and travel expenses to women attending. We also offered counselling support to the women who attended.

As part of an inclusionary and respectful process it was important to involve women's groups in the decision-making around suitable dates and venues for the workshops. The facilitator contacted key strategic leaders to discuss these elements of the process. Participants were sent briefing documents on 1325 in advance of the workshops and specific themes and topics to consider. Refreshments were provided throughout the day.

Structure:

The consultancy process was structured in such a way as to ensure a delicate balancing act between creating an opportunity for women to engage in a meaningful way with each other through free flowing conversations (within the framework of the resolution) and more structured opportunities to impart information, via short storytelling presentations and written content. With this in mind, the following content was included:

- Two or three women speaking on different topics about their experience of living with conflict to help women reflect on their own experiences (10-15 minutes each). This worked to stimulate discussion in smaller groups, and to encourage women to share their story, and to provide evidence.
- The screening of a film (20 minutes) on how women in Liberia came together in solidarity to pressurise government and combatants to create a peace agreement (Pray the Devil back to Hell). This inspiring film shares creative ways for women to influence formal political processes. This aided discussion about solutions to existing problems, and comparative analysis.
- Paper handouts for facilitators with key discussion topics to focus conversation and to aid note takers drafting of key points. This helped to structure the process and to facilitate the gathering of evidence.
- The creation of a 'wish list' by women for future generations of girls and women. This provided evidence of women's ideas for a better and safer society, and for input to the action plan in the form of indicators.

Content:

Content for the workshops/consultation process drew from the report on 1325 NAP best practise, prepared by the NWCI and other NGO's on the original consultative group; the draft version of Ireland's NAP and Departmental Audit; as well as recent NAPs demonstrating best practice in civil society consultation, such as, Sierra Leone. The broad thematic headings used within the consultation process included:

Women's Participation in decision-making and leadership:

Assess obstacles to women' participation; discuss electoral politics (quota systems); local government; community involvement; education and training.

Women’s Security, protection and prevention of violence:

Discuss security sector reforms; women and girls access to resources; measures that need to be taken to protect women and girls from GBV in Ireland North and South; capacity building for Ireland’s peace support operations in conflict regions.

Women’s Rehabilitation and Recovery needs:

Discuss women-centred truth recovery processes; women’s access to justice; healthcare and economic resources.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

Discuss the capacity building/resource needs of women/groups/CSOs to effectively monitor and evaluate Ireland’s NAP.

Locations and venues:

Dublin	Cork	Derry
17 November	24 November	2 December
Royal Irish Academy Dawson Street.	Cork City Partnership Board Room, Heron House, Blackpool Park.	C.A.L.M.S Centre, 10 Northland Road. (Community Action for Locally Managed Stress)
1-5pm	10.30-1.30pm	10.30-3.30pm

Workshop format:

Relaxing music is playing in the room as women enter.
Registration, name badges, informal introductions, tea and coffee and programme is distributed
Outline the process and agree participation guidelines; overview of resolution 1325 and outline programme for the workshop
Introductions and icebreaker Each woman says her name, where she is from and one word to describe how she is feeling – which is written on a flipchart.
I Woman's personal story 'my experience of living with conflict' II Woman's personal story 'my experience of living with conflict'
Reflection and Silence/Singer/Music
Small group discussion – using precious stones – passed from woman to woman which contains each woman's story and ensures others do not interrupt. Facilitator outlines key questions and asks the women to introduce themselves; and gets discussion started; note taker writes down main points.
Open floor discussion led by facilitators Followed by Lunch
The Bridget's tree wish list: during a reflection on the women's experiences - a wish list for future generations of women and girls was written out by each of the women - and the wishes were hung on the Bridget's tree to grow to fruition.
Film - Pray the Devil Back to Hell – Liberian Women's experience of involvement in peace talks
Open floor discussion in response to the film Monitoring and Evaluation – discussion on the next steps Singer/musician performs
Closing – woman's name and word to express how she is feeling – written on flipchart – poem is created of the women's feeling words and read back to the group by the facilitator - this ensures all women's feelings are included and heard.

Documentation:

Documents were sent to participants or community leaders in advance of the workshops, with a background briefing on UNSCR 1325; outlining the programme for the day; and highlighting topics for discussion.

Materials and tools:

- Handouts – with key contacts on 1325 in Ireland and internationally; and information about support services, counselling and freephone helplines.
- Provided email address 1325@nwci.ie and telephone number to all participants for afterthoughts, comments.
- Provided access to a counsellor for anybody who may feel they need support during or after the workshops.

Invitations:

Invitations were circulated to individual women/women's groups/CSOs working with women in direct provision; organisations working with women who have experienced sexual violence and violence within the home; women from the border counties; women in the North of Ireland; and academics working on women, peace and security research; women MLAs in the North of Ireland; and women social and health workers. Invitations to each workshop were circulated by email initially and then followed up by telephone a few days later to ascertain level of interest/involvement and to encourage participation.

Some of the organisations invitations were sent to included:

NWCI members; Cross Border Women's Reconciliation Project; Donegal Women's Network; Women Into Public Life; CALMS centre Derry, Women's Centre, Derry; Ballybeen Women's Centre; Footprints Women's Centre; Windsor Women's Centre; Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA); Women into Politics; Relatives for Justice; Equality Commission for Northern Ireland / Northern Ireland Women's European Platform; Dochas for Women (Monaghan); Integrating Ireland (Monaghan); Training Women's Network (NI); Immigrant Council of Ireland; New Communities Partnership; Migrant Rights Centre Ireland; Galway Refugee Support Group; Akidwa; Louth African Women's Support Group; Irish Refugee Council; Galway Refugee Support; Mayo Intercultural Action; Greenway Women's Centre; Cork City Partnership; New Communities

Partnership; Somalian Human Right Advocacy Group, Cork; Development Education Office NASC; The Irish Immigrant Support Centre; Rosemount and the Creggan women's groups, Derry; Donegal community workers cooperative; Women into Public Life Donegal, Tar Anall, Interaction Belfast, An Coiste, WAVE and many more.

Academics from the School of Politics, International Studies & Philosophy, Queen's University, Belfast; Transitional Justice Institute and INCORE, at the University of Ulster. Global Women's Studies at NUI Galway; Department of Education Development, Cork Institute of Technology; Academics working in conflict and peace research in UCC and UCD.

Women who attended workshops:

The women consulted with came from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences of living through conflict. They were women who had been bereaved, injured and harmed by the actions of state and non state actors during conflict. They were women who had experienced sexual violence and other forms of torture and abuse during the conflict. They were women seeking refuge and a safe place for themselves and their families. They were women who had been imprisoned and those whose family members had been imprisoned. They were women who had been activists during the conflict and involved in peace process with families, communities, political parties and military structures, both state and non state.

In total 130 women were consulted with through this process and other consultations were independently co-ordinated by women's groups in Belfast, Wicklow and Galway – bringing the final numbers to approximately 200 women.

Attendance at each workshop:

Dublin: 60 (Ireland – Dublin, Wicklow, Louth/Dundalk, Monaghan, Longford, Galway, Sligo, Mayo, Belfast, Tyrone, Rest of world: Liberia, Sudan/Darfur, Kenya, Pakistan, Nigeria, South Africa, DRC, Zimbabwe, Burundi, Cameroon, Somalia, Chile).

Cork: 33 (Ireland, Sri Lanka, Somalia, Nigeria, Palestine, Cote D'Ivoire, South Africa).

Derry: 37 (Derry, Donegal, Laois, Belfast, Tyrone).

Belfast: 38 (Relatives for Justice, WAVE, and An Coiste).

Wicklow: Glenree Peace and Reconciliation Women's Group consulted with women from the North and border counties.

Galway: Galway Rape Crisis Centre consulted with women asylum seekers and issued a report titled '2005-7 Asylum Seeker Clinic'.

Overview

Due to the wide range of organisations, academics and women's groups invited to each event and the diversity of the women's experiences from other countries; the border counties and the North; we now have a wide range of experiences to consider in terms of their application to Ireland's NAP on 1325.

As the aim of the process was to hear women's testimonies, experiences and ideas a workshop methodology was developed that aimed to create as safe a space as possible for women to tell their stories about what they had experienced during conflict. Mindful at all times that by asking women to retell their stories that the process can re-traumatize them. Therefore tools were incorporated to help relax and support the women - to enable them to tell their stories, tools such as music, film, storytelling, reflection, and the creation of a '1325 wish list'. There were counsellors present at each of the workshops to support the women and also a leaflet was handed out to each woman with contact details of supporting organisations available in her area. Participants were encouraged to participate only to the level which they felt comfortable and knowledgeable. It was a priority for the facilitator to create a safe and inclusive atmosphere at all times. Listening to women and their experiences, needs, and ideas was the top priority of the workshops. The use of jargon was limited and if used, thoroughly explained.

During each workshop an hour was dedicated to women working in small groups to discuss specific topics within UNSCR 1325 that they were most comfortable talking about: these topics were : Protection; Participation; Prevention; Peacekeeping; Perspectives; Recovery; Rehabilitation; and Relief.

The general openness and the eagerness of women to engage in the conversations and the richness of the material that has come out of the process is indicative of the effectiveness of the methodology. However, the process was intense and emotionally very tough on everyone involved. Special thanks must go to all the women who agreed to facilitate and to take notes at each of the consultations, for their important work, and no doubt some have been deeply affected by what they have heard.

A discourse analysis was developed from the consultation process and this report will focus on themes rather than on any individual woman's story, however women's narratives are included anonymously to give background and context to the themes. These themes directly relate to 1325 and will inform Ireland's National Action Plan.

What did the women say?

Firstly, many of the women stated that they had never been given an opportunity to speak so openly about their experiences before – and that the ‘nonjudgmental environment’ created was key to the experience being a positive one. Whilst the women did feel safe overall during the consultation some women wept openly as they recounted their experiences or listened with compassion to those of other women. In every workshop the women supported each other.

After each event the facilitator contacted the women to find out how they were. They responded by saying that even though it was a challenging process to take part in, they felt proud to be able to tell their stories, to support other women, and that ultimately they found it a cathartic and healing process.

