

2020 Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture
“Full, Equal and Meaningful Participation of Women in Peacebuilding”
Electronic Consultation: 1 May 2020
Statement by Ireland

As we cannot be in present in person to voice this critical issue, Ireland would like to thank the Commission for bringing our words together on the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in peacebuilding. During this difficult, unprecedented global health crisis, we know that the pandemic and its socio-economic impact is having a disproportionate effect on women and girls. It is essential now, more than ever, to ensure a broad and inclusive approach to peacebuilding.

Ireland believes in the importance of international organisations in supporting and driving peacebuilding efforts. Indeed, the pandemic is a stark reminder of our interconnectedness and the importance of effective multilateral responses to global challenges. Given the key advisory role played by the Peacebuilding Commission, there are many opportunities which must be taken to drive the implementation of WPS.

Despite a global consensus on women’s right to meaningful participation in decision-making on peace and security, and ample evidence that meaningful participation of women is a prerequisite for sustainable peace, we know women continue to face obstacles that undermine their important contributions to conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding. This is one of the many reasons why gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is a keystone of Ireland’s foreign policy. A more equal, peaceful and sustainable world will only be achieved through enhancing the participation of women and girls in peacebuilding and post-conflict peace processes.

Ireland strongly believes that women’s meaningful participation is fundamental to peacebuilding precisely because we have lived it. Women’s involvement in the Northern Ireland Peace Process led to the inclusion of language and provisions on equal opportunity, on women’s rights to equal political participation, on social inclusion, reconciliation, on the

needs of victims, on integrated education and on mixed housing. These elements introduced by women into the Good Friday Agreement have been critical to sustaining peace.

Ireland strongly supports the increasing partnership approach of the PBC and the need to take an inclusive approach to peacebuilding and the recognition of the key role that women and youth should play. We have sought to use our membership of the PBC to increase the focus on women in peacebuilding, to ensure women speakers and to focus on gender sensitive approaches to peacebuilding in our recommendations to the Security Council. This should be at the core of our work.

In October 2019, Ireland worked with the PBC to initiate a discussion on women in peacebuilding, in advance of the Security Council's Annual Debate on WPS. This will now become an annual discussion on the PBC calendar.

Also in October, Ireland supported the participation of Emma Johnson of Youth Action Northern Ireland who briefed the Peacebuilding Commission on Strengthening Linkages on Women, Peace and Security and Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace.

Ireland, too, recognises that local leadership and capacity is what will drive lasting change. We strongly promote equal participation of women at all levels and the inclusion of a gender perspective in all aspects of our work.

For Ireland, that is not lip service. To ensure the voices of local and national women peacebuilders are meaningfully included in the Peacebuilding Architecture Review, Ireland, working in partnership with the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP) and UN Women, conducted a series of in-country consultations on WPS and the Peacebuilding Architecture Review in Colombia, Uganda, South Africa and Northern Ireland. We look forward to sharing these findings with the UN Community in greater detail, but our early review of the data has been eye-opening. These rich and instructive consultations with local women peacebuilders drove home five clear points:

1. It is a sad reality that women remain severely under-represented in national and local governance, conflict-management structures, mediation and peace negotiations, and in security forces which results in processes and policies that are neither gender sensitive nor conducive to inclusive peace.
2. Women peacebuilders and human rights defenders are under attack and the exclusion of women and girls is exacerbated by such widespread violence.
3. Local women peacebuilders lack the resources and financial independence due to discriminatory laws and practices which inhibits their full participation to the detriment of peace building efforts. A clear message from the consultation in Colombia was that the economic empowerment of women is a pre-requisite for advancing women's roles in governance and ensuring that they are actors of local development and in local economy.
4. While local women play a crucial role in peacebuilding and sustaining peace, many of those who attended the consultations were unaware of the Sustaining Peace resolutions, the global, regional and international frameworks that can support them, nor the ways the Peacebuilding Architecture can strengthen their work. It is our responsibility to change this.

At the consultation in South Africa, Ms. Tintswalo Makhubele, Secretary-General, South Africa Congress of Non-Profit Organizations, drove home this point, reminding us of the lack of coherent and tailored peacebuilding strategies that are both meaningful and inclusive. She argued for better communication and coordination and clear definition of roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders and actors in peacebuilding. We are delighted to have heard Ms. Makhubele present these perspectives in greater detail over video for the Peacebuilding Architecture Review.

5. The contribution of women to conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and sustaining peace is both underappreciated and underfunded. Political support is lacking and where funding is made available to women peacebuilders, it is often not inaccessible

to those working at the local level due to limited dissemination of information and complex application procedures.

Echoing the Secretary General's 2019 report on WPS, these consultations demonstrate that there is a gap between what the WPS Agenda set out to achieve and what playing out on the ground. If we are to achieve what was set out 20 years ago, it is vital that our efforts be informed by realities on the ground if we are to effect change.

The discussions with local women peacebuilders present us with a number of clear paths forward toward the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in peacebuilding.

We must make leadership accountable for the implementation of the WPS agenda through targeted data collection, joined-up analysis, strategic planning, and increasing visibility. The Peacebuilding Commission should continue to seek to include perspectives of local women peacebuilders in its deliberation, including through inviting more women civil society briefers, and providing opportunities for civil society as well as academic institutions to provide concrete recommendations to its work.

We must ensure the meaningful participation of women in all stages of building peace. The Peacebuilding Commission should use its strategic advisory position to demand meaningful women's participation, which goes beyond observer or advisory roles, in all peace processes.

As well as condemning human rights violations, discrimination and Gender Based Violence, the UN, including the Peacebuilding Commission, should encourage and support the establishment of rapid response mechanism for women activists, peacebuilders and human rights defenders, who are facing increased threats globally.

We need to act to address the economic insecurity which acts as a barrier to women's participation, particularly now during the COVID19 pandemic, which we know is exacerbating the inequalities that already disadvantaged the lives of women and girls. The UN and international development partners should invest in better understanding and addressing the specific barriers faced by marginalized groups.

We must ensure that conversations on WPS are not pigeonholed into one or two time slots per year. All country or region-specific discussions at the PBC should include a gender perspective, and expert-level PBC country configuration meetings should be convened specifically on gender and peacebuilding.

Lastly, we must finance the WPS agenda and invest in women peacebuilders. The UN and its development partners should ensure that its priorities and programmes are aligned with grassroots needs and priorities, and include women peacebuilders in priority-setting and program design from early stages. This is of particular salience as COVID19 threatens the institutional survival of many women's grassroots and civil society organisations globally doing vital work on peacebuilding.

This is a moment for clear-eyed assessment of what has been achieved and what remains to be done. The outcome of the Peacebuilding Architecture Review must be that we step-up to meet our commitments and work together to bridge the gap between rhetoric and reality on women's meaningful participation.

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