



Wezesha welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) on development of Ireland Third National Action Plan on Women Peace and security, resolution 1325. Our submission is informed by the work of Wezesha with the African Diaspora in Ireland and our pilot work on the ground with women at grassroots level in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Kenya.

INTRODUCTION

With Ireland's Second National Action Plan (NAP) coming to close this year, Wezesha would like to emphasize a focus for the Third NAP to be on the participation of young people coming from conflict regions, especially in the African Diaspora. There have been a growing number of people fleeing their homes in Africa due to conflict and instability. This past June, Taoiseach made a public commitment to do more to help the mass migration from Africa and the Middle East¹. Taking on initiatives to bring in more refugees fleeing worn torn regions is one thing; promoting their participation in the new society once they arrive is another. With this, we encourage **Ireland's Third NAP to create forum that brings together young migrants from conflict regions, particularly the African Diaspora, as they offer insight on how to better serve them and promoting peace and security. In addition, we recommend a recognition and involvement of women on the ground of armed conflict regions like DRC.**

BACKGROUND ON WEZESHA AND AFRICAN DIASPORA IN IRELAND

Of the 544,000 non-Irish living in Ireland (INIS 2013), 54,419 individuals indicated that their birthplace is in Africa, thus revealing that there is a significant population of Africans who have immigrated to Ireland. Africa diaspora in Ireland, while resilience, have been very active socially, economically and politically and their efforts toward integration are apparent. While African immigrants create a sizeable portion of Irish society and economy, they often find it difficult to integrate into their new homes, whether due to language or discrimination. In a 2009 survey of refugees by UNHCR, 'a significant number of participants felt that they had not been sufficiently supported in their efforts to integrate.' Thus, Ireland must take steps to further the integration process for refugees and immigrants in order to

¹ <https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/politics/ireland-to-take-more-refugees-in-show-of-solidarity-37040514.html>

create a more cohesive society, and to develop the capacities of the African Diaspora to strengthen the Irish economy. From here, it is possible to engage the Diaspora in efforts to lead the development of their countries of origin from their place in Irish society.

Wezesha, Swahili for “empower or enable” is a diaspora led development organisation working with women and children affected or likely to be affected by conflict, violence, war and poverty. Wezesha works in collaboration with local groups and organisations in establishing partnerships to raise awareness, end sexual and gender-based violence and poverty. One of Wezesha key objectives under the migration and development pillar is to mobilize the African Diaspora for engagement in international development. The Organisation also hopes to support and strengthen the African Diaspora groups, help in establishing and partnering with other African Diaspora internationally in order to facilitate the channel of resources, enhance investment, draw on expertise, capitalize on remittances and address other issues affecting migration practices.

WEZESHA AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Even though our work is a diaspora led focused on Africa, we also engage with youth living in Ireland to address issues of migration, inclusion, and peace and security building. On 21 and 22nd July 2017 Wezesha held two days residential workshop- Youth for Peace (YFP), managed by Donegal County Council as part of Local Authority as Drivers for Development Education and Awareness Raising (LADDER). The workshop aim was to educate and raise awareness with the youths on global issues in order to promote the notion of global citizenship, peace and integration among them. One of the main objectives of the training was **to educate youth about global peace & sensitise them on the importance of being socially active in their communities**. 21 young people ranging from 18 -33 years of age participated.

The workshop was the first time young people especially from background representing different nationalities met in an organized group form. Countries of origin of the participating included Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Congo, Swaziland, South Africa, Kenya, Ireland, Slovenia, Somalia, and Syria. Most of these young people arrived in Ireland when they were infant or very young children and have grown up hearing about war and conflict which caused their parent to leave their country of origin, the workshop therefore was very relevant as well a learning process.

The youth spent a significant amount of time discussing peace and security issues. They described conflict to be caused by things such as misunderstanding, hate, insecurity, lack of trust, and fear of unknown. They added that conflict and violence can also occur due to government distribution of resources found to be unequal and only benefiting a few not having consideration for the most poor.

The youth shared very insightful thoughts regarding the prevention of violence and promotion of peace. These insights, which inform Wezesha's recommendations for Ireland's Third NAP, included: **equality, education, political and civic participation, tolerance and inclusivity.**

WEZESHA'S EMPOWERING WOMEN IN PILOT COUNTRIES

Wezesha work focuses on 3 key areas: Gender Based Violence, Alleviation of poverty and Migration and Development. With the alleviation of poverty, the organization work involves women economic empowerment, training and education, health. The organisation has been focusing work in Kenya and DRC the two countries selected for piloting until 2019. Understanding the impact of poverty as both a promoter and prevention of conflict, Wezesha has supported income generating activities of women in Kenya, (Majengo kanuku and githurai 44). The support with microfinance was delivered to the group in December 2015. Five women from Majengo received loans to advance their small business, this include coffee business, food and vegetable kiosk and hair saloon, the githurai 44 has 19 active women involved group d in the microfinance, the group continue with their lending and saving and have progressed significantly since 2013. Women in Wezesha Congo continued to work on their income generating activities as well however women in Eastern Congo continue to live with fear of ongoing conflict and violence.

In addition, Kenya also continues to experience impact of post conflict caused by local elections in 2007 as well as recent elections, which continue to cause tribal tensions. Women are particularly impacted by these conflicts through sexual violence such as rape, loss of properties and loved. With these, there need to be have resources to help them overcome these traumas. Furthermore, Kenya has also become host country for huge number of refugees from neighbouring countries including Somalia, and thus this also add to tension in the country and call for additional resources to alleviate the stress.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Encourage participation of youth

In general, young people are voice for social change. It is important to further recognize the power in the voice of young people, especially from conflict regions. We recommend that the Third National Plan have a specific focus on involving young people by convening them through a forum where they are able to voice their opinions on how to best serve them. Bringing young migrant in a setting like this will recognize their voice as key stakeholders in Irish society and will make them feel valued in the decision making process.

In 2016 when Wezesha engaged youth in conversation about peace and security, they were extremely insightful. For example, the youth advocated for better climate initiatives including renewable energy, recycling, planting trees. The youth also stressed the important of an equal world as a path toward stability, love, and peace. Inclusivity was also a key

recommendation from the youth in preventing conflict and promoting peace. They advocated for a society that educate its citizens about differences in background, race, education, and religion. The youth also emphasized a participation in decision making as key factors for promoting voice for everyone, leading to a safer and peaceful society.

Engagement and protection of grass-roots women level in armed conflict regions

Not everyone is able to escape the violence taking place in their home countries. The impact of the violence will severely impact the women and girls who are still in the region. From Wezesha's piloting work in DRC and Kenya, the organization has learned that women will always continue to find strength in conflict to create better lives for themselves and their families. With this, it is important for any peace building initiatives involving women to promote activities that recognize their resilience and empower economically, politically, and socially.

- Reaching out to grassroots women and ensuring their voices are heard. During Wezesha visit to Goma in April 2018 over 200 grassroots women who met with Wezesha team highlighted lack of consultation and involvement in peace discussion. Women in rural are the most affected with ongoing insecurity. Ensure grassroots women are involved in discussions and their voices are heard.
- Economically: there should be support and empowerment for women through entrepreneurship and income generating activities.
- Politically: ensure involvement of women in decision making structures- build the capacity of women through training, sharing of experience. Ensure there are strong laws and polices protect women and to ensure women receive justice.
- Socially: Invest in educating the community and target men, boys, faith-leaders to influence change, debate and discussions on gender equality. There should also be continuous support for the young girls through education and health.