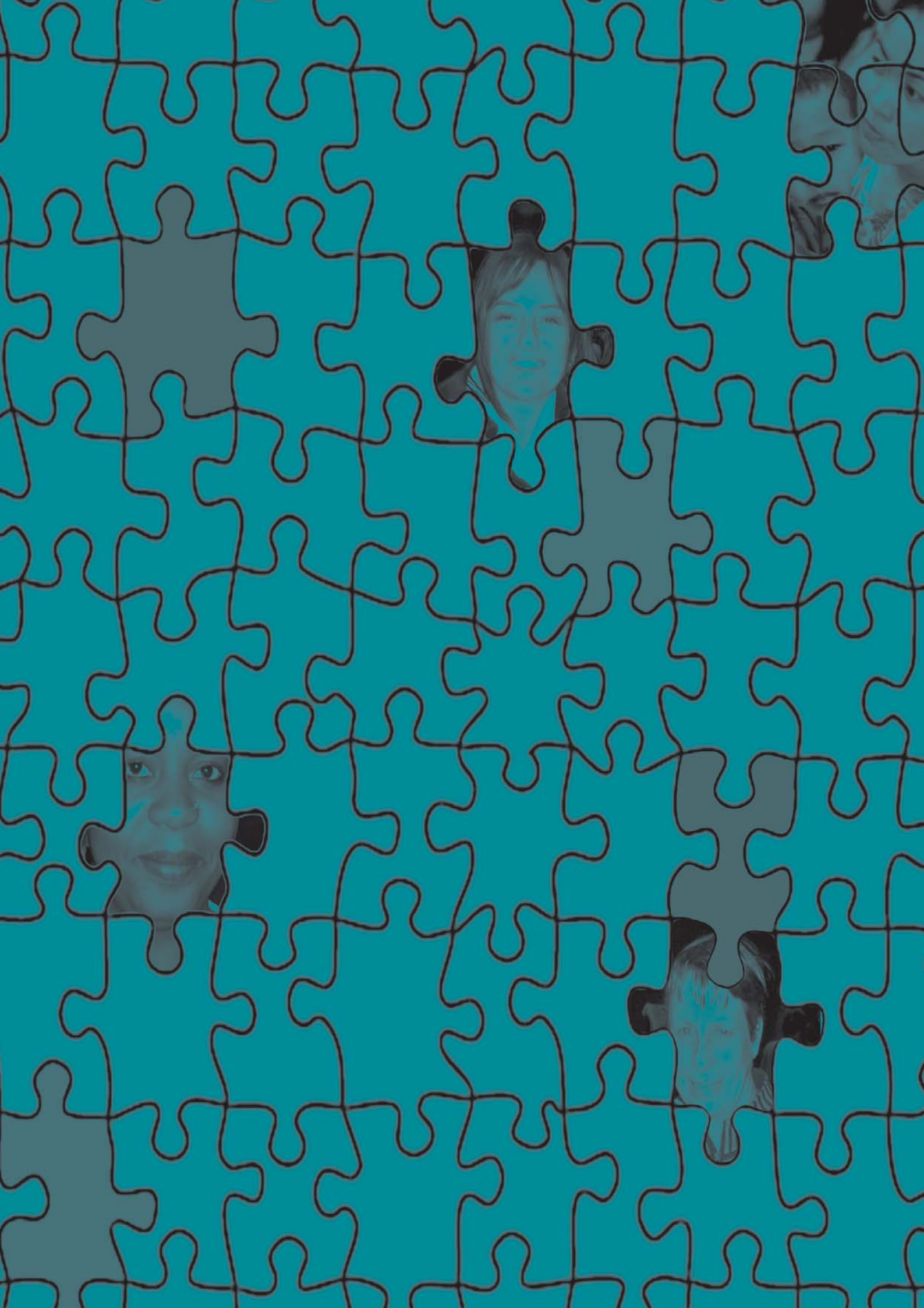


women's equality

International Standards

& Local Strategies



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WOMEN'S EQUALITY:

INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS - LOCAL STRATEGIES

Thursday 28TH April 2005

10.30am- 3.30pm at NICVA, Duncairn Gardens

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

- | | |
|---------|--|
| 10-30am | Introduction (Chair) - Margaret Ward |
| 10-40am | Key Note Speaker Beijing Platform for Action:
10 year review and appraisal -Brenda Campbell |
| 11-15am | Feedback from the Commission on the Status of Women, New York
March 2005 - Therese Murphy (NWCI), Kate McCullough (NIWEP) |
| 11-45am | Presentation of findings from WEFT/WRDA Research
- Louise O'Meara & Maire Crawley |
| 12-05am | Panel question and answer session (Brenda Campbell,
Therese Murphy, Kate McCullough, Louise O'Meara, Marie Crawley) |

LUNCH

LOCAL PERSPECTIVE

- | | |
|--------|--|
| 1-25pm | Introduction to afternoon session (Chair)-Iris Lyle |
| 1-30pm | OFMDFM - 'Gender Matters - Mary Bunting Dept of Justice
- National Women's Strategy - Dermot Kilgallon |
| 2-00pm | Ad Hoc Women's Policy Group - Margaret Ward
National Women's Council of Ireland - Joanna McMinn |
| 2-30pm | Panel question and answer session (Mary Bunting, Margaret Ward,
Dermot Kilgallon, Joanna McMinn, Brenda Campbell) |
| 3-15pm | Feedback and close |

INTRODUCTION TO THE REPORT

The Ad Hoc Women's Policy Group consists of a wide range of organisations from the voluntary, statutory, and trade union sectors. It also has a cross-border dimension, with the involvement of the National Women's Council of Ireland and Women Educating for Transformation. The group was highly active during the consultation on OFMDFM's cross-departmental 'Gender Matters' strategy, making plain its disquiet on the limitations of the strategy by providing a widely circulated Briefing Paper. It was felt that a constructive approach to the next stage of the gender strategy would be to organise an event that would set out the international benchmarks for women's rights that our local strategy should emulate, while providing an opportunity for discussion between policy makers and representatives of voluntary organisations. As the Irish government is also in the early stages of developing a National Women's Strategy, it was agreed that this would be an all-Ireland event, providing for a sharing of ideas and best practice. As the Beijing +10 event had recently taken place in New York, those who had attended that event from the Northern Ireland Women's European Platform and the National Women's Council of Ireland were asked to provide a report back so that seminar participants would have a context for discussion on how our national strategies are meeting international commitments.

The seminar 'Women's Equality: International Standards - Local Strategies' took place on 28 April 2005. It was attended by almost 80 participants from north and south of Ireland, representing a wide range of organisations, including older women, disabled women, and ethnic minority women, whose multi-identities are currently excluded from the gender strategy. Brenda Campbell as the key note speaker provided an informative overview of the importance of CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action as international benchmarks for the elimination of gender inequality. She was followed by Kate McCullough for NIWEP and by Therese Murphy for NWCI. The difficulties in maintaining the agreements reached in Beijing were graphically illustrated by examples of American determination to turn Beijing +10 into an anti-abortion event. While they were outnumbered and outmanoeuvred by the rest of the world, the outcome was that no new advances could be agreed in an atmosphere where it was important to defend the gains of Beijing.

The afternoon discussion saw Dermot Kilgallon of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform outline the approach being taken in developing an Irish strategy that would be 'Beijing in an Irish context', high level and strategic and relevant to all women. It was clear that the Irish government has no difficulty with the concept of a specifically women's strategy. Mary Bunting, on behalf of OFMDFM, provided a robust defence of the work of the Gender Unit, expressing her 'disappointment' at the negative feedback they had received in the consultation response. However, she stated that the responses would be 'taken on board' and she suggested a future meeting with those in the 'gender equality sector' to discuss the way forward. Margaret Ward, speaking on behalf of the Ad Hoc Policy Group, replied that the strength of the response was a measure of women's determination to have a policy that was radical and inclusive and which acknowledged the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland in ensuring that women had an equal role in the task of conflict resolution and reconstruction. Joanna McMinn for NWCI concluded by outlining what a strategy for women should contain, emphasising the importance of political will in ensuring that a strategy would be developed, resourced and implemented.

The final discussion of the seminar provided the opportunity for an open exchange of views regarding the limitations of the gender strategy and the misuse of Section 75 in ignoring women's multi-identities because of an assumption that a gender strategy could only be about ensuring that women received equal treatment to men. Participants voiced their frustration at the 'gender neutral' approach of policy makers and the failure to accept that equality of outcomes rather than equal treatment defined the spirit and the reality of S75.

It was an important and timely seminar which highlighted the need for engagement with policy makers and which illustrated the strength of including an all-island dimension within the discussion. One positive outcome seminar has been a commitment by OFMDFM to look again at its proposed strategy. An advisory committee is in the process of being established and we are told that there will be an action plan for women and a further action plan for men.

Ad Hoc Women's Policy Group, September, 2005

WOMEN'S EQUALITY: INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS - LOCAL STRATEGIES'

INTRODUCTION

Margaret Ward
Ad-Hoc Women's Policy Group

On behalf of the Ad-Hoc Women's Policy Group I would like to welcome you all to this seminar. We think it is a ground-breaking event, bringing together as it does the women's NGO sector, from north and south, together with representatives of both governments and statutory organisations, to discuss the development and implementation of strategies to eliminate discrimination against women and to consider the extent to which our respective government's international obligations are being met.

The Ad-Hoc Women's Policy Group

The Group was formed in early 2002 as a support group for those within the women's voluntary sector involved in considering policy issues relevant to women on the island of Ireland. Those currently active in the group in the north come from the Equality Commission, the Family Planning Association, NIC-ICTU, the Women's Resource and Development Agency, Women's Support Network and Women into Politics. From the south we have WEFT (Women Educating for Transformation) and the National Women's Council of Ireland. Other organisations join the group for specific purposes, as they work on issues that are relevant to the group. The overall aim of the group is to work in partnership in sharing information and discussing research, thereby collectively strengthening the gender dimension of policy making throughout Ireland. Its strength is its 'ad-hocery' - it is genuinely open to all who are working on issues related to women's equality. Do make contact with us if you would like to come to meetings or be put on our mailing list.

Work undertaken by the group includes acting as a consultative body for the Gender Equality Unit of the Office of First and Deputy First Minister in its pre-consultation meetings for 'Gender Matters'.

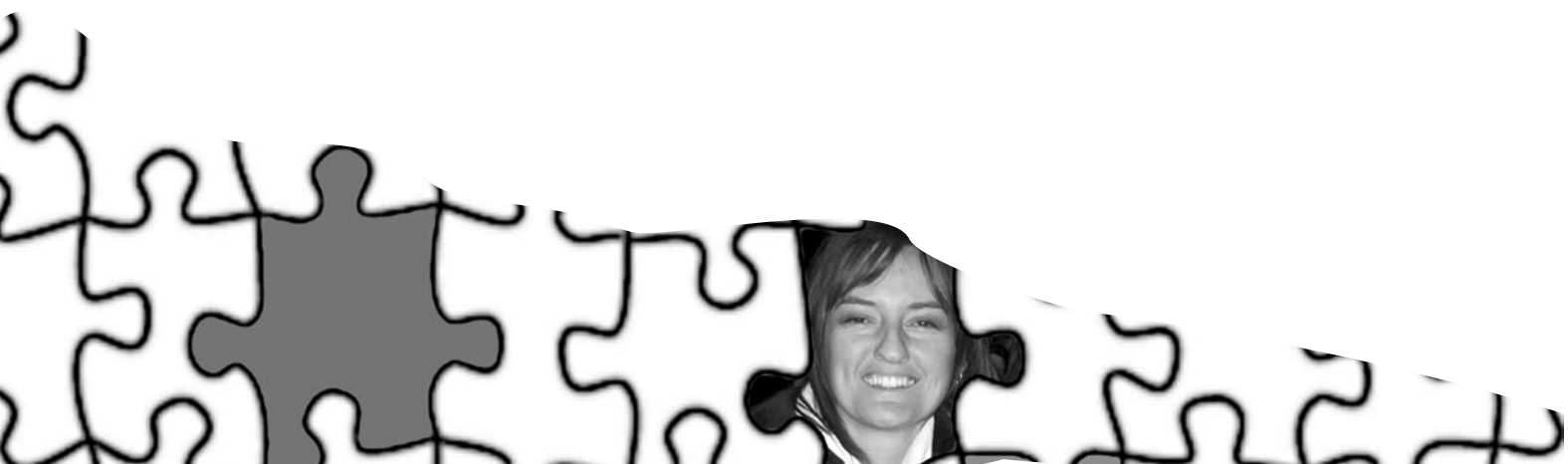
Before the November 2003 elections the Group worked in partnership with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in producing a Women's Manifesto highlighting a set of demands around key equality issues that women hoped a new Assembly would consider. This was endorsed by a wide range of women's groups, trade unions and other organisations and candidates from all political parties. It is now being used again - by Women into Politics - to put the same questions to parties in the Westminster and local government elections.

