



Federation Northern Ireland

# **RESPONSE TO OFMDFM CONSULTATION**

## **PROGRAMME FOR COHESION, SHARING & INTEGRATION**

### **November 2010**

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24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline - 0800 917 1414  
Open to anyone affected by domestic violence

## **Core Work of Women's Aid: Background Information & Statistics**

### **Introduction**

Women's Aid is the lead voluntary organisation in Northern Ireland addressing domestic violence and providing services for women and children. We recognise domestic violence as one form of violence against women. Women's Aid seeks to challenge attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate domestic violence and, through our work, promote healthy and non-abusive relationships.

### **Core Work of Women's Aid**

The core work of Women's Aid in Northern Ireland, including Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland and the 10 local Women's Aid groups is:

- To provide refuge accommodation to women and their children suffering mental, physical or sexual abuse within the home.
- To run the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline.
- To provide a range of support services to enable women who are leaving a violent situation to rebuild their lives and the lives of their children.
- To provide a range of support services to children and young people who have experienced domestic violence.
- To run preventative education programmes in schools and other settings.
- To educate and inform the public, media, police, courts, social services and other agencies of the impact and effects of domestic violence.
- To advise and support all relevant agencies in the development of domestic violence policies, protocols and service delivery.
- To work in partnership with all relevant agencies to ensure a joined up response to domestic violence.

### **Women's Aid Statistics (2009 - 2010)**

- 12 refuges with 300 bed spaces, playrooms and facilities.
- 1077 women and 854 children sought refuge.
- 15 resource centres for women seeking information and support; group work and training.
- 2,938 women and 4,489 children accessed the Floating Support service enabling women to access support whilst remaining in their own homes and communities.

- Move-on houses for women and children leaving refuges.
- In 2009/10 the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline open to anyone affected by domestic violence, managed 32,349 calls. This represented an increase of 17% on 2008/09
- Volunteers are a core part of the Helpline team: throughout the year they contributed a total of 3,337 hours to the service, an average of 9 hours per day, 365 days of the year

#### Additional Women's Aid Statistical Data

- Since 1999, Women's Aid across Northern Ireland gave refuge to 13,656 women and 13,602 children and young people
- During the last 15 years Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland managed 244,564 calls to the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline

#### Statistics: Domestic Violence & Violence Against Women

- Domestic violence is a violation of Article 5 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights – that “no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”;
- The joint NIO, DHSSPS Strategy “Tackling Violence at Home” estimates that the cost of domestic violence in Northern Ireland, including the potential loss of economic output, could amount to £180 million each year.
- UNICEF research released in 2006, showing per capita incidence, indicates that there are up to 32,000 children and young people living with domestic violence in Northern Ireland.
- Where the gender of the victim was known, 75% of adult victims of domestic crimes recorded by the PSNI in 2009/10 were female.\*
- Over 30% of all domestic violence starts during pregnancy.\*\*

#### Domestic Violence: Crime Statistics

- Domestic Violence is a crime. PSNI statistics for 2009/10 indicate that there were more recorded crimes with a domestic motivation (9,903) than the combined total of all the following crimes (9,864). These include all recorded sexual offences (1,944), robbery (600), armed robbery (557), hijacking (119), theft or unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle (2975), arson

(1980) dangerous driving (865), handling stolen goods (226) and offences under anti-terrorism legislation (7).

- PSNI Statistics for 09/10 indicate that they responded to a domestic incident every 21 minutes of every day of the year.
- The total of 9,903 crimes with a domestic motivation in 09/10 represents an average of approximately 1 domestic crime every 53 minutes in Northern Ireland.
- The number of all recorded offences of murder in Northern Ireland in 09/10 total 18. Those classed as having a domestic motivation total 7. Therefore, 38.9% of all murders in Northern Ireland in 09/10 had a domestic motivation.
- There were 461 rapes (including attempted Rapes) in Northern Ireland in the period 2009/10.

(Source: PSNI Statistics 2009/10)

- Official sources (NISOSMC) estimate that up to 80% of sex crimes are not reported.
- Violence Against Women is not limited to domestic violence, it includes amongst other crimes murder, rape, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, trafficking, sexual stalking and sexual harassment.

(\*Findings from the PSNI Crime Statistics Report 2009/10 N.B. "Adult" defined as aged 17 and over)

(\*\* Women's Aid Federation NI)

Women's Aid Federation NI welcomes the opportunity to comment upon the OFMDFM consultation on a Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration on behalf of our members. The following comments reflect their collective views.

After consultation with our local groups, Women's Aid Federation NI would wish to fully support and endorse the views and opinions expressed in the following comprehensive response written by Angela Hegarty on behalf of and in collaboration with an ad hoc group, led by Women's Resource and Development Agency, with funding from the Community Relations Council. Brid Ruddy facilitated the consultation events that provided much of the evidence contained in this report. Almost 100 women participated in the consultation process.

## **Part I: The CSI Consultation Approach: A Gender Critique**

### **1 Introduction:**

It is well established that conflict impacts more adversely and in different ways on women than men.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, there is no doubt that the effect and long-term impact of the conflict in Northern Ireland is dissimilar on women and men. It therefore follows that the experiences and needs of women in relation to violence, prejudice and inequality are significantly different. Thus, measures to bring about "a cohesive society ... in which everyone can live, work and socialise together free from intimidation and prejudice"<sup>2</sup> must acknowledge that differential impact and experience and be programmed accordingly.

- 1.2.** However, the documents issued for consultation on the Draft Programme For Cohesion, Sharing And Integration (CSI) do not demonstrate such awareness. There are a number of significant flaws in the approach taken in the draft strategy, which is aimed at bringing about a cohesive, pluralist society. The lack of any concrete goals or timetables is one obvious example. However, the failure to acknowledge the different experiences and needs of women and men and plan accordingly is such a fundamental error that it undermines the purpose of the draft strategy.
- 1.3.** The authors of the CSI consultation documents are aware "that the promotion of equality of opportunity is an essential element of building good relations."<sup>3</sup> However, the consultation document only includes two aspects of equality in that equation - race and political/religious beliefs. It makes a commitment to "publish a sexual orientation strategy."<sup>4</sup> We welcome this and call for its development and implementation as a matter of urgency. However,

at no point does the consultation document consider the requirements of the government's own published gender equality strategy. In considering only the good relations aspect of s75 and ignoring the other equality duties, the consultation documents default on the requirements of both s75 and the NI government's own gender equality strategy.

