

**SENATE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE:
UNSCR 1325 ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY**

March 24, 2014

Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and good evening to all. I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Jess Tomlin and I am the Executive Director of the MATCH International Women's Fund, which is a proud member also of the Women, Peace and Security Network of Canada.

The network itself is entirely volunteer-based and is made up of Canadian organizations and individuals from around the country who do two things, primarily. The first is promoting and monitoring the efforts of the Government of Canada to implement and support the United Nations Security Council on women, peace and security issues, and the second is in providing a forum for exchange and action amongst Canadian civil society specifically on issues in relation to women, peace and security.

Many of us within the group represent organizations or work individually in regions of conflict such as the Congo, Colombia, the Middle East, and work directly with partners who are struggling to build peace first-hand and promote the rights of women in these processes. The groups that I'm representing here today continue to look to Canada for leadership on these issues.

I can take a moment to tell you about the MATCH International Women's Fund. MATCH International is an organization that has been a feminist development organization for the last 40 years, but has recently become a grant-making agency that works to support women's rights organizations in the global south. We make an intentional grant-making effort to support women particularly in situations of conflict, and like Nobel Women's Initiative have a great deal of interest and presence in places where women are most disproportionately affected by rape and violent conflict. Specifically, we work on forced disappearance of women brought on by the conflict in Colombia. We work to support women's rights organizations in the Congo, specifically mobilizing young women within the national women's rights movement to harnessing technology and social media to talk about rape and violent conflict. We are working in Uganda incorporating women's meaningful participation in the peace negotiations within the Great Lakes conflict conversation.

When we speak about the issue of women, peace and security, we are referring, as the Women, Peace and Security Network, to the broad suite of issues addressed by the UN Security Council on this theme. Since 2000, seven resolutions have been adopted that call

on women's equal and full participation as active agents in the prevention and resolution of conflict, peacekeeping, peace-building and post-reconstruction.

If I can take a few moments of your time to reflect on the C-NAP, while the days are early and the C-NAP has just recently been circulated, we do have some preliminary comments.

As you know, the Government of Canada released its national action plan on women, peace and security in October 2010. After the long delay we were pleased to see that the government released its second annual report earlier this month, as earlier mentioned.

While our analysis of these reports is still ongoing, the reports are long and full of detail, and it can be difficult for us to pull out overall themes or identify gaps. I will, though, try to make some preliminary observations on behalf of the network.

First, we would like to applaud the government and Minister Baird for the statements in support of ending violence against women in conflict. We appreciate seeing the listing of departmental initiatives, funded projects and activities, and we note that Canada has funded some important work on women, peace and security around the world, including support for the crucial work of the Women's League of Burma and a national conference on 1325 in South Sudan.

Second, we are pleased to see that the second report notes -- and I emphasize -- "the empowerment of women in decision-making processes, including for conflict resolution, is central to Canada's foreign policy". This is a strong statement, and we hope to see this centrally reflected in future initiatives.

Third, despite all the information in the report, it is unfortunately difficult to actually get a sense of the overall priority these issues have in Canadian policy-making and programming. Information is presented anecdotally, often without an overall context on how these specific initiatives inform broader diplomatic, defence or development initiatives. Given that the NAP did not have targets, it is also difficult to know if progress was made more or less than anticipated or planned. Finally, most of the report focuses on activities carried out, rather than analysis of changes or results to be achieved.

Fourth, given how the information is presented in the reports, it is difficult to track the financial investments in women, peace and security initiatives and how these investments compare to the total of overall investments. We do note, however, and this I think is an important point, that according to the reporting under indicator 3.1, the projects reported on by the stabilization and reconstruction program, only 7 per cent or 9 projects

specifically targeted gender equality issues. Furthermore, and disappointingly, close to four out of five projects in this same group had no or only limited gender analysis.

Finally, to this point, and in looking at the two reports, it would have been interesting to see a discussion, rather an honest reflection of what did not go as planned and where the government thinks it could be doing better. Furthermore, it is not clear how having a national action plan is contributing increased resources going to these important issues or if Canada is achieving improved results in this area. It is a telling story indeed that builds on our effectiveness in promoting both the role and the rights of women in situations of conflict. Are we telling the right story? Are we reflecting effectively the progress that we have made or are we simply just reporting back on simple information and anecdotally? Ultimately, I think we all want this information to be useful.

It is useful to be here today to engage in this discussion, and if you will allow me, I will now take a moment to present some of the recommendations as a part of my testimony based on the C-NAP.

My first overarching recommendation is in relation to leadership. In general, across the board we urge the Government of Canada to meaningfully embrace the role of leadership, which means a long-term commitment and resources to women, peace and security issues. This specifically includes supporting survivors and ending sexual violence in conflict.

Being a leader involves significant resource investments. Minister Leitch recently noted at the Commission on the Status of Women that Canada had contributed \$2.85 billion to the Muskoka Initiative on maternal and child health. A commitment of comparable size to ending violence against women at home and abroad would truly enable Canada to claim the title of leader in the women, peace and security sector and the violence against women sector more broadly. Being a leader involves ensuring that there is a robust policy framework guiding our international relations that truly does have the rights of women and girls as one of its guiding principles. Will the newly merged Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development adopt a strong gender equality policy that mandates consistent gender analysis of all initiatives and gives priority to explicit gender equality results across all areas -- trade, development and defence -- in all areas of the department's work, including peace and security?

In conclusion, if I can just take a quick moment to build on a couple of additional recommendations, I cannot underscore for a moment the importance of grassroots women's rights organizations and human rights defenders and the role that they play in situations of conflict. These organizations are the kinds of organizations that my organization supports. We know that the average annual budget of these organizations is

under \$20,000 a year. We know that one in five do not know where their rent is coming from next month. We know they are volunteer driven, we know they have no reserves and yet they are the ones who continue to persevere in the most troubling and complex circumstances.

We would like to see a real and legitimate commitment to supporting the grassroots movements of women's rights organizations who are holding ground and breaking ground in Syria, in the Congo and all over the world. We have recommendations for you, if you need them.

The second thing I would like to highlight is that the future NAP reporting will facilitate an understanding of how the government has actually contributed to changes and how women, peace and security objectives inform and influence broader policy and programming directions; and that the government consult with and involve Canadian civil society -- I think that's something you've heard from all three of us here today -- which includes women's organizations, development NGOs and peace organizations in future stages of the NAP. We want to work with you.

Finally, we strongly believe that Canadian progress on women, peace and security issues will only be possible in the context of a Canadian foreign policy that includes broad support for gender equality and women's empowerment. The newly merged Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development offers an excellent opportunity to ensure that women's rights are supported across the entire department. However, in order to take advantage of this opportunity the department will have to invest resources, strengthen policy commitments and put the rights of women and girls at the centre rather than at the margins of policy and action.

In conclusion, we would like to thank the senators for the opportunity to appear here today and welcome the opportunity to engage and further discuss these issues with you both today and in the future.

Jessica Tomlin
Executive Director, MATCH International Women's Fund

For: Women, Peace and Security Network - Canada