We have also organised a seminar considering the technical difficulties in analysing departmental budgets from a gender perspective. This might be work that we will come back to in the future.

Why this seminar?

We called this seminar 'Women's equality - international standards - local strategies' because its timing coincides with a number of highly significant, indeed, historic events. Here in the north we have had 'Gender Matters', the consultation on the development of a gender equality strategy, which closed at the end of February, the response to which we await with anticipation. In the south they are currently engaged in considering a future National Women's Strategy. We thought that it would be important to consider both of these initiatives. And at the same time, in New York from 28th February to 11th March, the 49th Session of the Commission for the Status of Women drew governments and women's organisations from around the world to consider the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as 2005 sees the 10th anniversary of the Beijing Conference.

We felt that in developing strategies in Ireland intended to eliminate the causes of persistent discrimination against women, it would be helpful to consider international commitments to advance women's equality - particularly CEDAW and Beijing - that have been signed up to by the UK and Irish governments. The overall aim of the seminar is to consider international standards regarding women's agenda for equality and to discuss how our local strategies are complying with these international standards



PLENARY ADDRESS

INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS AND WOMEN'S EQUALITY

Brenda Campbell
Barrister

Within the UN Structure

The Evolution of the CEDAW Convention

1975 -1985:	The Declaration of the Decade for Women
1979:	The adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
1993:	Second World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna
1995:	The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
1999:	The CEDAW Optional Protocol
2000:	Beijing + 5
2005:	Beijing + 10

The Impact on Women's Equality

Women's Rights as Human Rights

Identification of the problems faced by women and obstacles that impede the advancement of women's human rights
Identification of programmatic steps (gender sensitisation and gender mainstreaming) necessary for the advancement of women

Statistics

In Northern Ireland there are no female judges in the Higher Courts (High Court or Court of Appeal) nor have there ever been.

In Ireland, the percentage of women representatives in the Dáil has risen by only 1% in the last decade from 12% to 13%. At this rate it will take another 370 years for the percentage of women to reach 50%.

- There is no country where women earn more than men
- In 1999, the Gardai responded to 10,110 incidents of domestic violence. In 92% of these cases, the victim was female.
- In Ireland 42% of women experience some form of sexual abuse in their lifetime. • Only 3% of managing directors in Ireland are women.
- In 1999 the three refuges in the Eastern Regional Health Board area accommodated 2,060 women and their children. 1,104 were refused refuge in this area in the same year.

The Evolution of Women's Human Rights

Two strand approach:

1. insight and identification of the realities of discrimination and inequality faced by women globally (BPfA)
2. development of an instrument through which discrimination against women can be identified and addressed and women's human rights can be realised (the CEDAW Convention)

State Obligations

- States undertake to eliminate discrimination against women in all its forms including by:
 - Incorporating the principle of equality of women and men into the legal system, abolishing discriminatory laws and adopting appropriate laws prohibiting discrimination against women
 - Eliminating all acts of discrimination against women by any person, organisation or enterprise.
- Prevent discrimination
- Prohibit discrimination
- Identify and redress
- Impose sanctions against discriminating acts
- Promote women's rights and equality through proactive measures
- Accelerate de facto equality
 - Equality - the legal standard or end result
- Non Discrimination - the means or process through which equality is to be achieved

Equality

The right to be equal to men or substantive equality?

- equality of opportunity
- equality of access to the opportunity
- equality of results

Non Discrimination

Article 1

- "Any distinction, exclusion or restriction, made on the basis of sex, which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human and fundamental freedoms, in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field."
- Are legal rights curtailed by denial of women's rights to economic and social development?
- The overarching challenge in applying women's human rights is to characterise women's multiple disempowerments, not just at a particular stage in life (education, employment, motherhood) but from their own births as a cumulative injustice that governments are obligated to remedy.

Intersectionality

- **Multiple forms of discrimination**
 - Intersectional oppression that arises out of the combination of various oppressions which, together, produce something unique and distinct from any one form of discrimination standing alone.
 - takes into account the historical, social and political context which recognises the unique experience of the individual based on all relevant grounds.
- **Enforcement**
 - The international protection of human rights should not be confused with criminal justice. States do not appear before the Court as defendants in a criminal action. The objective of international human rights law is not to punish those individuals who are guilty of violations, but rather to protect the victims and to provide for the reparation of damages resulting from the acts of states responsible
 - Case of Velasquez Rodriguez, Inter-American Court of Human Rights, July 29, 1988, para. 134
- **Binding contract between states parties**
- **Obligation to report to CEDAW Committee**
- **Optional Protocol procedures**
 - Inquiry
 - Communications
- **Litigation**

Conclusion

- The CEDAW Convention and BfPA do not automatically confer rights on women. Promise can only be delivered if we learn to use them effectively in practice to set goals, identify needs, frame laws, policies and programmes and evaluate action.
- By ratifying the CEDAW Convention and affirming BfPA, States are saying that they:
 - Recognise discrimination and inequality.
 - Recognise the need for State action
 - Commit themselves to do certain things and not do certain things.
 - Are willing to be held accountable at national and international levels.

49TH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION FOR THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Kate McCullough
Northern Ireland Women's European Platform

From Northern Ireland to the United Nations

The Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (NIWEP) has consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations and has permission to attend the sessions of CWS. I attended the 49th session on behalf of the organisation to:

- Lobby for the recommitment by world governments to the Beijing Platform for Action, the Special Session outcome document of 2000 and other Declarations;
- Raise awareness of concerns of gender inequalities in Northern Ireland;
- Participate in meetings and discussions with EU presidency and the UK government;
- Learn about new models of practice and to share these with organisations in Northern Ireland;
- Share Northern Ireland information and experience on Northern Ireland with women and governments from around the world;
- Make recommendations on issues which may have an impact on women in Northern Ireland;
- Continue feedback/monitoring of the Platform for Action with organisations in England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland and European partners.

It was agreed in the 48th session of the Commission for the Status of Women (CWS) in March 2004 that the 49th session would be a high-level event. At its substantive session in July 2004, ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council of the United Nations) decided that the 49th session of CWS should convene a high-level plenary meeting, open to the participation of all UN Member States and Observers, on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.¹

The Chairperson of the 49th session of the Commission was requested to transmit the outcome of the 49th session through ECOSOC to the member states 60th session of the General Assembly at the United Nations, including to the high-level event of the General Assembly on the review of the Millennium Declaration.

Two Thematic Issues

The CSW draws its programme of work closely from the Platform for Action and the Outcome Document so as to ensure their effective implementation. The Commission produced two thematic issues for the 49th Session which were:

- 1. Review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"; and*
- 2. Current challenges and forward looking strategies for the advancement and empowerment of women and girls*

¹ The full text of the Platform for Action, the outcome document of the Special Session 2000 and the Millennium Development Goals can be obtained at www.un.org



As an NGO with special consultative status the Northern Ireland Women's European Platform prepared for the 49th Session by:

- Preparing and submitting to the United Nations an 'alternative' report to the UK government's responses to the UN questionnaire which detailed some of the weaknesses in implementing the Platform for Action in Northern Ireland
- Attending European Economic Commission for Europe pre CWS meeting held in Geneva in December 2004 and participated in preparing the NGO statements on the following:
 - 1) Women and the economy; a) Employability b) Social protection & pension
 - 2) Institutional Mechanisms to promote gender equality
 - 3) Trafficking of women in the context of migratory movements
 - 4) Roundtable on emerging issues ¹
- Preparing a Statement for the Secretary-General which was circulated to all governments during the plenary session in the first week and copies were distributed to all NGOs at the session;
- Prepared and printed the Platform's outcome document on the conference on the UN SCR 1325 on Trial ² for distribution

Opening Session

The Session was opened by Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations, who expressed his confidence in governments reaffirming the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly in 2000. Mr Annan stressed that to mark the ten years since the Beijing Platform for Action, governments should make 'great steps forward' and that 'gender equality was critical to peace.'

He went on to state that there should be specific targets of action to:

- Strengthen girls secondary education as well as primary
- Guarantee sexual and reproductive rights
- Invest in infrastructure to reduce the burden on women and girls
- Guarantee women's inheritance/property rights
- Eliminate gender inequalities in employment
- Increase women's share in participating in government
- Redouble the effort to increase women in leadership ³

The Draft Declaration

At the following opening session governments proceeded to make statements to the draft Declaration and their commitment to reaffirm, by adopting the draft Declaration, their commitment to increase gender equality.

The draft Declaration, which needed total agreement by the 191 countries to be adopted, had already been sent to the governments and none had made any amendment except for one, which was the US. The amendment to the draft had been requested to be included before the start of the session and we were informed that the US would not commit to the draft Declaration unless the amendments were agreed.

The European Union was very strong in its commitment not to amend the Declaration, even though it agreed with the non governmental organisations (NGOs) that it actually could have been strengthened by stronger text, but considering that there was already unease and a demand for amendments before the plenary it was highly unlikely that the Declaration would have survived. This was very disappointing to the European Union and even more disappointing to NGOs.



Immediately following the opening statements the European Union NGO caucus met to discuss the issue of the negative amendment to the draft Declaration. This meeting included ECE regions (North America, America, Israel and CIS). The active NGOs agreed to write a statement that could be used to pressurise the US and it was also a tool for lobbying to keep countries committed to accepting the Declaration in its entire form without any amendments. This was carried out by:

- NGOs lobbying the government in question through e-mail and engaging supportive politicians
- Writing statements to other NGOs from other regions hoping to encourage them to make their governments stand firm
- Working and sharing with other regions to create more statements to condemn the amendments

The pressure continued for the week. Governments and NGOs believed that the US government would back down during the reading of its statement, which was to be delivered by its Ambassador Ellen Sauerbrey. The NGOs waited with baited breath on the Tuesday 1 March at 5pm. The US did drop the first amendment recognising that abortion law was not at international level but at national level, every country was responsible for setting its own laws on abortion, but the US still maintained the second amendment should be adopted. American NGOs demanded meetings with their government officials, which they eventually got the following morning.

It was extremely frustrating as nowhere in the Platform for Action Is abortion mentioned. There is only a reference to ensure women's control of reproductive rights and services, which provide sexual health. Most NGOs felt that this was a ploy to slow up the session or to open up the abortion debate, which would have caused deep division between NGOs and governments. The US asked to meet with each European country one by one and each informed the US that they were supporting the European Union's statement and commitment to the Declaration without any amendments.

The draft Declaration needed to be agreed by Friday 4th. That day, at 5.30pm, the government who had requested the amendments withdrew to the cheers of the women in the hall. The abortion debate - which is not part of the Platform for Action or Beijing +5 -, was allowed to take over the 49th session, yet over 6,000 NGOs succeeded in holding governments accountable.

Trafficking and Prostitution

As Chairwoman of NIWEP I was aware that coming to this session it was very important that I identified vital information that I could expand into the Platform's action plan which I was prepared to undertake when I returned to Northern Ireland. The Platform will consider carrying out research on trafficking, the link to sexual violence and ways of addressing this issue. I was extremely keen to follow the resolution by the US on reducing demand for trafficked women and girls for the following reasons:

- The whole debate on trafficking and prostitution is one that Northern Ireland has not attempted to open up for discussion;
- The lack of knowledge and information on the extent of women in Northern Ireland trafficked and the sexual exploitation of women in Northern Ireland;
- It is also a debate which the European Union has disagreements between member states, some of whom have legalised prostitution;
- Many countries are either passing legislation to legalise prostitution or are turning a blind eye to the flaunting of state legislation.

Government - Sweden's Experience

I attended a number of side events to learn more about trafficking and prostitution. An example of a side event which I attended was delivered by the two Swedish government ministers. In 1999 the Swedes adopted a law which criminalised persons who buy sex and not the person selling it. It was not easy. Since the 1970 and 80's the women's movement had been lobbying for this change but there was divided opinion both at local level and at government level. What changed opinion was when all the Liberal and Conservative parties united to address the issue, not as a feminist matter but as a social matter. It was argued by the parties that prostitution was unequal power between women and men.

