

Submission to the Consultation on Irish NAP on Women, Peace
and Security. August 2014.

Organisation:

Northern Ireland Assembly All Party Working Group on UNSCR 1325 Women,
Peace and Security. (NIA APG)

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Response from the
Northern Ireland Assembly All Party Group on UNSCR1325

Introduction

The Northern Ireland Assembly All Party Group (NIA APG) on
UNSCR1325 Women, Peace and Security was originally
established in the 2007-2011 mandate and was reconstituted in
July 2011 following the Northern Ireland Elections in May 2011.

Members of the NIA APG are as follows:

Chair	Paula Bradley	Democratic Unionist Party
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Vice Chair	Anna Lo	Alliance Party of Northern Ireland
Secretary	Stephen Agnew	Green Party in Northern Ireland
Treasurer	Mike Nesbitt	Ulster Unionist Party
	Chris Lyttle	Alliance Party of Northern Ireland
	Basil McCrea	NI21
	Dolores Kelly	Social Democratic and Labour Party
	Megan Fearon	Sinn Fein
	Bronwyn McGahan	Sinn Fein
	Claire Sugden	Independent

The main aim of the NIA APG is:

- ***To raise awareness of the lack of participation of women in political and public life in Northern Ireland in areas outlined in UNSCR1325 Women, Peace and Security.***

Background

In 1998 with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement (Belfast Agreement)¹ the peace building negotiations may have made an attempt to include a commitment to increasing women's participation in decision-making in the new structures and bodies in the post-conflict era of Northern Ireland, but in reality the main focus was based on addressing the sectarian divide in Northern Ireland.

¹ <http://www.nio.gov.uk/agreement.pdf>

The peace process of 1998, the mandating of a devolved government and the establishment of a legislature, (the Northern Ireland Assembly), in a fragile peace process was not without its problems. In 2002 the fragility of the peace process resulted in political parties being unable to work together, leading to the suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly. Northern Ireland returned to Direct Rule until the negotiations and subsequent agreement, known as the St. Andrew's Agreement,² led to the re-establishment of the Northern Ireland Assembly and new political structures in 2007.

Commitment to women in Agreements

While it must be acknowledged that UNSCR 1325 Women, Peace and Security was not adopted by the UN until 2000, many therefore, argue that the UK Government, Northern Ireland Executive, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the new bodies established post-conflict were not to be held accountable for providing the commitments in the Resolution. However, while UNSCR1325 was not yet adopted in 1998, there was evidence available to those well used to peace negotiations (such as the UK and Irish Governments) that without women at the decision-making table or playing a major part in the reconstruction of societies any peacebuilding was liable to fail. In the words of Hillary Clinton "history has taught us that any peace not built by and for women is far less likely to deliver real and lasting benefits."³

² http://www.nio.gov.uk/st_andrews_agreement.pdf

³ Hillary Clinton, *Address to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women* - delivered 12 March 2010, United Nations, New York

Although few commitments in the GFA /Belfast Agreement of 1998 were specific to women there were two in particular which, if implemented fully, would have moved towards incorporating some of the provisions in UNSCR 1325 and included women's contribution to the post-conflict era.

Under Human Rights *“the right of women to full and equal political participation”*, and under Economic, Social and Cultural issues *“...the British Government will pursue broad policies for sustained economic growth and stability in Northern Ireland, and promoting social inclusion, including in particular community development and the advancement of women in public life.”*⁴

It is the case therefore, that the work of women in local communities during and after the conflict, which maintained stability and developed cross-community contacts and projects, should have been used as templates of good practice for a lasting peace which could have been built on to establish stable relationships.

Indeed, Section 75 and Schedule 9 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998⁵ came into force on the 01 January 2000 and placed a statutory obligation on public authorities in carrying out their various functions, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity including between men and women provides public authorities with avenues for positive action . But

⁴ <http://www.nio.gov.uk/agreement.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/47/contents>

positive action with regards to women's equality has been lacking and, generally, through poor interpretation, led rather to a gender neutral approach to policy and legislation which has meant inequality in some instances for women.

