

Written Statement Submitted to CEDAW on the Occasion of the General Discussion on Women in Conflict and Post-conflict Situations

July 18, United Nations, New York, NY

Submitted by Global Action to Prevent War

1. Global Action to Prevent War affirms the importance of the General Discussion at the 49th Session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) on “**The Protection of Women in Conflict and Post-conflict Situations**” and considers the protection of women in these situations as being at the crux of the non-discrimination discourse elucidated in CEDAW.

2. Women are less likely to attend school or universities in insecure environments as they fear for their safety, most especially when the institute of learning is located a fair distance from their living quarters. Women are specially victimized during conflict and are subject to sexual violence which is increasingly used as a tactic of war. Furthermore, the International community has a strong obligation to ensure that there is no discrimination regarding the **education and access to education** of women in accordance with Article 10 of CEDAW. Women represent two thirds of the world’s 759 million Illiterates (UNESCO Institute for Statistics Global Education Digest 2010). This percentage has not changed over the past two decades. Currently, 60 percent of countries have not reached gender parity in primary and secondary education by 2005 which was the target set by the World Education Forum in 2005, and the Millennium Development Goals in 2000. In conflict and post-conflict settings these disparities are even higher.

3. All women have the **right to work**. However, women who have either no education or one that is limited are unable to properly exercise their inalienable right to work as elucidated in Article 11 of CEDAW. Each year, statistics show that primary school attendance boosts a girl’s future wages by 10-20 percent (Policy Research Working Paper 2881, World Bank, Washington D.C, 2002). Women tend to invest their income to the betterment of their households and in the education of their children. In the private sector, women continue to be severely underrepresented in the top decision making positions and only 13 of the 500 largest corporations in the world have a female Chief Executive Officer (The World's Women 2010: Trends and Statistics, UN Statistics Division). The right to work must be properly fostered and women must be provided with access to safe and legal jobs. In societies that have been impacted by armed conflict, state parties and international actors have a special obligation to secure safe and legal work arrangements for women.

4. Women need to be **active participants** at all levels of government. This is especially important during armed conflict and in post-conflict situations. CEDAW Articles 7 and 8 support measures taken by governments and international organizations to increase women’s participation in governance, specifically in political processes at national and international levels. Culturally, women who have little or no education are not likely to participate in political processes at any level. This hinders their ability to impact the security sector and peace building activities. Women are co-contributors to society and in times of war often represent a majority of the population. Yet, lack of education prevents them from participating fully in societal reconstruction and post-conflict governance. The solution to this dilemma needs to be long term and involve the full participation of national and international actors. To date, becoming the Head of State or Head of Government remains elusive for women, with only 14 women worldwide currently holding either position. In just 23 countries do women comprise a critical mass – over 30 percent – in the lower or single house of their national parliament. Worldwide on average only one in six cabinet ministers is a woman (The World's Women 2010: Trends and Statistics, UN Statistics Division).

Recommendations to the CEDAW committee, Governments, international actors and civil society organizations

5. Women need to have **access to education** in conflict and post –conflict settings. There is a clear need to conduct post-conflict education and literacy campaigns for women. Security needs to be provided to prevent sexual harassment and violence both at school and en route to school, including in refugee or IDP camps. There needs to be more robust and relevant educational opportunities tailored towards women living in post-conflict settings. Financial burdens of women in these situations also need to be alleviated to help them seek out and obtain a better education. There needs to be investment in sexual and reproductive health including education about rights to health care access. This would be a way forward in achieving gender equality and justice.

6. The **right of a woman to work needs to be fostered with adequate resources** in addition to an education. Education leads to better health for women and affirms the commitment made by states regarding the right to work. It is essential that women be prepared to enter the marketplace and be provided with training and technology. Micro-finance schemes that support private enterprise by women must be fostered. There needs to be continued legislative support for reservation policies and quotas for women and girls. This will help end discrimination as well as increase women’s access in the business sector and more general involvement in decision making.

7. Women’s **right to participate in government and politics needs to be approached comprehensively**. Access to education, training and skills must be coupled with adequate security and resources. Women’s organizations and networks need to be fostered to provide a platform for training especially for women leaders and cultivate leaders to emerge who are aware of the issues and how they ought to be addressed. Therefore, it is clear that investments in gender equality must be scaled up and properly budgeted for as part of a long term financial policy commitment. This commitment must address women’s participation in areas particular to governance, security sector reform, and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes.

8. These recommendations must be treated with high importance by the international community if CEDAW’s mandate is to be implemented in conflict and post-conflict settings. Without education and access to work, women are without the tools necessary to participate in public life. If these resources are not provided, women will be unable to break out of the poverty trap and will continue in cycles of discrimination and powerlessness.

Global Action to Prevent War (GAPW) is a transnational network, (founded in 1999), dedicated to practical measures for reducing global levels of conflict. GAPW is located at the United Nations (UN) and works closely with diplomats, UN staff, and non-governmental organization representatives in its core programs in New York. GAPW’s work integrates publications, regional workshops and advocacy activities with governments and civil society actors to develop informed policies at national and international levels. GAPW promotes Women’s participation and advocates for gender-integrated security strategies and peacekeeping policies in the areas of conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

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