



Australian Bahá'í Community Office of External Affairs

18 October 2011

National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security
Office for Women
Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
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Canberra Business Centre ACT 2610

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Draft National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security

The Australian Bahá'í Community welcomes the release of the consultation draft of the Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325) was a landmark resolution, which recognised for the first time in the Security Council's history the needs of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations and their enduring role in the promotion of peace. We commend the Australian Government for its expressed commitment to a whole-of-government approach to the full implementation of UNSCR 1325 and related resolutions 1820, 1888, 1889 and 1960. The development of the National Action Plan is an outstanding opportunity for Australia to take action and demonstrate leadership among UN member states in this critical area of endeavour.

Our feedback on the draft Action Plan focuses on adopting an action orientation; incorporating indicators and a framework for monitoring and evaluation; a more partnered approach to governance; the allocation of resources; and the adoption of a long-term perspective.

We note the joint submission developed on behalf of a large number of women's NGOs which provides detailed comments and suggestions on each section of the draft Plan. We do not seek to repeat that analysis here, but urge consideration of the recommendations made in the joint submission.

The National Action Plan

At the level of principle, we believe the draft Action Plan provides a good foundation. We support the four priority areas of Prevention, Participation, Protection, and Relief and Recovery, noting that these accord with the goals articulated in the 2008-2009 United Nations System-wide Action Plan. We observe that these outcomes are applicable to the Australian context as well as to Australia's work in the region and other parts of the world. It will be

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important to bear their domestic application in mind, in order to avoid the Plan being regarded solely as an international Action Plan.

Action orientation

We feel the Action Plan would be greatly strengthened by identifying specific actions to which the Government is committed, rather than listing action that “may be considered by Government” towards achieving each of the strategic objectives. A more action-oriented approach would enable the Australian Government to play a greater leadership role in its support for the equality of women and men, and specifically the rights and circumstances of women and girls in conflict and post conflict settings. The National Action Plans already developed by Canada, Denmark and Norway provide useful examples of such an approach.

Indicators

The feedback template accompanying the draft Action Plan states that a set of indicators will be developed to measure its progress. The consultation draft also expresses the Government’s commitment to developing mechanisms for the Plan’s implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Given the importance of these elements in maximising the effectiveness of the Plan, we recommend that these components should form an integrated part of the Plan itself.

In relation to the proposed indicators against which progress can be measured and evaluated, we believe these should set out practical objectives and go into specific detail, rather than being limited to theoretical or general statements of intent. While recognising that the diversity of national and local contexts means the same indicators cannot be applied in all circumstances, we recommend the adoption of indicators based on those identified in the report of the UN Secretary-General on Women, Peace and Security, issued on 23 April 2010 (S/2010/173). That report articulated the benefit of indicators as follows:

Indicators are signposts of change; a means for determining the status quo and the progress towards the intended goal. They indicate trends and allow for tracking of progress towards intended results. Indicators are critical for effective monitoring and evaluation, and they help to:

- (a) Improve decision-making for ongoing programme and project management;
- (b) Measure progress and achievements as understood by the different stakeholders;
- (c) Clarify consistency between activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts;
- (d) Ensure accountability to all stakeholders by demonstrating progress;
- (e) Assess programme, project and staff performance;
- (f) Identify the need for corrective or remedial action.¹

The report provided 26 specific indicators that fulfil the criteria of being specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound. We commend these to the Government’s consideration.

¹ S/2010/173 can be downloaded at <http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/sgrep10.htm>

Governance

In relation to the governance of the Action Plan, we recommend that a more partnered approach with NGOs would be beneficial and welcomed. It is proposed that the Plan be governed by an inter-departmental working group comprised of members from relevant Government Departments and Agencies to serve as "the coordinating mechanism for the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the final National Action Plan." Given the government's observation that "the ongoing involvement of civil society organisations in developing, implementing and evaluating the final National Action Plan will be vital", we recommend that consideration be given to including selected representatives of civil society in the working group.

Resources

While the draft Plan does not address the question of the allocation of resources, we trust that adequate resources, including human resources, will be allocated to the development of the Action Plan, awareness-raising about the Action Plan, and the ongoing monitoring of its implementation

A long-term orientation

Finally, we recommend the adoption of a long-term orientation to the Action Plan. Peace-building requires more than bringing women into the various arenas of the current social order, important though this is. It involves women and men striving together to build a new social order characterised by justice, peace and collective prosperity, in which all human beings can develop to their full potential. Deep-rooted changes, including a transformation in values, are needed to create a culture where justice and equality prevail over the impetuosity of authoritarian power and physical force. With this framework in mind, we support the adoption of a long-term perspective to guide short and medium-term efforts. A long-term orientation, looking ahead one, two, or more generations, allows exploration of a wider range of policy and programmatic options and allows consideration of a diversity of contributions, including from NGO, academic, business and informal sectors.

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Some 25 years ago, in a statement marking the International Year of Peace, the international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith observed:

The emancipation of women, the achievement of full equality between the sexes, is one of the most important, though less acknowledged prerequisites of peace. The denial of such equality perpetrates an injustice against one half of the world's population and promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from the family to the workplace, to political life, and ultimately to international relations. There are no grounds, moral, practical, or biological, upon which such denial can be justified. Only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavour will the moral and psychological climate be created in which international peace can emerge.²

² Universal House of Justice, "The Promise of World Peace", available on-line at <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-7-2-1.html>

Given the foundational importance of this principle to the Australian Bahá'í Community, we are grateful for the opportunity to comment on the draft National Action Plan; and we look forward to participating in the further stages in its development and implementation.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Natalie Mobini', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr Natalie Mobini
Director