

# Peacebuilding Commission Working Group on Lessons Learned

## Enhancing gender-responsive national reconciliation processes 11 December 2013

### Chair's Summary

#### I. Introduction

1. On 11 December 2013, the Working Group on Lessons Learned (WGLL) of the Peacebuilding Commission convened a meeting under the chairmanship of the new Permanent Representative of Japan, Ambassador Motohide Yoshikawa. The WGLL addressed the issue of national reconciliation processes from the perspective of women's participation. The discussion took place in light of the following recent developments: (a) the Peacebuilding Commission's declaration on women's economic empowerment for peacebuilding on 26 September 2013 and (b) Security Council Resolution 2122 which places the focus on women's leadership and participation in conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding.
2. National reconciliation has been identified as a priority thematic area this year for the Commission, with particular relevance to Liberia and Guinea configurations which have set the theme as a key peacebuilding priority. As set out in the concept note, reconciliation takes many forms, involving a broad range of areas and engagements at different levels. In order to gain a better understanding of the issues and promote good practices on implementation, the Chair outlined the main objectives of the discussion as follows:
  - Facilitate dialogue among national and international peacebuilding actors on challenges and opportunities for enhancing gender-responsive national reconciliation processes.
  - Share lessons learned and good practices from national experiences on enhancing gender-responsive national reconciliation processes.
  - Propose recommendations grounded in national experiences to inform the development of gender policy/guidelines for the Commission, as well as to strengthen implementation of the Secretary-General's Seven Point Action Plan.
3. The meeting was attended by the following panelists:
  - Ms. Saraswathi Menon, Director of Policy Division, UN Women (on behalf of Mr. John Hendra, Assistant Secretary-General of UN Women).
  - Ms. Zhanna Saralaeva, Expert of the Department of Ethnic and Religious Policy, Office of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic.
  - Ms. Jamesina King, Commissioner, Sierra Leone Human Rights Commission (by TV).

#### II. Presentations by Panelists and Respondent

4. **Ms. Saraswathi Menon** opened her presentation by highlighting the fact that although reconciliation can take different paths, experiences show that women are still not adequately included in processes as victims or decision-makers. This means that their

experience of conflict is ignored and their perspectives are not usually accommodated in building future economic, political and social institutions.

5. Ms. Menon stressed that enhancing women's roles in reconciliation processes is not just about increasing the number of women present, as gender relations affect women's capacities to voice their views and participate constructively. UN Women has engaged in substantive efforts in Yemen, supporting women to take part in national dialogue and providing specific technical support and advice. In Liberia, UN Women has assisted in establishing over 20 Peace Huts in remote communities, supporting a transformative approach to reconciliation processes.
6. Ms. Menon underlined the following five principles to inform policy and practice on gender responsive national reconciliation:
  - Context matters: different strategies across different areas are required;
  - Efforts must address the backlog of gender inequality and women's exclusion;
  - Timing matters: women must be consulted in the design of reconciliation processes, from the earliest stages of the process;
  - Funding matters: donor funding to facilitate women's full engagement is only a fraction of the total funding for peacebuilding;
  - Any approach must be transformative: reconciliation processes should seek to change the status quo and engage women as the leaders of peace.
7. **Ms. Zhanna Saralaeva** noted that women and children had faced specific vulnerabilities during the armed conflict of 2010 between Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities, including multiple cases of sexual violence that were never investigated. However, women also significantly contributed to dialogue, reconciliation and conflict prevention.
8. Ms. Saralaeva provided examples of women's voluntary involvement in peace and reconciliation efforts, such as creating a telephone hotline to help refute rumors and appease ethnic tensions, and evacuating families from the conflict zones and accommodating them in the homes of other ethnic groups. When the conflict ended and recovery began, Kyrgyz women set up a "Women's Peace Network", which today comprises 900 members, to promote women's participation in decision-making on reconstruction and peacebuilding. Currently, members of the network are monitoring potential conflicts and providing monthly analytical reports to state authorities.
9. She emphasized that despite these grassroots efforts, women's participation is not usually seriously recognized by the government. Kyrgyzstan has developed a National Action to implement Security Council Resolution 1325, but women remain under-represented in the institutions established to develop and implement policies on truth and reconciliation, peace talks, etc. She appealed to participants that more support is needed in the areas such as assistance to victims of gender-based violence, engaging civil society, increasing women involved in crisis management and programme development, developing effective measures for coordination and monitoring, etc.
10. **Ms. Jamesina King** presented Sierra Leone's reconciliation efforts which have been centered on a transitional justice approach, comprised of the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, reparations programs, Special Court to prosecute the leaders, and community initiatives. She recalled that the emphasis has been placed on

healing and redressing the societies that have suffered from rape, sexual violence and mutilation which were used as weapons of war. Ms. King noted the impressive activism by women on the quest for an inclusive and equal society, which made them willing drivers and beneficiaries of reconciliation and transitional justice processes.