Furthermore, with the suspension of the Assembly in 2002 and all party peace negotiations not resuming until 2007, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 should have been implemented fully in Northern Ireland, not only by the UK Government (which had developed its first NAP in 2006) but also supported by the Irish Government, which was party to the St. Andrew negotiations.

Women in post-conflict decision-making

From 1998 to 2002 as the new structures began to appear it was apparent that no attempt was being made by the British / Irish Governments, the political parties or the new legislature to ensure that gender equality in politics and decision making was one of their key priorities in peace building.

For example:

- monitoring and ensuring gender equality on new bodies was ignored – i.e. the Policing Board for Northern Ireland, the Parades Commission
- political parties were not committed to ensuring elected women representatives were nominated to serve on the Policing Board and other new boards

- although the Police Service for Northern Ireland (PSNI) does encourage recruitment of more women, monitoring of the PSNI was based on the sectarian divide and not on gender
- political parties were not committed to the Sex Discrimination (Electoral Candidates) Order 2002 : a number of political women left their seats early and parties replaced them with men
- the outcome of not setting targets resulted in only 33% of public appointments being women, but only 19% of chairs of public bodies.

There was, however, an example of good practice; The establishment by local Councils of the District Policing Partnerships (2003) which involved local community representatives working with elected Councillors to monitor and hold the new Police Service accountable saw a new process under the Patten Commission which resulted in nearly 50/50 gender equality breakdown of its independent members. This process was also adopted in the Community Police Liaison Committee, a lower layer of community representatives monitoring at a local level policing.

Devolved vs Reserved Powers

International negotiations are not devolved, but as part of the UK, devolved Governments are obliged to ensure the monitoring, creation and delivery of any international plans. For example the UK National Action Plan⁶ states that, while the leading

⁶ <http://www.fco.gov.uk/resources/en/pdf/global-issues/conflict-prevention/women-peace-security-action-plan>

Departments in the application of the UK National Action Plan are the Department for International Development, the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and it also states that all Departments of State are stakeholders. Thus this also includes the Northern Ireland Office and brings the issue of UNSCR1325 firmly into the sphere of the Northern Ireland Executive and Northern Ireland Assembly

The Northern Ireland Government and Legislature

The willingness to proceed to a peaceful solution to the conflict saw the commitment made to increase women's participation in politics and decision-making in the Belfast Agreement being ignored, and the reality that equality in decision making structures would be based on the political and sectarian divide. Many of the new institutions and new structures established were not encouraged or monitored to ensure gender equality, and those with responsibility for ensuring gender equality such as the Office of the First and Office of Deputy First Minister's Department (OFMDFM) Gender Unit has been both poorly resourced and with no power other than persuasion.

There is to be a Gender Strategy for Northern Ireland in 2016 yet few Departments have completed Gender Plans with any positive actions to advance changes for women in Northern Ireland from the last strategy. Even recent Government strategies relating to strengthening the peace building in Northern Ireland, *Cohesion, Sharing and Integration*, *Together Building a United Community*

and *Victims* have little or no reference to women or their role in peacebuilding.

The Northern Ireland Assembly All Party Group on UNSCR1325.

The NIA APG on UNSCR1325 has, since its inception in 2010, been connecting with women's groups and civil society in order to ascertain the situation in which women find themselves in NI today. Although within the APG there is a difference of opinion about the definition of the conflict, all agree that the inclusion of women in peacebuilding is crucial. The NIA APG has met with and heard from many groups and academics, and has been monitoring the various reviews of the UK NAP.

To that end, the NIA APG joined with the Westminster Associate All Party Group on UNSCR1325 in an Inquiry to research the situation of NI women and UNSCR1325, and to hear from women directly and from organisations that also have a view on it.

Over the last 18 months written evidence has been taken, and in December 2013 an Oral Hearing took place in the Assembly. The Panel who heard the evidence was Baroness Ruth Lister, Margaret Owen CBE and Paula Bradley Chair of the NIA APG on UNSCR1325.

Representatives from all sections of NI life took part from Equality and Human Rights bodies, public bodies such as the Victims Commissioner and the Commissioner for Public Appointments, and the PSNI; and from civil society including the Trades Union. The only people who did not turn up were representatives from the OFMDFM Equality Unit (tasked with co-ordinating Section 75 equality laws across the Government Departments and with implementing the Gender Equality Strategy).

