

## Twelfth Meeting

11<sup>th</sup> July 2018, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Iveagh House

### Minutes: Thematic Meeting

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#### Session 1 Promoting Women in Mediation

This session was intended to reflect on the **Promoting Women in Peace Mediation** event held on the 1<sup>st</sup> June and examine possibilities in moving forward with this agenda.

Those that had attended the event spoke of how they had found the documentary film **Peacemakers: Wave Goodbye to Dinosaurs** particularly inspiring. It was suggested that the film could have a greater global reach in the sharing of experiences of women in peace mediation or navigating a place at the negotiating table. It was noted that if the film could have subtitles in a variety of languages it would allow for a much greater global reach.

However, it was highlighted that if lesson sharing from the Northern Ireland experience on this topic is to be developed further, it should take account of the fact that there were, and continue to be, many other women peacebuilders that were not part of the Women's Coalition. Therefore, it is important to look at lesson learning beyond solely high profile women who were involved in the Good Friday negotiations, or those that were members of the Women's Coalition, but also towards grassroots women who often work independently in mediating and negotiating tensions, and may have not been supporters of the Women's Coalition.

In reference to the report on the 1<sup>st</sup> June event, the discussion clarified some of the points raised by speakers. For example, Dr Catherine Turner had noted that there is often little connection between gender experts on mediation, (those that advocate for greater inclusion of women or a gender perspective at the negotiating table) and those who are practicing 'women mediators'. The point she raised is that there needs to be greater connection between those 'gender advocates' and 'women practitioners'. A further issue that was raised was the importance of diversity in mediating teams, that promoting women in peace mediation is not just about rights but that a diverse mediating team can improve effectiveness.

The Chair also raised the important question of *where you find the women to go into mediation*. However, it was reminded that there are a number of women across Ireland, both the North and South, that are already working on mediation and negotiations. For example, Bronagh Hinds has worked with the gender advisory board on the Syrian women's negotiations. Sponsored by CRU, Monica McWilliams will be in Cyprus in September working with grassroots women, in an initiative aimed at increasing local women's support for restarting the (currently stalled) negotiations. There are also a variety of organisations, North and South, who have women on their staff who are working on direct mediation (domestically and internationally) or providing training and capacity building for women in

this area. Some of these organisations are noted in the report on the mediation event that has been circulated.

It was also raised that the event had highlighted the importance of networks in creating horizontal and vertical linkages between women peacebuilders. Frequently there remains disconnect between women in grassroots mediation and those in higher political negotiations. Yet it is important to connect the two so as such processes are not carried out in parallel arenas.

### **An Irish Network**

The Secretariat, introduced some of the ideas around the possible development of an Irish network of women mediators, noting that there is a lot of interest for this from Irish academic institutions (UCD, DCU, ISE and Maynooth have all shown interest in the initiative). It was also noted that rather than just being focused on promoting individual women mediators in high-level negotiations, it could be better conceptualised as a consortium of research and practice in this area. This would focus on retaining and sharing the knowledge on women's experiences of negotiations/mediation that currently exist on the Island of Ireland, and sharing it in a more global context.

It was highlighted that if this initiative is to be developed further, it would first be useful to conduct a mapping exercise on the focus (theme and geographical area) of existing networks, so as to see where Ireland could work complementary to other existing networks, or where meaningful connections can be made.

It was also noted that if an Irish network were to come into existence it would require clear objectives, Terms of Reference, and a Steering Committee. Moreover, as Áine highlighted, if an Irish Network were to develop more substantive ties to other networks, the Nordic network would be the most appropriate fit. Ireland already has close ties to Nordic political groupings as member of Nordic Plus.

The ideas for this initiative are still being developed and meetings continue to take place between the Secretariat and 1) mediation institutions in Ireland 2) EEAS and European partners 2) representatives of existing women mediation networks.

