

Submission to the Ireland's Third National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security

Submitted by: Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

Contact: Ms. Ray Acheson, Director of WILPF's disarmament programme Reaching Critical Will | Email: ray@reachingcriticalwill.org

INTRODUCTION

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom welcomes the opportunity to submit input to Ireland's development of a new National Action Plan (NAP) on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. This submission provides recommendations for Ireland's NAP on issues related to disarmament and demilitarisation.

USE OF EXPLOSIVE WEAPONS IN POPULATED AREAS

Explosive weapons use blast and fragmentation to kill and injure people in the area where they detonate, as well as to damage objects, buildings, and infrastructure. When used in populated areas they tend to cause high levels of harm to individuals and communities. The use of explosive weapons in populated areas may have specific implications for women due to destruction of civilian infrastructure including houses, schools, and markets; exacerbated social and political inequalities and pressures from the increase in female-headed households; inequalities in access to survivor assistance; and increased risk of sexual violence and exploitation of displaced people and refugees fleeing the bombing and shelling of their town or city.¹ The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has expressed concern with sexual violence and abuse of refugee women fleeing to Europe from armed conflicts in the Middle East, especially due to bombing and shelling in populated areas.²

A group of governments (including Ireland), UN agencies, and civil society organisations affiliated with the International Network on Explosive Weapons have indicated support for developing a political commitment on preventing harm from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.³

We urge Ireland in its NAP to:

- Support the development of an international commitment to end the use of explosive weapons in populated areas as means to prevent human suffering;
- Support data collection on the gendered impacts of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas; and
- Commit to not transfer weapons or approve arms export licences to end-users using explosive weapons in populated areas as an effective means to help prevent this practice.

INTERNATIONAL ARMS TRADE

All conventional weapons can be used to facilitate gender-based violence (GBV) or exacerbate gender inequalities. All users of conventional weapons, including the military, police, state security services, private contractors, peacekeepers, or non-state actors, can commit GBV.⁴ The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) mandates that arms export officials conduct a risk assessment on GBV for every single arms export license application. To do so adequately, officials must assess the risk that the weapons could be used to facilitate sexual or physical violence against women, girls, non-binary people, or others on the basis of sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation; impact girls' education or women's reproductive health; or that sex and gender are being used as a signifier in targeting attacks or conducting post-strike analyses (i.e. targeting men as militants on the basis of their sex and age).⁵

Two Security Council resolutions on WPS reference the ATT's provision on GBV: **UNSCR 2106** (2013) and **UNSCR 2122** (2013). The **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)** recognises that GBV in armed conflict is part of a larger systematic discrimination against women, girls, and others who do not conform to hegemonic masculinities. The **CEDAW Committee** and the **Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESAR)** have recommended tighter arms export controls, including to prevent GBV and other human rights violations.⁶

We urge Ireland in its NAP to:

- Highlight the correlation between the increased prevalence of GBV, discrimination, armed conflict, and the international arms trade;
- Highlight that Ireland's efforts to eliminate GBV also contribute in the long term to preventing conflict, its escalation, and the recurrence of violence in the post-conflict phase;
- Indicate support for the robust and effective regulation of the arms trade, including by effectively implementing and promoting universalisation of the ATT; and
- Emphasise that control of the international arms trade will help prevent the use of conventional weapons to commit or facilitate acts of GBV.

PROLIFERATION OF SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

The possession and use of small arms and light weapons (SALW) can facilitate GBV and exacerbate gender inequalities. One of the UN Security Council resolutions on WPS concretely addresses the illicit trade in and proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW). **UNSCR 2242** (2015) encourages the empowerment of women to participate in efforts related to the SALW. Two UN Security Council resolutions on small arms and light weapons also address the relationship between WPS and SALW: **UNSCR 2117** (2013) and **UNSCR 2200** (2015). The outcome document of the **Third Review Conference of the UN Programme of Action (UNPoA) on SALW**, adopted June 2018, commits states to take account to gender differential impacts of SALW; encourage leadership roles for women; ensure coordination between UNPoA national authorities and those responsible for women's affairs or gender; to encourage gender mainstreaming in disarmament processes and plans; to encourage coordinated implementation of NAP's under relevant UNSC's and target 16.4 of the SDGs; and to encourage collection of gender disaggregated data on the illicit trade in SALW.⁷ The **UN Human Rights Council** has adopted several resolutions that have touched on arms transfers and firearms and the consequences on human rights, including women's rights and GBV: **UNHRCR 24/35** (2013), **UNHRC 26/16** (2014), **UNHRC 29/10** (2015), and **UNHRC 32/12** (2016).

We urge Ireland in its NAP to:

- Build capacity of women, non-binary, and LGBT people to engage in disarmament and arms control processes and discussions at all levels;
- Include measures and initiatives to take into consideration the specific impact of conflict and post-conflict environments on women's and girls' and non-binary people's security, mobility, education, economic activity and opportunities;
- Report on indicator 16.4.2 on illicit arms flows, including through biennial national report on the UNPoA and during the High-Level Political Process; and
- Address measures it will take to prevent GBV through the possession of domestic firearms.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Women and girls face unique devastation from the effects of the use of nuclear weapons, such as the effects of radiation on reproduction and maternal health. Women who have survived nuclear weapon tests or use also face unique social challenges related to how they are treated in societies and communities. The justification for the possession of nuclear weapons is bound up with concepts of violent masculinities, in which protection and strength are generally equated with the capacity for massive violence. The nuclear weapon discourse

is also mired in dichotomies such as hard versus soft security, or national security versus human security. Those talking about humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and calling for their prohibition are accused of being divisive, naive, and even emotional. This discourse undermines the contributions of those promoting a perspective of disarmament and peace, whether those individuals are women, men, or non-binary. Challenging these narratives is essential, as is ensuring gender diversity in nuclear disarmament discussions and processes.