- 1.4. We challenge the approach taken in the CSI consultation documents: an approach that views sharing, cohesion and integration only through the lens of race and community background. In this approach, conflict and violence are regarded as having had no impact upon women and gender equality is considered irrelevant. This is fundamentally wrong.
- 1.5. We regard the absence of any consideration of gender from the consultation documents as a cardinal flaw and, further, a failure to fulfil a range of statutory and policy requirements. It is also a breach of the UK's international obligations, not least under UNSCR1325.
- 1.6. That failure cannot go un-redressed. As part of the preparation of this response, an extensive consultation exercise was undertaken with women's organisations. Almost one hundred women attended events in Belfast, Derry/Londonderry, Dungannon and Newry. Time and again throughout that exercise there were expressions of shock, hurt and sheer disbelief that a document addressing such a fundamental set of problems and issues could so completely ignore women. Those with political responsibility for this draft strategy must immediately apologise for that error and take steps to ensure that it does not occur again.
- 1.7. In order to ensure that this does not recur, we suggest that those tasked with preparing the CSI consultation documents undergo gender awareness training as a matter of urgency in order that they familiarise themselves with the requirements of the law and of government policy.

## **2. The legislative requirements:**

**2.1.** The statutory framework governing gender equality in Northern Ireland comprises a number of pieces of legislation, from the Sex Discrimination Orders<sup>5</sup> to s75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The latter requires public authorities (including the NI government) to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between:

- persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- men and women generally;
- persons with a disability and persons without; and
- persons with dependants and persons without.

**2.2.** In addition and without prejudice to this obligation, public authorities are also required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, and racial group. Yet in the CSI draft strategy, the equality requirements of this statutory duty are jettisoned to focus upon the requirement to promote 'good relations'. This is despite an acknowledgement in the documents that good relations cannot be brought about in the absence of a consideration of equality.<sup>6</sup> It is also contrary to the government's own gender policy.

### **3. Policy Requirements: the Gender Equality Strategy**

**3.1.** Despite a robust legislative framework, significant inequalities between men and women still exist. The need to address these gaps through policy as well as legislation was recognised by the NI government, which issued its first Gender Equality Strategy (GES) in 2006. This was issued under direct rule Ministers during a hiatus in the devolved government and endorsed by the devolved NI government in 2010. It identifies eleven key action areas, amongst which is 'peace-building'.

Unlike the CSI consultation documents, the GES recognises the differential impact the conflict has had upon men and women and affirms the need to ensure equality in peace building. Implementing this strategy is a stated aim of the *Northern Ireland Executive Programme For Government 2008-2011*, although like the GES itself, there is a significant lack of specific aims and means of measuring progress.

**3.2.** Whilst the GES may be criticised for a dearth of targets and indicators, it did demonstrate a more sophisticated and informed approach to equality than had previously pertained. It recognises that discrimination and inequality are caused by a multiplicity of factors and must be addressed in a holistic fashion.<sup>7</sup> It specifically acknowledges that multiple identities impact significantly upon equality and that needs to be taken into account when shaping government policy.<sup>8</sup> Because of this and the acknowledged need to mainstream gender equality, the GES specifically undertakes to ensure that it will be integrated with other equality strategies, including those addressing “good relations, poverty [and] social exclusion.”<sup>9</sup> A key aim of the GES is ‘to ensure the active and equal participation of women and men at all levels of civil society, economy, peace building and government.’ Yet the draft CSI strategy ignores this avowed aim of government.

**3.3.** The necessity of applying a gender strategy was emphasised by Antoinette McKeown, Head of Policy & Development at the Equality Commission Northern Ireland, who has said:  
“all policies need to be gender proofed, particularly in light of the Gender Equality strategy that highlights the differential impacts of social policy on men and women. There particularly needs to be formal recognition of the impact of conflict on women specifically.”<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately this seems not to have filtered through to those responsible for drafting the CSI consultation materials. This suggests that much more work is necessary to ensure that the GES is mainstreamed and implemented by the devolved government.

- 3.4.** For example, the GES specifically recognises that a gender-neutral approach is not a solution,<sup>11</sup> yet the CSI consultation documents adopts such an approach, ignoring the different impact of the conflict on women and men. The GES also states that government departments are committed to ensuring that gender stereotypes and sexism do not influence policy formation.<sup>12</sup> Yet the CSI documents ignore the contribution of women to conflict resolution and peace building. This is despite the requirement that the NI government “mainstream gender concerns into all policies.”<sup>13</sup>
- 3.5.** In this the GES reflects best practice and the requirements of international law and policy. As the UN Secretary General has recently observed, governments must “mainstream gender perspectives at every stage of conflict prevention, resolution and management as well as peace building.” He goes on to add that this means taking positive steps to prevent sexual and gender based violence and requires an “increase in women’s representation in decision making bodies and security institutions [and in] resources and technical support for women’s organizations.”<sup>14</sup> There is no evidence of this in the draft CSI consultation documents.
- 3.6.** The CSI consultation documentation is a very concrete example of the failure of the government to mainstream gender equality into policy development and formulation. The absence of a consideration of gender from the CSI documentation also means that there is no identification of “specific operational objectives with outcome focussed targets to meet these strategic objectives” as stipulated in the GES.<sup>15</sup>
- 3.7.** The consultation questionnaire asks “how could the relationship between the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration and the Racial Equality Strategy be strengthened?” Yet no comments were invited as to how the relationship between CSI and the Gender Equality

Strategy could be strengthened – another example of the failure to mainstream gender equality in policy formulation.

