

Women's Participation in Peace-Making and Security in Northern Ireland and Elsewhere

Monica McWilliams: Forward Global Women: Humphrey School of Public Affairs. Minnesota.

August 19th

I would like to thank Senator Pappas and all those involved in the Forward Global Women's Network for inviting me to open the convening and a special thanks to Orlyn and Marit who are hosting my sister and I. For special people like Sandy, Orlyn and Marit and all the other hosts who I met last night, I say with sincerity God Bless America.

Drawing on my experiences of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, a bi-communal feminist grouping involved in the multi-party peace talks for the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, this opening talk will highlight the importance of women activists becoming involved in peace processes. The talk will also show that despite women's interests now being recognised as integral to peace accords, entrenching these interests in the aftermath of a peace accord can be the most challenging part of the process. In transitions from conflict to peace, what gets resourced and implemented can fall short of what was promised. So the question that arises is how can we ensure that a more genuine transformative process takes place?

If a democratic deficit is allowed to prevail, through an absence of women in legislative and oversight bodies, then the reconstruction of society will not be fully addressed and there will be a lack of accountability for gender specific harms. In societies moving out of conflict, gender specific interests must not be left in the 'aspirational/to do' list of peace accords. Instead, the empowerment of women and their full and equal political participation must form part of the 'constitutional' and legislative guarantees that are being agreed.

First I should note that although I am strongly in favour of increasing the role of women as decision makers on human security and safety, I am also aware that not all women are essentially peace builders. I work closely with women who have been former combatants in Northern Ireland who have explained why they became involved in physical force 'Republicanism'. Some of these women actually

contested us forming a women's network across the communal divide and argued that we were creating a diversion from the main negotiating issues and that we should wait for another time to prioritise women's interests. But we had heard that all before. In response to those party leaders who called for us to leave politics alone or claimed that we were some kind of cult and would grow in on each other and disappear, I argued that women had been expected to watch and wait but now it was time to start building. This became a very bitter discussion but today the other parties, and even the women combatants, acknowledge that the Women's Coalition did play a constructive role.

Having addressed that issue I would like briefly to talk about some of the other reasons why mainstreaming gender in mediation and negotiations is important. My colleagues at the Transitional Justice Institute at the University of Ulster prepared a data base of all the peace agreements in which women were involved. They have concluded that there is as few as ten percent women peace negotiators and only three per cent of women signatories to international peace agreements, so augmenting the number of women at the peace table is crucial. The Dayton talks on the Bosnian conflict proved that engaging only with men who had started the war simply reinforced the divisions in that country. Bosnian women on all sides argue that an inclusive peace will simply not be realised without women's presence and perspective at the table'.

But women moving from the margins to the mainstream has to mean more than just a physical presence. We also should note that not all women will have shared the same experiences of the conflict and there can be no assumption that all women will share the same concerns and priorities in a peace process. It is also worth emphasizing that women participants should ensure that certain issues do not get the label of 'women's issues' and others become categorized as 'more important' issues. There are gendered dimensions to all aspects of political, economic and social construction, so gender equality and women's participation requires attention throughout the substantive negotiations and implementation phase of peace agreements.

My colleagues Catherine O'Rourke and Christine Bell who prepared the

data base on peace agreements argue for the participation of women in the peace and security from five different perspectives.¹ First, participation as seen through the lens of representation (the importance of 'presence'); second participation as deliberation (those most affected by conflict being involved in reflective and thoughtful outcomes); third, participation through inclusion (women's specific needs being addressed); fourth, participation requiring women's expertise (on gender specific concerns) and fifth, participation providing role models (showing how women can perform these tasks). Tangible evidence exists to show that if one, or more, is built into the framework for peace, the better the outcomes.²

Effectiveness of peace processes also requires that these should be built on the widest base of experience. Thus they need to take into account women's lived experiences before, during and post-conflict.³ Failure to do so can lead to an impoverished understanding of peace and security, with its focus on militarism and the security sector.

The inclusion of women participants was one of the factors in the success of the South African transition, emphasised to the negotiators from the Northern Ireland peace talks in their meetings in the Eastern Cape with the ANC and other major political parties.⁴ President Mandela spoke of his insistence that, before the negotiations with the South African government, half of all the negotiating teams had to be female.⁵

Mary Robinson, the first UN Special Envoy to a conflict region, stated

¹ Catherine O'Rourke (2012) Peace and Security Decision Making: Does the Participation of Women Matter? Paper delivered at the University of Minnesota Law School Conference: 'Gendering Conflict and Post-Conflict Terrains: New Challenges and Opportunities'

²Porter, E. (2007) Peace Building: Women in International Perspectives, Routledge (Oxon) p41.

³ Aisling Swaine

⁴ As a participant in this meeting with President Mandela, the negotiators were asked to consider various elements of the South African process to see what lessons could be learned.

⁵ *Irish Times*, March 5 2001. As Carolus stated if women had not been so heavily involved, the talks would have suffered from what she called "testosterone poisoning".

more recently, in her report on July 25th 2013 to the United Nations Security Council on her role in Central Africa: "Women's voices should not only be heard because they are the victims of the war. Their active participation in peace efforts is essential because they are the most effective peace builders. I believe they are the region's best hope for building lasting peace." So women need to be included at the earliest possible phase of the process and especially in the pre-negotiations to peace talks.

