Concern Worldwide submission to the
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Public Consultation for
Ireland's Third National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security

1. **Introduction**

Conflict is now the single greatest driver of humanitarian crises. With over 68 million people forcibly displaced and 134 million in need of humanitarian assistance,[i] response systems are overstretched and the diplomatic structures in place for conflict prevention and resolution have proved wholly ineffective Working in conflict-affected contexts presents great challenges for humanitarian actors. Preventing and responding to conflict; protecting women and girls in crisis; and ensuring that disruptions to societal structures do not further disadvantage women and girls, are not easy tasks, but they are essential. Concern Worldwide works to prevent sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV); protect vulnerable populations; and empower women and girls to be leaders and champions for peace and equality in their communities. Our documented experience has generated many lessons that hone and shape our programme and advocacy work. At the core of this work is our understanding that conflict affects women, men, youth and people from vulnerable groups in starkly different ways that often reinforce existing inequities and require tailored responses.

Concern's history is firmly rooted in Ireland and the Irish experience. The experience of Northern Ireland has shown that while political leadership is essential to bringing an end to violence, peace can only endure when it is embraced, owned and experienced at the community level. We also know that peace is only truly achieved when all members of the community are meaningfully included, share in decision-making, and can enjoy it equally.

Since Ireland's second National Action Plan (NAP) was developed, the global environment has seen changes in the nature of violence; increasing strain on multilateral institutions; a retreat from human rights norms and increased disregard for international humanitarian law. As a result, communities are often caught in increasingly complex conflicts in which norms of civilian protection are being eroded or ignored; displacement lasts longer; and recovery is more fragile, as protracted and cyclical crises create uncertain futures. Where access is possible, humanitarian assistance in often inconsistent and inadequate to provide a comprehensive package of support or to enable transition to resilience and recovery.

As Ireland increases commitments to overseas development aid, and strengthens global policy engagement , the third NAP is an opportunity to reflect these new contextual realities, expand

Ireland's leadership role in the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, and clarify strategic, policy and programing priorities.

2. What strategic objectives should be priorities for the Third National Action Plan?

The third NAP should articulate an ambitious and courageous vision for gender transformation within Women, Peace and Security. Building on the success and lessons learned from the previous plans, the strategic priorities must reflect and connect Ireland's domestic context, the international environment related to WPS, and Ireland's political ambitions.

The plan should respond to critical gaps in the implementation of the WPS agenda globally, including: *i) gender-sensitive conflict prevention; ii) protection of women and girls in conflict; iii) support for gender-equal recovery from conflict; and iv) the promotion of local ownership of the WPS agenda.*

i) Gender-sensitive conflict prevention

Supporting communities to establish or revive locally owned systems of conflict prevention and peacebuilding must be at the heart of Ireland's approach. To achieve this, women must be empowered and comprehensively supported, to not only participate in, but also to drive, peace processes at every level.

At the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, President Michael D. Higgins[ii] spoke forcefully of the need to protect women and girls, promote and support the Call to Action[iii] and prevent and end conflict in line with the appeal from the then Secretary General Ban Ki Moon. The first pillar of the Agenda for Humanity[iv] calls on determined and bold leadership to prevent and end conflict, guide national discourse and decision-making that supports the humanity of others.

Concern's extensive research on the impact of conflict on communities illustrates the complex linkages between national and local-level conflicts. It also demonstrates the value of strengthening communities' capacity for conflict management and the strong demand among local champions of peace for greater support; and the important contribution humanitarian and development organisations can make in promoting and supporting local-level peacebuilding and conflict resolution initiatives as part of integrated responses.[v]

The NAP should outline Ireland's continued commitment to put civilians at the heart of advocacy and political engagement on the prevention of armed conflict, addressing the underlying causes of violence, and promoting non-violent dispute resolution. Across many sectors, the Irish Government is a flagbearer in gender-equality focused aid.[vi] However, aid with gender equality and women's empowerment as a principal or significant objective has constituted just over one-third of conflict prevention ODA by the Irish Government since 2008.[vii] Increasing this proportion will strengthen women's voices and the sustainability of peace overall. Other countries, including Canada, have committed that 95% of peacebuilding funding will either specifically target or integrate gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls by 2022.[viii]

We recommend that:
- **Ireland strengthen its focus on peace, conflict prevention and fragility, by tripling the funds provided to integrated programmes that include locally-led civilian peacebuilding, conflict prevention and conflict resolution initiatives;**
- **Ireland champion women's participation and leadership in these approaches, supporting women's organisations and networks in conflict-affected contexts to develop locally owned, gender-sensitive conflict prevention action plans; and**
- **Ireland set practical and achievable targets, and indicators for tracking the number of initiatives and levels of funding should be included in the NAP.**

ii)   Protection in conflict

Global research shows that in conflict, many women and girls experience violence both as a weapon of war, and in less visible, sometimes hidden forms, including child marriage, trafficking, and violence in their homes and communities.