The women spoke about the obstacles they have had to overcome as a result of living with conflict and the solutions they have creatively developed to resolve the difficulties they live with, these include:

- Coming to terms with /or fleeing violence in their own homes; as well as dealing with violence in the community and wider society;
- Finding protection and safety for themselves and their children;
- Mediating amongst members of their own communities to build peace;
- Working together to find ways to influence formal politics and peace building;
- Taking on roles as human rights defenders in their own communities, and their ongoing safety concerns as a result of taking a public position;
- Working with children and young adults and trying to help them come to terms with their situation – of growing up in a conflict;
- Helping young adults to deal with their anger and in some cases their desire for revenge; which could lead to a possible re-escalation of violence.
- These women spoke passionately about their wish to create a safe community for the next generation;
- About teaching young adults life skills and coping strategies that don't leave them depending on

alcohol or drugs;

- They talked about the importance of women supporting women – informally and formally – in the community and in formal politics;
- They talked about how necessary quotas are to increase the numbers of women in positions of power;
- They talked about the necessity of childcare;
- About training, particularly in negotiation skills, mediation, and peace building.
- And in some cases they also spoke about being able to access education and literacy skills – as they had missed out when they were younger because of additional responsibilities they had to take on as children to support their families during conflict.
- They talked about being equal to men and about the need to work together with men to break down gender stereotypes and sexist attitudes.
- They talked about the diversity of roles and responsibilities they had to take on during and after the conflict (sometimes because family members had been injured, or killed or were in prison) which gave them skills that made them very valuable to their communities in terms of their experience, knowledge and wisdom.
- The women also talked about forgiveness, acceptance and understanding and the difficulties of coming to terms with the psychological and emotional trauma, which is more prevalent than physical injuries.
- They talked about the need for mental health issues to be taken seriously, and for them not to be stigmatized – they talked about the need for ongoing counselling and support from the community to help relieve and release the layers of trauma they have experienced.

It was clear from listening to women's reports that many of them have great resilience, strength and determination. Often in the most adverse conditions, women have protected themselves and their children and tried to create as 'normal' a life for their families as possible. One woman from Derry told a story about how school was the safest place for her to be during the day – but all day long she would fret that something might have happened to her parents while she was gone and she would rush home at the end of the day to see if they were still there. These constant feelings of fear, tension and anxiety, were mentioned by many of the women; and when asked if they feel

safe now most said 'no'.

However, no matter what each woman had been through not one of them said she felt hopeless. This is reflected in their wish list for future generations of girls and women – all of the wishes are listed anonymously in Appendix II.

The fact that so many women were prepared to participate in this process at such short notice and many came out in the snow and ice, is a testament to how strongly they feel about the importance of this consultation and the need for women's voices to be heard on the subject of conflict, peace and security.

Special thanks need to be extended to all of the courageous women who took part in this consultation and for sharing their valuable experiences and knowledge.

Thanks also to the members of the Consultative Group and the ICGBV for funding this project. Many thanks to the Consultation sub-committee: Dr Niamh Reilly, Dr Melanie Hoewer, and Sorcha Tunney for their support with devising the consultation process; and to all the women who facilitated small group discussions and gathered notes. Thanks also to Sharon Curran for her daily support and administrative work. And finally, many thanks to Inez McCormack, Susan McKay and Kieran Clifford for their inspired leadership, commitment to this process, and determination to bring about a consultation with women across Ireland to inform the Irish NAP on UNSCR 1325.

Shirley Graham, UNSCR 1325 Consultant

Introduction

In keeping with the sensitive nature of this work all of the women consulted with to write this report have been promised anonymity. Therefore, no individual woman is named and in many cases her country of origin is not included. This was key to creating a safe space for women to share their stories and to openly express their fears and concerns without creating further worries or trauma. All of the views in this report are the views of the women consulted with, who have been affected by violent conflict or who work closely with these women. Where pertinent, references have been made to reports from UN agencies or non-governmental organisations working on women, peace and security issues to highlight the similarity of the issues experienced by women wherever they are in the world.

This report is separate to Ireland's National Action Plan (NAP) on UNSCR 1325, although it has been researched and written with the intention of informing Ireland's NAP on UNSCR 1325. Ireland's NAP on UNSCR 1325 will discuss the many government programmes and initiatives currently in place working with women on issues of peace and security.

This report reflects how women feel about what they have experienced during violent conflict. How they are currently coping with the aftermath of conflict; and in some refugee and asylum seeking situations how women are coping with the knowledge that the conflict still continues in their country of origin and that family members are being affected by it. Also, this report highlights women's ongoing concerns and fears in relation to the possible re-ignition of conflicts and women and children's future protection and security needs.

This report's aim is to provide insight into women's experiences so that the programmes on women, peace and security currently in existence, can be strengthened and further joint initiatives can be developed. The report is divided into four sections.

Section I – protection and security: Violence against women comes in many forms and from many different perpetrators. Women not only experience gender based violence at the hands of militia and state forces during and after conflicts, they also experience violence within the home from members of their own families, some of whom may also be actors in the conflict and thus armed or with power and status in the community. In this first part of the report the women outline the many different types of violence they have experienced and how it has impacted on their lives.

Section II – participation and empowerment: In the second section of this report women talk about their participation in formal and informal politics, decision-making, leadership roles and the importance of women’s empowerment and the inclusion of women’s experiences and knowledge in peace processes.

Section III - prevention: In the third section women talk about their role in the prevention of violent conflict and their perspectives on the key issues that need to be addressed to support their efforts and to create sustainable peace.

Section IV - recovery, relief and rehabilitation: In the fourth section women talk about their recovery, relief and rehabilitation needs after a conflict and they outline the importance of healthy individuals to build healthy families and communities.



Section I: Protection of women and girl children from violence

The accounts below are a record of what women attending the workshops talked about. While we cannot verify individual stories, there were many similar accounts given at different workshops across Ireland.

Specifically in relation to asylum seeking women similar accounts are also found in Akidwa's publication *'Am only saying it now'*¹ and the Galway Rape Crisis publication *'Asylum Seeker & Refugee Clinic Report 2005-2007'*² and *The Irish Times, Weekend Review, 25.09.10 page 3* and the FLAC report *'One Size Doesn't Fit All'*, 2010.

Women who have lived through a conflict have experienced many forms of violence from psychological fear and intimidation to sexual abuse and violence to physical violence and torture. In many conflict regions, women experience high levels of sexual violence during and after the conflict. Therefore, women's protection and safety needs were discussed within the context of specific conflicts they have lived through.

Throughout the consultation process the word 'fear' was used constantly. It was the most commonly felt emotion by all the women. Fear has been a constant in women's lives: fear for the physical safety of their families and themselves; fear of the impacts of the conflict; and fear that their sons and daughters would become 'involved'. Women in the North of Ireland (NI) talked about how many of these fears have not gone away and continue within the era of the peace process. For example, there are continuing problems of segregation: segregated communities; sectarianism; and segregated schooling. Many women remain concerned that the conflict will re-ignite and that children, particularly young men, may become involved in ongoing insecurities

¹ <http://www.akidwa.ie/Publications/AmOnlySayingItNowAkiDwA.pdf>

² <http://www.galwayrcc.org/pdf/RefugeeReport.pdf>

and/or that they and their families may become victims once again. Many women, particularly those who have experienced traumatic incidents, continue to fear that the worst will happen and they live their lives through such fears.

In NI the presence of security forces became the norm for everybody during 'the Troubles'. Women were searched when going to and from town and the media reported the conflict on a daily basis. House raids were ongoing and terrifying. Normal activities such as eating dinner were often interrupted by violence and/or harassment from the police. One woman recounted a memory from childhood when she was playing in the field near her house a raid took place and she crawled along on her belly to hide – she said this was a normal activity for her as a child. Everybody lived their lives on high-alert never knowing where the next violent attack would come from. The women said that they became brainwashed into thinking that this was normal life and that even though change was needed they didn't think anyone was taking a leadership role politically to bring about change.

Paramilitaries acted outside the law. Women knew that other mothers were feeling the same – fearful. Secrets were common. Children were told not to talk about certain subjects. Older girl children did a lot of the caring for stressed and damaged families. Mothers didn't want their children to go out to play in case they got caught up in a security alert.

Women said that in the main they kept things going because the men were often not at home. Women felt restricted by the conflict and stayed in their own areas; they were traumatised by what they saw and heard in their community and also what was reported by the media.

Migrant Women

Many women from conflict regions come to Ireland to seek asylum. These women are often fleeing different types of violence, both within the home and within the wider community. They are effectively refugees. According to the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, a Refugee is defined as someone who:

Owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of her/his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return.

A Refugee is someone who is forced to leave their country for any of the reasons listed above. An

Asylum Seeker is a person who seeks asylum and asks to be recognised as a refugee in accordance with the terms of the 1951 Geneva Convention. While someone is having their case examined by the government here in Ireland they are called an Asylum Seeker.

In many conflict regions sexual violence against women is used as a tactic of warfare. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) it is estimated that as many as 800,000 women have been raped as part of the conflict (www.peacewomen.org). The Galway Rape Crisis Centre works closely with Asylum Seeking women and they say of those who report sexual violence 79% of the perpetrators were members of security forces and typically there was more than one perpetrator (GRCC, Asylum Seeker & Refugee Clinic Report 2005-7).

In many parts of the world when women are raped they are often abandoned by their husbands as men see sexual violence against women as a form of humiliation not only against them but against their ethnic, tribal or religious group³. Many children born to women resulting from rape are abandoned or orphaned.

In Darfur, reporting sexual violence risks being exposed to further violence. One woman said that even when the UN or international NGOs are present, women are afraid to report sexual violence for fear of reprisal attacks. She also spoke of witnessing such barbarity and horror in the conflict there that a decision was made not to include details of her story in this report, to protect readers from secondary trauma. Such is the extent of the violence.

However, women's protection and safety needs cannot be spoken about without highlighting some of their experiences. The women consulted with come from a diverse range of conflicted countries, and although they shared very personal stories of violence they had much in common with each other. For example a woman from Kenya spoke about how people are banished from their homes for not voting for their own tribes and that there is enormous corruption in the security forces, which discourages reporting of violence against women.

A woman from Liberia told of how she had to move as a result of the conflict but she had nowhere to go and in her own words she says she was 'used by men in order to earn money'. Another woman spoke about the general insecurity in Nigeria and how there are no agencies there that can provide help. Calling the police after a robbery or a sexual assault only adds to the victim's problems, especially for women. She says that the police cannot protect community members as they are in fear for their own safety and that it is the gun that gives the greatest sense of security

³

Refer to: www.peacewoman.org.

in her country.

Domestic Violence and sexual abuse within the home

In Northern Ireland (NI), a woman explained how even though her house was a 'safe house' for paramilitaries it was never a safe place for her, because she was sexually abused by an uncle when she was a little girl. Many of the women spoke about high levels of domestic violence during the conflict. Women in NI who experienced violence within their homes by husbands who were involved in paramilitary activity had nowhere to go for help. These men were considered heroes in their community and if women confided in friends or family they would be considered disloyal or a traitor. Police could seldom offer help because for many people trust had broken down or had never existed between the community and the security forces.

The peace process in the North exposed high levels of domestic violence especially in terms of increased reporting to the police (PSNI). However, women say that there has been a lack of resources put in place to address the problem and that they continue to suffer intimate violence because they have nowhere to go. One of the legacies of the conflict is the impoverishment of the border area including a lack of services for women.

Many of the women consulted with had direct experience of violence within the home either as children growing up in a violent household or as adult women in relationships with violent men. The women said that domestic violence was present in their homes before during and after the conflict. Some women also reported experiences of sexual abuse within the home and the extended family. These are all key justice issues for women as highlighted by UNSCR 1325.

