

**Submission to Republic of Ireland Women, Peace and Security Consultation**

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Submitted by:

Dr Fiona Bloomer, Ulster University

Dr Kathryn McNeilly, Queen's University Belfast

Dr Claire Pierson, University of Liverpool

Dr Jennifer Thomson, University of Bath

This submission intends to focus on one aspect of the women, peace and security agenda which is often marginalised within National Action Plans - the area of reproductive rights (see Thomson and Pierson, 2018, for analysis of NAP's and reproductive rights).

The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo (ICPD) defined reproductive rights as 'the recognition of the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. They also include the right of all to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence.' (ICPD Programme of Action 1994, para 7.3). This definition is widely accepted and has been adopted by numerous institutions including the World Health Organisation.

This definition includes some or all of the following: the right to legal and safe abortion; the right to birth control; freedom from coerced sterilization and contraception; the right to access good-quality reproductive healthcare; and the right to education and access in order to make free and informed reproductive choices. Reproductive rights may also include the right to receive education about sexually transmitted infections and other aspects of sexuality, and protection from practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM).

Reproductive rights are increasingly viewed as an essential part of the Women, Peace and Security agenda which cannot be overlooked. Ireland has the potential to lead the way with the full inclusion of the remit of reproductive rights within its third national action plan.

Below we respond to consultation questions pertinent to reproductive rights protection.

## **1. What strategic objectives should be priorities for the Third National Action Plan?**

The Third National Action Plan should clearly embed reproductive rights within its framework. Reproductive rights are mentioned throughout the text of several UNSC Women, Peace and Security resolutions, particularly in the most recent resolutions.

Resolution 2106 states that:

“Recognizing the importance of providing timely assistance to survivors of sexual violence, urges United Nations entities and donors to provide non-discriminatory and comprehensive

health services, *including sexual and reproductive health*, psychosocial, legal, and livelihood support and other multi-sectoral services for survivors of sexual violence, taking into account the specific needs of persons with disabilities.”

Resolution 2122 reiterates this call for service provision in terms of reproductive health, in particular in the case of sexual violence. It calls on Member States and UN entities to ensure humanitarian aid to cover the broad range of healthcare provision required by women, “noting the need for *access to the full range of sexual and reproductive health services*, including regarding pregnancies resulting from rape, without discrimination”.

In light of this, reproductive rights, including the right to safe and legal abortion, should be clearly embedded within Ireland’s next NAP. Doing so in the wake of the 2018 referendum on the 8<sup>th</sup> amendment would be a particularly timely moment in which to act.

### **3. How can the Third National Action Plan reflect the commitments in Ireland’s Policy for International Development and other relevant government policies and strategies?**

Ireland’s Policy for International Development clearly states that:

Consistent with the ‘Cairo Programme of Action’, we will support efforts that reduce maternal and infant mortality, and promote universal access to reproductive healthcare, including ante-natal care and family planning services. Access to quality maternal and reproductive healthcare, supporting safe motherhood and allowing women to control their fertility, within the context of national legislative frameworks, is central to women’s empowerment and the health of nations.

Irish development policy therefore already clearly understands the key links between women’s reproductive rights and human security and development. This recognition of the importance of reproductive rights should be carried over into the third NAP on Women, Peace and Security.

### **4. How should the National Action Plan apply to the Ireland-Northern Ireland context as well as migrants, asylum seekers, and others living in Ireland who come from conflict and post-conflict affected areas?**

In light of the above, the NAP should embed reproductive rights in particular reference to Northern Ireland and the legal situation around abortion there. Women continue to be denied access to abortion in Northern Ireland, even in cases of rape, incest and fatal foetal abnormality

(Bloomer, McNeilly and Pierson, 2018). This lack of full reproductive rights, particularly in cases of rape, is clearly in contravention of successive UNSC resolutions on Women, Peace and Security. The current inadequate access to reproductive rights in Northern Ireland has also been held as in violation of other international legal obligations, including CEDAW (UN CEDAW Committee, 2018). The CEDAW Committee's General recommendation no. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations affirms CEDAW's linkages with the Security Council's women, peace and security agenda and makes clear that the Convention applies in all forms of conflict and post-conflict settings (Swaine and O'Rourke, 2015). In addition, it stresses that these frameworks can be used to strengthen and reinforce each other. Ireland's third NAP has the potential to reinforce the link between women's rights and the WPS framework.

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### **Reference List**

Bloomer, Fiona, Kathryn McNeilly and Claire Pierson (2018), *Northern Ireland and Abortion Law Reform* (Belfast: Ulster University).

Thomson, Jennifer and Claire Pierson (2018), 'Can Abortion Rights be Integrated into the Women, Peace and Security Agenda?' *International Journal of Feminist Politics* 20(3): 350-365.

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Swaine, A and O'Rourke, C (2015) Guidebook on CEDAW general recommendation no. 30 and the UN Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security (UN Women).

UN CEDAW Committee (2018), *Report of the inquiry concerning the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland under article 8 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/OP.8/GBR/1.