Utilising a different skill base in peace negotiations

Although the inclusion of women addresses the issues of justice and fairness, peace negotiations also need a great deal of nurturing, requiring particular skills, especially since so many agreements fail during the first five years.⁶ John Paul Lederach argues that it can take a society the same amount of years to come out of conflict as the duration of the conflict itself. He also points out, for people living in settings of deep-rooted conflict; they are faced with an extraordinary irony. Violence is what many have become accustomed to — so what happens in peace remains a mystery. Where violence and conflict have become the norm, negotiating an agreement and implementing an alternative 'normality' built on peace and justice, can be a challenging prospect.

Since 2000, with the introduction of Security Council Resolutions on women, peace and security, the United Nations has insisted that the environment enabling peace agreements become more inclusive of women as well as emphasising the importance of bringing gender perspectives to the various phases of peace agreements.⁷ In such a scenario, peace building requires patience and persistence and an understanding that progress can be precarious. Whether women bring this 'added value' to the 'mix' of conflict transformation is a question that has exercised academics, peace activists, the global women's movement and international agencies. What, if any, difference does it

⁶ Examples from Angola, Liberia etc

⁷ United Nations Security Council 2000. Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security Resolution 1820 on women and peace and security. <http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/unsc-resolutions.htm> (accessed 28 August 2013).

make if women from civic society become directly involved?

Successful negotiations require the involvement of those with the capacity to test the public thermometer for political accommodation, dismantle rumours, maintain dialogue at times of crisis and sustain momentum when the process stalls. Individuals in civic society, such as women community leaders, attain these skills through mediating local disputes. However their more usual role in peace processes is to cajole the Track One negotiators to keep the process moving and to open new avenues for dialogue across divided lines.

For countries like Northern Ireland as for others facing conflict, choices have to be made about the way forward. It is a process and not an event, involving many different people working together for an agreed outcome. The circumstances have to be right and the right relationships have to be in place. It requires leadership and a form of participation that is meaningful. It also requires patience and a great deal of pragmatism.

How can this happen when the quality of relationships between parties, and people, engaged in a lengthy conflict is not good – where cultures clash and any ‘constitutional’ conversation takes the form of a blame game. How can conflicts be aired between the differentiated political/religious communities; how are perceptions of the ‘other’ addressed; how can different values and standards be defined through a new lens, one that is inclusive of gender as well as ethnicity; how can key demands be brought together in a new political settlement and how can an agreed interpretation be achieved between men and women on the new political dispensation? These are the questions that stare us in the face when negotiating and implementing an agreement in a conflicted society.

To move out of conflict the old problems also need new questions asked of them. In going forward in any peace process, enquiring minds are critical to ensuring that we are not held back by the fears and rigid certainties drawn from past hurts or set perceptions. The people who say ‘Why not?’ are vital in peace processes. Women are right to expect negotiators to try out new approaches; to engage in lateral thinking; to question the norm. In a peace process, the importance of connecting learning to listening is also vital.

Given that it is a process and not an event, it involves three stages –

first the pre-negotiations, then the talks themselves and finally the implementation stage. This usually starts with talks about talks following a ceasefire. When 'the right to self-defence' has been the predominant motivator, what are the triggers to get talks started? The conflict in Northern Ireland was a lengthy one, lasting for over thirty years, and practically everyone knew someone who had been injured or killed. It eventually reached its "mutually hurting stalemate" with two particularly horrific incidents bringing us to the edge of the precipice.⁸ A situation finally arrives when one or both sides agree that there will be no winners in continuing with the military campaign and it is time to seek an alternative route to resolving the conflict.

According to Zartman this mutually hurting stalemate occurs where "Each party begins to feel uncomfortable in the costly dead end of the conflict. This plateau must be perceived by both sides not as a momentary resting ground but as a flat, unpleasant terrain stretching into the future, providing no later possibilities for decisive escalation or graceful escape." In our own situation in Northern Ireland, and possibly now in Israel and Palestine, both sides come to see that there are no victors where militias, despite high levels of support on the ground, continue to face highly equipped army personnel who can draw on increasingly sophisticated technology for their engagements. On the other side the most sophisticated army also knows that it will continue to face guerrillas who have extensive networks, and a great deal of support, from within the local community. There eventually comes a time when there is a need to declare a draw, halt the military/paramilitary action and enter a political process in which the legitimacy of each side will be recognised.

Who permits who to have legitimacy in such a situation can be one of the most difficult issues to resolve, whether in Northern Ireland, or the Middle East, or in Colombia where talks between the FARC and the government have commenced with support from the Norwegian government. Not to resolve the issue of who is entitled to be recognised as a legitimate actor means that violence goes on with the

⁸ One incident was in the Protestant district of the Shankill Road where an IRA bomb planted in a fishmongers shop killed over a dozen people, including a family, on a busy Saturday afternoon. The other incident became known as the Greysteele Massacre where ten people were shot dead, and many seriously injured, by loyalists who entered the pub on Halloween night firing guns and shouting 'trick or treat'.

increasing loss of life and stalemate.

When ceasefires are declared, the main apprehension of 'so called' constitutional political parties in these circumstances is that gunmen outside the negotiating rooms may determine both the direction and pace of subsequent negotiations. I purposely use the term 'so-called' to describe some of the parties who continue to create verbal explosions of hatred although not physically taking part in the conflict. These are the parties who 'polish the bullets for others to fire' and then denounce them as terrorists for doing so. Every conflict suffers from spoilers who make demands that are impossible to meet. Some of the diaspora can also wreck the process, pushing for 'the armalite' as well as 'the ballot box'. This was at times the case in Northern Ireland but I am also mindful of how influential the Irish community in the USA were, convincing President Clinton to agree to give Gerry Adams a visa, resulting in the British Prime Minister refusing to take his phone calls for the following six weeks.

