

The Role of Women in Achieving Peace and Maintaining International Security NGO Statement -read out at the ARIA FORMULA Meeting of the UNSC on October 23rd 2000.

The NGO coalition on Women and International Peace and Security, and our partners world-wide would like to thank the Governments of Namibia and Jamaica for taking this opportunity to bring the issue of women, conflict and peace building to the attention of the United Nations Security Council.

We wholeheartedly support the recommendations stated in the Windhoek Declaration of May 31 2000 on "Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multi-dimensional Peace Support Operations," and Security Council Statement 6816 of March 8 2000 acknowledging that 'peace is inextricably linked with equality between men and women'.

We speak today on behalf of the thousands of women, and the hundreds of grassroots groups and local organisations that struggle every day to prevent war, and to bring peace and security to their ravaged communities in the midst of the most horrendous conflicts.

Afghanistan, Burundi, Colombia, DR Congo and Kosovo, Kashmir, Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone, Cyprus, and East Timor.

You know only too well, that in every case, more and more women have been caught at the centre of these conflicts. You know that in ethnic, religious and identity wars, sexual assault and the rape of women and girls are being used deliberately as the most powerful of stealth weapons of mass destruction, wrenching out the souls of families for generations.

You know that women are also the indirect victims of warfare, and economic violence. Militias attack their homes. They are forcibly displaced into refugee camps. Often women are stripped of their belongings and forced into prostitution, trafficking and criminal activities, just to survive.

Peacekeepers, and humanitarian agencies and personnel know this is happening. Yet time and again they have failed to protect women and girls. In many regions, women they have also endured decades of military occupation, where they are in constant threat of sexual violence.

But, you also know that women are neither simply victims, nor are they passive in the face of war. As you acknowledged in the March 8th statement (6816) "during times of armed conflict, the role of women is crucial in preserving social order, and as peace educators both in their families and in their societies, thereby playing an important role in fostering a culture of peace in strife-torn communities and societies."

In spite of all they endure, in towns and villages across the war zones, women are picking up the pieces and carrying on. They continue to care for the young, the old and the sick in their communities. They shoulder the burdens of their families singlehandedly--with no help from the outside world.

More than that, we all know that even in the worst and most dangerous of circumstances, women have shown their courage and leadership as problem solvers and peacemakers, reaching across the conflict divide to seek resolution and common ground.

In South Africa, black and white women joined together to fight against apartheid. In Latin America, mothers, wives and sisters dared to question the military juntas about their 'disappeared' relatives. In Mali and Liberia, women rallied together to call for disarmament. They stood at arms deposition stations across their countries, taking away the deadly kalashnikovs and M-16s from the men and boys. In the Philippines, women run peace zones around villages protecting their children. In Bosnia women from across ethnic lines are working in parliament to rebuild their communities. In

Burundi the women's coalition is struggling to bring the voices of those most affected by war to the peace table. In Sudan, women from both sides have opened new avenues for peace talks. In the Middle East, Israeli and Palestinian women have been working for years at the grassroots not only building the trust needed for sustainable peace, but also warning of the dangers of excluding all sectors of society, including civil society from the implementation of the peace process.

But as you asserted on March 8th, "although women play an important role in conflict resolution, peacekeeping and peacebuilding, they are still under-represented in decision-making in regard to conflict."

Their work is rarely acknowledged, nor recognised. Time and again, when it comes to peace deals and high level negotiations, women are excluded and marginalised. Even though women head the majority of households after war, and know what is needed to rebuild peace, they are neglected by their own governments and the international community.

You also acknowledged that "if women are to play an equal part in security and maintaining peace, they must be empowered politically and economically, and represented adequately at all levels of decision-making, both at the pre-conflict stage and during hostilities, as well as at the point of peacekeeping, peacebuilding, reconciliation and reconstruction."

