

Background

1. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) is the umbrella organisation for trade unions on the island of Ireland representing 832,000 workers affiliated through 64 trade unions in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.
2. ICTU is required, through its mission statement, to strive to achieve economic development, social cohesion and justice by upholding the values of solidarity, fairness and equality.
3. The Northern Ireland Committee (NIC) of the ICTU is the representative body for 34 trade unions with over 215,000 members across Northern Ireland. In membership terms, it is the largest civil society organisation in NI representing workers across the public and private sector. Over half of our membership are women.
4. Contact information: clare.moore@ictuni.org 028 90 247 940.

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions is a full member of the Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (NIWEP). Congress is represented on the NIWEP Board which sets policy and submissions for the organisation. ICTU would like to endorse the NIWEP response to this consultation on Ireland's Third National Action Plan. The NIWEP response is attached as a separate document.

In addition to endorsing this response, Congress would also highlight our work over many years in relation to the area of Women, Peace and Security.

Congress has repeatedly called for the UK Government to implement UNSCR in Northern Ireland and has simultaneously encouraged the Irish Government to engage with the appropriate Northern Ireland authorities as well as with civil society organisations to encourage the development of measures and policies consistent with the aims of UNSCR 1325.

Our policy on this matter has been determined at our biennial policy setting conferences. In 2014, a motion calling for was unanimously carried at our Biennial Delegate Conference.

WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

Conference condemns the ongoing failure of the UK Government to implement UN Security Council Resolution UNSCR 1325 in Northern Ireland. This Resolution on 'women and peace and security':

- *reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction;*
- *stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security;*
- *urges all actors to increase the participation of women and incorporate gender perspectives in all United Nations peace and security efforts; and*
- *calls on all parties in conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, in situations of armed conflict.*

The failure of the UK Government to implement this Resolution was recently condemned by the CEDAW Committee at its examination of the UK government in Geneva in July 2013. At that examination, the examining committee was informed by OFMDFM that UNSCR1325 was 'not relevant' because both the UK Government and First Minister did not agree that the NI conflict was an armed conflict within the definition of the resolution.

The Irish government, however, has acknowledged the applicability of UNSCR 1325 in the NI context. For example its National Action Plan (NAP) on UNSCR 1325, underscores the need to engage with appropriate Northern Ireland authorities to encourage development of policies and measures consistent with the aims of UNSCR 1325, in consultation with civil society organisations.

Conference calls on ICTU Women's Committee to work with ICTU structures and all affiliates in a campaign and lobby of the UK Government for the full implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Northern Ireland.

In 2015, Congress gave evidence to the Westminster Associate Parliamentary Group on UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Chairperson of the Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU, Pamela Dooley argued that given the UK Government's refusal to implement UNSCR 1325 in Northern Ireland, the continued emphasis on Northern Ireland within the National Action Plan of the Irish Government was of utmost importance.

In summary, the Northern Ireland Committee of ICTU welcomes the inclusion of Northern Ireland in the scope of the consultation and believes that the NAP can provide a potentially very helpful model framework on women, peace and security for Northern Ireland. In particular, by reflecting the issues specific to women in Northern Ireland it can serve to promote and support action in Northern Ireland. Furthermore NIC ICTU believes it is important that the principles of United National Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) are implemented across the island of Ireland. In particular, we would like to emphasise the importance of effective institutional arrangements that protect women and enable their full participation in public life, and would welcome to see these issues given strong priority.

ANNEX A

Oral Evidence to Westminster Associate Parliamentary Group on UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Hearing in 2015, Parliament buildings, Stormont.

1. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) is the single umbrella organisation for trade unions on the island of Ireland. It is unique in Europe in that it is the only trade union Congress covering two jurisdictions. We are therefore familiar with a range of complex constitutional issues arising in the development of public policy and the making of legislation. It is regrettable that this constitutional complexity is being used by the UK government to avoid application of UN SCR 1325 to women in Northern Ireland. The impact of the conflict on women in Northern Ireland, their role in holding families and communities together, their role in peace building and their role in challenging sex discrimination and the absence of many fundamental women's rights and human rights is a matter of record and one on which you will hear much evidence today.
2. Congress is the largest civil society organisation on the island. Through our mission statement, we strive to achieve economic development, social cohesion and justice by upholding the values of solidarity, fairness, equality and human rights.
3. Some years ago the composition of the trade union movement across Ireland historically reached 51% women. Today it stands at nearly 53%. This gives us a clear perspective on the extent of gender discrimination across our society in both parts of this island. Incidentally, my own union UNISON, represents over 1 million women across Britain and Ireland.
4. ICTU has consistently produced evidence on the patterns of discrimination faced by women and the need to address them. We have

given evidence to CEDAW and to the UN Committee of Social, Economic and Cultural Rights. We are affiliated to the European TUC and to the International Confederation of Trade Unions.

In that capacity evidence has been given on our behalf to a host of European and UN bodies, including most recently, the UN Council on the Status of Women where the trade union movement placed particular emphasis on growing violence, domestic and 'political' against women on an international basis. As you know, that body has concluded the violence against women has reached epidemic levels.

We are in regular dialogue with Government in Northern Ireland. We responded in detail to the OFMDFM inadequate Gender Equality Strategy and we continue to press for the rights, in particular of the most disadvantaged women in this society. It is our contention that women in general, and women from disadvantaged groups and areas in particular have borne the brunt of conflict and are net losers in our peace process. My colleague will take this argument further.

4. It is our contention that the commitments on equality and human rights contained in the Good Friday Agreement have been ignored and that there is a roll-back which has a particularly devastating impact on women.
5. ICTU has been a staunch defender of the Good Friday Agreement and has regularly spoken out in defence of it, including and especially a Bill of Rights for the people of Northern Ireland. In defence of the spirit and principles of the Agreement and as part of our continuing action in support of the Peace Process the Trade Union Movement has taken to the streets and to the political lobbies to facilitate public abhorrence at continuing violence and sectarianism and in protest at policy decisions of either the UK Government or the NI Assembly which deepen adverse impact in particular for women in our society and consequently undermine the Peace Process. We have been no less vocal on the failure

of Government to produce a real action plan, based on Beijing principles which is targeted at the elimination of discrimination against women in this society and the promotion of their rights.

6. We are full members of the Equality Coalition, the Human Rights Consortium, the Northern Ireland Women's European Platform and a range of women's rights organisations. In this capacity we have inputted to their extensive range of submissions, including on UNSCR 1325 in addition to submitting a body of evidence of growing discrimination against women over the past 15 years since the Peace Agreement.
7. In our view, while there have been some positive developments at some levels, on the whole our Government has side stepped its responsibility on implementing Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, on its failure to produce a Poverty Strategy. It refuses to support a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland and its inadequate Gender Equality strategy ignores core issues such as women's reproductive rights.
8. While Government in Northern Ireland struggles to find any real basis for agreement on the action plans necessary to eliminate gender discrimination, no such struggle is apparent with the UK Government. It has the power to introduce a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland with a clear emphasis on Women's Rights. It has the power to include UN Resolution 1325 in its Country Plan but refuses to do so. It has the power to ensure positive action is built in to the NI Block Grant to protect the poorest women in our society from further adverse impact, for example, from loss of public services, increasing casualisation of employment and attacks on welfare benefits. It refuses to do so and we call on the Parliamentary Group to exert pressure on the UK Government to discharge its responsibilities for the range of international treaties and conventions on women's rights to which it is signatory and to ensure, as called for by CEDAW that it takes steps to acknowledge the impact of political devolution on the promotion of equality across its jurisdiction.