**3.8.** It is deeply worrying that such an important policy as CSI should so comprehensively fail to take cognisance of gender. It is also a disturbing indicator of the effectiveness of the GES. It begs several questions about the awareness of the GES amongst policy formers. The absence of a consideration of gender from the CSI consultation documents is of great concern, but is unfortunately entirely in keeping with previous approaches—the forerunners to this draft strategy shared the same flaw. For example, the word 'gender' appears nowhere in the *A Shared Future and Racial Equality Strategy: Good Relations Indicators Baseline Report*, nor in *A Shared Future First Triennial Action Plan 2006 - 2009 (Improving Relations In Northern Ireland - Making It Happen – Implementing The Policy And Strategic Framework For Good Relations In Northern Ireland)*.<sup>16</sup> It appears once in the Shared Future document itself, but only in a note that there has been criticism of the draft policy for its failure to address the other s75 groups.<sup>17</sup> Thus, despite being clearly aware of this critique and the defect that produced it, the CSI consultation document perpetuates the defect. It is a crucial error, makes the draft strategy completely unbalanced, because it is ignoring more than 50% of the population.

**3.9.** The draft CSI strategy suggests that rather than implement the cross-departmental, mainstreaming integrated methodology required by the GES, the authors of these documents have reverted to the deeply unsatisfactory approach of the past, which the GES was supposed to reform. Viewed through the prism of the gender equality strategy the draft policy on CSI is a significant failure. The GES declares:

“The gender perspective will be taken into account during the whole process of policy development in all of the government functions and in

the subsequent implementation, review and evaluation of that policy.”<sup>18</sup>

Yet the CSI consultation documentation appears to have been developed without even a cursory glance in the direction of gender.

- 3.10.** The GES also requires that there be a gender champion within each government department. We would like to know who the gender champion in the relevant departments is and what input she or he had into the drafting of the CSI consultation documents.
- 3.11.** The gender equality strategy and the recognition of the need to mainstream gender concerns into all aspects of government policy have their roots in the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement. It specifically acknowledged “the right of women to full and equal political participation.” The failure to implement that aspiration in the years following the Agreement is one of the factors that led to the GES. But production of a strategy alone is not sufficient. As Kate Fearon and Rachel Rebouche have remarked:

“How well the GFA serves the needs of women depends on how it is implemented and the level of commitment political and civil actors have invested in strengthening equality between women and men, However, repeated commitments to “inclusiveness” by the new institutions are without substance if they fail to take account of the inclusion of women in particular. “<sup>19</sup>

In many respects the CSI consultation documents are a monument to the ongoing failure to deliver on the requirements of both the Agreement and a range of international commitments, such as UNSCR 1325. The exclusion of women from official policy and structures is a perennial problem, which has in this case been compounded by the remarkable blind spot on the part of those

drafting the CSI consultation documents. They appear ignorant or dismissive of the positive role played by women in good relations and conflict resolution in Northern Ireland.

- 3.12.** The devolved government is not alone in this regard – as a recent UN report on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 notes: “Despite some gains, in most conflict and post conflict societies women remain excluded from conflict prevention and gender perspectives are largely absent. This exclusion inhibits an effective social, cultural and structural transformation towards more peaceful and gender equal societies. Local women’s initiatives and experiences in preventing hostilities should be fully incorporated in national and United Nations conflict prevention frameworks.”<sup>20</sup>

This is borne out by the experience of women in Northern Ireland who have suffered greatly as a result of the conflict and have contributed significantly to its resolution and prevention, but who have seen that contribution largely ignored in post-conflict policy. As Michael Potter asserts: “in order to counter the years of marginalisation that women experience in conflict, it is necessary to empower and resource them at community level.”<sup>21</sup>

- 3.13.** It is clear, therefore, that extra vigilance has to be exercised by women’s organisations when scrutinising policy drafted to address post-conflict concerns and peace building. Despite the recognition given by the First and Deputy First Ministers and their Junior Ministers in the second edition of the NI Gender Equality Strategy that “women and men can be affected in different ways by government policies and actions,”<sup>22</sup> it is apparent that this has not filtered through to those drafting policy. Indeed, it is unclear if any equality impact assessment was carried out on the draft strategy before it was issued: the document refers to the requirement to screen for an EQIA, but does not describe the screening exercise nor does it specify its outcome.

#### **4. International Law & Policy**

- 4.1.** It is a requirement of international law and policy that governments tackle the issues affecting women in post-conflict societies. Further, they are required to take action to ensure that women are fully represented in post conflict settlements and institutions.
- 4.2.** Since 2000 the UN Security Council has established a normative framework on the matter of women, peace and security. This framework is made up of nine presidential statements and four Security Council resolutions. The principles established under this framework are generally accepted and ought to form the basis of any policy developed by UN members, such as the UK.<sup>23</sup> These are not optional choices – this framework binds the UK.
- 4.3.** The main source is UN Security Council Resolution 1325 adopted on 31st October 2000. It calls for the active participation of women in the process of peace making and peace building worldwide. UNSCR 1325 makes it clear that conflict is a gendered activity and that women and men experience and recover from the effects of violence and community destabilization differently. It insists that recovery from conflict necessitates the full participation of both women and men.
- 4.4.** If fully implemented, this resolution would place women at the centre of peace and security matters in all countries. It is something that those drafting the CSI strategy should have had recourse to, but patently did not. The failure to take account of the UK's international obligations has an adverse impact on women. As the authors of the *Global Monitoring Checklist on Women, Peace and Security* note:  
"Women in Northern Ireland continue to face major inequalities, such as...having very little access to formal politics, with women under-

represented in the judiciary and public office. Extremely significantly, despite being in a post-conflict and reconstruction phase, Northern Ireland is not covered in the UK National Action Plan (NAP) (2006) on women, peace and security, in which the UK government committed to promoting gender perspectives and supporting women in post-conflict situations."<sup>24</sup>

