



Response in relation to:

## **Ireland's Second National Action Plan: Women, Peace and Security**

**20<sup>th</sup> August 2014**

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**24 Hour Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline**

Call: 0808 802 1414

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Text **support** to 07797 805 839

Freephone from all landlines and mobiles. Translation service available.

Open to *all women and men* affected by domestic & sexual violence

## Contents

Section		Page
1	Women's Aid Information & Statistics	3
2.	Women, Peace & Security: Northern Ireland Context	4
3.	Violence against women in post conflict Northern Ireland	5
4.	Recommendations	7
5.	Contact Details	9

## Women's Aid Information & Statistics

### Women's Aid statistical data

- Since 1999, Women's Aid across Northern Ireland gave refuge to 16,425 women and 15,488 children and young people.
- During the last 17 years Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland managed 374,406 calls to the 24 Hour Domestic & Sexual 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”.
- 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, 72% of adult victims of domestic crimes recorded by the PSNI in 2012/13 were female.<sup>1</sup>
- Over 30% of all domestic violence starts during pregnancy.<sup>2</sup>

### Domestic violence: Crime statistics (Source: PSNI Statistics 2012/13)

- Domestic Violence is a crime. PSNI statistics for 2012/13 indicate that there were more recorded crimes with a domestic motivation (11,160) than the combined total of all the following crimes (9,976) – all recorded sexual offences (1,948), shoplifting (5,890) and theft of a motor vehicle (2,138).
- PSNI Statistics for 12/13 indicate that they responded to a domestic incident every 19 minutes of every day of the year.
- The total of 11,160 crimes with a domestic motivation in 12/13 represents an average of approximately 1 domestic crime every 47 minutes in Northern Ireland.
- The number of all recorded offences of murder in Northern Ireland in 12/13 total 17. Those classed as having a domestic motivation total 5. Therefore, 29% of all murders in Northern Ireland in 12/13 had a domestic motivation.
- There were 533 rapes (including attempted Rapes) in Northern Ireland in the period 2012/13.

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<sup>1</sup>Findings from the PSNI Trends in Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 2004/05 to 2012/13 N.B. “Adult” defined as aged 18 and over

<sup>2</sup>Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland

## Women, Peace & Security: Northern Ireland Context

- Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland welcomes the opportunity to submit our views on Ireland's second National Action Plan on Women, Peace & Security on behalf of our local Women's Aid groups. Our comments relate to women, peace and security in the Northern Irish context, with a particular focus on violence against women and girls in Northern Ireland. We also echo the views of the Northern Ireland Women's European Platform put forward in their consultation submission.
- Northern Ireland is emerging from 40 years of conflict. Nearly 20 years after the peace process commenced, Northern Ireland is not yet at peace as the legacy of the past continues to overshadow the present. In a report by the *Northern Ireland Community Relations Council* and supported by the *Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust*, the year 2013 is described as 'being one of the worst years in a decade.'<sup>3</sup> Northern Ireland is a society in transition from conflict rather than a peaceful society. Violence continues to be a feature of Northern Ireland society and there are deep rooted sectarian divisions. The impact of the conflict on women lives has not been adequately addressed or indeed sufficiently researched and understood.
- Recently new evidence of the incomplete peace and continuing conflict can be seen in reports from workshops held with women from across Northern Ireland by a project, *Women and Peacebuilding: Sharing the Learning* which aims to capture the experience of women during the conflict and the period of conflict resolution<sup>4</sup>. Women from some areas have reported:
  - ⇒ *high levels of control (through fear and intimidation)*
  - ⇒ *local women unable to speak up due to threat to property and personal security*
  - ⇒ *women (and men) and their families living in fear and silence due to the threat of reprisals*
  - ⇒ *high levels of criminality (some of it drug related). Criminality and money emanating from criminal activity has resulted in divided and mistrustful communities*
  - ⇒ *women do not have 'safe spaces' to discuss issues'.<sup>5</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report 2013

