



Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights

June 11, 2015

Thank you very much, Madame Chair, and good morning to all. I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to appear before you today.

My name is Jess Tomlin, the Executive Director of The MATCH International Women's Fund. We have been supporting women's movements globally for nearly 40 years and our funding now comes entirely from individual Canadians. We are Canada's only international women's fund and we strive to channel more resources directly into women-led, community-based organizations that serve women and girls. We support organizations in more than 25 countries globally. Because of this, my remarks will focus on the vital role women's organizations are playing across the broad spectrum of peace and security.

Two years ago, The MATCH Fund launched a global call for proposals to take the pulse on the state of women's organizations around the world, many of them in conflict-torn countries. We received nearly 1,000 proposals, the large majority of which asked for funding to combat violence against women. Of these proposals, we received \$3 million worth of requests from women's organizations working specifically in conflict-torn countries. We were able to fund only 7. I'm here today on behalf of the others.

When I last spoke to this Committee in March 2014, I shared that the average annual income of a grassroots women's rights organization is only \$20,000. This figure drops to \$12,000 in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Today, let me also highlight that:

- ┌ 48% of these organizations never receive core funding for day-to-day necessities such as turning on the lights, powering the internet, or providing a modest salary for staff members.
- ┌ It is, therefore, no surprise that 1/5 of grassroots women's rights organizations regularly face the heartbreaking decision to close their doors due to financial shortfalls.

Yet, these are the organizations that have the greatest positive impact on women living in conflict. When they close their doors due to a lack of funding, women cannot access valuable services. These are the women that stand in the way of the side effects of violent conflict in its many ugly forms- Early forced marriage, trafficking, rape and other extreme forms of sexual violence.

I implore the committee to see the work that women do at the grassroots as an essential part of brokering peace. I will illustrate this by drawing on examples of women's rights organizations that The MATCH Fund currently supports.

- [During the 2014 protests in **Ukraine**, women's organizations were the ones staffing hotlines and volunteering at pop-up medic centres. It is also these women's organizations that are working hard to mitigate the rise in trafficking. Since the onset of the conflict, 1 in 10 Ukrainians know someone who has been trafficked;

- [In **Uganda**, Akina Mama wa Afrika ensures that women in the Great Lakes Region are included in peace negotiation processes. This year, this pan-African organization reviewed the implementation of the Kampala Declaration, and 90% of the organization's recommendations were taken up by Uganda's Ministry of Gender.

- [In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, 1.7 million women in a 2011 survey reported having been raped, most often by armed combatants. Midwives of a South Kivu women's organization noticed that a significant number of the pregnant women with whom they worked were carrying the child of their rapist. Due to the midwives unique position within the community, this organization provided midwives with training to deliver trauma services to these rape survivors.

- [In **Colombia**, sexual violence is widespread and has been used by all sides in the conflict as a war strategy. A recent study situated the impunity rate for these crimes at 98%. Women's groups worked tirelessly to pass a new law last year to protect survivors and to improve access to justice.

In spite of the fact that these organizations run wide and deep, responding in ways few others can, they remain the most underfunded asset in the international peace and security effort.

In April 2015, Canada announced an additional \$5.5 million to address sexual and gender based violence in fragile and conflict-afflicted areas. As the most recent Government Progress Report on Canada's Action Plan specifically states, "the empowerment of women in decision-making processes, including for conflict resolution, is central to Canada's foreign policy." This is a welcome and necessary commitment to be sure.

However, of the organizations that received this funding, not one of them is a women's rights organization- and by that I mean an organization working within the community, led by women with the focus of supporting women and girls. We cannot empower women if we are unwilling to increase our direct support to women-led organizations in conflict zones.

I implore the committee: Canada must commit in a significant, long-term way to grassroots women's rights organizations as they are essential assets in building lasting peace.

To conclude, I would also like to echo my support for the **Global Acceleration Instrument for Women, Peace, and Security**, which is on track to launch this fall.

This instrument is just one of the many ways we can work together to put much-needed funding into the hands of women in conflict areas. Propping up these organizations will ensure higher success in brokering peace and in keeping people safe.

Thank you for your time today, and would be happy to answer any further question members of the committee may have.

Thank you.

|
|