Women who are asylum seekers spoke about specific cultural practices in their countries of origin that are inherently abusive. One woman from Cameroon explained how once a girl is married she is no longer considered part of her original family. In traditional marriages once the 'bride price' has been paid the girl becomes the property of her husband's family. She effectively has no voice and the expectation is that she will be protected by her husband's family. If she is not treated well there is no one or no place for her to go to for assistance. This woman also asserted that if a woman seeks help from a women's organisation or a government agency they will ask for her marriage certificate before they will help her. But because the woman is considered within her community as the property of her husband's family she is not given access to documentation such as marriage certificates. Therefore, she cannot access help. If a woman's husband dies she automatically becomes the property of her husband's older brother and all documentation for the woman and her children is handed over to the older brother. She explained how this can lead to

the woman being tortured and raped within her extended family.

Witchcraft is also used in parts of Africa to control people – in particular it is used to reinforce traditional cultural practices – in this way many women become enslaved within their families. For this reason, some African women believe that they cannot live alone and that they need men in their families to protect them. This is another form of conflict that is experienced by women ‘in the home’. This is a common situation that women are fleeing. These particular issues of domestic violence need to be respected and addressed.

Refugee and asylum seeking women believe that they cannot go to the Garda if their husbands are violent towards them. Firstly, they are frightened that the man will be returned to his country of origin; secondly, if they access refugee status they fear that they will not be able to provide financially for their children if their husband is imprisoned. Thirdly, the women are afraid that if they report a domestic violence incident they will be deported. Women need safe places to escape to, to protect themselves and their children from abuse. They also need information – they may have more rights than they know.

Racism was also discussed by the women and their view is that some, but by no means all, service providers hold racist views about violence in the home and sometimes consider it to be part of the culture of a particular race or ethnic group rather than a universal problem.

Violence in the home and violence in the wider community are inextricably linked. With increased tensions politically and socially come increased tensions within the home and acts of violence become more frequent and affect every member of the family.

Recommendations:

- More resources provided for women who are experiencing domestic violence e.g. more refuges, stronger protection mechanisms and increased access to justice.
- Information to asylum seeking women of their rights and inform them of support services.
- Inform women that they can seek asylum separately to their husbands.
- Some African women asked for a family approach to domestic violence that includes the husband, children and rest of the family to create a safe space for women to return to if they wish to do so. (However, this is generally regarded by service providers, such as Women’s Aid, as an unsafe approach to resolving violence in the home).

- We need to ensure that those working in Direct Provision and in provision of services to refugees are well trained, receive anti-racism training, and are sensitive to cultural differences.
- Need for periodic assessment and review of the treatment of women in direct provision centres and in the delivery of services to asylum seeking women more generally.

Trafficking of women and children

The UN report that 95% of people trafficked experience physical or sexual violence. While some asylum seeking women were trafficked to Ireland – few spoke at the workshops about this experience. There is a gap in our knowledge about how some of the women get here. We do know that some women were trafficked from African countries via Italy to Ireland. It has been reported that some of these women were forced into prostitution and raped before they came to Ireland (Migration Policy Institute, 2010⁴).

Many of the women who have been trafficked to Ireland report that they experienced a type of voodoo curse which was placed on them by their traffickers. The women's skin is broken and they are told 'when the white man rings you no matter where you are or what you are doing you must do what he asks' (service provider, 2010). The women are told that they will die if they tell anyone about the curse. This form of control creates very fearful and obedient women.

Because trafficked women are placed in Direct Provision hostels it is easy for their traffickers to find them. Traffickers commonly use mobile phones to send text messages to the women they have trafficked to threaten them or tell them what to do. A woman from a West African country said that her trafficker raped her and said he would report her to the authorities if she didn't comply. She said that because she was trafficked her documentation (passport) was taken away from her by the woman she was staying with, and that made her vulnerable and frightened. She claimed that the Gardai found her and arrested her and handcuffed her – even though she was six months pregnant. She said she was briefly detained while the Gardai assessed her situation. She said an Irish man helped to secure her release (it is not clear who he was or what he did) but that on her release he raped her. She now has legitimate status as a refugee in Ireland. This story highlights the vulnerability of women who are trafficked.

Another example of how trafficking can work was highlighted by a woman who described how a particular tribe in West Africa is organised in a caste system. This allows some of the men to bring

⁴ <http://www.migrationinformation.org/feature/display.cfm?ID=318>

young women from the lower castes to work in their embassies in Europe. She said the young women have no documentation and are effectively slaves. She said that the men who are involved in this form of trafficking should be criminalised. This woman also considers some media reporting of trafficking as racist implying only certain races are involved in trafficking, when it is in fact a global issue⁵.

Trafficking of Children

A service provider said unaccompanied minors who have been trafficked to Ireland have been put into hostels with adults without any family member to care for them or to protect them⁶. Even though some of these girls have said they were only 16 or 17 years old and should have been placed in foster homes – the HSE placed them in hostels until they could verify their age – by the time they had verified their age one or two years later the girls were officially now women. Worryingly many of these young girls/women have had two and three children since they have been in Direct Provision centres in Ireland and yet counsellors working with them have never heard them mention a boyfriend or husband or partner of any kind. Service providers are concerned that these young women who have been trafficked are highly vulnerable to violence including sexual violence, coercion into prostitution and other threats of violence and abuse (service provider, 2010).

Due to reports of the abuse and soliciting of asylum seeking women by men in the Galway area, two Liaison Gardai (women) were put in charge of calling into Direct Provision hostels to check on the safety of the women and to listen to their concerns (service provider, 2010). Although this is a good system in theory in practice it has not led to any reports or arrests. Part of the reason for this, a service provider told us, is that pressure is brought to bear on the women from other residents of the hostel who do not want problems reported. They fear that if one woman reports an incident of sexual violence, threats or coercion it will affect them all and all of their applications for asylum will be turned down. Therefore, few people, if any will report. On occasions where women have reported incidents they have later withdrawn the reports due, it appears, to pressure from others in Direct Provision.

⁵ Refer to UN.GIFT, global initiative to fight trafficking at:
http://www.unglobalcompact.org/docs/issues_doc/labour/Forced_labour/HUMAN_TRAFFICKING_-_THE_FACTS_-_final.pdf

⁶ See <http://www.barnardos.ie/what-we-do/campaign-and-lobby/separated-children.html>

Many asylum seeking women who have reported incidents of sexual violence in their own countries were then attacked and raped by security forces there. These women are too frightened to report violence they have experienced in Ireland to the Garda as they fear the same thing could happen here. The fact that the Garda are used to escort asylum seekers out of the country means that most of the women we spoke with had difficulty seeing the Garda as protectors or guardians. There seemed to be little trust between asylum seeking women and the Garda. Some of these women do not believe that they have any human rights because they have no status and because security forces have acted with impunity in their own countries they fear will do the same here.

None of the women who took part in the consultation process said they had reported a crime. Only one service provider said that they had supported women in reporting crimes but due, it seemed, to intimidation by other asylum seekers (who feared that by reporting the crime they would all be deported) the women withdrew the charges and dropped the case.

Immigration

The view strongly expressed by many women from conflict regions was that their stories and experiences are not believed when they come to Ireland. Many of the women said that they did not tell immigration officials about violence in the home; sexual abuse they or their children have experienced; or the fact that they have been the victim of sexual violence during the conflict. They said that they suppressed this information because they are deeply ashamed and feel the cultural pressure to remain silent.

Many women commented that when they spoke to police, immigration officers, counsellors and social workers that they felt that the body language of these officials suggested that they either did not believe the women's stories; or they simply do not know what to do with the information. The women expressed how this has had the impact of silencing them and stopping them from telling their stories; seeking help; or accessing services.

One woman said she did not share her story of abuse with immigration officials because she was ashamed. She had never previously told anyone about the abuse not even her mother. She didn't feel she could trust the immigration officials as she didn't feel that they were trained to deal with abuse or GBV issues. There is a language barrier and a cultural barrier and she said she felt like she was being victimized all over again. This woman was referred to a counsellor by her doctor and it was only then she felt she could open up and talk about her experience. However, she is in constant fear for her sisters in their home state in Central Africa as she knows they are suffering the same abuse. She said 'fear keeps you silent, when you hold it inside you are suffering'.

Another woman talked about how the immigration interview was quite complicated and she felt that she did not know how to present her story even though she had experienced sexual violence and torture in her country of origin and she had evidence. She claimed she was not given information on the process; the criteria that the officials work with; nor advice on how to present her story. She engaged a private lawyer who gave her help and what she considered to be good information. Due to the harrowing nature of her story, the lawyer did not take money from her and has been giving her ongoing support.

A Service provider explained how some of the women she worked with said that they felt their asylum tribunals exposed them to insensitive and re-traumatising questions. They told her that they were cross examined about exactly how many men raped them – and they felt that if they were unsure of the number their honesty was questioned. They said that they didn't think that their experience of PTSD was considered within the process. One of the women said she didn't know if she was allowed to bring a friend or family member with her to the tribunal and that she wishes she had been encouraged to do so as she found it very stressful. Another woman said that if women need to appeal the asylum process they are not allowed to bring new facts into the process. This, she held, was damaging as many women try to avoid telling their stories of abuse in the first instance because of feelings of fear and shame. Because, rightly or wrongly, some of the women believe that they are seen as dishonest, this can lead to many women in the asylum process feeling like criminals.

Many of the women asked 'how does the Irish Government make decisions about which parts of the world are 'safe regions' (from which asylum claims are likely to be designated unfounded) and those which are considered 'conflict regions'? They feel that these decisions are made without a deeper understanding of the particular cultures; their specific conflicts; and the cases of individual women.

Recommendations:

- ☐ Provide clear information to women on the immigration process and criteria for telling their stories.
- Legal terms should be explained properly so women understand the process fully.
- There is a need for an independent body to be involved in the immigration process so that there is proper oversight of how people are treated during the process.
- Military police should cross train Gardai in Ireland with specialist knowledge on how to deal with women who have been affected by conflict.

- Immigration officers need to understand the full context of the countries of origin the women are coming from and the types of violence they are experiencing which do not always fit into a neat box of what a conflict looks like. For example, many women experience forms of violence such as female genital mutilation; forced marriage at an early age; domestic violence; sexual abuse within the family; ownership by in-laws and being forced to become sexually available to brothers-in-law if their husbands are killed or missing.
- Comprehensive training for immigration officials that includes cultural issues, state of the country of origin, gender dimensions particularly gender based violence; as women may resist disclosing about violence particularly to male immigration officials.
- Support workers and a friend or family member should be present at tribunals.

