U.S. Civil Society Working Group Expert Statement for the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security

The following statement and recommendations were compiled by the U.S. Civil Society Working Group on Women, Peace and Security. In publishing this statement the Working Group aims to assist the U.S. Government turn declaratory policy into action and engender effective outcomes that bring peace, security and dignity to the lives of women and men in conflict and crisis settings.

WHY IS U.S. IMPLEMENTATION OF UNSCR 1325 CRITICAL?

Nearly half of all peace processes fail within the first decade of their signature. The result is societal fragmentation and often greater violence than before, with women bearing the burden. As civil society experts, we have seen first-hand that engaging women in peace processes can provide a framework for more sustainable peace and security as in South Africa, Northern Ireland and Liberia. Evidence shows that peace processes are viewed as more credible and are more likely to succeed when they are inclusive. Research indicates that the failures of international peace processes frequently have a direct impact on U.S. national security and interests.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recognizes the nefarious effects of violence against women and the importance of including women in peace processes. In October 2010, she stated "The only way to…reduce the number of conflicts around the world, to eliminate rape as a weapon of war, to combat the culture of impunity for sexual violence, to build sustainable peace – is to draw on the full contributions of both women and men in every aspect of peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peace building." She also announced that the U.S. was joining over 25 other countries that developed national action plans (NAPs) to integrate the provisions of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in their domestic and foreign policies in formulating a U.S. "National Action Plan to accelerate the implementation of Resolution 1325 across our government and with our partners in civil society."

Tremendous opportunity exists with the U.S. NAP. In this Experts' Statement, the U.S. Civil Society Working Group provides a brief overview of UNSCR 1325, highlights key recommendations for making the U.S. NAP effective, and clarifies misconceptions about women, peace and security. This statement follows the Working Group's February 15, 2011 memo to the U.S. Administration on Recommendations for Benchmarks for the U.S. National Action Plan.

WHAT IS UNSCR 1325 ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY?

UNSCR 1325 is a framework for more effective conflict resolution and sustainable peacebuilding. The Security Council adopted the resolution unanimously in October 2000, following persistent advocacy by grassroots civil society groups. It is the first ever UNSCR that explicitly acknowledges the contributions of half the world's population towards restoring and maintaining peace and security.

UNSCR 1325 and four subsequent resolutions (UNSCR 1820, 1888, 1889, and 1960) make up the women, peace and security agenda and lay out actions to ensure:

A) The participation and inclusion of women (including civil society actors) in decision making related to conflict prevention, peacemaking and post-conflict reconstruction;

B) Provisions for the promotion and protection of women and girls' physical, social, economic and political rights during and after conflict, including refugee and displacement settings;

C) Conflict-related sexual violence prevention, effective reporting and protection of victims;

D) Training of military and civilian personnel, including peacekeepers, on protection of women, including zero tolerance of sexual exploitation and abuse of local populations; and

E) Systematic implementation of the resolution by all governments and UN missions.

Although often dubbed the 'women's resolution', UNSCR 1325 is first and foremost about international peace and security. It echoes the demands of women caught in the frontlines of conflict, who want wars prevented and stopped. Its implicit message is that given the cost of contemporary warfare on civilians and the limitations of the state-based international system, a wide range of actors is necessary for effective conflict prevention, peacebuilding and security. The resolution explicitly recognizes women's contributions to peacemaking, the importance of addressing the differential needs of women and men in peace processes and the relationship between human rights and international peace and security.

UNSCR 1325 also highlights the importance of women's inclusion for the sake of equity and effectiveness. It is rooted in the premise that women's inclusion – their presence, participation, and perspectives – will improve the chances of attaining viable and sustainable peace. Similarly, attention to the protection of women's physical well-being and legal and political rights is not simply an end in itself. It is not about making conflict safe for women. Rather it is a recognition of the fact that if half the population is experiencing violence or discrimination, there is no chance of peace, justice or democracy.

WHAT SHOULD THE U.S. DO TO ENSURE ITS NATIONAL ACTION PLAN IS EFFECTIVE?

1) Ensure more inclusive U.S.-supported mediation and negotiation processes.

Mediation and negotiation processes provide the blueprint for reconciliation and post-conflict reconstruction initiatives. All stakeholders, particularly women, must be part of designing this future. The U.S. must standardize its approach to ensuring women's participation and the provision of gender expertise in U.S.-led or supported mediation efforts. Required actions include:

- **A)** Provide incentives to parties in peace processes to include more women in their negotiating teams—e.g. additional seats at the negotiating table for women negotiators;
- **B)** Make U.S. funding for peace negotiations contingent on women's participation;
- **C)** Appoint as U.S. envoys and to mediation teams men and women who have demonstrated competence in advancing women's participation in peace and security processes;
- **D)** Address the provisions of UNSCR 1325 in defining the strategies of U.S. mediation teams and international contact groups;
- **E)** Train all U.S. envoys and mediation teams on UNSCR 1325 provisions; and
- **F)** Establish and support peace and security processes that ensure structured and regular engagement with women's and other civil society organizations from the earliest stages and throughout mediation, negotiation and post-conflict planning and recovery processes.

