

## Comments on International Commitment

Comments by organisations, groups and individuals listed alphabetically under each of the headings identified as the main issues raised in the responses to the consultation.

**Ad-hoc Women's Policy Group** - recommend the development of a strategy for women, based on Beijing+ 10, with the inclusion of UN Resolution 1325 to ensure the increased participation of women in decision-making and conflict resolution.

**Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI)** - support the key action areas being fully inclusive of all the action areas under these international obligations.

**Community Foundation for Northern Ireland** - believe that the gender equality strategy must meet fully the existing commitments already outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action. [Also referred to under "structural inequalities] and are disappointed that the document does not provide an action plan that includes a commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action and CEDAW.

**Disability Action** - believes a National Action Plan for women is a better vehicle to deliver CEDAW and the Beijing Declaration.

**Down Lisburn Trust** - stressed that the Beijing Platform for Action 1995 refers to the necessity of gender budgeting.

**Equality Commission for Northern Ireland** - recommend that the developing strategy is simpler and less complex but crucially that it is backed up by a detailed action plan which follows through on international commitments to the Beijing Platform for Action and the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The Commission notes that the issue of women and conflict has not been addressed in this strategy. The ECNI point out that the Beijing Platform for Action calls for a dual strategy - gender mainstreaming complemented with actions to redress historic disadvantage faced by women.

**Falls Women's Centre/Ionad Mhná Na bhFál** - recommend that rather than a gender strategy, the OFMDFM produces a strategy that aims to tackle the structural inequalities experienced by women based upon the Beijing Declaration. Additionally, the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on 'Women, Peace and Security' should be included in any such strategy.

**Family Planning Association** - refer to international commitments commenting that no mention is made of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Equally, the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) NI Order 2003 is conspicuous by its absence. The Association think this is a very significant oversight in the context of a strategy, which aims to promote the equality of women.

**INGAGE** - Inter-Agency Group - recommended that further guidance and support should include creating understanding of existing legislation and existing global and local governmental commitments on gender equality. THE Group think that the strategy should outline any linkages to current EU commitments and obligations.

**Institute of Conflict Resolution** - refer to the issue of women and violence being done in a limited manner that largely reduces the relationship to issues of sexual and domestic violence and of women as victims. The Institute think this is an unduly narrow focus and ignores the growing evidence of women's active agency in regards to forms of violence and their growing numbers in the criminal justice system.

**NASUWT** - are pleased to note that the proposed gender equality strategy is in line with a number of EU and UN directives.

**NIC ICTU** - commenting in terms of "Gender & Post-Conflict Society" would welcome specific recognition of the particular role of women in conflict resolution and in shaping a post-conflict society. Referring to "Rural Women" [Referring to Article 14(1) of CEDAW] NIC ICTU would welcome further clarification as to envisaged actions in support of this obligation. On "Decision-making" Congress note that the strategy will seek to address representation in public life and in senior decision-making roles. However, NICICTU point out that the requirements of the CEDAW are to take all appropriate measures to ensure that women are on equal terms with men with the right to participate at all levels of public and political life (Article 7) and, with reference to the Beijing Platform of Action, across all governmental and public administration positions (Para. 190(a)). This vision of society [referring to UN Women's Committee interpretation of CEDAW Article (4)1] requires much more than simply treating everyone the same without recognising unequal life situations and the social structures that support gender inequality in our society. Congress believes that 'visioning' a more equal society, requires a commitment to utilising a range of equality tools in the pursuit of de facto equality. In addition to removing barriers to equality of opportunity, Congress recommends that the pillars of action include the commitment to promoting de facto equality as specified under the CEDAW. NIC ICTU recommends that international standards on gender equality which the UK has accepted should form the framework within which action should be taken to promote gender equality in Northern Ireland.

**NICVA** - consider that the fact that the proposals seek legitimacy by continuously citing these instruments (CEDAW and Beijing Platform for Action) suggests confusion at best and misinterpretation of equality at worst. They ask if the strategy's own reference to these human rights instruments that uphold women's rights surely undermines its 'equal treatment' approach. They also ask how it can be a gender strategy when it acknowledges that the key action areas reflect the major international instrument to promote women's rights. The Council concludes that the discussion on gender budgeting highlights the fundamental flaw in these proposals. NICVA would therefore recommend that the gender equality unit withdraws this flawed document and focuses on an action plan that implements the government's commitments under CEDAW and the Beijing Platform of Action with an additional focus on the inequalities suffered by the most marginalized women and the need to work for more equality of life chances. This is recommended as NICVA consider that the present strategy's lack of outcomes, targets, timeframe and resources undermines the commitments under Beijing and CEDAW.

