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CONSIDERATIONS ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY IN THE AMERICAS

(Item 6 on the Agenda)

Background

Throughout the world, the full and equal participation of women in all aspects of peace and security is fundamental for democracy-building, good governance and the the construction of more stable and secure societies where conflict is less likely to develop.

In general, in countries suffering armed violence, women are present in all aspects of conflict as victims, combatants, heads of family and leaders of their communities, yet their voices are rarely heard at the peace tables and their priorities continue to be largely marginalized.¹ On one hand, prevailing social attitudes and tradition tend to exclude women from debate and decision-making in peace and reconstruction processes; on the other, most approaches to conflict negotiation, mediation and peace reconstruction ignore the issue of gender.

Conflicts, wars, and post-conflict settlements have a different impact on male and female. Women are specifically targeted as a tactic of war through sexual violence, trafficking, and mutilation. As civilians, they bear the main burden for the care of survivors, both children and adult, and must also act as protectors and providers for their communities. As civilians and combatants, their limited participation in peace negotiations means that they receive much less support than male fighters in post-conflict reconstruction programs and projects. The fact that gender-related considerations are not usually taken into account in peace negotiations and processes contributes to the perpetuation of injustices and inequalities that ultimately hinder long-term reconstruction goals.

Women's approach to peace is also different from men's. While most men come to the negotiating table directly from the war and the battlefield, women usually arrive from civil activism and family care. Women tend to perceive peace in terms of "human security" and "inclusive security", building on the idea of a better future for their children. These concepts, which emphasize women's agency in achieving global

¹ Naragui, Sanam. Women at the Peace Table: Making a Difference. United Nation development Fund for Women. 2002.

stability² and demystify women's vulnerability in conflicts, are often disregarded in peace negotiations³.

International Mandates

Since warfare has become “inclusive” – with civilian deaths more common than military deaths – the approaches to end conflict need be inclusive as well – reflecting the perspectives of all those involved and affected by war - and be focused not just on absence of war, but also on the creation of sustainable peace through fostering relevant changes within the society. Women are powerful agents of change and their presence is crucial to reconstruction processes due to their active participation in non-governmental organizations, popular protests, electoral referendums, and other citizen-empowering movements whose influence has grown with the global spread of democracy. The experience of many countries has shown that the formidable challenges of rebuilding democracy and achieving peace can be seriously undermined by excluding women from the processes of negotiation, and by not recognizing their critical role in reconstruction.

International organizations have called for recognition of the role that women can play in preventing violent conflicts and wars, and promoting sustainable peace. Efforts in this direction were set in motion by the Declaration and Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, China- 1995), which recognized the many "gender -specific impacts of conflict and war on women and girls,"⁴ and noted with concern the under-representation of women in peace building and post-conflict processes, urging all member states to incorporate gender mainstreaming in peace negotiations and reconstruction.

In 2000, the UN Security Council Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1325, acknowledging “that peace cannot be sustained unless women have an equal and active role in formulating political, economic and social policy and that without women's full participation in peace processes there can be no justice or sustainable peace and development in the reconstruction of societies.”⁵ In response to this mandate, the European Union passed on strongly-worded resolution which calls on its members to promote the equal participation of women in diplomatic conflict resolutions, ensure that women fill at least 40 percent of all peace mediation posts, and support the creation and strengthening of NGOs (including women organizations) that focus on conflict prevention, peace building and post-conflict resolution.

Regional Considerations

Relative to other regions of the world, Latin America and the Caribbean are comparatively free of armed conflict. Nevertheless, serious threats to peace and stability in the region exist. Tensions involving social and economic difficulties, ongoing

² Naragui, Sanam. Personal Communication, April 1, 2004

³ Naragui, Sanam. Personal Communication, April 1, 2004

⁴ www.international-alert.org/women/coneres.paf

⁵ Ibid.

inequalities and extreme polarization, among others, have created the conditions for serious escalation of internal conflict in various countries. The stability of a number of states in the region is being threatened by international drug operations, arms trafficking, an alarming rise in crime, and growing levels of violence at all levels, among other factors. Failure to “deliver” on the basic needs of citizens, and the inability to address chronic problems, threaten the legitimacy of governments and could erode the hard-won democratic advances of the past decade.