In such situations we need those who will act as the 'go betweens' trying to get the main players to start talking again, to go to the table or to stay at the table. This was the situation last month in Kinshasa where women from ten different countries in Central Africa came together to demand that the peace agreement be honoured between their countries. Their Kinshasa statement stands as a useful model for future peace agreements.

It is also true that violence can take away people's lives, but intransigence can take away their hope. So preventing intransigence from paralyzing a peace process and maintaining the momentum in the process is crucial. What is often forgotten is that in a peace process, there is not just one but a whole range of peace processes going on with civic society playing a crucial part. Having a pre-existing network based in civic activism, and drawing on expertise from a range of community backgrounds, adds to the skill base for peace negotiations.

Following the ceasefires in Northern Ireland, ten parties who were successful, in the electoral list, were permitted to become negotiators. Six weeks before the elections to the peace talks, the Women's

Coalition was formed.⁹ Its formation was the outcome of intense discussion by women activists from a wide variety of backgrounds and political opinions who, during the exclusively male pre-negotiation phase, had come to a realization that unless women formed themselves into a political party, the talks on the future of Northern Ireland would be heavily influenced by a different kind of gender dynamics.¹⁰ The party with its roots in civic society succeeded in getting a mandate for two women delegates, leading to their direct involvement in the multi-party negotiations and signing of the peace accord.¹¹ In the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, the skills and knowledge came from those who had participated in the peace and civil rights movements as well as 'accidental activists' who had cut their political teeth on women's rights issues.¹² The party poster declared 'Wave Goodbye to Dinosaurs'. That particular slogan did not endear the women to the other party leaders who demanded to know who was calling them dinosaurs. Since there were no names on the posters it was interesting to note that some of the parties were self identifying as dinosaurs.

In the training that we will be doing here we will also be looking at how principles can be designed for peace negotiations and the importance of women's interests even at this early stage. In Northern Ireland the Mitchell Principles were introduced in 1996 to address concerns of the participants that a sustainable ceasefire was in place

⁹ The first cease-fires by paramilitaries in the summer and autumn of 1994 opened up possibilities that compelled the British and Irish Governments to consider alternatives for a political settlement for Northern Ireland. After a long period of secret pre-negotiations amongst the main protagonists, a new process was designed so that ex-combatants could become part of the process.

¹⁰ Institute for Inclusive Security Strategies for Policy makers No.2 October 2009

¹¹ It succeeded in getting women elected to the Multi-party peace talks, to the Forum for Dialogue and Understanding, to local councils and to the first Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly. Although it made the decision in 2006 to stand down the formal structures of the Coalition, its members continue to support the involvement of women in political and public life in Northern Ireland.

¹² The Northern Ireland process benefitted from having a concentration of feminist and community activists who were established 'agents of change' within the community but when the peace talks were declared they moved to become more formal players in the process.

and to give credibility to the negotiators.¹³ This year we have witnessed the first cease fire agreement to include the issue of sexual violence. The Libreville Ceasefire Agreement for the Central African Republic in January agreed an immediate cessation of sexual violence, declared to make sexual violence a prohibitive act in the definition of ceasefire and arranged to address sexual violence in a programme of urgent priority. UNDPA drafted these clauses and found a way for the mediators to get them included. The UN has now published its 'Guidance For Conflict Related Sexual Violence'. This is one example of tool kits needed for mediators and negotiators in the field of conflict resolution and inclusive security.

Parties entering negotiations have to learn to make compromises – or if the language of compromise is too difficult then they have to learn to reach an accommodation. In all conflicts, parties will struggle to make the choices demanded of them – the adherence to old dogmas and certainties, old positions, old and worn language about the position of women, a choice between that and new thinking, new vision, new political imagining.

It is to be expected that political parties in peace talks will fear the 'other'. They also fear losing one's identity through too many concessions being granted to one's opponents. When Pearl Sagar and I first entered the Forum for Political Understanding and Dialogue, we were considered the 'double' other. We renamed it the Forum for Political Monologue and Misunderstanding. We were women and we each came from a different political/religious background. Because we had disrupted the status quo, initially there was a serious attempt to subordinate us, to make us objects of derision, to undermine our rights to occupy such a political space. We placed an insult of the week notice board outside our party room where each insult was publicly recorded and witnessed by those passing by. The tactic worked and the insults became less frequent.

¹³The Northern Ireland principles were relatively simple: I had to agree, with other party leaders at the table, to abide by the terms of any agreement reached in all-party negotiations and to use only democratic and exclusively peaceful methods if I tried to alter anything with which we may disagree.

In a recent report, the Swedish researchers from Kvinna till Kvinna noted that targeting abuse at women in leadership positions was a deliberate tactic of intimidation used by male politicians across five different conflict societies.¹⁴ Women who were singled out reported how the denigration of their public roles was designed to diminish their credibility in public life.¹⁵ The implications of political conflict for the objectification, and degradation, of women in war zones has been an important focus of analysis but the ways in which this abuse extends to women in leadership positions in post conflict societies also needs to be challenged.¹⁶ Hilary Clinton would undoubtedly have something to say about that as would Julia Gilliard, who was the brunt of many misogynist comments when acting as the Prime Minister of Australia.