¹ NIWEP's 'alternative' response to the UN questionnaire can be viewed at <http://www.unecce.org/oes/gender/beijing10.htm> and statements from NGO working groups can be viewed at www.niwep.org.uk

² Copy can be found on NIWEP website www.niwep.org.uk

³ Full speech can be obtained at NIWEP Offices, 58 Howard Street, Belfast BT1 6PJ

The NGO Working Group on Women and Peace and Security

The UK Working Group on 1325 was invited to meet with the NGO working group on Women, Peace and Security. The NGO Working Group was formed in May 2000 to successfully advocate for a UN Security Council Resolution on women, peace and security. Its mission is to collaborate with the United Nations, its member states and civil society towards full implementation of the resolution.⁴

The meeting was held in the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children and resulted in a detailed exchange of the work that was being carried out by the NGOs based in the UN and the UK Working Group. I had the opportunity to speak on behalf of the work the Platform was carrying out in raising awareness of 1325. For me this meeting was very important as we were able to establish the work that each of the working groups was carrying out and to be able to share our experience and to seek support for further lobbying and information sharing.

Presenting the Platform experience of UN SCR 1325 at training workshops

Before attending CWS I was asked if I would give a presentation to women at two workshops on the experience of NIWEP in lobbying on the implementation of 1325 in Northern Ireland. Other panel members came from West Africa, Columbia, Israel, Palestine and Fiji. This was a wonderful experience for me as I felt many women in the room could identify with not having government support in implementing 1325, especially if a government does not know the commitment to this international law. Some women were appreciative of the small steps the Platform was carrying out - lobbying, awareness raising, working with the UK Working Group, engaging with the Peace Women at the UN and the NGO Working Group. A number of women's groups and organisations hoped to get in touch to discuss ways of engaging government.⁵

Implementing Resolution 1325 with Norwegian Ambassador for Women's Rights and Gender Equality

I attended a side event in which the Norwegian Ambassador gave an overview of her work in implementing Resolution 1325. Ambassador Guro Katherine Vikør informed the Group that Norway was involved in peace negotiations in Sri Lanka, Haiti, the Philippines and Sudan and how it was important to ensure that women were involved in peace building and could be seen to be taking senior positions in decision-making roles. For example, in Haiti, 30% of women are involved in a discussion between the two disputing groups.

Close of the Session

At the close of the session the Commission on the Status of Women adopted 10 wide-ranging resolutions on improving women's status, including six new texts, but it was unable to conclude its session, owing to several roll-call votes on a series of amendments to a new United States-led draft on women's economic advancement.

Chairperson Kyung-wha Kang (Republic of Korea) announced that the Commission had run out of time to take care of the session's remaining business. She said, "we will see if and when we are able to reconvene".

Still, the Commission succeeded in adopting six new resolutions on:

- Gender mainstreaming in national policies and programmes;
- The possible appointment of a special rapporteur on discrimination against women;
- Trafficking;
- Integrating a gender perspective in post-disaster relief, particularly in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster;
- Indigenous women;
- Women's economic advancement.

It adopted four traditional texts on: women, the girl child and HIV/AIDS; the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW); the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan; and the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women. The two week meeting to review the progress made since the women's conference in Beijing ten years ago concluded by underscoring the need for governments to do more to achieve gender equality and facilitate the advancement of women.

A Declaration reaffirming the commitments made ten years ago in Beijing and calling for further action from governments, although it got off to a shaky start, was adopted at the end of the first week. The participation included approximately 80 Ministers, over 1,800 government delegates from 165 Member States, 7 first ladies and more than 2,600 non-governmental representations from all regions of the world.

⁴ Information on the accomplishments of the NGOWG can be obtained at NIWEP Offices, 58 Howard Street, Belfast BT1 6PJ

⁵ Pack from the training session is available at the NIWEP Offices, 58 Howard Street, Belfast BT1 6PJ

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WORK IN NORTHERN IRELAND

- To raise awareness not only of the outcome of the 49th session of the Commission for the Status of Women, but the Platform for Action, Beijing+5, CEDAW, the Millennium Development Goals with women, community voluntary organisations, government and other relevant statutory agencies.
- To have groups and organisations to monitor and report to Northern Ireland Women's European Platform the implementation of the Platform for Action at a local/national level in Northern Ireland.
- To lobby the UK and Northern Ireland government on behalf of women in Northern Ireland to fully implement of the Platform for Action, using the Declaration adopted at the 49th Session as a lobbying tool.
- To ensure Northern Ireland government officials attend CSW and other UN sessions in order to gain knowledge of what is required to implement the outcomes of the Beijing Platform for Action, the outcome document of Beijing+5 and recommendations made by the Committee for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- To contribute to raising awareness of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, Women Peace and Security, and to lobby government in recognising the under representation of women in Northern Ireland in new peace building structures such as the policing board, the parades commission, high court judges, political parties, independent monitoring commission.

COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Therese Murphy

National Women's Council of Ireland

Good morning everyone. My name is Thérèse Murphy and I am the Chairperson of the National Women's Council of Ireland. It was in this capacity that I travelled to New York to attend the 49th session of the Commission for the status of women. I would like to tell you a little about the 49th Session. Kate has already told you much of the background and I will deal with what happened at the most recent meeting. It was a truly amazing experience and were it not for the fact that I was in the company of a former chair of NWCI, Grainne Healy, and the current General Secretary of the European Women's Lobby, Mary McPhail, it would have taken me a lot longer to orient myself. We attended for the second week of the Commission and joined Banúlacht and Women from the North West, who had arrived during the first week, Anne Murray from the Irish Countrywomen's Association joined us also.

I will just give you an overview and some background information on what appeared in the media and then go into detail. During the first week the focus was on the gaps and challenges in implementing the Beijing agenda. The 45-member functional Commission of the Economic and Social Council held a ministerial-level debate that resulted in the consensus adoption of a declaration, by which governments emphasized that the full implementation of the Beijing documents was essential to achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. The second week then was given over to debating the individual resolutions.

American Resistance

The first order of business was to be a quick approval of a simple statement reaffirming the Beijing meeting's closing declaration. But on the Monday of the first week, the Americans created turmoil by announcing that the United States would not join the otherwise universal consensus unless the document was amended to say that it did not create "any new international Human rights" or "include the right to abortion". This situation was received with dismay, even anger by many of the NGO's. For one thing, the Beijing statement is nonbinding. For another, the Beijing negotiators had tried to anticipate controversy by recognizing unsafe abortions as a serious public health issue while leaving the question of legality up to each nation. Specifically, the Beijing Platform says that abortion should be safe where it is legal, and that criminal action should not be taken against any woman who has an abortion. All of this seemed clear enough, but the Bush team apparently could not resist an opportunity to press its anti-abortion agenda.

It was not until the Friday of the first week that the American delegation agreed to drop its proposed amendment altogether, realising that it was totally alone in pressing this issue. This was only after global opposition, from every regional group at the conference, which had argued for the statement's approval without amendments. This delay resulted in the business of the Commission being unfinished.

Experience of a government delegate

How was all this dealt with and what did we do while we were there? Grainne and I were part of our Government Delegation, so we had places that other NGOs did not. What this meant was that every morning we could attend the informal sessions where the resolutions were being debated and receive a copy of the resolution as it had been amended the day before. NGOs as observers did not get a copy of the amended resolution and had to ask their Government Delegation for a copy later in the day. Not all NGOs were able to get a copy and so it was quite difficult for them to influence the progress of the resolution. We were able to have discussions with our Government Delegates and help them influence the outcome of the debate. We organised meetings between the Irish Government reps and ourselves at 1 pm every day to discuss the progress of the various resolutions. The UK Government reps also did this. So we were among the best informed delegates there. The members of the European Union spoke as one unit. The representative from Luxembourg was the spokesperson as they hold the European Presidency. Last year Ireland were the holders of the Presidency, so we were the spokespersons.

Every morning at 9am the NGOs were allowed to use the main conference rooms. Speakers were invited to address the delegates on various aspects of the resolutions. Here the events of the day would be announced and interpretation was available. This meeting was very informative and useful. Every day there were side events and "Caucuses". The European Women's Lobby held a Caucus every second day at 5pm and the United States Women as the organisers, held one every other day at 5pm. Here the events of the day were discussed from the point of view of the hosts of the Caucus and NGOs had a chance to catch up on the thinking of the other nations and get a feel for where each of the resolutions were headed. It was here that actions were decided on to lobby government delegations on various issues. It was very interesting to hear the views of the other NGOs. Interpretation was not available for these meetings so English and French were the main languages used.

Following the Progress of the Resolutions

The nature of the event is such that you cannot follow everything that is happening. Of the 10 resolutions at the 49th session we choose two to follow: the resolutions on Trafficking and the Economic Advancement of Women. Grainne has a great deal of expertise on the subject of Trafficking and so I took on the Resolution on the Economic Advancement of Women. The Government delegates were divided up in the same way so I met with John O'Connell from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and Grainne met with Kathleen Connolly, also from Justice. The permanent representative to the United Nations covered the other resolutions. Of the other resolutions there was debate about Gender Mainstreaming and the position of Asian women after the tsunami disaster. The other resolutions were passed largely as they were presented, uncontested and some were just to signal that they would be on the agenda for the 50th session - most importantly, the appointment of a Rapporteur with responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the UN conventions on human rights and gender equality. The necessary background work had not been done but in order to have these included as part of the work of the Commission, agreement in principal is needed.

Every morning at 8am there were closed sessions where the government representatives only would meet and discuss the resolutions. Then it would go a public forum where the government representatives and government delegates would participate. Not all NGOs were allowed to participate but were seated up in the gallery as observers. Each day NGOs would ask for permission to make an intervention. They would be notified in advance and sit in the front row of the gallery to be called on in turn by the chair of the session. The resolution would be debated line by line. A consensus would have to be reached before accepting any change. Sometimes it would go to a vote. Later that day or the next morning the Government Delegates would meet and the proposing country - the USA in the case of the two resolutions mentioned above - would say if the amendments agreed the day before were acceptable to them. Often they were not acceptable and would be deleted. When the amended document was distributed at the informal session a paragraph which was hard won the day before would have been deleted and the debate would start all over again to have it re-inserted.

Of course the most exciting day was the very last one. Everyone expected the conference to end on the Thursday afternoon. But because of the shenanigans of the USA during the first week this did not happen. On the last day each of the resolutions were voted on and accepted - but not without a little drama.

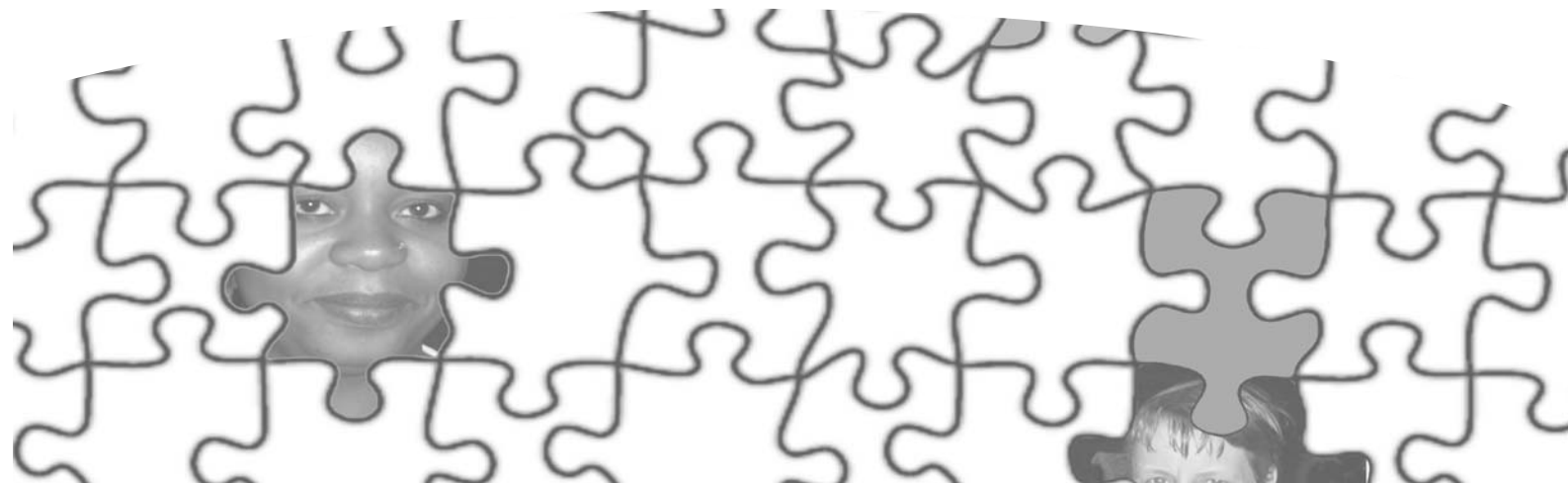
The resolution on Palestinian women was adopted by a recorded vote of the 45-member Commission of 38 in favour to 1 against (United States), with 2 abstentions (Canada, Iceland). By the terms of the text, sponsored by Jamaica on behalf of the "Group of 77" developing countries and China, the Commission reaffirmed that the Israeli occupation remained a major obstacle for Palestinian women with regard to their advancement, self reliance and integration in the planning of their society. It called for measures for the tangible improvement of the difficult situation on the ground and the living conditions faced by Palestinian women and their families.

