



Associate Parliamentary Group  
on  
Women, Peace and Security (UN SCR 1325)

Annual General Meeting

Plus

Plenary Meeting on Widowhood in Conflict: Democratic Republic of Congo

July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008 (House of Lords)

Chaired by Baroness Greengross

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Associate Parliamentary Group on Women, Peace & Security (APG)

The APG is the parliamentary forum in the UK for the discussion and critical analysis of issues relating to Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.

The APG is a unique opportunity for Parliamentarians, civil servants and civil society to come together in one forum to debate; to encourage dialogue, on the basis of expert information and opinion from across the political spectrum and civil society, on issues relating to gender and peacebuilding. It particularly focuses on how to promote throughout government UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which highlights the vital role women play in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. The group concentrates on four areas Afghanistan, Iraq, widowhood issues in conflict and gender training of troops.

The Associate Parliamentary Group on Women Peace and Security was officially registered in July 2006 and is jointly chaired by Anne Milton MP and Baroness Uddin. The group is coordinated by Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS).

Gender Action for Peace & Security (GAPS)

GAPS was formally established in May 2006 "to build on UNSCR 1325 and, through collective action, promote, facilitate and monitor the meaningful inclusion of gender perspectives in all aspects of UK policy and practice on peace and security".

GAPS is a research and advocacy organisation that works to bridge the gap between the realities of women (activists and non-activists) at the local level in conflict and post-conflict affected countries and UK decision makers and practitioners working on peace and security.

The group highlights both practical examples of women's contributions to peace and reconstruction efforts as well as strategic ways forward for the implementation of UN SCR 1325 and the UK National Action Plan. GAPS acts as a resource and provide support to policymakers engaged in promoting peace and security within the United Kingdom, using its extensive contacts in conflict-affected regions and at different national and international policy levels, including the United Nations.

For further information, please contact Charlotte Onslow, GAPS Coordinator [gaps.uk@googlemail.com](mailto:gaps.uk@googlemail.com) or 0207 627 6883

## **PART I**

### **Minutes of the Annual General Meeting Held at the House of Lords on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008**

#### **1. Present:**

Please see attendance list in Appendix I

#### **2. Apologies for Absence:**

Baroness Uddin  
David Drew MP  
Baroness Tonge  
Baroness Gibson  
Sandra Osborne  
Baroness Williams

#### **3. Treasurer's Report:**

There have been no funds in or out of the APG bank account between July 2007 to June 2008.

#### **4. Election of Officers:**

There were no objections to the nomination of Anne Milton MP and Baroness Uddin as Joint Chairs of the group.

Baroness Tonge and David Drew MP declared their interest in continuing as Vice Chairs. There were no objections.

Baroness Gibson declared her interest in remaining Treasurer. There were no objections.

#### **5. Any Other Business:**

Future meetings:

- (i) APG 1325 Iraq subgroup meeting (6pm, July 2<sup>nd</sup>, Conference Room 134, 2 Millbank House);
- (ii) APG Executive Group meeting (Monday 7<sup>th</sup> 5pm, Portcullis House Café);
- (iii) Joint APG 1325 / APPG Great Lakes: *Answering 'the Greatest Silence': Measures to end Sexual Violence in Congo* (July 16<sup>th</sup>, 7pm, Wilson Room).

## **PART II Panel Discussion: "How to respond to the voices of the widows of the Democratic Republic of Congo"**

### **1. Brief overview of widowhood issues in context of UNSCR 1325 - Margaret Owen, Director, Widows for Peace through Democracy**

Although there are no official statistics, some NGOs in eastern Congo estimate that over 40% of the population are widows and 70% of children depend for their survival on these impoverished and homeless women. The situation of widows in the DRC provides probably the very worst illustration of the plight of these women in conflict and post-conflict scenarios. In the DRC, their poverty and vulnerability to discrimination and abuse, including sexual violence, demands urgent response from the international community.