Getting to the table may be difficult but deciding who sits next to you at the table can be just as difficult. Seating arrangements are contentious since parties are more comfortable being separated from each other. One party leader in Northern Ireland refused to sit next to individuals who he referred to as 'warlords'¹⁷. Not everyone will sit next to someone they believe to have caused serious harm.¹⁸ However, seating strangers next to each other ensures that at least some participants become acquainted during the process. It helps to create a more constructive environment by encouraging better communication amongst previous protagonists.¹⁹ The Women's Coalition argued that this seating arrangement be maintained in the new seating arrangements for the legislative Assembly. However, the parties instead went back to what they were accustomed to and

¹⁴ Kvinna till Kvinna (2012) Equal Power Lasting Peace, Stockholm

¹⁵ Labels such as whore and witch were highlighted by women from Armenia and Azerbaijan, reported in the Kvinna till Kvinna study.

¹⁶ McWilliams M (1996) The impact of political conflict on domestic violence in Dobash and Dobash Rethinking violence against women Sage NY

¹⁷ One party disagreed with this arrangement and changed the name to read UDUP rather than DUP which meant they could be seated closer to their political allies at the table.

¹⁸ A recent example of this was related to the author by Afghan women members of the High Peace Council. Some disputed the term 'warlords' being used to describe members of tribal parties seated at the table whilst others noted the difficulty they had seeing individuals known to them as perpetrators involved in killing members of their families.

abandoned the alphabetic seating arrangements. The Coalition also proposed a successful voting mechanism known as the sufficiency of consent. This led to confidence building in this early stage of the peace talks and showed that designing an effective process can be as important as the substance of the talks.

In such situations there is great need to open up back channels to the 'enemy'. This is not easy, particularly if the 'enemy' is affiliated to armed groups. Both prior to and during the peace talks, the Women's Coalition nurtured contacts with both republican and loyalist combatants holding clandestine meetings in prisons and other subversive spaces. This approach was to prove critical to the maintenance of the peace talks when both republicans and loyalists found themselves excluded, following breaches of their ceasefires. Such bi-lateral discussions allow provision of sensitive briefings for parties who feel left out in the cold at such times. It may also be indicative of the different kind of engagement that women believe in.²⁰

As President Obama noted when launching the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security "Peace accords are too often negotiated between armed combatants who originally fought the war or groups whose experiences are not easily transferred. When women are included as meaningful participants, they enlarge the scope of agreements and include the broader set of critical societal priorities and insert needs required for lasting peace."

Exhorting policy makers to recognize that women's perspectives, women's agency, and particularly women's ways of promoting peace do make a difference to conflict resolution requires determination.²¹

²⁰ At a delicate and very tense stage of the peace talks, the Women's Coalition visited the Maze high security prison at the request of a loyalist party wanting to reassure their 'political' prisoners that their interests were being fully represented at the table. In order to facilitate such a dialogue, Monica McWilliams and two of her colleagues agreed to be escorted by guards to a mobile hut and to be locked in with paramilitary prisoners for several hours of private discussion. It was this kind of relationship building – and the information and insights that it provided – that underpinned the relationships already established with the 'constitutional' political representatives.

²¹ Women Waging Peace, Summary of discussions at the 3rd Annual Women Waging

Recent initiatives have been provided by Liberian women activists, establishing 'early warning rooms' parallel to peace talks in their neighbouring countries so that negotiators can be briefed on potential problems or alert to spoiling influences. In 2011, Liberian women activists travelled to the Cote D'Ivoire to ensure that their experience of conflict prevention was applied at the earliest possible stage.²² They are now building on their experiences recorded in the documentary 'Pray the devil back to hell'. Two women leaders, Leymah Gbowee and Erleen Shirleaf Johnston in this process received the Nobel Peace Prize last year along with an outstanding woman leader from Yemen.

In Northern Ireland a similar early warning system was established by community leaders in Belfast who set up a mobile phone network between activists on both sides of the peace walls, so that accurate and effective communication channels could be kept open, dispelling rumours and reducing the potential for riotous behaviour. Rumour and speculation about what 'is going to happen' can damage any relationship, however fragile, so keeping back channels open at the formal and informal level is crucial. This is sometimes referred to as Track Two diplomacy but it also helps if track two activists can become track one players.

This kind of genuine engagement needs to take place during peace talks, otherwise the common space that has opened up will quickly become vacant. Women who have been the community activists throughout the conflict know that it is a dynamic process through which we become opened up to others and as a consequence we broaden our understanding of the world. We become vulnerable to change and allow our horizons to be susceptible to alteration. This process of rooting, which we get from our own community, and shifting to stand in the other person's shoes means we are more able to acknowledge our own 'ideological' upbringing whilst appreciating the 'other's' standpoint. I was amazed in our talks that parties felt it was a

Peace Research Symposium, 2001,
<http://www.womenwagingpeace.net/content/researchcenter/symposium/2001>

²² Ruth Caesar from Liberia representing AWAP at a Kvinna till Kvinna roundtable in Geneva reported how women were involved in resolving conflicts in neighbouring countries. She felt they had moved beyond the role of facilitators and should be accepted as negotiators capable of resolving disputes at the centre of peace negotiations.

strength on their side not to be seen talking to the other side. But we asked how can you be better negotiators if you don't talk and engage in dialogue.

How can we decide on the rights of each party in a conflict? How do I get you to recognise my rights, my entitlements, and my allegiances particularly when we deny the other's existence. Is it possible to find common humanity where negotiating parties start out with a belief that the other side is somehow less worthy. Women know this best because too often, they have been used and abused and are seen as less deserving of rights. In the aftermath of conflict, then, and especially in a peace process, human rights for all have to be reasserted and restored not just for the main religious or ethnic groups but also for women.