Direct Provision Accommodation

When a woman comes to Ireland seeking asylum she is placed in a Direct Provision centre until her case has been decided. Direct Provision centres are often situated outside communities and some women said that they feel this creates barriers to women accessing community services. The women often share rooms with other families and have cited that this as well as the often cramped conditions; lack of privacy; being unable to work; unable to cook their own food; as well as isolation and separation from family and friends - is re-traumatizing for them. Some women said that they feel dehumanised by the Direct Provision system. One woman from West Africa spoke about the difficulties of living in Direct Provision with her husband and four children in one room. She said that the frustration and anxiety is constant and her husband is reacting to the situation with violent behaviour. She did not know how to resolve this situation because she feels isolated and anxious that her husband should not be sent back to their country of origin – which would break up her family.

Other women also talked about the tension of families being separated and the injustice of children born here being sent back to the country of origin of the parents. One woman said ‘the children know no other home’ and she is fearful that if she is deported when she reaches her country of origin she will be taken away and killed.

Asylum Seeking Women, Direct Provision and Prostitution

Some of the women seeking asylum spoke about how they were propositioned for sex by Irish men. One woman living in Direct Provision on her own with her children said that an Irishman offered to give her children a lift to school in his car if she returned his favour by providing sexual

services to him (she said there was no transportation for her children and they had to walk down dangerous country roads with no path). She said it is very difficult for African women to talk about their experiences because many are restricted by cultural differences and feel that there are no safe spaces in which to talk about these kind of issues.

Service providers have gathered evidence that women in some areas are being intimidated into providing prostitution services to the local community and women are having pressure put on them to prostitute their girl children. These women are reluctant to report what is happening to the Gardai out of fear that they may be deported. There are rumours within the Direct Provision system that if a woman reports any crime she will be deported.

Further, some of the women in Direct Provision centres have expressed concerns about the lack of privacy within the centres and have requested that this be looked into. Women who are unaccompanied by male family relatives, have also recounted feeling vulnerable to being pressurised to provide sexual services.

While it is clearly beyond the scope of this report to investigate the very serious allegations made by some of the women, there is clearly cause for concern. Overall women's protection needs in the Direct Provision situation are serious and we heard many claims that they are having their human rights violated. The lengthy asylum process itself clearly causes potentially irreparable damage to women. No one was meant to stay in Direct Provision for more than six months – many have now been waiting for six years or more.

There have now been several reports strongly recommending that the Direct Provision system is reviewed as a matter of urgency (see Akidwa's publication '*Am only saying it now*' and the FLAC report '*One Size Doesn't Fit All*⁷). The stories we heard at the workshops strongly back the case for such a review.

Recommendations:

- Need speedier processing of asylum applications.
- Inform women of their rights, and dispel myths which may inhibit them from seeking justice.
- Extensive and on-going training for those working with asylum seekers and refugees.

⁷ http://www.flac.ie/download/pdf/one_size_doesnt_fit_all_full_report_final.pdf

- Gender based violence to be taken into account as grounds for asylum.
- At least one women only centre for vulnerable women.
- More transport provided for school children where required and none available.
- More regular free transport provided for women to access facilities and amenities in nearby towns/cities.
- Private rooms within Direct Provision centres with keys used by occupants only.
- Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of hostel management to assess security and safety of occupants.
- Criminal charges brought against men who proposition women for sexual services or coerce women into prostitution.
- Security provided for women and children in direct provision centres.
- Outreach to women offering advice and assistance on security and protection issues.
- Ensure women have access to services including counselling, community development, social workers, and legal aid.
- Support for women experiencing domestic violence in direct provision including access to safe accommodation away from the perpetrators.

Support from Donor Agencies in Ireland

Many women in Ireland from conflict regions have lost family members and do not know how to trace them to find out if they are alive or dead. There is a lack of information for these women about agencies and organisations who can help them trace their families. The loss of children in particular is one of the biggest traumas for women. One woman recently found out that all her children are in a refugee camp in Somalia, however, her husband is still missing. Red Cross made contact with her children and notified her of their whereabouts and she has been able to communicate with them directly as a result.

Recommendations:

- Increase visibility of services in the direct provision hostels and through the Refugee Lawyer Association, counsellors and social workers.
- Immigrant officials to clearly promote and provide information to asylum seekers about Red Cross and other donor agencies to help them access resources to find family members; to maintain contact with families; or to access counselling and other services.

Security and Refugee camps

A woman from Kenya talked about how many women there are homeless, as they were displaced by the 2007 conflict. Women are living in makeshift camps, afraid to return home and children are unable to attend school. She says donors have made limited impact. Because of the dire needs of individual survival, women have not been able to organize politically to redress the situation. In the conflict, politicians were fighting one another, so there is no sense of women being able to influence decision-making via political participation. In this limbo she said it is difficult to even speak of recovery. There is an enormous difference between what is happening on the ground in Kenya and what is happening in The Hague (ICC indictments).

A woman from Darfur spoke about the extreme terror and horror of what she witnessed in the refugee camps and how the perpetrators of violence acted with impunity. She commented that when the militia came the women ran into the forests to hide. She said the militia would follow them into the forest to attack them but the peacekeepers didn't protect them. She wondered aloud 'who was there to protect who: the peacekeepers to protect the women; or the women to protect the peacekeepers?' She said that there is enormous fear even to speak her own language, because it identifies her ethnic group, and is regarded as subversive by some people. She lives in fear that she will be sent back to Sudan.

A woman from Somalia spoke about the many abuses by peacekeepers that took place during the conflict there. She said that the people who were meant to instil trust such as peacekeepers and police are often the ones that commit crimes with impunity. She asked how can a community feel safe if the people trained and sent to protect them are also abusing them? When sections of the police and army break the trust with their community this is destabilising as trust in the pillars of society take a long time to rebuild. These issues are well documented by the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations⁸.

⁸ See http://www.peacekeepingbestpractices.unlb.org/Pbps/Library/Capstone_Doctrine_ENG.pdf

Recommendations:

- Peacekeepers to be given robust mandates that allow them to actively protect women and girls.
- Mandates need to be clearly communicated to and understood by all the people they are there to protect.
- Peacekeepers need to be prosecuted for breach of code of conduct and local people informed of actions taken.
- More peacekeepers and Gardai who understand the needs of women and how conflict affects women and girl children.
- More women peacekeepers deployed with skills to work directly with women.
- More men to have skills that enable them to work directly with women and children.
- Women should be told what the role of the Gardai is and how they can help them. Need more ethnic minority Gardai to help build trust.
- The Refugee Legal Support services / Immigration officials / Asylum Tribunals / Gardai / other state agents - need to have specific training on referrals and on how to deal with disclosure about incidents of sexual violence by a woman.
- The women need to know that their information is confidential.
- Information needs to be given to women on their human rights and how to report incidents and crimes.
- Asylum seeking women need to be given information about their rights to decision making and involvement in the community.

In this section on the subject of protection and security women have voiced their deepest fears and concerns for themselves and their families. It is clear from what women say that unless a woman feels safe and secure it is very difficult for her to heal and recover and to feel empowered to participate in society. The next section of this report looks at women's empowerment and participation.



Section II: Women, Empowerment and Participation

Women in NI who took part in the Belfast workshop reported a general feeling that ‘thousands of women have been affected by the conflict and they don’t have a voice.’ They said that women’s voices should be much louder now and more assertive to ensure that things are achieved. However they asserted that ‘women are airbrushed they are pushed out of [decision-making arenas]’. They also said that participation can encompass instances where they are asked to/or have the opportunity to give advice and support; partake in formal politics; be involved in demonstrating and advocacy; undertake and give classes. ‘Participation’ is seen as a mechanism that provides for the survival of the self, the ripple effect of which empowers the family and beyond into society. Women need opportunities to participate in community life and activities that can be self-empowering which can then be used to make an impact on peace building, formal decision making arenas and government policy.

Women also talked about how they are often only portrayed as victims during conflicts which limits their access to full participation in society. One woman said: ‘We have to stop seeing women as only victims but recognise their role as agents of change. Women have to be empowered and their voices have to be included. But we need to ask women about their empowerment needs [first]’. As agents of change women need to be involved in every level of the peace process not only in grassroots consultations.

Barriers to political participation:

The issue of the ‘triple-shift’ (childcare – work – home) for women was highlighted by many women as a barrier to participation. Women talked about removing the main barriers for women in accessing formal politics: culture, confidence, cash and childcare, known as the ‘Big Cs’.

- **Culture:** invest in educating the young on those issues to move towards cultural changes
- **Confidence:** empowerment and access to adequate education is essential to increase confidence and to encourage the active participation of women.
- **Cash:** we need to pay attention also to women’s access to money and to economic power positions ‘whoever has the money rules’.

- **Childcare:** probably the biggest issue of them all. One woman said ‘as a man you can be a politician, a revolutionary, a soldier, a business man. As a woman you can do this as well until you have children. It is outrageous that budget cuts always target childcare.’
- **Consultation and inclusion:** consultation meetings start and finish on time (this breaks with an endless talking culture and considers child care issues). No single gender meetings.

Education

Education and the lack of it for women in certain regions was highlighted as a barrier to women’s participation in formal politics and peace negotiations. In many countries literacy is a major issue for women who have had to forgo schooling because of their culture which favours boys over girls and if a choice needs to be made a family will educate boys rather than girls. In some cultures there is a perception that girls do not need education as much as boys as they will not be required to earn a living outside of the home. One African woman commented that at a very young age girl’s learn that their duty is to find a husband. She said ‘this creates a “let the men do it” attitude’ that acts to increase women’s dependency on men and which inevitably undermines women’s self-confidence and esteem.

Women in NI talked about how many of them took on extra responsibilities in the home when they were children and this sometimes had an impact on their access to education. This lack of education and literacy skills inhibits women and undermines their willingness to put themselves forward to participate formally in politics or peace processes.

Recommendations:

- Mainstream funding for community education as this enables a progression route for women.
- Training courses on personal development, self esteem, confidence building, assertiveness, communication skills, including active listening and problem-solving skills are needed to support women’s participation.
- Mothers and grandmothers need to encourage their girl children in the home first – emphasizing that women can and do make a difference.
- Training women for political life should not be about fitting in to a masculinised system but about creating a new fairer system that reflects women’s lives and needs.
- Affirm the diversity of experience and knowledge women bring to politics rather than criticising

differences.

- Acknowledging the wealth of experience, knowledge, creativity and wisdom women bring to politics.
- Women need to support women who are willing to put themselves forward in whatever small way that is possible.
- Role models are needed for young women; we need to create opportunities for young women to shadow women who have positions of power.
- investment in Northern Ireland must improve so that children can access training and employment.

Participation

It was noted by some of the women from the North that during the conflict activists and community workers held and retained a certain amount of energy and power within their communities at community level. Women were the community leaders. A gap has since developed between those that now have formal political/appointed responsibility and those at 'grassroots' levels. Power has shifted from ordinary people to the formal political arena. The political system itself prevents women from entering politics as it is not accessible to women in relation to timings and processes. For most women they feel they would have to choose between their families or their career – which would mean an inevitable sacrifice of one or the other to fit into the current system.

