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## Acronyms Used

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CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
EP	European Parliament
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HLPG	High Level Planning Group
IA	International Alert
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
NGO	Nongovernmental Organisation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNIFEM	United Nations development Fund for Women
UNOMIG	United Nations Observing Mission in Georgia
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

## **Part I. Context**

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### **1.1 Executive Summary**

This report explores the main issues affecting the security of women in the South Caucasus resulting from unresolved conflicts in the region. It examines the role of women in peacebuilding activities and in the political processes in the South Caucasian region and the obstacles that they face.

The aim of the report is to map the issues affecting women's peace and security in the region in order to inform a future strategy for engagement with women's groups and to influence policies affecting women's safety and empowerment in the region.

The unanimous adoption of UN SC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (October 2000) and the adoption of the Resolution on the Gender Aspects of Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding by the European Parliament (November 2000) provide the rationale for this report. The peace and security focus adopted by both resolutions provide a framework for the research. In order to adequately explore the issues concerning women, peace and security in the region, five field trips were made to Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia and Abkhazia (in August 2000, October 2000, April-May 2001, June 2001, October 2001). In addition, consultations with partners and NGO leaders from South and North Caucasus were organised in London during the period January-August 2001.

### **1.2. The Approach**

This report takes a human security perspective. The concept of human security reflects the growing consciousness that not enough has been done by the international community and by states to protect individuals against threats and situations that endanger their safety and well being. The rise of armed conflict, globalisation and the deepening gap between poor and rich countries as well as social and economic changes in many parts of the world have shown that a different approach to security should be considered that puts the safety of the individual at its centre.

The concept of human security is not new but it became popular during the last 10 years. There are many definitions of human security although security analysts are still sceptical, perceiving them as vague and detached from practice. One of the first descriptions of human security states that: 'Human security is not a concern with weapons - it is a concern with human life and dignity. Human security has four essential characteristics: it is universal, interdependent, is best ensured by prevention, and is people-centred. The threats to human security could be grouped into seven categories: economic security, food security, health

security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security’  
(UNDP 1994 Human Development Report)

The understanding and the definitions of human security developed and expanded other aspects related to security of the individuals: ‘Human security means freedom from pervasive threats to the rights, safety or lives of people...Today the language of security extends beyond defending sovereignty and the rights of the states. It encompasses freedom of expression and forced migration, internally displaced persons and war-affected children...In the new era the primary victims of conflict, if not the primary targets, were most often civilians. Clearly, the protection of individuals would have to be a major focus of our foreign policy’  
(Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade)

Human security means safety for every individual from any kind of threats - both violent and non-violent. As the well known Czech dissident and politician Vaclav Havel observes ‘the sovereignty of the community, the region, the nation, the state ... makes sense only if it is derived from one genuine sovereignty - that is, from the sovereignty of the human being’ Exploring the issues of peace and security makes sense only if the individual is the main focus of attention and concern. International Alert believes this to be true and thus frames the issues in this report in terms of human security.

## Part II. Conflict, Women and Peace in the South Caucasus

### 2.1. The Current Political and Economic Situation in the Region

The South Caucasus is a political concept that refers to a cluster of countries i.e. three independent states (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) and three break away territories (i.e. Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh). Currently the 3 conflicts in the region (in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh) are still politically unresolved. Despite the different status of the territories in the region, there are current tendencies that are common to the entire region. The Soviet era style of political leadership is still common within the governmental structures of all of the states, social gaps are growing within the societies, the public sector is still dominant, and the lawlessness and all-powerfulness of criminal mafia structures is threatening the everyday security of the people.

#### Republic of Armenia

**Term for Citizens:** Armenian(s).

**Capital:** Yerevan.

**Date of Independence:** September 23, 1991

**Size:** Approximately 29,800 square kilometres.

**Population:** By official 1994 estimate, population 3,521,517; in 1994 annual growth rate about 1.1 per cent; 1991 population density 112.6 persons per square kilometre.

**Ethnic Groups:** In 1989 census, Armenians 93.7 per cent, Azerbaijanis 2.6 per cent, Kurds 1.7 per cent, Russians 1.6 per cent, and other 0.4 per cent.

**Languages:** Official state language Armenian, spoken by 96 per cent of population. Russian first language of 2 per cent, second language for about 40 per cent of population.

**Religion:** Approximately 94 per cent of population belongs to Armenian Apostolic Church. Other religions include Russian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant

denominations, and Islam.

**Education and Literacy:** Education compulsory through secondary school. Literacy estimated at 100 per cent. In early 1990s, substantial changes, begun in previous centralised Soviet system, emphasised national heritage. \*

*Source: The Library of Congress, Country Studies*

#### Republic of Georgia

**Short Name:** Georgia.

**Term for Citizens:** Georgian(s).

**Capital:** Tbilisi.

**Date of Independence:** April 9, 1991.

**Size:** Approximately 69,875 square kilometres.

**Population:** Mid-1994 estimate 5,681,025. Annual growth rate 0.81 per cent in 1994. Density seventy-nine per square kilometre in 1994.

**Ethnic Groups:** In early 1990s, Georgians 70.1 per cent, Armenians 8.1 per cent, Russians 6.3 per cent, Azerbaijanis 5.7 per per cent, Ossetians 3 per cent, and Abkhaz 1.8 per cent.

**Languages:** In early 1990s, official language, Georgian, spoken by 71 per cent of population. Russian spoken by 9 per cent, followed by Armenian with 7 per cent and Azerbaijani with 6 per cent.

**Religion:** In 1993 Georgian Orthodox 65 per cent, Muslim 11 per cent, Russian Orthodox 10 per cent, and Armenian Apostolic 8 per cent.

**Education and Literacy:** Free and compulsory through secondary school. Previous Soviet system modified to eliminate ideology and strengthen Georgian language and history. Some teaching continues in minority languages. Nineteen institutions of higher learning. Literacy estimated at 100 per cent by 1980s. \*

*Source: The Library of Congress, Country Studies*

Today, more than 10 years after the end of the communist regime, the process of democratisation in the countries in the South Caucasus is still problematic. The authoritarian mentality remains an overwhelming feature of political life. The authoritarian ruling elite in the region is not willing to transfer their power to the new political or civil society leaders and the capacity of civil society to participate in policy making is still problematic. Women have even less capacity and opportunities to participate in the political life of the countries. The conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh continue to affect the political

and economic situation in the region.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the beginning of the 1990s all the territories went through transition processes and today the region's economic development is still below par. Russia remains the main economic partner for all the countries in the region. There is no accurate data about the scale of the shadow economy but in some reports it is estimated to be about 40 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>1</sup> Poverty, insecurity and the lack of a clear vision for the future are prevalent throughout the region. Women are among the groups most affected by the economic crises.

## 2.2. Historical Background to the Conflicts in the South Caucasus

Historically and geographically the Caucasus region has been a borderland and a bridge between East and West, between North and South. Its strategic geopolitical location between the big regional powers has not resulted in advantage for the region. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union five

armed conflicts broke out in the Caucasus region. These were the conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno Karabakh, Chechnia and Prigorodniy Rayon of Vladikavkaz. These conflicts have resulted in severe damages for all involved including thousands of casualties (most of them civilians) and approximately 2,600,000 people displaced from their homes.<sup>2</sup>

Three of the Caucasian conflicts (in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh) occurred on the territory of the South Caucasus, which is now made up of three independent states (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) and two of them (in Chechnia and Prigorodniy Rayon) - in the North Caucasus, which is now part of the Russian Federation.