Demands for a participatory democracy and power sharing arrangements inclusive of women have to be met; where women constitute a critical mass (at least 30%) of the future legislators so that they can play an equal part in the reconstruction of their country. For this to happen however peace proposals have to move from being 'aspirational' to become 'institutional'. Guarantees have to be provided either through constitutional reform or the establishment of equality and national human rights institutions that will ensure the enforcement of affirmative action or temporary special measures for women and other minorities.

Quotas or affirmative action have been proposed but they are often too low such as the Somali government's quota of 12% of the 205 Parliamentary seats or the 15% quota for women agreed by the Philippine/Mindanao accord. It is possible that even these quotas would not have succeeded had women leaders from Somalia and Mindanao not been present in their peace processes. The experience of Sudan is also illustrative since the quota was dropped completely because the Sudanese government claimed that women had not been part of the fighting forces, so the promise of 25% quota did not need to be taken seriously.

Despite affirmative action measures having been introduced in Afghanistan, only nine out of the 68 delegates to the High Peace

Council are women.²³ It is apparent that a political climate that continues to allow the neglect of gender issues and the associated lack of accountability to address gender equality as a goal of peace agreements remains a significant challenge irrespective of the UN Security Council Resolutions.

The lack of enforcement on the UN resolutions has meant that each country, including Israel and the USA, has had to produce action plans showing what they are doing to meet their international obligations. And even with these in place progress can still be precarious. We need to pay attention to these issues as countries can just as easily go backwards after a negotiated settlement. For example in Afghanistan, the future talks between President Karzai's government and the Taliban could erode the progress on women's rights that has been slowly built across the country. Karzai has been quoted as posing the question – do the women want to go to school or do they want to stay alive. He needs to be reminded that principles and values that are to be enshrined in any future negotiations apply to women and men in equal measure.

Drafting a new constitution or producing a Bill of Rights are also key to transitional justice and as we have seen in Egypt, those tasked with building the foundations for their new society need to be mindful of everyone's human rights, including those of women. The women who went to Tahrir Square were determined that their revolution should be meaningful to all Egyptian citizens and not just to the Brotherhood. We are now faced with another dilemma which is how to draft an alternative that includes all factions. The revolution in Egypt was meant to bring about a new beginning. Indeed, the Good Friday Accord in Northern Ireland, acknowledged the need for 'A New Beginning' and it opens with this very title. But in Egypt as in Northern Ireland, a fair constitution guaranteeing the rights of all is what was demanded. This did not happen. As Galtung and others have noted it is possible to have a negative peace. If you deny people justice, they will deny you

²³ In a recent training session with the author, the women delegates wanted to develop more capacity building skills in interest based negotiations so as to become more effective contributors in their engagement with agents, who may in the future include the Taliban.

peace. But is the army now creating conflict and violence with liberties being eroded, and then justice continuing to be denied. If the Egyptian or indeed the Syrian people's right to freely self-determine their future, then citizens will not give their allegiance to an imposed system of justice. What this means for the practice of peace building is that only a holistic approach that addresses justice and peace as mutually inter-dependent can ever succeed. To address the huge chasm that now exists in Egypt will not be easy but it will have to be faced.

The fundamental project of any agreement is to create a set of structures and institutions that all can support and have confidence in. We have to accept that communal divisions will remain and that national allegiances and opposing political aspirations will still exist as of democratic right. However an agreement should be able to propose the basic features for an agreed society, or a shared space. For us, the right to be British, or Irish or both was guaranteed and the new governance arrangements, the deep reforms to police and criminal justice and the establishment of new institutions like the Human Rights Commission, which I led for six years, were all designed so that everyone could have faith in the fairness and justice of the society they were to live in.

Most agreements address the DDR issues of transitional justice and this was also the case in Northern Ireland. Included in the final peace agreement, were proposals on policing and criminal justice reform, demilitarisation, decommissioning and the early release and reintegration of political prisoners. In Burundi, women demonstrated creativity inserting imaginative proposals in the negotiations. Women in Liberia took direct action by picketing the negotiations and refusing to leave until a successful resolution was reached. In Northern Ireland, the Women's Coalition actively worked for disarmament by building close working relationships with those who had influence with the paramilitary organisations. The Coalition had argued that the weapons should be put beyond use, that the act of decommissioning be a voluntary one and that parties who had demanded it, not be permitted to belittle it. ²⁴ These inclusive methods of working proved as

²⁴ The Women's Coalition had argued that the weapons should be left to 'rust in peace' which became a phrase widely used to describe the voluntary nature of such a process. They also made an analogy with the weapons used in domestic violence situations arguing that not all arms were imported – in other words damage can be

productive as that of the formal Commissions who, on more than one occasion, placed the peace process in jeopardy by insufficiently contextualising their findings.²⁵

But what also requires a share of attention is the harm caused by a violent conflict from a gender perspective. Evidence in Northern Ireland on violence against women during the political 'troubles' showed a much higher femicide rate due to the availability of legally held weapons.²⁶ While the retention of illegal weapons was a contentious issue in the political negotiations, legally held personal protection weapons were not.²⁷ The circulation of legal weapons in everyday society did not form part of the security sector reforms, despite the Women's Coalition drawing attention to this concern and noting that approximately 17 firearm certificates are withdrawn annually, as they had been brought into the home to abuse female partners. One outcome is the requirement for police officers to keep these weapons at work which signals attention to this issue.