Many of the women said that peace processes need to be about real participation not tokenism. A woman spoke about how that process in Liberia was held up as an example of conflict resolution where women were engaged in negotiations. But when the real negotiations started the women remained outside the talks. She said that men see women as redundant because they express emotions and therefore stereotype them as not being suitable for political life.

A group of women in the North and Border Counties spoke about how equality has turned into a 'tick box exercise' there are gaps between what happens in the community and at the leader's level. They said that they judge leaders and activists by their 'actions' not their 'words' and find many do not live up to their words. They say there is a system of 'rights by redress process' rather human rights as part of an ongoing sustained process of peace building and reconstruction.

Another woman from NI commented that 'The UN should lobby for a 30% quota for women in national emergency situations. This should not be optional but must be introduced as a condition sending out a clear signal to the international community'. It was clear from all of the consultations with women that even though every country and conflict is struggling with different issues; women's issues exist everywhere. On the subject of quotas while the majority of women agreed with them they don't always go far enough. One woman spoke about how in Afghanistan there is a quota system but still the culture condones violence against women. Emphasizing the deep-rooted sexism condoned by certain cultures and traditional beliefs that will take a long time to change. These sexist attitudes towards women were mentioned again and again with women believing Irish society has become more sexist not less.

Recommendations:

- Creating space for innovation within politics, e.g. support NWCI campaign to get more women into electoral politics.
- More women in decision making roles and in political life; quotas are needed to increase numbers of women in these roles as advocated by NWCI.
- Participation must be meaningful for women; they need to know that their voice is listened to.
- Women must be given more opportunities to influence government policy development; often documents are too wordy, too much jargon and women are often turned off by their presentation style.
- Measurement of politicians/government behaviours not their words.
- Counter bullying by people in positions of power – which is used as another form of violence against women.
- Need to be able to hold the government accountable for its behaviour e.g. the violent behaviour of some people is unresolved in the community in NI.
- Needs to be a real space for independent politicians to participate equally.
- Women need to be able to speak about emotions in a formal process; they want to remove the taboo that emotions are private.
- Needs to be recognition that what Ireland's government is planning for donor countries is also

needed in Ireland. 'We can't do business as usual anymore' need to think deeply about where best to put our resources here.

- There needs to be more women in the NI Assembly; with working hours to be convenient for women to attend political meetings (not late in the evening).
- Need a Northern Ireland Regional Plan on 1325; this 1325 process could create a space for women to continue to talk about their experiences as part of the healing process for the entire community.

Peace building and Women

Some of the women consulted with said that when peace comes often women and their activities are left behind and ignored. Peace can be very exclusive with only certain voices allowed to be heard. Peace building can take place politically, socially and economically and the barriers to women's involvement need to be removed. Women in NI talked about how they were excluded from the peace dividend and the decision-making process. Often women's work at grassroots level is not given respect or visibility. The collectivity of women's work is ignored. Equal participation in decision-making needs to be seen as part of the recovery process and this can be achieved by giving everyone a say in how to build a better and safer society. 'There is a fear that if action is not taken we will go from one war in the North to another'.

A woman from Somalia spoke about how only the older men or patriarchs in her community were included in the peace talks and how women were excluded formally from peace talks. However, women did have informal power, they mediated with men over the conflict and refused to be wives to their husbands unless the men stopped fighting. She said that women were supported by the international community to take part in the peace process and there are now a few strong women ministers in Somalia.

Women as human rights defenders

To take on the role as mediator or peace builder in her community a woman has to have enormous amounts of courage and resilience. Many women have had to learn to deal with different tactics of harassment and intimidation, and in one case a woman's home was attacked by pipe bombs and other devices in the first six months of 2010, and veiled threats made against her family. She has had to leave her home that she worked very hard for, often working three jobs at a time to pay the mortgage. She maintains that while she may not give in to intimidation, she spent the years of the Troubles protecting her children, but now feels she and her family are more

vulnerable and scared than ever. The idea that someone made an incendiary device with her name on it is what she finds most terrifying.

One woman shared a story about how Community Development workers in Colombia operated in very insecure settings and were labelled as left wing supporters because of their work. They therefore didn't feel safe in rightwing strongholds in Colombia. To overcome this problem they worked in the local university. This setting provided the community with a safe and secure place to work away from other places where there was an association with the location by one group or another. This can be one way of creating safe environments in which human rights defenders can work with the community.

Recommendations:

- Include women at all levels of peace negotiations from grassroots to national formal politics & mechanisms needed to monitor gender equality in those processes.
- Finances need to be provided to women both at grassroots level and to support women moving into formal politics.
- Protection and security provided for mediators and peace builders.
- There needs to be secure places to work on mediation and community building.
- Women need resources and supports for them to become politically involved as women often feel vulnerable in political positions.
- Every individual has the capacity to be a change agent in society, however, women shouldn't have to become like men to fit into the political system.
- Qualifications for women involved in community work; there needs to be greater recognition of all their hard work in mediation, negotiation and peace building.
- In policy making there needs to be platforms for grassroots women, often they have lost out on formalised qualifications but they have valuable life experiences to share, they need to be heard.
- To participate women's needs have to be met rather than them trying to fit into a 'man's world'.
- Men are needed as supporters on gender issues. Gender inequality is not only a women's problem, it is a wider societal and political problem.



Section III: Women's Role in the Prevention of Conflict:

Women in the North voiced their fears that the conflict continues to bubble under the surface, paramilitary control is still there and new dissident violence and violence from loyalist groups is a reality. Many are still power hungry. They say that so-called punishment shootings and beatings have started again. All of this creates ongoing fear and affects women's ability to move on with confidence that they have seen the end of the extreme violence lived with for so long. Women in Belfast spoke about how the 'peace wall' split communities and that there is less conflict when there is more 'eye to eye' contact with another human being. They make an effort to meet their neighbours on the other side of the wall to continue building and sustaining relationships. Although some of the women commented that there is a hierarchy of victims in the North they also believe that they can and are building alliances between individuals who have different perspectives and experiences.

Women in NI talked about how they were crucial in keeping society together during the worst years of the conflict. During the conflict mothers became overly protective of their children. Their children became the focus of their lives, because the children were traumatized and the women were trying to create a 'normal, safe' environment. The women talked about how they encouraged their families to work hard in school to get an education, to motivate them to get better jobs and to discourage them from joining paramilitaries; and they also worked hard to help their children understand that religion should be respected and not used as a vehicle for hatred. Mothers created solidarity in their communities. Women talked about how they weave safety nets and scaffolding to protect. In particular, they have a natural need to protect their children, and often find themselves unable to provide the level of safety for them that is necessary during and after a conflict. One woman said 'as women we don't separate our needs from our children's, when our children hurt, we hurt and many of our children are still hurting'.

Working with children and young adults

Many of the women spoke about the need to break the cycle of violence and the desire for revenge in young adults. There was a deep concern amongst the women of how to protect their children and ensure they do not repeat violent behaviours. Some women have moved families out of neighbourhoods where they felt their children were exposed to violence. Other women have

fled their own countries to come to Ireland to protect themselves and their children from the violence there.

Women who have experienced conflict said that they can feel confused, have low self-esteem and difficulty with handling stressful situations and this can impact on the lives of their children. Trans-generational trauma passed from one generation to another was also highlighted and the need to care for children and young adults and to develop their skills. Therefore, women were concerned about the importance of early intervention in the lives of children in terms of their health. Particular references by a service provider in Derry were made to the work of George Hoskins at WAVE which aims to reduce violence worldwide by 2030⁹.

Many of the women spoke about the need to have inter-generational dialogue with young people to give them opportunities to express what they need from family and community members. There also needs to be more transparent and improved information mechanisms for young people in this post conflict era. One woman emphasized the need to work with young people to give them a sense of self-worth and self-respect. She talked about how discovering her own talents and skills has given her a sense of security that could not be undermined. She explained how a deep sense of security and self-confidence has provided her with a foundation to deal with difference and conflict in a non-violent way.

Working with young women

There is a particular concern amongst women in the North for young women who they believe are in more unequal relationships than ever, because of sexist attitudes and gender stereotyping. One service provider in Derry spoke about how young women are being forced into sexual relations with friends of their boyfriends – as a form of abuse and control within the relationship. While young women appear confident, it was felt that cycles of oppression of women are coming back again and there is a loss of respect for young women by men. There is thus a consistent need for women's issues and rights to be addressed within the aftermath of the conflict.

Women spoke about how community cohesion and support has broken down and it is more difficult for young people to become involved in their communities or for women to have voices. Many young women are not engaged in politics and there is less space for women to take opportunities to empower themselves at a local level. They argued that this space needs to be opened up for women rather than closed down in the aftermath of conflict.

⁹ see <http://www.wavetrust.org/>

It is important to support younger women to develop their own sense of self and autonomy and help them to develop self-esteem and confidence. Women voiced concerns that there are not enough 'real' role models for young women and girls. Most of their role models are celebrities reflecting concerns with physical appearance; and less about women's empowering role within the community. They assert that the media has a role in encouraging young girls to look to older sisters and mothers as role models as well as women leaders within the community and to encourage women to support each other and to learn from each other's experiences.

Recommendations:

- The Government must promote more integrated nursery schools and education in NI.
- A re-education process for children in post-conflict needs to be included as part of peace building. To break the cycle of children acting out behaviours from the conflict, learned by growing up in a violent society.
- Educating young women and men about ways to resolve conflict without violence.
- Education in schools to include confidence building through skills development and capacity building in the following areas: universal human rights, respect, dignity, equality, mediation, peace building, negotiation skills, conflict resolution.
- Teaching young girls that it is ok to say 'no'.
- More research on young people and their attitudes and beliefs about violent behaviour.
- More positive role models from the community are needed to work with young adults.
- The stereotyping of women as emotional and men as rational needs to be challenged.
- When women voice an emotion/concern in a public/political/business environment they are often seen as unstable or unprofessional - this needs to be challenged.
- There needs to be more support groups and solidarity amongst women.
- Improve sex education for girls and boys with gender equality as the goal.
- More education about domestic violence and domestic harmony and mental health issues – this could reduce the cost of conflict and the resurgences of violence.

- Some women feel that pregnancy has become stigmatized during their careers and affects their promotion opportunities; negative attitudes towards women of childbearing age within the workforce/amongst employers need to be challenged.
- Women need to be supported by other women and challenged rather than undermined.
- There needs to be acceptance of women's sexuality and safety for women to talk about their sexuality – women do not want to be seen as sexual objects.

Working with Men

Many of the women talked about including men in the process for change. One woman commented that 'if men are not briefed on issues that affect women and if they do not participate in discussions – women end up effectively talking to themselves and no change will happen in gendered power structures. Men need to work alongside women to change traditional ways of think about women and men's roles in society, to create more egalitarian and just societies. She said that all institutions need to be included in this process: the family, the church or faith institutions, the media, the village elders or people with authority and power. A woman from Uganda said you have to educate men in order to change their attitudes and beliefs. There are deeper cultural issues in some countries where the men are spoiled and served by their mothers. She emphasised the important role of mothers educating young boys about gender equality.

