

**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
General discussion on the protection of women's human rights in conflict and post-conflict
contexts
New York, 18 July 2011**

ORAL STATEMENT BY WOMEN & MEDIA COLLECTIVE

I wish to make the following submission on behalf of the Women & Media Collective in Sri Lanka. We have been working on the issue of women and armed conflict for 25 years, with a particular focus on 'State and Policy Reform' and are currently concentrating on forging links between women from the North and South in Sri Lanka to address the specific vulnerabilities of women in post-war Sri Lanka. I wish to first thank the CEDAW Committee for this very important, essential and timely deliberation on a General Recommendation on the protection of women's human rights in conflict and post- conflict contexts. I put forward the following issues for your consideration.

State parties and the UN should recognise that the implications for women in situations in which the military alternative is utilized to resolve internal conflicts is different to situations in which armed conflict is concluded through a negotiated settlement, since the former creates a different set of challenges for women, particularly in the post-war reconstruction, return, resettlement and rehabilitation phase. Further, in a post-war context, donors and development partners should be alert to possible escalation of militarization, particularly of humanitarian, early recovery and development work and address them; they should ensure that donor funds are not utilized to further entrench a militarized, post-war state.

The specific needs, concerns and vulnerabilities of women as combatants should be acknowledged and met. Following the end of war/conflict, states should formulate and implement a DDR plan that is both gender aware and female-specific and abides by international standards. The main focus of the programme should be the facilitation, in an expeditious manner, the re-integration of former combatants into civilian life, their communities and families in a manner that preserves their individual dignity and rights and does not expose them to stigma or continued suspicion. Within this framework, the specific needs of women combatants should attract particular attention and resources. When implementing a DDR plan, cultural, social, religious, communal and geographical sensitivities should be taken into consideration.

In a heavily militarised post-war situation women are open to different types of vulnerabilities that exist as a result of the militarization of re-construction, rehabilitation and development processes. In a context in which their livelihood options are limited and they are unable to exercise and enjoy their socio-economic rights, women are likely to find themselves in exploitative relationships, for instance with members of the armed forces, as a result of their efforts to seek greater economic security. This also leaves them open to trafficking. Donors, development partners and state parties should be aware of these vulnerabilities, which they should address by putting in place special measures to both prevent such exploitation, and strengthen the capacity of women to achieve economic security.

In a post-war environment, where the armed conflict has been brought to an end through a military victory, it is highly likely that little attention will be paid to transitional justice processes. Hence, the international community, particularly donors, development partners and the UN, should ensure that state parties acknowledge the existence of and the need to address the root causes of the conflict/war. Even where there is little space locally to establish accountability mechanisms, the international community while urging the state party to investigate allegations of both human rights and humanitarian law that took place during the war, including sexual violence against women, should stress the need for reconciliation initiatives that are participatory and inclusive and address the concerns of marginalised and non-majority communities, including political rights/issues.