- 4.5.** The role of women in ameliorating, diverting and resolving conflict is well surveyed,<sup>25</sup> but their entitlement to be involved in post-conflict peace building and decision making has been less easy to realise. Women in Northern Ireland are considerably underrepresented in decision and policy-making processes which have emerged since the conflict.<sup>26</sup> This is contrary to of UNSCR 1325 and represents an ongoing breach of the UK government's responsibilities in international law. It must urgently be addressed, yet neither the national UK government nor the regional administration in Northern Ireland has developed any strategy for doing so. Northern Ireland is omitted from the UK's reporting responsibilities under 1325, something the UK government was taken to task for by CEDAW in its concluding observations on the UK's record.<sup>27</sup>

## **5. Women's Safety and Security**

In failing to consider the concepts of security and shared spaces from the perspective of women, the draft document betrays a faulty mindset. The predominant narratives – such as those that appear to have given rise to the draft CSI strategy - do not recognise the gendered aspect to the conflict. During the conflict, political and military power was prime and those spaces were almost entirely occupied by men: the post-conflict settlement has merely replicated that.

Violence against women is seen as a private matter, rather than a crucial element of the peace equation. Thus, the 'security' debate is focussed on dealing with dissidents, whilst domestic violence, Rape

and Sexual Assault is increasing. Yet women and the groups that represent them see their physical integrity as essential to their security.

Throughout the consultation exercise undertaken by the Women's Sector, the issues of domestic violence and women's safety were repeatedly raised. It is remarkable and a serious omission, that in considering the matter of public security and community safety, the document's authors do not think the issue of domestic violence relevant.

## **6. Women's Work as 'Good Relations' Work.**

- 6.1.** As the authors of "*Is Gender Part of Good Relations?*" note: "the issue of gender has been largely absent from the Shared Future discourse, partly as a result of women's marginal position in public life in Northern Ireland and partly due to the historical separation between the women's movement and the community relations/good relations field."<sup>28</sup>

Because of this it has been a struggle to persuade those in authority that work undertaken in the women's sector on issues such as sectarianism and racism is 'good relations' work, and by extension, to get that work supported and funded. Time and again the gender gap in various strategies and policies relating to good relations have been pointed out to those in charge of policy. Yet time and again that gender gap is perpetuated, as it is in the current set of proposals.

- 6.2.** There has been significant work undertaken by the women's sector in this field, allied with the many different ways in which women's organisations bring together women from a plethora of different backgrounds, ethnicities and outlooks. There is a need to undertake an audit of all of the work undertaken by women in this area. There is no doubt that a great deal of work has been undertaken by women to address the conflict and its impact, as well as promoting cohesion

between communities. Yet the authors of the CSI consultation documents seem either to be unaware of this work or to regard it as irrelevant to the CSI policy process. However, women's contribution to the resolution of the conflict and to peace-building has been and remains critical.

- 6.3. One of the key themes that emerged from our own consultation exercise is just how bewildered and angered grassroots women's organisations are by this ongoing gender gap. On their behalf, we require an explanation from those responsible as to why this attitude persists. We also require that urgent measures are introduced to remedy the problem.

## **7. The Consultation Process:**

- 7.1. In addition to the significant shortcomings of the CSI consultation documents, the timing and manner of the consultation process bear some criticism.
- 7.2. Many in the community & voluntary sector in Northern Ireland have long regarded the issuing of documents for consultation over the summer months as a way of protecting the status quo. In this case, the CSI consultation documents were sent out for discussion at the end of July and the consultation ends on 31 October. The official consultation events were held in the first week of September, in a period when most parents are concerned with the return of their children to school or college or their entry into a new one. This suggests that little cognisance was taken of the ability of parents to participate in the meetings.

Furthermore, meetings were held in the evening and no childcare facilities were on offer, something guaranteed to discourage many women.

- 7.3.** The timing and format of the official consultation exercise is a good example of the problems created by doing things the way they have always been done, without actively considering the gender implications. As one participant on our own consultation exercise put it: “You can’t just carry on with the same old ways of working and expect women to participate on this basis”. This experience is in itself an excellent argument for a gender equality strategy that is understood, implemented and mainstreamed by public servants. It may well be the case that those involved in drafting the CSI documents would benefit from gender awareness training.
- 7.4.** The many flaws of the consultation process have been compounded by the exclusion of women as a sectoral group. The purpose of these sectoral meetings is described as giving “particular sectors the opportunity for more focused discussion on aspects of the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration.”<sup>30</sup> Yet the women’s sector, which represents more than 50% of the population, is excluded – something we are at a loss to understand.

## **Part II: Conclusions & Recommendations**

### **1. Introduction**

Throughout the conflict and its aftermath, the issues of gender, women and human rights were frequently seen as “soft issues” that could be addressed after the ‘important’ or “hard” security issues have been addressed.<sup>31</sup> The long term impact of this is that the post-conflict political structures and processes are founded on pre-existing inequalities. This is despite the fact that the Good Friday Agreement expressly recognised “the right of women to full and equal political participation”<sup>32</sup> and required the government to “pursue broad policies for... the advancement of women in public life.”<sup>33</sup> This also means that much of government policy directed at the post conflict transition

ignores or devalues women's needs and contribution. This has had a significant impact on the funding of women's organisations.

## **2. Marginalising The Already Marginalised**

**2.1.** In ignoring the needs and rights of women, the CSI consultation documents further marginalize a large section of society who are already significantly marginalized. The absence from the draft CSI strategy of a consideration of the needs and role of women is therefore simply another manifestation of the discriminatory approach of government to women and the conflict. It is also directly attributable to the chronic under-representation of women from political and decision-making processes and another good argument for ensuring that women are fully represented as of right.

**2.2.** It is such an alarming omission that those responsible for preparing and approving the CSI consultation documents must now meet with representatives of the women's sector to explain how the documents came to be drafted and circulated for consultation without appearing to consider:

- the government's own gender awareness strategy
- the impact of the conflict on women;
- the contribution of women to peace-building, conflict resolution and cohesion, sharing and integration;

**2.3.** In addition to the inequality and unfairness of such an approach, circulating such a flawed draft strategy is also a huge waste of public resources. This is at a time when those resources are very scarce. Those responsible for ensuring the efficiency of the use of public funds may wish to look at the process that led to the production of the draft CSI strategy.