In spite of this, protection responses generally, and gender-based violence interventions in particular, remain poorly funded relative to other sectors in emergency response. In UN coordinated appeals, protection funding has one of the lowest percentage of requirements met, with under one-third of appeals funded, and GBV interventions in turn receive at most 30% of protection funding.[ix] These funding gaps are also gender gaps. They inadvertently perpetuate the suffering and unmet needs of women and girls documented throughout Concern's programmes and research.

We recommend that:
- **Ireland use the NAP, and the international platform of WPS, to highlight and address gendered funding gaps and funding gaps in protection work more broadly, that can result in disproportionate harm to, both physical and psychological, and increased vulnerability of, women, girls and survivors of SGBV in conflict.**

iii)   Supporting gender-equal post-conflict recovery

Most research on post-conflict settings, including recent in-depth field research carried out by Concern, shows that conflict's legacy lasts much longer than violence alone, affecting the likelihood of return and the success of reintegration and reconciliation long after stability is re-established.[x] The necessity of recognising and planning for the inter-generational impact of conflict is often forgotten in planning and not considered in short-term interventions engagement. Our research also shows that the reach of conflict goes far beyond the scope of physical and psychological violence alone, but includes many layers of structural violence, transforming (and often destroying) economies, social networks and household and community support systems far from the frontlines of active hostilities.

The upheaval of conflict can also lead to dramatic changes in gender relations and roles within households and communities, although evidence suggests that any improvements in women's economic and political decision-making as a result of these changes are typically short-lived.[xi] In the midst of the uncertainty and rapid changes when transitioning out of conflict, there is often a unique window of opportunity to support more meaningful transformation of gender roles as society and communities are adjusting to new dynamics.

For example, in Central African Republic, Concern, with multi-year funding from Irish Aid, is pioneering an integrated, multi-sectoral programme approach addressing these impacts. The programme provides material assistance in the form of support to food security and livelihoods; community resilience; and health, nutrition and WASH services. Additionally, programme activities are designed to support conflict management capacity at the local level.

We recommend that:
- **Ireland strengthen the focus on integrated support to post-conflict recovery in the forthcoming NAP, reflecting the fact that the ambition and vision of USNCR 1325 can only be achieved when gendered legacies of conflict are addressed in all spheres.**

iv)   Promoting local ownership of the WPS agenda

Raising awareness and securing commitment from Ireland's diplomatic community abroad should remain an integral part of Ireland's WPS strategy. Increasing engagement with national governments, civil society, and humanitarian and development actors in WPS target countries would strengthen Ireland's programming and policy engagement on WPS.

To date, 79 countries (or 41% of UN Member States), and only three of Irish Aid's current 9 Key Partner Countries have developed NAPs on Women Peace and Security.[xii] Adopting, funding and

implementing National Action Plans are vital to localising global commitments; transforming them into concrete, locally-owned action; and ensuring accountability for women's representation, participation and leadership in championing peace at the local, national and international levels.

We recommend that:

- **The importance of the WPS agenda is reflected in the forthcoming White Paper on International Development. To strengthen coherence and impact, the NAP should be aligned with the new Key Partner Country plan and commit to collaborating with those countries on Women, Peace and Security. These countries should be identified in the new NAP as WPS target countries for dedicated support on UNSCR 1325 to deliver concrete benefits, clarify Ireland's impact internationally, and strengthen cross-government policy coherence;**
- **Within these WPS target countries, the Irish Government should support national governments to develop NAPs, and invest in the establishment of in-country consultation groups for implementation in target countries,[xiii] connecting diplomatic, development and local civil society actors to generate gender-sensitive conflict analyses to inform and support both domestic, and Irish government, policy and programming; and**
- **Ireland explore the possibility of establishing and convening networks of 'Friends of WPS' in WPS target countries, bringing together international and inter-governmental actors, to strengthen dialogue and awareness and promote greater coherence between diplomatic representatives, national governments and civil society.**

3. **Are the existing Pillars the most effective way to structure the NAP?**

In line with WPS objectives and the established pillars of SCR1325[xiv], the next NAP should retain the current pillars while strengthening Pillars 2 and 4. Drawing on the specificity contained in the Sweden's NAP[xv], we recommend that:

- **Ireland strengthen the language of participation in Pillar 2 to include meaningful participation in peace processes and in peacebuilding and state building; and**
- **Ireland strengthen the language of gender in Pillar 4 reinforcing the gender perspective in the promotion of WPS agenda.**

