



Social Change Initiative

1 Lanyon Quay, Belfast BT1 3LG

RESPONSE TO PUBLIC CONSULTATION PAPER for IRELAND'S THIRD NATIONAL ACTION PLAN – WOMEN, PEACE and SECURITY

The Social Change Initiative was established in Belfast in 2015 as an INGO working to support civil society activism and advocacy on issues of peacebuilding, human rights, equality and refugee and migrant rights (www.thesocialchangeinitiative.org). It has a small team of staff and associates that have extensive experience of social change activism, independent philanthropy and policy-making. It offers a range of programmes including Fellowships, Mentoring, Learning Exchanges, Research, Convenings and Strategic Communications work. SCI is rooted in the practice of peacebuilding over many years in Northern Ireland, as well as insights drawn from work in other areas of conflict.

SCI welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Public Consultation Paper for Ireland's Third National Action Plan on Women, Peace & Security and is appreciative of the fact that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade recognises the particular relevance to the context of Ireland-Northern Ireland, as well as migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and others, in addition to providing further outreach to better engage women and girls, men and boys, and LGBTQI+ people from conflict affected areas. SCI has compiled a number of Peacebuilding Practice Notes on its website as well as 'Funding in Conflict-affected Environments: Notes for Grantmakers' (2017).

GENERAL COMMENTS

1. SCI believes that the Third Action Programme should build on the four Strategic Priorities of the Second Programme with a cold eye cast on what has

proved effective over the past strategic period and what might be reinforced. The framing around the four pillars previously identified, and related to SCR 1325, offers ample space to take forward the strategic objectives. SCI feels that there is still much work to be done under the objectives of – (i) strengthening women’s leadership and participation in decision-making in conflict and post conflict situations; (ii) ensuring that a gender perspective is incorporated into Ireland’s engagement in overseas humanitarian and development aid, peace-keeping, governance, post-conflict activities and interventions; (iii) bolstering Ireland’s ongoing work in protection from and prevention of gender-based violence; and (iv) leverage of Ireland’s participation in global and regional fora to champion the implementation of Women, Peace & Security resolutions.

2. As an INGO based in Northern Ireland SCI feels strongly that SCR 1325 should be applicable to Northern Ireland given the experience of the years of conflict and the current post-conflict context. Work undertaken by the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland and WRDA (Women’s Resource & Development Agency) in 2012-2014 through its Women & Peacebuilding initiative demonstrated the relevance of the four pillars of 1325 to the current concerns of community-based women across Northern Ireland and the Border Counties. Many of these concerns still need to be addressed, including the increase in reported levels of gender-based violence and the limited representation of women’s voices in conflict legacy issues. SCI also notes the lack of tangible commitments to gender integration in community relations issues across government in Northern Ireland as highlighted in a report on *Peacebuilding in Northern Ireland and the Women’s Sector* by the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council (NICRC).
3. As an INGO with a specific focus on peacebuilding, SCI is also acutely aware of the important learning that can be shared across societies, civil society and activists that have lived through violent conflict and peacebuilding. Over the past year it has hosted learning visits from as far apart as Bougainville (PNG) to Colombia, and from Ogaden (Ethiopia) to Israel/Palestine, with common threads being apparent notwithstanding the differences of the situational challenges of peacebuilding. This ability to facilitate shared learning is particularly relevant in the area of Women, Peace and Security. SCI recognises how much, in past years, that Northern Ireland benefitted from such exchanges with activists in other societies emerging from conflict.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Internal Irish Issues – North & South

4. SCI believes that Ireland should model the concerns and approaches that it proposes to advocate and support in other societies that are experiencing violent conflict. One important area of concern is that of gender-based violence. We note that in Northern Ireland PSNI statistics show a doubling of the number of reports of domestic violence since 2004 (14,073 reports in 2015/16). The DHSSPS/DOJ (2016) *Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy in Northern Ireland* needs an effective budget attached. Alongside this, 2016/17 saw 823 reported rape cases in Northern Ireland, with only 15 convictions – at 1.8% the lowest in the UK. SCI believes that when addressing gender-based violence globally, Ireland should itself be a model of good practice, both North and South. It further recognises that findings from Doyle & McWilliams (May 2018) *Intimate Partner Violence in Conflict and Post Conflict Societies* (PERP) demonstrate the learning that can be drawn from effective local work – in terms of understanding the impact of police reform, paramilitary demobilisation and effective trauma support for those most impacted by the violence.
5. Recent SCI research on public attitudes to refugees and immigrants in the Republic of Ireland (2018) also highlighted the need for public information to challenge misperceptions and potential ‘othering’ of specific minority groupings (with women often being the most visible manifestations of such groups). Levels of coolness/warmth highlighted the need to address the ‘othering’ of women in the Muslim community and the Traveller community in particular –