**Northern Ireland Women's Coalition** - referring to CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action and UN Resolution 1325, stress that the current post- conflict context of Northern Ireland makes the need for such a strategy even more urgent.

**Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (NIWEP)** - consider that there is no reference to the deficits identified by the previous CEDAW committee nor any reference to UN Resolution 1325. They also think that there needs to be a stronger emphasis on women's equality. They suggest that a strategy could be built around these international commitments [CEDAW and the Beijing Declaration] recommending that the 12 critical areas included in Beijing Platform for Action should form the basis of a gender strategy.

**Older Women's Network NI (OWN)** - think that the present approach falls short of international commitments, specifically to the Beijing Platform for Action and the CEDAW.

**Save the Children** - One of the 12 critical areas of concern of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, considered to be a major obstacle to the advancement of women is "the effects of armed or other kinds of conflict on women (no. 5). We were disappointed to note that the document did not mention that Northern Ireland is still emerging from conflict and that this conflict has had a different impact on women and girls than it has had on men and boys.

**Social Economy Network** - think what is required is a National Strategy for Women as outlined in declaration at the United Nations Beijing Conference in 1995.

**Training for Women Network** - think that the lack of defined targets in the various areas of disadvantage identified, even with reference to government commitments to national and international strategies and treaties, makes the document ambiguous and without potency.

**UNISON** - UNISON feel that the Strategy fails to state how it relates to international standards on gender equality and mainstreaming adding that it is clear that the current Gender Strategy is not that envisioned by the 1995 Beijing Declaration. commented that a contract culture of temporary employment with minimum standards is against the spirit and letter of Article 11 of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women - specifically, the right to work and to have job security". UNISON feel that the Strategy fails to state how it relates to international standards on gender equality and mainstreaming adding that it is clear that the current Gender Strategy is not that envisioned by the 1995 Beijing Declaration. Women Educating for Transformation - refer to the Beijing Platform for Action as having a radical agenda and that both the UK and Irish governments signed it. They do not see that radical approach reflected in this document but rather consider Gender Matters is an opaque and confusing document and recommend that it should best be seen through the lens of the Beijing Platform for Action. The document, they say, is not what was required under the agreements made in Beijing in 1995. What is required is a strategy that meets the commitments made by the UK government at Beijing i.e. that sets out time bound and resourced actions to remove all obstacles to women's equality. Windsor Women's Centre - consider that the U.K. governments response to the UN Resolution 1325 does not mention its responsibilities with regards to Northern Ireland and the inclusion and participation of "women" in the peace process and conflict resolution. Resolution 1325 poses a challenge to the male dominated political culture within N. Ireland with its recognition of women human rights, yet it is virtually unheard of in Northern Ireland. Women's Policy Forum - feel that this strategy should be developed in the context of international commitments on women including the Beijing Platform and CEDAW. The Forum added they think there is no political will to ensure its continued existence, or to push this strategy forward.

**Women's Support Network** - recommend that international standards on gender equality, CEDAW and the Beijing Platform of Action, form the framework for a plan of action to achieve equality for women.

**Women's Resource and Development Agency and the Rural Women's Networks** - do not believe that if you had to benchmark this strategy to the above [referring to extract taken from UN Women's Committee: "Women enjoying their rights in various fields in fairly equal numbers with men, enjoying the same income levels, equality in decision-making and political influence and enjoying freedom from violence."] as it currently stands, that it would deliver on women's equality.

They contend therefore that a separate Strategy for women should replace the proposed Gender Equality Strategy adding that Gender Matters fails to recognise the particular impact of the Conflict on women in Northern Ireland which needs to be

properly addressed. The work carried out by the women's community and voluntary sector during, and post conflict needs to be recognised and a commitment given to provide core funding for this sector. This opinion was repeated later by stating that measures which will ensure women's increased participation in conflict resolution, and in all decision making levels in Northern Ireland need to be implemented in line with UN Resolution 1325 and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for action. It is felt that Gender Matters is a half-hearted attempt to fulfil domestic and international commitments and obligations and that Gender Matters falls far short of meeting these commitments. WRDA recommend that a Strategy for women must be developed following international principles and guidelines to ensure the increased participation of women in public and political life, and at all levels in decision-making and conflict resolution within Northern Ireland.