4. **How can the Third National Action Plan reflect the commitments in Ireland's Policy for International Development and other relevant government policies and strategies?**

As the plan will run during Ireland's candidacy for a seat on the UN Security Council and the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325, coherent engagement with the UN is important. The *Global Study* suggests that the UN Security Council establish an expert group to brief it on 1325 implementation; and that an elected member of the Security Council co-lead on 1325 with a permanent member.[xvi]

As momentum around the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) intensifies with a decade to go to 2030, the concept of 'leaving no one behind' must be integrated into the forthcoming plan. A

challenge to the holistic impact of the first two plans has been the inconsistent application of resources and attention to implementation. The principles of the WPS agenda should be mainstreamed across government departments and government engagement on issues of national and global importance on a global scale.

We recommend that:
- **Ireland champion the UN Women recommendation that an elected UN Security Council member co-lead on 1325 implementation during its tenure, and make this a policy priority of its NAP to support institutional knowledge retention, and deliver renewed energy and resources.**

5. **How can the plan better engage those who have a role to play in Women, Peace and Security, but may not feel directly impacted?**

As this plan will drive policy over a five year period, it is vital that it promote a truly transformative vision of gender equality, and not further instrumentalise women in conflict-affected contexts. The plan should adopt a holistic and inclusive approach that recognises the social, political and economic gendered realities of conflict.

Concern's experience of engaging women and men in gender transformative approaches has led to positive outcomes for women, children and men. Many men suffer from socially constructed gender stereotypes and are often forgotten as key actors in successful programming. Belief in rigid norms about what it means to be a man is directly related to violence, alcohol abuse, and unsafe sexual behaviours.   Our research also highlights the gendered vulnerabilities men and boys themselves face in conflict, and how wider assumptions about men's responsibilities, masculinity and status in society can be damaging.[xvii] Men must be engaged as allies in the fight against gender-based violence and harmful gender roles, and in the work of truly transforming gender relations.

Finally, we recommend that:
- **Ireland allocate specific funding to Pillars 1 & 3 for both programming and research in humanitarian settings through the lifetime of the next NAP to ensure high quality support can be sustained to protect women and girls and extend appropriate assistance to men and boys in conflict and in prolonged post-conflict settings.**

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i UNOCHA (2018), *Global Humanitarian Overview 2019*.

ii https://static.rasset.ie/documents/news/statement-by-michael-d-higgins.pdf https://president.ie/en/media-library/speeches/leaders-statement-world-humanitarian-summit; (Accessed 11.12.2018);

iii https://www.calltoactiongbv.com/

iv https://www.agendaforhumanity.org/cr/1 (Accessed 8.12.2018)

v Concern Worldwide (2018), *Breaking the Cycle of Conflict, Hunger and Human Suffering*, https://www.concern.net/insights/breaking-cycle-conflict-hunger-and-human-suffering.

vi OECD (2018), *Aid in Support of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Donor Charts*, http://www.oecd.org/development/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-topics/Aid-to-gender-equality-donor-charts-2018.pdf, p. 17.

vii OECD (2018), 'Aid projects targeting gender equality and women's empowerment, 152: Ireland, 2008-2016' Creditor Reporting System,' https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=CRS1; 'conflict prevention' category calculated according to the methodology outlined in OECD (2018), *States of Fragility 2018*, p. 142.

viii Government of Canada (2017), *Gender Equality: A Foundation for Peace*, http://international.gc.ca/world-monde/assets/pdfs/cnap-eng.pdf, p. 12.

ix Coalition of Feminists for Social Change (COFEM) (2017), *Funding: Whose Priorities? Feminist Perspectives on Addressing Violence against Women and Girls*, http://raisingvoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Paper-4-COFEM.final_.sept2017.pdf, pp. 2-3.

x Concern Worldwide (2018), *Breaking the Cycle of Conflict, Hunger and Human Suffering*.

xi See Justino *et al*. (2012), *From the Ground Up: Women's Roles in Local Peacebuilding in Afghanistan, Liberia, Nepal, Pakistan and Sierra Leone*, http://www.actionaid.org/publications/ground-womens-role-local-peacebuilding-afghanistan-liberia-nepal-pakistan-and-sierra-le.

xii PeaceWomen (2018), 'National Action Plans for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security,' http://www.peacewomen.org/member-states.

xiii 1325 Dutch NAP Partnership (2016), *The Netherlands National Action Plan*.

xiv http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/#resolution

xv https://www.government.se/contentassets/8ae23198463f49269e25a14d4d14b9bc/women-peace-and-security-eng.pdf

xvi UN Women (2015), *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace* http://wps.unwomen.org/, p. 194.

xvii Concern Worldwide (2018), *Breaking the Cycle of Conflict, Hunger and Human Suffering*.