[http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=5&ved=0CEkQFjAE&url=http%3A%2F%2Fcain.ulst.ac.uk%2Fevents%2Fpeace%2Fdocs%2Fnipmr\\_2013-04\\_sum.pdf&ei=mDRmU-SOFoKyPOqIgLgD&usg=AFQjCNH\\_qSFDq3uDRZK3HCUswECQC9zRgw](http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=5&ved=0CEkQFjAE&url=http%3A%2F%2Fcain.ulst.ac.uk%2Fevents%2Fpeace%2Fdocs%2Fnipmr_2013-04_sum.pdf&ei=mDRmU-SOFoKyPOqIgLgD&usg=AFQjCNH_qSFDq3uDRZK3HCUswECQC9zRgw)

<sup>4</sup> The Women's Resource and Development Agency, the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland and the National Women's Council of Ireland are partners in the PEACE III funded project.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/margaret-ward/excluded-and-silenced-women-in-northern-ireland-after-peace-process>

Decades of civil and political conflict have impacted on and escalated the violence that women and children experience in their homes. There has been a failure to acknowledge the link between the conflict and domestic violence, a link identified in research internationally. In the absence of the principles of UNSCR 1325 being fully implemented in Northern Ireland, women continue to be left at the bottom of priority list in peace-building efforts.

- While women in Northern Ireland are confident they have been active peace builders at local, national and international levels, the participation and perspectives of these women have not been included in the development and implementation of the post conflict structures and mechanisms. The focus on equality in Northern Ireland is at a cross community level rather than a gender focus and women in Northern Ireland have not seen the realisation of the right to participate in these processes. Consequently women in Northern Ireland have little or no opportunity to influence and implement the decisions that are made about rebuilding their country and shaping their lives and those of their communities. This reflects the position of women in Northern Ireland.
- Only 19% of the elected Assembly representatives are women and just 23% of councillors are women. Women are underrepresented in the senior civil service and absent from the higher levels of the judiciary. The delegation of 33 members which discussed parading in Cardiff in Spring 2013 had only three women participants and the Board of the Maze Long Kesh Development Corporation had only one woman in ten members with a man occupying the chair.
- Based on evidence we must clearly recognise that if Northern Ireland's post conflict society does not recognise the contribution of women to peace-building and the inclusion of women in political and decision making roles, the peace process may begin to fracture. If the Northern Ireland, UK and Irish governments want to ensure the peace process continues, then setting a benchmark using UNSCR 1325, they should set actions which will have a positive impact on equal access to power for women and men.

## Violence against women in post-conflict Northern Ireland

- There are a number of gaps in how violence against women has been addressed in Northern Ireland, particularly relating to the connection between conflict and violence against women.

- **Lack of research on domestic & sexual violence through a conflict lens:**

It is well-established that violence against women, in particular sexual violence, often increases or intensifies in post-conflict societies. Yet no research has been carried out to assess the extent of sexual violence during or after the conflict in Northern Ireland. We have yet to look in-depth at the links between the proliferation of violence during the conflict, how this may have normalised violence within our society, and how this has affected the proliferation of sexual violence against women. There is also insufficient understanding of conflict-related trauma and how this has contributed to increased levels of mental illness and violence against women. This lack of awareness has contributed to under-funding of initiatives to address these issues. Without research and knowledge on the extent and nature of sexual and other types of violence against women, we are curtailed in our abilities to provide a sufficient and appropriate response, or to acquire funding for initiatives that would be tailored to the need identified by such research.

- **VAWG perpetrated by those with paramilitary connections:**

Anecdotal evidence has shown that domestic and sexual violence perpetrated by paramilitaries or those with paramilitary connections was hugely under-reported during the conflict. This was due in part to the power wielded by paramilitaries in their communities, the perceived 'greater good' in keeping those paramilitaries out of prison, and fear of reporting to police. This continues to be an issue – Women's Aid has supported women who are unwilling to report their perpetrators to police on account of their paramilitary connections, or because they are ex-combatants released on license from prison. In such cases where a perpetrator would be returned to prison if he committed further crime, some women have disclosed being pressured by their community not to report incidents to police. In some cases women choose not to report, but it is not always a freely made choice.

