

The promotion of women's agency for peace and security

**Written submission by Inter Pares to the House of Commons
Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International
Development, as part of its study on Women, Peace and Security**

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As a member of the Women, Peace and Security Network – Canada, Inter Pares is pleased to present the following written submission which supplements the oral testimony we presented before the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development on April 12, 2016. Inter Pares is a feminist, social justice organization that works closely with local counterparts in many parts of the world engaged in promoting women's agency for peace and security. Many of our counterparts have gained deep insights on this issue, based on years of experience working with grassroots women's organizations in a variety of conflict-ridden contexts.

In April 2015, with funding from various sources including Inter Pares and the (then) Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, Inter Pares' main counterpart in Latin America, Project Counselling Services (PCS), coordinated three national consultations with women from Guatemala, El Salvador and Mexico (Chiapas). The purpose of the consultations was to provide input to the global study commissioned by the UN Secretary-General in preparation for the High-level Review of Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325). PCS is in a privileged position to comment both in its own right, as well as to convene various actors on issues of peace and security, having worked alongside communities and organisations affected by armed conflicts since its inception over three decades ago.

A total of 101 women took part in this process, representing a wide range of groups and organizations that have had firsthand experience of conflicts, such as local and feminist women's organizations, key actors in the countries' respective peace processes, survivors of sexual violence during the armed conflicts, women ex-combatants, Indigenous women, etc. In each of the consultations, participants assessed the progress and obstacles in the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and formulated recommendations and actions for the Mesoamerican region.

Beyond contributing to the global assessment of UNSCR 1325, the consultations had a value in themselves as a space where women were able to reflect on what "peace and security" means for them; on the current problems related to peace and security that have a particular impact on their lives; and on the state's responses to these problems. In addition, special attention was devoted to the analysis and validation of the contributions made by women to the construction of societies with justice, peace and security.

While none of the countries in Central America are in a situation of open conflict today, there is a high prevalence of impunity for sexual violence and other crimes against women committed during the armed conflicts that took place in both Guatemala and El Salvador. In Chiapas, the current low-intensity warfare is a source of displacement, extrajudicial executions and other serious human rights violations. Within this context, international support – both political and financial – has been important in helping consolidate a strong, organized women's movement that remains crucial to hold governments to account to their human rights obligations and to the needs of their citizenries. Clearly, continued

support to women's grassroots and community-based organizations is of great importance to strengthen participatory and inclusive democracy in post conflict scenarios.

A number of positive achievements were highlighted during the consultations. These were made possible as a result of the ongoing work of civil society organizations from the region, in particular women-led organizations. For example, it was found that women have played a significant role in the construction of legislation and institutions in favour of the rights of women. In Guatemala, participants highlighted the contributions of women to the processes of truth, justice and redress, with a special emphasis on crimes of sexual violence during the armed conflict, as well as the struggle for the implementation of the peace agreements and the defense of land and territory. In El Salvador, women's organizations have worked to position the issue of violence against women as a public security concern and to promote both the political participation of women in conditions of equality, and women's access to justice. In Chiapas, women have played a key role in leading pilgrimages for peace, and in efforts to bring an end to violence, impunity and war.

Notwithstanding the positive developments, rampant inequalities, especially in terms of land distribution, remain at the centre of long and violent conflicts, with their differentiated impact on women. As the consultations led by PCS illustrated, women face not only unresolved problems from the past, but also new phenomenon, such as non-state actors who are generating violent conflicts and threatening the security of women, communities, countries and the Mesoamerican region as a whole. Only by tackling the root causes of the conflicts over the long term can we prevent them from happening.

The consultation process itself, together with the conclusions reached, reinforce the key recommendations made by Inter Pares during our April 12, 2016 appearance before the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, namely:

1. Listen to local women directly impacted by the conflict;
2. Provide long term, stable funding to women's organization, before, during and "post" conflict;
3. Support access to the full range of sexual and reproductive health services;
4. Insist that women are at the negotiation table for peace processes; and
5. Invest in conflict prevention and address the root causes of conflict.

The results from these consultations will inform Inter Pares and PCS' programming activities on the theme of women, peace and security in the upcoming years. We also believe that they represent concrete avenues of action for Canada, in order to ensure that women's rights and perspectives are at the heart of Canada's response to conflict and post-conflict situations. **The full report (*Security, Peace and Justice for Women – reflections on resolution 1325 in the Mesoamerican region*) is attached to this document in its original Spanish version with an executive summary translated into English.**

In conclusion, Canada can play a very strong and proactive role in supporting women's agency in peace and security, supporting local actors to transition from victims to survivors. The consultations organized by PCS, Inter Pares' main counterpart in Latin America, are providing concrete recommendations of how to move forward around the effective implementation of the UNSCR Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.