Women around the world look to and support the United Nations as the world's peace organisation founded to eradicate the scourge of war. Preventing war is impossible while preparation for war consumes such an enormous amount of the world's wealth. It is well documented that the human family needs one quarter, just one quarter, of global military spending to provide food, health care, housing, education, clean renewable energy, and environmental restoration, including the removing all landmines and dismantling all nuclear weapons. Reducing global military spending by 5% each year for 5 years would free up half a billion dollars a day.

The founders of the UN saw a particular role for the Security Council in establishing a system for the regulation of armament under Article 26. We feel that the Council is more able than ever to fulfil this role to address the primary root causes of war which is the actual preparation for war: militarism. The permanent war economy that has existed since the end of World War II has created military dependent communities, industries, cultures and economies.

Of course, converting from a culture of war to a culture of peace will require massive investment, but much less investment than has been ploughed into the rampant militarism we see around the world today.

When women talk about disarmament, they are certainly talking about the imperative to dismantle weapons of war, from weapons of mass destruction to the deadly small arms and landmines that are permeating their lives. But they are also talking about the need to disarm our economies, our cultures, our minds, our logic and our assumptions.

We want to eradicate war to save civilians. We also want to stop what war does to men. Men who have fought in war, say it is neither glorious nor heroic work. We see and live with men who live with the fear and trauma of war, years later with every helicopter that flies by, or the sound of every storm or even car that backfires. The violence that occurs in households and communities across the world as men try to live in peace with what they have done and seen in wars, is a significant contributor to the massive statistics of domestic and social violence, as well as depression and mental health disorders that we see around us.

We believe that as long as war is considered a legitimate political option, civilians and our societies are at increasing risk. As long as soldiers are only trained for war, and have insufficient training for peacekeeping, there is always a high risk that they contribute to the exploitation of women, through prostitution and the spread of HIV/AIDS in the world's poorest nations. Of course this goes against every code of conduct set by the United Nations, and offends our expectations of peacekeepers whose prime responsibility should be the security and protection of civilians.

We ask you now, not only to consider the plight of women in armed conflict, to give the protection needed, and end the culture of impunity that exists around crimes committed against women in war. But we also ask you to use, to the utmost, the talents and experience of women and civil society in conflict prevention, resolution, reconciliation and reconstruction. As you broaden your concept of security, we urge you to include the insights, experience, indeed expertise, of women in matters of daily human security. We ask you to acknowledge that non-violent conflict resolution has become an imperative of human survival.

In March you stated that "peace is inextricably linked with equality between women and men." You affirmed that "the equal access and full participation of women in power structures and their full involvement in all efforts for the prevention and resolution of conflicts are essential for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security."

We agree with you wholeheartedly. So long as women do not have an equal role in all security matters there is every likelihood that war will continue to put all the Human family at risk.

So today, we ask you, the current custodians of the UN Security Council, to set yet another precedent, by taking the first steps in ensuring that these words and concerns become a reality in the lives of the women who suffer and struggle through war every day.

In terms of Conflict Prevention, and conflict resolution measures, we ask the Council to:

1. Appoint more women as special representatives and envoys to conflict regions, and senior gender experts to all missions, towards attaining 50/50 gender distribution in D-1 and senior levels of the UN Secretariat;
2. Include senior level representation on gender and armed conflict on the Exec. Com. on Peace and Security;
3. Include gender advisors and a mechanism for civil society to have input to the Information and Strategic Analysis Secretariat (ISAS);
4. Ensure that in negotiations for ceasefire and/or peace agreements, all UN-sanctioned third party negotiators, especially all SRSGs are mandated to ensure indigenous women are an integral part of the negotiating team and process, and that gender issues are placed on the agenda and fully addressed in the agreements reached;
5. Encourage and require other third party mediators/facilitators and warring factions to also ensure consultation with and the participation of women's groups and civil society in peace processes;

6. Require the Dept. of Political Affairs to establish and maintain a database of expert women peacemakers from around the world with experience in conflict prevention/mediation and traditional peacemaking processes to be drawn on for missions and peace processes.