The task of managing these conflicts and preventing them from becoming violent is one of the primary responsibilities of governments. However, the multitude, magnitude and urgency of these complex problems exceed the capabilities of governments alone. The ability of conflicts to spread vertically and horizontally –that is, to harm vulnerable social groups as well as neighboring states- points to the need for more strategic approaches that are inclusive of other actors, including women. Opening these inclusive spaces is fundamental for strengthening democracy and building sustainable peace.

Although women have had a prominent role in conflict situations, as combatants, heads of family, community leaders, etc, their participation has not been constant and the gender perspective has not been systematically integrated into peace building processes.

In certain countries, like El Salvador and Colombia, women have emerged as the leading advocates of a negotiated solution. In the case of El Salvador, women’s participation in negotiations had a significant impact on reintegration through recognizing the inclusion of women fighters in benefits programs; and recognizing and including non-combatant members of the opposition movement in the negotiations⁶. Nevertheless, “the lack of significant systematic support for women has been detrimental to the country’s overall development and is a missed opportunity with regard to social capital.”⁷ In the case of Colombia, “women’s organizations developed a process to build consensus and create an agenda for peace addressing the root causes of conflict such as political, social, and economic exclusion.”⁸ However, their efforts have not been fully included in the conflict negotiations.

The Summit of the Americas process has linked the political empowerment of women to the reduction of poverty and sustained socio-economic development, as well as to the consolidation of democracy and the peaceful resolution of conflict. The 1994 Miami Summit of the Americas mandated several initiatives to eradicate discrimination against women; namely, the promotion of the fulfillment of women’s potential through education, training, skills development and employment. Similarly, the Third Summit of the Americas, held in Quebec in 2001, and the Special Summit, held in Monterrey in 2004, reiterated that the empowerment of women, their full and equal participation in the development of our societies, and their equal opportunities to exercise leadership are

⁶ Pampell, Camille.; Martinez, Salome. Adding Value: Women’s Contributions to Reintegration and Reconstruction in El Salvador. Policy Commission. Women Waging Peace. January 2004

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Rojas, Catalina. In the Midst of War: Women’s Contributions to Peace in Colombia. Women Waging Peace.

fundamental for the reduction of poverty, the promotion of economic and social prosperity, and for people-centered sustainable development.

To advance in this direction, in 2000, the Member States of the OAS adopted the *Inter-American Program on the Promotion of Women's Human Rights and Gender Equity and Equality*, a tool for strengthening and furthering the integration of the gender perspective in regional and national policies, strategies and proposals as well as fostering the full and equal participation of women in all aspects of economic, social, political and cultural development and in decision-making levels at all levels.

Similarly, the Inter-American Democratic Charter, adopted on September 11, 2001, in Lima, Peru establishes in Article 28, that "States shall promote the full and equal participation of women in the political structures of their countries as a fundamental element in the promotion and exercise of a democratic culture." This article recognizes that one of the fundamental elements in the promotion and practice of democratic culture is the full and equal participation of women in national political processes.

In this same line of thought, the V Meeting of Ministers of Defense of the Americas (2002), pointed out that democracy and its institutions constitute essential elements for hemispheric security, and expressed satisfaction for the advances made in incorporating women to the armed forces and security forces in the Hemisphere's States and for the first "Seminar on the Role of Women in Peacekeeping Operations," held in November 2002, within the framework of cooperation between the European Union and Latin America and in response to the mandate in UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

The Special Conference on Hemispheric Security (Mexico, 2003) acknowledged the importance of enhancing the participation of women in all efforts to promote peace and security, and pointed to the need to increase women's decision-making role at all levels in relation to conflict prevention, management, resolution and to integrate a gender perspective in all policies, programs, and activities of all inter-American organs, agencies, entities and processes that deal with matters of hemispheric security.

Finally, the Declaration of the II Meeting of Ministers or of the Highest-ranking Authorities Responsible for the Advancement of Women in the Member States (Washington D.C., April 2004), emphasized the commitments made at special meetings and conferences to enhance and assure peace and security in the Americas and the importance of facilitating women's participation in all efforts towards conflict prevention, peace-building and promotion and security initiatives. It also emphasized the necessity of including a gender perspective in all programs and activities of all inter-American entities that relate to hemispheric security, stressing the urgency of intra-governmental coordination and cooperation with civil society in order to combat corruption and organized crime in all its dimensions, particularly inasmuch as it fuels violence against women and trafficking of persons.