DRC widows face multiple problems. Tradition and custom deprive them of inheritance, property rights and land. Homelessness and poverty forces them and their daughters into prostitution while their sons, unable to attend school, are easily recruited by warlords and criminal gangs. The international community must understand that neglecting to address this complex issue, at a time when peace accords are developing, will frustrate other efforts to procure a sustainable peace based on equality, the Rule of Law, democracy and justice.

Before the existence of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (SCR 1325), in many conflict zones, women's (and widow's) rights and their role in building peace were undermined and ignored. The resolution emphasises the need for a gender perspective and the pursuit of gender equality in all aspects of peace-building, including security sector reform, transitional justice and in meeting their basic needs. Perhaps most importantly, it also requires that all actors in conflict resolution analyse the impact of war on these women's lives, ensure that their voices are heard in peace negotiations, constitutional and law reform. Widows must be seen not merely as victims but as having key roles as sole supporters of children, and as crucial players in rebuilding their communities. Widows must be assured of their legal, social and economic rights.

The UK has a clear national action plans for SCR 1325 implementation. However, there remain significant ongoing obstacles to the implementation of SCR 1325, including:

- Gender not being seen as a priority in context of security and peacebuilding
- Lack of awareness of the resolution across National Governments and civil society and lack of allocated financial resources for implementation
- Gaps between policy and practice – lack of effective implementation of UK women, peace and security policies at local level
- Women viewed as a "homogenous whole" leading to the neglect of particular categories of women, such as widows and wives of the missing, who have specific needs and roles and are subject to particular discriminatory treatment.

Despite this, UN SCR 1325 offers an opportunity and a mechanism for the international community and the DRC government to address the situation of DRC widows and their children, study the impact of the conflict on their lives and futures, and ensure that policies are developed to address their situation. It is imperative that these women are included in the consultative processes essential for developing concrete policies, which will only be effective if based on real information about their needs, roles, experiences and hopes. Widowhood issues must also be prioritized in all strategies to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

### **2. Introduction to DRC case study - Marie-Louise Pambu, President, Common Cause UK**

Congolese widows are suffering in silence. Since the independence of the DRC, no social policy has enabled widows to live a harmonious and prosperous life. Regardless of the socio-economic situation, a woman who loses a husband or partner in the DRC becomes vulnerable, is neglected, excluded and her fundamental rights are likely to be violated. This situation is exacerbated by the continuation of armed conflicts and the lack of rule of law in the DRC, which in turn continue to produce ever larger number of widows and female-headed households.

During her last visit to the DRC, Marie-Louise witnessed the extreme living conditions of many DRC widows.

- Widows are notably among the poorest of the poor, with many being the victims of accusations of witchcraft, social alienation, ostracism, harmful practices and humiliation.
- Young widows with no education remain illiterate and often try to financially support their young children through informal trade of vegetables or fruits. In many cases, their children have no access to education, ending up begging on the streets, in prison or being trapped in prostitution. Widow's children are acutely vulnerable social group.
- Widows have no right to inheritance and have had their houses and properties confiscated. They receive little or no living allowance – many allowances are not only insignificant (less than \$ 2) but often misappropriated by male relatives. Widows are therefore forced to live in highly deprived areas in poor conditions of hygiene and sanitation, with no running water or electricity.
- Widows have increased vulnerability to physical, mental and sexual violence being. As a result of this social and economic marginalisation, violence is perpetuated with impunity and their lack of knowledge of their basic rights hinders their access to justice. Many have been victims of rape during and after the conflict and are afflicted by HIV/AIDS and other sexual transmitted diseases (STDs).

On the 29th of May 2008, Marie-Louise Pambu held a joint meeting with leaders of widows' organizations in Kinshasa, under the Network of CAUSE COMMUNE RDC at the Centre LILOBA. Liloba means "speak" and the widows were able to break their silence and raise many painful issues together. Ms. Pambu also reported back on the 52nd session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women and raised awareness of numerous national, regional and international legal frameworks signed by the Government of DRC, such as CEDAW and UN SCR 1325 and the African Union Maputo Protocol.