## **3. Women and The Conflict**

**3.1** A crucial absence from the CSI consultation documents is a consideration of the conflict, which the draft strategy ignores. As one participant in our consultation exercise put it: “We feel the document comes from a false position because it doesn’t mention the conflict”. We are not in a post-conflict situation, as recent attacks and bombs have demonstrated.

**3.2.** Thus a redrafted strategy must acknowledge:

- that a long and violent conflict took place and is still in some aspects ongoing;
- the differential impact of the conflict on women and address the needs of women which result;
- that this impact continues – for example in respect of dependency upon alcohol, prescription drugs, mental health problems etc;
  
- that dependency upon drugs and alcohol also feed into hate-based crimes and a health strategy needs to address that;
- that inequality was a factor in the conflict and that the conflict impacted upon inequalities in education, housing and employment;

**3.3.** A redrafted strategy must also tackle those issues with concrete proposals, with set targets, measurable indicators and timetabled, independent, periodic reviews.

**3.4.** Those involved in making and drafting policy must undergo gender awareness training. This must include MLAs and civil servants at all levels.

## **4. Addressing Women’s Exclusion**

**4.1.** Women are significantly absent from many of the key decision making processes in Northern Ireland and are elsewhere considerably under-represented.<sup>34</sup> Despite a specific commitment in the Good Friday

Agreement to address the matter of gender, women remain outside the doors of power, primarily because there is little political will to enforce that commitment.<sup>35</sup> Progress on women's rights is very slow but integration of women is crucial to developing community cohesion.

- 4.2. Thus, a new CSI strategy needs to acknowledge the role of women in conflict resolution and peace-building. It must look specifically at examples of good practice in the women's sector and especially that outside Belfast.
- 4.3. An audit of this work, past and present should be undertaken and the lessons of the experience enumerated and drawn.
- 4.4. The definition of cohesion should be all encompassing and specifically name women and women's groups as having contributed to the development of peace. It must also acknowledge women's groups as having a place in building the peace and the need for the women's sector to be positively encouraged into public life in a post conflict situation.
- 4.5. The strategy should regard identity as multi-layered and address the fact that women's cultural identities are varied and different to those of men.
- 4.6. Women should be included as a 'vulnerable group'.
- 4.7. A new CSI strategy should set measurable targets and timetables for the improvement of women's participation and representation in all of the decision making structures (e.g. government, local councils, community bodies, police and judiciary).  
Positive action, such as confidence building and family friendly measures are needed to ensure such participation.

## **5. Engaging Women From the Grassroots Up.**

5.1. Women at the grassroots are often so excluded from policy discussions that they are not aware of policy developments. There is a really pressing need to involve grassroots workers, volunteers and activists in drafting and reviewing policy.

5.2. At the same time, there is a need to involve people in new and different ways – many people, for example, simply won't engage when a jargon-laden document is circulated. Women's organisations have become adept at facilitating participation through creative and artistic pursuits and this experience should be drawn upon.

## 6. "Shared Spaces"

6.1. The strategy should be redrafted to consider how all of the spaces it envisages could be made safe, shared and welcoming for women specifically. It needs to notice and address that there is a dearth of safe open space where women feel comfortable.

6.2. The strategy needs to address the specific concerns and needs of women and shared space, for example:

- When requiring all public authorities to "discharge functions and deliver services equally and inclusively recognising the diverse nature of the community they serve," the strategy should ensure that this is being done specifically in relation to women. It needs to pay particular attention to women from a minority ethnic background, who face significant and quite distinct barriers.
- When considering any unnecessary duplication of services, the impact of this upon the needs and requirements of women specifically should be considered.
- The process of "Developing a culture of fairness, equality, rights, responsibilities and respect" should be implemented to ensure that the rights of women are respected and promoted.

A good place to start would be with a gender awareness programme for those involved in drafting this strategy.

- Any strategy around ‘crisis intervention’ must ensure that it will assist women who are the subject of hate crimes and other forms of violence, such as sexual assault and domestic violence;
- Women who experience sectarianism, racial violence and hate crimes have specific needs and especially so women from a minority ethnic background who often find it difficult to access services;
- Any proposed process of community renewal must specifically seek to involve and empower women, given the historical under-representation of women in political structures and public bodies.

**6.3.** At the same time, there is sometimes a need for safe, reserved spaces – e.g. for women who want to start education in a woman friendly environment. There is no “one size fits all” approach different people need different spaces as we live in a diverse society we need space to understand each others issues.

## **7. Urban and Rural Women**

The document acknowledges sectarianism and racism are experienced differently in rural and urban areas, but seems unaware that women and men experience them differently too and that for women, these often manifest with sexism to compound the trauma of the experience. Yet nowhere does the strategy acknowledge that reality: that needs to be changed. A redrafted strategy also needs to look at infrastructure and transport, that also have a significant impact on cohesion, sharing and integration, especially for women from the inner cities and rural areas.

## **8. Empowering Every Generation**

- 8.1.** There is a great deal of emphasis in the document on youth, but no awareness of the value of older people nor the benefit of intergenerational working, where the experience of wise women is invaluable. This needs to be factored in to a revised strategy, where there is a need to look specifically at the needs of young women and girls. Thus, a redrafted strategy must engage with the needs of marginalized young women – such as, for example, young women who have children whilst they are still at school.
- 8.2.** Whilst it is laudable to wish to “support...young people to increase their civic responsibility including facilitating and empowering youth groups to work together on civic responsibility projects,” any such proposal must specifically target, involve and empower young women. This is because women are significantly under-represented in our political system, from which many of us feel excluded.
- 8.3.** Similarly, any focus in education on promoting greater understanding of shared values must specifically address the issue of respect for women, especially considering the increase in violence against women and sexual assaults.
- 8.4.** Any consideration of harassment and name-calling and its impact on a shared society must address the experiences of women, young and old, who have experienced name-calling and harassment because of their gender.
- 8.5.** When the draft CSI document talks about young people, it makes no reference to young people with disabilities and their carers – how will this strategy impact upon them?
- 8.6.** The document’s focus on young people seems to ignore the fact that youth services have been continually and systematically cut back in funding and resource terms.