The conflicts in the South Caucasus could be defined as the rebellion of ethnic-based autonomous regions of the Soviet era rebelling against their respective central government

### Republic of Azerbaijan

**Short Form:** Azerbaijan.

**Term for Citizens:** Azerbaijani(s)

**Capital:** Baku.

**Date of Independence:** October 18, 1991.

**Size:** Approximately 86,600 square kilometres.

**Population:** Mid-1994 estimate 7,684,456; 1994 annual growth rate 1.4 per cent. Density in 1991 approximately eighty-three people per square kilometre.

**Ethnic Groups:** Azerbaijanis 82.7 per cent, Russians 5.6 per cent, Armenians 5.6 per cent, and Lezgins (Daghestanis) 3.2 per cent, per 1989 census (Armenians and Russians much less in early 1990s).

**Languages:** Azerbaijani 82 per cent, Russian 7 per cent, and Armenian 5 per cent, per 1989 census (Armenian much less in early 1990s).

**Religion:** In 1989 Muslim 87 per cent (about 70 per cent of which Shia), Russian Orthodox 5.6 per cent, and Armenian Apostolic 5.6 per cent (much less in early 1990s). Many mosques reopened or established after religious restrictions of Soviet period.

**Education and Literacy:** Compulsory education through eighth grade. In 1970 literacy estimated at 100 per cent (ages nine to forty-nine). After 1991 major reform program was begun to modify Soviet system, eliminate ideology, increase use of Azerbaijani language, and reintroduce traditional religious instruction. \*

*Source: The Library of Congress, Country Studies*

<sup>1</sup> Central Asia and the South Caucasus: Reorientations, Internal Transition and Strategic Dynamics: Conference Report October 2000

\* Due to the lack of official similar information about the non-recognised entities this report could not provide similar data for Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh

<sup>2</sup> Rupert Colville, "Starting from Scratch", REFUGEES, 1995, p.28

during the liberalisation and dissolution of the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> Due to the process of the politicisation of ethnicity, the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, (former Autonomous Region of Abkhazia and Autonomous Region of Ossetia of the Georgia SSR) which remained within the territory of Georgia, sought more autonomy and eventually independence from the Georgian state. Similarly Nagorno Karabakh (former Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Region of Azerbaijan SSR) was fighting for its independence from the Azeri state.

In the local elections in 1988 the population of Nagorno Karabakh voted for unification with Armenia thus sparking the armed conflict that lasted from 1988-1994. This conflict claimed more than 35,000 lives, and displaced over one million people.<sup>4</sup> On 2 September 1991 the region declared independence as the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR). On 12 May 1994 Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Armenia signed a cease-fire agreement, which is still valid, but in spite of this people are still killed each year in the disputed territory. Negotiations for the final settlement of the conflict under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk<sup>5</sup> group have still not resulted in any solutions. Established in 1992, the aim of the OSCE Minsk Group is to work directly with the two Presidents (of Armenia and Azerbaijan) and increase the potential for the political resolution of this conflict. An OSCE High Level Planning Group<sup>6</sup> is also working to plan for a possible OSCE peacekeeping force in the area in the event of a successful implementation of the political settlement process. The United Nations and the international community do not recognise the Nagorno Karabakh Republic.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Georgia adopted a new constitution in which Abkhazia was no longer spoken of as an Autonomous Republic. In return Abkhazia in its new Constitution unilaterally reinstated its earlier status. In a similar way Georgia abolished the autonomy of the former Soviet Autonomous Province (Oblast) South Ossetia.<sup>7</sup> Both Abkhazia and South Ossetia proclaimed themselves "independent republics". Consequently, in 1992 these two former autonomous entities became involved in an armed conflict with Georgia and

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<sup>3</sup> Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus*, 1999

<sup>4</sup> OSCE, Nagorno-Karabakh Peace Talks( [http://www.osce.org/news/In\\_focus/nagorno\\_karabakh\\_in\\_focus.Php#3](http://www.osce.org/news/In_focus/nagorno_karabakh_in_focus.Php#3))

<sup>5</sup> The Helsinki Additional Meeting of the Council of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), on 24 March 1992, requested the Chairman-in-Office (CiO) to convene as soon as possible a conference on Nagorno-Karabakh under the auspices of the CSCE to provide an ongoing forum for negotiations towards a peaceful settlement of the crisis on the basis of the principles, commitments and provisions of the CSCE. The Conference was to take place in Minsk. The Minsk Conference was never held, owing to lack of agreement among the parties to the conflict. However, its designated participants have been meeting as the "Minsk Group". (OSCE fact-sheet)

<sup>6</sup> The OSCE High-Level Planning Group (HPLG) was established on 20 December 1994. It is made up of military experts seconded by OSCE participating States and is mandated to:

- make recommendations for the Chairman-in-Office on developing a plan for the establishment, force structure requirements and operations of a multinational OSCE peacekeeping force for Nagorno-Karabakh;
- make recommendations on, inter alia, the size and characteristics of the force, command and control, logistics, allocations of units and resources, rules of engagement and arrangements with contributing States.

The HPLG superseded an earlier Initial Operations Planning Group (IOPG), which was established in May 1993. After conducting fact-finding visits to the region, the HPLG began detailed conceptualization that resulted in the Concept for an OSCE Multinational Peacekeeping Mission for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, presented to the Chairman-in-Office on 14 July 1995. It included four options, of which three were a mixture of armed peacekeeping troops and unarmed military observers, their strength varying from 1,500 to 4,500 personnel, the fourth being an unarmed military observer mission.

Putting into place the peacekeeping force depends on the successful implementation of the political settlement process and on consensus among the OSCE participating States. At present, the HPLG is adapting the concept to the current stage of negotiations and updating the four options through fact-finding missions. (OSCE fact-sheet)

had much of their territories destroyed and a large part of their population displaced from the country (about 300,000 people from the two regions). In the search for a peaceful solution and in order to monitor the partial peace-agreements, the UN Secretary-General appointed a Special Representative for Georgia. In August 1993 the Security Council established a United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG). Also in 1993, the OSCE established an Observer Mission in South Ossetia. A Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) peacekeeping force (mainly Russian-dominated) has also been established to monitor the cease-fire in South Ossetia (1992) and the peace agreement in Abkhazia (1994). As in the case of Nagorno Karabakh, the Republic of Abkhazia and the Republic of South Ossetia remain non-recognised by the UN and other international actors.

### **2.3 Gender Stereotyping in the South Caucasus**

The Caucasus is a region with established cultural traditions. Its location at the cross-roads between Europe and Asia has had a cultural, social and economic impact on the lives of the people in that region. The influence of the communist past has also been significant. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, openness to Western values and the desire to integrate with the Western world has been manifested in all the South Caucasian states although this tendency has been opposed by many people.

