

## **National Women's Council of Ireland Consultation Workshop**

### **To inform Peacekeeping Questionnaires on Gender**

#### **In fulfillment of the Irish Defence Forces Action Plan on**

#### **UNSCR 1325, Women, Peace & Security**

**4<sup>th</sup> February 2014**

The NWCI hosted a consultation with civil society members to discuss personal and professional experiences of coming into contact with peacekeepers. The learning from this consultation is gathered below. The consultation's aim is to inform the Irish Defence Forces (DF) of women's perspectives on peacekeeping and the issues that they want to raise awareness of to the DF, its gender advisors, the drafters of pre-deployment gender training and post-deployment questionnaires. Attendees at the workshop are listed at the end of this document.

#### **Culture**

- Culture and communication were raised as two of the most important issues to take into concern by peacekeepers.
- Understanding and acknowledgement of culture both within the host countries and within different peacekeeping forces is a key issue. However, all parties should be cognizant of not using cultural norms in the host nations to reinforce gender stereotypes or to devalue women's contribution to the mission or society more broadly.
- The use of culture as a rationale to gender stereotype or to position women coming out of conflict as 'victims' should be avoided at all times.
- Culture must not be used as an excuse for violations of women's human rights. Positive aspects of culture which support safety and empowerment and give protection should be acknowledged and reinforced.
- Women who are more traditional (e.g. veiled) and who may be most marginalised are frequently not the ones who are consulted with; instead it is the local women who speak English and are seen as more 'westernised' who are invited to meetings. This is not always helpful as more traditional women also have a lot to contribute to discussions. In fact, they may be the women who need change the most and may actually know more about what is happening at a grass roots level. Therefore, ALL the different women/groups/communities should be engaged with. Sometimes issues that address women in conflict (especially gender based violence) go unreported and unrecognized not because women don't report, but because they are not asked the right questions in the first place.

## **Mission Mandate/Communications with Local Population**

- It is important to clearly communicate the mission mandate to local populations (outlining what civilians can/cannot reasonably expect from peacekeeping forces and mission staff).
- Serious issues arise in relation to the wearing of uniforms by civilians and ex-soldiers and this instills fear amongst women and communities of anybody in a uniform. This is an issue peacekeepers need to be cogniscent of and another reason why their roles and responsibilities need to be clearly communicated to civilians within the host nation.
- One example cited by a workshop participant was her experience of working in Cote d'Ivoire where she witnessed women being controlled by men in uniform, because the women assumed those men were supported by weaponry and comrades. If the women knew which groups were still operational, and which were totally disbanded, it would have given them a degree of protection. They might have been able to stand up against the violence in at least some cases.
- The mission needs to be cogniscent of the fact that community engagement on a day to day basis is often diminished due to the location of peacekeeper camps and headquarters away from villages and communities. This disconnection from civilians needs to be resolved through pre-planning and prioritizing communications and outreach initiatives before the mission arrives in the country.

## **Human rights**

- As part of the communications process, human rights and women's and girl's rights need to be clearly and effectively communicated to the local population. For example, huge billboards aimed at ending gender based violence (GBV) are prominently raising awareness of a zero tolerance policy on violence against women in Liberia. When people know their rights they are more likely to individually and collectively recognize their right to become agents of change for themselves and their communities, in seeking justice and access to resources.

## **Gender does not mean 'women'**

- Gender discussions and analysis must be broadened to encompass relationships between women and men; both within the host nation and within peacekeeping forces. Male dominated organisations will not proactively look at issues such as GBV unless they are required to report on it. Peacekeepers must communicate directly with women to ascertain their experiences and needs, as well as men's needs and experiences. Gathering data on women and recording and reporting on communications with women are key to including gender perspectives that encompass the views of diverse groups within that society, not only men's views.

## **Gender Advisers**

- Gender advisers are generally women. Civilian and military (senior level) male and female gender advisers are needed to demonstrate the importance of a gender analysis of a conflict situation and to role model egalitarian attitudes and behaviours. If only civilian gender advisers are present on a mission, the gender component of the mission will lack authority and the local

population will not take it seriously. It is also essential that Mission Readiness Exercises (MREs) contain a gender dimension.

### **Institutional ownership of gender**

- It is important that gender awareness/sensitivity/mainstreaming is owned at an institutional level, with institutional accountability. For example, gender issues must be mainstreamed and permeate through all levels of the military/peacekeeping mission by being included at every stage in the planning of missions.
- This necessity to gender plan and strategize also applies to the military police, administrative processes and throughout all mission functions.
- The Irish Government has a huge responsibility not just in terms of the behaviour of their own peacekeeping troops but also that of the organisations they fund or contribute to. The Irish Government must commit to speaking out against violations that are being committed by peacekeepers from other troop contributing countries, especially those countries/troops that Ireland is involved in the training of. All violations must be recorded and reported and actions taken publicized both at home in the country of origin of the peacekeeper and abroad, in the host country. This will ensure that a zero tolerance policy and practice towards any violations of the peacekeepers code of conduct and other humanitarian laws is communicated to everybody affected by a mission.

### **Opportunities to lead and role model new behaviours**

- By highlighting 'best practice' the DF can act as agents of change internationally and amongst their troop contributing peers. Peacekeepers can play an important role in role-modelling and demonstrating behaviours that support gender equality. Women peacekeepers must be visible in senior ranking roles with decision-making/leadership responsibilities. Mixed patrols that include women and men peacekeepers are key to providing security for all civilians in host nations.

### **Monitoring & Evaluation**

- There can be a disconnection between planning and policy-making bodies and the evaluators and the work being done on the ground. The infrequency with which committees such as the Monitoring Group on UNSCR 1325 meet creates further difficulties in enabling accurate evaluations and timely and effective actions.

**Dr. Shirley Graham and Ms. Rachel Doyle**

**2014**

## **List of Workshop Participants**

Ollie Barbour, Director Personnel Support Services, Irish Defence Forces

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Jane Dundon, Policy Officer, Rape Crisis Centre

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