The Economic Advancement of Women

For the resolution on the economic advancement of women, a series of amendments were submitted from the floor by the South African and Cuban delegations - all but one proposal were adopted - which involved adding and removing text, and rephrasing it on a range of topics from reproductive rights to the public sector's role in establishing an enabling environment for women. After adoption of the first set of proposals, the United States' representative said she wished to withdraw the changed text from consideration. On a point of order, Cuba's representative said it was not possible to withdraw a text once it was amended. The United States later withdrew its sponsorship of the draft, after which, it was adopted, as orally amended, without a vote.

According to the main thrust of the text, Member States were called on to undertake legislative, administrative and financial measures to create a strong enabling environment for all women entrepreneurs and women participating in the labour market. They were urged to design and revise laws to ensure women's full and equal rights to own land and other property, including through inheritance, and to undertake administrative reforms to give women the right to credit, capital, appropriate technologies, and access to markets and information.

Draft summaries of the proposals are in Appendix 1.



PEACE BUILDING THROUGH POLICY PROJECT

Marie Crawley

Louise O'Meara

The Peace Building through Policy Project was established in June 2004 by WEFT in partnership with the Belfast based Women's Resource and Development Agency (WRDA). The overall aim of the project was to:

'Strengthen the capacity of the community based women's sector to influence and lobby policy makers'

There were two components to the project. The first was the commissioning of a gender audit of participation in public bodies in the 12 counties (6 Northern and 6 southern border counties). The second was a 10 day training programme broadly aimed at exploring gender mainstreaming within the community based women's sector.

Gender Audit Findings - Balances along the Border

The Gender Audit results constitute a baseline outlining the number of women involved in decision making in Northern Ireland and the six Southern Border Counties (SBC). The audit of bodies and agencies was researched and is presented under the following headings:

- Government
- Local Government
- Civil Service
- Local Development Agencies
- Health
- Education
- Europe
- Public and Other Bodies

Key Conclusions

- One of the most significant areas of imbalance is that of elected political representation where the percentage of women, both North and South, falls far short of the 60:40 ratio generally accepted as being necessary for effective representation
- The under-representation of women in local authorities has added significance, both North and South, as places are reserved for local authority representatives on other Boards and agencies such as; Local Strategy Partnerships, Health and Social Services Boards and Councils, Education and Library Boards in the North and County Development Boards, Health Boards and VECs in the South.
- One of the significant areas of difference between the North and the Southern Border Counties is that of Health and Social Services representation; women are represented to a much more significant degree in the North, in one instance, having 57% representation
- Figures relating to civil service employment present evidence of a robust glass ceiling for women, both North and South
- Organisations within the community, voluntary and local development sectors show significantly more balanced representation than that with in statutory and semi-state agencies

Gender Mainstreaming Training Initiative

An important component of the Peace Building through Policy Project was a training programme for women in the community and voluntary sector in Northern Ireland and the six Southern Border Counties.

The aims of the training were:

- 1 to provide an opportunity to explore the barriers to the achievement of a gender equality agenda (in the present post conflict situation) with a view to overcoming these barriers
- 2 to promote peace and reconciliation within the context of participation of the community sector in statutory gender mainstreaming processes
- 3 to identify, and discuss ways of overcoming, the barriers to cross border collaborative policy working on gender mainstreaming
- 4 to develop skills in gender mainstreaming
- 5 to explore gender mainstreaming tools
- 6 to build the capacity to the women's community sector to engage with policy makers on implementation of gender mainstreaming
- 7 to encourage the community women's sector to engage with policy makers on the implementation of gender mainstreaming and to identify how and where participants might use skills and knowledge acquired on the training programme

The training facilitated the exploration of gender mainstreaming within the community based women's sector and resulted in greater awareness among participants of the value of engaging with policy makers. Many participants left the training programme with a clear plan of action. The training relating to the use of gender proofing tools was viewed, in particular, as a crucial step to developing the confidence and ability to progress gender mainstreaming in the respective jurisdictions.

Participant Reflections

Participants expressed considerable frustration around the under representation of women in decision making, and a strong belief that 'major positive action' is required:

" we must insist on 50/50 for the next elections, and insist on this from the top".

" Government will have to put it in to practice, rather than pay lip service to it".

While acknowledging the difficulties of bringing the learning back to their respective communities, participants nevertheless felt they had a role in this process. This, they suggested, included lobbying for strategies to be put in to place that would remove the barriers currently preventing women from participating in public life.

Peace Building Module

Given the range of experience and connection to the conflict present amongst the participants, it was essential to emphasise that the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement is relevant to all - regardless of where they are in relation to the conflict. The common factor is to see the Agreement as an opportunity to build the future. More time and work is needed to make more explicit the connections between the work that people do and peace building - in the sense of creating a new future. It is also important to emphasise the different experiences of conflict and the importance of conflict mapping as highlighted by the United Nations.

Full details of the project are contained in the report 'Balances Along the Border', which can be obtained from:

WRDA

6 Mount Charles

Belfast BT7 1NZ

e mail: infor@wrda.net

MORNING DISCUSSION

Benedictiah Vation

Louth African Women's Support Group, Dundalk

Benedictiah asked about the imposition of HIV/AIDS tests on Africans based in Ireland who are seeking mortgages. It appeared to be systematic discrimination on the grounds of race and the Irish state was doing nothing about this, although it was rectifiable in domestic law.

There was discussion around the use of domestic law through the Equality Authority or the Human Rights Commission in bringing a formal action on behalf of those affected. Also, whether it could be brought to the UN under international protocols based on race or gender. These would not be legally binding but they could be forceful.

Eilis Rooney

University of Ulster

Eilis drew attention to the complexity around women's presence. More women being in the room does not mean that the agenda will be progressive in terms of economic rights or religion/political opinion and did not necessarily impact on women's priorities at policy level. Gender was not just about men and women, but about power.

Anne Gallagher

Older Women's Network

Anne asked how the value of older women's work could be acknowledged by government, particularly in terms of their support for younger members of their family. The role of grandparents in providing childcare support that enabled their daughters to compete effectively in the workplace was vital and society could not function without this. Yet government ignored their contribution. It was important to bring the needs of older women into the agenda.

Tansey Hutchinson

Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities

Tansey stressed the importance of including race within the multi-identities of women that must be included in any strategy. Gender training did not include ethnic minority women, and they needed to be brought into training.

LOCAL PERSPECTIVES

Iris Lyle

Chair's Remarks

Welcome back. This morning's inputs have given us an understanding of the supra-human rights mechanisms of CEDAW and the BPfA. At the core of the BPfA is the idea of accountability - governments have an obligation to address the root causes of inequality by taking specific actions.

We have heard the findings from the WEFT/WRDA research. This gives us a snapshot of women's participation in public bodies in Northern Ireland and the Southern Border Counties. In terms of women's representation, we can see that there is still a long way to go.

In this afternoon's session we turn to how the commitments made by governments in the two jurisdictions of Ireland are translating into action. We will have inputs on the development of a gender strategy for women in Northern Ireland, followed by an input on the National Strategy for Women in the Republic. These inputs will be followed by responses from Joanna McMinn of the NWCI and Margaret Ward on behalf of the Ad Hoc Women's Policy Group. Then follows a panel question and answer session and then a final opportunity before closure for participants to make any final comments or suggestions for future action.

GENDER MATTERS

Mary Bunting
Director of Equality, OFMDFM

As Ms Bunting delivered an unscripted speech the following account is compiled from notes taken by members of the Ad-Hoc Policy Group.

The development of a gender strategy for Northern Ireland had to be put into the context of the political and legislative background. While the devolved administration had been in existence there had been much work on the development of equality legislation. There was currently a consultation on updating the Sex Discrimination Order to implement EU equality obligations and there was the on-going consultation around a Single Equality Bill. The Gender Equality Strategy was mandated from the Programme for Government, along with other strategies and the government wants to see progress on this. Single equality legislation was also happening in the UK and it was possible that they would learn from the experience of Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland administration also fed into the UK response to CEDAW and Beijing +10.

The difficulty was the political landscape - what will this mean in the climate of Direct Rule for the foreseeable future? The new minister would meet with the political parties after the election. Who will be the minister then? A review of the operation of Section 75 was undertaken as a consequence of the Joint Declaration and that was now complete. A review of the effectiveness of Section 75 would be undertaken by the Equality Commission in the autumn. Another important context is the importance of Section 75 in driving the process of mainstreaming.

There is within the administration a top priority commitment to gender via the Gender Equality Strategy. The framework and principles were in place, informed by CEDAW, Beijing and extensive pre-consultation. We may not have got that right, we are beginning to hear that from the consultation. The strategy was a framework for promoting equality of opportunity by means of gender mainstreaming and key action areas. The Gender Impact Assessment Handbook which had been commissioned was to help departments to develop a gender focus. There were some fears that this undermines Section 75 but it should be viewed as an additional tool. The next step was to turn high level principles into an action plan for all departments, with targets to measure progress.

Regarding responses to the consultation, Mary expressed disappointment at the negative tone, given that they engaged with key stake holders. But they were taking them on board. She recognised the need to re-engage with the sector and with the Equality Commission in terms of an action plan. She wanted real actions to make a difference on the ground.

Mary acknowledged that the multiple identities of women have come through as a key theme in the consultation. People were becoming more sophisticated in their thinking around this issue. The complexity is joining up the different strategies, age, ethnic minority identity etc, in the context of women's/gender perspective. The approach of working in partnership was continuing but she wanted consultation to produce product, so there had to be a limit to consultation. The process was not as important as having a successful outcome, yet the process is still important as it represents who is engaged. People do not want just to be consulted, they want to be participative. In terms of re-engagement, she would like a meeting to talk about the best mechanism for engaging effectively with the Equality Commission, women's groups and men's groups. However, her view was that a strategy for women's equality was not possible as things currently stand. The mandate of OFMDFM is to produce a gender strategy, but we now recognise that women and girls are most disadvantaged. Taking into account what people are saying, there may be a need to go back to the Minister, and they might decide to have a different focus. It is not beyond us to think of a different approach to a gender strategy for women.

A NATIONAL WOMEN'S STRATEGY

Dermot Kilgallon

Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform

The Role of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform

First of all, to explain the role of the Department. It co-ordinates gender issues for government across all areas, especially in the international context, but also national, for example, women in decision-making.

It has responsibility for delivery of gender equality commitments.

- Legislation on Equality, Maternity, Parental, Adoptive Leave
- Policy development on gender equality
- Positive Action (since 2000)

The general approach of the Department.