11. Ms. King underscored that reclaiming and restoring the dignity of women in post conflict society is a long and delicate process that should be handled with commitment, care and caution in a multi-faceted way. The ways women cope with horrible experiences of violence vary. Research conducted on reparations in 2004 and 2005 has shown different reactions by women survivors: some wanted to forget their experiences, while others were willing to testify in public; some claimed compensation by the State for social amenities and assistance to children born as a result of rape, while others wanted guarantees of non-repetition, reburial of their loved ones, and legal reform for women's equal rights and protection from discrimination and violence.
12. Ms. King stressed that reparations can create a positive change if approached flexibly even for women who wanted to disassociate themselves with conflict. She underlined the need for mobilization of substantial funds from different sources which should be jointly designed and implemented. She concluded by cautioning that a one-size-fits-all approach limits the benefits of reconciliation processes. Effective gender-sensitive communication channels are crucial to the success of any reconciliation process. It is also necessary to ensure that reconciliation activities do not expose women to further harm.
13. **Mr. Kenny Gluck, Director and Deputy Head of PBSO**, in his capacity as the former Head of Office for Mr. Jamal Benomar, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, who was not able to participate in the meeting as a panelist, highlighted that women's participation in the national dialogue in Yemen through a quota of 30% was made possible not only by the intervention of the UN, but also through women's leadership at the forefront of the demonstrations in 2001. Yemen's political transition was led by women activists, who demanded the transition of the country to a new state and that a new social contract would provide meaningful participation for men and women alike.

### **III. Member States' views**

14. In the discussion, Member States reaffirmed the importance of gender mainstreaming throughout peacebuilding and reconciliation processes, including women from the earliest stages of the planning, priority setting, design and delivery. The majority emphasized that as all reconciliation processes are context-specific, it is important to employ differentiated and targeted approaches tailored to the needs in specific contexts, taking cultural and social factors into account. Nevertheless, some participants took note of pertinent common lessons which could be applied to various contexts, including the need to work in a more coherent and comprehensive manner in support of UN principles. Some Member States also noted the necessity of taking holistic and coordinated views of various mechanisms and processes, as reconciliation involves wide-ranging dimensions including governance, economic recovery, justice, security, information and education. Some speakers further stressed the need to increase support for victims of sexual violence where legal processes are often inadequate and assistance is piecemeal.

15. In addition, members as well as responding panelists, focused their interventions on the following themes:

- **Capacity Building and Special Measures:**

Many participants reiterated the needs for strengthening capacity building, as women often face considerable barriers to participation in reconciliation. They recognized that technical support, advice and special measures (outreach, quotas, etc.) should therefore be employed as appropriate to rectify the situation. It was noted that a lessons-learning exercise for certain special measures may be further needed to explore their applicability to other contexts.

- **National Ownership and Transformation:**

Many members were encouraged by examples provided by panelists about women's local ownership and roles played by civil society. Some participants emphasized the critical importance of the strong commitment and leadership of the national government, especially in the context of transformation of social relations.

- **Funding:**

Many members underscored the need for channeling sufficient resources for participation and empowerment of women in national reconciliation processes. While recognizing the value of PBF being allocated to support critical stages of gender-responsive national reconciliation in Kyrgyzstan and Sierra Leone, it was noted that even the PBF has not yet achieved the Secretary-General's 15% gender target within post-conflict projects implemented by UN entities.

- **Promoting Implementation in the work of the PBC:**

Many members underlined the need for translating lessons learned into action. Some participants mentioned that there is still more to be done in breaking down general lessons to ensure that they are usable and can be practically applied to specific contexts. In this regard, participants agreed that the PBC has an important role to play in disseminating lessons, sustaining long-term engagement by the international community, mobilizing adequate funding from different sources and forging coherence among various actors in support of national efforts for gender-responsive reconciliation processes. Many speakers noted that as country-specific configurations are the major platform for a coordinated approach to gender-related issues in peacebuilding, there might be a need for developing common standards/practices to be applied across country configurations. For instance, one speaker mentioned strengthening efforts to meet and interact with women's groups during PBC field trips.

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