### **Session 2: Karti Project**

This session was presented the group the proposal for the Karti Project initiative by Siobhan O'Brien-Green and Nura Hagi. The executive summary of the project is as follows:

*Karti Project is a collaborative, Women, Peace and Security focused initiative that has a key focus on women's networks and collaboration as a source of women's empowerment, support and integration. Karti project seeks to address the harmful effects of conflict on women and support the support vital roles that women can play in conflict resolution, prevention and peacebuilding. The project will have both a domestic dimension that is centred around addressing the needs and challenges faced by women living in Ireland that*

*have come from conflict contexts, and an international dimension that is aimed at supporting women Peacebuilders in the Somalian context.*

*Domestically, Karti project seeks to support women who have come to Ireland from conflict contexts and contribute to the integration process. Ensuring close cooperation with other Irish civil society organisations that work with women asylum seekers and refugees, Karti project takes an approach that recognises the challenges faced by such women in Ireland but also works with women in a manner that reflects and recognises the skills and expertise that such women can bring to Irish society. The focus on building networks emphasises the importance of close engagement between migrant communities and the Irish population for the psychological and physical wellbeing of women coming from conflict contexts. The provision of a platform for the channelling of information, will allow for the knowledge dissemination around issues such as the provision of services and access to resources and support networks.*

*Internationally the project seeks to engage closely with women Peacebuilders in Somalia. The Somali context has been selected in order to add to and support the ongoing peace process in the region and the important role that women continue to play in this. Consistent with global priorities around the promotion of women in processes of peace mediation, Karti project will engage closely with grassroots women in Somalia from the perspective of capacity building in mediation skills. It will also work to support the development of horizontal and vertical networks of women peacebuilders in order to promote cross-tribal dialogue processes at the community level that can feed into, and support, the ongoing peace process. Karti will also provide training and capacity building in mediation and negotiation skills and will also engage in lesson learning initiatives, drawing from the experience of women in peace mediation in the Irish context.*

Siobhan O'Brien-Green provided a background to her research in the area of violence against women in Ireland. The slides are attached, in addition a EU report referenced.

Nura Hagi presented to the group her own experiences of arriving in Ireland from a conflict context and the difficulties that she faced. Although her experiences of Irish hospitality and inclusion are generally positive, this does not detract from the fact that a lack of knowledge of how to access resources when arriving in the country or dealing with the trauma of conflict is a huge challenge for many women arriving from situations of conflict. Nura's own experiences of the challenges faced by such women are what has provided the incentive to propose the establishment of Karti project. In addition, Nura's work as a Human Rights Defender in Somalia and her in-depth context specific knowledge of the harsh realities that women face in the Somali context has led her to propose an international dimension to the project that focuses on supporting women peacebuilders in the Somali context.

The word 'Karti' is a Somali expression for 'Making Change', which is consistent with what underlies the objectives of the initiative.

## Queries and Comments

Oversight group members were generally positive about the proposal but the Chair suggested that the proposal could be developed further to be more specific. There are various organizations that are working on women's integration, therefore it is necessary to be careful not to be duplicating what others are doing. It is therefore advisable to find a niche that is unique to Karti. In response to these comments, Nura and Siobhan clarified that the project would specifically be aimed at women arriving in Ireland from conflict contexts. This can be developed further in the proposal to make it its unique selling point.

It was noted that, from a WPS perspective, Karti could focus the initiative on UNSCR 1325 pillar, 'Relief and Recovery', as it relates to issues faced for women after the experience of conflict and also long-term rehabilitation. This is a pillar which is frequently paid less attention than others.

In the spirit of networks, it was suggested that Karti could also link in other organisations working in this area such as Spirasi in order to expand its network of services. Another possibility suggested was to establish itself under the umbrella of the National Women's Council of Ireland so as to reduce administrative costs and complexities.

The question of where it would operate was also raised as Nura is based in Cork and its reach would need to extend to a variety of locations. On clarification, it was noted that the long term plan would be to have outreach projects in various major hubs across Ireland.

A question was also raised about the level of gender balance on the board as there is only one man. This is something that will be addressed as the project develops.

## Suggested funding

It was suggested that **Dormant accounts**, could be one possible avenue for funding. As Áine noted, this is what was also used to fund the recent national anti-GBV campaign 'what would you do if'.

Other possible sources of funding were suggested as via the **National lottery** or the **Civil Society Fund**.

## The international dimension.

Colm Byrne, highlighted that applying for funding for the international dimension is more complex than applying for domestically focused work. It was therefore suggested that it may more productive to just focus on the domestic dimension initially, without getting bogged down with all the complexities of the funding for international projects.

*Secretariat to the Oversight Group to the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security*  
23<sup>rd</sup> July 2018