- Legislation - discrimination on gender prohibited in employment and in goods and services
- Gender mainstreaming - NDP Units, but also employment, health and social welfare, crime, community development
- Positive Action, for example, Equality for Women Measure
- Other measures - childcare, elimination of violence against women

Gender Equality Commitments

International agreements

- UN Beijing Platform for Action
- UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women

National Commitments

- Programme for Government/Sustaining Progress
- Policy documents: National Action Plans, including Employment Action Plan, Health Strategy
- Programme for Government/Sustaining Progress
- Reviews of legislation - (Maternity, Parental, Equality - Employment and Equal Status
- 40% gender balance on state boards
- That each public sector entity implements a structured programme to address imbalances in gender representation in management positions
- Childcare
- Development of a National Women's Strategy

Background to the Development of a National Women's Strategy

- Sustaining Progress Commitment
- National Plan for Women 2002
- Beijing Platform for Action
- Aspirations for Women 2002
- Galligan/Fitzpatrick/EU gender indicators
- EU Gender Equality Policies



Overview of the Strategy

- Vision
- High Level and Strategic
- Beijing in an Irish context
- Achievable targets, realistic timescales, budgets
- Supported by local plans where necessary
- Relevant to all women
- Not to duplicate strategies already in place but may add to or update - NAPS, Health Strategy, NEAP
- To be published October 2005
- Time frame - 2005-2015

Structure

- Interdepartmental Committee
- Social partner (including NWCI) Consultation Group
- Equality Authority - advisory
- Secretariat: Gender Equality Section

Content/Presentation

- Introduction on each issue in the Strategy
 - Background
 - Current Position
 - Issues
- Template
 - Objective
 - Indicator
 - Target/Timescale
 - Action
 - Responsible

Proposed Chapters of the Strategy

- Introduction
- Policy Context
 - Historical Perspective
 - National/International Commitments
 - Data
- Vision
- Economy (employment, etc.)
- Health
- Education and Training
- Decision-Making
- Poverty and Social Inclusion
- Caring
- Violence Against Women
- Other
 - Arts, Sports, Culture
 - Rural development
 - Environment
 - Other
- Policy Development
 - Gender Equality Policy, Gender Mainstreaming,

Responsibilities of Individual Departments, Role of Agencies

- Infrastructure/Funding
- Implementation and Monitoring
- How, resources, by whom

Summary

The National Women's Strategy will be high level and strategic and will be relevant to the needs of people and will be developed in accordance with Ireland's national and international commitments.

GENDER MATTERS

Margaret Ward Ad-Hoc Women's Policy Group

Introduction

On behalf of the Ad-Hoc Women's Policy Group I would like to begin by saying how pleased we are to have this opportunity to have a public discussion around the development of strategies to further the equality of women in Ireland - north and south. It will be a frank discussion, and I hope a fruitful exchange of views. What we intended, in organising this event, was to facilitate dialogue so that, in the end, we have a strategy that women can own and feel part of and which is as robust as our collective contribution can make it.

The WPG was involved from the early stages of the development of 'Gender Matters', and while we welcome the fact that there is a cross-departmental commitment to respond to the challenges set by international agreements on women's equality, we have to say from the outset that it is our belief that as it stands at the moment, 'Gender Matters' will do little to advance the equality of women in Northern Ireland. We do not believe that the direction taken by the proposed 'gender equality strategy' - which sets out to achieve equality between women and men by a strategy of 'treating women like men though the provision of 'equal opportunities' - can succeed.

What we need is very different.

- We need recognition of the specific disadvantages suffered by women and strategies to counter those disadvantages.
- We need acknowledgement of the factors that prevent women from being able to compete on equal terms with men.
- We need strategies that include positive measures to redress inequalities in the workplace and in public life.
- We need a strategy that acknowledges the multiple identities of women and the needs of some of the most marginalised women, including migrant workers, disabled women, lesbians, members of ethnic minorities, older women.
- In other words, we need a strategy that has as its central aim the eradication of the structural inequalities that prevent women from achieving an equality of condition with men.

What we have is a strategy that looks only at women in so far as they compare with men - that is, 'women with and without dependents'. It also looks at transgender, which is a separate issue completely. This is counter to the spirit and to the reality of the provisions of S75, which looks at equality of opportunity in a much broader sense, extending it to race, sexual orientation, disability, etc. The narrowness of the focus has serious repercussions in terms of the issues that are included. Issues specific to women, most notably that of reproductive rights are not included within the proposed framework, it would appear because there is not a direct equivalence with men.

Why we need a women's strategy?

To argue for a woman's strategy is not to deny that issues specific to men and boys exist - but it is to argue that they are of a different order and require specific policies. Men as a sex are not structurally discriminated against. Women as a sex are. The gender pay gap disadvantages women, not men. It is women, not men, who are under-represented in public and political life. It is women who perform the majority of caring work in this society. It is women who suffer disproportionately from gender-based violence. Issues such as boys' under-achievement at school, or male suicide rates require specific policies, but they are not issues of gender-based discrimination. The gender equality strategy cannot explain why girls' better performance at school still leaves them underpaid and heavily concentrated in traditionally female sectors of the workforce. It is gender stereotyping, discrimination and lack of structural support, such as affordable childcare, that contributes to female disadvantage. A woman's strategy is consistent with the international obligations that have been agreed by the UK government in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and in CEDAW, which call for the implementation of national plans for women.

Equal treatment

A framework of 'equal treatment' cannot begin to change this deep-rooted imbalance between the conditions of men and women. Treating women equally to men cannot ensure equal outcomes because women and men experience different life situations. Equality of opportunity is meaningless if people are not equal. 'Gender Matters' appears reluctant to admit that women suffer from any intentional discrimination and women are in part blamed because inequality 'may also be partly caused by the choices women make...and the influence of our values and conditioning on these choices.' A strategy that begins with the need to empower women would begin with a very different analysis in considering the 'choices' that women are forced to make and the burden of care that falls largely on them.

Affective Equality

There is a need to include the achievement of 'affective equality' alongside economic, political and social equality. Affective equality is concerned with the right of everyone to have love and support and the need to recognise, respect and value the caring role performed, in the main, by women. This would include the need for an adequate income for carers and the provision of a caring infrastructure, with properly funded elder and child care. Kathleen Lynch, in the equality framework devised by her and her colleagues in UCD, has talked about the injustice involved in women having to give up work because of the lack of childcare. To frame the issue in terms of 'equal opportunities' is to privatise the debate so that we cannot see it as an equality issue that should belong to all of society. When we stop doing that, the solution is very different. It is no longer a question simply of an individual's ability to access that care.

A strategy that was woman-focused would also reject the term used by economists to describe those people who are not making a paid contribution within the workforce as 'economically inactive' in preference for another, such as 'unpaid care work', which is commonly used internationally. This would help to highlight the extent of women's unpaid activities in the care and maintenance of society.

Multiple Identities

Although introductory remarks in 'Gender Matters' admitted that in preliminary consultations 'much emphasis was placed on the importance of recognising that everyone has a multiple identity', the final document chose to ignore the issue of multiple identity and therefore failed to give recognition to the multiple discrimination experienced, for example, by black and minority ethnic women. We would urge that a fully integrated approach to addressing the needs of women must include older women, lesbian and bi-sexual women, black and minority ethnic women including Traveller women and disabled women.

Positive Action

Positive action measures are vital if the under representation of women in public life is ever to be remedied. There is no suggestion within 'Gender Matters' that positive action measures will be included within the final strategy, despite the fact that they are an integral part of all international agreements, approved of in law by CEDAW as 'temporary special measures to accelerate the achievement of equality of treatment'. They exist, for example, in the Sex Discrimination (Election of Candidates) Act 2002, which has not been used by political parties here and the parties have had no pressure placed on them to use the provisions of the Act. The GFA pledged support for the 'full and equal participation of women' and the implementation of this pledge requires some enforcement mechanism.

And importantly, given our situation in Northern Ireland, as a country coming out of conflict, we would have expected UN Resolution 1325 on 'Women, Peace and Security' to have formed a major element in a strategy to ensure that women take their equal role in the task of conflict resolution and reconstruction. With the strength of 1325 we can argue that women must form half of interface groups, community organisations, the developing Neighbourhood Partnership Boards - where the procedures to ensure gender parity are not at all clear - even the Parades Commission. In addition, 1325 also calls for gender sensitisation of all groups involved in the area of peace and conflict resolution. 1325 poses a challenge to the male-dominated political culture of NI, and it can be a tool to help to transform that culture.

Now that the south of Ireland is insisting on 40% representation of either gender on public boards we cannot fall behind.

Action Plan

It is difficult to draw conclusions from 'Gender Matters' regarding a future action plan. There are no targets, no outcomes indicated and no time frame. Neither is there any budget to drive the strategy forward. We hope that there will be clear departmental budget lines dedicated to gender equality. We recommend a high-level interdepartmental group is established to monitor the implementation of the strategy, with representatives of the women's sector included within the groups. We look forward to discussion on the next stage.

A NATIONAL WOMEN'S STRATEGY

Joanna McMinn

National Women's Council of Ireland

Introduction

The Irish Government's National Women's Strategy is a commitment in the current 2002-2005 Social Partnership Agreement 'Sustaining Progress'. Currently at early drafting stage, it is not possible to comment on the actual drafts, rather this presentation will focus on the strategic focus a National Women's Strategy should have, from the perspective of the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWC) which is the representative organisation of women in Ireland, with 165 Affiliates and representing over 300,000 women.

The NWC wishes to see an ambitious and effective National Women's Strategy (NWS) that envisions substantive equality that will enable all women achieve their full potential and participate fully in Irish society.

In order to deliver substantive equality for women, the NWS must:

- Set a clear strategic goal of eliminating gender inequality in Ireland
- Ensure coherent national data strategy with international comparators to support evidence based policies
- Create institutional mechanisms to monitor and evaluate progress

Rationale

Women remain in a disadvantaged position in Irish society, notwithstanding legislative changes and commitment to gender mainstreaming and to international human rights conventions. There are key areas of persistent (and structural) inequality, which must be addressed as a matter of priority. From a public policy perspective, there is a need for systematic focus at high level inter-departmental and social partner level and Clear commitment to outcomes

Background

The Irish Government made a commitment to implement the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), setting out the state's obligation to recognise and implement women's human rights; this was reaffirmed at the 'Beijing +10' meeting of the Commission for the Status of Women in 2005.

The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform carried out a wide consultation with women in Ireland that resulted in the publication of 'Aspirations of Women in Ireland: Towards a National Women's Strategy' in September 2002, and two documents focused on indicators.

The work of implementing the government commitment in 'Sustaining Progress' to a National Women's Strategy (2002-2005) began in February 2005. The NWC has been invited to participate in a NWS Consultative Group that will comment on drafts written by an Interdepartmental Group of civil servants from ten government departments. The NWC will argue strongly for a strategic and human rights focus in the NWS, and effective mechanisms for implementation of the strategy.

NWC Recommendations for a National Women's Strategy

1. Strategic Focus

The NWS should focus on key strategic areas of persistent gender inequality, for example women in decision making, economic inequalities and issues of care and caring, over a three year time frame with a new set of priorities for the following three years, plus a further three years until the strategic goal of eliminating women's inequality has been achieved.

2. Human Rights Focus

The NWS should establish strategic objectives that, at a minimum, meet international women's human rights standards as set out in the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Objectives from the Beijing Platform for Action place the government under obligation to, for example:

- Ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision making
- Make adequate resources available and ensure consultation from grassroots women's organisations to government in order to ensure that a gender policy would underpin all levels of government decision making
- Protect and promote the human rights of women
- Promote women's economic rights and independence
- Ensure equal access to training and education for women
- Alleviate the increasing and persistent burden of poverty on women