Reflecting on the discourse on legal and illegally held weapons in post conflict situations, Shelley Anderson, calls for an examination of the links between this 'private' violence and the 'public' violence of armed conflict. I have also written in this subject in a paper titled '*Don't you know there is a war going on?*' where I make the links with the every day ordinary violence that women experience from intimate partners with what is viewed as the extra-ordinary violence of political conflict.

done by physical violence without the use of weapons – and that it was necessary to change attitudes that led to the use of violence and not to focus simply on the 'hardware'.

²⁵ The International Commission on Decommissioning worked with the interlocutors of the paramilitary organisations in deciding the methods to make the weapons obsolescent

²⁶ McWilliams, M (1994) *The Impact of Political Conflict on Women's Lives – femicide* is where men use these guns to kill their spouses or female partners in intimate relationships. Figures for incidents of domestic violence have risen steadily, from 6,727 in 1996 to over 17,000 by 2011.

²⁷ There are 134,000 legally held small arms with one person in 17.6 holding a shotgun certificate.

In several of the most recent peace agreements there is some recognition of the gendered harms suffered by women and girls, including sexual and other violence throughout the conflict and the need to end impunity for these crimes. However there is little recognition of the importance of reconfiguring gender relations in the post conflict society, leaving this as a priority and concern for women. A paradigm shift is essential if gender justice is to be understood as an important feature of democratisation in deeply conservative societies.

Had the Coalition not been present at the Northern Ireland peace negotiations, the proposals to address the needs of victims in the conflict would have been lacking in the final agreement. If victims had been the case, the subsequent referendum on the peace agreement would have been hard to carry.²⁸ Social justice has to be included for agreements to be perceived as fair and worthy of citizens allegiance. Thelma Ekiyor argues that if 'the structural violence, discrimination and exclusion are contributory factors to war, they must be countered by a commitment to social justice and inclusive structures that are essential contributory factors to peace'.²⁹

The piece of transitional justice that was also identified with the Coalition was the establishment of a civic forum. This was proposed to sit in parallel with the elected Assembly to ensure the involvement of civic society. Comprising victims groups, trade unions, young people, the women's movement and others, the forum was mandated to consult with the legislative body on economic, social and cultural issues. Civic society, through the forum, would also be in a position to measure the performance of the new democratic institutions. It should come as no surprise that this particular institution was later found to be at odds with the political parties. Enscorced in their new power sharing government, the political parties saw the forum as surplus to

²⁸ The agreement was carried by..... but in the run up to the referendum there was much dispute about victims needs not be given the same consideration as prisoner releases. Some referred to it as a terrorist charter and it was the inclusion of the section on victims that made a substantial difference to those advocating a 'yes' vote.

²⁹ Ekiyor, T. A. (2004) Women's Empowerment in Peace-Building: A Platform for Involvement in Decision- Making, WIPNET, quoted in Porter, E. (2007) Peace Building: Women in International Perspectives, Routledge (Oxon) p41.

their needs and stood down its members two years after its formation.

Proposals for 'reconciliation between and within communities and traditions' were also drafted by the Coalition as were the commitments to facilitate mixed housing and encourage integrated education. These were added to counteract the sectarian segregation of communities and schools in Northern Ireland.³⁰ The Coalition was particularly keen to ensure that this much needed reorientation involved young people 'affected by the troubles' and made proposals in the agreement for 'support for the development of special community-based initiatives based on international best practice'.³¹

For young men in these communities, the role models were the paramilitaries, the vanguard fighters, the standard bearers of all that they believe in. In insisting on such clauses, the women negotiators were conscious that post-conflict rebuilding processes had also to include a change in attitudes regarding traditional gender roles. As Kvinna Till Kvinna, argues: 'If nationalism and prejudice are allowed to flourish then conflicts will easily rise to the surface again. In most societies affected by war and hostilities, the gender roles are very conservative. The key to sustainable peace could therefore lie in changing stereotyped gender roles and improving gender equality within the various sections of the community'.³²

This will also mean that in future agreements containing provisions concerning security of the population will also need to pay more attention to the specific concerns of women post conflict, particularly in relation to issues of physical security, including in the home and the family. The term post-conflict may also be a misnomer from the perspective of women and has been disputed alongside the terms reconstruction, reintegration and rehabilitation.³³ These concepts all assume an element of going back, restoring people to a position that

³⁰ HMSO (1998) The Agreement Reached in the multi-party negotiations, p.18, para 13.

³¹ HMSO (1998) The Agreement Reached in the multi-party negotiations, p.18, para 12.

³² Kvinna Till Kvinna, Rethink! A handbook for sustainable peace (Stockholm, 2004), 15, [http: www.iktk.se/publikationer/rappporter/pdf/Rethink](http://www.iktk.se/publikationer/rappporter/pdf/Rethink).

³³ Cite reference

previously existed. But what women most seek is societal transformation based on respect for standards of human dignity that may never have previously existed. Rather than restored dependence and subordination they demand, and need, an enhanced social position that accords full citizenship, social justice and empowerment. Translating this enhanced social provision into gender specific clauses and finding champions to support and enforce this provision remain a work in progress.

Within a list of rights that encompassed a right to equal opportunity and provision for human rights protection was a separate clause affirming 'the right of women to full and equal political participation'.³⁴ The Women's Coalition proposed the wording that was subsequently inserted into the agreement based on the equality provisions of the Guatemalan peace agreement that had been negotiated two years previously in 1996.³⁵ While this has proved to be an important aspiration, it has not been legally enforced in the implementation process nor has the British government accepted these provisions in the advice presented to it on a future Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.³⁶

Too much of the focus rests on the removal of arms and the disbandment of armies or paramilitary groups rather than on the decommissioning of mind-sets and dominance of masculinities. In the transitional stage, men return from prison to take up leadership positions in local communities resulting in a diminishing role for women who had previously held 'the frontline'.³⁷ Simultaneously, women in local communities compete for resources against projects for

³⁴ The Agreement: agreement reached in the multi-party negotiations, (Belfast, 1998), 16.