Evidence also was taken in open and closed sessions from women from local communities and NGOs such as Women's Aid, Community Foundation N Ireland, and Democrashe. (The report of the Inquiry will be published in the autumn.)

The evidence taken presented a deeply depressing pessimistic picture by all those involved in this work. In the main the evidence could be loosely divided into two themes.

Firstly, from those organisations who reported on the problem of the paucity of women in decision-making positions in organisations such as business, public bodies and politics. This was seen as detrimental to the success of the prosperity of N I society; and examples were given of other places where the added value of women had made significant difference to society. Calls for high level support and leadership were made, and demands that the implementation of the provisions in UNSCR1325 could make significant advance in these areas.

Secondly, especially powerful was the evidence given by Grass-roots women who feel increasingly fearful of their position in their communities. From a position during the "Troubles" when many were in leadership positions in their communities, and where Direct Rule Ministers dealt with them face to face, they now find themselves marginalised with no access to decision-makers. The Panel heard of a silencing of and exclusion of women with always the threat of violence if they stepped out of line. Domestic Violence statistics are increasing. 39% of women are said to have a high fear of crime. Women are being silenced in communities increasingly today. They are told "not to rock the boat" of the peace process by complaining about GBV as this can mean the

men being sent back to prison. This is evident in both Nationalist and Loyalist communities.

Very worrying was the view of younger women who felt there was no future for them in any form of leadership as they witnessed the way the older women are being treated and did not want therefore to get involved.

How should the NAP approach actions relating to Ireland/N Ireland?

The NIA APG on WPS welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the Consultation on Ireland's 2nd NAP. Obviously there are some jurisdictional constraints and sensitivities, but the unique inward/outward aspect of Ireland's first NAP opens a channel of discussion between Ireland and N Ireland on the issue of WPS which has been further strengthened by the work of the Anglo-Irish Division and the Reconciliation Fund, and, indeed in the many joint ventures undertaken by CSOs north and south of the Border.

The Cross-Learning Conference led by Baroness Nuala O'Loan which included N Ireland, Timor Leste and Liberia drew an added credibility for us from the fact that there had been a conflict in Ireland which affected both states. The lessons drawn from our joint experience were useful connections with our colleagues in Timor Leste and Liberia in the learning experience. As Ambassador Anne Anderson said "we lived the experience"

While obviously the main responsibility for the exclusion of N I from the UK NAP on UNSCR1325 is that of the UK Government, the Irish Government has also responsibilities under the Belfast/GFA. Because of this, it is felt that the relationships and structures which were set up in 1998 should, in the main, be used to promote and embed the gender-mainstreaming which is necessary if women's issues and concerns are to be reflected in the strategy and policies decided in this post-conflict era.

The overarching question which this Consultation poses is "what action do you think should Ireland take on WPS?" The answer is to create for women all over the world in conflict and post- conflict situations "visions of what might be". To give a voice and an impetus to achieving equality and safety to those who live in silence and fear.

And so reflecting on the failure of the WPS agenda since the Belfast/GFA was voted for in such numbers all over the Island of Ireland, and the hope which was then felt for a peaceful, secure and stable society for all who live in N Ireland and Ireland, there are measures which need to be put in place to reclaim that hope and to give to women their rightful position in society.

Recommendations:

- The issue of women, peace and security should be at the centre of all fora between ROI, UK and NI.

- Post-conflict reorganisation should be seen through a gendered analysis so that women's contribution to the peace is recognised, included and their needs met.
- A formal reporting mechanism for both UK and Irish Governments is required which monitors the implementation of all aspects of the Belfast/GFA, and which measures outcomes and impact.
- The UK and Irish Governments need to address the demands of the CEDAW Committee in 2008 and 2013, and implement the Pillars of the UNSCR1325 in a Regional Plan for N Ireland.
- Continued support for women's CSOs from Anglo-Irish Division and the Reconciliation Fund especially within aims of PEACE 1V is crucial.
- Relations between NIA APG Women, Peace and Security, the CRU, the Monitoring Committee and the Anglo –Irish Division should be strengthened and put on a more formal basis so as to develop a cross-border strategy to support women north and south of the Border and to monitor the impact of such work.