This evidence is corroborated by the work of other organisations working with women in Northern Ireland. During consultation with grassroots women in Belfast for the Women & Peacebuilding Project run by WRDA, fears were expressed by women about "controlling personalities" within both Unionist/Loyalist and Nationalist/Republican paramilitaries, in particular about fear for girls being caught up in "*a culture of 'trophy girlfriends' that often resulted in abuse.*"

- **Victims of violence in communities where hostility towards police exists**

Historically in communities where suspicion or hostility towards police existed, reporting domestic or sexual violence to police was rare. In addition to mistrust of police, there was a reluctance to be seen with a police officer or vehicle outside the home. While confidence in policing has substantially improved among most

communities in Northern Ireland, there are some areas in which this remains an issue. Therefore there are women in Northern Ireland who continue to live with the impact of unreported abuse that occurred during the conflict, and women who continue to suffer abuse and feel unable to report it.

Self-policing within communities was common during the conflict, and this approach remains in some parts of Northern Ireland today. Tackling domestic & sexual violence within the community, either through community restorative justice, churches or community groups can be problematic for a number of reasons. Victims may not get the support and justice they need if their abuser is a community leader or someone of 'good standing' in the community. Women may feel unable or unsafe to report domestic or sexual violence due to the status of the perpetrator, or risk not being believed or pressured to withdraw their complaint in the interests of the 'greater good'. If the support offered is not from experienced organisations who have the expertise to carry out effective safety planning and risk assessment and understand their needs, victims may not get the support they need, or even be placed in danger or put at risk of further abuse.

- **The weaponised legacy of the conflict**

The conflict in Northern Ireland has resulted in a larger number of weapons, in particular firearms, circulating in society and within households. This includes legally and illegally-held firearms, whether they are in possession of paramilitaries, ex-paramilitaries, police or individuals. There is an overwhelming body of evidence that links gun ownership to domestic violence and in particular more violent incidents of physical violence. Women's Aid staff have supported women who have been threatened with guns, assaulted with firearms, or suffer heightened levels of fear and anxiety because they know a gun is in the house or in possession of their abuser.

These fears have been vocalised by many grassroots women in Northern Ireland. In consultation sessions during the Women & Peacebuilding Project facilitated by WRDA, fears were voiced that increases in the number of women reporting domestic violence may be "*an indirect result of the culture of violence and continued access to legal arms in the society*".

Women's Aid continues to lobby for weapons to be removed from those who have legally-held firearms, including police officers, if a non-molestation order was obtained against them. Currently the PSNI look at this on a case by case basis.

## Recommendations

- Women's Aid supports the recommendations made in the Mid-Term Progress Report that

*“The Anglo-Irish Division should review and extend the range of actions on Ireland-Northern Ireland so that these are represented in and enhanced across all Pillars of the NAP. In particular actions should be strengthened on women's empowerment and participation at all levels; engagement with Northern Ireland authorities, cross-border bodies, the British Government and East-West fora. The areas of gender-based violence and dealing with the legacy of the past should be included.”*

- We strongly recommend including actions across all pillars for Northern Ireland, including actions specific to tackling gender-based violence. For example under Pillar 4 on relief, recovery and rehabilitation, we urge that actions are included to assist victims and survivors and organisations who support them in dealing with the legacy of the past.
- We also endorse the recommendations contained within the Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (NIWEP)'s submission to this consultation process, which are as follows:
  - To demonstrate leadership and high level commitment to the principles of UN SCR 1325 and the actions necessary to deliver its outcomes in meeting the commitments of the Good Friday Agreement, including through the work of the North South Ministerial Council and its constituent bodies such as InterTrade Ireland.
  - To commit to work with the UK government including in the Council of the Isles, as the peace negotiators in the Northern Ireland peace process to ensure the principles of UNSCR 1325 – prevention, protection, promotion and participation - are adopted by the Northern Ireland Executive in all its policies and legislation.
  - To commit to work in partnership with the UK government to encourage the Northern Ireland Executive to adopt temporary positive measures to increase women's participation in decision-making roles.
  - To commit to work with the UK government to ensure mechanisms to monitor the implementation of the principles across the public sector in Northern Ireland and to develop ways in which to make change to address gender inequalities.



- To commit to ensuring gender issues are a priority and there is gender balance in those attending any future peace building discussions.
- To ensure sustainable funding for the infrastructure of support organisations and high level policy and provision to address violence against women.
- To work in partnership with the NI government in developing an overarching strategy to adequately resource women's groups and organisations in order to ensure the wealth of knowledge and expertise is supported to make a greater contribution to building and sustaining peace in Northern Ireland and elsewhere.

## 9. Contact Details

For further information about this response please contact:

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