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2) Achieve substantial women's participation in multilateral and bilateral post-conflict planning and programming.

When planners perform gender analyses and engage women in preparing for political and post-conflict transitions, programs are more likely to reflect the priorities of broad communities. As a result, development is more sustainable and cost-effective. The U.S. should ensure gender analysis is applied to and women participate fully during post-conflict planning stages. Required actions include:

- **A)** Address the provisions of UNSCR 1325 in gatherings related to countries affected by conflict, including: "friends" groups, donor conferences, and UN Security Council sessions;
- **B)** Invite women's civil society organizations, including those representing refugee and displaced women, to participate in multilateral meetings as above;
- **C)** Support establishment of in-country UNSCR 1325 working groups to coordinate efforts by bilateral actors, UN entities, non-governmental organizations and local government agencies;
- **D)** Allocate at least 15 percent of U.S. government funds for multilateral and bilateral support for post-conflict reconstruction projects; and
- **E)** Provide funds directly to national civil society organizations working on women, peace and security in post-conflict environments.

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3) Prioritize the needs of women and girls in U.S.-funded emergency response and recovery programs.

In times of conflict and other disasters, women and girls have a critical role to play in helping their families and communities to stabilize and recover. The U.S. government must ensure that women and girls have safe and equal access to assistance programs and have opportunities to participate in decision-making processes. Required actions include:

- **A)** Support systematic collection of sex and age disaggregated data to inform assessments, programming and funding decisions, recognizing the diverse needs and challenges facing women including those with disabilities, widows, refugees, abductees;
- **B)** Ensure that bilateral and multilateral programs are consistent with established Inter-Agency Standing Committee guidance on integrating gender considerations into humanitarian response, as well the Guidance on addressing gender-based violence in humanitarian settings;

C) Require organizations implementing U.S.-funded activities to demonstrate how they will engage women and men equally in program design and implementation;

D) Increase support for initiatives to reduce women's vulnerability to gender-based violence and to improve services for survivors. This includes prioritizing implementation of the Minimum Initial Service Package for reproductive health in emergencies;

E) Support leadership training for conflict-displaced women and girls displaced by violence to encourage their participation in decision making processes; and

F) Ensure that USAID Disaster Assistance Response Teams (DARTS) include gender and protection experts.

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4) Maintain zero tolerance and 100 percent accountability for sexual and gender based violence.

Sexual and gender based violence is endemic in crisis, conflict and post-conflict settings. At its most severe, state and non-state actors commit sexual violence as a tactic of war to spread fear, displace and destroy community identity and provoke escalation of violence. Military, civilian personnel, aid workers and defense contractors working in conflict and post-conflict settings have committed abuse against adults and children they were sent to protect. When abuse is committed, condoned or ignored by official actors or official institutions, impunity for sexual and gender based violence undermines the legitimacy and effectiveness of all other diplomacy, development and defense effort. The U.S. must work at home and with its partners, including in all Status of Force Agreements (SOFAs), to address this issue. Required actions include:

A) Insist that impunity is unacceptable by vetting security sector recruits for past abuse, ensuring zero tolerance, investigating and prosecuting abuse committed by U.S. personnel and contractors, and urging troop and police contributing countries to apply the same standards;

B) Strengthen the oversight and investigative capacity of the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services;

C) Build partner capacity by integrating gender and protection principles into security cooperation programs, including technical support, education and training for military and police personnel of all ranks;

D) Mandate mission-specific pre-deployment training on gender and codes of conduct for all categories of U.S. and international personnel and ensure regular and structured engagement with women's civil society organizations regarding conduct of security personnel; and

E) Build U.S. technical expertise by strengthening relationships with and supporting research by the Office of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, civil society organizations, and academic and research institutions.

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5) Ensure that U.S. financial support for multilateral organizations is contingent on compliance with the provisions of UNSCR 1325 and the four subsequent resolutions.