However, despite the existing legal frameworks, due to the institutional corruption and clientelism, the Government does not take into account the situation of widows in its social and development policy. There appears to be a lack of political will on the part of the Congolese State in the application of these different legal instruments.

Unfortunately, discussions on widowhood are notoriously vague. Due to war, lack of infrastructure and defective national/local institutions, there aren't any reliable statistics. However, according to certain reports from local NGOs in Eastern DRC there is an exponential increase in widowhood, currently estimated to 40% of the population. There are even villages consisting of only women and children, as all men have been killed during the war. This is a situation that requires urgent attention.

### **3. Response by Nick Bates, Senior Political Analyst, East and Central Africa Unit, DFID**

The abject poverty of widows in DRC and their position in society, as some of the most marginalized with few rights and access to justice, is unmistakable. It is clear that this is a marked problem that should be addressed. It is not apparent whether the central government is lacking in capacity, financial or other, or whether it is through mal-intent that there is a failure to protect or provide justice for widows and wives of the missing. One key method of addressing their acute lack of rights and low status could be to lobby the provincial parliaments in DRC for an official recognition of their rights and their situation in line with the national level laws that are meant to protect this category of women. It is likely that provincial parliaments and assemblies would engage more with this issue than at central government level.

#### **DFID's work in DRC**

For the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be achieved in Africa, it is essential that the UK works in the largest countries including DRC, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Sudan. UK support is focused on poverty reduction and post conflict reconstruction. DFID's work beginning in DRC in 2001 with a small humanitarian contribution of £5 million for displaced people in Eastern DRC. Now in 2008 the budget has risen to around £70 million, with the potential for this budget to rise to between £120 and £130 million over the next two years. In

terms of capacity, the DFID office in Kinshasa has grown from one individual to around 40 today – around 50% of DFID's Kinshasa staff are Congolese. Their role is to ensure the effective delivery of the UK aid budget and to work with health and education service delivery. The three key areas for DFID, in line with the Country Action Plan are: (i) to build an accountable state; (ii) to create a peace dividend for poor people; and (iii) to reduce conflict and the impact of conflict.

DFID's efforts to ensure gender mainstreaming across their work and the institution is framed by the Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP). DFID clearly recognises that without empowerment of women and their protection effective sustainable development is not possible. This understanding is fundamental to DFID work with some of DFID's early work in DRC including a 100-bed extension of Panzi hospital in South Kivu for fistula cases.

#### **4. Recommendations to the Government of DRC, international community and donors:**

To improve the position and situation of widows and to achieve the MDG objective of women's empowerment, we recommend:

- I. The Government of DRC demonstrates clear political will for effective support of widows, to mainstream widowhood issues in policy / practice and encourage analysis that allows for an understanding of the roles and needs different categories of women. Donors, through their different structures and agencies should encourage and assist the Congolese authorities to assume their responsibilities.
- II. To support, both in terms of finance and capacity, the creation of a national Federation or Union of Widows in DRC. This national structure will act as a support network for widows in the DRC regardless of their social status and will work for the promotion of rights of widows, reinforce strategies for the protection and the empowerment of widows, and take concrete actions such as lobbying, advocacy, campaigning, and education. The Union will promote a dynamics of solidarity between widows to prevent abuses by family and by the legal system in the absence of State authority. The Union would use media for raising awareness and also for the reporting of abuses and could support and promote activities that generate revenues for widows through microfinance projects.
- III. Increased donor funding for research on widowhood issues in DRC – research that is lead by and consults with widows. The Congolese Authorities and the International community could support a Union office to collect information and statistics for evaluation, publication and the monitoring of widowhood, as well as ensuring widows protection.
- IV. Donor support, through training and other resources, widows' groups to work with the Ministry of Statistics to fill the gap in data on widowhood through utilizing "*mapping and profiling*" surveys which can reveal information on their life-styles hitherto unavailable to policy makers and outside actors.
- V. Engage with and encourage alternative masculinities, as well as including men in "women's" projects, particularly projects on violence against women, with the aim of reducing the systematic abuse of widows by family members, and reducing the social stigma of widowhood.
- VI. Improve access to justice – gender training should not be limited to top level justice sector actors, it is important to also target grassroots level justice actors such as local police, village chiefs, religious and community leaders.