Traditions and traditional roles in the society are highly honoured in the Caucasus. This is very much reflected in the stereotyped vision of the roles of men and women. Research shows that men and women in the Caucasus enjoy different rights in all spheres of life (work, home, free time) and in every case women have fewer rights. A man has the role of decision maker, he is considered to be 'the head of the family', to pursue a career, to enjoy time with friends outside the family, whilst women are much more deprived. These different statuses and roles do not seem to require any justification apart from – 'Because this is how it is'.<sup>8</sup>

The South Caucasian states (apart from the break away territories) have signed up to all the international instruments relating to women's equality and human rights<sup>9</sup>. They have also adopted local laws and machineries for implementing those policies. But the fact that the laws of all the South Caucasian states does not deprive women of different rights does not mean that their fathers, mothers, husbands, family, society or the taboos and stereotypes imprinted in women's psyche will allow them to appreciate and enjoy the rights and freedom they have been given by law. According to commonly held opinions, women's rights should be determined in

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<sup>7</sup> The North Caucasus; Minorities at a Crossroads, Report of Minority Rights Group International, May 1994

<sup>8</sup> Study of Gender Stereotypes and Hidden Female Discrimination, Caucasus Women's Network, 1999

<sup>9</sup> Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women  
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women  
Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women  
Convention on the Political Rights of Women  
Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict  
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

consideration with local traditions and values. This feeling is wide spread among both men and women in the Caucasus and the struggle for more women's rights is considered by both genders 'a senseless and harmful practice, copied from the West'<sup>10</sup>.

It is difficult for Caucasian women and men to point to the existence of gender discrimination, since the discrimination is rooted in the traditions and hence socially and culturally accepted as normal. According to recent sociological research<sup>11</sup>, the women in the Caucasus don't feel oppressed. On the other hand they state very strongly that they need to have more freedom and initiative, to be more active, to have the possibility to develop their own skills and abilities, and to enjoy time with friends. The satisfaction of such needs requires a certain degree of freedom which men are not willing to give to women. This highlights the fact that the feeling of oppression is not actualised and if women are oppressed, they perceive this as something normal and not as oppression. Public statements that criticise the traditional roles of women in the family and the society are viewed as 'feminist' and perceived as a 'western virus'.

There is a strong feeling among the women in the South Caucasus that 'feminism', or expressing 'feminist' opinion is something not relevant and contradictory to the Caucasian culture. Generally the women there are not aware of what 'feminism' in philosophical terms actually means and they don't make difference between gender equality, gender discrimination and feminism. Terms such as 'gender' is associated with radical feminism in Western Europe. Speaking about anything related to women's issues, women's rights, women's needs or gender is referred to by women themselves as 'being a feminist' and therefore avoided. There is also a certain kind of 'allergy' to issues addressing gender equality and emancipation, which is due to the experience from the recent communist past. Even established female activists or politicians are openly antagonistic towards 'feminist' ideas and the promotion of women's rights. Irina Sarishvili-Chanturia, a prominent woman in Georgian politics and leader of the National Democratic Party, openly derided feminism as 'worse than homosexuality'<sup>12</sup>.

This type of attitude at times results from ignorance. However, very often women, especially those with political careers, intentionally draw a line between their political platform and 'feminism'. They do not want to be perceived as fighters for women's rights or women's leaders because they are worried that no one will take them seriously and they will be marginalised. Due to such misperceptions and fears of exclusion women failed to integrate gender equality into the foundations of the policies of the new states and the new societies in the South Caucasus.

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<sup>10</sup> Study of Gender Stereotypes and Hidden Female Discrimination, Caucasus Women's Network, 1999

<sup>11</sup> Study of Gender Stereotypes and Hidden Female Discrimination, Caucasus Women's Network, 1999

<sup>12</sup> Morton, A.L., Allen Nan, S, Buck T., Zurikashvili F., Aftermath: Women's Organisations In Postconflict Georgia, USAID, September 2000

## 2.4 Women's Status in the South Caucasus Before the Conflict

The communist system, which lasted more than 70 years in the South Caucasus, fostered two generations of highly educated and 'emancipated' women. The communist ideology highlighted a different understanding of the role of the women in the traditionally male dominated culture in the South Caucasus. Women became 'comrades', 'party activists', and 'outstanding workers'. Pictures of women builders, doctors, train drivers, technicians posted in every factory or at any event were popular ways used by the communist propaganda system to promote the emancipation of women. Up to 90 per cent of the women were working full time, state sponsored childcare was widely available, and the law had granted women their right to work. It may seem that during that time the women in the communist societies had achieved most of the rights that a western feminist fight for, but the reality was very different.

The women in the South Caucasus were forced into feeling a sense of false emancipation because their labour was needed. The planned economy and the process of industrialisation required a large workforce and women's participation in the labour market was demanded. Women were working together and equally to men in almost every field of the industry. There were though some sectors of the economy where more women were concentrated than men i.e. education, social services, public administration and support services. While women were the majority of those working in the factories. Many of them occupied low status and low paid jobs. Despite having the same level of education as men and working the same number of hours, women were earning approximately 30 per cent less than men's wages. Often they were refused promotions because 'their childcare responsibilities would prevent them from performing equally to men at work'.

In the communist society, where 'work was a duty, not a right'<sup>13</sup>, women were exploited both by the state and by the patriarchal society. They were obliged to work like men but they also had to continue playing their traditional roles in the family. There was no 'equality' for women and men in the participation of domestic work. The main responsibility for running the household and rearing the children lay on the shoulders of women. Within the family they had to obey the patriarchal traditions. There was no law effectively protecting women from discrimination and ill treatment at home. Domestic violence was unrecognised and even intentionally hidden by the authorities of the socialist community. The role of a communist woman included being an excellent employee, mother, housewife and active member of the society at the same time. This led to women working on average four additional hours daily and becoming exhausted and nostalgic about the pre-communist past when women stayed at home and took care of their families and themselves.

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<sup>13</sup> Suzanne LaFont, *Male Economies and the Status of Women in the Post-Communist Countries*, 1999

For many women the collapse of the Soviet Union and the process of 'modernisation' and 'democratisation' meant returning back to the imagined 'rosy' time when they were less exploited. For some women, who entered the nationalist movements in the South Caucasian states in the late 80s and early 90s, the understanding of 'fighting for the nation' was misunderstood as fighting for lost traditions. For others it was fighting for real respect and recognition, which they were said to have enjoyed but actually lacked in the communist society.

## **2.5. Women's Participation in the Conflicts in the South Caucasus**

As a result, in the pre-war phase many of the women in the South Caucasus, intentionally or not, contributed to escalating the conflicts. The lack of political experience and understanding of the complexity of the geopolitical situation at that time made women vulnerable to the propaganda of their leaders, who were pursuing goals serving other interests. 'Being used to Soviet life we could not imagine what horrible events awaited us and how it could harm women and children'<sup>14</sup>, confesses one of the women, witness of the controversial role that women played during the pre-conflict time.

Women were followers and supporters of the escalating process of proclaiming war, but did not have any control over it. There were almost no women in leadership positions or in the decision-making bodies of the armed forces during the pre-conflict months. In many parts of the South Caucasus women supported violent actions and nationalist movements in the belief that this was the way to gain the right to live in a fair and open society.

Many of the women in the South Caucasus, especially those who felt they had not achieved self-realisation during the communist regime, found a way of participating in the political processes by joining the nationalist movements. In Georgia for example many of the women participated to a large extent in the escalation of the conflict by passionately supporting the nationalist policy of President Zviad Gamsachurdia. Politically and socially misinformed for several decades, women felt 'liberated' once communism ended and quickly became engaged in picketing activities and street demonstrations. Some highly educated women and representatives of the intelligentsia, who were not so isolated from the political life during communism were more passive spectators than actors in the processes. However, those who were less passionate participants in the escalating violence admit that they didn't do much to 'stop their men' either.