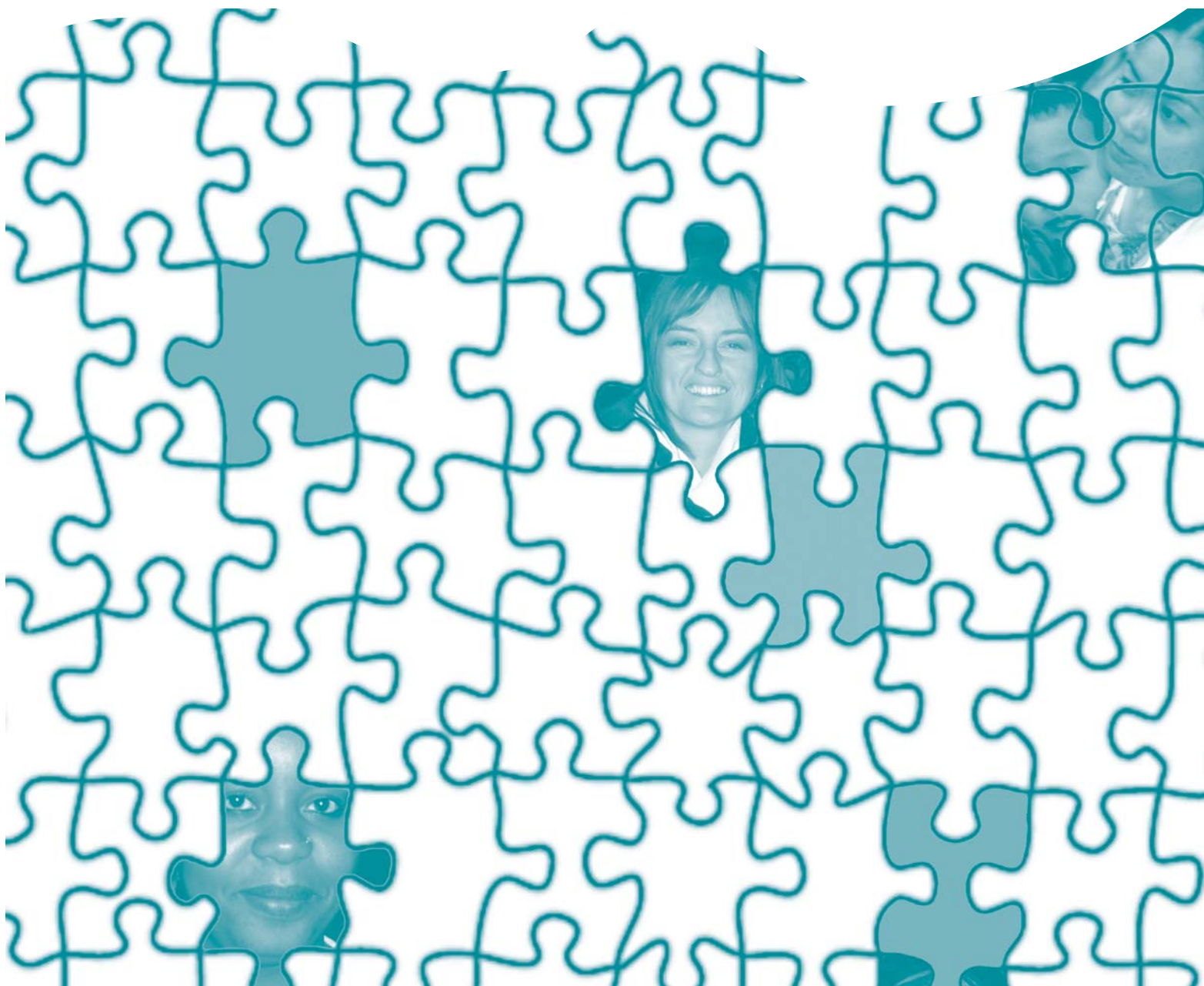
3. Effective implementation of the NWS

There needs to be clear and effective institutional mechanisms to implement the NWS. A Gender Mainstreaming Monitoring Committee with high level inter-departmental personnel and social partners should oversee the delivery of the overall strategy within a three year time frame in key agreed areas, and produce interim and three year progress report on the indicators and outcomes achieved.

There should also be a National Steering Committee for key strategic areas to do a body of work on delivering the targets and agreed indicators (similar to the current National Steering Committee on Violence Against Women). The work of the committee would be to monitor the indicators (including data), targets, budgets and timeframes for each strategic objective.

Conclusion

An effective NWS must contain a comprehensive set of time bound gender equality targets, the resources to implement them, and specific equality indicators to measure the progressive realisation of gender equality. It is on the targets set and the resources committed to reaching them that the value of the National Women's Strategy will ultimately rest.



AFTERNOON DISCUSSION

Carmel Roulston, University of Ulster and Women into Politics

As a member of the management committee of Women into Politics, Carmel wanted to ask about the use being made in Northern Ireland of the Sex Discrimination (Election of Candidates) Act 2000. It is a positive action measure to improve parity of representation yet it is clear that political parties here are not using it. Given the low participation of women in decision-making there was a need for stronger measures than permissive legislation. There should be a quota for gender matters, and given the announcement by the Irish government that there would in future be a 40% quota for women on public bodies, would the Gender Strategy include support for such a measure.

Mary Bunting

She agreed that we would have to look at women's participation, but how? There has been a lot of work in terms of improving women's participation on public bodies. The Diversity Group set up by Dame Rennie Fritchie is due to report in May. It will be interesting to see what it says. The question about the Sex Discrimination legislation is - is it lawful? Whose job is it to make political parties aware of the Act? She did not see the enforcement of the Act to be the business of government.

Brenda Campbell

Brenda declared that the state is obliged by international agreements to protect those who are discriminated against and to rectify the situation. This brings us back to our obligations under Beijing and CEDAW.

Anne Gallagher, Older Women's Network

She believed that one of the problems was the lack of media recognition of women's issues. Despite the fact that members of the Older Women's Network had undergone extensive training on how to deal with the media they have not been asked to talk about their issues, although they had made attempts to interest the media. The water charges event in Stormont had been excellent, with all the political parties there.

Aideen Gilmore, Committee on the Administration of Justice

She was disappointed by the comments made by Mary Bunting regarding the process of consultation. The process is important as a means of getting a good outcome and there was a need to accept negative views - that is what consultation is about. It was taking us back to the days of PAFT (Policy and Fair Treatment). She wanted to emphasise, in relation to the Gender Strategy, that the implementation of Section 75 is a unified strategy and should include all nine groups within the strategy.

Ann Graham, Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation

The experience of Women's Aid is that there is no commitment from government to equality. The mandate of gender is not a women's strategy, as can be seen in the domestic violence strategy, which has become a violence in the home strategy and now it is happening with the sexual violence strategy. They are gender neutral. Women are not mentioned specifically. They are reluctant to use the term women.

Eliz Byrne-McCullough, Family Planning Association

She wanted to express her outrage with Mary Bunting's remarks regarding the Sex Discrimination (Election of Candidates) Act. The state is obliged to protect its citizens and to ensure that its citizens are represented equally. The Gender Equality Strategy was to redress the imbalance in public life and it should include the Sex Discrimination (Election of Candidates) Act.

Mary Bunting, OFMDFM

She would reply to a number of the points raised in the discussion and in Margaret's presentation. Civil servants work with a political mandate. Political parties are important because issues can be brought to the attention of parties to influence Direct Rule ministers. She was disappointed that the work in the preliminary consultation hadn't come through. There was a need to reflect this in the final outcome. She agreed that the process is important, but too much time could be spent on models etc.

The Gender Equality Strategy was concerned with equality of opportunity. Section 75 was about the promotion of equality between women and men generally. It was not about treating everyone in the same way. Within this there could be positive action and specific actions targeted at specific groups. We can build on what we have. She agreed that north-south cooperation was important and that more should be done at an official level.

In terms of Resolution 1325 - we would need to look at this in the context of taking the strategy forward. The Taskforce Review Group was a useful place to focus on women's role in disadvantaged and divided communities.

Eilis Rooney, University of Ulster

While the Taskforce was reviewing the future of the voluntary sector, in terms of the funding for the women's sector and the continued difficulties experienced by the sector, it was little more than lip service on a plate. It is important to consider other aspects of S75. It was misused by the Equality Commission, who failed to mention religion and political opinion in their submission to CEDAW. She recognised that it was difficult for the voluntary sector to consider issues related to women of different religious belief or political opinion, but we must expect better from the government and from the Equality Commission. Another issue is that of social class and New TSN - what has happened there? We need political will and committed civil servants.



Anne Moore, NICVA

The Gender Equality Strategy and other overarching strategies that have been deemed to be 'high level' policies are being exempt from Equality Impact Assessments. But if there were high level EQIAs, they would highlight multiple discriminations.

Monica McWilliams, University of Ulster

There have been negative attitudes towards positive action, for example on policing, where women were not included as a group requiring positive action measures in terms of recruitment. This attitude is contained within the Gender Equality Strategy itself. Class is important in many ways, for example, in terms of gender-based violence and middle class, professional perpetrators, who get off lightly on the grounds they are 'fine, upstanding citizens' when the reality is that this should be considered as an aggravated offence and they should receive heavier offences in consequence. In terms of political candidates in the current elections, where there is an increasing trend in some parties towards family dynasties and where many candidates have dual and triple mandates. This does not serve democracy. In France, with gender parity legislation, parties were fined if they didn't put up equal numbers of women. They chose to ignore this penalty in higher level elections, but it has established a principle. Can we make parties here do this through compliance - penalties or positive action?

Bronagh Hinds, Institute of Governance, Queen's University

She remembers that Mary Bunting and Margaret Ward were working in the Northern Ireland Women's Rights Movement thirty years ago. We are going forward, although there is some resistance. We are working in a society where equality is contested and therefore this trickles down into other areas and issues and we have to contend with this. We need a top-level commitment by civil servants and a high level commitment by politicians. On our impact on political parties - we need political will and the context of Direct Rule is very different. The Direct Rule ministers bring things back to the political parties, some of whom are resistant. The Sex Discrimination Act is permissive legislation only. So how can civil servants work on this? We need to pressurise political parties. She works with an American funded programme that helps women in political parties to be more effective.

Patricia Haren, Women's Support Network

The Women's Support Network is currently engaged in lobbying for women's funding and working with the Department for Social Development to have future funding agreed. There has been cross-party support for the campaign and the DSD have said that it was the strength of the lobby from political parties across the board that convinced the minister that the issue of funding for the women's sector had to be taken seriously. What is important is grass roots women and lobbying on the ground. Women need more training and capacity building to be effective.

Mary Bunting, OFMDFM

Equality of opportunity will include disability and older people. There is cross-party support and support for women. It might be possible to seek the influence of political parties to change the Gender Equality Strategy into a strategy for women.

Liz McArdle, YouthNet

The policy of equal opportunities in the youth sector led to girls leaving the sector at the age of thirteen as nothing was done for them. They are now talking about equality within the sector. So that is a lesson that can be learned. Young women are very disenfranchised. They fall between all stools.

Tansey Hutchinson, NICEM

It is important to emphasise that equality of opportunity in Section 75 is not restrictive, it is about outcomes. She agreed with Margaret's point that the Gender Equality Strategy ran counter to the spirit and the reality of S75. It should not be in the equal treatment sense but should be concerned with outcomes and results. Again, she felt she had to state how crucial it was to look at the realities of multiple identities.

Chair's closing remarks

The BPfA places an obligation on governments to address the root causes of discrimination. In reality the recommendations in the BPfA will only become meaningful if governments have the political will to translate them into action. In practice this means the women's community sector and its allies must become familiar with these commitments, so that we can use them as tools to lobby. Today's exchange between government departments and the women's sector has allowed us to share information and to exchange ideas. This builds all our capacity to make the BPfA meaningful.

Many thanks to all the speakers and organisations who have made this event possible and to all of you for coming and making it such a stimulating event.

Appendix 1

Draft Summaries of Resolutions Discussed at the 49th Session

HIV/AIDS

The girl child and HIV/AIDS (document E/CN.6/2005/L.2/Rev.I), sponsored by Mauritius on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Deeply concerned that the global HIV / AIDS pandemic disproportionately affected women and girls, and that the majority of new HIV infections occurred among young people, the Commission on the Status of Women would stress with deep concern that the HIV / AIDS emergency, with its devastating scale and impact, required urgent actions in all fields and at all levels, according to a revised wide-ranging draft resolution on women.

The Commission would also stress that gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls were fundamental elements in reducing their vulnerability to HIV / AIDS, and emphasize that their advancement was key to reversing the pandemic. It, therefore, would urge governments to take all necessary measures to empower women and strengthen their economic independence and to protect and promote their full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, in order to enable them to protect themselves from the HIV infection. In a related provision, the Commission would call on governments to intensify efforts to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls in relation to HIV / AIDS, including through challenging stereotypes, stigmatization, discriminatory attitudes and gender inequalities and to encourage the active involvement of men and boys in that regard.

Trafficking of Women and Girls

Document E/CN.6/2005/L.3/Rev.I

According to a two-part draft resolution on reducing demand for trafficking women and girls, sponsored by the United States the Commission, concerned about the increasing occurrence of trafficking for all forms of exploitation, especially for commercial sexual exploitation, which overwhelmingly affected women and girls, would call on governments to adopt or strengthen legislative or other measures to deter exploiters and discourage the demand that fostered trafficking of women and girls for all forms of exploitation. The Commission would further call on governments to criminalize trafficking in persons in all its forms, and condemn and penalize traffickers and intermediaries, while ensuring protection and assistance to the victims, with full respect for their human rights. It would further call on governments to conclude bilateral, subregional, regional and international agreements to address the problem of trafficking in persons, especially women and girls; and to adopt specific measures aimed at reducing demand, as appropriate, to complement the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. The Commission would call on governments and civil society to: take appropriate measures to raise public awareness of the issue; implement educational programmes; undertake research on best practices, methods and strategies, information and mass media campaigns, and social and economic initiatives to prevent and combat trafficking in women and girls, particularly to eliminate demand; and encourage the business sector, in particular, the tourism industry and Internet providers, to develop or adhere to codes of conduct, with a view to preventing trafficking in persons.