#### **5. Comments and Question and Answer session**

##### **Philip Mandangi (UDPS)**

Q: The Government of DRC has been known to silence its critics including women and widows and, as such, it is extremely difficult to monitor its effectiveness. How can UK, its largest bilateral donor, ensure that it is monitored properly?

**Alice Ukoko (Women of Africa)**

*Comment:* Donors offer so much bilateral funding to African governments at the expense of civil society, which impacts on their attempts to monitor government. People of Africa are therefore unable to engage with their own government in order to protect their own rights.

**Marie-Claire Faray (WILPF)**

*Comment:* Women's voices are still not reaching the discussion tables, especially the peace negotiation tables, where as rebel groups are able raise their voices. Women should be adequately represented and able to speak up. Women must monitor and evaluate policies such as the DFID Country Action Plan, perhaps through a Shadow Reports, to ensure they are gender sensitive and effective at the grassroots level.

**Marie-Claire Ruhama (FIREFEC, Belgium / WILPF)**

*Comment:* DRC's problem is a human problem rather than a political problem. Women and widows must feel empowered and supported to vocalize their needs and their situation. We must remember that there is huge difference between those who know their rights and those who don't. Women must be supported at the grassroots level – they are ready to engage with poverty reduction.

**Sarah Masters (IANSA Women's Network)**

Q: Small arms have a particular impact on the security of women and widows; does DFID fund small arms projects?

**Charlotte Onslow (GAPS)**

Q: What is the percentage of aid that goes on direct budgetary support and what percentage goes towards civil society?

**Response: Nick Bates**

Many concerns have been raised with regards to bilateral funding versus funding of civil society and there are always differences in opinion as to how much should go to governments and how much to civil society. It is important to understand that no money goes directly to the DRC government; rather DFID works to build capacity of government institutions and departments. DFID works with Government because there must be change in governance systems to ensure good governance and long term security. However, it is important to be cautious of working with governments who work against their own people. It is essential that civil society receives funds. DFID is looking to increase its work with civil society.

The general breakdown of UK aid to DRC is as follows:

Service delivery	20%
Humanitarian support	50%
Capacity building of Parliamentary system	20%
Conflict resolution (SSR, justice, police etc.)	10%

DFID is aware of the problem of small arms but due to other priorities small arms falls outside its current agenda and does not currently fund small arms programmes in DRC. MONUC is the lead agency with regards to small arms work.

DFID works with other donor agencies (amongst others the French, Belgians, South Africans and World Bank). With regards to concerns about China's engagement in Africa, it is also important to remember that China's engagement in DRC must be managed by the international community as well as the Government of DRC. DFID has offered to look at a partnership with between Government of DRC and China to support an environment damage assessment.

**Anon.**

*Comment:* There must be more focus and understanding of the fact that if widows are marginalized and have no rights that this has a huge impact on their children and the next generation of children.

Q: What the outcomes of the DFID input into the election of the Government of DRC? What can we expect from this regime?

**Response: Nick Bates**

The election in 2006 produced a legitimate government voted in by the Congolese people. This was an extraordinary exercise in democracy with people making a political choice under hugely difficult circumstances. The Congolese people demonstrated to the international community a genuine expression of will against the undemocratic nature of the regime of the previous forty years.

With respect to whether the Government of DRC has delivered, their task must be set in the context of what they inherited. DFID feels that there is a genuine attempt to improve the lives of its people, however, that there are certainly elements of political incompetence, corruption and elitism. These matters are historically part of Congolese political life but they pose a serious problem for the country. DFID is looking for leadership to face these issues but we are well aware that these problems are not going to disappear over night. We need to feel confident that the Government has political will.

Human rights abuses is a serious issue in Congo and it is true that these abuses occur at the top of society in terms of high level abuses of political power but it must also be tackled at the grassroots levels, where local people are abused of their human rights because the system fails to protect them.

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