

## **Statement at the Arria Formula Meeting on the Role of Women in Achieving and Maintaining International Security**

### **Statement to the Arria Formula Meeting of the UN Security Council**

**23 October 2000**

The NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, including International Alert, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Amnesty International, the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, and the Hague Appeal for Peace speak, today, on behalf of the thousands of women victims of violent conflict, and the hundreds of grassroots groups and local organizations that struggle every day to prevent war, and to bring peace and security to their ravaged communities in the midst of the most horrendous conflicts.

Even though states have agreed to international legal standards regarding human rights and the conduct of conflict, more and more women have become caught at the centre of these conflicts. Violence against women is not an accident of war; it is a strategic weapon of war to the extent that it is even a method of ethnic cleansing and an element of genocide.

Conflict shatters women's and their families means of survival, including through the destruction of crops, homes and livelihoods at the hands of one or other of the parties to conflict. Women are forcibly displaced in their own communities and are also forced to flee to other countries finding refuge in camp settings. Where peacekeepers and military forces violate the rights of women, and contribute to their exploitation including through prostitution, a culture of impunity and silence prevails.

Peacekeepers and humanitarian agencies and personnel know this is happening. We call for the end of silent witnesses and for the provision of gender sensitive training in order to fully protect women. But, women are neither simply victims, nor are they passive in the face of war.

Even in the worst and most dangerous of circumstances, women have shown their courage and leadership as problem solvers and peacemakers, reaching across the conflict divide to reach resolution and common ground, often shouldering the survival of their families single handedly.

In South Africa, women from all parts of society joined together to fight against apartheid. In Latin America, wives and sisters dared to question the military juntas about their "disappeared" relatives. In Mali and Liberia, women rallied together to call for disarmament. They stood at arms deposition stations across their countries, taking away the deadly Kalashnikovs and M-16's from the men and boys engaged in conflict. In the Philippines, women run peace zones around villages protecting their children. In Bosnia women from across ethnic lines are working in parliament to rebuild their communities. In Burundi the women's coalition is struggling to bring the voices of those most affected by war to the peace table. In Sudan, women from both sides have opened new avenues for peace talks. Israeli and Palestinian women have been working for years at the grassroots level to build the trust needed for sustainable peace.

But as the Council asserted this March 8th, "although women play an important role in conflict resolution, peacekeeping and peace-building, they are still under-represented in decision-making in regard to conflict."

Their work is rarely acknowledged, nor recognized. Time and again, when it comes to peace deals and high level negotiations, women's voices and their experiences are excluded and marginalized. Even though women head the majority of households after war, and know what is needed to rebuild peace, they are neglected by their own governments and the international community.

The fear and trauma caused by war are pervasive and long lasting. At the individual level alone, men and women who have participated in war know that it is neither glorious nor heroic work. It has been found that the trauma of war is a significant contributor to the increased incidence of domestic and social violence.

The prevention of war and the restoration of peace depend on ensuring respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms. It also depends on the regulation of armament. In most arms exporting countries there is insufficient parliamentary scrutiny of the trade, let alone public transparency. Those responsible for gross systematic violations of human rights know all too well that very often the arms supply will continue. The founders of the UN saw a particular role for the Security Council in establishing a system for the regulation of armament under Article 26. We feel that the Council needs to fulfill this role now more than ever, in order to assess the root causes of war, which include the actual preparation for war: militarism. This means a diversion of resources away from war. We could start this if we reduced global military spending by 5% each year for 5 years, to free up half a billion dollars a day.

In your July 20th statement, you reaffirmed that "early warning, preventive diplomacy, preventive deployment, preventive disarmament and post-conflict peace-building are interdependent components of a comprehensive conflict prevention strategy."

In developing this strategy, we ask that you ensure women's equal and full representation. We urge you to draw, to the utmost, on the insights, experiences, and expertise of women and civil society in matters of daily human security, conflict prevention, resolution, reconciliation and reconstruction. We ask you to acknowledge that non-violent conflict resolution has become an imperative of human survival.

Today, we ask you, the current custodians of the UN Security Council, to set yet another precedent, by taking the first steps in ensuring that these words and concerns become a reality in the lives of the women who suffer and struggle through war every day.

We urge you to take the following actions:

1. Ensure that all UN fact-finding missions are mandated to consult with women's organizations and to require the UN system to use common gender-based indicators for conflict early warning and response procedures;
2. Appoint more women as special representatives and envoys to conflict regions, ensure that women have equal participation in the negotiations process, and that gender issues are placed on the agenda and fully addressed in the agreements reached;
3. Ensure that all peacekeeping and peace support operations are mandated to protect women and girls, against sexual violence, abduction, prostitution, trafficking, and threats imposed by military, paramilitary, and to uphold peacekeeping codes of conduct;
4. Request the Secretary-General to ensure that all personnel involved in United Nations peacekeeping and peace-building activities have appropriate training on the protection, rights and particular needs of women and girls, and that regional organizations and Troop Contributing Members fulfill their responsibility in this regard;

5. Ensure the full integration of women's human rights into the consolidation of peace particularly in the reform of the constitution, the electoral system, the judiciary and the security sector; and
6. Establish an independent expert panel to report on these issues, and recommend a follow-up consultation between the Security Council and NGOs involved in women, armed conflict and peace building issues within a year.

So today, we call upon you, the Security Council of the United Nations, to accept us, **the peoples of the United Nations**, as equal partners in our struggle to protect the most vulnerable communities in the world, to build sustainable peace, and to eliminate the scourge of war.

Thank you.

International Alert, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Amnesty International, Women's Commission on Refugee Women and Children, and the Hague Appeal for Peace.