Many of the migrant women argued that the empowerment of women can only happen if both men and women are empowered, for example, if a development agency only focuses on empowering women this can have the result of increasing violence towards women as men react negatively to a system that they feel excluded from, and this frustration can be taken out on women.

One woman spoke about the positive effects of a peer learning process amongst men who come together to discuss the emotional affects of the conflict. Peer pressure amongst equals can encourage men to support women.

Recommendations:

- More men need to become positive role models for boys.
- Boys need to be encouraged to become as nurturing and caring in their roles as girls.
- Girls need to be empowered to speak out and actively participate in society.

- Need to develop a methodology for challenging unacceptable behaviour in our communities and society.
- Increase awareness of how women's lives are affected differently to men's by conflict.
- Outreach to men and men's groups: peer education, awareness raising and action plans need to be resourced and developed.
- Long term commitment to changing cultural and gender norms. For example, creating a more just and less violent society takes at least 20-30 years after a conflict, not 5-10 years.

Justice and Financial Resources

There needs to be investigations into abuse and harms caused during conflict and such investigations should incorporate an understanding of the specific harms that resulted from women's roles as carers as well as other gendered patterns of harms and abuses. Truth recovery processes should enable a wider societal acknowledgement of what happened throughout the conflict. There needs to be an understanding of what happened at all levels in order to prevent the recurrence of future conflict. By discovering the many different 'truths' we develop a deeper understanding of different perspectives and views which creates a collective narrative that integrates all voices and can lead to reconciliation.

Women also noted that the allocation of so few financial resources to women's issues was reflective of the lack of political will by governments to support and encourage women's increased participation. One woman from a conflict region in Africa said 'governments need to be on board, if they are not, rapists will continue to live un-punished in their societies, and that sends out the wrong signal to the entire community'. Women and the wider community are not getting justice for the crimes committed against them. This directly connects with the prevention of the re-ignition of conflict as a result of revenge killings and sexual violence. One woman from Belfast talked about how injustice in the North of Ireland made her feel like a foreigner in her own country. She said 'peace is more than an absence of war it is an equal society that is the only guarantor for lasting peace'.

Recommendations:

- An end to impunity; prosecution of perpetrators of violence.
- Clear messages of non-acceptance of violence against women.

- Resources allocated to prosecutions and justice for women and children.

Reconciliation

Women in Derry spoke about whether forgiveness was possible or not. They felt that it was very difficult to forgive and that it was more important to try to understand what had happened and to accept it than to forgive. An interesting point was made: that it is difficult for victims to accept when perpetrators say sorry for what they did, but do not believe that what they did was wrong at the time. In other words there was a sense that some perpetrators of violence did feel sorry about the consequences of their actions, after having time to reflect, but this did not alter their belief that their actions were justified at the time. This raises a fundamental question about how reconciliation processes should be structured in conflicts fuelled by political differences or rebel movements by a sense of injustice, discrimination and oppression.

Recommendations:

- Creative tools (art, music, poetry, dance) to be used in truth recovery processes and in reconciliation processes as sometimes language cannot fully explain the many different processes/experiences an individual may go through in their lifetime, for example, from violence to peace; from victim to perpetrator; from victim to peace activist; from perpetrator to peace activist.
- The introduction of language that fully explains the deep human complexities of war and conflict.



Section IV: Recovery, Relief and Rehabilitation

Women take on additional responsibilities in the home when their husbands are arrested or killed or missing during conflict. These include financial responsibilities; more work in the home caring for family members; and often the responsibility of ‘keeping quiet’ or silent about the impact of the conflict on women’s lives. Women in the North and border counties talked about how they were expected to shoulder the emotional burden of the conflict without complaining or seeking help or support from those around them. The many additional roles women take on include acting as: counsellors, peace makers, policewomen, advisors, listeners, finding volunteers; and working in a women’s or community centre to support others. They were not given money or resources to support these additional responsibilities.

Women in the North and border counties particularly emphasized living a life continuously fearful that they or a family member will be murdered. They said that the levels of stress are so high that they no longer know what ‘normal’ is. Their bodies have been in ‘fight or flight’ mode for 40 years or more. A key point that all the women agreed on was how violence was normalized. As children they thought the conflict and the continuous feelings of fear were normal. Some of the women spoke about how they lost their childhood; or their teenage years; or their entire life to the conflict. When asked if they feel safe since the peace process they said ‘no’. They are still frightened. There is a lack of investment in women and children’s needs to help families and individuals recover from the trauma of the conflict.

Mental health issues

Mental health is broadly speaking about having emotional and spiritual resilience. A group of women in Derry spoke about how there is no space to talk about emotions, spirituality, politics, and religion – in an open and safe environment. Growing up these women could only speak about these issues within the home – if they were lucky – many more said they couldn’t talk about them in the home either. They said that the community endorsed silence for fear of reprisals – a ‘words are dangerous’ attitude prevailed. This culture of silence has had a negative impact on women’s well-being, especially their mental health. Many of the women in the Northern workshops talked about using anti-depressants or sedatives to help them cope. Many saw their mothers do the same. A Derry woman spoke about the ‘chemical straight jacket’ medication prescribed for

depression became for her. She also noted that Derry has the highest incidence of women being admitted into psychiatric hospitals.

Women talked about how the attitude to mental health is one of emotions or emotional breakdowns being stigmatized – women are expected to keep going. Anti-depressants were used as a sticking plaster to cover over the problem so that women could shoulder their additional responsibilities and support their families (including members of their families in prison). The conflict oppressed women further by encouraging this wall of silence to surround them. As one woman said, medication can only ‘patch-up a woman’, women need support from the community; to be listened to, not isolated and stigmatised. They say there was little if any respect for their role during and after the conflict to support others and to create as normal an environment for their husbands and families as possible.

Recommendations:

- More women’s centres, groups, places to meet, share, learn, train and talk, working together across communities; women need to have ways to meet regularly and support one another.
- Community group support should be valued – funding for these centres should be mainstreamed.
- Women require ongoing support to assist with recovery from the hurt and pain of the conflict; healing support, mental health services, anti-bullying strategies, and access to financial resources.
- Safety nets are needed to support families - as post-conflict there is a lot of family breakdown, parents/carers are unable to cope with difficult teenagers, the use of drugs, solvent abuse, lack of money, violence and the fear of suicide. Information about available supports is needed.
- More outreach workers are required to work with young people especially at night – to show them positive ways of living, deal with lack of motivation, feeling on the outside of society, lessen dependency on alcohol and drugs and build their self esteem and self belief as active, important citizens.
- More sporting opportunities are needed for young adults/teenagers along with training, personal development courses, and safe places for them to socialise; 13 – 21 year olds are at the highest risk of suicide.
- The Government must address the lack of good quality affordable social housing in NI as private landlords are profiting as families struggle to make up the difference in their rents and family life

suffers as a result.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Most of the women from conflict regions have lost family members – either they were killed in the conflict or are missing. Women who have been affected by the conflict in Ireland and women from other conflict regions stated that they need help to recover from the trauma of these conflicts. A common outcome of living continuously in fearful situations is post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is an anxiety disorder that can develop after exposure to a terrifying event or ordeal in which grave physical harm occurred or was threatened. Traumatic events that may trigger PTSD include violent personal assaults, natural or human-caused disasters, accidents, or military combat¹⁰. The symptoms of PTSD include insomnia, headaches, confusion, nightmares, irrational fear, anxiety, depression and suicidal feelings.

In the North concerns were expressed that women's health and well-being needs were not adequately recognised or in any way addressed during the conflict. Women were expected to cope alone without professional assistance. There remains a lack of recognition of the need to support women and families who are dealing with mental health issues as a result of conflict. The stigma associated with mental health issues needs to be counteracted through a formal recognition of the links between mental health illnesses and the impact of the conflict on the population. Adequate mental health related services are necessary on a wide scale both during and after conflict. Because the conflict endured for a long time, unhealthy coping mechanisms developed. Over time these became normalised and acceptable ways of coping. Women experienced multiple harms and traumas and the multitude of experiences need to be acknowledged and addressed more comprehensively. The value of the contribution of voluntary organisations that have tried to bridge the gap between needs and responses should be recognised and integrated into a comprehensive approach.

For asylum seeking women living in Ireland one of the biggest concerns they face is that of missing children. Many have lost children and do not know if they are alive or dead – and if they are alive where they are. However, counselling is not generally available to these women and where it is it is typically only one or two sessions which is not long enough to develop a trusting relationship with the counsellor or to build up confidence to be able to tell their stories. There should be more information readily available about services. One service provider – Galway Rape Crisis Centre – stated that most of their referrals come from solicitors working with Asylum seekers with others

¹⁰ Refer to: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/health/topics/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/index.shtml>

being referred by GPs and psychiatric services.

A counselling service provider ran group therapy for asylum seekers. Initially they tried using a standard method but they quickly realised that the women were experiencing so many layers of trauma and were still being traumatized by the conditions in which they live in Direct Provision centres that Group Therapy was not 'safe' for them emotionally. They decided to focus on recovery through dance, music, art and offering practical support like family planning and general health and wellbeing workshops instead. They commented that because so many of the women are suffering from PTSD they are emotionally in a chaotic state and therefore many suffer from confusion and there are also cultural differences that mean that often women dropped into the centre when they were feeling particularly re-traumatized rather than waiting for an appointment. To accommodate these women a decision was made to set up a 3-day a week drop-in clinic for asylum seeking women. Asylum seeking women are not comfortable using help-lines and they do not have adequate after care because of the conditions in which they live in their hostels. For example, they do not have private space or time alone to reflect and heal; therefore, they cannot do self-care actions like having a long bath, because they are sharing a bathroom with many others. They do not feel safe in their own homes as they are often sharing accommodation with other families and therefore have no privacy, so they cannot heal.

Amongst the asylum seeking community in Ireland levels of post traumatic stress disorder are so high that women from this group are five times more likely to be taken into psychiatric care. However, many of the women who need support are heavily medicated with anti-depressants and sleeping tablets rather than being given the care and rest they need to recuperate. Many of the women who have been in psychiatric care, repeatedly return to hospital. Being cared for in hospital is often the only break they get. One service provider explained that trying to counsel a woman who has experienced the layers of violence and abuse that many of the asylum seeking women have who are now being further traumatized by Direct Provision is like trying to counsel an abused child with the abuser present. It is impossible as the women are still frightened, vulnerable and exposed to further abuse.

Recommendations:

- Emotional and psychological supports and health screening for women.
- Better co-ordination of health services and information to women affected by conflict.
- Processing of cases needs to be more sensitive to the trauma people have experienced.

- Create ways for asylum seekers to become part of the community in Ireland through work/voluntary work/education/English language development/access to their children overseas.
- More visibility and accessibility to support services like the Migrant Rights Centre.
- Stronger influence on policy based on lived experiences of people.
- Recognize the fact that people experience trauma in different ways.