## **9. Women and Culture - Respecting All Our Citizens Equally.**

- 9.1.** Any strategy aimed at “building a peaceful climate of fairness, equality, rights, responsibilities and respect” must do so in a way that promotes the rights of women as equal citizens and acknowledge the historic and continuing significant inequalities faced by women.
- 9.2.** Any programme aimed at “working with and supporting the local community to resolve contentious cultural issues” must ensure that those women are fully involved and empowered. Such programmes also need to ensure that the experience and wisdom of women and women’s organisations in this respect are valued, accessed and supported.
- 9.3.** Where the strategy proposes encouraging “greater engagement with and understanding of, cultural diversity and intercultural relations,” it must do so in a way that encourages a greater understanding of the contribution and importance of women in cultural diversity and intercultural relations.
- 9.4.** In any promoting cultural exchanges, joint events and tourism initiatives, women’s cultural activities (such as arts and crafts, for example) must be included and facilitated.
- 9.5.** Tourism initiatives and other such activities must address and celebrate the role and contribution of women in history, art and culture.
- 9.6.** Any strategy aimed at “encouraging community events which reflect cultural diversity and are open, welcoming and inclusive to all” must ensure that it reflects the diversity of women’s lives and experiences. Such a strategy must also be open, welcoming and inclusive to women, something the current strategy is not.

- 9.7.** There was particular irritation in our own consultation exercise at the focus in the CSI consultation documents on sport, as both a locus for sectarian and racial abuse and as a means of addressing prejudice. Sport has long enjoyed significant public funding and is very male-dominated. But there are many other leisure activities which are undertaken primarily by women and which are as important to cohesion, sharing and integration. So the strategy needs redrafted to fully consider the contribution and importance of, for example, arts and crafts activities. These are as important in cohesion, sharing and integration as soccer, Gaelic and rugby.
- 9.8.** Any strategy which is intended to “build community support networks across community, cultural and minority ethnic groups” must ensure that women are able to fully participate in these community networks. Women’s organisations should be fully entitled to be involved in these networks and be consulted and funded to fully participate.
- 9.9.** In “building capacity of the local and minority ethnic communities to support people who have experienced hate crime,” the strategy needs be redrafted so that it specifically supports women who have experienced hate and other similar crimes.
- 9.10.** Women must be involved and empowered in any multiagency partnerships between indigenous and minority ethnic and migrant worker communities. This is especially important given the significant under-representation of women in political structures and public life.
- 9.11.** The strategy should be redrafted to ensure that organisations and programmes that specifically support and empower women are properly resourced and funded, especially considering the chronic under-funding of women’s organisations identified by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).
- 9.12.** The consultation documents refer to migrants in several places, but

show no awareness that the difficulties and barriers faced by women migrants are significantly greater and different to those faced by men. For example, the document describes “work[ing] with the Construction Industry Forum NI to bring forward proposals that address the issue of migrant workers within the NI construction industry and ensures their fair treatment.” Yet it completely ignores all the other sectors, such as the service sector and does not even address at all the issue of forced migration and trafficked women. A revised strategy should address this problem.

- 9.13.** Similarly the document refers to the needs of travellers and their significant marginalisation. But it does not acknowledge that the needs and experiences of Traveller women are different and need to be addressed in a very different way.

## **10. Secure Communities Must be Safe for Women**

- 10.1.** The document speaks frequently to the need for people to feel safe, but it does not once refer to the issue of women’s safety and our right to be free from violence. When discussing the issue of ‘secure communities’ the issue of women’s safety in public spaces and at home must be addressed.
- 10.2.** Women have particular safety issues that need tackling specifically. For example young women out socialising are afraid to travel in the evenings, older women are afraid in their own homes, women in families are often threatened by domestic violence. Any increase in street crime is particularly threatening to women, so any strategy aimed at creating a secure community must take into account crime variations and statistics.
- 10.3.** Women’s Aid are baffled as to why domestic violence is not considered a hate crime and why it is that the authors of the CSI consultation documents do not seem to regard building respect for women as a

major contribution to societal cohesion. When developing “Zero tolerance” for crimes motivated by prejudice, offences against women, such as sexual assault and domestic violence must be included.

- 10.4.** The CSI strategy should seek to tackle prejudice against women and place domestic violence in that context. The redrafted strategy should link to relevant policies and programmes on domestic and sexual violence and it should pay particular regard to the needs of women from migrant and/or minority ethnic backgrounds and the needs of those women who have experienced domestic violence and who have No Recourse to Public Funds.
- 10.5.** The CSI strategy should draw upon the experience, wisdom and best practice of women’s organisations in this respect. The contribution of women and women’s organisations to the promotion of rights and respect as a basis for combating hate crimes must be recognised and supported.
- 10.6.** The themes laid out in the draft documents are vague and are not spelled out sufficiently. What, for example, is meant by crisis intervention? When conflict arises (through dissident bombs, interface violence or racism etc.) what is needed is a multi-agency approach, which involves and empowers local people and communities.

## **11. Community Cohesion**

- 11.1.** The work that grass-roots women’s groups do is ignored in the CSI consultation documents, as is the central role that women play in the leadership and improvement of local communities, particularly along interface areas. This ignorance may be a result both of historic and continuing inequality and of the focus on ex-combatants since the ceasefires. These factors have had a significant funding impact for women’s organisations. Thus, where the CSI consultation documents seek to “support the local community to resolve local issues through

local solutions” there must be specific proposals to support and empower women to play a full role at community level. This is especially important given the significant under-representation of women in political structures.

**11.2.** Similarly, when “ensuring the sharing of best practice projects aimed at improving cohesion, sharing and integration” the strategy must be redrafted to ensure that it draws upon the experience of women’s organisations. It too must propose concrete measures for encouraging the involvement and participation of women.

