

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, U.S. Section welcomes President Obama's Executive Order of December 19, 2011, instituting a National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (NAP). In particular, we appreciate the President's care in articulating clear accountabilities, timelines, and processes inclusive of civil society for its implementation, review, evaluation, and revision. We note with satisfaction that the NAP includes commitments from a broad range of federal agencies and anticipates the integration of the concepts motivating the Women, Peace and Security agenda into national level policies and strategies where relevant to women living in conflict affected environments.

In preparation of the NAP, federal representatives engaged with civil society in a number of ways, including by attending five consultations with grassroots and civil society women held at various locations outside Washington, D.C. In our report on those consultations, issued December 10, 2011, we noted . . .

We welcome the reference to international human rights and humanitarian law as a framework for professional training throughout federal agencies. Although it goes beyond the scope of this NAP, the administration may over time find it more cost effective to include basic human rights education in the curriculum for primary and secondary education, and even to incentivize such training through federal funding.

While there is much to applaud in the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, we are concerned about the use of female engagement forces in conflict zones. While women in the military deserve opportunities to advance their careers and should be offered the same protections from sexual assault as their civilian counterparts, the brief experience of employing specialized military female engagement forces to enlist the "hearts and minds" of occupied populations blurs the distinction between military and humanitarian missions in a way that compromises the social viability of women and endangers their lives. It is important to maintain a clear distinction between military and humanitarian efforts, lest we all become enemy combatants.

Similarly, we would caution U.S. diplomats and strategists to consider that conflict prevention as it has come to be understood within the Women, Peace and Security agenda is not synonymous with what at one time was referred to as "pacification" in the training manuals of U.S. agencies involved in counterinsurgency efforts. In a similar vein, we are wary of the overuse of the phrase "diplomatic and development support" under objective 4 of the NAP. It is important to recognize the autonomy of women and their affiliative groups in determining the value system within which development is welcomed. Development cannot be assumed to be in service to corporate profit nor can it be assumed to mean simple monetization of previously subsistence economies.

In its repeated reference to "conflict affected environments" we find hope that U.S. policy will going forward recognize the rights of the earth, and the dislocations that occur—and reoccur as armed conflict—when these rights are undermined for the sake of profit and corporate gain.

Only if SCR 1325 is manifest for its transformational power to rethink national security will it do what both President Obama and WILPF imagine it will do by promoting "women's participation in conflict prevention." Our report from the civil society consultations organized by WILPF and attended by representatives of the U.S. Department of State details the decimation of a domestic infrastructure

designed to elevate women's voice in politics and public policy. Ultimately, the success of the NAP on Women, Peace, and Security rests on Congress's political will to release funds earmarked for military expenditures into the general fund used to support civic engagement at the local level. Should such funds be released, they could be redirected to support the economic, hence political, empowerment of many U.S. women, suffering under the current conditions.

We might see this money redeployed to create employment opportunities for :

- Human rights educators in public schools
- Creative artists and media specialists promoting a culture of peace where there is no social impunity for perpetrators of sexual violence
- Mediators managing conflicts in the home and community without further criminalization or further inflation of already horrific incarceration rates.

We call on President Obama, who has already improved U.S. multilateral relations through robust engagement with the Human Rights Council and the various relevant human rights monitoring bodies, to exercise global leadership in realizing a Women, Peace and Security agenda that is firmly grounded within a human rights framework and proactive in creating sustainable peace.