* For the prevention of crimes against women and the role and mandate of peacekeeping and peace support operations: we ask the Council to take action to:

1. Ensure that all UN Security Council resolutions setting up or extending peacekeeping/support operations has a clear mandate on gender mainstreaming, and the protection of women and girls, against all sexual violence, abduction, prostitution, trafficking and threats imposed by military, paramilitary, peacekeeping and other groups;
2. Ensure that all mandates for Peace Support Operations refer to the provisions of CEDAW and relevant international legal instruments where applicable;
3. Ensure that the human rights components of PKO are fully staffed and required to integrate a women's rights approach in all documents and reporting.
4. Create a Gender Unit at DPKO headquarters, and routinely include gender units in field missions with senior staff with direct access to senior decision-makers; and local gender experts linked to indigenous women's groups, funded under regular budgets;
5. Appoint a senior gender adviser in DPKO to serve as a gender focal point for field missions, funded under regular budgets and filled as a matter of urgency.
6. Require DPKO to develop, operationalise and maintain a comprehensive database on female candidates with military and civilian qualifications, building on the Lichtenstein Initiative and organise a standby pool of gender experts ready for emergency deployment;
7. Include gender advisors in the Brahimi-proposed Integrated Mission Task Forces;
8. Review and update PK Standard Operating Procedures/Code of Conduct to address gender issues adequately;
9. Call on the SG to establish a standard means of ensuring accountability for violations of international law committed by peacekeeping personnel against civilians.
10. Ensure that all DPKO personnel (male & female) at headquarters and in the field have gender sensitivity training including in the protection, rights and needs of women and girls, PKO Code of Conduct, CEDAW, Convention on the Rights of the Child, related international law and local culture, history and social norms.

11. Call on the DPKO to support Member states and regional organisations with gender awareness guidelines, training and materials to be incorporated into national training programmes for military and civilian police in preparation for deployment;

12. Include 50% women in all reconciliation, peacekeeping, peace-enforcement, peacebuilding, and conflict preventive posts - including fact-finding and observer missions;

13. Appoint UN Protection Advisers charged with mobilizing immediate community and international support for the protection of women and girls experiencing violence;

* In terms of Peace Support Operations and Post-Conflict Programmes, we ask the Council to ensure that under the mandate and actions of all UN peace support operations:

1. That all women and men benefit equally from the reconstruction initiatives, specifically that female ex-combatants and civilians are not neglected or excluded from demobilisation and reconstruction programmes;

2. That refugee and IDP women participate fully in the design and management of humanitarian activities, so that they have equal access & benefits of all services, including education & micro-enterprise programmes;

3. Require all UN peace support operations to ensure gender-disaggregated data collection and the monitoring and analysis for conflict-affected adolescents and women.

* As a means of monitoring the Follow-up to, and Implementation of the Outcomes of the Open Session, we ask the Council to:

1. Require a Secretary General's Report on Gender Mainstreaming within the UN system, particularly in Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding;

2. Establish an Independent Expert Panel to report on a) Women's Role in Peacebuilding b) Humanitarian Issues and Protection of Women during Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding, c) gender, post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation;

3. Routinely give special consideration to women affected by armed conflict through requesting that all field reports to the SG and SG's reports contain gender component;

4. Require a follow-up consultation between UNSC and NGOs involved in women, armed conflict and peacebuilding issues within a year.

The wars we witness today reach into people's homes and communities. The burden of preventing war and making peace cannot be shouldered by the United Nations system alone. NGOs, and groups world-wide are committed to sharing this burden with governments, UN agencies and the Security Council.

Today we call upon the Council to accept us, the peoples of the United Nations, as equal partners in our struggles to protect the most vulnerable communities in the world, to build sustainable peace, and to eliminate the scourge of war.

Thank you.