

UN Article 1325 highlights both the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls and the critical role of women and girls in conflict prevention and resolution, peace negotiations, peace building and post conflict reconstruction and governance. In making this submission may I make it clear that I am engaging in the stated objectives of Ireland's National Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolution 1325, 2011- 2014 which sought to have women's voices involved in conflict prevention (Pillar 1) and in peace building and further that I am engaging in both 'the participation and representation of women in decision making' (Pillar 2) and in the promotion of the Women Peace and Security agenda in a national arena (Pillar 5).

In the consultation document under article 5, issues for consideration listed include:

6. How can Ireland promote Women, Peace and Security in Multilateral Organisations.

As I am composing this submission the illegal military operation launched by the Israeli military three weeks ago and known as Operation Protective Edge is affecting the entire population of occupied Gaza and as a result I will restrict my submission to actions that Ireland could take to help end these attacks in the immediate situation and use as a template for further actions should they be required in the life of the second national action plan.

Of those who have so far been killed, injured or displaced in these attacks (currently the figures are 1400, 7000 and 200,000 respectively) the vast majority are women, children and non combatants. This and previous such attacks such 2009's Operation Cast Lead are in direct contravention of International Human Rights Law and of the Geneva Conventions which prohibit the targeting of civilians. Further to this since 2006 Gaza has been held under an illegal siege which has ensured the collective punishment of its inhabitants and the breach of nearly every single recognised human right and that is enshrined in international agreements. If the Irish Government seeks the fulfilment of the aims and objectives of UN1325 with any degree of seriousness it should now begin to use our state's participation in all available forums (The UN, The EU etc) to put an end to these egregious and repeated breaches of women, children and men's human rights.

Some concrete, non-violent measures that Ireland should now take to prevent conflict, build peace, empower women and seek to end the ongoing conflict that has disproportionately affected women and children in the Occupied Palestinian Territories are as follows:

- The Irish Government, namely our Taoiseach and Minister for Foreign Affairs should call for an 'immediate' end to Israeli attacks on the people of Gaza as a vital precondition to a lasting ceasefire agreement with the sanction proposed that should a ceasefire not be agreed, then Ireland will expel the Israeli Ambassador.
- It should call for suspension of preferential trade agreements with Israel such as the Association Agreement under the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, (known as the Euro-Med Agreement) which has given Israel privileged access to the EU markets since 2000. Israel is in clear and multiple breach of the conditions of the Euro Med Agreement which at Article 2 states: *“Relations between the Parties, as well as all the provisions of the Agreement itself, shall be based on respect for human rights and democratic principles, which guides their internal and international policy and constitutes an essential element of this Agreement.”*
- Ireland and its representatives at all EU levels should seek to highlight Israel’s non compliance with the conditions of this agreement and argue that it be suspended until such a time as Israel complies with Article 2. The effects of any suspension of this preferential trade agreement should not be underestimated as the EU is Israel’s largest trading partner despite its continuous and ever worsening breaches of both international human rights law and the Geneva Conventions. If after a reasonable time no action has been taken by Ireland’s fellow EU members, Ireland should state its intention to cease trade with Israel until such a time as that state begins to comply with its obligations and respect the dignity and humanity of those who live in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.
- The Irish Government and our representatives in all multilateral and international forums should also actively campaign to call for an end to the illegal Israeli-imposed siege of Gaza which, due to the demographics of the population there disproportionately impoverishes and inhibits the development and health of children.

General Concerns with the actions of Ireland's representatives in international forums:

On 23rd of July 2014 Ireland's Ambassador to the UN Patricia O'Brien abstained from voting on the Human Rights Council's resolution setting up a commission of inquiry into allegations of war crimes in Gaza. Whilst this decision was defended by O'Brien and the Minister for Foreign Affairs who insisted that in fact it was the text of the resolution that they objected to and that Ireland's voice was best heard by allying itself with the voices of other EU member states, public opinion was clearly not in agreement with them. This submission wishes to suggest that Irish Government or its Diplomatic Representatives need not re-invent the wheel:

- In each such situation Ireland should immediately make it clear that its commitment to respecting and promoting respect for international human rights law is non-negotiable and will underwrite all decisions that it is party to.

In order to fulfil the objectives of UN 1325 and cognisant of the fact that as a small not militarily powerful state Ireland must seek peaceful and inventive ways of contributing to the promotion of Women Peace and Security, Ireland should ensure that all of its foreign policy decisions, votes and statements are grounded in International Human Rights Law and that it pursues an independent human rights based foreign policy, not one of pragmatism nor one dictated by our relationships with any other state. In this way Ireland can seek to promote UN1325 both in its actions and through giving other states an example to follow.

Allowing a state which participates in international forums and benefits from its interactions with institutions in which Ireland has a voice to repeatedly flout all of the very basic human rights conditions which govern our relationships with each other has now, and will continue to have negative implications for the security, safety, development, health and empowerment of woman and children worldwide. Whilst I accept that other current conflicts are equally as deplorable and in some cases have had had greater loss of life and casualties, the situation between Israel and the Occupied Palestinian territories has clear points of leverage on which the

international community can take action, something which is less clear in many of the other situations. There are things we can do in this situation and that being the case we should take those actions that are available to us in the hope that in the future much as happened in northern Ireland that we might arrive at a situation where all parties to the conflict would be enticed or pressured into engaging in genuine negotiations.

If the participation of women in conflict resolution is to have any effect perhaps its best potential lies in women's ability to take pragmatic steps in pursuit of their ideals rather than to surrender their ideals to pragmatism. If we are serious about the participation and the protection of children then let's use this Second Action Plan to take a leaf out of their book and make the fullest use of our collective imaginations in pursuit of an end to conflicts, beginning with this one.