Initiatives within the OAS

Within the OAS, the issue of gender in conflict resolution and reconstruction is being addressed by both the **Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM)**, the principal forum for promoting women's human rights and gender equality and equity in the Hemisphere, and the **Unit for the Promotion of Democracy (UPD)**, the main body within the General Secretariat of the Organization responsible for activities in support of democratic consolidation in the member states.

The **Inter-American Commission of Women** has received several specific mandates on the issue of women, peace and security. Its Strategic Plan of Action, approved in 1994, establishes the need 'to expand efforts to find solutions and reduce conflicts through dialogue and political negotiations.' Resolution CIM/RES 227, adopted by the 2002 Assembly of Delegates, mandated the CIM Permanent Secretariat 'to continue working in partnerships with civil society organizations to... support and promote the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in the Hemisphere and the full participation of women in conflict prevention and peace-building'.

Activities carried out in fulfillment of this mandate include a videoconference held in preparation for the November 2003 Special Conference on Hemispheric Security, to examine the integration of a gender perspective in hemispheric security issues and to analyze women's contribution to peace-making and peace-building in the Hemisphere. This event, held in coordination with the civil society organization *Women Waging Peace*, marked the first time that there had been a dialogue among members of the Committee on Hemispheric Security, women's organizations working on peace building processes in their countries and CIM delegates. The CIM continues to work in close collaboration with *Women Waging Peace* on several initiatives, including the development of a training program on gender and peace-building, and maintains contact with women's organizations in the member states.

The **Unit for the Promotion of Democracy (UPD)** is the principal body within the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States (OAS) responsible for activities in support of democratic consolidation in the member states. Gender mainstreaming in democracy building is one of the Unit's cross-cutting issues. Various legal instruments of the Inter-American System have mandated this affording a crucial role to the promotion of women's political rights and representation. One of the first international treaties on women's civil and political rights was the 1933 Inter-American Convention on the Nationality of Women signed in Montevideo, Uruguay. The 1948 Inter-American Convention on the Granting of Political Rights to Women, signed in Bogotá, Colombia, ensured a woman's right to vote and to be elected to national office, both considered as essential to the respect of women's human rights.

The UPD has carried out various initiatives to respond to these mandates. In its own work, the UPD seeks to maintain a gender perspective in all of its programs in the region and has developed several specific initiatives designed to promote the

participation of women in politics. For example, the UPD and CIM jointly sponsored a workshop in Guatemala on campaign financing and how it undermines women's participation in politics. Through the Guatemala Program for Political Administration and Democratic Values, the UPD created a Network of Women to help Guatemalan women enter politics. The UPD undertook a study on the perception of Guatemalan women on women in politics and conducted a leadership-training program. The UPD has also been training young leaders in political administration and democratic values since 1998. Gender is one of the principal topics of this training program. Finally, both the UPD and the CIM collaborate with the Inter-American Development Bank on the Program for the Support of Women's Leadership and Representation (PROLEAD), a yearly training program on democratic governance for young women in the Americas.

To respond to requests in the field of conflict prevention and dialogue promotion, the UPD established in 2001 the Special Program for the Promotion of Dialogue and Conflict Resolution. The Special Program's mission is to assist the OAS, governments and civil societies of its member states in the design and implementation of dialogue and consensus building processes as well as conflict prevention and resolution systems. The Special Program makes available to the OAS and its member states human resources, methodologies and conceptual frameworks that have been developed through multiple regional experiences over more than a decade. The methodologies employed by the Special Program are designed to build government-civil society trust and collaboration as well as promote values, attitudes and practices that foster inclusion, citizen participation and consensual decision-making.

The CIM and the UPD's Special Program for the Promotion of Dialogue and Conflict Resolution, are currently working together with civil society, in particular, with the non-governmental organization *Women Waging Peace*, to advance the equal participation of women in conflict prevention and peace-building and the full implementation of UN Resolution 1325 in our Hemisphere.