

KAIROS Brief on Women, Peace and Security for the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development (FAAE)

**Ian Thomson, Partnerships Coordinator – Africa
KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives
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KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives appreciates this opportunity to appear as a witness in the Standing Committee's study on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). KAIROS is a national ecumenical organization working with partners in Canada and internationally for human rights and ecological justice. We bring together 11 Canadian churches and religious organizations from eight Christian denominations.¹

KAIROS' Women of Courage Program

KAIROS approaches all of its work through the lens of *gender justice*, understanding gender justice as full equality and equity among women, girls, men, and boys in their diverse identities and in all spheres of life. KAIROS is committed to working for a more just world in which power and responsibility are shared equally by all, and to supporting those individuals and organizations working to transform power relations and end historical injustices.

KAIROS and our global civil society partners have a noteworthy history of working on issues of WPS and human rights in countries of protracted conflict. Together with these partners, KAIROS has developed our Women of Courage program. This work is rooted in the understanding that while women around the world face many injustices, women are also key catalysts and agents for change when they create and exercise leadership in human rights and peace building. KAIROS works with partner organizations in Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Israel/Palestine, the Philippines, and South Sudan to respond to the needs of women in their local contexts. In addition, KAIROS builds solidarity relationships with women in Canada who are affected by gender-based oppression, particularly Indigenous and migrant women.

Our Women of Courage programming is multi-faceted and includes:

- Psycho-social support and counselling, as well as legal support, to women victims of human rights abuses and survivors of sexual violence in conflict to increase their access to truth, justice and reparations;

¹ KAIROS members are: Anglican Church of Canada, Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Canadian Religious Conference, Christian Reformed Church in North America, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, Mennonite Central Committee Canada, Presbyterian Church in Canada, Primate's World Relief and Development Fund, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), and United Church of Canada.

- Training and capacity-building workshops for women’s organizations and women human rights defenders to assist them in using national legislation and international frameworks/resolutions to protect women’s human rights in contexts of militarized conflict and to advocate for women’s participation in peace-building processes;
- Grassroots education campaigns on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and other women, peace and security resolutions, to increase awareness of these commitments among women and all members of society; and
- International exchanges between women’s organizations and human rights defenders that allow for sharing of experiences and best practices in order to develop joint strategies and recommendations.

In Colombia, in the context of the current peace process and victims’ law, KAIROS and our partner *Organizacion Femenina Popular* are supporting individual and collective reparations for victims of human rights abuse and gender-based violence, and victims committees in which women receive legal representation and support to prosecute abuse and violence.

In South Sudan, KAIROS works with the national women’s program of the South Sudan Council of Churches to engage women across tribal lines on advocating for peace locally while developing an understanding of the international frameworks on women’s role in peace building, including UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

Although historically women have been at the forefront of movements for peace and human rights, peace-building processes are often dominated by men’s voices and experiences. From 1992 to 2011, only 2% of chief mediators and 9% of negotiators in peace processes were women. At the same time, studies show that peace processes that involve women are not only more equitable and inclusive, they are also more sustainable. There are convincing reasons to support the participation of women’s civil society organizations and women human rights defenders in peace processes and post-conflict development: equity, inclusivity, justice, sustainability and efficiency.

Recommendation 1

The Government of Canada should provide more financial support to women’s rights organizations and grassroots civil society organizations for peace-building efforts in conflict-affected and fragile states.

KAIROS supports the recommendation of the Women, Peace and Security Network (WPSN–Canada) to establish a target of 15% of all development assistance in fragile contexts and all “peace and security” funding to initiatives that have gender equality/women’s empowerment as the **principal** objective.

KAIROS was very encouraged by Canada’s remarks at the UN Security Council in March that recognized the critical importance of supporting the participation of local women’s organization in peace building.

In contrast, the Government of Canada has focused much of its official development assistance in recent years through large multilateral organizations, such as UN agencies and the World Bank, and less

through partnerships with civil society organizations in Canada and internationally. There are cases where this makes sense, and when Canadian support can leverage contributions from other donors. However, experience in peace building has shown that lasting peace is achieved by supporting the WPS agenda at all levels.

