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Portugal approves National Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolution on Women, Peace and Security

One month away from the ninth anniversary of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325/2000, Portugal becomes the latest country to adopt a National Action Plan, recognising the specific impacts of contemporary wars in the lives of women and the efforts to prevent, combat and mitigate these.

The IANSA Women's Network and OGiVA (the Observatory on Gender and Armed Violence, University of Coimbra) welcome the approval of the Portuguese NAP as well as the participatory process that led to its development, one which encompassed wide and public consultations.

The plan (2009-2013) is built around: strengthening women's participation and representation in all efforts to promote peace and security; promoting gender mainstreaming in the sectors of security (peacekeeping missions, security system reform), justice; and development aid; and reinforcing protection of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict areas.

Specifically, the plan contains mechanisms for implementation, monitoring and evaluation of five main objectives:

- 1) To increase women's participation and mainstream gender equality in all phases of peacebuilding processes and at all levels of decision-making.
- 2) To promote capacity building of those involved in peacebuilding and development aid efforts on gender equality and gender-based violence, as well as other aspects covered by UNSCR 1325 and 1820.
- 3) To promote and protect women's human rights in conflict areas and post-conflict scenarios, taking into account the prevention and elimination of gender-based violence and the promotion of the empowerment of women.
- 4) To invest in and disseminate knowledge on issues concerning women, peace and security, including awareness raising among decision-makers and the broader public.
- 5) To ensure the participation of civil society in the implementation of Resolution 1325 and NAP.

Despite these positive steps in addressing women's insecurity in war and post-war scenarios, the Portuguese NAP falls short of the expectations raised by the tentative recognition that the "Portuguese Government interprets the resolution as extending beyond armed conflicts and humanitarian aid to include the promotion of policy coherence at a national level concerning issues such as disarmament and weapons control, public security and the elimination of gender-based violence".

As emphasised by IANSA and OGiVA during the public consultations on the NAP, the threats and insecurities experienced by women, in particular those resulting from the proliferation and misuse of firearms, are common to several scenarios (war, post-war and formal peace). As a result, attention to these violent expressions and its international linkages

would benefit from a broader interpretation and implementation to 1325, encompassing peaceful States as well, particularly those plagued by significant levels of armed violence. Thus, in addition to considering 1325 operationalisation in the foreign policy domain, Portugal should have taken into account the continuum of violence and considered the integration of armed violence analysis, prevention and response in intervention sectors other than the foreign policy field.

Internationally, particularly at the bilateral level, Portugal could make greater efforts to promote and assist the development of adequate policies, strategies and legislation to prevent armed violence, including domestic armed violence, and protect its victims, as well as to integrate systematically in development programmes and projects a gender dimension and to train development actors in this field; enforce existing measures in terms of security sector reform and DDR programmes; and reinforce both community dynamics of access to justice and the development of proximity security policies, which respect human rights.

At the multilateral level, States could deepen their commitments towards comprehensive arms controls measures, namely through the support of an international Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons and its regional conferences/declarations.

Nationally and locally, this would involve commitments for supporting research; and developing local policies and programmes aimed at curbing and preventing armed violence (supply and demand) in articulation to international measures.

Another crucial aspect would be the improvement of national legislation on firearms possession and use, namely through the introduction of strict criteria that exclude the granting of licences to those with a history of violence in the home or community, and which take into account the declared reasons for requesting a licence, the context in which the application is made and the likelihood of misuse.

In order to ensure effective programmes of domestic violence prevention, harmonisation between gun legislation and domestic violence laws in particular would be important, to refuse and revoke gun licenses to both domestic violence offenders and those under restraining orders, and introducing safeguards such as clauses on spousal consent and approval of gun ownership. Countries with harmonised laws such as Canada, Australia, and Trinidad and Tobago have registered significant decline in homicide rates, particularly for women (40% to 57%) (Kwing Hung, 2004; Mouzos and Rushforth, 2003).

The broadening of the initiatives programmed to prevent and combat small arms proliferation, traditionally aimed at young males, as well supporting national disarmament plans targeting civil society and destruction of small arms, and improving the accountability and training of law enforcers and armed forces constitute other important steps to prevent and curb social violence.

If SCR 1325 and the NAP could be interpreted in this way, we would have an additional and better equipped instrument, supported by member states of the United Nations, to strengthen violence prevention in our societies.