We urge Ireland in its NAP to:

- Recognise the importance of nuclear disarmament for human security and for challenging violent masculinities embedded in policies of nuclear deterrence and other justifications for the possession of nuclear weapons;
- Promote the entry into force and universalisation of the Treaty of the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons; and
- Support the inclusion of women and non-binary people in nuclear weapon discussions, negotiations, and processes.

FULLY AUTONOMOUS WEAPONS

Emerging technologies of violence, including the development of fully autonomous weapons, will have implications for gender equality and GBV. Weapons that operate without meaningful human control are at risk of containing gender-based biases in algorithms related to the selection of targets; they may also be used, as armed drones already are, to target all men of a certain age as militants.

We urge Ireland in its NAP to:

- Commit to preventing the development of fully autonomous weapon systems as technologies of violence that could seriously violate human rights and international humanitarian law and have gendered impacts, including by supporting a prohibition on the development and possession of fully autonomous weapons; and
- Support research and analysis into gendered impacts of emerging technologies of violence, including fully autonomous weapons.

DEMILITARISATION

The **Beijing Platform for Action and Agenda 21** affirmed the need to reduce excessive military expenditures and redirect resources to gender equitable sustainable development. Measures requiring financing in this area include integrating gender impact assessments and gender and human rights analysis and budgeting into national budgets in order to promote systemic learning that improves results on state obligations to respect, protect, and fulfil women's equal human rights progressively and using maximum available resources.

We urge Ireland in its NAP to:

- Develop policies that take into account the impact on women, girls, non-binary, and LGBT people of every military deployment and operation, and that considers the use of unarmed military protection as a preferable method.
- Explicitly affirm a human security integrated approach to sustainable peace, recognising the need to address the gaps and strengthen the links between peace and security, human rights, disarmament and arms control, and development as a means to address root causes of armed conflict and threats to the security of women, girls, and non-binary people in the pursuit of international peace and security.
- Outline measures it will take to facilitate women and LGBT people's full and meaningful participation in all policymaking, planning, and implementation processes related to disarmament and arms control; and
- Support the generation of new public and private financial resources for implementing the WPS agenda, including through the reduction of military expenditure and investment for arms production and acquisition, and prioritise investments in accessible, affordable, and quality social infrastructure and essential service.

ABOUT THE WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR PEACE AND FREEDOM (WILPF)

WILPF is an international non-governmental organisation with National Sections and an International Secretariat. WILPF has consultative status (category B) with the United Nations. Since our establishment in 1915, we have brought together women from around the world who are united in working for peace by nonviolent means and promoting political, economic, and social justice for all. We use existing international legal and political frameworks to achieve fundamental change in the way states conceptualise and address issues of gender, militarism, peace, and security. For more information please see www.wilpf.org and www.reachingcriticalwill.org.

¹ *Women and explosive weapons*, Reaching Critical Will of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, February 2014, <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Publications/WEW.pdf>.

² "UNHRC concerned at reports of sexual violence against refugee women and children," UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 23 October 2015, <http://www.unhcr.org/562a3bb16.html>.

³ See <http://www.inew.org> for more information.

⁴ For more information on the relationship between GBV and the international arms trade, please see *Preventing gender-based violence through arms control: tools and guidelines to implement the Arms Trade Treaty and UN Programme of Action*, Reaching Critical Will of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, April 2016, <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Publications/preventing-gbv.pdf>.

⁵ For guidelines on how to implement the GBV provision of the ATT, please see *Preventing gender-based violence through arms control: tools and guidelines to implement the Arms Trade Treaty and UN Programme of Action*, Reaching Critical Will of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, April 2016, <http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Publications/preventing-gbv.pdf>.

⁶ See for example Concluding Observations on Germany CEDAW/C/DEU/CO/7-8, paragraph 28; Sweden, CEDAW/C/SWE/CO/8-9, paragraph 26 and 27; France, CEDAW/C/FRA/CO/7-8, paragraph 22; Switzerland, CEDAW/C/CHE/CO/4-5, paragraph 17c); Germany; Netherlands, CEDAW/C/NLD/CO/6, paragraph 30a). CEDAW General Recommendation No.35, CEDAW/C/GC/35 on GBV (just published last year) also references arms in its recommendations paragraph 42: "Addressing factors that heighten women's risk of exposure to serious forms of gender-based violence, such as the accessibility and availability of firearms, including their exportation, high rates of criminality and pervasiveness of impunity, which may be increased by armed conflict or heightened insecurity." The CESCR recommended to the UK to "conduct thorough risk assessments prior to granting licenses for arms exports and refuse or suspend such licenses when there is a risk that arms could be used to violate human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights" (E/C.12/GBR/CO/g, paragraph 12 (c)).

⁷ See <http://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/salw/revcon2018/documents/final-report.pdf>.