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Women, Peace and Security Consultation Document, July 2014

Submission on behalf of the Irish Federation of University Women (IrFUW)

The Irish federation Of University Women (IrFUW) has been in existence for over ninety years and was established to unite the Irish Women Graduates Associations to uphold the aims of the International Federation (IFUW) of which it is an constitute member. The all-Ireland network, which is the basis of the IrFUW, has remained intact over the years surviving the constitutional and political changes which have taken place. The links between members in the North and South were a constant source of strength and support through the years of civil disturbance and acts of terrorism. Given this background and the IrFUW's current involvement in supporting girls and women in conflict and post conflict situations, on a global basis, makes our desire to be involved in this Consultation pertinent and most relevant.

The IFUW is the leading girl's and women's global organisation run by and for women, advocating for women's rights, equality and empowerment through access to quality education and training up to the highest levels. Our Vision is of a world in which girls and women have equal opportunities and equal access to quality education within a peaceful and secure environment, a world which respects their rights, one where poverty is reduced and discrimination eliminated, where girls and women have equal opportunity in status, leadership, employment, income, education and careers and all women are empowered through education to reach and use their full potential in private and public life.

Irish Federation of University Women

In Ireland we work **locally** in our Associations to promote these aims. In Northern Ireland we currently work in collaboration with Queens University Alumni and Women's forum in promoting and advocating on issues pertinent to our society. Many of our members are involved in Education, Health, Law, Politics, the Arts and Business as well as Church and non-governmental organisation to promote peace and reconciliation at all levels in our society.

Nationally the IrFUW is involved in an annual Public Speaking Competition for Teen age Girls where they come together to compete on topical subjects which include those which reflect issues associated with the Aims of the IFUW. We hold an annual Conference on these subjects in different location throughout Ireland. We are also members of the University Women of Europe (UWE) and as such we attend European gatherings to support our delegates in their work to promote our aims and objectives at European Council level.

Internationally, we are actively involved with the work of the Federation through its consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the international Labour Organisation (ILO) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) In Ireland we support several overseas projects connected to creating opportunities for girls and woman who lack opportunities due to conflict situations or natural disaster.

As part of the Centenary celebrations in Queens University in our Association there organised a Project in post conflict Rwanda to educate 20 girls through the six years of their post primary education which would not have been possible to provide for them had we not raised the funding. We continue to support the final five students who are still in school until 2016 when we will have provided this opportunity for 22 pupils 12 of them were able to get scholarships to higher education and the others were deemed employable on leaving school. We worked through our IFUW Association in Rwanda and learned a lot about the problems of education in the post conflict time for orphans and widows of the Genocide.

Comments on the Issues outlined in the Consultative Document

General overall comment

As we address Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals the IrFUW believes passionately that education is the key to many of the issues of Women, Peace and security in our world today. At our recent IFUW Conference in Istanbul we resolved to promote 'Education for All' as we address the future in our multi-cultural, multi-racial society. Inequalities in economic status and enduring lack of access to adequate nutrition and health care are the scourge of our troubled world. In post conflict Ireland we need to encourage an Educational system which encourages greater understanding of Cultural differences and promotes Education in its broadest form to encourage respect for people of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds. We must also act and educate society that the role of women has changed and that some cultural norms, such as domestic violence is unacceptable and should be classed as a criminal act. We must also be aware that some practices such as Trafficking of Women and Female Genital Mutilation, accepted as a cultural norm in some countries, will not be acceptable in Ireland and will be treated as criminal acts under the Law.

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

We would advocate for Education in its broadest form as an overarching priority for the second National Action Plan.