## **2.6. The Impact of Conflict on Women**

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<sup>14</sup> Manana Mebuke, War and Social Problems of Women Caused by War, Women's Initiative for Equality, March, 2000

After these first years of chaos women gradually realised that they had unintentionally served the political interest, which threw the countries of the South Caucasus into 'brother-killing' wars and that led to violence and bloodshed. As the conflicts spread it became obvious to those who were its primary supporters that that is not what they were fighting for. Instead the conflicts were followed by massive violence and ethnic cleansing with women as the majority of victims.

The wars had a disastrous effect on the socio-economic and psychological state of the women in the region. Manana Mebuke, Chairman of The Union of Wives of Invalids and Lost-Warriors, describes the life of the Georgian women after the conflicts broke out: 'War especially affects civilians - women and children...Civil Law does not rule, families collapse or lose bread winners. There is a lot of pain, sorrow and stress. Many are left without shelter and food. After war is over the rehabilitation process begins and women and children are often left without special care and attention. Women, who lost husbands in the war, suffer more, because according to the Georgian reality, they lose the right to marry or to have children. Besides that tragedy, they have to flee from native places and become refugees. The statistics reveal that the majority of such women either took part in fighting or joined the armed forces.'<sup>15</sup>.

During the war, women maintained the civil and economic infrastructure with their work. 'Because of war, says Manana Mebuke, women undertake unusual functions. This changes women, they take on new responsibilities, acquire new status in society and they think differently about the future. All that is caused by war. Often women view themselves radically differently after going through dangerous and difficult moments of life. This is when women discover hidden potential in themselves. They lead families, often create society structures, and support family members. It does not matter what functions women acquire at this time, what is important is that she is no longer the same person'.<sup>16</sup>

## **2.7. Women's Response to the Conflict**

Having gained some experience and having faced the first disappointments it became difficult for the women to continue supporting the cause of war. Feeling responsible and guilty for the "enormous mistake" they participated in and contributed to, they could not stay passive victims of or spectators to the continuing wars either. "We have learned a bitter lesson, we hope we'll never repeat our mistakes again", says Marina Pagava, a displaced person from Abkhazia, one of the leaders of the women's movement in Georgia. "The most important change that happened at that time was the shift in our outlook and vision. Before that we thought that what happens in politics and in public life, is a matter only for the politicians, but after the tragic years of bloodshed, violence and human rights violations, we felt that WE women are equally

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<sup>15</sup> Manana Mebuke, War and Social Problems of Women Caused by War, Women's Initiative for Equality, March, 2000

<sup>16</sup> Manana Mebuke, War and Social Problems of Women Caused by War, Women's Initiative for Equality, March, 2000

responsible for what is going on. Lately we realised as well, that we can not deal with these complicated issues working alone and that we have to work together to find ways for getting out of the situation in which we have been trapped.<sup>17</sup>

There was a wide network of women's organisations during the communist time, which had branches in every town or village. The communist party supported it and women were encouraged or obliged to participate. This was one of the reasons why women developed a kind of 'allergy' to any participation in organisations or networks. But after the conflicts broke out because of desperation, or anger, or feeling of powerlessness when striving to cope with the hardship by themselves, some of them came back to the still existing structures trying to find ways to impact the conflict and stop the war. Many other women looked for alternatives and started organising in groups, building new kind of organisations, which had one main goal - resist the violence and help the victims of the war.

The armed conflicts and the process of transition very quickly weakened the economy of the South Caucasian states. Left without any support and unable to rely on social structures that no longer existed, women had to find ways to reorganise their lives. 'If women did not mobilise and did not find strength in themselves they could not survive'<sup>18</sup>, Manana Mebuke says of her experience in Georgia. Sharing and supporting each other in their survival strategies was the driving force that bonded women together.

After the cease-fire in the conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh, in many cases, because of the will to restore what had been lost and to pick up the pieces of what was left from the past life, many women tried to create links with others across the conflict divide and to find understanding among the women of the 'other' side. Some women's groups from the different sides of the divide in Georgia, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Nagorno Karabakh and Russia managed to find ways of meeting and talking to each other. 'Tell me how do you live' was the main theme, which made them regard each other not as enemies but as human beings, mothers, and wives. They were united by the fact that women were all victims of the political interests that led to war. "We found out that we all have the same destiny, the same severe problems and the same goal for a peaceful and stable Caucasus, which to achieve, we all have to work together"<sup>19</sup>, says one of the women who took part in these first attempts to rebuild the destroyed bridges of communications.

Solidarity was a crucial element in the women's peace-building strategies. Caucasian women began to identify common problems and to look for ways to respond to them. Firstly their activities were oriented towards humanitarian assistance for war affected people, but they were quickly re-oriented towards trauma-healing, rehabilitation for those groups most affected

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<sup>17</sup> Personal conversation with Marina Pagava, 2001

<sup>18</sup> Manana Mebuke, War and Social Problems of Women Caused by War, Women's Initiative for Equality, March, 2000

by the conflicts and reconciliation and confidence-building between the conflict-torn communities. They started developing common projects around their shared concerns over health, these included: the problems of refugees and displaced persons, child-care and cross-community trust and confidence-building.

Alliance-building across the divide has been a difficult and highly sensitive process. However, organisations like the Caucasus Women's League<sup>20</sup>, created by women from all the countries and regions in the Caucasus, have been established and have managed to work out a common strategy and action plan for future work.

Many of the women that became involved in the peace process were neither diplomats, nor politicians, rather many of them were teachers, doctors, journalists and house-wives in their 'previous' lives. The end of the communist system and the wars dramatically changed the everyday life of both women and men. Women, who had considerable routine and a secure life before the conflicts began, suddenly found themselves in a position where they had to struggle for survival. One of the ways to fight for survival was to join their efforts to impact the political processes in order to bring peace to the communities. Despite the fact that they didn't have any substantial experience in influencing political processes, women were the ones who started talking about peace in their communities and participated in the first steps for reconciliation. Women managed to create 'space for peace' in the war zones (Armenia and Azerbaijan) and were very actively involved in confidence-building activities as a part of the people's diplomacy process.

Women's participation in the people's diplomacy has shown that women possess qualities that allow them to find solutions when men have not. "We can talk about issues which are "forbidden" for the others. In the Caucasus for example men can't ask for peace, but women can. There are issues, some very sensitive and painful, that it is important to articulate and discuss. It helps us to find meeting-points, to see if a compromise is possible'<sup>21</sup> - one women commented, who participated in the people's diplomacy meetings.

Having devoted all their energy and efforts to support the reconciliation between the divided communities women saw the cease-fire agreements in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh as their achievement too. After the fighting ceased they could not return to their traditional status in the society. The war changed family relations, civic rules, values, people's status. 'After war women want to take new role in life. For example form non-governmental organisations and become active members of the society, create working groups for the development of the society. Often women aim to become leaders of parties and professional

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<sup>19</sup> Verbal Note, Women of South Caucasus Building Peace Conference, Tbilisi - Georgia, October, 2000

<sup>20</sup> Caucasus Women's League is a network of women's organisations from all the regions of North and South Caucasus as well as from the Russian Federation. It has been developing over the past two years as a result of the International Alert's confidence building work in the region.

unions, to fight for the defence of human rights and participate in the reconstruction process of the country'<sup>22</sup> says the Chairman of The Union of Wives of Invalids and Lost Warriors in Georgia.