6. The experience of refugee/asylum seeking women in the current Direct Provision system in the Republic of Ireland is a matter of concern, offering few opportunities for positive contact and engagement that has long been a proven aspect of effective integration and inclusion. Within Northern Ireland refugee and asylum seeking women are disadvantaged by the lack of any Northern Irish Integration Strategy nor any umbrella body such as a Refugee Council to gather data, offer a platform to refugee women or to support the design of a holistic integration service. A 2016 study by Murphy & Vieten (*Asylum Seekers & Refugees Experiences of Life in Northern Ireland*) also made specific mention of the lack of effective legal support for those making asylum claims (the UK Home Office lose 75% of asylum appeal cases where there is legal representation). A spokesperson from the Law Centre (NI) referred to the fact that known trafficking cases in Northern Ireland were only 'the tip of the iceberg' (23/11/2018 – Law Society Conference – Borders and Blurred Lines: Entry to the UK: Rights and Restrictions in Practice), a situation that the implications of Brexit (in whatever form) will only accentuate. There is concern in the NGO sector that the introduction of a UK 2019 Immigration Bill will only make matters worse in this regard.

7. There are a number of specific issues arising from the post-conflict settlement in Northern Ireland that still remain to be addressed within the framing of UN SCR 1325. Notwithstanding the fact that the political leaders of three mainstream political parties are female, there is still the danger of gender-specific issues being side-lined, including that of representation. It is noteworthy that the Cardiff talks on outstanding contentious issues (Parades,

Emblems, Flag, etc.) in Summer 2013 had 3 women participants out of the overall participation of 30. Similarly, the Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition Commission is made up of 14 men and 1 woman. In short, on the 'contentious political issues', the representation of women seems to be expendable. This should be challenged in the Northern Irish context and should be taken as advance warning of the political dynamics in any society emerging from conflict. In this context it is important that the Northern Ireland Office should be bound by Section 75 of the Northern Ireland equality legislation alongside local government departments.

8. The need for a specific gender perspective in proposed mechanisms and approaches to 'deal with the past' has been raised in the context of Northern Ireland in a recent report on *Dealing with the Past in Ireland: Where are the Women*', by Relatives for Justice. SCI supports this argument and believes that it applies to all conflict/post-conflict situations, where issues raised by women in terms of the legacy of violent conflict are all too often termed 'private' issues, whereas those put on the table by male protagonists are deemed 'public' issues.

Applying learning from Ireland to the Global Context

9. There is considerable learning from Ireland itself that should be applied to the programme for Women, Peace and Security. Insights include:
 - The need to constantly undertake conflict sensitivity and gendered peace & conflict analyses to identify and power map the exclusion and marginalisation of women.
 - The importance of linking financial resources with confidence-building, support and development work to ensure the inclusion of the most marginalised groups in peacebuilding (given that such groups often experience the greatest impact of the violence). This highlights the crucial role of small, flexible grant-assistance programmes alongside the more substantial areas of peacebuilding investment.
 - The need to take account of, and address the specific barriers, to the inclusion of women with multiple identities (such as the LGBTQ+ community), particularly where such identities run counter to accepted societal norms.
 - The importance of avoiding competitive tendering in the in-country programmes supported which can further fracture and marginalise women's access to necessary resources, as well as accentuating division.

- The design of support programmes that are sufficiently long-term to facilitate the building of positive relationships across societal divides and that are programmatic rather than project oriented.

There is considerable learning to be drawn from a critical analysis of the respective EU PEACE programmes in Northern Ireland, with particular reference to the more flexible and responsive approach adopted under the EU Special Support Programme for Peace & Reconciliation (1995-1999), as well as the experience of independent philanthropies (The Atlantic Philanthropies, the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland), and the IFI (International Fund for Ireland).

10. From its direct experience of the management of funding programmes, SCI supports the practice of gender-based beneficiary analysis and evaluation of peacebuilding and reconstruction donor funding, including Multi-Donor Trust funds.
11. From its experience of peacebuilding in societies that are in transition from violent conflict, SCI recognises the importance of a long-term developmental approach that accepts the often uncertain and hesitant implementation of both peace processes and peace agreements. Consequently, it values core funding for committed and credible peacebuilding organisations rather than shorter-term project funding. However, alongside this it is aware of the potential contribution of small grant support, given in a flexible and timely manner, that might be administered at Embassy level in response to niche opportunities to progress the process.
12. SCI believes that investment in leadership and human capital within societies emerging from conflict can make a crucial contribution. Fellowships, mentoring schemes and the ability to benefit from reflective convenings can all play a part in both fostering local leadership and developing networks to support peace activists which, in the longer term, can underpin sustainability of effort and exchange of learning.
13. A specific area that is often overlooked within Women, Peace and Security is the role of electoral systems and the design of institutional decision-making structures in promoting the participation and representation of women in peace processes. SCI would welcome the convening of a Technical

Assistance/Knowledge team to collate, analyse and share this information with civil society, non-state actors and political decision-makers engaged in peace processes.

14. SCI believes that the identification of priority thematic and geographic foci by the Ireland National Action Plan would be welcome to ensure greater impact, while also offering the possibility of sharing this learning to areas of conflict on a wider basis by disseminating the outcomes of the work and investment. It supports a 5 or 6 year Action Plan to allow for sustainability and recommends a gender/peacebuilding analysis of related humanitarian/development aid and other relevant Irish government strategies. Finally, SCI would welcome the maintenance of independent monitoring arrangements.

December 2018.