In Ireland we continue the change from a mainly rural society to a more urban one. We have many more Immigrants and are facing major demographic changes in the age profile of society. IrFUW would see education as crucial in all these changes. Quality pre-school education for all, at an affordable rate, gives children a better start in life and can lay the foundation for future employability. This particularly important for the children of non-Irish citizens who need to be encouraged to integrate in to Irish society with good language skills and a wider cultural understanding. This avoids misunderstandings which promote inter racial fear, a frequent source of inequalities, conflict and discrimination

2. *How can Ireland help empower women affected by conflict.*

Education is also a way to empower women affected by conflict By educating them to rebuild in a way which helps them to deal with past hurt with a greater awareness of the way that they can learn from past conflict situations and not pass on ancient hurt to a new generation. This requires a sensitive understanding from all strata in our society .There is also a need to provide a continuum of support networks from community groups to specialist care for those who have mental health issues. Social contacts for those marginalised and acceptance that living with the past is difficult and that forgiveness takes time and cannot be 'prescribed' as a panacea for all. Often such comments come from someone who is insensitive and unaware of the impact that conflict can have on people's life perspectives and on and their sense of basic security at home or in the workplace.

3. and 4. ***How should the second National Action Plan reflect the commitments in Ireland's Policy for International Development, 'One world, one future' and other International relevant government policies and strategies?***

How should the National Action Plan approach actions relating to Ireland-Northern Ireland?

Development Issues related to International Development and the National Action Plan should always be 'People Centred' and promote a humanitarian, rather than a political stance in all the plans made. Any Plan should reflect that the Policy makers have listened to those who will be beneficiaries of the outcome of such plans. Listen to the women involved. Women care for their families as well as they own needs. This can be in relation to childcare or elder care issues. Women usually access such plans in relation not only to the benefits for wider society, their working lives but at the basic level of the family unit. Education in its widest form is crucial to all development plans. Taking time to educate all ages of people on how to gain maximum benefit from plans is as crucial as the Plan itself.

Giving education on how to benefit from new technology is as essential for the more mature age group as it is for Children.

The benefits of good nutrition and health promotion factors should have built in plans for the dissemination of this message and education on such facts for all in society. Programmes should be related to the pertaining problems but guard against becoming too patronising or stigmatising.

5. ***How can the existing monitoring mechanisms of the National Action Plan be improved? How can Oireachtas play a greater role?***

Monitoring is essential for the achievement of all planned outcomes. Please make all written monitoring as straight forward and as focussed as possible. Often small community groups struggle to make funding stretch to achieve their objectives but may be overburdened by monitoring form which reads more like a University examination. Keep monitoring focussed to essential quantitative data and details only .Smaller groups cannot pay for professional assistance with such matters. Taking evidence on the efficacy of the planned service delivery or benefits to be derived by talking to the users should include a listening process. A more qualitative approach by user involvement and interviews would enable a more People centred approach to be adopted. Where there are problems identified consideration should be given to further awareness raising programme for current and potential users. This can be achieved through education by the use of focus groups to not only hear of such problems but also to listen to how the users might see a solution from tier perspective. Change may be slow but all achievements should be celebrated as an encouragement and a way of developing new approaches in the future.

6. How should Ireland promote Women? Peace and Security in a multilateral organisation?

Listen to the Women first, and throughout any processes of continued contacts. Ask them how they see their needs before you tell them what they are going to get. Where problems arise the women can usually identify where things are going wrong. Don't presume that those in control of any projects, programmes of intervention or support know better than those most affected by Conflict and who are experiencing a lack of security. Respect the individual contributions of all.

Even in the darkest days in Northern Ireland it was often women who courageously crossed physical and psychological barriers to reach out to people in distress. Those who worked on the front line in the aftermath of community violence often noted that it was usually the men who spoke to revenge and retribution. It was usually the women who spoke of their anguish, shared their tears and spoke of their desire that no more Families would have to endure similar fear, pain, anguish or loss if the conflict continued. These heartfelt pleas for peace and security transcended all sections of the community.

Education of common goals and common concerns with an understanding of other people perspectives can often promote 'Women. Peace and Security from the basic levels of interpersonal relationships to community structures and multilateral organisations.