³⁵ Fearon, *Women's Work*, 106. Avila Kilmurray, in her speech to launch the WEA Women in Public Life Programme, 'Women on the Fringe of Power', 9 November 2001, Grosvenor Hall, Belfast, also confirmed that the women were told as this was not contained in the 'chapeau' of the first paragraph of the human rights section it could not be included. The NIWC response was to argue a tired official into agreement.

³⁶ Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission replicated these provisions from the agreement in its advice to the Secretary of State in 2008.

³⁷ This theme is further expanded in F NI Aolain, D F Haynes and N Cahn (2011) 'On the Frontlines' Gender War and the Post Conflict Process.' Oxford University Press.

the reintegration of prisoners.³⁸ In the trade offs on de-militarisation and disarmament, women negotiators have little to bargain with.³⁹ When issues are prioritised for implementation, it is the militarists who win out whilst the women's interests get marginalised. The gain in normalising society by standing down armed groups is important but normalisation also involves addressing the needs of victims as well as making provision for health, education and housing. It is often women in civic society who have a long-term vision of what is needed but the outcomes for politicians are generally based on the shorter term.

Even when peace agreements contain issues of concern to women or gender-related aspects or provisions, these are sometimes phrased in such general terms so as to provide insufficient opportunity and basis for action in the implementation phase. For example, while there may be references in peace agreements with regard to participation of women in executive, legislative or judicial bodies, there is rarely reference to full and equal participation or commitment to 50/50 gender balance in such bodies, within set time frames.

Agreements also often fall short on providing any means or strategies to ensure implementation, or measures to sanction non-compliance. As a method of inserting influence on local parties, international bodies such as the UN (and international donors) need to make governments meet their international obligations in the aftermath of an agreement. Few policy makers appear to understand that unless high-level representation is achieved, the good practice that exists at community level will not be disseminated or developed into policy initiatives. Equally, because it is at the implementation stage of peace accords where the foundations for a future society are often set, it is at this level where gender issues should be addressed and where a gender perspective on peace should be incorporated.⁴⁰

³⁸ A beneficial impact of the projects 'From Prison to Peace' has been in ensuring that the next generation of young people are alert to the penalties of being involved with paramilitaries and to wean them periodic episodes of 'recreational rioting'.

³⁹ European Union and Irish diaspora funds totalling 1.6 million have been allocated for the re-integration of ex-combatants

⁴⁰ Jacklyn Cock 'Closing the Circle: Toward a Gendered Understanding of War and Peace' (2001) <http://www.uct.ac.za/org/agi/newslet/vol8/lead.htm>.

Central in deliberations in many peace processes, including the Middle East, have been questions concerning communities, the extent to which, if at all, they bear rights and how their entitlements will be included in the new constitutional settlement. These questions are not surprising since it is the name of community interests and the so called 'cause' that so much of the killing takes place. We only have to consider how various forms of nationalism and the often perverted concept of what is supposedly 'just' can be distorted from a sectarian/racist standpoint, to see how central the recognition and protection of group identities can be. This past week I was part of a discussion in Belfast with young Palestinians and Israelis who had come to there to see how our process was working. The issue of identity came up in the discussions in which two of our politicians went to some length to explain how their Britishness and Irishness was so important to them respectively. I was in the middle seated between them and it struck me that my identity was formed as much by growing up as a woman. The rights that I had been denied, and the discrimination that I had been exposed to, were as much to do with my gender as they were to do with my political/religious background. Of course we now speak of the intersectionality of these issues, how class and race and ethnicity can all intersect and impact on one's life – but somehow for these men, it was still apparent the extent to which they perceived their identity to be entirely marked by the side of the communal division they had been born into.

For much the same reason, in many transitions, there is little consensus on how to deal with the legacy of the past – since both sides perceive their legacy to be the key one. But a clear eyed view of the past, that identifies what was wrong on all sides, is a necessary basis for building the future. Whether the transitional justice process focuses on the needs of the 'collective', the societal needs, or on the 'individual' victim or group's interests, it has to be built on a determination to establish the highest standards in the future. It is only on this basis that dealing with the past can avoid reliving or recreating a nightmare. Grasping with the question how we deliver truth to a divided people and how we do justice to that truth are not easy issues to resolve. There are now more than 33 truth commissions – most of which are non-judicial, using restorative justice processes. Most of these have been criticised for ignoring the needs and interests of women. What I have witnessed in places like Uganda and the DRC is the generation of young people, mostly young women,

who have been deprived of education and the opportunity to learn a vocation. Too many young have been deprived of a normal adolescence, sharing and mixing with other young people on either side of their psychological and physical walls. For most women health services, educational facilities and other fundamental services remain sorely lacking. Single mothers, many of whose partners were killed or who bore children as a result of rape, are deprived of access to land and property rights because they do not have a male relative. That is why the abolition of discriminatory practices and inheritance laws must form part of the transformation. In East Timor, the women were forced to take contraception by the Indonesian army to lower their fertility rate has meant that even today women are suspicious of family planning. They have the highest number of children of anywhere in the world and too many of them are dying during childbirth. Despite their Truth recovery process being one of the first to include women, the reparations that were recommended did not include women's health needs or their gender specific interests.

