

Northern Ireland

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(May 2016)

The conflict in Northern Ireland (1969 to 2001) resulted in 3,526 deaths of which 1,855 were civilians. Despite this, the women of Northern Ireland have not received the protection and participation guaranteed in UNSCR 1325. The government of Margaret Thatcher (1976) insisted the "Troubles" should not be seen as a conflict but rather as a crime and terrorist scenario. Since then, there has not been an agreed definition of the conflict by the UK Government and the Northern Ireland parties. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) defend their lack of engagement in Northern Ireland through the UK NAP on UNSCR 1325 citing that Northern Ireland affairs come under the Home Office, putting them outside their remit. The UK Home Office Minister for Equalities and Criminal Information stated:

"The situation in Northern Ireland has never been considered as an armed conflict, as defined in International Law. Nevertheless, some aspects of UNSCR 1325 such as participation in peace and political processes are relevant to all states and the Government will continue to work towards increasing the representation of women in Northern Ireland in public and political life".

Therese Villiers, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, stated the Government supported the 'principles' of UNSCR 1325 in Northern Ireland. Support for UNSCR 1325's implementation in Northern Ireland has also come from the CEDAW Conclusions (2008 and 2013) that called for the full implementation of UNSCR 1325.

The Irish Government in its two NAPs has also pronounced support for women in post-conflict Northern Ireland. In its 2nd NAP (2015) support for the peace process and the post-conflict situation continue. This support for the participation and empowerment of women and the promotion of the principles of WPS within North/South bodies will be evidenced in the setting-up of a North-South Consultative Forum (as provided for in the Good Friday Agreement) which would advise both administrations on social, economic and cultural issues including the advancement of women in public life. Programmes on men and women, which aim to reduce violence in communities and raise awareness of GBV and women's rights, will also receive support. The Reconciliation Fund set-up previously to help women affected by the conflict in Northern Ireland will continue. Furthermore the Monitoring Committee, set-up to oversee the implementation of Ireland's 2nd NAP, will hold one of its meetings in Northern Ireland.

Since 2010 there has been an All Party Group (APG) on Women and Peace in the Northern Ireland Assembly set-up to promote the principles of UNSCR 1325 and other WPS Resolutions in Northern Ireland. The APG and the Westminster APG on WPS set up an enquiry to elicit the views of women and other interested parties on the Province's need for implementing UNSCR 1325. The Westminster APG on Women, Peace and Security initiated the enquiry after CEDAW's 2008 Conclusion. The enquiry covered the areas of gender equality, women and electoral politics, women and decision-making, violence against women, and women as victims of conflict. The enquiry led to the collection of written evidence and an oral hearing at the Northern Ireland Assembly (December 2013) before a panel of representatives. Representatives from the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), the Victims' Commissioner, the Public Appointments Commissioner, the Equality

Commission, Women's Aid and CSOs representatives gave evidence strongly supporting the necessity of the WPS Resolutions to aid Northern Ireland's women.

The testimonies heard proved very powerful, in particular the interventions from grassroots women who gave their testimony in camera as they feared the consequences from violent people in their own communities, should they speak out in public. One panellist summed up the evidence she heard as: *'these women have been intimidated, made invisible and rendered voiceless.'*

Women's civil society in Northern Ireland and its international friends continue to make the case for supporting women's protection in conflict and their representation in peacebuilding. The PSNI's Chief Constable recently stated the IRA remains active, 'punishment' beatings and murders continue and community tensions re-emerge. "Fresh Start", an agreement reached in 2015, fails to recognize women for their contribution to building a peaceful, stable society.

A welcome increase of female MLAs gained victory in the most recent NIA election. The Government has also appointed first female First Minister and two female Chief Justices. Even though these developments show signs of encouragement, more work must occur.