Despite their active involvement in the 'people's diplomacy' and in grass-roots mobilisation when it comes to political participation and taking part in the peace-negotiations, women in the South Caucasus have felt largely powerless and marginalised. Although women expressed readiness to participate in the political life of their countries they have not had the opportunity to become active actors in it. Most of them do not have any previous experience in politics and do not have formal education in that field. Lacking the confidence to stand next to male a 'politician' and defend their right to take part in the political processes, they are easily excluded from the diplomatic negotiations and decision-making in the South Caucasian states.

## **2.8. Women's Exclusion From the Political Space and Decision Making in the South Caucasus**

Today women in the South Caucasus remain very much disconnected from political processes. There are few women in positions of power in the region. No women played a central role in the political run-up to the wars in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh; likewise no women participate in the ongoing political negotiations between the official parties involved in the conflict. The few women currently in positions of power at both the national and local levels are mainly the former communist elite, who perpetuate the old totalitarian governance practices and that have little interest in advancing women's rights.

One of the benefits that women gained from the communist system, was the very high degree of education that they obtained. All the evidence show that there is no educational gender gap in the states in the South Caucasus. However, the existing data could lead to the conclusion that in the past decade women failed to capitalize on this important asset. The lack of political experience and the gender bias was an obstacle for many women to find a place in the decision making after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The egalitarianism of the socialist ideology and the communist ideal of gender equality and equal participation of women in the governing system were more illusory than reality. There were imposed quotas for women elected in the state parliaments during the communist time and women represented 30 per cent of the members of parliament in the Caucasian states at that time. But since this practice was not based on real respect and recognition of women's leadership and decision making qualities it never became a tradition grounded on the understanding that women have equal rights and abilities to make decisions and govern.

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<sup>21</sup> International Alert, Eurasia Programme's archive

<sup>22</sup> Manana Mebuke, War and Social Problems of Women Caused by War, Women's Initiative for Equality, March, 2000

After the collapse of the communist system the percentage of women elected in the state parliaments dropped to somewhere between 5 and 12 per cent in the different South Caucasian countries. Compared to all other countries in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union, where women's participation in the parliaments is low but where there are many more women elected for the local councils, in the South Caucasus the grassroots participation of women in the local politics is even lower. In Azerbaijan for example women represent 12 per cent of the seats in the parliament and only 9 per cent of the seats in the local councils. Women are under-represented in the senior and middle level government posts as well. In the years after the conflicts broke out in the region women occupied only 4.2 per cent of the posts in the governments of the South Caucasian states.<sup>23</sup> Many people argue that the percentage may be low but that at least these women are sincere representatives of their communities in comparison to the 'communist' ones. Still the countries and the societies in the South Caucasus have a long way to go to achieve a critical mass of women in their parliaments that will provide opportunity for the female half of the population to have a say in policy making.

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<sup>23</sup> Suzanne LaFont, *Male Economies and the Status of Women in the Post-Communist Countries*, 1999

## Part III. Current Security Issues in South Caucasus

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### 3.1. Lack of Individual Security due to a Weakened State System

Recently achieved independence from the Soviet Union, distorted by the internal armed conflicts and fear of external threats and weakened by the process of economic transition, the states in the South Caucasus have lost the ability to guarantee the security and the rights of their citizens. Additionally, in a situation of 'no war, no peace' the states have been concerned rather more with state security than with that of the individual. In many cases in the South Caucasus the main provider of security for the people in the region has been not the states but external actors.

Inevitably, due to external threats and internal conflict, the governments in the South Caucasus have focused on increasing their military strength, which is a potential source of further insecurity of the individual citizens. None of the states, or the break away territories, have absolute democratic control over their armed forces. Even where controls exist, they are not democratic and cannot foster long-term stability. There is therefore a serious danger of unauthorised groups taking control over the armed forces and sparking a war of uncontrolled intensity.<sup>24</sup> The functioning of the security sector of the states in a non-democratic manner is a risk for the security situation throughout the region. Although there have been some debates on democratic reform in the army and the police, women have never been considered as being able to play a role in the process. The main institutions that are supposed to provide security for the individuals in the state, are almost solely 'male' structures. A gender approach and addressing the different security needs of men and women have not been a part of their agenda.

The physical security and safety of the people, guaranteed civil, political and cultural rights, better access to education and health service, and reduced unemployment are issues that the states have failed to effectively address in their policies. Mainstreaming gender and considering the different needs of men and women in post-conflict reconstruction remain one of the main gaps in the legislation of the states in the South Caucasus.

### 3.2. Poverty

The last decade has been a transitional time for all the states and break away territories in the South Caucasus and as in any other transitional process it has been characterised by general insecurity. The process of reorganisation from a state to a market economy can be

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<sup>24</sup> Studies in Contemporary History and Security Policy; Volume 3: International Security Challenges in a Changing World; *Regional Security Issues and Conflicts in the Caucasus and the Caspian Regions* by Mustafa Aydin

considered as a human security issue itself. Due to the conflicts, the economic situation in the countries of the South Caucasus are even more complex. The processes of both post-conflict reconstruction and transition from one type of economy to another have been accompanied by the rise of insecurity for both women and men.

Except for Azerbaijan, which is a potentially rich country because of its energy deposits, most of the countries in the region have little to count on for long-term income and economic development. As they are mostly war-torn and just beginning to recover, the challenges they face are considerable. With ethnic strife, enforced migration, economic deprivation and large-scale unemployment experienced throughout the region, the South Caucasus is largely dependent on foreign economic assistance from the West.<sup>25</sup>

There is a significant decline in the economic development of the South Caucasian states after 1989. About 90 per cent of the population (with some exemptions in Azerbaijan) live below the official poverty line. The GDP in the states in the region fell by over 50 per cent. Unemployment has drastically increased after the end of the conflicts. More than half of the jobs lost were held by women, who today represent approximately 60 per cent of the unemployed. The level of salaries also fell sharply, which make maintaining two incomes in a household a matter of survival. This puts many women, regardless of their qualification and experience, in a position of accepting any jobs in order to contribute to the incomes of their families. Due to the conflict there are thousands of displaced people, the majority of which are women and children.

One of the traditional roles of the women in the South Caucasus is as 'carers'. They take care of the family, the children, the disabled and the ill and they perceive that as their duty as women: 'We must love and help those who went through the hardship of war and fighting, got crippled or lost family members'<sup>26</sup>. Due to the conflict and drastic transition processes, gender relations have changed. There has also been a shift in the traditional division of labour. Since many of the men became unemployed women had to expand their role of carers and look for any possible ways to support their families and increased number of dependants. They had to overcome their pride and to take low status jobs, which men most often refused to do. Due to the conflicts women faced increased workload, stress and at times humiliation while fighting for the survival of their families.