Deeply concerned over all activities that fuelled the demand for victims of trafficking, in particular, activities by armed forces, peacekeepers and military and civilian advisers in other countries, the Commission would call on governments to ensure the provision of training on commercial sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, including trafficking, to armed forces, peacekeepers and military and civilian advisers to be stationed in other countries, including for United Nations peacekeeping missions, and to ensure that allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse, including trafficking, would be swiftly investigated and dealt with to the fullest extent.

A Special Rapporteur for Women

Document E/CN.6/2005/LA

Under the terms of a draft resolution on the special rapporteur on laws that discriminated against women, submitted by the Philippines and Rwanda, the Commission would urge governments to intensify their efforts to revoke any remaining laws that discriminated on the basis of sex and to remove gender bias in the administration of justice, in accordance with the Beijing Platform for Action through the adoption of all appropriate means and measures at the national, regional and international levels. The Commission would decide to consider at its fiftieth session the advisability of the appointment of a special rapporteur on laws that discriminated against women.

Gender Mainstreaming

Document E/CN.6/2005/L.5/Rev.I

According to a comprehensive draft text on mainstreaming a gender perspective into national policies and programmes, the Commission would reiterate that gender mainstreaming was a tool for effective policy-making at all levels and not a substitute for targeted, women-specific policies and programmes, equality legislation, national machineries for women's advancement and the establishment of gender focal points. The Commission would stress that, in order to ensure effective implementation of the Beijing agenda and enhance the work for women's advancement at the national, subregional, regional and international levels, governments, the United Nations system and all other relevant organizations should strengthen their efforts to promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all policies and programmes.

It would also stress that political will and commitment at all levels were crucial to ensure the main streaming of a gender perspective in the adoption and implementation of comprehensive and action-oriented policies in all areas. In that regard, the Commission would call on Member States to, among other things: ensure that gender mainstreaming was fully understood, institutionalised and implemented; increase understanding of that process; develop and use frameworks, guidelines and other practice tools and indicators to accelerate gender mainstreaming; develop effective and coherent accountability mechanisms; involve parliaments and the judiciary, where appropriate, in monitoring progress; recognize civil society's role in that regard; establish or rein-

force existing national machineries for women's advancement and provide them with the necessary human and financial resources. Under a related term, the Secretary-General would be asked to report to the Commission at its next session on progress in mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development, implementation and evaluation of programmes and policies that addressed the inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels.

Gender and Natural Disasters

Document E/CN.6/2005/L.6/Rev.1

By a new draft text sponsored by the Philippines on integrating a gender perspective into the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster the Commission would urge governments, in planning for disaster preparedness and responding to natural disasters, to integrate a gender perspective, as well as to ensure that women took an active and equal role in all phases of disaster management. The Commission would strongly call on governments and other relevant bodies, in their responses to disaster situations, to meet the needs of affected populations such as food, clean water, shelter and physical security, as well as to provide services such as health care, including reproductive health, psychological health and psychosocial support and education, taking into account the particular needs of women and girls.

In a related provision, the Commission would underline the need to address the gender equality dimensions of livelihood, security, land tenure, land rights, property and housing since they posed major challenges to women, in particular widows, women heads of households, women with disabilities and women who had lost family members in natural disasters. It also underlined the need to give special attention to the vulnerabilities and capacities of marginalized groups of women and girls. Among its other terms, the Commission strongly urged governments, United Nations entities and other relevant bodies to take necessary measures to protect women and girls from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse and all other forms of violence in the context of natural disasters, and to provide appropriate care for women and girls who had been exposed to sexual abuse and other forms of violence. It called on governments to involve women in all levels of decision making in disaster situations, including in community-level welfare centres for displaced persons, and it urged governments, United Nations entities and relevant stakeholders to support gender-sensitive capacity-building at all levels of disaster management.

Palestinian Women

Document E/CN.6/2005/L.7

The draft resolution on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women, sponsored by Jamaica on behalf of the "Group of 77" developing countries and China, would have the Commission call on the concerned parties, as well as the international community, to exert all necessary efforts to ensure the full resumption of the peace process on its agreed basis, taking into account the common ground already gained. The Commission would also call for measures for tangible improvement of the difficult situation on the ground and the living conditions faced by Palestinian women and their families. It would reaffirm that the Israeli occupation remained a major obstacle for Palestinian women with regard to their advancement, self-reliance and integration in the developing planning of their society, and it would demand that Israel, the occupying Power, comply fully with the provisions and principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Geneva Conventions, in order to protect the rights of Palestinian women and their families.

In a related term, Israel would be called upon to facilitate the return of all refugees and displaced Palestinian women and children to their homes and properties, in compliance with relevant United Nations resolutions. The Commission would call on the international community to continue to provide urgently needed assistance and services, in an effort to alleviate the dire humanitarian crisis being faced by Palestinian women and their families, and to helping the reconstruction of relevant Palestinian institutions.

International Research

Document E/CN.6/2005/L.8

The draft resolution on strengthening of the International Research, tabled by Jamaica (on behalf of the Group of 77 and China) and Mexico, would have the Commission welcome that body's active participation and contributions to the review and appraisal of the Beijing Declaration and Platform and the outcome documents of the 2000 General Assembly special session. It would also invite voluntary financial contributions to the United Nations Trust Fund for INSTRAW and stress the importance of such contributions to enable it to carry out its mandate. The Secretary-General and all relevant United Nations bodies would be urged to support efforts to strengthen the Institute, particularly by promoting its collaboration with other United Nations system organizations. Also by the text, the Commission would request INSTRAW's Executive Director to report to it at its fiftieth session on the implementation of its programme of work and strategic plan 2004-2007, in particular activities related to the follow-up to the Beijing follow-up.

Economic Advancement of Women

Document E/CN.6/2005/L.9

The new draft text on economic advancement for women submitted by the United States, would have the Commission call on Member States to eliminate discrimination, provide equal access and encourage women's and girls' participation in education at all levels; undertake legislative and administrative reforms to create a strong enabling environment for women entrepreneurs; promote the collection, dissemination and analysis of statistics that are disaggregated by gender to better facilitate monitoring of the situation of women; and eliminate discrimination in the work place, providing equal opportunity for the hiring and advancement of women. By further provisions of the text, Member States would be called on to facilitate further development of the financial sector to increase women's access to savings, lending and other financial services; encourage business organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), professional associations, revolving loan funds and others to provide services to women entrepreneurs; enhance rural women's income-generating potential; promote government and civil society programmes that can enhance the economic opportunity of vulnerable women, such as widows, women with disabilities, elderly women, women belonging to racial and ethnic minorities, refugees and internally displaced persons; and promote equal access for women to information and communication technology-based economic activities and to information systems and improved technologies.

Also by the text, the Commission would encourage all relevant United Nations funds, programmes and agencies to assist governments in strengthening their capacity to reform laws, practices and institutions in order to promote women's entrepreneurship.

Women and Girls in Afghanistan

Document E/CN.6/2005/L.II

A draft text on the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan, tabled by Jamaica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, would have the Commission welcome the Afghan Government's commitment to the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by women and girls, the restoration of the active participation of Afghan women in political, economic and social life, the education of girls, as well as boys, and the opportunity for women to work outside the home. The Commission would also welcome the following: the provisions of the new Constitution; the ongoing security sector reform processes; the peaceful and successful presidential election on 9 October 2004; the candidacy of Afghan women in both the presidential and vice-presidential ballots; and the recent publication of a report on transitional justice.

Among its many other provisions, the text would also have the Commission urge the Government to: fully implement the Constitution and all international treaties to which Afghanistan was a party; ensure that legislative, administrative and other measures support women's and girl's full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms; enable the full, equal and effective participation of women and girls in civil, cultural, economic, political and social life throughout the country and at all levels; and ensure that women were able to register, run for office, campaign and vote in the upcoming national assembly elections.

The United Nations system, international and non-governmental organizations and donors would be invited to, among other things: ensure a human rights-based approach and coherent policy and resources for gender mainstreaming in all operations and programmes; ensure the full and effective participation of Afghan women in all stages of humanitarian assistance, recovery, reconstruction and development; support civil society in the field of human rights and encourage the involvement of women therein; and support measures for women's employment and the integration of a gender perspective into all social, development and reconstruction programmes, taking into account the special needs of widows and returning refugee and displaced women and girls, as well as those living in rural areas.

Indigenous Women

Document E/CN.6/2005/L.I0

At the time of preparation of this background section, the text of the draft resolution on indigenous women was incomplete.

APPENDIX 2

Beijing+10 Briefing Paper

Maeve Taylor, Banúlacht, February 2005

The Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) was the outcome of the Fourth UN World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China, in September 1995. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) were adopted unanimously by 189 world governments. The Beijing Declaration promised to remove all obstacles to equality for women and to ensure a gender perspective in all government policies and programmes.

Promises

1. Alleviate the increasing and persistent burden of poverty on women
2. Ensure equal access to training and education for women
3. Ensure equal access to health services for women
4. Eliminate all forms of violence against women
5. Prevent all acts of violence against women during armed conflict and the massive outflow of refugees
6. Promote women's economic rights and independence
7. Ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision making
8. Make adequate resources available and ensure consultation from grassroots women's organisations to government in order to ensure that a gender policy would underpin all levels of government decision making
9. Protect and promote the human rights of women
10. Create equality and participation in the media and eliminate sexual stereotyping
11. Ensure women's equal participation in relation to environment and management of natural resources
12. Eliminate discrimination against and violations of the rights of the girl child

The Beijing Platform for Action is one of the most comprehensive articulations of Governments' commitments to the human rights of women and girls. It contains an analysis of the underlying causes of poverty and discrimination, and its strategies and actions outline what human rights commitments to women would actually mean. At the core of the BPfA is the idea of accountability - that governments have a duty to implement these commitments.

But the political will to advance these rights is often lacking. Indeed, the Platform's human rights principles are often undermined by discriminatory laws, social and cultural practices, lack of willingness to invest significant resources in it, and the impact of globalisation. The Platform for Action and the Outcomes Document of Beijing+5 both recognise that governments have a duty to take measures to ensure that the commitments of the BPfA are not undermined by the negative effects of economic globalisation and the neo-liberal economic model. Thus, the implementation of the BPfA also raises questions of global governance - of how to hold international institutions like Multi-National Corporations, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation accountable when their policies violate or lead to the violation of women's human rights.

The BPfA was drafted and adopted by governments, but hundreds and thousands of women activists worldwide have contributed during all the phases of developing, drafting and then monitoring and implementing the Platform for Action. The BPfA is not about abstractions - the issues in it affect the lives and cause the deaths of women and girls everyday. But the recommendations in the Platform are only meaningful if women know them and use them to further policy and action at all levels.

Since the 1990s, women's organisations in Ireland and worldwide have used the review processes of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to demand that governments fulfil the commitments that they have made in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and in many subsequent human rights treaties and world conferences.

In 2000, at the time of the Beijing+5 Review, women's organisations in Ireland joined the thousands of women's NGOs worldwide in calling governments to account, and demanding resources and political will to achieve the implementation of the BPfA. The Beijing+10 Review will be held at the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2005. This is an opportunity to focus the world's attention once again on the human rights of women and to demand that governments renew their commitment to women's rights as human rights and to take further action as well as dedicating the necessary resources to turn that commitment into reality.

The Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals

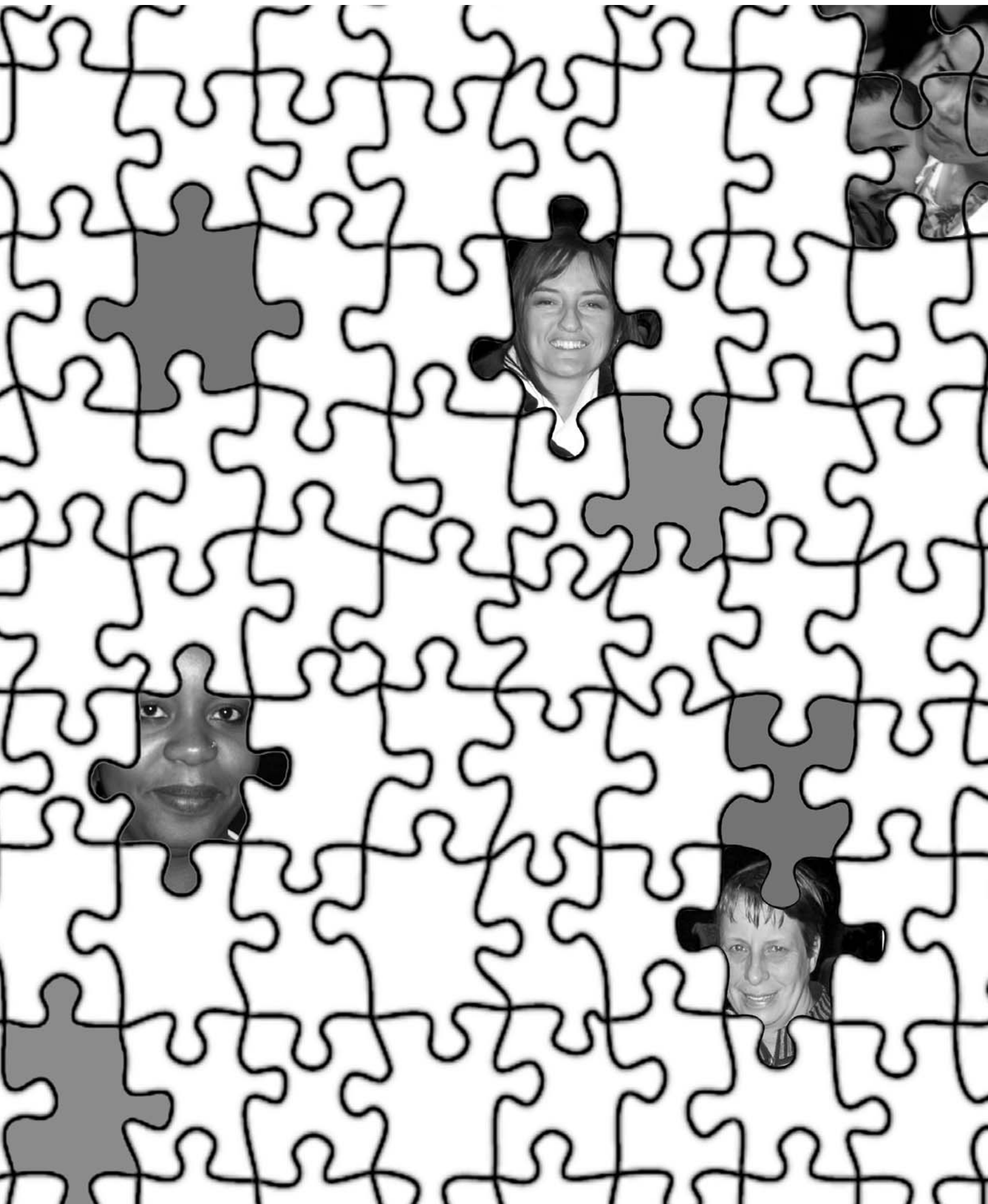
In 2000 the world's governments adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Declaration aims to address people's needs for the new millennium and recognises women's centrality in development processes.

In it, governments commit *"to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable."*

The Declaration also addresses *"the equal rights and opportunities of women and men"* and pledges *"to combat all forms of violence against women and to implement CEDAW."*

However, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), published in 2001 as a 'road map' for the implementation of the Declaration, have many weaknesses. It is undoubtedly positive that for the first time world governments have set out clear commitments to addressing issues such as world poverty and health, and have established time-bound targets and measurable indicators. However, the MDGs divorce issues such as poverty from underlying structural causes, such as gender power relations and racism, and lack the explicit underpinning of the human rights framework. The BPFA, by contrast, reflects an understanding of the global context and the multiple causes of poverty and disadvantage, and recognises the complex interactions between, for example, reproductive rights and freedom from gender based violence and women's empowerment.

It is of crucial importance, therefore, that the BPFA is recognised as a central mechanism for the realisation of women's human rights and of the MDG 3. The Beijing+10 Review is an opportunity for the international community to reassert the primacy of an internationally accountable and universally applicable system of human rights and to state clearly that the MDGs cannot be achieved without the implementation of the BPFA.



CONFERENCE SPEAKERS

Dr Margaret Ward

Margaret Ward is Director of the Women's Resource and Development Agency. She was previously acting as policy worker for the Women's Support Network. She is also working on an Economic and Social Research Council project in conjunction with Queen's University, the University of Ulster and Democratic Dialogue, 'Re-imagining women's security in societies in transition: Northern Ireland, Lebanon and South Africa.'

Brenda Campbell

Brenda Campbell has been actively involved in women's human rights for many years, both domestically and internationally. She has worked with International Women's Rights Action Watch - Asia Pacific (IWRAP Asia Pacific), an international NGO based in Malaysia, focusing on the implementation of the CEDAW Convention and other international human rights treaties. She has prepared and undertaken training courses for NGO's in Asia and Europe and drafted numerous papers for governments and non-government organisations on the implementation of human rights treaties. She has attended UN Human Rights Committee sessions to lobby governments on their obligations under International Human Rights Conventions. She continues to work with IWRAP Asia Pacific on a consultancy basis. Brenda is an Advisory Committee member for the Amnesty International Stop Violence Against Women Campaign and for the Women's Human Rights Alliance. She is a Barrister at the Bar of Northern Ireland and the Bar of England and Wales and is currently practising from 2 Garden Court Chambers in London.

Therese Murphy

Thérèse Murphy is the Chairperson of the National Women's Council of Ireland and represents the NWCI on the Board of the European Women's Lobby. Thérèse attended the Commission on the Status of Women in New York 2005 to review the Beijing Platform for Action (Beijing +10), as part of the Irish Government delegation. Thérèse is employed by the Electricity Supply Board, and currently is completing a secondment as Trade Union Equality Officer 2002 - 2005.

Kate McCullough

Kate McCullough is Chair of Northern Ireland Women's European Platform, her role there including development of the international work of the Platform which includes Committee for the Status of Women (CSW), Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, Women, Peace and Security. Kate has been involved in attending CSW since 1999. Previously she worked as Development Officer for the Platform. Kate has participated in a number of international projects such as Women Waging Peace in Boston and the Community and Mentoring Programme in Washington. She has had a variety of employment including working for a trade union, a newspaper and a drug rehabilitation centre. At present Kate is employed by the Northern Ireland Assembly and during suspension has volunteered to work in key projects with government departments.

Mary Bunting

Mary Bunting is Director of Equality in the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. She Mary has extensive experience in equality issues and prior to joining OFMDFM she held senior positions in the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the former Fair Employment Commission. In her current post Mary through the work of her Directorate, has responsibility for delivery of Government's priorities and plans on equality, targeting social need, human rights and community relations including policy and strategy on victims and survivors and children and young people. The Directorate sponsors the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People. Through its community relations work, the Directorate has established a dedicated Unit in North Belfast which is working to improve community capacity and community relations through a community partnership approach. The Directorate is also taking forward a major review of community relations policy which focuses on building trust and confidence within and between communities in Northern Ireland. Within the Directorate, the Gender Equality Unit, working in partnership with key stakeholders, is taking forward the development of a Gender Equality strategy.

Iris Lyle

Iris Lyle has worked in the community sector for many years both in the UK and Ireland. Manager at Women Educating for Transformation (WEFT) since 2000, she co-ordinated WEFT's last project, Building Peace through Policy, in partnership with WRDA (Women's Resource and Development Agency). The project involved research and training on gender mainstreaming. The research findings are presented at today's seminar.



Dermot Kilgallon

Dermot Kilgallon is an Assistant Principal in Gender Equality Section of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. He is responsible for developing policy and implementing national and international commitments on gender equality issues. He was centrally involved in developing Ireland's National Plan for Women 2002 on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and in preparing Ireland's combined Fourth and Fifth Reports under the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. He is currently managing the Equality for Women Measure under the National Development Plan

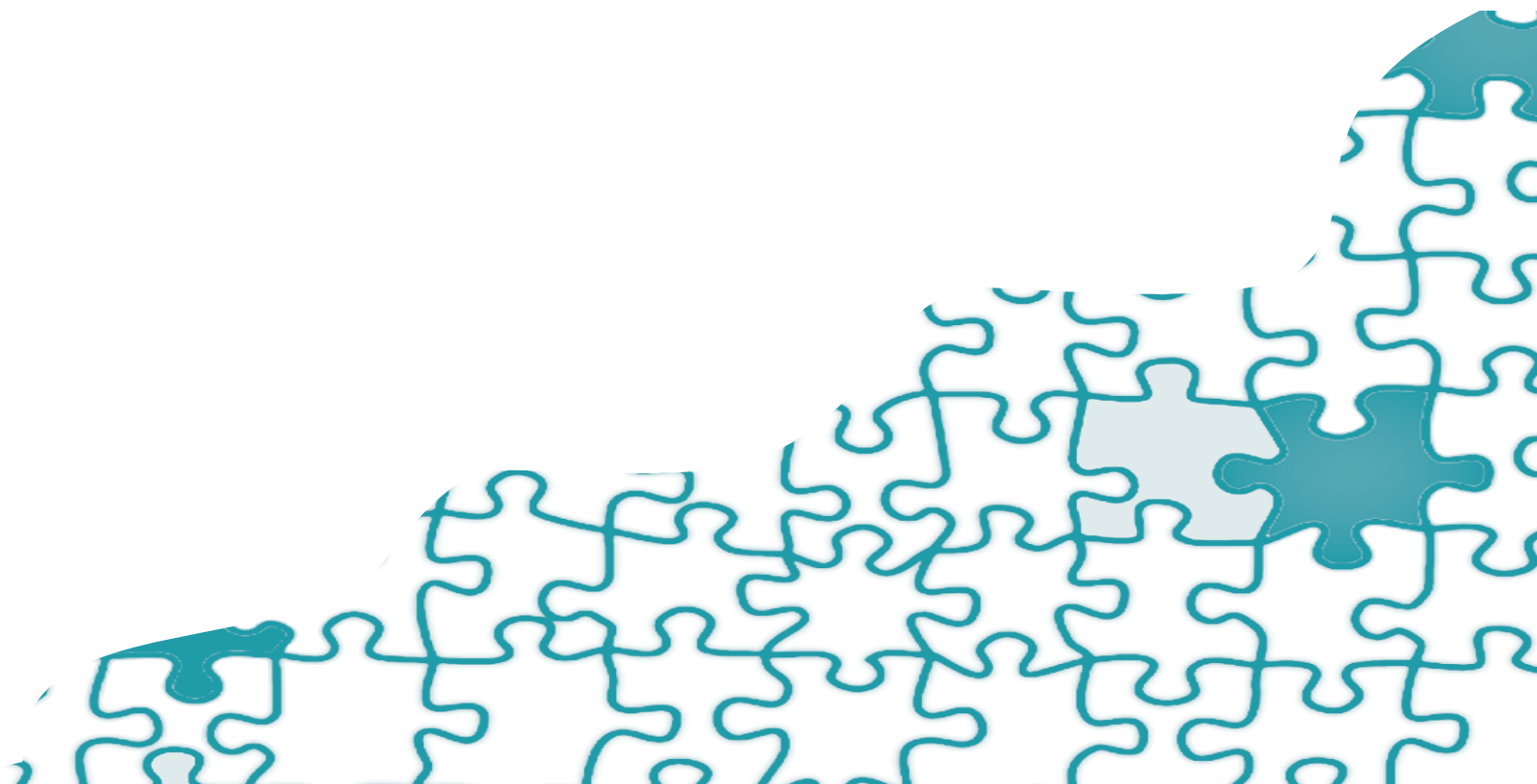
Dr. Joanna McMinn

Joanna McMinn is the Director of the National Women's Council of Ireland. A feminist activist in the women's voluntary and community sector since 1981, she was the founding development worker of the Women's Education Project, and Director of the Women's Resource and Development Agency in Belfast until 1994. From 1994-2000, Joanna worked as an independent consultant on organisational development for the women's community and voluntary sectors in Ireland, while researching women's community education, social justice and equality for women in Ireland, for a doctoral thesis in Equality Studies, University College Dublin.

Marie Crawley & Louise O'Meara

Marie Crawley and Louise O'Meara have many years experience in gender equality work with the community, voluntary and statutory sectors. Their work has included design and delivery of training courses, production of resource materials to support training initiatives, research projects, strategic planning exercises, and bespoke consultancy services. Recent gender equality/gender mainstreaming work includes:

- design and delivery of Gender Impact Assessment Training with Government Departments in Northern Ireland;
- design and production of a 'Gender Impact Assessment Handbook' for use by Government departments and other agencies in Northern Ireland (published October 04);
- design and production of a 'Gender Proofing Handbook' published by the NDP Gender Equality Unit and widely used in the South of Ireland;
- research, design and delivery of 'Developing and Implementing a Gender Equality Policy' Guide for the NDP Gender Equality Unit (published April 04).



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