**11.3.** Where intercultural work through the Minority Ethnic Development Fund is promoted, these funds must be distributed to ensure that women and women’s organisations are properly and equally resourced.

**11.4.** The concept and funding of ‘good relations’ work needs to be strategically linked to community development. There is a strong correlation between social disadvantage and some of the issues the CSI strategy is intended to tackle. A more coherent community development strategy would help to address this. However, any good relations or community development strategy that does not acknowledge and address the issue of gender equality and the ongoing disempowerment of women will be a failure. The contribution of women and women’s organisations should be recognised and women must be supported and empowered as leaders. A review of just some of the activities carried out by the women’s sector in this area is contained in the appendix to this submission.

## **12. “A Shared Society.”**

**12.1.** A new redrafted strategy must make the issue of equality central. This is for a number of reasons, not the least of which is inequality as a driver of conflict and a barrier to peace-building. A strategy that simply

ignores the existence of widespread and historic inequality is doomed to fail from the start. Nor can a strategy simply dismiss the inequality of more than half the population as irrelevant: how can a 'shared society' be built upon such false foundations?

**12.2.** The authors of the draft CSI strategy state that it is intended to provide the framework for “the delivery of aspects of the Racial Equality Strategy relating to good race relations in a co-ordinated, joined up process”. It also gives a commitment to issue a policy on sexual orientation, something we welcome. However, it is unclear what this actually means, especially given the failure of the documents to relate to gender equality in a joined up way. A redrafted document must not focus only upon the delivery of the Racial Equality Strategy or a newly minted sexual orientation strategy, but also and equally upon the delivery of Gender Equality Strategy.

**12.3.** The absence of women from decision making processes is stark, despite their contribution to peace building and conflict resolution. It is therefore imperative that any new community structures proposed address this absence and ensure that the central role that women play in the support and regeneration of those communities is acknowledged. In particular:

- if the state was willing to countenance a 50/50 quota for recruitment to the PSNI for Catholics and protestants, there is absolutely no reason why there should not be a 50/50 quota for women and men in recruiting to all public bodies.
- A Minister for Women is required in the local assembly and targets must be set to ensure that political and public bodies reflect the population.

### **13. The Role of Business**

**13.1.** When addressing the issues of civic responsibility there is a need to have the business community involved. We also believe that

investment initiatives should specifically support and promote the efforts of women entrepreneurs.

**13.2.** We support the idea of developing and supporting workplace initiatives to promote respect and understanding of cultural diversity. But those initiatives must address the need to promote respect for equality between men and women and in doing so should tackle outmoded and erroneous ideas about the roles of women and men.

#### **14. Health & Education**

**14.1.** Women's Aid shares the view that there is a need to make health and education cross-cutting themes. These are two areas where the conflict has impacted greatly and where improvements could significantly contribute to community cohesion and integration.

**14.2.** However, we are concerned that the draft document says it is aimed at "Encouraging shared neighbourhoods...[and]...Reducing and eventually eliminating segregated services." In doing so, it betrays no awareness of the need to consider the specific requirements of women that might arise when eliminating segregated services (e.g. in health, family planning, adult education). This should not be an excuse to cut back much needed health and education provision in areas of significant social disadvantage.

**14.3.** The CSI consultation documents have little to say about tackling the ongoing problem of anti-social behaviour. Nor do they take into account the importance of family and parenting support in doing so. A redrafted strategy must address this gap.

**14.4.** Education is a key concern for women, not least because it offers the opportunity of future economic independence. However, without access to affordable childcare, neither education nor work is as open to

women as they are to men, because of continuing inequalities in childcare responsibilities.

**14.5.** More specifically, the following need to be tackled:

- The need for the curriculum in schools to look at the impact of violence and conflict on women and girls
- The need for more nursery places, especially in areas where the conflict has impacted most;
- The need for funded places for childcare if women are to be able to take part in all aspects of education.

**15. Looking Outward**

**15.1.** The Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration proposes that an effective outward looking dimension is part of the programme. In identifying key exemplar projects that have proven track records of success in promoting good relations, it must look specifically at the experience of women's organisations – something the draft documents fail to do.

**15.2.** In sharing of relevant research and experiences on a North/South, East/West, European and international basis, it must ensure that women's experiences and expertise are included and supported. Women's organisations have been very effective in developing cross-border networks and their expertise and experience in this respect should be utilised.

**15.3.** In promoting cultural diversity and encouraging better social networks on North/South, East/West, European and international level, it should take specific steps to ensure that women and their expertise and contribution are empowered and recognised.

**16. Proposed Structures.**

**16.1.** The absence of indicators and/or targets is a significant flaw.

Throughout the consultation exercise, women asked “how would this strategy help address the divisions in our communities?” and came swiftly to the conclusion that it would not. Partly this is because vague concepts are deployed but not defined – for example, what does the strategy mean by “shared space”? How would it measure progress towards an improvement in shared space? Neither of these questions is capable of being addressed by the document in its current state.

**16.2.** Yet we learn, in the answer to a written question in the Assembly, that: “In the implementation of CSI, the Ministerial Panel will set out the targets, objectives and indicators of key programmes of work that are intended to tackle the themes which will include: shared spaces, interfaces, young people, racial equality, hate crime, respecting cultures and other interdependent themes.”<sup>36</sup>

Thus the structure, makeup and other aspects of the Ministerial Panel are crucial. (It must be noted as an aside that the written answer assumes a particular outcome from the consultation process). Our comments about the structures proposed by the CSI consultation documents must therefore be read in that context.

**16.3.** Any proposed structure which emerges from the CSI consultation needs to bring on board much more practical experience of conflict resolution and peace building. Very many women’s organisations feel that the proposal is too much focussed on ‘experts’ with little practical experience.

**16.4.** There must be a specific role for the women’s sector on any such advisory body. This should not a token place at a table, but an effective Women’s Advocate to articulate the perspective of the sector and able to critique and effect change in policy, practice and funding.