Women in the South Caucasus countries generally tend to be concentrated in occupations, which are low paid. They largely hold jobs in the public sector, - education, health care, public administration and social services. A considerable part of the female population depends on state enterprises where salaries are much lower than those in private companies. A secretary in a private company earns 8-10 times more than a professor at the university and discrepancies

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<sup>25</sup> Studies in Contemporary History and Security Policy; Volume 3: International Security Challenges in a Changing World; *Regional Security Issues and Conflicts in the Caucasus and the Caspian Regions* by Mustafa Aydin

grow larger. Due to the economic crisis and weakness of the economy, the state dependent public sector is shrinking every year, leading to salary reductions or redundancies. The gender bias in the recruitment to private companies is an obstacle preventing women from taking up jobs in the private sector. The gender discrepancy in the wages is significant in all the South Caucasian states and break away territories. Data shows that women earn about 75 per cent of a man's wage.<sup>27</sup>

The situation is even more difficult for those women who are sole supporters of their families or that have become widows because of the war. 'The Government must realise that women and children victims of war need special care and attention. The government gives medical benefits, pensions and other allowances to war veterans and in many cases civilian victims are left without any support from the government'.<sup>28</sup>

### **3.3. Displacement**

Although the problem of the IDPs has been in existence in the South Caucasus since the conflicts broke out at the beginning of the 1990s, today it remains among the most pressing social, economic, and political issues facing the region. As a result of the three conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh some 1.5 million people in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan have been forced from their homes.<sup>29</sup>

The prolonged situation of displacement has led to extreme and miserable life conditions for almost 100 per cent of the displaced. Most of them do not have permanent jobs and have to live on several dollars a month, which the state grants them. (In Georgia for example the state support for the displaced is less than 6 dollars a month while a loaf of bread costs 0.5 dollars). Access to health care, education and income-generating activities for the displaced has been insufficient. High unemployment rates among the displaced and limited access to agricultural activities have seriously limited their capacity to sustain their livelihood.

The official data shows that the majority of those employed in the South Caucasus are men. Research carried out by UNHCR and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) showed that 64 per cent of the people of the displaced community in Georgia are unemployed. The majority of the displaced women had to give up their professions. Highly qualified specialists are engaged in non-professional work. Most of them are forced to provide for their families by street peddling, which has detrimental physiological as well as economic effects. UNHCR, NRC and Danish refugee Council's (DRC) field surveys confirm that displaced women have been more successful at adapting and have become the main source of income in most displaced families.

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<sup>26</sup> Manana Mebuke, War and Social Problems of Women Caused by War, Women's Initiative for Equality, March, 2000

<sup>27</sup> The Library of Congress, Country Studies

<sup>28</sup> Manana Mebuke, War and Social Problems of Women Caused by War, Women's Initiative for Equality, March, 2000

Health problems are also a serious issue for the women in displaced communities. The physical health of the women living in exile has been seriously affected. The rate of illness and death of pregnant women in the region are three times higher than the international standard. Infectious diseases have become widespread. Instances of cardiovascular and gynaecological diseases are also frequent.

Apart from the serious economic and health problems, the lack of any free time for the displaced women is also an issue that they highlight as seriously affecting their psychological health. Discrimination against women within and outside the family is an issue for most of the women both in the displaced and the local communities. Women, due to the difficult economic situation in the region, are forced to earn a living on the street the entire day and afterwards have to perform household duties. In that sense many of the women in the region exist in intolerable conditions. Compared to men, they suffer from a deficit of time, freedom and opportunities for self-realisation. Women spend most of their 'free' time doing their household duties while men maintain their role as household decision makers.

A large number of national NGOs, as well as most UN agencies, bilateral aid agencies and several international NGOs have provided extensive support to the displaced communities, but the future status of the autonomous regions and the return of the displaced populations remain a key obstacle in the negotiations between the parties involved. The Representative of the UN Secretary General on Internally Displaced Persons, Dr Francis Deng, in a visit to the South Caucasus in May 2000, represented his conclusions and recommendations to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights at its session in March-April 2001 (UN 17 May 2000). Because of the protracted situation of "no-war-no-peace", the character of the international support has shifted from emergency assistance to development support. Recently the Government of Georgia, for example, announced the launch of a 'New Approach' to displaced persons assistance in Georgia. The program recognises the displaced persons' right to be treated equally and to enjoy the same socio-economic rights as all Georgian citizens. It also aims to enhance self-sustainability of the displaced through income generating projects and other kinds of support. The right of the displaced persons to return to their regions of origin once the security situation improves remains.

### **3.4 Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons**

The South Caucasus is one of the regions, which is severely affected by the proliferation of small arms. While in other regions where this problem exists it has already been addressed to some extent, in the South Caucasus there has been a little progress. The wide availability and flow of small arms and light weapons in the region is a serious problem for the states, which are

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<sup>29</sup> Womenaid International, Conflict in the Caucasus, A Background Briefing, 2000

unable to guarantee a basic degree of security from violence to their citizens. The combination of politically unresolved conflicts, weak government and widespread criminal activities foster the spread of small arms among the population. The perception of the governments in the region and of the main local actors is that this problem cannot be dealt with before the conflicts in the region are resolved.

At the borders and in the conflict zones, the local border-control forces, UN observers and peacekeeping forces are facing problems with small arms proliferation and smuggling almost every day, but they do not have the mandate to deal with the issue. The UN Observer Mission in Georgia for example is mandated only to verify that heavy military equipment is not reintroduced in the restricted weapons zone.<sup>30</sup>

The control at the borders is weak and the existence of regions with unclear status (Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno Karabakh) makes the control and the monitoring of the situation difficult. There are four military bases in the region (within Georgia/Abkhazia), over which the local state authorities have no legal means of control. At one time or another, directly or indirectly, the South Caucasian states, as well as Russia have supported the sites involved in the conflicts with supplies of light weapons. Illegal access to light weapons is not difficult and the availability of second-hand or 'surplus' arms of Russian origin make the weapons cheap and affordable. In addition, weapon possession is a tradition in the Caucasian culture and this has been noted many times as a fertile cultural soil for the proliferation of small arms in the region. It is necessary to make clear that men carry weapons and that it is not appropriate for a woman to carry weapons even for self defence or smuggling. There also has not been any research done on the different experiences of men and women as a result of the increased possession of arms among the civilian population in the South Caucasus.<sup>31</sup>

Several reasons fuel the demand for small arms in the region. Wars and trade restrictions have fostered conditions for the flourishing of criminal groups and have provided easy access to arms. The decrease in the living standards has led to a drastic growth in criminal activity and has created a need for possession of small arms for self-protection. In Armenia, for example, during the conflict the overall crime rate in 1991 rose by 11.5 per cent compared to the previous year. The following year, in 1992, this had increased to 24.8 per cent.<sup>32</sup> The highest growth in 'major' crimes was in murder and armed robbery. Many of the victims of robbery were women. Instances of rape have also increased drastically. State legitimacy and the legitimacy of the mechanisms for security are broadly questioned by groups among the population, but mainly by women who are the ones mostly vulnerable to the crimes.

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<sup>30</sup> Ermina Van Hoye, Ian Davis, Small Arms – Large Measures, Curbing Arms Transfers as a Conflict Prevention Strategy in the South Caucasus, East-West Institute and Saferworld Roundtable, Tbilisi, Georgia, August 2000

<sup>31</sup> Ermina Van Hoye, Ian Davis, Small Arms – Large Measures, Curbing Arms Transfers as a Conflict Prevention Strategy in the South Caucasus, East-West Institute and Saferworld Roundtable, Tbilisi, Georgia, August 2000

### 3.5. Priority Issues for Women in the Region

- **Exclusion from the peace negotiations**

Women are excluded from the peace processes and this is one of the critical issues that they most often addressed. According to them, in those rare cases when a woman is invited to attend events related to the peace-process, she is invited as a guest or observer, not as a part of the official delegation.