It is only 10-15 years after a conflict that the real affects of the conflict are being felt and for example in the North of Ireland, women need support now. A common problem felt by women in NI is that only those who are 'bleeding' get support. By this they mean that the trauma that is not physically visible through injury is often overlooked. Women in conflict situations tend to just survive and keep the community and the family moving and so it takes time for them to feel the deeper impact of the conflict on their bodies and on their lives.

Truth Recovery and story telling

All of the women agreed that story telling as part of a truth recovery process is a powerful way to share experiences, to be heard, to be believed and to help to release the pain, grief, anger, and trauma that is needed to be able to heal. Many of the women consulted with said they had never told their stories before in a shared group setting, and that they found it overall a very positive experience. Women discussed how a new language was needed post-conflict because forgiveness and the word 'sorry' do not fully capture the complicated and contradictory feelings felt by those affected by violent conflict.

The process of storytelling is about trust. The effectiveness of the process of storytelling depends on who asks the questions – do they allow you to tell your story? Do they constantly question you? How people are asked about their story, and where and when, are all important factors to be considered in truth recovery processes. It is important to bear witness, for someone to say 'I understand and I believe you'. It can be a relief to tell the story and story-telling needs to be facilitated and supported in a safe and sensitive way as identified by women, as the experience can have both positive and negative impacts. Equally important is the process of truth recovery as a form of justice.

One young Derry woman grew up without her father (he was in prison) she felt angry and abandoned. When her father was released from prison it was through story telling that she began to understand his experience and make sense of her own life without him. This story telling was

facilitated by the Glencree Peace and Reconciliation Programme. This greater understanding allowed her to build a closer relationship with her father. It has deepened her sensitivity towards the experiences of victims and given her a clearer perspective on the tensions between families of victims and perpetrators of violence. She also talked about the lack of support experienced by her father when he came out of prison. He did not have the skills to negotiate life in the community after 13 years of being incarcerated. Simple tasks like crossing the road or having a bank account were difficult for him.

Another Derry woman spoke about how she and her father were both beaten so severely during a raid in her area that her father was taken to hospital and although discharged two days later – he died from his injuries a month later. She explained that her family were not politically involved in the Troubles, that there had been a gross violation of their rights and her family was made out to be ‘terrorists’. They suffered ongoing severe harassment which had a grievous impact on the whole family. For 30 years none of her family spoke about what had happened to them and this silence between them had severe negative consequences on all of their lives and relationships. It was only when the police ombudsman reopened the case 30 years later that she discussed what happened with her brothers and sister for the first time. She found out that her sister had flung herself on top of her to try and protect her from being beaten; and that her older brother felt guilty all of his life because he couldn’t protect his father. This brother is now an alcoholic. This woman first began to tell her story when she attended a writing class in a women’s group in Derry. Through the process of writing down her story she began to come to terms with it and is now healing.

A concern highlighted by a group of women in Belfast is how the media can re-traumatize families by showing footage without prior consent of funerals, bombings, and pictures of family members who were killed or injured. They said that the media need to become more sensitive to the healing needs of the entire community when they decide to release footage of the conflict.

Recommendations:

- Counsellors who will meet with women regularly to build trust.
- De-stigmatize mental health issues.
- Truth recovery and storytelling processes provided in a regular, safe and non-judgmental environment.
- The media need to become more sensitive to the healing needs of the entire community.

- Women need to be able to access safe ‘women-centred’ justice processes.

Many of the women said that they would welcome the opportunity to take part in a truth recovery story telling process as they believed it is cathartic and healing as well as enabling deeper understandings of different perspectives and views of a wide range of people in their communities.

Post conflict reconstruction

Some of the women spoke about how there needs to be a separation from reconstruction processes and stabilising the peace post conflict. Reconstruction processes can be obstructed by a lack of in-depth and holistic research into what is needed for each community. Not one shoe fits all. One African woman commented on how aid money often only goes into the physical infrastructure of a country, rebuilding, but it is often not put into building human capacity. She said that Aid money is often used to support military operations. Reconstruction needs to address the social and human needs as well as the political aspects.

Peace building programmes are discussed at national level between politicians and the programmes developed are often far removed from those working in the community which has resulted in women being overlooked. One woman from the North said ‘buying peace is not peace building. There has to be accountability and transparency. I want to know what is happening with the money, we need tougher criteria in Ireland’.

A woman from Cameroon commented that ‘Aid money for HIV-Aids treatment often goes into the pockets of Chieftains – as the heads of the ruling party – they use that money to secure their power and to buy votes in the elections and to get rid of the people who do not support them’. She said ‘that happened to my husband; he had to die because he didn’t support the ruling party. That’s how much power they buy with wrongly used aid money.’

Child soldiers and Disarmament, Demobilisation and Re-integration of Combatants

In many conflicts children are exposed to intense levels of violence, often witnessing sexual violence committed against mothers and sisters and the killing of fathers and other family members. The children are frightened and can be full of hatred and bitterness towards the perpetrators of the violence. It is not difficult for war lords to recruit these scared orphaned children into their armies.

In Liberia women and NGOs working with children to help re-integrate them felt that not enough

was being done to help with this process. They spoke about how if the reintegration failed the chances of a return to war were high. One woman commented that reintegration programmes are not adequately protecting children as most reintegration programmes are set up for six to 12 months. She said that amount of time does not allow the appropriate structures to develop that will help the community to take back their young combatants. The timeframe is too short for real construction, which typically take up to three generations for change – approximately 30 years.

Economic issues within post-conflict communities, is a major issue that needs to be addressed in reconstruction processes. One woman points out that poverty is one of the motivations for war and for people to join armed forces, because they have nothing, they have nothing to lose. Women spoke about how economics play a major role in a return to fighting by disengaged soldiers who can be enticed back to fight by high wages. For example, in Liberia those who were overlooked by reintegration programmes went back to fighting in other areas, as they would receive large sums of money to fight.

Also, livelihood programmes are typically focused on men. For example, one woman spoke about how in Somalia young women were forced by militia to take care of them by cooking for them, washing their clothes. If the women refuse they were threatened with rape or the murder of their families.

Another woman in Derry commented on how Peace III funding to ex-combatants was geared towards men with an 80%-20% distribution to men-women's groups. She said that because the perception of the Troubles is that it was a 'male struggle' it is thought that men need this funding more because they were the ones who carried the guns and used the weapons.

Alcohol and Drug Abuse

In NI there is a huge problem with drink and drugs particularly amongst the younger generation. The social cost of alcohol and drug abuse in the North is estimated at £840 million per year (NHS NI, 2010). Many women voiced their concerns about children and young adults not learning how to deal with the aftermath of the conflict in a healthy way and the need for coping strategies to be taught in schools and universities.

HIV/Aids

Amongst asylum seeking women in Ireland there are issues in relation to HIV/Aids. 'Statistics have indicated that the resultant effects of extreme poverty and gender inequality, especially in the post-conflict environment and countries in transition, is women's increased vulnerability to the

epidemic of HIV/Aids, which leaves households and communities with unimaginable burdens. Often these women are victims of forced sexual assault and rape by soldiers and aid workers'¹¹. However, these women live with the fear of being exposed. A service provider commented on the lack of confidentiality around private health issues in the asylum seeking process. Women with HIV/aids are particularly vulnerable to isolation and stigmatization because there is a lot of misinformation circulating generally about the illness. Due to the lack of privacy within the Direct Provision Centres many women with HIV/Aids have to hide their medication so as not to be exposed.

Recommendations:

- Accountability by aid agencies and donor governments in relation to DDR and gender mainstreaming of aid.
- Information and education about the effects of substance abuse and human capacity building around healthy coping strategies.
- Awareness campaign about HIV/Aids and other illnesses.
- Confidentiality and protection of women's privacy particularly in relation to illnesses.
- Post-trauma stress counselling, care and support.

¹¹

Refer to: <http://www.undp.org/women/docs/gendermanualfinalBCPR.pdf>



Monitoring and Evaluation

A first class national action plan will incorporate a monitoring and evaluation process that focuses on the impacts of the actions in the NAP. This would require concrete objectives, timelines, budgets, as well as SMART indicators (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound) attached to activities and outputs, as well as official annual reporting and review mechanisms.

The women consulted with requested that regular formal meetings take place on a regional basis throughout Ireland to assess the overall impact of the NAP. It was suggested that these meetings could take place on a quarterly basis. They also requested the creation of an awareness raising programme to ensure everyone in Ireland has access to the NAP via a website and that there are processes to allow a diverse group of women to respond to its objectives and actions. Women affected by conflict wish to share their experiences and knowledge with the Irish Government, particularly in relation to the impact of the NAP and its ongoing development.

Recommendations:

- Capacity building for women's groups to assess the NAP on a regular basis.
- The creation of monitoring and evaluation forms; training on how to use these forms; and regular update meetings between women's groups, NGOs and government departments.
- 1325 awareness raising campaign, website, and other communications tools.
- Annual conferences to highlight achievements and challenges of Ireland's NAP.



Conclusion

There was agreement amongst women consulted with that the Irish National Action Plan (NAP) on 1325 must strongly reflect the experiences of the conflict on this island and the peace process; as well as the experiences of women who come from conflict regions and who now live in Ireland. The Irish NAP must be based on the widest range of women's experiences. This consultancy process reasserts women's need for recognition, investigation and redress for the harms and human rights abuses that have been carried out on women by state and non state actions and policies.

The Irish National Action Plan on 1325 should also recognise the various roles carried out by women in conflict and conflict resolution and learn the lessons from these. There should be specific commitment to the goal of societal transformation rather than a return to the past. This should include the transformation of systems and structures that limit women's participation in society such as socio-economic disadvantage. All of the women expressed their fear of the recurrence of conflict and felt that their proposals for dealing with the past and transforming the future were necessary to ensure that violent conflict does not happen again.

Despite the intense suffering of women most have a steely determination to recover from their ordeals and to get on with their lives. One of the asylum seeking women living in a Direct Provision centred commented on how she was 'passing through this time' in her life, aware that it was not forever and that there is hope for a better future for her and her children.

Some of the women talked about their inner transformative journey from victim to peace activist. In particular how through finding a sense of shared or collective problem solving they were able to break down the barriers of anger, grief, guilt or shame and identify solutions to ensure positive change.

As part of the recovery process there needs to be an acknowledgement of all that women have done to support their families and communities throughout conflict. One woman said 'in conflict women are both negotiators and defenders. Consequently women have to be an integral part of the peace, because if women do not support the peace process, peace is not going to happen'.

Ends

Appendix I

Questions for Consultation process

A. Prevention – truth recovery

Have you been asked to tell your story before? Formally or informally? How did that process work? Who asked the questions? What types of questions were you asked? Did you get to tell your whole story or part of it? Were your concerns as a woman included in the story? What happened to your story? Did it get passed to a national organisation? What would you like to happen to your story now?

Did you feel that you were visible as a woman? How was your presence felt by others? What impact do you think your story made?