**17. OFMDFM Funding for Good Relations Work**

- 17.1.** The consultation documents lay out options for structures and mechanisms for the delivery of advice to Government and funding delivery services. We have reservations about good relations funding becoming the responsibility of OFMDFM. We believe this function should remain separate from political institutions and direct political influence.
- 17.2.** Women's organisations are both chronically under-funded and face great difficulties in having their work recognised as 'good relations' work. The strategy must be revised to acknowledge and address this issue, as well as ensure that funding follows that work. Thus any structure for funding work around cohesion, sharing and integration must enable, empower and support women's organisations in undertaking that work.

## **18. Equality Issues**

- 18.1.** The consultation document seeks views on the equality implications of the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration. This is despite the very marked failings of the documents in relation to gender equality and the role and contribution of women, all of which we have outlined above.
- 18.2.** There is no action plan for implementing any equality aspect of the draft CSI strategy and no targets, timetables and indicators for measuring progress. This needs to be addressed.
- 18.3.** It is unclear if an EQIA has been carried out on the draft strategy. The wording in the CSI consultation documents is very confusing. When one MLA enquired about the findings of the EQIA on the Draft

Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy, the written response from government did not make matters any clearer.

Instead of stating that an EQIA had been carried out, the answer instead indicated that:

“In addition to OFMDFM’s strategic level EQIA, Departments will screen all policies and programmes which support the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration and undertake full equality impact assessments where screening indicates that this is necessary.” 37

This implies that no EQIA has in fact yet been carried out. If this is the case, it is remarkable. However, we will reserve comment on this matter until we learn whether in fact an EQIA was carried out before the draft strategy was issued.

#### **19. Conclusion:**

Women’s Aid would wish to leave the final word to one of the participants in the consultation process, who very effectively summed up the mood and the response of the women’s sector to the draft CSI strategy. She said:

“They’re talking about promoting fairness, equality, rights responsibilities and respect - how can this be done when women, half of the population, are missing from the policy? There can be no cohesion in society when 50% of the population are not named in a CSI strategy. And this is in the year 2010!

Women built the peace by our work in networks, in making relationships, in being aware of multiple identities and multiple roles. Male politicians built the conflict resolution of the Agreement on the back of this work. The Agreement might have been the end of conflict but it was just the beginning of building the peace. Women’s groups must be involved in this as of right, because without us there would be no security and no peace.”

## **ENDNOTES**

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2 CSI CONSULTATION DOCUMENT op cit, at p5

3 at p3

4 at para 1.9.

5 As amended. The new Equality Act 2010 does not as yet apply in Northern Ireland.

6 at p3.

7 at para 3.5

8 at para 3.13

9 at para 3.2.3

10 IS GENDER PART OF GOOD RELATIONS? REPORT OF A CONFERENCE ON A SHARED FUTURE ORGANISED BY THE WOMEN'S RESOURCE AND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (WRDA 2007), at p10

11 at para 2.5

12 at para 2.6

13 at para 3.3

14 United Nations Security Council, WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL, Sept 2008, at p24

15 at para 3.25

16 Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, April 2006

17 See *A SHARED FUTURE, POLICY AND STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR GOOD RELATIONS IN NORTHERN IRELAND* March 2005, at p62)

18 at para 3.2.8

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20 UNSG REPORT 2008, op cit, at p10

21 *PEACE BY PIECE*, op cit at p 64

22 Foreword to 2nd edition

23 See UNSC CROSS-CUTTING REPORT ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY, UN, New York (Oct 2010) at p7.

24 GLOBAL MONITORING CHECKLIST ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY, GENDER ACTION FOR PEACE AND SECURITY UK (GAPS), 2009, at p102.

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26 See, for example, Ward, Rachel, WOMEN, UNIONISM AND LOYALISM IN NORTHERN IRELAND: FROM 'TEA-MAKERS' TO POLITICAL ACTORS, Irish Academic Press, (2006); Roulston, Carmel, and Celia Davies (eds.)

GENDER, DEMOCRACY AND INCLUSION IN NORTHERN IRELAND. Palgrave, (2000).

27 CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND), op cit, at para 284-5

28 Op cit, at p8

29 As a recent ESRC study has shown, women still do the majority of the housework and childcare, even when both partners are working. See

Harkness, S EMPLOYMENT, WORK PATTERNS AND UNPAID WORK: AN ANALYSIS OF TRENDS SINCE THE 1970S' (ESRC 2005)

30 NI ASSEMBLY, WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS, Friday 1 Oct 2010, AQW 256/11 (available at

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/qanda/2007mandate/writtenans/2010/101001.htm>, visited 12<sup>th</sup> Oct 2010)

31 See Logue, M, Newell, N & Hegarty, A, WOMEN BUILD PEACE ACROSS BORDERS: TOWARDS FULL & EQUAL PARTICIPATION - REPORT OF THE PROCESS AND OUTCOMES, The Women's Centre, (Derry, Oct 2008)

32 THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT/THE BELFAST AGREEMENT Human Rights, at para 1

33 THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT/THE BELFAST AGREEMENT Rights, Safeguards And Equality Of Opportunity, at para 1

34 See, for example, Ward, Roulston & Davies, op cit.

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37 Answer to John Dallat, MLA, NI ASSEMBLY, WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS, Friday 17 September 2010, AQO 9/11, available at

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51 History of WiP, Women Into Politics website, , [http://www.womenintopolitics.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=section&id=6&Itemid=54](http://www.womenintopolitics.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=section&id=6&Itemid=54) (visited Sept 3 2010)

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56 excerpts from Windsor Women's Centre Website, [www.windsorwomanscentre.co.uk/](http://www.windsorwomanscentre.co.uk/) (visited 1 Oct 2010)

57 Material summarised from several pages on WiP's website (<http://www.womenintopolitics.org/>, visited 5th Oct 2010)

58 See pictures of the exhibits at [http://www.flickr.com/people/tico\\_bassie/](http://www.flickr.com/people/tico_bassie/)

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24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline - 0800 917 1414  
Open to anyone affected by domestic violence