- **Socio-economic security**

Another concern is the socio-economic security of the people in the country in the process of post-conflict reconstruction. People feel disempowered as they do not see real opportunities for them to provide social security for their families. Both men and women suffer from misery and poverty. They have to rely on drastic self-sustaining strategies, such as renting out their houses. In the current economic climate in the country most of the people live below the poverty line. The majority of displaced persons live in worse conditions, because they have even fewer opportunities and they do not have property at their disposal.

Most women in the region are now much more interested in the everyday economic survival confronting their families and communities than they are in political questions. In political terms they feel abandoned and betrayed by their governments. However, they highlight two main issues: meeting the immediate everyday needs of their families and communities and speeding up the negotiations at the official level with the goal of reaching political solutions to the conflicts, so that the affected communities can rebuild their lives again.

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<sup>32</sup> [Http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/)

## **Part IV. Conclusions and Recommendations**

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### **4.1. Human Security and Security of Women**

This report looks at the issues affecting women's security and peacebuilding activities from a human security perspective. Although the approach places the focus of the research on the safety of the individual it has to be admitted that the existing understanding of human security does not take into account the gender specific security needs of women and men. There has not been a comprehensive analysis so far of the differences of women's and men's perceptions of human security. Without a better understanding of the concept and its local, national and global gender dimensions, the ability to enhance women's (and men's) human security in a comprehensive and holistic manner will remain ineffectual. The question, 'what is different about women's and men's security?' should be answered in more detail by future research on the issues affecting women in the South Caucasus region. There is a need for eliciting women's perspectives and understanding of security and developing recommendations on how gender security interests should be addressed. Insecurity caused by gender specific responsibilities, gender inequality in access and control over resources and power, violence against women and lack of women's human rights are issues that could be explored further. IA's Women Building Peace Campaign could play a facilitating role for such research and in its dissemination to relevant policy makers and practitioners.

### **4.2 Women's Participation in Decision Making in the South Caucasus**

There is a need for women's participation in decision making to be built from the grassroots through local politics. Women have had even less success in local elections than in national ones, which demonstrates that the leadership potential at grass roots level that could be a building block for future participation in higher decision-making levels doesn't exist in the countries in the South Caucasus. Another obstacle is the fact that women do not have enough confidence to participate equally with men in the political processes. Women do not vote for women candidates in the elections in the region. As a result women are disempowered and marginalised in terms of policy and decision-making. There is a need for building leadership and empowering women to take part in the political processes in their countries. Awareness raising, discussing gender issues with both women and men in the South Caucasian societies and capacity building for key women's groups and coalitions could be activities on which the Campaign and the Eurasia Programme could focus in future.

The issue of women's inclusion in the official delegations leading the peace talks should be addressed effectively at national and regional levels. A regional meeting bringing women from the South Caucasian states and break away territories together with policy makers could be an appropriate way of discussing the problem and identifying solutions such as introducing quotas

for women in the delegations and assuring a key role for women in the implementation of the peace agreements. A petition supported by women from both sides of the conflicts to their governments and similar activities for raising awareness could be an appropriate way of working to change the status quo.

#### **4.3. Potential Partners for Advancing the Project**

Civil society organisation in the region is nascent and still developing. There are many non-governmental organisations, but only a small proportion of them are really active and well established. Women's organisations are, nonetheless, very active, some of them are well organised, but almost none of them have done any serious advocacy work. Generally, in the region there are almost no women's organisations which have been engaged in the monitoring of policy implementation, or that have been involved in any other serious policy work. Some of the biggest NGOs that have been established mainly as humanitarian NGOs after the wars have incorporated in their work some monitoring or advocacy activities and work broadly on security issues. There are also some NGOs in the region (not specifically women's NGOs) that have worked on issues relating to women and security and have done some monitoring or advocacy work. Such organisations should be considered as partners in Women Building Peace's work.

International Alert's Eurasia Programme has been working with organisations and establishing partnerships in the region for several years. A women's branch has been established in one of the projects of IA's Eurasia programme, with joint projects led by local partner organisations in both the North and the South Caucasus. This has resulted in the formation of the NGO Caucasus Forum (a network of NGOs working for peace in the Caucasus, constituted in July 1998) and in the creation of a network of women's organisations known as the Caucasus Women's League (CWL). The CWL is made up of women leaders of non-governmental organisations from all the regions of the North and South Caucasus working on a variety of issues related to conflict transformation, peacebuilding and gender equality. IA's Women Building Peace Campaign should continue to build on these relationships and work with the existing partners and should also be open to collaboration with other relevant organisations and authorities.

#### **4.4. Regional Conflict Sensitive Advocacy Approach and Working with the Governments in the Region**

The state structures in the region are complex, consisting of three official states and three break away territories. Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, according to international law, are regarded as parts of one state, the Republic of Georgia. However, Abkhazia and South Ossetia

have proclaimed themselves independent republics and they operate largely as such, although they are not formally recognised. The case of Nagorno-Karabakh is similar.

In order to have an impact on the peace on the ground, the project implementation should encompass all of these areas and should involve working with women's groups from all of the regions in the South Caucasus. In order to facilitate constructive dialogue civil society actors from the North Caucasus may be included in some activities of the project. In order to contribute to the process of conflict transformation and peacebuilding our advocacy approach should be conflict sensitive and should focus on working in a regional coalition (including all recognised and non-recognised entities) and on issues, that unite people across the conflict divide and that particularly contribute to increasing sustainable peace in the region. Otherwise there could be a danger of escalating the tensions in the region as a result of any advocacy and policy work. Similarly to reduce the risks of confrontation the governments of the states in the South Caucasus should be fully informed and involved in the activities of the project.

For the purposes of this project the definition of `advocacy` should be `constructive dialogue and critical engagement between civil society, governments and the international community in order to address, in an inclusive and gender-sensitive manner, the issues of conflict transformation and human security`.

#### **4.5 Terminology**

Since the refugee/IDP issue is very sensitive, we should be careful in the terminology we use. For example, the displaced people are considered `Internally Displaced` by Georgia and `Refugees` by Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The most appropriate term, which could be used, could be `displaced` persons as all parties seem comfortable with this term.

#### **4.6. International Instruments and Non-recognised States**

The break away territories of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh have proclaimed themselves independent states, but they are not recognised by UN and the international community. Abkhazia and South Ossetia do not recognise Georgian law and Nagorno Karabakh does not recognise Azeri law, hence they do not necessarily see themselves as accountable to international instruments and agreements signed or ratified by the Georgian or Azeri states. As break away territories, they have not signed or acceded to any of the international instruments for protection of human rights and women's rights. Some of the questions, which will need to be considered during the course of the project, will focus on how the rights and security of women can be protected in such a situation.

#### **4.7. Displacement**

The opportunities for the displaced population to settle down in their new locations or to return to their previous towns are very limited and unclear. The Governments and the communities in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh are reluctant to accept the displaced back. They fear that this will put in danger their future independence (since they will become a minority in their own state). They are also worried that they cannot assure the security of the returnees. There are also many other important issues related to this - the property of the displaced and the changed situation in the multi-ethnic regions among others. The communities and the civil society in all the states share these fears. The issue of returning the displaced is a 'taboo' subject in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno Karabakh, there is no legislation related to the possible return of the displaced or of assuring their security, and there are no discussions on this. In fact the issue is avoided. The issue of displaced people is politically controversial. It has to be approached in its complexity and from all legitimate points of view. Sensitising and awareness raising in the areas from which the displaced persons originate is a way to address this problematic issue.