The United States' substantial financial support for many international institutions provides it a unique ability to advance the women, peace and security agenda. The U.S. government should leverage its membership with multilateral organizations to advance implementation of UNSCR 1325 regionally and globally by requiring certain standards are met by the institutions it financially supports. This is especially relevant in conflict and crisis settings and notably applicable to the Organization of American States, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), World Bank, International Monetary Fund and UN entities. Required actions include:

A) Collect sex-disaggregated data systematically;

B) Appoint and nominate senior professionals who demonstrate commitment to ensuring women's participation in peace and security processes;

C) Ensure outreach, consultation, inclusion and funding of women's civil society organizations in country programming;

D) Request accountability from such institutions vis-à-vis budget allocations and funding for women's peace and security activities; and

E) Stipulate zero tolerance and accountability for personnel involved in sex trafficking, sexual abuse or exploitation of local populations or colleagues.

6) Require U.S. government security and development contractors to demonstrate core competencies on UNSCR 1325 provisions in the contractors' work, programs, and policies.

U.S. government contractors must be held to the same high standards as U.S. government personnel. The U.S. must, through contracts and terms of agreement, require its contractors to meet these standards. Required actions include:

A) Collect sex-disaggregated data systematically;

B) Inform program design with context-relevant gender analysis;

C) Ensure women's equal participation in training, education and program activities; and

D) Stipulate zero tolerance and accountability for personnel involved in sex trafficking, sexual abuse or exploitation of local populations or colleagues.

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7) Create strong capacity to implement the NAP within the U.S. government at all levels.

The NAP can only be implemented effectively if U.S. government personnel have the necessary knowledge and skills, and maintain close working relationships with U.S. civil society organizations. Given the process-oriented and context-specific nature of this work, interventions and responses may vary by case but various approaches exist to increasing staff and institutional capacity at the national level. Required actions include:

A) Establish an office in the National Security Council, led by a Senior Director on Women, Peace and Security, to advance the goals of the NAP, and to monitor the effective application of the plan;

B) Establish a Joint Government-Civil Society Task Force on UNSCR 1325 that has oversight and reporting responsibilities, coordinated by the NSC office defined above;

C) Ensure the Office of Global Women's Issues at the Department of State is permanently headed by an ambassador-level official who reports directly to the Secretary of State;

D) Rotate staff between the White House, Department of State, Department of Defense and USAID to increase learning and exposure on cross-cutting issues;

E) Mandate training on women, peace and security for U.S. government staff at all levels, with the expectation that they will apply new knowledge and skills in their jobs; and

F) Incorporate women, peace and security knowledge and skills into U.S. government performance assessments.

WHAT MYTHS AND EXCUSES PREVENT WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PEACE AND SECURITY?

Myth #1: We are trying to stop the war - what is the evidence that including women can make a difference?

The best evidence is the failure of current efforts. Fifty percent of peace agreements fail within a decade, unleashing more violence and fragmentation of armed actors. Research shows that inclusive processes are more credible to the public and have a higher success rate. There is also empirical evidence of women's contributions to improving peace negotiations, sustaining ceasefires, disarming and reintegrating fighters, and improving governance and justice.

Myth #2: We have to be culturally sensitive - this is a "Western" Agenda.

UNSCR 1325 came from women in conflict zones worldwide and today, in every war zone, from Afghanistan to Sri Lanka to Libya, women are endangering their own lives to bring about peace. Sidelining them or suggesting that they are "westernized" due to our own lack of cultural understanding damages their efforts.

Myth #3: It is hard enough getting an agreement - adding women will just rock the boat.

The immediate goal of stopping warfare and ensuring a ceasefire often overshadows everything. A common argument is that pushing the issue "too soon" may rock the boat. However, research indicates this assumption is unsubstantiated by evidence and that bringing women in earlier in the process enhances stability, decreases corruption in political institutions, and promotes higher living standards.

Myth #4: We are already working with women.

The lone woman or ad hoc meeting are not enough. Traditional development programming does not address the issues of peace and security that the UNSCR 1325 agenda tackles. This agenda is about ensuring women's central role in the key moments when their future is being negotiated at the end of war. It is about ensuring that 50 percent of the population has a say in determining national security, constitutional, governance, justice, social and economic priorities, and systems that will govern their lives.

Myth #5: We do not have the budget to do more training, add more staff, etc.

Many argue that the U.S. government lacks the budget for additional training and staff to support implementation of UNSCR 1325. However, the U.S. and its allies currently dedicate huge resources to peace and security issues, despite poor returns on their investments. This is in part because efforts are not targeted adequately to the people and realities on the ground. Gendered-situational analysis provides important information about the context and the actors, including their capacities and needs. It ensures that U.S. resources are targeted correctly. This agenda does not require new funds. It requires reallocation of existing funds and reprioritization of activities.

Myth #6: "The Women" need to organize themselves and speak with one voice.

The notion that women are disorganized and lack an agenda is inaccurate. At most it is a relative concept, as it presumes that other actors, especially armed groups and political parties - have a coherent agenda. In many cases, women are not only organized but also have a shared message.

