



## OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE NOTE

### WOMEN IN PEACE PROCESSES AND AGREEMENTS

#### **I. Background**

The aim of peace agreements is to bring an end to conflicts and to build peace. Accordingly they define the political, civil, economic and social structures in post-conflict societies. While women, during conflict, suffer the added burden of being targeted by gender-based sexual violence, which has become a weapon of warfare and one of the defining characteristics of contemporary conflicts, they also participate in conflict as armed combatants. This gives them a unique perspective, which needs to be taken into account during the peacemaking and post-conflict peace-building process.

Explicit attention to the participation of women and reflection of gender perspectives in peace agreements is vital to ensure that agreements fully address the needs and priorities of women in the aftermath of conflict and are supportive of women's equal participation in the reconstruction of post-conflict societies and in the prevention of future conflict.

The absence of women in peace processes and the failure of peace agreements to promote gender equality can lead to the perpetuation of discrimination against women and their continued marginalization in the post-conflict rebuilding of society. A peace process that fails to include women in agenda setting, substantive talks and implementation has no democratic legitimacy and lacks the inclusiveness to generate any sense of ownership among women. This can undermine the prospects for the durability of the agreement and sustainable peace.

Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) recognizes that an understanding of the impact of armed conflict on women and girls, effective institutional arrangements to guarantee their protection and full participation in the peace process can significantly contribute to the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security. The resolution calls on all actors to adopt a gender perspective when negotiating and implementing peace agreements.

#### **II. What Women can Contribute to the Peace Process**

As armed conflict is highly gendered and women's experiences during war differ from those of men, any conflict mapping and tracking exercise undertaken for use in negotiations must also take account of shifting gender relations and women's activities throughout all phases of conflict and its aftermath. Women have such diverse and unique experiences during a conflict. Consequently, they are in a unique position to contribute to peace processes.

- **The Perspective of a War Victim**

As both witnesses and victims of war-related atrocities and other gross human rights violations, women can testify to the high human and material cost of conflict and the



rationale behind promoting peace and stability. Women are also material witnesses for the prosecution of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

- **Economic and Social Agents**

During conflict it is the women who are left to hold communities together, and who are the guardians of social and cultural values. Women are also the sole economic providers of the household during the conflict. In post-conflict contexts, it is the women who have the skills required to start small businesses and community projects to help restart the economy. They also raise issues which would bring positive change to their communities at large. Women who served as active combatants during conflict can provide their unique perspective to ensure that reconstruction, reintegration and rehabilitation programmes do not return women to a condition of discrimination and marginalization.

- **Advocates for Peace and Social Transformation**

As mothers, wives and sisters their voice is strong in advocating for an end to a conflict. What women seek in post-conflict is societal transformation, an enhanced social position that accords full citizenship, social justice and empowerment based upon respect for standards of human dignity. If integrated in all stages of the negotiating and peace agreement process, this perspective can help the transformation of society.

### **III. Including Women in the Peace Process**

In many instances, women within the war-torn community have come together and formulated their priorities for peace, but because women are absent from internationally-sponsored peace processes, these priorities do not find their way into the formal process and into the peace agreement. Women's full, equal and meaningful participation at the policy and decision-making levels is critical to ensuring that political structures, economic and social institutions and security sectors negotiated through peace talks address issues and concerns specific to women and girls, and facilitate the achievement of greater gender equality in post-conflict societies.

- **Enhancing Women's Participation**

All involved in the peace process must be accountable for a gendered approach to the peace process and the agreement. Participation must be enhanced from the onset in transparent manner by addressing both those who do the selection of participants and the criteria that is established for the selection of participants. The substance of peace agreement should also seek to have the input of from women's organizations.

- **International Peacemakers**

It is also important that international peacemakers include women at the decision-making level in their teams.

- **Pre-Negotiation Agreement**

Pre-negotiation agreements help identify the conditions for peace talks, determine the participants, set agendas and identify substantive issues. Peacemakers can help ensure



that women's participation is addressed within this context and that women's priority issues are incorporated within the agenda set for the substantive talks. Addressing these issues from the onset can facilitate subsequent legitimacy and generate a sense of ownership among women regarding the peace process and the agreement.

#### **IV. A Gendered Peace Agreement**

Gender equality is an important social goal in itself and a crucial factor for achieving sustainable peace. If gender equality is omitted from the peace agreement, a window of opportunity is lost for addressing the discrimination against women during the transformation of society in a post-conflict context. The peace agreement's silence on the position of women perpetuates and institutionalizes the marginalization of women in the political process after the conflict and allows those implementing the peace process, including the international agencies, to commence their mandates without reference to how their operations impact differentially upon women and men.

- **Gendered Language**

Peace agreements should not be framed in gender-neutral language on the assumption that they are equally applicable to, and appropriate for the needs and priorities of both women and men within the society in question. Language in peace agreements should be gender specific to facilitate implementation of programmes and policies which promote gender equality and women's participation.

- **Women's Priorities and Needs**

Those negotiating a peace agreement must be careful not to make assumptions about the needs and priorities of women within the conflict zone. All women do not share the same experiences during conflict; consequently, their post-conflict needs and priorities will be different. Women must have an opportunity to articulate these diverse gender specific issues as part of the formal negotiation process.

- **Gender Specific Provisions**

Peace agreements should address the gender dimensions of provisions to guarantee women's social, economic and legal rights in post-conflict societies. The issue of impunity for gender-based violence during conflict also needs to be addressed in contexts where the issue of war crimes is addressed.

- **Implementation**

An important part of implementation of a peace agreement is to ensure that provisions concerning gender equality and women's participation are carried forward in a comprehensive and sustained manner into the implementation phase. It is equally important that all other provisions of the agreement are implemented with full regard to their gender specific implications and, therefore, for the particular benefit of women and of society as a whole.

- **Monitoring Mechanism**

To enable women and women's groups to be part of a monitoring mechanism for implementation of peace agreements, effective consultation must be undertaken



between the international agencies, the transitional government, regional organizations and local women and women's NGOs.

- **Dissemination of the peace agreement**

It is important that the content of peace agreements be disseminated to the population to promote local ownership and ensure transparency and accountability. Measures also need to be put in place to effectively reach women in the dissemination and discussion of the peace agreement.

## Questions for the Peacemaker:

1. What are the international norms for gender equality which should guide the mediation process?
2. Does the historical background and mapping of the conflict incorporate gender-specific data and information?
3. Are there oral and written briefings on the experiences of women in the conflict?
4. Is there data on the gender composition of the various fighting forces at the negotiation table, especially at the leadership level?
5. Who are the women stakeholders to be invited to the negotiation table?
6. What are possible options to increase women's participation in the formal negotiation process?
7. What would be appropriate language for a gendered peace agreement?
8. What should be done to create a sense of ownership of the peace agreement among the population in general and women in particular?
9. What mechanisms could be put in place to guarantee implementation of the peace agreement and its gender specific provisions?
10. How can the Peacemaker ensure gender equality and women's participation in the peace process, and that women's perspectives and needs are addressed in the peace agreement?

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## **Sources and Citation:**

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Reference source: Report of the Expert Group Meeting on “Peace agreements as a means for promoting gender equality and ensuring participation of women – A framework of model provisions” Ottawa, Canada, 10-13 November 2003. Web location: [www.un.org.womenwatch/daw](http://www.un.org.womenwatch/daw).