Let me provide an example. In February, I was in the Democratic Republic of Congo. KAIROS and our Congolese human rights partner organization, *Héritiers de la Justice*, run a legal clinic that provides legal accompaniment and counselling to victims of sexual violence. To enable women to defend their rights and engage in peace building, paralegals and women's rights educators from the clinic hold training workshops on domestic law, international human rights instruments and UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Supported by *Héritiers de la Justice*, local women's committees have been established in towns and villages to help women support each other and break their silence around sexual violence.

In 2013, Canada made a significant investment of \$18 million through the United Nations Development Program to fight impunity around sexual violence in D.R. Congo. Through this project, mobile tribunals have been created to travel into rural areas of eastern Congo and facilitate access to justice. While this institution building is critical, it requires the participation and trust of women at a local level. Without investing in such grassroots capacity building by local organizations, Canada's commitment to ending impunity through this larger multilateral project will not be fully realized. So, it's not an "either-or" scenario. For peace building and women's empowerment to be truly lasting, top-down national and regional initiatives must be accompanied by grassroots civil society-led initiatives.

KAIROS was already planning to expand the legal clinic in Congo in 2009. Back then, we approached the Canadian International Development Agency to partner with KAIROS on this work in Congo and other conflict-affected states. As many of you will recall, notwithstanding a recommendation from the CIDA President, the KAIROS proposal was not approved.

In January of this year, KAIROS submitted an unsolicited proposal to the Partnerships Branch at Global Affairs Canada, seeking support for the Women, Peace and Security programming with our global partners. While we are still awaiting a response, we remain hopeful that the work of KAIROS and our partners will complement and ensure the success of Canada's current programming.

KAIROS believes our global partners and our international programming are transformative and deliver long-lasting, sustainable results. We see the lives that are changed, the communities that are empowered, and the women who regain their dignity and are able to exercise their rights.

However, more resources are needed to support women's civil society organizations and women human rights defenders. Despite recent research that proves that women's organizations and movements have been key drivers in defending women's human rights and promoting peace all over the world, the resources they receive worldwide are shamefully scarce and declining.

Recommendation 2

The C-NAP should be expanded to serve both as a strategic vision of how Canada will implement and strengthen its international commitments around WPS; and a monitoring /tracking tool to facilitate reporting on financial commitments, activities, gaps, progress to date, etc.

KAIROS recognizes that the Government of Canada has played an important role in supporting the passage of the first United Nations Security Council Resolution on Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325) in 2000; welcoming the passage of subsequent resolutions (1820, 1888, 1889, 1960 and others); and adopting a National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (C-NAP) in 2010. As I mentioned earlier, we appreciate Canada's recent statement to the UN Security Council, renewing commitment to WPS. Through our participation in the Women, Peace and Security Network (WPSN-C), KAIROS has been monitoring Canada's implementation of UNSCR 1325, and is committed to working with partners to ensure the implementation of subsequent resolutions related to women, peace and security.

We hope the review and renewal of the C-NAP in 2016 will produce a strategic vision for how Canada can best implement its international commitment on the women, peace and security. The plan must enable Canadians to gauge how our country is making this a priority policy directive, where we are headed and what will be Canada's particular contributions to this global effort.

Recommendation 3

The Government of Canada should consult and collaborate with women's rights organizations and their international partners on its policy development and programming around WPS issues. In the first instance, broad-based public consultations should be held across Canada to inform the renewal of the Canada's National Action Plan (C-NAP).

We believe that the renewal of the C-NAP is an opportunity for the Government of Canada to enhance the plan with input from a wide range of stakeholders. These Parliamentary hearings are building a good foundation. We hope, however, that Global Affairs Canada will conduct broad-based public consultations in cities across Canada in 2016 to inform the development of a new C-NAP. Women's organizations and other civil society groups like KAIROS have a great deal to share on the experiences from other countries and lessons learned from efforts in Canada to end violence against women and promote women's political participation and empowerment.

Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

For more information, please contact:

Ian Thomson, Partnerships Coordinator (Africa)
Tel: 613-235-9956 ext. 222
Email: ithomson@kairoscanada.org

Rachel Warden, Gender Justice Coordinator and Partnerships Coordinator (Latin America)
Tel: 416-463-5312 ext. 242
Email: rwarden@kairoscanada.org