B. Participation – empowerment

What sort of additional responsibilities did you have to take on as a result of the conflict? (Home, family, community, work, money?) Have you ever been in a role during or after the conflict where people came to you for advice, support or help to do with the situation? Were you able to help them? How did you help them? Were you ever asked to particularly help other women or girls? What did they want you to do? Were you ever asked to represent or speak for other women/men/children in your community? What did they ask you to do? How did you do it? What response did you get? What response would you have liked to get?

What support do you need to be able to manage these additional responsibilities? (Counselling, schooling/education/training, financial, family friendly work arrangements, other?).

Did you feel that you were visible in your role? How was your presence felt by others? What impact do you think you made?

C. Participation - peace building

Have you ever been involved in peace building? What were you asked to do? What specifically did that involve? Were there obstacles or obstructions you had to overcome to take on this role? What were they? How was your role as a peace builder supported by the community? Did you ever feel threatened or insecure as a result of taking on this role? Are you/were you aware of any warning signs of a relapse into conflict? How do/did you deal with that situation? What supports or resources do you need to enable you to continue being a peace builder in your community?

(schooling/education/training, political structures need to change to accommodate women, structures that support women, quotas).

Did you feel that you were visible in your role? How was your presence felt by others? What impact do you think you made?

D. Recovery, relief and rehabilitation: Economic, education and health needs

What sort of additional responsibilities did you and other women have to take on as a result of the conflict? (In the home; care for additional family members; community; work; money?)

How did you and other women cope during the conflict/post conflict situation? What did you/they need most urgently? (Safety, money, food, psychological support, healthcare?) What sorts of supports did you/they get? What do you/they need now? Are you/they getting those needs met?

Did you feel that you were visible as a woman? How was your presence felt by others? What impact do you think you made?

E. Protection: security

Who helped you during the conflict/after the conflict? (Individuals or organisations?) Did you come into contact with security forces or peacekeepers? If so, did they take your safety concerns seriously? How did they help you? Were there women present? Did those women make a difference? How? Do you feel safe now? What do you need to happen before you will feel safe? (engage men as well as women in a campaign to stop violence against women, include institutions such as churches in the campaign to raise awareness of and speak out against violence against women, build capacity for forensic evidence gathering, ongoing collation of data on GBV and communication of the problem).

Did you feel that you were visible as a woman? How was your presence felt by others? What impact do you think you made?

Appendix II

Wishes from women who have had their lives affected by violent conflict

Peace and Security
Support in the world. To be appealed to for their feminine power
Confidence and Self worth
Protection and happiness
Self Worth for you as woman – equality. No bigotry of any form
I wish for good self esteem and safety for the girls of the future
Value women from all aspects of life. Women to value women irrespective of class religion, education or sexual orientation
Recognition for their achievements
Peace and Strength to comfort fears and people who make them suffer any form of the above
Peace, safety, security, healthcare, happiness, harmony. The gift of seeing/loving their children's children
I would like these girls to have a sense of confidence and safely and freedom to be all that they can be
For girls to be listened to and believed and loved for being emotional and special strengths and power
I wish you all a strong sense of self- worth, peace and joy and friendship always
I wish all young ones to give love and peace to all

Equality
I witnessed the rape of two girls and killing one of them after raping her. I have trauma from Darfur. I have physical and emotional abuse from Janjweed
I will like to be in countries. I would like to help all those mothers and children to be able to communicate and come forward and to their mothers, on to communities
A commitment to honor the truth
That women will be able to chose and live their sexuality with freedom and without discrimination
Not The parent staying in a hotel with children for long long (stop for that)
Support for children or vulnerable adults during a time of trauma e.g. conflict support with their security and listening ear for their fear
I wish that no woman would ever feel as rick purely because they were alone with a man
Genuine Equality. Regard less of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, ability or disability, country of origin
Women should be the Prime Minister or President all over the world
Secured and successful life
Peace in all its forms
For a world where girls feel safe in their own homes/communities
I wish if the organization can do something to African people like Zimbabwe people are dying of disease they cant afford money for hospital
For women and girls everywhere to have full control over their own bodies

I wish that my children will not experience hardship in life. I wish that violence against women should stop
I would wish that girls and women should be given equal rights. Also that women who have feed their country for refuge should be considered and given state protection, not to sent them back to meet their previous tortured and death. Thanks very much. God bless you.
Peace and equality. Personal freedom and security
Be proud of how you are and where you come from. Never lose sight of your beginnings no matter how humble
Acknowledge the tears
Freedom and power to choose, to imagine and to create a good society for girls, women, boys and men
Justice for the victims. Acknowledged, respected, empowered and at peace, with peace, in peace
My wish is for young women to have respect for themselves and others. To have the courage to fight inequality and discrimination. To stand up for those less well off
To live in peace and always have hope in your heart
<p>I wish for younger women</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - love and happiness - Freedom to be themselves - Strength and opportunity to voice their ideas, fears, needs - Willingness to be partners with others, men and women to make a more equal world for girls and women to love in
I wish the young women the ability of the truth of war. I wish women of all ages the voice of power

Ensure training and education provided to all who suffer from trauma
More support and recognition of women who have experienced armed conflict
An end to rhetoric and good 'words' and a sustained focus on practical strategies that come from the voices and experience of the women who live there
Peace and Harmony
Peace building being a longer process. 3 generations not just a 5 or 10 year plan that starts the healing then leaves communities/ families unsupported to finish the process
I wish my granddaughters to feel happy within themselves to respect their bodies, their neighbors and their community
That all women live in a fair and equal society free to be
Stop sex trafficking by punishing those men who purchase sex from women and children. In Ireland and aboard by peace keepers and sex tourist (pedophiles) who travel outside
Young women feel safer
Girls I am requesting you to focus on education before involving yourself to sex for your better future. Work hard for your family please!! This will be for your family future. Please involve yourself in the National politics. Never keep yourself back for the man
Properly resourced refuges, supports and services for women and children experiencing GBV and sexual violence in every community

<p>Wishes not</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Staying in a hostel after fleeing a conflict situation for years on and without knowing their fate. 2. Being abused by a series of people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Government - Husband - Soldiers - Etc <p>A smiling woman...with</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peace - Love - Security - Prosperity - Family -Health -Wealth
<p>Your story will be heard! You are worth the time and truth</p>
<p>Gender Equality. Peace. And a safe environment for everyone to live in together</p>
<p>I wish... that all women and girls are treated equally and that their human rights are not dependent on their immigration status – a printed document should not determine ones existence in a state. My Christmas wish for women</p>
<p>The parents sleep same rooms with children and the parents go mad because of that. The government need to stop that, we need action</p>
<p>Love and beloved</p>
<p>That women and girls could love free of GBV and perpetrators are brought to justice. Zero Tolerance and full consequence</p>
<p>To have no violence in their relationships</p>
<p>I wish my children find love and peace in this life and be able to express themselves more than we were allowed in our childhood because of the</p>

Troubles and be more confident
Giving young people the ability and opportunity to have a dialogue with their parents and grandparents in a safe space to avoid them inheriting 'the guilt' or just feeling guilty without being able to rationalise it.
Peace and Happiness
I wish for my family to have strong characters and to overcome depression so that we will all be filled with peace and love, and then pass this onto the next generation.
Always be strong Don't be bullied Believe in yourself Love yourself
Education- how to actually survive in the world. Sharing of skills and knowledge. Sense of self worth. To give only what they want to give. Fathers who can show they are worthy of love and trust. That women and girls have the confidence to assert themselves and be responsible for their own choices.
I wish that every woman, girl will speak out, talk to friends, family and their children to speak out when in pain or being abuse either sexual, physically or in any way. Also, please as women don't ever encourage any form of sexual abuse. This is my wish.
Voices of women and men from all backgrounds respected and listened to equally. Respect and inclusion, equality of voices.
It would be great if 'society' in general would change. If no one made judgment. It would be a perfect world.
Safety from fear, protection!
I hope young girls do not be afraid to speak out and learn to say no. My wish is that grandparents that have been through the Troubles and don't know what to do with themselves learn the young ones how to cope and love themselves.

<p>My wish is that you will always be minded and carefree and you will look after the next generation of women and that you are safe. My wish for you is that you will be free to live your own truth and if you choose not to live with a man that this is Okay.</p>
<p>More dialogue between parents and children to encourage a new vision of society that respects listening and diversity</p>
<p>More self esteem and self confidence engendered in our girls and young women.</p>
<p>I wish that all violence against women will cease and more support will be give to them to enable them to bring up their children. I wish for better education for women and better chances of employment.</p>
<p>Courage and strength to do what she wants, despite the odds against her as a woman.</p>
<p>A safe and secure place, where they can be assured that their wants and needs are taken care of and they have someone to cuddle into-always.</p>
<p>To be able to have a good night's sleep without fear of themselves or family members being murdered.</p>
<p>To be able to bring their ' whole selves' – emotions included to the decision-making tables.</p>
<p>That women and girls could live free from GBV.</p>
<p>My wish: that society evolves to the degree that it has become 'blind' to gender, race, and ethnicity – as regards how people are valued, but not losing the various cultures. For individual girls and women that they know their value in the world and that they have faith and confidence in raising their voices.</p>
<p>To be happy in life</p>

More participant of women at the highest levels of Government, justice system, economics, in religion, science, education and health – Accountability
Have both parents, solid foundation. Civic duty Government, protect children from violence homes and get support for future. Respectful nations around the world and promote peace
A safe and happy childhood where you know you are loved and you learn how to love
Never feel insecure about who they are and have a world of <i>actual</i> possibility, where no barriers or ceiling can stand in their way
1. One day women will have power to stand and say – listen- to the men (stop rape)!! 2. Freedom
May you grow and flourish in your inner unique being in the treasure that you are!
Speak out about GBV and ensure that women’s voices are part of decision making process
More leadership roles in politics
Truth, love, equality, peace, strength and reconciliation, courage, peace of mind, freedom of choice, respect
Safe to walk the streets
Empowered assertiveness and happiness
Courage, confidence, prosperity
Dignity and respect
I would like there to be a culture of rights and an assumption of the equal worth of all girls to grow up in and be able to realize their full human potential

Education for girls especially from poor backgrounds so they are able to experience all things good in life
I wish that girls and boys are educated equally about respect for others – about difference- about non-violent <i>{illegible}</i> of conflict resolution and that peace and justice are important values for all to maintain
Confidence in their own worth and value from a young age
Emancipation. Peace with appreciation of diversity, Freedom to...
A world of equal opportunities without gender or racial discrimination
There is only one of you. You are unique. Always be your own woman. Inquisitive, confident and inspirational
Work together to make the changes you wish to see in the world, listen to each other and make sure no voice goes unheard
Make their own choices for their futures. For that they need security, freedom, confidence, education, ambition, supported from society
<p>I wish for my daughter (wherever she lives)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Available birth control - The promise of a college (or higher) education - to NEVER fear that she will be sexually violated - To have her dreams for her future as equally encouraged as her male peers