Myth #7: We cannot find any qualified women. We need to focus on girls' education first.

There are double standards as it is rarely asked if the men are "qualified." Willingness to use violence is often qualification enough for a seat at the table where decisions about the future are being made. Women who have experienced violent conflict and cared for others during war have a firm grasp of the impact of conflict on the lives of ordinary people. Even in the midst of chaos, they demonstrate resilience by caring for their dependents (as in refugee camps worldwide) and providing islands of normalcy (as Afghan women did in their secret schools and clinics). They are uniquely qualified to talk about priorities for peace and security.

Myth #8: Not all women are peaceful.

Where war and oppression exists it is unfair and unrealistic to assume that all women will be pro-peace. A minority of women takes up arms to fight for a cause and, in communities where injustice is rife; women can encourage vengeance and violence. But overwhelmingly, women are the first to mobilize for peace and reconciliation. From Northern Ireland to Rwanda, Cambodia, and Iraq, women have been at the frontlines in the struggle for real democracy, peace and moderation. The fact is women are never passive victims. Their influence – positive or negative – should not be underestimated.

Myth #9: Sexual violence is an inevitable consequence of irregular warfare and the changed nature of conflicts.

Sexual violence is common in many crises. But it does not have to be inevitable. It is often assumed that rebels or non-state militias are the primary perpetrators of sexual violence. But research shows that close to 50 percent of known cases are perpetrated by state military, police and other officials. In Iraq, U.S.-funded and trained police have been implicated in civilian rapes. The U.S. government works closely with many governments and funds the training of security personnel. We cannot prevent every incident but more can be done to ensure U.S. allies and U.S.-trained security forces are not perpetrators.

Myth #10: We are implementing UNSCR 1325 – we have a NAP.

Declaring "we have a plan!" is not enough - creating a NAP on UNSCR 1325 is not the same as implementing it. Planning a plan or even finalizing a plan is not implementation – it is aspiration. Every day there are opportunities in real-time, real-life contexts where civil society can make a difference – and in doing so – contribute to peace and saving lives. But for over a decade the U.S. and many of its international partners have never missed the opportunity to miss an opportunity. The women of Libya, Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and elsewhere cannot afford more missed opportunities. Civil society does not need a plan to start acting. The time to act is now.

The Gender and Peacebuilding Center at the U.S. Institute of Peace convenes the U.S. Civil Society Working Group on Women, Peace and Security

The U.S. Civil Society Working Group is comprised of:

- Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, Harvard Kennedy School of Government*
- CARE USA*
- Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington, Global Gender Initiative*
- Futures Without Violence*
- International Civil Society Action Network - Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (ICAN-GNWP)*
- Peace X Peace*
- Refugees International*
- Stockholm International Peace Research Institute - USA*
- The Institute for Inclusive Security*
- United Nations Association of the National Capital Area*
- Women for Women International*
- Women in International Security (WIIS)*
- Women's Refugee Commission*
- 1325 Training Partners*

* indicates the organization is actively engaged in meetings of the U.S. Civil Society Working Group on Women, Peace and Security

Supporting organizations include:

- Alliance for Peacebuilding
- Amnesty International USA
- Better World Campaign
- Center for Women Policy Studies
- Citizens for Global Solutions
- Clearinghouse on Women's Issues
- Creative Associates International
- Feminist Majority Foundation
- Global Fund for Women
- International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)
- International Women's Democracy Center
- International Youth Foundation
- Jewish Women International
- Media Equity Collaborative
- National Association of Mothers' Centers
- National Council for Research on Women
- The Center for Global Women's Leadership
- Vital Voices Global Partnership
- Women Thrive Worldwide
- Women's Action for New Directions (WAND)
- Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, USA (WILPF)
- Women's Learning Partnership
- World Pulse

About the U.S. Civil Society Working Group on Women, Peace and Security

The U.S. Civil Society Working Group on Women, Peace and Security comprises organizations and individuals dedicated to advancing the rights, security and participation of women in the prevention of and response to conflict. The Working Group is made up of scholars, peace and development practitioners, and human rights advocates, with years of experience working with women across conflict zones worldwide. Convened by the Gender and Peacebuilding Center at the U.S. Institute of Peace, the Working Group has been regularly meeting since its formation in July 2010.

The Working Group welcomes the Obama Administration's commitment to developing a National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. The Group believes that concrete actions undertaken by the U.S. under the Women, Peace and Security umbrella will make the world a more secure and prosperous place, and will advance an American foreign policy that is more effective and efficient at preventing conflict and promoting peace, development, and security.

For further information about the U.S. Civil Society Working Group, please contact USIP's Gender and Peacebuilding Center at gender@usip.org.

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