There needs to be a massive effort to rebuild women's lives after long running conflicts. Vital elements include financial reparations to compensate for the destruction of their livelihoods. In too many peace agreements land titles have been given only to men, leaving women without the property that they were entitled to previously. Women's organisations and civil society groups have to be at the table to raise these issues as their lives literally depend on them.

In post conflict situations, as soon as the political elites find an accommodating political arrangement and the 'ones with the guns' disarm, there is an assumption that the frontline actors who helped to create the process are no longer needed. Subsequent re-negotiations, and pay-offs, too often mean that important objectives, such as the health and education needs of women and the creation of a 'shared' societal future get side-lined.⁴¹

I have mentioned the substantive elements of a peace agreement but it is only that – an agreement outlining what has to be done. If the

⁴¹ Attempts were also made to side line Women coalition members by the predominantly unionist parties with frequent calls to the author and other members to 'go back to go back to where you came from'.

right and real human relationships are not built between the parties, and between the men and women, on different sides of the conflict then it will not be implemented. We cannot exist without our neighbours, our services and our economy. We cannot exist in any meaningful way, without reference to each other.⁴² Around the table in any multi-party negotiations, and indeed in local communities, learning how to work across differences, learning how not to silence or ignore these differences, are part of the mix for a constructive dialogue. Again women are good at building these relationships, acting as mediators and facilitators, as well as negotiators. Reconciling people in a divided land can be a difficult task but it should not be an elusive quest. It is not the land, but the people who live on it, that need to build a shared society. Recognising this need for one another, this interdependence on one another, is a critical step in building a peaceful country whatever the constitutional arrangements.

These relationships are most important but we also need determined monitors to ensure that what was agreed gets enforced. That is often the biggest challenge in any process – and remains the case in my own situation and indeed in many of the conflict regions that I have worked in.

Where there is the possibility of a roll back post conflict, we also need champions to walk alongside the process to ensure this does not happen. In post conflict we generally face a form of pragmatic muddling through, particularly by parties having to share power, instead of an alternative and more convincing interpretation - an interpretation that is better equipped to make sense of the new practices that the new political order imagined. Women can also be told by those who are muddling through what they regard as the hard issues of power sharing that women's participation in the new arrangements is not important. What we need at this stage of the transition are leaders who believe in women's rights and have the political will to ensure that these rights are embedded as part of the new society. When men and women speak of a transformation from conflict to peace then it has to be a genuine transformation for women as well as men and we have to work together on this – politicians and civil society, scholars and practitioners, monitors and mediators,

⁴² Porter, N (2000) The Elusive Quest

negotiators and service providers.

Conclusion

A peace agreement provides a pivotal moment for the design of a post-conflict society encompassing structures and institutions for a democratic state and the rule of law, reconciling the conflicting expectations of ethno/religious groups or national identities, providing human rights guarantees and setting out measures for economic, physical and social reconstruction. As Naomi Cahn and her colleagues have argued, if women are absent from peace negotiations then much-needed “social services justice” (care for victims, education, health, and well being) will also be absent in post conflict societies.⁴³

At the conclusion of the negotiations, Senator Mitchell, the chairperson of the peace talks, stated, “the emergence of women as a political force was a significant factor in achieving the Agreement (in Northern Ireland).”⁴⁴ Northern Ireland shows what can happen when women are included in the initial phases of transition and are able to make the case for equality in all spheres. The Women’s Coalition was aware that any ssilence in the peace agreement about the position of women would perpetuate and institutionalize the marginalization of women in the transitional political process. It would also have allowed those implementing the peace process, including international agencies, to commence their mandates without reference to how their operations impact differentially upon women and men. However, its proposals were not consolidated as the process became narrowed to security concerns on decommissioning and disbandment of paramilitary organizations. Transitional justice measures such as the proposals on affirmative action and temporary special measures need to have strong enforcement mechanisms to ensure that women do not disappear from the process. Robust language in a peace agreement to promote gender equality and women’s participation needs to be backed by specific responsibility for its fulfillment and an allocation of resources to facilitate proactive implementation.

⁴³ Cahn, N., Haynes, D. and Ni Aolain, F. (2010) Returning Home: Women in Post-Conflict Societies in University of Baltimore Law Review, Vol. 39, No.3.

⁴⁴ George Mitchell, G.J. (1999) Making Peace, Random House (Toronto).

Since a peace-building process is multi-layered, contextual, and at times formal or informal, the involvement of women and grass roots organisations, and not just the political elites, in negotiations and decision-making can open up a space for political transformation. But this space needs to be sustained. Since mainstreaming a gender analysis leads to a more comprehensive understanding of the realities of conflict and the meaning of human security, ensuring this analysis continues post agreement requires the support of political leaders. Women's contribution to peace talks shows what can be delivered but much more needs to be done to ensure that women maintain a central role in rebuilding their societies.

Both locally and globally, the seeds are being planted. If we are to embed a new culture, one that truly understands what is meant by Women, Peace and Security, then we have to counteract the fear and uncertainty that a transition from conflict brings. Whether it is in Northern Ireland, the Middle East or Central Africa, Latin America or Asia-Pacific, we have to believe in the worth of peace and justice and the institutions built to defend them. We cannot give up. There is much still to learn to keep us working for some time. As the African American poet, Langston Hughes says:

Gather out of star-dust

Earth dust,

Cloud dust

Storm dust

And splinters of hail.

One handful of dream dust

Not for sale.

Thank you for your attention.