

## **Public Consultation on Ireland's Third National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (Friday 14<sup>th</sup> December 2018 deadline)**

### Submission from Falls Community Council

1. Falls Community Council (FCC) was established in the mid 1970s as an umbrella organisation for community groups in West Belfast. We advocate for social and economic justice in West Belfast and deliver a range of programmes and services to meet community needs. Falls Community Council has worked throughout the conflict in an area which suffered disproportionately the trauma of the conflict, not only in the number of deaths and numbers of people affected by imprisonment but also the wider impact of militarisation, as well as marginalisation and isolation from the political and civic structures of the state.
2. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to Ireland's third National Action Plan as we believe the impact of the conflict was gendered in many ways that have still not been investigated and the post conflict needs of women have not adequately been addressed.
3. Falls Community Council has a track record of work around dealing with the past and the impact of the conflict. Our direct work in the community and our partnership work with other organisations has informed our understanding of the gendered impact of the conflict and the work that needs to be done in this area. A number of our own staff include people who have been bereaved and harmed. Our submission is informed by this first hand understanding of the impact of the conflict.
4. Many of the people we come into contact with have been bereaved or injured or harmed by the conflict. This includes a high proportion of those using our welfare advice service. We believe that the links between gender, poverty and the impact of the conflict need to be addressed through research and policy actions. We frequently see the intergenerational impact of trauma in the young people we support in our programmes and believe that there is a gendered aspect to this which also requires research to inform policy. We would like the third national action plan to take forward work in these areas and support community organisations to be involved in the work.
5. Our oral history archive Dúchas was established in 1999 and currently contains over 370 interviews almost half of which are from women. The archive includes collections from other community groups in Shankill and East Belfast. This archive represents an invaluable resource for understanding the gendered impact of the conflict.
6. In our recent submission to the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) public consultation on addressing the legacy of Northern Ireland's past FCC argued for recognition of Dúchas and other community oral history archives rather than a purely centralised archive in the Public Record Office Northern Ireland (PRONI). Along with a number of other organisations we recommended the involvement of PRONI along with the

expertise of other national archives in Ireland and Britain. Our view was that the proposal for an Oral History Archive should be an opportunity to reflect the three strands of the Good Friday Agreement incorporating institutional expertise and existing and emerging archives across Ireland, Britain and the diaspora. This comprehensive approach would also enable the widest gender lens to be applied to oral history experiences of the conflict. We would like the third national action plan to explore the opportunities for bi-lateral government approaches to dealing with the legacy of the conflict through the proposed Oral History Archive.

7. Through the Dúchas archive FCC supported the production of a film *A Kind of Sisterhood* which depicts the story of women political prisoners in Armagh and Maghaberry gaols and features interviews from eight republican and one loyalist prisoner. The film was the winner of the Irish Film Festival London best documentary award in 2015. The film highlights a gendered impact of the conflict that is little known and raises issues that could be addressed in Ireland's third NAP.
8. FCC was for many years the lead partner for the Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium (BCRC) which brought together community workers and former combatants in ground breaking conflict transformation work at interfaces. BCRC carried out research in 2011 (Gender at the Interface) which examined the significance of gender in conflict resolution work within and between interface communities in Belfast and cited UN 1325 in its recommendations. Although BCRC is no longer active, this research and the BCRC response to it remains a resource for work for the Women Peace and Security agenda.
9. FCC staff members have and continue to be actively involved in supporting the work of organisations working on dealing with the past and bringing a gender lens to this work. We are represented on the boards of Healing Through Remembering and Relatives for Justice. We were founder members and continue to be active in the Stories Network, a network for those gathering and sharing personal stories related to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. We helped to develop and are active in the Legacy Gender Integration group which in 2015 developed the Gender Principles for dealing with the legacy of the past. The Legacy Gender Integration group made a response to the NIO public consultation on addressing the legacy of the past and we recommend that this document informs the development of the third NAP.
10. FCC supported the work of the organisation Hanna's House through the involvement of a staff member. Between 2009 and 2012 Hanna's House engaged directly with both the British and Irish governments and the NI Assembly to argue that UNSCR 1325 become part of the fabric of the Good Friday Agreement and its institutions. Hanna's House advocated for a bilateral approach to meet the needs of women in both jurisdictions. Hanna's House argued that both governments and the NI Assembly should cooperate in order to implement 1325 in relation to the conflict and there should be co-operative or shared action plans that work in tandem. FCC believe this approach is still needed notwithstanding the significant challenges of the current context i.e. Brexit, the absence of the NI Assembly and the longstanding resistance of the British government to the incorporation of the conflict in its own

NAP. We believe that Ireland's third NAP should open up discussions on this approach.

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