#### **4.8. Capacities and Advocacy/Policy Skills at Local Level**

There is a need among civil society organisations on the ground for capacity building in advocacy skills for policy change. There is a current lack of basic knowledge of such skills. Even simple information material, manuals giving answers to basic questions (What is advocacy, policy work? 'How-to's of the process? etc.) could be beneficial. One of the best options to address this need is for the WBP to work jointly with IA's Eurasia programme and to organise a training in advocacy skills for the women's groups participating in our consultations. This should take place during the first days of the planned consultations and discussions around the Resolution 1325.

Specific sections could be included on advocacy in the context of the break away territories in the Advocacy Toolkit that the WBP programme is developing. Women in such territories need practical information on how to advocate for their rights when the territories have not signed up to any international instruments and are not recognised by the international community and internationally agreed legislation.

#### **4.9. Multi-Level Policy and Advocacy Work**

Policies on gender equality have been put in place in all official states in the South Caucasus but the governments fail to implement them effectively. Civil society groups also fail

to assist the governments by providing recommendations for effective implementation. Substantial policy and advocacy work with relevant civil society groups should be done within the countries on developing effective mechanisms for implementation and the monitoring of existing policies.

There is a need for initiating and facilitating dialogue between women's groups and local governments. The dialogue so far is sporadic and does not lead to any change in the status of women in the region. Women's advocacy work needs support, mainly with know-how and external expertise, so that women can gain the confidence and skills needed to advocate for their rights at national, regional and international levels.

One of the existing policy-gaps is international legislation providing protection of women in non-recognised states. Ways of assuring existence of gender equality in the "states" which are not de-jure, and hence have not signed up to any international instruments should be discussed at the international level. UN and OSCE should be sensitised and be held accountable for monitoring the situation and the violations in such states. Mechanisms for interventions and sanctions should be put in place.

Following the adoption of UNSC Resolution 1325 and the passage of EP Resolution on the Gender Aspects of Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding substantial work could be done at national, regional and global levels for advancing women's role in peace negotiations in the region. Sections on gender equality and mainstreaming should be included in the annual reports of the UNSG Representative in Georgia, the UNOMIG Mission in Abkhazia, the OSCE Mission in South Ossetia, the OSCE Mission in Nagorno Karabakh. Local women's organisations should participate in the monitoring work and in developing recommendations. Gender aspects of the existing systems for early warning and conflict prevention also need to be developed.

There is an existing need for systematic information on women's status in the states in the South Caucasus. Issues such as women's exclusion from the official peace-process are not sufficiently researched and women's groups lack facts and arguments for their advocacy work. A policy report on women's exclusion from the political processes and official peace negotiations will be extremely useful for advocacy purposes at the national and regional level.

Gender equality in the process of post-conflict reconstruction and transition in the South Caucasus is a critical issue and should be addressed at all levels and by all institutions. The issue is currently overlooked by most of the actors involved in the process.



## Appendix 1

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***Letter to UN Secretary General Agreed and Adopted by the Participants to the  
Consultative Meeting on UNSC Resolution 1325***

***Sochi, The Russian Federation***

***March 9, 2002***

To: Kofi Annan  
United Nations Secretary-General  
UN Secretariat  
New York

9<sup>th</sup> March, 2002

Dear Secretary-General

Congratulations on your sterling efforts to raise the visibility of women and ensure women's effective participation in issues of peace and security. We particularly welcome the unanimous adoption of UN Security Council 1325 in October 2000.

Secretary-General, it has been more than 10 years since the outbreak of conflicts in the Caucasus that are as yet unresolved. These conflicts have resulted in the extreme suffering of the population including economic blockades, displacement of the population, aggravation of the socio-economic problems, destruction of the unique identity of the Caucasus region and much more. The cost has been enormous and especially to women.

Despite being foremost among those affected by the loss and the difficulty of the social burden, women continue to be marginalized and excluded from decision-making processes at the highest levels. These realities deeply contradict the spirit and the letter of Resolution 1325, which unambiguously calls for more active involvement of women in all areas of political and social life, including the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts.

During a consultative meeting of women's groups from the North and South Caucasus and the Russian Federation and other organisations that was collaborative organised in Sochi (March 3-10, 2002) by International Alert, the London based conflict prevention non-governmental organisation, we discussed in minute detail the tenets of the document.

The Caucasus Women's League (CWL), formalised during this meeting to unite non-governmental organisations from different areas in the region developed the following recommendations and agreed that they should be shared with you for your urgent attention.

1. Paragraph I of the resolution urges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all levels of decision-making in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict. In accordance with this paragraph, the CWL requests that you take action to include members of women's peace-building organisations in the region on official delegations for peace negotiations and in the development of the peace processes on-going in the region.

2. In accordance with paragraph 8 and its concerns, we urge the Secretary-General to ensure that the UN system provides adequate and sustainable resources for women's peace-building initiatives in the region i.e. equal treatment for both recognised states and non-recognised entities. We believe that such action will contribute to the strengthening of the civil society and reinforce women's confidence to continue their activities.

3. Paragraph 16 invites you to undertake a study on the impact of armed conflict on women and girls and all that this entails. The CWL is aware that the study is already underway and we offer our congratulation and support. We believe that a generalised and systematic analysis of the results of this study will be important for the Caucasus and that it will contribute to better conflict transformation and post-conflict rehabilitation work.

The Caucasus Women's League expresses its hope that this letter will result in the UN Security Council as well as the UN system as a whole will pay more specific attention to the status of women in the Caucasus and to their political, social, economic and civil rights.

*Agreed and Adopted by  
the participants to the Consultative meeting on resolution 1325  
Sochi, The Russian Federation  
March 9, 2002*

## Appendix 2

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***Recommendations of the Women Participants in the Regional Consultative Meeting in  
the Caucasus on Women Peace and Security (UNSC Resolution 1325)***

***Sochi, The Russian Federation***

***March 9, 2002***

### **Recommendations**

- The governments of the Caucasian states and break away territories should be urged by the international community to include women peace-activists in the official delegations leading the peace negotiations;
- Concrete and quick measures should be taken by all international and regional parties involved in the resolution of the conflicts in the Caucasus to support and assure women's participation in the process of peace negotiations. UN and the UN representatives in the region, who participate in the facilitation of the peace negotiation, should assure that women are included and given the opportunity to play a key role in the official delegations leading the negotiations;
- Women should participate in the development of mechanisms for implementation of the peace agreements in the countries affected by the conflicts;
- Specific mechanisms, flexible for the different cases, should be developed for the women from break away territories to be fully involved in the peace-process;
- Specific measures should be considered to support women's peacebuilding initiatives in the region and especially in the break away territories. UN should show tangible commitment and provide concrete support for women's peacebuilding activities in the region, regardless of the status of the territories;
- A comprehensive study on the impact of armed conflicts on women and girls, the role of women in peace-building and the gender dimension of peace processes and conflict resolution should be carried out in all the conflict and post-conflict zones in the region. Women from the region should participate actively in conducting the study and the results should be widely disseminated;
- Mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of the UNSC Resolution 1325: Women, Peace and Security should be developed. Standards and mechanisms for implementation of the Resolution in the break away states should also be developed;

- Specific attention should be paid to displaced women and their security;
- UNSC Resolution 1325 should be broadly publicised among both women's groups and policy makers. Women's groups should be supported in popularising the instrument at different levels of the society in the Caucasian states and break away territories;

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